

Psychological Violence and Trauma: A Psychoanalytical Study of Bishan Singh's Character.

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Abstract

This paper aimed to explore the character of Bishan Singh from a psychological perspective. The character was portrayed as suffering from psychological trauma. The study investigated the factors that had affected his mental peace through close reading. Bishan Singh was presented as the protagonist of the story and as a symbolic representation of loss, suffering, heartache, bewilderment, and anarchy experienced by those who had helplessly witnessed their motherland being torn apart. The psychological impacts of division, the arbitrary nature of borders, the absurdity of the act, and the helplessness of the people at the time of division were also examined. The researcher stated that the study was significant because it addressed mental health in a specific literary domain, while the topic itself remained relevant in the modern world.

Keywords: Psychological Violence, Partition, Trauma, Insanity, Asylum.

Introduction

Saadat Hasan Manto was described as a widely read Urdu writer who required no introduction; he had been a novelist, playwright, essayist, screenwriter, and short story writer. Scholars noted that he had published five collections of radio plays, one novel, three collections of essays, and two collections of personal sketches, along with twenty-two collections of short stories. He was

regarded as one of the most persuasive Urdu writers of the twentieth century and was best known for his short stories.

Manto was born into a Muslim Kashmiri family in Amritsar. Critics observed that he had translated works of European literature, such as those of Oscar Wilde, Chekhov, Victor Hugo, and Maupassant, into Urdu. After the Partition, he migrated to Pakistan, and thereafter his short stories primarily addressed themes related to division. He had explored human behaviour during the Partition and the psychological effects of such events. The heritage of realism, linguistic economy, and focus on internal aspects formed the foundation of his works. Women, sexuality, and Partition were considered among his most frequent themes.

It was stated that violence was a widespread form of human behaviour across the globe. People of any age—children, adults, and the elderly—could engage in violent acts, and those who witnessed or experienced violence suffered numerous harmful consequences. According to the Oxford Dictionary, violence was defined as the use of physical force to harm, abuse, damage, or destroy. The World Health Organization defined it as the use of physical or psychological force against oneself, another person, a group, or a community, which resulted or was likely to result in injury, death, or psychological harm. Scholars pointed out that violence could take many forms: physical, sexual, domestic, cultural, emotional, spiritual, and psychological.

Psychological violence was described as chronic verbal aggression that could lead to physical violence. All forms of violence were reported to have psychological effects. The primary purpose of violent or abusive behaviour was to violate the integrity and dignity of another person. Any activity or behaviour causing harm to the victim's mental health was classified as psychological violence (Dokkedahl et al., 2019). Psychological and emotional abuse consisted of repeated incidents, whether intentional or unintentional, involving insults, humiliation,

threats, isolation, and control over another person. Psychological violence was the systematic use of non-physical acts intended to cause mental pain, anguish, and suffering.

The study aimed to investigate how the Partition of India and Pakistan had caused psychological violence through the lens of Manto's work *Toba Tek Singh*. The year 1947 is described as a turning point in the history of the Indian subcontinent, when the British departed and Pakistan and India emerged as separate states. This transition brought massive human suffering due to violence, forcing millions to flee their homes. On a psychosocial level, survivors of Partition had long endured the traumas of forced migration and social brutality.

It was argued that the Partition continued to affect not only political structures but also the psychology of individuals, and that even after sixty-four years, people still faced challenges in coping with its consequences. The forced migration had resulted in unpleasant socio-cultural disruption and the creation of an outcast population. The memories of 1947's psychological violence continued to resurface, affecting even those who had not directly experienced it.

Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, written in 1955, was cited as a key text in discussing the psychological violence of Partition. The story dealt with the exchange of lunatics—Muslims to Pakistan, and Sikhs and Hindus to India—agreed upon by both governments. When this news reached Lahore's asylum, confusion spread among the inmates. One lunatic, unable to comprehend the meaning of Partition, climbed a tree to avoid the discussion, declaring that he would live there instead of in either country. Others fought over claims of identity, with one insisting he was Muhammad Ali Jinnah and another claiming to be Master Tara Singh.

Among these inmates was a lawyer who cursed the politics of both Pakistan and India, as he was separated from his beloved by the newly drawn borders. Throughout the story, the lunatics

continued discussing the fate of India and Pakistan. Bishan Singh, who had been in the asylum for fifteen years without speaking to anyone, persistently asked where Toba Tek Singh was located, but no one could give him a clear answer. On the day of the exchange, when his turn came, he again asked which country had gained Toba Tek Singh. Receiving no clear answer, he collapsed to the ground in no-man's-land between India and Pakistan.

Literature Review

A literature review was defined as a summary of the body of research in a field, enabling the framing of specific research questions. It was stated that an extensive range of materials—books, professional articles, and online resources—had to be consulted and evaluated for such a review (Rowley & Slack, 2004).

Alhmdni et al. (2020) attempted to shed light on the concept of violence in Edgar Allan Poe's works, noting that his writings often centred on violence and madness. The researchers aimed to identify the reasons behind the violence portrayed in Poe's works by considering historical, sociological, and biographical contexts. They observed that Poe's characters often lacked moral judgment and sought to conceal their mental abnormalities. These characters were depicted as being involved with demonic forces, using manipulative language to avoid responsibility for their actions, and employing words as tools of guile and self-deception. At times, this manipulation was said to ease grief. Language itself was presented as capable of inflicting direct psychological violence, as verbal arguments, exchanges, and even gestures could have harmful effects.

Similarly, Shehabal et al. (2022) explored domestic violence, psychological struggle, and egoistic masculinity in Poe's works, using Gothic literary analysis. They intended to examine the narrator's internal conflict between traumatized psychology and egoistic masculinity. Their findings indicated that Poe's unnamed narrators committed violent acts under the guise of psychological disorder and lack of awareness, though in reality these acts stemmed from self-

centred mentalities. The researchers argued that while the narrators tried to appear mentally unstable, they were aware of the emotional transformations leading to their violent behaviour. They noted that psychological violence was particularly damaging. The researchers drew parallels between the violence in Poe's stories and the violence during the Partition, explaining that before 1947, Muslims and non-Muslims had considered themselves one nation, but after Partition, psychological and physical torture became common, with individuals being forced to leave their birthplaces based on religious identity.

Lanza et al. (2006) examined the idea that non-physical violence served as a risk factor for physical violence in healthcare settings. They argued that reducing physical violence against healthcare workers required addressing non-physical violence first. They found that non-physical violence occurred more frequently than physical violence and that both healthcare staff and patients were affected. They described psychological violence as emotional abuse, involving manipulation through fear, shame, criticism, and control, whereas physical violence deliberately caused bodily injury. They referred to the adage that while physical injuries could heal, psychological wounds often remained.

Tehrani and Feizabadi (2009) focused on the impact of domestic violence on children, both during childhood and later in life. Their study sought to determine whether children who had witnessed domestic violence or been its victims faced lasting consequences. They concluded that early exposure to domestic violence often predicted future physical and psychological violence, such as hitting and verbal abuse. They also noted that such children were more likely to engage in criminal activities, substance abuse, and risky behaviours, and faced heightened risks of anxiety, depression, and other health issues. These children often carried violent tendencies into their adult relationships.

Dokkedahl et al. (2019) studied the relationship between psychological violence and mental health problems. They reported that psychological violence could escalate to physical and

sexual violence, often beginning with insults or threats and progressing to isolation and coercion. They emphasized that psychological violence was a significant aspect of intimate partner violence, as defined by the WHO and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Their findings showed that such violence had measurable impacts on mental health, particularly when acts and consequences were considered separately.

The researcher of the present study focused on the psychological impacts of Partition on the mental health of characters in *Toba Tek Singh*, applying Gilligan's psychoanalytical concept that all behaviour carried psychological significance and expressed itself through symbolic language. Gilligan argued that unconscious processes strongly influenced behaviour, especially destructive actions, and that violence affected self-regulation, interpersonal functioning, self-concept, cognition, and emotional processing. In this study, these ideas were applied to interpret the psychological trauma and symbolic madness depicted in Manto's work.

Research Methodology

Research methodology referred to the systematic approaches, techniques, and procedures applied to collect, identify, process, and analyze information about a research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It defined the framework within which the research was conducted and ensured that the findings were credible and verifiable.

Two broad research methods were generally recognized: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative approach focused on measurable data that could be expressed numerically and analyzed statistically (Bryman, 2016). In contrast, the qualitative approach was descriptive and explanatory in nature, focusing on non-numerical data—such as texts, interviews, and observations—to explore meanings, experiences, and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

This study adopted a qualitative textual analysis approach, specifically close reading, to examine the representation of psychological trauma, suffering, and violence in Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*. Close reading was an exacting and detailed method that focused on the careful interpretation of a text to uncover deeper meanings and thematic elements (Schur, 1998).

Data Collection

Two types of data were used: primary and secondary. Primary data consisted of the original text *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hasan Manto, which served as the main source for analysis. Secondary data comprised scholarly and peer-reviewed sources, including journal articles, academic books, and reputable online research repositories such as Research Gate, Google Scholar and Academia.edu. The use of reliable academic sources ensured the credibility and validity of the study (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2016).

The combination of primary and secondary data, analyzed through close reading, enabled a nuanced understanding of the psychological violence portrayed in *Toba Tek Singh*.

Discussion and Analysis

Toba Tek Singh first appeared in 1953 in the Urdu magazine *Savera*. Scholars noted that the story was set against the backdrop of one of the greatest tragedies and episodes of violence in the history of the independence of India and Pakistan. It was described as one of the finest political satires that revealed the absurdity of Partition.

The central figure, Bishan Singh, was presented as a depiction of the turmoil, loss, agony, and heartbreak felt by those who had helplessly watched their homeland being divided. The asylum was portrayed as a microcosm of the entire subcontinent, symbolizing the absurdity of independence, while insanity functioned as a metaphor for the trauma experienced by the people and refugees. The madness of the asylum inmates reflected the chaos and irrationality

of Partition violence, rather than the inherent condition of the innocent people caught in the political upheaval.

Many individuals were said to have been confused about their interpersonal, regional, political, and national identities after Partition. Manto's story was seen as an accurate depiction of this mental disorientation. At the beginning of the narrative, the atmosphere in the asylum was described as tense and emotional after the inmates learned that the governments of India and Pakistan had decided to exchange lunatics—Muslim inmates would be transferred to Pakistan, and Sikh and Hindu inmates to India. This decision created confusion, as illustrated when a lunatic named Zamindar reportedly asked a Maulvi, “What is this Pakistan?” and was told in response that razor blades were manufactured there.

This line was interpreted as a reflection of the mental state of innocent people suffering from the consequences of Partition. The asylum thus became a symbolic stage for the broader societal confusion and trauma. The inmates' irrational behaviour was shown to be a direct consequence of the brutality of the era, demonstrating how traumatic displacement had left people distressed and uncertain of their place in either India or Pakistan.

Manto highlighted the people's psychological suffering by mirroring it in the madness of the inmates. For instance, one lunatic declared himself to be Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, prompting a Sikh inmate to claim he was Master Tara Singh, leading to a violent altercation. These figures represented the leaders associated with Partition, symbolizing the deep divisions it caused.

Historical accounts explained that in August 1947, the subcontinent was divided, giving Muslims their own homeland, Pakistan, and Hindus their own country, India. Territories were allocated based on religious majorities, which created minorities in both nations and forced millions into migration. Many were unwilling to leave their ancestral homes, yet were compelled to do so by government orders, resulting in widespread psychological distress.

The story illustrated these conditions through various incidents: one morning, a Muslim lunatic reportedly bathed and shouted “Long live Pakistan!” so loudly that he slipped and fell, knocking himself unconscious. Such moments served to portray the trauma of the time—marked by suffering, displacement, kidnapping, and violence—that deeply scarred the collective psyche.

Manto’s narrative suggested that those discussing Partition were as irrational as the lunatics, and that the world undergoing such a division resembled an asylum. The asylum’s portrayal symbolized the insanity of the act itself. Survivors of Partition carried these memories for the rest of their lives, and women in particular suffered extreme violence, with some choosing death to preserve their honor.

Bishan Singh, the protagonist, emerged as the symbolic voice of Partition’s intellectual trauma. Known as “Toba Tek Singh” in the asylum because he had been the landlord of that village, he was shown as unwilling to accept displacement. When told that Toba Tek Singh was now in Pakistan and that he would be moved to India, he vowed to stay in his homeland. On the day of the exchange, when all other transfers had been completed, Bishan Singh was found lying dead in the strip of no-man’s-land between India and Pakistan.

Manto thus portrayed Bishan Singh as a metaphor for loss, suffering, bewilderment, and helplessness, reflecting not only the trauma of the people but also the author’s own anguish over the arbitrary division. The asylum became the metaphorical subcontinent, with the inmates’ madness representing the illogical and destructive nature of Partition violence.

Conclusion

Toba Tek Singh was a short story written by Saadat Hasan Manto in 1955, in which he discussed the psychological violence of Partition. In the text, Manto conveyed that those who had spoken about Partition were portrayed as insane, and the world in which the division had

taken place was likened to an asylum. The lunacy of the patients served as a mirror reflecting the madness of the outside world.

The asylum was presented as a metaphor for the irrationality of Partition, symbolizing that those who had experienced psychological and physical abuse during this period were haunted by it for the rest of their lives. The event was remembered as one of the most barbaric in history, marked by the mass killing of women and children, and by the dislocation and agonising separation of families and communities.

Bishan Singh, the central character, was described as a metaphor for the grief, heartbreak, confusion, and chaos suffered by those who had witnessed their homeland being torn apart. He represented both the people and their mental state during the division. Manto reportedly believed that the exchange of populations along religious lines had been an irrational, arbitrary, and senseless act that turned people into strangers in their own homes overnight.

Thus, Bishan Singh's character was also interpreted as a reflection of Manto's own suffering and confusion about the Partition. Through this portrayal, the author had observed and documented the harsh reality of the event's physical and psychological violence.

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