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LOVE AND THE OTHER: POSTCOLONIAL DISPLACEMENT IN KRITIKA PANDEY'S "THE GREAT INDIAN TEE AND SNAKES"

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ABSTRACT

Kritika Pandey's short-form tale "The Great Indian Tee and Snakes" is an intense literary excavation of how postcolonial dislocation and communal hierarchy get enacted brutally in the small, trivial area of everyday life. This article conducts a detailed analysis of the text, taking postcolonial and feminist theories as its guides, and claims that Pandey makes the home a major battle field for the struggle between ideologies. The analysis not only examines the objects of symbolism—the separate tea cups, the *bindi*, and the skullcap—but also the narrative techniques of anonymity and a distanced third-person perspective, and thereby shows how the story portrays community strife and male supremacy as internalized traits which control the desire and push the politics of purity. The plot investigates whether love and individual power can act like resistance in these regimens; and it finally posits them as extremely fragile yet politically significant mixed up with the tragic fate of love. By putting the microcosm of a village tea stall in the context of the macrocosm of postcolonial India, Pandey's story unfolds the artefacts of partition and colonial "divide and rule" as still determining, in some sense, the contrasts between life and death in today's world.

Keyword: Postcolonial displacement, for bidden love, communal tensions, symbolic objects.

INTRODUCTION

Kritika Pandey's 2020 Common wealth Short Story Prize-winning work "The Great Indian Tee and Snakes" is an extremely concise narrative as it focuses

on just one incident, one glance, and that too, a forbidden glance to distil the great violent and fluid post-colonial Indian society. The Jharkhand village where the story takes place is silent, illicitly connected to the two unnamed teenagers—a Hindu girl denoted with her black *bindi* and a Muslim boy marked by his white skullcap—against the setting of a tea stall managed by the girl's father. Their uncertain, wordless love is fated to end with the boy's awful death in a mob attack that is a consequence of the communal violence. However, Pandey's narrative is more of a dissection of the circumstances that render romance impossible than an account of the romance plot. With the creative use of symbolic objects, a disciplined narrative technique of anonymity and detachment, and a sharp focus on the rituals of everyday life, Pandey not only describes but also demonstrates how postcolonial dislocation—the psychological and social alienation caused by historical partitions and hierarchies—is not a historical relic but a living, breathing force. This force manifests itself through communal strife, female subjugation, and a politics of purity that turns everyday actions into ideological enforcement sites. This paper posits that the story of Pandey depicts the home and the ordinary as the main stage for the postcolonial conflict, where love and personal power rise as tender but strong, the forms of resistance against the systemic oppression even when they are eventually overrun by it. By incorporating a methodological procedure of close reading of the text located within postcolonial and feminist theoretical frameworks, this investigation will clarify how Pandey turns the microcosm of the tea stall into an exposé.

In order to comprehend the heavy social commentary of Pandey's short story, it must be placed within the intersecting discourses of postcolonial and feminist theory. Postcolonial theory, which has been developed by scholars like Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, acts like a robust lens for diagnosing the remaining impacts of the colonial era, most notably the strategy of "divide and rule" which made religious and communal identities a means for administrative control. The historical othering process did not end with independence but was instead internalized, transforming into self-imposed social codes. Bhabha's notion of the 'unhomely'—where the intimate, domestic sphere turns out to be a confusing one for public, political trauma to be dramatized—fits particularly well to Pandey's tale (Bhabha 9). The tea stall, a typical Indian place where one can feel at home and at the same time meet others, turns out to be

'unhomely' exactly because here public biases harshly control private interactions. Additionally, Spivak's infamous inquiry, "Can the subaltern speak?" resonates here not in terms of a geopolitical scenario, but rather in a personal manner (Spivak 104). The girl and the boy are subalterns inside their own community's power structures—voiceless due to sex, religion, and age. Their lack of capacity to express their love emphasizes how control is exercised through combined power systems.

Feminist theory, being the most important support to this, reveals the gender discrimination aspect of this situation in particular. The girl's movement, longing and self-definition are all to a great extent determined by the laws of patriarchy. In her writing, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who takes the West's feminist position on this issue, proposes that the oppression of women in postcolonial societies should be analyzed through the lenses of "gender, race, class, and nation" (Mohanty 337). The girl is neither gender oppressed nor religion oppressed, but rather they together form a deadly combination that suppresses her. The girl's internalized patriarchy—her instinctive knowledge of the rules governing her body and heart—shows how power operates most effectively when its subjects enforce it upon themselves. The story's foundation is formed by this intersectional oppression that renders a communal or gendered interpretation, thus, inadequate. The fusion of these theories allows us to interpret the tea stall not merely as a place of civil conflict but as a patriarchal space where gender and religion are allied to impose silence and obedience.

RESEARCH METHODS

The principal part of the presented analysis has to do with qualitative literary criticism and involves the method of close reading. Close reading means a detailed examination of the story's linguistic, symbolic, and structural features for the purpose of unraveling its difficult meanings. The method is applied in two interconnected phases: first, a symbolic analysis of key objects and rituals (the cups, the *bindi*, the firewood) aimed at interpreting their socio-political messages; and second, a narrative analysis of point of view, character portrayal, and time frame to grasp the impact of form on the reader's experience of being displaced and alienated. This text analysis is always backed up with the theoretical frameworks aforementioned, thus making a conversation between the story's internal logic and the established critical discourse on postcoloniality and gender. Also, a small comparative approach is adopted,

through which the existing literature on the story (such as Mina Ma's work on anonymity or Kaninika Mishra's critique of re-orientalism) is referenced to position and sharpen the arguments original to this paper. The combination of close reading, theoretical application, and scholarly engagement constitutes the main methodological approach.

SYMBOLIC OBJECTS: THE EVERYDAY AS A BATTLE GROUND

The extraordinary strength of Pandey's art comes from her power to give history and ideology the burden of being imprinted on the most common, most ordinary things. The objects here are not only immersed in the ideological narrative but also wield power by reinforcing a social order based on postcolonial dislocation. One of the strongest connotations is the divided tea service. The father's conscious act of giving the Muslim child a stainless-steel cup while others are served in ceramic is nothing but an enactment on a smaller scale of communal superiority. The man's explanation—"Steel can be washed with soap and water… but you can't wash a *keema*-eater's saliva off of clay"—converts a daily transaction into a ritual of othering (Sadhwani). The "*keema*-eater" is no more than an impurity, his very bodily essence is considered unclean. This reasoning is a reflection of the colonial and casteist politics of purity, where the social pyramid is upheld by fears of both physical and ritual contamination. The steel cup is not just a tea mug but also a prejudice holder; it makes a visible social boundary. This event at the tea stall, which is a representative of public life, shows that the communal tensions are not just about massive riots but also about daily, ostensibly harmless interactions where such tensions are reproduced and normalized. It makes apparent the case of postcolonial displacement as a constant, low-grade alienation where one is always reminded of their "place" through the objects they are permitted to touch.

The *bindi* and skullcap are metonymic symbols that have the whole of a rigidly prescribed identity represented by a part. The characters are never referred to by their names; instead, they are "the girl with the black *bindi*" and "the boy in the white skullcap." This reduction to religious iconography brings to the fore the fact that their individual subjectivity has been erased by the communal category. The *bindi*, originally a symbol of auspiciousness and marital status for Hindu women, in this case, becomes a brand of gendered ownership and restriction. The girl's awareness of its meaning is direct and deep-seated: "Her

father doesn't need to tell her that girls with black *bindis* are not supposed to feel this way about boys in white skull caps. She knows" (Sadhwani). This awareness signifies the triumph of the patriarchal and communal socialization; the law is not imposed from outside but lives within her. Likewise, the skullcap designates the boy as the eternal other, an overt target in a majoritarian setting. Thus, their attraction is not merely between two persons but rather between two politicized symbols, thereby turning their love story into an unconscious uprising against the very norms that bind them.

The custom of gathering firewood represents the main conflict of the story between the everyday life and the hidden violence. The girl's task of gathering "twigs, leaves, bits of paper, cloth, and empty Lipton cartons before setting them on fire" depicts an ordinary existence (Sadhwani). However, in the story, this pile of combustible material is a horrifying prediction of events to come. It is the very opposite of the social powder keg of communal bias that is now going on and of the actual pyre where the boy is to be burnt. The writer has brilliantly connected the Hindu girl's domestic duty—preserving the fireplace—to the public violence being done to the Muslim body. This connection uncovers Bhabha's notion of "unhomely" with savage accuracy: the materials that make up the home are the same ones that can bring about death. The custom depicts how the potential for historical and communal violence is interwoven with the fabric of the daily life, waiting for a spark.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE: FORM AS A MIRROR OF DISPLACEMENT

Pandey's thematic concerns are echoed in her careful choices of form which mirror the experience of estrangement and ethical indecision on a structural level. The lack of names for the characters is a very powerful narrative element. Critic Mina Ma points out this method of character representation and observes that the characters "represent communal and collective norms as well as social identities instead of being individual personages" (Ma). The "girl" and "the boy" are nothing but stereotypes but their suffering is made to be a common one in the South Asian setting. The reader's attention is thus drawn from psychological aspects of the individuals to the determining factors of the structure. The reader is not placed in the position of one character but rather is encouraged to see the working of a system that obliterates uniqueness. The anonymity of characters also serves to underline their subaltern status; they are defined according to their (Hindu, Muslim, female, male) rather than

their personal traits, which is similar to the operation of systemic oppression that classifies and silences people by their groups.

The effect is further intensified due to the distant, third-person perspective. The voice over here has a clinical and disembodied character and gives only a little bit of access to the innermost thoughts of characters. When violence breaks out, it is represented with horrendous objectivity where the boy appears "like a blown tomato and dead" (Sadhwani). The comparison is very graphic but the presentation is very detached. There are no narrative hand-wringing, no moral commentaries. This estrangement of style is serving a critical function. It does not want to glorify the tragedy but rather present the violence as a commonplace and even unavoidable result of the social order. The reader is put into the position of a shocked, powerless witness which reflects the way communal violence often plays out— as a sudden, horrific eruption that is at the same time systemic and routine. The narrative voice itself turns into a symbol of the displacement it portrays being emotionally detached from the trauma it recounts.

Moreover, the linguistic hybridity—as demonstrated by Pandey's use of Urdu terms such as "*keema*" in English—is a powerful postcolonial literary device. It not only resists the imposition of one language over the other but also supports the narrative with a particular cultural stamp. The subtlety of the text is that it is a claim of a localized, multilingual reality. Critics like Kaninika Mishra voice the concern that such details might lead to "commodify[ing] Indian culture" for a Western gaze, but their main role is to express identity and uniqueness from the inside (Mishra). The changing of codes makes the reader conscious that the argument is going on in a very specific social world with its own languages and prejudices, and not in an abstract space.

LOVE AND AGENCY: THE FRAGILE COUNTER-NARRATIVE

The flicker of love or attraction between the girl and the boy defines the only personal agency in this symbol system and narrative limitation. It is a bond that remains unexpressed, almost at the level of the unconscious—a continuum of looks and subtle acknowledgments. Their mutual glance is a non-verbal and universal language of unity in a society that separates people in every conceivable manner (by using different cups, wearing different clothes, and even speaking different languages). This makes it a radical action, even though it is doomed. It is an extremely weak and hesitant refusal

to view the other as a mere symbol and instead to realize a human potential.

The girl's agency is very complicated and at the same time very limited. Instead of being expressed through open rebellion, it is shown in very soft and delicate ways like little gestures of acknowledgment and minor transgression: looking into his eyes, the whiff of silent understanding. She is able to express herself through her power of perception: feeling something she "is not supposed to feel." This brings to light the feminist dilemma in postcolonial situations: agency is frequently not a huge, liberating act but rather a very small, internal space of dissent that has to be carved out from within the overwhelming structures. Her fate is that this internal space eventually gets invaded and destroyed by the external public violence that takes away her beloved. The boy's death is not merely a murder but the total destruction of that possibility, the harsh reaffirmation of the political over the personal.

CONCLUSION

Kritika Pandey's "The Great Indian Tea and Snakes" manages to condense its story to the core idea. The short story format is not a tool for simplification but even more for the masterfully complex critique of present-day India. The author reveals through her story that postcolonial displacement is not an abstract notion but rather a daily and ordinary experience which is kept alive by rituals of purity, gendered codes, and communal segregation. The tea stall is thus a miniature nation where the divisions of history are served with each cup.

The author's primary narrative techniques—namely anonymity, detachment, and linguistic hybridity—are not just a matter of style for the story but they play an essential role in its meaning, formally imitating the alienation and systemic oppression they portray. The flickering love amidst such a stronghold of evil and despair resembles the counter-narrative of human agency and connection that is so fragile and its extinction is all the more painful. Pandey does not offer easy consolation nor does she give out hope. On the contrary, she gives a crisp, stark, and penetrating diagnosis: the private realm is always at the mercy of the public, political tempest, and the past haunts like a fire that is still alive, supported by the everyday small sticks of prejudice and fear. The narrative remains a strikingly powerful testimony to the capacity of literature to witness how the enormous, abstract forces of history are drawn, eternally and often fatally, onto the tiniest parts of human life and craving that are missed by most.

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