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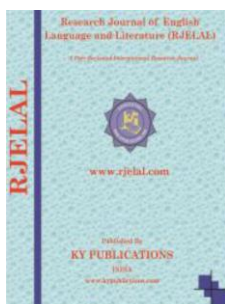
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

“IT’S JUST A NAME”: DEMYTHIFYING (IN)SIGNIFICANCE OF NAME IN MANTO’S “YAZEED”

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doi: doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.7219.401



ABSTRACT

Manto in his story Yazeed demystifies and ultimately breaks the historical and age old pattern of assigning reputation to names. In his characteristic style he breaks one more stereotype of identifying a name with a certain historical character. Yazeed, the name which is believed to carry a negative reputation in the Islamic history is used by Manto to deconstruct the myth. Caliph Yazeed had cut off the waters of the river to parch Husain and his followers. Karim Dad, the progressive protagonist of Manto's story believes that his son would bring water and sees him as a harbinger of hope and harmony. Written in the background of trauma of partition, this story adds an entirely new shade to Manto's art.

Keywords : Partition, Deconstruction, Identity, Namesake

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title

-William Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*.

The above lines from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* highlight the primacy of qualities over name which is just a signifier for a particular person or object. Romeo, to Juliet, shall remain the same person even if he is named differently. As a lover, Juliet brings to the fore the insignificance of name and argues that the inherent traits of a person do not change with change of name.

However, names refer to specific meanings in various different religio-cultural contexts. Sita, Draupadi, Ahilya, Ravana, Ram, Vibhishana etc. have come to acquire stereotypical meanings with the passage of time wherein some have positive connotations while some others connote negatively. However, despite all popular understanding of a

particularly associated meaning, there has been an undercurrent of understanding these names in their essence, thus dissociating them from their mainstream interpretation(s). This demythification could be a simple dissociation, deconstruction, subversion or reconstruction. Mahashweta Devi (1990), in her short story, "Draupadi" presents an interesting subversion and reconstruction of the Draupadi myth. A short story by K. B. Sreedevi (1993), "The Stone Woman" subverts the Ahalya myth.

One such name is the Arabic name "Yazeed" which literally refers to the increase, growth, and enhancement. As such, the name has a positive reference. Historically though, it stands for Yazeed bin Mu'awiyq, commonly known as Yazeed I, was the second Caliph of Ummayyada Caliphate and his caliphate was marked by the death of Muhammad's grandson Husain and the start of the crisis known as the second fitna. Yazeed's accession to throne was not accepted by some prominent

Muslim leaders including Husain resulting in bloody clashes. When Husain, his family and followers tried to migrate to Kuta, now in Syria, where nobleman had promised safety and support to them, they were intercepted on the command of Yazid I, by an army of five thousand soldiers who blocked their access to the water of the river Euphrates, leaving Husain and his camp followers including women and children parched and thirsty. On the 10 day of the infamous battle, known as Karbala, Husain and his followers were ruthlessly, almost sadistically murdered leaving an ugly scar on the collective memory of the Muslim history and thus, the name Yazid, who cut off and denied water to Husain and his followers and gave commands to kill him is recorded in the darkest letters. According to Gregory Maxwell Bruce:

Indeed, the name Yazeed typically functions as a metonymy for un-Islamic and tyrannical rule, and is contrasted with the righteous Husain, whose martyrdom symbolizes the rescuing of Islam from the unrighteous...In 'Yazid,' this has been grafted onto the landscape of Karimdad's world. That is, by implication, Hindustan threatens to become the army of Yazeed, thereby turning Karimdad's village into Husain's camp.

Known for his highly unorthodox views, Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-55) comes out with fresh interpretations of the otherwise worn-out topic i.e. partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The present paper endeavours to highlight Manto's allegiance to the larger humanistic agenda, propagated by creative writers of all times and climes. If Shakespeare, through his Romeo and Juliet, brings the reader round on the significance of the inherent features and rather insignificance of name, Manto too makes a 'blasphemous' attempt at highlighting the (in)significance dissociating a name from its historical or mythical stereotype(s) in his "Yazeed". The story, while recording the stock reactions of the partition-mangled inhabitants of an unnamed village in the newly-carved Pakistan at the Indo-Pakistan border, acquires new shades of meanings associated with the title. Yazeed, who has traditionally and mythically been perceived as the

cutter of the canal thus depriving Hussain and his followers of water, ultimately becomes the harbinger of change for the better, with Karim Dad envisioning his newly born son to herald an era of peace and prosperity amidst the news of Nehru's plans to divert the course of the rivers, thus stopping their flow into Pakistan and depriving them water exactly like the mythical Yazeed I.

The setting of the story is significant in the sense that the village has no name whereas Manto has the reputation of naming the places in his stories. Toba Tek Singh, Tithwal etc. are some locales that have got itched on the psyche of Manto's readers. In this case, however, Manto chooses to keep the locale unnamed. The story is set almost a year after partition. The stereotypical, trauma-ravaged villagers have not yet come out of the trauma of the brutal killings, rapes and devastation on the part of the enemies. Against this backdrop, Manto delineates the character of Karim Dad, the protagonist who, in spite of his personal loss – his father was savagely butchered by marauders – reacts with composure and courage. He is "a man who faced the traumatic events of partition as a man" (125).

Karim Dad's courage and valour in seeing through the critical times of partition sets him apart from his fellow villagers. Manto captures the scene artistically wherein Karim Dad's passive resistance is worth noticing:

There had been more incidents like this in the village. Hundreds of young and old man had been butchered; several girls abducted, some brutally raped. Karim Dad too had lost his father who faced the marauders single handedly and whose corpse he had carried on his shoulders and laid to rest in grave... (125).

The 'stoicism' of Karim Dad is contrasted with that of the other villagers who continue to mourn the death of their loved ones and find themselves in perpetual grief. Karim not only gets over his personal grief, but also pulls out his long-time love Jaina to gloss over the loss of her brother, Fazl Ilahi who too had lost his life fighting the rioters. Obviously, his approach to life is simple and yet

profound. He “wishes to put Partition and its violence behind him and move on with his life” (Bruce). It however does not mean that he simply wants to forget the past; rather he chooses not to mourn it. While persuading Jaina, his choice of words is significant: “Look, it has been a whole year since the dead were shrouded and buried. Even they are terribly tired of all this keeping and wailing over them. Let us go of it, my dear. Who knows how many more deaths we’re fated to see in this life. Save some tears for the future” (126).

By this exercise of independence of will, Karim is able to jolt not only Jaina but the villagers too out of their state of mourning. The grief-laden villagers too do not find themselves in a position to resist firmly as they themselves are fed up of the prolonged mourning. Karim Dad marries Jaina with customary fanfare, thus bringing life in the village back to normalcy.

But the true mettle of his character comes to the fore at the village *Chaupal* where the rumours of imminent invasion by India and cutting off the river water flowing from India into Pakistan are rife. Earlier at home, he has already laughingly brushed off the trembling of his tender-hearted wife on this issue. He fidgets uneasily as everyone in the *Chaupal* is abusing India and its Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal. But when Chaudhry Natthu starts hurling obscenities on India, he clears his throat and yells asking him not to call anyone names and when the Chaudhary in a tone, soaked in sarcasm, counters his objections and asks whether they should love the enemy, he firmly says: “No, Chaudhary, I am not asking you to love them. I only ask that they shouldn’t be called bad names” (131). Here Karim Dad appears to be a man of thoughtful action as against his fellow villagers who blurt out their rage using invectives for the enemy. He with his arguments is able to not only win over the villagers but also shows a deep understanding of the issue as is clear from the following description: This matter concerns tens of thousands, indeed, hundreds of thousands... Such matters require a lot of deep thought and deliberation... to devise a solid plan of action. They cannot divert in one day. It will take them years” (131)

Karim is realistic enough to understand that one cannot and should not expect mercy from an enemy as the designated enemy would not also expect any mercy from them. He emphatically says:

Why do you only remember that he is our enemy, and conveniently forget that we are just as much his enemy? If we had in power, we would act his food and water supply too. If the enemy is able and about to do that we should certainly have to think of a way to counter his more. And futile name calling won’t do that. (133)

With these thoughts crowding his mind, goes home only to receive glad tidings from the mid-wife Bakhtu about Jaina delivering a baby boy. As he jubilantly enters the room and lovingly tweaks the new-born baby’s cheeks, he joyfully ejaculates: “Oh, my Yazeed!” A shocked Jaina screams in horror; sculpted on her mind is the image of the ‘villain’ of Islam – Yazeed. She knew the story how he cut off the water of the river Euphrates in order to parch Husyan, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Unconvinced, she manages to say: “What are you saying, Kaimay – Yazeed?” (ibid)

At this point comes the climax of the story; Karim says in a grim tone: “It is not necessary that he should turn out to be the same Yazeed, the one who cut off the water; this one would make it flow again” (134). Symbolically, this new Yazeed would reverse the flow of enmity and the water, in symbol of life and hope will flow in the started and parched lives of the people of the enemy country. This act of unorthodox naming of his son signals Karim Dad’s rejection of the enmity model put forward by the political leaders and he resists it by naming his child Yazeed. Bruce rightly comments in this regard: “With the invocation of Yazeed, the archetypal enemy of Islam, Karimdad’s critique of enmity comes to its conclusion. In naming his son Yazeed, Karimdad hopes to change the meaning of Yazeed, and by extension the category of ‘enemy,’ and in so doing to alter the course of history” (Bruce).

Manto, thus, projects a fresh, alternative perspective to perceive the otherwise complicated reality by looking at human situation in an objective and dispassionate manner. His protagonist Karim

Dad emerges as a vibrant character with a life and will of his own. His perspective might appear to be bizarre to some; it however, has the conviction of a man who can think out-of-the-box and offer an entirely new view on problems concerning all. Through him, Manto successfully dissociates the historical, religious myth associated with the name Yazeed and having done that, he reconstructs it by presenting the newly-born Yazeed as a harbinger of hope and harmony. Manto suggests that the long standing feeling of animosity can be countered and come over only with such broad mindset only. Whereas the popular, mainstream perspective puts emphasis on the ideology of hatred and violence, Karim Dad's stance calls for harmony and mutual understanding at a covert level, though overtly, he continues to consider India as an 'enemy' nation. To quote Bruce again: "Karimdad's countercultural refusal to observe conventional naming practices leads to his refusal to name India as 'enemy,' and, consequently, to his refusal to implicate himself in the discourse of enmity and the violence that it engenders."

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