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An International, Open Access, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Victimization of Women in the Writings of Saadat Hasan Manto

Dr Nazish Khan

Assistant Professor,

Dept. of English

SBS Govt. PG College,

Rudrapur, Uttarakhand, India

DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2018.3.2.07

Abstract

Saadat Hasan Manto is considered as a great artisan of short stories and an analyst of human passion and social hypocrisy. He surpassed his time and nationality through the sensitive portrayals of human tragedy. His stories are beyond the limits of nationalistic borders and ages. The partition of the subcontinent witnessed the most gory and gruesome violence against women. The country, which considers a woman as goddess saw their victimization openly. The great divide of India and Pakistan blemished the essence of womankind. Large number of people became the witness of partition but women were the most victimized of all. During the communal riot, woman's body became a cultural symbol, and a territory to be conquered and dishonouring it became the symbol of dishonouring the entire community. Saadat Hasan Manto's stories have projected how women were victimized and denigrated as mere territory. Being a Progressive writer, Manto has displayed women's oppression in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Women, Victimization, Patriarchy, Partition, Suffering

Manto is one of the most gifted and controversial writers of the twentieth century. The oeuvre of his works deals with the realistic and brutal portrayal of the times he lived in, but still continues to remain relevant decades after his death. The events leading to the partition in 1947 and its aftermath bewildered his psyche and shocked his sensibilities and his traumatic experiences find expression in his works. Most of his works are centered on the scenario of partition, bloodshed, victimization, savagery etc. Many critics have taken Manto as a single-theme author because most of his works mainly deal with the trauma of partition and pathetic condition of women. His stories reflect the true image of society through its characters. His short stories are often offer a glimpse of the darkness of human psyche and how the values deteriorated during the partition by emphasizing the dismal social and political climate. Manto recaptures the experience and pain behind the partition trauma. His stories make his readers unsettled behind a hegemonized and civil society. All that he has written in context of taboos and victimization of women is considered obscene to that civil society which hides several heinous deeds under a mask of being well mannered. His main motive in his fiction is to make

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women's conditions visible through their sexuality. His stories are not only about the prostitutes but also overshadow their isolation and despair.

Manto has realistically portrayed the ills of the society but he delves into the psyche of his characters and also shows us a flicker of humanity in the most evil of his characters. He deals with psychological insight and hence his characters are more human and realistic and instead of being portrayed as black or white, show shades of grey. Both the oppressed and oppressor show the complexities and ambiguities of the human nature.

The present paper focusses on the women characters in Manto's short stories. Manto like his contemporaries, was influenced by the Progressive Writers movement in the subcontinent. The major preoccupations of the writers of the movement; bourgeoisie hypocrisy, hunger, exploitation, repression, raising women's issues, voicing the predicament of the downtrodden in the society, also remain at the core of his writings. The Urdu fiction at that time largely had moral, reformist agenda and portrayed women as moral, tender, subdued and dimensional beings who were incapable of treading in the forbidden territories of human experience. Manto's women, however, break free of these prevailing mores of the society and mostly belong to the margins of the society and he delineates their adversities, pain, sufferings, and predicament. Whether it is the women who traverse the dark world of prostitution, or the women who have survived the horrors of crimes against humanity during partition, he portrays strong and complex characters who push their boundaries and break free of the social taboos for their survival. He paints the reality that he sees around him.

His fallen women are shown living a life of disgrace, marginality and exploitation, at the hands of a society who is directly or involuntarily responsible for their sufferings. Like "The Girl From Delhi" is a story of a sex worker 'Naseem Akhtar', who went through the consequences of her profession and the communal riots. She wanted to get out of her business and the danger of looting and murdering. She insisted her boss Achchhan Khan to help her out but for Achchhan Khan Naseem was a jackpot and a source of earning bread. So, he assured her that he would get her out of there. She started dreaming to live a happy and normal life but soon she was sold to some courtesans by Achchhan against her wish and her dreams were shattered in a minute.

In 'Hattak', Saugandhi is a prostitute who is awakened from her sleep at night to attend a client. She gets ready and dresses up to meet him, but the client rejects her. This rejection enrages her and forces her to take control of her life. Later, when she is visited by her lover, who is, in fact, only interested in her money, she kicks him out and gets back to bed hugging her dog, the only creature who loves her for what she is and pledges its loyalty to her. Although throughout her she has let herself to be exploited by men, this incidence changes the course of her life and she vows never to be exploited again.

"The Wild Cactus" is a story of a girl Nawab who was silently enduring the pain inside her heart and on her body. In an early age she had to take over her mother's business as a prostitute. She had no choice to live her life as she wanted. After just hitting puberty she had

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to take up the same business and remained bounded to a three bedroom house. At last she was murdered for falling in love with a wrong man.

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 laugh, play and sing together and when the outing ends, she returns the money that was paid to her. This story tends to break away from the stereotypical image of a sex worker. The story shows that what Sarita lacks is simple fun and pleasure of life which any girl of her age would love.

'Khol Do' (She is Alive) is a story of naked barbarism spread during the Partition. A young girl Sakina was abducted from East Punjab and was raped by her abductors and rescuers as well. Her father kept searching her daughter from one camp to another. He finally finds her in a deplorable condition and takes her to a hospital. There the doctor asks Sirajuddin to open the window in the room and the halfdead girl starts untying the knot of her waistband. It is a chilling story of barbarism and cruelty unleashed on women during partition. The fact that went through this ordeal within the boundaries of Pakistan and at the hands of Muslim volunteers, makes it a metaphor of the endless sufferings of women at the hands of men.

"Bitter Harvest" is the story of two girls Sharifan and Bimla who become the target of hatred, anger, and revenge of the men from the rivalry groups. One girl was victimized for the other girl. The men of the opponent groups used their body to take communal revenge. "Thanda Gosht" (Colder Than Ice) is a story about a Sikh Ishwar Singh who raped a Muslim girl while looting a family of seven people. Later he realises that he has raped a dead body. It is a chilling example of insanity spread during the communal frenzy.

All the happenings and blood- dimmed tide of partition enforced Manto to take up a pen and write down the sufferings and inhumanity. He has poured out his agonised heart in his stories. These stories are the sincere attempt to lay bare the victimized women as the product of communal violence and hatred.

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