

Partition and Madness: Reflecting Manto's life, “Toba Tek Singh” and Arvind Kala's “The Unsafe Asylum”

Deboleena Dutta,
State Aided College Teacher (Grade-1),
Department of English,
Dwijendralal College,
Krishnagar, Nadia, WB, India.
epistlestodeboleena@gmail.com

Structured Abstract

Purpose: Partition was never easy. Partition was never just the change of power or separation of two nations. It has left an everlasting scar on our lives. We still suffer the after effects of the separation, politically, socio-economically as well as psychologically. This paper discusses the effects of partition on mental health as presented in the works of Saadat Hasan Manto and Arvind Kala.

Methodology: This is an overview of two selected writers and their works. Partition has played a very important role in transforming the life of Manto, obviously not in a better way. Extracting him from the city of a literary composition Bombay and dropping him in Lahore as an amateur writer had vivid effect on his psychological balance. Adding to his troubled childhood, partition Ann separation from Bombay dragged Manto into excessive drinking and hallucinations. His works encapsulates the pain of separation caused by partition.

Observation: All of a sudden there was a frenzy of exchanging lunatics on the either ends of the border owing to partition. The Muslim lunatics staying in the asylum of Amritsar were to be sent back to Lahore and The Hindu lunatics in the asylum of Lahore where to be sent to Amritsar. Nationality could never just be religion and unfortunately the sane people could not realise this. In Toba Tek Singh by Manto, we see the resistance of a lunatic against this insane exchange. Again, in Arvind Kala's “The unsafe asylum”, we come across the exchange of the lunatics due to the partition and here we see two

friends being separated just for the religion. The considered the people outside (sane people) to be more insane than they the so-called lunatics.

Key words: Lunatic, Madness, Asylum, Partition, Alienation, Post partition trauma

Paper Type: Comparative Study

Introduction

Dictionary defines madness as:

"The state of having a serious mental illness."

"Extremely foolish behavior."

"A state of wild or chaotic activity."¹

Now the question arises what is "mental illness"? What is the definition of "foolish behavior"? or what is "chaos"? hardly anyone of us can give away a straight answer. Partition plays a vital role in this mental frenzy. In this context, I shall begin the discussion with life of Saadat Hasan Manto. There are numerous facts and evidences Stating that Manto what had been suffering mental health problems which have undoubtedly added colors to his works. Manto had have a troubled childhood. He did not have a cordial relationship with his father who died when Manto was just eighteen years old. His father was an authoritarian but afternoon and frequently belittling kind of a person which scared Manto to such an extent that he had even jumped from the rooftop to escape his father². Manto's father's first wife was 'prone to fits of mental instability'³. The fact can be that Manto was also exposed to such fits and traumas which have led to his personal stress. According to Ayesha Jalal, the treatment his mother, who was the second wife is father, from his paternal family has left a deep dent in his emotional development. Owing to the disturbed childhood and the traumatic paternal relation that he had grown up wit, Manto had an effortless tenacity towards excessive expressions of emotions. Manto Was agitated and restless throughout his life. Manto always had the agitation and restlessness that life ultimately culminates in death and all the relations

¹ 1 Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.). (1999). Merriam-Webster Incorporated.

² Hashmi, Ali M. 2012. "Manto: A Psychological Portrait." *Social Scientist* 40 (11/12): 5-15.

³ Jalal, Ayesha. 2013. *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the IndiaPakistan Divide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

and affections that human beings share on earth are temporary. Although Manto was not a staunch devout in his adherences towards religious norms yet his thoughts were also influenced by Islamic faith. It is also stated that the writer might have been through multiple depressive disorders, mood swings, schizophrenic attack and excessive apathy towards life owing to partition, his separation from Bombay, trouble childhood and financial breakdown. Manto himself had admitted that if he stronger will, he would have dared commit suicide. It's not clear enough if this amount to a clinically definable suicidal tendency but it makes the hypothesis of depressive illness stronger that had hindered the exceptional writer throughout his lifetime.

Objective

As my sole focus in this writing surrounds mental illness and partition, I can't help but throw some light on the significant mental turbulence that this great Urdu literary masterpiece has been through. Alcohol addiction has played a significant role in the degradation of Manto's mental health. The intensity of his drinking has always been high, but it rather escalated after he had been forced to move to Lahore, which is obviously an aftermath of the partition. Manto had found his characters, plots and the essence after literature from every corner of Bombay. His family became so concerned that they twice admitted him to the antialcohol ward of the Punjab Mental Hospital for treatment between 1951 and 1952⁴. That failed to help for the literary expert continued with his drinking habits and had already started experiencing hallucinations, which is symptom of alcohol-induced psychosis, as mentioned by Ayesha Jalal in her book *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide*. Noting the high rates of comorbidity of alcohol addiction and mood disorders, Hashmi and Aftab have suggested that Manto used alcohol for self-medication, arguing that he 'sought refuge in substance abuse to ease his psychological pain' (2013, 1096), that pain included the separation from Bombay. This was the period of time when the established writer of Bombay was searching for his identity and fighting financial crisis in Pakistan better to put Lahore. Therefore, it is not unexplainable by the writer had to escalate his drinking habits or take refuge in alcohol. Ultimately, it was liver cirrhosis due to alcoholism that killed Manto at the premature age of forty-four. According to Hashmi, Manto's emotional outburst in his writings was an out shot of his preparation for impending

⁴ Jalal, Ayesha. 2013. *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the IndiaPakistan Divide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

death, where on the contrary Jalal pointed out that most of his stories were written when he was not drowned in alcohol or was sober and therefore this prolific outburst is credited with a period of soundness that lasted for some months after he had been discharged from the hospital after his first admission. According to his nephew Hamid Jalal, Manto might have been 'toying with the idea of suicide, either because it was the easiest way out or because he wanted to fill the family with remorse for having given him up as hopeless case' (192). Whatever be the argument, it's evident that his duel with his own drinking habits influenced his works. And here again I would question you, what led this revolutionary writer to lose his control over his own mental state? The answer has to come down to the brutal blows of partition at some point of time. Partition has undoubtedly contributed to his mental illness.

Methodology and Analysis

Several works of Manto, refer the trauma of partition and post effect. Since my paper concentrates solely on the effect of partition on madness, we will talk about Toba Tek Singh. "Toba Tek Singh," (1954), is perhaps the most contextual short story by Manto, regarding partition and my paper dealing with the transfer of the lunatics owing to partition. Narrating the scenario of exchange of inmates of Lahore mental asylum after partition, "Toba Tek Singh" uses the madness of the inmates as a mirror for the madness of the outside world as Fattu and Rulda had been discussing in Arvind Kala's *The Unsafe Asylum*. With the progress of the story, readers are convinced with the reality that the inmates of the asylum are actually saner than the people transferring them from this side to the other of the fences marking the partitioned counties. The main character, Bishan Singh, who struggles painfully for his identity, symbolises the displacement which millions of refugees have suffered during partition. Although the story is fictional, an actual exchange of psychiatric patients between mental hospitals in Lahore and Amritsar took place in 1950⁵. There have been extensive studies regarding Manto's life and work and his psychological and mental help but separately. Very few items have been made to study both parallel so that we can excavate the actual trauma that partition had imported over the writer's psychological health. Mental illness is crucial perhaps even defining the theme of the short story. It was highly significant to choose to write about partition through the lens of the inmates of an asylum. the different patience the writer has chosen reflection the madness of what was actually happening outside the cell. The asylum kind of represents the whole subcontinent that we were striving with partition.

⁵ Jain, Sanjeev and Alok Sarin. 2012. "Partition and the Mentally Ill." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (29): 4.

The frenzy of transferring the lunatics from one part of the fence to the other side itself was madness. As stupid comments by the asylum inmates demonstrate the absurdity of partition the decision about their exchange everything was so strange an incident. Those lunatics who at least had some sense left put-on satin whether they were in Pakistan or in India. their whole identity was at stake. Manto had written "Toba Tek Singh" after being discharged from his stay in the asylum and a clear similarity or echo of his experience in the asylum is traced in the short story; although engaging with the theme of mental illness and asylum was considered unbecoming, Manto's bravado to take up the theme was also an offshoot of his experience in the asylum. The character of Bishan Singh brings out a traumatic experience of being displaced which is equally empathetic for an author who has himself been a sufferer of it. His suffering represents back of the partition refugees. The repetitive question and demands to know about his homeland are evocative of the identity crisis and the loss of sense of belonging. They no longer belong to any country they were just commodities or car goes being transferred on a sudden notice of political frenzy. His character is also reflecting Manto's on suffering and confusion about his identity in the wake of his displacement to Lahore. Manto had written: "I found my thoughts scattered. Though I tried hard, I could not separate India from Pakistan and Pakistan from India." he also added, "I found it impossible to decide which of the two countries was now my Homeland."⁶ Bishan Singh's character thus can be regarded as a measure to the major displacement suffered by so many as well as a more specific portrayal of what the author himself has been through during his displacement. no matter from which perspective you read, the pain and suffering of the refugees as depicted in the short Storey as well as in the life of the writer is incomprehensible, significant and often contribute to the field of psychology implicitly or explicitly. Only a writer, who has himself suffered the trauma of partition can make a reader lives through those moments of trauma.

- "Upar di gur gur di annexe di bedhiyana di moong di daal of di Pakistan and Hindustan of di durr phitey mun",

"The inattention of the annexe of the rumbling upstairs of the dal of moong of the Pakistan and India of the go to bloody hell! "

⁶ Hasan, Khalid. 1984. "Saadat Hasan Manto: Not of Blessed Memory." *Annual of Urdu Studies* 4:85-95.

● As everybody rushed towards him, the man who had stood erect on his legs for fifteen years, now pitched face-forward on to the ground. On one side, behind barbed wire, stood together the lunatics of India and on the other side, behind more barbed wire, stood the lunatics of Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.⁷

Now talking about Arvind Kala's "The Unsafe Asylum". Kala, psychiatrist t by profession leaves in Ludhiana. He's interested in studying the lasting effects of partition both in India as well as in Pakistan. He has been involved actively in the cross-border exchanges of the inmates of the asylum on the other side of the fence partitioning two countries. This involvement reflects in many of his stories. In "The Unsafe Asylum", Kala has combined various narratives and has accounted the effect of partition through intertwined characters through thirteen short stories with engaging names. Amongst them two key characters are Fattu and Rulda. They are introduced to be hurdled under one umbrella, wearing oversized stripped uniforms, which make them look 'more of prisoners of war than patients in a hospital'⁸. They both have been discharged but had hardly found a place to squeeze in and are therefore restored to the asylum. Their friendship binds the whole narrative. Madness is a philosophy and the whole narrative of partition is conveyed through their prang of separation. When the political scenarios of partition are seen from their perspective, we counter the contrast between the interpretation of sanity and insanity:

"Have the outsiders gone mad?" Rulda wanted to know.

Fattu chuckled "yes they have."

"You really think so?" Rulda's amusement and interest was clear.

"We are at least predictable." said Fattu.

"Not always," Rulda was a fair man.

"Well, we are predictably unpredictable outsiders are unpredictably unpredictable that makes us more predictable they should be inside and us outside."

"...but there's so many all of them cannot fit in here rule the objected to the logistics of this proposition so many people cannot go cannot be mad the majority has to be seen cause if

⁷ Saadat Hasan Manto. Toba Tek Singh, Kingdom's End and Other Stories, Penguin Books. Page no. 15 and 18

⁸ Kala. Arvind.2018, The Unsafe Asylum, Speaking Tiger Publishing pvt. Ltd: 2

most people were insane the world would come crashing down." Rulda thought that it was a rather good argument.⁹

Findings and Observation

How is partition related to this madness? While reading Manto we have seen Manto's own mental health was affected by the frenzy of partition. Similarly, in the unsafe asylum visit the frenzy of partition killing each other and the people who are considered to be mad are kept in the asylum referring the people outside as insane people. Again, in the story titled the mad prophesier friend doctor Prakash Kohli visits Lahore, he meets Fattu, who has been living there for forty years now and become known as a person who can prophesize. he has become famous amongst politicians who believe he can successfully predict events such as the breaking away of East Pakistan now Bangladesh. The most heart aching effect of the partition is seen in this story, when Prakash saw Fattu has been trying to build a tunnel who connect the hospital with Amritsar mental hospital so that he can meet Rulda who has been relocated after the partition. "He has nowhere to escape to, no one either. He digs in order to make a tunnel to connect this hospital to Amritsar mental hospital in India, forty-five kilometers away, to meet his friend Rulda Singh, who had been here with him at the time of partition." "Images of an afternoon during his internship many years ago throng Prakash's mind: a freak hailstorm, a plate full of hot samosas and a mild-mannered Sikh with swollen gums, talking about the mental hospital express which had carried Hindu and Sikh patients from Pakistan to India and brought back Muslim patients on its return journey."¹⁰ Fattu Imagines that his friend on the other side is also digging a tunnel but Rulda cannot dig any further because he has no visa. Now my question is if they have such sense of responsibility and citizenship, can we really consider them mad or rather philosophers who consider the people outside the asylum to be the real insane people. Partition was rude and unsympathetic for it drew a line separating human beings and humanity. Something which separates human beings from humanity is nothing but insanity hence the two mad friends were true when they said the people outside are more insane. These two friends could never reunite physically because the partition had drawn a barrier owing to religion and nationality, both of which stand out to be very insignificant in friendship. The two friends never seized from hoping to meet each other,

⁹ Kala. Arvind,2018. The Unsafe Asylum. Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd; 17 10 Arvind Kala, The Unsafe Asylum. Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd,2018. Page no. 142

¹⁰ Arvind Kala, The Unsafe Asylum. Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd,2018. Page no. 142

but could never really reunite. And the Storey finally ends with Rulda asking "Is there a mental hospital in this city?"¹¹ Thus, is the effect of partition, not even sparing the 'insane people' living a peaceful life.

Conclusion

While surveying some of the undergraduate students, regarding their views on the concept of partition and madness, I came across assertions that madness is prevalent in every one of us but they who questioned the society odd fails to act as per the norms created by the society I sent to the asylum. According to the undergraduate students, they whom we call insane are saner than us, echoing Fattu's statement in the unsafe asylum. The students had an argument against the frenzy of the partition and concluded that it yielded more disaster and brutality, separation and loss, violence and inhumanity in the name of religion, language and nation, rather than yielding any progressive changes. These statements of theirs were good enough to prove the insanity of people initiating, propagating and executing partition at the then time. the statements of the students were more like the aching heart of Manto cursing the partition or the two friends' helplessness on being separated in the name of religion owing to partition and the exchange of lunatics in Arvind Kala's "The Unsafe Asylum".

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¹¹ Arvind Kala, *The Unsafe Asylum*. Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 2018. Page no. 245