

NECROPOLITICAL NATIONALISM: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SAADAT HASSAN MANTO'S SELECTED FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Nationalism is a framework for maintaining national unity and accommodating identities with common cultural, linguistic, racial, and geographical backgrounds. It is an ideological concept that does not encourage nation, state, and political amalgamation. In this way, nationalism stands as an exclusionary principle that eliminates all those groups who do not belong to the same geographical area. This paper will appropriate the concept of nationalism by forming a connection between nationalism and Necro politics. I will accomplish this by analysing the selected short fiction produced by Sadat Hasan Manto with reference to Necro politics and Nationalism. Mbembe's Necro politics deals with the subject of forms of targeting killing in the context of war. Keeping this precise nature of Necro politics, this paper will argue that the logic of nationalism had been used as a Necropolitical tool at the time of partition through which the generalized killing of the oppositional party had been justified. The framework used for this paper combines the notion of Mbembe's Necro politics and Chatterjee's insight on nation and nationalism in order to demonstrate the adverse effect of partition between Pakistan and India. Besides these theorists, some other theorists' views are also utilized in order to fully explore the nature of research problem.

Keywords: Nationalism, Necro politics, Partition, Manto.

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century witnessed the horrible event of partition between Pakistan and India. It was a time when both nations raised their own call of liberation. The Congress's slogan for "free India" and the Muslim League's slogan for a "free state" led to the rise of nationalism in the hearts of Indians and Indian Muslims. "Two Nation Theory" stood as the founding principle for the rise of nationalism. It was proposed by Muslim leader, Jinnah that, "the Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literatures [...] to yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as the majority

must lead to growing discontent and the final destruction of any fabric that may be so built for the government of such a state" (Ahmed, 2024). Jinnah's speech is marked by the spirit of religious nationalism. He constitutes a discourse of partition on the religious ground. This logic of religious nationalism is further deployed in the process of othering. For Muslims, Hindus were the other as they did not belong to their faith system, similarly for Hindus, Muslims were other as they did not lie in the category of being Hindu. Thus, nationalism though manifested itself as a tool of unity against the colonial power but it proved to be the very reason for discord among

Muslims and Indians during the wake of partition. Veer argued, "Nationalism in India has fed upon religious identification" (Khalili, 2011, p. 176). Religious issues generated passionate feelings and violent actions, which were followed by riots between the two parties.

Thesis statement

This paper argues that the logic of nationalism had been used as a Necropolitical tool at the time of partition through which the generalized killing of the oppositional party had been justified. The undertaken research looks at the necropolitical nature of nationalism in Saadat Hassan Manto's selected fiction.

Research question

The research question for this study will be:

1. What is the connection between Necropolitics and Nationalism?
2. How did nationalism emerge as a Necropolitical tool at the time of partition?
3. How does Saadat Hassan Manto's portrayal of partition allow us to foreground the elements of Necropolitical nationalism in his stories?

Theoretical framework

Nationalism is a framework for maintaining national unity and accommodating those identities who share a common cultural, linguistic, racial, and geographical background. It is an ideological concept that does not encourage the amalgamation of nation, state, and politics. In this way, this nationalism stands as an exclusionary principle that eliminates all those groups who do not belong to the same geographical area.

The concept of nation and nationalism is rooted in western philosophy. McLeod (2000) has mentioned in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* that "Idea of nation is Western in origin. It emerged with the growth of Western capitalism and industrialization and was a fundamental component of imperialist expansion" (p. 68). Hans Kohn has also explored the roots of nationalism in his book *Nationalism: Its Meanings and History*. He mentioned that the concept of nationalism springs from the soil of Western civilization. During the nineteenth century in Europe and America and in twentieth-century Africa and Asia nationalism dominated

the impulses and the attitudes of the masses, and at the same time served as the justification for the authority of the state and the legitimation of its use of force, both against its citizens and against other states (Kohn, 1982).

The notion of nation/nationalism is manufactured to create feelings of kinship and affinity with the homeland. Benedict Anderson (2006) has talked about this precise nature of a nation as he called the nation "an imagined political community". Members of that community think that they share "deep, horizontal comradeship" (p. 7) which gives them a sense of attachment. Hardt and Negri (2000) add to this idea by claiming that Nationalism ensures that the nation becomes the only way to imagine community (p. 107) Homi K. Bhabha (as cited in McLeod, 2000) also ensures that the nation is "a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" (p. 69). Keeping this view of nation/nationalism in mind, it can be claimed that nation is a concept, which mean to foster unity among the citizens of the common state. As stated by Soekarno in his book *Nationalism, Islam, and Marxism*, nationalism is an imagined framework for maintaining national unity. It includes only identities who share certain common notions including cultural, linguistic, racial, and geographical background. In this manner, nationalism stands as an exclusionary principle which eliminates all those groups who do not share certain similar notions (Soekarno, 1969).

It would be more suitable to think about nation/nationalism as counterfeit notion. The idea of nationalism has always remained under the much critical debates. Many critics have criticized this concept for being the facilitator of violence and civil war. Partha Chatterjee (as cited in McLeod, 2000) has pointed out "nationalism may promise liberty and universal suffrage, but is complicit in undemocratic forms of government and domination" (p. 104). Chatterjee (1986) criticized nationalism for being colonial. For him, Nationalism sought to demonstrate the falsity of the colonial claim that the backward peoples are culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the conditions of the modern world. Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonized people, it also asserted that the backward nation could modernize itself while retaining its cultural identity. It thus produce a discourse in which,

even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination, it also accepted the very intellectual premises of modernity on which colonial domination was based. (p. 30)

Many critics have argued that the myth of nation and nationalism is based upon the ideas of “racial, ethnic, and religious exclusivity” (McLeod, 2000, p. 110). According to Rosemary Marangoly George (as cited in McLeod, 2000), “Nationalism leads to the interpretation of the diverse phenomenon through one glossary thus erasing specificities, setting norms and limits, looping off tangential” (p. 110). John McLeod (2000) has explored the ways in which the myth of nation has become complicit with racism as he argued in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* that “Nationalism is derived from the west then attempt to construct a unifying myth of the nation can exacerbate existing conflicts between groups in some once-colonized nations or between different races or ethnicities” (p. 112). Thus for these critics, nationalism stands as a threat to world peace. It sows the seed of discord among different nations because it fosters intolerance for other nations and other races. George Orwell (2009) has defined nationalism as “an organizational loyalty leading to the simplistic confusions, rivalries, and delusions often encountered when defining oneself by allegiance to a single political unit”.

Nationalism has often been criticized as male chauvinistic in nature by many prominent feminists. For C.L Innes (as cited in McLeod, 2000) “Nationalism is very frequently a gendered discourse, it traffics in representation of men and women which serves to reinforce patriarchal inequalities between them” (p. 114). Carole Boyce Davies (as cited in McLeod, 2000) has also expended on the same theorization. She pointed out, “nationalism [...] seems to exist primarily as a male activity with women distinctly left out or peripheralised in a various national constructs. Thus, the feminine was deployed at the symbolic level, as in *Mother Africa* or *Mother India*” (p. 114-115).

The concept of Nationalism is always been confused with patriotism. It is a belief that is grounded in the faith of love and respect for one’s own country. Carlton Hayes (1960) believes that nationalism is a refined blend of patriotism and nationality (p.2). While these analyses have advanced in defining the notion of nationalism is

primarily a mental construct which has been interpreted in diverse fashions. It has made complicit sometimes with male chauvinistic activity and sometimes with patriotism. This paper appropriate the concept of nationalism by forming a connection between nationalism and Necropolitics.

Necropolitics by Achille Mbembe (2003) deals with the subject of contemporary forms of the targeting killing in the context of war. Mbembe extends the notion of Foucault’s Biopower, which categorizes people into the groups of those, who must live and those who should die. Mbembe, on the other hand, is concerned with the contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death (p. 39-40). In his formulation, necro power operates through the generalized instrumentalization of the human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population (Mbembe, 2003, p. 14). Unlike the former modes of power, where the central project was killing, in contemporary world, weapons are deployed usually to maximize the destruction of human bodies.

Analysis

Saadat Hassan Manto, being an eminent writer during the age of partition and colonial occupation has told us the moving tales regarding the horror of partition and threatened lives of people. In most of his stories, he critiques the idea of nationalism as the source of disunity and discord among the two nations; Indian Muslims and Hindus. His stories are crucial in exploring the ways through which the unjustified killing had been legitimized in the name of nationalism at the time of partition. Within this framework, I am arguing that nationalism had been used as the Necropolitical tool at the time of partition with special reference to Manto’s stories; *Two Nation Theory* and *The Assignment*.

“The Assignment” is the story of cheating, revenge, and broken ties. Manto has presented both sides of the picture; before and after the partition. He begins his account by narrating the tale of communal violence and unrest. Due to the partition riots, Muslims and Hindus who had been living in perfect harmony with each other for ages suddenly “began to leave for safer places” (Manto, 2007, p. 25). Advocate Mian Abdul Hai is the Muslim character in the story and he seems to be so stubborn to leave as he was hoping that

everything would be normal soon (Manto, 2007, p. 25). He is a fast friend of a Sikh, Gurmukh Singh. Mian Abdul Hai had once done his friend a favor and due to that reason, Singh brings him a “bag of sawwaiyyan (vermicelli)” (Manto, 2007, p. 29) on the occasion of Eid. Despite of the partition riots, Abdul Hai waits for his Sikh friend at the night of Eid. At last, Gurmukh Singh’s son comes to dispatch “Sawwaiya” (vermicelli) at Abdul Hai’s home. He is well aware of the group of young men who are after him and they bring kerosene oil in order to fire the house of the Muslims. He cheats them on the grounds of nationalistic concerns and does not care about the established brotherly ties of his father with that Muslim family.

It is very evident from this story that partition riots between Hindus and Muslims made them forget about every little act of kindness and all of a sudden they became enemy. Partha Chatterjee explores this stance in his book *Nationalistic Thoughts and Colonial World*, according to him, nationalism operates and justifies itself through the “undemocratic form of government and domination” (Chatterjee, 1986). This undemocratic nature is visible in the story, in which the brotherly ties between Hindus and Muslims are being compromised on the name of nationalism. Manto puts it, “Muslims living in Hindu localities began to leave for safer places and Hindus in Muslims majority area followed suit” (Manto, 2007, p. 25) due to the “communal riots” (Manto, 2007, p. 25). Chatterjee argues that “nationalism [...] has been the cause of most destructive wars ever seen” (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 2). Manto also manifests the nature of destructive war when he says, “These were not the first riots that the city had known” (Manto, 2007, p. 25). These riots had become a permanent part of the partition. People were expecting that this political unrest would not last longer but their expectations ended in vain and they began to kill each other in the name of nationalism. Mian Abdul Hai and his children were the only Muslims in the Hindu’s locality and that is why their “power and water supplies were suddenly cut off” (Manto, 2007, p. 26). The apparatus of nationalism had been used to promote “racial hatred” (Chatterjee 2) between the two parties and they became intolerant to each other.

“Two Nation Theory” is yet another story in which Manto has explored the same stance. In

the story, Mukhtar is the young boy who falls in love with Hindu girl, Sharda. Both of them want to marry each other but none of them are ready to accept each other’s religion. Two things that are quite evident from this story are the issue of religion and the issue of nationalism. This nationalism is in fact in the theology of religion as it is obvious in the words of Quaid-e-Azam while proposing a two-nation theory that Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious communities. Manto has chosen the title of the story as two nation theory because he wants to mock this very theory. Eran Tzidkiyahu (2015) states, “Both religion and nationalism play an increasing role in the lives of individuals and societies around the world, yet when dealing with the connection between the two we face a constant difficulty assuming universal conclusions, due to the particularity of each phenomenon and the need for a deep acquaintance with the local political, historical and theological context” (Tzidkiyahu, 2015, p. 4). The issue that both Mukhtar and Sharda encounter is the issue of religious nationalism. On the one hand, they want to marry yet at the same time their religion is the problem in their way. Chatterjee calls the ideology of nationalism a problematic phenomenon as it is “irrational, narrow, hateful and destructive” (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 7). When Mukhtar tells Sharda that she should marry him and for that, she has to accept Islam, Sharda’s reply is apt, she retaliates, “You become a Hindu” (Manto, 2007, p. 290). Hence, for both of them religious zeal is the issue. In one of the articles “Religion and Nationalism”, Rogers Brubaker argues, “Nationalism emerged from the decline of religion, and that it emerged in a period of intensified religious feeling” (Brubaker, 2011, p. 1). The time partition between Pakistan and India was one of the most intensified periods in which nationalism was born. Nationalism always speaks through a discourse and here nationalism is speaking through the discourse of religion. Mukhtar’s words are especially noticeable in this regard when he says, “How can I become a Muslim? [...] Islam is the best of religion. The Hindu religion is no religion. Hindus drink cow urine; they worship idols. I mean it is all right in its place but you cannot compare it with Islam” (Manto, 2007, p. 290). In the words of Chatterjee “resentment and impatience [...] are the elements of

nationalist thoughts” (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 9). The feelings of resentment is very tangible here. Sharda repays with the same “hatred” (Manto, 2007, p. 290) when she says, “Go, go away, our Hindus religion is very bad; you Muslims are the good one” (Manto, 2007, p. 290). Thus their love story ends with a sad note of relentlessness. Borrowing some terms from Moniza Alvi, their love story ends with the “partition of heart” (Alvi, 2013).

In focusing on the problem of nationalism I am suggesting that nationalism should not just be seen as the root cause of their parting rather it should be seen as the Necropolitical project through which the unjustified killing of the oppositional party has been justified. This thing is very visible in the stories of Manto. A lot of his stories revolve around the theme of killing in the name of nationalism. Partition was of course its main cause. Due to the partition between Pakistan and India, different liberation movements took place, which gave rise to political unrest. In her famous debut, *Remembering Partition Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Gyanendra Pandey noticed that, “the violence or simply (and frequently) the ‘riots’ that accompanied Partition in 1947” (Pandey, 2001, p. 52). Untamed violence and unjustified killing constitute the past of the two nations sadly. Manto’s stories are a live example in this regard. His stories tell us the sad tale of partition. Nationalism though manifested itself as a tool of unity against the colonial power but nevertheless it proved to be the very reason of discord among Muslims and Indians during the wake of partition.

In the same story, “The Assignment”, the young man who is Sikh by religion seems to be inconsiderate towards the Muslims and does not even care to show respect for the centuries-old brotherly ties with the Muslim family. After he departs from the home of Muslim, it is mentioned that,

Four men, their faces covered with their turbans, moved towards him. Two of them held burning oil torches, the others carried cans of kerosene oil and explosives. One of them asked Santokh (son of Gurmukh Singh), Sardarji, “have you completed with your assignment (giving them the bag of sawwaiyan)?”

The young man nodded.

Should we then proceed with ours? He asked.

“If you like”, he replied and walked away. (Manto, 2007, p. 31)

This incident makes it quite clear that the four men came to fire the house of Muslims as it had become a common practice at the time of partition. Achille Mbembe has talked about the nature of sovereignty and domination. For him, sovereignty is achieved through the creation of the death camps, “death camps are what constitute the nomos of the political space in which we still live” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 14). During the wake of partition, Muslim-majority areas had witnessed the death camps of Hindus, and Hindus majority areas had witnessed the death camps of Muslims. It is mentioned in the story that boy Basharat had seen “a blood drenched body lying in the street and the group of the wild looking men looting shops” (Manto, 2007, p. 27). Somewhere in the story has also been mentioned that “even the home-made bombs were being used” (Manto, 2007, p. 25). The most predictable cause of this could be what Mbembe has said “relation of enmity”. For Mbembe, “relation of enmity have become the normative basis of the right to kill” (Mbembe, 2007, p. 16). Thus it the relation of enmity between Hindus and Muslims that has become a sole cause of killing.

“The Price of Freedom” is another story by Manto in which he again expands on the same subject of killing due to partition riots. This story is based on Manto’s experience. He is narrating the incident of his friend who decides to lose his most human instinct for the sake of freedom. In the story it has been mentioned that, “there was so much to live for in those days. The slightest incidents sometimes led to the most violent upheaval” (Manto, 2007, p. 291). Here, again the logic of nationalism has been deployed to kill the other. In the words of Mbembe, “Killing become precisely targeted” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 29).

The case of partition invites us to consider the ways through which the logic of nationalism had been used as a Necropolitical tool through which the “generalized instrumentalization of the human existence and the material destruction of the human bodies” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 14) had been justified. In my exploration of this new category of nationalism, I hope to illuminate the relationship between Nationalism and

Necropolitics. Nationalism as the tool of discord has been explored by many critics. This paper offers the new category of Nationalism which emerges out of the experience of unjustified killing, massacres, and use of force against the oppositional party. In forming the connection between these two phenomena, I bring to light the case of partition between Pakistan and Hindus in which the people had remained the sufferer due to political unrest and communal violence. I maintain that the logic of nationalism had been used as a Necropolitical tool at the time of partition through which the generalized killing of the oppositional party had been justified.

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