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'On No Man's Land': Representation of Dislocation, Dilemma, and Identity crisis in select Urdu and Hindi short stories in translation

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Abstract

Plenty of works have already enriched the archive of Indian Partition literature. In contrast with those, this study aspires to present something different from the conventional ways of seeing the partition. The main objective of this study is to find out the dilemma of the characters in the selected short stories through the "in-between" concept of Homi K. Bhabha. Besides that, the paper also points out other significant themes of the partition like dislocation, trauma, and the loss of identity. In other words, the paper aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the inner conflicts of the refugees and immigrants who crossed the borderline and left behind their own homeland, family, neighbours and culture.

Keywords: Partition, India, Pakistan, in-betweenness, Manto, Gulzar, Chander, Bhabha, border, short stories

Introduction

The historical event of partition (1947) changed almost the lives of ten million people. Therefore it's no wonder that the partition was an emergency situation. The archive of partition literature is already abundant with all sorts of writings, and very recently many organizations are working on collecting real-life experiences from the eyewitnesses of the partition. Therefore it is growing large day by day as new documents, articles and writings are daily being added to the reservoir of the partition archive.

The fundamental objective of this paper is to methodologically approach some of the Urdu and Hindi short stories and dissect them through the lens of the theory of dislocation and in-betweenness propounded by Homi k. Bhaba. Four short stories will be taken into the discussion - "Toba Tek Singh" & "Khol Do" ('open it') by Saadat Hasan Manto, "Peshawar Express" by Krishan Chander, and "Ravi Paar" by Gulzar. These above-mentioned stories are very popular and widely regarded as the finest of partition short stories. Readers feel the trauma and horror of partition from these texts as they learn the consequences of partition, how it affected the lives of people in general. With close reference to the textual analysis of each of these stories, the paper would examine and explore the contexts where the refugees leaving their own country are trapped into a dilemma, caught in an in-betweenness, they can neither feel safe in their own country where they have been living for generations, nor they feel confident about their forthcoming situation in a new place. As if they're treading on continuous indecision, not reaching after facts but only after assumptions. They're caught in between two cultural spaces, unable to adopt the new one, nor to abandon the other. The paper will endeavour to substantiate these arguments through an in-depth analysis of the selected texts.

The historical event of partition was followed by an era of turmoil and upheaval in some parts of undivided India. Even government statistics failed to provide accurate information regarding the number of people killed or displaced. The psychological condition of people leaving their motherland can't be reproduced neatly in any format, by anyone who themselves haven't undergone such a predicament. Yet, some of the later day documentation arrests many readers' plausibility through the depiction of the pain of partition. The texts are selected for the particular purpose of validating the idea of in-betweenness and to show how the sense of identity loss and material property loss affects the mental and physical condition of the immigrants. At the same time, it is also desired that the analysis of these texts in the lens of the proposed theory, will eventually portray the trauma of partition, the horrific picture of atrocities and the communal discord that the immigrants couldn't escape. Their loss and deplorable predicament is not addressed in the national historiography of contemporary times, because it was busy celebrating the long-desired independence.

Saadat Hasan Manto, in his short story "Toba Tek Singh", creates a fictionalized asylum which is located in Lahore. There is a lunatic in this asylum for nearly 15 years, called Bhisn Singh. Besides Bhisn Singh there are many other lunatics as well. Manto moulds the story in a very well fashioned manner, with ample historical reference to make it plausible to the readers. However, the parallel concept that goes along the narrative of the story is the critique of the partition. The exchange of the lunatics between Hindustan and Pakistan merely acts as an occasion to portray the dilemma and undecidability of Bhisn Singh, who at that moment represented thousands of refugees who were forced to abandon their own homeland and emigrate to another country. Despite knowing the fact that his family members including her daughter have left for India leaving Toba Tek Singh behind, Bhisn Singh remains untouched by any provocation to leave his own land. Manto's criticism of national politics is evident from the oblique mention of the national political leaders by the inmates of the asylum. For instance, an inmate of the asylum called Mohammad Ali, suddenly announced himself to be the "Quaid-e-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah" while seeing him, another Sikh inmate announced himself to be "Master Tara Singh". The metaphor of madness that Manto employs in his story is very slippery and elusive to a certain extent because sanity is not attributed to those who are outside the asylum, but to those people like Bhisn Singh, the inmates of the asylum. It can be fairly interpreted, as Manto suggests, people living outside the asylum, who are involved in the partition politics, are the real lunatics or power mongers.

However, as has been mentioned earlier, the objective of this study is to apply Homi Bhabha's theory of in-betweenness to Manto's short story. According to Bhabha, in any given period and space, when people migrate from one border to another, they somehow cross a cultural space, a boundary which demarcates certain values, principles and customs which are partly or entirely different from the cultural space to which they belong. In such cases, more than often, people suffer from undecidability, they feel as if they're caught in an eternal in-between state. This concept of in-betweenness can be applied to Manto's character Bhisn Singh. Even though he's been portrayed as a lunatic, he knows the importance of homeland, the significance of one's birthplace. Therefore, he can't be forced to take shelter in another land. While Homi Bhabha exemplified his cross-cultural space theory through the borders of the USA and Mexico, Manto's story, as well as any writer's story for that matter, written in the context of Indian partition, delineates corresponding pictures through the India-Pakistan border. Manto eventually draws the ending of both the story and Bhisn Singh in the "no man's land", between the borders of Hindustan and Pakistan. Before the sunrise, Bhisn Singh exerted "a piercing cry" and laid prostrate on the ground before his death, exemplifying himself as a person, who didn't fall slave to a situation that may compel him to leave his birthplace forever.

Manto's other text, "Khol Do" (Open it) tells a story from a different perspective. This story puts its emphasis on a dehumanizing act by a group of eight boys, who although pretend to be the saviour of the distressed, actually, themselves become predators. To discuss briefly, the story is about an old man called Sirajuddin, and his daughter Sakina. Sirajuddin has lost his daughter in the confusion during their escape from India to Pakistan by truck. His

daughter, Sakina, is said to be extremely beautiful and young, only seventeen. Later when Sirajuddin asked eight young men to find his daughter, they consoled him and promised to inform him as soon as they found her. But the ironic aspect of the story is that the eight young men found Sakina near a railway line, but they didn't inform Sirajuddin, rather they continuously raped her until she became unconscious. After a few days, Sirajuddin noticed that a young girl was being carried on a stretcher to the hospital near the refugee camps, and luckily he found that it was his Sakina. However, her condition was miserable, so the doctor told him to open the window, "Khirki khol do" ("The window, open it!"). Having heard this, Sakina started to strip her lower garments, which made the doctor nervous and he began to sweat from head to toe, whereas Sirajuddin, who didn't understand the implication, cried out seeing her daughter alive. Manto here inscribes one of the many such traumatic experiences the refugees suffered during their journey towards a new land. The movement of Sakina at the end of the story reveals a psychological trauma, which takes place in her memory, that's why as soon as she hears the words "open it", she begins to undo her salwar and lower it. Manto has mastered the representation of this trauma in language and narrative. Trauma takes place in her memory by the recurrent tortures she has experienced.

Sampoorn Singh Karla, popularly known as Gulzar, has authored a considerable number of short stories about the partition of India. One of Gulzar's most popular and most quoted short stories is 'Raavi Paar'. It should be noted that the 'Raavi' in the title doesn't denote the sun, rather it's the name of a river in Lahore, Pakistan. Corresponding to the other stories mentioned earlier, it also has its climax at the concluding part of the story, when Darshan Singh, the male protagonist of the story, unknowingly throws one of his newborn sons in the sacred river of Raavi. This horrible incident happens when they're on the territorial edge of Pakistan and about to enter Hindustan. Such a turn of the story, strikes many readers, as no one could have anticipated such a turn of event. Shahni, Darshan Singh's wife, gives birth to two sons at a troubled time when they have to leave their land and migrate to India like other Sikhs and Hindus. Most scholarly articles on 'Raavi Paar' or on any other stories of Gulzar try to depict the traumatic experience of the people involved in forced migration. However, the fundamental concern of this paper is not only to portray the disturbing picture of partition but also to analyse the intervening space that the narrative creates between Pakistan and Hindustan. The crucial part of the story takes place on the bridge of the river Raavi. This bridge over the river can be conceived as the symbolic intervening space, which Bhabha would interpret as the 'interstice'. In this intervening space, Darshan Singh throws his living son into the river, instead of the dead one, and the sound of the baby's cry is submerged by the chanting of "Waheguru", "Hindustan zindabad" by the other passengers. Gulzar doesn't make the story oversimplified by mentioning the aftermath of the event, rather leaves it uninterrupted and lets the readers assume what might have happened afterwards. To some extent, the climax of 'Raavi Paar' also reminds the reader of Bhabha's in-betweenness. The moment of crisis takes place on the border, in between two nations, a symbolic act in a symbolic space.

The last concerned text that this paper includes in the study of partition short stories, is by the Urdu writer Krishan

Chander, called 'Peshawar Express'. It's also a very poignant and human appealing story about the partition. In this classic story, the author employs an inanimate object as its narrator, i.e the train itself. The story begins from Peshawar station, from where many Sikhs and Hindus were heading towards India, leaving their motherland. The initial part of the story delineates how the refugees lament for their soil, land, property and neighbours who are killed in the riots. The author's rendering of the narrative voice, describing the loss of their life-earned property, is a unique feature of the story. The narrative voice of the train itself describes the atrocities on the way to India in such a sarcastic and ironic manner that it demands appreciation. Krishan Chander gives the description of the violence that occurred in each station from Peshawar to Ambala alongside the legacy that particular place holds in the history of ancient times. For example, the train narrates how two hundred Sikhs and Hindu travellers were shot and killed in Taxila station dragging out of the train, while in the same passage it recollects the ancient times when Taxila was the centre of culture and heritage, the University of Taxila where the students from every part of the world came to study. From there, the narrative voice reaches another important station where a more derogatory picture of human wickedness and viciousness is seen. In the station of Wazirabad which was famous for its 'Vaisakhi' festival among the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims as well, the narrative voice witnesses the ultimate form of human depravity, dead bodies of Hindus and Sikhs are scattered on the station, and with their daughters and wives, a group of Muslim men celebrate the Vaisakhi, making them walk naked on the station. This ritual continues until the train crosses Lahore, after that the picture was completely different. From the Amritsar station onwards, the Sikhs and Hindus were the majority in number, and they started to kill the Muslim refugees. They stopped at each station and massacred a nearby Muslim or Pathan village. If any train consisting of Muslim refugees moved towards Pakistan, they would stop the train in a station and kill as many Muslims as many Hindus or Sikhs were killed. Thus, the journey which begins in Peshawar ends in Ambala carrying with it a taint of blood of thousands of refugees of both sides. This is how the train narrates its story of the journey. Therefore, in this entire procedure of crossing the border, reaching the boundary, thousands of people, people from both the countries and of all communities, suffer a huge amount of loss and experience trauma, be it mental, physical, material or spiritual. They had nearly lost all their hopes to land alive in a new country through the vicious holocaust. Undoubtedly, the partition was a holocaust of the Indian subcontinent, because such a large number of people never suffered as they did in the aftermath of the partition. Krishan Chander's story perfectly captures the essence of human vulnerability, how mutable human beings are in the hands of predicament. Thus, the story contemplates the identity crisis of the passengers, how they're butchered, devastated, before they could gain their new identity, from refugees to the citizens of India. The partition deprived many people of their identity, those only who could cross the border and settle in other countries could and did regain their identity.

Conclusion

A short synopsis of the entire paper would be, then, seeing some short stories through the lens of the In-between

concept of Bhabha. Therefore, to reiterate, the primary objective of this analysis was to apply Bhabha's concept of in-betweenness and dislocation in some selected Urdu and Hindi short stories. The thorough analysis of the selected texts achieves the objective so far. Yet, the arena of research, in any discipline, is so vast, that even after observing every minute aspect with clear distinction, some points always remain undisclosed. Similarly, this dissertation paper may also leave some aspects of partition unexplored, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it is incomplete within itself. The aim of this paper is achieved through the dissection of the short stories taken into consideration, and reviewing all the aspects as it was proposed to do. The abrupt and unexpected division of Punjab was a tragedy, which did cost the lives of millions of innocent people. These short stories mourn those lives and at the same time, hints at the inefficiency of both the government and the leaders who failed to control the situation and to stop the massacre of the innocents. Even though this paper talks less about the trauma, and more about the loss of property and identity, it no doubt makes room for further critical study on these stories, which can potentially attract more engaging theories into practice. These are the ideal short stories on the 1947 partition on which any critical theory can be applied.

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