



Dissent of Manto: A Protest of Nation, Gender and Humanity

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses Sadat Hassan Manto's short stories through the lens of how language works as a medium of protest and uses certain critical theories to analyze the plot of the story and how Manto was influenced by these factors. The time period which the short stories were written was during the partition hence the major theme revolving around the stories were violence due to religious difference, communal violence, rape, prostitution etc. Manto was deeply sympathetic about the out casted people of the society. Through his stories people like prostitutes, 'Jawans', illiterates and poor suppressed people find voice. Manto writes in a way which leads him to legal troubles but every time he comes out victorious. This is a form of a successful protest in which the art has won against the superstructures of the society which were being criticized in his stories. This paper will thus majorly revolve around how his stories come out to be a form of protest of Nation, Gender and Humanity which were the major themes in most of his stories which are taken for analysis.

Keywords: Sadat Hassan Manto, Partition Literature, Protest, Literature, Violence, Gender, Nationality.

INTRODUCTION:

The partition of India saw the biggest migration seen in the history of the world. Around fourteen and a half million people were uprooted from their birthplace, culture and nation. A

simple line on the map decided by the Politicians divided people and robbed them of everything. A new nation which was supposed to be the answer to the struggle for independence since centuries, came with a huge price. Over two million people were traumatised and suffered the tragedies of the partition irrespective of their gender, caste, religion or their community. The chaos of losing humanity and becoming bloodthirsty beasts were captured by the pens of the writers and their stories were tagged under partition literature. Among many partition writers like Khushwant Singh, Bhishm Shahni, Ishmat Chughtai etc. Sadat Hassan Manto has placed himself as a prolific Urdu writer during the era. Manto had a Kashmiri descent and hence was very sensitive about the nation and its division. His works primarily revolved around the people he used to counter in his life. Prostitutes, drunkards, maniacs etc would be the protagonists in his stories. He was the true face of protest as he stood for what he believed. He got in and out of the courts for his works were often claimed as obscene and indecent. The paper will therefore analyze and discuss how through his stories he protests against the government, sex oppression, selfish religious crusaders etc.

Manto was greatly influenced by the Russian Revolution and kept tabs on the political shifts happening around the world. Many of his stories like “Last Salute” and “Dog of Titwal” bring out the dilemma of the idea of nation and country. The whole humanity is being questioned in the war ground. In the story “The Last Salute”, friends who fought against the same enemy are now turned against each other and go down through a nostalgic lane to come back to the present and cause each other fatal wounds. Humanity takes form of a dog in the story, “Dog of Titwal”, who has no identity and no nation and thus is killed between the two borders. Manto’s protest was not only against the division of a country but also to the butchering of the humanity in form of communal violence, rapes, assaults, robbing

,murdering etc. Partition divided people geographically and mentally. The religion was defining the fate of a human life. In the short story, "Open It" or "Khol Do", Sirajuddin, a helpless father cries for his missing daughter Sakina in the midst of a communal attack from which they were running away. Manto gives a balanced view of the communal violence that not only the Muslims but Hindus and Sikhs were equally causing communal hatred and violence. In the story the daughter, Sakina is gangraped by her own religious protectors which brings us to question about the image of religious hatred inspired rapes which were happening. If Muslims were raping Sikh and Hindu women and vice versa then the question of how could Sakina be gangraped by the people who belonged to her own religion arises. Manto brings out the barbaric nature of men during partition through the rape stories which do not only focus on the psyche of the victim but also of the rapist like in the story "Thanda Gosht" or "Colder than Ice" where Ishhar Singh falls prey to erectile dysfunction after he realizes that he has raped a dead woman. Manto who often wrote about controversial subjects brings out what no one was brave enough to speak out loud, which was a form of protest against the society and the government. Prostitutes who are often treated as the worms of street become the heroines of his story. Manto shows the world that they too have similar emotions as the rest of the people and that partition affected them equally. Manto records the partition just like a historian does apart from the fact that his stories about partition is not as an event happened in the history but as a life changing experiences for people like Sakina, Ishar Singh, Toba Tek Singh, Mozail, Sugandhi etc.(Saleem,2003). Manto wrote in a subtle way that the reader has to read a story twice to understand all his allegories and hidden messages which they missed the first time they read. A reader experiences varying strong emotions regarding the partition even after seven decades of Partition. Manto wrote unabashedly and therefore he becomes an icon of a protest through language against the superstructures,

PROTEST OF NATION:

Manto protested through his works, a protest through language and words. His works were a protest against the hegemonic ideas and against the superstructures of the society. In the story “The Last Salute” and “Naya Qanoon”, he makes his characters as a pawn in the hands of politicians who make laws not “for the people” but for their own benefits. He doesn’t stick to a single political ideology but gets his message across through his characters that amidst all the political upheaval, it’s the common people who are being grinded between the massacres, violence and the whole myth of the independent India and a new muslim nation, PAKISTAN”. It was as if the whole partition was a staged drama and the myth of a independent nation was created and fed into the minds of the people that they were fighting each other with false consciousness, a sense of misdirection fed into the minds of people with mad frenzy which passed on to individuals like a virus without any control measurements. Manto creates characters like the cart-driver, Mangu in “Naya Qanoon” who symbolises uneducated mass who become the blind supporters of a leader or a law without even knowing its effects and aftermaths. His stories are relevant in the recent times as well as one realises that the stories transcend the boundaries of time but nothing majorly has changed.

Manto and his idea of belonging to a nation splits when he is forced to migrate to a new nation. His stories find a shift; his characters undergo much more trauma which is a reflection of his own trauma of leaving his ‘Bombay’ behind, which was the root from which he flourished into a Urdu story writer. In “The Last Salute”, Manto brings two companions face to face in the battle which either of the one didn’t want to flight, rather they consoled themselves that it was their duty and they had to do it unquestionably. If analysed through Althusser’s framework of ideology, Manto makes his characters so influenced by the Repressed State Apparatuses that they forget to question their actions. Their imagination is

being robbed and their identity fixed by the line of partition which makes them either a friend or an enemy. Rab Nawaz who is a force of the Repressed State Apparatus has being brainwashed to an extent that he shoots his friend Ram Singh on reflex. (Althusser,1970).

Manto brings us these tiny details of how the state had moulded the people into believing that they are fighting for their mother land and suddenly a line that divides the entire landmass into two bloodthirsty enemies without any proper logic or reason. The entire idea of a “Nation” comes into question that even after so long we still have the same feeling towards the neighbouring country, so deeply rooted that the cold war still goes on. Manto is deeply saddened about the ongoing slughter which is fuelled by the politicians as seen in the stories like “Open it”, “ 1919 ki ek baat”, “ Mozail”, “Sharifan” where the characters are either running for their lives from the violence or themselves are the inflictors of the violence.

PROTEST OF HUMANTIY:

Manto brings together psychobiography and historical analysis, probing the wounded recesses where individual and community colluded in doing violence to themselves (Literary Radicalism,91).The stories in which the existence of the humanity was questioned were “Open it”, “Sharifan”, “ Mozail”, “1919 ki ek Baat” ,“Thanda Gosht” etc. These stories all have a common theme of violence against the body.He shows the desperation of the fathers to protect their daughters and wives, desperation of all who were trapped in this grand event of partition to protect each other and escape the frenzy of killings and massacres. Manto does something which makes him different from other writers which is that he humanises even the perpetrator of the violence like in “Thanda Gosht” where he shows the other side of the rapist Ishar Singh when confronted by Kulwant Kaur.(Mohua Ahiri,2015). He invents another character who is aloof of all the happenings around that time and he sets his story in a asylum, a mad man, “Toba

Tek Singh” who gives a critique in a subtle yet powerful way that partition in the name of religion is just a mere murder of democracy and that a foreign power who ruled the country for more than a century, divided the united landmass into a chaos of bloodthirsty religious crusaders veiled under the name of a independent nation. Manto protests against this slaughtering of humanity in his story of “ 1919 ki ek baat” which describes the Jallianwallah bagh incident. The grotesque description of the incident itself tells us how distorted is the history documented by the government. The officials want to veil the ugly side of the partition and glorify the sacrifices of the poor masses as a necessary sacrifice for the greater good. Manto brings out these insignificant details to master it into nerve wrecking plots which makes one question about the glorification of the independence forgetting the price which millions had to pay with their blood and honour. Das and Nandy distinguished between violence as a form of resistance to colonialism and another being the communal riot and modernized bureaucratic violence in concentration camp or prisons. (Mohua Ahiri,2015)

What was happening in India after Independence was this modernized bureaucratic violence which was being propagated through the communal violence in the name of separate religious forward countries and segregation on the basis of religion.(Mohua Ahiri,2015)

PROTEST OF GENDER:

Manto portrayed women as strong characters even though some of them belonged to low societal backgrounds and statuses. He was known to create female characters that were resilient and tough. They had their own minds and commands of their body and sexuality. Like in the story “Hattak”, Sugandhi, the prostitute finally rises over the exploitation of her body by the clients who reject her and takes command over her sexuality and rejects not only her extortionist lover but also the patriarchy which has suppressed her for a long period of time and she decides that dogs are better than men. Manto weaves the character of women as strong

and ambitious as a man since he doesn't differentiate between the two. Fahmida Riaz, a noted Urdu poet and writer says that Manto "saw women as he saw men". He saw a human body filled with imagination, a creation which was able to think, express and innovate not the body based on gender, religion or nationality. (Iqbal Rabia,2018)

In the story "Mozail", he describes the woman's beauty in a great extent only to reduce her essence to the tatters when he makes her tumble down the stairs. A Jewish woman, who shows the mob of angry protesters that humanity can win over the uptight religiosity and that covering the body cannot make her gain her honour rather she would be naked than to be covered by a cloth of religion which suppresses the sexuality and mind. Her body becomes a site for religion, patriarchy and historical gendered suppression to assert the power. She defies the cloth which signifies all above and therefore poses a protest against all of the superstructures which have been oppressing her body, sexuality and identity.

The story "Open it" or "Khol Do", he portrays the helplessness of woman. Refugee camps were filled with sexually abused and harassed women. Pregnant rape victims who were bearing the first generation of the independent citizens of country were in dilemma to keep the child alive or to kill themselves along with the child. Among all these cruelty, there is a father who witnessed the death of his wife and is separated from his daughter who he finds days later in an unspeakable condition, gang-raped by people of his own religion. The victim, Sakina is so traumatised by the incident that on hearing the words "open it", she automatically opens her salwar and widens her legs, an act of submission to the rapists who had raped her. Manto through Sakina brings the reader to the gory parts of the partition. For him the partition was not only an uprooting from the entirety of the existence of people who lived together in harmony but an uprooting of values and emotions. In "Open it" Manto just shows the

helplessness of a father and his raped daughter but in the story “Sharifan”, Qasim who stumbles upon his daughter’s dead body which was raped and lying naked, he is filled with revenge and runs out of the house to kill every Hindu he sees. His blinding rage annihilates every Hindu man in a blink of an eye but when he commits the same crime done to his daughter on another Hindu girl, a chain reaction happens as the raped girl “Bimla” will now be avenged by her father. Manto brings out the gendered violence happening against women and also gives the critique of how men continue this cycle of violence by avenging their women. Gender plays a very important role in his stories as the perspective and the narrative plays a huge impact on the effect of violence which was being perceived by the readers. The males were always the ‘avengers’ and the females were always the ‘victim’.

Though in story like “Thanda Gosht” the male character, Ishar Singh is affected by the violence he committed. Here Manto topples his usual balance of the victim and the inflictor as Ishar Singh who has committed necrophilia himself becomes a victim. ‘... *I had carried a dead body ... a heap of cold flesh ... Janni, give me your hand*’ (Bhalla Vol. I 96). The affect of the violence transcends all the religion and language because the realization of the violence has affected the psyche of the inflictor. Manto therefore brings the reader to realise that both the genders were affected either actively or passively. The protest of the female sexuality and the male ego both have been crudely and unabashedly depicted in the stories of Manto.

CONCLUSION:

Manto therefore comes out as an iconic figure of resistance against the society, government, superstructures and dominant ideologies. He passionately writes about the characters who are downtrodden and therefore becomes a voice for the sub-altern. Urdu becomes his medium to mock the English speaking people and his stories touch the readers across time and boundaries.

He emerges as a celebrated writer for both the countries and becomes a unifying bond for the sufferings of the people who were affected by partition. His works hence become a beacon of protest for the nation, gender and humanity.

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