

Trauma Leaning Towards Insanity in Select Partition Literature

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Abstract: Trauma has been a lasting aspect of the survivors of the partition era who had to undergo numerous problems and horrendous moments during that black phase of human history. This went in continuation with the trauma theories that became a popular realm of studies in literature. A person traumatized as a result of facing a holocaust or a gory incident that shocks his existence till his psychological impulses are stretched to their utmost limit, faces a transformation that is tilting towards insanity. Literature is one of the mediums to express the trauma faced by the people who witnessed the biggest exodus in human history. How literature written during that phase reflected the insanity of the people who were traumatized by the horrors of frenzied mob bent upon decimating the people from the other religion, forms the crux of this paper. The effort would be to trace the depth of that trauma and the resultant shades of insanity in the demeanor and persona of the characters.

Key Words- Horrendous, Traumatized, Holocaust, Exodus, Frenzied, Insanity.

Partition and Trauma Studies

A lot has been written, spoken and expressed about the partition era upheaval that came to encompass and affect the fate of ten million people across both sides of the newly made border that divided the country into India and Pakistan thus liberating India from 190 years of servility. Ashis Nandy in his Forward of *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals* asserts that “Independence came packaged in genocide, necrophilia, ethnic cleansing, massive uprooting and the collapse of a moral universe.” (pp. xi). Indeed, the human massacre that took place during that phase wiped out the enthusiasm of independence. Dr. Asaduddin has described the era of partition as- A momentous event in history continues to tantalize historians, haunt the Indian psyche and cast its shadow on our social and political life....One of the most massive demographic dislocations in history, with its attendant human tragedy, it defies chroniclers to come to grips with it in all its dimensions. (312- 313). However, the trauma and the ennui faced by the survivors of that period have been a topic of intensified studies. Some among these works have been the works written by the survivors themselves while some others have devised the structure of their works with partition era as the time of storyline.

Partition Era Trauma Writers

In literature, we have writers with first- hand experience of partition era upheaval like Baldev Krishan Vaid, Intezaar Hussain, Saddat Hasan Manto, Amrita Pritam, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Khushwant Singh. Surbhi Jain while appreciating the sincerity of the partition era works says-“If one looks deeply at the whole gamut of Partition literature, it appears that apart from portraying the ordeal of Partition, or expressing their sense of rage, anguish, hatred, anger or loss, the writers seem to be questioning the ultimate benefit or validity of such events to mankind” (Jain 45). At the same time, we come across writers who, although did not experience the fury of partition violence and witness the resultant trauma, but, were sincere in their depiction of the chagrin, pain and trauma of the migrant hordes. They include Anjali Enjeti, Anita Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa, Salman Rushdie, Urvashi Butalia and numerous others. In all, the canvass of partition era depiction is full of a wide range of painful incidents, exasperating situations, characters as mere victims to the fury of rioters, tricky turn of events and suffering leading to mental agony and derangement and in some cases even death. In an article entitled ‘Memories of Partition: Revisiting



Saadat Hasan Manto' Sudha Tiwari argues that "the metaphor of madness and the theme of identity-crisis recurs often in the discourse on Partition, whether conventional historiography or fictional representation. The nationalist leaders were often heard saying, "Our people have gone mad." Gandhi appealed to the people not to "meet madness with madness". The newspaper editors said so, and so did ordinary men and women. Partition not only created a "mad" atmosphere but also made its victims "mad", "insane", losing their mental balances due to traumatic experiences. People in both the territories were confused about their identities, about their geographical and political identities, and about their citizenship as well. Manto merges these two themes and creates Toba Tek Singh. Toba Tek Singh has become a symbol of the confused and torn identities arising from separation from one's ancestral home. He wins over those who "claim to be sane" and who want to fix his identity, as his death takes place in no-man's-land, where the writ of neither nation prevails." (Tiwari 55)

However, as compared to the literary pieces, the history of the phase is not as accurate and sincere and, in order to evaluate the literature of the period as a whole and get a fair estimation of the trauma faced by the people on both sides of the border, literature has a pivotal role to play. Rightly does Urvashi Butalia share her concern and agony about the sincerity of the historians when she says- "how families were divided, how friendships endured across borders, how people coped with the trauma, how they rebuilt their lives, what resources, both physical and mental, they drew upon, how their experience of dislocation and trauma shaped their lives, and indeed the cities and towns and villages they settled in — find little reflection in written history." (Butalia 07) She is right in the sense that history keeps an account of the causalities, shifting of power, transferring of people to both sides of the border, allocation of land and properties. But the wails for lost family, the abject cries of the separated children, the pangs and pain of lost home, the sorrow of unrequited love; all fail to find a space in the histories.

While describing the massacre of partition, Khalid Hasan writes - "The great tragedy of the partition of India lay in the sectarian and religious bloodletting which preceded and followed it. To this day, it is not known with any degree of accuracy of how many people on both sides of the divide were massacred in cold blood. Savagery such as that witnessed at the time of partition has few parallels in history. A fierce madness seems to have taken whole of people who had lived together for centuries and, barring occasional and limited violence, in a spirit of mutual tolerance and understanding. In 1947, something snapped. The holocaust of partition was in a way more horrifying than the extermination of European Jews by the Nazis. It was the third reach which undertook the liquidation of Jews population as a matter of state policy. The machinery of the state was paced into service to accomplish this grisly task. It was organized and meticulously planned killing. In the subcontinent, it was not the state which killed people but the people themselves who became the pearl perpetrators of a vast and macabre drama of death. Overnight, civilized citizen turned into demented killer. Neighbours and friends killed friends. Reprisals were wide spread. If a hundred men were reported killed by one community, the other community made sure that it doubled the score. There were no holds barred. Women became worst victims of partition. Hundred upon thousands of them were raped, killed or abducted. No one was spared, not given children and old people. Whole neighbourhoods entire village were set on fire and the feeling, screaming inmates chased and turn to death with improvised weapons. No one has been able to make sense of that madness. It is clear that not only individuals but entire communities can go insane." (page xii-xiii, Hasan). One aspect of partition era trauma has always been a core area of interest for research and it would be interesting, and, at the same time, engrossing to gauge the extent of the impact of trauma resulting from the partition era violence and how it results into insanity in the characters of the literary works of the period. Cathy Caruth describes trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience," 208) In this paper, the attempt would be to focus on a few such works which showcase insanity and psychological upheaval resulting from partition trauma. Different works will be handpicked for the purpose and insanity bordering on trauma will be traced as a key element having its impact on the life and resulting circumstances of the central character.



Toba Tek Singh- A Short Story by Saddat Hassan Manto

Saddat Hassan Manto has written some very interesting short stories bordering on the psychological impulses of their central characters. His short story collections have opposed the idea of partition and his characters in these stories are the mouthpiece of this idea. Manto shows how people, who faced the partition violence chose to remain silent and as a result of that, lost their mental balance. Toba Tek Singh is his immortal story. Trauma, separation, identity and confusion are the lot of the lunatics in the asylum of Lahore after the announcement is made that the Hindu and Sikh lunatics would be shifted to India. Bishan Singh, the central character of the story hails from a place in Pakistan called Toba Tek Singh. The story shows the effect of partition between India and Pakistan upon those inmates. The lunatics who are to be shifted to India find it inappropriate and out of place to be made to shift to a new country. The reason they discuss is that they do not know the language of that country. Bishan Singh is a perfect example of resentment against the decision of the politicians to split India into two parts.

The pain of being alienated from the native land is not confined to the sane people only. Tahir Jokinen and Shershah Assadullah in their article "Saadat Hasan Manto, Partition, and Mental Illness through the lens of Toba Tek Singh" quote Tarun K. Saint to define the nonsense gibberish of Bishan Singh as a reflection of the arbitrariness and opacity of the governmental machinery. (Jokinen and Assadullah 3) The inmates of the mental asylum get haunted with the questions- "Where was Pakistan? What were its boundaries?" The trauma of displacement, alienation and partition was too much for Manto. A Muslim by birth, Manto was never tempted by religious fanaticism. The inmates of mad house are unable to differentiate between India and Pakistan. They seem to voice the mind of Manto who said-"Though I tried hard I could not separate India from Pakistan and Pakistan from India...my mind could not resolve the question: what country did we belong to now, India or Pakistan?" The derangement of lunatics is never a hurdle in voicing out the wrong things resulting from the political manoeuvrings of vested interests. Thus the feeling of trauma is too much for Bishan Singh and he stands there steadfast in his decision not to shift to the newly decided country for him. He dies in this upheaval while standing on the newly made border. His deranged mental state does not grasp the need of border. In a symbolic manner, Manto has openly rejected the idea of partition and questioned its mindlessness.

Manto was an avowed lover of his nation and birth land and his dejection and misery at the partition of the land of his dreams and aspirations was a heartbreak for him. His pain was too much for him to bear and it poured out in different forms and at different moments. As he himself writes in a letter- "My heart is steeped in sorrow today. A strange melancholy has descended on me. Four and a half years ago, when I said goodbye to my second home, Bombay, I had felt the same way. I was sad at leaving a place where I had spent so many days of a hard-working life. That piece of land had offered shelter to a family reject and it had said to me, 'you can be happy here on two pennies a day or on ten thousand rupees a day, if you wish. You can also spend your life here as the unhappiest man in the world. You can do what you want. No one will find fault with you. Nor will anyone subject you to moralizing. You alone will have to accomplish the most difficult of tasks and you alone will have to make every important decision of your life. You may live on the footpath or in a magnificent palace; it will not matter in the least to me. You may leave or you may stay, it will make no difference to me. I am where I am and that is where I will remain.'" (quoted from *Mumbai Fable*)

Supuriboner Sari- Shankha Ghosh a novella, translated into English with title *The Rows of Areca Nut Trees* by Mosarrap H Khan

The story takes us to Eastern part of India with the fall of 1947. The impact of partition is seen here too as is visible in the Western border of India. The Bengali Hindus are anxious about the safety of their families and are eager to shift to the safer region for Hindus, the Western part of Bengal, because the rumours are amuck that Eastern Bengal will go to Pakistan. The author has deftly juxtaposed the lunatic daughter in law with the male revolutionary who is fighting against foreign domination. The image of a mad woman writing in the confines of an attic is a harsh critique of male dominance that disciplines women into household limits because they symbolise



tradition and history. Nilu, the adolescent narrator is visiting his maternal grandfather's house for Durga Puja, probably for the last time as the family is leaving their household for good. Only the grandfather, the head of the family stays back, because, he cannot digest the idea of leaving the Areca Nut trees planted by him decades back, thus making these trees a symbol of attachment and a sense of connect with the roots, even in the wake of fast changing scenario.

Nilu is not able to answer the query of Harun if he will come back the following year for Durga Puja. The religious considerations and the emotional breakdown join hands and keep the voice of Nilu choked as the boat leaves the canal and enters the river to travel Westwards. Contrary to the thoughts of the other members of the family, Nilu thinks that Fulmami is not insane. The topics that she happens to discuss with him, show her to be in her sorts. The madness of Fulmami seems to represent that of the times. Nilu, the adolescent boy is unable to fathom the limits or the boundaries fixed for girls. Fulmami's madness is resultant from the fact that she cannot be reined in, she goes out of the house and comes in at her will and thus transgresses the limitations upon women. The search for her goes futile as she is untraceable. Still in the second sense, the family had lost her even when she was at home. The pain of losing a daughter in law can be coupled with the pain of losing the homeland as alien within the wink of an eye.

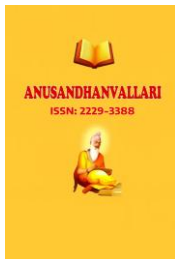
Fulmami's words- "I do not belong to this house" seem to reflect the mindset of the Hindus residing in the now Pakistan. They seem to think- "We do not belong to this place." Phulmami's madness is a cause of concern for the family and her irrational behaviour (according to the family) is grounded in her insanity. In Sharbari Sinha's estimation of Phulmami in *The Hindu*- "She would rather use words, no matter how humdrum, that are faithful not to tradition but to what she wants to say. In poetry, as in life, she is ready to break rules if it takes her closer to where she wants to be. All searches end in vain when she goes missing, but the family had lost her even when she had been in their midst. She had broken out of their control much before she is officially "lost". Their pain at the loss of a daughter-in-law, who is loved but not understood or accepted for what she is, seems to become indistinguishable from their pain at losing a cherished homeland that has become alien. The alienation, as the future poet understands, is rooted in their own fragmented consciousness."

'Parindey Jaan Hun Kithey' One Act Play in Punjabi by Dr. Sahib Singh

'Parindey Jaan Hun Kithey', a one act play by a celebrated dramatist Dr. Sahib Singh, is about partition era and brings to the surface the idea as to how the commoners are troubled by the decisions of the so called wise people, the politicians of the age. The human predicament in the face of a disaster in the form of separation and bleak future of a relationship appears on the surface. What the man thinks and what transpires, gives us a thought that man is but a puppet in the hands of fate. The mental pain to which Kehar Singh and Inayti are subjected breaks them up and drains Kehar Singh out of sensibility and benevolence towards mankind. A notorious bandit before Inayti came into his life, Jagir Singh was a synonym for terror.

Scene two of this play reminds us of the upheaval and dilemma of the mad man in the story Toba Tek Singh by Manto and here too, as in the play under discussion, the mad man questions the futility and absurdity of partition and migration of man to a new land formed on the basis of religion. For Inayti, the transition to Harbans Kaur has been an uphill drive. Searching for true love, Inayti elopes with Kaila, who later sells her off to Jagir Singh to ward off the financial constraints that face him. A woman has always been treated as a commodity, a slave, an object for physical gratification for centuries, who has no identity of her own. A refined woman in herself and an epitome of beauty, Inayti manages the household of Jagir Singh deftly and considers the household as her own. But her beauty rankles in the eyes of lecherous village idlers who envy Jagir Singh for this majestic booty. This is otherwise that Jagir Singh had bought Inayti before the partition unrest had begun.

This one act play ably vivifies the pain and distress of numerous such Inaytis who have taken up the new roles in the new household the fate has bestowed upon them. The partition lines drawn across newly formed states do not have any significance for common people. The emotional and innocent bond that Inayti and Jagir Singh develop



over a period of time are the foundation of a pious relationship, each overlooking the prior life and circumstances of the other. All goes well and then heavens fall apart within the wink of an eye. The two governments decide to exchange the women abducted during the partition riots. Inayti and Jagir Singh's peaceful matrimony of 12 years catches an evil eye and the village idlers instigate and hasten the process of Inayti's painful exit to her family in Pakistan. The pain of being separated has a psychological impact on Kehar Singh as he wishes to become the same notorious vagabond before Inayti became his wife. The psychological turbulence that troubles Inayti and Jagir Singh is too much for these simple folk to face. Jagir Singh promises to let all hell loose if Inayti is sent to Pakistan. He hovers between anger and insanity at the prospect of Inayti been sent to Pakistan.

Khol Do- Saddat Hassan Manto

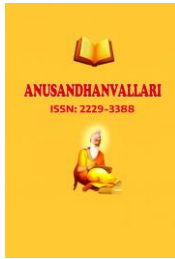
Another perfect example of a character going insane as a result of trauma in a literary piece of partition era is Sakina, the central character of the short story Khol Do by Manto. The physical abuse, which she is repeatedly subjected to, leaves her into mental trauma and numbness. She is raped numerous times over a span of a few days and she loses her senses and is mentally and physically numb. The last scene is touching and unnerving where the father is happy that his daughter is found even though she is in perpetual numbness, probably never to recover from it. Giving a description of his daughter to the soldiers, Sirajjudin mentions- "she's fair and very beautiful; she's taken after her mother, not me. She's about seventeen. Large eyes, black hair, there's a big beauty spot on her right cheek" (52). The assurance of the soldiers to find her turns blank as they recover her on road to Amritsar and seat her in the truck but do not restore her to her father. Human debauchery and lust raise their ugly face at her as she is repeatedly raped and made a victim of the sexual tendencies of the soldiers.

The traumatic memory of rape has such an impact upon the mind of Sakina that she is no longer in a position to resist and has no connection with language. The doctor, while examining Sakina, asks Sirajjudin- "The window, open it." Sakina hears the doctor's word and her hands loosen the salwar and lower it. The horrid time through which Sakina has passed for the last few days has taken its toll upon her mind and body. She is meekly responding to the statement without knowing where she is and under whose supervision. Her father is elated that his daughter is alive, unaware of the mental trauma and the physical torture she has gone through. The society's abnormal and callous ways thrust trauma upon the common people and the resultant pain, upheaval and trouble are altogether ignored by the society in its barbarity. With the aim to shock the readers and in order to heighten the impact of trauma on its victim, Manto has shown the victim to be under the impact of Schizophrenia. We find the mention of Schizophrenia in the book *The Divided Self* by a prominent psychiatrist Laing who describes "Schizoid" as a person "the totality of whose experience is split," who "is not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home in' the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation" (Laing,17)

The father Sirajjudin, is in stark contrast with the fathers of that period, who, either killed their daughters for the sake of protecting the family's honour or pushed them into the wells. The girl is laying on the stretcher in a lifeless condition and the father is elated that his daughter has recovered and is alive; forget the stain on her honour and her traumatic mental and physical condition. This example of trauma ranks Manto among the leading writers who were able to successfully portray the insanity of trauma during the partition era survivors.

Conclusion

Trauma affects a human being both on psychological and physical fronts. But, the psychological trauma leans towards insanity while the physical wounds are healed over a passage of time. Insanity was one of the end results of partition era upheaval and the writers have impeccably portrayed this aspect in literature. It will not be gainsaying the fact that the writers have effectively and impressively worked on this tendency of human mind to falter into insanity and trauma in the face of violence and riots. By citing a few examples of such works, a sincere



effort has been made to bring home the conclusion that partition era upheaval led to a lot of psychological turbulence for the central characters of these works.

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