

## **The Agony of Partition, Displacement, Loss and trauma: A Post Colonial Reading of Saadat Hasan Manto's Short Stories**

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### **Abstract**

Partition Literature is one of the fascinating and widely popular field of literary venture in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century post colonial literature. Writers, since the time of partition, of 1947, have rendered realistic and heartfelt accounts of the agonizing experiences of the turbulent historical episode and depicted the endless misery and night mare that befell thousands of individuals. Novelists and authors have dwelt upon the crisis that the people across the border have experienced along with the loss of their root. Among the pioneers of this complex literary genre, Saadat Hasan Manto comes foremost for his plausibly realistic depiction of the first hand experiences of the night mare of partition and its bloody consequences. Manto brings into foreground, the tragic outcome of the division of the Subcontinent and the complex issues that emerged along with. In the present article, I'll be discussing Saadat Hasan Manto's depiction of the sweeping historical massacre and the disaster that followed. In the course of my discussion I'll analyze a few of Manto's short stories and focus upon the author's profound concern and human empathy for those who were the worst sufferers. I'll throw light upon two of his representative short stories: "Toba TekSingh" and "Kholdu" to substantiate Manto's projection of the agony of partition and the problems of displacement, dislocation, rootlessness and communal violence and disharmony.

**KEYWORDS:** partition, postcolonial, displacement, communal violence, agony.

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The partition of India (1947) is one of the most widely debated historical phenomenon in the history of Indian Subcontinent. Along with historical documentation, other branches of academic discourses have thrown adequate light on this disgraceful episode in the journey of Indian Subcontinent. Literature of the time, too, represents the trauma of partition and its interlinkd problems in hundreds of short stories, poems and novels. Poets and writers projected illuminating discussions and literary examples on the stupendous effect of partition and its socio-political and economic aftermaths. ON the one hand they foregrounded the agony of the dislocated individuals, in either side of the border, and on the other hand explored several issues of the reconstruction of the new born nation.

Sometimes the writers incorporated their first hand experiences of the trauma of the partition, torture, violence, rape, murder and communal riot, while some others have delved deep in to exploring the promises and the complexes of the two divided countries based on religious differences. Among first generation partition writers, Khuswant Singh,

Bapsi Sidhwa, Chaman Nahal and Saadat Hasan Manto may be mentioned. Their works have dramatized the terrifying reality of partition and documented the problem of refugees, the rootless and the dispossessed. They dwelt upon the terrible crisis and the tormenting experiences that the common men, (both the Hindus and the Muslims) confronted immediately before during and after the partition. Their works epitomize the horror of partition within their richly textured narratives.

In the present article, I'll focus upon this cataclysmic historical event and the tremendous suffering of the common man and substantiate my point by analyzing the short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto, one of the foremost 'Urdu' writers of this complex, yet fascinating genre. To be precise, I'll analyze two of his remarkable short stories, "Toba Tek Sing" and "Khol Do" in which he narrativizes the tragic massacre of partition through the poignant and heart wrenching experiences of two broken individuals whose voices echo and re-echo in the serpentine labyrinth of history. My present article aims at elucidating the complex maneuvering of the narratives with enormous psycho-social insight.

Saadat Hasan Manto, one of the famous, provocative and controversial writer of this sensitizing genre, delves deep in to the horror and agonizing experiences of partition and dramatizes them in his narratives through the misery of certain displaced individuals who are trapped in the complex whirlwind of history. Unlike the other partition writers Manto does not diagnose the socio-cultural and political implication of this bifurcation of the nation, rather represents the terrifying realities through the torments of some insignificant individuals. His cardinal focus is on the alienation and socio-psychological affliction of the marginal who were subject to relentless misery and sufferings. His stories humanize the unheard cry and silent protest of the displaced marginals, on either side of the border, against the irrational political decision of the division of nation. To be precise, Manto's works are the powerful commentaries on the trauma of partition as well as the crisis in to which thousand of refugees and subalterns were thrust in to.

His most popular and widely acclaimed short story "Toba Tek Sing" is composed in 1954 which deals with the tremendous psychological effect of partition and the subsequent communal disharmony, violence and bloodshed through the metaphor of insanity and madness. The story opens at a mental asylum in Lahore and on the verge of the cross border exchange of lunatics and mental patients. The central character here is Bishan Singh a Sikh lunatic who was about to be transferred along with the other lunatics from Lahore to Amritsar. Manto poignantly depicts the tremendous mental trauma and agonizing experiences of partition which made them lose their mental sanity. Bishan Singh's madness is an effective metaphor for Manto, to convey the terrifying realities of partition along with its inter-related problems of despair, displacement, destabilization and rootlessness, as Stephen Alter observes, madness or insanity becomes a guiding metaphor in much of Manto's post-partition fiction. Through the tragedy of the lunatics like Bishan Singh, Manto interrogates the hopeless decision of partition and criticizes fanaticism of the short sightedness of the political leaders and statesmen of both Hindus and the Muslims. None the less, Manto brings in to foreground the cruelty and inhumanity of the decision makers and politicians whose arbitrary decision of the division of nation, destabilizes and dismantles thousands of common men. The insane

behavior and incoherent words of the lunatics, adequately demonstrate the immense psychological setback that the poor lunatics had suffered from. Two years after the partition, in a high level political conference, it was decided that the lunatics will be exchange between the two countries. At the beginning, Manto describes the details of a few mental patients who were the inmates at the asylum of Lahore and points out their strange behavior. The lunatics consist of Hindu, Muslim and Shikh patients. Among them there was an old Muslim, who once climbed up a tall tree and in spite of repeated insistence was unwilling to come down. When he was threatened by the guards, he climbed higher and strongly retorts that he would never stay in Hindustan nor in Pakistan, rather on that tall tree. The greatest irony of the story is that the lunatics and the insane could realize and interrogate this arbitrary political decision of dividing the subcontinent. Through their meaningless yet vehement protest, Manto depicts the agony and cancerous wounds that this barbaric episode had left in the mental health of thousands of displaced refugees.

In the middle of the narrative, Manto introduced Bishan Singh the central protagonist of the story who had been confined in the asylum for last fifteen years. It is often argued that 'Toba Tek Singh' is Manto's personalized account as he projects his individual's agony and strong disapproval of partition through the character of Bishan Singh, popularly known as Toba Tek Singh. Manto himself was confined in the Lahore mental asylum during the last phase of his life. Critics and admirers of Manto often argue that his best creations were made during his frequent mental instability as he was often suffered from strange feats of depression, melancholy and psychic disorder. Hence, the insane yet powerful protest of Bishan Singh may be considered as the writer's own emotional perturbation of the endless misery brought about by the bloody division of the country.

Bishan Singh was from a remote village named Toba Tek Singh where he had his lands and relatives. His relatives used to visit him often before the partition. Afterward they stopped coming, and there was no news from them. Once his friend Phazal-din came to visit from Toba Tek Singh and tears came flowing from the eyes of the protagonist. He enquired about his relatives, and latter confirmed that they had been safely transferred to India. As he asked about his daughter Rup Kaur, the visitor remained silent which means that this young girl's fate is like the thousand of poor Hindu and Muslim girls whose name and honour were lost in the bloody barbarism or communal riot and anonymity of history. In the entire phase of his staying in the asylum, Bishan Singh never slept or sat down and took bath only once in a month, when his relatives came to visit him.

At last the day came and the non-Muslim inmates of the asylum were ordered to board the bus to take them to the other side of the border. As the other inmates were forced to board, Bishan Singh all of a sudden jumped brutally and fell at a place which belongs neither to India nor to Pakistan. He fell down on the no man's land and gave a shriek with his face upward towards the sky and his voice echoes "I'll go nowhere, neither to India nor to Pakistan but live here in this land where there is Toba Tek Singh". With this resounding words he dies. The guards and officers were overwhelmed by the sudden outburst of emotion from a man who for the first time in the last fifteen years, had uttered so passionate and so bold a cry. This incoherent protest of a broken mental patient

may adequately sum up the terrifying agony of partition and the tragedy of a hundreds of people like Bishan Singh across the border. The people like Bishan Singh or his creator Saddat Hasan Manto, can not extricate themselves from the night mare of the accursed massacre or partition and will go on living in “no home, but in memory”. Through the parting cry of the protagonist, Manto, unambiguously articulates the fact that one can be alienated or uprooted from his native land, yet, forced and physical violence or political complexities can not permanently wipe out the familiar sights and sounds from the memory of the rootless. Bishan Singh, though dies of his futile quest for identity and root, can never be alienated from his beloved Toba Tek Singh which haunts him even in his days of amnesia and fading memories.

Poets, writers and novelists have projected varied responses towards the event of partition. Some have depicted its ugly veracity, while others have dealt with its complex socio-political aftermaths. Manto, with his first hand experiences, of the trauma of partition, depicts its horrifying realities, violence, terror and abominable communal fanaticism. Manto was often denounced for his depiction of sexuality, prostitution, rape and assault upon women. Though it is true that sometimes his depiction borders on the range of decency, yet, what he portrays, is out and out the realistic documentation of the bloody experiences. Manto after the partition was compelled to leave India for Lahore, yet could not extricate himself from his past life in Bombay. As a journalist, he was able to record, and reproduce the horrifying episodes of history with enormous socio-psychic insight and human appeal. His well known stories like ‘Toba- Tek Singh’, ‘Thanda Gohst’(cold meat), ‘Kholdu’ superbly epitomize and bring in to foreground the relentless misery which the displaced marginals were subject to, during the tragic massacre of partition. Though Manto’s vision was to some extent, limited and one sided, yet what he depicts through the imaginary figures like Bishan Singh, Sirajuddin, et all are the ground realities of the turbulent period and inarticulate cry of thousands of rootless men and women adults and children.

Among various terrible realities of partition, the torture, rape and sexual exploitation of women are some of the alarming issues that the readers come across in Manto’s stories. Blinded by communal hatred and narrow religious fanaticism, the Hindu, Sikh and the Muslim fundamentalists mercilessly tortured, raped and kill women. The women were treated like dehumanized cattle and were subjected to brutal and merciless treatment which disrobed them of their honour, chastity, and even the dignity of a human being. In depicting such inhuman treatment of women, Manto often crosses the border of decency and indulges in to crude vulgarity. His straight forward narratives are often vibrant with the depiction of some notable female characters. Some women and their stories serve as powerful and symbolic protest against the brutality and despicable criminality committed by orthodox communalists. These girls and women like Sakina in ‘khol du’ and her terrible experiences epitomizes the shame and inhumanity of the militant secessionist who disgraced and wounded the age old ambiance of communal solidarity and brotherhood prevalent in India. To substantiate my point of view, I’ll now switch over my attention to another of Manto’s exemplary short story Khol du ( Open It), one more poignant rendering of ‘the agony of partition’.

Along with other silenced issues of partition, the tragedy and oppression of women was also paid very little attention in native and translated partition literature before Bapsi Sidhwa's 'Ice Candy man' and Anita Desai's 'A Clear Light of Day'. Thousands of rootless women and young maidens on both sides of the border, were abducted, raped and sometimes even killed. They were mercilessly treated by the perpetrators of both the Hindus and the Muslims fanatics and often were abandoned. They were separated from their husband, father, and if somehow reconciled, were not welcome by their family members. Their misery multiplied as they were either abundant as fallen women or considered as intruders by their own persons. Often the stories of hapless women were represented among the other forms of oppression and dislocation. 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist critics have often pointed to the projection of female body as the dominant metaphor of the violence of partition and the atrocious mass orgy that the literature of the time dealt with. The most shocking revelation of the tragedy of women during partition is Manto's 'Khol Du', which though for some critics indulging in obscenity, yet reveals the trauma of a wrecked daughter and bereaved father in a poignant realistic way. As a powerful rejoinder to his detractors, Manto asserts, "if you consider my story dirty, then the society you live in is also dirty." Thus, Manto's protagonists are projected as a powerful satire against the hypocrisy of the-then society and the evil mechanism of the high level politicians who played a foul game on the common men under the complex process of fracturing and re-fracturing of the nation.

To come to the story, 'Khol Du' is one of Manto's iconic representation of the agony of partition. It is important in two ways, firstly because it demonstrates the torture of a woman by the members of her won community, and secondly, because the case in discussion represents a silenced yet abhorrent protest of a tortured teenage girl against the brutality and inhumanity . The story opens as old Sirajuddin gains consciousness and discovers himself amidst confusion , disorder and chaos at the Mughalpura railway station in Lahore. In a half conscious state of mind he searches for his wife and daughter. Gradually his faded memory works , and he remembers the rape and slaughter of his beautiful wife on there way from Amritswar by a band of wild communalist. In a semi conscious state, the old man realizes, that his daughter Sakina is no longer with him. He rose to his feet , and frantically search for his daughter. In spite of relentless effort , he found no trace of Sakina, but her dupatta which was still with him. All his quests were in vain. The old man moved here and there looking for his daughter and became frustrated in time.

One day he saw a group of young volunteers going to the border to rescue the missing or the displaced refugees. They promised Sirajuddin to bring his daughter back if she is alive. Days past, and one day he saw a group of male and female persons rescued and brought back in a loaded truck. With an expectant heart , the poor wretched man ran after them. But he found no trace of Sakina, rather, was assured of her rescue. One day he saw a few young men moving towards the hospital, caring an unconscious young girl. Sirajuddin ran after them and stood dumbstruck at the entrance of the hospital. They took the girl in to the hospital and the doctor came to check her up. The poor father stealthily entered and stood at the gate . As the light was switched on, he immediately recognized his daughter by the mol of her left cheek. The doctor examined and confirmed that she was still alive. The old man shouted in joy in hope of reunion with his daughter. The girl

with her feeble hand open the knot of her salwar and muttered ‘ khul du?’ (should I open?). With this dramatic and shocking revelation, the story comes to an abrupt end. The plight and pathos of the bereaved father and his craving for his daughter, reminds the readers, Bhisham Sahni’s short story ‘Pali’ in which Monaharlal and his wife lost their daughter Pali, during the mass migration after the partition. The anguish of the dejected parents, is equally heartfelt as that of helpless Sirajuddin. Bhisham Sahni’s story ends on an optimistic note of resurgence of humanity an communal harmony which missing in Manto.

Like his other short stories Manto ends this with ambiguous suggestion. The ending brings in to for ground multiple suggestions and layers of hidden controversies. Sakina’s story and her poignant revelation epitomizes the trauma of partition and its disastrous aftermath. Her final words though uttered in low murmuring tone, articulates a powerful protest against the brutality, ruthlessness, and barbarism of the perpetrators. Through her tragic consciousness, Manto interrogates the actual purpose and inevitability of such a historical/political blunder. Blinded by narrow communalism, inhuman fundamentalists unleashed tremendous torture upon the men, women and children. Like other works, in this story too, the author narrativized the wild barbarism of the communalists which stigmatized the history of the Indian sub-continent, releasing an atmosphere of disbelief, enmity, violence and disgrace.

In depicting the plight of forsaken women during the partition violence, Manto often incorporates bare and ugly realities. Though it is true that, in projecting the vulnerability of female body during the turbulent period of partition, he often hints at erotic suggestions and obnoxious sexual description, yet, he affirms the fact that women have their own sexual desire, power and freedom. In this stories like ‘My Name is Radha’ and ‘Smell’ he deals with the encounter with the prostitutes who firmly assert their won sexual freedom and distinctive identity.

Saadat Hasan Manto as a journalist and a prolific script writer was strongly opposed to the division of the sub-continent and his works register the author’s indignant responses to the absurdity of this savage historical phenomenon. His grand niece and famous historian Ayesha Jalal in her ‘Pity of Partition’ observes that though Manto was not always conformist to the conventional morality, social tabeas and gender stereotyping, yet, his is the most powerful voice against the despicable Villainy of politicians and religious fanatics of both Hindu and the Muslim communities. Jalal farther notes, Manto’s works was never moralizing: he prefers to record the event without imposing his personal choices and judgements. He wrote a number of stories after the partition and his sudden shift from Bombay to Lahore and all of them articulate his heart felt experience of the agony of partition. After his shift in to the new land Manto lost his creative focus, and gradually became a victim of economic degeneration, neuropsychic disorder and alcohol abuse. This bold and powerful voice was cut short due to his premature death in 1955 at age of 43. He was free from all religious parochialism and communal hatred. His narratives on the one hand are imbued with profound human appeal for the victims and tortured, on the other hand are replete with abhorrence and corrosive satire on the socio-political hypocrisy of this time. In spite of certain disagreements among the critics about the style of his writing as well as unpolished representation of naked realities, it can be

undisputedly assume that Saadat Hasan Manto could have been one of the pioneering literary voice of the sub continent both in his native Urdu and translated languages.

Manto's power of depicting the realities and the art of story telling sustains the readers's interest through out the texts. Nowhere else, is discussed the violent bestialities of partition and its sweeping affect on the lives of thousands of poor refugees, as powerfully as in the works of Manto. Ayesha Jalal is also of the opinion that Manto is the most powerful writer of memoire. He had a very good command over language. His poignant representation of the bloody atrocity of partition is free from any religious bias and conforming compromise to the straight forward norms of society, politics, religion and culture.

In portraying the alienated and shell shocked individuals like Bishan Singh, Manto projects his won despair and agony over this arbitrary bifurcation of the country. Like his protagonist Manto himself lost his right mind and creative impulse. Out of a sense of loss and insecurity, Manto shifted to Lahore from Mumbai immediately after partition and gradually sunk into deep despair anguish and frustration. Like Bishen Singh his creator too did not live in Hindustan or Pakistan, but at a space where arbitrary '*shadow lines*' can repress or restrict man's spontaneous exchange of emotion and sharing of cultural legacy.

Saadat Hasan Manto was not given adequate critical attention as a prolific short story writer mainly because of three reasons ; 1. He abruptly shifted to Lahore at the wake of partition, 2. He wrote in Urdu which is not one of the many languages in India, and 3. His works are pregnant with erotic suggestion and sexual connotation. A renewed interest in the works in Saadat Hasan Manto is seen in the 28<sup>th</sup> century with the emerging exploration of the issues of partition and its effect on literature, as well as the growing popularity of Translations Studies. To conclude, it can be said that, this towering yet unfortunate literary voice will always be read And explored until the night mare of partition is wiped out of the memory of the subcontinent: until the delirious cry of Toba Tek Singh will stop echoing in the air of the fractured subcontinent.

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