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THE THEME OF LITERARY REALISM IN SAADAT HASAN MANTO'S SHORT  
STORY LICENCE

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**Abstract**

The story "Licence" has been written by Saadat Hassan Manto which was later translated by Atish Taseer in a book called "Manto: Selected Stories". Through these short stories he has not only acknowledged women empowerment but simultaneously showcased the horrific reality of women oppression in the society. This story "Licence" is about an Indian girl who like most other women has been a victim of the patriarchal society. In this story the writer clearly shows how women were seen by the society. Although the story is a tragic love story where after her husband's death the girl feels pressured by men chasing to get the attention, treating her like something to be possessed and needs to be sheltered by men in order to live a personal life. But from the beginning when their love story began, her opinion was neglected and was forced to act like the pre-conceptual norm set by the society. Anything opposite to those norms were subjected to shame and disgrace according to the story and unfortunately the current reality. This paper pin points how the views mentioned by Saadat Hassan Manto in one of his short stories called "Licence", is still the everyday scenario of most women.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, hegemony, women empowerment, equality, sexual objectification, submission and expectations.

**Introduction**

The ideology of patriarchy where men should be the only decision maker in a family or society probably dates back to the beginning of the human existence as there is no exact answer about when these believe system actually started. Although, it's an old concept, its execution can still be seen in the modern era where at one part people are trying to shift the world to another planet and on the other part, there are people busy oppressing the women in every way possible. This is a common phenomenon in almost every part of the world. First world countries like the United States of America which has shown the world the impossible possible (sending humans to the moon), also happens to have the highest number of rapes in the world. Whether it is technological invention or oppressing the opposite gender (women) America has always been among the top lists. Another example similar to the US

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would be China, where girls over mid-twenties are pressurized to get married or else they are being labeled as the “leftover women”.

Even though countries like them have high literacy rates but how often people are introduced to the concept of equality in terms of free living and decision making is still a question. Almost 90% of the world population thinks that men are strong and women are not. This stereotypical concept grew from religious scriptures which described how physically strong men are and turned into a misconception that women should be under men protection for survival because they are naïve. People would not question this believe in fear of argument, being considered strange or simply withdrawn from the society. One of the most common concept is marrying of girls as young as just hitting puberty because they are considered to be a burden and an expense as described by Khaled Hosseini in his book “A thousand splendid suns” (Mariam and Rasheed).

Another concept is that girls are often considered to be weak which needs a masculine support to protect her from other predator just like the case of “Laila and Rasheed” in the book “A Thousand Splendid Suns”. Just like that the theme of the story “Licence” is also developed on the patriarchy ideology where a girl named

Nesti has to fight all sorts of temptation that men around her society had because she decided to live alone after her husband (Abu) died from TB in a prison. Moreover, the story depicts the concept of hegemony masculinity and sexual objectification simply because people (men) felt threatened by her work.

**Plot, setting and literary devices used in the story**

Now if we look at the setting of the story, it is clear that the story took place at the city named Gujarat located in India. The protagonist Nesti was a village girl who happens to visit her relatives in the city where while going back to her family she met Abu. To be exact the inciting incident began when she wanted to hire his coach to go to the station (teshan) where her family was waiting. Being the only protagonist she had to deal with all the antagonistic force (should be submissive to men by all means) from the society all by herself. According to the description, Nesti is a typical Gujarati Indian girl who dressed as all other traditional women which is hooped ear rings, long kurta (shirt), skirt and a shawl to cover her head and body.

The story begun to develop when he expressed his feelings and she decided to elope and get married. However, the story is seen to take another leap when Abu was accused of kidnapping and sent to jail for marrying a minor without her father’s

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consent. But the story took its peak when Abu dies in the prison due to TB and she was completely left on her own. This is when the excitement hits the peak because it showed how she fought the preset mind set of working from home and convinced herself to do something outside the boundary. However, the story started to fall when her license got revoked simply for being a woman and she agreed to work at the bazaar because that is what people expect her to do as a single woman (denouement). On the other hand, the story did not have a resolution as she was oppressed to agree to things she would not do especially after she made up her mind to empower herself which was unacceptable by others.

**Changes in Nesti's character after the death of her husband, how she was before, the beliefs she holds and how it affected her later**

As we read through the story we can see that she would dress as the typical Gujarati girls and would wear the traditional dresses. She too probably believed in the patriarchal society and accepted the fact that men should control, take care of women and that women should submit to men too (gender hegemony). This can be traced back to the rising action where Abu was holding and persuading her to accept him without even asking whether she has a consent or not. In her defense, she could have said something to stop him but as the cliché goes if a woman is touched

by a man she is no longer considered to be chaste. According to the religious sentiment no woman should get close to men before marriage. Also she was a village girl which means that those beliefs were inbuilt in her.

As the concept of hegemony would suggest, she (subordinate) accepted the fact that her dominant (Abu) holds the right to tease and oppress her to marry a stranger. She also showed her submissive nature by spending her savings and giving her only gold earrings to the prison guard to ensure his wellbeing at the prison. However, she tried her best to change her perception about how women too have the right to decide what they want to do to earn money for survival. But her dreams and belief system soon shattered when she got to hear the position an independent single woman holds in the eyes of the educated men of the society. In the story she was denied to run her coach as she was promoting women empowerment which was questioning other men's capability. Her license was seized and she was shown the derogative position an empowered woman holds in a patriarchal society. Hence, she had to bury her feelings and accept the place the society held for her for the temerity of asking for a respectable and independent life.

**Evidence of patriarchal beliefs**

Now if we focus on the concept of patriarchal belief, we can find plenty of evidence in the story. Abu's attitude toward her knowing she cannot react much

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since she is girl and also being quite stubborn to get her is a proof of that. Also during his time in the prison and death hours instead of persuading her to take control of the coach he instructed her to collect money as rent from his friend shows he wants her to be under the shadow of a man even when he is not around. Secondly, her father sending her husband to jail even after seeing his daughter happy is another proof of that ideology. Generally, fathers with this view find it hard to accept their daughter getting married on their own just like Nesti's dad. Also she was technically a minor when she got married (16/17 years) so this gave him a strong reason to take legal action. His dominance was yet seen when she decided to live alone but eventually he had to give up against her will power. Another example would be Abu's friends who would only come to help her with the motive to remarry. Because men in those culture considers women as objects that needs a possessor.

**Implication of having a patriarchal society**

Patriarchy not only showcased the control and authority over one another but promoted the idea of sexual objectification because soon after her husband's death people from her neighborhood would break in to sexually oppress her. Also she would be stared when she went out to work or for a walk. Normally by law municipals are supposed to be fair and beneficial to people

irrespective to their economic class or gender. But in this case she was clearly said to join the brothel by the people who holds the highest authority in the city simply because she decided to be independent. To them women is some kind of object desired by men and hence do things that satisfies them. Also women should do things which are different from manly work so that their capability is not questioned. This shows the inverse relation that education has with the way we think. Unless people's perception toward gender bias would change education would bring the least improvement in the society.

**The unfortunate similarity of Abu's character with other men with a difference in the method of imposing authority**

In the story we have seen different types of men each trying to get her. Unfortunately Abu happens to fall in that category because Abu made up his mind to get her as soon as he saw her in his coach. He did not even hesitate to pass mischievous comments thinking his client might get angry and leave. Rather he opened his mind fearlessly without even caring what the decision would be. Also grabbed her hands without permission which in such a society is very shameful for women. Moreover, he too wanted her stay home live with the rental income his friend-Dino would give her. This nature is very common in today's society where women

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are expected to do only house chores and live with the money their husband or man of the house brings. Abu was no different. Like all others he saw her as something he should own and did not hesitate to seize the opportunity. But unlike others he was not rejected because his persuading to oppress was so subtle that barely looked like he was showcasing the dominating nature.

**Conclusion**

In short, what we can say is that this antagonistic force is an everyday scenario. Maybe now independent women are not forced to do any derogatory work. Lots of opportunities have opened up for them, yet the thrust to be the Alpha to dominate a women even in a subtle way still exist. Women are still stared at like they are some kind of mystical creature from a different planet. Women have to adjust themselves just the way these stereotypical people wanted them to be on a constant basis. Just like Nesti, women too feel eyes glued on them while they are at work, walking on the

street simply because they choose to be themselves. It was clear from the beginning that she was surrounded by the patriarchal beliefs but she got to experience its strength when her had to kill her dreams at the end and act like how others would expect a single women to do in that society.

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