

A Thematic Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's Selected Short-Stories

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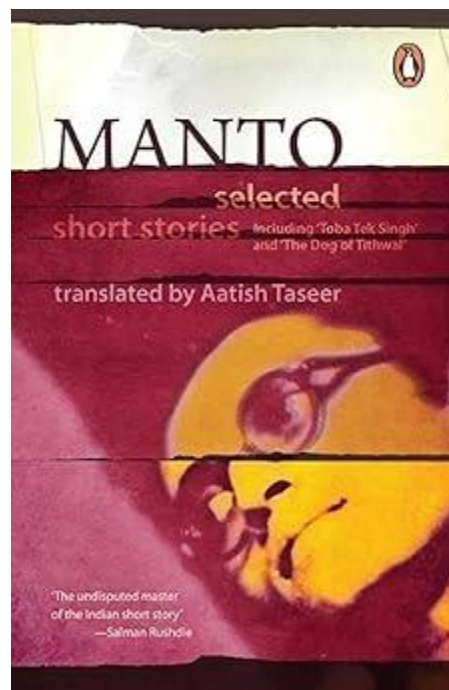
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Abstract

This research paper explores Manto's selected short stories i.e. **Toba Tek Singh, The Dog of Tetwal, Ten Rupees, Blouse, Khol Do, Licence, For Freedom, and Smell** from thematic perspectives. Manto deftly presents the issues of his time through the sentiments and experiences of his characters. The psychological impact of the partition, people's attitude towards animals after partition whether they belong to which country, how the hunger of stomach compels females to sell their body for survival, adultery, extramarital affairs, morality

influencing human relationships, hormonal changes during adolescent period resulting in emotional turmoil, communal riots resulting in bloodshed and loss of families, lust, fear, female victims' conditioning to surrender their body for survival to the lusty inhabitants, atrocities of the British on native Indians, freedom as a desired dream and female body as a sight for respite are some of the major concerns, Manto addresses in these texts. Thus, the writer unfolds the aftermaths of chaos, and unrest to the world while presenting the picture of society he lived in.

Keywords: Saadat Hasan Manto, short stories, psychological impact, helplessness, survival, bloodshed, human relationships, lust, atrocities.

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) is regarded as the greatest short-story writer of the Indian subcontinent. Born in 1912 Samrala in Punjab, British India, he became a radio and film scriptwriter, journalist, and short-story writer. Manto moved to Lahore in 1948 and died there in 1955. (Manto 159) Manto's inclination to minute observations and his lived experiences assist him in portraying a realistic picture of society with convincing narrative techniques.

Manto presents how the lunatics react to the government's decision to exchange the lunatics recently living in the mad houses of both the countries, i.e. India and Pakistan to their own countries after the partition of India, through the short-story **Toba Tek Singh**. Before this, all the citizens and prisoners were settled as per their wish of the country generally Hindus and Sikhs in India whereas Muslims were settled in the newly formed nation, Pakistan. Manto presents one case of a lunatic asylum in Lahore where the news of transfer becomes a hot topic of discussion. They attempt to understand the meaning of Pakistan and its location. All the lunatics are not mad actually, they were imprisoned for some other crimes, but presently all become mad due to overthinking and after living with lunatics for a long time. Manto writes about the protagonist, Bishan Singh who was in the asylum for fifteen years:

He slept neither during the day nor at night. It was rumoured among the wardens that in the fifteen long years, he had not slept, not even laid down, for a single moment. At most, he would occasionally rest against a wall.

His feet and legs were swollen up from standing up so long, but despite his discomfort, he refused to lie down. Whenever a discussion about India and Pakistan and the exchange of

lunatics began in the Asylum, he listened with keen interest. And, if ever, anybody asked his opinion, he gravely replied, '*opadh di gudh gudh di annexe di bedhayana di mung di daal* of the Pakistan government.' Later, however, in place 'of the Pakistan government', he had begun to say, 'of the Toba Tek Singh government' and would regularly ask the other inmates if they knew where Toba Tek Singh-his native land-was. (Manto 108)

Bishan Singh was a prosperous landlord before he turned mad. Although he never bathed in a month, when he knew instinctively about the arrival of some friend or relative, he used to inform the guard. On that particular day, he used to have a proper bath and would appear before the visitor afresh. From everyone, he would ask the same question about where Toba Tek Singh is and because of this, he is known popularly as Toba Tek Singh. Besides him, one lunatic troubled with the idea of India and Pakistan climbing onto a tree delivers a speech and says that he would love to live on that tree instead of these two countries. The other lunatic takes off his clothes and walks nude and one Muslim lunatic who has bath more than fifteen times declares him as Mohammad Ali.

The Dog of Tetwal brings out the cruelty of the National Armies of India and Pakistan on animals under the pretext of so-called patriotism. Manto satirizes the soldiers' attitude towards both countries i.e. playing with the emotions of a dog, first Indian army's efforts of befriending a stray dog, offering him biscuits to eat and hanging a board by writing 'Chapad Jhunjhun: this is an Indian dog' (Manto 175) on his neck with a rope and repeating the same pattern or behavior by replacing the words written on the boards with 'Sapad Sunsun: this is a Pakistani dog' (Manto 176) and thereafter, shooting the dog from their opposite camps. As the dog dies on the spot, Pakistani captain, Himmat Khan says in sadness, "Another martyr." Whereas Indian Corporal Harnam Singh while holding his gun says, 'He died that death that is a dog's alone' (Manto 179). With the cruel treatment of the dog in the hands of the soldiers of both countries who play with his emotions by giving him something to eat and pass their time with fun and then shoot him showing their patriotism, the writer satirizes the dual attitude of the soldiers. If the soldiers had to shoot him, they must not have entertained him by offering eatables. Moreover, the writer advocates the need to observe humanitarian values with special reference to the National Armies of enemy countries.

The short story, **Ten Rupees** showcases a mother's helplessness in permitting her daughter to sell her body as a prostitute due to utter poverty, women's managing extra-marital affairs to meet the basic needs of their family, and a silent agreement between women not to reveal each other's affairs before society and impact of such environment on the daughters of the family. The story opens with the arrival of Kishori, a pimp in the chawl looking for Sarita, a fifteen years old girl. As Sarita is not there, her mother moves out to search Sarita after letting Kishori sit in her room and asks the neighbours about Sarita. Tukaram's cross-eyed wife informs her about where Sarita is playing with the children. Both these ladies know the secrets of one another and do not reveal them to anyone. After seeing Sarita, her mother grabs her arm roughly and says:

'Come on, come into the house, come in and die. Do you have nothing better to do than play these rowdy games?' On the way in, in a softer voice, she said, 'Kishori is here. He has been waiting a long time. He has brought men with motor cars. Go on run upstairs and get dressed. And wear that blue georgette sari of yours. Oh, and listen, your hair is a terrible mess, get dressed quickly and I'll come up and comb it. (Manto 27)

Sarita's mother permits her daughter due to economic constraints for ten rupees. Kishori also earns two rupees for acting as a mediator and Sarita enjoys her rides to the hotels, she considers such trips as short entertaining outings without realizing the loss of her virginity in the environment her mother has provided to her.

Further, **Blouse** highlights the relevance of gender roles during the mid-twentieth century and the idea that opposite sexes attract especially during the adolescent period due to hormonal changes. Momim, a fifteen-year-old boy works as a servant at Deputy Sahab's home. He is directly engaged in work by Shakeela and Razia the daughters of the home. Razia has more inclination for songs, music, and films but Shakeela wishes to learn to stitch a blouse. They send Momim to the neighbourhood to bring a tape measure. "While trying the blouse Momim saw a tuft of black hair in her [Shakeela's] pale armpits... A quiver ran through his entire body" (Manto 45). When the blouse is ready and Shakeela tries it, Momim appreciates 'Bibi, you have even outdone the tailors!' at this Shakeela gets pleased. (Manto 49) Thereafter, when Momim comes to that room to leave a jug of water, he sees the blouse hanging from a wooden hanger. As there

is no one in the room, he takes a few steps up to the blouse and runs his hand over it while having a feeling that someone is also running their soft hands over the downy hairs of his body and he has restless dreams that night (Manto 50).

Khol Do presents a very poignant tale of rape victims through the character of Skina and the pitiable condition of her father Sirajuddin. When the old Sirajuddin opens his eyes on the cold floor of the camp, he becomes confused after seeing the dead bodies of men, women, and children. He feels stunned. Manto writes:

His eyes struck the sun, and he awoke with a start as its sharp blaze entered him. Images are assailed from all sides. Loot. Fire. Stampede. Station. Bullets. Night. And Skina. Sirajuddin stood up immediately, and like a madman, began surveying the sea of people all around him.

For three full hours, he scoured the camp, crying, 'Skina, Skina' But he learned nothing about the whereabouts of his only daughter. All around him, there was mayhem. Someone looked for his son, another for his mother; someone for his wife, another for his daughter. Sirajuddin, tired and defeated, sat down on one side of the camp... But as he racked his brains, his mind fixed on Skina's mother's body, her intestines spilled out he could think no further. (Manto 51)

Before taking the last breath, Skina's mother tells Sirajuddin to leave her, take Skina, and run for a safer place. Thereafter, Sirajuddin tries hard to remember where he has separated from Skina but cannot. Almost it takes him to get normalized when he meets eight young men who have a truck and guns and promise to help him unite with his daughter. Sirajuddin describes the features of his seventeen-year-old daughter. A few days later, the young men managed to sit Sakina in the truck after assuring her safety by mentioning her father. But when her father, Sirajuddin sees them in the camp and asks about Sakina, they say that they will find her soon. As some disturbance is reported in the evening, Sirajuddin comes to know that people have found a girl unconscious on the railway track and they have handed over to the hospital and left. Sirajuddin reaches the hospital to confirm. Manto writes, "The doctor looked at the body on the stretcher. He checked its pulse and said to Sirajuddin, 'The window, open it!' At the sound of the

words, Skina's corpse moved. Her dead hands undid her salwar and lowered it. Old Sirajuddin cried with happiness, 'She is alive, my daughter is alive!'" (Manto 54). Skina's unconsciously taking off her lower results from her experiences after the communal riots where every man she encountered abused her physically repeatedly. Till now she has become habitual to offer her body as per demand just for survival. Moreover, amidst such an atmosphere of communal tension, a father takes his daughter's response for happiness because it was bliss for him to find her alive.

Through **Licence**, the writer exposes the attitude of a patriarchal society towards widows especially towards women emphasizing the gender roles generally. After Abu's death with TB, his wife Nesti falls alone and the responsibility of managing Abu's horse coach befalls on her. First, she gives this responsibility to Dino who used to call her Bhabhi, his brother's wife, but within a few days, he proposes for her to marry him. When she refuses him, he does not hand over the exact earnings of the day to her. In this way, she takes back the horse and the coach from him and hires Maja, one of Abu's friends, but he too expresses his wish to marry her. Nesti takes the horse and the coach back from him too and gives them to an unknown coachman who crosses all the limits reach a drunkard at her home and attempts to rape her. (Manto 107) Thereafter, the coach and the horse remain in the stable for about two weeks without work. It becomes tough to manage the horse and the home as well, so she decides to work as a coachman as she knows the route and the work too. Once the municipal committee men called her and revoked her license as women cannot drive coaches. Nesti argues for equality but the officer suggests to her in a derogatory manner to sell her body in the bazaar where she would be earning more. The writer here criticizes the men's outlook that considers women a commodity.

For Freedom narrates the story of passionate young man Ghulam Ali who emerges as the most vibrant leader while leading the youth in Amritsar to kindle the spark of freedom from British Rule in India around the year 1930. The writer also reveals the patriotic fervor of Jallianwala Bagh where people used to gather to express their protest against the British to promote the boycott the foreign goods, civil disobedience movement, and a normal trend of imprisoning and releasing the revolutionaries as a common phenomenon. (Manto 123-125) Besides, the writer promotes the idea of inter-religious love marriages through the character of

Ghulam Ali and Nigar. When Manto meets Ghulam Ali after eight years, finds him as a settled businessman. In simple words, economic independence is a prerequisite to fight for the national interests.

Smell offers glorification to the female body through the character of Randhir who makes physical relationships with numerous Christian girls but he remains unable to forget the smell of a Marathi girl and rather misses her smell repeatedly. After having uncountable experiences of sex with numerous partners, he is left with no desire to have physical relationships with his newly married life partner. Now, perhaps it becomes merely a need for the sake of planning offspring without any excitement or pleasure.

The above short stories of Manto either present a realistic picture of the socio-cultural milieu where he lived or suggest corrections to the evils prevalent in society. Human beings can think about the welfare of their nation and society only if they do not have any worries about their stomach. A person with an empty stomach can never think about the welfare of others. Therefore, economic independence is the base for all types of independence. Further, Manto emphasizes the value of limited freedom that can enable a person to enjoy real freedom while observing fidelity in relationships. Besides, the aftermaths of partition, communal riots, rapes, insecurity, fear, terror, suspense, inequality, and the hunger of stomachs compelling the poor women to sell their bodies are some of the chief concerns Manto reveals to the readers. Moreover, Manto dreams of a society where there is no fear, and no starvation rather it is infused with love, peace, harmony, and economic prosperity.

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