

Unhomed and Rehomed: Interrogating the Problematics of Repatriation and Rehabilitation in Saadat Hasan Manto's short story "The Dutiful Daughter"

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Saadat Hasan Manto lived through the greatest upheaval in the Indian subcontinent i.e., the Partition of 1947. The Partition of India was accompanied by violence across the subcontinent. This violence divided communities along religious lines. People left behind their homes, possessions and loved ones. Between eight and ten million people migrated to places marked exclusively by religious identity. Amid this mass migration of people, thousands of women became victims of abduction, rape and brutal murder. As a sensitive writer, Manto was traumatized by the political turmoil of the times and his stories reflect his repeated attempts to come to terms with this cataclysmic event. For him this unfathomable violence was a clarion call for artistic intervention as he struggled with the inherent inexplicable nature of such widespread trauma. Poignantly, Manto never used the term independence, instead he always referred to the event as *batwara* – the ripping apart of the nation . Reflecting upon the dislocations in his own personal and professional life, Manto painfully explored the spectacle of parochialism and the politics of attrition on both the victims and the perpetrators with faithful accuracy.

Manto emigrated to the newly created Pakistan in 1947 but the horror of Partition, its effects and repercussions, remained deeply entrenched in his mind. Reflecting on the dislocation in his own life, Manto in his later stories, made the effects of communal violence and its consequent disruption, on both victims and perpetrators, his primary concern. As Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin assert, Partition literature 'validates historical truth precisely in its power to represent' the stories of thousands of people affected by the largest migration in the history of the subcontinent. (Menon and Bhasin 23) In such a time of intolerable insanity, the

plight of woman became most vulnerable. In a number of Manto's stories, there is an impending sense of immediacy with which one confronts a totally degenerate society, a world of raped and ravaged women, women commodified and consumed, with the backdrop of the Partition of 1947 which caused one of the most massive human convulsions in history.

Manto's stories map violence as a set of complex issues that converged during the dissolution of communities. Manto synthesizes thousands of accounts of Partition violence into narratives exploring the abuse of women during those unholy times. In doing so, they highlight how not just the body but also the body's place in the world becomes a site of trauma. In fact, the State in general and the society in particular, failed to address the trauma and the suffering of the ravaged women, who were rejected, returned, silenced and duly forgotten. Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* endeavours to pierce through this selective amnesia by placing people, their individual experiences and their private pains at the center of this epochal event. Butalia asserts that, 'The patriarchal and nationalist discourses that reduced women to mere symbols of honour also prevented them from speaking out or being heard. They were denied their own voices and experiences, and their stories were erased or distorted by history.' (Butalia 98)

While there are plenty of official accounts of Partition, there are few social histories and fewer feminist historiography on the partition of India. *Borders and Boundaries* by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin changes that, providing first-hand accounts and memoirs, juxtaposed alongside official government accounts. The authors make women not only visible but central. They explore what country, nation, and religious identity meant for women, and they address the question of the nation-state and the 'gendering' of citizenship. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's seminal work looks into the question of women's sexuality, as it had been 'violated by abduction, transgressed by enforced conversion and marriage and exploited by impermissible cohabitation and reproduction...' (Menon and Bhasin 20) The figure of the abducted woman became symbolic of crossing boundaries, of violating social, cultural and

political boundaries. Menon and Bhasin further asserts that the extent and nature of violence that women were subjected to when communities conflagrated, highlights not only their particular vulnerability but larger questions of women's sexuality under an overarching, hyper-masculine, nationalist-patriarchal system.

In the largest ever peace-time mass migration of people, violence against women became the norm. Thousands of women committed suicide or were done to death by their own kinsmen. Nearly 100,000 women were abducted during the migration. A young woman might have been separated from her family when a convoy was ambushed, abducted by people of another religion, forced to convert, and forced into marriage or cohabitation. After bearing a child, she would be offered the opportunity to return only if she left her child behind and if she could face shame in her natal community. These stories do not paint their subjects as victims. Theirs are the stories of battles over gender, the body, sexuality, and nationalism—stories of women fighting for identity.

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in the chapter titled “Borders and Bodies: Recovering Women in the Interest of the Nation” of their seminal work *Borders & Boundaries* write: ‘In the aftermath of Partition the governments of India and Pakistan were swamped with the complaints by relatives of missing women, seeking to recover them, either through government, military or voluntary effort.’ (Menon and Bhasin 67) Recognizing the enormity of the problem of the large number of abducted women, the Indian and Pakistani governments entered into an Inter-Dominion Treaty on 6th December, 1947 to recover as many abducted women, as speedily as possible, from each country, and restore them to their families. This agreement came to be known as the Central Recovery Operation, and within a short period of time, the initial agreement arrived between the two governments was given legislative sanction. The Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Ordinance was transformed first into a Bill and later, in 1949, into an Act. By the terms of this Act, the government of India set up an implementation machinery and arrived at a working definition of what was meant by the term ‘abducted person’.

The violence in Punjab had begun early in March 1947 thus any woman who was seen to be living with, in the company of, or in a relationship with a man of the other religion, after March 1, 1947 would be presumed to have been abducted and taken by force. Menon and Bhasin in their historiography give concrete numerical data, 'In all, approximately 30,000 Muslim, Hindu and Sikh women were recovered by both countries over an eight -year period.' (Bhasin and Menon 99)

In the story 'The Dutiful Daughter', Manto writes, 'The year 1948 had begun. Hundreds of volunteers had been assigned the task of recovering abducted women and children and restoring them to their families.' (187) The story deals with the aftermath of Partition and the confusion faced by the newly formed nations regarding women. Both India and Pakistan were overwhelmed with the repercussions of this cataclysmic event and a huge project was undertaken by the two nations in restoring the population of women who were abducted and raped, and were to be brought back to their own country. But the questions that Manto poses are how, on what basis did the two countries decide which country 'belongs' to the abducted and raped women? What were the grounds on which it was decided? Was it religious, patriarchal, or State driven? Manto writes, 'One heard strange stories. One liaison officer told me that in Saharanpur, two abducted Muslim girls had refused to return to their parents, who were in Pakistan. Then there was this Muslim girl in Jullandar who was given a touching farewell by the abductor's family as if it was a daughter-in-law leaving on a long journey. Some girls had committed suicide on the way, afraid of facing their parents. Some had lost their mental balance as a result of their traumatic experiences.' (187-188) In this story Manto problematises the narrative of abduction-and-rescue and interrogates the idea of the 'abducted' woman itself.

Told in the first person by a liaison officer involved with the recovery of 'abandoned' women, the story 'The Dutiful Daughter' portrays an old Muslim woman in search of her only daughter. Wandering from town to town in Punjab, each time she is encountered by the officer her condition seems to have worsen. But when the officer tries to convince that her daughter is

dead and offers to take her to Pakistan, she vehemently refuses as she believes her daughter is alive for sure: 'Murdered? No. No one can murder my daughter. No one can murder my daughter.' When the officer asks, 'How's that?' The old woman replies confidently, 'She's beautiful, so beautiful that no one can kill her. No one would even lay a hand on her.' (189) The story reaches its climax when the liaison officer finally encounters the old woman in a bazaar in Amritsar, just at the moment when a handsome young Sikh walks by with a veiled woman by his side. Pointing to the old woman, the Sikh says, 'Your mother', (190) at which the young woman averts her face and hurriedly walks away. But it is too late for the old woman has seen her. As the couple hastens away, the old woman screams out for her daughter. As soon as she sees the liaison officer the woman rushes towards him to inform him that she has just seen her daughter:

She was trembling. I have seen her...I have seen her.

Whom have you seen? I asked.

I have seen my daughter...I have seen Bhagbari. Her eyes were like burnt-out lights.

Your daughter is dead, I said.

You're lying, she screamed.

I swear on God your daughter is dead.

The old woman fell in a heap on the road.

The situation of the young woman in the story was not an uncommon one. As Menon and Bhasin have discussed in their book, young women were known to have made use of the social chaos ensuing from Partition to run away and marry men of their own choice from other communities. Acts that would have been impossible under normal circumstances. In other instances, as seen in novels like *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam, women often adjusted to situations such as abduction or forced marriage to settle down to fairly happy lives. In the ambiguity of the liaison officer's words, as consolation to the old woman as well as a true depiction of the fractured relationships of war-time separation, the single feeling that we are left with is that truly more people died than simply those that were physically murdered.

Menon and Bhasin argue that women's rehabilitation and return after the Partition of India in 1947 was a complex and contested process that involved multiple interests. They show how women were treated as symbols of national honour and communal identity, and just as their bodies became sites of violence and abduction, their return and rehabilitation also became a patriarchal, State imposition. Butalia asserts that women who had survived the violence of Partition were denied all agency. Under the Central Recovery Operation (1948-1956) of the government of India, both India and Pakistan agreed to return to their families and native homes the women who had been abducted during the chaos. However, a number of these women had already converted their religion, married, given birth to the children of their so-called abductors, and settled, happily or otherwise, into their new lives. This "recovery" was often against their wishes. Many of these women lamented leaving behind their children when they were being repatriated, some of them feared that they would be castigated as 'impure', and many of them chose to live in care homes or ashrams rather than joining their families.

The reluctance to being rescued and rehabilitated by women after the partition was therefore a complex, multifaceted concern that involved various factors such as trauma, stigma, identity, loyalty and agency. The recovery operations homogenized women, based on the assumption that all women wanted to return to their original communities, regardless of their personal circumstances and preferences. To the likes of Menon, Bhasin and Butalia, this operation of rehabilitation was more of a vindication of the honour of the emasculated nation. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin however clarifies, 'It is by no means our intention to suggest that the predicament these women found themselves in was not traumatic or fraught with anxiety and uncertainty, merely that it would be false to presume that their lot was uniformly grim, their 'abductors' without exception 'bestial' or unreliable and craven...' The 1947 Inter-Dominion Treaty legitimized India's Central Recovery Operation and led to an act of Parliament that was strictly enforced till 1957. Menon and Bhasin question why the Indian government pursued this plan despite the tremendous resistance they met from the women who were the supposed beneficiaries. Manto similarly asserts, 'It always amused me to see that such

enthusiastic efforts were being made to undo the effects of something that had been perpetrated by more or less the same people. Why were they trying to rehabilitate the women who had been raped and taken away, when they had let them be raped and taken away in the first place? ... Sometimes it seemed to me that the entire operation was being conducted like import-export trade.' (187-188)

Manto, who himself migrated from Bombay to Lahore, understood the agony and suffering of displacement that millions of people, on both sides of the border had to undergo. In 'Toba Tek Singh', arguably his most famous partition narrative, Manto similarly delves into the concept of being 'unhomed' through Bishan Singh's profound sense of displacement in the context of the partition of India in 1947. Throughout the story, Manto portrays the inmates of the mental asylum, including the protagonist Bishan Singh, as embodiments of this unhomed condition. These individuals, already marginalized by society due to their mental illness, are further estranged by the violent upheaval of partition. As the story unfolds, Bishan Singh finds himself caught between the newly drawn borders of India and Pakistan, neither of which feels like home to him. He refuses being moved back across the border. He challenges the drawing up of the geo-political boundary between nations. He finally chooses, or rather falls, in the zone of no man's land—unhomed from his asylum in Pakistan, the lunatic cannot accept the proposal of being rehomed in India. This gesture is his way of negating the cumulative pressure of history, his own past and his memories. His death on the undefined ground becomes a protest against the reality of madness, violence and dislocation. Manto uses Bishan Singh's character to explore the psychological toll of displacement and the existential crisis faced by those who are forcibly uprooted from their homes. Through his refusal to move from Toba Tek Singh, despite the chaos surrounding him, Bishan Singh becomes a poignant symbol of the human desire for belonging and the tragic consequences of political divisions. Such narratives, prove all over again that the partition was not merely a geographical and political fact. It is a continuing process that invades the psychic hinterland, effecting deep schism between the self and the other.

Manto's partition stories can be contextualized in relation to Soja's trialectical idea of space and Lefebvre's theory of spatial production by analyzing how space is not only a backdrop but a protagonist, a symbol in his partition narratives. The French Marxist theorist, Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* proposed the concept of social space as a way of understanding how societies produce and reproduce their spatial relation. He argued that space is not a neutral container of social life, but a social product that reflects and shapes social practices, perceptions, and representations. Lefebvre similarly developed a spatial triad and conceptualized space from three points of view: physical, mental and social. He proposes a spatial triad that consists of three dimensions of space: Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. Partition and displacement are phenomena that affect all three dimensions of space in different ways. Partition and its consequent displacement can be seen as affecting Soja's Firstspace, the directly experienced or perceived space, by changing the physical boundaries and forms of the territory and its inhabitants. Partition and displacement can also be seen as affecting Secondspace, the conceived or imagined space, by altering the subjective and symbolic representations of space in the minds of the people. Partition and displacement can also be seen as affecting Thirdspace, the lived or experienced space, by creating a complex and dynamic interplay between Firstspace and Secondspace. Therefore, we can see Soja's theory of trialectics help us understand partition and displacement as they are spatial phenomena that involve multiple dimensions and perspectives. Taking into account Lefebvre and Soja's theory of spatial production, we can interpret Manto's portrayal of different types of space in his partition stories. But the questions that Manto wants us to ponder over in the context of partition and its associated notions of displacement are—how and to what extent did the partition disrupt the spatial practices of the people, especially women? How did the partition challenge the representation of Space that defined people's, especially women's identities? What foundations of gender and space can we create out of these slippery notions of home and belonging? Is it really possible to build a home after the havoc of displacement?

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