

ISSN: 0976-8165

# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Vol. 7, Issue- 3 [June 2016]

## 7th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

*The Criterion*



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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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## Partition and Displacement: A Comparative Study of *Topi Shukla* and *Toba Tek Singh*

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“The judgement of religion has finally been made –

She gazed at the mirror and saw a numb creature,

Neither Hindu, nor Muslim

A human being stripped of all that meant life –“ (17-20)

*-The Death Train*

Partition – the most anomalous, diabolic act which the subcontinent witnessed in its history. It did not create fences between the arbitrary lands, but the lives of populous was thrown into such arbitrariness, that it still continues to find a “life” in the shackles of devastated humanity. The actions stimulated by handful of louts, weakened the sense of political judgements; the retribution which the “brothers” inflicted on each other was immeasurable. Moral righteousness, social sense, and brethren, were terms coarsened by the vendetta, which the British were successful in instilling.

The ‘Two-Nation Theory’, was introduced in the Lahore Resolution of 1940, and for the first time the roots to demand for a sovereign and independent Muslim state started emerging. Some critics allege that that the British haste led to the cruelties of the partition. Post Second World War, the stressed nation had diminishing resources, hence it became difficult to keep order. The British were left with no option but to play the inhumane card, and to put the humanity on stake. This celerity of winding their rule in India resulted in this redundant act of partition, even before the scheduled time of June, 1948.

The initial response of the populous towards the two nation theory was of utter disbelief. This implausible and capricious division of the nation by those in power left the common man in sheer confusion. The uproar that broke out during partition was incomprehensible. It was indiscernible that the same Hindus and Muslims who had taken the task of toppling the British from their roots together, in the rage of fanaticism and blind fervour, portrayed violence which was indecipherable. This superfluous act not only led to the insanity among individuals but among the entire communities.

*Rahi Masum Raza* and *Sadat Hasan Manto* were among the few writers who had the eye to focus on this primordial satanic act. For decision makers who remain unaffected, it was simply a matter of saying few words, but these few words turned the lives of the entire nation completely upside down, making them vagabonds and aliens in the land which till then had been their home. These works bitterly accuse partition in a cynical, ironical manner. These are an attempt to cement the temper, the ideologies, the ethos, the fervour which brought a draconian change in the society. Both the writers have commented on the unpredictability of political decisions which affected millions of lives.

*Raza* and *Manto* show, how geography and human identity share a strong emotional relationship built up over years at an unconscious plane. Identity is intrinsically linked to homeland. Thus, *Topi Shukla* and *Toba Tek Singh* are not merely names, but a critique on the deracination which turned the society fanatic. Partition, hence led to the dislocation or exile from one's natural home.

The constant fear with which *Iffan* lived, the hatred which *Sakina* bore in her heart towards Hindus, the loss of bonds, the loss of trust was the result of the alienation which they suffered in their 'own' home, in their own land. *Topi* says,

“*har musalmaan ke dil mein Pakistan ki or ek khidki khuli hui hai.*”

*Iffan* - “*fir main Pakistan kyu nai gaya?*”

*Topi* k pass iss sawal ka koi jawab nai tha. Haan, phir yeh *Iffan* Pakistan kyu nai gaya? Char – saade char crore musalmaan yahan kya kr rhe hain? ( 59 )

Even the Muslims who made a conscious decision to stay in India post partition were too dislocated from their roots. They were in constant flux that on which side of the border they belonged. They were alienated, uprooted from their natural home. The cultural salience was missing.

Not only who made a conscious decision to stay back suffered from identity crisis, but also those who migrated could not identify themselves with the 'new' land. *Raza* presents this crisis when the great grandparents and grandparents of *Iffan* died;

“*Iffan* k dada aur pardaada bahut hi prasidh mauvi the. Kafiro k desh mein paida hue. Kafiro k desh mein mare. Parantu yeh wasiyat karke mare ki laash karabala le jai jayen. Unki aatma ne iss desh mein ek saans tak na li”(25)

The demarcations in land ensured their physical presence across border, but their soul identified itself with their indigenous roots. Their presence on this land was a mere existence. In *Manto's Toba Tek Singh*, the sense of place in one's identity is also evident. Through the responses of the mad men to partition, *Manto* launches a strong attack on the vivisection of India by those in power. When other madmen asked *Bishan Singh* where this *Toba Tek Singh* was, he was confused. “How could one be certain where it was now, for such were the times that one moment Sialkot was in Pakistan and the next instant it was in Hindustan?” The chaos and confusion apparent in the actions of these madmen is merely a reflection of what was actually happening in the larger world outside.

An important area of life which was derailed and put away from its normal working in the system was the gravity of human relationships. The chaos in the relationships was the result of the physical dislocation post partition. *Raza* presents a critique of emerging 'love'

for materialism and the *khwaab* of *naukri*, which each young mind dreamt of. He says in the text:

“*aajkal naukri ka mahtav kisi ki aabroo se kum nai hai.*”( 61)

“*Pehle dilo k beech mein baadshah aaya krte the. Ab naukri aati hai. Har cheez ki tarah mohabbat bhi ghatiya ho gyi hai.*”(62)

It is discernible that the basis of relationships was now the amount of salary withdrawn. The ‘emotional’ dislocation superseded and the material need of the hour was grounded. In *Toba Tek Singh*, the young Hindu lawyer was in love with an Amritsar girl who snubbed him. With the partition of the country, the visits by *Bishan Singh*’s family and friends had come to an end. The narrator tells us,

“now it was as if the voice of his heart which has earlier signalled their visits to him had fallen silent.”( 191 )

Stuti Khanna in *Translating Partition* also observes the impossibility of sustaining personal relationships in the castrating shadow of socio historic events. In *How Many Pakistans?*, she observes,

“while both *Mangal* and *Banno* are trapped in Pakistan together, it is a painful togetherness, a togetherness that lacks the potential to unite them in any satisfying manner. More frightening perhaps is the notion that personal relationships have become redundant in this scenario...These are perhaps the saddest comments possible on the disabling potential of communalism, the insidious creation of rifts between two communities that have lived together all along.”(107)

Arjun Mahey in *Translating Partition* comments, “in a condition of absolute breakdown such as partition was, language, itself a symptom of cause and solidarity – is also in a condition of breakdown. The social body repairs itself after a while..., but is no longer what it used to be since the trauma has modified it...” (136)

When a Sikh madman asks another,

”Sardarji, why are we being sent to Hindustan? We can’t speak their language”, (187)

it shows how linguistic identity was being uprooted, and new political identity thrust upon. In the utter nonsense that *Bishan Singh* speaks, *Manto* seems to be commenting on the breakdown of all communication in the times of sheer devastation. Language which should enable people to connect, often betrayed. In *Topi Shukla*, the division at the level of language could also be seen. The Urdu teacher of *Iffan* could notice the division in his attendance register. There were no more Hindu names in it. In the annual function, a *Kavi Samelan* was organised against *mushiara*. The Hindi teacher did admit that the spark of *mushaira* could not be recreated in *kavi samelan* but *Maulvi Ahmadullah* asserted that the *mushairas* would die soon – the language would die soon. The same night when *Iffan* recited a Hindi poem before his mother, she cursed the language and considered it to be the language of low class.

Even the repetitive correction of the pronunciation of Urdu words by *Iffan* and *Sakina* is symbolic of the fact that the war at the level of language, the demarcations at the level of language, were emerging. Political ideologies were now taking primacy over linguistic identities. The sudden brusque end, in terms of sharing language and identity between

communities was witnessed due to this act of cryptic division. What kind of fate did language has to face when such a common receptacle was also divided? The unintelligible gibberish is the answer to it. *Bishan Singh* voices this apprehension in his constant, apparently meaningless speech.

The horror, the madness, the violence that followed in the wake of political decision shook the roots of a stable society as well. A peaceful, harmoniously shared history of the two communities had to witness a devastated condition. All the limits of detestation were surpassed. The chaos which was evident in the outer world, took a cruel face inside the asylum as well, when the madmen started identifying themselves as Jinnah and Tara Singh respectively. This enactment critiques the fact that how people who had shared such a beautiful repository, suddenly acquired communal identities and treated the other with immense aversion.

In *Speaking Havoc*, Nagappan states, “in *Manto’s* fiction, in their fragmentariness, in their eccentricity cannot be classified as a social history or documentary narrative. They are instead consistently polemical. *Manto* judges neither the victims nor the aggressors who people his stories; instead he levels a critique against language and literary forms themselves, and against the social and political systems, to which ordinary citizens subscribe.”(82)

*Raza* and *Manto* have taken extremes into consideration in order to fictionally represent the upheaval, perhaps, because this turmoil demanded such superlatives. Nagappan quotes Eric Auerbach in *Speaking Havoc* as he describes the way in which twentieth century writing expresses outright hostility to the world it must represent:

“We not infrequently find a turning away from the practical will to live, or delight in portraying it under its most brutal forms...there is a hatred of culture and civilisation..., and often a radical and fanatic urge to destroy”. (115)

According to Nagappan, Auerbach, of course, refers to western philosophical and artistic crisis that produced modernism but in *Manto’s* work (also *Raza’s* work can validate his idea), which labelled the catastrophe faced by South Asia in mid of twentieth century, “writing does not seek to destroy, but it does “fanatically”, or it does compulsively, expose culture and civilisation that have destroyed themselves. Such a social upheaval demands a radical kind of literary imagination – an imagination that very nearly extinguishes itself in the charged conclusion of every text”. (115)

*Sakina’s* refusal to tie rakhi to *Topi*, is symbolic of the hatred which she bore in her heart towards Hindus. Her father was killed by an agitated *Hindu* mob and so was her ‘*Hindu*’ brother *Mahesh*. The burning hatred inside her tells us that the people who till yesterday would have died for each other now thirsted for one another’s blood, simply because they belonged to different communities.

As Shashi Joshi claims, “these stories cannot be used to explain Holocaust, they can only be felt as many truths, many fragments of painful reality and of actually lived lives.”(Nagappan 81)

The pain of the displaced identities and the lost roots, which many try to erase from their memories, can be amply reflected in the following lines by W. H Auden’s *Refugee Blues*:

Say this city has ten million souls,  
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:  
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,  
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:  
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,  
Every spring it blossoms anew:  
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said,  
"If you've got no passport you're officially dead":  
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;  
Asked me politely to return next year:  
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where shall we go to-day?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said;  
"If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread":  
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and me.

...

...

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,  
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:  
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;  
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:  
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,  
A thousand windows and a thousand doors:  
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

...

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