

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 24
Accounts of the Survivor - I




Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. Today, we are going to talk about the accounts of the survivor. We have already discussed in detail about rehabilitation and the process of recovery; the recovery operations that were carried out on both sides of the border and how the women were affected as a result of this.

Today, we are going to take a look at some of the fictions and not necessarily about the woman, but about the different voices, the secondary voices. Today, we are going to look at (for example) the perspective of the child and of course, then we are going to talk about the experience of the woman that has been abducted and returned.

So, today we are going to talk about the experiences of the non-male members of the new postcolonial nations, and what they underwent as a result of the atrocities that led to and followed the partition. We see that this ideology behind the recovery operation was not only to bring the abducted women back to their natal home, but also bring them within the fold of a patriarchal structure. (Refer Slide Time: 01:58)

Woman and Partition

- The ideology behind the recovery act was not simply to bring the abducted women back home but to ensure that the women were returned to their male family members.
- Stephen Morton - [a]lthough . . . the recovery process might seem like a worthy cause that counteracts the abduction and violation of women, it is also complicit in the maintenance of national boundaries and discourses of ethnic purity" ("Violence, Gender and Partition in the Narration of the South Asian Nation (2012: 48).
- Shumona Dasgupta - Partition was coded as a failure of the male nationalist to protect the political integrity of the nation, as well as the inability of Hindu and Sikh men to protect their women. This led to a violent compensatory performance of . . . masculinity. Women were accommodated within the disciplinary parameters of a neo-nationalist discourse, only if they consented to be objects of violence.

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Women were returned to their male members and women that were not supported by male members were perceived as potential threats that were destabilizing the normalcy of the moral values that a society holds as very dear.

We see that women were returned to their male members; that is something at the heart of the recovery operation. So, Stephen Morton says, "although the recovery process might seem like a worthy cause that counteracts the abduction and violation of women, it is also complicit in the maintenance of national boundaries and discourses of ethnic purity."

In the same way, Shumona Dasgupta goes on to say that partition was coded as a failure of the male nationalists to protect the political integrity of the nation, as well as the inability of Hindu and Sikh men to protect their women. This led to a violent compensatory performance of masculinity. So, the recovery operation, the recovery act becomes a display of this welfarist paternalistic attitude on the part of the male enactors that were at the forefront of this nation-building process.

They were helpless at a point when they were not able to save the women, salvage the women from the fate, the violence that the women encountered and as a compensatory act, later try to accommodate these women within the disciplinary fold/ within the disciplinary parameters of a new nationalist discourse.

But as the feminist critics note, this bringing back is also another process of violence. It is not something that happens often with the consent and consultation [of] the woman. So, in the previous lecture we were talking about the rioters and how Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar observes their helpless position in not being able [to prevent a riot].



In an earlier instance, they have not been able to protect the dignity of a woman from their own community. As a result, they display hyper-masculinity through violating another woman from the opposite community - that is, the gesture of retaliation, the gesture of getting back actually tends to hide the vulnerability and the helplessness of the males.

A mob is essentially, as Rajakumar argues, a sign of helplessness; the gesture of a mob is something that reflects failure of the patriarchal project of nation and nationalism -

(something that went wrong and so the violence is etched on the woman's body). (Refer Slide Time: 06:01)

Literature and Partition

- Violence on women during partition, rape, abduction and the recovery that followed, were a horrendous process. These horrific incidents of Partition have been depicted in literature.
- In “Khol Do,” Manto does not see the perpetrators as Hindu or Muslim, Hindustanis or Pakistanis. He just sees and depicts them as human beings with all their insanity and barbarity.
- “Lajwanti” is a short story by Rajinder Singh Bedi which explores the plight of abducted women during the violence and upheaval of 1947 Partition. It portrays the stark emotional landscape of Partition violence faced by women.

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Now, violence on women and the process of recovery (as we have we have been stating again and again) - the entire process was horrendous.

These horrific incidents have been depicted in so many literary works. So many artworks that are available in different languages. For example, in Saadat Hasan Manto's *Khol Do*, we see that the perpetrators are...the beauty of Manto's writing lies in not attaching any communal identification with the perpetrator. So, the perpetrator is not seen as a Hindu or a Muslim, a Hindustani or a Pakistani.

These are just insane human beings that have gone on a killing spree. They are committing heinous acts, carnage and so they are depicted as human beings with all their insanity and barbarity. Today, we are mainly going to talk about Manto's *Khol Do* along with referring to a couple of more stories by Manto.

And then, we are going to discuss in details another important work called *Lajwanti*. *Lajwanti* is a short story by Rajinder Singh Bedi and it explores the plight of the abducted woman during the upheavals that one witnessed at the time of 1947 partition. So, the stark emotional (if you we could call it as a emotional scape); the skewed mentalscape that prevailed at the time of partition and so, women faced the brunt of such violence.

When we talk of Manto's short stories, at the heart of his works that informs most of his writings [there] is brevity and a shocking effect; something that jolts the reader out of his or her callous location outside of the time-space of the story. We are not allowed to remain passive consumers of violence.

We are made to think and so it disturbs, and the stories by Manto basically destabilizes and disquiets the reader. (Refer Slide Time: 08:56)

Saadat Hasan Manto: Jelly

- The English translation of Manto's short story titled "Jelly" goes as follows: "At six in the morning, the man who used to sell ice from a push-cart next to the service station was stabbed to death. His body lay on the road, while water kept falling on it in steady dribblets from the melting ice. At a quarter past seven, the police took him away. The ice and blood stayed on the road. A mother and a child rode past the spot in a tonga. The child noticed the coagulated blood on the road, tugged at his mother's sleeve and said, 'Look mummy, jelly'" (149).
- Words are economized so as to contain only the time period that it takes for blood to take the shape of jelly. Jelly in the story is a child's misinformed perception.
- The singular manifestation of mortal perversity combines the child's joy in what he fathoms as jelly with the grown-up's realization of it to be coagulation of blood. The spectatorship and the responsibility of a gruesome deed has been carried on to the level of juvenile sensibility. Through its joyful misconception, the child's perspective amplifies the macabre vision.
- As Partition scholars observe, women and children have time and again been rendered a sub-human infantile status by the rehabilitating measures undertaken by the paternalistic State. Hence incorporation of a child Other's perspective unnerves the complacent rhetoric of Partition.



To read the English translation of Manto's short story that is titled as Jelly would go as follows: "So, at six in the morning, the man who used to sell ice from a pushcart, next to the service station was stabbed to death.

His body lay on the road, while water kept falling on it, in steady dribblets from the melting ice. At a quarter past seven, the police took him away. The ice and blood stayed on the road. A mother and a child rode past the spot in a Tonga. The child noticed the coagulated blood on the road, tugged at his mother's sleeve and said "Look mummy, Jelly." And that is where the story stops.

The story is as brief as just comprising one paragraph. And it is sharp, it is incisive, it hits the reader directly, it actually covers only the time span that it takes for blood to coagulate and take the shape of jelly. So, Jelly actually talks about the child's misinformed perception, the child that is still innocent and does not know about the reasons that cause riot, the reason that causes human killings and the atrocities, the carnage. He understands and perceives

a blood clot on the road as Jelly. He does not understand that a murdered person...an individual that has been murdered... I mean it is the blood of a person that has been assassinated. There is a kind of mortal perversity in this singular manifestation. So, we see an interplay of emotions in this story comprising only a few lines.

On the one hand, we have the child's joy, ecstasy which is a misinformed ecstasy by the way, in seeing the Jelly (seeing the blood that he fathoms as jelly), on the road. And then

we have the mother who is an adult onlooker of the partition happenings, and who has all the idea, I mean who has some idea of what is lying on the road, and the mother must be terrified, she must be petrified at the child's suggestion.

So, we see how there is an interplay of different contrastive emotions in the story. The child's joy versus the mother's fear and apprehension. So, the spectatorship and responsibility of this gruesome deed have been carried on to the level of juvenile sensitivity, but in a displaced fashion. It has gone on to [the child]...you know, it is not even leaving the child aside.

Even the child has become a spectator to the whole thing, but they [children] understand it differently. So, this joyful misconception by the child and the child's different perspective, how does a child experience partition, a child onlooker, seeing blood on the road while traveling in a Tonga, it amplifies the macabrous vision, right. So, partition scholars have observed time and again that women and children were rendered a secondary status vis-a-vis the nationalist discourse.

They were rendered an infantile status by the rehabilitation measures, for example, that were undertaken by the paternalistic state. Manto here is incorporating the other's perspective, which unnerves [and] goes on to disquiet the complacency that is associated with the grand narrative on the independence of both the abutting nations. (Refer Slide Time: 13:39)

Saadat Hasan Manto: Modesty

- In the story "Modesty", a great paradox that the human character had to come in terms with during these riots, is evinced.
- "The rioters brought the train to a stop. Those who belonged to the other religion were methodically picked out and slaughtered. After it was all over, those who remained were treated to a feast of milk, custard pies and fresh fruit (158)."
- The train becomes in essence the twin post-Partition nations, and the act of feasting amid bloodbath becomes the onerous celebration of a supposed independence that both the countries had thrust on their respective people.
- Between the conferring of food and geniality to one set of people and killing of the other stands the notions of citizen and outsider, which de-legitimizes plural communities in hope for communally "pure" political nations.

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Similarly, we have another short story, there are very many short stories that could be discussed, but due to lack of time and scope, we have brought here only select short stories by Manto. Another would be a short story called Modesty. We observe the great paradox of human character. It is at the time of the riots; this is how the story goes and it is as brief as this. "The rioters brought the train to a stop. Those who belong to the other religion were methodically picked out and slaughtered; after it was all over, those who remained were treated to a feast of milk, custard pies and fresh fruits." So, this is the entire story. Only three or four lines. We see how human mind works in a warped manner of thinking that informs the rioters' minds.

On the one hand, they are conferring food and geniality and they are congratulating a set of people that belong to the same community, and on the other, the same people are methodically, systematically killing/ decimating the peoples that are perceived as outside of the community. This goes on to tell us about the difference, how a nation-state is formed on the edifice of this difference between the citizen, our own people versus the outsider- someone who does not belong.

Such an idea of nation thereby delegitimizes any possibility of plural existence, plural communities, syncretic communities, and so formation of such a nation and nationality's concept [refer to] the idea of pure political nations; we are talking in terms of purity, and so anything that is perceived as outside or kind of diluting, threatening the purity of the nation is decimated; it is gotten rid of, it is eradicated.


So, [in this story] train becomes in essence the twin post-partition nations. We have the act of feasting going on, and it is almost unseemly and it is so inhuman that people are feasting [where] there is excess of blood. On the one hand, [there is blood bath] and on the other hand people are feasting, there is a party, there is a funfare going on. So, onerous celebration of a supposed independence and this notion of independence where feasting has to go on simultaneously with bloodbath is being imposed on the common people.

It is extremely fulsome, it is repugnant after a point and that is something that Manto is trying to depict in the short story. So, coming to his short story Khol Do, it challenges the discourse of nationalism and problematizes such an idea through depicting how the idea of nationalism is co-opted with patriarchal ideology. Nationalism and patriarchy

actually go hand in hand. Nationalism upholds and in turn is upheld by the patriarchal set up/the patriarchal mechanism. There is a connivance between these two concepts in further and further marginalizing the woman. (Refer Slide Time: 18:02)

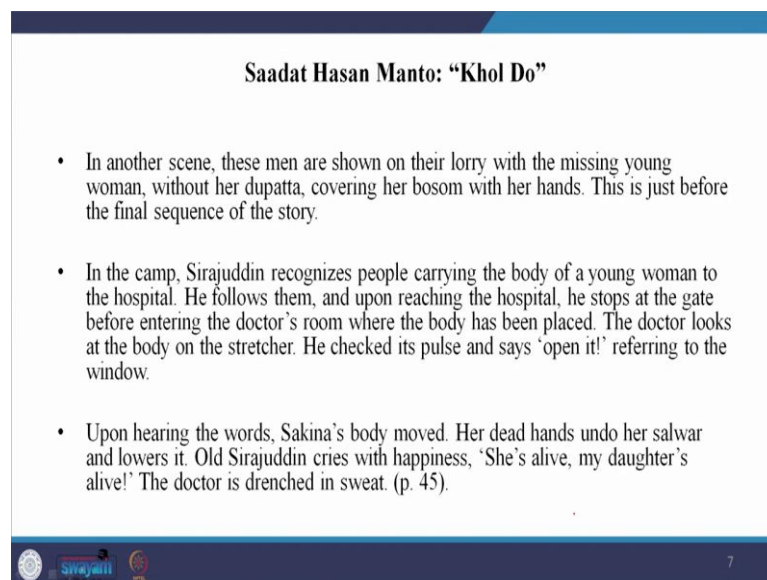
Saadat Hasan Manto: "Khol Do"

- Manto, in his short story "Khol Do", challenges the discourse of nationalism and problematizes it by bringing forth the idea that nationalism is a discourse co-opted by the patriarchal ideology. Nationalism upholds the patriarchal setup, which in extension marginalizes women (Khan, Bibi and Aziz). This is done through a set of fine-tuned techniques of micro-physics of power, as suggested by Foucault (1991).
- The story begins with Sirajuddin witnessing the violence and chaos around him, and he remembers how his wife had already died due to this aggression. Completely absorbed by his thoughts, suddenly, a Sirajuddin's hand reaches the dupatta of his daughter Sakina and recognizes that she is missing. The old father gets up and starts asking people about his daughter, and finally, some young men who call themselves "volunteers" promise to help the desperate father.

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So, it is done through a set of fine-tuned techniques of micro-physics of power, as Michel Foucault would suggest, and so they are very similar in the way they function - the idea of nationalism and the idea of patriarchy. The story begins with Sirajuddin witnessing the violence and chaos around him and he remembers how his wife had already died due to this aggression. Completely absorbed by his thoughts, Sirajuddin's hand reaches the dupatta of his daughter Sakina and suddenly recognizes that the daughter is missing.

The old father gets up and starts asking people about his daughter and finally, there are some young men that claim to be volunteers and who promises to help the desperate father; (Refer Slide Time: 19:01)



Saadat Hasan Manto: "Khol Do"

- In another scene, these men are shown on their lorry with the missing young woman, without her dupatta, covering her bosom with her hands. This is just before the final sequence of the story.
- In the camp, Sirajuddin recognizes people carrying the body of a young woman to the hospital. He follows them, and upon reaching the hospital, he stops at the gate before entering the doctor's room where the body has been placed. The doctor looks at the body on the stretcher. He checked its pulse and says 'open it!' referring to the window.
- Upon hearing the words, Sakina's body moved. Her dead hands undo her salwar and lowers it. Old Sirajuddin cries with happiness, 'She's alive, my daughter's alive!' The doctor is drenched in sweat. (p. 45).

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then some time has passed, some time elapses. In another scene, we see these same men traveling in a lorry with a missing young woman; a missing young girl without her dupatta actually and who is trying to cover her bosom with her hands.

After that, the reader is taken to the final scene (the climax) of the story, which is in a refugee camp, where a half-dead young girl is brought for medical checkup. Sirajuddin comes and recognizes the body of this young half-dead woman as his daughter, and upon reaching the hospital, he enters the doctor's room where the body has been placed.

And the doctor looks at the body on the stretcher and commands to open the window. The doctor says "open it", suggesting that the windows be opened so he can take a better look and examine the patient properly. Upon hearing these words, Sirajuddin's daughter

Sakina actually moves faintly. With her almost dead hands, she undoes her salwar and lowers it.

The reaction of the father is remarkable, he is joyous, he cries with happiness that Sakina is alive, (he says, "my daughter is alive") and the doctor in turn is drenched in sweat; that is where the story actually ends. So, Sakina becomes representative of a great number of women whose bodies were receptacle of the atrocities committed during this tumultuous time-period.

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Saadat Hasan Manto: "Khol Do"

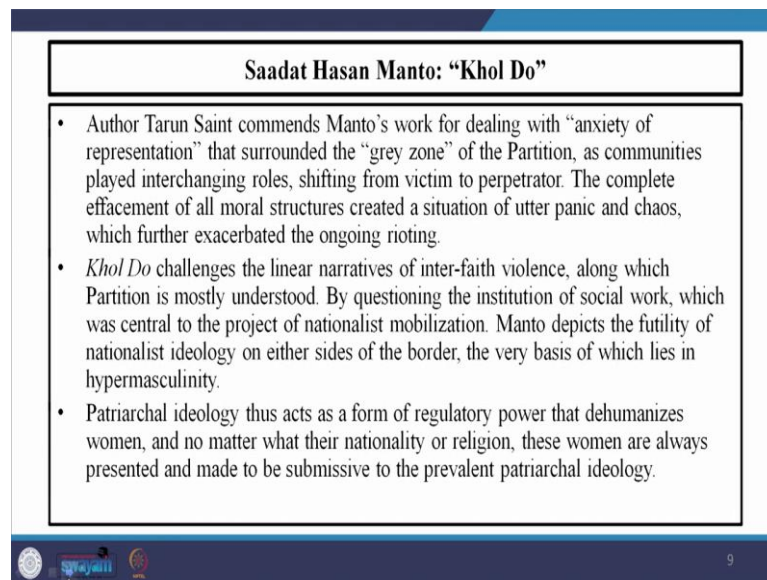
- Through her gestures, Sakina represents the great number of women who were victims of the atrocities that occurred during this tumultuous time period. These women, who bore the brunt of the chaos of Partition and were otherwise silenced and hence forgotten from history, are given voice through Sakina's gesture (Khan, Bibi and Aziz).
- Sakina is a victim of different fragments of power exercised over her, and all of them act as an oppressive forms of power over her.
- "Khol Do" explores how the women who were migrating to their "respective" countries were victimized not only by their enemies, but also by their supposed protectors. In the story, we see how Sakina, a Muslim girl, was repeatedly raped not only by Hindu/Sikh but by men from her own community. This skewed nationalism, where the protector becomes the predator, where collective madness spares no one, therefore, needs to be looked into.
- Manto here presents how men who were considered as the rescuers of national honour and pride were the ones who turned to bestiality and madness.

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These women bore the brunt of the chaos of partition, and their chapters have been silenced and forgotten from history. So, this silenced part of history is being given voice through Sakina's singular gesture of untying her pajama strings. Sakina is a victim of different fragments of power that have been exercised on her, and all of them have oppressed and dehumanized her.

So, *Khol Do* explores how the women that were migrating to their respective countries were violated and victimized not only by men from the opposite communities, but conversely also by the ones that claimed to be volunteers and that came garbed as the protectors, the supposed protectors. So, in the story we see that Sakina is a Muslim girl. She is ravished by the Hindu or Sikh men and then later on in the process of being salvaged/brought back, she is also ravished by the men from her own community.

So, from here we get a very skewed notion of nationalism, where the protector becomes the predator in fact, and where this collective madness and lack of humanity spares no one; and this is something that Manto is trying to examine. Manto presents how men who were considered as rescuers of national honour and pride through protecting and safeguarding the woman, were the ones that had resorted to bestiality and madness. (Refer Slide Time: 23:07)



Saadat Hasan Manto: "Khol Do"

- Author Tarun Saint commends Manto's work for dealing with "anxiety of representation" that surrounded the "grey zone" of the Partition, as communities played interchanging roles, shifting from victim to perpetrator. The complete effacement of all moral structures created a situation of utter panic and chaos, which further exacerbated the ongoing rioting.
- *Khol Do* challenges the linear narratives of inter-faith violence, along which Partition is mostly understood. By questioning the institution of social work, which was central to the project of nationalist mobilization. Manto depicts the futility of nationalist ideology on either sides of the border, the very basis of which lies in hypermasculinity.
- Patriarchal ideology thus acts as a form of regulatory power that dehumanizes women, and no matter what their nationality or religion, these women are always presented and made to be submissive to the prevalent patriarchal ideology.

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So, Tarun Saint commends Manto's work for dealing with "anxiety of representation" that surrounded the "grey zone" of the partition. So, we see that there is only a thin line separating the victim from the perpetrator. Once again, going back to the image or the

symbol of the mob, the one that has been victimized before, i.e. the male victim, at a later stage goes on to become the male aggressor.

And the line between sanity and insanity is very thin and almost fragmented/ breaking down. So, the complete effacement of any kind of moral structure created a situation of utter panic and chaos, and it further exacerbated the ongoing rioting. So, Khol Do is challenging any form of linear narrative on interfaith or enmity.

This is a common [or] stock narrative or assumption that historiography is based on; this is a stock assumption that Hindus were against the Muslims, Sikhs were against the Muslims and vice versa. So, here we see that the young girl is violated by men from all communities actually, and this harkens back the lecture where we earlier discussed about how the police, the people from the upper echelons of the society, men in power from influential factions were all conniving, they were all supporting one another, they were in the process of trading of women, selling women as slave girls and so, it is very difficult to understand who is the protector and who is the violator.

And so by questioning the institution of social work here, i.e. what the volunteers are actually doing in the story, we understand how by questioning the institution of social work, here the project of nationalism, the project of welfare and charitable acts by the volunteers is being questioned. So, the idea of social work, the idea of volunteers or national heroes rescuing the victims is put to question.

Manto depicts the futility of nationalist ideology. On both sides of the border, he notes that such an ideology is standing/founded on ideas of hypermasculinity. Patriarchal ideology acts as a form of regulatory power that dehumanizes women, no matter what their nationality or religion right. And so, they are expected to be made submissive to the prevalent patriarchal ideology. (Refer Slide Time: 27:00)

Communal Identity and Violence on Women's Body in "Khol Do"

- In "Khol Do," body and language both function as simulacra in which collective desire and collective death overlap.
- Through his economization of words, Manto unfolds trauma in its glaring intensity that had permanently balked the smooth programming of articulation. The slippage in meaning transpires through a distorted relationship between the signifying word and its concomitant silent gesture.
- In Sakina's act, there is a mechanical responding quality that unveils the libidinous components of massacre
- By paradoxically juxtaposing emotion and language with action, the terseness and often comic treatment of the grisly sights in Manto's writings enable a visualizing capacity for the readers, thereby deliberately heightening the unguarded shocking impact.

In Khol Do, body and language both function as simulacra, in which collective desire and collective death overlap. The body of Sakina actually, it is a concentrate of collective desire and as the author suggests, the body has died many times; although it is not medically declared as dead. So, through economization of words Manto is unfolding trauma in its glaring intensity.

Something that had balked and [was] rendered defunct, the smooth programming of articulation. We see that [there is a] slippage in meaning, the relation between the signifying word and its concomitant silent gesture, is kind of distorted. So, there is a slippage in meaning through a distorted relationship between the signifying word and the concomitant silent gesture.

So, in Sakina's act, there is a mechanical responding quality. And it is unveiling the libidinous components of massacre. So, we see emotion and language being juxtaposed with action, where there are two elements being deployed by Manto - one is succinctness, brevity and then comic treatment of bloody acts, grizzly sites; which enable a visualizing capacity in the reader and deliberately heightens an unguarded shocking impact.

Something that is unprecedented, something that the reader did not expect as coming and so it is [unprecedented] and hits the reader directly. (Refer Slide Time: 29:03)

Language and Violence on Women's Body in "Khol Do"

- Beyond expressing her horrific violation in his utterance, the father wants her to live despite portions of her body's failing, and espouses her mutilated self.
- Sirajuddin accepts the suffering Sakina who may have been considered socially dead by other fathers.
- Grief is shown as a transient emotion. Grief is metonymically perceived as bodily anguish, and the female body is portrayed as the one that will carry this pain within her for the rest of her life.

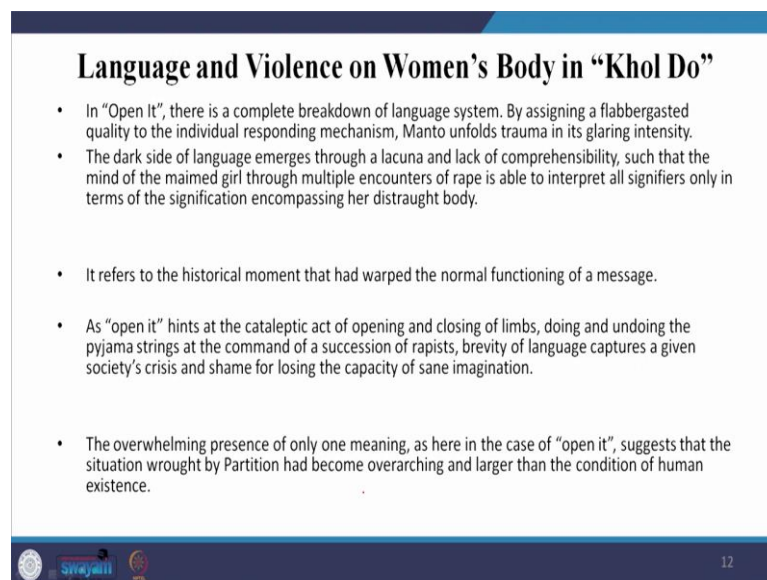
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Beyond expressing her horrific violation, the father of Sakina wants the daughter to live despite knowing that parts of her body have failed.

And so he is embracing/he is accepting her mutilated self, the way he finds the daughter. So, Sirajuddin's accepting the suffering Sakina who might have been considered as socially dead by other fathers, is actually remarkable in the story. And we understand the female body is going to carry this pain, even if Sakina survives; we do not know if she will survive, and if she does she will carry this pain, this remembrance of violence in her body for the rest of her life.

So, in *Open It*, if we understand the story in terms of what violence does to language, we would note that there is a complete breakdown of the language system. There is a flabbergasted quality of the individual responding mechanism and that actually reveals violence or reveals the bestial act in its bare form.

The dark side of language emerges through a lack of comprehensibility. There is a gap and a lacuna that cannot be overcome, cannot be bridged. So, the maimed girl that has encountered rape several times... she has been raped by many men. (Refer Slide Time: 31:07)



Language and Violence on Women's Body in "Khol Do"

- In "Open It", there is a complete breakdown of language system. By assigning a flabbergasted quality to the individual responding mechanism, Manto unfolds trauma in its glaring intensity.
- The dark side of language emerges through a lacuna and lack of comprehensibility, such that the mind of the maimed girl through multiple encounters of rape is able to interpret all signifiers only in terms of the signification encompassing her distraught body.
- It refers to the historical moment that had warped the normal functioning of a message.
- As "open it" hints at the cataleptic act of opening and closing of limbs, doing and undoing the pyjama strings at the command of a succession of rapists, brevity of language captures a given society's crisis and shame for losing the capacity of sane imagination.
- The overwhelming presence of only one meaning, as here in the case of "open it", suggests that the situation wrought by Partition had become overarching and larger than the condition of human existence.

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And so, she is able to interpret all signifiers only in terms of that one signification that encompasses her distraught body.

We see it is a historical moment that had warped the normal functioning of a message - the word open it or Khol Do could refer to so many things; in this instance, it was [originally] referring to a window, a command that a window be opened. But Sakina relates it only with one signification of untying her pyjama strings and lowering her salwar.

So, open it hints at the cataleptic act of opening and closing of limbs. She is opening the salwar and then she is opening her limbs; [she has been] doing and undoing the pyjama strings at the command of a succession of rapists. So, here Manto does not explain; he is giving us a very pared off form. There is a minimalism in his language, which actually captures the society's crisis and shame for losing the capacity of sane imagination.

Who is to be blamed for Sakina's loss of sane imagination? Whenever she hears Khol Do/ open it, she actually connects it with the very one thing, right. She can only connect it with one thing. So, we see this overwhelming presence of only one meaning at the cost of obfuscating other meanings as in the case of open it. It refers to a situation, where partition had become overarching; it had become larger than the condition of normal human existence.

So, at this point I would like to stop today's lecture and let us meet for another round of discussions with the next lecture.

Thank you.