


Trauma in Prostitution: An Analysis of Select Short Stories of Sadat Hasan Manto and Kamala Surayya Das

Aisha Haleem* 
Research Scholar
Department of English
Modern European Languages
University of Lucknow
Email: aishahaleem141096@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Prostitutes encountered and continue to experience a great deal of trauma related to their existence and profession—which is not even considered or recognised by society, especially in South Asian countries, even after the legalisation of prostitution—sex workers have no respect and place in society, and hardly any writer or radical thinkers have written about them. In the late 1990s, major figures in the movement for sex workers' rights openly questioned the queer theorists' silence on the matter of prostitution and sex work. Not much has been done to emphasise the expressly queer side of sex work, despite efforts made by sex workers to "come out of the closet" and engage with the larger queer theoretical community. The absence of any discussion of how sex functions in queer theory refutes the logical inference suggesting that it has no relevance to this area of research. Prostitution can also be referred to as queer profession because their lives are full of traumatic experiences. Only a small number of authors from South Asian nations have written or spoken about prostitution. Among them are Sadat Hasan Manto and Kamala Surayya Das, whose short stories "Insult" (Hatak), "The Hundred Candle Power Bulb", "A Doll for a Child Prostitute," and "Padmavati The Harlot" accurately, surreally, and impartially depict the life, surroundings, and struggle of sex workers. The most extended and most in-depth story in her collection of short stories, "A Doll for the Kid Prostitute," features an inspector sahib who has had enough of women and demands a fresh child recruit, Rukmani. The inspector pulled her dress and transformed her into a prostitute without even considering her age; the sentence, which solely described the inspector's conduct, was harsh. This made their first encounter painful. With this awful first encounter, Das creates a world of unrestrained carnality in which innocence must perish. The short novella emphasises the issue of prostitution and how it affects women. The stories of individuals like Sita, Meera, Laxmibai, her son, Saraswati, Krishna, etc. are very well portrayed, and they are all intriguing. Das regularly uses the dramatic approach and writes realistic stories. She expresses herself artistically primarily through discourse. Manto's story "A Hundred Candle-Power Bulb" demonstrates how prostitution and division coexist because pimps are prepared to exchange their most important resource: prostitutes, even in the midst of riots between various ethnic groups.

Keywords: *Prostitution, trauma, communal riots, partition, male gaze, paedophilia.*

Kamala Das, the recipient of the Sahitya Academy Award and several other honours, was born into a literary family and has always had a penchant for writing. She found herself writing in

* Author: Aisha Haleem

E-mail: aishahaleem141096@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0644-043X>

Received 18 June. 2023; Accepted 21 June. 2023. Available online: 25 June. 2023.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)



two languages after getting married to Madhav Das, a bank official when she was just 15 years old. Madhav Das supported her love of writing. Kamala was lucky to live in Calcutta, which provided wonderful chances for artistic talent in the 1960s. Together with a young generation of Indian English poets, she started to publish her work in cult anthologies.

She was renowned for creating short Malayalam stories in addition to English poems. Das also published a syndicated column. His first collection of poems, *Summer In Calcutta*, was a breath of fresh air in Indian English poetry. During a time when Indian poets were restricted by 19th-century diction, emotion, and idealised love, Kamala Das exchanged the security of an antiquated and occasionally sterile aestheticism for the liberation of the mind and body. Her stories typically involved love, betrayal, and the accompanying sadness. Her second book of poems, *The descendants*, were considerably more direct. At the age of 42, she bravely penned her autobiography, *My Story*, which was originally written in Malayalam and afterwards translated into English. When asked why she includes aspects of her personal life in her writings, Kamala Das said in an interview with P. P. Raveendran,

There are so many complaints that I sell the same stuff as poetry, as story and as essay. But since I am the same person and have got to write of what happens to me I cannot help it. I can only my personal experiences, and being versatile, I see poetry in an experience, and then see good prose coming out of the same experience. I just dabble in all these areas, that is all (149).

The stories “Pakshiyude Manam”, “Neypayasam”, “Thanuppu”, and “Chandana Marangal” are among some of her most well-known works. She wrote a few works with Neermathalam Pootha Kalam. Movies like “Neermaathalathinte Pookkal”, “Mazha”, “Aami”, and “Kadhavedu” are all based on Das' stories.

Saadat Hasan Manto was a Pakistani author of Indian descent whose writing was deemed controversial for the time period. Because of this, he was accused of obscenity six times in both India and Pakistan. Manto wrote with the aim of confronting societal concerns and addressing what he thought was holding mankind back, notwithstanding those who disagreed with him. Moreover, he received Nishan-e Imtiaz. ‘If you can't handle these tales’, the society is too much for you, he declared. Manto was a prolific Indo-Pakistani author who produced 22 volumes of short tales during the course of his career.

Victor Hugo, Oscar Wilde, and Russian authors like Chekhov and Gorky were among the authors whose works he began to translate over his creative career. His debut piece, “Tamasha,” was inspired on the carnage at Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh. His latter work gradually got

starker in showing the depravity of the human mind as humanism ideas gradually waned around the World. His earlier works, influenced by the progressive writers of his day, clearly demonstrated a leftist and socialist bent. Manto courageously stated something in court that genuinely supported his writing career. He said that “A writer picks up his pen only when his sensibility is hurt.” (Shivpuri) In the late 1940s, Manto was a consistent participant in impassioned literary debates and arguments that took place in Lahore's legendary Pak Tea House. Pak Tea House is a symbol of Lahore's lively culture and great literature of yesteryear. Saadat Manto's pen flowed like a river, hitting the unexplored regions of the heart while exploring the nakedness of human nature. He weaved his works depicting the dark parts of human drama and battle for life with sarcasm, sorrow, and mocking (Ali).

There are numerous researchers who have written and researched about Manto's and Kamala Das's works because they both bravely revealed the hidden, brutal truth of society in their works. For example, Dr S. Z. Abbas wrote a paper titled “Women-as-Prostitute-Paradigm in Manto's Short Stories “The Insult” and “Behind the Reeds”, in which he dealt with Manto's startling quality of talking about margins and a subaltern group of those women who is not even neglected but also have an inconsiderate identity in the society. Similarly, "Sadat Hasan Manto and His "Charged" Tales" is the subject of Saheb Kaur's research, while Ria Basu's article is titled "Prostitutes as a City's Paradox: Navigating Society Through the Body of the Fallen Woman in Selected Stories of Sadat Hasan Manto." In a study titled "Empowered at the Margins: Women in Manto's Narrative," Vishal Ranjan discussed how women are marginalised in Manto's work. Researchers like Dr Mazhar Iqbal Ranjha, Dr Khalid Ahmad, Sundus Gohar, and Sumble Sarfraz collectively written a paper on Manto's short story “The Hundred Candle Power Bulb” the name of their paper is “Challenging the Myth: A Transitivity Analysis of Manto's The Hundred Watt Bulb.” Kamala Das and her writing experiments also held and still hold a unique position among researchers' choices of works to write on, which is why researcher Purnima Bali wrote an entire paper on Das' poems in general without mentioning any specific work, with the topic “Poetry of Protest and Confession: A Study of Kamala Das.” Meanwhile, Dr. Swati Vandana examined Das' autobiography in her paper titled, “Feminism and Indian Response to Kamala Das' ‘My Story’.” Another researcher Jai Shankar Tiwari focused his area of research on her short stories and wrote a paper under the title "A Study in Short Stories of Kamala Das.” similarly, Savita Bola Shetty have written a paper named, "Kamala Das As a Short Story Writer.” after analysing previous works done on both the writers

this paper will deal with the trauma and subaltern identity of prostitutes through the select stories of Sadat Hasan Manto and Kamala Das. Both of Kamala Das' short stories, which the paper is about was first published in 1992 in the collection *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Short Stories*, later in 2020. The candid discussions of the women characters in Das's eighteen short stories included in this book pull out the Indian woman's journey in the hunt for her identity (Tiwari 40).

“A Doll for the Child Prostitute” the narrative is set in Mumbai and is about the issues that the head of a brothel house faces. The narrative depicts the story of convicts and the disruption of the police agency. Kashiviswanthi, who is proud of her words, decides to spend her remaining years of life in Banaras under the umbrella of God. It is a short story blended with so many stories of prostitutes who used to live under the supervision or dominion of Lachmibai, among them Rukmani, a twelve-year-old girl who was raped by her stepfather, so her mother Anasuya, who was previously a prostitute, brought her daughter to Lachmibai in order to save her from her abusive and rapist husband; that became the out of the frying pan straight into the fire situation. Another little girl, Sita, who is two years older than Rukmani, was also introduced by Das and quickly became friends with the latter. Through Rukmani, a 12-year-old girl sold to a brothel by her mother, Das demonstrates that compassion and emotions have not completely deserted these despicable circumstances. Characters like Saraswati, Radha, Sita, Mira, and Rukmani are just a few examples of those that show how trauma and subaltern identity are present throughout the plot. All of them were content with the compensation they received, occasionally receiving reprimands from Lachmibai. However, Inspector Sahib, who used to demand that Rukmani spent all of her time in his bed as a prostitute and promised to give her a doll worth 100 rupees, caused Rukamani to suffer during her childhood. This demonstrates how he can only entice her and rob her of her youth with the use of a toy.

Readers also witnessed the height of brutality when 14 years old Sita got pregnant by one of her clients, a Madrasi man working in a School, after the condition got out of the hands of doctors and everyone Lachmbai with the help of Sindhuthai aborted her child, and she died at that very moment. Not only that, but she was also severely beaten by Lachmibai when she threw up on her client's face. This illustrates the trauma of prostitution, particularly for young people who fall into the muck only to be mercilessly killed one day. Lachmibai lamented her passing, but her lamentation was over the loss of a single piece of flesh that had previously provided her with income.

Like every other individual, Sita too had a backstory and a cause for ending herself in a brothel. Her three brothers and her parents perished from cholera, and she was afterwards sold to Lachmibai for 300 rupees. Rukmani compares the Sita's situation to the English doll, which utters "Mumma" when someone presses on her stomach; similarly, the Sita tries to vomit by pressing on her tummy. Readers learn a lot about the past and present conditions of prostitutes through this story because of women like Kaushalya, Lachmibai's rival, who regularly beat her girls until they were red and blue. Lachmibai occasionally follows Kaushalya's example, which is why some people thought Lachmibai had a soft spot for her girls. One cannot ignore the absurdist existential and surrealistic reality of this diplomatic society, where inspector Sahib, on the one hand, used to cherish, protect, and care for his reputation and family members, particularly her granddaughter, and on the other hand, he pressed 12-year-old Rukmani's breast and used to tell her that he didn't love her granddaughter and children the way he loved her. This absurd behaviour was abruptly put to an end by Rukmani's single sob when she hugged him and called him "Papa" which made him kind of realise or hit him where it hurt as he says, "Something had died in me today." (Das 91), to which Lachmibai replies, "Maybe something has been born inside of you today," Lachmi said." (Das 91). In this story, reader saw the concept of paedophilia as Rukmani and Sita was always exploited by their older clients.

In her short story "Padmavati, The Harlot" Das presents brutality, inhuman acts, existential crisis, absurdist circumstances, and a traumatising environment in a straightforward manner. The story centres on a middle-aged prostitute who, after finishing her life's work of educating and marrying off her younger siblings, came to the holy shrine and had long since left her profession behind. Even so, she was disrespectfully misled by young boys outside and ended up being raped by one of the temple's key members, leaving her traumatised and in a deplorable state. The author's viewpoint is that these kinds of actions not only physically harm a person but also destroy that person's psyche of believing anyone in this world, which is pathetic beyond comprehension. Das' art of portraying visual imagery and that harlot's miserable condition after the rape represent this viewpoint. In this way, Padmavati lost her sole hope, which she was attempting to find through spiritualism, in addition to the items she had taken to gift the temple.

Similar to this, Manto has also written short stories on sex workers' life. In order to write realistically about them, he used to reside in their neighbourhood and had intimate knowledge of their lives and themes. Such a tale as "The Hundred Candle Power Bulb" was first publish

in Urdu in 1980, and in English it was published in a collection *Naked Voices, Stories and Sketches* in 2008. The cruelty and trauma prostitutes must endure in exchange for food and money. After a long day of laborious work, the sex worker in this narrative only wants to retire to bed calmly, but her pimp forces her to accompany a customer for thirty or forty rupees. Here, the prostitute stands in for all sex workers who are required to labour in accordance with the demands of the client and pimp and who are not even permitted to sleep, eat, or move around on their own after that. Prostitutes should have a time restriction and the same rights to work in accordance with their needs and bodies as employees in any other profession. She ultimately killed the pimp by shattering his skull into bits in order to fall asleep, and she now sleeps comfortably next to him as a result of the forcefulness that prompted her to perform such a horrific act. Via one of the story's protagonists, who arrived looking for a sex worker to sleep with, readers are able to see this incident. Nevertheless, what he witnessed shocked him beyond what he could handle. Through the peeping eyes of the customer, who witnessed the entire scenario with the aid of a 100-candle power lamp that was hanging close to the prostitute, this scene was depicted in a voyeuristic manner. The concept of the male gaze can also be seen in this story through this scene.

“The Insult” was first published in Urdu in a collection *Manto ke Afsaane*. In English, it was published in a collection *Bombay Stories*, in 2014. “Haatak” Saugandhi learns to value herself in society via her experience of rejection. She also realises that society is always in crisis, rendering her helpless and at the mercy of others. In a flash of insight, Saugandhi is shown as a woman who can resist tyranny from anybody by rising up and fighting back. The intricate detail used to depict Saugandhi's room, together with the belongings and particulars, provide a picture of her life and experiences. According to Harish Trivedi's research paper “Manto, God, Premchand, and Some Other Storytellers”, Manto's depiction of the prostitute “Saugandhi” in the short story “Haatak” demonstrates how the visual sense is the story's central sensory aspect (Trivedi 64). The reader doesn't anticipate the story's ending to be as shocking at first, but before it happens, Manto creates a beautiful image of the world of a whore. Saugandhi had spent the previous five years fairly serving both “gentlemen” and outlaws in the city. Instead, she takes pleasure in the fact that she has a thorough understanding of them and the ability to cope with them, which ultimately proves to be her fatal flaw if we exaggerate her tragic flaws, which is not necessary now. On the other hand, she is not tragic just because she is under oppression. On the other hand, she is not a sad figure only because she is oppressed. even so,

while discussing the, it is evident that in order to go further in the oppressor/oppressed paradigm, one must define their point of view. Hence, it might be challenging to support individuals who call for improved working conditions and legal rights for former employees and abolitionists assert that the very existence of such a concept is a patriarchal tactic to support female trafficking. Perhaps Madho, who plays the robbing-hood part in the narrative, got a peek of the insult Saugandhi had to face two hours before he creeps into her chamber. Every second line of the story contains an overarching patriarchal intrusion into a woman's private life, despite the fact that the setting is not ideal for reading between lines for such a purpose.

Saugandhi, who first relies on Madhu, a feigning male lover, achieves her own identity only after she ceases to depend on him, a patriarchal presence for the appearance of love. Although society has less influence over Saugandhi's life, she appears to still have some views that a woman is generally reared with, one of which is that they are unsatisfied without a male (Abbas 446). As a sex worker, she learns that she cannot let her life depend on men around her; she must give up the external locus of control she has made for herself in Madhu, after all, he is simply an impostor. Saugandhi discovers Madhu in her room the next morning, and as usual, after some sweet-talking, he tries to extort money from her. Saugandhi had framed images of four of her regulars that she admired in her apartment, one of whom was Madhu. When Madhu is seated, Saugandhi begins removing the frames off the wall one by one, until she reaches the one of Madhu (Basu 20). With the ritualistic tearing down of the photos, she loses the last vestiges of her male-dependent identity. She mocks Madhu for his artificiality and asks him to leave; he leaves amid the barks of her beloved dog and her hysterical laughing; she permanently bans him from her room and her life. Saugandhi discovers her identity by letting go of the illusory anticipation of affection from a guy. She decides not to compromise any more and walks away from Madhu's financial abuse.

Manto uses the feminine quiet and her body as a primary issue. He discusses every single nuance but in his own way. He emphasises on the identities of his characters combined with 'obscenity' that is tied to a feminine body. In fact, he establishes somewhere in the background of all this obscene writing that there was something really hoarse that happened somewhere within society. He appropriately and rightfully takes advantage of his artistic licence and offers a picture of a neglected narrative and un-silencing the 'silenced'. Most of Manto's story are based on the backdrop of Partition and communal riots.

Finally, trauma of various kinds is prevalent in these accounts about prostitution. Commercialization has reached such a high point that even female children like Rukmani and Sita are forced to become prostitutes. Forced exploitation of prostitutes to attend their clients regardless of how exhausted they are throughout the day is another type of traumatic situation that sex workers must endure. After all of this, sex workers like Saugandhi were subjected to racial insults that disgusted her beyond words. Das' stories are striking in their description of many people. These are similar to tiny paintings. Kamala Das employs both submissive and aggressive images of Indian women, with her heroines attempting to break down barriers of male dominance and the patriarchal system. They do not succeed, therefore their lives end tragically. In real life, Kamala Das has stated that she is a "new lady" although her stories rarely resemble her actual image. Kamala Das's ladies are fearless, fierce, brave, daring, and even shy. At the start of certain stories, they may appear that such, but they do not always conclude with that character attribute. Her ladies are fighting. Her women seldom voice their minds. The ladies in her stories are her. The ladies in her stories are possibly all of us – those who have been denied a voice and do whatever it takes to express themselves. Her writing is about losses, with a few successes thrown in for good measure. It's about abandoned spouses and women who go out and live their lives the way they want. Leaving men, loves, and even portions of themselves behind. Whether it's Padmavati the Harlot, who only wants to rectify herself in front of her God, or Padmavati the Queen, she speaks about empowerment in her own unique manner, of modest decisions made by her characters, and suddenly it all comes crashing down on the reader, like an avalanche of emotions.

Manto was formed in Bombay, where he resided in Foras Lane, Mumbai's red-light district, and wrote and spoke about the plight of prostitutes and how their employers treated them at various times. Manto describes the prostitutes' dilapidated state and the wear and tear they had endured physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychologically. Manto had a corner for suppressed people in times of deep-rooted hatred, anger, and blood. He used them as a tool to fulfil their sexual desires and needs, creating a sexual slavery bond where a humanitarian feeling was lacking and the relationship dissolves (Sethi).

Work Cited:

- Abbas, Dr. S. Z. “Women-as-Prostitute-Paradigm in Manto’s Short Stories ‘The Insult’ and ‘Behind the Reeds’.” *International Journal of Research*, vol.2, no. 6, June 2015, pp. 446-53. <https://journals.pen2print.org/index.php/ijr/>. PDF download.
- Ali, Shameela Yoosuf. “Sadat Hasan Manto, the Illutrious Story Writer.” *DESIBlitz*, <https://www.desibliz.com/content/saadat-hasan-manto-illustrious-writer>. Accessed 5Mar. 2023.
- Bali, Purnima. “Poetry of Protest and Confession: A Study of Kamala Das.” *The Criterion*, no.12, Feb. 2013, <https://www.the-criterion.com/>. PDF download.
- Basu, Ria “Prostitutes as a City’s paradox: navigating the society through the body of the fallen woman in the select stories of Sadat Hasan Manto.” *Proceedings of the World Conference on Women’s Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, pp. 17-24, <https://doi.org/10.17501/24246743.2022.7102>. PDF download.
- Bolashetty, Savita. “Kamala Das As a Short Story Writer.” *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*.” vol. 6, no. 4, Dec. 2006, pp. 820-23. www.ijcrt.org. PDF download.
- Das, Kamala. “A Doll for the Child Prostitute” *Padmavati the Harlot & Other Short Stories*, Rupa Publication India, 2020.
- _____. “Padmavati the Harlot” *Padmavati the Harlot & Other Short Stories*, Rupa Publication India, 2020.
- _____. and P. P. Raveendran. “Of Masks and Memories: An Interview with Kamala Das.” *Indian Literature*, vol. 36, no. 3 (155), May 1993, pp. 144–161, http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/00195804/v36inone/144_omamaiwkd.xml.
- Kaur, Saheb. “Sadat Hasan Manto and His ‘Charged’ Stories.” *Consortium An International Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 2, no.1, June 2022, pp. 30-39, <https://www.consortiumejournal.com/journaldetails.php?journalid=22010500030SA>. PDF download.
- Manto, Sadat Hasan. “The Hundred Candle Power Bulb” *Naked Voices, Stories and Sketches*, translated by Rakhshanda Jalil, Roli Books, 2008.

-
- “The Insult” Bombay Stories, translated by Matt Reeck and Aftab Ahmad, Vintage International, March 2014.
- Ranjan, Vishal. “Empowered at the Margins: Women in Manto’s Story.” *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, vol. 5, no. 6, June 2018, pp. 240-46, <http://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIRC006042.pdf>. PDF download.
- Ranjha, Dr. Mazhar Iqbal, et al. “Challenging the Myth: A Transitivity Analysis of Manto’s The Hundred Watt Bulb.” *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 7, 2021, pp. 5328-36. <https://www.tojqi.net/index.php/journal/article/view/4616>. Accessed 24 Feb. 2023.
- Sethi, Arya, “An Ode to Sadat Hasan Manto.” *PUBLIC tunes*, 28 July 2020. <https://www.publictunes.com/post/an-ode-to-saadat-hasan-manto>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2023.
- Shivpuri, R. K. “Social and Political World-View of Sadat Hasan Manto.” *Kashmir Sentinel*, Feb. 2003, <https://www.panunkashmir.org/kashmirsentinel/feb2003/14.html>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2023.
- Tiwari, Jai Shankar. “A Study in Short Stories of Kamala Das.” *International Journal of English*, vol. 8, no. 3, June 2020, pp. 37-41. <https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v8i3.3225>. PDF download.
- Trivedi, Harish. “Manto, God, Premchand and Some Other Storytellers.” *Social Scientist*, vol. 40, no. 11/12, 2012, p. 64. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23338871>. Accessed 10 Mar. 2023.
- Vandana, Dr. Swati. “Feminism and Indian Response to Kamala Das’ My Story.” *International Journal of Research*, vol.7, no. 10, Oct. 2020, <https://ijrjournal.com/index.php/ijr/index>. PDF download.