



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 49 - DISPLACED PEOPLE, ABANDONED HOMES

DR. SARBANI BANERJEE
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Tamas (1987)

- Tamas (1987), a television series by Govind Nihalani, showcases the **trauma of violence, personal pain, loss, uprooting of one's native place.**
- The movie gets into the genesis of hatred which had led to the Partition, and how quickly it traps the human into the darkness.
- Bhisham Sahni is a grieved spectator as well as the filmmaker.
- Sahni frames the insuperable conditions and shapes the characters in a way that there is only a thin line separating the victim from the aggressor. Human dilemma and crises are delineated in great details.
- The film draws a vivid picture of the **animosity torn Punjab** and makes the audience go through the trial by way of experiencing the artwork.

Tamas (1987)

- Tamas is set against the backdrop of a Muslim-majority region of Punjab, presumably somewhere **near Rawalpindi**.
- The series starts with the **Congress party** promulgating the need and beauty of harmony.
- **Muslim League** members stop the *prabhat pheri* (morning procession).
- The character **Nathu** is a Dalit tanner who is forced to murder a swine and deliver it as a part of an agreement, for five rupees. Nathu is told that the pig will be used for clinical purpose.
- The dead pig appears at the doorstep of the town mosque the next day (Swine is ***haram*** according to Islam).
- Following this incident, the town witnesses a gore, filth, and hate-ridden misfortune.

Tamas (1987)

- The film depicts the **cruelty that ordinary humans are capable of**. The events of partition discover an unknown facet of the ordinary people.
- What are the outcomes, the country got divided into two and eventually into three?
- It is because of the **Tamas (darkness)**, the darker inhuman possibilities which were unleashed and caused all the havoc.
- Tamas is a **story of survival**. It has many characters, but the chunk of drama is driven by the characters played by **Om Puri, Deepa Sahi, Bhisham Sahni, and Dina Pathak**.

Tamas (1987)

- The conflict that comes out of oblivion prevails, and the terror predominates. It eclipses the very hope and mercy, which are the guards of **harmony**.
- Tamas describes the moment of human tragedy when humanity took a sideline by losing its vigour.
- In the end, the **dead body** of Nathu (Om Puri) is revealed, as his wife delivers a baby.

Tamas (1987)

- In many portions, **Nihalani** picks to narrate through the aid of visuals.
- For example, there is a scene in the last part, when a bloodshed fight happens between Sikhs and Muslims.
- The Sikh women jump into the well with their children to save their honour and prevent themselves from being converted to Islam. This scene is evocative of **Jauhar**.
- Following this there is complete silence, and three Muslim Rababis enter the Gurudwara to chant the Sikh hymns.
- The Rababis or musicians occupy a third space and a liminal existence, which is similar to the Dalits and the females, outside the communal dyad.



Tamas (1987)

- The issue of **dislocation and displacement** is an essential aspect which has wider connotation than merely geographical.
- Moreover, apart from economic misery and physical abuse, the pain and trauma of being labelled as refugees in their own homeland are some other aspects which have been deeply probed recently in the histories of memories.
- **Penderai Moon** - by March 1948, four and half million Hindus and six million Muslims had become refugees.

Tamas (1987)

- The film **portrays the helplessness and inertness of the administrative and political establishment** in dealing with the riots and consequent chaotic situations.
- It exhibits the **vacuum and confusion** created after the change of the political baton, which resulted in **anarchy and a complete breakdown of the law and order of the state**. The chaos were tacitly promoted by the British rulers, then on back foot, as they had nothing more to gain from India.
- During the time of chaos, the disruptive elements mocked the law-and-order machinery. At places, protectors of law and order collaborated with the anti-social elements in committing heinous crimes.

Tamas (1987)

- In the years immediately before the Partition, the atmosphere was coloured with **pangs of misery and agony**.
- Even on the basis of the rumours doing the rounds, the religious fanatics would burn the whole town and turn the social relations from bad to worse.
- *Tamas* underlines the harsh reality that **the poor becomes the worst victim of cataclysms at large**.
- This movie depicts how innocent people like Nathu were used as weapons for starting a riot, spreading hatred and communal disturbances by the fanatics that favoured the idea of Partition.

Tamas (1987) – Powerful Moments

- Partition at the semantic level, where suddenly language of myths and gospels are used by leaders to enchant and pull a crowd. Such language has a militant tone, which is gradually also acquired by the female leaders, who talk of valorous heroes and wars before rallying women for mass suicide.
- Sensibility of women from all communities, who are far away from the political schemings.
- Hypermasculinity and guiltless murder of members from opposite community endorsed with superior meanings – the student's *gurudakshina*, a child's play, a youth's service to the nation
- A brittle wall separating goodness and evil, friendship and enmity
- The accountant in the refugee camp interested only in statistics

Tamas (1987)

- Should the refugees be charted according to their communal identity, or class allocation and degree of victimage?
- Women's mass suicide as a farce, as the husbands want to take off jewellery from their corpse
- Unity among extremist and hate-spewing Hindu and Muslim upper-class businessmen for mutual benefit
- The trauma of the displaced compared to the caged parrot, Mithu
- Leaders that preach through *prabhat pheri* but loathe cleaning a sewage, quoting their caste and birth, live on. A naïve enthusiast like Jarnail Singh dies.

Thank You

