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# Dualism of Mourning in Manto's 'Kali Shalwar'

*Takbeer Salati*

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## Abstract

Pakistan-based writer Saadat Hasan Manto's 'Kali Shalwar' received critical appreciation for the choice of his subjects such as a sex-worker. The conditions of the depletion of human conditions have been the prime source of Manto's short stories. 'Kali Shalwar' (Manto, 1941) tries to fictionalize the ritual of Muharram, a 'mourning practice' into the normalized 'gendered' mourning conditions of Manto's sex-workers. Lacan's 'Graph of Sexuation'<sup>1</sup> represents the sexed subject and sexual relation to the phallic function. A different relation to the phallus structures the masculine and feminine positions. The phallic functions inscribe the male subject 'man as a whole', or 'as all'. Lacan's remark stands true for Sultana. The paper reverts to the 'mourning' representations of subjects in their perpetual psychic 'mourning' which provides a sense of space for these universally deplorable conditions of sex-workers.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Mourning, Culture, Society, Lacan, Manto.

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## 1.1 Introduction

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at...The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into the object-and most particularly into the object of vision: a sight.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lacan, Jacques, 'The Graph Of Sexuation', 1973, Paris.

<sup>2</sup>John, Berger, 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. The United Kingdom. Penguin.

Manto with his array sketches of woman characters outlines Sultana as the 'regular'. She reminds of those with the displaced self- identity but also gets her to the voices of the society; a perfect setting for a woman like Sultana to function. Manto's 'Kali Shalwar' is like a haunting tale of a woman who tries to get out of the bazaar-e-husn. Manto, like the designer of the market, gives different sketches of the women characters to make his association with Sultana clear. Sultana is the portrayal lead for 'Kali Shalwar'. The story which portrays the facets of different kinds of people in society is the world for Sultana. She, as the subject of mourning, is tried and tested by monstrous men who act like half-God. The character(s) like Khuda-Baksh helping the men prostitute Sultana act like a messiah for the otherwise madwoman in the attic. For Manto religion was the depiction that always dealt with the body, self, and masculinity. The body here appears like the status of the workers, the self depicts the communal riots and the adjectives of masculinity and femininity depict the higher and lower standards of the human mind. Lacan discusses masculinity and femininity in his lecture XX.<sup>3</sup> Here, according to Lacan these binaries do not represent or rephrase the biological differences but it is he who suggests the interpretation as they lived like the experience of the bodies and selves. Gilbert and Gubar, however, argue that

'The nineteenth- century women writers were faced with two debilitating stereotypical images of women; women were depicted in male writing as angels or as monsters.'<sup>4</sup>

This stands true for the monstrous Sultana because of her struggle of identity and her way through the traumatic victim of the patriarchs. In Lacan's lecture XX the position of the woman is not positioned as anybody but as not the entire phallus. At the beginning of the story 'Kali Shalwar', Sultana is seen on a balcony looking deep at the crisscross lines of the railway track which comprises almost every day of her life. Here, Sultana's life is similar to Manto's. Sultana's transference from Muzaffarpur to Mumbai is similar to what her creator (Manto) has experienced. But Sultana

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<sup>3</sup>Lacan, Jacques, 1998. *On Feminine Sexuality: The limits of love and knowledge: Book XX: Encore*. Paris: Norton.

<sup>4</sup>Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar, 1979, *Madwoman in the Attic*.

being a vision, an object of sight is exposed to the mourning of the society experiencing the woman's condition inside of the human condition. As Laura Mulvey wrote, 'woman is 'spectacle' and man is 'the bearer of the look' fixes Sultana in the right position.<sup>5</sup> Khuda-Baksh, Sultana's friend, and partner, on the other hand, is reliving his faith in the camera. The despair and loneliness which Sultana undergoes are equated with the rise of new Khuda-Baksh, from the storms of the transfer from the rural to the metropolis. He is a new man in the town of the 'Übermensch'.<sup>6</sup> Whereas, Sultana, like Eden without any personal guilt, is transformed into an object of self-pity, marginalized and alienated. Manto cleverly shapes Shankar's character as the only of the other characters who try to help Sultana out of the depressed metropolis life. Alluding to God Shankar, the doer according to the Hindu mythology Shankar knows what his role is meant to do. Unlike, Lacan who thinks of women to be a part of their existence, Shankar finds the truth, unity in their existence and believes in the power of femininity. But unaware of his powers, he tries only to lure Sultana through his wit and power. Thus it is noted that the environment of Manto's characters is psychologically challenging and to help the characters through this perspective remains in aporia. Thus the subject of 'Sultana' in 'Kali Shalwar' has poignantly gendered through both her choices of a garment as well as her practices of religion.

## 1.2 Psychic Mourning

Lacan famously declares that 'there's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal', a metaphysical concept with determinate and substantive content.<sup>7</sup> Sultana, in herself, stands out to be a story of the woman who tries to relocate her within the cosmos of the modern world which buries her consciousness into Manto's psyche. Manto who was a product of partitioned India shifted to Punjab from Kashmir and had a soft

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<sup>5</sup>Mulvey, Laura, 1975, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Screen: University of Glasgow: Press, 6-18.

<sup>6</sup>Pasley, Malcolm, 1978, *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought: A collection of essays*. University of California: Press.

<sup>7</sup>Lacan, Jacques, 1998. *On Feminine Sexuality. The limits of love and knowledge: Book XX: Encore*. Paris: Norton, 72.

corner for the women characters of his stories. Manto portrayed British mullah's who exhibited their provinciality on a woman's body and destroyed their self in a microcosm. Sultana is Eve in Manto's perspective, for she is trying to hide her sexuality under the guise of the British soldiers who take advantage of her innocence, and her bewilderment on the onset of the masculinity in the society. The traditional coyness that leads Eve to her downfall is co-related to Sultana's who leads to the downfall of Manto and the present scenario. The Lacanian power that stops Sultana for not functioning in partitioned India are men like Khuda Baksh and Muneer who treat women nothing more than products to play with. Khuda Baksh is a name that signifies the power of God who is forgiving and ultimate. Khuda Baksh who is one of the major characters in the story puts a question to the very figure of God who is obscene and tries to rape women in the most terrorizing way. Jacques Lacan, in his story of the mirror-stage, emphasizes that the women ought to bring the imitation of the child through the actions and the activities which respond to the overall development of the women. When Sultana gets paid for sex, especially by Khuda Baksh who tries to capture the moment with his camera is a revelation of the figure of a patriarch. The only object that is equal to the masculinity of Khuda Baksh is his camera. Khuda Baksh, who is desperate and is trying to celebrate what his manhood fails to deliver, engages the macrocosm of the society into his psyche. Manto picks up the object of a camera for patriarchy in the guise of Khuda Baksh who is unaware of the mourning of women in prostitution. Here the male gaze of Khuda Baksh on an assumed 'Sultana' the queen abandons her in the city where she is mauled by men. Manto points out

On the first day, when she went to answer the call of nature in that toilet; she was feeling an acute pain in her back. After getting relieved, she took the support of the hanging chain to get up. Noticing the chain, she had thought that since those houses were specially built as dwelling places for people like her, the chain she had thought had been fitted out to provide some support.<sup>8</sup>

Sultana, who is laced in jewels, embroidered with velvet designs is put to shock when her beloved in the guise of Khuda

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<sup>8</sup>Manto, 2010. *Kali Shalwar*. Vishwa Pushtak Kendra, 153.

imitating British, rejects to help her to get out of the clutches of the society. In other sense, he tries to take advantage of the time and helps himself to navigate through each space of the geography of Sultana's body. 'Kali Shalwar' becomes a story of the woman who is not only de-motivated by the male gaze of the society but is also termed as abnormal for the intrusion of the phallic camera of Khuda Baksh. Anwari, another woman character of the story helps Sultana initially to establish her business but then Sultana's beauty makes her jealous. This jealousy leads to the failure of the business which collapses at the brim of modern sexuality that collides with the religious outcry of Moharram. The description of mourning is depicted in this paragraph:

The month of Moharram was fast approaching but Sultana had no means of getting a black outfit made for her. Mukhtar had a snazzy lady Hamilton shirt with black georgette sleeves made for her. And to go with it, she had a black satin Shalwar which glistened like kajal.<sup>9</sup>

With the self -flagellation in the city of Sultana on one hand, and on the other the cries of women behold a stunned audience in the cinema. Kali Shalwar which is not only a garment but a way towards Sultana's hopes and desires is stained through such socio-ethical issues. Be it Khuda Baksh or Manto, the women of 'Kali Shalwar' are mystified by the outrage of the outer world of which these two are real transactors. Manto always cried for women and men together. He gave a different voice to feminism in the decade where women were not even understood. It was a period of false allegation on the design of the body of women. 'Kali Shalwar' as it is the story of sexuality is also a tale of erupting partition that beckoned a new India. 'Kali Shalwar' also becomes the symbol of the defeat for the British because black meant death and it was the death of the British Raj during Manto, who could write and voice it. 'Kali Shalwar' is symbolic of Moharram, the cry forsakes the brightness of the outer world which needs to be triggered with the victims of religion. Women, who wear such garments on different occasions, are seen through Manto's eyes as being as pure as the women under the veil. These psychic women of society engage the

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<sup>9</sup>Manto, 157.

readers into the dualism of mourning.

### **1.3 Manto**

The partition which had a great impact on Manto came with a sense of loss and despair. Manto, who resisted each kind of atrocity on woman, mourned the death of each one of them. It wasn't a battlefield of only India and Pakistan over territory but it was an occupation of the human body particularly that of the surveyed female. Manto doesn't vow for any change in the society neither does he make claims for any topic world, but what he does is show his belief in the reality of his society. Thus illuminating within him the sense of guilt, the pressure of not being able to do what he had thought to achieve through his writings. The writer Manto is the one who also celebrates Moharram. The dualism which exists in mourning is through these lenses of the society. The partition which led to the division of the country and the women who got raped, brutally murdered are together mourned by Manto through his writings.

### **1.4 Conclusion**

Manto is a writer of partition and women. He understands the concept of territory and land. The spaces that they exhibit around are mourned by Manto for the socio-political conditions of the time. 'Kali Shalwar' is the work of the mistaken notion that Sultana dances around for the men in the society. It is this which Manto mourns in the cyclic conditions of the society to which he is directly or indirectly a part of.

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Dr Kalpana Bhakuni