

VOICES ACROSS THE BORDER: A POLYPHONIC AND DIALOGIC STUDY OF MANTO'S MOTTLED DAWN

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ABSTRACT

This essay delves into the multiple voices that echo in Saadat Hasan Manto's collection *Mottled Dawn* (1997). Manto (1912-1955) is known for his psychological realism for he unveils the deepest recesses of the mind of his characters which are polyphonic and dialogic compared to monologism. The essay takes insight from Makheil Bakhtin's theory of Dialogism and Polyphony. The essay is qualitative in approach and critical textual analysis of Saadat Hassan Manto's short stories based on the partition of 1947. Manto being himself a migrant witnessed the bloodbath of partition and experienced its horrors. Thus his work is a true and realistic representation of the partition. The stories in the collection *Mottled Dawn* portray a range of voices which is the hallmark of Bakhtine's concepts of dialogism and polyphony. Mikhail Bakhtine's idea of dialogism explains that the text has a range of voices. The voice of the writer and the characters merge. It is the skill of the writer to give a vivid and clear picture which is painted not only by the voice of the author but also by the voices of the characters. The essay determines that *Mottled Dawn* contains a range of short stories with the background of the partition and involves a plethora of voices that appear, disappear and reappear on the scene.

Keywords: Partition literature, trauma, violence, dialogism, polyphony, monologism

1. INTRODUCTION

This essay is about the dialogic and polyphonic investigation of Saadat Hassan Manto's collection of short stories *Mottled Dawn*. The narratives in this selection by Manto are identified with the partition of 1947. Manto depicts genuine characters and their horrible issues amid the partition of 1947. *Mottled Dawn* by Saadat Hasan Manto is a collection of short stories that delve into the complexities of human nature, society, and the impact of partition on individuals. The book is known for its raw and unflinching portrayal of the harsh realities of life, often exploring themes of violence, trauma, and the human psyche. Manto's writing style is characterized by its stark realism and poignant storytelling, making *Mottled Dawn* a powerful and thought-provoking read for those interested in exploring the darker aspects of human experience. Partition literature is crisp in contemporary analysis. This paper goes for various voices that rise and submerge in the waterway of the accounts. For the interpretation, Bakhtine's ideas of dialogism and polyphonic have been taken.

Polyphony and dialogism are key concepts in the work of the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Polyphony refers to the idea that in a literary work or discourse, there are multiple voices or perspectives at play, rather than just a single authoritative voice. This allows for a diversity of viewpoints and voices to coexist within a text, creating a more complex and dynamic narrative. Dialogism, on the other hand, emphasizes the interactive and dynamic nature of language and communication. Bakhtin believed that all utterances are inherently dialogic, meaning that they are always in conversation with other voices and perspectives. This dialogic nature of language highlights the interconnectedness of all communication and the constant interplay of different voices and viewpoints (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Akram & Abdelrady, 2023).

Overall, Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and dialogism emphasize the importance of diversity, interaction, and complexity in language and communication. They encourage us to consider

the multitude of voices and perspectives that shape our understanding of the world and to engage in dialogue with others to create richer and more nuanced interpretations of texts and ideas. Human life is a combination of multiple roles and their performance all day long and all life. The complexities of human activities are coupled with mental recesses that are always in flux and remain in polyphonic and dialogic working. Likewise, the authors have substantial experience of their surroundings and they couple it with their imagination and create stories and characters. Manto is one such author who sees human life from close quarters and pictures in multiple shades. These multiple shades are dialogic and polyphonic.

Life is a shared event hence it is dialogic and living life in a society as its participant is dialogic. Meanings are generated or pop up whenever there is dialogue, all activities performed have meanings. All human conversations that have utterances, written or spoken, are internally dialogic when in the form of communication. Dialogue is the storehouse of human life as all individuals participate in it all through their social life. Literature as a close depiction of human life paints the interplay of characters (Ramzan et al., 2023). They engage themselves in dialogue that has some conflict in the background. The multiple voices in the dialogue lead to a multiple web of meanings while maintaining the author at a distance from its characters. Sometimes, authors are blamed for serving their purpose through characters as they move them on some agenda for the author cannot be detached from his writings; however, this may be turned as that no matter how biased is the author and maintains monologist text the multipronged voices are discernable from such texts. Holquist puts, "All speech utterances are heteroglot and polyphonic in that they partake of different languages" and resonate with "many voices." (428).

The text of fiction is not limited to the narrator's speech but also involves character speech. Hence, in literary discourse, the characters of a story express a range of points of view that are sometimes potentially contradictory as they deny being the mouthpiece of the author (Ramzan et al., 2023). It is the dialogic or polyphonic style of Manto that gives birth to multiple voices that are put in the background of the partition of 1947. *Mottled Dawn* is a collection of Saadat Hasan Manto's most dominant pieces on the Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. The book incorporates

extraordinary stories like *Toba Tek Singh*, *The Return*, *The Assignment*, *Colder Than Ice* and some more, bringing alive the most awful occasion ever of the Indian subcontinent.

The Partition divided India into two country states for Muslims and Hindus: the Dominion of Pakistan and the Union of India. It was depicted by Lord Mountbatten as 'one of the best regulatory tasks ever'. The historic and historiographical works about segments have their very own place and esteem, writing has an indispensable task to carry out in saving occasions in aggregate memory, and translating the suggestions for children. Parcel writing exists over all major scholarly structures: books, short stories, lyrics and true-to-life.

Many of the writers from the subcontinent used the partition of 1947 as a historical setting of their fiction. A standout amongst the most acclaimed books is *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khushwant Singh, made into a film of a similar name in 1998 by Pamela Rooks. In the book, Singh centres on nearby occasions in an anecdotal town called Mano Majra, to outline how even a generally quiet and detached town, where Sikhs and Muslims have dependably lived as kinfolk, was burned by the fire of shared brutality that spread through India around then. Singh splendidly catches the ethical perplexity caused by an extraordinary occasion like partition.

Bhisham Sahni's tale *Tamas* (Darkness, Ignorance 1974), is set in a little town in the North West boondocks territory (presently in Pakistan), where the slaughtering of a pig, thought debased by the Muslims, and a cow, thought about blessed by the Hindus, prompts shared uproars. Amusingly, when the bloodletting has run its course, the specific individuals who were subtly behind the twin triggers, circumvent engaging for harmony. Govind Nihalani, who made *Tamas* into a TV film in 1987, portrayed it as an "inauspicious notice of the massive disaster that outcomes at whatever point the religious slants of networks are controlled to accomplish political goals. It is a prophetic caution against the utilization of religion as a weapon to pick up and propagate political power. The background of his stories is mostly the 1947 partition. Barnali (29) is of the view that the horrors of the partition cover a large portion of Manto's short stories. Communal violence, atrocities of the colonizers and the plight of the natives fill the subject matter of his stories.

Manimozhi (8) also asserts the fact that Manto's short stories are the holocaust of the

partition. Tabssum et, al. (302) interpret his short stories through the lens of Habermasian and conclude that Manto's stories explicitly show women as doubly colonized and subordinate to the system and society. They are further subjugated by the oppression of the multiple laws. There is little that is soothing and healing. Christopher (87) also conversely expresses that Manto's stories move between migration, medicine and artistic expression. They are not merely about the personal experiences of the migrants but the loss that is linked with it. All stories are meticulous in terms of linguistic power and artistic ornaments. Further, they create and raise awareness of the reader about cultural sensitivity.

Sonal (360) expresses that partition is integral to the stories of Manto; however, there are also elements of division, dislocation, identity, territory, society and community of South Asia. Kuldip and Kaur (57) also argue that nearly all actions of his stories take place on the ground of partition. It is explicit and gives rise to human emotions attached to the concept of loss and homeland. Manto exposes the pure grotesqueness and beastliness that lie dormant in the human mind. The victims' cries and the senselessness of it all have endured over time because of his unvarnished portrayals. The essay examines how the narrative of disruption persists years after it occurred by looking at *Mottled Dawn*. Lubna (66) views Manto's stories from the perspective of feminism and femininity. She further, asserts that the subjugation of women and oppression of the softer sex have been closely portrayed in his stories.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research. The selected stories have been interpreted with an insight taken from the dialogism and polyphony of Mikhail Bakhtin. The data for the essay were the short stories taken from Manto's collection *Mottled Dawn*. The selected stories have been critically examined and interpreted within the theoretical framework. Hence, this essay is textual.

2.1 Theoretical framework

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (2013), Bakhtin built up the ideas which were to illuminate quite a bit of his work. The idea of 'polyphony' (obtained from music) is integral to this examination. Polyphony implies numerous voices. Bakhtin read Dostoevsky's work as containing a wide range of

voices, unmerged in a solitary viewpoint, and not subordinated to the voice of the creator. Every one of these voices has its very own point of view, its very own "legitimacy", and its very own story load inside the novel (70).

The writer does not put his very own account voice between the character and the reader, but instead, enables characters to stun and subvert. It is along these lines as though the books were composed by various characters, not a solitary writer's point of view. Rather than a solitary target world, held together by the creator's voice, there is a majority of consciousness, each with its reality. The reader does not see a single reality introduced by the creator, but instead, how reality appears to each character (Bakhtine 37).

In dialogism, the content shows up as a cooperation of particular points of view or philosophies, carried by the distinctive characters. The characters can represent themselves, even against the writer – maybe alternate voices specifically through the text. The job of the writer is essentially changed because the writer can never again consume the 'ability to mean'.

Dostoevsky's "dialogical guideline" is counterposed to the monologism (single-thought talk; likewise named 'homophony' – single-voice) normal for conventional composition and thought. In monologism, one supernatural point of view or cognizance coordinates the whole field and consequently incorporates all the connoting rehearses, belief systems, qualities and wants that are esteemed critical. Anything immaterial to this viewpoint is regarded as pointless or unessential when all is said in done (Bakhtine 70). Bakhtin's 'dialogism' could be named a dialogics of the solid. An essential component (maybe even a downright objective) of this dialogism is that the reification of social relations in present-day society (either entrepreneur or a bureaucratized communism) be tested through basic scholarly practice as well as in the carnivalesque sanctioning of the idealistic network, which makes a transgressive or 'liminal' social space of opportunity and credibility (Gardiner, 170-171).

The Bakhtinian hypothesis holds the majority and polyphony of observer and authorial voices, which takes into consideration a discourse of the specific subjectivity of the eyewitness as a fundamental piece of the imaginative procedure. For Bakhtin, the subjectivity of the eyewitness is

attached to the specific situation or area of the onlooker and even this abstract setting is inconsistent exchange with a majority of others. Deborah J. Haynes features the issue behind the propensity of overwhelming talks to benefit the article to the detriment of various subjectivities when she states: "Women's activists have indicated the inquisitive and even risky actuality that white male scholars, for example, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault have focused on the item and the 'passing of the subject' or the 'demise of the writer' accurately as ladies all things considered and men of shading have gone into people in general circle in expanding numbers." Dialogism allows an exchange of the connection between the subject and writer, one that does not benefit the reification of talk over lived involvement. Maybe more vitally, a dialogical strategy searches out the incendiary voices that challenge the monologism of power (Jordan 9). Every one of Bakhtin's works is energized and controlled by the guidelines of discourse. It is winding up progressively clear that Bakhtin's deep-rooted reflection on discourse does not have a place exclusively ever of hypothesis, vast as the outskirts of that subject have as of late moved toward becoming. It is currently certain that dialogism is additionally involved in the historical backdrop of present-day contemplating (Michael 14).

3. DISCUSSION

The short stories which have been taken for analysis are *Colder than Ice* and *The Assignment*. '*Colder than Ice*' is the fourth story in the collection *Mottled Dawn*. Manto in this story presents the picture which is gory to imagine. In the holocaust of partition of 1947 when the grand scale migration brought with it blood tide the characters of *Colder than Ice* raise multiple voices which are heart-curdling in nature.

Thanda Gosht (Colder than Ice), the story for which Manto would have been condemned to hard work in jail, recounts the narrative of a marauder amidst mutual butcher, communal slaughter, loot and rape. It is a story of a Sikh. In an already plundered, empty house, he comes across an unconscious young woman of the targeted community and tries to rape her, only to realise that she is dead. The recognition that he was trying to rape the corpse of a woman so horrifies him that it renders him impotent forever. The real human and social denotations of communal bloodshed and violence

with all its horror, its violation of decency and outrage of human values becomes glaringly manifest in the last few lines of this unforgettable story. Since the protagonist was shown as a Sikh, besides obscenity, Manto was also accused of ridiculing the honour of Muslims. However, it is not the authorial intention that is weighty here but the across-border voices that speak volumes in the generation of meanings. "Any utterance, whether spoken or written, that people use in communication with each other is internally dialogic" (Bakhtin, 1986 as cited in Marchenkova, 2005 p.72).

Manto is an excellent storyteller and presents the viewpoints of all the characters which come not from Manto but from the characters. There is fiction that tells the action and there is fiction that shows the action but the short stories of Manto take the reader inside the action on the canvas of the story. *Colder than Ice* beautifully and skillfully portrays the polyphony of the characters. The character of the Sikh is one voice that represents thousands of voices spread across the horrors of the partition of 1947. The Sikh comes to his lady at night. He locks the door and starts the foreplay. His mistress is a formidable and dominant woman. He prolongs the foreplay but when it comes to performing he fails. His mistress is much annoyed and taunts him for his impotency. But she also needs to know the cause which has run her lover dry. When she insists, her lover gives the whole account of the plunder. He tells her the way he kills a Muslim family and abducts a young beautiful girl from the house. While he carries her on his shoulder to rape her she's already died of utter fear. His brutality does not stop and he raps the dead girl (*Colder than Ice*) many times. So much so that he runs himself dry and cannot satisfy his mistress who taunts him furiously.

The first voice in the story is the voice of Ishwar Singh, the second voice is the voice of his conscience. The third voice is of a beast present in Ishwar Singh and the next voice is of a human being in Ishwar Singh. All these multiple voices collage at a focal point and the reader submerges his voice at that point. "*Ishwar Singh stood quietly in corner, holding his kirpan absent-mindedly. Anxiety and confusion were writ large on his handsome face.*" (17) Manto's description itself is a voice. It does not necessarily show what the writer feels about the character rather it tells how the reader perceives the character. Anxiety and confusion are the first voice of Ishwar Singh. But this voice is pressed under other

voices and one of them is the voice of Kalwant Kaur. Ishwar Singh in the quiet room cannot focus his attention on Kalwant Kaur. On the contrary, she cannot comprehend what is in the mind of Ishwar Singh. But their body language is quite suggestive and tells the untold. "Ishwar Singh raised his head, then turned it away, unable to deal with Kalwant Kaur's fiery gaze." (17) Manto moves along the changing moods and the changing voices of his characters. Kalwant Kaur cannot tolerate the silence of Ishwar Singh. When she inquires where has he been. He answers that he does not know. Here she loses her temper a different voice comes from her. "Kalwant Kaur lost her temper. 'What sort of motherfucking answer is that!'" (17) Ishwar Singh and Kalwant Kaur are two voices that suggest thousands of voices submerged in the horrors of the partition of 1947.

Here it can be said that Manto gives a version and account of one side across the borders but there is no voice from this side of the border. There is no denying the fact that both sides committed atrocities beyond imagination. The Sikhs and the Muslims coloured their hands across borders. The trauma that we see in the eyes of Ishwar Singh is vivid in *The Assignment*. *Colder than Ice* is one voice of millions on the other side of the border. Similarly, *The Assignment* is another voice from this side of the border. Manto gives room to all voices and brings forth an unbiased and clear picture. By the end of the story, Ishwar Singh tells his beastly act and brutality. He tells the way he kills six male family members and spares the life of one girl. "Kalwant Kaur shook him violently. 'What happened?' Ishwar Singh opened his eyes. 'She was dead... I had carried a dead body... a heap of cold flesh...'" (21). *Colder than Ice* is not monologic in narration. The voice of Ishwar Singh and his confession speaks volumes. His character is a living and walking character of his times. The news reports and the historical accounts of the times confirm the voice of Ishwar Singh. It is not the voice of Manto that gives the horrific subjective account of the brutality of Ishwar Singh rather it is the voice of Ishwar Singh which is the voice of hundreds of other Ishwar Singhs present in the partition of 1947.

He left a large body of work, containing the stories of his delightful sojourn in the Bombay film industry, innumerable sketches of celebrities and very ordinary people, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis and Jews, the entire web of the

vibrant society of this great metropolis. The second story for the investigation is *The Return*. *The Return (Khol Do)* is an account of a lost girl when a train going to Lahore from Amritsar is halted mid-way and assaulted by the agitators. The story is of disgrace and the plunge of human character and how in some cases the specific friends in need can end up being the perpetrators. The dad is hunting down his little girl lastly discovers her. His solitary alleviation originates from the way that she is alive. Nothing else appears to issue. That was the incongruity of the circumstances at that point. Saadat Hasan Manto's composing is never sugar-covered. He generally composed how he saw and what he encountered. At this point, you would have understood that I would prescribe his composition to everybody who peruses. He is the ace of Urdu writing and I am very much happy that his composing has been accessible to all for decades.

The Return is a dialogic narrative of the Pakistani side of the border during the partition of 1947. The volunteers of the Muslim League promise to search and return the young daughter of Sirajuddin but they never return rather they keep her and rape her consistently. The volunteers and Ishwar Singh are the two sides with different labels of the same coin. A helpless father in the turmoil of migration loses everything. 'He spent hours looking, all the times shouting his daughter's name... Sakina, Sakina...but she is nowhere to be found' (8) This is the voice of Sirajuddin which multiplies during the story. The ironical undertone is also one of the voices in the story. He gives an ironical account of the volunteers. 'At the risk of their lives they had driven to Amritsar, recovered many women and children and brought them back to the camp, but they had not found Sakina'. Manto does not give monologic accounts in his stories. *The Return* may appear on the superficial level as a monologic account but a little close perusal yields the dialogic polyphony. The Muslims are doing in *The Return* what the Sikhs are doing in *Colder than Ice*. The contrast in these two stories exhibits the dialogism present in the short stories of Manto. As the story progresses the same amount of horror and awe become obvious on the part of the reader as it is in *Colder than Ice*. The last description is heart-rendering for any sane reader. At last, Sakina is found half dead on the railway tracks and she is brought to the hospital where her father recognizes her. The only matter for him is the life of Sakina. 'The half-unconscious Sakina is on the

stretcher and cannot see the situation around. She is in trauma because of the rapes done to her.

Her hands groped for the cord that kept her shalwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs. 'She is alive. My daughter is alive', Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (10)

This is not less than the account that Ishwar Singh gives. The stories of Manto present this side of the story and that side of the story. This is what is called dialogism.

4. CONCLUSION

Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories are polyphonic and dialogic because they often feature multiple voices, perspectives, and layers of meaning. Manto's characters come from diverse backgrounds and social classes, each with their own unique viewpoints and experiences. This creates a rich tapestry of voices that interact and engage in dialogue within the stories, reflecting the complexity of human relationships and society. Manto's use of dialogue also adds depth and authenticity to his narratives, making them more engaging and thought-provoking for readers. The short stories of Manto cover the in-depth arena of the minds of the characters that he places in his stories. His characters not only serve as instrument of action but also a plethora of voices. *Colder than Ice* is one such example. The two leading character Kalwant Kaur and Ishwar Singh echo in the mind of the reader and leave many avenues to ponder upon. This is the skill of the author that multiple views emerge from one character and single voice and Manto is master of this.

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