

Manto and the Mahabharata Individualization, Ownership, and Violation of Female Sexuality

Anushree Joshi

Student

Lady Shri Ram College for Women

Abstract

The paper focuses on the treatment of female sexuality in the respective societies of the Mahabharata and the period of Partition in India. Using the Mahabharata's *Sabha Parva* as the primary text, it traces the concepts of regulation and ownership of women's sexuality, established during the times of the Mahabharata, which then became conventional in both the societies. The paper argues that the Mahabharata, as a primary text of philosophy, history and polity, has contributed to the normalcy of the treatment of women's sexuality as property. It examines the texts of Manto, primarily focusing on women- *Mozel*, *Hatak*, and *Thanda Gosht*- along with the text of the Mahabharata to prove the difference in the approach of the representation of female sexuality through their women characters. It looks at the lack of individualization of sexuality and the concept of its control as a way to systematize patriarchy by using the evidences from the Mahabharata, and then compares these with the tone of Manto's texts that portrayed full-fledged human beings, not metaphors for an external ideal. At the end, the paper concludes that the treatment of women in the text of the Mahabharata has manifested itself into the attitudes of the society, such that its projection of controlled, owned women is revered and accepted, while Manto's representation of women as full-fledged human beings with sexual desires, expressions and individual ownership of their sexuality has been criticized among the masses, and even in the circle of writers, as a lesser, obscene form of literature.

Keywords: female sexuality, society, women, Manto, Mahabharata, Partition

The times of the Mahabharata are now recognized as the times of evolution in the Indo-Aryan society, as it is organized presently. With the open-door class system, based on worth, decreasing in its applicability for the emergence of the closed-door caste system, based on birth, the formation of territorial lines, the rise of tension and shifting power dynamics between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, and numerous other changes along similar lines, the society was firm on its fluidity. This may be the reason why the text of the Mahabharata, according to “Interpretive Histories” by Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, has been read in the times long after it as a source for political, social and economic history of India in its ancient days of foundation, a religious and philosophical text, a unified literary masterpiece, as well as a guide to the psychological roots of the present-day Indic civilisation (20). Similarly, the Radcliffe line drawn in the India of 1947, and the struggles preceding its formation paved the path for times of extremities. The extremities of the said timespan in the shared history of India and present-day Pakistan were divisive in nature, such that two communities who ate together, lived in the same neighbourhoods, spoke the same language, and had claimed spaces in their unity became immensely aware of ‘the other’ (Bhalla). Struggle for power dynamics, as it had occurred in a society in formation many millennia ago, became explicitly manifested in the private and polis of the nation(s). Saadat Hasan Manto and Ved Vyasa are the writer and the bard, respectively, who wrote in the times of the foundation, the evolution, the extremities, and the destruction of two societies.

The two societies, with one integrally influenced by the other, possess similarities where female sexuality, especially its expression, is concerned. In the context of this paper, this central aspect of being human throughout life will be focused upon within the realm of eroticism, pleasure, and intimacy. The conduits for the experiences and expressions of sexuality have been understood as thoughts, desires, attitudes, fantasies, beliefs, practices, behaviours, roles, and relationships. These dimensions in which sexuality can be found to manifest itself are influenced by the interaction of biological, social, psychological, spiritual, cultural, economic, and historical factors (qtd. in World Health Organization Report).

With these dimensions of female sexuality in mind, let us examine how the two texts provide a mimesis of their respective societies with a key difference in the approach to the representation of the female sexuality through, and of, their women. During the time of the Partition when Manto wrote, the idea of ‘ownership’ of the sexuality of women was established and in practice, even used as a trope in popular Urdu literature, in a manner rooted deep enough to influence the instinctive, the organized, the personal, and the public domains of the society. The ownership here refers to the control and denial of agency to women in the interests of their sexual expression. The control was vested within a male member of their family, usually the husband. In most situations, the control was exercised in a way that recognised the masculine as the dominant in the way of deciding how the feminine, in his ownership, utilized her sexuality. He was, in the natural perspective of the society, the decisive and the restriction itself such that the ‘submission’ of the female body to the male was an obligation- a right he had earned the day he came to ‘possess’ her. Her body, her sexuality, had to be utilized to fulfill any erotic fantasies and pleasures he desired, in accordance with the role, she had no choice as a ‘service-provider’ but to be consistent with. Simone de Beauvoir, in her essay titled “The Married Woman”,

summarised the applicability of the possession of the sexuality of women by their husbands, and the consequences of that ownership-

In regard to her erotic fate, two essential consequences follow: first, she has no right to any sexual activity apart from marriage: sexual intercourse thus becoming an institution, desire and gratification are subordinated to the interest of society for both sexes; but man, being transcended towards the universal as worker and citizen, can enjoy contingent pleasures before marriage and extramaritally (453).

The conduits for experiencing and expressing her own sexuality were supposed to be in the possession of the male dominant. They were fulfilling their decisive roles accepted by the society, essentially moderated and controlled by the male, the husband, and their sexuality was not their being's aspect of power.

The other dominant over and in control of the female's sexuality was the society concerned with the individual. It was the society which put the power of control of 'his' woman over the individual male through the practice of organized patriarchy applied using religious, spiritual and sociological factors, and the woman's sexuality was 'in representation of' an ideal considered to be greater than herself. She was not a human possessing the agency of a sexuality in the biological and psychological context, but she was an object, a metaphor, a medium for the society's factors to mete a purpose, not decided by her own self. It was this representative nature and ownership, combined to deny individual agency of her own sexuality to the female, which stemmed from and, in a vicious cycle, led to the societal attitude towards the violation of the woman's sexuality.

During the tumultuous times of the Partition in India, the violence against the female, in the form of rape and the complete annihilation of the female body through that violence was primarily, and sometimes entirely, sexual in nature unlike that against the males who were murdered without a violation of their individualized sexuality (Bhalla). This can be understood as an implication of the 'ownership' of the female sexuality normalized in and by the society, so as to assert a sense of superiority and power over one community, i.e. the 'other' religion, by doing so in the violation of that which 'belonged' to the community. Sexual violence against the female in those times, thus, became a doubly-effective and applicable way of bruising that community which was religiously not one's own by exerting force over the sexuality of the female itself, viewed as a 'representation' of the society's dignity, and the 'property' of the man-the individual- belonging to that 'other' community. Therefore, a woman's sexuality was, in a way, stamped and viewed as a metonym of the greatest possession, the most valuable property, in control of the male individual who was a part of the community, and it was used as a conduit of essentially humiliating, violating, and perpetrating the loathe and hatred against that which was 'the other' by violating the boundaries, through rape, decided for the property by the owner, i.e. the male dominant. The psychoanalytic support for drawing a direct link between the paradigm of sexual excitement and a wish to harm somebody, with at least a whisper of hostility, comes from Robert J. Stoller and Ann Garry as well (qtd. in Garry 349).

Romila Thapar has dated the events of the Mahabharata back to 3102 BC, and the Indo-Aryan society of that period was actually responsible for establishing the practice against the autonomy entitled to women with regard to their own sexuality and their agency pertaining to its

expression. In her research paper titled “Mahabharata through the eyes of women”, Dr. Kavita A. Sharma has cited the following example which is evident to show the same:

The scope of chastity seems to have got progressively narrowed as patriarchy gradually became more and more firmly entrenched. Pandu talks of a time when women were not immured within their houses nor were they dependent on their husbands and relatives. They were free to go wherever and to whomever they wanted and were still considered virtuous because that was the accepted customary usage. However, their freedom was curtailed by Swetaketu, the son of the ascetic Uddalaka. One day a Brahmin came and invited Swetaketu’s mother to go with him in the presence of Uddalaka his father. She readily agreed but Swetaketu did not like it and got angry in spite of his father telling him that there was nothing wrong with it, as that was the sanctioned practice. Swetaketu laid down rules of conduct for women by which they were obliged to adhere to one man and it became sinful for them to deviate from this. . . . Thus, morality got circumscribed (Sharma).

Evidence here points to the societal belief of fear that considering female sexuality as an agency in itself, governed by the respective individual females, could lead to a blow on the patriarchy as women could not only deny men the power to their sexuality, but they could also deny them lineage in the process. This curb of autonomy in the forward trajectory of the society suggests a psychological fear of the threatening equity in power dynamic which was justified as feudal and destructive, leading to the regulation of sexual agency to systematize the patriarchy. Devdutt Pattanaik too found the evidence of the justification of the establishment of the ‘regulation’ and ‘subordination’ of women’s sexuality, and he wrote, “Unattached women were seen as sexual predators and fearful yoginis who could consume men, unless they were restrained by marriage and maternity. This may explain the cultural fear of independent women” (Pattanaik).

Thus, the Mahabharata, as a literary text and *itihaasam puram*, held up a mirror to its society which systematized patriarchy and denied agency to women. As a primary text of philosophy, history and polity long after its society is supposed to have perished in the *yuganta*, Mahabharata has also contributed to the normalcy of the treatment of women’s sexuality as property, and the most prominently remembered women in the Mahabharata lack individualized sexual agency. Let us examine this by first focusing on the *vastraharana* sequence in “The Dicing” from the *Sabha Parva* of the Mahabharata of Krishna – Dwaipayana Vyasa. In the twentieth throw of the dicing game at the court of the Kurus, Sakuni encouraged Yudhishtir, who had already staked and lost his own self in the previous throw, to play for Pancali (57.32). There were no explicit objections made to the throw, as the woman, not only a subject of the king, was also considered his property. But how is this different from the ownership of the males, the brothers, the subjects of Yudhishtir- the king? The integral difference is the sexual objectification of Draupadi, unlike all the other throws. It was not her ownership decreed as a subject, but it was her sexuality that was at play, left worsened in its extreme regulation by the husband.

Unlike all the other Pandavas, Draupadi’s stake was explicit in her sexual objectification, clearly implying that it was not just her body, but her sexual services as well at stake because, as a woman without sexual autonomy, she could be objectified as her owner deemed fit-

She is not too short or too tall, not too black or too red, and her eyes are red with love- I play you for her... Her sweaty lotuslike face shines like a lotus. Her waist shaped like an altar, hair long, eyes the color of copper, not too much body hair... such is the woman, king, such is the slender-waisted Pancali, for whom I now throw, the beautiful Draupadi! (57.33).

The description of Draupadi's body and the comparisons drawn, for example the redness of love as a symbol of her sexual vigour and lust, was done by her own husband, who had the right on her sexuality and thus, its expression as well. Whether she accepts or rejects the objectification is not significant because she cannot exercise her autonomy, as her sexuality is under proprietorship. This erotic objectification contributed to the creation of a slippery slope for the rest of the *sabha*, as nobody else lost in the game of the dicing was subjected to a sexual violation against their will.

Duryodhana furthered the objectification of Draupadi, using the same erotic comparisons her husband had used. Thus, a precedent of her sexuality's proprietorship being at stake was set by Yudhishtir, and exploited by Duryodhana- "You shall now love the Kurus, long-lotus-eyed one, / You've been won under Law, come along to the hall!" (60.20). Slavery, for the men, is sex slavery for Draupadi in this regard. There is, according to the statement of Duryodhana, no lawlessness in the violation of sexual boundaries because there exist none for an object without autonomy, at the mercy of its master- either the husband as the owner, or the society as the decision-maker. No objections were raised by the elders and the teachers, well-versed in the law, to prevent the demand of sexual gratification from Pancali, because it had been normalized in the society to objectify the sexuality. In the Mahabharata, objectification is not the exception; it is the Law. Under this law, the woman becomes a subject of sexual violations, actually intended to humiliate her 'owner'; the proprietor would be punished by damage to the property, which is the sexuality of 'his' woman. The psychological goal of deriving pleasure, or extracting revenge, or doing both, then become interlinked with the violation of the sexuality of the woman associated with the 'enemy'.

In the *sabha*, the game of dicing was intended to bereave the Pandavas of any kingship opportunities and share in the kingdom and wealth, so as to fulfill Duryodhana's quest for revenge against them, in accordance with their long-drawn rivalry fueled further at the witnessing of their prosperity at the *Rajasuya* ceremony. Thus, the 'taunting' of Bhima, as an attempt to humiliate the masculinity of the Pandavas, make Draupadi's violation not a primary goal but a collateral damage, again proving the absolute objectification of her sexuality. Touching Draupadi's hair was Duryodhana's and Duhsasana's method of 'unmanning' the Pandavas. (60.20) Her hair, a metonym of her sexual prowess and ability of sensuousness, being gripped by them to humiliate the masculinity of the Pandavas is a reiterating that the sexuality of a woman was not individualized to her own autonomy but used as a representation, an object that belonged, to the dominant male. The following lines resonate with the events of several millennia later when the women in the Partition were doubly maltreated and their bodies tangibly defiled, not just because they were a part of 'the other', but also because they suggestively belonged to the male, the society, as their property: "Then, smiling up at Radheya and taunting Bhima, he exposed to Draupadi who was watching him his left thigh soft like a banana tree and auspiciously marked- an elephant trunk and a thunderbolt in one." (63.11).

It is ironic that their absolute lack of autonomy, a consequence of their ownership by the men whose humiliation turned their sexual violation into collateral damage, was driven to an extent where they had to appeal, in the Mahabharata, to the same men, the same society, who put them in the position of experiencing abuse. When Pancali channeled the *Sri*- the waters of life- who had been violated in her humiliation, and attempted to exercise autonomy by questioning the *Dharmic* ramifications of the events at the assembly, the Mahabharata diluted it in its representation. Her sexuality, as is the sexuality of the women in the Mahabharata, is not individualized but is always externalized, universalized, if not controlled for a purpose greater than personal desire and boundaries. She could question the Dharma, as the wives often do in the Mahabharata, according to Kevin McGrath's "Speaking of Truth", but it was more to represent a higher ideal of subordinated, regulated wisdom and never to exercise an autonomy of opinion (203). As for sexual boundaries, let us look at how the questioning by Draupadi during the violation of her sexuality is treated in the text, and the type of conclusions arrived at in the treatment of the text later on.

"Bharata, whom did you lose first, yourself or me?" (60.8). Draupadi questioned and her original question was repeated in the *sabha*, but it was not met with an answer by the person to whom it was addressed. Yudhishtir's attitude of silence towards Draupadi's question and his subsequent indifference, almost cold-shouldered treatment, towards Draupadi after the game point to an egotism (Hiltebeitel pp. 167-179). The text hints to the fact that he was 'as if unconscious' upon hearing her question, but eradicating the supernatural hypotheticals only reveals unshifting silence, and disappointment, on Yudhishtir's part (60.9). The *Dharmic* hero of the Mahabharata, as intended by Duryodhana and his aides, was suggestively intolerant of a challenge to his intellect, and authority over the ownership of Draupadi's being. The silence of the elders, representatives of the social law, was supportive of the fact that Draupadi's act of questioning was an act of defiance which they cannot condone or satiate with an appropriate response. When it was responded to by the eminent and respected Bhishma, he iterates the proprietorship of Draupadi to Yudhishtir, who had the right to stake her to whomsoever he deemed fit, and referred to wives as the chattels of their husbands (60.40).

The treatment of her act challenging the law of ownership was met with two responses. First, the concept of cosmic intervention and justice was introduced as an interpolation (qtd. in Hiltebeitel 158). The possibility that a woman's sexuality as an individualized entity which requires her consent in setting the boundaries is not entertained, and Draupadi is saved because of the intervention of supposedly cosmic, supernatural forces. The myth of Krishna, a male deity, protecting her as she begged for mercy to him in her prayers has been popularized (Hiltebeitel 158). Individuality of sexuality is not an available option. Second, she was condemned and criticized for being a 'Lady Pundit', the only appropriate way for whom to defend her 'honour' was through the power of her tears and begging for mercy to the males and elders (Karve 99).

A woman was exposed to genitalia in a court of law before her five husbands, and extended family (63.11). She constantly objected to her mistreatment. Despite the situation of crisis, her act of questioning in the court of law, albeit lawless in the normative sense, was justified by the practice of *Appadharmā*, which can be understood as follows:

...the principle of Appadharmā, whereby relaxing the normative codes of conduct enables an individual to avoid failing the demands of his or her own Dharma when

situations of crisis arise. An authentic situation of crisis effectively places a moratorium on the application of the usual codes of behaviour (Bowles 29).

Law is fluid for the protection of justice, but not when the justice serves a woman. When Bhisma and the elders claimed Dharma as defining a wife's status as her husband's chattel and the sons of the royal family violated her with sexual attacks, the situation of crisis demanded a practice of the normatively unconventional, such that an intervention by the elders, well-versed in the law, protected Pancali from the public violation of her sexuality.

As a literary text, Manto's short story titled *Mozel* too has a background set in a society reconstructing itself without an absolute in its formation. The absolute, in both the societies, is the subordinated treatment of their women. *Mozel*, the titular character of the story was not a conventional trope of a woman according to the standards of the society of India in 1947, as she was shown to exercise her agency of choice.

The first description of *Mozel*, done by the male narrator of the story, started on an unconventional path in the world where women's sexuality had a stamp of male ownership:

जो पहली नज़र में उसे खौफनाक हद तक दीवानी मालूम हुई थी... खुले गिरेबान से उसकी नीली पड़ी बड़ी-बड़ी छातियों का लगभग चौथाई भाग नज़र आ रहा था। बाहें जो कि नंगी थीं उनपर महीन-महीन बालों की तह जमी हुई थी। (The one who seemed to him frenzied to a frightening degree...From her loose attire, almost a fourth of her blue, big breasts was visible. Her arms, which were naked, had a layer of trimmed hair frozen over them; my trans.; Manto 23).

The description noted *Mozel*'s frenzy in the very first line, as if issuing a warning to the readers of what lies ahead in a story involving her. She was not a docile woman who would prostrate herself to the whims of a man; she had a frightening frenzy of her own. Then the choice of the words for the physical description of *Mozel* did not emphasise on her naked body parts, it only stated it. The chest of the woman, usually utilized as an object of great desire in works of literature, had been described, not glorified, as looking 'blue'. For what followed, this could be the narrator's way of hinting at *Mozel*'s cold-heartedness, but that was not a stance Manto let invade the individuality, and the owning of that individuality, attributed to *Mozel*. She donned trimmed body hair, and did not create or contribute to the illusion of a woman's 'perfectly feminine' body in the stereotypical context. There is a layer to her character, on a metaphorical level as well, which is not conventional with the society's idea of femininity.

Mozel's relationship with Trilochan was one where she, unconventionally, exercised an agency far beyond her time. She initiated physicality in their courtship, but she decided her own boundaries. She made it explicitly clear that her consent to an encounter at a particular time did not imply consent over any or all parts of her body, or any actions, indefinitely (Manto 29). Acceptance and encouragement of access to her sexuality at a specific time through a specific course of activity did not entitle Trilochan indefinite access. Like the men since the time of Swetaketu, Trilochan did desire unchallenged, unshared, uninterrupted access to the love and life of *Mozel*, but she had no patience for the restrictions he hoped to impose. She would kiss him senseless, but would also stand him up on a date to visit an old friend, indicated to be her boyfriend, before Trilochan (Manto 24). Like Draupadi's words in the *sabha*, *Mozel*'s actions and the nature of her entire character questioned the concept of ownership and regulation of

sexuality. The key difference is in the poesis- the representation of the truth- of the two worlds. It was, in fact, a psychological grip Mozel possessed over Trilochan due to which there was a reversal of roles, implied in the scene where Mozel told Trilochan to shave his beard and let loose his hair to appease others, especially herself (Manto 25). It was unconventional of a man to change his appearance, which women often did for men in the *Sringara Rasa*, to claim the attention of a woman. Along similar lines of unconventional submissiveness, Trilochan chose to acquire Mozel's love at the expense of denouncing his religious code of appearance, for despite being a Sikh man who felt offended by Mozel's mockery of the Sikhism practices concerning hair, Trilochan got his hair cut. He was entrapped in his necessity to be with her, while she was free, a freedom which was further asserted by her abandoning him on the day of their wedding (Manto 24, 28). Mozel had not been created as a paragon of female empowerment without any flaws to make her character appear unreal, her qualities unattainable. She was whimsical, but there was an individual choice in her whims. It made Trilochan suggestively become a mouth-piece for the society's opinions when he called her 'shameless and ill-mannered' against the 'pure' Kripal Kaur because her past, unlike Mozel's, has no man accessing her sexually. In the very next line, he admitted that he still liked Mozel, in spite of all her flaws (Mozel 28). Her individuality was not her flaw, Manto can be found to assert it through the set tone.

The following exchange between Trilochan and Mozel, as they venture into a Muslim-dominated neighbourhood to escort Kripal Kaur to safety, is a fitting characterization for Mozel: "मगर सुनो तो- कफरू है। / 'मोज़ेल के लिए नहीं- चलो आओ।'" ("But listen to me- there is a curfew.' / 'Not for Mozel- come.'"; my trans.; Manto 33). The 'curfew' existed- fierce, brutal and frightening- on women's agency in the society, but Mozel was not bound by the restrictions. She exercised her free will, not in an attempt to subvert social order, but she was a subversion of the accepted order in her own individuality. Trilochan attempted to make her understand the significance of wearing underwear as it made way for embarrassment and shame when she wore skirts, but Mozel put her own discomfort of underwear as a decisive factor for not following Trilochan's insistent advice (Manto 29). The final act of Mozel was also the rejection of the turban to cover her naked body smeared with blood (Manto 41). It was the last struggle between the forces of religious conventions imposed on women's sexuality, i.e. Trilochan asking her to cover her 'sexual', private, organs, and the individuality that she demanded in it. She told him to take away his religion from over her body (Manto 41). Being covered by his turban, a metonym for religion, shows how societal construct tried to cover a woman's sexuality, the expression of it, in the entirety of her life and in her death as well. No intervention of the cosmos existed, but it was her individual denouncement of the atrocities of religion and societal constructs of division and oppression which contributed to the saving of two lives- an indication of the upholding of humanity through her act of rebellious individuality. Before falling to her death, Mozel opened the door stark-naked to the men out on a murder spree of the man belonging to the other religion and the sexual violation of the woman in his proprietorship, representation of the other community, finally reiterating her unabashed individuality (Manto 40). She did not cover, or hide, the physical, the sexual, of her being but she used it because she was aware, smartly aware, of the shock it would create for the males knocking on the door. Stripping women down to annihilate them physically is a convention, but seeing a woman stripped down, in her own right of it, is something the society has a difficulty coping with.

While the personal choice of expressing her sexuality is represented through the actions and the character of Mozel, the exercising of the agency of women, if any, has to have a cause greater than personal desire in both the societies, and the text of the Mahabharata. This can be instantiated by the portrayal of Kunti, who was granted a miraculous chant from the Brahmin pleased by her services, including sexual services, to him (Karve 44). As a curious maiden, she chanted the mantra and invited Surya- the Sun-God- without intending to proceed further with the copulation.

Kunti was aghast and said: "I am an unwedded girl dependent on my father. I am not fit for motherhood and do not desire it. I merely wished to test the power of the boon granted by the sage Durvasa. Go back and forgive this childish folly of mine." But the Sun god could not thus return because the power of the mantra held him. She for her part was mortally afraid of being blamed by the world. The Sun god however reassured her: "No blame shall attach to you. After bearing my son, you will regain virginity." (Rajagopalachari ch.9).

Thus, the choice of invoking Surya with whom she bore her first son, Karna, was her first exercise of agency, individualized in action born out of a personal desire to explore the possibilities, took the shape of a coercively consented sexual liaison because there had to be fruition- an accepted higher norm- of her invitation or else it would have been a transgression of the system's order. Individualization of sexuality was treated as a stain in the society which might degrade her social standing- dependent upon virginity before wedding and the ability to produce sons after it- and her moral standing- dependent upon the containment of pleasure and personal desire. After their coerced liaison, the maiden Kunti asked for the renewal of her virgin status each time after she bears a child to compensate the wrongness for an individualized act of curiosity, considered a sinful transgression.

The practice of *Niyoga*- cohabitation with somebody else for the procreation of children- furthered the concept of association of an external, a universal, i.e. to the members of the society, with a woman's sexuality. It was a sin to copulate out of personal desire for a woman, as shown in the Kunti-Surya encounter, but the husband had the complete rights to ask his wife to share her bed with another male for the desire of the continuity of lineage. Kunti, like many other women in the epic, surrendered to her husband's wishes for sons even if that meant copulation with another male, not out of desire. According to myths, she once again chanted the mantras provided to her by the ascetic she had served and her three sons were born out of her relationship with three God-figures (Karve 44). Eliminating the aggravated element of the supernatural with it, it becomes clear that Kunti had to share the bed with other men, possibly his brothers, owing to the impotency of Pandu and his demands for the continuity of a patriarchal lineage. As a daughter, she was given by her biological father to Kuntibhoja, who then made her serve an ascetic as a young maiden (Karve 43, 44). The paucity of agency in her life, and her treatment as a commodity by the male dominants in her life contributed to her psychological oppression which suggestively manifested itself into a serious ambition for power when she was left to fend for herself after Pandu's death. The treatment of her sexuality, like that of the other women in the Mahabharata, can be understood by Simone de Beauvoir's inferences on the individuality of a woman: "Her relations are not based on her individual feeling but on a universal; and thus for her, unlike man, individualized desire renders her ethic impure." (453).

Saadat Hasan Manto's story titled *हतक* (*Insult*) represented the protagonist of Sugandhi with this unconventional individualization in her sexuality, while continuing to mirror the truth of the society she inhabited. Sugandhi freely consumed alcohol, but Manto did not dwell on the elaboration of an act considered to be a characteristically morally derogatory trait in a woman of 1940s' India (56). The writing of the physical description of a woman engaged in prostitution is neither sensuous, nor judgmentally objectifying her; it is rather neutral towards her human nature. Her body is a body, neither a metaphor for Manto, nor a sin. She appreciated compliments on her beauty and openly admitted to being proud of the fullness of her chest (58). With her desire for the material superficial, Manto has also depicted Sugandhi's faith in the spiritual. The moral police of the Indian society is quick to consider prostitutes spiritually deprived, damaged, but Sugandhi engaged in idol-worship like those who frowned upon prostitution (57).

Manto's Madho chastised Sugandhi, despite being the one who too paid her for her services, thus acting as a chorus of the society-

सुगन्धी से जब माधो की पहली मुलाकात हुई थी तो उसने कहा, 'तुझे लाज नहीं आती अपना भाव करते? जानती है, तू मेरे साथ किस चीज़ का सौदा कर रही है? और मैं तेरे पास क्यों आया हूँ? छी-छी-छी... अब इन साढ़े-सात रुपल्लियों पर तू मुझे ऐसी चीज़ देने का वचन देती है, जो तू दे ही नहीं सकती और मैं ऐसी चीज़ लेने आया हूँ, जो मैं ले ही नहीं सकता... यह धंधा छोड़।' (When Madho met Sugandhi for the first time, he said, 'Do you not feel ashamed of assigning a price to yourself? Do you understand the kind of thing you are dealing me with? And why do I come to you? *Chhi-chhi-chhi*... Now for this deal worth rupees seven and paise fifty, you are promising to give me a thing which you cannot give to me, and I have to take such a thing which I cannot take... Quit this business.'; my trans.; 61).

He, like the society, assumed a suggestively moral stance in asking her to quit her job and to change her way of life, yet when it came to accepting any responsibility in affecting a real economic change, he was all but helpful (62). But Sugandhi's portrayal by Manto does anything but victimize her as the conventional trope of a prostitute's portrayal would ensure. She was not 'trapped' in a trade to sell her soul as people often perceive and project, but she traded the service of her sexuality, treating it like an individual entity within her body, through intercourse. It was a choice of individualizing her control over her sexuality and, despite the conventional opinion, she derived and enjoyed pleasure through the acts of foreplay and intercourse (59). Her body, Manto represented in the utmost humane manner, desired the roughness of physical contact to attain sexual contentment (59).

Awakened late at night to attend to a client, she dressed up to appease him but the Seth client rejected her on the basis of a first look (Manto 64, 67). When Madho visited her the next day to extract monetary help from her while psychologically manipulating her into believing he was concerned about her, Sugandhi got enraged, threw him out, and fell asleep embracing her dog (Manto 71-75). The rejection jolted her to the reality of how society contributes to her exploitation and then has the audacity to judge her as tainted with unimpressive, unacceptable traits.

Unlike in the Mahabharata, the women in *Insult* were neither blamed, nor glorified for their individuality. The characteristic feature of the epic is that the war was pushed by Draupadi, and the end of the epoch thus happened because Dharma had collapsed in the society (Thapar 18, 20). Even today, it is considered inauspicious at festival drama-cycles to show a menstruating, near-naked Draupadi being disrobed in the assembly (Hiltebeitel 153). It is viewed as a stain and there exists academic foundation to believe that late sectarian copyists omitted Krishna's role, if there was any, in rescuing Draupadi in the text so as to rescue him from being tainted by having any "textual contact" with a bleeding woman in disgrace (Hiltebeitel 154). Even Kunti blamed Madri for enticing Pandu into copulating with her, leading to his death in the epic (Karve 48). Patriarchy conveniently allows the men to have ownership of women, such that they may be violated without any agency to revolt, without considering the men responsible for their actions. Unlike this shifting of blame and irresponsible proprietorship condoned as a literary trope in the text of the Mahabharata through the hero-making of the men who contributed to women's violation and suffering, Sugandhi was portrayed as a woman who saw through the farce and hypocritical nature of society's judgmental attitude on morality, and utilized her own individuality to put an end to their critical exploitation of her choices in life.

"That is, woman is not concerned to establish individual relations with a chosen mate but to carry on the feminine functions in their generality; she is to have sex pleasure only in a specified form and not individualized." (Beauvoir 454). The sexual lust Kunti witnessed in each of her five sons towards Draupadi was used as a reason of her using the power of Draupadi's sexuality, her attraction, as a method of keeping the Pandavas united in the form of a closed fist (Karve 85). The woman's sexuality was, yet again, a metaphor for the base of the palm holding the fist together. On the contrary, Kulwant Kaur of Manto's *ठण्डा गोश्त* (*Cold Meat*) was portrayed as a woman who enjoyed the pleasures in sex and demands sexual gratification from her husband (52). Her sexuality was not victimized or utilized as a pawn- she treated her physical urge for sexual intercourse with mutual participation in the act. While Draupadi's lawful relationship with five men, not even a choice of her own, was considered a just reason by Karna for her sexual violation in the *vastraharana* sequence, as it was against the notion of a wife's sexuality being in the control of one man, Manto's Kulwant Kaur turned the tables by assigning a fate of suffering to her husband whom she suspected of having sexual relations with another woman (van Buitenen 61.36; Manto 53). If Draupadi's fate of suffering can be called a 'feminine' fate in the context of an accepted norm, then Kulwant's assignment of the feminine fate to Eshwar by stabbing him, as he begged her for forgiveness, was a reversal of conventional roles and fortunes (Manto 53-55). Manto thus held up a mirror to the society influenced by the Mahabharata, which dehumanized its women by repudiating them of their individuality, and yet showed the fate of a man in a woman's shoes. He represented the male in the situation where a woman being penalized in the name of justice would have been acceptable and condoned.

Manto's poesis of the immediate society he represents through his writing is, thus, liberating for women in the individuality it offers them in its tone and through its conclusions, without creating a moral barometer to either degrade them, or to utilize them as metaphors for something else outside of their being. How his texts written in the times of the Partition, or *batwara*, i.e. the division from a whole, as Manto referred to it, were treated by the readers and the moral agents of the society is in stark contrast with the reverence offered to the Mahabharata.

He was put on trial six times on the charges of obscenity in his works, and the popular opinion was that he sympathized with prostitutes and women his contemporary writers were wary of associating with through text (Rumi 75-77). Even Faiz Ahmed Faiz, admired by Manto for his writing about the Partition, stated in his testimony during Manto's trial in Lahore that his work was not up to the standards of 'good literature' (Rumi 76). Mahabharata, on the other hand, has been treated as a historical text, considered to be a mirror of civilization (Pandey 59). It is considered, for the academic audience, an entire literature suited to give its readers insight into the most profound depths of the Indian Soul (Winternitz vol.1). As the fifth Veda, its treatment of the women characters and the representations of female sexuality have influenced the Indian society immensely, while it is only posthumously that Manto's stance on women has gained popularity despite the criticism it garnered significantly post-Partition. "If you find my stories dirty, the society you are living in is dirty," Saadat Hasan Manto often commented and went on to state this in his sixth trial at Lahore (Rumi 80). The attitudes towards the Mahabharata and Manto's works among the masses of India then point to a frightening reality of women oppression to systematize patriarchy into the ideals of societal morality through the construction of ownership of women's sexuality, and the lack of agency provided to, and in, women to individualize their sexual expression like full-fledged, whole human beings.

Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone de. "The Married Woman." *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Shiela Malovany-Chevallier, Jonathan Cape, 2009, pp. 453-454. Print.
- Bhalla, Amrita. Interview. By Anushree Joshi. 3 October 2018. Telephone interview.
- Bowles, Adam. "The failure of Dharma." *The Enduring Epic: a symposium on some concerns raised in The Mahabharata*, April 2010. Print.
- Garry, Ann. *Sex, Lies and Pornography. Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*. Hugh LaFollete ed., Blackwell, 2002, pp. 348-350. Print.
- Goldman, Robert P., and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman. "Interpretive histories." *The Enduring Epic: a symposium on some concerns raised in The Mahabharata*, April, 2010. Print.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. "Draupadi's Question." Gupta and Pande, pp. 146-180.
- Karve, Irawati. *Yuganta: The end of an epoch*. Orient Blackswan, 2008. Print.
- McGrath, Kevin. "Speaking of Truth." Gupta and Pande, pp. 202-205.
- Manto, Saadat Hasan. *ठण्डा गोश्त [Cold Meat]. टोबा टेक सिंह और अन्य कहानियाँ [Toba Tek Singh and Other Stories]*. Translated and edited by Prakash Pandit, Rajpal and Sons, 2013, pp. 49-55. Print.
- Manto, Saadat Hasan. *हतक [Insult]. टोबा टेक सिंह और अन्य कहानियाँ [Toba Tek Singh and Other Stories]*. Translated and edited by Prakash Pandit, Rajpal and Sons, 2013, pp. 56-75. Print.
- Manto, Saadat Hasan. *मोज़ेल [Mozel]. टोबा टेक सिंह और अन्य कहानियाँ [Toba Tek Singh and Other Stories]*. Translated and edited by Prakash Pandit, Rajpal and Sons, 2013, pp. 20-41. Print.
- Pandey, Rakesh. "The mirror of epic." *The Enduring Epic: a symposium on some concerns raised in The Mahabharata*, April, 2010. pp. 59. Print.

- Pattanaik, Devdutt. "Shunning the feminine." Devdutt, www.devdutt.com/articles/indian-mythology/mahabharata/shunning-the-feminine.html. Accessed 7 October 2018. Web.
- Rajagopalachari, C. "Kunti Devi." *Mahabharata*. 61st ed., Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2015. Print.
- Rumi, Raza. "Reclaiming Humanity: Women in Manto's Short Stories." *Social Scientist*, vol. 40, no. 11/12, 2012, pp. 75–86. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23338872. Accessed 16 October 2018. Web.
- Sharma, Kavita A. *Mahabharata through the Eyes of Women*. Dr Kavita A Sharma, www.drkavitasharma.org/research_article_page1.html. Accessed 10 October 2018. Web.
- Thapar, Romila. "The epic of the Bharatas." *The Enduring Epic: a symposium on some concerns raised in The Mahabharata, April, 2010*. Print.
- van Buitenen, J. A. B., translator. "The Dicing." *The Mahabharata: Selections from the Sabha Parva and Udyoga Parva*. Edited by Kanav Gupta and Meha Pandey, Worldview Critical Edition, Worldview Publications, 2016. Print.
- Winternitz, M. *A History of Indian Literature*. Translated by S. Ketkar. Vol. 2, University of Calcutta, 1927, www.archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.97551/page/n7. Web.
- World Health Organization. "Working Definitions." *Defining sexual health: Report of a sexual consultation on sexual health, 28-31 January, 2002, Geneva*. World Health Organization, www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/gender_rights/defining_sexual_health.pdf. Accessed 5 October 2018. Web.