



Exploring the idea of Resistance in Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*

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Abstract— “*Toba Tek Singh*”, portraying psychic-asylum inmates and their transfer between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of partition, is possibly a most celebrated short story by Saadat Hasan Manto. He intensely brings out his personal experiences of dilemma after the partition on which he colors his work “*Toba Tek Singh*.” In doing so, the author produces a character, revolutionary in nature, called Bishan Singh. The present paper investigates the story from a contemporary philosophical prospect to consider asylum as well as no man’s land as a space of resistance.

Keywords— *Partition, Asylum, Hegemony, Manto, Resistance, and Space*



The Muslims and Hindus were engaged in a bloody fratricidal war. Thousands died every day ... they said I was out of my mind. Indeed I was. My wife and children were in Pakistan, but they had gone there when it was still the India I knew ... But now that piece of land which I had once known as India had a new name...I found it impossible to decide which of the two countries was now my homeland-India or Pakistan?

(Saadat Hasan Manto, *Kingdom's End*)

Instead of presenting a precise history of segregation of British India, Saadat Hasan Manto’s narratives portray the individual dimensions of Partition. Strategically employing the lunatic asylum, Manto illustrates the chaos of communal violence so as to expose the idiocy of Partition. Published in 1955, “*Toba Tek Singh*” depicts the bewilderment and sufferings of the insane inmates of a shelter when they learn that the newly formed governments, India and Pakistan, will exchange them on the basis of their religions. India is supposed to hand over Muslim lunatics to Pakistan, whereas Pakistan would send non-Muslim (such as Hindu and Sikh) lunatics to India. Bishan Singh, a Sikh, is one of the inmates of the

asylum who yearns and longs for his native village, “*Toba Tek Singh*.” But the author vividly utilizes the space created as well as constructed due to partition of the Indian subcontinent without limiting the lunacy of resistance to the refuge only.

Manto, in this story, portrays a painful and overwhelming theme of displacement of the people relating to borderlands, meant for the people and of the people. Having used the space of the madness, i.e., the insane asylum, to disarticulate rationality and irrationality in a way that it becomes a place of emulation, Manto makes a space of resistance within the British hegemonic foundation. Hence, it becomes a space of the subaltern’s (marginalized), and the asylum becomes a space where the marginalized subalterns sound more logical as well as rational in their concern of segregation that lies, “in contrast to the illogical rhetoric of nationalism resulting in craziness constructed outside the walls of the asylum. The asylum as a place of resistance or refuge from the illogical atrocities committed by Partition becomes an inversion of the nation as an actual place of craziness” (Das 205).

In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault discusses his historical method of madness and calls it “archaeological method”, an approach in which discourses can be revealed through a series of relations and shifts.

Establishing a discourse on madness, Foucault views it beyond a subject and object relationship. According to him, subject-object judgment presents a complication within philosophical investigation in terms of interpretation of discourses of human experiences. Subject-object relationship takes anything and everything either as subjective or as objective. Further, the subject has the quality of observation and thinks of the matter as well as voices for himself, whereas object does not have the quality of observation but to be observed and thought of. Besides that, the main concern of the objectification is that it identifies anything and everything with a pre-assigned identity. Therefore, Foucault questions the predetermined object and considers it as something through which accurate and innate knowledge can be achieved. But he finds out that madness does not appear to be such kind of entity and discovers that it exists as a concept relative to different discourses. As a result, Foucault suspends the subject-object perception as inoperative within his context of madness. Rather, it can be thought or discussed in terms of relation and alternations that can be formed within discourses of reason, thus, it is neither subjective nor objective and different from subject-object distinction. Therefore, by adopting Foucauldian archaeological method, “Toba Tek Singh” can be studied in terms of relation and shifts to get the better knowledge of space and power in relation to madness.

To get a full understanding of how Manto, by adopting the hegemonic space, creates a space of resistance, it is important to consider the history of the lunatic asylum as a modern establishment in British India that provided a place of detention and rehabilitation for reason. British imperialism, in various ways, left its imprint on the subcontinent. One of the most important ways of inscription was the effectuation of many foundations that were established to maintain the hegemony in the colonized system. During the 18th and 19th centuries, since leprosy faced continuous disappearance, the practice of social exclusion continued and the insane were ignored acutely than the lepers. Therefore, the asylum, a space designed by the society, superseded the lazar house, a type of social exclusion despite meeting with shift but remains consistent and a place where the subjects were treated to be policed as well as marginalized.

Furthermore, lunatic shelter was promoted into a place of servitude, like hospitals, penitentiaries, and prisons. Foucault, in his work *Madness and Civilization*, stresses, “... the same walls could contain those condemned by common law, young men who disturbed their families’ peace or who squandered their goods, people without profession, and the insane” (Foucault 45). Hence, ‘confinement’ was an “abusive amalgam of

heterogeneous elements” (45), in which foundations of integrity were formed. Establishment of asylum took place to lessen the inequalities, suppress the vices, and to dispose of all kinds of irrational manners with the help of homogeneous provision of morality. As the insane asylum operated to suppress the various marginalized subjects, it started functioning like nationalism by imposing productivity, economic values, and morality, by forcing order into the disorder, and by changing the members of society from worthlessness to worthiness.

British established madhouses in India for the operation of the government, similar to madhouses established in Europe, to constrain the subjects that appeared to be a forthcoming risk to the public order. The Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the rule of the British East India Company intimidated the colonizers, and they realized that the Indian subcontinent had the population and potential for an abrupt insanity of physical violence. To minimize this threat, of a sudden outburst from the subcontinent, the colonists employed confinement as a weapon against those who stood against the British authority, and it was founded within the legal structure where ‘mad’ Indians were negotiated and confined for policing. Mills enunciates, “incarceration of the non-criminal Indian lunatics was one of the many strategies devised by the authorities during this period to control the Indian population and to limit its potential for disorder” (*Madness, Cannabis, and Colonialism* 79). Confinement, thus, carried out harsh systems of restriction that divided Indians from Europeans and held the established racial hierarchy from its crushing down. Furthermore, Mills interprets, “The British fantasized that they would transform Indian from ‘uncivilized,’ that is irrational and unproductive to ‘civilized,’ that is ordered, industrious, and regular” (40). The refuge granted limited representation and perceptions of the Indian in a place of confinement, such as prison, and provided the British unrestricted access to the Indian body on which they exercised their authority. However, Indians efficiently found various ways to defend Indian subjection and to resist the British authority.

Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh” is a notable work that portrays the resistance against the partition due to cultural and political crisis in the subcontinent, which appears from the space of asylum in the form of refuge. It begins by resolving the issues of psychopaths in India and Pakistan through their transfer in their respective nations, which turns out to be relevant to the authorities of asylum because it is rational with the political ambition of nationalism. Like the British asylums in India, Manto’s crafted shelter consists of a diversified sect of people who are from various religious communities and their occupations also vary vastly. For instance, one Muslim with an M.S. degree works

as a radio engineer whereas the other one is dedicated his life for All India Muslim League. After finding out that the agreement of transfer has been finalized, the inmates start having bitter arguments amongst themselves with respect to the forthcoming creation the separate dominions of India and Pakistan. Their consternation is clear when the chronicler states:

As to where it was and what its geographical dimensions were, they hadn't a clue. That being so, all the madmen in the madhouse who weren't completely mad were in some perplexity as to whether they were in Pakistan or in Hindustan. If they were in Hindustan, then where was this Pakistan, and if they were in Pakistan, then how was it that a little while ago, though staying in the very same place, they had been in Hindustan? (Manto 106)

Being annoyed by the settlement, one of them climbs up the tree, while another in the state of nakedness starts running on all sides of the garden. But a Muslim maniac and a Sikh inmate adopt the characters of significant political leaders of Quaid-a-Azam Mohamed Ali Jinnah and Master Tara Singh. Further, some of them reasonably suspect the direct after effects of the transfer, for instance their adjusted position, sustenance, and freedom in jobs. For instance, when a Hindu lawyer from Lahore, who has become crazy because of unreciprocated love, is informed by the other madman that he would be sent to Amritsar where his beloved lives, he becomes disheartened by listening the news. He announces he does "... not wish to leave Lahore. He was afraid he might not be able to build up much of a legal in Amritsar" (Manto 107). For him, his legal practice is important than his inamorato and his beloved cannot be the reason to move to Hindustan as his homeland matters to him. The advocate, being 'insane,' recognizes the significance of his land and the issues that will emerge in shifting to a foreign soil that the so called 'sane' cannot calculate. Besides that, two Anglo-Indian lunatics are certainly worried about their immediate dietary arrangements. When they are informed that the British had given sovereignty to India, they become disturbed about their changed status. They suspect, "Would the European Ward be retained or be abolished? Would they get a proper English breakfast" or would they "be obliged to swallow the 'bloody Indian chapati'" (Manto 108)? Manto graphically illustrates the chaotic situation deriving from the dispute of inmates as follows:

It was no easy task to bring the madmen out of the vans and to hand them over to the other set of officials. Some would not budge at all, and others who did come out ran off in all directions. Those

who were naked tore off any clothes which the officers attempted to put on them. Some shouted abuse and some sang. Some wept and some howled with misery. It was difficult to hear oneself speak. (Manto 111)

The dissident inmates show the disruption made by Partition and nullify the prospect that establishes disjunctive spaces. And when the insane are circumscribed in the constructed space, the convicts Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Anglo-Indians encounter the same understanding of that particular space on the Indian subcontinent. According to Husain Intizar, "truths, ethicality, and religiosity were not the exclusive preserve of any single community or sect" (Husain xi). As long as the concerned authority placed them inside the refuge, it unites them; further, outside of the refuge, when pushed to conform to the nationalist agenda, they are recognized as the insane. By modifying the characters of the irrational (the marginalized) and the rational (the state), Manto critiques not only the Western perceptions of notion of nationalism but also criticizes its modernization as well as its development.

Manto, further, through his story "Toba Tek Singh" mocks the paradoxical view of nationalism by formulating binary between the space within the asylum as rational and the space outside the asylum as irrational. Manto himself feels the same anxieties and the conflicts of nationalism after the partition. Therefore, he reveals his internal torture through his main protagonist named Bishan Singh, a Sikh. Being detained for fifteen years, he only utters "mysterious gibberish." His obscure language is accompanied by his unusual physical behavior. He describes Bishan Singh: "The guards said he had not slept a wink these fifteen years. He never even lay down. All he might do sometimes was to take a 'tek' or lean his back against a wall. Because he stood all the time, his feet were swollen and his calves were distended, but despite the physical discomfort, he never lay down to rest" (Manto 108). To Bishan Singh, taking rest is not a choice therefore; he must live wide awake and vigilant throughout this calamitous point. Whereas Manto's other characters enquire reasonable questions and present legitimate worries related to their case, Bishan Singh, on the other hand, expresses what is believed to be the senseless phrases of a crazy inmate. He asserts, "Opar di rumble-tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentis of the lantern" (Manto 108). And sometimes with utmost seriousness, he shouts, "Opar di rumble-tumble di annexe of the thoughtless of the green lentis of the Government of Pakistan." But later, the Government of Pakistan was replaced by "of the Government of Toba Tek Singh" (Manto 108).

However, it is notable that every time the same senseless phrases have been uttered with a little modification and closer investigation of his senseless phrases reveals that his linguistic hybridity (mixed of Punjabi and English) is the result of the British hegemony over its subjects. Besides that, it also emphasizes that language as an important means of communication collapses or stops functioning any kind of negotiation. And when the incident of partition takes place on the lines of religion, which soon leads to affect his fate too and is realized by the all insane inmates, they not only mock the political leaders through their own madness but also show their resistance against the government's decision.

On the one hand, being troubled with the division between Hindustan and Pakistan, Bishan Singh starts asking all his asylum inmates about the present location of his village, Toba Tek Singh. For him, it does not matter whether it is in Pakistan or Hindustan. What does matter to him is the current location of his village, is it in Hindustan or in Pakistan? And showing more interest for his village, Toba Tek Singh, rather than Pakistan and Hindustan, he demonstrates the resistance against the partition based on the line of religion. On the other hand, there is another Muslim madman, who has gone more insane than before due to the turmoil resulting from the religious partition of the Indian subcontinent. He climbs up a tree higher than usual in spite of the threat from the guards and gives a lecture for two hours on the outcome of the partition of undivided India. And the overall conclusion of his passionate speech is that he is against the partitioning of the country, as he mentions, "I [the Muslim madman] want to live neither in Hindustan nor Pakistan. I had rather live on this tree" (Manto 107). The above-mentioned statements made by the Muslim madman also express his resistance to the partition on the line of religion. At last, when he climbs down, his heart grows heavy, and he hugs all his Sikh and Hindu friends, as he knows that they have no option but to leave him and go to Hindustan.

When all the preparations for the transfer are executed, the authorities of Pakistan and Hindustan secure a date for exchange. And on that particular day, "Police vans full of Hindu and Sikh madman departed from the madhouse of Lahore escorted by the officers concerned. At the border at Wagah... the exchange... went on all night" (Manto 111). At last, when Bishan Singh's turn appears, he asks the concerned officer, "Where is Toba Tek Singh? In Pakistan or in Hindustan?" And the concerned officer laughs and replies that, "In Pakistan." He moves in the direction of Pakistan, but is forced toward the borderline of India. Being declined to enter in Pakistan, he takes his stand "at a spot in the middle with an air that suggested that no one could now remove him from there" (112), as he takes

his position between the borders that is "no-man's-land." The entire night he remains upright and unmoved from the "no-man's-land", but just before the dawn cries out, he collapses on the ground. Manto addresses, "Over there behind the barbed wire fence lay Hindustan and over here behind the barbed wire fence lay Pakistan. In the middle on a strip of no man's land lay Toba Tek Singh" (Manto 112). And it is the first time, "that the man who had stood on his legs day and night for all of fifteen years was now lying on his face" (Manto 112). It is the conflict of his existence and displacement of his village, Toba Tek Singh, that forces him to take up the space between the line of Hindustan and Pakistan through which both the nations come into their existence.

Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" exposes the madness on the national level that emerges from the partition of one undivided state into two nation states: India and Pakistan. His portrayal of madness within the lunatic asylum and the madness within the state provide an inspection of the rationality through the character of Bishan Singh and his resistance against the newly formed states as the partition has demolished his identity. Being a non-Muslim and on the ground of exchange, he becomes a citizen of Hindustan, but he is always a native of Toba Tek Singh, which is now in Pakistan. Because of the partition, he becomes 'a man of no lands'. The fact that Manto accepts in his writing that he was indeed in lunatic condition and struggled to decide his own identity and realized that he belonged neither to India nor to Pakistan. However, preferring death on "no man's land" over the part of "new man's land", Bishan Singh shows his ultimate resistance against the newly formed governments, the opportunity of resistance against the artificial line that Manto missed during the partition.

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