



CRESTFALLEN CHRYSANTHEMUMS: Violence against Women in Saadat Hasan Manto's Stories

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims at the violence against women in Saadat Hassan Manto's short stories which are mirrors of the miseries of women in the communal riots during the Partition of India. This paper attempts to expose the brutal activities imposed on women. This paper discusses the harrowing experiences of women during the partition. The stories "Khol Do' (Open It), Dus Rupay' (Ten Rupees)," and "For Freedom's Sake" show the wounds of women victims who suffered and became mouthless and heartless objects during the time of partition. In the aforementioned stories, Manto paints the sufferings of women at the time of communal riots.

Keywords: partition, communal riots, violence, victims, brutality.

INTRODUCTION:

"I am a woman
I want to raise my voice
because communalism affects me
In every communal riot
my sisters are raped, my children are killed . . .
my world is destroyed and then
I am left to pick up the pieces . . .
It matters little if I am a Muslim, Hindu or Sikh
and yet I cannot help my sisters."

Butalia in her essay "Community, State, and Gender Some Reflections on the Partition of India" (1994) mentions the above lines from a write up by an activist group called Women Against Fundamentalism. Then, she depicts the most pathetic condition of women among the screams of partition. The Partition of British ruled India into two separate nation countries of India and Pakistan grounded on the religious attention of the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs redounded in unknown changes in the lives of the people who were disabused by the unforeseen identity extremity that they were impelled to face on account of the territorial bifurcation.

Millions of people migrated across the recently formed borders, millions were pulled and there was wide collaborative violence which led to huge loss of life and property. This was a situation of complete chaos and lawlessness, as fueled by strong religious sentiments and communitarian abomination the Hindus and Muslims were bent on killing each other. Manto's short stories serve as a chronicle of the trauma and pain in the fate of Partition and recite the horrible situations of mortal debasement when brazened with such an unanticipated dislocation of social and political structures. His stories present first-hand prints of the acute agony and morbidity faced by his characters attesting to the gross injustice and cerebral torture in the wake of the recently achieved Independence which came with an irreplaceable loss.

There's a huge corpus of Partition literature produced by several prestigious pens like Ismat Chughtai, Khuswant Singh, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, etc. but what differentiates Manto's art of story-telling is that he strikes at the central whim-whams inspiring a plethora of painful feelings and recollections that cannot be ignored in the converse of Partition.

The trauma caused by partition is described beautifully by author Ismat Chughtai in the following words:

"Those whose bodies were whole had hearts that were splintered. Families were torn apart . . . The bonds of human relationships were in tatters, and in the end, many souls remained behind in Hindustan while their bodies started off for Pakistan."

Saadat Hasan Manto's Life

Saadat Hasan Manto was born on May 11, 1912, in British India in a small Punjab village called Samrala. He was a Kashmiri and he was born into a family of Sunni Muslims. Not much is known about his youth but this important is known that his family was in the profession of law and his father was a judge.

Though a disinterested pupil from the morning and a council powerhouse, Manto had a sharp mind and a knack for jotting and at the urging of one of his musketeers and tutor Abdul Bari Alig, Manto started reading French and Russian authors. The jottings of these authors inspired him to restate Victor Hugo's "The Last Day of a Condemned Man" in Urdu. Over time, he restated numerous notorious Russian and French books in Urdu. His jotting career began in 1934 when he started working for a small news publication.

He studied Writing and Literature at Aligarh Muslim University, where he met several important numbers. He came musketeers with an Urdu pen, Ali Sardar Jafri. In his council, he wrote short stories and published one of his workshops, Inqilaab Pasand.

In India, it was in the 1940s that Manto gained elevation as a pen. Between 1941 and 1943, he wrote all stripes of stories and also produced four volumes of radio plays. By 1945, he'd written and published his notorious and most controversial short stories Dhuhan, Kaali Shalwar and Bu, which latterly came part of his collected twenty- two short stories volumes

Manto said about his stories,

"If you find my stories dirty, the society you are living in is dirty. With my stories, I only expose the truth."

The Holocaust of Partition

"Hindustan had become free. Pakistan had become independent soon after its inception but man was still a slave in both these countries — slave of prejudice — slave of religious fanaticism — slave of inhumanity and barbarity."

Manto wrote the above in partition. The partition was the greatest and biggest mass movement of humanity in history, close to 14 million people moved. The partition also caused one of the most gruesome and bloody genocides, as two million people died.

The partition of India in August 1947 was a hastily drawn-out affair. The borderline which was arbitrary and artificial was established by a British barrister called Sir Cyril Radcliffe. It was a very successful attempt by the British to divide the country along religious lines. They turned Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh neighbors and friends against each other.

Indeed no one was prepared for the brutal and bloody aftermath of partition. The deadly concoction of fear, anger and mistrust turned common ordinary men into rioters, rapists and murderers.

For Manto partition was the precipitous insaneness.

"Don't say that 100,000 Hindus and 100,000 Muslims have been massacred," he would write, "say that 200,000 human beings have been slaughtered. And it is not such a great tragedy that 200,000 human beings have been butchered but the real tragedy is that the dead have been killed for nothing."

A Few Saadat Hasan Manto's Stories and Women

Raza Rumi in her article named "Reclaiming Humanity: Women in Manto's Short Stories" says, "The notion of a feminist and the concept of feminism in the 1940's was very different from what it is today. And, since he portrays the abuse of his female characters, his works redefine long-held patriarchal notions of vulgarity and taboo through teaming up humanism with taboo. Here the taboo is just a man-made convention that cannot stain the humanity of the character. What we call feminism is a new philosophy so at the onset the notion that Manto used female as a 'sex exhibit' needs to be discarded. Feminism has no unanimously agreed definition except that a feminist viewpoint emerges out of an awareness of institutional exploitation and inequality and willingness to do something to improve the entire system."

Saadat Hasan Manto first published this story in 1948 in a collection of Urdu short stories titled Black Margins (Siyah Hashiye). Following the publication of 'Khol Do,' and two other stories from this collection, he was charged with obscenity because these stories were alleged to comprise a threat to the public peace.

This story commences with Sirajuddin, an elderly man, regaining his consciousness in a refugee camp in Lahore. As he comes to consciousness, he realizes that his daughter, Sakina, is not with him. He searches for her in vain after which he takes the assistance of several young male camp volunteers who assure him that they can locate her. But after initially providing support, it is obvious that they rape her. She capitulates to her concomitant injuries. Later, Sirajuddin goes to a hospital where a corpse has been brought on a stretcher whereupon he realizes it Sakina.

The story ends with a horrible hurting scene. The doctor enters the room, takes her pulse, and orders the father, "Khidki khol do" (open the window), presumably because of the corpse's strong foul smell. After hearing "khol do" (open it) words, the corpse-like Sakina opens and drops her salwar further down. We infer that Sakina had been so accustomed to following this order in the last days of her life, that even in death, her lifeless body complied with the command. Manto depicts that women are exploited by their community and by the men of other communities.

In 'Dus Rupay' (Ten Rupees), Manto describes the story of Sarita, a young girl who has been forced into prostitution by her penury-stricken mother. Sarita enjoys her outings with men in exchange for money. But on a particular outing, she is taken to a beach by two young men.

The trio laughs, plays, and sings together and when the outing ends, she returns the money that was paid to her. This story shows the tendency to break away from the stereotypical image of a sex worker. The story shows that what Sarita misses is the casual fun and pleasure of life which any girl of her age would love.

In the story "For Freedom" Niger is the victim of the social norms and absurd customs. She and her husband both are abused by Baba Ji. Niger kills her desire to satisfy Baba Ji. When Niger says "We were rotting. Inside us, a kind of crust seemed to harden over our finer sensibilities. We become strangers to one another!" These lines depict the loneliness of Niger that although she is married but their married life is just like a flower without fragrance. It shows that Women have no separate identity of their own.

Through the character of Niger, Manto depicts that women can escape from this torture only after death. The protagonists of Manto's stories are ordinary people who are left to cope with the monumental tragedy of millions of families being torn asunder, and losing their homes and their lives. In the story, we can hear the loud shriek of Niger for motherhood.

Manto laments.....

"I am no sensationalist." "If you cannot bear these stories then the society is unbearable. Who am I to remove the clothes of this society, which itself is naked? I don't even try to cover it, because it is not my job, that's the job of dressmakers."

CONCLUSION:

Hence, the partition of India is the most remarkable and momentous event in the history of the Indian subcontinent. Saadat Hasan Manto presents through his short stories namely "Open It", "Ten Rupees" and "For Freedom" that women were the target point of every community during the time of the Holocaust. In these stories, women remained the worst sufferers of partition. Manto clearly outlines in these stories that women, and girls like Sakina, Sarita, and Niger suffered all kinds of humiliation, violence, and torture and apart from that they were molested by the people of other communities. Through the character Sakina, Manto expresses that the easiest way to take revenge on the opposite community was to dishonor and victimize their women. Saadat Hasan Manto was disappointed after seeing the ghastly picture of the partition riots. Manto in his stories also emphasizes the ideology of a patriarchal set which plays a great role in the victimization of women. In his lifetime he was cursed for obscenity which is a regular thing in his stories.

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