

UGC CARE LISTED
ISSN No.2394-5990

संशोधक

• वर्ष : ९१ • डिसेंबर २०२३ • पुरवणी विशेषांक ०७

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भारत 2023 INDIA



प्रकाशक : इतिहासाचार्य वि.का.राजवाडे संशोधन मंडळ, धुळे



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इतिहासाचार्य वि. का. राजवाडे मंडळ, धुळे
या संस्थेचे त्रैमासिक
॥ संशोधक ॥

पुरवणी अंक ७ - डिसेंबर २०२३ (त्रैमासिक)

- शके १९४५ ● वर्ष : ९१ ● पुरवणी अंक : ७

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दूरध्वनी (०२५६२) २३३८४८, ९४२२२८९४७९, ९४०४५७७०२०

कार्यालयीन वेळ

सकाळी ९.३० ते १.००, सायंकाळी ४.३० ते ८.०० (रविवारी सुट्टी)

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विशेष सूचना : संशोधक त्रैमासिकाची वर्गणी चेक/ड्राफ्टने
'संशोधक त्रैमासिक राजवाडे मंडळ, धुळे' या नावाने पाठवावी.

अक्षरजुळणी : सौ. सीमा शिंदे, वारजे-माळवाडी, पुणे ५८.

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Sexual Dysfunction, Past Trauma and Broken Relationships: A Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's 'Colder than Ice'

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Abstract:

The man-woman relationship is in danger due to sexual dysfunction and its roots can best be found in the past of a character, situation or event. The thoughts buried down deep in mind comes out through the action of any person come to the surface and same is reflected through the behaviour of a person, his thoughts, action and speech. The present research paper aims at exploring how the thoughts repressed in the mind of individual or the events he was involved in effects in sexual dysfunction and breaking the relationship between man and woman. Saadat Hasan Manto's short story 'Colder than Ice,' a translation of 'Thanda Gosht' is taken for the case study to prove the hypothesis that the breaking of the sexual relationship between male and female results in the breaking of their relationship. The present research aims to discuss how the thoughts in mind, depression and mental state of a person results in sexual dysfunction permanently or for a temporary period. The study does not intend to say that sexual dysfunction is the only result of any kind of involvement in past action as there are many other elements that cause sexual dysfunction.

Keywords: Manto, sexual dysfunction, personal history, broken relationships

According to the metaphysical poet John Donne, the spiritual union is impossible without physical union between the man and woman. The family system is stood on the legalization of sexual intercourse between male and female in the society. Due to some flaws, past trauma, feeling of guilt or physical problem, an individual in general and a man in particular fails to satisfy his partner sexually which results in breaking their relationship and bonding in the family. Nobody wants to share the love of the one's spouse with any other person. If a person fails to perform the sexual act with full satisfaction of the other, it creates a wall between the two – the wall of silence, suspicion, or doubt that leads sometimes to revenge.

Saadat Hasan Manto was a renowned Urdu short story writer known for his gritty and realistic portrayals of human relationships and societal issues. Many of his stories explore the complexities of human emotions which are related to sexual dysfunction, past trauma, and broken relationships. His characters frequently struggle with sexual issues, often as a result of societal constraints, personal traumas, or psychological factors. He sheds light on the struggles and stigmatization associated with sexual dysfunction, revealing the vulnerabilities of his characters. Moreover, his characters often



carry the burden of past trauma, be it from partition, violence, or personal experiences. These traumas influence their present behaviours and relationships. His writings inquire into the psychological and emotional scars that these characters bear. Broken and tumultuous relationships are central to many of his short stories. He depicts the disintegration of relationships due to various factors, including social standards, misunderstandings, or personal flaws. His narratives often showcase the emotional disorder and despair that result from these broken relationships.

'Colder than Ice' (Thanda Gosht) is a short story written by the well-known Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto, a well-known Urdu writer. The story in translation form is taken for study in the present research paper. It is one of Manto's most contentious and stimulating works due to its explicit and challenging subject matter. It is set against the backdrop of the violence and chaos of the partition of India in 1947. It is one of the many stories of Manto which *unsettle us* according to Ismat Chughtai "*because they take us to the darker, brutal corners of our psyche, to desires repressed and ugliness that settles.*" (Tatsita Mishra) It revolves around the character of Ishwar Singh, a Sikh man, who has experienced extreme trauma and violence during the partition. He is deeply scarred by the events he witnessed or in which he was involved. The original title 'Thanda Gosht' means "Cold Meat" in English. It serves as a metaphor which brings out "the horrifying implications of man's descent into bestiality where a woman's body becomes the contested site for conquest, violence, and sexual assault that lies at the core of the story." (M. Asaduddin) In his story, Manto exposes "a culture of silence, which problematises the state's continued control over the Muslim woman's body..." (Sadia Uddin) In it, Ishwar Singh returns home to his wife, and

it becomes evident that he is suffering from severe psychological trauma. The narrative explores the themes of sexual dysfunction, trauma, and the impact of violence on an individual's psyche.

Manto's 'Colder than Ice,' is a powerful and disturbing exploration of the human condition in the midst of violence and conflict. It challenges societal norms and forces the reader to confront the psychological consequences of trauma and violence. The story is often cited as an example of Manto's bold and unflinching approach to storytelling. It is a powerful exploration of sexual dysfunction, past trauma, and its impact on relationships. It is important to note that Manto's works often delve into taboo subjects and are known for their unambiguous content.

In 'Colder than Ice,' Manto presents a complex narrative that delves into themes of impotence, trauma, and the breakdown of relationships. The central character, Ishwar Singh, is a man who suffers from sexual dysfunction, specifically impotence, after witnessing the horrors of violence and bloodshed during the Partition of India in 1947. This trauma has a profound impact on his ability to engage in sexual relationships. The story also touches upon societal norms and expectations surrounding masculinity and sexual performance. The inability to perform sexually is deeply stigmatized, leading to feelings of shame and isolation for Ishwar Singh. His wife, Kalwant Kaur, is unable to understand the root of his dysfunction and is deeply affected by the emotional and physical distance that has emerged between them.

The story can be seen as a commentary on the broader impact of historical trauma on individuals and their relationships. The Partition of India was a violent and traumatic event that left scars on many people. Manto uses Ishwar Singh's impotence as a metaphor for the impotence of a society that has experienced such



horrors. The breakdown of the relationship between Ishwar Singh and Kalwant Kaur is a tragic consequence of the unaddressed trauma and the societal expectations surrounding sexuality and masculinity. The story highlights the need for understanding and empathy when dealing with individuals who have experienced trauma and the importance of addressing the emotional and psychological wounds that can affect relationships.

The story begins at midnight in a room in a gloomy atmosphere having a "strange and ominous silence seemed to have descended on the city." The fear of losing a partner makes Kalawant Kaur, a woman in the story to close the door from inside. Ishwar Singh's holding a kirpan absent-mindedly points towards the mental condition of Ishwar Singh. Apart from this, his face is full of anxiety and confusion. Manto portrays Kalawant Kaur as follow:

Kalwant Kaur was a big woman with generous hips, fleshy thighs and unusually high breasts. Her eyes were sharp and bright and over her upper lip there was faint bluish down. Her chin suggests great strength and resolution.

Kalawant Kaur is afraid of losing her partner and she becomes very angry at her husband that makes her to ask about his whereabouts. The silence is then altered by the abuse: "What sort of mother-fucking answer is that!" As soon as she finds her husband in anxiety, she tries to patch up the relationship. She runs her fingers through the long hair of her husband to make him feel relaxed by arousing sexual desire in him. He calls her the best bed partner; but she reminds him in irritation that he had been to city to loot more and he did not want to share the details of it with her. She identifies the change in him over the last week. So she asks for more explanation. She says:

Tell me what happened to you the last night you were here. You were lying next to me and you had made me wear all those gold ornaments you had looted from the houses of the Muslims

in the city and you were kissing me all over and then, suddenly, God only knows what came over you, you put on your clothes and walked out.

To avoid cross questioning, he invites Kalawant Kaur to arouse him sexually. On one hand she tries her level best to arouse him for sexual intercourse; but on the other hand, she continues her investigation like a police officer. The intension behind her investigation is to bring back her partner to potency. He also responds back her positively. He undresses her as if he was skinning a banana. Manto very clearly portrays how Ishwar Lal make her boil with passion "like a kettle on fire." He writes: "He bit her lower lip, nibbled at her earlobes, kneaded her breasts, slapped her glowing hip resoundingly and planted big, wet kisses on her cheeks." Because of his best performance, he succeeds in arousing her; but, is unable to erect himself because of the trauma in his mind. The failure to do sex and the fear of losing partner makes Kalawant to ask again and again the same question with whom he had slept with to investigate the reason of growing impotency in Ishwar Singh. The interaction between man and woman starts with silence, abuse, reconciliation, irritation, assurance and confidence; but then it is transformed into threat, torture and confession in the final stage.

Kalawant Kaur stabs Ishwar Singh with his kirpan and asks him 'who was the bitch.....?'

Her act reflects that a woman cannot bear to live with an impotent man. She prefers to live alone instead of living with an impotent man. When the blood flows from his wound, he tells her the truth that he had hidden from her. He tells her about the incident that took place last week when he killed six people from Muslim community but left one young and beautiful girl. He is attracted towards her because of her beauty. He says to himself, "Ishr Sian, you gorge yourself on Kalawant Kaur every day how about a mouthful of this luscious fruit!"



The beauty that attracts him towards a Muslim young girl becomes the cause of his impotency. He carries her over his shoulder, thinking that she is unconscious as she witnessed the death of her family members, out of the city and behind some bushes, he raped her. Being relaxed after sexual intercourse, he comes to know that he had not only carried a dead body on his shoulder but also raped her. His mental state is clearly stated by Manto: "She was dead I had carried a dead body a heap of cold flesh....." The feeling of guilt of raping a dead body arouses fear in his mind. He becomes impotent because of the feeling of guilt rooted deep in his mind. His sex organ does not erect despite the continuous attempt from both the sides. It makes Kalawant Kaur angry and Ishwar Singh to feel inferior and beg for sympathy. The feeling of inferiority due to impotency makes him to lose all the manly characters and he becomes almost colder than ice. The term 'colder than ice' implies the impossibility of his coming back to potency. Kalawant Kaur's placing her hand on Ishwar Singh's hand is the result of sympathy that is felt for an impotent man. She tries to support her by catching his hand in her. It reflects symbolically that she has taken his sex organ in her own. The body of Ishwar Singh reflects the inability to come back to potency. When a man loses his potency, a woman becomes superior to him. A woman submits herself to a sexually active man accepts his superiority over her; but once he loses his potency, she does not accept him at all.

Like a great psychologist, Saadat Hasan Manto shows how any mental trauma becomes the cause of sexual dysfunction in an individual and how it results in breaking the relationships between the two partners, may it be husband and wife or lover and beloved. Any woman feels insecure when her husband fails to perform sexual activity. The fear arouses in the mind of a woman because of the doubt or thought of

what would happen if her husband's potency does not come back. There is nothing but a complete darkness in front of her eyes showing the possible mishaps and uncertainties that may come in her life. Such fear is not felt by the male because patriarchy is on his side to help him which gives him more importance and makes his wife a mere slave. Sexual dysfunction in a woman does not matter a lot, because she does not need erection. At the time of rape, her body is used as an object to fulfill the sexual desire of a man. Ishwar Singh's rape on a dead Muslim girl proves the fact that readiness of a woman for sex is not of more importance at such times. On the contrary, a man needs stimulation and erection to perform the sexual activity. If he fails to erect, there is impossibility of sexual performance on his part. So, male impotency matters a lot and is taken seriously because it becomes the reason to break the family relationship.

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