



Subjectification of Women through Patriarchal Ideology in the Subcontinent: An Analysis of Manto's *Khol Do*

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Abstract

Modern discourse on gender is dictated by the patriarchal ideology. In this new micro-system of power, women are overpowered and subjectified in the hands of men. The patriarchal society of the subcontinent, as depicted by Manto, clearly defines the way oppression of women occurs in the hands of the suppressing ideology. Deploying Foucault's notions of power and knowledge, this study aims to investigate the ways in which women are subjugated to subjectification under the patriarchal setup in the subcontinent prior to the partition. This paper highlights how women's bodies are commodified in an unremitted fashion in the subcontinent and how their bodies' time, place and movement are directed by the "micro-physical" power.

Key Words: Power, Gender, Subjectification, Patriarchy, Governmentality

Introduction of the Study

Manto's stories bring forth the subaltern, marginalized voices that were previously silenced. He utilizes fiction as an instrument for the unveiling of the evils that had been disguised and made obscure in the society, he was living in. With the backdrop of the partition of the subcontinent, his stories reflect the everyday lives of the common people buzzing through their lives. Gender is a configuration of the patriarchal power in which women are subjectified by the microphysics of power now decentralized and organized in the form of culture.

In this study, Saadat Hassan Manto's short story "Khol Do" is analyzed thematically and stylistically to investigate the ways in which women are subjugated to subjectification under the patriarchal setup in the subcontinent prior to the partition. It also examines how women's bodies are commodified in an unremitted fashion in the subcontinent and how those who are compelled into means of production, which are unacceptable in society, are othered.

Statement of the Problem

Modern discourse on gender is dictated by the patriarchal ideology. In this new micro-system of power, women are overpowered and subjectified in the hands of men. The patriarchal society of the subcontinent, as depicted by Manto, clearly defines the way oppression of women occurs in the hands of the suppressing ideology.

Multiple studies have identified how Manto presents the oppression and subjugation of women (Gatica, 2014; [Rumi, 2012](#); & [Jalal, 1996](#)). Certain studies have investigated the relationship between Foucault's ideas of history and Manto's depiction of the subcontinent, while others have analyzed Manto's portrayal of madness ([Chhetry, 2015](#); [Kumar, 2012](#)). There still remains a substantial gap in investigating the role of patriarchy as a fragment of the micro-power structures that govern the sub-continental society, as depicted by Manto. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine the way women are portrayed by Manto as the subjects of the governmentality of the subcontinent.

The present study sets out to investigate how the women's bodies are subjected to a form of power which is characterized by the patriarchal setup of the society, and how their bodies' time, place and movement are

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directed by the “micro-physical” power which is now in the hands of multiple structures, institutions and individuals. It also seeks to comprehend how the disciplinary and regulatory practices of the modern form of government are engendered by the patriarchal ideology leading to a higher level of subjectification of women as compared to men.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate how the patriarchal ideology acts as a regulatory form of power in the selected story.
2. To examine the ways women are objectified, and women’s bodies are commodified for the perpetuation of patriarchy.
3. To investigate the ways women’s bodies are inscribed with traditional and cultural signifiers, which are then exploited and are oppressive.

Research Questions

1. How does the patriarchal ideology act as a regulatory form of power in the selected story?
2. How are the disciplinary and regulatory practices of the modern form of government engendered by the patriarchal ideology leading to a higher level of subjectification of women as compared to men?

Significance

Invariably, the discourse that is created around women and their bodies act as an instrument of suppression and oppression. This form of oppression is conducted in a manner that is different from the subjectification of men as this subjectification of women through commodification centralizes and privileges men while marginalizing the women. This study aims to investigate this oppression that occurred in the subcontinent through subjectification that is primarily limited to women only, thus, allowing the voicing of the silenced.

Literature Review

Introduction

The current study is informed primarily by the works of Foucault, particularly focused on the instrumentalization and subjectification of the individuals by power structures. The present study adopts and adapts the ideas presented by Foucault to investigate the way the female gender is marginalized and oppressed by a society rooted in a patriarchal setup. In this manner, women are further oppressed on the basis of not only being subjects but also on the basis of their gender.

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between Foucault’s notions of power and knowledge and subject construction and how it is reflected in feminist analysis. With special reference to how the women are subjectified and objectified by power structures, patriarchy in the case of the current study, and how their bodies become the site of confrontation and battle. The current study thus creates an amalgamation of the theory of feminism and Foucault’s notions of subjectification and power/knowledge dynamics.

Foucault

According to Foucault (1991), modern power is fragmented, and it operates through discipline and regulation of people’s actions. It is distributed among multiple structures, institutions and individuals instead of residing with a single sovereign institution or individual. Foucault (1991) also theorized that power operates through the creation of certain discourses, which in turn construct identities that creates the identities of the normal subjects and is thus exclusionary in nature.

Foucault (1991) actually attempts to uncover how the sovereign power, which was used to be displayed forcefully and publically by the state/authority, has now transformed into a new and hidden form of power that is understood less as punishment and more as a discipline by the public. For Foucault, when the power structure displays power openly in the form of punishments and public executions, all can see it. One experiences power in a very obvious manner: “[the public execution] was a manifestation of force; or rather, it was justice as the physical, material and awesome force of the sovereign deployed there” (p. 50). According to Foucault, when punishments are

carried out publically, people see it as the revenge of the sovereign rather than an attempt to transform the persecutor. However, when this public display of power is displaced from the public eye, the same power became more humane and less cruel.

One of the core aims of Foucault (1991) is to show that, in this new structure of punishment, power doesn't disappear at all. Rather, it is re-arranged to become more efficient: "... although the new criminal legislation appears to be characterized by less severe penalties, a clearer codification, a marked diminution of the arbitrary, a more generally accepted consensus concerning the power to punish (in the absence of a more real division in its exercise), it is sustained in reality by an upheaval in the traditional economy of illegalities and a rigorous application of force to maintain their new adjustment". (p. 89)

With this new manifestation of power, Foucault sees the emergence of a constant need for policing along with several forms of disciplining institutions and methods. According to Foucault, discipline emerged in the 17th and 18th century, before which it was present in "monasteries, armies, workshops" (p. 137). In the 17th and 18th century, Foucault claims that the "general formulas of domination" actually aimed at creating docile bodies, which would be more obedient and, thus, more useful (p. 138).

Foucault (1978) takes up the idea of power and disciplining further and claims that the subjects which result from such hidden and pervasive form of power are the one who is very obedient. The new form of power is less focused on punishment, prohibition and authoritative power and emphasizes more on productive strategies of power, which modifies the manner in which one thinks not only about the subject but also about resistances to mechanisms of power.

Thus, the subject doesn't feel as being absolutely in control of the state or of the king; rather, according to Foucault (1978), the subject is involved in multiple relationships to the power structure. And it is on the basis of this relationship on which s/he lean-to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct his/her identity.

Feminist Take on Foucault

Critique of Foucault

Although Foucault's work on power, knowledge and production of the subjects is relevant to the feminist theorists, his accounts are themselves gender-neutral. Feminists have come to criticize this blatant disregard for the significance of gender in power and knowledge and subject formation. (Bartky, 1997; McNay, 1997; & Sawicki, 1991). As [Bartky \(1997\)](#) claims, "Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine". (pp. 63-64)

Foucault Employed by Feminists

The work of Michel Foucault has been extremely influential amongst feminist scholars, and for a good reason, his reflections on discipline, power, sexuality and subjectivity are very much relevant to feminist analysis. In a patriarchal society, the female gender is established discursively and, thus, in many societies, they are considered inferior to men. At the same time, women are also considered as a threat to men's dominance, and for this reason, it is seen that they are subjected to particular disciplinary techniques of control and containment.

Foucault (1978) argues that power functions in every human relationship to influence individuals to behave a certain way. His this approach towards power was employed by many feminists. Especially the second wave feminists took Foucault works on power and history to expose the diverse ways through which women's subordination to patriarchy is romanticized and normalized. (Deveaux, 1994; pp. 211-238)

Foucault (1978) offers an alternative view of seeing the relationship between sexuality and wider social forces to traditional functionalism. Foucault doesn't see women sexuality in terms of body and pleasure but understands it as a historical condition of existence. Foucault's problematization of gender and sexuality demonstrates how gender and traditional gender roles are constructed to maintain male supremacy. Such an explanation also offers the possibility of alternatives to the already established status quo.

Foucault's theories also offer a critique on the traditional ways of thinking about the subject as a rational, unified being with a fixed core or essence, arguing that: "Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (Foucault 1991, pp.87-8). There is no

'natural' body or pre-discursive, an essential human subject who is "amputated, repressed, altered by our social order; it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (Foucault 1977, p. 217). Foucault's commentary of how subjectivity is produced echoes Simone [de Beauvoir's claim \(1949\)](#) that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 295). This anti-essentialist attitude to the individual's body "indicates to feminists a way of placing a notion of the body at the centre of explanations of women's oppression that does not fall back into essentialism or biologism" ([McNay, 2013: p. 11](#)). This helps in the development of the idea that gender is a social and historical construct rather than a natural or essential notion. [Benhabib and Cornell \(1987\)](#) take this idea further and define how it is the way "anatomy is socially invested that defines gender identity and not the body itself". (p. 14)

Patriarchy is an ideological structure that characterizes a man as the normal subject, and a woman is defined as the "other", thus, subjugating her to a subordinate role. In this case, patriarchy acts as a discourse that normalizes the male gender while subjugating the female gender and thus oppressing the women.

Foucault (1991) asserts that an individual's body is branded with past events, and on it, the cultural hierarchies are reinforced. The current study aims to analyze how certain gender roles are normalized and how the female becomes the "other", the abnormal subject who is inscribed with cultural and historical specific practices and traditions. In this manner, their bodies act as a battleground where the wars among the men are fought. According to Michel Foucault (1991), the "body manifests the stigmata of past experiences as the inscribed surface of events, the locus of a disassociated self, and a volume in perpetual disintegration" (p. 148). The current study aims to investigate how the women's bodies, in Manto's short story, present the violence exerted by power structures, in this case, the patriarchal setup.

Through a realistic and satirical representation of the violent time of the Partition, Manto realistically depicts the sufferings of the women who bore the brunt of the violent time period. He depicts the way the partition was inscribed onto the bodies of these women by the male members of the society, and even though the women remain silent, their bodies become the signifiers of the brutalities exerted onto them.

Multiple studies have been conducted on the works of Manto, discussing his work from diverse perspectives. [Chhetry's \(2015\)](#) deals with the connection between nationalism and madness, particularly in the context of partition of the subcontinent in 1947 through the use of Manto's fiction. She claims that schizophrenic identity was absorbed and adorned by people during partition. She also highlights the way nationalism is a skewed notion and how to unfold the performativity of madness depicted by Manto is merely rhetoric of nationalism.

[Kumar \(1996\)](#) focuses on the realistic portrayal of the suffering faced by the women of 20th century India. He analyses the direct unveiling of the degeneration prevalent in the Manto's time period and how the women were faced with the blunt of the degeneration. He investigates the way Manto discloses dehumanization of women through his account of the "fallen women".

Gatica (2014) takes the works of Manto, Singh and Sidhwa to explore the way they represent their female characters and their roles in the new states of Pakistan and India during and after the partition of the subcontinent. Her aim is to investigate how the gendering of the partition raises questions including about the role of states, political parties and personalities on the lives of common individuals, especially women.

Methodology

Introduction

The current study employs the qualitative mode of inquiry through which the selected story will be thematically analyzed in order to answer the research questions. Through the use of the framework presented by Foucault, this study aims to utilize these thematic categories to analyze the selected text.

Text Selected

Saadat Hassan Manto's short story "Khol Do" is selected for the current study. This short story is the third story belonging to the collection of stories "Manto: Selected Stories" translated by Aatish Taseer (2016).

Framework of Analysis

The framework of the analysis of the current study is informed by the themes of analysis as presented by Foucault

(1991, 1991, & 1978). Foucault's notions of power and knowledge are adopted to understand the gendered oppression as depicted in the text. It seeks to investigate that how women are subjectified and objectified by the patriarchal ideology by creating them as docile and weak subjects. This docile and malleable subject marker of women is presented as normative; thus, all those women who do not conform to this image are othered and are subjected to disciplinary forms of power.

Analysis

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 is co-opted to uphold the patriarchal setup, which in extension marginalizes women. This is done through a set of fine-tuned techniques of "micro-physics of power, as suggested by Foucault (1991). These microphysics of power allow for the institutionalization and normalization of patriarchy, thus, centralizing men while marginalizing and silencing women.

Manto's texts are depictive of the traumas and violence faced by the common man during the Partition of the Subcontinent, not in the hands of a sovereign head of state but rather through the individuals who possess some sort of power and control over other individuals. This includes men over women, men who are at an advantage due to the patriarchal setup of the society, which grants them power and control over women.

"Khol Do" is representative of the violence and chaos faced by the common people during the partition. This is a story of a young girl named Sakina who was abducted and was then raped by not her abductors but also her rescuers. She is finally discovered by her father in a hospital in a traumatized state.

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 Siraj ud-Din hand reaches the dupatta of his daughter Sakina and recognizes that she is missing. The old father gets up and starts asking people here and there about his daughter, and finally, some young men who call themselves "volunteers" promise to help the desperate father. 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, Siraj ud-Din 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. Siraj ud-Din recognizes his daughter just at the moment the doctor enters the room:

The doctor looked at the body on the stretcher. He checked its pulse and said to Sirajuddin, 'the window, open it!' At the sound of the words, Sakina's corpse moved. Her dead hands undid her salwar and lowered it. Old Sirajuddin cried with happiness, 'She's alive, my daughter's alive!' The doctor was drenched from head to toe in sweat. (p. 45).

The ending of the story is chilling and makes the reader shudder at the extent of the violence and barbarity unleashed during the tumult of 1947. Without the actual description of violence done onto the body, her mere gesture speaks volumes.

Women's voices which had been silenced by the historiographer is also given some allusion of voicing here. Through her gestures, Sakina gives voice to the great number of women who were victims of the atrocities that occurred during this tumultuous time period. These women, who had become the blunt of the chaos of partition and were otherwise silenced and hence forgotten from history, are given voice through Sakina's gesture.

Through the discourse of nationalism, the subject of the brave soldier is constructed. The subject is willing to risk his life for the country and do whatever it takes to defend one's nation. This allows for the legitimization of any violent actions taken against those belonging to the enemy nation.

Manto, in his stories, reveals how the individuals, the common men and women suffered during the communal violence of partition. Prominent among Manto's account of these individuals is his portrayal of the plight of the woman. The women acted as a means to avenge the national honour; thus, these women's bodies become the battleground onto which the national violence was perpetrated.

Manto's text depicts how women are converted into an object of a commodity through which the co-option of tropes such as nationalism for the advancement of patriarchal ideology. Their bodies are inscribed with traditional and cultural signifiers, which then become a way of justifying their bodies becoming spaces upon which

national battles are contested. In the case of Sakina, her body becomes the battleground of not only nations but space where men can assert their dominance. In the text, Sakina's *dupatta* is representative of her honour which she has lost. Her *dupatta* is not depicted as separate from her identity, but it becomes an extended signifier of her through it signifying her honour. This signification allows for her objectification as her identity and dignity are represented defined by an object.

Manto, through this particular story, highlights how the women were not merely the symbol of avenging national pride and honour but also this facade of "nationalism" gave free rein to men to exercise their power over women no matter their nationality or religion.

Sakina is a victim of different fragments of power exercised over her, and all of them act as an oppressive form of power over her. Firstly, she is a victim of the oppression at the hands of the men who raped her. "Khol Do" also 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 of her own religion and nationality. 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 the rescuers of national honour and pride were the ones who turned to bestiality and madness.

Finding and Conclusion

The searing experience of the partition had been conveyed to us through Manto's stories, and in "Khol Do", through the metaphor of the "violated body," he depicts the multiple forces from which the women face oppression (Rumi, 2012). Sakina is a victim of different fragments of power exercised over her, and all of them act as an oppressive form of power over her. She is no longer under direct oppression from the sovereign, but instead, she is dehumanized, victimized and violated by the fragmentary form of disciplinary and "productive" forms of power now existing instead of the sovereign power. These fragmented forms of power are violent and oppressive in a much more silent and discreet manner. Their oppressions are made invisible from the general public and take the shroud by veiling themselves as productive and beneficiary for those under their influence. In the case of this text, Sakina was the victim of not only the so-called "enemy" or the state but was made to suffer in the hands of those who had control over her because of her gender, thus, providing them with the upper hand.

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. Concepts like nationalism, which are to present equal liberty and freedom to all citizens, still create a distinction between men and women and considers men as superior. To perpetuate the oppression of women, they are objectified as their bodies act the space onto which not only traditional and national identities are forged but also where these are contested. Though these battles are contested on these women's bodies, their plights and fights are silenced from the historical narratives rendering them silent "objects". This discourse of nationalism and patriarchy further subjectifies women and marginalizes them by silencing them.

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