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TOBA TEK SINGH AND KHOL DO: UNMASKING THE MASK OF POWER POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Violence and partition are synonymous with each other. Where there is partition there is violence, abduction, murder, burning, and migration, destruction of lives, wealth, culture and ethnicity. Men and women, irrespective of their caste, creed and gender, are equally become the victims of partition and violence. Women lose their virginity. Those who are friends at a time become 'fernemy' in a few seconds. They, in a frenzic moment, begin to kill each other mercilessly. Power-monger politician play a vital role behind the scenario as if it seems that they laugh at behind their lips. The innocent people become puppet at their hands and they gain their objectives and retain in power forever. History justifies itself. Power is dangerous. Power- monger gains power at the cost of countless lives. It continues. Never ends. The subject of partition receives huge attention among the poets, writers, novelists, historians, and academicians. They tried to unmask the bitter truth and naked reality behind this partition. The most celebrated author among them is Saadat Hasan Manto (controversial also). To give justice of my article I have selected two stories from Manto's collection, one is *Toba Tek Singh* and the other is *Khol Do* (Open It). My tendency to bypass these two stories is curious one since partition has played an important role in the annals of British decolonization especially because it raises serious theoretical questions about the nature of postcolonial state formation, nation-building, state division and the role of power-monger behind this politics.

Key words: Partition, power-monger, violence, mask, communalism.

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INTRODUCTION

"Unity in diversity"-the sole *mantra* of United India lost its glory when Bengal divided into two parts in 1905 popularly known as *bango vango* and again on 15th August 1947 the partition of British India into two independent nations-India and Pakistan. The joy of independence got married with the partition and now it became "aching joys". At the root of partition there lie the seeds of communalism between the two principle communities i.e., Hindus and Muslims. Communalism is a political assertiveness of a community and it tries to maintain its unique homogenous identity in a heterogeneous society. It has no end. In the name of religion man turns against each other and begins to kill. "One communalism does not end the other" as the then Indian premier Jawaharlal Nehru ventures "each feeds on the other and both fatten." But who are the actors behind

the instigation of communalism-is it Quid-I-Azam Ali Mohammad Jinnah, Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi, Jawharlal Nehru or in political terms Muslim League of National Congress? They are all along with the colonial rulers particularly British rulers. The great modern historian like Bipan Chandra, in his book *India's Struggle for Freedom*, suggests that the creation of partition because of the "surging waves of the Muslim communalism and mainly because of the long term failure of both Congress to draw the Muslim masses into the national movement." The tension of communalism begins after the khilafat and non-cooperation movement which also makes the deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relationship. Mushirul Hassan terms it as "bloody vivisection" (xi). The British colonial ruler with heinous "divide and rule" policy paved the way for India and Pakistan division. The *Sepoy Mutiny* in 1857 was also the result of divide and rule policy of the British Government. Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* emphasizes on "colonial nationalism" for partition. He thinks that "the colony confined bureaucrats' pilgrimage" shaped the careers of both the earlier Latin American Creole elites and those of their twentieth century native Asian and African counterparts. He ventures that:

"Out of this pattern[of restricted pilgrimages or colony-confined career routes] came that subtle, half-concealed transformation, step by step, of the colonial-state into the national state, a transformation made possible not only by a solid continuity of personnel, but by the established skein of journeys through which each state was experienced by its functionaries."(22)

He further clarifies that: the isomorphism between each nationalism's territorial stretch and that of the previous imperial administrative unit or of the evolutionary transformation, step by step of the colonial –state into the national state." Joe Cleary in his *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State*, clarifies that:

"Imagined Communities assumes as normative, a greater appreciation of the significance of rival sub-national movements within each colony would allow us to begin to understand why in some colonies communal cleavages should have resulted in territorial division while in other situations where communal or regional cleavages were no less acute- cause such as South-Africa, Nigeria or Lebanon for instances- partition was avoided (18)."

But United India is undone. And the result is the massacre of common folk. The power-mongers have many reasons to celebrate. One million people are believed to have died during the partition. Mushirul Hassan in his book titled *Inventing Boundaries*, suggests that the "range from 29,000 to 50,000 Muslim women and 15,000 to 35,000 Hindus and Sikhs women were abducted, raped, forced to convert and marriage." The reality, pain, agony and suffering are more than that. Words cannot express them. Genius like Manto never fails to depict the agony and pain and sufferings of people during partition. He surpasses all. A plethora of literature is produced on this subject particularly from Indian sub-continent. The trauma, agony and suffering of people have found its space in Saadat Hasan Manto's writings.

TOBA TEK SINGH

Toba Tek Singh is a remarkable work of Manto which highlights the endless suffering of people during partition. Set in a mental asylum at Lahore after two years of partition, the authorities of India and Pakistan decided to transfer the lunatics to their respective countries on the basis of their religions. Manto has ridiculed the formation of separate countries for Hindus and Muslims because of their religion:

A couple of years after the partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatics, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslims lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistan asylum should be sent to India. (110)

Lunatics have no clear idea about the happenings. A Sikh lunatic asks, "Sardarji, why are you being sent to India?" they even have no clear notions about India and Pakistan:

No one knows where this Pakistan was or far it extended. This was the chief reason why inmates who were not totally insane were in a worse dilemma than those utterly mad- they did not know whether they were in India or Pakistan. If they were in India where exactly was Pakistan? (111)

Manto digs at the leaders for their power crave:

Whether or not this was a sane decision we will ever know. But people in knowledgeable circles say that there were many conferences at the highest level between bureaucrats of the two countries before the final agreement was signed and a date fixed for the exchange.(116)

The authorities do not care for common people and their wishes. They have to retain in power, nothing matters. Bishen Singh, popularly known as Toba Tek Singh does not want to leave his own country, his own village that he loves more dearly. At the Wagah Border in Punjab there were slogans all around "Pakistan murdabad" or "Pakistan jindabad". Bishen asks the authority "where is Toba Tek Singh?" the officer answers "of course, in Pakistan". He runs back to Pakistan. He carries gibberish, "o pardi, good good di, anekas di, bedhyani di, moong di dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan (117)." He denies moving despite all kinds of persuasion from the officials:

Bishen Singh planted himself on the dividing line and dug his swollen feet into the ground with such firmness that no one could move him... the man who had spent all the nights and days of the last fifteen years standing on his feet, now sprawled on the ground, face down the barbed wire fence marked the territory of India, another fence marked the territory of Pakistan. In the no man's land between the two barbed wire fences lay the body of Bishen Singh of village Toba Tek Singh. (117)

Thus end the life of Toba Tek Singh and his death unmasks the greed of power-monger and we come to know the harsh reality of partition.

Khol Do (Open It)

Manto's another masterpiece *khol do*, sets during the violence and partition in 1947, depicts the harsh reality of human suffering. The horrendous acts of sexual violence stirred the the whole world. Sirajuddin, an old Muslim man, victim of partition, after regaining consciousness, recalls that he lost his wife while travelling along with their daughter Sakina from India to Pakistan in Punjab Province. At a crowded railway station he also lost his daughter. He hopes to find her and seeks help from volunteers. And finally he finds his daughter with the help of this "volunteers" on a lorry. But she has no *dupatta* to cover her bosom with instead she was wearing a jacket given by her "protector" who used to keep her for their pleasure and amusement. Here the savior becomes the devourer. Sirajuddin never knows that her "protector" were her destroyer of her virginity and respect. He recognizes her daughter by the mole on her checks:

"I am her father," he stammered. The doctor looked at the prostate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man,"open the window".

The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her salwar tied around her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs.

"She is alive. My daughter is alive," Sirajuddin shouted with joy.

The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (Manto, trans. Alok Bhalla)

She gives response through her gesture and takes it as a command as she is now habituated forced by her "protector". The father of the girl happy to find her daughter and his joys know bounds. Actually he never knows what happens to his daughter and now he contented with her. He fails to comprehend what kind of traumatic sexual violation and tortures his daughter had to endure. Only she knows and the doctor and the readers of Manto. It highlights the greed of power-monger politicians who do not care for even the lives of other.

Conclusion

Thus Manto exposes the naked and vulgar reality of partition which the millions of people had to suffer during the India-Pakistan partition. He jibes at the politician, the power-monger, and the colonial-imperial rulers who were solely responsible for partition and incurable sufferings of people. He unmasks the other side of masked politician and power-monger.

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