

**MANTO'S TOBA TEK SINGH AS A POLITICAL SATIRE: A CRITICAL STUDY**

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Saadat Hasan Manto is one of the greatest short story writers in Urdu literature who has produced twenty two collections of short stories dealing with different subjects such as partition, human life, social taboos, communal violence, so on and so forth. His stories revolving round the subject of partition of the subcontinent after independence in 1947 are more famous and more known than his other stories. *Toba Tek Singh* is one such story, a masterpiece, which is interwoven with the theme of partition and its emotional and psychological effects on the human psyche. Manto very realistically depicts the division of society into different sects after the partition in the name of the religion. *Toba Tek Singh* tells a story of migration of Hindus and Muslims to India and Pakistan respectively after partition in the name of religion. The paper attempts to critically analyze the story as a political satire and criticize the political regimes of both India and Pakistan which divided the nation both religiously and geographically.

Keywords: *Partition, Religion, Division, Political Satire, India, Pakistan, Migration.***Citation:**

- APA** Thoker,S.H.(2017) Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* as a Political Satire: A Critical Study. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, 4(4), 194 - 197.
- MLA** Thoker, Shamsul Haq. "Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* as a Political Satire: A Critical Study." *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.4, no.4, 2017, pp. 194 - 197.



INTRODUCTION

Saadat Hasan Manto is one of the renowned and prolific short story writers in Urdu literature, whose stories move around the social, political and cultural happenings of pre, during and post partition of India. He was born on 11th May, 1912, in Sambrala at Punjab. Manto's stories deal with the different subjects such as partition, man-woman relationship, prostitutes, humanity, communal riots, religion and other social problems and issues prevalent in the society he belonged to. But the stories written on the partition are more famous which got him popularity and recognition as a short story writer in the history of Urdu literature.

Manto's "*Toba Tek Singh*" is regarded his magnum opus which tells the story of partition and its aftermath. It delineates very realistically the picture of partition and its immediate effects upon the human psyche. The story is about how after partition people were forced to migrate and leave their ancestral place unwillingly and unlawfully; and how they were divided in the name of religion spreading the religious hatred among people especially the Hindus and the Muslims. Therefore the story is a powerful political satire in which the author criticizes the political system of both India and Pakistan that is responsible for this division of people in the name of religion. It's a powerful satire, and also a bitter indictment of the political process and behavior patterns that produced Partition.

The story depicts the partition of the sub-continent and its aftermath. Manto reflects how after partition the political system of both countries India and Pakistan forces the common people to leave their native places on the basis of religion. As in the opening lines of the story, Manto says:

A couple of years after the partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums should be sent to India. (*Mottled Dawn* 1)

Therefore, the decision of the higher authorities of both India and Pakistan that Muslims should live in Pakistan and non-Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, should go to India, divided people on the basis of religion and forced them to leave their ancestral home against their will. As a result, people experienced the sense of alienation leaving a deep and profound effect upon their psyche. Thus, in the story, Manto portrays very patently the griefs/woes of the affected families, the sad plight and tormenting experiences of the people who were displaced forcibly from their ancestral home in the name of religion.

Before partition, people lived with harmony and love with one another irrespective of religion and culture. This is exemplified in the story when Bishen Singh's old Muslim friend, Fazal Din comes to see him from Toba Tek Singh and tells him that soon he would be sent to India and he should remember him to "bhai Balbir Singh, bhai Vadhawa Singh and bahain Amrit Kaur. Tell Bhai Balbir Singh that Fazal Din is well by the grace of God. The two brown buffaloes he left behind are well too" (*Mottled Dawn* 6). He also brings him a gift "a nice treat from home". Bishen Singh receives the gift and gives it to one of the guards. Thus, Manto reflects how the love and respect people from different community used to share with one another before the boundaries were drawn in the name of religion by the decision makers. But once the boundaries were drawn, all these things came to an end, thereby promoting the religious hatred among the common people. These higher officials filled their minds with religious hatred and elements of communalism. People began to hate each other on the basis of religion:

A muslim lunatic from Chaniot, who used to be one of the most devoted workers of the All India Muslim League...announced his name was Muhammad Ali—that he was Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This had led a Sikh inmate to declare himself Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Sikhs. Apprehending serious communal trouble, the authorities declared them dangerous, and shut them up in separate cells. (*Mottled Dawn* 3)



It also tells the story of those who have lost their loved ones, their families, friends and their identities as a result of the geographical division of the country and forcible displacement of the people. The story very realistically portrays the emotional trauma of the partition. A Hindu lawyer from Lahore who is in love with a girl from Amritsar turns mad and experiences a sense of grief when Amritsar becomes a part of India:

There was a young Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had gone off his head after an unhappy love affair. When told that Amritsar was to become a part of India, he went into depression because his beloved lived in Amritsar, something he had not forgotten even in his madness. That day he abused every major and minor Hindu and Muslim leader who had cut India into two, turning his beloved into an Indian and him into a Pakistani. (*Mottled Dawn 3*)

And when he comes to know that he is now being sent to India, the country where his beloved lives, he doesn't feel happy and is not willing to leave his ancestral home, Lahore, "because his practice would not flourish in Amritsar" (*Mottled Dawn 3*).

Manto depicts the piercing pain of partition and its emotional trauma through an old man Bishen Singh who is the central character of the story. Bishen Singh, a "prosperous landlord" from Toba Tek Singh, lost his mental stability fifteen years back. Since then he had been living in a mental asylum in Lahore. His mind remains always occupied with the concern of his native land and whoever he comes in contact with, he asks him the same question 'Where is Toba Tek Singh, in India or in Pakistan?' One day he asked one of the inmates who declared himself God, "if Toba Tek Singh was in India or Pakistan. The man chuckled. 'Neither in India nor in Pakistan, because, so far, we have issued no orders in this respect.'" (*Mottled Dawn 5*). Bishen Singh begged him to issue the orders immediately so that his problem could be solved, but got disappointed after he knew that the 'God' was "preoccupied with more pressing matters" (*Mottled Dawn 5*). He got angry and told

him, "You don't answer my prayers because you are a Muslim god. Had you been a Sikh god, you would have been more of a sport." (*Mottled Dawn 5*).

Again, one day one of his Muslim friends from Toba Tek Singh came to see him after fifteen years and brought him news about his family, saying that his family was all well and was sent to India safely. He explained to him that he was supposed to come to bring him the news. Bishen Singh kept quiet and asked him the same question:

Where is Toba Tek Singh?, he asked.

'Where? Why, it is where it has always been'.

'In India or in Pakistan?'

'In India ... no, in Pakistan.' (*Mottled Dawn 5*)

Even when he was asked for his name at the time of exchange, he repeated and asked the same question to the official, "Where is Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?" (*Mottled Dawn 7*). Towards the end, when Pakistani guards tried to push him towards India, he refused to move and told them "This is Toba Tek Singh" (*Mottled Dawn 7*). In the end, he remained in "no man's land" and the story ends on a tragic note with his death:

Just before sunrise, Bishen Singh, the man who had stood on his legs for fifteen years, screamed and as officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed to the ground. There, behind barbed wire, on the other 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. (*Mottled Dawn 7*)

This reflects his concern and love for his ancestral home and how partition and forcible displacement has a deep and profound effect upon the psyche of Bishen Singh. He sacrificed his life for the place and he himself becomes Toba Tek Singh that lays neither in Pakistan nor in India, but in between. It was the separation of his family and friends that drives Bishen Singh insane.

Manto depicts the impact of the decision, taken by the higher authorities, to divide people in the name of religion upon the psyche of the common people. Manto exposes the real face of the politics or



politicians who are responsible for making the common people and harmless people, like Bishen Singh, suffer and who issue the orders to divide them and draw geographical boundaries without knowing their opinion.

CONCLUSION

Toba Tek Singh deals with the theme of partition and its aftermath. Manto reflects how the geographical division and the forcible displacing of the common people by the political process of both—India and Pakistan exert a deep and profound impact upon the lives and minds of these common people. Manto exposes how the decision makers, who are considered responsible people for they always bear in mind the welfare of the country, go opposite here and create chaos and confusion. The innocent and common people are forced to leave their places and are divided in the name of religion and the geographical boundaries are made, thereby spreading religious hatred among the people. Therefore, Manto debunks the meaninglessness and absurdity of the politics of the times. Though the country got freedom from the British rule, but Manto gives way to a sense of grief over the partition and its impact upon the common people. The same feelings are also expressed by a renowned poet of Urdu, Faiz Ahmed Faiz in the following lines:

Ye daagh daagh ujala, ye shab gazeeda seher
Wo intezaar tha jiska ye wo seher tau nahi
Ye wo seher tau nahi, jis ke arzu le kar
Chaley thay yaar ke mil jaye gi kahin na kahin.
(*Subh-e Azadi*)

This stained light, this night-bitten dawn;
This is not that long-awaited day break;
This is not the dawn in whose longing,
We set out believing we would
find, somewhere.

(*Dawn of Independence*)

REFERENCES

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