

Imagining the Nation Through Madness and Borders: A Study of Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* and *The Dog of Tetwal*

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Abstract

Partition of India in 1947 is one of the most traumatic event in the history of South Asia in relation to mass displacement, communal violence and formation of new national identities. One of the most influential literary voices of the Partition era, Saadat Hasan Manto critically explores its repercussions in his short stories, *The Dog of Tetwal* and *Toba Tek Singh*. Both stories undermine the validity of state lines and reveal nationalistic ideas and the human factory that results from them. In the story of a free-spirited dog that roams with a military border, and Bishan Singh, a Sikh man who is locked in a mental hospital, Manto's disassociates from the logic of nation states and the arbitrary nature of borders between countries. This paper tries to see Manto's satire, allegory and irony are used to expose the harrowing consequences of Partition as they defined human identity, belonging and human relationship over the horizon of belief system. By referring to the notions of 'imagined communities' by Benedict Anderson and 'liminality' by Homi Bhabha, the paper considers Manto's representation of border areas as places of exclusion and displacement. Manto focuses on marginalized protagonists, existing outside the central/mainstream strands of power, uncovering the inconsistencies of nationalism, and he is a strong critique of political boundaries – the problems in the world. These themes

abound in his stories, and continue to resonate today in the discussion of migration, citizenship, and national identity and the human consequences of exclusionary nationalist notions of nation. He is a believer of 'inclusive society'.

Keywords: Partition Identities, Border, Nationhood, Migration

Introduction

In August 1947, Partition of British India took place which was a turning point in the history of South Asia. This brought a lot of change in South Asia. One of the world's largest forced migration in modern history – you won't find that on this scale anywhere else on the subcontinent they were split into the independent sovereign nation-states of India and Pakistan. Millions of people migrated to newly created borders by Britishers not only for security but also for livelihood, while countless others lost their lives due to communal violence and were displaced and more over lost their identity. Those communities who had lived together and known each other for generations were suddenly cut apart, with the spaces where they lived once again being violently disputed, with communities engaged in a struggle against each other. Official accounts may highlight political negotiations, constitutional developments and the general process of attaining independence, but literary representations of Partition create an altogether different narrative; and speak of the deep human suffering that accompanied the process of creating new nation-states where people played no part in it. Saadat Hasan Manto is a prominent and influential one among the illustrious authors that chronicled this tragedy of history. Unlike nationalist narratives of the birth of the nation state and of independence as a triumph of national self-determination altering the future of countries, Manto's Partition narratives interrogate the claims of political self-determination, while also prompting an awareness of the eradication and destruction of human rights so central to national security and the exercise of sovereignty. The political figures and the state institutions are no longer the focus of the attention but day-to-day people, whose lives have been broken down by political

constructions and who had no share in any political decisions. In his works, he always undermines the facile notion of national identity and reveals the violence at the core of efforts at territorial division. Using irony and satire, the author Manto takes apart the traps of rhetoric of nationhood and exposes the stories of people who have not been an integral part of the dominant historical narratives. Particularly revealing about the idea of nationalism and political boundaries are two of Manto's important Partition story, '*Toba Tek Singh*' (1955) and '*The Dog of Tetwal*'. The stories have different settings and employed various narrative forms; however, they both explore the results of dividing people into newly defined national identities. Within the context of *Toba Tek Singh*, the Mental Asylum represents the symbolic site where Manto calls into question the irrationality of Partition and on how it affects both people of both countries. That the convicts could not grasp the rationale behind the division of the country is a demonstrative of the confusion faced by millions of normal human beings who now became citizens of two countries due to the division of the country. In *The Dog of Tetwal*, the tale of a stray dog roaming the Kashmir border who is an unexpected victim of military belligerence, the folly of nationalistic mania is laid bare. As shown in both these stories, political borders shape, reshape human relations and produce political exclusion. With hat trick vision in view. A review of Manto's critique in the light of the theoretical views on nationalism makes her role more transparent. According to one of the famous critique Benedict Anderson, nations are "imagined communities" whose boundaries are made up of shared stories, which he claims are not by nature nor eternal (6). The National identities – they are not a reality in and of themselves, but constructed and produced through cultural and political processes. The tales of Manto sheds light on the impact of imposing such invented identities on beings with bonds to local histories, memory and social relations. The fraught relationship between "lived experiences around belonging" and "official citizenship, defined by bureaucratic process," comes to light through the emotional and the psychological conflicts of his characters. Another

well-known critique with whom it is forged convenient to understand the border room depicted in Manto's fiction is Homi Bhabha and his concept of liminality. According to Bhabha, there are in-between spaces affecting and changing fixed identities. They are liminal spaces that call into question the boundaries between self/other, nation/exile, inclusion/exclusion. Such liminal spaces as Bishan Singh and *The Dog of Tetwal*. The figure will not fully fit into the nationalists' compartments created by the political powers. Their experiences should make us aware of the weakness of the nation-state as well as the inadequacy of this concept in the face of a human identity that is very complex. Further significant characteristics of Manto's work is the manner in which marginalised subjects are depicted in Manto's storytelling. He does not generally depict heroic characters, the icons of the nation, but those who are usually left out of a national political discourse. Those who are mentally ill, displaced – even animals - serve as means of discussing large-scale social issues. It is a narrative approach that is used to show how the views of nationalism and nationalists are paradoxical and from an out-of-the-box point of view. These characters are regarded as unreachable and 'irrational' and this can sharply engage with the rule of destructive logic of governments and military institutions. Consequently the line between sanity and insanity grows thinner and the dichotomy is impressed upon his oeuvre in general. This paper adopts an allegory, a satire and ironical approach to demonstrate how *Toba Tek Singh* and *The Dog of Tetwal* are challenging the dominant idea and understanding of nationhood and territorial belonging. The symbolic nature of Bishan Singh and the Tetwal dog in Manto's work allows the reader to understand the political borders and the outcomes of being displaced, having an identity crisis and being socially excluded. In his attempt to centralize the lives of people living at the margins of society, he renders visible the human cost of Partition and problematises the nationalism which inspired these ideologies. At the end of the day, it is individuals, whose lives are disrupted and disturbed by the arbitrary lines created by politics, who are the ones who suffer the most. The Politics of Madness in *Toba Tek Singh* Toba.it is

perhaps the most powerful among Manto's Partition narratives, and an attack upon nationalism and political authority. It takes place several years after Partition in a mental asylum, and is about a government decision to swap mentally ill people between India and Pakistan, based on their religion. In these seemingly absurd but once inconceivable thought, Manto uncovers irrationality of the political logic of Partition. The asylum becomes a symbolic portrait of a society trying to understand the implications of partition, and the inmates are revealing – if unlikely and unwanted – voices of critique on the ironies of nationhood. Significantly important is the location of the story in a mental asylum. In the traditional sense, the asylums are these types of institutions whereby people who are deemed irrational or incapable of functioning in accordance to the accepted norms of the society are isolated from it. But, Manto turns upside-down this traditional knowledge, in characterising the inmates who are more insightful than the authorities who run this exchange of inmates. The patients have difficulty when they watch that geographical places suddenly change their country without actual change. The confusion that they show mirrors what many millions of ordinary people felt in 1947 who face a bewildering order to suddenly break their homeland. In this reversal, Manto calls into question the meaning of "normal. If rationality depends on accepting the arbitrary dividing of communities, and families, then the separation of Normal and madness is problematic. The sane and the insane is again and again teetered in the tale of *Toba Tek Singh*. Asylum inmates are moved by Govt officials with the efficiency of a bureaucracy and used as objects to be sorted and moved as per fresh boundaries. They are a reflection of the Partition administrative process more in general, that saw whole populations being classified depending on their belief system, and forced to cross the new boundaries. The twist of swapping madmen on the basis of nationality is just how mechanical State powers work in your country - like you are nothing but a subject. Manto argues that asylums provided that same logic to divide their patients, so it was used to divide millions of citizens. The implications of the story are accordingly that the

madness which was the stuff of the Partition is not situation in the asylum, but in the system itself. At the heart of this criticism is the character of Bishan Singh – a Sikh inmate who is torn between devotion to his hometown, and being a hero for prisoners of conscience. Bishan Singh has an odd way of resting for years and has been saying incoherent phrases and standing up all the time. He seems to be slightly crazy, but still he has a good sense of attachment towards the town of his origin, Toba Tek Singh.

As word of the exchange finds its way to the asylum, Bishan Singh is troubled by one thing: Does Toba Tek Singh belong to India or Pakistan? He tries to find out for which he gets confused and contradicted. The question asked by Bharat Scouts and Guides President, Bishan Singh, has great symbolic significance. Well, at first it seems it's just a geography question. Particularly, however, at a deeper level, it is representative of Partition's conundrum of Identity. His association with Toba Tek Singh was well justified and logical till 1947. With the establishment of national boundaries this companionable landscape becomes an ambivalent place. The state used to impose a demand to define oneself according to national and religious parameters, ignoring the local affiliations which traditionally give a sense of belonging. Bishan Singh's difficulty in locating his hometown represents the difficulty in navigating life which countless people have found themselves trapped in, due to various decisions which they had no control over politically. Additionally, the character's connection to place can call into question nationalist conceptions of identity. Nationalism may imply that people naturally belong to a certain nation (on the basis of religion, birth) or are citizens of a certain nation (ethnicity, blood). In debating the status of 'belonging', Manto refuses to accept the notion of a legal relationship acting as a proxy for belonging; instead, it is an emotional and cultural connection that is portrayed. For Bishan Singh, identity is an inextricable part of his memory, history, and lived experience. The connection between his place of birth and Toba Tek Singh can't be rubbed out even if a new line has been drawn by few people. In this respect, the tale

offered an illumination of the restrictive nature of nationalistic ideology to explain the multifacetedness of human bonds and loyalties. The high-point of the story is when the shift is made at the Indo-Pak border. When he hears that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan he does not want to go into India. He stands between the two countries; he can't see how to reconcile his personal ideas of belonging with the emerging political realities forced upon him and many his friends. Ultimately, he breaks down and dies in the area of land between the border of India and Pakistan. It is one of the most potent symbols in Partition literature in this no-man's-land.

A lot to convey from this extremely idea of no-man's -land. This liminality in the interstitial area between two nations reflects a liminal state in a condition of being which defies easy categorization. The question of Bishan Singh's inclusion in a country is not a political one as such but is a question that is beyond India and Pakistan. Because the last role demonstrates the limitations of the notion of nationalism which aims to categorize human beings into nations. Exclusion takes its toll on his life as he dies in a land that isn't his. The story can be interpreted as a symbol of all those evacuees who were left stranded in between two nationalities during Partition. Theoretically, Bishan Singh's fate can be seen as an "imagined" community, by using Benedict Anderson's concept of imagining the nation as 'imagined'. Political maps and state institutions draw national boundaries, but personal identities can be formed within local areas by emotional attachments and experiences (Anderson 6). The rebuke Bishan Singh gives to the logic of Partition makes sense of these competing appropriations of 'belonging'. His death exposes the human price of having to fit into the abstract categories of the nation. Moreover, Homi Bhabha suggests liminality to analyse the importance of Bishan Singh's final act. He exists between the two nations; is in an in-between place and so is constantly challenging any definitions of being. When he refuses to move, he is rejecting binary logic and understanding of nationalism. While he is killed off by this resistance, his demise also reveals the artificial ideological constructions which try to define belongingness exclusively in terms of territorial

belonging and which do not recognize human and emotional relationships. Madness is ultimately used to powerfully criticise politic issues in *Toba Tek Singh*. The irrationality of the seemingly rational processes of nation-building is being brought forth by Manto through the character of Bishan Singh and the symbolic space, provided by the no-man's-land. The story has shown that Partition not only meant building a barrier between people but formidable, Identity Crisis as well as a feeling of alienation and not belonging. Manto uncovers the inconsistencies of nationalism and thereby calls into doubt the validity of political frontiers that would place emphasis on territorial possession and put individual human experiences and relationships aside.

The Dog of Tetwal excels in Border Consciousness and keeping the audience fully engaged. The absurdity of Partition is explored in the context of a mental asylum in *Toba Tek Singh* and of a militarised border landscape in *The Dog of Tetwal*. The Kashmir setting of the story relates tension that arose between India and Pakistan immediately after the Partition in the mountainous region of Kashmir, in which the attempts to draw and secure of the new territorial lines, and new identities of India and Pakistan were underway. Manto casts light on the irrationality of the nationalist hostility; he renders apparent how political frontiers turn also the most innocuous into a suspicious entity as he portrays a stray dog moving around between military outposts. The tale acts as a potent allegory of Partition and an illustration of the way nationalism can divide people, as well as enter their perceptions of the everyday. Setting is an important aspect in conveying Manto's message in the criticism of nationalism. The border area in *The Dog of Tetwal* on the other hand, reflects the political division of Partition while the Asylum in *Toba Tek Singh* reflected the psychological confusion at Partition. The natural landscape, mountains and valleys are treated as if they were not politically affected by the new national boundaries. The nature seems not to be concerned, much less with the battle between the two nations of India and Pakistan. But on both sides of the border the land is seen through

the prism of patriotism and military competitiveness. This juxtaposition of durability of nature and the fragility of the political boundaries, underscores and one of the major thrusts of the story: that boundaries are a human creation, and primarily one of imagination, but they are able to engender a reconfiguration of social reality. The sole figure in the scene, the stray dog is completely removed from the motif of the nation or nationality. The dog does not have comprehension of territory, religion or political-sentiment such as the soldiers have. It travels freely along the border country realm, on its own instincts for food and company. In many ways the dog is a way of living untouched by the partitionings that prevails in human society. It is very free-moving against all the conception of borders and inflexibility that is imposed on human beings by the national borders. But the dog can't be taken by the soldiers as a neutral because of being one. Instead, they immediately read the presence of that from the perspective of the political struggle between two nations. The innocent animal roams then between the two military camps – now the questions are about the nationality of which nation the animal belongs. The soldiers start wondering if the dog is Indian or Pakistani – and as it has no national identity they say it is a matter of national importance. In this vein, Manto illustrates how the concept of nationalism lures people to superpose categories on reality. A classification of the dog based on country-loyalty is part of a more general focus on the delimitation and control of boundaries. As we see the soldiers' reactions, we can discern a sort of border consciousness, the mentality that grows out of the existence of borders, a consciousness always marked by division and threat from the other side. In such an environment, even good things that a creature may do become suspicions. Dog is no longer seen as an innocent animal but rather as a symbol of an enemy's presence on the territory. The image depicts how nationalism impacted the minds of the people. Political ideologies can divide space and can alter how the individuals perceive and interpret their surroundings. Everyday objects, features and human and animal figures all take on new significance in a world of fear and hostility. Manto satirizes such an attitude. The

concept of a stray dog being "nationalist" is obviously absurd and has meaning in an invented world where strays aren't made that way, a world that the soldiers take quite seriously. Rational logic, though applicable to real-life situations, and one such as would arise in a peaceful nationalistic competition, is lacking in their behaviour, and irrational logic has often been a characteristic of nationalist conflicts in real life. The story implies that if societies fall prey to political differences, soon they see enemies all around. Trust is replaced with suspicion, and ideology trumps common humanity. By means of humor and irony, Manto exposes the depths to which nationalism leads to irrational thought. The dog is also a sign of the many numerous innocent victims of Partition on either side. People do not usually have control over historical events; the military and political leaders do, but the ordinary people suffer the most when there is a war. At the same time, the dog's vulnerability reflects that of refugees, uprooted families and minorities engulfed in conflicting nationalities. These people are like the animal in that they are exposed to forces they can't control or even comprehend. Political choices of others cause their suffering to be inevitable. The fear and suspicion grow with the story, culminating in violence. Thus the harmless dog is a soft target for gunfire, becoming a casualty of the nationalist paranoia. Its death is tragic and is symbolic. The human being considers the animal to be a cause of death because it "has no right," because it "has committed a crime," etc.,—because people have imposed politicized meanings upon its life. In this one swoop Manto mocks nationalism as it is about so much more than an actual threat; lots of it is imagining threats, or divisions, propped up by ideological differences. Also represented are the dehumanization that accompanies political conflicts, the killing of the innocent dog. The logic of dealing with an animal abused in this instance is similar to the lack of logic in the treatment of human beings during the Partition. Individuals were often discriminated by virtue of their religion or nationality and not for their merits. Complex lives of humans were reduced to simple categories which helped to oil violence and exclusion. Manto underscores the irrationality and

the cruelty of such thinking by depicting a dog getting same treatment. In addition, there are important questions to be raised concerning the meaning of “belong.” These categories seem exceedingly shaky if they can be expropriated by a stray dog that has no inner sense of any boundaries. According to Manto, nations, national identity itself are not givens but are social constructs based on classificatory and exclusionary practice. The essential artificiality of the different kinds of dog is revealed by the fact that the dog refuses to fit them. *The Dog of Tetwal* takes Manto's attack against Partition one step further and illustrates how political boundaries shape perceptions and reimagine relationships and ethical values. In the guise of a narrative about a dog, he reveals the irrationality of the nationalist suspicion and the helplessness of the interpellated ones whose territories of belonging are conflicting. This story also uncovers that borders not only divide territories, but also shape the way by which people think, feel and relate with the world around them. Thus, Manto is providing a deep criticism of ideologies aligning country with compassion and humanity. While both share similarities in the themes, it is obvious that *Toba Tek Singh* and *The Dog of Tetwal* both reveal the arbitrary nature of national boundaries and their impact on the lives of people who may find themselves in between conflicting political identities.

Manto brings on concepts of characters which fall beyond the norm of the nation using Bishan Singh and the stray dog. The two characters can't be easily defined by the homogeneous definitions adopted by the new states of India and Pakistan. The Benedict Anderson's notion of the "imagined community" of a nation may be useful in understanding Manto's criticism of nationalism (Anderson 6). Both narratives have political regimes that try to impose territorial and religious criteria on belonging. But like Bishan Singh's sense of identity with his hometown and the Dog's lack of interest in national identity and demarcation, human identities are more often tied to personal experiences than to state-drawn identity and boundaries. They are unable to meet the nationalists' expectations and that shows up the shortcomings of the political

classification. Here the concept of Homi Bhabha's theory of liminality also applies. Bishan Singh is on the no man's land between Indo-Pak borders and that where the dog happily trots around the Indo-Pak borders freely. They both share the space between, which confuses notions of identity and belonging. As evidenced by their existence, borders are not natural but exist as a result of acts of power and exclusion. Finally, Manto personifies liminal characters as ambivalent figures that offer refrain on dogmatic nationalism; characters that figure out how to resist, to speak of a common humanity across political boundaries.

Conclusion

Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* and *The Dog of Tetwal* remain to be one of the strongest literary efforts against the Partition of India. Manto is being satirical, ironic and allegorical in opposing and questioning the validity of political boundaries and revealing the human suffering produced by nationalist ideologies. Instead he avoids concentrating on the political leaders or the actual events; he chooses lesser known characters whose stories provide a vivid picture of the ravages of Partition on the people of both sides. National borders' creation, created a rupture, contained in myriad stories, against previously accepted realities of identity, belonging and community living, with many people caught up between different political realities. The character of Bishan Singh symbolizes the psychological and emotional dislocation which is produced by Partition. The nationalism he fails to comprehend and the ultimate medley in no-man's-land reveal the limitations of nationalist concepts in the understanding of human sense of place and of memory. In the same vein, the roaming dog straining at the leash in *The Dog of Tetwal* is a kind of innocence marred by clash of ideas. How a nationalism that breeds suspicion and hostility can cause even the most innocent creatures to become victims of violence is exemplified by its death. The stories draw on Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities and Homi Bhabha's notion of liminality, which holds that the nation and citizenship are 'constructed' and political identities are unstable.

The borderlands of Manto's become the places where the notions of belonging are questioned and the words of the displaced and the marginalized have a forceful presence. The implication of his stories is that identity is not solely contained in the borders that the State exercises. What is noted, however, is the fact that Manto's critique goes beyond the Partition settings of the history. His stories hold up today in a modern world faced with migration crisis, border disputes, citizenship, as well as national identity. At the heart of Manto's story lies a universal truth: that political ideologies and differences are not sufficient to separate human beings from one another. If present situation of the world is observed this idea remains relevant. His works challenge his readers to look at the human price of boundaries, and consider possibilities for new modes of belonging that can be understood as being built on compassion and co-existence and not on ideological and territorial restrictions.

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