



Repulsions of Gendered Violence during the Partition in ‘*The Return*’ By Saadat Hasan Manto.

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to study the Partition and its correlation to gender. The target short story presents the whole generation of women who were the worst sufferers, whose bodies and ‘self’ were crushed and withered during the division. This story uncovers the victimization of women and violation of women’s space at a crucial time. This research paper emphasizes on narratives of women which were often omitted, gives the low down to the unspoken voices of women. Divided and violated mother nation–Bharatmata became the magnified image of despoiled and partitioned ‘self’ of women.

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-55), is “the undisputed master of the Indian short story” as described by Salman Rushdie. He is the grand dame of Urdu letters, his works created the ripples around. Manto’s short stories picture the repulsions of gendered violence during the Partition. His one of the eminent short stories *The Return*, originally written in Urdu as *Khol Do*, tackles the brutality head on with its denouement, leaving the reader thunderstruck.

Key Words: Gender, Partition, Violence

During the Partition of India, violence against women was an extensive issue. It is estimated that during the partition of India approximately 75,000 and 100,000 women were kidnapped and raped. The rape of women by males during this period is well documented with women also being complicit in these attacks. Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-55), is “the undisputed master of the Indian short story” as described by Salman Rushdie. He is the grand dame of Urdu letters, his works created the ripples around. His enormously popular stories like ‘*Khol Do*’ (Open It), ‘*Thanda Gosht*’ (Cold Meat) and ‘*Mozail*’ uncover the torment of women during the division. He was a distinguished British-Indian born Pakistani writer of Urdu language. He also served as a film and radio scriptwriter and a journalist, penning twenty-two collections of short stories, one novel, five collections of radio plays, three collections of essays, and two collections of personal sketches. He was tried for obscenity before and after the Partition in Pakistan but never convicted. He began his literary career translating works of celebrated writers like Victor Hugo, Oscar Wilde and Russian writers like Chekov and Gorky. His first story was *Tamasha*, based on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre at Amritsar. He is best known for his short stories, *Bu* (Odour), *Khol Do* (Open It), *Thanda Gosht* (Cold Meat), and *Toba Tek Singh*. He was connected with Indian Progressive Writers' Association (IPWA). He displayed his range in writing scripts and dialogues for Hindi films, including *Kishan Kanhaya* and *Apni Nagariya*. He worked as a screenwriter in films like *Aatth Din*, *Chal Chal Re Naujawan* and *Mirza Ghalib*, which was released in 1954. He has published four collections of radio plays, *Aao* (Come), *Manto ke Drame* (Manto's Dramas), *Janaze* (Funerals) and *Teen Auraten* (Three women).

His first collection of short stories in Urdu was *Atish Pare* (Sparks; also Quarrel-Provokers) followed by *Dhuand* (Smoke) and *Manto ke Afsane* and his first collection of topical essays, *Manto ke Mazamin*. This phase accomplished with the publication of his mixed collection *Afsane aur Drame* in 1943. He died at the age of 42. On January 18, 2005, the fiftieth anniversary of his death, Manto was memorialised on a Pakistani postage stamp. Moinuddin Jinabade in his article, *Natraj ki Gun Ki Funkari*

compares Manto to “the composite artist, the ultimate performer, *Natraj*.” He further says: “He startles, astonishes and entertains but never once does he lose his balance.” (Jinabade 113)

Manto’s short stories picture the repulsions of gendered violence during the Partition. His one of the eminent short stories *The Return*, originally written in Urdu as *Khol Do*, tackles the brutality head on with its denouement, leaving the reader thunderstruck. It talks about a refugee who hires a group of *razakaars*—volunteers, acclaimed as rescuers to find her missing daughter Sakina. These self-appointed social workers trace her, feed her, and eventually, Sakina's father and the reader finds her brutalised by them. The story begins with Sirajuddin waking up from his consciousness on the railway platform of Mughalpura after the awful journey from Amritsar to Lahore. When he finds himself alone, the image of his wife who was on the verge of death with ripped open stomach flashes in front of him.

The memories of journey come into his mind as clippings or fragments of a film, and in this way, he experiences the traumatic journey where he lost his wife and separated from his daughter. It is also the way of telling this story, from the beginning to end there are the only scant descriptions about the setting of the story. Sakina’s mother who was concerned for her grown-up seventeen years old daughter told Sirajuddin to take Sakina away while dying. Absorbed in thoughts, his hand touches Sakina’s *dupatta* (long scarf) and suddenly realised that she is nowhere. She was lost while fleeing to Pakistan; only her *dupatta* remained which he collected while it slept off. *Dupatta*, in the cultural context, is looked as an insignia of women’s *izzat* (honour) and sleeping off *dupatta* from her shoulder predicts her violation.

With anticipation to meet her, Sirajuddin appeals the group of eight young men who are doing a ‘tough task’ of bringing back the women remained on the other side, and one day, *razakaars* captured this stunning beauty but concealed from Sirajuddin, giving assurance of locating her. Manto’s use of the pun in the description of these volunteer’s benevolence ironically refers to cruelty below this kindness when the same liberators turned into tyrants. After escaping from Hindu rioters, she falls prey to Muslim volunteers who got an authority on her body. She was subjected to successive rape by her “saviours” who break the prevailed belief and trust that community men are protectors. The men hailed as “redeemers” found her after “searching and risking” their lives, turned out to be assailants who ab(used) her and left her unconscious. The co-religionists who pretended to act out of the sense of honour and goodness reduced to cruelty by becoming perpetrators of inhumanness. Violence by co-religionist never considered the discussable issue, and this patriarchal ideology shared by both the nation-state and ethnicity which looks upon women as a communal possession. Several days later, Sakina's abducted body discovered near the railway tracks and hospitalised. Sirajuddin goes to see her daughter and the story concludes with the most shocking piece of prose. The doctor looked at the prostrate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man: “Open the window.” The young women on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her *shalwar* tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs.

Her reaction to a doctor’s words marks the atrocity of her brutalisation. When a doctor tells her father to open the window, Sakina’s hands involuntarily moves to unfasten the chord of her *pyjamas* (trousers). The oft repeated rape makes her so habituated to this word that she undoes her trouser strings on hearing a doctor saying ‘open it’ where he meant opening the window. She was so traumatised that she lost the sense of language and *Khol do* (open it) carries the only meaning to surrender herself to be violated. The question arises whether a doctor is also one of the violators. She has become accustomed to abduction and torture that she reacts to nothing except this one word and, the trauma has made her a lifeless machine. “The normality of language has been destroyed as Sakina can hear words conveying only the “other” command.” (Das: 2007, 46) This reaction on hearing a male voice points at unrelenting and remorseless vehemence which made her battered animal and validates her violence and broken psyche as she forgets everything apart from that. Sakeshi Kamra observes in *Bearing Witness: Partition, Independence, End of the Raj*:

'...how language was fractured and bruised during Partition; how language, the sign of normality, had created new charms in the world. It offers a critique of the cultural insistence on the "purity" of women by offering the image of a father less concerned with his daughter's chastity than with her survival. Finally, it offers Partition as a psychic space that gave a play to all of these cultural tropes and repressions.' (136)

Attuned to cold cruelty, she responds instinctively and unconsciously to the only "word" which proves her alive. Seeing her alive, the father's exclamation of over joy is ironic and pathetic when he says, "She is alive. My daughter is alive, Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke in a cold sweat." (14) Here, a word "alive" used ironically by Manto showing her only physically alive. Sirajuddin's spontaneous euphoria adds sarcasm where he is unmindful to what had been inflicted upon her. She communicates violence through her response and her silence which cannot be conversed through words: "The humanistic discourse, the father-daughter bond, asserts itself over the brutality and mindlessness of violence. The juxtaposition of two opposite frames the traumatic experience much more sharply than any descriptive narrative could have done." (Jain 325)

Veena Das has a contradictory opinion about his character stating how Manto transforms the role of the conventional Indian father who desires her daughters to die for the honor rather than to live. "...*this father wills his daughter to live even as parts of her body can do nothing else but proclaim her brutal violation.*" (Emphasis in original) (Das: 2007, 47) For the reader, Sakina's response is the sign of her virtual death and total reversal for Sirajuddin who finds this as a sign of life as "he creates through his utterance a home for her mutilated and violated self." (Das: 2007, 47) Her voice was suppressed by the untamed barbarism which left her as a corpse, a cadaver. The constant attacks have made a girl surrender herself and, she was abused so often that her screams and sighs died away into impenetrable silence which is more horrendous than her cries. Silence shows the lack of communicability and unspeakable violence, "the persistent, dehumanizing sexual commoditization and violence against women within communities." (Daiya 85) Women express their loss through their body and language... Therefore, even in their silence, victimized women of communal violence objectify grief through their bodies (for example, mourning rituals such as wailing), or through language, where there is a need to fictionalize their accounts of violence.

Violence and powerful political discourse plays the prominent role in the loss of voice. Manto highlighted her state of silence; she was never shown articulating anything even when she was located by volunteers. Her silence speaks louder than words about her physical, psychological and emotional state by voicing her trauma and exposing the insanity of the two-nation theory. Muhammad Hasan Askari said about Manto in the preface of Siah Hashiyat: "Manto only tried to see as to what is the relationship between acts of cruelty from the different points of view of the perpetrators and the victims of cruelty."

Having androgynous approach towards writing, his art raises a question to a feigning society and breaks the fabric of so called morality. Perceiving inner strain of women, his stories look the world through women's eyes. Deserving to be termed as a "feminist", he creeps into the psyche of broken and wrecked women. Marcel Proust states that "the universe is reborn with a new writer; this applies to Manto." (qtd. in Bhalla: 2004, 192) Sakina's silence addresses her atrocity and the cause behind it, Patriarchal institution and the Partition. Her silence silences the reader leaving them a witness of the horrifying reality of bygone era. *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin transmits the same horror when Roop sees the mutilated bodies of women at the railway station. She utters in shock:

Is this India we fought for God-chosen or Godforsaken? She is like a woman raped so many times she has lost all count of the trespassers across her body. (547)

Sakina's rape isn't a typical representation of abduction usually found in the Partition narratives; it is marked by the absences and urges to read between the lines to understand the meaning. Her slightest action indicates enormity of the tragedy that has reduced her to impenetrable and perpetual silence. Veena Das and Ashish Nandy notices: "A movement in her body represented as a *gesture* that transforms it into a sexually violated body. "The violence itself is not described. If, then, the violation of Sirajuddin's daughter

Sakina should be seen as the subject of the story, it is then the subject only in so far as *the reader* must delve into his imagination to find out what violence would mean in this context...the violation is on the periphery of (the dialogue in) the story.” (qtd. in Jaunch 199) Sakina’s trauma states that she was so “brutally raped that they lost the sense of language itself.” (Tiwari 53) Manto’s short stories provide another perspective of looking at trauma by constituting images and presenting violent pictures through the absence of Subject’s dialogue. Manto is silently showing the barbarism rather than describing and explaining it.

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