

## INDIANNES IN SELECT SHORT STORIES OF SADAT HASSAN MANTO

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**Abstract:**

*Saadat Hassan Manto needs no introduction; as he is a stalwart in South-Asian Literature, a multifaceted personality; a short story writer, a film and radio script writer, a playwright, a journalist, and left his mark on the every area of art he touched. He has written twenty-two collections of short stories, one novel, and five collections of radio plays, three collections of essays and two selections of personal sketches. Even though, he wouldn't write anything else his short stories have made him a maestro in the South Asian Literary canon. Born in British India in 1912, moved to Pakistan after Independence from the British Raj, he shares those Indian sensibilities which are connected with the aftermath and the agony of the Partition: political and emotional. The present paper intends to bring forth the Indianness underlined in Manto's writings, especially during the partition era as most of his writings evolve around this theme.*

Key words: Partition, Partition Literature, Indianness, South Asian Literary Canon

Manto's writings are the documentaries of his patriotic zeal in the British Raj. His early short stories are based in Amritsar, his hometown. This proves that his sensibilities cannot be different from the then Indians. Though he moved to Pakistan after independence, his early upbringing in India cannot be denied. India especially the northern part and Pakistan share the history, culture, traditions, language and civilization, so no one could escape from the effects of each other. Manto was deeply connected, was influenced and actively influenced the Progressive writers' Association, with leftist ideology, with which the most of his contemporary Indian writers were associated. While at Aligarh Muslim University in 1934, he soon got associated with Indian Progressive Writers' Association (IPWA) under the influence of eminent urdu writer Abdul Bari Alig.

*"Cold Meat"* is a horrible tale about a mad Sardarji's butchering some six men with his dagger and abducting a lovely young woman and raping her after her death. Kulwant Kaur, the mistress of the Sardarji, Ishwar Singh, however in a fit of jealousy, slit his throat with her dagger and he died shortly, after making the gruesome confession. Saadat Hasan Manto's "Cold Meat" deals with such a story. Ishwar Singh cruelly murdered six people in a house and took away a lovely young girl alive for his future enjoyment. He had already a ladylove by name Kulwant Kaur. His intention was to keep the abducted girl in some secret place and to "taste this delicacy

also” (95). With this intention, he carried her over his shoulder and on the way he laid her down behind some bushes and raped her. When it was over, he found to his great shock and dismay that she had already been dead. Stephen Alter in one of his essay, “Madness and Partition: The Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto” says:

*“No writer has been able to convey the violent ambiguities of communal conflict with as much force and conviction as Saadat Hasan Manto. Many of his short stories focus on the sense of despair and dislocation caused by the partition of Pakistan and India in 1947. Manto vividly recreates the anger and horrors of this period and the trauma of refugees uprooted and victimized by the delineation of arbitrary borders. As the characters in Manto's stories confront the ruthless inhumanity of Hindu-Muslim violence murder, rape and mutilation- their only conceivable response is madness.”* (p.91)

Manto’s hometown was Amritsar and he based many of his early stories on the vents he witnessed here. His first story “Tamasha” was written in 1934 on the killings at Jallianwalla Bagh when he was a young boy. It is a story of Revolution against the British Raj in pre-Independent India. The motif of the story is to drive the British out of India. It is a moving autobiographical account of what he experienced as a seven year old innocent boy on that historic day in the Indian Independent Movement, the story confirms that he only wrote about what he either witnessed or heard reliable accounts of. The story is depiction of his own experiences as child witnessing the heartless massacre in the Jallianwalla Bagh. It appeals the sense of Indian patriotism; an earth-shattering rage against the British raj in India.

In “1919 ki aik Baat” (A Story of 1919), was written after the partition of India in 1951. Manto shows that for him partition was not an deviation but an intimate aspect of the inner dynamics of India’s history. He starts the story by recalling the anti-colonial commitment that existe in Amritsar in 1919. Some people blamed the British for the bloodshed at the time of partition, but he could not “help seeing the blood on our own hands.”

Manto’s acknowledgement of Indians’ responsibility in the partition violence set him apart from the other Indo- Pakistani writers of the Independence Era. Far from reinforcing social divisions, Manto’s *Siyah Hashiye* disturbs the fixity of identities imposed by the nation-state without denying the validity of religiously informed cultural identities. The religious identity of the characters is rarely made explicit, though occasionally there are references to regional affiliation. The naturalization of religious difference by Manto makes it easier to come to grips with the *batwara* despite all its contradictions, horrors and unanswered questions. It is precisely because Manto does not approach partition and the violence that came in its wake from the lofty heights of an ideologically coherent theoretical point of view that he is so successful in capturing the human tragedy with all its paradoxes.

Manto has an antipathy towards religious bigotry and deplores incidents of human bestiality. Instead of skirting around the issue, Manto acknowledges the role religiously informed cultural differences play in the making of everyday choices without being judgmental. In his short story “Dou Qaumein” (“Two Nations”) that was published in the collection “Khali Botlein aur Khali Dibbe’ (“Empty Bottles and Empty Boxes”) in 1950, he delicately juxtaposes the

question of religious difference against the mutual attraction felt by Mukhtar, a Muslim, and Sharda, a Hindu girl, who are neighbors. Beautifully written and evocative in its description of a budding romance across the religious divide, “Dou Qaumein” starts with Mukhtar’s voyeuristic discovery of Sharda, who he sees taking a bath behind a latticed window and proceeds to fall in love.

Attraction to the “other” and affinity to one’s own religious identity in “Dou Qaumein” is subtle and untrammelled by heavy-handed narrative intervention by the author. Readers have the freedom to see through Mukhtar’s double standards and his gendered sense of religious superiority and, depending on their own socialized predilections, to empathize and admire Sharda’s proud defense of her identity both as a Hindu and a woman in control of her own subjectivity. The narrative tension in Manto’s story leaves no scope to gloss over the reality of social differences even as the two protagonists are physically drawn into a short-lived intimacy that is rudely shattered by Mukhtar’s tactless suggestion that Sharda should embrace Islam.

While sharing their revulsion to partition violence and condemning its oppressive and dehumanizing characteristics, Manto was uninterested in documenting its outward manifestations and apportioning blame on the departed colonial masters. His short stories were not about violence, but the psychological state of people in the throes of an upheaval they neither are fully understood nor controlled. The perpetrators and victims of oppression interest him only insofar as they help to lay bare the all-too-human characteristics that can momentarily turn the gentlest of souls into the most demonic monsters.

Neither an end nor a beginning; partition with its multifaceted ruptures, political and psychological; was for Manto not a deviation to be dismissed as a fleeting collective madness. It was part and parcel of an unfolding drama that gave glimpses into the best and the worst in humankind. Through his choice of characters and plots, Manto turns short story writing into a testament of his belief that human depravity, though real and pervasive, can never succeed in killing all sense of humanity. His faith lay in that kind of humanity. Combining psycho-analysis with human behaviour, he was arguably one of the best story tellers of the 20th century, and one of the most controversial as well. When it comes to chronicling the collective madness that prevailed, during and after partition of India in 1947, no other writer comes close to Saadat Hasan Manto.

Though his earlier works, influenced by the progressive writers of his times showed a marked leftist and socialist leaning, his later works progressively became stark portraying the darkness of the human psyche, as humanist values progressively declined around the Partition of British India in 1947. His final works came out in the dismal social climate and reflected an innate sense of human impotency towards darkness that prevailed in the larger society. To many contemporary women writers, his language far from being obscene brought out the women of his times, prostitutes and pimps included, in realism, never seen before, and provided with the human dignity they long deserved. He once told a court judge: “A writer picks up his pen only when his sensibility is hurt.”

Manto wrote about the topics considered social taboo in Indo-Pakistani Society. His topics range from the socio-economic injustice prevailing in re- and post-colonial era, to the more controversial topics of love, sex, incest, prostitution and the typical hypocrisy of a traditional chauvinistic male. In dealing with these topics, he does not take any pains to conceal the true state of the affair-although his short stories are often intricately structured, with vivid satire and a good sense of humour. In depicting the lives and tribulations of the people living in lower depths of the human existence, no writer of the 20th century came close to Saadat Hasan Manto. His concerns on the socio-political issues, from local to global level were expressed in his essays and letters to Uncle Sam! Therefore, no one can deny that Manto's early writings expressed the sense of Indianness, as it was the depiction of its shared history, culture and the language.

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