UNIT 2 GETTING TO KNOW THE TEXT

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit gives you a critical summary of each chapter of Tamas followed by some questions and/or comments that would help you to get to the heart of the novel. We hope that after first reading the novel and then reading the novel again with the help of the summaries you will be able to critically analyse the novel.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Tamas is a novel in 3 Parts. The novel is set in motion by Nathu’s act of killing of a pig at night at the behest of Murad Ali and its being thrown at the entrance of a mosque in a large town of West Punjab. This leads to eruption of violence and arson and looting in the town and in the neighbouring villages. The administration finally decides to take action and law and order are restored and there is an uneasy peace in the area.

2.2 DETAILED SUMMARIES

2.2.1 Part-I

Chapter 1 (first day, early morning) Nathu is commissioned by Murad Ali to kill a pig for the veterinary surgeon.

The novel opens with Nathu, a skinner, trying to kill a pig at the behest of Murad Ali. The carcass of the pig, said Murad Ali, was needed by the veterinary surgeon and Nathu must finish the work by four o’clock in the morning. He had been told to wait for a pushcart to come and pick the carcass up. He had never killed a pig before and he had told this to Murad Ali but he wouldn’t listen. There were many pigs wandering around and he was asked to entice one into his hut and kill it. Murad Ali had given him five rupees for it. Murad Ali was a useful man. He was a man of contacts, particularly in the Municipality and often helped Nathu get dead animals to skin. So he couldn’t refuse him.
The work of killing the pig proved very tough. He tried all possible ways to kill it but failed. He felt himself to be entrapped and regretted accepting the assignment. Finally, in desperation he picked up a slab of stone and threw it on the pig. Thereafter he went outside for a breath of fresh air.

The cool air brought him some relief. He longed to be with his buxom wife but he had come away without telling her anything.

When Nathu went back into the hut, the pig started moving again but died soon after. Soon he heard the sound of a jolting pushcart approaching. It was apparently coming to take the pig to the veterinary surgeon. Nathu was greatly relieved.

*The next we hear of the pig is later in the morning when the pig is found at the entrance of a mosque.*

**Comments/Questions**

- In this chapter we are in the mind of Nathu: his feelings, his incomprehension of why he has been asked to do the deed and the inextricable situation he finds himself in.

- Do you think that the narrator has added anything to the narrative by way of comments or remarks? No, he hasn’t. This, you will find, is characteristic of most of the novel. The writer leaves it to us the readers to draw our own conclusions. This requires you to be active and alert as readers.

- What impression do you form of Nathu, the skinner?

**Chapter 2 (first day, early morning)** *The Congress prabhat pheri starts for its usual round.*

It was about 4 o’clock in the morning when Congress activists, both young and old, stood outside the Congress office waiting for their compatriots to join them for the *prabhat pheri* that they took out every day in different localities of the town. Among those who were present were Mehtaji, President of the District Congress Committee, Bakshiji, Secretary of the District Congress Committee, Aziz, Kashmiri Lal, Shankar, Master Ram Das who led the singing and Jamail, a middle aged Sikh who was fanaticized devoted to the cause of freedom and was ever ready to make speeches.

Much of the conversation was marked by needling, taunts and leg pulling.

The first to suffer satiric needling was the thickset, elderly Bakshiji who had spent 16 years in jail, at the hands of Aziz who recited a couplet on his late coming. Mehtaji, always immaculately dressed, was Shankar’s target. Shankar had a pique against Mehtaji because the latter had not included his name among the district representatives to a conference to be addressed by Pandit Nehru. Shankar in turn was instrumental in getting Mehtaji’s favourite, Mr. Kohli’s name deleted from the list of district representatives to the Provincial Committee for not wearing khadi. Eccentric Jamail, ever ready to make a speech, was asked by Kashmiri Lal to make one. It was with great difficulty that he was made to stop.
Master Ram Das came panting for breath and informed them that instead of the *prabhat pheri*, it had been decided to do ‘constructive work’ that day. Brooms and shovels and iron pans were already in Sher Khan’s house.

Bakshiji then asked Ram Das to lead the singing, Kashmiri Lal picked up the tricolour, Jarnail started to shout ‘Left, Right’, and their round started and headed towards Dhok Qutab-ud Din.

**Comments/Questions**

- The origin of the Mehta — Shankar tiff, mentioned briefly in the summary, comes to us in a flashback. Keep a note of other episodes that come to us through flashback.

- Is the presentation of the Congress activists favourable or unfavourable? Which words or sentences tell you?

- Bakshiji’s entry is announced through this sentence: ‘The light of the lamp fell only on the man’s legs so it seemed as though only a pair of pajamas was walking along’ (12).

- Do you think this is an objective description? Is the narrator being ironical?

- Keep notes on characters like Jarnail, Bakshiji and Mehtaji.

- Comrade Dev Datt is first mentioned by Jarnail on page 16. Keep track of him because he will play an important part later in the novel.

**Chapter 3 Nathu roams the streets, witnesses a confrontation between Congress and Muslim League activists.**

Meanwhile, Nathu freed from the obnoxious task, heaved a sigh of relief and passed through the different lanes of the town. He was keen to reach home. The atmosphere was calm and peaceful. People were getting ready for a new day. The sights and sounds were familiar. Women were waiting for water at the municipal tap or going to the temple or the gurdwara. He saw a fakir with an *ektaara* singing a song to rouse the people from their sleep. He gave him a *paisa* and earned his blessings in return. He then heard the chiming of the Sheikh’s tower-clock and the temple bells and the *azan* from the mosque behind Imam Din Street.

He came across a spell placed by an unfortunate woman to shift her misfortune to someone else. But since he was childless, the spell did not bother him. Later he found his foot in a pitcher containing cow dung and horse urine placed outside the house of a miser to induce rain.

He suddenly started wondering in which direction the pushcart would be going! Towards the cantonment? But what did the veterinary surgeon need the pig for? Then he dismissed the whole thing from his mind.

He walked along the railing of the municipal grounds opposite the Imam Din Street. The municipal grounds were the hub of activities of the town. Dog
fights, pegging contests, circus shows, Muslim League meetings — all were held here. The Congress meetings were held in the Grain Market.

He didn’t have a clear idea of the developments taking place around him. He witnessed a confrontation between the Congress activists and the Muslim League members. The latter were insisting that the Congressmen should admit that the Congress was a party of the Hindus, which was contradicted by the Congress activists. Nathu also spotted Murad Ali but slinked out lest the man should ask him why he was loitering there. Murad Ali’s instructions were for him to wait for him in the hut but he had come away.

Comments/Questions

- Do you think the presentation of the morning scene realistic? List the details that make you think so.

Chapter 4 (first day, morning) Richard tells his wife, Liza about the British Policy towards Indians.

Richard the young Deputy Commissioner of the district and his wife Liza were out riding their horses. Liza had rejoined her husband after six months’ stay in England. Richard was interested in art objects and history and had a huge collection of Buddha heads and other specimen of Indian folk art and tried to make her interested in these things. He also suggested that as the wife of the Deputy Commissioner she should take the lead in social work but all this didn’t interest her at all. So she spent her time sleeping or drinking beer. Richard told her about the communal tension in the town. He said that while Hindus and Muslims fought against them for freedom, they fought each other in the name of religion. Liza corrected him to say that it was they (the Englishmen) who made them fight each other. Richard said that they left it to the two communities to resolve their differences and added that if the subjects fought each other, the ruler was safe.

Comments/Questions

- A major focus of the novel is the British ruling class. Richard and Liza appear several times later also. Why does the writer give them such a lot of attention in the novel?

- What is the core of the British rulers’ policy in India?

- Is Richard’s interest in Indian civilization genuine or is it divorced from sympathy?

Chapter 5 Congress activists engage in constructive work in a Muslim mohalla. Bakshi and Jarnail remove the carcass of the pig from the entrance of a mosque.

When the Congress activists reached the Imam Din Mohalla where they were to do constructive work, dawn was brightening into day. They had picked up brooms and shovels and tastlas from Sher Khan’s house and started cleaning the place.

It was a poor Muslim locality, which was almost like a village with only one kachcha drain. The ‘constructive work’ they had started doing elicited varied
comments from the residents. A tonga driver seeing Bakshiji sweep the ground insisted on Bakshiji’s giving his broom to him. On the other hand an elderly person commented that by taking the filth out they were spreading disease. Another elderly pious-looking person praised them for their ‘goodness of heart’ and their ‘nobility of purpose’.

While they were busy cleaning, there was a sudden tension in the air. Stones started flying. A man came running and talked to the local residents with violent gestures. The elderly man who had been effusive in his praise for their work also came back and asked them to clear out at once if they didn’t want to be skinned alive. They were all bewildered and stopped all work. Then they saw the carcass of a pig lying at the entrance of a mosque.

They were all nonplussed. Mehtaji was against their trying to remove the carcass from the mosque. But Bakshiji was firm. Finally he and Jarnail removed the dead pig from the entrance of the mosque and dragged it down and concealed it from view.

Just then a cow came running towards them in terror being pursued by a young man.

Bakshiji stood still with anxiety, pale and gloomy. He said: ‘It seems kites and vultures will hover over the town for a long time.’

Comments/Questions

- Which character or characters appear in the most sympathetic light in the scene? Why?

- Why does Bakshiji insist upon removing the dead pig from the mosque? What does it show about his character?

Chapter 6 (late morning) Hindu steps for self-defense; Ranvir’s initiation.

The weekly satsang ended with the chanting of Vedic mantras by Vanprasthiji in impeccable Sanskrit. In the mantras he wished every living being to lead a happy and contented life. Then followed the Shanti Path, which also sought the well being of every living being. He didn’t favour reciting the traditional aarti because it contained self-deprecatung sentiments such as ‘I am a fool, a lout, O Lord’ which had a demoralizing effect on the singer. Later there was another meeting of core members to which representatives of another Hindu organization and of the local Gurdwara Committee were invited to discuss preparations for self-defense. Vanprasthiji set the tone by reciting a couplet that condemned the Muslims. He straight suggested that each house should store a canister of linseed oil and coke and charcoal. Boiling oil could be thrown on the enemy from the roof. A suggestion to train young men in lathi-wielding was made for which the well-known merchant, Lala Lakshmi Narain offered to pay for purchasing 200 lathis. An insistent demand to send a delegation to the Deputy Commissioner to explain the Hindu viewpoint to him was also made. It was also suggested that the alarm bell installed at the Shivala temple after the riots of 1926 be repaired. It was decided to circulate the decisions regarding the storage of oil and coal to all the members and also to take a delegation to the Deputy Commissioner.
The absence of Ranvir, the 15-year old son of Lala Lakshmi Narain from home caused much unease to his father. Ranvir was at that time walking behind his preceptor, Master Dev Vrat, the organizer of the Youth Wing. He was going to be initiated.

As a child he had heard Masterji tell him stories of Rana Pratap and Shivaji. The latter had taught him to tie different kinds of knots and about fire/rain-producing arrows. He had also told his disciple that the technique to make bombs and aeroplanes was there in the Vedas.

To pass the initiation test Ranvir was directed to slaughter a hen with a knife and thus prove that he was mentally tough. Ranvir failed in his first attempt but on the second attempt was declared to have passed the test. Then Masterji dipped his hand in the blood and put a tilak on his forehead.

Preparations of the Youth Wing for self-defense were seriously afoot. They had collected several weapons — knives, a dagger and a kirpan. They also had a can of oil but no cauldron. It was decided to borrow one from the halwai’s shop. Luckily, though the shop was closed, the door was open. Ranvir went in along with another young man, Dharmadev. He asked his companion to pick up a cauldron. When the shopkeeper tried to resist, Ranvir struck him on the face, which made him bleed. Afterwards Ranvir felt that killing was not difficult. ‘It is fighting that is difficult, particularly when the other person stands up against you. To stab a man to death is far easier.’ (96)

When his companion questioned Ranvir why he had hit him, he threatened him too.

Comments/Questions

- Do you notice any change of tone when the narrator is talking about Vanprasthiji and Ranvir’s initiation? Earlier his tone has largely been objective and neutral?
- What attitude does the Vanprasthiji have towards Muslims? What is the term used for them? Compare it with the term used by a Muslim character for Hindus in Chapter 8(130).

Chapter 7 (first day) Citizens’ Delegation to the Deputy Commissioner for peace.

The delegation, consisting of representatives of different organizations, was organized by Bakshi, who was agitated because of the increasing tension in the town. Besides Bakshi, it included Hayat Baksh of the Muslim League, Mr. Herbert, the American Principal of a local college, Prof. Raghu Nath and others. Bakshi said to the Deputy Commissioner that they had come to talk to him about the tension in the town and wanted him to exercise his authority and take steps to ensure law and order in the town. But Richard said that power rested in the hands of Nehru. Hayat Baksh said that if the police was alerted, the situation could be brought under control in no time. When Bakshi suggested patrolling by the police and the setting up of army pickets at different places, Richard replied that the army was not under his control. He was also not in favour of clamping a curfew for he feared that it would make the people more nervous. Instead he proposed that leaders of the town take a round and make a joint appeal for peace, which he felt would be more
effective. Bakshiji, however, said that the situation was critical and called for immediate action and suggested that if an aeroplane were to fly over the city, it would serve to warn the people and prevent rioting. But Richard replied that he had no authority over aeroplanes either. But he supported the American Principal’s proposal to go round the city in a bus and make a joint appeal to the people. At this point news was received about the breaking out of rioting in the city and the meeting broke up and the delegation dispersed.

It was Sunday noon and Liza was alone on a scorching hot day. This time she had come back from England resolved to take interest in Richard’s work and also in welfare activities. But nothing seemed to work. She was hugely bored. She tried to divert herself by playfully interrogating a babu, Roshan Lal who worked in the office but she finally gave up and went in.

Comments/Questions

- This chapter needs to be read together with Chapters 4, 8 and 21.

- Why does Richard turn down every single suggestion made by Bakshiji and others to bring peace to the city?

- What is Liza’s state of mind?

Chapter 8 (first day) The general atmosphere in Shivala Bazar calm and stable — communal relations harmonious — Tailor Khuda Baksh’s dealing with Sikh women customers — old Karim Khan’s story about Musa and Khizr — Jarnail’s announcement of a Congress meeting — Pir of Golra Sharif passes by — Nathu’s restless wanderings, his drinking, meeting with the unresponsive Murad Ali, Nathu finds relief in the arms of his wife — riot begins, the Grain market in flames, Nathu distressed.

The shops in the Shivala Bazar were crowded. Tailor Khuda Baksh — Bakshe to Hindu and Sikh women customers — was assuring Hukam Singh’s wife that he would sew the wedding dress of her daughter in time. The tailor also noticed the installation of the alarm bell of the temple that was damaged during the 1926 riots and said that he trembled hearing its sound.

At Fazl Din, the nanbai’s shop, old Karim Khan was telling his listeners the story of Musa and Khizr to illustrate his point that a ruler was able to see what ordinary people could not. That was why a handful of firangi, he said, were able to rule over us because they were ‘very wise, very subtle and very far-sighted’.

Nathu was drinking tea at the shop. In the beginning he wanted to go home. But the news of a dead pig being thrown at the entrance of the mosque made him fearful and restless and he roamed the different lanes of the town. Once he thought of going to Motia, the prostitute and spending the night there but later changed his mind. He heard an announcement of a Congress meeting to be held in the evening to make an appeal for peace.

Soon everyone in the shop stood up for a holy man, Pir of Golra passing through and everyone paid obeisance to the Pir. Old Karim Khan remarked
that Pir Sahib could cure any disease and gave a personal example of it. Earlier even kafirs could go to him — he didn't touch them and felt their pulse with a stick — but now he hated them and didn't examine them.

There was another turn in Nathu's mood. He felt good. When he passed by the Jama Masjid, he saw an unusually large number of people coming out of the mosque. Probably the Pir had delivered a sermon there. In the Bara Bazar he ate kababs and drank country wine and bought a flower garland and put it round his own neck. In this drunken state he saw Murad Ali for the second time that day and tried to talk to him but was unable to extract a word out of him.

When he reached home, it was night. Nathu's wife had been waiting for him all these hours and was hugely relieved to see him back. She hadn't eaten anything. The news of the killing of a pig and its being thrown at the entrance of a mosque had made her nervous and she had cried all day. Nathu then made love to her. But he still didn't share his secret of the pig with her.

Soon they both heard loud noises and the Muslim slogan of Allah o Akbar and the Hindu reply — Har-Har Mahadev and above all the insistent ringing of the alarm bell. They also saw an unnatural glow of light in the distance — probably the Grain Market was on fire. All this made Nathu tremble and he sat on the cot stone stiff, holding on to his wife.

The confused mixture of sounds woke up Liza also. She roused Richard from his sound sleep but he dismissed her fears and asked her to go to sleep. When she insisted, he told her that a riot had broken out between Hindus and Muslims. In effect he told her that the Britishers best safety lay in their fighting among themselves.

Comments/Questions

- What metaphor does the writer use to describe the relationship evolved through centuries of communal living? Pick out the lines that describe the relationship. Whose sentiments are these?

- What term does the Nanbai use to refer to Hindus while talking about the Pir of Golra? See page 130. Also compare it with the term used for Muslims in chapter 6, pages 81-2.

- What is the point of the story of Musa and Khizr narrated by Old Karim Khan?

- There is a comment about characters with an inner balance. Who is making these remarks? And who is being talked about?

Chapter 9  Lala Lakshmi Narain's growing anxiety about family safety in a Muslim mohalla — Grain Market fire — Ranvir's absence — the decision to seek Muslim help to shift to a safe place.

It was night and the Grain Market was on fire. The alarm bell was ringing. Slogans were being raised. The rioting had broken out. Lala Lakshmi Narain was very anxious about the safety of the family living in a Muslim mohalla. His neighbour, Fazl Din, had assured him of safety. Earlier Hayat Baksh, President of the District Muslim League — they had grown up together — had
also assured him. But he felt that Muslims were not to be trusted. Ranvir too was absent from home but the family had received word that he was with Master Dev Vrat. The only weapon in the house, a small woodchopper, was missing, having found its way through Ranvir to the Youth League’s arsenal. Lalaji was greatly upset and he wanted to send his servant, Nanku, to his in-laws to seek the help of their Muslim friend, Shah Nawaz, to take them to a safer place. But his wife, concerned with the safety of the servant, persuaded him to wait till the following morning.

To add to Lalaji’s anxiety he heard the sound of running feet and of someone being chased but to his great relief, the person was not Ranvir.

**Comments/Questions**

- Do observe the sudden distrust of Hindus for Muslims in a neighbourhood in which the communities lived harmoniously as a fallout of the incident spelt out in the beginning.

**Chapter 10  The riot-torn city — Shah Nawaz escorts Lala Lakshmi Naran and family to safety; retrieves his friend Raghu Nath’s wife’s jewellery box from his old house but kicks their servant Milkhi.**

The following day the city woke up only half alive. All business and other activities had come to a standstill. Many persons had been killed. Shops had been looted. Overnight a dividing line between Hindus and Muslims had been drawn. Rumours were rife. Jarnail, however, reached the Congress office for the prabhat pheri and condemned his colleagues for their cowardice and the British for their mischief and appealed to all to maintain peace.

Shah Nawaz came and escorted Lala Lakshmi Naran and family to a relative in the cantonment. Then he went to his bosom friend Raghu Nath’s house. On the way he stopped at a Muslim locality where Maula Dad told him that a poor Muslim had been killed by some kafirs. But he added that they too had killed five kafirs. Soon after he saw a funeral procession of the Muslim being taken out.

Shah Nawaz was on intimate terms with the entire Raghu Nath family. He affectionately called his friend ‘yabu’ and his friend’s wife didn’t observe purdah from him. It was Raghu Nath’s boast that his closest friend was a Muslim. But when Raghu Nath lamented that things were bad and brother was killing brother, they both became conscious of the fact that their political perceptions were different from their personal relationship. To change the subject Shah Nawaz told him of his chance meeting with an old schoolmate of theirs, Bhim, the previous day.

Raghu Nath’s wife then requested Shah Nawaz to retrieve a jewellery box that contained all the family ornaments from their old house. The latter immediately agreed. On the way he encountered the hostile eyes of Feroz Khan, the hide-seller and his friend Maula Dad. His friend’s house evoked fond memories of his long association with the family. He also noticed the chutia on the Garhwali servant Milkhi’s head. While taking the box out, he happened to look out of a window and saw a crowd of mourners in a mosque. Whether it was the chutia on Milkhi’s head, the grieving crowd of mourners,
the funeral procession, or all that he had heard during the past few days, something snapped in him and he kicked Milkhi viciously which broke his spine and killed him.

Back at his friend Raghu Nath’s house, he handed the box to his friend’s wife but told them that Milkhi had fallen from the staircase and had broken a bone or two. He assured them that he would arrange for medical help for him. At this moment Shah Nawaz seemed a saint to Raghu Nath’s wife.

Comments/Questions

- Shah Nawaz is a member of the Muslim League but this does not interfere with his being helpful to his Hindu friends. Why does he kick Milkhi viciously?

- What is your attitude towards Shah Nawaz? The writer does not romanticize Shah Nawaz’s character. Is he a simple character or a complex character?

Chapter 11 (same day) Comrade Dev Datt’s peace effort in riot-torn city — defies parents — Congress-Muslim League meeting imperative — Jarnail killed while speaking for peace.

Comrade Dev Datt proceeded to continue his efforts for peace systematically. Also, the riots must not spread to villages. Arranging a meeting between the Congress and the Muslim League was imperative. His parents vociferously opposed his venturing out on such a day but he still went out with his bicycle, assuring his mother that he would return. There were dead persons or persons nearly dead on the road but he went straight to the party office for a meeting. Only three members were present. A fourth member had been sent to the villages. The fifth member, a Muslim, had left the commune because a dead pig had been thrown outside a mosque and three Muslims had been killed before his very eyes. So he felt that it was wrong to blame the British for the riots. Dev Datt vainly tried to argue that he should not get emotional and that viewing things emotionally could be very misleading for a communist. It was reported that working-class areas had so far been free from rioting. But Comrade Jagdish’s hands in the labour colony at Ratta needed to be strengthened.

The Congress-Muslim League meeting was held at Hayat Baksh’s house. Dev Datt had succeeded in bringing Bakshiji along with two other Congressmen. At first there was an exchange of angry words and accusations between them. Hayat Baksh was insisting that Bakshiji should first admit that the Congress was an organization of the Hindus. But ultimately Dev Datt’s appeal for peace prevailed and both sides signed the joint Appeal for Peace.

While he was leaving, news came that rioting had broken out in Ratta also. So he decided to go there at once and went to the Party office to pick up his bicycle. There he again confronted his father who was furious with him for staying out in the deteriorating situation. But he remained unmoved and sent Comrade Ram Nath to escort his father home.

That very afternoon Jarnail was killed while delivering one of the several appeals for peace in different localities. He was saying: “We are brothers, we
shall live together, we shall live as one...’ Just then a lathi hit him on the head splitting his skull into two. His sentence remained incomplete.

Comments/Questions

- What is the author’s attitude to Comrade Dev Datt’s efforts for peace?
- What do you think about Jarnail?

Chapter 12 Ranvir and his band of ‘warriors’ watch for mlechha quarries—
Inder trails an elderly Muslim selling oil and scents, and kills him.

Ranvir and his band of ‘warriors’ were stationed in a double-storeyed house, itching for action. The other ‘warriors’ were Shambhu, Manohar and Inder. They cast themselves in the style of the Rajputs of old. Ranvir, supremely confident after being initiated, liked to think of himself as Shivaji. He was addressed by others as ‘Sardar’. The idea of boiling oil was given up for want of coal. At the behest of the Sardar, Inder gave a demonstration of his skill in the use of his knife. All his movements ended with his knife aimed at Ranvir’s back. Ranvir shook his head in disapproval saying, as Master Dev Vrat had said, that one should not aim at either the enemy’s chest or back. The best place to plunge the knife was the waist or the stomach, he said.

Then Ranvir spotted a mlechha, an elderly oil and scent seller walking down the street. At a hint from Ranvir, Inder leapt into the lane and followed the scent seller for some time. At the turn of the corner the scent seller saw the boy for the first time and started talking to him. He thought the boy was afraid and was walking with him for protection. He was telling him about the sales that he did. Suddenly Inder swung into action and stabbed the old man remembering to give a twist to the knife as the Sardar had said, and ran away. It was after sometime that the old man realized that he had been stabbed. He collapsed saying ‘O, I have been killed.’

The number of kites flying in the sky seemed to increase.

Comments/Questions

- This chapter needs to be studied with Chapter 6. Do you think the narrator has used the same tone here also?
- The writer has shown Shah Nawaz in Chapter 10 as a complex character. The same thing could be said about Ramzan in Chapters 16 and 17. Do you think the author has dropped his objectivity while dealing with these Hindu young men and oversimplified their character?

Chapter 13 (second day) Nathu’s guilt and deep distress at the killings and burning caused by his act; his final confession to his wife; Nathu’s wife’s attempt to cast out the spectre from their house.
Nathu was deeply distressed. He held himself guilty at being the cause of the killings and burning taking place in the city. But he didn't know the purpose for which the dead pig was to be used. Sometimes he would join his fellow skinners but would feel restless and go back to his house. Sometimes he would wish to take a glassful of country liquor and forget everything. He wanted to tell everything to his wife but he feared her revealing the secret to others in an unguarded moment. And then no one would believe him that Murad Ali, a Muslim, had asked him to kill a pig and have it thrown on the steps of the mosque. And maybe it was not the same pig. Couldn't there be two pigs of the same colour? One impulse was to go to Kalu, the scavenger, and ask him where he had delivered the pig or go to Murad Ali. But Murad Ali might even blame him and have him arrested. Then he told himself that what he had done was done in ignorance. But those who were killing and burning were doing so with wide, open eyes. He recalled his father's words that a man whose hands are clean, will never do an evil deed.

He saw a man walking along the road stop and look at the skinners' colony. He feared that the man was looking for the person who had killed the pig. Again he felt like telling her everything. He was restless and was behaving oddly. Finally after a lot of dilly-dallying he told her that it was he who had killed the pig and that he had been paid five rupees for it. But it was Kalu who had thrown it on the steps of the mosque, not he. Kalu was a Christian, not a Muslim. He told her the whole story.

At first his wife was deeply upset at the horrible thing he had done and had actually trembled while listening to Nathu's account but she said that he wasn't to blame. Earlier she had refused to touch the tainted money but later said that it was his hard-earned money and she would buy dhotis with it. She said that their hearts were clean and they didn't need to fear anyone. But she cautioned him not to tell anyone else.

Later they heard someone say that a riot had broken out in Ratta. Nathu's wife felt that the shadow of some dreadful omen had fallen on their home. And though she asked her husband to go out and join other skinners, she herself tried to cast out the phantom by sweeping and then washing the room thoroughly.

Comments/Questions

- Like Chapter 1, this chapter is entirely concerned with Nathu.

- Why does he feel guilt-ridden?

- Why does the writer give so much attention to Nathu? What is his purpose?

- Who does Nathu represent?

2.2.2 Part-II

Chapter 14 Harnam Singh and his wife Banto leave their home and hearth.

The riots had spread from the city to the countryside. Among the villages affected was Dhok Elahi Baksh.
Old Harman Singh and wife Banto were forced to leave their shop-cum-home in the evening of the third day of rioting. A pious god-fearing couple, they were the only Sikhs living in the village where Harman Singh had a teashop running. A local well-wisher, Karim Khan, had warned them of grave danger to their lives from marauders from outside the village and urged them to leave at once. At first Harman Singh with an unshakeable faith in human goodness was most reluctant to leave but Karim Khan’s words had left them no option. Banto took some of her jewellery in a small packet and Harman Singh took his gun along with him. Before going Banto opened the cage and let their little pet myna fly away. The myna repeated the sentence — ‘God be with you Banto! May God be with everyone’ that it had learnt from Harman Singh. At this Banto’s throat choked and she repeated the words of the myna. The myna obviously followed them part of the way for they continued hearing the myna’s words for quite some time.

Harman Singh and Banto could hear the noise made by the advancing marauders even before they had left their place. As they made their way into the unknown, they could hear the attackers break open their shop and loot their house. Later they saw flames in the sky, which told them that their shop was on fire. From residents they had become homeless outsiders in no time.

They thought of the safety of their children, Iqbal who had a cloth shop at Nurpur and daughter Jasbir at Syedpur. They were more worried about Iqbal for he was alone while Jasbir lived in a village, which had a large Sikh community. Possibly the community had gathered together in the gurdwara.

At daybreak they were sitting on the bank of a brook, close to village Dhok Muridpur. ‘They had spent the whole night praying, brooding and dragging their feet.’ They washed themselves, prayed and went towards the village and knocked at the first door they came to, to seek shelter.

**Comments/Questions**

- The figure of Harman Singh is based on a real Sikh whom the author had met in a refugee camp where he had worked for some time.

- Obviously the fate of Harman Singh and his wife Banto who are forced to leave their home and hearth is not an isolated one. Which lines give you this information? Harman Singh is thus a representative figure.

- Why does Harman Singh want to continue to live at Dhok Elahi Baksh in spite of Karim Khan’s warnings? What does his reluctance tell you about his character?

**Chapter 15 The Sikhs of Syedpur, assembled at the gurdwara, prepare to fight the Muslim marauders.**

Syedpur was another village to be affected by rioting in the city. The scene shifts to the local gurdwara to which the Sikh residents of the village had moved for reasons of greater safety. The chapter opens with the description of a congregation plunged in frenzied exaltation by the singing of a song that expressed sentiments of supreme sacrifice. The song was reminiscent of the sacrifice demanded of the Sikh soldiers known as the Khalsa some three
hundred years ago. Everyone there felt himself or herself to be a link in the long chain of Sikh history, ready to lay down his or her life.

Muslims were spoken of as Turks, the traditional enemy of the Khalsa. Preparation for a possible fight with them had been made. Jathedar Kishen Singh, a World War Two veteran, was in charge of the defense. Besides seven double-barreled guns and five boxes of cartridges, there were lances, swords and lathis. Armed pickets were set up and more arms were sought for from Kahuta. Since yellow was the colour of selfless sacrifice, they all tired to wear something that was symbolic of the old tradition.

The Muslims too had been preparing for the fight and had cast themselves in the role of mujahids, ready to launch a jehad against the kafirs.

S. Teja Singh, the chief of the congregation came and exhorted the Sikhs to be ready to make sacrifices. He told the assembly that they had informed the Deputy Commissioner of the Muslim efforts to collect arms. When he said that they had tried to contact Sheikh Ghulam Rasul and other Muslims of the village, and that they couldn’t be trusted, he was contradicted by a frail, young Sikh, Sohan Singh, who said that it was all a lie. Among interruptions and threats, he said that Sikhs and Muslims were being incited against each other and that rumours were adding to the tension. He advocated the need to maintain contact with Muslims and peace in the village. Sohan Singh ascribed the rioting to the mischief of the rulers and said that if the Muslims from outside attacked them, it would be difficult for them to defend themselves.

At this Teja Singh said in a trembling voice that that very morning Ghulam Rasul had assured him that nothing untoward would happen in the village, but soon after the Brahmin peon of Khalsa School was killed and his wife abducted. Sohan Singh again stood up to say that the peon was only injured and that his wife was with him. He also told the assembly that the attackers had come from outside and that the situation had been saved by Comrade Mir Dad from the city. Some people derided his efforts to intervene and wondered who Mir Dad was. The atmosphere was so tense that a Nihang Singh gave Sohan Singh a blow.

A somewhat similar scene was being enacted in another part of the village between Mir Dad and some butchers. Like Sohan Singh, Mir Dad also attributed all the trouble to the Britishers, a position that was hotly contested by the locals. He was challenged to go to the gurdwara and to ensure that the Sikhs did not collect arms. If they did that and dispersed, the Muslims too would go to their homes.

Mir Dad had come from the city to meet his brother Allah Dad who lived in the village and also to open a school that could develop into a community centre. Though some people did listen to him, he did not make much headway because he had no land or property. At the moment he had been sent along with Sohan Singh to prevent rioting from spreading.

While Mir Dad was engaged in arguing with the butchers, an incident took place that was ridiculous but that was interpreted by both Muslims and Sikhs to reinforce their suspicion of the other. Gopal Singh who had been sent to find out Muslim plans saw someone coming from the other side and taking out what he thought was a dagger. The man was actually old Nura [old, bald and toothless and almost blind] who was sitting down to relieve himself. Gopal
Singh thought that he was about to attack him. In his confusion he ran and collided with him. When they heard the sound of running feet, one of the butchers ran after the man and threw his lance at him. Gopal Singh escaped unhurt. But his misadventure resulted in the hardening of the attitude of the communities to one another. While Mir Dad was shouted down, Sohan Singh received another blow for his pains.

Among the women in the gurdwara Jasbir stood out for her piety and religious fervour. A short kirpan hanging from her waist, she was known in the congregation as ‘the daughter of the Guru’. She had inherited her intense devotion from her father, Harnam Singh and she went about performing tasks like washing the steps of the gurdwara, cleaning the shoes of the people, fanning the congregation, and serving them cool water with a radiant face.

Just then a cloud of dust was sighted in the distance. Soon after the muffled sound of drumbeats was also heard. This was obviously an attack from outside the village. The situation had taken an entirely unexpected and dangerous turn. The news electrified the entire congregation. ‘Turks! Turks have come. Turks are here.’ Everyone was asked to go to his or her post. Jasbir’s hand immediately went to her kirpan. The Muslim slogan of Allah-O-Akbar was answered with Boley So Nihal! Sat Sri Akal!

It was dusk. Like many others, Baldev Singh had left his old mother unprotected at home. When the Muslim attackers came, he realized what he had done and thinking that the attackers would have killed her, he ran shouting ‘blood for blood’ with a naked sword and killed the old blacksmith Karim Baksh to avenge her ‘murder’.

Night was deepening over the village but the noises had become louder and sharper. The attackers had started their destruction.

Comments/Questions

- This chapter needs to be studied with Chapter 18. Both talk about the defense of the gurdwara at Syedpur.

- Is the narrator critical of the Sikh attempt to link their fight against Muslims to the struggle of the Khalsa against the Turks? How do you know?

- What is the writer’s attitude towards religious frenzy?

- Do you think that this religious frenzy can be linked with the frenzy which Master Dev Vratt instills in young Ranvir and his friends in Chapter 6?

Chapter 16 Harnam Singh and Banto receive shelter in a Muslim home in Dhok Muridpur

This chapter is a continuation of Chapter 14 dealing with the uprooting of Harnam Singh and his wife Banto from their village Dhok Elahi Baksh.
When Harnam Singh and Banto sought shelter in the first house they knocked at, the woman of the house, Rajo let them in and bolted the door again.

Harnam Singh narrated their tale of woe to her. She heard Harnam Singh tell his tale of woe and offered them a glass of lassi. They hesitated for a moment but finally drank it.

Rajo told them that the men folk were away and were about to return. Her husband, she said, was a God-fearing man but her son was a member of the League and she couldn’t say how he would behave towards them. Harnam Singh was completely resigned to his fate and said that if she wanted them to leave, they would go and moved to the door. Rajo watched them for a moment and then told them not to go. The younger woman, Rajo’s daughter-in-law objected but Rajo could not bring herself to turn out those who had sought shelter from her. She hid them in the loft. Harnam Singh had decided that in case of an emergency he would shoot Banto first and then kill himself. At Akran’s suggestion Rajo asked Harnam Singh to hand his gun over to her. Harnam Singh hesitated but realizing that he had no choice, gave it to her. He felt even more defenseless than before.

When Rajo’s husband came with a big black trunk, she told him that she had given shelter to an old Sikh couple. Meanwhile Akran was busy breaking open the lock. At that moment Harnam Singh looked out from his hiding place, recognized Ehsan Ali and asked them not to break open the trunk — it was their trunk — and offered them the key. Ehsan Ali felt embarrassed. Later the same drama was enacted as had happened earlier with Rajo. Ehsan Ali told them that the people were looking for them and that if they came to know that they were hiding here, they would get into trouble. Harnam Singh, resigned as before, came down the loft and prepared to leave but Ehsan Ali had second thoughts and hid them in the godown. Sometime during the day Rajo gave them chapattis and buttermilk. The thoughts of their children, Iqbal and Jasbir came to their mind.

When Ehsan Ali’s son Ramzan came home and was told of the situation, he went wild with rage, broke open the door of the godown and asked the kafirs to come out. But when it came to killing him, he couldn’t, for he too had recognized Harnam Singh.

It was nearly midnight when the tall and stately Rajo escorted the Sikh couple out of the village. She handed Harnam Singh his gun and Banto the packet of jewellery that she had found in the trunk and wishing them well, sent them off to an uncertain future.

Comments/Questions

- What is the author trying to bring out in this episode?

- There is a comment made by the narrator, which explains the behaviour of Rajo, Ehsan Ali and Ramzan towards Harnam Singh. What is it?

- Bring out the great irony in this scene.
Chapter 17  Iqbal Singh is hunted, humiliated and is forced to get converted to Islam.

The story of the pursuit and capture and conversion of Iqbal Singh almost runs parallel to the incidents in Chapter 16. It is only after Ramzan has finished with Iqbal that he comes home and is wild with rage at Harnam Singh seeking shelter in his own house.

Ramzan and his friends — some 20 or so of them — were returning from looting in Dhok Elahi Baksh and Muridpur when they spotted a young Sikh running for his life in the distance. He had a cloth shop at Mirpur (Or is it Nurpur?) and was probably going to join his father, Harnam Singh at Dhok Elahi Baksh. The marauders saw him and pursued him. Ramzan was in the lead. At one stage he hid himself in a deep hole. But they pelted him with stones relentlessly and finally succeeded in ferreting him out. They told him that he must embrace Islam or he would be stoned to death. Iqbal, bruised and battered and completely broken in spirit came out on all fours. He had no other choice but to assent to being converted.

At this they led him in triumph to the village for conversion. But his agreeing to conversion did not mean the end of his torture or derision at the hands of the marauders. In the village his hair was cut off and his beard given a Muslim cut; he was asked to suck a piece of raw meat thrust into his mouth; and he was made to recite the kalma. Then everyone embraced him as his new brother. Thereafter he was bathed and dressed in new clothes, was circumcised, and finally given a new name and a new identity as Iqbal Ahmed.

Thus all marks of Sikhism were wiped out, replaced by the marks of the Muslim faith. He was now no longer an enemy but a friend, not a kafir but a believer.

Comments/Questions

- The writer doesn’t spare us a view of any brutality perpetrated during the partition. For sheer animality it would be hard to match this scene.

- This again is an example of religious frenzy which tramples over the rights of other human beings.

- What is the narrator’s view about religious conversions?

Chapter 18  Sikh women’s heroism amid fierce fighting at Syedpur. Government finally intervenes and the rioting stops.

The fight between Sikhs and Muslims was bitter and lasted two days and two nights. Each community looked upon the other as its traditional enemy. Among the many people who died was Sohan Singh. He had earlier been sent with a peace proposal and his death was the Muslim answer to the peace proposal. Shops and houses had also been set on fire.

The ammunition on both sides was nearly exhausted, though each side shouted their war cries more vociferously to appear strong.
The gurdwara was virtually under siege. The morale inside was pretty low. It was realized that they had blundered by assembling at the gurdwara and by snapping ties with Ghulam Rasul. The Sikhs now tried to buy peace. Mir Dad’s services were sought but when he learned that money was involved, he dissociated himself from the process. The choice of the negotiator then fell on Mehar Singh, the younger brother of the granthi. The Muslim demand was said to be two lakhs. But Mehar Singh was asked to settle for any amount up to one lakh rupees.

Meanwhile some ‘mujahids’ were narrating their experiences at Ghulam Rasul’s house. One ‘religious warrior’ said that several of them had assaulted a Hindu girl. But when his turn came he found that the girl he was assaulting had died. Another case was of a bagri woman who pleaded with them not to kill her and all the seven of them could have her as their keep. But one of them stabbed her to death.

Suddenly the fighting flared up again. While the younger granthi was going to the Muslims for peace negotiations, the Nihang posted on the roof of the gurdwara shouted that the attackers had come. Alarmed at this, the elder granthi shouted to his brother to stop and come back but he continued to move forward. When the elder granthi realized that Mehar Singh had been killed, he rushed out barefoot and was brought back with difficulty. War cries were heard and heavy firing started. The Sikhs responded with fighting with their swords — there was no ammunition left. The situation was, however, desperate. The marauders had reached the lane leading to the gurdwara. The Sikh women led by Jasbir Kaur went to the well outside the gurdwara and jumped into it. Some women jumped along with children while others went alone.

By the time the day broke, the fighting had ceased. Dead bodies were littered all over. Kites and vultures and crows arrived in large numbers and hovered over the village and particularly over the well. The rioting had ceased but not quite, for a young Muslim was in the process of spilling kerosene oil on the windows of the gurdwara and setting fire to them. He gave up his idea only when he saw an aeroplane flying overhead.

When the aeroplane came towards the village, people came out in large numbers. At times the aeroplane flew so low that one could see its white pilot with goggles on smiling and waving to the people below. Kishen Singh, his spirits suddenly uplifted, thought the pilot had actually saluted him and he clicked his heels and saluted him in return. He shouted: ‘God save the King, Sahib, God save the King’. When the pilot flew over Ghulam Rasul’s house, it seemed to Kishen Singh that he (the pilot) did not return the salutations of the people there. This thrilled him no end and he shouted defiance at the Sheikh’s men to fire now.

All hostilities came to an end and life began to return to normalcy.

Comments/Questions

- How do you rate the scene of Sikh women jumping into the well in order to avoid being captured by Muslim marauders in terms of its heroism? Does it remind you of Rani Padmavati’s famous johar, jumping into fire along with other women at the fort of Chittore?
Contrast this with Allah Rakha — Prakasho episode in chapter 20.

After letting them destroy each other for three days, the British rulers intervene in the Hindu/Sikh — Muslim rioting and stop the fighting.

The episode of Sikh women jumping into the well is based on a real incident, which happened in village Thoa Khalsa in Rawalpindi District in 1947.

**Chapter 19** The District Administration reestablishes law and order and provides relief to riot victims.

The narrative shifts back to the city again.

On the fourth day of rioting the situation in the city and the surrounding area was brought under control. An eighteen-hour curfew was imposed which was later relaxed to twelve hours. Army pickets were set up and police patrolling arranged. The Deputy Commissioner’s reputation as being firm was established on the basis of his having shot a young man who didn’t heed his warnings. Refugee camps were set up and arrangements made for treatment of the wounded and the disposal of the dead. The Congress too set up a relief office. The D.C. came to enjoy the reputation of being ‘sympathetic and capable’. He took personal interest and went to the house of the Health Officer and instructed him to go to Syedpur and take steps to prevent the spread of diseases.

Later he gave a resume of government efforts to provide relief to a gathering of prominent citizens. As always there were some people who were critical of the government. Manohar Lal was harsh on both the Congress and the government. Bakshiji, though unhappy with Manohar Lal for being over critical, had also been feeling uneasy. He felt that the Government first incited riots and then controlled them. It was they who had had the last word.

At home, Liza feeling extremely bored and unhappy, in her husband’s absence, became dead drunk with beer. When Richard came around eight, he found her asleep on her sofa. When he lifted her to take her to the bedroom, he realized that she had wet the sofa on which she had been sitting. She had now woken up and was somewhat sober.

He told her that the grain market had gone up in flames and that one hundred and three villages had been razed to the ground. “So many villages burnt down, Richard and you still have work to do?” This made Richard wonder if she was being ironical. His relations with Liza were becoming more and more estranged. The thought of snapping the marital tie also came to him but he was considered a sagacious and efficient officer and for the sake of his career it was imperative that he keep Liza by his side. So he invited her to accompany him on his tour of Syedpur where women had jumped into a well. From there they could go to Taxila. The whole area was lovely, he added. He had heard a lark and seen many new birds there. This shocked Liza who wondered how he could see new birds and hear a lark in such places. In response Richard said that as an administrator, he had to be emotionally uninvolved whatever be the scale of the tragedy. Before leaving for his office,
he asked her to lend a helping hand in collecting clothes and other things for refugees.

Comments/Questions

- Ponder over the remarks of the omniscient narrator regarding Bakshiji, the District Congress Committee Secretary:

Ever since the riots had broken out, Bakshi’s mind had been in a sort of mist. He kept saying to himself again and again that the British had again the last word, had again had the better of them while his own hold on the situation had been feeble all along. (307-08) (italics added)

Do think in the light of the work done by Bakshiji, this is a fair comment on the man? Has the comment anything to do with the author’s attempt to show communists like Comrade Dev Datt and his friends in a more favourable light?

- What is the point of showing the estranged relationship between Richard and Liza?

Richard is reminded of the case of the wife of a fellow administrator whose wife, Mrs Lawrence, also drank beer out of sheer boredom and who would wet her clothes and her sofa. Eventually Mrs Lawrence left her husband and married a young army officer. Coincidentally Richard had purchased the sofa from Lawrence. Is the author suggesting something general about the fate of young British wives whose husbands are posted in India?

Chapter 20  The Scene at the Relief Committee Office.

The narrative here gives a glimpse of the different hues that constitute the variegated scene witnessed at the Relief Committee Office.

One of the functionaries at the Office was the Statistics Babu whose task it was to collect figures of those who had died, of those who were wounded and the losses suffered. But the refugees who came to him tried to pour out their heart to him. Each had a different story to tell. Harnam Singh, the teashop owner of Dhok Elahi Baksh, wanted his gun to be recovered from the person who had given shelter to him at Adhiro. Another Sikh hoped that his wife Sukhwant and their son Gurmeet might not have jumped into the well and could be traced somewhere. A third, in his desperation, even tried to offer bribe to the Statistics Babu to help him recover the gold chain and bracelet that she was wearing when she jumped.

The statistics collected showed that the number of Hindus and Sikhs killed was more or less equal to the number of Muslims killed. The material loss suffered by the former was of course higher. Comrade Dev Datt wanted another category to be included — how many of those killed were well-to-do persons and how many poor.

At another place there was a heated argument among Congress activists about what to do in case of physical attack. Should one offer one’s neck to be chopped off? Bakshiji replied to Kashmiri Lal who had first raised the issue: ‘Jarnail did not suffer from any such mental conflict…Jarnail was eccentric,
unlettered, crazy, but he was never worried about what he should do in the event of his being attacked... ’ (327) Later: ‘Listen. You yourself should not indulge in violence. That is number one. You should persuade the fellow to desist from using violence. That is number two. And if he does not listen, fight him tooth and nail. That is number three.’ This reply however didn’t end the discussion.

Another group of refugees were laughing over something. In the midst of them on the ground lay an elderly Sikh who had clasped his hands tightly between his thighs and who moved from side to side. He refused to go to his village for fear of being circumcised. This response made everyone laugh loudly.

At another place sat a Brahmin pandit and his wife. At first they had wanted the Babu to help them in recovering their abducted daughter, but later they apparently realized that she must have lost her caste — ‘They must have already put the forbidden thing in her mouth.’ — and also that they were too poor to feed her. So they gave up their idea of her recovery.

We are also shown how easily Parkasho, the abducted daughter comes to accept her new destiny and makes peace with her abductor, Allah Rakha, the tonga driver.

The chapter ends on a sombre note.

**Comments/Questions**

- Parkasho’s story comes to us in a flashback. Do you think that the ease with which Parkasho makes peace with her abductor Allah Rakha is natural and convincing?

- In an interview with Lalit Mohan Joshi in 2002, Bhisham Sahni said he had worked in a refugee camp and that his task was to prepare reports of the experiences of the refugees.

- What image does the narrator use in the last paragraph of the chapter that suggests that people were in the grip of forces beyond their control? Quote the sentence and point out the significance of it.

- Is there an example of grim humour in the chapter? Forcible circumcision is no laughing matter. Witness the circumcision done on Iqbal in Chapter 17. But the way in which the matter is presented here is grotesque.

- In Gandhi’s country is it not surprising that there should be a discussion on how to respond to violence. Do you think Bakshiji gives a fitting reply to the question raised by Kashmiri Lal?

**Chapter 21 Peace Committee meeting and its results.**

A meeting of eminent citizens belonging to different political parties to elect a Peace Committee was held at a neutral venue, the Christian College. The meeting was the result of the efforts of Comrade Dev Datt who felt that it was
imperative to bring all political parties under one roof and bring peace to the city.

The conversation among the invitees before the meeting began avoided reference to the recent riots. Also a polarization between the communities was already visible — Muslims were keen to move out of Hindu localities and vice versa. On the political front too it was felt that if a Hindu candidate stood for election he would need the support of the Congress and a Muslim candidate the support of the Muslim League.

The proceedings of the meeting reflected the deep divisions brought about by the riot in society. The College Principal, Mr Herbert who was an American was elected chairperson of the meeting. His proposal to set up a Peace Committee consisting of representatives of all political parties was greeted with loud applause. The members of the Committee were to spread the message of peace in every mohalla. He also suggested a joint appeal to the people for peace through a bus fitted with a microphone and a loudspeaker going round the city. Shah Nawaz offered to pay for the petrol.

At Dev Datt’s suggestion three vice-presidents, one each from the Congress, the Muslim League, and the Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, were elected. Dev Datt himself was elected the General Secretary. For the Working Committee the election for which was less easy it was decided to have 15 members — seven Muslims, 5 Hindus and 3 Sikhs.

There was a brief discussion about who should sit where, who should speak first and which slogans should be raised. Finally both the Congress and the Muslim League presidents sat side by side. And the person who had the mike in hand and who raised the slogans for peace and Hindu-Muslim unity with full passion was none other than Murad Ali. If Nathu had been there, he would have recognized him but Nathu was dead.

Though Bakshiji sat in the bus with the President of the Muslim League, he was deeply despondent. His recurrent thoughts were: ‘Kites shall hover, kites and vultures shall continue to hover for long...’ (351).

Richard and Liza sat in their drawing room in a more relaxed frame of mind. He told her that his transfer to some other place was imminent. Liza had wanted to know about the developments that had taken place but now when Richard was ready to tell her about them, she wasn’t interested anymore.

Comments/Questions

- Bakshiji’s prophetic sentence about kites and vultures hovering over the city is repeated in the novel. In which chapter does it appear first?

- The words ‘Kites will fly’ appeared as the title when Jai Ratan’s English translation appeared first.

- Do these words suggest that the novel is pessimistic?

- Note that Richard and Liza are farther apart from each other than ever before.
2.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have dealt with detailed summaries of the Chapters with comments/questions provoking you to think on the story line of Tamas. The first thirteen chapters dealing with the town are loosely tied together with the presence of Nathu. The remaining eight chapters carry the story of violence over into the villages till order is restored. The focus is principally on a Sikh couple, Harnam Singh and his wife Banto, their son Iqbal Singh and their daughter Jasbir.

2.4 QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of the places and the people and groups that come in for significant mention in the novel.
2. Which are the characters that are treated sympathetically in the novel and those that are not?
3. If you were to choose the best scene in the novel, which one or ones would you choose? Why?