

A Desire To Regain The Lost Paradise – A Study OF A Novella “Sleepwalkers” BY Joginder Paul

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***Abstract**---The paper attempts to focus on and analyse the trauma and the madness that an individual undergoes after the violent and the most deteriorating and disturbing situations that had occurred in the past. Primarily focusing on the novella “Sleepwalkers” by Joginder Paul, originally titled as “Khwabrau”, which is based on the post-partition trauma of India and Pakistan in 1947, the paper proposes to highlight the insanity that an individual suffers due to forced displacement triggered by the partition of the land. While underlining the insanity that the prime character of the novella named Deewane Maulvi Sahab suffers, the paper tends to look upon how the character in the novella attempts to make himself comfortable just by his own thoughts of having regained his ‘Paradise’ in his own mind and thus getting satisfied by it. It will further be analysed that the chaos initiated is not only present between the international borders of the newly formed countries India and Pakistan but is also present within the countries between the natives and the non-natives, who have been forced to leave their original homes and resettle into a totally different and new found land.*

***Keywords**---Paradise lost, Paradise regained, Post-Partition trauma, Madness, Forceful Migration, Violence, Suffering, Sleepwalkers, Toba Tek Singh, Indo-Pak relations, Borders.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration is often accompanied by a feeling of unavoidable disorientation, and the circumstances of 1947 would have pronounced this feeling. In most cases, it would have created an involuntary distance between where one was born before the Partition and where one moved to after it, stretching out their identity sparsely over the expanse of this distance. As a result, somewhere in between the original city of their birth and the adopted city of residence, would lay their essence – strangely malleable. (Aanchal Malhotra, Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory)

The Partition of 1947 has, apart from bringing Independence to both the newly formed countries, India and Pakistan, also created a lot of havoc and upheaval both within and across the newly formed borders. Because of the political and hasty decisions of dividing the country into two based on the ethnicity and religion, it also forced the people of both the countries to leave their original homes, no matter on which side of the border they lived, and move to a different land leaving behind everything that they may have. The above quote from the book titled ‘Remnants of a Separation’ is very much apt with the kind of confusion and disorientation the people may have undergone while migrating from one place to another. The people who were at that time forced to migrate leaving behind everything that they had with them created and brought a huge loss relating to not only the immovable assets

like home, offices, farms, etc., but also led in the loss of relationships which they had built during the years of their life. These migrations whether voluntary or forced had never went smooth, people had to pay a huge cost in the name of losing their children, wives, parents, their loved ones, friends, etc., who were either killed or murdered by the rioters or were misplaced due to the large numbers of people moving at the same time.

Each Partition narrative that has become the part of the literature and in its own special way has tried to describe the ordeal, that this partition and the riots which occurred just after, created in its best possible mode. Each narrative in its own unique style has become the most exclusive and inimitable chronicle of its time because of the way it has presented its experiences and happenings in each novel or story. The present novella, is of an altogether different and distinctive experience and hence talks about the insanity that an individual undergoes due to the involuntary dislodgment and resettlement into a totally different and a strange newfound land. It discusses about how the mere change of locales create a disbalance in the mind of the person and makes it all the more disillusioned.

This Indo-Pak partition which occurred in 1947 still has its scars in the psyche of the people even after 72 long years. The division that came into being long ago still has its impact over the people of both the borders as it had not only just been a division of geographical borders but it also became an indelible scar in the memory of the people who underwent the trauma of it and who migrated from place to place either with title of being called as a muhajir or a refugee. The situation became so terrible and disparaging that many people got into the trauma so hard that it became difficult for them and their family to cope up with it. In extreme cases they even dipped down into depression and hence became insane.

II. THE NOVELLA *SLEEPWALKERS*

The forceful and sudden shifting of locales from the land which has been theirs' since decades to a totally newfound land gave a certain kind of setback to their minds. In order to maintain a balance in their minds these people tried to create the same kind of atmosphere, environment and ambience which they previously had in their original land. They tried to revamp and rebuild the lost glory of not only the houses, connecting roads and other infrastructure but also maintained the parks, vegetation and every other essential facility with the motive of regaining and preserving their balance of mind.

The same kind of the situation is experienced in the novella "*Sleepwalkers*" by Joginder Paul, wherein people originally living in Lucknow in India are forced to leave the country and resettle in Karachi in Pakistan. People in such a state not only just took their essential required things but rather all the possible things which they can with them.

They say people come and go, places stay where they are. But, in this case the mohajirs had transported an entire city within the folds of their hearts. With some came the bricks of their houses, some carried entire homes, intact. Some brought a whole gali – whatever they could contain in their hearts! As soon as they recovered their breath after reaching Karachi, the entire city emerged from their hearts, brick by brick. (12-13, *Sleepwalkers*)

These mohajirs (Muslim immigrants of multi-ethnic origin) created their Lucknow in Karachi in such a

beautiful manner that it totally became the replica of what they had left behind. Even the visitors to the city would get amazed by the kind of architecture that these people had employed. And such an amazement of the visitors and the tourists is very much evident from the incident in the novella, wherein when Deewane Maulvi Sahab's cousin comes to meet him, he very astonishingly remarks, 'Quibla Maulvi Sahab, what can I say? I am beginning to feel that the real Lucknow is, in fact, here. And it is not you who have migrated from our place to this, but it's we who have moved from here to there.' (18, *Sleepwalkers*)

Apart from the beautiful and the splendid architecture that these people created around themselves to make them feel home, there still remained a lack because of which they never really felt happy. The sense of content still was not there in the hearts of all the mohajirs who had shifted from 'their Lucknow' to 'this Lucknow'. Every character in their hearts felt some loss – something which was still not there with them and for which they had been yearning all through the lives since the time they had reached here.

For Deewane Maulvi Sahab, who is the chief character of the novella, this loss was his loss of sanity, his loss of balance of mind which is depicted and which he suffered in two different manners. In the beginning and almost across half through the story, the shape of this loss of sanity is described as where Maulvi Sahab thinks that they haven't shifted to any new place but have been staying in the original Lucknow of Hindustan since decades and his this situation is very well understood by his family, neighbours and particularly his wife; because of which they never make him feel that he is living in the Lucknow of Pakistan and not in the Lucknow of Hindustan.

They all in their own possible way try and help him preserve his 'precarious balance' – which aids him in living alive. Everyone around the area knows deep in themselves that for Deewane Maulvi Sahab 'his Lucknow' always comes first and later on any other thing and this is very much evident from the situation when in the earlier shifting phase every person tried their level best in making Maulvi Sahab realise that this is not the Lucknow of Hindustan but actually the Lucknow of Karachi in Pakistan. But when they understood that it is impossible to make him realise this, they fathomed out that for Maulvi Sahab, Lucknow is there only wherever he himself is, he has never and can never come out of the Lucknow of Hindustan. If he has himself illusioned and shaped him in that way than it is better not only for him but for everyone around him, because the moment he comes to know that he has left his dearest Lucknow of Hindustan, he will be shattered and devastated from within and it will be difficult for everyone to make him come back. His said situation of having been disillusioned is very much conspicuous through the incident when he offers a 'Malihabadiaam' to his younger son, Ishaq Mirza, when he comes to meet them. But when Ishaq takes the mango in his hands it comes out to the fore that it is not a real Malihabadiaam but a replica of it made out from clay. Thus, Maulvi Sahab even through the clay mangoes is making himself feel like he is living in the Lucknow of Hindustan and gets happy just by the touch of that CLAY MALIHABADI AAM.

Another tragedy is that though Maulvi Sahab's wife, Achhi Begum, understands him so well, she herself is unable to put her heart out in front of her husband because of the very fact that he has lost his balance of mind.

To speak her heart out she only has her two sons, Nawab Mirza and Ishaq Mirza. She and even her daughter-in-law, Chand Bibi (wife of Nawab Mirza) feel scared whenever her son, Nawab Mirza or for any chance Maulvi Sahab have to go out into the roads of the city either for the reason of Nawab Mirza's own official and factory work or for just roaming around in the city, because the situation in the city never remains stable; every other day there happens to be a bomb blast which leads in the loss of life.

“These are strange times. Even in one's own city, one feels stifled, as if one were in an alien land.....Can there be greater misfortune than not feeling at home in your own house?” (17, *Sleepwalkers*)

Therefore it can very well be interpreted from the above quoted situation that despite having shifted from their Lucknow of Hindustan to here, the civilians are still not safe and secure; their still resides a sense of fear and strangeness in the minds of each and every person because of the bomb being blasted at any moment of the day and hence a feeling of alienation dwells in the heart of every person in the city. This very sense of strangeness and fear is very well elucidated in various incidents in the novella through the astonishment of the city dwellers; the dialogue between ManwaChacha, who is the chawkidar and Ajijo, who is the Chaiwala; and through the letters of Ishaq Mirza to his friend Hashim Ali:

“Even after recreating a whole Lucknow, exactly as it was, over this long period of time, why do we still have this gnawing sense of being strangers in our own homes?” (17, *Sleepwalkers*)

“Bombs keep exploding every other day in different areas, ours and theirs, precisely because even after four or five decades of physical co-existence, we have mentally been dwelling in our separate planets.” (50, *Sleepwalkers*)

“So you should pray that I bring myself to write my next letter to you soon and that in the meantime I do not become the target of a bullet. Yes bhai, the situation is so bad that all of a sudden someone starts showering bullets from any corner of a street and, in this game of his, whoever from amongst the passers-by falls, falls forever.” (51, *Sleepwalkers*)

“Just a little before going there he had had a cup of tea with me here. How was he to know that he was drinking his last cup of tea! Neither did I know otherwise I would have given him a special.” (93, *Sleepwalkers*)

It can very well be construed from the above quotes that despite having shifted and resettled in the new and strange land, because of the forceful orders of the politicians and their sycophants, it is not only the non-natives who have to suffer but also the natives who have been living there from the very beginning without having undergone the pain of migration. The natives in spite of staying in their own lands and home, still are hounded by the sense of fear and strangeness, because of the very reason that the people from some other area have started to live among them and have occupied not only their area but have also transformed it into an altogether different place. These natives or the local people who have been living in their area since decades have suddenly started feeling a sense of disillusionment because of it being transformed now by the newly settled non-natives, according to their comfort levels and satisfaction.

So, in a way this sense of disillusionment, fear, strangeness and the struggle of finding one's identity is being countered not only by the people who are forced to leave their original homelands but also by the other section of the people who have been permanently staying in their original homes and have not undergone the ordeal of leaving their homes. It can be thus construed that the sense of suffering and grief is being experienced by each and every section of the society in both the countries in their own way and it is because of this cynicism there is chaos even within the borders and hence the chances of bombs getting exploded in any corner of the city, leaves the people in sudden and utter shock.

III. SIMILARITY WITH THE COLONISERS AND COLONISED

The above situation of natives and non-natives both feeling a sense of strangeness can also be well understood by another example of colonisers and the colonised; wherein the colonisers or the people who begin to settle into a different land with the motive of colonising or dominating the colonised (natives) start to rebuild and re-establish the place according to their old homes that they have left. They start renaming the places with the names that they had in their countries or homes; and because of this renaming and re-establishing the place according to their convenience, leaves the colonised or the natives illusioned and deceived. The above situation can be well comprehended through the poem 'Names' by Derek Walcott.

And when they named these bays
bays,
was it nostalgia or irony?
In the uncombed forest,
in uncultivated grass
where was there elegance
except in their mockery?
Where was the courts of Castille?
Versailles' colonnades
supplanted by cabbage palms
with Corinthian crests,
belittling diminutives,
then, belittling Bersailles
meant plans for a pigsty,
names for the sour apples
and green grapes
of their exile. (109, *Neruda, Walcott and Atwood: Poets of the Americas*)

Even the poem 'The Sea is History' by Derek Walcott, also talks about the same disillusionment and disorientation of the colonised which happened because of the changes which the colonisers created in order to make

the place 'homely' for themselves and also in a way of making the colonised know that they are subservient now; it was their way of showing dominance over the other.

IV. SLEEPWALKERS AND TOBA TEK SINGH

Joginder Paul has very well described the tragedy of the common people through the portrayal of his characters in this novella through the disintegration of the individual psyches because of the political decisions suddenly thrust upon them. A sense of sympathy and empathy is very well evoked into the hearts of the reader for the helplessness of both the victims and the aggressor, both of whom are caught in the collapse of reason when they are wrenched away from the physical and psychological securities that have been built over generations. The same is the accomplishment of Saadat Hasan Manto, who through the vivid and sarcastic portrayal of his characters in his stories, manages to arouse the same feelings in the hearts of the readers. In one of his short stories titled, 'Toba Tek Singh', which is somehow based on the same theme of disillusionment that is felt by the common people, although here these the common people are actually insane, tries to bring to the fore the absurdity of these madmen who in a way appear to be more humane and reasonable when set against the bizarre scenes of rape, massacre and plunder that was witnessed during and after the times of partition.

The story talks about the dilemma that these madmen undergo, when an announcement of their sudden shifting from across the borders of the asylums is made based on the ethnicity and religion of the madmen. Manto has very well managed to portray the basic questions that may have come into the minds of the common people when being shifted across the borders; through the madmen. Madness in the story thus is just a metaphor for sanity. The underlying irony and black humour of the scenes of the asylum is explicitly woven into the texture of the story.

"All the madmen who weren't completely mad were in some perplexity as to whether they were in Pakistan or in Hindustan. If they were in Hindustan, then where was this Pakistan, and if they were in Pakistan, then how was it that a little while ago, though staying in the very same place, they had been in Hindustan?" (106, *Modern Indian Literature*)

Because of such utter chaos and anarchy created by the politicians for their own selfish motives; the derision, bewilderment and madness that took over and the boundary between the madhouse and the outside world collapsed because of the very reason that the sudden partition done so as to create two different countries based on the religions which created disorder in every section of the society. Each person whether insane or not had to undergo the qualms of their own identity thereby undergoing the sense of fear, disillusionment and hence suffering insanity by many.

The chief character of the story 'Toba Tek Singh' named Bishan Singh, all through his stay in the asylum of Pakistan has been asking every person who came across him as to where is Toba Tek Singh, where he and his family had been staying since decades. But the tragedy is that no one answers his questions to his satisfaction and thus in the confusion of whether 'his place' is in Hindustan or Pakistan, Bishan Singh dies in between the borders of the two countries which was neither considered as Hindustan nor Pakistan. He died in the middle on a strip of no man's land.

On the other hand Deewane Maulvi Sahab, whose mind had the imprint that he has been living in the Lucknow of Hindustan, now after the bomb blast, in which his whole family died leaving behind two small kids, comes under the shock of an altogether different insanity. He starts to think that he has just come for a short visit to meet his younger son Ishaq Mirza to Karachi and will soon be leaving for 'his Lucknow in Hindustan' where his elder son, his family and his wife are living. Towards the end of the novella Maulvi Sahab keeps on to think that this is just his short visit to Karachi and hence every fortnight he asks his son to let him go to 'his Lucknow' as his family has been waiting for his arrival. He is so entrenched in his culture that in spite of the fact that he and his family have migrated to Karachi and now they are dead, he does not feel that he has or he can ever come out of 'his beloved Lucknow'.

Thus a constant process of creating and destroying keeps happening within the stories. Both the stories are so skilfully woven that the gaps and ruptures that appear endow the story with endless possibilities.

“When Deewane Maulvi Sahab is displaced from Lucknow, he recreates his city in Karachi; and when this Lucknow crashes down, he finds a place in his dreams and starts preparing for another journey.” (125, *Sleepwalkers*)

The characters therefore in both the stories have lend themselves into a misplaced reality, a reality that is somewhere in the midway between the setting world and a rising one, between the state of being and that of nothingness. They in every possible way try to link themselves with the new city and its culture and try to establish themselves with the new soil. Where the novella '*Sleepwalkers*' deals with the issue of how an imaginary paradise – which exists only in dreams – is mistaken for real; the story by Manto talks about how Bishan Singh is trying his level best to regain his lost paradise by asking each and every passer-by as to where is his Toba Tek Singh. Where one has made himself satisfied with regaining his lost paradise in his dreams or in other words having never left it; the other is yearning hard to regain that lost paradise. Where one is surviving thinking his dreams to be real; the other is surviving with the hope that one day he will regain his paradise and in his this quest of finding his paradise he dies on a no man's land.

V. CONCLUSION

Both the stories, though having written by two different authors have a very universal appeal as the experiences intermingled by them and the emotions evoked out of them are not solely of the characters themselves but of every other person who has undergone this suffering of partition in any part of the world, not only India and Pakistan. The emotional impact of the events described in both the stories is in a way very much authentic and genuine. Every person irrespective of his/her caste, creed or religion very well understands the emotions and the sentiments depicted in either of the stories.

Gulzar in one of his poems has very well described the characteristic of these borders drawn in order to divide the land into different parts based on religion, ethnicity or any other thing:

Lakeerienhaathmeithi to mukaddarthi
Inhe hum band rakhte the
Zameeno par bichhi to fir samandar, mulk, ghar, aangansabhi ko
Kaat-tiguzri! (76, *Suspected Poems*)

When lines were only etched on the palm

They told our destiny

We kept them closed in a fist;

When they are drawn on the ground

They cut across oceans, countries, homes and hearths. (77, *Suspected Poems*, Trans. Pawan K. Verma)

The lines very aptly explain all the tension and disillusionment that every person not only in these fictional stories but in reality as well might have endured during the times of partition because of the vested interests which these politicians may have in their hearts without thinking about the anguish the citizens might have to bear.

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