

MANTO'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE TRAUMA OF PARTITION

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Abstract

The partition of the Indian sub-continent unequivocally possessed very few features of delectation and contentment for those who had a strong faith in humanism. After all, the contemporaries of the event could not have envisaged that so much of bloodshed and hatred would ooze out from the volcano of human civilisation. It can be said that the most evolved, highly educated and the one with maximum understanding on subjects of different kind, commit blunders which affects the lives of millions of people. Somewhere down the line, it is all about capturing the power to rule the majority. The society is structured in such a way that things would move in a particular manner which would suit the normality of mind and emotions. Here comes the power struggle, the one who wants to be on the top have their ambitions and do comprehend the way to achieve it. For them, it does not matter how much instability it would create in the human lives, who would have to lead their lives with enormous losses and scarred memories. However, in this case what we are dealing with is the most naked form of partition which every literature of the world has provided a space to. Histories wonderfully show the path that the best qualities of a component can suddenly transform into a vice of top quality, and thus, lead to huge destruction and devastation.

Keywords: humanism, bloodshed, scarred, naked, devasta

Partition literature is a significant part of Indian literature because of its diverse resources available due to its multi-cultural and varied ethnic groups of inhabitants. The presence of the multicultural ethnicity especially, Hindus and Muslims flattered by the British Raj from the back stage remained perfect ingredients for the recipe of partition. The point is that both the communities had innate suspicion and hatred for one another. Noteworthy is the fact where one can find the confederation of the two communities in getting the independence from imperialism. Their huge freedom struggle unity and deep nationalistic emotions got well-noticed by the Britishers, who later fanned the hatred existing in them and thus, ultimately led to partition. Amrit Rai describes the situation and remarks:

“ Lakhs of men had died, lakhs of children had been orphaned, lakhs of women had lost their homes and honour. Now all that remained were their stories, stories which were told and heard by people.”¹

Writers might have found it difficult to incorporate the detailed account of the grim tragedy, and so, short stories became the medium with which the narration became somewhat possible. Time had a tremendous healing tendency, and so, years later authors and intellectuals transformed the process of informing the world through other art forms. The short stories wonderfully out-poured the multi-directional outcome of partition tragedy. No language could fit into describe the indescribable violence, brutality, horror, fear, pains and losses incurred to the masses. In regard to this, Amrita Pritam, rightly remarked:

“ Corpses lie strewn in the pastures
And the Chenab has turned crimson.”³

When Amrita Pritam mentioned that Chenab had turned crimson, she tried to convey the message that partition of any geographical boundary needed blood. History had witnessed that in the tragedy of partition, massacre and blood was common. It could be common for history writers, but it was perturbing for a sensitive human being, who faced the real situation of partition. It could also be a fact that many short stories were written on partition but none of them were written in favour of violence. It was the interesting feature of Saadat Hasan Manto that his writings were often questioned in the society. It must be worth-mentioning here that the violence caused by partition was futile and unjustified. No argument could justify the bloodshed which was caused by the partition movement. The bloodshed and trauma coming out of it was only for the division of the nation.

The divide and rule policy of the colonial power saw a huge potential in the religious and recusant society of this undivided sub-continent. It might be said that it was on the grounds of religion that such a massacre took place. Quite truly, it was in the roots of the Revolt of 1857, as remarked by Chaman Lal in *Partition and Indian Literature*⁵, that the Indian society got bifurcated as a whole. The question of religious identity engulfed the human mindset and people found it difficult to preserve their national identity. The Bolshevik revolution of Russia in 1917 was in its full momentum in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as a result of which, the Soviet Union put across a strong protest against the colonial rule. Nevertheless, colonization imposed upon its colonies their language and transformed their nation's ethnic values. However, in regard to the Indian sub-continent, which had its cultural values and tradition strongly intact, the Britisher

found it a mammoth task to crack the bond in between its people. . The question to be evaluated was that how could identifying oneself with the lineage of the virtual past give that much of obnoxious courage to the present generations that human society would transition itself, and put forward the colossal example of the horror of partition. Gyanendra Pandey in his work, *The Prose of Otherness*, unfolded the fact that it was on the pillars of innate violence in the human gene that determined the outcome of the two nations. Writing history on the account of series of events and to conclude the immediate ground was somewhat virtual. He said:

“The historian seeking to represent violence in history faces problems of language (how, for example, does one describe pain and suffering?), of analytical stance (how can one be “objective” and express suffering at the same time?), and of evidence (for does not large-scale violence destroy much of its most direct evidence?). There is the associated question of how the moment of violence comes to be recorded by the state or by “neutral” observers, how it becomes part of an archive, and how it is integrated into a larger history by the historian.”⁶

It could be highly unnerving for anyone to envisage a situation when one would be forced to leave their home, family, friends and so significant memories. It was a scar our previous generation encountered, they learnt to live with it, digested it with aches and pains and got relieved only on sharing the bed with death.

Saadat Hasan Manto, the literary giant, who possesses in himself an immensely unique insight of deciphering the multi-layered skin of partition. The short stories of Manto are an indicator of society and point in time to which he

belonged. The most astonishing part to note is that in the social framework of the nation in which he wrote his short stories, it is not much different from the social circumstances of India today. The milieu of topics and concerns which he raises throughout is still noticed and is very eminent in today's society. Paucity and ethically corrupt people, the politicians who are the greedy good doers and who try their tricks to draw attention, the precise decision and ability of dealing, the anguish of great minds and the triumph and achievement of the ordinary minds were one of subjects and concern on which Manto wrote. His analysis of rudimentary characters and their emotions which he has upheld trespasses the time gap.

His endeavour in bringing out the pangs of psychological set back could well be witnessed in his literary masterpiece, 'Toba Tek Singh'. The mental asylum in the story was supposed to be the microcosm of the sub-continent and the condition of the patients were symbolically an image of the victims of partition. Manto's microscopic view highlighted the lunatics in the asylum to be more rational than that of the government authorities, who were taking the decision of their exchange across the countries. The confusion and bewilderment of the lunatics could well be witnessed as they established their shock in comprehending the fact that if they were in India, then where was Pakistan, and, vice versa. After all, before quiet sometime, they were in India and as such, they had not moved from the place they were in. The story stood as a classic embodiment of partition violence, where the exterminated victims of the predicament could not believe their trepidation. Manto emphasized the parallel between the mental disturbances of the lunatics to that of the mental illness stretched out in the ambience. The trauma of displacement and dislocation was personified in the character of Bishan Singh. The fear of physical as well as mental oscillation resulted in the forcible death of the partition victim:

“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.”⁸

The riot condition could be visualized as a fearful event where one strong community attacked the other, resulting in chaos and confusion. Humanity died every minute by witnessing the horrible sight of man transforming into creatures who were worse than animals. This was beautifully described by William Wordsworth in his poem, ‘Lines Written in Early Spring’:

“To her fair works that Nature did
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.”⁹

Wordsworth, the poet close to nature wonderfully showcased the contrast between the kind and democratic principles of nature to that of unnatural attributes of human mind. Man himself for the sake of wealth, property, jealousy and anger lead themselves towards war and grief. It was the pessimistic aspect of passionate emotion which superseded upon the positive virtues of happiness or help. How ironical was the harsh fact that man remained incapable of comprehending a romantic poetry related to nature. It was only for the sake of façade that majority of people lie about things in their everyday life, when it came to practicing these ideologies, the fanatics preferred to get themselves indoctrinated by divisive speeches and pamphlets.

Everything has their own pros and cons in their specific arena. It was for the sake of religion that in the year 1857 the Hindus and the Muslims, for the first time in the history of the Indian sub-continent, came together to fight against the powerful and invincible colonial rule. At that time, apparently, no one could have had imagined that one day, it would be their religion which would be the root cause of all strifes between them. Khushwant Singh reflected through a character called Iqbal in his novel, *Train to Pakistan* that:

“ India is constipated with a lot of humbug. Take religion. For the Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow-protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and hatred of the Muslims... For the Parsi, fire-worship and feeding vultures. Ethics, which should be the kernel of a religious code, has been carefully removed.”¹⁰

Manto's story, 'The Assignment', could be regarded as a brilliant representation of fright, trust, clash, loyalty and betrayal. Though the retired judge, Mian Abdul Hai did not carry the dilemma, which the societal riots were emitting, however, Sughra his daughter explored the experience of the affects of ongoing violence filled in the air. Initially, the theme of story seemed to exhibit the motive of massacre and vengeance, but the introduction of the diabolic character, Santokh Singh, the son of the family's loyal body, Sardarji shattered the way one would show sympathy to the family. The family of Mian sahib trusted Sardarji, who gave an annual visit for the favour done to him. But, his son's betrayal to the family turned the readers of the story cold. As Santokh stated to Sughra that since Sardarji was dead, he was in-charge of carrying forward the legacy of bringing the sawwaiyan, a token of

gratitude to the family. But, it took very little time that how the family was betrayed and was about to face the consequences of it:

“As Santokh Singh turned the corner, four men their faces covered with their turbans, moved towards him. Two of them held burning oil torches; the other carried cans of kerosene oil and explosives, one of them asked Santokh, ‘Sardarji, have you completed your assignment?’

The young man nodded.

‘Should we then proceed with ours?’ he asked

‘If you like’, he replied and walked away.”¹¹

Manto’s speciality of turning the whole game of the story stood unmatched. The whole concept transformed upside down as how Mian Sahib and Sughra felt a sense of security in Santokh’s presence and later, how they encountered the deceit and treachery from a loyal folk. Undoubtedly, partition from the past to the contemporary time was recapitulated not simply for its socio-political importance, but, for the massive and unjustified massacre of human kind. Manto was unable to comprehend that how could the masses get themselves indoctrinated with the idea of communalism, intolerance and uncivilized ethics. He successfully brought out the animosity and revengeful attitude of humanity which carried its lusty activities in an unashamed manner.

It was noteworthy to witness the point that the glorification and celebration of the triumph of freedom struggle got snapped immediately with the penetration of the verdict of partition. The immeasurable suffering of the victims of partition could be assimilated in their sorrows, distress, disgust, difficulties, anguish and

trauma. History of human civilization did not witness such a large scale butchery and mass murder. Manto's another story, 'The Dog of Titwal' was an exemplary effort in reflecting the psychological state of the refugees:

“It soon became a game between the two soldiers, with the dog running round in circles in a state of great terror. Both Himmat Khan and Harnam Singh were laughing boisterously. The dog began to run towards Harnam Singh, who abused him loudly and fired. The bullet caught him in the leg. He yelped, turned around and began to run towards Himmat Khan, only to meet more fire, which was only meant to scare him. ‘Be a brave boy. If you are injured, don’t let that stand between you and your duty. Go, go, go,’ the Pakistani shouted.”¹⁵

The death of the dog in the story resembled the plight of the people who had no alternative other than, to suffer at the hands of the perpetrators of horror. The innocent animal's dilemma became a source of pleasure for the commanders of power. The brute force and insatiable savagery resulted in the bewildered and petrified state of the animal, an epitome of the refugees. After all, what could have been done? Where should the victims take refuge? There was a state of total confusion and shock. It was not the case that life was a bed of roses for the refugees who tried to take shelter at the new space. The native's did not provide a favourable atmosphere to them. Millionaires turned into impoverished class and the affluent families remained completely at the mercy of other. They found themselves in the no-man's land and meet their deaths in a manner quite similar to the dog or Bishan. This apprehension of the victims could well be witnessed in the

writings of Ismat chughtai. In one of her story, 'Roots', when the central character of the story tried to persuade his mother that they should leave the nation of traitors and create a new home in their own country, Ammi refuted immediately:

“What is this strange bird called our country? Tell me, where is that country? This is the land where you were born, which gave birth to you; this is the earth on which you grew up, if this is not your country, how can some distant land where you merely go and settle for a few days become your country? Besides, who knows if you won't be told to go and settle in some other place? I sit here like a flickering lamp. A small gust of wind will extinguish me, and put an end to all this turmoil about choosing one's own counter. This game of destroying an old country and founding a new nation is not very interesting... A nation seems to be no better than a shoe! If it becomes a little tight, discard it for a new one!”¹⁶

The whole of partition literature has a completely different story to tell, as in regard to the women who received the brutality and bestiality to the utmost level. Manto's work offers a diagram, on which the gruesome and grim horror of partition immensely thrived, thereby, creating an unbearable atmosphere of terrible fear and incurable reminiscence of past. Women being an intricate part of subaltern perspective attracted a major area of Manto's interest. The realistic as well as pessimistic content of his writings has gigantic global relevance. The quintessence choice of his subjects correlates with the works of writers, such as, Gustave Flaubert, Henrik Ibsen or Guy de Maupassant.

To sum it up, Manto is the only one who has received mixed reactions on his stories. Few spoke high of him few expressed disgust and anger for it. While

penning down for this class, Manto has dished out the immense pain in their lives along with the ordeals that they had to face hand in hand with their blindness, financial problems, and emotional discontent and physical abrasions.

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