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Women's place in society: An analysis of Manto's selected works

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Abstract

The short stories of Manto emerged between the colonial and post-colonial eras. He was much ahead of his time as he wrote stories that symbolize today's world as well. Manto not only acquaints his readers with the ugly truths of society but also pins down the balloon of conventional literature which favors patriarchy and considers women as a secondary gender. Manto attempts to strengthen the female voice by portraying strong women characters who fight for their love, struggle with conservative society and take a stand against deceit. However, it is always a perilous task for them because of the fear of repercussions that might follow. This paper will depict the relevance of Manto's stories in contemporary times through a review of four selected short stories; *Hattak (Insult)*, *Thanda Gosht (Colder Than Ice)*, *Khol Do (Open it)*, and *Mozel*. Overall, the writings are the depiction of an orthodox mindset, topics which are being tabooed by society like talk of sex and sexuality that has crowned Manto as an obscene and controversial writer of his times. The findings further suggest that concepts in Manto's stories are quite relevant in present times as the perpetrations and abuses against women are still prevalent in different forms and different spheres than earlier. Moreover, these atrocities and stereotypes have evolved differently within the same space and have not vanished. The instances of discrimination, allegations, violence, and atrocities have been metamorphosed. Partition did not just bring us communal violence but also escalated sexual violence which can be related to modern times in the context of war where women are more marginalized than men in terms of security. During partition women in particular were targeted for dismantling the honor of the community to which they belonged and the same is being experienced by women in modern times in the forms of honor killings, early marriages in case of rape and even abandoning women by their families.

Keywords: Patriarchy, sexuality, discrimination, contemporary times, atrocities, partition, marginalization

Introduction

Manto during partition and Manto in contemporary time

Manto depicts the condition and ways of perpetration that were opted by the people in an inhumane way on Women before and after the partition of Hindustan i.e. India and Pakistan. To dismantle the integrity of a particular community is considered to strike on the weak but the most pivotal point and finally what we heard the news of rape, molestation, the parade of naked, killing, and much more. The predicaments of women are the same as they used to be in the time of Manto. They are still reluctant to live in an unsettling environment where the news of abduction and rape are still prevalent. We not only get a glance at marginalized sections but of the strong women characters who are adamant to fight for their cause. Indeed, they accept the brutality, and perpetration caused by the male dominant society but they are also stagnant to face the repercussions which will follow them to save their families, neighbors, and lovers. However, it is not always uncomplicated to stand against the offense but there would be consequences for them.

It is considered that Manto is much ahead of his time, which is why his stories are still relevant in contemporary times. This paper will further examine the relevance of Manto and his selected short stories in contemporary times.

A renowned feminist Indian writer Urvashi Butalia writes about the mayhem, rapes, and exodus of mass in *The Other Side of Silence*.

“Twelve million people were displaced as a result of partition. Nearly one million died.

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Some 75,000 women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, forcibly impregnated by men of the 'other' religion, thousands of the families were split apart, home burnt down and destroyed, villages abandoned. (35)" And such instances can be explicitly imagined through the stories of Saadat Hassan Manto.

Understanding Manto's *Khol Do (Open It)*, *Thanda Gosht (Colder than Ice)*, *Mozel*, *Hattak (Insult)*

One of the breathtaking stories of partition *Khol Do (Open it)* not only gives goose bumps to the reader but also drenched the Doctor in cold sweat who comes to examine the rape survivor. Sakina, a Muslim girl, is gang raped by the abductors who are supposed to rescue her. The impact of rape on her psyche makes her unconscious and half-dead. When a doctor comes to inspect her and utters the word '*khol do*' (Open it) for the window meanwhile Sakina suspends the knot of her salwar to unfasten it. The trauma of being exploited brutally has occupied her mind which makes her do so. She has equipped with the thought to surrender herself but is not willing to accept the same perpetration again and again which she already has been through. Here, Sakina has been portrayed as a vulnerable and defenseless character who is savagely dehumanized in a way that her mind responded instantly when she hears the word '*khol Do*' (Open it).

Women are taken as crucial members of family, community, and nation, and this women's 'pride' is the prominent target of the conflict. Conflicts between local, regional, national, and international levels are acted out on women in a physical form because women were treated as a precious yet sensitive and soft part of any community and therefore becomes an easy and valuable target to accomplish any kind of revengeful act. Thus, women's bodies are looked upon as hostile battlegrounds, and women are cruelly raped, tortured, and murdered.

On the other hand, *Thanda Gosht (colder than Ice)* is a story of the gruesome killing, necrophilia, lust, and deceit. Ishwar Singh, who is on the prowl for wealth, raped the family's little girl before realizing she was frozen flesh. These incidents happen in ongoing clashes between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims. Coming back home after this event, he fails to satiate his wife Kulwant Kaur sexually which makes her suspect his gestures and activities. After his confession of committing necrophilia, she kills him cold bloodily. Kulwant Kaur comes out as a strong character having bold traits by not accepting deceit and taking her stand without bowing down to patriarchal supremacy by killing her husband. She may be said to have exacted revenge for the murder of an innocent girl who she also views as a lady...

Urvashi Butalia utters: Violence is almost always instigated by men, its greatest impact is felt by women. In violent conflict, it is women who are raped, women who are widowed, and women whose children and husbands are sacrificed in the name of national integrity and unity. And for every fire that is lit, it is women whose job it is to painfully build a future from the ashes... (Butalia 1998).

Moreover, we can hypothesize that Manto perceives women the same way he perceives men which is why he draws strong women characters like Mozal, an exquisite Jewish woman who falls in love with a Sikh man Trilochan. However, she rejects his proposal of marriage for being a

religious and conservative woman forcing Sardar ji to get him engaged with a girl of his religion. During the religious carnage, Mozal aids his wife Kirpal Kaur by giving her a Jewish robe which has left her utterly naked. While naked she confronts bloodthirsty mutineers who are enchanted by her body. She slips down the stairs having multiple abrasions and shrugs off the veil given by a protester saying "Off with it, your blasted religion". Her guts of putting down her convictions aside to save the life of her lover and his wife by laying down herself in danger show her courage and love towards the Sardar ji irrespective of her religious differences. In contrast to the majority of the men around her, she is a clever, independent, and farsighted woman.

Similarly, Saugandhi a prostitute from *Hattak (Insult)* emerges as a sophisticated woman determines not to accept any form of exploitation which helps her to commence a new life after being duped by a so-called lover who extorts money from her. Rejection from Seth has made her self-conscious and her rage dispels all delusion from her. Her inner conscience compels her to decide to stop being exploited on daily basis. The love which has been void to her has now been found in her dog, She would rather spend time with a docile dog than put up with oppression and deceit. The character of Saugandhi comes to light as a self-aware lady who is determined to stop maltreatment and live her way of life.

"Saugandhi's character is more powerful than that of many virtuous wives, a character that has the ambition and intelligence to understand her exploitation"(Rumi,2015) ^[5].

Relevance of Manto in contemporary times

Salim Akhtar says: An artist is relevant so long as their work can find readers through changing times. Rather, a work must also possess "something else" which distinguishes it from numerous other works. (Akhtar and Flemming 1)

Manto a legend, is a propounder of Sexual Realism in Urdu literature. Based on this realism he brings out sex and sexuality to the center of his stories, from the closed gates. He exposes secret facts that were previously considered taboo via his words. Nudity, sexuality, and sex have become a subject for him to criticize society which is a common motif in his short stories. However, the truth is that it is the sensationalism of his court cases, not the sex in his best-known stories, that has affected the public's perception of his whole body of work. Moreover, his stories are not made to provide sensual pleasure neither is he a 'pornographer'. Instead of delights, his approach makes us disgusted because of his frank and open style. The dissent of Manto is a social one. The majority of his stories depict simple, innocent people from diverse walks of life, the doors to their deepest selves going to open up with the trigger word of sex. Manto was unrivaled in his use of this magical word.

Sex is operated on two levels in Manto's stories. On one level he has brought out the inconsistencies of life through sex. Yet on another level, sex has become a means of protest. (Akhtar and Flemming 1)

What requires today is the kind of moral courage that Manto represented, free from the stigma of falsehood. Manto has the guts to face the harsh reality, to understand it, and to present it, irrespective of repercussions. His battle for the right to tell the truth his entire life has made him face not only religious and legal condemnation but also the rejection of his contemporaries in the progressive movement. Despite

all this, he remains on his path. On the other hand, today's short-story authors appear to be more apprehensive than their predecessors. We need a Manto, not to teach us the finer nuances of short story writing, but to motivate, shake up, and stimulate us to overcome our fear of being ostracized. The air is thick and stagnant once more, and the breath is restricted and trapped, the door of our mind is shut, despite the fact, we require a powerful voice with the bravery to re-open the window. This is a time when we need a much louder voice to reflect the true face of this blooming world.

Conclusion

Manto as a writer has penned down not only words but emotions and realities of the society that are easy to accept but hard to digest. Things still exist today as they were yesterday and it is next to impossible to predict whether this orthodox mindset of considering females as a secondary, derogatory, and weaker gender will perish in near future. In other words, the probability of not happening in such instances is very low, as a result, Manto must be read and interpreted in a way that will benefit mankind as a whole. The scenic depiction of partition by Manto resembles the situation in wars and violence in present times where most women are victims of such carnage. The characters of Manto, are not only delicate but also courageous one who inspires today's women to speak for themselves that is why it is argued that Manto's writings give confidence to women as well as to men to take a firm stand for them so that they can present a defense against the violations of their rights. The sensuality that has been depicted in Manto's writings is actually the depiction of how he experienced the world around him, and what it meant to him and others His highly vocal writings have aroused people against him not only in his times but also at present times where people are still under the ties of patriarchy. His writings liberate those women who are struggling to get good for themselves and aspire to achieve new heights in the world to come.

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