



SAADAT HASAN MANTO'S "TOBA TEK SINGH"

Deepak

Assistant Professor (English, MGCUB)

Former, Jr. Research Assistant, Penn State University, USA

PARTITION

- Partition, one the saddest moments of India in twentieth century, is a dominant sad theme in Indian literature, either English or in Vernaculars. The sadness can be imagined by the fact that around 10 to 12 million Indians displaced during the event that is followed by butchering, killing, prostitution and even in rapes of women of opposite religion.
- A host of writers like Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh, Salman Rushdie, Bhisham Sahni and others put pen to it.



MANTO

- It was the selection of shocking and real life stories which makes Manto one of the most controversial short-story writer of the time.
- In his small career of some 20 years, Manto never afraid to expose the madness, nakedness and hollowness of the society around him.
- His theme somewhere surpasses the Progressive Writers' Association and other place over take the social-realism. In short, he was more progressive and more realist than any other author of the time.
- His popular partition stories are (mp3 link from youtube)
- Titwal Ka Kutta (<https://youtu.be/6OGpyfjWkAM>)
- Toba Tek Singh (<https://youtu.be/wLfwvQc8R-A>)
- Khol Do (<https://youtu.be/GqBp32oXU5I>)
- Thanda Ghost (<https://youtu.be/kiLh-DNinwQ>)



BACKGROUND

- Manto, the more real than realists or to say socio-realists, tragically showcased the real life stories of the victims exposed to the partition, both from India and Pakistan.
- Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh," written shortly before his death, is a live example of it that has its setting in the environment surrounded by the Partition of India.
- The plot takes one back to some 2-3 years after the partition, and the story can be seen as a slap on the face of governments of Pakistan and Hindustan. Both, during this critical time, decided to exchange the lunatics across the border. This remains the theme of Manto's story.



TOBA TEK SINGH

- Toba Tek Singh, a Sikh lunatic locked in Lahore Insane Asylum, is one of those displaced victims. [click of the link below to read full story]:
<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/tobateksingh/translation.html>]
- His real name seems Bishan Singh yet he is introduced as Toba Tek Singh, which is also the title of the story. One can imagine that Manto was writing about village and its residents. Thus, Toba Tek Sigh and Bishan Singh are synonymous to one another.
- Although he was mad, yet desired to die on his land and ultimately, by the end, his wish fulfilled as he dies on the desired place, his village Toba Tek Singh.



TROPE OF MADNESS

- The stroke of August 15, 1947 change the lives of unnumbered Indians like that of Toba Tek Singh.
- He was, no doubt, insane but through the metaphor of madness, Manto hit like a red-rag upon those who were not-mad, especially the politicians.
- In short, Toba Tek Singh, despite the impact of madness, seems more conscious, when compared to those who were responsible to/for the partition that is attached to the violence and abduction.
- The mad residents of asylum raised very logical and big questions, but sadly, these questions were never answered by the politicians of the time.
- Thus, the madness was a symbol through which Manto hit a metaphorical slap on the faces of Jinnah and Nehru for the political violence that erupted across the borders.



WHAT IS SPECIAL IN TOBA TEK SINGH

- Mad people were given less importance during the partition, as others were more important due to erupted violence. However, it does not mean that they never appear on the annals of creative writings.
- Mad characters are seen frequently in novels and the earliest example of it is the character of Pagli from the novel *Pinjar*, written by a Punjabi author Amrita Pritam.
- *Pinjar*, in critical sense, is about only one character, but Manto went one step ahead and brought out full asylum on the pages of literary history.
- Earlier, there is hardly an attempt to write on them. Thus, Manto wrote on the most neglected section of the society, more neglected the rapes during partition. Indeed, he became the voice of the voiceless or a spokesperson to those who cannot speak.
- The questions which are raised by insane characters will force one to interrogate oneself: whether or not they were mad. In fact, these mad personas are exposing the real character of society. In fact, mad people were more intelligent but people do not want to pay attention to them.