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PROBLEMATIZING THE NATIONALIST DISCOURSE OF INDO-PAK PARTITION: A POSTCOLONIAL GOTHIC READING OF MANTO'S SHORT FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of Saadat Hassan Manto's partition stories in the light of postcolonial gothic thereby exploring the author's negation of the Two-Nation theory behind 1947 Indo-Pak partition. Instead of conjuring real ghosts or apparitions, these stories paint gothic images of brutal homicide, mutilation of body parts, and rape of a dead woman to present before us the loss of humanity, sensitivity and reason that was manifested during partition and its entailing migration of millions of people. Manto's use of gothic elements in his stories primarily refers to the ghosts of nationalist discourses that possessed the people's rationality and humanness and directed them to undertake mass-scale destruction, bloodshed, and ethnic violence. The result-directed analysis of the selected short stories argues that Manto adopts gothic conventions to problematize the nationalist discourses such as Two-nation theory and their resulting trauma and mourning for the past loss that still haunt the generations of both India and Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Saadat Hassan Manto's partition stories fall under the category of postcolonial literature which David Punter defines as "the uncanny, the haunted and haunting...which conjures phantoms, which banishes phantoms, and which always leaves us uncertain whether or not we are alone" (5-6). Gothic conventions in postcolonial literature are deployed with an aim to foreground the haunting of a crushed past, and to picture frightening experiences faced

during colonization. Fiction writers from (ex) colonies find gothic the most appropriate literary form/genre in order to challenge the predominant historical narratives, and to illustrate the concerns of a nation struggling for an identity in the postcolonial time and world. Here, it would be harmless to mention that the colonial experience of the Indian Sub-continent was different from that of other regions like Africa and Caribbean Islands in many ways. For instance, the people of the Sub-continent were not physically traded or transported as slaves, and that the British colonizers came under the disguise of business/commercial pursuits, and gradually got hold of the political power in order to extract and export resources such as coal and useful minerals from the region to their country.

The Indian Sub-continent comprises of multiple ethnicities, and the policy of “divide and rule” was used by the British colonizers to achieve power over the indigenous population. This strategy of division then crept into the very psychological and social fabric of the Sub-continent whose residents previously celebrated their region’s ethnic and religious diversity and multiculturalism. Ultimately, the ending of British rule with the partition of the Indian Sub-continent into two countries was charged with extreme brutality and bestiality as the parties of both the sides; Muslims, and Hindu and Sikhs caused great damage to each other’s properties, lives and specifically women. This partition was followed by migration which got plagued by unimaginable violence and viciousness. Ironically, this violence during the apparently decolonial process of Empire-going-back was not done by the British rulers; rather it was executed by the indigenous people of the region based on ethnic and religious differences. The blood-stained political event of 1947 and its consequences still run deep into the stream of political relations between the nation-states of India and Pakistan. But most importantly, the psychological traumas of melancholia and mourning caused by the atrocious partition and migration still exist and afflict both the nations-that are broadly depicted by the writers of the region (Tomsky 61).

The first generation of postcolonial writers from the Sub-continent such as Manto, Intizar Hussain, Abdullah Hussein, Bapsi Sidhwa and Khushwant Singh voice the agony resulted from the traumatic experiences of partition extensively in their writings by using gothic conventions of dark imagery, and memories from the past. Therefore, it can be articulated that the postcolonial or post-partition literature produced in the Indian Sub-continent intersects with the gothic literary conventions to articulate the psychological trauma that resulted from the loss of land, roots, relations, and loved ones.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is rooted in qualitative research in which the researchers have undertaken a narrative analysis of the selected fictional accounts. In addition, scholarly books and other relevant references have also been utilized to substantiate the argument and results of this research which explored the use of gothic elements, and their meaning and dynamics in Manto’s short fiction. Some data has also been taken from other sources such as journals, books of literature, author’s biography, essays, articles, and other relevant information. A Thematic analysis of the selected short stories has been carried out through

careful perusal of the texts. The researchers chose the intersection of postcolonial theory and gothic literary techniques developed by David Punter and Julie Hakim Azzam to be employed as theoretical framework for the analysis of the Manto's partition stories. This research examined the issues of political discourses such as nationalism, ethnic violence, postcolonial experience, trauma and suppression of women and minorities.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- To analyse the dynamics and reason of Manto's use of gothic elements and details in representing Indo-Pak partition in the selected short stories.
- To investigate the writer's stance and treatment of the political event of Indo-Pak partition and the nationalist discourse of Two-nation theory embedded therein.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the dynamics and reason behind Manto's use of gothic elements and details in representing Indo-Pak partition in the selected short stories.
2. What is the writer's stance and treatment of the political event of Indo-Pak partition and the nationalist discourse of Two-nation theory embedded therein?

ANALYSIS

The selected stories; Toba Tek Singh, Open It!, Cold Flesh, Mistake Removed, Mishtake, Ritualistic Difference, Out of Consideration, Due Supervision, Modesty and The Room with the Bright Light- written on partition by Saadat Hassan Manto- unveil the violent consequences of the Indian partition in 1947, and the melancholia caused by this political event with an ambiance of Goth to stimulate a threatening sense of torment and chaos. Gothic ambiance is created in these stories through dark imagery, cruel manslaughter, alienated places, mutilated body parts, and rape of a dead woman to illustrate the psychological trauma for the loss as well as the bestiality incited in-, and exercised by-, the people of the region during partition.

Philip Holden maintains that the gothic elements in the postcolonial gothic are "seen as directly addressing and calling into question colonialism, imperialism, humanism, and legacies of the Enlightenment" (354). But, Saadat Hassan Manto's short fiction written on the subject of partition as postcolonial gothic fiction differs from Holden's theorization. His portrayal of the partition, and the violence entailed by it call into question the nationalist discourses which caused the two major nations of the region to devastate each other cruelly. Manto witnessed the colonial reality of India and then partition of the Sub-continent in 1947 which led him to migrate to Pakistan from Bombay. The partition based on nationalism caused extreme violence among the multiple ethnicities of the Sub-continent which rendered the nations, especially the migrants, of India-Pakistan subject to, what Freud labels as, "melancholia and mourning" for the past lost.

Julie Hakim Azzam argues that gothic in the postcolonial fiction addresses four main issues; (a) it highlights the failure of nationalist discourses, (b) it unveils “unhomely” nature of the home constructed in abroad after displacement/migration, (c) it “employs a gothic historical sensibility or a sense of ‘pastness’ in the present, and (d) it “deploys the gothic as a mode of frightening itself with images of transgressive women who threaten to expose the dark underbelly of their own historical and political contexts” (iv-v). Manto’s partition stories can be analyzed with reference to the first three concerns of the postcolonial gothic literature conceptualized by Azzam. But, “pastness” or “historical sensibility” and critique of “nationalist ideals” occupy a wide space in these short stories. These ties with the past or history can be analysed in Manto’s fiction in relation to the trauma of “melancholia and mourning” conceptualized by Freud, Abraham and Torok and Ian Chambers.

Manto’s short story *Toba Tek Singh* offers a great deal with reference to “pastness” and “melancholia” in this critical analysis. In this text, the author narrates detailed accounts of mental patients in an asylum in Lahore- among whom the Hindu and Sikh patients are waiting to be transported to India under the dictates of some new law. The asylum consists of numerous psychological patients who suffered from the traumatic loss during partition, while some people confined therein are not actually mentally deteriorated. Manto gives little accounts of their responses to the issue of their transfer. The dilemma and absurdity of the patients in the Lahore asylum in relation to partition is narrated by Manto in this story as,

“All that these inmates knew was that there was a man by the name of Quaid-e-Azam who had set up a separate state for Muslims, called Pakistan. But they had no idea where Pakistan was. That was why they were all at a loss whether they were now in India or in Pakistan. If they were in India, then where was Pakistan? If they were in Pakistan, how come that only a short while ago they were in India? How could they be in India a short while ago and now suddenly in Pakistan?” (Manto: *Life and Works* 282).

This predicament of the people in post-partition time of Sub-continent portrayed by the writer not only implicitly critiques the failure of nationalist discourses but, it also thematizes that “the relation to the past is strictly not a relation to one’s own past but to a social history and its material and institutional effects, and [it] is in no simple way a matter of internal psychic dynamics” (Lloyd 212). In addition to that, Manto shows that the psychological downfall of these patients is basically on account of their rootlessness. For instance, Bishan Singh keeps on asking about his native village Toba Tek Singh, and he remains adamant to return to his home. Unfortunately, his past home has now become “unhomely” for him because under the partition’s dictates, Bishan Singh is Hindustani while Toba Tek Singh has been declared a part of Pakistan (Azzam 35).

Bishun Singh- who has been confined “in the asylum for fifteen years”- constantly keeps on muttering to himself “[o]per di gur gur di, anx di, bay dhiana di, mung di daal di, of di laltain” (Manto, *Manto Life and Works* 282). His continuously uttered “gibberish” explicates what Chambers describes as

result of “loss of roots, and the subsequent weakening in the grammar of ‘authenticity’... [o]ur sense of belonging, our language and the myths we carry in us remain, but no longer as ‘origins’ or signs of ‘authenticity’ capable of guaranteeing the sense of our lives. They now linger on as traces, voices, memories and murmurs that are mixed in with other histories, episodes, encounters” (18-19).

Furthermore, Toba Tek Singh’s little account of a lawyer confined in the asylum-“who lost his sanity over a tragic love affair”- remains “deeply grieved (after) he discovered that Amritsar had become a part of India because the girl he loved was from there... and he cursed all the leaders, both Hindu and Muslim leaders who had conspired to divide India into two, thus making his beloved a Hindustani while he was now a Pakistani” (Manto, *Manto Life and Works* 282).

The melancholia of the lawyer caused by the traumatic loss and his continuation to “care for her (lawyer’s beloved) despite his mental condition” (282) corresponds to Freud and Ruti’s argument that “[s]uch objects, which often take on a larger-than-life meaning and magnificence, demand the individual’s loyalty so intensely that disavowal becomes impossible” (639).

On the other hand, Bishan Singh’s “imperviousness to the passage of time”, his act of constantly “standing [on feet] inspite of the bodily discomfort” for fifteen years, and his futile “long[ing] for his visitors” (Manto, *Manto Life and Works* 283-85) foreground “the public display of an interminable process of mourning” (Abraham and Torok 136). And in the end, Bishan Singh’s forceful transfer to the Indian border by the Pakistani soldiers, and his passionate insistence on returning to Toba Tek Singh; his native homeland explicate his deep sense for “pastness” (Azzam 36). Hence, both the lawyer and Bishan Singh’s obsession with their past conform to Abraham and Torok’s idea that, “[m]elancholics cherish the memory as their most precious possession” (136). To sum up the analysis of this story, I would state that the Toba Tek Singh’s asylum stands as an allegory of the post-partition Sub-continent in which the melancholic and psychologically distorted nations reside. And, as a microcosm of the postcolonial South Asian Subcontinent, the mental asylum of Lahore portrays the situation of the post-partition subjects conceptualized by Azzam as the “unhomely” nature of the house constructed in the postcolonial condition (35).

Manto’s other short stories, such as *Mistake Removed*, narrate the cruel manslaughter and mutilation of body parts done publically during the riots between Hindus and Muslims. In *Mistake Removed*, a man- who self-proclaims to be Dharam Chand- is murdered by Hindus on investigating his naked body which reveals his real identity as a Muslim man. The “evidence” of his “circumcision” is declared by Dharam Chand as a “mistake” that he had to make in order to deceive the Muslims while crossing their area. But in the end, the “mistake (of his body) is removed (by the Hindu soldiers) and with that Dharam Chand” (Manto, *Manto Panorama* 46-47). Similarly, in the stories; *Modesty* and *Tidiness*, Manto narrates brutal incidents in which the

passengers of a train “who belonged to the other religion were methodically picked out and slaughtered” (Manto Panorama 57, 63).

The stories *Ritualistic Difference* and *Mishtake* fall in the same category of brutal partition's representation as they present little accounts of discussion among Manto's characters regarding the “correct religious ritual” to “slaughter someone” (Manto Panorama 61, 62). On the other hand, in the story *Due Supervision*, Manto produces a staunch critique of the “military's neutrality” by narrating through a character that “everything (including murder/rape of the migrating people) is done under the due supervision” of the army men (Manto Panorama 55).

All the above summarized short stories of Manto portraying the brutalities of partition and migration of the Indian Sub-continent explicate the loss of humanness, sympathy and sensitivity of the nations of the region that resulted from the prevalent ethnic and nationalist discourses. His short fiction on the Indian Sub-continent's partition through the deployment of gothic features-illustrates Manto's aim to criticize the nationalist discourses, and to foreground the loss of humans' critical faculties- caused by the rhetoric of nationalism which led the masses into massacres thereby ignoring the value of human life.

The end of reason on account of nationalism has also been portrayed in the story *Dog of Taytwal*. In this story, Manto narrates the account of a wandering dog which is killed by both the Pakistani and Indian soldiers near the border who maintain that “[n]ow the dogs too will have to be either Hindustani or Pakistani” (Manto, *Manto Life and Works* 162). Each party considers the dog to be of the opposite country's origin. Manto, through this story, exposes the absurdity and lack of sagacity of the Sub-continent's people who killed humans as well as the innocent animals in the name of loyalty to religion and nation. Here, Manto's story works as postcolonial gothic fiction which “appears upon the realization of the failure of the national or political project in question” (Azzam 4).

On the other hand, *Out of Consideration* is a two-lined story which depicts the scene of harassment of a young girl in front of her father. Similarly, *Open It!* narrates the story of an old-man in search of his young beautiful daughter Sakina whom he lost when the train to Pakistan carrying his family was attacked by the Hindu rioters. Sirajuddin's “nightmarish vision [rises] before his eyes – flames, loot... people running... a station... firing... darkness and Sakina” after remaining unconscious for a day (Manto). Later on, Sirajuddin is told by young men of the refugee camp that his daughter will be looked for during their patrolling, and that they will bring her back to him. After many days, Sakina is found by the neighboring men in injured and unconscious state by the roadside. She is transferred to the camp's medical clinic. When the doctor asks Sirajuddin to “open the window”, the girl makes a move and opens the “cord holding up her trousers... [and] the doctor [breaks] into cold sweat” (Manto). The story reveals that Sakina was found, but then sexually assaulted, by the same youngsters who promised to help her father. Manto, in these stories, reveals not only the failure of the “promised land”, but he also refers to

the “failure of nationalist” rhetoric by exposing that women were not even safe from the men of their own nation/religion/ethnicity. (Azzam 39).

Cold Flesh is another story by Manto detailing the victimization of women during partition. This tale unveils the extreme guilt and mourning of a Sikh man Esther Singh- who fails to respond to his wife’s seductive ventures- on account of remembering the incident of killing a Muslim family, and raping the corpse of the family’s girl which had become “cold flesh” (Manto). Esther Singh’s “melancholia and mourning” results from the loss of his humanness (Freud 244-46) and this trauma “encourages a rich sense of the presence of the past, the historical depth that underlies and helps to determine the shape and significance of the present” (Azzam 36).

The last story under examination in this paper is The Room with the Bright Light. Manto, in this story, narrates the account of a man- who visits an area called “Qaiser Gardens” which he used to come to in the past. The character laments on the “desolate look” of “Qaiser Gardens” and recalls the past glory of the area as it “used to be such a gay place, full of bright, happy, carefree men and women” (Manto, Manto Panorama 100). He wanders in the area by strolling through “dark courtyard and dark corridor” and ascends “dilapidated stairs” (102). Manto, again criticizing the nationalist political discourses of Inqilab, narrates, “[it] was nothing short of a revolution, but a revolution, which had brought decay” on account of “riots, accompanied by massacres and rapes... during [which], women had been stripped naked and their breasts chopped off... [that made] everything look naked and ravaged” (Manto Panorama 100-101). The protagonist’s remembrance of the old Qaiser Gardens illustrates the “mourning” of Manto and his generation who witnessed and suffered the penalties of partition directly. The Room with the Bright Light depicts what Freud formulates as “mourning for lost objects, places, or ideals” (248).

CONCLUSION

To sum up the whole study of this paper, I would argue that Manto’s short stories on partition portrayed with gothic ambiance represent the postcolonial gothic fiction- which “is shaped by a historical sensibility or sense of pastness”- to foreground the “melancholia and mourning” of Manto and his compatriots who had to go through the violent partition in 1947 (Azzam 36, Freud 246). Moreover, the selected stories analyzed in this paper can be seen as the postcolonial gothic attempting to respond to “the problematic questions of the postcolonial “domestic terrain:” question[ing] the concerns of legitimate origins; rightful inhabitants; usurpation and occupation; and nostalgia for an impossible nationalist politics”, and to the “failure of national politics that are riven by sectarian, gender, class, and caste divisions” (Azzam 32-36). Furthermore, Azzam theorizes that, “women signify nationness, [and] a threat to their femininity or sexual purity constitutes a threat to national identity”- which clearly corresponds to the portrayal of women’s victimization in relation to partition depicted by Manto (39). Hence, it can be observed that Manto’s short fiction, as a work of postcolonial gothic, attempts not only to highlight his disappointment with the promised nationalist ideals, but it also portrays the traumatic exploitation of women thereby exposing the continuous

threat to the “nationness” of the newly made countries. Moreover, his partition stories expound the “unhomely” nature of the newly constructed homes after migration thereby vocalizing the melancholia of the “weary generations” plagued by the past loss.

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