

Executive Summary

of

UGC Minor Research Project

titled

“Chronicles of madness and Mayhem: A Study of Saadat

Hasan Manto’s Short Stories”

by

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By the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead, and all of northern India was in arms, in terror, or in hiding. (Khuswant Singh, *A train to Pakistan*) I found it impossible to decide which of the two countries was my homeland- India or Pakistan? (Saadat Hasan Manto, *Kingdom's End*)

The partition of India involved the division of three provinces, Assam, Bengal and the Punjab, based on district-wise Hindu or Muslim majorities. The boundary demarcating India and Pakistan became known as the Radcliffe Line. It also involved the division of the British Indian Army, the Royal Indian Navy, the Indian Civil Service, the railways, and the central treasury, between the two new dominions. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at the All India Congress Committee meeting called to vote on the proposal, Patel said:

I fully appreciate the fears of our brothers from [the Muslim-majority areas]. Nobody likes the division of India and my heart is heavy. But the choice is between one division and many divisions. We must face facts. (Menon V.P.)

The partition was set forth in the Indian Independence Act 1947 and resulted in the dissolution of the British Raj. The two self-governing countries of Pakistan and India legally came into existence at midnight on 14–15 August 1947. Massive population exchanges occurred between the two newly formed states in the months immediately following the Partition. "The population of undivided India in 1947 was approximately 390 million. After partition, there were 330 million people in India, 30 million in West Pakistan, and 30 million people in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)" (Kharbanda). The partition of India into East and West Pakistan ascending from the end of British rule saw an unprecedented violence between the Hindu and Muslim population of the Nation. A lack of law and order allowed the political unrest to spiral out of control.

A study of the total population inflows and outflows in the districts of the Punjab, using the data provided by the 1931 and 1951 Census "has led to an estimate of 1.26 million missing Muslims who left western India but did not reach Pakistan" (Bharadwaj et. al.) The corresponding number of missing Hindus/Sikhs along the western border "is estimated to be approximately 0.84 million. This puts the total of missing people, due to Partition-related migration along the Punjab border, to around 2.23 million"

(Bharadwaj et. al.) Women were the worst affected in the process, many were abducted, raped and disowned. Responding to the problem of Hindu and Sikh families' and communities' refusal to reintegrate women sexually violated during the Partition riots and later repatriated from Pakistan, Mahatma Gandhi addressed the issue at a prayer meeting on 7 December 1947:

It is being said that the families of the abducted women no longer want to receive them back. It would be a barbarian husband or a barbarian parent who would say that he would not take back his wife or daughter. I do not think the women concerned had done anything wrong. They had been subjected to violence. To put a blot on them and to say that they are no longer fit to be accepted in society is unjust. (Debali Mookerjea-Leonard)

Fictive testimony of the trauma of Partition keeps the debate of collective violence and extensive breakdowns of social and cultural norms in the history of the human race alive. Tarun Sanit opines that “the belated psychological after-effects of the rupture of Partition” and “continue to bedevil the descendants of refugees as well as minority groups across South Asia to this day”(53). The remarkable corpus of short stories of Partition by Saadat Hassan Manto form a starting point to the “institutional and political legacies for India and Pakistan” which can be only fully understood “within this historical context” (Tabolt).

The stories of Saadat Hasan Manto’s capture the “horrific images of violence, craziness and death” (Das) during one of the largest exodus of human population, it also “invokes an overwhelming fear of the illogical violence, and at the same time question what is at the root of that violence” (Das). Manto is considered not just as a “most important witness to Partition violence” (Saint) but his stories paradoxically prefigure and bear witness to “subsequent outbreaks of communal/ sectarian conflict” (Saint).

The present study was conducted to trace through the stories of Manto the impact of Partition, its insane communal fury that left men, women and children at the mercy of blood crazy, violent and ferocious sections of the population. The initial outpouring of writing by Manto was often uneven in quality. In his survey of the stories written by

Manto in the immediate aftermath of 1947, Alok Rai terms this unreflective portrayal of blood, gore and barbarism as “pornography of violence”. Veena Das on the other hand reminds us that “this was a time that produced a condition of dumbness, as language itself was brutalized”. Stories such as “Thanda Ghosht” and “Khol Do” prompted the new government of Pakistan to prosecute Manto for obscenity. Leslie A. Flemming says that in his first shocked reaction to Partition the only way Manto could deal with it was to divest them of all possible emotion and laugh at them. He goes on to say that the presence of sarcasm, anger and compassion in his later stories show a maturity in his response to the partition (1973). Manto is certainly the most important of the first generation of partition writers. His ability “to empathize with the marginalized, the outcaste, and to evoke moral outrage at the atrocities committed is unique” (Ravikant & Saint). “Toba Tek Singh” becomes then, the triumph of ambivalence and a great story because it proclaims the in-betweenness of its protagonist and his triumph over those who want to fix his identity.

Manto’s stories drew criticism for their depiction of women. The stories elicited the ire of progressives who denounced Manto’s alleged obsession with sex. On the contrary, Veena Das’s sensitive reading of “Khol Do”, demonstrates Manto’s elegance of style and restraint. In the story Sakina, the traumatized victim, subjected to repeated rapes, by men masquerading as well-wishers exemplifies the condition of dumbness brought on by the shock of Partition. The threats to family, religion, national status and security during the partition magnified the tension over ownership and honor in female sexuality, leading to terrible violence inflicted against the women of both societies. The sexual violence that occurred during the time of the partition of India and Pakistan illustrated an extreme manifestation of the societal view of women's sexuality, namely the need to control and own her.

The violence also illustrated how women's sexuality symbolically represented power in the arrangement of gender relations in both the Hindu and Islamic communities in India. The locus of the trauma in research studies has been the loss of homeland, migration, dispossession, and refugee dilemmas. Feminist studies by Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia, and Veena Das—drawing upon oral histories and official

records—testify to the prevalence of the practice by families of rejecting women abducted and/or raped in the communal (religious community based) riots of 1946-7. There are ellipses of history, and especially to women’s histories that are inextricable from the histories of nation-formation but “which has been, until recently, only a few glosses in the margins, if not wholly omitted” (Debali Mookerjee-Leonard).

The study also undertook a survey of young college going women to understand their concepts of sexuality and power in the context of the Partition of India and Pakistan. The subject sample comprised 100 college going women in the age range between 18 and 23. 95% of the sample expressed a desire for peace between the nations as unrest is perceived as a threat to honour and human rights violation of women. 82 % cited religion as the root cause of continued conflict between the nations. 46% felt that the Partition was necessary for growth of India. The survey reflected a need for sensitizing the upcoming politically alert citizen to overcoming the communal divide for peace in the troubled South Asian region. Literature and Partition narratives can be used as a tool for sensitizing students to the legacy of hostility, and the horrific aftermath of bitterness and rancor between the peoples and government of India and Pakistan.