



Partition literature through the lens of Sadat Hasan Manto's short stories- 'Khol Do', 'Thanda Gosht' and 'Toba Tek Singh'

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ABSTRACT: Partition is one of the significant events that shaped the face of Indian history. It is not just confined to the geographical division of two lands but it is an amalgamation of history, displacement, pain of the people who were involved in it, and the psychological impact it inflicted upon the people who witnessed it. Partition literature is a particular type of literature that deals with the themes of displacement, identity, violence, crime, trauma, memory, and socio-political dynamics of partition. The trauma of partition and agony experienced by the people of the Indian subcontinent found its voice in the partition literature. Despite numerous books being written on partition, the true essence of it cannot be captured by just one writer. The representation of Indian partition violence and trauma by most writers is focused mostly on the cause and whoever the culprits accused or censured. By emphasising the important reasons over the actual occurrences, the majority of historians have tried their best to keep violence at bay. It is difficult to hide the real crimes of kidnapping, uprooting, train raids, trauma, insanity, suicide, murder, and devastation. In contrast, one of the greatest Urdu writers, Sadat Hasan Manto, depicts this tragic environment with unparalleled impartiality in his stories "Toba Tek Singh," "Cold Meat," and "Open It" ("Khol Do"). These three works incorporate overt discussions about the brutal realities of partitions that are either concealed or hushed in society because it unveils one of the most atrocious traumas associated with partition. Thanda Gosht discusses disturbing themes like rape and sexuality out of the marital ties among other predation methods during partition. Toba Tek Singh talks about the political and physical displacement of people in the name of partition especially the mental asylum patients on the basis of religious grounds Sikhs and Hindu patients residing in Pakistan were moved to India and Muslim patients were displaced to India. Khol Do revolves around the predatory nature of men and the atrocities faced by women during this period. This research paper will analyse 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Khol Do' and 'Thanda

Gosht' to provide profound insights into the tragic and shady realities of life that are created and endangered by Partition. Additionally, this study seeks to locate the pain and horror in the victim's psyches.

KEYWORDS: Partition Literature, Sadat Hasan Manto, Toba Tek Singh, Khol Do, Thanda Gosht

I. INTRODUCTION

This research paper aims to analyse partition literature as expressed by Sadat Hasan Manto through the three short stories mentioned above. It will enable one to capture the essence of psychological impact and pain associated with gruesome acts committed during partition. Partition is a much broader concept than the segregation of two lands. It has left an everlasting impact on political history but most importantly on the people who had a first hand experience of it. There are few recurrent themes that are characteristic of partition literature which has found its way in Manto's works. Sadat Hasan Manto is one of the key writers who has positioned himself as a prolific contributor to partition literature. He is a versatile writer who wrote novels, essays, plays, film scripts but he is best known for his short stories. He provides a prism to the partition through his overt depictions and less reluctant approach. He was even charged for obscenity multiple times due to his real depiction of stories without any concealment. This paper as mentioned above is going to analyse three of his short stories- Toba Tek Singh, Khol Do and Thanda Gosht. There have been numerous stories that talk about the implications that took place on the basis of religion but Toba Tek Singh is a peculiar one as it not only talks about displacement based on religious grounds but it is moreover a satire on society. The mental asylum patients of Lahore are displaced to either Pakistan or India depending on their religious background mirrors the madness in the real world. It also implies the futility of religious divisions as all the inmates suffer from mental illness. Talking about Khol Do, It talks about prevalence of



rape and subordination of women in this world. Although it is a fictional story, Manto utilises real life imagery and experiences to draw a clear picture of that time. The story starts with a major theme of sexual intrusion towards women by the people who are actually supposed to protect them and ends with how women had been so accustomed to take orders and serve that even after death they can't break away from the shackles of subordination. Thanda Gosht deals with harsh realities of communal politics. To get a better idea about how and why Manto chose partition literature one must understand that Manto was a victim of partition. His family moved to Pakistan while he moved after a few months. Khalid Hassan encapsulates this transition by saying "His early days in Pakistan were bewildering. Everything was out of joint. There was a mad stampede for allotments of evacuees properly and a sense of terrible insecurity. Some people were living as if there was no tomorrow. Those who had been once rich were on the streets". This description is not subjective to Manto but an encapsulation of what every individual who was a part of partition felt at that time.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sadat Hasan Manto is one of the few writers who have provided a clear depiction of partition without any filters. He has incorporated a fictional pathway to show the madness of partition in the midst of madness in his characters. This research paper is focused on three of his short stories. These stories have been studied numerous times by various researchers and have resulted in multitude of opinions. The major inferring from these researches has been enumerated and explicated below.

1. **Institutional violence:** Structural violence refers to any scenario in which a social structure prolongs inequity. Such inequality causes suffering to the common people, penetrating them in various ways. In many cases, such structural violence outreaches the level of trauma and will have life-long effects on the victims. Structural violence, especially, examines the ways that social structures (economic, political, social, and legal systems) can have a disproportionately negative impact on particular groups and communities. The concept of structural violence gives a way to consider how and in what forms the negative impacts occur. It also digs out ways to overcome or restrict possible harms. Such inimical forces play significantly in Sadat Hasan Manto's story "Toba Tek Singh". The story is set in the backdrop of Indian partition violence. It presents how the protagonist suffers the violence incurred by

the state apparatuses in the asylum. Representative of his class, Singh's sufferings rest in the systemic violence, which is violence inherent in the legal, political, and social systems inflicting the individuals.

2. **Restricted liberty in the political sphere-** People have the right to rejoice in their religion, nationality, and freedom. The political decisions should be made considering the individual's freedom and rights. In the absence of prudent decisions, the individuals suffer. Political authorities should not curtail the rights and freedoms of individuals. During the partition in India, there was heavily curtailing the rights and freedom of individuals. Partition was a time in which the populace was robbed out of their rights and henceforth disabling them to exhibit liberty. Sadat Hassan Manto talks about the loss of individual's liberty in three of the analysed texts thoroughly. This theme is recurrently present in them.

3. **Restrictions on social life-** Sadat Hasan Manto through these short stories also brings out the complexities of the partition and impacts on ordinary individuals restricting to live a peaceful social life. The characters in the story find themselves caught in a whirlwind of political decisions beyond their control affecting their everyday life. The partition compelled the lunatics to be transferred from their land and gave them traumatic experiences in 'Toba Tek Singh'. Moreover the forced relocation of their residence was a violation of their freedom. In 'Thanda Gosht' the discussions of predation methods used in disguise of partition also poses a question about the destruction of social life in midst of the chaos of partition.

4. **Women as victims and Agents of partition-** Partition was a change that impacted everyone and changed the face of history. The gendered experiences of partition however reveals that for women was more atrocious, barbarous and gruesome. Women were not only subjected to the mental trauma and catastrophe as men but they were also a victim of sexual assaults and a colossal level of subordination. 'Thanda Gosht' and 'Khol Do' deal particularly with this aspect of partition. Often when partition is talked about, the amount of heart-wrenching details and the associated trauma is magnanimous for everyone which leads to overlooking of the impact it had on women especially about their widespread rapes, subordination and victimisation.

5. **Dehumanisation and Objectification-** Studies frequently concentrate on how Manto portrays people as being dehumanised and reduced to nothing more than victims of their circumstances. For instance, Bishan Singh in Toba Tek Singh symbolises



the uprooting of entire communities, while Sakina in *Khol Do* becomes a metaphor of innocence being abused.

6. Trauma and Brutality of Partition:

One of the key reasons that can be attributed to the popularity of Manto's works is the fact that he resorted to a realistic approach for depiction of partition rather than many other writers who often refrain from giving a true picture about the grim realities of partition. *Khol Do* features a stark depiction of gender-based violence during Partition. Critics have deduced that Manto employed Sakina's suffering to critique the inhumanity unleashed on women in the name of partition; bodies of women became battlegrounds during communal conflicts. *Thanda Gosht however* expresses the moral and physical degeneration caused by religious and communal hatred. In *Toba Tek Singh*, researchers highlight the absurdity of Partition by showing how arbitrary borders resulted in distortion of lives which resulted in leaving people in an utter state of delusion, delirium and alienation.

III. Partition Analysis of Toba Tek Singh

The story "Toba Tek Singh" by Saadat Hasan Manto depicts institutional violence in an uncompromising manner. Through the protagonists' devastating political, social, and economic sufferings, it illustrates the effects of structural violence. It displays the harsh facts and savage face of the inhumanity that was let loose during the division. The impact of the ridiculousness of drawing lines on the maps is portrayed as the loss of identity and sense of belonging.

Absurdity of partition

Toba Tek Singh is centred around a mental asylum and the main protagonist of the story is an inmate. During partition, religion was the centrefold which resulted in displacement of mental asylum inmates on grounds of religion. The Hindu inmates were displaced to India and the Muslim inmates were sent to Pakistan. Absurdity and madness depicted in the story replicates the absurdity and pointlessness of 'partition'. The ailment has no relation to the religion but the society specifically bifurcates the inmates because of religion when they were despite being mental asylum patients residing peacefully with each other. This is a stark comparison of how humans at the core are all the same but the bifurcation because of religion is adding confusion and absurdity to the whole dynamics. The protagonist, Bishan Singh, represents the countless people uprooted by Partition. His inability to grasp the concept of borders reflects the incomprehensibility of dividing communities

based on religion after centuries of coexistence. The pain of the imposed decision forced the lunatics of the asylums to disobey the order. Not all lunatics understand the concept of partition in the same way but they had a multitude of opinions and reactions. The entire issue of Hindustan-Pakistan and Pakistan-Hindustan resulted in further disorientation for one lunatic. While sweeping the floor one day, he suddenly suspended his task and climbed onto a tree, where he remained for nearly two hours. When he was on the tree, he lectured extensively and nonstop on the matter of Pakistan versus Hindustan. He climbed even higher when asked by the guards to come down, when threatened with force, he said, "I will live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I'll live in this tree right here!" (Manto, 2003)

The majority of Indians, who at that time would have been either Hindustani or Pakistani, are shown in Bishan's reluctance to remain in either country but instead to stay in the no-man's land. This striking statement demonstrates that the people of united India did not desire Pakistan - what separated them was politics!

Trauma and structural violence

Toba Tek Singh is a great story to understand how structural violence and trauma works hand in hand. Bishan Singh known as Toba Tek Singh was one of the inmates who blatantly voiced his reluctance to the new concept of 'Hindustan' and 'Pakistan'. He preferred to stand in the no man's land rather than succumb to these segregation. The inmates were forcefully divided on the basis of religion. There were cries and havoc everywhere as all the inmates were perplexed about this change majorly because they didn't ask for it. 'Partition' as a concept benefitted none except those who were in power and the ones who wanted to perpetuate the religious divisions into the society. For all others who were either a witness or a victim of partition it has left an everlasting scar. Besides Manto, Urvashi Butalia in her short story 'Blood' emphasises the traumatic side of 'partition'. The partition distanced her maternal uncle from the entire family not because of emotional shortcoming but because of geographical divisions. In the same context, Bishan Singh's family is present in 'Hindustan' and waiting for Bishan Singh to arrive but he decided not to move and stay in the no man's land. Bishan Singh appears as a negating factor of structural violence when actually he is the victim of it.

The day of exchange had left long lasting echoes of cries in the inmates:

Those who were willing to come out became difficult to manage, because they suddenly ran here and there.



If clothes were put on the naked ones, they tore them off their bodies and flung them away. Someone was babbling abuse, someone was singing. They were fighting among themselves, heard at all- and the female lunatics' noise and clamor was something else. And the cold was so fierce that everybody's teeth were chattering (Manto, 2003).

IV. Partition Analysis of Khol Do

Sadat Hasan Manto adopts a bold depiction in this story. Consequently, he was even charged with obscenity. The brutalities of partition remain like a never healing scar in the hearts of who were directly affected by it. But these brutalities are concealed and people are said to look at the 'bigger picture'. Bigger picture which is not a pleasant one but actually coaxed with perpetuation and propagation of religious hatred of the communities who have co-existed for decades. The infliction of catastrophic trauma by partition was done on all but the most victimised and barbarous receivers were women and children. This short story talks and displays a great deal of violence and what was happening during partition in real time.

Partition violence

In 'Khol Do', Sirajuddin wakes up in camp one morning. This camp echoed the cries and sufferings of all those who were present there. Sirajuddin boarded a train to Amristar but landed in this camp where there were weeping and signs of gory and gruesome violence everywhere. The violence was not just physical but it left the recipients numb and devoid of any senses. The extent of the violence and psychological imprint it left on the minds of people could be understood by these lines from the story:

"His gaze was fixed on the gloomy sky when his eyes happened to stumble upon the sun. The intense sunlight penetrated every sinew of his being, and he regained his senses. Several images ran through his mind. Looting...Fire...Helter-Skelter...The station...Bullets...Night and Sakina"(Manto,1948).

Women as a victim of partition

'Khol Do' revolves around Sirajuddin and his daughter Sakina. When Sirajuddin woke up, he was numb and devoid of all sorts of senses. But when he regained his senses the first stream of thoughts reverberated the violence and Sakina. One side, his daughter was missing and on the other side his wife's corpse lay disemboweled. The gravity of such a traumatising situation when he is supposed to look for her daughter but his wife is dead besides him.

Such a situation was not unique to Sirajuddin but everyone present in the camp was going through the same plight : "There was a sort of bedlam all around. Someone was looking for their son, another for their mother, someone else was searching for their wife, and another for their daughter." (Manto,1948) despite all the chaos he was trying to recollect the moments when Sakina was with him. One of the significant moments can be accorded to when Sakina's dupatta fell down and Sakina told her father to let it go but he picked it up and stuffed it in his pocket. This is an ironic situation when the honor of a woman resides in a dupatta which is preserved by her father but the father was unable to preserve his daughter from actual infringement of honor. Sirajuddin instills his trust in few soldiers for finding Sakina as these soldiers were there to offer protection and solace to these citizens. These soldiers found her but didn't inform her father as they had ulterior motives. The protectors of people here are actually the predators. The sexual exploitation inflicted upon Sakina was revealed towards the end when Sirajuddin discovered his daughter's dead body and the doctor instructs to open the window by uttering the words 'Khol Do'. Sakina's dead body pulled her salwar down as an instantaneous response: "The doctor looked towards the cadaver lying on the stretcher. He checked the corpse for a pulse then told Sirajuddin, "Open the window." There was movement in Sakina's dead body. With her lifeless hands, she untied her salwar and lowered it." (Manto,1984). Even death was unable to break Sakina away from the subjugation and subordination experienced by her inflicted by the men around her while she was living in this partition world. This implies that as soon as she was found by the soldiers, she was objectified and raped numerous times rather than offering her solace and hand her to her father. Sakina's unconsciously lowering her salwar culminates from her gory experiences of this divisioning land, where every man she encountered abused her physically and sexually repeatedly. She has up till now developed the practice of giving her body when asked in order to survive. Her body lacked an authority of her own but it was reduced to an agent for survival. The habitual nature of this action is heart wrenching because women were used by men for sexual gratification but for women it was purely survival. Her father was holding on to her dupatta while she was getting disrobed and intruded by many. Despite an atmosphere of communal tension, a father takes his daughter's response for happiness because it was bliss for him to find her alive. The elated response of a father here is a representative of the deepening psychological impact partition had on the citizens.



The father couldn't fathom that his daughter has been a victim of sexual abuse because his thoughts were clouded by a ray of hope of seeing his daughter alive. This is an account of one woman, but partition witnessed numerous of these horrific and barbarous crimes against women under the wraps of partition.

V. Partition analysis of Thanda Gosht

Sadan Hasan Manto employs a peculiar writing style by revealing dark psychological aspects of partition that leaves a disturbing and traumatic impact on the psyche. 'Thanda Gosht' is one of the stories that openly reveals the condition of women during partition and how women were subjected to sexual violence despite their bodies being live or dead. The peculiarity in this storyline stems from the mention of the impact of rape on the perpetrators to a extent which renders them impotent. This text features dual side of personalities of women: one side which is helpless and is victimised by the society by physical and sexual violence and one side which fierce and authoritarian.

Women, sexuality and authority

Manto doesn't give in to the conventional gender roles and portrays his women characters as fierce and strong like Kulwant Kaur and men vulnerable like Ishar Singh. Besides the actual portrayal of society, the adoption of defiance of gender roles depicts an utopian vision of society. 'Thanda Gosht' is a differential partition text where women are portrayed with authority but also at the same time they are a victim of patriarchal oppression and sexual assault. Overt portrayal of sexuality is connotated in the text not singularly from male point of view but from female lens through the character of Kulwant Kaur. She is confident and not hesitant to voice her opinions in front of her lover unlike many women in the partition era. Kulwant Kaur defies all the conventional norms and demands sexual gratification from her lover that too with an authoritative and dominant tone. She is a strong headed woman who doesn't fall in the trap of seduction and let go of her lover's infidelity. Besides voicing her sexual desires ardently she doesn't let go of the idea of her lover's infidelity which is generally not the case with most women because they accept infidelity from their husbands and lover out of their deplorable condition in society. The sexual dissatisfaction from her love culminated to atrocious rage. Kulwant Kaur used the 'Kirpan', the very weapon which is associated with self defence and stabbed it right in Ishar Singh leading to a fountain of blood : "Kulwant Kaur went berserk. She hastily picked up the *kirpan* from the corner and removed its

sheath as if she were peeling a banana and threw it aside. Then she attacked Ishar Singh. A fountain of blood burst, spraying everything. Kulwant Kaur, not yet satiated, like a bunch of attacking cats, began to pull Ishar Singh's hair all the while cursing this unknown mistress." (Manto, 1950) She is far from the conventional idea of a woman which is often associated with victimisation, calmness, accepting and nurturing attitude but Kulwant Kaur is confident, authoritarian, unsettling, violent and cruel.

Rape: a sense of power or impotency?

Rape is an action employed to assert power over someone but it renders the victim impotent and devoid of power. Ishar Singh couldn't manage to get an erection despite all his efforts and Kulwant Kaur's effects of sexual arousal. The reason behind the same was not physiological but rather deeply psychological. The psychological impact imprinted on Ishar Singh's mind stemmed from his action of raping a dead body. Ishar Singh is a predator in the story but he experiences not just physical pain and suffering after being attacked by Kulwant Kaur but he also experiences deep psychological trauma tied with the act of using a dead body for his sexual needs. The sexual needs which are now dead just like the very corpse he tried to rape. Act of Rape is often connected with the idea of fragile toxic masculinity and objectification of women. This idea is perpetuated by men like Ishar Singh who believe that they can easily assert their control over a woman's body according to their wishes especially in the world of partition where women and children lack control. In Ishar Singh's case, this idea of toxic masculinity is shattered to the very core as he faces similar physical, psychological, emotional and sexual trauma similar to rape victims. 'Sex' was no more pleasurable for Ishar Singh despite sexual pleasure being the motivation behind his atrocious sexual infringement of the girl. The act of rape executed by Ishar Singh was done to attain sexual power and assert power over a woman's body but this same act lead to his impotency.

VI. Conclusion

Sadat Hasan Manto offers a profound exploration of the devastating human cost of Partition, transcending its political and geographical implications. These stories do not act as a remembrance of this atrocious past but they serve as windows into the psychological and emotional landscapes of individuals caught in the web of societal chaos. Manto's way of depicting these brutalities is stark, uncompromising and overt, denying to soften the grim realities of this period. In



‘Toba Tek Singh’, the absurdity of religious segregation of mentally ill patients questions the rationality and depicts the pointlessness of this political phenomenon. In ‘Khol Do’, Manto emphasizes the impact of partition on women and reveals the horrific and barbarous violence inflicted upon them. Manto reveals the extreme dehumanization and objectification of women during Partition. ‘Thanda Gosht’ focuses on the psychological and moral decay created by the communal chaos of partition.

Manto’s stories are not just a reminder of the horrors of partition but they are a scathing indictment of the societal, political, and religious systems that led to the perpetuation of such violence. Manto employs an individualistic approach and focuses on individual experience which acts as a mirror of the society. Manto questions and reveals the human cost of political decisions and the absurdity of communal hatred. The unflinching realist approach by him and his ardent refusal to conceal the true atrocities makes his work a poignant and unsettling portrait of Partition. His works act as a reminder of scars of partition that are deeply rooted and go far beyond the concept of just geographical division and political motives.

Through ‘Toba Tek Singh’, ‘Khol Do’ and ‘Thanda Gosht’, Manto attempts to achieve a raw, bare portrayal of the complexities and tragedies of Partition. These stories act as a reflection of all those who witnessed it with the portrayal of individual characters employed by Manto.

VII. Citations

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