

**BREAKING THE WAVES: CULTURE ON THE IRE IN
MANTO'S STORIES**

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Abstract

Saadat Hasan Manto, a rebel against the contemporary conservative Indian culture and societal norms. The prodigious short story writer originally wrote in Urdu and Hindi. Manto's writings break the waves of conventional shackles and pave the way for a new unconventional, modern culture. The writer artistically and authentically disrobes the cultural tabooed issues-such as Sex, prostitution; intimate relations among same genders, man-woman relations etc. Forbidden issues which the contemporary society did not allow to discuss openly find scope in Manto's writings. Manto probably is the first to write about the forbidden territory – sex and sexual urge in Urdu literature. He passionately depicts the potential, universal unexposed human feelings in his writings and hence many a times he has been accused of pornographic writings. The research paper opines Manto's writing breaks the shackles of old conservative trends in Indian Society and culture as a whole. The two short stories entitled, "The Blouse" and "A Wet Afternoon" for discussion brings a new and fresh sensation to human lives.

Key Words: Culture, tabooed issues, conventions, innate relationship etc.

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Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto and with him lie buried all the secrets and mysteries of the art of short-story writing. Under tons of earth he lies, still wondering who among the two is the greater short-story writer: God or he. Saadat Hasan Manto, 18th August 1954.

Saadat Hasan Manto – one of the renowned, unarguable, controversial literary geniuses in Urdu literature. He was born in village, Samrala, Punjab on 11th May 1912 and died in Lahore, Pakistan on 18th August 1954. The mentioned quote is an epitaph of Saadat Hasan Manto. He has written his own epitaph six months before his death. The epitaph depicts worth of short story as a significant form of literature. The epitaph admires himself as a great short story writer. During his short span of life he has contributed substantially to Urdu literature.

Manto utilizes 'short story' as the form at his best to capture the sensational, unexposed, covert issues in social milieu. Manto though was born in Punjab spent most of his life in Bombay. He served to the Bollywood also by contributing the scripts to theatres. Hence he has 'hands-on' experience of the then real Bombay. Manto used 'short story' as a form of expression for his rebellious thoughts. Manto originally wrote either in Urdu or Hindi. His work tremendously got translated into many languages. Khalid Hasan one of his translators writes, "No other Urdu writer's work has been as extensively translated in English as that of Manto...Manto has also been translated in very many languages spoken in the subcontinent... and here and there in English-language anthologies, the odd Manto story continues to appear." (Introduction, xiv).

The research paper opines Manto's writings as wave breaker axing the traditional rigid, Indian conservative culture. His writings sets free the human innate emotions which were forbidden to discuss in the then society. The article focusses on two short stories from the book of Selected Stories entitled Saadat Hasan Manto's Kingdom's End by Khalid Hasan

in translation. The first short story for discussion is 'A Wet Afternoon' and the second is 'The Blouse'. Both the stories mirror the tabooed issues in Indian contemporary society. The former portrays same gender relationship which still today was a tabooed subject to accept in Indian society. Whereas the later captures the emotions a young boy's adolescence and his subtle urge for sex through the significant symbol of the blouse. Many a times due to his use of sensational symbols he is accused of 'pornographic writings' but to his critics he aptly retaliates, as he says, "...how he could he possibly disrobe a society that was already naked, he did not beautify what was ugly nor hide what he felt should be exposed. He did not moralize" (Introduction, xii).

Both the stories-'A Wet Afternoon' and 'The Blouse' are anecdotes of Manto's excellence in handling the forbidden issues. 'A Wet Afternoon' depicts the untouched human feelings of intimate relations between the same gender. The story appears at first number out of twenty seven stories ranging from the theme of Independence, patriotism, individual psychological pangs, Sexual urge and partition and so on. 'A Wet Afternoon' delineates the subtle experience of the sexual urge of teenagers through Masood, his sister Kalsoom and her friend Bimla. The artistic use of symbols and metaphors play a significant role in Manto's writings. As the artistic devices saves him from accusations of vulgarity. Metaphor- one of the significant figures of speech enabled Manto to capture the human feelings in his story. Symbol like 'a throbbing sheep fresh flesh' signals at Masood's eagerness towards the sex and sexual desire. Manto writes, Masood watches:

...A BUTCHER CARRYING A huge basket on his head that contained two recently slaughtered sheep...The carcasses were so fresh that they were still throbbing. He saw it and his body trembled, bringing a glow to his cold cheeks..." (1)

Masood's inclination towards sexuality due to his physiological changes is so natural but forbidden to discuss openly. Manto handles it so carefully through the symbols like 'sheep flesh', 'wet afternoon'. The story narrates one of the significant incident as Masood's sister-Kalsoom always complain him about her body pain and very often asks him to press her body. Masood, as usual reluctantly accepts her requests

and presses her body. But he that day he feels happy and a kind of sensation goes through his body when:

Kalsoom came in and threw herself on her bed, face down...Masood climbed on

Kalsoom's back and began to work her waist rhythmically with his feet, pressing the flesh in, then relieving the pressure... Kalsoom began to moan softly... Whenever Masood's feet happened to fall on Kalsoom's buttocks, he felt as if he was gently pounding the butchered sheep's flesh...

(5)

Manto handles the latent and forbidden issue exquisitely. The kind of experience both brother and sister go through is sensational and inclined towards sexuality.

The depiction of same gender relationship between Kalsoom- Masood's elder sister and her friend- Bimla creates ire on the Indian conservative society. Human relationships have been presented through mirror transparency to the society by Manto during his short span of life. When Bimla comes in Kalsoom asks Masood to go out quickly but when Masood peeps into her sisters' room, 'Kalsoom and her friend Bimla screamed, and then covered themselves with a quilt. But he had seen what they were doing.' (8) The narrator tells us, 'Bimla's blouse was unbuttoned and Kalsoom was staring at her breasts' (8). The story ends with Masood's now the grooming young man frustration brought by new experiences of his own flesh and mind.

The other story 'The blouse' further ardently proves the research title "Breaking the Waves: Culture on the Ire in Manto's Stories". The Blouse in the story plays a significant role of depicting Momin's restless feelings. Momin is a teenager like Masood, who also experiences the same kind of sensation and curiosity towards the sex. Manto writes, 'FOR SOME DAYS PAST, MOMIN HAD BEEN FEELING VERY RESTLESS. HIS ENTIRE body was like a boil about to erupt. A strange pain had taken hold of him.' (264). Several changes were taking place in his body His boyhood was racing towards youth which was affecting every drop of his blood. The physical changes of his physique developed his curiosity

towards sex. He was working as a servant to a Deputy Sahib's home. The Sahib has two daughters Razia the younger one and Shakeela the eldest. Momin used to help Shakeela. He was helping her in her designing the blouse which Shakeela wanted to wear on the day of Id. Momin watches her from the outside of the door when she disrobes herself to measure her waist. Manto writes, 'Get it now,' she said in a strangled voice. When Shakeela exhaled, Momin felt as if several balloons had exploded in his chest.' (265) Momin looks at a 'bunch of black hair' under the fair armpit of Shakeela. This image of 'bunch of black hair' mirrors Momin's desire towards the sex.

The blouse was prepared with great efforts has been created by Shakeela to wear on Id. One night Momin's enters in the room where the blouse was kept and '... he looks at carefully and then apprehensively, ran his hand over it, which made him feel as if someone was caressing his entire body with an exceedingly light and airy touch.'(274) Later on he finds himself, '...clutching a black satin blouse in his hand. He could also feel a throbbing object that lay under his hand... A spasm of fear, surprise and sweet pain shook his body. It was a most strange feeling.' (274)

To conclude, Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories in translation by Khalid Hasan prove him as one of the rebels of his time. Manto as a visionary and being outspoken in his ideas was much ahead of his time. His sharp writing reflects his views against conservative Indian culture of contemporary era which made the innate human emotions and feelings forbidden to discuss openly. Both the prescribed stories "A Wet Afternoon' and 'The Blouse' prove him as the rebel. He was the first to write about the forbidden territory in Urdu literature. Both the stories depict the onset of puberty among the teenagers. Khalid Hasan rightly points out that, "He did not beautify what was ugly nor hide what he felt should be exposed. He did not moralise. Manto had great empathy with those on the outer fringes of society" (Introduction xii) Manto had contempt for the hypocrisy. He was deadly against of the double standard of the day.

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