Volume : 3 | Issue : 6 | June 2014 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper Language

The Identity Crisis in Saadat Hasan Manto's Short Story "Toba Tek Singh"

Nafisa Zargar Research Scholar, Department of English, Bhadarwah Campus, University of Jammu.

ABSTRACT *The Partition of India transformed for millions the very thought of home. People who had certainly not been out of their cut off villages for generations were all of a sudden strained to choose a country and this in addition changed for them the idea of nation. Possibly for many, nationhood became a conscious truth only because of the Partition, when companions became rivals because they were of the other religion and compelled them to escape to a land far away. Under such state of affairs personal identity became a transferable place in itself. People who left their homes and migrated to new land to help the progression of identity-formation underwent an identity change themselves. A similar identity crisis has been depicted by Saadat Hasan Manto in his short story "Toba Tek Singh".*

KEYWORDS : Partition, migration, hostility, exile, identity.

Partition is the main disposition in Manto's stories, the true bandit that had smashed the lives of millions. All the aspects that place Manto's space out from other writers are put in a nutshell in his Partition stories. The supremacy of his expression along with his command on human psyche time and again leave readers speculating if they could overlook his stories, even if they wanted to, taking into consideration the hard, chilly reality concerning the sinister side of humans highlighted in his stories. Manto affirms:

I came to accept this nightmarish reality (Partition) without self-pity or despair. I tried to retreat from this man-made sea of blood pearls of a rare hue, the single-minded dedication with which men killed men, the remorse felt by some and tears shed by murderers …

The first light of independence came besieged with the severed limbs and blood-sodden bodies of innocent men, women and kids: this is the nightmare on or after which the subcontinent by no means completely recovered. The gigantic human catastrophe of the Partition and its progressing repercussions has been better conveyed by insightful, ingenious writers and artists like Manto in his short stories, than by Historians. Most of his writing is fairly gruesome and gives the reader chills, predominantly about the Partition.

The two holocausts, that is, The Second World War and the Partition of India launched the bloodiest butchery the world had ever seen. As for the Partition of India, Muslims run off from India to Pakistan, Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan to India. In the knowledge of the mohajirs (Refugees) who found themselves dug up in the Procedure of Partition, exodus necessitated a computation with imagery of native soil that projected into the past as well as the future; and for many, a consciousness of the betrayal of political space meant that personal identity became a portable space in itself.

The expatriate fiction, which deals with emotional problems, clearly reflects the pathetic condition of the modern man. Getting uprooted from the native cultural traditions and values, the loss of indigenous language, man's position as a mere outcast or un-accommodated alien, together with multiple injuries and lacerations of the psyche, all account for the theme of identity deterioration in many of Manto's short stories. Bharti Mukherjee – an expatriate writer – has admitted:

… the finding of a new identity … the painful or exhilarating process of pulling yourself out of the culture you were born into, and then replanting yourself in another culture.

Manto was so hard done by a related identity crisis that it was, to a degree if not utterly, accountable for his alcoholism and ultimate death about eight years subsequent to the partition. The twinge and torment that Manto personally experienced during the Partition of South Asian Subcontinent in 1947, is mournfully portrayed in his most acknowledged short story "Toba Tek Singh".

"Toba Tek Singh" is a stupendous work of Manto that expressively illustrates the individual's identity crisis. Set in a madhouse, the narrative uses lunacy as a metaphor for sense. The madmen in the Lahore asylum are a microcosm of the social order; through them all subdivisions of society are mocked at and among them is Bishen Singh, who wants to subsist neither in Hindustan nor Pakistan. Hindustan and Pakistan are identities that have been purposely fashioned and Bishen Singh effectively refuses to accept all efforts for any such identity to be pushed upon him. He wants to depart back to Toba Tek Singh, the hamlet where he was born, which is his innate identity. Manto, therefore, is probing not just the two-nation hypothesis but also the very thought of nationhood as the fundamental root of identity. Bishen Singh would rather like to stay alone in no man's territory than make a preference between Hindustan and Pakistan.

Subsequent to the Partition of India, it was decided that the lunatics, like prisoners, should be exchanged. Muslim lunatics should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindus to India. After several official meetings the day of exchange was decided. It can be said that in a way Manto has ridiculed upon the higher authorities of both India and Pakistan about their decision of forming separate nations for the Hindus and Muslims:

A couple of years after the Partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistan asylum should be sent to India. (11)

These lunatics had no idea about where India or Pakistan was. Even those prisoners who were kept in asylums to avoid capital punishment were unable to judge the distinction between India and Pakistan. There was a vague idea that a man named Quaid-e-Azam (The Great Leader) had set up a separate for Muslims called Pakistan. One of the lunatics climbed up a tree and expressed his desire to live on the tree and not in India or Pakistan. The Anglo-Indian lunatics had their own fear of eating Indian chapatti rather than western breakfast. But there was one strange lunatic named Bishen Singh who was a prosperous landlord in Toba Tek Singh and had suddenly gone mad. He had been standing on his legs for the last fifteen years because of which his legs were swollen. Usually nothing bothered him but he too had grown interested in the current debate.

He was also confused about the happenings and could not figure it out what had happened to his home town, Toba Tek Singh as Sialkot which used to be in India is now in Pakistan. But he was a harmless old man with white beard and hair which gave him a little frightening look. He used to ask only one question to everyone where Toba Tek Singh was, whether in India or in Pakistan. Nobody could answer him. It once happened that one of the lunatics declared himself to be God. Bishen Singh begged him to solve his problem but even the so called god disappointed him. He says, "You don't answer my prayers because you are a Muslim God. Had you been a Sikh God, u would have been more of a sport"(16).

One day Bishen Singh was visited by his old friend Fazal Din who informed him about the well being of his family and his loving daughter, Roop Kaur whom he had left behind fifteen years ago. Bishen Singh came to know through his friend that Toba Tek Singh was now in Pakistan but his family had shifted to India. Bishen Singh was also to be transported to India now like other Hindu and Sikh lunatics.

Finally, the day of exchange came and all the lunatics from both the countries were brought to the Wagah border in Punjab. It was a cold winter evening and all the lunatics were out of control as they were unable to understand what was happening to them. There was chaos all around. There were slogans of 'Pakistan Murdabad' and 'Pakistan Zindabad'. Some of the lunatics were shouting abuses while others tearing off their clothes. As Bishen Singh was brought out of the bus he asked one of the officials where Toba Tek Singh was. The official answered that it was now in Pakistan. On hearing that his home town was in Pakistan he tried to run away but was caught by the officials calling him by the name Toba Tek Singh. Bishen Singh was unable to move and kept standing at a point with his swollen legs. Before the sunrise Bishen Singh gave a loud cry and fell down on the ground being dead. His dead body was lying just on a piece of land which was neither India nor Pakistan, "There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh" (18).

Primary source:

Manto, Saadat Hasan. Kingdom's End: And Other Stories. Trans. Khalid Hasan. London: Verso, 1987. Print.

REFERENCES

Prasenjit Chowdhury, "The Partition as Manto saw it," JSTOR 2 April 2010. Web. 26 Aug. 2010. | 2 N. P. Krishna Kumar, "Bharti Mukherjee and Clark Blaise: India is in touch with us," Indian Express 13 Sept. 1992:16. Print. | | | Author: Nafisa Zargar, R/O Green Colony Pasri Bhadarwah, Distt. Doda, J&K, C/O Ghulam Mohd. and Sons, Watch Makers, Takia Chowk, Bhadarwah. Pin code:182222. | Email: nafisazargar14@gmail.com. Contact: 9796047769. |