

Violence and Rape: Marginalized Voice in Sadat Hasan Manto's Selected Short Stories

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Abstract— *The 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan is one of the greatest catalyst events in the Indian History. It resulted in mass killing, abduction, rape, loss of life and family. Most of the accounts that we find in the form of history are tailored and fabricated according to the "grand narrative" which consciously has marginalized the voices of women. Sadat Hasan Manto attempts to voice these marginalized, silenced and neglected voices through his writings. Manto was a fearless champion of the truth and was disdainful of any kind of hypocrisy. He wrote for marginalized people, openly mocking the system which tried to suppress some voices.*

Keywords— *Abduction, Marginalized, Partition, Rape, Violence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

All nations, all nationalism and nationalist discourses, are made in exceptional (that is to say, particular, if not unique) historical circumstances (Pandey 168)[1] Gerald James Larson considers Partition as a profoundly defining event of modern independent India and Pakistan and it continues to be the defining event of modern nation-states of India and Pakistan. According to him, "Partition was and is a profoundly *religious* event for both sides . . . and most of the agony over religion throughout the South Asian region is to a large extent traceable to it. . . In many ways it is the core plot in the unfolding narrative of modern, independent India. (Larson 182-3) [2] Partition is considered as one of the main colossal tragic events in the history of India which resulted in the huge loss of life and property. Millions of people lost their lives, their relatives, friends, land and property during Partition. Mushirul Hasan writes that as on date it is not known as to how many perished or became homeless and dispossessed in this mayhem. He puts the estimates of death between 200,000 and 3 million (*Partition Omnibus* xxiv) [3]. In what was to remain etched in history as "the largest forced migration of the twentieth century" an estimated 15 million people were forcibly dislodged, approximately 100,000 women were kidnapped on both

the sides of the border and the death toll between 200,000 and an unimaginable 2 million (Talbot and Singh 2) [4]. Perhaps the exact number will be never known. In the words of Hasan, "'Partition cruelly displaced millions, divided India's past, wrecked its civilizational rhythm and unity and left behind a fractured legacy' (Hasan) [5]

Many historians like Alok Bhalla, Mushirul Hasan, Ian Talbot, Partha Chatterjee, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kavita Daiya, Veena Das etc and literary writers such as Kushwanth Singh, Chaman Nahal, Bapsi Sidwa, Ismat Chughtai, Reema Moudgil, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Rajendra Singh Bedi, Sadat Hasan and many more have tried to grapple with Partition and its repercussions but even to this day it remains a "puzzling fact" which challenges human psyche which had failed to come in terms of it. The research paper tries to interrogates how Manto becomes successful in depicting the violence that was incurred on the bodies of women during Partition riots.

Sadat Hasan Manto is one of the prolific writers in Urdu literature, who is known for his realistic, humouristic and humanistic portrayal of characters. His microscopic depiction of both bright and grey shades of the human mind has elevated him as one of the greatest short story writers of 20th century. If we read his biography written by Ayesha Jalal we see how the Partition was a serious and incomprehensible blow which affected him not only mentally but also creatively and physically. Rather than as a creative writer he was associated with the world through humanity. As Ayesha Jalal says, "amidst the darkening shadows of criminality, avarice and lust, he plumbed the psychological depths of his characters in search of some residual goodness that could help to restore faith in human being." (3)[6] Partition not only destroyed the belief that he had in human relationship but also shattered the faith that he had in human beings. Thus through his writings he tried to see the human being in true colours and emotions. His themes varied from depicting different faces of human world like Kama (sensuality), Krodha (anger), Moha, Lobha (greedy),

Madha(ego), Mathsara(jealous or enimity), and Bhaya(fear) and stories such as “Toba Tek Singh”, “The Assignment”, “A Man Of God” , “The Dog of Titwal” and many other tries to explore these themes. Writers like Alok Bhalla, Khalid Hasan and few more have translated many of his stories into English. As Sudha Tiwari says “Manto’s stories on partition scathingly highlight the physical and psychological impact of violence, abduction, migration and resettlement and most openly narrate the issues of masculinity and vulnerability of sexuality during the phases

on “man” made violence.” (50) [7]

Three short stories of Manto are selected for the study. The attempt is to analyse how woman were treated as “object” and how her body was targeted as the center of violence. Manto was a fearless champion of the truth and was disdainful of any kind of hypocrisy. He wrote for marginalized people, openly mocking the system which tried to suppress some voices. Manto’s characters are prostitutes and pimps, writer and even madmen. They are often nameless people whose human essence and relentless quest for identity and dignity he sought to explore. As Anwar says, “Manto not only profiles his times but reflects unforgivingly on our collective consciousness. He clearly visualizes the politics of marginalization which disowns the very people that are the real constituents of a civic order.”[8] What Manto constantly tries to point out through his stories is that society has failed to provide succor to those who are most in need. It’s a dog-eat-dog world; only the fittest survive. Manto’s stories shock the reader with their graphic yet humane descriptions. Manto never wrote from a distance. What society considered filth, he considered sacred. He always walked hand –in –hand with his characters. His stories are up close and personal, giving us the feeling that they are not fictional accounts but personal anecdotes. For his detractors, Manto had this to say: “If you find my stories dirty, the society you are living in is dirty. With my stories, I only expose the truth.” It is this faith in what he believed makes Manto relevant today. (Ahmar 9) [9]

“Open It” is a short story of a father and a daughter. During Partition riots his wife was killed and both the daughter and father had tried to escape from the place. After a while he realises that his daughter was missing and he goes to the nearby refugee camp to enquire about his daughter but all his attempts, to find his daughter, turn vain. Then he sees a group of soldiers, who are into the rescue of missing people or refugees, and gives them a description of physical appearance daughter, “She is fair, very pretty... About seventeen. Big eyes, black hair, a mole on the left cheek.”(15) [10] and requests them to find his daughter. Every day he waits with a keen eye to recognise his daughter in the camp but he fails and when

he enquires of the soldiers whether they say “If your daughter is alive, we will find her.” Later one day he sees that a girl is brought to the camp on a stretcher in an unconscious state and looking at her he cries “Sakhina my daughter” and goes along with her to a room where a doctor comes to check her. As the doctor feels the pulse of the girl he points towards the window and tells the father to open it. As these words , “open it”, falls on the ear of the girl “Her hands groped for the cord which kept her salwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs.” [11] Looking at this movement the doctor sweats with “astonishment” and he is completely bemused. At the same time looking at the movement in her daughter’s body the father exclaims “She is alive. My daughter is alive.”

At one point in the story we see that the group of soldiers were successful in finding a girl with “a mole on the left cheek” and one of the soldiers had given his jacket to “cover” herself because she was feeling very uncomfortable without her “duppata” but at the same time we see that she is not brought to the camp on the same day but subjected to rape repeatedly until she becomes unconscious. As Jalal says “The perpetrators and the victims of their oppression interest him only insofar as that help to lay base that all –too –human characteristics that can momentarily turn the gentlest of souls into the most demonic monsters.” (24)[12] Men who were regarded as “protectors” turn out “rapist” during partition. Women who were subjected to rape were double alienated, as their body was exploited they became polluted and unwanted for their own people and for the others they remained “unattached” , and “war widows”. Women who were regarded as “mothers” and “sisters” became just an “object”, a “*mall*” that has to be enjoyed and relished. As Kalpana Sharma says, rape “is the tool men use to assert their power over women. It is a tool men use to assert their power over other men, by rapping “their” women, especially in an arena of war and conflict but even otherwise.”[13]

“Cold Meat” is another “reformist” story written by Saadat Hasan Manto. During Partition Ishwar Singh had participated in looting and killing. He had come across a Muslim family that consisted of six men and a beautiful girl. He had killed all the men and had carried the girl, thinking that she was unconscious, to the bushes outside the city. Looking at her physical beauty he felt “I could have slashed her throat but I didn’t... I said to myself... Ishr Sian, you gorge yourself on Kalwant Kaur every day... how about a mouthful of this luscious fruit.” In the eyes of Ishwar Singh the girl becomes just an object of desire that has to be relished hence within a second he “threw the thump” on her. After raping her he realises that she is not at all a girl with life but just a heap of

“Cold Meat” As Veena Das says, “The violence of Partition was about inscribing desire on the bodies of women in the manner that we have not yet understood.” (*Life and Words* 52). [14]

After eight days he visits Kalwant Kaur who is a prostitute. He has come to her to make love to her but rather than love and passion his mind is filled with “anxiety” and “confusion”. He is not the old “Ishr Sian” he used to be. He is more rigid, reluctant, insensitive and dried. Series of sexual gestures and actions made by Kalwant Kaur fail in arousing sexual passion in Ishr Sian. Actions like “biting”, “pinching”, “slapping”, “kneading”, etc are done by Ishr Sian on Kalwant’s body to make his senses realize that he is with a woman who has life and not just another heap of “Cold Meat”

Manto’s another story titled “A Concession” from the collection “Black Margins” is a two line story. “ ‘Don’t kill my young daughter right before my eyes.’ ‘All right, let’s agree. Take off her clothes and throw her in with the rest.’”(100) [15]

“Open It” discusses life –in –death situation whereas “Cold Meat” tries to explore death –in –life situation and “A Concession” is a story of a father who is given a concession. His daughter is not killed in front of his eyes but paraded naked and “throw(n)” with the rest. All the characters who are subjected to rape are mute or silent in the stories. Voice is a sign of presence and silence is absence, this binary construction of women as passive, mute and voiceless is what we see in the stories. All the women characters who are subjected to violence don’t have a voice to express or resist or revolt against man’s atrocities. Thus it remained “unheard”, “silenced” history which is erased from national history. In Manto’s these voiceless, mute characters are the ones who occupy the centrality.

“Open It” Sakhina gains life through her father’s proclamation “My daughter is alive” As Veena Das says “she (*finds*) an existence only in the utterance, he creates through his utterance a home for her mutilated and violated self”(54) [16]and a nameless Muslim girl in “Cold Meat” is just an object of desire. In both the stories the body is subjected to violence. Violence in the form of rape has been variedly argued to be ‘the depersonalisation of women, a terror, a perverse objectification’ (Winkler, 1991), ‘a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear’ (Brownmiller, 1975) and as ‘terror warfare’ (Nordstorm and Robben, 1995). Body was used as a metaphor to define women’s identity. Their biological “womb” which was regarded as “domain of culture” and “producers of son” made them the target of men. On the one hand Sakhina’s struggle to cover her breast with “duppata” and on the other her unknitting of salwar defines her struggle to find a way of existence through her body. Her movement is the sign of

her existence as a “woman” than as a human being. Veena Das opines “women who were violated and rejected may be said to be occupying a zone between two deaths, rather than between life and death.” (79)[17] During Partition women’s existence was defined through their body. For men they were just a property that had to be either “protected” or “possessed”. All the women who were subjected to rape in the stories are defined with words like “beautiful”, “about seventeen”, “young”, “luscious”, “fair”, “pretty” and etc. This description of the body is what made the women the object of desire. As Jalal says “Three potent factors –Zan (women), Zar (wealth) and Zamin(land) ingrained in the material and patriarchal culture ...played a critical role in shaping the nature of violence ...in 1947.” (11) [18]

The image of woman there by changed from individual to national icons. Nation was represented through their body, “purity”, “virtue” and many such images were used to define their existence. Most of the women during Partition riots were killed by their own family members; they were forced to consume poison or commit suicide because they were the symbols of culture and tradition and such women were portrayed as “brave” “courageous” and their death was considered as “sacrifice”, “worthy” and “noble” and the dead were “martyrs”. But hundreds of abducted women remained “unattached” because their family members did not accept them. They became “outsiders” all of a sudden. As Butalia and Menon record even today there are many abducted women who are living a life “between two deaths”. Thousands of women died ghastly death during Partition. Many were ‘martyred’ to save the ‘purity’ of the community/nation and their death beatified. Butalia subverts the notions of ‘martyrdom’ by underscoring how women were “victims of a patriarchal consensus”. The trauma that women were subjected to go through remains unnoticed and there is a huge ‘silence’ that is maintained in expressing the different shades of violence that they were subjected to.

Hence at last the necessity has arrived to re-write history, to take in to regard these neglected points of view and in this attempt Manto’s writing has gained momentum towards narrating history from “silenced” voices.

“Manto, the individual and writer, is ideal fare for the historian of Partition. As astute witness to his time, Manto’s drafted stories that give a more immediate and penetrating account of those troubling times than do most journalistic accounts of Partition.” (Jalal 23) [19]

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