

WOMEN MISERIES: IN SADDAT HASAN MANTO'S STORIES "OPEN IT" AND "FOR FREEDOM"

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ABSTRACT:

This paper is an attempt to study the miseries of women in Saadat Hassan Manto's works, mainly including his short stories that are masterpiece of South Asian literature. This paper focuses on the issue of violence and miseries against women during the communal riots that followed the Partition of India in 1947. This paper is focused on gender-specific reading of partition genocide. It gives emphasis on various forms of violence imposed on women. These two stories "Open It" and "For Freedom" presents the lively picture of victimization and marginalization of women who suffered during the time of holocaust. In the aforesaid stories, Manto presents the true picture of marginalization, subordination and sufferings of women at the time of partition. In furthermore, the paper highlights the issue of abducted women. This study also adopts and adapts the ideas presented by Foucault to investigate the way that the female gender is marginalized and oppressed by a society rooted in a patriarchal setup. In this manner, women are further oppressed on the basis of not only being subjects but also on the basis of their gender. It is only through women that an ethnic community or nation-state demonstrates its sense of purity and honors. As a result, women turn into mute objects stripped of individual autonomy, of control over their bodies and lives. In this study, Saadat Hassan Manto's short stories "Open It" and "For freedom" are analyzed thematically to investigate the ways in which women are subjugated, suppressed and raped during the time of holocaust.

Keywords: Partition, Community, Raped, Prostitution, Victimization, Argument, Barutalization, sex, society.

INTRODUCTION:

The partition of India took place in the year 1947. It divided India into two parts one is India and another is Pakistan. It is called a black day in Indian history. It gives birth to riots, violence and treachery. This incident is proved most horrifying and terrible in human history millions of the

people were killed raped and kidnapped. At the time of holocaust people's resident were burnt and mostly women were put to death. Most impact of the partition was felt by the people who were migrated from India to Pakistan and Pakistan to India. Thus it can be imagined that partition of India is a painful and gruesome event for both the nation India and Pakistan. No doubt men were suffered but the sufferings of women were cross all its walls. They were doubly exploited. After they were raped by the other community their own family was not ready to accept them as the member of their own family. Their virginity was questioned. Due to killing, the earth of both countries turned red. As Nisid Hajari says in his book *Midnight Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition* "The railway between India and Pakistan was filled with dead bodies of refugees". One can say that achieving freedom from the bloodshed of such innocent people is a shameful deed in Indian history. In modern era there are so many writers who wrote about partition. Including, Khushwant Singh, Kmlshwar, Manohar Malgonkar, Gulzar, Bhisham Sahni etc. Their literature is a mirror for the society. They have written novels, memoirs and poetry on this horrifying event. But this saddat Hasan Manto paid his more attention towards short stories. This area of short stories is remained untouched by the other writer of the era. The paper, through a reading of two of Manto's translated short stories—"Open It" and "For Freedom" attempts to show how the women character in the story are exploited at the time of riots. Pramod Nair, summarizing Simone De Beauvoir's ideas from *The Second Sex*, points out those women by accepting the stereotypes associated with them by the patriarchal society becomes their own instruments for self-oppression (88).

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) is a Pakistani writer, playwright, and author born in Ludhiana, British India. He presents the naked picture of riots spread at the time of partition holocaust. He had a special corner in his heart for the women; he had observed them minutely. Manto's characters are obviously belongs to the category of prostitutes, widow and madmen. He portrayed the most pathetic picture of women in his stories. Manto, present that no doubt men were suffered but the suffering of women were supreme. He wrote these stories during the time of partition. The most pathetic and harrowing story about the suffering of a woman is "Open It" in which a Muslim girl named Sakina is abducted and raped by a group of people, ironically belong to her own community. Through sakina, Manto depicts all type of danger faced by women. It is symbolic of the ways that communal identity put women in harm during 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 relationship were in tatters, and in the end many souls remained behind in Hindustan¹ while their bodies started off for Pakistan.

For instance, Butalia in her essay “*Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India*” (1994) cites a pamphlet by an activist group called Women against Fundamentalism. Here, she depicts the most pathetic condition of women at the time of riots.

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. (99)

Women did not participate in the partition violence In spite of that they are the victim of it. Violence is started by male but its greatest impact is felt by female. What Bidyut Chakrabarty notes in his article:

“What it is relevant to note is the underlying theme, articulated in the pain and agony of the Hindu family that had vacated the house and that of those who had occupied it. Their plight was the same. Both the families are victims of circumstances beyond their control and become homeless refugees with an uncertain future in an unknown place. (20).”

“Open It” presents pathetic and deplorable condition of women at the time of holocaust. What Urvashi Butalia notes “We must not place women into the category of “mere victims of a patriarchal consensus’ arrived at by their men”(168). In the Story “Open It” Sirajuddin lost his wife his daughter after that his silence reflects the mentally trauma that people were faced during the time of holocaust. Wounds were so deep that even after the seventy year after the partition people can’t able to forget the miseries. Sirajuddin Sakina’s father asks everyone for help in tracing his daughter, Sakina, but nobody is ready to help him. Sakina is violated by the people of her own community. Manto affirms that behind every civilized face there lurks a monster, ready to pounce upon anybody even on its master. In the ending of the story when doctor said to Sirajuddin open the window after listing this sakina with her dad hands lowered his trouser. This incident depicts that how much barbarity and violence are in the society at the time of political riots. Manto depict that women are exploited from own community and from the men of other community. When Sakina is hospitalized the doctor pointing towards the window asks her father to open it, on hearing the phrase she in her subconscious state tries to untie her trousers. The father observed her movement and shouts in excitement, ‘She is alive. My daughter is alive’ (9). Manto says that the women who faced this trauma cannot able to forget their memories. Study of Manto’s stories depict that he was a keen observer of the society. As what Jalal says in his words about Manto:

“He had faith on humanity, which motivated him to write fascinating short stories

about the trauma of 1947, and it is acknowledged internationally that his writings represented the pain of migration and savagery of humanity without any objectivity”

Similarly in the story “For Freedom” Saddat Hasan Manto presents the situation of women who are suffered because of superstition that was prevalent at the time of holocaust. Ghulam Ali is the main character in the story. He is deceived by Babaji who is a saint during the time of the holocaust. Ghulam ali wants to marry a girl named Niger and he asks Babajii for marriage. At this he says that you will remain unmarried until India got independence. Baba makes a long speech at the wedding, where he states that the sexual link is not as important as it is made out to be in a marriage. He adds that a true marriage should be free of lust. Ghulam Ali declares to Babaji that as long as India does not win freedom, he and Niger will not live as husband and wife but as friends. He dominates people by seducing them. He has opened several ashrams and persuades his disciples to come and reside there. Baba makes a long speech at the wedding. Thus, Niger is the victim of this type of stereotypical norms that were widespread in the society. Niger remains voiceless in the face of the manipulation and oppressive dictums of Babaji. Here Manto also highlights the silence of women. Moreover, she instead of taking any decision keeps moving between the ideology and the wishes of both Ghulam Ali and Babaji Through the character Niger, Manto depict the oppressed condition of women. What Simon De Beauvoir says “One is not born women but rather become women”. Manto also depict the psychological trauma faced by women at the time of political riots. In this conflict he kills his inner desire. Through the character Niger Manto show the imaginary picture of private conflicts faced by women because of their sexual frustration. Manto by birth has been called a rebel and he never paid attention towards society while even depicting women miseries and communal violence .What Naila Inayat says about Manto: “Here lies buried Saddat Hasan Manto in whose bosom are enshrined all the secret and art of short story writing. Buried under mounds of earth, even now he is contemplating whether he is a greater short story writer or God”.

Through the character Niger and Sakina Saddat Hasan Manto depict the trauma of mental separation during the time of partition riots. 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!”(5). 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 Niger Manto depicts that women can escape from this torture only after death. As Ayesha Jalal puts in his words: “ the protagonists of his stories are ordinary people who are left to cope with the monumental tragedy of millions of families being torn asunder, losing their homes and their lives. In the story we can heard the cry of Niger for motherhood. Her cry

remains unanswered. It is not the cry of Niger only it is the cry of so many Niger's during the time of holocaust. Through Niger Manto presents the cry of millions of women who meets her tragic end because of these partition riots. Ghulam Ali's trust is shattered when he notice that Babaji himself involve in partition politics. In the beginning it seems that Ghulam Ali needs Niger for companionship but with the passage of time she becomes a mere thing for her. Niger in the story depicts very pitiable state of womanhood.

Thus, Manto's stories particularly based on crime committed on women. This division is responsible for the killing of hundreds and thousands of innocent people. Niger in the story craves for love and for soft touches in her life but he always follow Babajii. At the end he realizes that he has made a mistake by allowing his life to be controlled by another individual. Here, Gulam Ali first time realizes that how Niger craves for motherhood. Ghulam Ali thus decides to break his promise to Babaji and produces a couple of children with Niger. These words of Niger depict her agony.

“We were rotting us; a kind of crust seemed to harden over our finer sensibilities. We become strangers to one another thought, after many days of consideration, that even if we stayed true to our oath”. (122)

Thus, Manto present the various forms of violence were inflicted upon women. During times of partition rape is one of the most common forms of sexual violence. In addition to rape, “tattoos were inscribed on the bodies of women and they were paraded naked in sacred spaces such as temples, mosques, and gurudwaras, and their breasts were cut off” (Menon, 30). Manto says that all of these gruesome acts were meant not just to cause pain to the women, but also to cause public shame to their communities. The act of cutting off women's breasts “symbolically severed their role as potential nurturers” and was a physical display “to other men that these women were second hand” (Menon, 45). As Deepika Bahri put it, the detached body parts denote “the dehumanization of women and their reduction to ghastly currency” (224) in this war of partition, controlled by men. Women were solely seen as pawns in the ongoing conflict between men of different groups.

Violence against women during Partition was not just violence against their personhood, but also against their community, family, and nation. And for each family, community, and nation, “a display of the wounded, an admission of violation, (would be) tantamount to an admission of public defeat” (Bahri 220)

Apart from that if women wanted to speak about their suffering, then they were more tortured

by the society as we see in the case of Sakina and Niger. “In a society so focused on purity and honor, a woman raped or abducted and speaking of her shame must accept that she can no longer occupy any available and acceptable social space” (Bahri,220). She must be defined by her relationship to the men around her and her purity or motherhood; after those relationships have been severed and she is no longer considered pure or fit to be a mother, she is no longer acceptable as a member of society. The safest option is to remain silent. Silence provides a degree of preservation, a hope that she may re-integrate into society, only if she never speaks about the unspeakable. However, Urvashi Butalia notes that we must not place women into the category of “mere victims of a ‘patriarchal consensus’ arrived at by their men” (168). Women become “polluted” through rape committed by a man from a different community, and even the potential of rape is so fearsome that death is a more desirable option than the corruption of the women’s purity, which is tied to the communal identity. Communal identity also becomes extremely important during the time of Partition because each nation is trying to create a firm identity through these communities

Humanism is the core concept in Manto’s short stories but it is worth noticing that his characters of short stories are people who were socially marginalized. The women are not slaves of patriarchy after that they have been brutalized by the rioters says Mahnaz Ispahani in her general review of Manto’s works. An important observation she makes is that his work often reads like journalistic naturalism— “about alienation and sexual violence, by blighted endings.” (Ispahani, 184). All academics have somewhere or another commented on Manto’s portrayal of women in his stories. According to Ispahani, his women characters are represented through their sexual vulnerability thorough events like sexual humiliation, rape, prostitution etc. She believes “they are almost always victim, with the power only to occasion their own destruction.” (Ispahani, 186). All his stories are the reflection of what Manto see in the society. Once he said that “I, believe, there are instances in some of his stories where his women protagonists have the power to save somebody else although it might be at their own cost, so in some ways they also have a power to affect someone else’s life in a constructive way”. The horror that is presented by Manto is not sensational it’s the reflection of his inner soul what he saw in the society during the time of holocaust. Manto’s writings are full with objectivity. Manto, believe that for him the human body, especially the women’s, becomes the land on which the horrors of partition played out. He “blends the Partition holocaust so meticulously into the lives of his characters that it creates a living memory of the bloody event. It is the most powerful metaphor for what humans did to each other during the 1947 bloodshed.” (Rumi, 81) His most memorable stories like, “Open It” and “For Freedom” are the representation of the women who are the victim of partition riots. Furthermore, Robinson argues that most of the women engaging in prostitution in Manto’s story have a history of physical and sexual abuse’, in that case, it becomes more an issue of

exploited adolescents than a choice (23). His stories depict the clear picture of miseries of women who are the main point of exploitation during the time of partition riots.

CONCLUSION:

Hence, partition of India is the most remarkable and momentous events in the history of Indian subcontinent. Saddat Hasan Manto present through his short stories namely “Open It” and “For Freedom” that female were the target point of every community during the time of holocaust. In these stories that female remained the worst sufferers of partition. Manto, clearly outline in these stories that women, girls like Sakina, Niger suffered all kind of humiliation, violence, torture and apart from that they were molested by the people of other communities. Through the character Sakina Manto express that the easiest way to talking revenge to opposite community was to dishonor and victimized their women. 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 own desire in order to satisfy Baba jii. Manto basically through his short shows that partition literature is filled with the theme of brutalities of women. Saddat Hasan Manto was disappointed after seeing the ghastly picture of partition riots. Manto in his stories also emphasis on the ideology of patriarchal set up which plays great role in the victimization of women. In his lifetime he was cursed for obscenity which is a regular thing in his stories. Through these stories Manto depict that how much filth is already gather in human minds. It does not matter that what nationality or religion they belongs.

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