

## “Toba Tek Singh” in English: An assessment of Khalid Hasan’s translation

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### Abstract

In today’s fast developing world where everything is going global; lingual, cultural and regional boundaries are still operative in India which is a country with a plurality of culture and language. In this scenario, translation of regional literature into English, a target language that is common among the heterogeneous linguistic communities is a step towards dissolving these boundaries and painting a common national ethos. Saadat Hasan Manto is a well-known short story writer of Indian subcontinent. His Urdu short stories have been translated into many languages. His story “Toba Tek Singh” is considered a masterpiece. It has been translated into English by different translators. The present paper attempts a comparative study of these English translations and tries to evaluate the merit and authenticity of these translations.

**Keywords:** Toba Tek Singh, Khalid Hasan’s

### 1. Introduction

Recent times have witnessed resurgence in Manto studies for a variety of reasons. One among them is the growing interest in the partition of India in 1947. Attempts have been made by historians, social scientists, academicians and researchers to comprehend this complex phenomenon. They are looking beyond the official historical documents by shifting their focus to literary narratives of the partition. The creative writings of that period are very insightful for they illuminate critical human situations effectively. Saadat Hasan Manto’s oeuvre occupies an important place in the partition fiction and it is accessible to non-Urdu reader through translation, especially English translation. Though English acts as language-bridge to link multi-lingual global community yet the translation of regional texts into English is a contentious issue.

Manto’s short story “Toba Tek Singh” is definitely one of his best partition narratives. It has been translated many times into English by various translators. The notable among these are translations by Khushwant Singh, Tahira Naqvi, M. Asaduddin, Muhammad Umar Menon and Khalid Hasan. Among all Manto’s translators in English, the best known to date is Khalid Hasan. His translation of “Toba Tek Singh” is available in various collections, namely, *Kingdom’s End and Other Stories*. Since these have been quite widespread in their circulation, this paper proposes to concentrate on Khalid Hasan’s translation of the story to examine how Hasan’s translation raises important issues about the pitfalls of translation.

Translation is a portal to the rich lode of literature available in different languages across the world. Translation has come a long way from mere imitation of the original text to an act of reading and writing simultaneously. A translated text cannot be the exact replica of the original text, but this cannot undermine the importance and value of translation as it gives a wider reach to the text. Translation can help regional literature to come out of its cocoon and reach out to larger reception.

Translation can be defined as the transferring of already available material from one language into another. It is transference of meaning from the source language to the target language. According to Bijay Kumar Das, translation is a

“process of analysis, interpretation and creation which leads to a replacement of one set of linguistic resources and values for another” (2). J. C. Catford defines translation as “the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent material in another language” (20). As it is not easy to find the equivalent textual and literary material of the source language in the target language, there is some loss of original meaning in translation. In spite of various difficulties, one cannot undermine the importance of translation, especially in the present globalised world. Translation is a kind of bridge building between two languages and cultures. It is a journey from one language to another.

Translation is both a linguistic and a cultural activity. Translation of a literary work involves more than the knowledge of two languages as literatures are the products of their communities, cultures, nations. In the translation of a literary text, each word, each phrase, and each sentence, etc. becomes a carrier of the socio-cultural information having also a specific meaning and a special message. It becomes imperative for the translator to ensure that the meaning of the translated text makes an almost similar impact on the new reader as the original text did on its reader.

A translator has to tackle many obstacles in the process of translation. While translating a literary text, “the translator decodes the motive of the text in the source language and re-encodes it in the translation” (Das 5). Both linguistic and cultural factors shape the acts of ‘decoding’ and ‘encoding’. The translator has to avoid ‘transliteration’ or word to word translation, but at the same time she should not adhere to transcreation. Although the translator usually sticks to the original text, but being a reader, and interpreter, and a creator – all in one - her handling of the language becomes creative to some extent. In other words, the translator is a writer in the language in which she is translating as her handling of the language is not merely competent but creative.

A translator should possess inwardness with both the languages. She should keep in mind the socio-cultural matrix, she should be competent in handling the specific requirements of the genre, and she should be sensitive enough to understand the emotions that underlie the scripts. Though the elusive

nature of language and language of literature being metaphorical and rhetorical, make the task of a translator really tough, yet, Tutun Mukherjee argues in favour of making regional language texts available in English. She writes, "If English is the language for documenting the history of the country and its culture, if English is the way out of 'ghettoization' of either 'regionalism' or 'womanism' into the mainstream of life and culture, then certainly it make good sense to reach out to larger reception through English" (22).

The present paper concentrates on Saadat Hasan Manto's short story "Toba Tek Singh" available in English translation. A comparative study of various translations of this short story has already been attempted by Muhammad Usman Khan. He has comparatively analyzed the four translation (by Tahira Naqvi, Khushwant Singh, Frances W. Pritchett, and anonymous) in accordance with the criterion set by Meldred Larson's meaning-based translation theory. He has not taken into account the translation by Khalid Hasan. Khan advocates an explanation, within the text, of words which are unfamiliar for the non-Urdu reader. His advice is impalpable for a translator should resolutely resist the temptation to 'improve upon' the original writer. "He should not endeavour to expand, on his own, the textuality of the original in his translation" (Asaduddin 170). Moreover, while comparing the original and the translations, Khan does not quote Manto's original text; he rather substitutes his own translation for the original.

Khalid Hasan's translation of "Toba Tek Singh", undoubtedly, fulfills the criterion of readability in the target language. But as one compares it with the original, one is astonished by the kind of liberties the translator takes with the original and the way he distorts the original. According to M. Asaduddin, Hasan commits "all the errors of an inordinately adventurous translator", such as, he changes the titles of stories without any valid reason, leaves out big chunks of the original, summarizes descriptive paragraphs and dialogues, changes the order of the sentences, eliminate ellipses, flattens out uneven contours and cultural angularities of the original and sometimes adds his own bit for the benefit of readers not acquainted with Indo-Islamic culture and the history of the subcontinent (163). Asaduddin's comments are made in relation to overall translations attempted by Hasan; he does not concentrate on the translation of "Toba Tek Singh" to justify them. The present paper asserts that Hasan's English translation of "Toba Tek Singh" is filled with some of the above listed flaws and a few more. The paper endeavours to substantiate these allegations with illustrations from the text and attempts to show the impact of these errors in diminishing the stature of the original.

The opening lines of the source text read:

*Bantware ke do-teen saal baad Pakistan aur Hindustan ki hukoomaton ko khayal aya ki ikhlaki kaidiyon ki tarah pagalon ka bhi tabadla hona chahiye, (192)*

And Khalid Hasan translates it as:

A couple of years after the partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. (70)

The use of "a couple of years", though a correct expression, is vague because it does not specify the exact time. The exchange of people was carried out by the respective governments of India and Pakistan only in the initial years after partition. The word "hukoomat" is closer in meaning to "reign" rather than

"government". The government is concerned about the opinion of the people, whereas the reign hints at the attitude of the administrators who were least bothered about the masses and the word suggests the callous attitude carried on as a legacy of the colonial masters. The translation of "Hindustan" as "India" robs the word of its socio-political significance. The country was partitioned on the basis of religion; "Hindustan" (the land of Hindus) conveys Manto's anguish at the formation of two nations on religious basis whereas the use of word "India" betrays the author's purpose. The translator's use of "prisoners" is an incomplete expression as the word "civil" or "ethical" is missing. The translator adds unnecessary details such as the use of the phrase "partition of the country" instead of "partition" and "inmates of lunatic asylums" in place of "lunatics". In the first paragraph "Hindustan ke havale kar diya jaye" is translated as "should be sent to India" instead of "handed over to India". Moreover, the first paragraph in the original text is a single paragraph whereas the translator has divided it into two.

The next paragraph in the original runs as follows;

*Maloom nahi, yeh baat makul thi ya gair-makul, baharhal danishmandon ke faisle ke mutabik idhar-udhar unchi satah ki kanfrense hui aur bilakhir paglon ke tabadle ke liye ek din mukarar ho gya. Achhi tarah chhanbin ki gai ... jitne Hindu-Sikh pagal the, sabke-sab pulis ki hifazat me barder par pahuncha diye gaye. (192)*

The word 'danishmandon' is translated as "important officials". The literal translation of the word is "wise" or "intelligentsia". Manto uses the word "wise" as it presents a contrast to the "lunatics". There is an intended pun on "wise", translating it as "important officials" robs the story of its fundamental question, that is, the sanity of the so called wise is in question both in the exchange of the lunatics as well as in the process of the partition of the country on communitarian lines. Moreover, it is questionable whether the officials decided about the exchange or the respective governments. The original text talks about the "chhanbin", that is, the investigation regarding the families of the lunatics. The translator confuses this careful investigation with the careful working out of the details of exchange. He writes, "Final details, like the date of actual exchange, were carefully worked out" (70). The careful working out of details is very questionable. When the finer details of the partition of the country were not worked out carefully, how could the finer details of an exchange of "mere" lunatics be drawn with utmost care? The day of the partition was fixed arbitrarily, without any deliberation because the British wanted to exit from India as soon as possible and the Indian political leaders failed to reach a consensus. This lead to confusion and chaos among the masses. Manto clearly hints at the arbitrary nature of everything concerning the process of partition and exchange, the accompanying insanity and insensitive handling of the whole process of partition. But the translation betrays this. Translation of "Hindu-Sikh pagal" as "non-Muslim lunatics" is another grave mistake committed by Hasan. "Hindu-Sikh" does not equal to "non-Muslim", especially at the time of partition. It is obvious that non-Muslims also include Christians, Parsis etc. This translation entirely misses the point, the animosity is not between Muslim and non-Muslim but it is between Muslims on the one side and Hindus and Sikhs on the other side.

Further, the text reads: “*Udhar ka maloom nahi lekin idhar Lahore ke pagalkhane mein jab is tabadle ki khabar pahunchi to bari dilchasap chimgoyian hone lagin*” (192). The phrase ‘dilchasap chimgoyian’ is translated as “heated discussions”; whereas its literal meaning is “interesting gossip”. Heated discussions suggest aroused passions but the lunatics are not fanatics. This translation defeats the whole purpose of the story where the writer wants to convey the saner behaviour of the lunatics in comparison to the wise. What follows in the story is definitely an interesting gossip which is not even close to a heated discussion. “*Ek musalmaan jo barah baras se, har roz, bakaidagi ke sath ‘Zamindar’ parhta tha, usse jab uske dost ne puchha: ‘Molbi sa’b, yeh Pakistan kya hota hai?’*” (192) is translated as “One Muslim lunatic, a regular reader of the fire-eating daily newspaper Zamindar, when asked what Pakistan was”. The translation substitutes “a regular reader” for “twelve years” and the phrase “fire-eating daily” is added for rhetorical expression. It is notable that “Molbi sa’b” is not translated by Hasan. The difference between the real life maulvis and Manto’s maulvi is remarkable. A maulvi acts not only as a priest but also as an interpreter of Muslim laws. Manto’s maulvi, though a lunatic, is not an ‘insane’ fanatic Muslim unlike the ‘sane’ maulvis. The sentence “*pehredar sipahi anparh aur jahil the*” (193) is translated as “the asylum guards were ignorant if not illiterate” (71). This translation implies that the guards were literate, which is not true. The source text makes an ample use of binary pairs, such as, lunatic-wise, insane-sane, literate-illiterate etc. This device has been used throughout the story to emphasize the sharp contrast between the world of the lunatics and the wise; it shows how the world has turned topsy-turvy where the lunatics act wisely and the sane act foolishly. But the insensitive translator spoils, intentionally or unintentionally, what the author strives to achieve. The word “*muhalle-vukoo*” is translated as “located”, whereas it should be “geographical location” for the whole story revolves round the geographical location of Toba Tek Singh. Similarly, “*takrir*” is reduced to “spoke”, it should be “speech”. The sentence “*is khayal se uska dil bhar aya tha ki veh use chhod kar Hindustan chale jayenge*”, is translated as he was “fully convinced that they were about to leave him and go to India”. “*dil bhar aya*” at the thought of separation has been left out. The phrase, subtly and indirectly, suggests the warm and close bond shared by the Muslims and Hindus who have been living together as friendly neighbours for many years. Manto writes about a Muslim inmate of the asylum, whose name is Mohd. Ali, “*Chaniot ke ek mote musalman ne, jo Muslim League ka sargaram karkun reh chukka tha*” (193) and Hasan translates it as “A Muslim lunatic from Chaniot, who used to be one of the most devoted workers of All India Muslim League” (72). The word “*mote*” (fat) is replaced by “lunatic”, “*sargram*” (active or zealous) is translated as “the most devoted”, and “All India” is added to “Muslim League” by the translator. These are unnecessary omissions and additions which certainly affect the story. The source text reads: “*uski dekha-dekhi ek Sikh pagal Master Tara Singh ban gya - isse pehle ki khoon-kharaba ho jaye, dono ko khatarnaak pagal karar dekar ali-hda-ali-hda kar diya gya*”. Hasan translates it as “This has led a Sikh inmate to declare himself Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Sikhs. Apprehending serious communal trouble, the authorities declared them

dangerous, and shut them up in separate cells” (72-73). Hasan unnecessarily explains for English readers that Master Tara Singh was the leader of Sikhs. Such explanations can be added as footnotes but these should not be made to look like an integral part of the original text. The omission of the word “mad” before dangerous blurs the perspective of the narrator. The entire process of partition was madness and by implication political leaders responsible for it were mad, thus the omission is not admirable. Moreover, the translation of “*khooon-kharaba*” (bloodshed) as “communal trouble” is inappropriate as it fails to convey the magnitude of the massacre that accompanied the partition.

Hasan omits certain details that form essential elements of character portrayal. While referring to the main character Bishan Singh, he leaves out “*veh din ko sota that na raat ko*” and “*veh let ta bhi nahi tha*”. These lines give reader an important insight into Bishan Singh’s world and at the same time this information is very crucial to appreciate the ending of the story. Manto’s “*Ajeebo-gareeb Alfaaz*” (strange or quaint words) is translated as “mysterious gibberish”. This translation is questionable as Bishan Singh’s words are neither meaningless nor nonsense. Saadat Hasan Manto, while defending himself in a court case for obscenity charges against his story “Thanda Ghost” argued that a rustic character like Ishar Singh would use the language that he uses. Extending the logic to “Toba Tek Singh”; Bishan Singh, a lunatic, convincingly speaks incoherently. His utterances and his thoughts may be incoherent but there is certainly logic behind this incoherence. Whether the lack of coherence leads to utter lack of sense is a contestable claim. Moreover, a translator overshoots his brief when he tries to interpret and analyze the source text for the reader and tries to improve upon the original writer.

It can be safely maintained that Khalid Hasan’s translation of “Toba Tek Singh” raises important issues about the objectives of a translator. He often overshoots his brief as a translator and alters the original text. He eventually presents to non-Urdu readers a somewhat unreliable version of Manto. The lapses on his part defeat to objective of translation.

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