
Trauma and Bodies: A Study of 'Traumatic Neurosis' in Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" and "The Return"

Saumya Srivastava*

Abstract

Saadat Hasan Manto is a story teller and one of the best Urdu writers of South Asia. The realistic and robust portrayal of the events in his works made him the most controversial writer of his times. The themes of his works revolve around the dehumanizing effect of partition, communal riots, emotional breakdown, struggle for free-nation, plight of the marginalized etc. Manto's short stories are deeply concerned with the serious repercussions of partition. His stories speak about how partition leads to serious mental disorders? Manto's stories namely "Toba Tek Singh" and "The Return" recalls the darkest chapter of Indian history which led to the migration and interchange of millions of people across border. The partition phase was marked by brutal activities forced upon by the political forces which created havoc on the personal, emotional and intellectual fronts. This paper deals with the trauma theory which includes the study of the psychological, philosophical, aesthetic and ethical representation of trauma in fiction. Trauma theory helps us to read the wounds afflicted on to the characters during the time of crisis in literature. One of the most common disorder with which millions of people suffered during partition is PTSD (Posttraumatic stress disorder). The short stories "Toba Tek Singh" and "The Return" depicts trauma in its true sense which consequently leaves the reader despondent and jittery. Manto attempts to preserve the collective memories of catastrophe in his works.

Keywords:

Psychical Trauma;
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder;
Traumatic Neurosis;
Trauma Narratives;
Traumatic Memory.

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Author correspondence:

Saumya Srivastava,
Assistant Professor,
Amity School of Languages,
Amity University, Lucknow Campus
Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow (India)

Email: saumya.sri16@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Saadat Hasan Manto is one of the most famous writers of the twentieth century. He is an Indo-Pakistani writer, who has been tried for obscenity six times. The themes of his works usually revolve around the trauma of partition; death and destruction; quest for identity; physical and mental assaults; victimization of the innocents etc. Manto is the writer of the times when partition of India and Pakistan took place. He had not only witnessed the horrifying effects of partition but also went through the trauma of it. Saadat Hasan Manto is memorable for his pen portraits which speak volumes about the partition and the irreparable damage that the partition does to the psyche of the people. He published twenty-two collections of short stories, a number of essays, filmscripts, a novel, a play and so on. Manto's most famous works based on the theme of partition are: "Thanda Gosht" (A Lump of Cold Flesh), "Khol Do" (Open Up), "Khuda Ki Kasam", "Mozalle", "Tetwal K Kutta" (The Dog of Tetwal) etc. *Mottled Down* is yet another powerful account based on the theme of partition. His works faced a lot of criticisms and oppositions but at the same time his immense contribution to the field of partition delineates a new discipline of study, that is, partition studies. None of the writers until today could match his genius as far as his contribution to the field of partition studies is considered.

'Trauma' can be defined as a physical injury or wound, which can have psychological and emotional repercussions. The physical wound turns into the psychical trauma when the negative environmental factors accompanied with the psychical pressures are deeply penetrating and enduring. Another term in the field of 'trauma theory' suggested by the two famous psychologists of Austria, Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer is "Traumatic neurosis," which is a mental disorder caused by a traumatic event. The aim of this paper is to study the emotional and psychological responses of the people who were victims of the trauma of Indo-Pakistan partition in the story "Toba Tek Singh" and "The Return". The trauma of partition inflicted innumerable psychical wounds onto the minds of the people witnessing this catastrophic event. Mentally challenged people of Lahore lunatic asylum in "Toba Tek Singh" and Sirajuddin's daughter Sakina in "The Return" were exposed to 'nervous shock' during the time of partition, which left them despairing.

2. Exploring the effects of Trauma on Bodies

In the short stories "Toba Tek Singh" and "The Return" Manto points out the problem of the segregation of India and Pakistan- which leads to the emotional,

psychological and intellectual breakdown of the people residing in these two nations. The event with which Manto is dealing in his short stories is the most important event in the chapter of Indian history as this particular event is responsible for changing the fate of the two nations. It is because of partition that many people became homeless, bereft and destitute.

Psychic trauma is generally defined as a reaction to an overpowering event resulting in psychological damage, but instead of understanding trauma according to event and/or response, Cathy Caruth – unarguably one of the key figures in contemporary trauma theory – has famously redefined it according to “the *structure of its experience*”: “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.” (Risberg 1)

Trauma theory is an interdisciplinary area of research which developed in 1980s. It was popularized by Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman and Roger Luckhurst. Trauma theory as a discipline is the outcome of cross-fertilization of the two disciplines namely, psychology and the humanities. The scholars of other disciplines especially those from media studies and films have embraced the pluralism associated with the trauma theory. The contemporary literary trauma theory claims that trauma induces such a fright in a person that it disrupts the identity of oneself. The fright disturbs and weakens the mental processes due to which social relationships and moral laws seem bizarre and worthless. Other disciplines which embraced trauma studies are- history, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, psychology etc.

Mental illness previously was regarded as the sign of physical weakness and degeneration of an individual to the more animalistic state. Earlier Austrian psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer, in their essay “On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena” proposed that the cause of hysteria and other mental disorders is physical degeneration. But later on in their studies they corrected their earlier analysis and came out with another theory where they considered that madness no longer is the result of physical ailment. It is however, the result of ‘nervous shock’. Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer in their essay “In Traumatic Neurosis” proposed that bizarre behavior, extreme mood swings, amnesias and variant trance states could be the result of a traumatic event, which has the potential to afflict severe wound on to the psyche of an individual. In “In Traumatic Neurosis” they point out:

the operative cause of the illness is not the trifling physical injury but the affect of fright- the psychical trauma. In an analogous manner, our investigations reveal, for many, if not for most, hysterical symptoms, precipitating causes which can only be described as psychical traumas. Any experience which calls up distressing affects- such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain- may operate as a trauma of this kind. (qtd. in Waugh 498)

The trauma represented in Manto's short stories is so intense and distressing that it usually leaves the readers unnerved. Saadat Hasan Manto explores the bitter truth of human existence in his short story "Toba Tek Singh" which is considered as his magnum opus by many of the critics. Post-partition people instantaneously felt destitute, devoid of identity, helpless, wretched, despairing and orphan. The trauma in the story "Toba Tek Singh" is the trauma of partition which has aggravated the madness of the lunatics and compelled them to question their current nationality post partition. The lunatics get shattered on being forcefully separated from their inmates. "As to where Pakistan was located, the inmates knew nothing. That was why both the mad and the partially mad were unable to decide whether they were now in India or in Pakistan" (Manto, "Toba Tek Singh" 10). The partition does not only hamper the mental health of the normal people but even the mentally retarded people were deeply affected by the bitter trauma of partition which aggravated their vulnerability. The adverse effect of the horror of partition on the mental and emotional health of the patients of Lahore lunatic asylum is explicitly visible in the story. The aggravation of the severity of the disorder is indicated through the patient's rapidly deteriorating mental and emotional health.

As earthly beings, it is very natural to be afraid of traumatic events. The real problem starts only when our defense mechanisms surrender themselves in front of the traumatic events and we find ourselves incapacitated to defend the psychical trauma. "Stress has a number of immediate effects and if, the stressors are maintained, long-term behavioral, physiological, emotional, and cognitive (thinking) effects occur" (Morgan et al. 323). Freud and Breuer in their essay "In Traumatic Neurosis" points out that the memory of trauma proves to be far more detrimental to the psyche of an individual than the trauma itself. The memory turns into traumatic memory when the mind due to the 'nervous shock' is unable to assimilate the usual mental processes. The traumatic memory is hidden deep into our psyche so that the retrieval of dreadful experiences becomes almost impossible. Our conscious mind never wants to access the past unpleasant experiences as they are

disquieting and disturbing. Thus, the unpleasant experiences are repressed and pushed into the subconscious part of our mind. In the words of Freud “Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (qtd. in Waugh 499). The repeatedly reliving or re-experiencing of the traumatic events makes the recovery of the psychical wound even more difficult. Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* talks about the compulsive repetition of the unpleasant experiences. Every individual is doomed to re-live the trauma. This concept of ‘repetition compulsion’ can be seen in Manto’s short story “The Return” where Sirajuddin’s daughter re-lives the trauma in her subconscious state of mind. Sakina being totally oblivious of her present situation reacted in the manner as if she is still under the threat of trauma. Traumatic experience has the potential to pierce even the innermost protective layer of the mind. Therefore, the brutality and molestation afflicted on to Sakina in the immediate past does not allow her mind to grasp the present social reality.

The surviving witnesses of the holocaust usually develop a very serious mental disorder called Posttraumatic stress disorder. In 1980 American Psychiatric Association included Posttraumatic stress disorder in their diagnostic manual. Posttraumatic stress disorder occurs when an individual is constantly exposed to ‘extreme traumatic stressor’. The stressor which leads to Posttraumatic stress disorder can be in the form of warfare, traffic collision, natural disaster, massacre etc. Posttraumatic stress disorder is the mental derangement in which a person loses touch with reality, followed by nightmares, distressing memories, insomnia, emotional numbness etc. In “Toba Tek Singh” Manto narrates the story of Bishen Singh, a Sikh lunatic who could not resist the trauma of partition and suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder. Unable to defend the psychical miseries he eventually ends his life in no-man’s land. Manto’s another short story “The Return” talks about the pathological wound afflicted on Sakina during the phase of partition which leaves her mentally disordered. Being molested and assaulted by her own countrymen she was unable to gain the right consciousness.

“The Return” portrays the chaotic atmosphere of partition, where everybody is running in order to save their lives. Innumerable people like Sirajuddin are looking for their lost fathers, sons, daughters, mothers and wives. The people who have got separated from their families do not know where to go. They do not find any answers to their questions by the political authority. The authority fails in their attempt to manage the chaos. In “The Return”, the scene of war becomes alive in the following line: “Many had been killed on the way, a lot more injured and countless lost” (Manto, “The Return” 39). The story speaks about the traumatic atmosphere and dehumanizing conditions prevalent

during the time of partition. The dreadful events of partition keep haunting the survivors and the trauma keeps returning to them again and again belatedly. Women and children are usually the worst victims of riots. Being aware of the danger and threat which partition poses onto her young daughter, Sakina's mother asks her husband to run away from that place, in order to save Sakina. Sakina's mother, while breathing her last says: "Leave me where I am. Take the girl away." (Manto, "The Return" 39) Her concern associated with her young daughter was relevant as Sakina went through the same trauma from which her mother wants to save her. Sirajuddin's daughter Sakina in the story suffered from Posttraumatic stress disorder as her own countrymen outraged her modesty. Her unconscious reaction to the doctor's words "open it" (Manto, "The Return" 41) depicts the brutality through which she must have undergone. Her mother fails in her attempt to save her as Sakina eventually falls into the trap of the molesters.

The effect of partition on the emotional health of the lunatics is seen in "Toba Tek Singh". A drastic change in the behavior of the patients is noticed when the news of partition broke to them. Deeply affected by the partition, one of the patients of Lahore lunatic asylum climbs up a tree and refuses to come down. He wishes to live the rest of his life on the tree rather than in India or Pakistan. Initially his mind was not prepared to accept the social reality of partition, but later he realizes that partition is the inevitable truth and must be accepted. The patients were aware of the fact that they will soon be shifted to another place. Therefore, when he comes down after some time, he starts embracing his Sikh and Hindu inmates as by that time, he was fully convinced that they will soon depart. Another lunatic who used to be the member of All India Muslim League went bonkers after hearing about the partition. He had obsessive compulsive disorder of bathing fifteen to sixteen times a day. He suddenly stops bathing and declares himself to be Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Watching this, another lunatic maniacally declares himself as Tara Singh. Anticipating communal riots in the asylum, both of them were locked up in different cabins by the asylum authority.

The politics of partition derailed the emotional well-being of mentally challenged people of the Lahore asylum. Another demented patient of the Lahore lunatic asylum in "Toba Tek Singh" suffers from partition trauma. He was a highly qualified person and was an engineer by profession. Though he was partially mad but his condition worsens when he got the news of the partition. The news of the exchange of the lunatics had such serious impact on his psyche that he ran into the garden undraped. "The story shows the partition as an outbreak of collective madness which is turned upside down. For Manto, the partition

was primarily a lived reality which became a metaphor for human depravity” (Panthi 705). The story reveals the madness of the patients which actually aggravated when they were forcefully been driven out of their country. Many lunatics started crying bitterly when they were forced to move to other nation as they do not want to leave their hometown or the place to which they belong. Other patients reacted in a wild manner. They ran here and there in order to escape from being sent to another place. Female lunatics shouted more fiercely as they felt homeless and devoid of identity. They were clueless about why they were forcibly been driven to a strange place which does not belong to them. The partition proved venomous for the mentally disabled people. This disorder continues to affect the psyche of the individuals even after many years of partition.

3. Interpreting Psychical Abrasions and Traumatic Memory

Trauma narratives help the spectators to have a cathartic experience of the trauma. The repeated reliving of the traumatizing event makes the survivors even more vulnerable and poses psychological threat. Trauma narratives cause pain and suffering to both- writer as well as the reader. It disorganizes and distorts the psychology of both but at the same time it helps the reader to ponder over the social and psychological issues prevalent during the time in which it was written. Consequently, it helps the society at large to figure out the main causes of these problems.

Hallucination, anxiety, nightmare, stress, fragmented speech, partial amnesia etc. are some of the symptoms of Posttraumatic stress disorder. The dissociation with the reality is yet another major symptom which develops in people with Posttraumatic stress disorder. One of the lunatics in the story “Toba Tek Singh” once, declares himself to be almighty. Considering that inmate as God, Bishen Singh starts asking him about the location of his village Toba Tek Singh. The lunatic camouflaged as God giggles and pronounces that it is nowhere on the world map. On hearing this, Bishen Singh suddenly starts thinking that he is a Muslim God as he does not respond to his prayers and does not give a satisfactory answer to his question. The news of partition for Bishen Singh came as a big shock which disrupts his already disturbed mental state. He was utterly disillusioned and disturbed when he got to know that “Toba Tek Singh” is now in Pakistan.

Similarly in the story “The Return” Sirajuddin fails to apprehend that he and his daughter are in the life threatening situation and it is not the time to pick up Sakina’s dupatta, rather they should run away in order to escape the danger. Later in the story, Sirajuddin and Sakina got separated in the stampede like situation. Amidst the chaos of partition Sirajuddin could not recall where he had seen his daughter last? Where were they separated? He actually does not know where to move ahead in order to find her? He kept on thinking that: “Had he brought her as far as the railway station? Had she got into the carriage with him? When the rioters had stopped the train, had they taken her with them?” (Manto, “The Return” 40)

Partition poses psychological and emotional threat to Sakina and his father Sirajuddin. The mental state in which Sirajuddin was put in, during the time of partition was frightful and ghastly as he saw his wife dying in front of him. He could do nothing to save his wife. He had to leave her in that condition in order to

save his daughter. “He was in shock, suspended, as it were, over a bottomless pit” (Manto, “The Return” 39) when amidst the commotion of partition he was even separated from his daughter and knew nothing of where to find her. He tried to weep but in the state of extreme nervous shock tears refuse to come out. The mental processes of Sirajuddin could not resist the trauma therefore it results in disordered mental reactions.

Manto through his stories seems to assert that the harm partition does to the psyche of the people, is beyond imagination. ““Normal” or justified as posttraumatic stress disorders might seem, they can extremely be debilitating” (Bootzin and Acocella 163). Pierre Jenet’s concept of “Traumatic memory,” refers to the memory of trauma which haunts the victim for a long period of time post calamity. Each recall is synonymous to reliving that trauma psychologically in his or her mind which further intensifies the severity of the disorder. “Trauma overwhelms the individual with intense fear, terror and hopelessness which makes the experience unrepresentable by language, making the memory of violence a very private affair for most of the survivors” (Daimari 25). The intense fear and hopelessness could be administered in Sirajuddin, who actually saw blood gushing out of his wife’s stomach. She died in front of him and he could not save her. This was the image which can never be forgotten by him. This image appears before him by way of a sudden flashback, while he was searching for his daughter. “A flashback is a sudden intrusive re-experiencing of a fragment of one of those traumatic, unverbilized memories. During a flashback, people become overwhelmed with the same emotions that they felt at the time of the trauma” (Bloom 6). The image of his dying wife has resided in his traumatic memory and it will keep returning to him again and again.

Traumatic neurosis can be seen in yet another demented patient of Lahore lunatic asylum who was a lawyer by profession. He was partially mad and the reason of his madness was the unhappy love affair with his beloved, who lives in Amritsar. He does not remember much in his madness, but one thing that he did not forget is the place, where his beloved lives. When he was informed about the India and Pakistan segregation, he went nuts and started abusing everybody whom he think has divided the nation into two, making him and his beloved, citizens of the two different nations. He could not stand the forced partition from his beloved in the form of Indo-Pakistan divide. Therefore, his mental health deteriorates considerably and he lands up into severe madness and depression.

People suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder and Traumatic neurosis show lack of responsiveness to external environment. This is often termed as ‘emotional anesthesia.’ They do not reciprocate the affection which their family members or friends show towards them. Trauma theory studies the physical or overt reactions of the victims which includes incoherent speech, internal conflict, bizarre behavior, distance with social realities etc. “In addition, people diagnosed with PTSD may experience emotional numbness or withdrawal from themselves or others such that they lose interest in usual activities or are regarded as distant and emotionally unavailable” (Portillo and Pastorino 632). Bishen Singh in Manto’s story “Toba Tek Singh” lacks the ability to adjust with the outside environment. He shows no sign of emotional attachment when visited by his childhood friend, Fazal Din. He was even unable to recognize his own fifteen year old daughter, RoopKaur. The emotional numbness of Bishen Singh becomes the major cause of worry and pain for his family and friends. Other symptoms of Posttraumatic stress disorder in Bishen Singh are- insomnia, heightened sensitivity, anxiety, incoherent speech, insensitivity towards pain etc. Since the last fifteen years he never went to sleep. He would lie down for some time, but he is usually seen walking by his inmates. Due to this, his legs had become permanently swollen, but it seems as if this does not

affect him in anyway. He seems all fine in spite of having sore legs. This insensitivity towards pain is one of the major symptoms of Posttraumatic stress disorder. Bishen Singh often utters some incoherent words, which does not seem to have any meaning attached to it. His speech is fragmented and bizarre. He is unable to express his thoughts. Whenever he is asked to speak, he utters “*Uper the gurgur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain*” (Manto, “Toba Tek Singh” 11). He mumbles the same words when he was asked to give his opinion on India and Pakistan segregation. The disorganized speech and the incoherent expression, speaks for his madness.

Pathological symptoms can be studied in the character of Sirajuddin in the story “The Return”. He suffers from traumatic neurosis and anxiety disorders. After losing his wife and then his daughter, he suffered from nervous shock. His psychological and emotional state can be determined from his behavior, which is aptly depicted in the following lines-

Then his eyes moved and, suddenly, caught the sun. The shock brought him back to the world of living men and women. A succession of images raced through his mind. Attack... fire... escape... railway station... night... Sakina. He rose abruptly and began searching through the milling crowd in the refugee camp.

He spent hours looking, all the time shouting his daughter’s name... Sakina, Sakina... but she was nowhere to be found. (Manto, “The Return” 39)

Towards the end of the story, Sirajuddin’s ecstasy was beyond all boundaries when he sees his daughter moving, as her movement was indicative of her being alive. Sirajuddin in the moment of crisis, remain incapacitated to apprehend the meaning of her daughter’s unconscious reaction. This indicates that partition has derailed the mental order of the surviving victims.

The political and religious structure dominated the moral and ethical structure of the society during the time of partition. Posttraumatic stress disorder was common among many people who were the eye-witness of physical violence and butchery during the time of partition. “In the process of venerating the national narrative of both the nations, they have neglected the personal narratives of people for whom the partition was a nightmare” (Panchal 96-97). Partition was accompanied by chaos, suffering, bloodshed and annihilation, which was all-pervading at that time. Manto’s works aptly encloses the disaster of partition. His short story “Toba Tek Singh” and “The Return” presents the distorted ideologies of the people during that time.

Sakina being brutally assaulted in the past shows insensitivity towards pain, which is one of the major symptoms of Posttraumatic stress disorder. She follows the doctor’s orders slavishly, being totally oblivious of the context in which the doctor was speaking. Likewise deeply disturbed by the partition and unaware of the location of his village Bishen Singh became agitated and annoyed, due to which his mental condition degraded considerably. Even in his madness Bishen Singh wanted to be in his village Toba Tek Singh. Therefore, towards the end of the story, in his severe madness he screams and ends his life on the Wagha border (the land between India and Pakistan), declaring it as “Toba Tek Singh”. In the story “The phrase, “lay Toba Tek Singh”, refers both to the man stretched out on the ground and to the piece of ground itself, which has become for him “the homeland” Toba Tek Singh, where he wanted to be” (Thakur 224). Partition creates intellectual and emotional depravity of the people witnessing the terror, annihilation and the forced residential shift.

4. Conclusion

“SaadatHasanManto’s oeuvre occupies an important place in the partition fiction and it is accessible to non-Urdu reader through translation, especially English translation.” (Kaur 26). Manto is rebellious, bold and candid in his approach. He is an iconoclast who speaks of sordid realities with utter audacity. His consciousness never allowed him to gloss over the squalid realities of life. The honest description of violence and butchery in his works lands him amidst controversies and criticisms. The domains on which he focuses on in his works is not just limited to political and social rather he also deals with domestic and personal issues. Manto never shied away from presenting or exposing the grotesque picture of the society in front of the spectators or readers. The main purpose of Manto was to make the people experience the emotions of the surviving victims of the holocaust. His works gives the pen portraits of the gruesome realities of the victimization of women, poor and marginalized. Manto’s works essentially focuses on partition and the tragedy of partition. “Traumatic experience can produce a sometimes indelible effect on the human psyche that can change the nature of an individual’s memory, self- recognition, and relational life” (Vickroy 11).

SaadatHasanManto asserts that the personal, emotional and intellectual structures succumbed in front of the political structure prevailing at the time of partition. No other writer had the audacity to deal with the theme of partition in the immensity in which he has dealt. Manto in his short stories paints a true picture of partition which speaks volumes about the incurable psychical wound afflicted onto the people during the time of partition. The tragedy of partition leads to the loss of faith, identity crisis and feeling of homelessness in many surviving witnesses. Manto very aptly encloses the disaster caused by partition in his writings. By dealing with the subject of savagery, starvation and destruction of partition, Manto tries to put human beings and their emotions in the center. Manto’s stories help us to understand the social, cultural and political consciousness prevailing during the phase of partition. He stands against the political structure as he believes that the political authority remains inconsiderate to the people’s emotional and psychical well-being. The brutality with which he professes his thoughts is remarkable as it helps the society to become conscious of the further decay. Manto exposes the cataclysmic consequences of the holocaust that devastated the lives of many innocent human beings. Manto’s works opens up the façade of the repercussions of the partition.

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