
6. Locating the Socio-Sexual Exploitation of Manto's Child Characters Amidst a Canvas of Development: A Select Study

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Introduction:

Today, when parties & groups insist on a modified idea of a 'third world', Development has become the most-coveted terminal, it becomes an imperative for us to share what we know of Saadat Hassan Manto's world. With 24,212 cases of child abuse being registered in India this year, we need to talk about the disastrous impact that a distorted society has in the formation of social and individual identity in adolescents.

This research paper would therefore use two of Manto's child characters- 'Sarita' from 'Dus Rupaiyya' and 'Khalid' from 'Tamasha' to talk about the need to study the socio-cultural and psycho-sexual causes that cause the understanding of the world around them to become 'ugly' and 'distorted'. The former character is forced into child prostitution and the latter experiences lynching right before his eyes.

The manner in which they respond to the tumultuous society amidst them represents the adolescent understanding of a broken world that prohibits their proper progression. This paper would therefore bring forward the fact that nearly 8 decades after he constructs these 'Afsanas' Sarita and Khalid seem to be gathering a disconcertingly increasing number of real-life siblings in India who are living in a society whose perversions they are forced to internalize.

With the growth of a 'new disturbed identity' it becomes mandatory for us to identify the aghast that it causes in the personality of the adolescents. Therefore, to understand the malaises of their world, understanding the process of adolescent identity formation is highly inevitable.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as “any human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” Children are an integral part of the society and a state possesses the imperative to build a society for them that guarantee security, proper health and an environment in which they can grow free, think free and live uninhibited. South Asia’s rich ecological, geographic and cultural diversity make the region unique but also explains why it is volatile and vulnerable in social, economic and environmental terms.

The region faces continuing challenges from weak urban governance, poor provision of public services, lack of effective social protection systems and mounting urban poverty to the impact of climate change, natural hazards, political turmoil, gender inequality, etc.

According to the upcoming Violence in childhood index, South Asia is the third highest region for violence against children scoring 37.12.

Manto’s two stories ‘Tamasha’ and ‘Dus Rupaiyaa’ narrate the childhood scenario of their child protagonists who live in a society that is dark, disgruntled and torn apart. To understand these stories and the society around them, it is vital to understand these two child characters intricately.

The first story that I would like to talk about is *Dus Rupaiyaa* which is about a teenaged prostitute, *Sarita*, who is so enamored by the cars she is taken along in that the circumstances of her life fade away before that love. The first lines of the story establish the protagonist before us. It narrates the action of *Sarita* playing with other young girls who lived in her neighborhood. At the same time, we learn that the area where she played was surrounded by heaps of garbage thus immediately revealing the ambience of *Sarita* to us. We find *Sarita*’s mother expressing her duplicity as a character-on one side, we see her getting agitated when she plays with the young boys of her neighbourhood, but it is the same mother who lets her out in the open for being devoured by young men in exchange of money. *Sarita*’s silent protest against being looked down upon or mercied upon is a trait that she probably inherits from her father; a man who embraces death but does not succumb to a despotic officer.

In understanding the character of her father, we see that the Subaltern has a voice here; but that voice is trampled. The most defined and pronounced part of *Sarita's* child-like nature is her affinity towards car rides. The car and the ambience that she experiences while the car drives past trees, buildings and people are the part of her imagined perfect world; beautiful and picturesque not gruesome like her real world. *Sarita* although being sexually victimized and being forced into a 'false' idea of being a woman, dreams of a world where all these inhibitions do not exist. The story ends when *Sarita*, ecstatic at the end of a day spent in a car with three feeble young clients, returns the ten rupees to one of them given to her saying that she did not do anything that demanded her remuneration. Living in a tiny one room flat with her single mother who pimps her out to earn a livelihood, *Sarita's* life isn't exactly conventional but to a reader it appears to be the order of the day due to the manner in which Manto narrates the story to his readers. To picturize the entire scenario in which *Sarita* lives, we are also immediately reminded of the other children with whom *Sarita* plays or interacts who are also similarly being subjected to this nymphomaniac society. In such a pedophilic world, *Sarita*, her mother, her pimp *Kishori*, those three young men and the innumerable men she has been traded to are equally to be blamed.

In stealing the pleasure of a happy and humane childhood from her, these people are responsible. Vandana Shukla in one of her articles remarks about Manto: "...he continued to unmask the world by never allowing his pen to be obscured by the convenience of compromise." (Vandana Shukla, *The Tribune*). He was a champion of the cause of women and listened to their unspoken longings and aspirations which had always been unattended, and highlighted very pointedly the sexual subjugation they were experiencing, and became a male crusader spearheading the movement addressing the issues concerning the rightful place and dignified survival of woman in society in his times. Therefore, in her wimps and fancies, we meet the child *Sarita*, in her subjugation and rejection of merciful remuneration at the end of the story, we meet the woman *Sarita*.

Through his stories Manto voices his concerns for the terrible difficulties of women and like a true feminist he forcefully though indirectly pleads for the honor and self-esteem of his battered and bruised women characters. He also tries to solve the puzzle as what governs the man-woman relationship, within the safe limits of society and outside it.

Sarita's innate desire to experience the rides of motor cars and feel the breeze move past her hair seem to be her want to escape from the pitiable condition she actually lives in. Sarita firmly believes that Sex Trade is the reality of all girls her age, and promises her friend 'Shanta' that she would appease the former's mother to allow her to accompany Sarita to her rides. She wants to share the pleasures of these escapades with her friend too. Manto's works re-establish the protracted patriarchal ideas of crudity and taboo which he assimilates with utmost humanism. Here taboo is just a synthetic principle that cannot blemish the humanity of the character. Najma Manzoor in the essay, *Manto, Aurat aur Waris Alvi* enunciates;

"Manto's aristocracy is such that he never preaches but continues to enlighten reader's mind and stir their conscience. Women have been subject to humiliation and Manto through his stories has empathized with their plight and has shown solidarity with their cause. His portrayals of domesticated women and prostitutes are unique for he associates unconventional attributes. for example, determination, will, not being content in every situation and above all the ability to laugh. "

Manto employs his characters as metaphors in order to accentuate the widespread maltreatment of human race in those times. He fabricated his women characters that endured the revulsion of misdemeanor against humanity, free them from those men who had metamorphosed into mutual slaughterers and did not give up even in the face of utmost suffering. Manto's women characters are powerful and rebellious deviating from the prevalent approach in Urdu narrative that vaguely debased women and underscored simply the widespread traditions of a traditionalist culture. Sarita's greatness as a character lies in the fact that she reveals herself as a mature individual before the reader unabashedly, without any modifications and that establishes her beauty. Manto's approach towards the portrayal of the child through the portrayal of woman involves a movement away from depicting women as victims of hegemonic forces. His writings present a space where women are not portrayed as simple dupes of an ideology, but rather as actively constructing positions for themselves, using discursive constructs. He had an uncanny knack for exposing the corrupt soul of the so-called civilized people of his time and he did this with his frank and honest portrayal of Oppressed, pitiable, weak and victimized people in his stories. In this story, the two Hyderabad men in the backseat-Shadab and Anwar and Kifayat in the frontseat as the driver is symbolic of the society

that not only performs the destruction of the chidscape by polluting it with sexual perversions but also enjoys watching the deflowering of these innocent souls as voyeurs. To an immature, average reader Manto appears a sensualist dealing in obscenity and vulgarity; to a Sensitive mind endowed with all those human sensibilities and the finest qualities of heart And head, this agitated, untamed but humane spirit is found to have a great insight into Human Psychology and behavior, particularly of women, and is involved in a ceaseless struggle with the forces which dehumanize the fragile psyche of the feminine world, refusing to toe the line of irrational, hollowed and hypocritical ways of this so-called developed world. This is why Sarita finds an innumerable number of real-life sisters in 2020.

We should take into account how Manto remains a controversial writer to read or discuss in our present time which indicates how the society may remain similar to when Manto wrote—how certain systems of power are still in place and how they do influence child sexual oppression in 2020. Similarly, when further examining the wider context of portrayals in the two stories, one sees that the array of characters that Manto creates around Sarita, from her mother to Turkaram's wife, are all characters who do more than feature in the story as side-characters.

They act as thought-provoking examples of social commentary through certain personality characteristics. For example, Sarita's mother serves as a question to the concept of motherhood, whilst Tukaram's wife not having a name of her own serves as a reminder of the notion of female identity shrouded under the identity of the 'man' who owns her and how it is socially determined by the men women marry than their own selves. Manto had a much more localised upbringing and less privileged life in comparison—a life that has allowed him to represent members of the subaltern, in our case the children who are surrounded by such individuals thus charring their childhood and its memories. Manto writes in his essay 'Beautiful Girls will Be Harassed' (translated by Aakar Patel),

“As long as men are put next to women, this harassment will happen. There might come a time when women's existence is no longer necessary for men and this will stop by itself. But not before that time is this going to end.” (p. 39)

Critics of Urdu literature such as Muhammad Hasan Askari, treat modern Urdu writing (of the decades of 1940's and beyond), as propelled by a desire to find a 'tradition' for "the fundamental homelessness of Modern Urdu literature", by negotiating colonial experience, forces of nationalism/marginalization and of western literary influences (As discussed in Aamir R. Mufti, "The Aura of Authenticity", 95). Manto, himself seems to have been acutely conscious of the appendage of "newness", "progress" that had been thrust upon the writing of his time, particularly his own. Deliberating in his quintessential wry style in the essay titled "Touchstone", Manto refers to the "new packages" in which Literature seems to have become available in his era- "obscene", "progressive", "reactionary" and so on. Therefore we find the characters like Sarita and Khalid being presented to the reader-a new means of imparting voice to the restlessness of the society.

'Tamasha' was published in a small literary magazine from Lahore, was built around the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre. The darkness and the impact of the atrocities have been narrated through the voice of a 6-year-old who finds all of this meaningless. The story begins with him questioning his father that why his school remains closed-which he finds absurd and meaningless. We are immediately narrated about the incessant flying of airplanes over Khalid's house which doesn't fail to create fear in the mind of the 6-year-old. The environment in which Khalid is living is abounding with terror, trauma, abject and horror. Although young Khalid doesn't realize the grievousness of the situation that is going to come before him, he prepares for a repartee according to his understanding. The neighborhood is preparing for a confluence of the natives but constant orders to stop this kind of confluence are being sent by the despotic powers of the day. The adult members of the family understand the effect this kind of a tumultuous time is going to bring to their lives, but young Khalid is seen to respond to all of this with utmost innocence. His practice of preparing his gun with which he would take revenge is used by the author to describe unadulterated innocence.

A kind of innocence which if present in grownups could possess the capacity to make the world a better place to live in. Khalid is born into a world where he has experienced fear of despotism from a very early stage and this is more pronouncedly realized when we see six-year-old Khalid reacting to the sound of planes. His rising desire to take revenge from those who would want to hurt his family seems undeterred.

On asking questions-he is scolded by his father and asked to go and play. Khalid questions- 'Where should I go and play?' The city is surrounded by people who are waiting for a despotic doom and his friends don't come anymore to play with him. The trauma in the air and the hatred in the society have very beautifully destroyed Khalid's childhood obliterating even spaces to play. His looking out of the window and wondering as to why the shops remain closed even after three days and eventually not coming to any answer to it point out to the pointlessness and futility of these activities around him. On hearing the sound of the firing, Khalid's saying to his father, that the 'Tamasha' has begun-is replete with sarcasm, pointing out to the grievous mockery of violence. The scene of the young boy dying before his eyes-and the parents of Khalid being unable to save him indicates the kind of fearful restlessness that prevailed in the society then. Manto writes, 'Death is painful but violence is more painful than death'. Khalid understands that he may be punished but what kind of punishment involves bloodshed? Khalid's plea to God whom he understands to be superior to any master at the end of the story moves us-making us understand that perhaps any child, any Khalid could be at the place of the boy who was victimized. Globally the World Health Organization estimates up to 1 billion children aged 2-17 years have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence or neglect in the past year. Target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to 'end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of, children.'

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