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SILENCES IN MANTO'S STORIES

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Abstract: This paper explored the silences in Saadat Hasan Manto's stories *Thanda Gosht*, *Khol Do* and *Toba Tek Singh*. Woven in the background of partition these stories highlighted the echo of the silence during the partition. Toba Tek Singh was not the only person who had become silent. Sakeena and the dead women in *Thanda Gosht* was among thousands who had been silenced. The victims of violence and bloodshed were silenced due to the trauma of losing identity, native places and their loved ones. Words were no longer capable to heal their wounds. However, there was another silent community that consisted of the people indulged in performing violent activities. These people rejected any kind of dialogues. They were so much intoxicated by hatred that they were making statements with actions. Carl Schmitt's concept of friend and enemy explained the actions, which had happened with utmost silence, both in these stories as well as in history. Narratives were developed around the silence during the partition. Ramesh Chandra Sen's *The White Horse* clarified how the actions ignored the words or, how the silence provoked actions. These three stories by Manto represent the two different kinds of silences which were associated with the bloodshed and violence. The trajectory of the silence does not limit here only. Same silences echo in the stories by Gulzar compiled in *Ravi Par*. Like situations have the same kind of silences. *Khuda Ki Kasam* by Manto and the story of Boota Singh, in Kamaleswar's *Kitne Pakistan* represent the counter-

narrative of the silences in Manto's stories. Analyzing the silences in contrast to different kinds of silences provided a better understanding, in this paper.

Keywords: Silences, partition, violence, bloodshed, trauma,

Saadat Hasan Manto is one of those millions of people who had to migrate across the borders leaving their birthplace. He was an established writer in Mumbai. He used to be a writer in Bombay Talkies. He had to migrate to Pakistan when communal riots broke out all over in India as well as in Mumbai during Partition. Khalid Hasan's introduction of '*Mottled Dawn*', which contains fifty stories and sketches of Partition by Saadat Hasan Manto, documents how the writer was much disturbed by one of his closest friends, film actor Shyam's hateful attitude towards the Muslim community. Manto continued writing stories in Pakistan for various magazines and the Lahore film industry. According to Hasan, the communal holocaust, produced as an aftermath of the Partition, shook Manto deeply on humanitarian grounds. Manto was watching the riots, violence, bloodshed, and murder detachedly but not indifferently. He does not limit himself to the violence merely. His sketches and stories based on the Partition reflect the minutest episodes of the Partition which do not come into observation easily. This paper traces silences in some of Manto's stories written during the Partition. The three stories we will discuss primarily are "Toba Tek Singh", "Khol Do" and "Thanda Gosht". All of these stories are translated by Khalid Hasan in the book we have discussed already, '*The Mottled Dawn*'. The latter two stories are translated with the title "The Return" and "Colder Than Ice".

According to Urvashi Butalia almost ten to twenty million people had to migrate across borders during the Partition among which almost two million people were killed in the massacres and riots. Butalia in her book '*The Other Side of Silence*' interviews the people who had first- and experiences of the atrocities of Partition. People were being slaughtered by people from different religious communities. Some of them, especially women and children were so unfortunate that they were killed by the male members of their own family to protect the 'honour' of the family. The people whose interviews Butalia has collected in her book had been silent for years. They used to narrate the bloodshed that happened during the Partition to their family members. Yet there were many incidents and experiences which they always avoided. The traumatic experiences they disclose reluctantly in the book are more soul-shaking than the experiences of violence. These experiences justify their silences to

some extent. Instead of discussing violence, bloodshed, slaughter, and rapes, the paper tries to trace whether silence has been a chief narrative of the Partition.

Toba Tek Singh is the story of Bishan Singh, a Sikh lunatic who is an inmate of Lahore lunatic asylum in Pakistan. He becomes popular in the asylum as Toba Tek Singh because he keeps on asking about where Toba Tek Singh, his native place, had gone after the Partition. He is introduced in the story as a person who has been confined for fifteen years. The only words he utters are a set of unclear expressions that are hard to decode. When the governments of India and Pakistan decide to transfer the lunatics to “their country” according to their religion, it becomes an ambiguous situation to most of the inmates of the asylum whether they should go to India or not as most of them were not sure where their native places are. Bishan Singh, resists crossing the borders when he gets hints that Toba Tek Singh is still in Pakistan while he is supposed to be transferred to India. He keeps on standing silently the entire night between the bordering wires of India and Pakistan and dies with a scream before the daybreak.

Manto does not indicate if Bishan Singh would have spoken anything but the gibberish. He screams only before he dies. What does Manto wants to show here with the absence of words. The silence Toba Tek Singh or Bishan Singh has acquired is not his silence only. This silence should be analyzed on a broader level. It was mentioned that he had a sixth sense which helped him guessing the days when his relatives would pay a visit to him. Is Toba Tek Singh the only person who rejects the Partition? A better question might be as to who accepted the Partition? Why was Bishan Singh silent when he did not get the exact location of Toba Tek Singh? Was he vocal? Were his voices heard? Or there is a deliberate attempt to indicate him silent? Why does he become silent again when he declares the no man’s land as Toba Tek Singh?

Let us discuss some more silences which we find in Urvashi Butalia’s book, *‘The Other Side of Silence’*. The interviews of Ranamama, Shubhadra Butalia, Damayanti Sahgal, and Mangal Singh etc., have some basic similarities. They had been a victim of the migration during the Partition. When Butalia is interviewing them, they have already set up with new places or new families. The interview is recorded after almost forty years of Partition. But all of them prefer silence when it comes to their own experience. When they finally give the details of what happened with them or their kith and kin their family members get astonished and ask them why they did

not tell these minute details for so long. The trauma of the loss and the harsh experience puts so deep a silence on them so deeply that they do not want to remind the incidents again. They have settled well. They always had a lot to tell. But they could never get the courage to utter a single word. Silence was like a symptom to them.

The reason behind silence of these people and Bishan Singh are different. Bishan Singh seems silent more to resist. There is one thing which can establish a connection here, between Bishan Singh and the people who had been interviewed. Bishan Singh is in no man's land. He is in his Toba Tek Singh. But, he is silent also at the same point. No one is making any effort to send him across the border at that time. The people who are interviewed are also settled after the migration. They are at the end of their life. No one is, now, going to displace them anywhere. Since they too were silent entire their life, can it be a reason of the silences that they were in a no man's land.

The Return: The volunteers of a refugee camp in Pakistan bring Sakeena to the camp many days after they have found her. Sakeena has been raped continuously by men from both sides. By the time she is brought to the camp, she has embraced the silence. When the Doctor asks someone to 'open' the window, Manto describes a seemingly unconscious Sakeena's response to the word as,

“The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her *shalwar* tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garments down and opened her thighs.” (Manto 14)

Sakeena does not scream. She does not even make a single sound. She just unties her *shalwar* and pulls it down. It is implied she had been raped for many days. Her screams must have been unheard or suppressed at those times. Her father becomes happy just seeing her alive. For her father, it does not matter whether she was silent or vocal. It is very important to note that she was in her sense when the volunteers find her across the border. We find her unconscious days after the volunteers find her.

Urvashi Butalia's book has mentioned the restoration of abducted women. In the case of restoration of the abducted women, lots of women were searched, found and transferred to the country where they should have been according to their religion or where their respective families had shifted. Most of the women, abducted or sold, had been settled by the time. Most of them had children. No one bothered to take the consent of the women who

were supposed to be transferred. The protests of most of these women were ignored by the authorities. It is an important thing that almost all of the women restored had been settled for years. Damayanti Sahgal mentions, in her interview in Butalia's book that one of the women protested the restoration asking if the Governments had wanted that she should change a husband every day. Butalia further mentions that the life of the women was not better after the restoration. The pregnant women had to abort. The women had to admit their kids in the orphanages. Some of the women were raped by those people who were involved in the process of restoration. Most of the families of these women did not accept them.

What we can draw here comparing Sakeena with the restored women is interesting. The ironical thing is that Sakeena was in consciousness and these women were vocal on the other side. It is the restoration that attacked them like a disaster and made them silent. It is not "the others" who were responsible for the silence. Their own people are responsible to a large extent for the plight of the restored women.

The story Thanda Gosht has a different kind of silence in comparison to the silence in 'Khol Do'. Ishar Singh who loots homes in the town finds a house with seven members. Six of them are male, whom he kills with his *Kripan*. He then drags the lone woman away from the house with the intention of raping her. Ishar Singh believes that she has been knocked unconscious. He later realizes that the woman he was attempting intercourse with was already dead. This entire incident shakes him deeply. He starts feeling guilty. The level of guilt is so high that he could not describe this incident to his lover Kulwant. He gets courage to narrate the event to Kulwant only when he is about to die.

Guilt was the reason of Ishar Singh's silence. Apart from the trauma, guilt plays an important factor in silence. Mangla Singh also reflects guilt in his interview. When we follow Butalia's interview of Mangal Singh, we find a shocking fact that he and his brother had killed seventeen of his family members consisting of women and children during the escape from their home. Mangal Singh proudly titles them martyrs and suggests that, in his own words, 'death was preferable of rape and conversion'. (Butalia, 195) Mangal Singh claims that it was their volunteer ship that they preferred to be killed. But, it is the guilt of killing the innocents which makes him silent for so long. He never gets the courage to confess this incident with his family members he is living with.

Let us talk about the rioters who were involved in violence during partition. They were active on both sides of the borders and attacking on the respective minorities of their regions. It is very important how we see their actions. Were there dialogues among fighting communities? Were the rioters, not silent? Can their actions be taken as statements? Silent statements? Or the statements made through the actions? We can analyze the pattern and mechanism of the violence with Carl Schmit's concepts of 'friend and enemy'. The analysis traces the requirement of words, a verbal conversation, or above all, conversations during this kind of violence. The analysis helps us to understand how violent activities can happen in silence.

Carl Schmit's concept of 'friend and enemy' becomes relevant here to understand the reason for violence and bloodshed. In his book, '*Concept of the Political*' he defines that the enemy is a person belong from existentially other community. He argues that the two persons who are enemies of each other need not have any connection between them. They may be unfamiliar with each other. Two people may be enemies to each other whether or not they have any economic, religious or social competitions or adversaries. One could be an enemy of the other just because he or she exists. Schmitt defines the enemy as:

The enemy is not merely a competitor or just any partner in a conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship. (Schmitt 28)

Schmit's concept helps a lot when we try to understand the hostility among the communities of different faiths, which further leads to bloodshed and violence, as described in the stories like 'The Return' and in the memoirs of the people Butalia interviewed. We can take reference of the abyss which was formed between Hindus and Sikhs, and Muslims during the Partition from Butalia's books as well as the stories. Communal hatred was fueled so much that Hindus and Sikhs have declared their Muslim neighbours as others. So did the Muslims to Hindus and Sikhs. A person from "other" religion was considered as an enemy. A community was standing against another community. Schmit further tells why violence happens after this kind of identification of friend and enemy. He tells that the enmity is political and combat becomes necessary to deal with enmity. As we can see

that the fighting communities indulged in combat. They were involving in action. They did not need words. Neither did they used it. The silence was parallel to their actions. The silences we encounter in the stories we have discussed so far are a form of the silence produced in addition to the violence.

Kamleshwar's much-appreciated novel '*Kitne Pakistan*' presents a conversation, though fictitious that conversation or the scene may be, of Lord Mountbatten, the then governor of India, and Mohammad Ali Zinnah. Here Zinnah is shown sitting in deep confusion, totally silent and Mountbatten is offering him the documents of India and Pakistan's Partition. Mountbatten asks Zinnah whether he accepts Pakistan. Zinnah could not utter a single word at that time. He just shook his head slowly in a great disappointment. Kamleeshwar considers Zinnah's silence as a prediction of the aftermaths of the Partition. Zinnah was in favour of Pakistan, a separate nation, but, when the time came he had guessed that all he would achieve is silence. The very silence we can see in the stories woven on the background of the Partition. It seems that Manto had sensed the silences somewhere in violence. The silence was not limited to a single person or a single kind. Different people are silent for different reasons. Some voices have been suppressed. Some have insufficient words to express themselves. Some of them are silence due to trauma. Some of them were feeling guilty. There is another story by Manto in which a Muslim woman after marrying with a Sikh person denies recognizing her mother. She acquires silence while her mother keeps claiming the woman her daughter. Manto himself remains silent most of the time. He avoids giving many details. In his stories, most of the things are described by narrating the action; not by the dialogues of among the characters. He does not show steadiness. People are involved in their respective actions. The migration, violence, bloodshed, riots, abduction, and slaughtering etc. Memoirs of people help to trace the silences in Manto's stories as well as in Partition.

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