

Moral Condemnation of Partition Violence in Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*

Dadhi Ram Panthi

Tribhuvan University, Pashupati Multiple Campus,
Chabahil, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract

The research paper; written on the theme of the Indian Partition of 1947 on Saadat Hasan Manto's Toba Tek Singh; attempts to explore the quest for universal moral values. In doing so, the writer presents a character named Bishan Singh who is revolutionary. His attempt to break the religious and cultural boundaries is praiseworthy as he is ready to die on the border i.e. no man's land raising the voice of true universal moral values. In fact, millions died during partition violence. The Muslims died chanting the slogans- "Pakistan Zindabad" and the Hindus and Sikhs died chanting the voice of their liberation and demanding a separate state based on their religious principles. In such a critical condition, the character Bishan Singh neither supports India nor Pakistan; rather he climbs on the tree that lies in between India and Pakistan. His death on no man's land indicates that he is opposing partition and intends to live in harmony. The writer's attempt to disqualify the ethical aspects by highlighting moral values is his condemnation of partition violence.

Keywords: Indian Partition, Revolutionary, Universal moral values, No- man's land, Ethical, Moral.

Introduction and Analysis

Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* exposes not only the idea of the trauma of the Indian partition violence but it also highlights the importance of universal moral values and human values. He is presenting his idea through the role of the protagonist Bishan Singh. Bishan Singh represents Toba Tek Singh and Toba Tek Singh represents Bishan Singh and at the same time Toba Tek Singh represents no man's land from where he is expressing his ideas. Despite being neutral, Bishan Singh, an extreme victim of partition violence is forced to leave Pakistan and is taken to the border in the police custody with all the Hindus and Sikhs from the Lahore asylum. It was decided two or three years after the partition by both the Indian government and the government of Pakistan that Muslim lunatics from Indian institutions should be sent over to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics from Pakistani asylums should be allowed to go to India. Bishan Singh seems quite radical and wants to protest the decision of both the governments as he is quite away from politics and force which is being exercised in the name of religion.

When force is used to chase the partition victim Toba Tek Singh away and then he remarks, "I want to live neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan- I will live on this tree"(15). It clearly indicates that he is quite neutral and he is far from politics and ideology. He means to say that human life is greater than the nation. He is climbing on the tree which lies in no man's land. Some of the lunatics, who are not completely mad, shout "Pakistan Zindabad and Pakistan Murdabad!"(18). Here, Manto tells us that human values or moral values lie in complete lunacy. People forget their ideology if they are completely traumatized, as traumatized as Toba Tek Singh. He condemns the force used by any government either by the Indian government or by the Pakistani government. Toba Tek Singh or Bishan Singh is speaking from a common ground that is neither Pakistan nor Hindustan. In the story, the expression, "When the guards threatened to use force, he installed himself in a place between the borders and stood there as if no power in the world could move him"(19). It exposes that the use of power violates human values. Force is used upon Toba Tek Singh and other lunatics to displace them and it exemplifies that misuse of power leads to the end of moral values and it is the sign of anarchy.

Bishan Singh's cry is the cry for human values. The end of his traumatic life is not the end but it is the sacrifice for human values and moral values. He is dying in no man's land calling human values. While dying it is heard, "... a peircing cry arose from Bishan Singh..."(19). And the expression indicates that Bishan Singh's extreme pain is unbearable. Toba Tek Singh's neutral position can be felt through the expression as Manto exposes, «Beyond a wired fence on one side of him was Hindustan and beyond a wired fence on the other side was Pakistan. In the middle, on a stretch of land that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh"(19). His life ends in such a land which has no name, no national boundary and he does not confine him within the limit of any religion. For him, the earth has been a common home in which all human beings should have equal rights and freedom for life. And religions, customs, forces and issues of nationalism all are obstacles that distort moral values.

Tarannum Riyaz argues that the main character Bishan Singh in the story "*Toba Tek Singh*", is the writer Manto himself as he says:

It seems that the main character of the short story, a mad person, is no other than Manto himself. At the time of partition the piece of land, Toba Tek Singh, fell neither within

the boundary of India nor of Pakistan. Toba Tek Sigh is a piece of land which has no specific national identity....(205)

Here, Toba Tek Singh's identity allegorizes Manto's identity that is forced on him. In this sense Toba Tek Singh is partly autobiographical. On the one hand, Toba Tek Singh represents a fictional character named Bishan Singh. On the other Manto's own life.

For Devendra Issar, Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* exposes Manto's identity as "Liminal Zones". He argues:

Manot's stories often take place in liminal spaces where borders are erased and consciousness loses its bearings, where sanity and insanity, health and sickness, moral goodness and sin cease to be sharply demarcated. The asylum and the hospital are apt symbols for life in such spaces.(186)

The main issue raised by Devendra, in this sense, is the issue of moral values. He might be indicating that there lies humanity where borders are erased and consciousness loses. Asylums and hospitals can be such liminal spaces where issues of nations become minor and all the victims are seen through the perspective of human values. Such spaces are free from politics.

Prakash Bodh in his "Nation and Identity in the Narratives of Partition" writes:

Bishan Singh's identity is established by his pseudonym, Toba Tek Singh, the name that alludes to the character more often than to his village. By this simple device, Manto is able to collapse the individual and the communitarian identity. Bishan Singh is Toba Tek Singh both literally and metaphorically. He not only belongs to his village; he becomes his village, land and home....(14)

Prakash Bodh's idea expressed in this essay is that when we are able to collapse our individual identity and communitarian values then after human values will appear. Forgetting our personal identity and communitarian identity, we will be able to see and analyze the real trauma of the partition victims. We should see the pain of the sufferers by forgetting our identity, community and politics. This is Manto's demand.

Harish Narang expresses that Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* does not talk about the lunacy of the victims but it is the use of force that becomes lunatic. The power exercising authority has been brutal and this is an act of lunacy. Bishan Singh is ironically presented as a lunatic. He is an extreme victim but not a real lunatic. Both the governments forgot human values and moral values so Bishan Singh is presented here as the character who carries human values. Harish Narang argues, "Use of force upon common but the very lunacy of forcing people to give up their roots-physical, cultural and psychological"(72). It shows people have been traumatized physically, culturally and psychologically due to the use of force even after the partition violence. Khalid Hasaan writes, "India was free. Pakistan was free from the moment of its birth, but in both states, man's enslavement continued: by prejudice, by religious fanaticism, by slavery"(90). Prejudice, religious fanaticism and slavery are the problems of both India and Pakistan even after the partition violence and these problems have been the obstacles in the path of development and moral values have collapsed due to these problems. He further argues, "... wherever I go, I will make my little world"(89). In this way, he is in favour of mobility and he believes that our identity is determined through mobility but not within certain national boundary fixed by certain nations. Gopi Chand

Narang asserts, «The logic of human relationship is more powerful than the logic of religion" (vii). He is making us aware that human values are better than religious values. In *Toba Tek Singh*, the protagonist Bishan Singh does not listen about any religion but he sees only human being in the centre. Beerendra Pandey argues, "Trauma is sociopsychological"(125). His notion of trauma is neither singularly cultural nor exclusively psychological; it coalesces the two. Pandey agrees to Manto's notion of trauma as he knows, "Morality, for Manto means emphasis on human relations..."(131). It means trauma of 1947 should be seen through humanitarian level neither through merely cultural nor psychological level. Pandey's disagreement is that both India and Pakistan are involving in identity politics forgetting the real trauma of the victims which is dangerous for both. Pandey further argues:

The trauma of 1947... means speaking to a shared suffering from the perspective of a shared moral need for the pain to be listened to by a moral community... morality functions as the basis for disqualifying ethics concerned with personal and communal relationships. (131)

Ethics is disqualified in the presence of morality because ethics does not care about the real pains of the victims. Like Manto, Pandey demands the formation of the moral community.

In her "Trauma and Testimony," Veena Das raises the issues of prophecy, everyday business and acknowledgment. She studies the prophecy theory of Reinhart Koselleck and Achille Mbembe's theory of subjectivity and proposes for remaking. Koselleck's notion is futuristic notion where as Mbembe's notion is 'self-writing'. Mbembe argues that Afro-Americans don't write themselves but others write about them so their subjectivity cannot emerge in their writings. Without subjectivity, trauma cannot be authentic. Veena Says real trauma can be realized only through everyday business and acknowledgment. She further argues, "I found that the making of the self was located not in the shadow of some ghostly past but in the context of making the everyday inhabitable"(300). It shows if victims are busy with daily business, they will be less traumatized. Actually, she is studying the gap between prophetic approach and diagnostic approach for the remaking of the future. Here, she is quite hopeful about future as she expresses, "...public acknowledgment of hurt can allow new opportunities to be created for resumption of everyday life"(302). In this way she speaks on the behalf of future community. Manto also seems quite optimistic about the creation of a good future community. Geoffrey Hartman writes, "Monuments can foster forgetfulness in the way they select what is to be remembered. They are highly visible metonymic markers that can be politically exploited..."(72). Video testimony tries to struggle to be authentic/truthful but it remains only realistic. Video testimony loses its aura due to simulacrum so video testimony can be realistic but not truthful. Remembering trauma through a monument is not authentic. Trauma should not be forgotten deliberately because forgetting refers to 'mental block'. Acknowledging trauma is a must. Remembering trauma through icon is metonymy. So remembering trauma through the icon is political which is quite dangerous and it creates a lot of conflicting situations. Hartman's ideas can be connected in Manto only in the sense that both are in search of authenticity of traumatic testimony. But Agamben is quite closer to the ideas of Manto because Agamben in "Testimony and Authenticity", raises the issue of "Muselman" (qtd. in Hartman: 87). 'Muselman' refers to a survival with extreme pain. 'Muselman' is the extreme victim of extreme violence. 'Muselman' is also called living dead. There is contradiction between Hartman and Agamben in terms of the authenticity of trauma. For Agamben, living dead or extreme victim can be the best source of authentic testimony but for Hartman true witness is the dead. So searching truthful testimony is a vain job but Agamben

disagrees with him and tells that truthful testimony lies in extreme victim or living dead or 'Muselman'. In this connection the protagonist Bishan Singh of Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* is the extreme victim of extreme violence who has lost consciousness and is demanding freedom. He is lunatic in the sense that he is in the state of melancholia due to extreme violence. In other words, he is 'Muselman' of Agamben. His speech becomes authentic because he is not escaping or running away from no man's land. He cries a lot and dies there. Video testimony is the interest of Hartman and the problem in it is the problem of ethics. But Agamben's interest is the interest of Muselman's muteness or unspeakability. Agamben, like Manto is highlighting moral issues not ethical issues.

In *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit also raises the problem of ethics and memory. Ethics is in binary opposition to morality. Remembering the past is our ethical responsibility. He argues, "Being moral is a required good; being ethical is, in principle, an optional good"(105). Ethical issue is optional whereas moral issue is a need. The major issue raised in this essay is the issue of relation. Relation consists of two parts: thin relation and thick relation. Ethical relation is thick relation whereas moral relation is thin relation. If we want to be the member of a certain community we are in thick relation but if we take us as a member of whole universe we are in thin relation. The members of thin relation are few because very few people believe in moral values. The writer further argues, "For the goodness within the relation, memory is crucial"(106). So thick relation is good relation in ethical level and good relation is based on memory. But thin relation seems better in moral level. In *Toba Tek Singh*, Bishan Singh is maintaining just thin relation as he strongly believes in moral values. He has a very thin relation with India or Pakistan so he has been alone. The writer further says, "Ethical element that makes good relation"(106). We lack human values if we live just ethical life though it seems better in individual and cultural level.

Amitav Ghosh, in his novel *The shadow Lines* expresses that national and cultural boundaries are useless. Partition is the power to make the familiar to unfamiliar even uncanny. Nationalism is a problem for him. He does not talk about Indian line or Pakistani line but his journey is towards human line. This is his cosmopolitan attitude. The writer exposes this attitude through the mouth of the narrator which is expressed, "...believing in the reality of space... I believed in the reality of nations and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality"(219). Here, the writer is using the phrase 'another reality'. What does it indicate? He might be indicating that human values exist beyond the reality of nations and borders. So 'home' is not a geographical entity, but an emotional, moral and intellectual entity which can be identified in *The Shadow Lines*. This is the meeting point of Manto and Ghosh as both are in the quest for 'Home' which is common ground for all. The protagonist Bishan Singh's struggle is the struggle for common home where human values exist. This is his cosmopolitan notion.

Allen Meek is quite influenced by Agamben's theory of Homo sacer and argues, "In Agamben's theory Homo sacer, once a marginalized figure, has become no longer the exception but the rule..."(25). Meek's opinion proves that victims are not real victims. They are made up victims by force. If they get freedom they can be rulers not just exception. In this sense 'Homo sacer' is a person of bare life and he is the person who has been marginalized by the people who are in the power. So far as Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* is concerned, Bishan Singh is not real lunatic but he has been made lunatic by force. It shows biopolitics is the main cause of the violation of human values. Meek further agrees to Kristeva and says photographs are more speakable than the experience of real death itself in the trenches as he argues reading Kristeva's theory of *Powers of Horror*:

The spectacle of mass death and decomposing bodies in trench warfare was unprecedented. Julia Kristeva has argued that such an experience of the abject- the body as disgusting other- threatens the foundations of the self's sense of individual integrity. The experience of death in the trenches was more than indescribable; it was unspeakable. But photographs could show it. (59)

It shows the world of traumatic image is more communicable and speakable than real experience of traumatic violence and death. In Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* it is quite clear that the image of the death of Bishan Singh is comparatively more traumatic and painful than such real event like the real event of 1947 partition violence of India and Pakistan.

Walter Benjamin, in "Theories, Histories and Images" argues, "Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was'. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger"(qtd. in Meek: 41). Benjamin sees problems in history as it is not written from the below. Traumatic memory tends to come in our mind but we forcefully try to forget it. This is the moment of danger for Benjamin. Real trauma comes automatically through memory and we never try to suppress or forget it. In *Toba Tek Singh*, the writer Manto has presented such a character named Bishan Singh or Toba Tek Singh who is naturally expressing his pain without fear. He does not care about the use of force and dies in no man's land with a loud shriek. He knows it is moment of danger but he does not afraid. His cry is the cry against biopolitics. Lacapra's emphasis is on empathy where as "Benjamin rejected empathy"(Meek: 43). It shows Lacapra was interested in cultural politics where as Benjamin hated it. For Benjamin humanity was greater than culture. Benjamin's major concern was to "brush history against the grain" (Meek: 44). His interest was that truth of violence emerges if history becomes 'discontinuous' and if it is written in 'unsettled' manner. Unless and until it is done human values are always in the shadow. Same thing is expressed in Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* because no one shows interest to listen the voice of Bishan Singh or Toba Tek Singh.

Elissa Marder in her "Trauma and Literary Studies" writes, «Elman proposes that certain historical trials inadvertently put the very blindness of the law to its own limits on display in the trail ... and enacts the effects of the very trauma that law is unable to see"(50). Elissa and Felman both favour moral values. The major point of Felman is that trauma does not have legal values. Trauma cannot be closed through law. Felman argues that law is unable to heal trauma. Literature is more authentic testimony than court of law. Law only works on the basis of closer. Literature can be taken as a traumatic testimony but not history or law. Trauma literature is acting out and it has some healing power. "Literature", in the words of Manto, "is not a malady but a response to malady. It is a measure of the temperature of the country, of the nation. It tells us of its health and disease..."(qtd. in M Asaduddin: 24). Manto is quite hopeful in the sense that literature emerges with some sort of healing power. For him literature is not sickness but rather a response to sickness. He means to say that literature only can address trauma but not history and literature carries human values and moral values. So Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* is a piece of literature but it is more powerful than any historical document and law.

Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* is a triumph of ambivalence as it proclaims the in-betweenness of the protagonist. The madman's death takes place in no man's land where the writ of neither nation prevails. 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. The partition became a metaphor for the post independence communal divide. The story

is short but it tells a lot about partition violence of India and Pakistan in 1947. Manto suggests us to fight for humanity and morality forgetting national boundary, culture and religion.

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