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Manto's Madness: Exploring Neurosis in his stories

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Abstract

The history of war literature has chiefly discussed about the subject of war and its repercussions on the people. The war and post war writings critically exhibited its destructive nature that left people awed and dismayed. The present paper is the study of the symbiotic relations of war and writings and has explored the reason of its inherent connection.

Keywords: War Neurosis, psychoanalysis, Indo-Pak Partition, communal violence

Introduction

War has been epitomized as a mass annihilation of physical and mental domains of the perpetrators as well as of the victims. Those affected soldiers exhibited symptoms of anxiety and despair to a larger extent that lasted for decades. Innumerable ways of treating the so-called traumatic illness were carried out, however major ones were observed as inhuman and politically inclined. These treatments were primarily meant to ease or solve the psychological problems of the soldiers, on the contrary the medical practitioners, especially psychiatrists and psychotherapist deviated from their therapeutic goals. This led to the ambiguity attached to the term 'war neuroses', as it perceived as the result of vested interest of such aforesaid professionals. One of the references strengthen this point of view by stating 'The Ministry was concerned that the impression was being given that some doctors were making diagnoses and treatment plans according to financial interests, i.e., reducing the cost of war pensions, rather than in the interest of the health of the patient.' After many controversies and intellectual deliberations on the issue which began with 'Kriegstagung', a Conference held in Munich, the term 'war neurosis' was banned in 1944.

It is also worth mentioning that no such umbrella term as 'war neuroses' was spotted in official records, nevertheless, "Paul Lerner (2001: 141) has estimated 200,000 'war neurotics', without specifying which diagnostic labels". The medical irregularities diagnosed in the war affected soldiers of WWI were recorded as nervous illness and neurological illnesses such as epilepsy or progressive paralysis, and psychogenic disorders which included hysteria, psychopathy, and nervous shock. The second world war being a mobile warfare, some evident changes in the physiological symptoms were noted, as more inward-oriented type, contrary to WWI, being trench warfare. Needless to say, in the years to come, the medical fraternity emerged as the saviours of not only nose-diving young military commanders but also of the disintegrating economy. The diverse treatments were carried out under the term 'active treatment' that effectuated on tripartite model of hypnosis, discipline and punishment. Amongst them, Hamburg neurologist Max Nonne's techniques of suggestive hypnosis, and Kaufmann's technique popularly known as 'Kaufmann cure' were prominently adopted. As Kaufmann's electromagnetic therapy exposed the gruesome side of medical brutality, psychoanalysts interwind and practiced with their more docile forms of psychotherapy treatments. One of the references observed, "Sigmund Freud saw the symptoms as founded in a conflict within the ego. The conflict between the old peace-time ego and the new, martial ego of the soldier became acute as soon as the peace-time ego recognized the extent to which the actions of his newly-formed parasitic double endangered his life (Freud, 1919: 5).

The medical understandings of traumatic neurosis were thus caught between the psychotherapeutic approaches and practitioners of 'active treatment'. Nevertheless, this referential evidence helps us in deducing the impact of 'war neurosis',

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"It becomes clear that the threat the 'war neurotics' faced, a threat which was integrated in the very concept of the treatment, reached a new dimension in WWII: the final step in the process for therapy-resistant persons was their possible annihilation."

Partition of India and Pakistan: Associated Meaning of War Neurosis

The division of subcontinent into independent India and Pakistan was a traumatic, chaotic and violent experience for the inhabitants. Unlike the active and exuberant work done by body of doctors during both the world wars, India, in this period witnessed a silent response from its medical fraternity to its communal violence. There is lack of information regarding the victims being treated for being psychiatrically unwell during or aftermath of Indo-Pak war. One of the major reasons being, the health care professionals could not work on forefront nor against the mobocracy as they themselves became the targets owing to their respective religious affiliations. They were majorly preoccupied with reinstalling the consistent dissembling health care services. The main reason of this neglect was the shift in the community roles that emerged in the said geography in 1940s. Studies reveal that the documentation of 'war neurosis' in India and Pakistan that engulfed every motivated or incidental individual was handled by the local bodies and charitable organisations. Such pictures of human suffering were captured and noted by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in post-WW2 Europe. On the contrary, the horrid tales of war neurotics in post-independence India era were drafted and formulated by writers making literature the crux of social and political life. Baher Ibrahim, refers to the same notion, "There are millions of victims, but, apparently, no one is guilty. The guilt of perpetrators 'is conveniently and automatically banished' (p.232) because the grief of victims is not addressed, says Pratima Murthy in the final chapter.

The psychological complications that developed due to seemingly senseless violence were predominantly the result of question of nationality and identity crisis formed thereafter. The British colonisation in India had remapped the native mind on the basis of race, and in the coming years, the Partition of India and Pakistan ameliorated it on the basis of religion. This notion of otherness was so ingeniously embedded in the minds of the diversified nationals that they actualised and practiced violence without guilt and remorse. The sufferers were not soldiers but the refugees who have been uprooted from their native land and forcibly displaced to another through staunch religious hypnotised locals. Baher Ibrahim, in his review 'Review: The Psychological Impact of the Partition of India' stated "The distancing of the mental health professions from the events of the Partition had lasting consequences for how psychology and mental health were thought about in South Asia: individuals became redefined as a part of community and clan networks, a 'perverse reaffirmation of the colonial gaze'

War Neurosis as projected in Manto's Selected Short Stories

The Father of Psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, in his theory of Psychoanalytic criticism postulated that work of an author is the manifestation of his own secret desires or anxiety or to extreme step, even neurosis. Manto's insanity

was real or feigned, one could never fathom, but his biographical references mention that, to save him from being convicted for his obscene literature, he was sent to mental hospital. His masterpiece 'Toba Tek Singh' can be assumed as his experiential writing in the backdrop of his stay at the asylum. The mystery behind the existence of 'Toba Tek Singh' is parallel to that of 'Godot', in 'Waiting for Godot' an absurd drama by Irish playwright Samuel Beckett. The war has left the victims in the state of awe and they could not realise the meaning of their existence. The mind, in the process had become feeble and anxiety driven which gave rise to unsolved conflicts and repressed emotions.

His works had tried to project the psychic bombarding of the characters – they have deeper entrenchments than mere social and philosophical conundrums. The exchange of lunatics between the two nations after around two years of the partition itself seems to be insane. Manto's Toba Tek Singh's is magnum opus that has communicated his most intimate vision of the human situation, addressing the mysteries of existence itself. The insanity in the story is redoubled, as the protagonist, an already a madman, named Bishen Singh is traumatised and turns more chaotic when he knows about the partition. The perplexity of nationality and identity makes the protagonists an incurable soliloquiser battling with these inner thoughts. His only one concern "Where is Toba Tek Singh", is his recurring act of the partition induced pathology. In the paper entitled, *Madness as a Critique of State-sponsored Violence: A Study of the Mad Fellows in Select Partition Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto*, the author Mir Ahammad Ali writes, "In a carnivalesque manner, the behavioural patterns of the lunatic inmates and their aggression within the periphery not only subvert the dominant socio-political discourse but also undercut the absurd politics of the mad world". The rearrangement of space converts an isolated and motionless man into an obsessive-compulsive disordered personality who perpetually talks about his native place 'Toba Tek Singh'. The action becomes so repetitive and hammering to his peers that it becomes his own name and they start calling him as, 'Toba Tek Singh'.

In his other story, he has expressed his concern regarding the identity crisis the war had inflicted upon its natives. His characters are in dilemma, whether they are Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, which questions their ethnicity and bring their nationality in jeopardy. The casualties of Indo-Pak war in the form of communal violence gave birth to the character 'Qasim', father of Sharifaan, in his short story 'Sharifaan'. Qasim, after witnessing the naked body of his daughter gets neurotic and avenges the murder by killing an innocent Sikh man with his axe. Pragya Jha refers, "As Larry Ray points out, in this process of seeking revenge on the rival community, the chief stimulus works at the subconscious level, and inflicting "shame" or disgrace on the rival community becomes a chief motivation. Qasim, at once, took his axe which he generally used for chopping firewood and immediately reached a nearby chowk where he encountered a tall Sikh man. Qasim struck the man on his head (giving him a fatal injury), without any apparent reason as the Sikh man never did any harm to him. But Qasim's aggressive, and hence, 'mad self' thought of nothing except committing an act of ethnic violence. He was brimming with rage as if the "blood coursing through Qasim's veins grew

hot and began to splutter as boiling oil does when the smallest drop of water falls on it”.

This phenomenon can be traced as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from a psychoanalysis point of view, and Qasim who was initially the victim becomes the perpetrator in the story by raping and killing a young Hindu girl the same way his daughter was killed.

In the real world, the living victims of the desperate revengeful nations got mentally imbalanced and psychologically lost in their own land. To summarise, the mindless war gave birth to mindless individuals at the end.

Conclusion

Being born in Paproudi village of Samrala in the Ludhiana district of Punjab and in a Kashmiri Muslim family of barristers did not give Saadat Hasan Manto the right to be Indian. His endowed nationality was Pakistani and he began his literary journey by translating the works of Russian writers Chekov and Gorky. Manto, throughout his lifetime advocated reality in literature for which he was charged a number of times. As a writer, he was philanthropic towards the uncivilised section of the society, as we can see, his protagonists were the chosen underprivilege folk such as prostitutes, criminals and beggars. In his short story, *Boo*, he portrays a young poor beggar woman, as an entity who is unwashed and thus smelly, a smell which captivates the man and leave an undying mark on his heart and mind from which he can never re-establish. Their love-making is explicitly expressed heavenly sexual act in contrast to the discomforting union of the man and his newly wed wife. He noticed and penned the underlying stories of unconventional or outcasted mortals who were surviving as lunatics of sex-alcoholics. The partition was a paradigm shift that augmented the still prevailing disorder and madness as his original stories were the black and grey collages of the society, he lived in. His integrity found place in his bare and truthful words that described men and women through the hidden themes of lust and depression. Pragya Jha, in her paper, entitled *Psychoanalytical Criticism of the Characters of Manto mentions*, One of the most remarkable voices of the Progressive Writers' Movement, Manto, had undoubtedly outshined his contemporaries not only in chronicling the Partition-induced “pornography of violence” in realistic terms, shedding aside any “thick veil of hypocrisy” (Jalal 26), but also succeeded in digging deep into the psyche of millions, both the affected ones and the perpetrators of partition violence.

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