

TRAUMA OF PARTITION : SAADAT HASAN MANTO**Dr.G.Manoja**

Associate Professor in English

Palamuru University

Mahabubnagar

The decolonization of India in 1947 was accompanied by its geographical partition into two nations – India and Pakistan – based on religious differences and anxieties about mineralization after independence. In the nine months between August 1947 and the following year, by unofficial counts, at least 28 million people --- Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims --- were forced to flee their homes and became refugees; at least a million were killed in communal violence. Despite the scale and nature of violence involved in this partition, making it one of the most violent events in the history of nation-formation, little attention has been paid to the literary response to it at the time, and to the critical impact of this violence and mass migration on South-Asian literature and culture.

The partition of the subcontinent led to one of the largest ever migrations in world history, with an estimated 12.5 million people being displaced or uprooted. In Punjab, the province most affected by violence and killings, 12 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were involved, and migration of some 9 million

people began overnight in an area the size of Wales. At the stroke of midnight on August 14th 1947 India became independent. The joy of freedom was overshadowed by the brutal partition of the country along religious lines. Muslims would now live in Pakistan and Hindus in India. Chaos and confusion led to unimaginable human tragedy. Over a million people died as Muslims and Hindus slaughtered each other and fought their territories and religions.

Independent India woke up to a sweet and sour beginning. The euphoria of independence was sapped by the anguish of partition. "We were free---yet killed"¹. The aftermath of partition, carried communal carnage, broken homes, destroyed relationships – it scarred souls, perhaps forever the fear tormented their souls. A gruesome episode destroyed cultures, families and individual lives.

The great tragedy of partition lay in the sectarian and bloodletting that surrounded it and this savagery has few parallels throughout history. A fierce madness seemed to control the people and

the people themselves became the perpetrators of a vast drama of death throughout their communities: “Overnight, civilized citizens turned into demented killer sit is clear that not only individuals but communities can go insane”².

Yet the literature on this major event is mostly inadequate, impressionistic and lacking in scholarly rigor. even after six decades of independence and despite the access to wide-ranging primary source materials, there are no convincing explanations of why and how M.A.Jinnah’s ‘two-nation’ theory emerged, and why partition created millions of refugees and resulted in over a million deaths. Similarly, it is still not clear whether partition allowed the fulfillment of legitimate aspirations or represents the mutilation of historic national entities. Part of the reason for this frame of reference is the inclination of many writers to draw magisterial conclusion from isolated events and to construct identities along religious lines. As results, the discussion tend to be based on statements and manifestos of leaders and leaders and their negotiations with British officials in Lutyens’ Delhi and Whitehall.

The birth of freedom on that elevated day August 14, 1947 for Pakistan and August 15, for India – did not bring India any ‘ennobling benediction’.. On the

contrary, the country was shaken by ‘a volcanic eruption’. Few writers revealed such poignancy and tragedy of nationally division and borders. Saadat Hasan Manto, born in Sambrala in Punjab in 1912. Jallianwalabagb massacre served as the background to his Partition stories. Literature and politics were inseparable to Manto. His anguish was revealed as ‘I found it impossible to decide which of the two countries was now my homeland—India or Pakistan’ He tried in vain to ‘separate India form Pakistan and Pakistan from India. He asked himself: Will Pakistan literature be different---and if so, how?’ Therefore, the day remained merely ‘a partition day’ to people like Manto. It was never an independence day Manto referred to 15 August as partition day.

He questioned these gruesome acts and was caught in the whirlwind that surrounded Partition. He could not stand that people started seeing him as a Muslim and not as Manto. He finally accepted partition as a nightmarish reality and showed little self-pity or despair. Yet throughout these events, Manto wrote unbiased accounts with detachment and passion using deep irony and humanism that served to effectively, even more lucid today, that took complete stock of the did not allow the savagery to diminish his faith

in the essentials of human nature. His stringent task of sustaining empathy was evident throughout his works. He could not stand human suffering and throughout these times he maintained that all that mattered were that people were human beings.

He was, perhaps, the finest and the most sardonic witness to the genocide that accompanied the partition. His first set of stories like 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Khol Do', 'Thanda Gosht', 'Mootri' or 'Siyah Hashye', written immediately after 1947, are vituperative and brutally ironic. Harsh in tone, gratingly rough in diction, the scenes they refuse to suggest a religious, political or moral solution to misery. Unlike most other writers about the partition who often find a place in their narratives for virtuous men who refuse to abandon their belief that it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it on others and who refuse to accept a politics without rules of ethical conduct, Manto mockingly asserts that the two new sovereign states were created to legitimize our worst impulses. His stories are nightmares because they reject man as a creature who has any ethical sense or religious virtue. His stories reveal that atrocities can be committed by any one of us, against arbitrarily selected victims, in the name of the political principles and god.

Thus, when the old man, Siraj-ud-din in 'Khol Do' asks eight young 'razakars' (volunteers) in a refugee camp in Pakistan to find his daughter, who has been left behind

in India, they pick her up, rape her and then abandon her. Letter, she, is brought the doctor's tent in the camp. On hearing male voices, she, like a battered animal, lowers her pyjamas and opens her legs as the doctor and her father watch in horror. The last part of the story:

The doctor turned towards the body on the stretcher, then took her pulse and said, "Open the window..." The body on the stretcher stirred...Lifeless hands pulled the cord holding up the salwar...And pulled the salwar down...Old Siraj-ud-din shouted with joy, "She's alive...My daughter is alive." The doctor broke into cold sweat.³

The story is profoundly despairing. It makes all ordinary responses to the world in which we live seem obscene. The last cry of the father, as he notices the abused body of his daughter stir once more, cannot be read as a banal sermon against hard-hearted patriarchs who refused to forgive women for being raped during the riots. What is scandalous about the story is that it erases the common and normal world so radically that there is

nothing left to hope for and nothing to retrieve.

His short stories in *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Stories and Sketches of Partition* (1998[1954]) negotiate the very same representation of violence against women during this crisis. These cultural texts complicate recent historical and anthropological writings on ethnic violence, which often align or conflate the communal and the national as interchangeable forces that generated ethnic violence against women. However, this period was in transition to secular democracy, the communal and the national were not always aligned or interchangeable in terms of their ideological effects. Sexual violence against women was sometimes communal, sometimes nationalist, not always both, and sometimes inter-communal – suggesting that the explanation of sexual violence during this period as communal violence sometimes misses the mark.

Manto even jeeringly points out that all the talk about religious identities and national loyalties was based on nothing more substantial than a vulgar absurdity. Written in brief and spasmodic sentences, the entire story mishtake reads as follows:

The knife ripped through the stomach reached down to the penis. The cord of the pyjama was cut.

The man with the knife exclaimed with surprise, as if he was reading the Kalma to ward off evil, “Chi, chi, chi...I made a mishtake.”⁴

WHILE thousand are involved in the unprecedented communal frenzy that follows the announcement of Partition, the inmates of a mental asylum find themselves in a strange situation. The authorities have decided that while the Muslim inmates could stay back, the Hindu and Sikhs would have to go to India. This creates confusion because the inmates have not heard of Pakistan. A Sikh inmate refuses to leave because, when he was brought in, the asylum was in India. What follows is confusion, confusion and more confusion. And as you read you begin to wonder who is insane: the inmates of the asylum or the violent mobs outside, hell-sent on killing anyone who does not belong to their religion. And all though the story, Toba Tek Singh is hilarious are nor quite sure whether to laugh or cry.

The history books do not record the pain, trauma and sufferings of those who had to part from their kin, friends and neighbors, their deepening nostalgia for places they had lived in for generations, the anguish of devotees removed from

their places of worship, and the harrowing experiences of the countless people who boarded trains thinking they would be transported to the realization of their dreams, but of whom not man woman or child survived the journey

In other words most people were indifferent to the newly created geographical entities and were committed neither to a Hindu homeland, nor to an imaginary world of Islam. They were caught up in the crossfire of religious hatred – the hopeless victims of triangular game plan master minded by the British, the Congress and the Muslim league.

Discarding emotionalism and slogans, Manto adopted a plain, realistic style with which he explores the depths of human psychology. His stories about the 1947 killings and disturbances are a moving record of the period. Their grim realism evokes the tensions and tragedy of the time with powerful directness. Manto has created memorable characters and there is hardly anyone in Urdu literature who approaches his skill at characterization. He has been accused of misanthropy and bitterness, but his social criticism is profound and his censure of hypocritical attitudes devastating. Manto does not rely on abstract reasoning in his approach. He is an artist who feels

instinctively and expresses himself without inhibitions. He is however sympathetic to his characters for all his fire and fury and not and does despair of humanity. His motivating concern seems to be to make his readers aware of meanness, and selfishness, as also concern and feeling, in the most unexpected place.

Khalid Hasan observes that “Manto’s humanism and his conviction that happiness does not necessarily lie in conflicts over religion and nationalism, but on fellowship and caring, on love and decency, on tolerance and forgiveness. If Manto were asked if he had a message for the entire subcontinent, he would surely say: Yes, make peace.”⁵

After six decades of partition, or so to say, independence of both the nations Manto’s dream of peace remained as a fiction’s word only.

References :

1. India Partitioned: The other face of freedom, Part I, *Lotus collection, Roli books, New Delhi*, 1995.
2. Reproduced from “Pakistani Short Stories” edited by Waqas Ahmad Khawaja Publishers’ Distributors Ltd., New Delhi, 1992.
3. An English translation in *Stories About the Partition of India*, vol Ibid, vol 2, p 304.
4. India Partitioned: The other face of freedom, Part I, *lotus collection, Roli books, New Delhi*, 1995.