

## **Body, Space and Curfew: Sa'adat Hassan Manto's "Mozelle" in the Light of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space***

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### **Abstract**

"Each living body is space and it also produces that space" (Lefebvre 170) is what the paper intends to explore and analyze through "Mozelle" (1951), by Pakistan based short-story writer Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) of which the event of partition forms a backdrop setting. The paper fuses Lefebvre's (French Marxist philosopher) *The Production of Spaces* (1974) and Foucault's "Body" and argues especially how female body reconstructs itself through different space evolving in a conscious self-identity within his short story. It also researches on the ways bodies function as the spaces of alienation which regulate and transform the three characters Mozelle, Trilochan and Kirpal Kaur as autonomous living bodies performing religion and constructing their bodies against the traditional culture. These are forcibly woven into a critical frame to argue and coalesce with the re-reading of "Mozelle." The paper highlights how bodies are spaces of alienation and underline the presentation of varied forms of social relations to reconstruct and contain the female body, especially Manto's sex worker in its self-identity.

**Keywords:** Manto, Lefebvre, Mozelle, Bodies, Space.

The idea of representation of body and space in Sa'adat Hasan Manto's "Mozelle" has been interpreted and re-interpreted to focus on the role of spatiality of partition. It reads the various acts and movements of bodies moving in and out of the present communal violence which surrounds itself with its characters. The paper critically examines "Mozelle" by focusing on how Foucault's body together with Lefebvre's space puts perspectives on the conscious idea of moving spaces and evolved bodies of partition. "Mozelle" is the story of three characters, Mozelle, Trilochan and Kirpal Kaur who live through the partition and its pain, horror and violence on their lives. The characters move in a space of transaction between their social roles as

segregated from the various gender roles which are forced on them. Partition which sets the timeline of the story is depicted as a happening event. The concepts of body and space first work as a leitmotif surrounding itself within alienation and later evolve against the patriarchal issues that seek to put perspectives of self-identity. The setting of the short story is the cityscape of Bombay and its buildings which are mentioned throughout the story. The timeline of the narrative starts with Trilochan on the terrace of the Advani Chambers which lets him to evolve in his free self in parallel to the suspended air of partition. The signs of the violent city clashes against the image of transparent Trilochan adapting himself in an alienation from the other subjects in his space:

The sky was completely clear but hung like an enormous ash-colored tent over all of Bombay. For as far as he could see, lights burned through the night. It seemed to Trilochan as though countless stars had fallen from the heavens and had attached themselves to the buildings, which in the dark of the night loomed like enormous trees around which the fallen stars glimmered like fireflies. (Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

Henri Lefebvre a French Marxist theorist in his work *The Production of Space* (1974) talks about social space and the different approaches to producing it. According to Lefebvre, in the production of space humans do not only produce or create social relations and use-values, but in the process the creation of social space engages in more special units, extending itself to two binaries of social space and physical space. He considers "each living body is space and has its space and it also produces that space" (Lefebvre 170). Thus, the terrace of the Advani Chambers is not only a free space away from the divided territories of partition but is a space where in his four years of absentia is now spatially alienated and is recreated in his own glorification of existing in a Sikh body.

Trilochan had grown used to the electric fan's artificial breeze, which oppressed his very existence: every morning he got up feeling as though someone had been pummeling him all night long. But now he felt rejuvenated, as the morning's fresh breeze washed over his body. He had come up to the terrace feeling anxious, but after only

half an hour the tension had eased. He could now think clearly.  
(Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

The terrace comprises Trilochan's existence as a living body which is both formed and constructed from his space and his relation with religion, as his memory traces back to his relation with Kirpal Kaur and her family who control his close relation with the Sikh community. In contrast to the city of Bombay, his experience with Kirpal Kaur exfoliates the earthy experiences of their relationship which is denoted by the essence of belonging to the same community. Manto allows love to settle in the discourses of the same religion through a sense of the collective fear from the raging Muslims and the mob shouting slogans for their demanding bodies. In the village, the bodies exist in the attire of the religion and witness a sudden revival from the cultural memory.

She had a slim figure, as if she still hadn't filled out. She had small breasts, which would have been more pleasant if plumper. In comparison to average Sikh country girls, her skin was fair, more like the color of raw cotton, and her body was glossy like the texture of Mercerized clothes. She was extremely shy.

(Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

Lefebvre in his analysis of the historical development of urban life and a continuing concern expresses the existence of our being in the world, but also as an inevitable source of alienation (Lefebvre). This explained the image of existence according to Lefebvre embodies Kirpal Kaur who is doubly alienated both from the perspectives of her body and from the codes of the Sikh religion it captures. Manto represents the character of Kirpal Kaur as that of an alienated Sikh woman also as an object for men like Trilochan to gaze in the village hauled by the other men belonging to different communities. A little later in the narration her identity is constructed from the clutches of distant memory residue, Trilochan corresponds new meanings of his love and to the image of Kirpal Kaur. Differing it from the normal image of Kirpal Kaur who had a "slim figure," he alienates himself with the thoughts and allows himself to the cultural signs of emerging bodies and spaces of each other. In view of representation Stuart Hall, the famous theorist says that "Representation itself is a biased activity. However, it is important to study representations as

they contain new knowledges, new identities and new meanings" (Hall 25).

Manto's social codes depict Trilochan's distant memory which travels through story's time-space through the living body of Kripal Kaur and seeks closure at the time he devours himself in the semantics of his love for Mozelle, a Jewish woman. As a toolkit of reviving memory, Trilochan recollects two women and their roles to produce a space for his own masculinity. The story follows accounts of Mozelle, a Jewish sex worker settled in the Advani chambers living on the second floor is the main focus. Trilochan had just moved into the chambers and had just met Mozelle. As the second part of the story opens:

He crossed paths with Mozelle the very day he got an apartment on the second floor of the Advani Chambers through the doings of one of his Christian friends. At first, she seemed frighteningly crazy. Her bobbed brown hair was in irremediable disarray, and her lipstick, cracked in spots, clung to her lips like clotted blood. She was wearing a loose white gown whose open collar revealed a generous view of her breasts, large and marked with blue veins. Her upper arms, which were bare, were covered with a dusting of extremely fine hairs as though she had just come from a beauty salon where during her haircut these hairs had fallen onto her arms to stick like crushed nuts on sweets. But more than anything, her lips held his attention: they weren't that thick, but she had smeared burgundy lipstick across them in such a way that they seemed as fat and as red as chunks of buffalo meat. (Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

There are turns of phrase selected for their arty manipulations, rather than communicative clarity, like a distinction "between true space and the truth of space" (397). The act of Trilochan's masculinity alienating the body of Mozelle, doesn't form itself in a true space rather involves itself within the truth of space that draws her reality through her attire and evokes the subject of her profession as a sex worker. However, different to the other gazes, Trilochan as a signifier of social practice desires Mozelle for her beauty and both strike to each other through the glimpse of each other's sexuality. This shows the gender of women as by-products of masculine spaces and their importance as commodified objects. Trilochan also misrecognizes Mozelle's Christian

indraprasth

boyfriends as her lovers and is strewn into jealousy. However, both are reluctant to leave each other. Veena Das argues in her work “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain”:

In the work of mourning in many societies it is the transactions between language and body, especially in the gendered division of labor, by which the antiphony of language and silence recreates the world in the face of tragic loss. (66-67)

Manto in the process of mourning of their relation exercises the “truth of space” and its relation to their religion into illustrations of scars and wounds on their bodies. The tragic loss of code of love between Mozelle and Trilochan is assured by dismissing the symbol of religious signs of Sikh beard. Das argues this mourning to be the transaction between Trilochan and Mozelle’s through Mozelle’s demand of removing his beard as the only sign of love. She expresses herself:

Mozelle pushed herself away. “When you cut your hair and shave.”

Trilochan was resigned to his fate. Without thinking, he said, “I’ll get it cut tomorrow.”

Mozelle began to do a tap dance. “You’re talking nonsense, Triloch. You’re not that courageous.”

Suddenly religion was the last thing on his mind. “You’ll see.”

“I *will* see,” Mozelle repeated. Quickly she came up to Trilochan, kissed him on his beard, and left, grimacing. (Manto, “Mozelle” 26)

The story “Mozelle” presents the character of Mozelle as a cynical subject to deter the inter-relations depicted within the story. Though being a by-product of her own profession, in reality she abandons her body and refuses to control her body and its multiple lovers. It is within her sexual territory aligned with her alienated self that she demands her missed identity and exemplifies her imagined lived space. Trilochan becomes her only way to identify herself back in the society which had exercised its power of alienation and is a reference to male sexuality. Mozelle thus becomes a representation of a sexual figure that manipulates herself as a power fantasy wherein she drives Trilochan against

his religion which he can't leave as it is his reality of and his "true space." It is who he is, a Sikh. His situation with Mozelle is clearly understood by looking at his own blurred image between his real and constructed self. In his real sense of identification, Trilochan associates himself with the cultural codes of his attires that Manto describes in his presentation of his character:

The first day after getting his hair cut, Trilochan didn't leave his apartment. The second day he sent a note to Mozelle through his servant saying he was sick and asking if she could come by for a moment. Mozelle came. Seeing Trilochan, she stopped short. "My darling Triloch!" she cried out before throwing herself onto him and kissing him so much that his face turned red from her lipstick. (Manto, "Mozelle" 26)

It is noticeable that Trilochan has lost his identity with his trimming down of the beard. The motifs of cultural sign of his beard in their relationship alienates him with the idea of reality. In the relationship of Trilochan and Mozelle, both of them fuse themselves in the space against their individuality and into the insult of their own religion. The continuous interventions of the outside world highlight their insecurities which in the narration is read through the dialogues concerning with religion and its transparency. Lefebvre calls for "a counter gaze" to "insert itself into spatial reality" (382). Manto places the scene of wedding in the outskirts of Pune and willingly shows how both had outgrown themselves out from their marked territories. It was in this desirous space of their marriage that Mozelle runs away to Deolali and deceives Trilochan from his value. This part ends where the reality of Trilochan is again abandoned. He is left into his own imaginary world of belonging to two different cultures and thus fails in producing the "truth of space" (Lefebvre) as a living body tormented in love. While Trilochan develops the sense of precise double alienation Mozelle takes advantages of her space by violating her own marriage producing for her a space of desire and a body of value grown tired from the traditional uses of religion. Furthermore, in the last part of the narration wherein the alleys surrounding by the cityscapes of Bombay are in the space of curfew is described through the lens of heterotopia that Foucault explains as:

Real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very

institution of society which are sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time represented, contested, and reversed sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. (Foucault 5)

Curfew is represented as a heterotopia space, an abnormal space wherein Manto's trinity meets and produces spaces of social revival and reconstruction of social reality. Curfew that is imposed in the neighborhood of Kirpal Kaur becomes a meeting point for two women who share their scars as alienated bodies surviving conflict in the communal violence of the partition. Mozelle who suffers to introduce herself to Kirpal Kaur becomes an alter reality of her life and thus escapes from the intimacy which both share with Trilochan in different time paradigm. The women produce their spaces of reconciliation and reinterpreting their bodies when Mozelle instructs Kirpal Kaur to remove her pants in the visible space of the masculine power around the society and later removes her white dress and remains naked both as a living and dead body. While the two Sikh bodies are saved from the ongoing violence of the mob, Trilochan identifies himself as a Muslim 'Karim' as his new identity given to him by Mozelle in the space of conflict and for his last belief in religion, his turban. This interplay of alienated bodies through the "true space" of religion discourses of love ends with the death of Mozelle wounded in her scars. She liberates herself from her own self-identity that evolves by creating a body of sexual politics of self-desire and value. Foucault argues:

A "political anatomy," which was also a "mechanics of power," was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so they may do one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus, disciplines produce subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies. (Foucault 138)

Manto's "political anatomy" here relates to Trilochan, a part of a large group of men bestiality upheaving riots in the community while as "docile body" are the female protagonists Mozelle and Kirpal Kaur of the short story including the other absent women which are present in absentia. Curfew, for a long time has constructed female docile bodies through the politics of it. Here in "Mozelle"

it acts as heterotopia of forbidden place and engages Mozelle in her own production of space as a free-spirited Jewish woman and gives her own spatial significance where from she is released through her death. While the other two living Sikh bodies allow themselves a position of flattering image of existence, Manto mourns the death of Mozelle in her textual space recreating a sense of her belonging. The gaze on the partition reoccurs in this story since the beginning and stretches to the end scene where the alleys are full with the violent mobs. As a living dead body Mozelle mourns for her alienated desires which she valued more than she valued her multi lovers who were devoted more to their religion. In "Mozelle," Manto recreates "truth of space" between body and speech, death and life, and offers his characters their own lens of social relations.

## II

Manto's other works that explore the existence of sex workers in their brothels located in the alleys of partition are different than "Mozelle." On the other hand, it explores these bodies from the spaces of religion. While the semiotics of their bodies read them as naked, Mozelle is without her attire, Trilochan removes his turban and is portrayed as castrated Sikh while as Kirpal Kaur performs her naked and exists as a living dead. The body serves as a critical figure too. The body takes its revenge, or at least calls for revenge—for example, in leisure space. It seeks to make itself known, to gain recognition, as 'generative.' It is Lefebvre's contribution to this endeavor, to the conception of the generative and creative social body—a phenomenological body (Kristen Simonsen). There is viciousness in the last intimate scene where the bodies have started to train for each other in alienation. Lefebvre asserts on the localized time or a temporalized place to further understand the process of production of space. This means the last scene of "Mozelle" has to be implored through the difference of spatial geography of the characters united together by the trope of narration. The starting of last part though starts with communal stigma for Trilochan's polarized identity:

They set off. Suddenly a man carrying a large brass basin on his head ran into Trilochan, and the basin fell. The man looked Trilochan up and down and realized Trilochan was a Sikh. Quickly, he reached for something inside his waistband, but Mozelle stumbled forward

as if in a drunken stupor and rammed into him. “Hey, what’re you doin?” she asked in a drunken voice. “You wanna hit your own brother? I’m gonna marry him.” Then she turned to Trilochan. “Karim! Pick up the basin and put it on this man’s head. . . . The man withdrew his hand from his waistband and leered lasciviously at Mozelle; then he went up to her and nudged her breasts with his elbow. “Enjoy yourself, lady. Enjoy yourself.” Then he picked up the basin and ran off down the road. (Manto, “Mozelle” 26)

Trilochan’s identity shifts to a Muslim name ‘Karim’ which is a positive assurance to his survival and existence. The living body of Mozelle, thus produces Lefebvre’s space for Trilochan in the resistance of many conflicted social relations. Identified Mozelle thus as a sex worker is finally violated and constructed from her female identity. Her need and desire of associating herself with a female body is evident through her signification of “rubbed her breasts” to feel a connection to herself: “Mozelle rubbed her breasts. ‘It wasn’t that bad. Shit happens. Come on, let’s go’ (Manto, “Mozelle” 26). Thus, it is only towards the end of the story, where Mozelle tries to introduce herself to Kirpal Kaur from her assurance of Trilochan’s presence Kirpal Kaur for the first time emerges out of her sociocultural restraints and becomes a public eye. The bodies engage into the languages of their personal scars and wound which transpose them into a collective community trauma. The moment of bodies as the sites of discourses related to the performative unconventional religion is relocated through the subversive space of hypervisibility of spatiality of partition. Trilochan offers Mozelle his turban as the most important and pure symbol for his religion revealing the scars and wounds on the body of Mozelle which illuminates her historiography rather than the invisible damage of the spatiality context of religion. As the narration traverses through the city in its end:

“Oh, damn it!” she said, and wiped her mouth with the back of her wrist. Then she turned to Trilochan. “All right, darling—bye bye. . . .”

Trilochan wanted to say something, but the words stuck in his throat.

Mozelle removed Trilochan’s turban. “Take it away—this religion of yours,” she said, and her arm fell dead across her powerful chest. (Manto, “Mozelle” 26)

Critiquing the various perspectives on living bodies during partition, Manto’s

"Mozelle" directs its attention to the formation of a conscious self-identity found in his characters. His characters as imaginations of living bodies of partition evolve within the communal violence, hatred and horror of the spaces existing. But apart from Mozelle's deep imaginations what appeals it, the tendency to represent space as microcosm of producing social relations those living inside it is also focused. While "Mozelle" questions the growing of individuals in a unique space it also portrays a mirror reflection of chaos, self-doubt and distrust as elements of partition on their face values. "Mozelle" by establishing a relation of space and body as sign and signifier subverts the role of body and religion as traditional values but offers them a growth within social relations. While "Mozelle" questions the idea of religion and self-identity, it also reflects the failed politics of imagined landmarks as the only acts of resistance to partition. The paper reads "Mozelle" through the lens of Foucault's body but attempts to go beyond the parameters of it to understand the wide array of spaces that co-exists in the readings of Manto and partition.

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