



Post-Traumatic Growth in Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*: An Exploration

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Abstract— *The Partition of India in 1947, one of the most violent episodes of the 20th century, deeply influenced literary expressions across the Indian subcontinent. Bhisham Sahni, an eminent Hindi writer, witnessed this event and wove its legacy into his writing. His works, particularly Tamas, delve into the traumatic experiences surrounding Partition, yet also reveal unexpected dimensions of resilience, compassion, and growth amidst chaos. This article studies the concept of post-traumatic growth as manifested in Sahni's Tamas, specifically focusing on how his characters evolve through trauma. The article draws on the theory of post-traumatic growth (PTG) to uncover the complex interplay of loss, healing, and moral resilience in Tamas.*



Keywords— *growth, Partition, resilience, Tamas, trauma.*

INTRODUCTION

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) describes positive psychological changes experienced after trauma. This growth does not negate the suffering caused by trauma; rather, it signifies an individual's capacity to find meaning, purpose, or new perspectives in its aftermath. Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) has defined as "the positive psychological change that comes about as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (Akhtar 30). PTG is more than mere recovery; it is a transformative process through which individuals find "higher well-being" and "deeper meaning" in life, emerging from their adverse experiences with a renewed outlook.

Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, a seminal work capturing the horrors of Partition, presents a tapestry of traumatized individuals who simultaneously reveal profound resilience and potential for growth. Sahni's engagement with trauma in *Tamas* goes beyond depicting the darkness of the Partition; it demonstrates an almost instinctive human capacity to reframe adversity, forming a distinct narrative that echoes the core elements of PTG.

Partition as Trauma: The Context of *Tamas*

The Partition of 1947 has been a major theme in South Asian literature. Most critical analyses focus on trauma, violence, and body politics. Other key themes include nationalism, history, memory, film, and narrative techniques. Partition literature is deeply rooted in the agony, displacement, and identity crises faced by millions. Sahni's *Tamas*, which narrates the harrowing experience of Partition, draws readers into this historical trauma. The characters in *Tamas* do not just endure violence; they are deeply scarred by it, enduring losses that disrupt their sense of security and belonging. Sahni's *Tamas* is emblematic of collective trauma, with its characters representing individuals from varied social and religious backgrounds. This diversity enables Sahni to explore trauma's unique, yet universally human, consequences.

Sahni's Narrative and Post-Traumatic Growth

Sahni's portrayal of trauma is not one-dimensional; it is grounded in the resilience and adaptive changes that emerge from it. Tedeschi and Calhoun, pioneers of PTG research, argue that "while trauma disrupts an individual's worldview, it can also provide opportunities for growth by altering self-perception, relationships, and

philosophical beliefs" (5). The transformation of Sahni's characters aligns with this framework, as they often find themselves redefining core values, embracing inclusivity, and reaffirming a shared humanity. This growth is particularly evident in the empathy that characters develop toward each other, bridging divides even amidst chaos.

Self-Perception and Agency

PTG is often accompanied by shifts in self-perception, where individuals gain a renewed sense of agency and resilience. In *Tamas*, characters like Nathu, the sweeper who unwittingly becomes a catalyst in the communal unrest, embody this shift. His initial shock and despair gradually transform into an awareness of his societal role and identity. Nathu's transition from innocence to awareness is emblematic of the resilience that often surfaces amidst trauma. Although Sahni does not portray Nathu as an overtly heroic figure, his quiet persistence and self-awareness underscore the subtle ways trauma redefines personal agency.

Shifts in Relationships and Community

PTG also reflects shifts in relationships, often increasing empathy, compassion, and a greater appreciation for close relationships. This relational growth is evident in Sahni's portrayal of Harnam Singh, the local leader, who witnesses and suffers atrocities but ultimately realizes the importance of communal harmony. His response to trauma encapsulates the potential for reconciliation and empathy, drawing upon communal bonds that supersede religious and ethnic divides. By portraying Harnam's growth from a passive onlooker to a proactive advocate for peace, Sahni illustrates the PTG theme of improved interpersonal relationships in the face of shared suffering.

Transformation of Philosophical and Spiritual Beliefs

One of the core dimensions of PTG is the transformation of philosophical beliefs. Characters in *Tamas* often undergo a spiritual awakening, finding deeper meaning in suffering. For example, the religious leader, Shah Nawaz, initially staunch in his beliefs, develops a nuanced understanding of faith as he grapples with the horrors surrounding him. His journey reflects a PTG-related spiritual shift, characterized by humility and inclusivity. Sahni's portrayal of Shah Nawaz reflects how the trauma of Partition acts as a catalyst for embracing universal values, transforming rigid ideologies into an inclusive spiritual framework.

Sahni's Narrative Technique and PTG

The narrative style in *Tamas* further amplifies the theme of PTG. Sahni uses realism and empathetic descriptions to allow readers to emotionally connect with his characters. His storytelling is interspersed with moments

of quiet reflection, symbolizing resilience and growth. Rather than dwelling solely on despair, Sahni highlights the capacity for endurance, faith, and renewal. His characters' reflections provide insight into their evolving values and perspectives, making *Tamas* not just a novel of trauma, but one of hope and rebirth. Sahni's focus on post-traumatic growth not only offers a counter-narrative to the Partition's devastation but also presents readers with a vision of reconciliation and transformation.

CONCLUSION

Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* is a poignant exploration of trauma and post-traumatic growth. Through his characters' journeys — Nathu, Harnam Singh, and Shah Nawaz, Sahni illustrates the potential for resilience and moral growth amidst profound suffering. Instead of staying victims of the surrounding violence, they experience deep personal changes. They find ways to rise above their suffering. This positive change is an example of post-traumatic growth, and a deeper understanding of themselves and others. Sahni's work not only bears witness to the horror of Partition but also illuminates the strength, compassion, and resilience that can emerge from such profound adversity. By highlighting these elements of PTG, *Tamas* becomes more than a recounting of historical trauma; it serves as a testament to the indomitable spirit of humanity.

REFERENCES

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