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Do You Know Me? The Study of Fear of Losing Identity in Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*

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Abstract:

Ever since the beginning and the development of human race, mankind has known the value of identity and individuality. The quest for identity and the fear of losing it has been most prominent factor in most of the historic wars and fights. All the wars, intrusions and slavery have been the result of man's desire of establishing his superiority over others and making his name known to more number of people. For accomplishing this desire man has migrated, emigrated, immigrated and even intruded various foreign places, hence increasing the reasons for disturbances and the countries like India, which are the land of religious and cultural diversity, became more prone to the problem of communal and religious disturbances. This land has witnessed many riots and uproars at the name of religion and identity, the largest, renowned and major cause of riot has been "Mountbatten's Plan of Partition- 1947". The chaos and the confusion of the times have been represented by many authors. Many pens have scribbled the pain of their holding hands and minds on the piece of paper. Punjab, being most affected by the partition, made the authors of partition, out of them Sadat Hasan Manto is one name to be underlined. He brings alive the most traumatic episode in the history of the subcontinent, he brings into light the confusions prevailing at the time of separation. His many stories are partition oriented however, this paper analyse Toba Tek Singh for understanding the fear of lost identities at the time of forced mobility.

Keywords: Partition, identity, dilemma, mobility, migration, desire.

Introduction:

Migration has been the part of human history since time immemorial. Humans have been migrating from their native and known lands to alien and unfamiliar lands in search of food, treasure, career and other various reasons. However while migration has served as a tool for globalization, the cultures, languages and traditions have intermingled with each others. In the process of settlements and resettlements the identities have been formed, damaged and reformed. The formation of one's identity occurs through one's identifications with significant others (primarily with parents and other individuals during one's biographical experiences, and also with 'groups' as they are perceived). These others may be benign such that one aspires to their characteristics, values and beliefs (a process of idealistic-identification), or malign when one wishes to dissociate from their characteristics (a process of defensive contra-identification) (Weinreich & Saunderson 2003, Chapter 1, pp 54–61). The mobility if by wish is always the reason of the happiness. However, if that is a forced mobility no matter how beneficial it may be but causes the scars never to be dissolved. It is

not the mobility which is the main concern or reason for the depressions, confusions and broken hearts but the loss of identity which is an obvious outcome of it, hence causing the disharmonious environment.

Toba Tek Singh is painted on the canvas of partition. The story speaks at the pinnacle of its voice about the fear of losing identity. The identity refers to the capacity of self reflection and the awareness of self. While moving or migrating from the home place both self reflection as well as self awareness are at stake. One has to restart the life in new place, everything has to be revised, and one has to establish his identity once again. How far and to what extent a person is successful in doing this, is an issue. The story starts with the decision of governments of India and Pakistan that the asylum inmates should be exchanged too; this decision came when a common man was already settled in his life after the turmoil of the Partition. The declaration of date of exchange ignited the confusion among the asylum inmates. It shows the unconscious and ignorant living of the lunatics. Manto employs the bouts of discussion to highlight the confusion and fuss created by a simple but well thought decision of the governments. The asylum itself becomes a micro cosmic view of the India and the confusion among lunatics resembles the actual confusion among the people of colonial India. The lunatics of Lahore asylum ask each other the whereabouts of the country named Pakistan and the language that is spoken there. They are totally unaware of the fact that India and Pakistan are their own lands and nothing more than a fruit of the tree whose seed was sown by Imperialism. Even the asylum guards are shown to be ignorant and finally when the day of exchange comes the confusion and fear is unleashed. The cries and roars are heard out of the vans. One Sikh lunatic who kept on asking about the whereabouts of his ancestral village called Toba Tek Singh dies at the place between India and Pakistan. Manto marks that place as the death place of sensitivity of both the nations.

Analysis:

The story is a powerful satire .It is the representation of the faulty and clueless political process leading to the partition of a nation. However, Manto has not even once mentioned any political evidence but a reader can very well see that through the painfully comic dialogues of the inmates. The story is revealed through series of meaningless dialogues between the lunatics of Lahore asylum. He successfully brings out the confusion of the period and also the fear of loss of identity among the lunatics. Manto effectively but mutely relates the fear at the times of the partition of India and Pakistan. All the chaos of the period, the bloodshed and the hatred has its roots in this psychological aspect of mankind. A psychological identity is all about self esteem, self image and individuality. As Weinreich defines identity "A person's identity is defined as the totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future". It is this psychological identity which is at stake as the inmates are being transferred to the place unknown to them, hence causing a state of dilemma for them. The lunatics, who have not seen the outer world for years and again are going to live in confinement, should not be bothered by the transfer. Nevertheless, this transfer becomes the reason for their unbalanced discussions about the whereabouts of the place of their shift.

Manto uses various events to describe the mental chaos caused by the pain of losing the identity. The intensity of desire of “being known” and “individuality” is portrayed by different weird and unconscious happenings. For instance, one lunatic climbed the tree and installed himself on the branch, and spoke for two hours continuously on the topic of India and Pakistan. When asked by the guards to get down he went a branch higher and declared, ‘I wish to live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live in this tree.’ It is not a fit of mental imbalance neither his attitude is ignorant, but an unconscious try to protect his identity. It is not merely the words uttered by a lunatic but his conscious effort to tell about his wish to live in the place which is known to him and where he is well known. India is as alien for him as is Pakistan or any other foreign land. The asylum is his home and he is well known to the inmates, he has an identity there, he can see his self image through his fellow mates and his individuality is not hampered with the presence of other inmates. However, the day he will be transferred, he will lose everything. It will be in a new place and between new people, lunatic or not, but he will not have any identity among them.

In another incident, a Muslim lunatic who was a radio engineer and was so affected by the debate that he took off all his clothes, and ran into the garden stark naked. This is another unconscious effort to save his identity. He was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim when born, thus not liable for any transfer. Therefore, he ran stark naked, declaring in his way, that he belong to no country, that he is just a child who has not been clothed yet. Hence, he is eligible to be exempted from the transfer. He never had any identity when he was born hence no fear of losing it. He wish to hold on his identity by reversing the age and the best he could do was to remove all his clothes as a declaration that he do not belong to the world of adults which is prone to such conflicts and partitions.

In yet another incident there is a Hindu- Muslim fight and hatred at the time of Partition. A Muslim lunatic from Chaniot announces himself as Quaid-e- Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. As a reaction to this a Sikh lunatic has declared himself as Master Tara Singh. Apprehending serious communal trouble, the authorities declared them ‘dangerous’ and they were shut in separate cells. Manto, with his well crafty pen, satirize the political situation and political leaders. The harmless lunatics confined in the walls of the asylum were considered dangerous whereas the actual culprits of the partition were worshipped in their respective nations. The lunatics were just imitating their respective leaders, yet they were dangerous and were cautiously shifted to different cells. This would have been done actually to avoid serious and real communal violence. It is in this unique way that Manto gives his idea of solution to the problem of partition.

Manto through this unique portrayal of confusion and chaos of Partition highlights another common story of failure of love at the hands of hatred. He employs a character who is another lunatic, a young Hindu lawyer and a lover too. He keeps on abusing both the governments and leaders who cut India into two, turning his beloved into an Indian and him into a Pakistani. Later when this news of transfer reach Lahore asylum, he is congratulated by his fellow mates that now he will be transferred to the country of his beloved but he declares that he has no intention of leaving Lahore, as his practice would not flourish in Amritsar. This is again a psychological identity which makes him declare this and for safe guarding his

individuality he is ready to sacrifice his love, for which he has lost his mental balance. The issue which was the matter of concern for him is immediately dwarfed and he starts looking at his identity as the matter of urgency. He is not willing to shift to the place of his beloved but want to be a part of the place where he is known already. Not only Indian inmates are shocked and horrified, similar feelings are also shared by two Anglo –Indians who are also equally affected by the decision but in quiet a different manner. They are more concerned about their breakfast which is of course different from Indian chapattis served to other inmates and about the existence of European Ward which now seems to be under question. The changed government and a fear of abolition of European ward are there in them because both mark their presence and give a separate identity to them. If abolished, then their separate status will be abolished too, hence snatching away their identity from them.

Bishan Singh another inmate who has resolved to be quiet for so many years was also affected by this. Nothing appeared to bother him for last fifteen years but after the announcement of the decision he started listening to the discussions carefully and slowly started inquiring about his village 'Toba Tek Singh'. Through the series of discussions, Manto reveal about his family life and background. Moreover, it is through this character that a unique feature of love- hatred relationship is revealed, when his friend Fazal Din is shown coming to meet him we come to know about the help rendered by both the communities to each other despite of all the hatred showcased during the ordeal. In the times of political disturbance when ladies of one community were raped by men of other community, at the same time there were people like Fazal Din who were helping the daughters of their Hindu friends. This is illustrative of the fact that the wars and conspiracies are the offspring of political people and their lust for power, they have nothing to do with common man. People of both the nations wept while they were departing, the tears marked their attachment with each other, their psychological attachment which forms their identity was going to be lost and this was true in the cases, the partition and the transfer. When such a conflict arises due to the fear of losing the identity then even the most unbalanced mind can even start thinking and this happened at the time of partition as well as at the time of transfer of lunatics. The minds who have been declared not balanced tries to solve the mystery of unknown worlds to them .For them it is the matter of shock that a country which was India has now been divided and a new place named Pakistan has came into existence, has the identity of India been changed or snapped with that of Pakistan or Pakistan is some other place on globe which has taken the possession of Muslim Indians? This is something they feel for themselves also. They get utterly confused when they come to know that Sialkot, which used to be in India, was now in Pakistan. This raises a fear in them that someday entire sub continent of India might become Pakistan and probably both India and Pakistan may vanish from the map of world. This fear is intermingled with their own fear of their identities getting vanished. Though for common people their presence do not make any difference but still they have an individuality and losing that is the same nightmare for them as much as it may be for others.

Finally when Bishen Singh was brought out from the van on the day of transfer, he asked, 'where is Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?' and the official answered with a vulgar laugh, 'Pakistan'. This episode again cries at the apex of its voice about the lust of power and

need of identity. Bishen Singh shares an identity with the place called Toba Tek Singh and that is the reason for his inquiry about its whereabouts. He was a landlord in that village and had spent his heydays there; therefore the place bore the marks of his wealth, prosperity and individuality, where he was Bishen Singh and not merely an Indian or Pakistani. Moreover, the 'vulgar laugh' of the official is the representation of lack of sensitivity due to the lust of power and that again, is for the sake of identity. Power actually leads to the security of identity and a secure, safe identity gives birth to power and lust for more power, so this is a bi directional phenomenon.

Conclusion:

No one remains indifferent to this decision of transfer, virtually a second round of partition. Manto employs a wide range of characters a lawyer, a lover, a landlord, a worker of political party, an engineer, Anglo- Indian to describe the intensity of reaction from the people getting affected. An aerial view of the partition and the people affected by it is given by this story of Toba Tek Singh. The lunatics are none other than confused, traumatized and shocked common people who were affected by the decision of partition. The officials are the people in power, insensitive towards the feelings, emotions and desire of common man. The decision of partition was nothing but the fear of losing their individuality after independence as the political leaders. Since, no way both the leaders would have become the head of new democracy so they decided to have their equal share of power by dividing one nation into two. If it was actually a problem of common man to have a separate nation then there would have not been even a drop of tear shed at that time. People lost their houses, lives, respects, possessions, properties and the identity, the one who gained was the political powers.

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