



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring communal strife: A comparative analysis of conflict in the novels of Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amrita Pritam

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how the authors Amrita Pritam, Bhisham Sahni, Khushwant Singh, and Bapsi Sidhwa depict acts of violence against members of the same community in their respective works. A comparative lens is utilized to analyze the writers' representation of the social, political, and emotional aspects of inter-communal strife, particularly about the Partition of India, a company at the same time, each author investigates topics such as trauma, identity, displacement, and the drive to survive in their distinctive ways. In addition to this, the study investigates the human cost of religious and ethnic disparities, as well as the wider implications of violence on memory at both the individual and the societal levels. The research intends to highlight the writers' demands for understanding and reconciliation and their criticisms of sectarianism by evaluating important story elements, characters, and historical circumstances. This will be accomplished through the analysis of the research.

Keywords: Communal violence, Partition of India, Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, Bapsi Sidhwa, Amrita Pritam, trauma, displacement, religious conflict, identity, reconciliation.

Introduction

Many people think that the 1947 Partition of India was a watershed event in Indian history, both traumatic and transformative. After this catastrophic partition, which resulted in the establishment of two independent nations, Pakistan and India, unprecedented degrees of bloodshed, enormous migrations, and a deep reorganization of cultural and national identities ensued. The impact of this historical event continues to be felt, shaping the local literary scene and changing people's minds for generations to come.

As a medium for expressing communal suffering and investigating the intricate mechanisms of communal

conflict, literature flourished during the partition. This study's overarching goal is to analyze the works of four prominent authors from different cultural backgrounds. Authors like Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Bhisham Sahni are included here. The *literature on the partition* has benefited greatly from the contributions of each of these authors. Writers like them have chronicled historical events in great detail while simultaneously painting nuanced and personal images of the human condition in times of strife and division.

An important critique of the bloodshed that swept across the Punjab area is found in the book *Train to Pakistan*, penned by Sikh writer and journalist Khushwant Singh. In his book *Tamas*, Bhisham Sahni vividly depicts the communal tensions that persisted during the revolution, based on his own experiences as a Hindu during the chaos. In her book *Ice-Candy Man*, Pakistani Parsi author Bapsi Sidhwa offers a new take on the story by telling it from a child's point of view. Prominent Punjabi author Amrita Pritam delves into the gendered aspects of violence during India's Partition in her moving masterwork *Pinjar*.

This research demonstrates the multifaceted nature of community struggle in Partition-era literature by examining these many narratives. Through this discussion, we will examine how these authors deal with issues including social isolation, violence, displacement, and loss of identity. In

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How to cite this article: Thaker, Y.Y., Bhadauriya, D. (2024). Exploring communal strife: A comparative analysis of conflict in the novels of Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amrita Pritam. *The Scientific Temper*, 15(spl-2):230-235.

Doi: 10.58414/SCIENTIFICTEMPER.2024.15.spl-2.35

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None.

addition, we will analyze the methods each author used to portray the significant impact that historical events had on individuals and communities.

Among the many important concerns that this comparison aims to resolve are:

- How does the genesis and impact of intergroup conflict manifest in these authors' stories?
- How can separated communities benefit from the insights provided by their writings on the psychology of violence?
- How do the texts tackle the themes of nationalism, identity, and belonging with partition?
- In what ways do these literary works serve as historical testimony and add to the collective memory of partition?
- How do the authors depict the human condition's sorrow and optimistic and compassionate moments?

This essay aims to contribute to the body of writing on the partition and its role in clarifying the nuances of a pivotal event in twentieth-century history. This will be accomplished by delving deeply into the selected texts and discussing these topics. In addition, by comparing and contrasting these narratives, we may better grasp the many viewpoints and life experiences that contributed to developing our knowledge of communal conflict and its enduring effects on the Indian subcontinent.

Rather than reducing these books to mere historical records, it is essential to acknowledge their potency as instruments for empathy, understanding, and reflection within the context of this literary study. These writings provide light on the toll that violence has on people and the ongoing fight for reconciliation in a community still reeling from the aftereffects of sectarian strife and colonial divides.

Comparative Analysis of Partition Novels

This research delves into four seminal texts that vividly depict the horrific communal violence that occurred during India's Partition via the lens of comparative literary analysis. Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (also called *Cracking India*), and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* are all books in this category. A more nuanced understanding of the pertinent works is achieved by exploring the psychological, social, and political aspects of partition through the prism of trauma studies and postcolonial philosophy.

In particular, the study intends to zero in on the writers' narrative strategies. Some of these techniques include shifting between first- and third-person perspectives, rearranging the sequence of events, and using symbolic imagery to suggest the characters' tragic displacement and loss of identity. More specifically, the study looks at depictions of gendered violence, including looking at women's roles as victims and symbols of the community's dispute.

An expanded analysis of the works' characterization is part of the inquiry. Particular attention is paid to how all characters, heroes, villains, and supporting characters depict the moral dilemmas and pain brought forth by community violence. Each author offers a unique perspective on the political and religious conflicts that led to one of the worst atrocities in South Asian history, and these perspectives inform their examination of identity, survival, and displacement.

This comparative study better understands the long-lasting psychological wounds caused by partition. It highlights the writers' calls for healing, unity, and transcendence of religious and racial divides by appreciating our shared humanity. To do this, trauma and postcolonial theory are employed.

Literary Depictions of Communal Violence: A Thematic Examination of Partition Novels

Khushwant Singh's train to pakistan

Singh uses the fictitious border town of Mano Majra, which lies between Pakistan and India, to provide a microcosmic depiction of the partition's bloodshed. In the novel, the slow breakdown of communal harmony is vividly shown, as is how external influences shatter the centuries-long peace between Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus. The novel's strongest point is the frank portrayal of how ordinary peasants were enlisted in terrible activities.

This important insight lends credence to Singh's critique of the deliberate nature of communal violence as it suggests that the phenomenon is more akin to a disorder than an expression of spontaneous outbursts. The author painstakingly traces the gradual disintegration of Hamlet's social cohesiveness due to rumors, propaganda, and outside forces, building up to a bloody climax evoking the greater tragedy of partition. By centering his tale on a tiny town, Singh allows readers to see the human toll of political decisions taken in big cities. People confront difficult moral decisions in times of communal strife, as exemplified by the improbable heroism of Juggut Singh, a local criminal. Through Juggut's metamorphosis, Singh hopes to demonstrate that, despite overwhelming odds, redemption and humanity are still attainable.

Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*

The psychological underpinnings of interpersonal aggression are thoroughly examined in Sahni's study, which provides a detailed examination of how rumors and false information worsen confrontations. *Tamas*, meaning *darkness*, is a potent metaphor that the author uses throughout the book to describe the moral and ethical numbness that engulfs societies during trying times. Using a multipronged approach, the author paints a detailed image of a society during societal turmoil. In times of community upheaval, this feeling represents the weakening of social connections

and the dominant desire to protect one's interests. Sahni brilliantly demonstrates how seemingly ordinary individuals may become violent criminals and victims due to emotions like fear and uncertainty.

Tamas stands noteworthy due to its unfaltering depiction of the role of political manipulation in sparking discontent. The story shows how local and colonial elites use religious feelings for political gain, which leads to an endless cycle of violence. The diverse range of socioeconomic origins represented by Sahni's characters thoroughly examines how communal violence impacts every aspect of society. The novel's format, which shifts between many points of view, highlights the period's unease and uncertainty. Through honest language and vivid descriptions, Sahni makes the reader feel like they are there, witnessing the unfolding catastrophe firsthand. Using this all-encompassing technique, *Tamas* serves as both a historical chronicle and a cautionary tale about the fragility of social coordination.

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*

A fresh and original take on India's Partition is presented in Sidhwa's story via the eyes of a little Parsi girl called Lenny. This narrative choice paints a picture of community differences' ubiquitous and naive absurdity. The young narrator, playing the role of an objective observer, notes how adults' rigid adherence to national and religious identities is arbitrary. The author brilliantly depicts the shifting allegiances and identities that pervaded the turbulent years preceding and including India's Partition. The statement uses sarcasm to emphasize the synthetic nature of the national identities that arose during the partition. Drawing on Lenny's research, Sidhwa questions the legality of these newly established borders, which have a geographical and social bent.

One of *Ice-Candy Man's* most impressive aspects is how it delves into women's lives during the partition. Sidhwa highlights the sexual exploitation and abuse of women that happened during this extremely unstable era because of individuals like Ayah. The *Ice-Candy Man's* tragic descent from amiable street seller to ruthless mafia lord teaches us all a valuable lesson about the power of hate and how ordinary people can be consumed by it. Sidhwa heightens the terror of the last slide into violence by bringing to life the cosmopolitan environment of Lahore before the partition via the use of vivid visual and sensory aspects. During political turmoil, the novel's non-linear structure and focus on individual connections paint a nuanced picture of how major historical events affect particular lives.

Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*

A noteworthy and persistent issue in Pritam's work is the gendered experience of the partition, including the kidnapping and sexual abuse of women. A potent allegory for the fractured subcontinent, Puro's voyage deals with

issues of belonging and identity while also addressing the physiological integrity of women during times of upheaval. The Indian subcontinent is powerfully symbolized in this text. Pritam holds a feminist perspective on the link between gender discrimination and community violence, and this comment mirrors that perspective. According to the author, societal strife is caused by dominance and aggression against women, which in turn leads to greater patterns of oppression.

A pioneering approach to the subject, *Pinjar's* depiction of the physical and mental suffering that women endured during the Partition period is unfiltered. A common theme in Pritam is how women's bodies are contested as sites of identity and dignity struggles within communities. The narrative confronts the patriarchal conventions of the past by amplifying the experiences of the many women who were kidnapped, sexually abused, or forced to become believers during this period.

The unsettling mood is set by Pritam's storytelling style, which combines realistic events with lyrical imagery. There is a reflection of her characters' mental states in this setting. The author delves further into the themes of identity and survival through her symbolism, namely the metaphor of the skeleton *pinjar*, to represent the most fundamental aspect of human nature. Pritam delves into several weighty themes, like love, loyalty, and forgiveness amidst communal violence, via Puro's intricate relationships with her captor and family. The book concludes by pleading for a humanity that does not discriminate based on race, religion, or nationality. It shows that even when major disagreements arise, there is still hope for healing and reconciliation.

Comparative Themes

Even though they write in very different styles, Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amrita Pritam all depict communal turmoil during the partition in a manner consistent with several concepts. This comparative analysis aims to demonstrate how these writers contribute to a comprehensive knowledge of this turbulent era in South Asian history through their diverse viewpoints.

Violence and Its Representation

All four stories deal with tragic social turmoil. Still, the authors use different methods to show the brutality that is important to these stories. Works of Bhisham Sahni, such as *Tamas*, and Khushwant Singh, such as *Train to Pakistan*, depict violence more graphically. They paint a terrifying picture of partition that forces the reader to face the truth of the situation. A terrifying depiction of the train disaster appears in Singh's artwork. The level of destruction that had transpired could be perceived. A cloud bank obscured the moon, although it sometimes peered through to illuminate the sky. The train was strewn with lifeless bodies when we arrived.

There can be no doubt about the atrocities perpetrated since this straightforward strategy emphasizes the severity and immediacy of the violence. Nevertheless, Amrita Pritam in *Pinjar* and Bapsi Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy Man* frequently use metaphorical or implied violence, depending on suggestion and aftermath, to portray the horror of what has transpired. From a kid's viewpoint, Sidhwa alludes to violence in her works through ambiguous imagery. After collecting little branches and twigs, Hari and I construct and fire smaller pyres. The smoke combines with the smoke emanating from the houses on fire.

By avoiding overtly violent events, the authors can delve into the mental effects of violence, creating a more disturbing and lasting impact on the reader. Pritam offers a fresh perspective on this subject by using the subcontinental subcontinent as a metaphor for the subcontinental subcontinental abuse of women's bodies. As a potent metaphor for the larger acts of community violence, she utilizes Puro's abduction and forced conversion. "The entire village seemed to have been swallowed up by the darkness... Puro felt as if she had been cut off from the whole world," according to her. By comparing and contrasting these methods, we may observe how the writers approach the unexplainable from various angles. Each of them conveys the varied ways communal violence impacts individuals and groups.

Displacement and Identity

The fact that relocation and its effects on one's identity are recurrent themes in all four works reflects the profound chaos that partition wrought. As a result of experiencing personal, cultural, and geographical relocation, the characters in these works fight to reimagine who they are. An analogy for this conflict is Ayah from Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*. A victim of abuse within her multireligious community, she went from being well-liked to a victim of violence outside the group, demonstrating how identity can be delicate during times of strife. Sidhwa penned the piece. "And when she raises her lowered head, her eyes are bright with tears, and I see her chin is firm and resolved... I think she has at last understood the meaning of partition." This exact instant encapsulates the drastic change in how individuals see themselves brought forth by unpredictable political events.

Continuing this thinking, Pritam's *Pinjar* investigates how migration impacts social duties and gender identity. As Puro goes from being a kidnapped Hindu girl to a Muslim bride and back again to staying with her captor, traditional ideas of belonging are called into question. "I am a tree whose roots have been left behind on the other shore, whose trunk has floated to this side." This stunning image depicts the rootlessness and challenging discussions about identity many people endured during the partition.

Despite primarily examining community dynamics, Singh and Sahni examine how relocation impacts collective and individual identities. An example of the strong connection between one's identity and physical location is shown in *Train to Pakistan*, which depicts the story of Mano Majra and his family's journey from a peaceful village to a center of sectarian strife. According to Muslims, Sikhs were plotting their deaths. Sikhs believed Muslims wanted to kill them all. This abrupt shift in perspective among neighbors exemplifies how rapidly long-standing identities may disintegrate into pervasive fear and suspicion.

Hope and Humanity

The authors provide positive and sympathetic sections despite dealing with really sad issues. These stories demonstrate the resilience of the human spirit and the possibility of finding harmony in the face of adversity.

In *Train to Pakistan*, the heroic rescue of a Muslim train by Juggut Singh represents a profound act of redemption. Bravery on the part of individuals could, according to this book excerpt, help to dismantle barriers between different communities. On top of the world, Jugba sat. Grasping his kirpan, he began to slice at the rope... As the engine approached the bridge, the rope split in the middle.

Despite the story's generally gloomy tone, its ending has some optimism, which implies that hate may be overcome via unselfish acts. Even though Sahni's *Tamas* depicts violence clearly, it also has multicultural moments that unite people. An example of this philosophy is the character of Harnam Singh, who puts himself in danger to save a small Muslim kid. "Harnam Singh felt as if this boy was his son..." The boy's Muslim faith slipped his mind.

Stories like this help to show readers that no matter how dire the situation, we all have a common humanity. As female-identifying authors, Sidhwa and Pritam frequently draw inspiration from the tenacity and unity of their female characters. Ayah seeks safety in the women's shelter in *Ice-Candy Man*, and the facility stands as a symbol of harmony among other civilisations. Here, they are safe, women of all faiths and backgrounds who have been abandoned or lost. Similarly, the touching reunion scene at the end of Pritam's *Pinjar* is poignant. Here, Puro shows that healing may occur regardless of one's religion or cultural background by choosing to stay with her Muslim husband even as she tries to reconnect with her Hindu family. It seemed as if Puro were schisming apart... Rashid had a claim to her, and her family also had a claim to her. The writers paint a nuanced picture of humanity in these difficult times by interspersing these acts of compassion and optimism throughout the story. They show that even at the worst times, there is a way out of the vicious circle of revenge and violence by demonstrating that understanding and forgiveness are viable options.

By drawing parallels between these topics, we can see how Singh, Sahni, Sidhwa, and Pritam contribute to a complex and comprehensive analysis of the communal strife during the partition, even if they use different perspectives. Beyond offering a detailed account of historical events, their paintings delve into the intricacies of the human condition, including the interplay between violence, identity, and the unwavering need for healing.

Conclusion

Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Amrita Pritam, and Bhisham Sahni all write about more than only the sectarian bloodshed that happened before, during, and after the partition. Instead, they offer complex and reflective insights into the human condition when confronted with challenging circumstances. During one of the worst epochs in South Asian history, the authors skilfully threaded a complex web of social, emotional, and political factors. Although they disagree on several issues, they do have common ground. Along with serving as historical accounts, these works are potent investigations of the mental effects of horrific experiences like violence, relocation, and loss of identity.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* shows how easily communal cohesion may crumble under political pressures from outside the community. Singh used the small-scale environment of Mano Majra to show how larger-scale nationalist ambitions may destroy bonds and shared heritage, transforming friends into enemies. In *Tamas*, Bhisham Sahni delves into the mental basis of communal conflict. It shows how terror, rumors, and false information may cause individuals to lose touch with their moral compass and lead to anarchy. In these situations, the "darkness" he sees in people's souls goes beyond just violent acts and into a more fundamental lack of moral vision that impacts whole countries.

The story *Ice-Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa has a fresh viewpoint because it is told from the kid's point of view. This perspective highlights the stark contrast between the story's innocent characters and the harshness and absurdity of grown-up arguments. Since the partition lines were so artificial, Sidhwa's research on how national identities are malleable and how they were drawn raises doubts about the validity of the violent allegations they triggered. In contrast, *Pinjar*, a film by Amrita Pritam, primarily focuses on the gendered aspects of the partition. It emphasizes the suffering of women who were made into symbolic battlegrounds for honor and retribution. Using Puro's narrative as an example, Pritam critiques patriarchal wartime control over women's bodies via the lens of gender discrimination and community violence.

Comparison and contrast between these four narratives may help us comprehend the nuances of community violence, forced migration, identity crises, and the tearing apart of social fabric. The novels bring the Partition tragedy

to life by making it more relatable and human by putting a face on the historical figure. The concept that violent acts against communities are just the result of isolated instances is also challenged by them. They highlight the carefully planned character of these meetings, which are usually driven by ill-considered political aims and ideologies.

These works have stood the test of time because they are relevant even after all these years. After all this time, the novels are still a good way to examine the problems of nationalism, sectarianism, and identity. Even if religious, racial, and cultural differences still lead to bloodshed in many parts of the world, the difficulties of sustaining communal peace are a global concern. These works are a sobering reminder of the human cost, interpersonal damage, and lives lost due to these divisions.

In addition, they teach important lessons about the value of understanding and developing empathy. These stories force us to reconsider our responses to people we label as the "other" in a society where ideological divides widen. They urge us to put aside our preconceived notions of ourselves and society and recognize the humanity that binds us. A dedication to global peace, forgiveness, and compassion is a theme that runs through the works of Pritam, Sidhwa, Sahni, and Singh. What sets these works apart is how they depict pain, perseverance, and the necessity of making amends. As we face the challenges of the present period, these literary works continue to be vital resources for comprehending the human cost of polarisation and the necessity of constructing bridges instead of walls across groups.

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