



Human Apathy Portrayed in Manto's short story "khol do"

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Abstract— The paper describes how the sufferance of partition has stripped the attackers and the victims equally of their emotional stability. The "Khol Do" short story particularly focuses on the gendered aspect of partition violence. The story moves forward to unfold the slow detriment of human sentiments in both the perpetrator's mind and the survivor's too. The paper explores how the apathetic behaviour stemmed from the mad violence that traumatised or ravaged the sensibilities of the common folks. It goes on to investigate how nation-building resulted in human massacre and disrupted the emotional equilibrium of the common people of India.

Keywords— emotional sensibility, gendered violence, human apathy, violence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The joy of freedom for India after years of struggle was lessened due to the horrifying consequences of Partition. The Partition of India divided the old territory into two separate countries, India and Pakistan. The new nation of Pakistan is comprised of the areas of West Punjab and East Bengal. The laceration of the nation, which was a unified territory and ran under one administration, was not an easy task. Neither the divisions of the territory, people, property, duties were easy before the partition nor did the consequences of the division come easily for the people or the government.

Manto's stories were a powerful description of the carnage during Partition 1947. His concise and unambiguous portrayal of how the conditions of those who died and those living during Partition were equally devoid of human feelings is something that makes the readers instantly visualize the pain and the trauma. The openness with which the violence was described has retrieved forgotten or willfully forgotten memories from the pages of history. The emotional history, which was completely suppressed by the official archives, has been dug out through the short, direct, and invective phrases from Manto's works. He was a writer who faced the pangs of partition himself, and he voiced the madness that he

witnessed as it is in his works. He was defiant towards the willful silence that hovered over the madness of the bloodshed and brutality of Partition. (Sengupta 12). He chose to pierce this bubble of successful nation-making with the truth of the outrageous violence that was scavenging human lives, sensibilities, and the fabric of ethics, which are regarded as the foundation of a stable society.

II. WOMEN & PARTITION

This particular short story by Sadat Hasan Manto, which is strongly based on the immediate consequences of partition on the common families, has been poignantly described. In particular, this story speaks about the gross violence against women and its inhumane consequences. According to Urvashi Butalia, the laceration of the motherland, i.e., Bharat Mata, into two separate countries is seen through the lens of violence on the body of the mother. (Butalia 189) Apart from this metaphorical meaning, the literal pain and violence that women, regardless of religion, had to endure during Partition were horrifying and exceeded human limits.

The patriarchal concept of attaching the honour of the community to the women from that particular

community is what led to the rampant violence against women. Raping and tormenting the women of the community was seen as a way of disrespecting and dominating the entire community. (Butalia 204) Such incidents were condemned, but they were rarely recorded in the country's history until fiction writers like Manto repeatedly emphasized the occurrences of this violence in their works. "Khol Do" or "Open It", is one such bitter and excruciating expression of the pain faced by women during Partition. Though Manto's story is based on the background of Partition, there are two reasons for what sets apart this piece. First, it directly portrayed the violence against women during partition, which was rarely acknowledged even by the survivors, due to fear of societal labelling of the fallen woman or just to move on with life and forget the past. Second, the way this story strongly evokes the dearth of human sensibilities has made it a masterpiece.

III. HOW "KHOL DO" VINDICATE THE GENDERED VIOLENCE DURING PARTITION

The emotional emptiness on the part of the perpetrator and the survivor in the story "Khol Do" has been succinctly shown through very few words. The story opens on the platform of Mughalpura where a man named Sirajuddin is lying unconscious in a refugee camp. As the sun shone on his face, he woke up to remember snippets of the past incidents of boarding a train, violence, gunshots, and lastly, his daughter Sakina. As he remembers Sakina, he jolts back to reality and tries to find his daughter like a "possessed man". (Manto 216). Unfortunately, Sakina was not found for the next eight days, and Sirajuddin requested a group of eight men from the relief camp to help him find his only daughter. He described to them Sakina's facial features for easy recognition by the volunteers. (Manto 217). The ailing and lost father kindled new hope as the volunteers promised to help him. The homeless man, with no support and resources to get assurance of help, was now impatiently waiting for his daughter to return safely to him. He raised his hands in blessing to these men, who were his only hope.

After ten days, the volunteers found a girl with similar facial features as Sakina, and they made her feel comfortable through immediate arrangements of food and clothes. They tried to "lift her spirits" (Manto 218) in every possible way. But days passed, yet Sakina did not return to her father. One day, Sirajuddin found a stretcher carrying an unconscious girl inside the hospital. He eagerly waited outside the ward to catch a glimpse of the girl's face. Sirajuddin could instantly recognize the mole on his

daughter's face, and he gave his identity as the father of the girl. The doctor, looking at the condition of the girl, asked Sirajuddin to open the curtains of the window. As soon as the doctor ordered "open it" to Sirajuddin, the unconscious Sakina undid her salwar and lowered it. Sirajuddin screamed in joy, realizing his daughter was not dead. (Manto 218).

The paradox of the joy of the father on realizing his daughter is alive through her action and the same action that clearly shows the sexual torment she has gone through is the climax of the story. The psychological trauma of the daughter and her mechanical movements due to repeated exploitation of her body and mind starkly illustrates the extent of human apathy. The perpetrators, who were supposedly the rescuers, have been repeatedly requested by the helpless father to find his daughter. But the bestiality of the men to dominate and exploit the helpless girl only to prove their power over her made them cross all the limits of human sensibility. The casual reply by the men, "we will, we will" (Manto 218) when Sirajuddin asked them about Sakina when he met them a few days back, clearly illustrates the emotional barrenness of those men. They unflinchingly replied to the father, who had been searching for his daughter madly yet did not feel responsible enough towards Sakina or his father.

IV. OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMENS' BODY AS A SPACE FOR POWER PLAY

The act of male domination over women has been explained by a theory of social dominance. The hierarchies are based on age, gender, and arbitrary-set, which are group-based hierarchies that are culturally defined and do not necessarily exist in all societies. Such arbitrariness can be based on ethnicity, religion, and nationality. (Siddanious & Pratto 33). In this story, the groups of men were blinded by several of these biosocial factors that made their human sympathy or empathy numb. Firstly, they were driven by the fact that Sakina migrated from an enemy country to this new place, and secondly, her being a girl, they exacted their social and biological beliefs by exploiting her body. Her body was no longer a living component for them. Rather, it was a place where they could demonstrate their animosity and prowess toward the opposing country or even religion. There was a complete suspension of values and senses by these men that led them to carry out this inhumane act of violence against a girl who was already in pain and fear.

Manto exaggerated how the play of nation, religion and gender made the men bereft of their basic sensibilities. The opium of proving the superior nation and religion drove males to target weaker females, who were

projected as symbols of respect for families, countries, and communities. The body of the woman was turned into a space of power play. The destruction or the victory was marked with the ability to tarnish women's dignity and obliterate the dignity of the religion they belonged to. There was a complete loss of fundamental sympathy that a human being is bound to follow to live in a civilized society. Human society turned into cannibalistic attackers overnight to champion the ideals of religion and successful nation-making. In the maze of power plays in politics, the common people turned into murderers, rapists, and dacoits. The agony of the women like Sakina kept on repeating as the attackers lost their consciousness and empathy to the cyclic nature of the violence in the name of religion and nationality. Respect for religion or nation, and demonstrating it through displays of masculine power, has devolved into insanity. As one entered the vicious cycle of this violence, there was no turning back; the desire to prove one's power was nothing short of insane.

Human apathy or indifference from the perspective of the perpetrators is influenced by the aggression and extremism of religion. But there is a need to understand Sakina and her father, Sirajuddin's indifference or apathy towards society's convictions. It is important to understand that the apathy of Sakina and her father has been determined for completely different reasons from that of the perpetrators. The shame that is dawned upon a rape survivor by society has been completely overshadowed by the joy of the father seeing his child alive. The lost hopes of a bereaved father were rekindled by recognizing the mole on the unconscious girl's cheek. With a fumbling voice and a sceptic mind, the time-beaten father was impatiently waiting to know if his daughter was alive. As soon as he saw the movements of Sakina's hands to unknot her salwar, he could not hold his joy of seeing his only child alive. The paradox of emotion captured in this particular moment through the father's joy whose daughter has been brutally exploited has crumbled the structures of morality. The moment itself is the biggest paradox that Manto has left us with, regarding the supposedly most sensible creature on Earth.

On the other hand, the association of honour with a woman's covered body has been forgotten by the psychologically ruptured Sakina, who used to feel uncomfortable even without a dupatta. The gargantuan pain that has been inflicted upon her dignity and her innocent psyche has made her behave apathetically on hearing the doctor's order. She lost her ability to judge the situation and use her intellect to behave the way she had been taught by her family. Her ability to discern has been lost along with the annihilation of her body.

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore, human apathy has been hammered by jingoist ideals which turned men of flesh and blood into cannibals, and which also ripped off Sakina and her father's culturally influenced sense of shame, fear, and protocols. The degree of negativity through violence is the same for both the perpetrator and the survivor, but the ways of sufferance are different. But in the end, all have suffered, whether the dead, attackers or survivors. The mayhem of loss, identity, and homes has destabilized the emotional equilibrium and has led to apathetic outbursts through the collapse of human values.

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