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Trauma and its Manifestations in Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh"

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Abstract

Aims: The present paper entitled "Trauma and its Manifestations in Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" aims to elaborate the concept of trauma both in clinical and psychological terms. It also tries to establish a link between trauma and its various manifestations in Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh".

Methodology and Approaches: The paper is primarily based on the elaborations of the various events occurred in "Toba Tek Singh". The character of Bishan Singh has been analyzed showcasing him as a typical case of psychological trauma. The analysis has been made in such a way that can lead to a larger understanding of literary narratives as an outcome of traumatic psyche. The methods and approaches adopted for writing of this paper are explanatory, analytical and reinterpetive.

Outcome: The paper offers a new approach to relook into certain literary texts. It also raises question on the role of memory as a device to ascertain historical facts in a troubled time.

Conclusion and Suggestions: Trauma is an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" stands as a powerful indictment of the trauma inflicted by the partition of India and Pakistan. The characters of Manto's other short stories such as "Mozail" and "The Return" can be analysed from the perspective of physical trauma.

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Etymologically, trauma is linked to the Greek word “wound”. According to *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, trauma is “1- an injury (as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent, 2- a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time.” The dictionary traces the origin of the word to the Greek “traumat” which is an alteration of “troma” that means “to wound” or “to pierce”. In piercing, something comes from the outside which punctures the protective shield.

In their book *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja write “since the nineteenth century the term (trauma) has mutated so that it is now- primarily used to describe emotional wounds, traces left on the mind by catastrophic, painful events” (Davis and Meretoja 1). Trauma refers to psychological injury, lasting damage done to individuals or communities by tragic events or severe distress. Trauma has become a key interpretive category of our time. Since the introduction of the diagnosis “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the 1980 edition of their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the concept of trauma has virtually exploded. Now, it has generated its own discipline and is informing numerous others. The terms like “trauma paradigm”, “trauma culture”, “post-traumatic age” have become buzzwords which capture the impact that the notion of psychological wound has made within and beyond literary studies in recent years.

The partition of India in 1947 is one of the major political events that caused a massive psychological trauma to the entire population of the Indian subcontinent. The trauma of the partition was so colossal that Gulzar, the contemporary poet said “the wounds will take decades to heal, centuries to overcome the trauma”. The partition of India in 1947 has remained one of the most focal points of the writers of India and Pakistan.

Among the writers who have produced great literary works on the partition, Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) is arguably the leader of all of them. Written in Urdu, his short stories dealing with the violence of the partition are still considered one of the finest and subtlest literary responses. They are held in high

esteem by writers and critics. Salman Rushdie calls him “the undisputed master of the modern Indian short story”. In the opening lines of his article “Madness and Partition: The Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto” Stephen Alter writes:

No writer has been able to convey the violent ambiguities of communal conflict with as much force and conviction as Saadat Hasan Manto. He vividly recreates the anger and horrors of this period and the trauma of refugees uprooted and victimized by the delineation of arbitrary borders.
(Alter 91)

Manto’s short stories such as “Toba Tek Singh”, “The Dog of Tithwal”, “The Return”, “The Dutiful Daughter”, “Colder Than Ice”, “Mozail”, “A Girl from Delhi” are the best examples of the manifestation of physical and psychological trauma of their protagonists resulting from the partition of India and the violence and displacement which accompanied it. Amongst the 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio play, three collections of essays and two collections of personal sketches, the most remarkable are his short stories especially those which are based on the partition. However, in the present paper, we shall explore the presence and manifestation of forms trauma found in Manto’s famous short story “Toba Tek Singh”.

"Toba Tek Singh" was first published in 1953 in an Urdu magazine called *Savera*. Saadat Hasan Manto's haunting short story, “Toba Tek Singh”, is a stark portrayal of the psychological trauma inflicted by the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. In the chaos following the partition of India, Saadat Hasan Manto's “Toba Tek Singh” takes us inside a mental asylum in Lahore, Pakistan. The story centres around Bishan Singh, a Sikh inmate who hails from the town of Toba Tek Singh. As tensions rise and the newly formed governments of India and Pakistan decide to exchange inmates based on religion, confusion grips the asylum. Bishan Singh, though seemingly detached from reality, becomes fixated on a single question - where does Toba Tek Singh lie now? Is it part of India or Pakistan? This seemingly simple question takes on immense importance for him. The asylum bustles with activity as authority’s attempt to sort the inmates. Bishan's

friends, fellow inmates Fazal Din and Chhabel Singh, try to explain the situation, but their words fail to penetrate Bishan's growing obsession.

When it is time for Bishan to be transferred to India, he throws a wrench in the plans. He refuses to budge, insisting that he cannot leave for India if Toba Tek Singh isn't there. The authorities, at a loss, try to reason with him, even offering to send him to a better asylum in India. But Bishan remains resolute, his entire world seemingly reduced to the fate of his hometown.

Desperate to resolve the situation, they take Bishan to the Wagah border, the stark physical division between India and Pakistan. Here, amidst the barbed wire fences, Bishan stands at the centre, declaring that Toba Tek Singh must be here, in this very no man's land. This act becomes a powerful symbol of the absurdity of the partition that ripped communities apart based on religious lines. The story concludes tragically. Unable to reconcile the loss of his home and the imposed division, Bishan Singh collapses and dies in the no man's land. Through the tragicomic figure of Bishan Singh, a man fixated on his lost village, Manto lays bare Bishan Singh's mental state and the absurdity of the situation to depict the lingering trauma of the partition. Bishan Singh is the typical case of the victim of trauma caused by the partition of India.

In their research article titled “Intergenerational Trauma in the Context of the 1947 India–Pakistan Partition”, Harjyot Kaur and Pooja Jaggi mention different kinds of symptoms and responses of psychological trauma. They are feelings of anger, sadness, guilt, difficulty in concentration and anxiety. Kaur and Pooja Jaggi further write “In some cases of trauma, an individual may also experience dissociation. It involves an experience of disconnection or detachment from oneself and the world around oneself. It can manifest itself in the form of taking on a new identity, frequently forgetting personal information.”

Now, if we evaluate the story “Toba Tek Singh” we can easily find the above-mentioned symptoms and responses in Bishan Singh. It is important to note that all of these symptoms of psychological trauma are triggered by the partition of India. In the following paragraphs, we shall try to locate these symptoms in the text of the story. In the story, Bishan Singh is obsessed with Toba Tek Singh's

location. It showcases a classic symptom of trauma. The story describes him constantly muttering, "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" (Manto 17, 18). This repetitive questioning reflects his inability to process the upheaval and the threat of losing his home.

Bishan Singh is indifferent from everything. Since the time he has heard about the partition he has dissociated himself from everything. He does not pay heed to any visitor or the world around him. "He lived in a kind of limbo, having no idea what day of the week it was, or month, or how many years had passed since his confinement" (15). He has even refused to recognise his daughter. "In the strange world that he inhabited, hers was just another face" (15). He shows no interest to the gifts brought to him by one of his visitors Fazal Din from his town. "Bishan Singh took the gift and handed it to one of the guards. 'where is Toba Tek Singh?' he asked" (17).

Bishan's belief that Toba Tek Singh exists in the no man's land between India and Pakistan can be seen as a delusion. This distorted perception highlights his desperate attempt to find a sense of belonging amidst the chaos. When he is taken across the border he "tried to run, but was overpowered by the Pakistani guards who tried to push him across the dividing line towards India. However, he wouldn't move. 'This is Toba Tek Singh,' he announced. *Uper the gur gur the annexe the be dhyana mung the dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan*" (18). The story mentions him declaring, "This is it... This is Toba Tek Singh!" at the border, demonstrating his disconnection from reality.

The story mentions Bishan rarely sleeping and staying withdrawn. "Guards said he had not slept a wink in fifteen years. Occasionally, he could be observed leaning against a wall, but rest of the time, he was always to be found standing. Because of this, his legs were permanently swollen, something that did not appear to bother him" (14). This social withdrawal can be a coping mechanism for dealing with overwhelming emotions and the trauma of displacement.

Bishan Singh is so anxious and anguished that he struggles to distinguish reality from his anxieties. He clings to the idea of Toba Tek Singh as a symbol of

stability, even when presented with evidence that contradicts his belief. Moreover, he is emotionally fraught. The story doesn't explicitly mention emotional outbursts, but Bishan's refusal to move suggests a deep emotional response to the potential loss of his home. Trauma can make it difficult to regulate emotions.

Bishan Singh's emotional outbursts are a manifestation of the collective trauma experienced by countless individuals during partition. When informed that Toba Tek Singh might be in "Neutral territory," he erupts in frenzy, screaming, "*Uper the gur gurthe annex the mung the dal of Guruji the Khalsa and Guruji ki fateh . . . jo boley so nihai sat sri akal*" (5). This denial reflects the psychological resistance to accepting the brutal reality of the divided homeland. The concept of a neutral territory, a space free from national identities, becomes a desperate fantasy for Bishan Singh, a yearning for a world untouched by the madness of partition.

The story's tragic climax reinforces the sense of despair. Bishan Singh falls right on the borderline and dies. "There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh" (18). His fate, adrift and belonging nowhere, becomes a stark representation of the countless individuals who were uprooted and forever scarred by the violence and displacement.

In conclusion, Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" stands as a powerful indictment of the trauma inflicted by the partition of India and Pakistan. Through the tragicomic figure of Bishan Singh, Manto exposes the profound sense of loss, fractured identity, and lingering psychological wounds that accompanied this historical event. The story's enduring relevance lies in its ability to remind us of the devastating human cost of political division and the struggle to rebuild a sense of belonging in the aftermath of such immense trauma.

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