

6

Daughters of Turmoil: A Postcolonial Feminist Study of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Saadat Hasan Manto's *Khol Du*

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial feminism deals with how the women of the colonised countries are dealt with after decolonisation. In the present paper, I have tried looking at two works – J.M.Coetzee's '*Disgrace*' and Saadat Hasan Manto's '*Khol Du*' from postcolonial feminist point of view. The lives of both the women characters – Lucy and Sakina face similar torments because of their identity being attached to two very volatile terms, one being postcolonial and the other being woman. This association in itself acts as a catalyst to their tormented life and agonised psyche.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Postcolonial Feminism, Patriarchy

How does one feel when one is subjected to a great amount of exploitation? The person succumbs to the constant abuse. And if the exploitation is at two different levels it makes the person unable to raise himself. The constant hitting makes the person bruised and battered. The Post-colonial turmoil does the same to a person. A person is constantly bearing the brunt of the aftermaths of Colonisation wherein he is trying to figure out his place in society as a whole. He is constantly made to feel that he is in the wrong place. In the case of a woman it is a double blow, as Dr. Ritu Tyagi says:

She has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonised subject, but also as a woman. In this oppression her colonised brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. In his struggle against the coloniser, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her in the nationalist discourses. Not only that, she also suffers at the hands of Western feminists from the coloniser countries who misrepresent their colonised counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities, and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their "sisters". (Tyagi, 2014, p. 1)

The coloniser and the native might have their frictions but patriarchy takes an upper hand when the question of women arises. In the words of Ania Loomba:

Although men on both sides of the colonial divide engaged in bitter strife, they also often collaborated when it came to the domination of women. (Loomba, 2014, p. 142)

The native had no control over what was going on in his land. The only place where he could exercise his supremacy was over the women. Women in a way became the symbol of a 'land' which was to be captured and trampled. The native man had in a way taken the woman; her body as representative of his power.

Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality. (Loomba, 2014, p. 142)

Colonial repression of women did not change even after decolonisation. The effects of it still remains. The condition of women, post colonisation, can be called the same because in their instance they were already dealing with patriarchy. The only respite, if it can be called so, was their getting freedom from their colonial masters.

Colonialism is ill effecting in itself but if we add the ill effect on the women who had to face the adverse situations on two

fronts that is of being colonised as well as being a woman in that situation, it makes the situation all the more against them. The works which are analysed in the present paper are *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee and the short story *Khol Du* by Saadat Hasan Manto. Both the texts have the character of daughter, which is central to the work. The daughter in these works is not just in the role of a daughter, she is a postcolonial subject as well as a women-both of which face trial in their individual capacities. The character of Lucy or Sakina both are facing the same situations. Both are placed by their authors into a time-space where they are both post decolonisation; both have just their fathers and both have been sexually assaulted.

Before moving into the works it is essential to delve into the thought process of the writers of both the works. J.M. Coetzee and Saadat Hasan Manto both experienced colonisation in their respective countries, South Africa and India. Coetzee being a white knows the response a white was getting in the post-apartheid South Africa. His works have showcased the position of the white supremacist which has changed in a way for the worse for the coloniser. The white masters were now in a country which was no longer their own. They were the intruders now – the odd ones in a land which they thought of as odd. In the novel '*Disgrace*', there is an example of the changing dynamics between David Lurie, Lucy and Petrus-their servant:

In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one's temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place. But though Petrus is paid a wage, Petrus is no longer, strictly speaking, hired help. It is hard to say what Petrus is, strictly speaking. The word that seems to serve best, however, is *neighbour*. Petrus is a neighbour who at present happens to sell his labour, because that is what suits him. He sells his labour under contract, unwritten contract, and that contract makes no provision for dismissal on grounds of suspicion. It is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he

knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it. (Coetzee, 2000, p. 116)

Lucy can be seen here as the representation of every white person choosing to live in the land which is no longer eager to take them as their own. The assault on Lucy can also be seen as an assault on every coloniser choosing to live in the land which they are willing to choose as their own. The roles are reversed and the 'assault' is a sort of 'ransom' they must be willing to pay if they choose to live in an ever turning alien land.

Saadat Hasan Manto is a writer who experienced the Indian Partition first hand. His works show the plight of two nations which fought to win over their freedom eventually turning hostile, as well as into two nations. The massacres on either sides were not the triumph of anyone, but rather a loss on the part of mankind. As Ayesha Jalal lucubrates in her book *The Pity of Partition*:

Life in Pakistan was unlike anything Manto had known. The impact of partition was everywhere, as if an earthquake of great force had left everything in ruins, disconnected and disorderly. A few people were delirious about their ill-gotten gains. Most others were distraught and pensive, since they had lost everything in the upheaval and were reduced to living in extreme destitution in refugee camps. It was as if two streams were flowing side by side, one of life and the other of death. (Jalal, 2013, p. 151)

Manto gives the real picture of the effects of decolonisation. The country is no longer the same. It is in a volatile state; ready to 'explode' at the spur of stimulation. Ayesha Jalal states:

The lack of congruence between the frontiers of modern states and the fuzzy contours of multiple and overlapping identities at the social base is not peculiar to South Asia. Colonial gerrymandering, for strategic and political purposes, has left enduring legacies in large swaths of Asia and Africa with withering effects for their polities and societies. While a longer history of social discord has played a role, the hastily drawn frontiers of Western decolonisation have often been the principal

cause of volatility in many parts of the postcolonial world. (Jalal, 2013, p. 5)

In the works '*Disgrace*' and '*Khol Du*' taking into account the aspect of the women characters just being postcolonial subjects doesn't suffice as both can be looked in the Feminist light as well. Both are suffering in the larger postcolonial perspective. Both have no choice but to be rather the puppets in the hands of the society which, colonial or postcolonial, is still patriarchal at large. They have to suffer because they are women. Their plight is just because they are born as women. Both Lucy and Sakina have in a way unwillingly surrendered to whatever is happening to them. This is reflected through the way both are just monotonously giving in to the pressures. Lucy is taking her assault as a price one has to pay to live in a place where the equation has changed. Lucy has reconciled in a way or she tries to as is evident through the following dialogue between her and her father:

'What are our plans for today?'

'Our plans? To go back to the farm and clean up.'

'And then?'

'Then to go on as before.'

'On the farm?'

'Of course. On the farm.'

'Be sensible, Lucy. Things have changed. We can't just pick up where we left off.'

'Why not?'

'Because it's not a good idea. Because it's not safe.'

'It was never safe, and it's not an idea, good or bad. I'm not going back for the sake of an idea. I'm just going back.' (Coetzee, 2000, p. 105)

Lucy is unlike her father who wants his daughter to report the violation. She on the other hand doesn't want to go on with

the entire episode. She wants to leave her violation not because she doesn't care anymore, it is because of the fact that they represent the minority now and whatever they do it will be of no use in regaining the lost ground, literally and metaphorically. She has accepted the fact that living in sync with the natives is the only way for the ones who have chosen to live in the land which they once took as their own; this is difficult for David Lurie who still cannot give up on his supremacist attitude. The dialogue between Lucy and David cements this fact:

as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.'

'This place being what?'

'This place being South Africa.' (Coetzee, 2000, p. 112)

Sakina, of Manto, is a representative of Lucy in the post partition India. She has faced the brutality of rape to an extent that she has in a way taken it as a predicament from which she can't cut herself loose. Sakina untying the drawstring of her *salwar* is symbolic of her giving up herself to her fate. She is not in control of her life. The drawstring of her *salwar* has converted into a string which controlled her life as a puppet in the hands of the people who were going to be her so called saviours. Her father, Serajuddin, is in a similar state as David from *Disgrace*. Like David he is in a state where he can be of no help to his daughter. He has lost Sakina just as David has lost Lucy – the difference being literally and metaphorically. Both the fathers can just conjecture what has happened or what is happening with their daughters. Serajuddin lost Sakina to the helter-skelter crowd. He couldn't recall the happenings. All that were there were vague thoughts of what could have happened to Sakina. David lost Lucy metaphorically when she is defiant to his idea of reporting her violation. Her defiance is:

Sitting up in her borrowed nightdress, she confronts him, neck stiff, eyes glittering. Not her father's little girl, not any longer. (Coetzee, 2000, p. 105)

Lucy is in contrast to Sakina in the above as both of them have faced the same trauma but both are at a different echelon. Lucy here can confront her father as she still has the will physically as well as emotionally. Sakina has been drained of her very being, to such an extent that she cannot confront the society or anyone.

Lucy and Sakina both face similar violation, but how is Lucy able to confront her situation in a better way than Sakina? Lucy and Sakina are both victims of their being caught in a state which is not chosen by them. They are postcolonial and women, a combination which makes them vulnerable. Both women have no choice in the present situation but they can only go onwards. Lucy does that when she confronts her father. No doubts Lucy chooses what she wants to do but Sakina has a different set of issues to confront. Her being from a third world presents an added problem to her already great predicaments. She cannot be a chooser like Lucy, as Lucy even though, deals with similar plight she is in a better position than Sakina just by her being from the 'white' fold. Sakina is facing a double curse. Lucy can choose whether she wants to keep her child. She is in a better position because of her societal standing. Sakina is constantly abused on various lines. She is in a different country because of her being from a religion which is no longer acceptable in the country which she used to call hers. She is fleeing her country as it has been partitioned by the White supremacists who ruled over her and many like her, thinking they were the ones who were the rightful rulers. Sakina in the backdrop of the above was also violated because of her being a woman – something which has made her all the more susceptible to the torment heaped on her by the patriarchal men folk. Both women have a geographical region which has turned against them. They are just mute spectators in the lot of things. Lucy chooses to stay

whereas Sakina has no choice but to leave and move to a new place.

The identity of both women is a changed one. Lucy has taken a land which was earlier ruled by them where she had a larger role as a 'white colonist'. Her identity has shrunk akin to the people they were ruling. She is on the mercy of the likes of Petrus – their servant, whom she is even willing to marry in order to remain protected. Sakina's identity has changed from being the citizen of a country to a refugee. She cannot choose to live back like Lucy as she doesn't have the choice of a compromise as Lucy had.

The characters come from two different geographical vicinities. Both were ruled by the same Colonial power but still one can see stark contrast in the way the postcolonial landscape is discussed. The two lands are not just presenting their geographical, but also their cultural disconnection. The land which Lucy comes from has a cultural background which stands at a different pole than Sakina's. Lucy being a white does give her an advantage over Sakina. Sakina is coming from a very different racial background than Lucy. Lucy is violated, but she came from a position of advantage; it was more of a gradual change for her. Sakina is and has been subject to suffering throughout. She cannot have the guts to stand up like Lucy because that continuous agony which she has been made to go through, much ahead of that continuous violation, will never give her the spirit to face her condition with boldness. She cannot be viewed in the same way as Lucy even though their sufferings are of the same kind. As Shaila Lohia says:

Women in India have been facing violence in all spheres of life for thousands of years. They face domestic, political and social violence also, making it a multi-faceted and complicated issue. (Lohia, 1998, p. 51)

Lucy has not faced apartheid. She has not faced anything because of her religious affinities. Sakina is facing all of this and

more. Sakina is facing a situation very different from Lucy yet their pain is same. She is in the middle of a partition pandemonium. As the prelude to Ayesha Jalal's book says:

Human beings had instituted rules against murder and mayhem in order to distinguish themselves from beasts of prey. None was observed in the murderous orgy that shook India to the core at the dawn of independence. "Now before our eyes lie dried tracks of blood, cut up human parts, charred faces, mangled necks, terrified people, looted houses, burned fields, mountains of rubble, and overflowing hospitals. We are free. Hindustan is free. Pakistan is free, and we are walking the desolate streets naked without any possessions in utter distress." (Jalal, 2013, p. 1)

Sakina and Lucy may no doubt have their similarities but both come from two different backgrounds. They have borne the brunt of decolonisation as well as patriarchy, but still both have a 'similarity of uniqueness'. One might have suffered more than the other, but can the suffering be justified? How is it that every woman is a culprit in the eyes of its patriarchal society and she has to always pay the price to live. Why, just as Lucy and Sakina, a man is not asked to compromise and adjust? Why does a woman like Lucy face a situation where she has to marry someone to remain safe? Why a Sakina is raped again and again? The answer to all these questions would lead one to men who can change things but do not want to, because changing the gender dynamics would definitely change the place where they would be deriving their sense of power, and that would be a lot of giving up on the part of the men of this world.

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