

Expressive Aphasia and Functional Amnesia in Manto's "Toba Tek Singh"¹

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Abstract

This article, based on Saadat Hassan Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh", attempts to explore the effect of the decision of diplomatically agreed exchange of lunatics of Lahore asylum from the perspective of war, violence and trauma. The decision was made between the two newly formed nations, India and Pakistan, just after some time of their partition in 1947. The madmen were forcibly brought to the border on the trucks and they were to be exchanged on the basis of their religious faith. The Hindus and the Sikhs were going to be deported to India and the Muslims to Pakistan. This paper investigates how violence, beyond physical injury, hurts one's psyche pushing the victim to a loss of language and memory. It uses the theory of violence and trauma to study the effect of partition. Reflecting on the meaning disorder, it analyzes the traumatic shock that is conveyed through blurry words that sound insensible according to the rule of semantics. Revisiting the common notions of lunacy, it examines how expressive aphasia and functional amnesia impair the major character of the story. Its finding suggests that the trauma and psychological breakdown caused due to partition violence can lead one to a state of expressive aphasia and functional amnesia.

Keywords: expressive aphasia, functional amnesia, partition, psyche, trauma

Introduction

The political decisions of the states often have direct impact on the everyday lives of the general people. When it comes to having agreement on particular issues between the two countries, a large number of people of several countries are affected. Moreover, when it is the decision of the partition of a country into two, millions of people suffer from it. Such decisions are always followed by unimaginable riots. Tiwari (2013) writes that in the ferocious massacre that followed the partition of India and Pakistan, at least a million Muslims and

Hindus lost their lives (p. 50). Singh (1969) writes that the partition violence took a toll of more than 500,000 lives and uprooted ten million people from their homes (p. 501). Not only the sane people suffer from such holocaust, physically disabled and the inmates of asylum also get affected. George (2007) claims that during the partition months of India and Pakistan, violence against women (in the form of sexual assault, mutilation, murder, and abduction) rose to unprecedented levels (p. 136). In spite of their innocence, the case of women was so pitiable that touches too painfully on sensitive nerves (Mansergh, 1965, p. 1). For Nancy

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(1991), the partition event is the gravest and most painful testimony of dislocation or the conflagration of community (p. 1). The survivors from the events also suffer from trauma as the bleak picture of the whole violence they witnessed is always there in their memory. Manto (1994) presents a realistic picture of the then society in his story "Toba Tek Singh". His characters suffer from different stages of aphasia and amnesia. This study concentrates on how major characters like Bishan Singh suffer from the loss of language ability and functional memory.

In the general terms of the word, aphasia is the loss of language ability affecting the production and comprehension of speech. It results due to various reasons like brain injury or strokes. It is of different types. Expressive aphasia is one of its types. Individuals suffering from expressive aphasia have trouble speaking fluently and sensibly. Such people have difficulty in producing grammatically correct sentences and their speech is limited. It results not only due to physical injury, but may also happen due to a shocking event that takes place affecting us. Similarly, amnesia is the loss of memory. Both of these states are caused from a visible or invisible injury, shock or wound. The British medical journal document under the article "Aphasia and Kindred Disorders of Speech" (1926) states:

Aphetic patient is speechless under the stress of emotion; he can however understand what is said to him, while unable to repeat words. He suffers from verbal amnesia, on the other hand, though he cannot pronounce words, cannot appreciate the meaning of words-that is he has lost the special

memory of both spoken and written words, and consequently cannot use words to express his ideas; he is suffering from what others have called 'sensory aphasia'. (p. 647)

In Manto's "Toba Tek Singh", the protagonist of the story Bishan Singh suffers from these states. The inmates of Lahore asylum get affected by the partition of India and Pakistan. When the officials of both countries decide to transport the lunatics on the basis of their religious beliefs, this decision shocks them and leads to aphasia and amnesia.

Manto was a story writer from India before the two countries partitioned. He was drawn to the geography that was later known as Pakistan. His new nationality was the outcome of a few handful elite class authorities in the then government of both countries against whom he protested through his writing. Geographical boundary, for him, did not make much sense. He had a transnational character. The barbed wires could not determine his location and nationality. He wanted to enjoy freedom like the birds that can fly to any geography of the entire world. He took the partition decision made by a handful of diplomats as a thoughtless event. He opposed it openly in spite of the fact that he was under the surveillance of the authority that wanted him to stop his opposition. Ispahani (1998) described, in his partition stories, Manto conveys, as no historian could, as no politician would, the disorientation, the mystification, the shroud of nonsense that fell upon the subcontinent in 1947 (p. 190). Several times he was also questioned by the

court law for his opposition of the state decision and obscenity in his writings.

The story "Toba Tek Singh" was written just after the partition of India and Pakistan. The partition, for Mushirul Hasan (2004), was profoundly a religious event for both sides and an agony over religion (p. 103). The story captures the irrational violence of the Communal Holocaust graphically (Ramakrishnan, 1996, p. 167). So, it is on the theme of overall effect of this partition on the people of entire subcontinent. The story portrays the pain on the part of people though the elites who made the decision of partition were not at all affected by it. Manto records, with compassionate humor, the odd, often astute responses of the lunatics to the news about their imminent displacement. The inmates of the asylum are at natural confusion; they are not quite sure where India is, or where Pakistan is, or where the asylum itself is. One lunatic climbs a tree and declares, "I wish to live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live in this tree" (Ispahani, 1998, p. 191). Bishan Singh's bold statement about his decision to live neither in India nor Pakistan has variously been interpreted. Singh (2021) has interpreted it with an ecocritical lens. He feels Bishan Singh acquires the name Toba Tek Singh, by virtue of his oneness with, and love for his native place (p. 2). His intense associations with this place play an important role in shaping his personhood. His death at the liminal place of the border can be read as a powerful narrative of resistance against the dominant political and national discourse of the times, reflecting Manto's own disagreement over the partition.

The major character Bishan Singh, a madman in the story, resists the decision of transporting the Hindu lunatics to India and Muslim ones to Pakistan. He not only resists, but also challenges the state authority and disallows them to fix his nationality. He typically stands on his bare and swollen feet for fifteen years decrying and protesting the decision of exchanging lunatics. The trauma caused by the shocking decision makes him so awkward that he cannot further express his protest with the words available. The decision of the high-profile persons of the states takes away his language ability from him. He not only suffers from expressive aphasia but also from functional amnesia. This leads him to a state when he accepts his death in the no man's land rather than accepting the state order. This is an extreme state of trauma. Here, his transnational character denounces all avaricious geographical physical boundaries. In this context, this study wants to explore what pushes Bishan to suffer from trauma, why he does not obey the state decision and how he opposes it. It tries to study how the traumatic effect can lead Bishan to a state of expressive aphasia and functional amnesia. This study adds an insight on traumatic effects like aphasia and amnesia resulted due to partition. At the same time, it reflects how the partition of a country may set ground for an irrational violence impacting thousands of lives.

Review of Literature

Manto and his works have received a huge critical attention from a number of critics. Evaluating Manto's characters Hashmi (2012) asserted that Manto's characters leap off the page straight to the readers' heart (p. 5). Manto has indeed made

his characters unique. Many of his characters are memorable and feel like real. Their plights are similar to the plights of people from everyday life.

Manto wanted to maintain national harmony by writing. His partition stories are sociopolitical satires on typicality and incongruities of the time. By writing, he wanted the concerned authorities to correct those anomalies. However, Koves (1997) asserted that his partition stories did not subvert the myth of national communities based on religion even though they undercut various elements of that ideology (p. 2148). The social impact of a writer is long term mission, yet Manto wanted to connect narratives with social reality of the time hoping that they would draw people's attention.

Passing comments on Manto's stories that reflect partition violence, Flemming (1977) described them as "essentially a collection of anecdotes". They depict "looting, murder, rape, frantic attempts at escape or concealment, and police corruption and participation in the violence". Flemming further claimed that all anecdotes have the theme of man's inhumanity to man, and especially the man of "other" religious community (p. 100). The religion was basically the cause behind partition. The differences between religious creeds and the tussle mainly between the Hindus and the Muslims had led the nation to fragmentation.

Talking about why Manto wrote "Toba Tek Singh" Singh (1969) wrote that "Munto was also an ardent nationalist and refused to accept the theory that the Hindus and Muslims were two different nations". So, he "pretended to ignore the fact of partition

and chose to live in Bombay rather than return to his home town, Lahore, which became the capital of West Pakistan". Singh further observed that "[t]he communal massacres and the tension between India and Pakistan became too much for him" (p. 501). Singh believed that Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" is, in some ways, the summing up of his own life and that of his homeland (pp. 501-502). Sometimes the writer may have the reflection of their own lives in their narratives. Manto has also crafted the story reflecting his own biography.

Talking about how Manto deals with partition violence Visvanathan (2007) claimed that the partition "was not mere mayhem. It was a search for order that would not tolerate smaller disorders and Manto's secularism was a mode for handling these smaller upheavals". This is the reason why his story "Toba Tek Singh" "captures the madness of Partition as it reaches an asylum where the mad have to be divided between India and Pakistan" (p. 267). In this way, critics on Manto's writings have so far argued on the effect of trauma, social, cultural and political life. Unlike them, this paper deals with the effect of trauma in the linguistic level. Similarly, it also deals with the effect of trauma in the sphere of individual memory. As it analyses expressive aphasia and functional amnesia in the major characters, the study is expected to point out to a new direction in the field of scholarship.

Methods

This is a qualitative research as it concentrates on detecting historical experience, culture, religion and social problems. It uses Manto's text as primary

data. It uses references and journal articles, author biography as secondary data. This study analyzes the relevant scholarly opinions expressed on the text scrutinized for this project. Being a thematic interpretation, it concentrates on literary connotations that the author and critics have intended to communicate.

Discussion

State Decision and the Dislocation

After two/three years of partition in 1947, it occurred to the government of India and Pakistan to exchange their lunatics. They were being exchanged on the basis of the regions they belonged or the religious creed they put faith in. The Hindu and Sikh lunatics were to stay in India and the Muslims were to be sent over to Pakistan. *The Annual Report* (1950) of the Punjab Mental Hospital Lahore described about how the patients were behaved in the hospital during the exchange:

The outstanding feature of the work of the hospital during the year was a repatriation of the non-Muslim mental patients from Western Pakistan. Since this was scheduled to coincide with the transfer of the Muslim patients from many other states besides Punjab in India, and since this exchange was canalized through Amritsar, it involved considerable preliminary organisational work. Four hundred and fifty non-Muslim mental patients were received from Lahore out of which 282 Punjabi patients were accommodated in the Amritsar mental hospital, the remaining having been sent on to the Inter-Provincial

Mental Hospital, Ranchi. As against this, 233 Muslim patients drawn from different mental hospitals in India were evacuated in the opposite direction to Lahore. That against an estimated non-Muslim population of six to seven hundred of the Mental Hospital, Lahore at the time of the partition only 317 patients were actually exchanged at the time of the transfer, is a tragic fact which sadly betrays the treatment meted out to those unfortunate victims who could not be retrieved earlier from the Lahore. (p. 56)

Though the lunatics were socially in the margin, they first expressed their confusion over the proposal. Then they aspired to know whether their new placement would be in India or Pakistan. They inquired the whereabouts of their new homes about which they had no idea. Some of the Muslim lunatics even chanted a slogan “Pakistan Zindabad”.

On the day of exchange of lunatics, when his turn came to cross the border, Bishan Singh asked the officials where Toba Tek Singh village was, in Pakistan or in India. He asked this question to a Muslim lunatic friend named Fazal Din but was not satisfied by his answer. His inquiry about the exact location of this place shows his deep sense of confusion and grief. As the officials tell him that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan and he now has to leave his present home in India for Pakistan, he is severely shocked. He feels dislocated as he has to lose his place attachment. Though the authorities force him to leave India, he is determined not to go to this new place leaving his present home,

property and the entire attachment with the soil, environment and a circle of friends. He challenges their dictatorship and chooses to stand in a place between the border, a place that is neither Hindustan nor Pakistan. He stands in this no man's land for fifteen years before he dies.

Bhalla (1999) adds that people who have witnessed the carnage can only wait and pray for death like Toba Tek Singh from the lunatic asylum, who stands in no man's land between two pious and ethically pure nations and calls down curses upon both except that as there seems to be no God who can carry them out (p. 3124). The Following lines reflect Bishan's resolution to resist official decision.

Before the sun rose, a piercing cry arose from Bishan Singh who had been quiet and unmoving all this time. Several officers, and the guards ran towards him; they show that the man who, for fifteen years, had stood on his legs day and night, now lay on the ground, prostrate. Beyond a wired fence on one side of him was Hindustan and beyond a wired fence on the other side was Pakistan. In the middle, on a stretch of land, which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. (Bhalla, 1991, p. 7)

These lines speak about how deep the wound of Bishan Singh is caused by the decision of transporting the inmates of the asylum to new places where they have never ever been before. Bishan Singh is so severely traumatized that he, a helpless creature before the state, decides to go nowhere. He is meek and knows that his voice against the state

decision is sure to be crushed. He finds no language to express his pain.

He feels, after the separation, the language he speaks now is not going to be his own language, and he does not know the language of the new place where he is going to be deported. He wants the guards to understand his grief. He even tries to speak with them. But he realizes that it is just like a goat's wailing before a butcher who is holding a sword to slaughter it. As the butcher knows no sorrows of the goat, the authority is indifferent towards present and forth coming sorrows of the people or the victims who are forcibly being exchanged. Bishan Singh suffers from a loss of language because the language he may use to appeal them, as he knows, is not going to work at all. Therefore, he murmurs senselessly. His agony of being displaced and homeless brings out a piercing cry "uper se gur gur di annexe di bay dhanian di mung di daal di of laltain (Bhalla, 1991, p. 3). Though this gibberish was incomprehensible to anybody, it conveys the whole idea of displacement that was imposed on him and many other millions of people. For him this forceful displacement was a violent act to bear.

Being a madman, his eccentric behavior detests the violence of the state which, by force, fixed the nationality of the lunatics. We can realize a sense of sanity in opposing and showing unwillingness to comply this identity. He criticizes the pettish factors that divide man from man, body from body, soul from soul. He wants to propagate the message of peace and prosperity to the people of both countries by showing them the way that leads them to a land where there is no division in the name of religion, where

liberty, equality and fraternity prevail and where winds blow only to spread the fragrance of universal brotherhood and eternal peace. This event refutes his lunacy questioning the sanity of his jailors. His lunacy is an irony here.

The metaphor of madness and the theme of identity crisis recurs often in the discourse on Partition, whether conventional historiography or fictional representations. Tiwari (2013) writes:

The nationalist leaders were often heard saying, "our people have gone mad." Gandhiji appealed to the people not to "meet madness with madness". The newspaper editors said so, and ordinary men and women. Partition not only created a "mad" turn to Pakistan atmosphere but also made its victims "mad", "insane", losing their mental balances due to traumatic experiences. (p. 55)

The clinical science fails to diagnose this lunacy. It shows the absurdity of political division. The indecisiveness and indeterminacy of the inmates of Lahore asylum about their new homes now is an event that leads them to lose the link between past and present. They find that their memory is permanently erased. Bishan Singh, in the asylum, might be interpreted as what trauma theorist Malabou (2012) defines trauma as the "wounds that have the power to cause a metamorphosis which destroys individual history, that cannot be reintegrated into the normal course of life or a destiny" (p. 53). As Bishan loses his memory permanently, he cannot return to the normal course of life. His health degrades further and the wound cannot

be healed as suggested by Malabou above. It destroys both of his linguistic ability and the memory.

According to Balaev (2008), trauma is a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self (p. 150). He claims that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys the identity (p. 149). When an individual history is forcibly erased for no reasons, trauma can never be cured. So Bishan Singh suffers from expressive aphasia. He cannot convey his agony in the shared discourse of meaning and understanding. The department of lunatics fills them with meaninglessness. Their confusion appears to be more sensible response than that of the sane people. The Hindu, Muslim as well as Sikh lunatics of the Lahore asylum show their grave concern after they come to know about the sudden and unexpected dislocation imposed on them by the hegemonic political course. This is further intensified when the two Anglo Indian inmates express their shock to know that the British had left but they had begun to worry about the post imperial status of India and the quality of breakfast. Bishan Singh, after being told of the partition, utters incomprehensible sentences that express his resentment at the inattention of the high-ranking diplomats to the quality of daal of mung (a variety of pulse). Kumar (2001) writes: "Toba Tek Singh, when told about Partition, he exclaims, "Uper the gurgur the mung the dal of the laltain." That is "neither Punjabi, nor English nor Hindi nor Urdu-it's just gibberish" (p. 48). This is a state of expressive aphasia. He loses his linguistic

ability due to the shocking decision of partition.

The effect of trauma is not only in the linguistic level; but Bishan Singh also suffers from amnesia. His memory loss takes him to a position that he cannot recognize his own daughter as she comes to see him in the asylum. She sits weeping before him. “In the strange world that he inhabited, hers was just another face” (Manto, 2008, p. 8). The severe trauma leads him to a state of systemic amnesia. His own daughter becomes stranger to his cognitive schema. Kandel and Larry (2008) say,

what takes place in Toba Tek Singh may be described as functional amnesia— where emotional factors seem to determine what is lost and human being lose significant parts of their past permanently and irretrievably, as well as retrograde amnesia whereby the new memory perishes before the old, before the simple. (p. 112)

In another event, when a Muslim friend of Bishan Singh named Fazal Din, comes to see him, Bishan does not show any sign of familiarity with that man: “on seeing him Bishan Singh tried to slink away, but the warden barred his way. Don’t you recognize your friend Fazal Din?” he said. “He has come to meet you.” Bishan Singh looked furtively at Fazal Din, and then started to mumble something (Bhalla, 1999, p. 5). These lines show that Bishan Singh is not mindful of any events, his kin, kith and the circle of friends. Fazal’s visit even hurts him because he is thinking that his friendship with Fazal will also be distanced from

geographical, political, social and cultural point of view. Manto further writes:

Previously his sixth sense would tell him when the visitors were due to come. But not anymore. His inner voice seemed to have stilled. He missed his family, the gifts they used to bring and the concern with which they used to speak to him. (Bhalla, 1999, p. 5)

Here, we can find how his previous memory is disrupted.

The main issue raised by Manto in the story is a heartrending tale of the Lahore asylum. He is successful to communicate the idea that humanity lies where borders are erased and the pettish consciousness of nationalism vanishes. The places like hospitals and asylums are apt places where one forgets the lowly impulses of nation, religion, caste, race etc; and the victims are seen and treated with humanitarian values. “Toba Tek Singh” is a realistic representation of partition violence in an ironic way. Through the double-edged use of metaphor of madness, Manto offers his indictment against human madness. The setting of the story, i.e. the lunatic asylum, throws irony in the story. Generally, the lunatics are supposed to be of weaker capacity than the sane people. But Manto’s lunatic characters are different from what people ordinarily think about them. They read the newspapers; and show their concern over the political events. They are aware of political and religious ideologies. One lunatic is so involved in the exchange of the lunatic debate among the inmates; he climbs a tree and sits on one of its branches for two hours. There

he gives a lecture without any pause on the complex issue of separation between India and Pakistan. When the guards ask him to get down the tree he climbs even higher. As they try to frighten him with threats, he replies “I will live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I will live in this tree right here” (Bhalla, 1999, p. 3). Flemming (1977) stated that Toba Tek Singh is both a man stretched on the ground and a piece of ground itself (p. 107). Here, the person whom the medical science calls a mad seems to be far wiser than the healthy people because he transgresses the borders of nations. Like a bird that makes its nest on the branches of the trees, he chooses a branch if the so-called sane society takes away his right to stay in the place where he and the generations of his family has been living. A bird sitting on the branch of a tree does not need visa to fly to any country. The whole world is its home. It is a member of entire universe. Similarly, the lunatic who denies coming down the tree is analogous to a bird. Though the act of climbing a tree and deciding to stay there may sound weird in a general sense, it is a quite symbolic protest of the agreement of partition and the exchange of madmen on the basis of their religion. By denying going neither to India nor Pakistan, the lunatic proves him a universal citizen who regards the national boundaries as insignificant and lowly. As the guards persuade him for some time, he climbs down and weeps there and embraces the Hindu and Sikh friends thinking that they might not

meet again. He shows a deep agony at the loss of his place. This dislocation haunts every lunatic of Lahore asylum. Thus, Flemming (1977) says, “Manto genuinely comes to the grips with human pain of partition, exploring with remarkable combination of anger, sarcasm and tenderness the effects of the violence and dislocation on its victims” (p. 105). His story expresses pain and anger at the same time.

Conclusion

With the evidences presented above, this paper, comes to conclude that the partition decisions are most painful because they cause intolerable pain to people and such decisions are often followed by unimaginable events like loots and riots, rape, theft, fights, killings including terrible bloodshed and mass destruction. The trauma of partition violence is deep and incurable. The victims who are often marginalized people and the women suffer from different social crimes. It hurts people’s psyche so deeply that the victims are pushed to a state of aphasia and amnesia as seen in Bishan, the major character of the story “Toba Tek Singh”. It also forces some people to suffer from lunacy. Similarly, it impairs the co-existence of all creeds, racial and religious harmony pushing most of the people except the diplomats, who are unaware and indifferent about the psychic breakdown of the victims, to an entire gloom.

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