



IIT ROORKEE



NPTEL ONLINE
CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 24 – ACCOUNTS OF THE SURVIVOR

DR. SARBANI BANERJEE

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Woman and Partition

- The ideology behind the recovery act was not simply to bring the abducted women back home but to ensure that the women were returned to their male family members.
- Stephen Morton - [a]lthough . . . the recovery process might seem like a worthy cause that counteracts the abduction and violation of women, it is also complicit in the maintenance of national boundaries and discourses of ethnic purity” (“Violence, Gender and Partition in the Narration of the South Asian Nation (2012: 48).
- Shumona Dasgupta - Partition was coded as a failure of the male nationalist to protect the political integrity of the nation, as well as the inability of Hindu and Sikh men to protect their women. This led to a violent compensatory performance of . . . masculinity. Women were accommodated within the disciplinary parameters of a neo-nationalist discourse, only if they consented to be objects of violence.

Literature and Partition

- Violence on women during partition, rape, abduction and the recovery that followed, were a horrendous process. This horrific incidents of Partition have been depicted in literature.
- In “Khol Do,” Manto does not see the perpetrators as Hindu or Muslim, Hindustanis or Pakistanis. He just sees and depicts them as human beings with all their insanity and barbarity.
- “Lajwanti” is a short story by Rajinder Singh Bedi which explores the plight of abducted women during the violence and upheaval of 1947 Partition. It portrays the stark emotional landscape of Partition violence faced by women.

Saadat Hasan Manto: Jelly

- The English translation of Manto's short story titled "Jelly" goes as follows: "At six in the morning, the man who used to sell ice from a push-cart next to the service station was stabbed to death. His body lay on the road, while water kept falling on it in steady dribblets from the melting ice. At a quarter past seven, the police took him away. The ice and blood stayed on the road. A mother and a child rode past the spot in a tonga. The child noticed the coagulated blood on the road, tugged at his mother's sleeve and said, 'Look mummy, jelly'" (149).
- Words are economized so as to contain only the time period that it takes for blood to take the shape of jelly. Jelly in the story is a child's misinformed perception.
- The singular manifestation of mortal perversity combines the child's joy in what he fathoms as jelly with the grown-up's realization of it to be coagulation of blood. The spectatorship and the responsibility of a gruesome deed has been carried on to the level of juvenile sensibility. Through its joyful misconception, the child's perspective amplifies the macabre vision.
- As Partition scholars observe, women and children have time and again been rendered a sub-human infantile status by the rehabilitating measures undertaken by the paternalistic State. Hence incorporation of a child Other's perspective unnerves the complacent rhetoric of Partition.

Saadat Hasan Manto: Modesty

- In the story “Modesty”, a great paradox that the human character had to come in terms with during these riots, is evinced.
- “The rioters brought the train to a stop. Those who belonged to the other religion were methodically picked out and slaughtered. After it was all over, those who remained were treated to a feast of milk, custard pies and fresh fruit (158).”
- The train becomes in essence the twin post-Partition nations, and the act of feasting amid bloodbath becomes the onerous celebration of a supposed independence that both the countries had thrust on their respective people.
- Between the conferring of food and geniality to one set of people and killing of the other stands the notions of citizen and outsider, which de-legitimizes plural communities in hope for communally “pure” political nations.

Saadat Hasan Manto: “Khol Do”

- Manto, in his short story “Khol Do”, challenges the discourse of nationalism and problematizes it by bringing forth the idea that nationalism is a discourse co-opted by the patriarchal ideology. Nationalism upholds the patriarchal setup, which in extension marginalizes women (Khan, Bibi and Aziz). This is done through a set of fine-tuned techniques of micro-physics of power, as suggested by Foucault (1991).
- The story begins with Sirajuddin witnessing the violence and chaos around him, and he remembers how his wife had already died due to this aggression. Completely absorbed by his thoughts, suddenly, a Sirajuddin’s hand reaches the dupatta of his daughter Sakina and recognizes that she is missing. The old father gets up and starts asking people about his daughter, and finally, some young men who call themselves “volunteers” promise to help the desperate father.

Saadat Hasan Manto: “Khol Do”

- In another scene, these men are shown on their lorry with the missing young woman, without her dupatta, covering her bosom with her hands. This is just before the final sequence of the story.
- In the camp, Sirajuddin recognizes people carrying the body of a young woman to the hospital. He follows them, and upon reaching the hospital, he stops at the gate before entering the doctor's room where the body has been placed. The doctor looks at the body on the stretcher. He checked its pulse and says ‘open it!’ referring to the window.
- Upon hearing the words, Sakina's body moved. Her dead hands undo her salwar and lowers it. Old Sirajuddin cries with happiness, ‘She's alive, my daughter's alive!’ The doctor is drenched in sweat. (p. 45).

Saadat Hasan Manto: “Khol Do”

- Through her gestures, Sakina represents the great number of women who were victims of the atrocities that occurred during this tumultuous time period. These women, who bore the brunt of the chaos of Partition and were otherwise silenced and hence forgotten from history, are given voice through Sakina’s gesture (Khan, Bibi and Aziz).
- Sakina is a victim of different fragments of power exercised over her, and all of them act as an oppressive forms of power over her.
- “Khol Do” explores how the women who were migrating to their “respective” countries were victimized not only by their enemies, but also by their supposed protectors. In the story, we see how Sakina, a Muslim girl, was repeatedly raped not only by Hindu/Sikh but by men from her own community. This skewed nationalism, where the protector becomes the predator, where collective madness spares no one, therefore, needs to be looked into.
- Manto here presents how men who were considered as the rescuers of national honour and pride were the ones who turned to bestiality and madness.

Saadat Hasan Manto: “Khol Do”

- Author Tarun Saint commends Manto’s work for dealing with “anxiety of representation” that surrounded the “grey zone” of the Partition, as communities played interchanging roles, shifting from victim to perpetrator. The complete effacement of all moral structures created a situation of utter panic and chaos, which further exacerbated the ongoing rioting.
- *Khol Do* challenges the linear narratives of inter-faith violence, along which Partition is mostly understood. By questioning the institution of social work, which was central to the project of nationalist mobilization. Manto depicts the futility of nationalist ideology on either sides of the border, the very basis of which lies in hypermasculinity.
- Patriarchal ideology thus acts as a form of regulatory power that dehumanizes women, and no matter what their nationality or religion, these women are always presented and made to be submissive to the prevalent patriarchal ideology.

Communal Identity and Violence on Women's Body in "Khol Do"

- In "Khol Do," body and language both function as simulacra in which collective desire and collective death overlap.
- Through his economization of words, Manto unfolds trauma in its glaring intensity that had permanently balked the smooth programming of articulation. The slippage in meaning transpires through a distorted relationship between the signifying word and its concomitant silent gesture.
- In Sakina's act, there is a mechanical responding quality that unveils the libidinous components of massacre
- By paradoxically juxtaposing emotion and language with action, the terseness and often comic treatment of the grisly sights in Manto's writings enable a visualizing capacity for the readers, thereby deliberately heightening the unguarded shocking impact.

Language and Violence on Women's Body in “Khol Do”

- Beyond expressing her horrific violation in his utterance, the father wants her to live despite portions of her body's failing, and espouses her mutilated self.
- Sirajuddin accepts the suffering Sakina who may have been considered socially dead by other fathers.
- Grief is shown as a transient emotion. Grief is metonymically perceived as bodily anguish, and the female body is portrayed as the one that will carry this pain within her for the rest of her life.

Language and Violence on Women's Body in “Khol Do”

- In “Open It”, there is a complete breakdown of language system. By assigning a flabbergasted quality to the individual responding mechanism, Manto unfolds trauma in its glaring intensity.
- The dark side of language emerges through a lacuna and lack of comprehensibility, such that the mind of the maimed girl through multiple encounters of rape is able to interpret all signifiers only in terms of the signification encompassing her distraught body.
- It refers to the historical moment that had warped the normal functioning of a message.
- As “open it” hints at the cataleptic act of opening and closing of limbs, doing and undoing the pyjama strings at the command of a succession of rapists, brevity of language captures a given society's crisis and shame for losing the capacity of sane imagination.
- The overwhelming presence of only one meaning, as here in the case of “open it”, suggests that the situation wrought by Partition had become overarching and larger than the condition of human existence.

Thank You

