

A Study of 'Partitioned' Identity in Manto's Toba Tek Singh

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ABSTRACT:

The word Identity is basically meant by, who or what a person really is. It came from French identite, from Latin identitas, and idem, which means 'the same'. In sociology and psychology, a person's expression and conception of their own and others' group affiliations or individuality, is what is known as the identity. Society, identity and self are inseparable terms regarding an individual. Identity is derived from culture because individuals are socialized into it. Identities are fragmented and fractured, but multiply and are constantly in the process of transformation. Geography or physical surroundings in which the human being is brought up or currently based has a vital place in that person's identity formation.

Keywords: Self-Concept, Society, Culture, Socialization, Identity Formation, Identity Transformation, Fragmented Identity, Multiple Identities, Identity Development,.

A person identifies himself with his surroundings in which he was brought up. When suddenly this geography changes due to reasons like war and migration, from the native to a foreign land, the identity gets threatened putting the person in the dilemma whether they belong to the former place or the new land, to where the migration happened. The partition between India and Pakistan in 1947, resulted in the same sense of identity dilemma to many people who migrated either to India or Pakistan. Most people who were caught up in this crisis had never been out of their villages before the partition. So, this had been a huge paradigm shift for them. It was for them to accept a new Indian identity if they were from Pakistan and a new Pakistani identity if they were from India, when they migrated. A 'partitioned' identity may be called as a state of a person's identity when there is trouble between internalizing a 'new' identity, leaving behind the 'previous' identity, during the partition process of two countries. Memory becomes a crucial

component in identity formation. It helps to preserve social and class identities. So, when a person goes through Partition, the memories also get disturbed.

Identities are fluid and individuals negotiate new identities as social contexts change. The mind of a migrant oscillates between the native and affiliated identities, finally coming in terms with the new one. This is for a person with a stable mental condition, who is healthy. Whereas the story chosen for study, *Toba Tek Singh*, deals with lunatics staying in a mental asylum and the identity change during the Partition could not be internalized by them. This was not the case with lunatics only, but also with the common man. Even a person with a healthy mental condition could not take in this vast change, easily.

Saadat Manto is one of the greatest widely read and debated Urdu short story writers of the 20th century. Born into a family of barristers in Punjab he moved to Bombay to revive his career and

joined the film industry. Threatened by the violence in Bombay he migrated to Lahore in 1948. Unfortunately, he could not settle down in Pakistan, where he developed a sense of strangeness to the country. Even today he continues to have his hold among the contemporary readers. With his associations with the Progressive Writer's Movement, which flourished in Urdu from 1935 to 1960, he sparked off many controversies in his stories. His enduring legacy of short stories has more than twenty published collections. His stories written before independence reflect his general sympathy with progressive aims and depict the nobility and goodness of lower-class characters on the margins of society. Like many of the Progressives Manto was deeply shaken by the Partition.

As a Punjabi he had roots on both sides of the border. His identity as a Muslim was never central to his life. Later, after being terribly unsettled in Pakistan, lead Manto to express the trauma of the Partition in many deeply moving stories. This identity dilemma could be found in most of his works. He merged psychoanalysis with human behavior and is one of the unrivaled story tellers. Penetrating deep into human psychology, Manto presented characters without names. Neither Hindu nor Muslim they are human beings belonging to nowhere, but still exist. "*Thanda Gosl*" (Cold Meat), depicts the sexual violation of a dead woman during the riots and "*Khol Do*" (Open Up), alludes to the rape of a young woman, during the Partition period, in the frame of male exploitation of women.

However, in the allegorical story "*Toba Tek Singh*", Manto offers the subtle and nuanced depiction of the psychological effects of the Partition. Set initially in an insane asylum in what has become Pakistan, the story touchingly depicts an old Sikh lunatic whose family has migrated to India and who is brought to the border in a general exchange of asylum inmates. When the Sikh finally realizes that his ancestral village of Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan, he refuses to cross, instead, collapsing and dying on the strip of land that doesn't belong to any man, between the two borders.

Toba Tek Singh, a masterpiece about catastrophic theme of fear of loss of individual identity and that of separation during partition, shifts the vision from the external world to the inner reality while exploring the intricacies of the inner world. The characters in the story belong to the rejected and fallen sections of the society. The focal point of the story is the exchange of lunatics, inmates of mental asylums like prisoners between the two countries, after two years of the Partition. The plan was to transfer Muslim lunatics in India to Pakistan while Hindu and Sikh lunatics in asylums in Pakistan to India. The inmates of one such asylum located in Lahore, in what became Pakistan, upon learning of this decision, could not comprehend its meaning. Manto highpoints the agony of the inmates by drawing a verbal picture of the asylum. The inmates had no idea about where India or Pakistan was, nor their existence. There was a dilemma within them to decide whether they were now in India or Pakistan due to their compromised mental state. They were confused by the thought that if they were now in India, then where was Pakistan and if they were in Pakistan, how only until the other day, it was in India. The chaos led to many communal riots where Hindus and Muslims fought each other. A seed of hatred was sown into the hearts of the once harmonious people, who lived together as a family. It was not only a physical partition, but a psychic partition too. The ordeal is so evident in the statement of a Muslim lunatic.

"One Muslim lunatic...when asked what Pakistan was, replied after deep reflection, 'The name of a place in India where cut throat razors were manufactured'" (213).

Manto seeks deepest recesses of human mind mostly dealing with the Partition of India and its effects on people. Many were against the event, including the author. They could not withstand their motherland being torn apart, making the ancestral country in to a strange land causing revulsion, not to live in either of the countries. The short story is rich in such episodes like when a lunatic, with the ludicrousness and

meaninglessness of the whole episode of partition rages out: "I want to live in neither Hindustan nor Pakistan I'd rather live on this tree" (214). The short story has an element of humour also which Manto uses to heighten the pathos. The description of the Anglo-Indian lunatics who had their own fear of eating Indian chapattis rather than western breakfast is one of them. A Hindu lunatic laments for being separated from his beloved. "Among the inmates of the asylum was a Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had gone mad because

of unrequited love. He was deeply pained when he learnt that Amritsar, where the girl lived, would form part of India. He roundly abused all the Hindu and Muslim leaders who had conspired to divide India into two, thus making his beloved an Indian and him a Pakistani." (214).

These lines are a satire on those leaders who advocated Partition. The lunatics were chosen to speak out as an allegorical device. They were the mouth piece of the author who vehemently opposed it and had personally witnessed many traumas because of the event. Most of the population also experienced a disturbed mental state, on the news of Partition and what was yet to come. No one had proper answers and the state of things was in chaos. Communal riots became common and law and order was out of question. Some of the people in a family chose to stay back in their old places while many left for the new land. This led to a separation among families, nostalgia and helplessness which continues even today.

The protagonist of the story was Bishen Singh, a lunatic now, who was an affluent landlord in the place called Toba Tek Singh who had suddenly gone mad, fifteen years ago. Everyone in the asylum called him by the name of his village, Toba Tek Singh. He was almost bald, with swollen legs due to his standing all the time. He also had the habit of uttering a nonsensical phrase, *Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dbayana the mung the dal of the laltain*. He was also clueless about the happenings, not able to figure out whether his hometown, Toba Tek Singh (Sialkot) was in India or Pakistan, now, which later he comes to know

was now in Pakistan while his family shifted to India, from his friend Fazal Din. Furthermore, that he shall be transported to India like other Hindu and Sikh lunatics.

Despite this incoherence, his attachment to his birthplace remains lucid and powerful. When told that he must go to India because he is Sikh, he asks, "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" The officials inform him that it lies in Pakistan. In a final act of defiance, he refuses to move, collapses, and dies in the no-man's-land between the two countries—a space symbolizing his existential displacement. His identity as a resident of Toba Tek Singh, was fixed in his psyche. It was in India, before the Partition, because there was no Pakistan then. So, the mentally confused Bishen Singh, could not comprehend where Pakistan was and where Toba Tek Singh was. His brain could not perceive the huge change that took place, and hence revolted. He refused to go to the new land, Pakistan. He just wanted to return to his ancestral village at any cost. That was why he was not willing to go to India, where all of his family has crossed over and settled. The soldiers had to forcefully drag him to which he protested. Even the sores on his legs could not deter him. Unfortunately, he had to fight till death, literally, but to no use.

"The Pakistani soldiers caught hold of him and tried to push him to the other side...." (220). This story is a fervent satire on the viciousness as well as brutality of partition. "Over 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." (220).

Bishen Singh eventually passes away on a land belonging to no one, gaining the status of a 'nowhere' man. This was the case of many people who had never been out of their respective villages before the Partition. They had to undergo an ocean of changes when they crossed national borders. They were physically, mentally and financially ruined. The climax seeks to find the identity loss, experienced by Bishen Singh during the entire process of exchange of lunatics. The mentally challenged inmates in the

Lahore asylum provide a miniature picture of the social order of that period through whom all subdivisions of society are mocked at.

The protagonist actually represents the dilemma of the thousands of displaced people during the Indo- Pak partition. The story represents contemporary man's feeling of meaninglessness, rootlessness and alienation. The 'partitioned' identity found in the story had been experienced by people wherever there had been a mass exodus. Transcending their time and place,

Manto's stories depicting people on the social margins have a psychological truthfulness and universality about them that speaks even today. Modernist writers regard him as one of the first to attempt serious formal experiments. Most importantly, his uncompromising maintenance of his own unique point of view and choice of subject matter, even under pressure, continues to inspire today's writers. His wish: "It's possible that Saadat Hasan (the man) may die, but Manto (the writer) will not", as he expressed, has come true.

Bibliograph

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