

Reading Aesthetics of Violence in the Fiction of Saadat Hasan Manto

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Abstract

Saadat Hasan Manto was an Indo -Pakistani writer .He had written around 250 short stories, seven plays and three collections of essays. He is known for his stories on partition and its aftermath on people. He was tried for obscenity six times during his writing career but never convicted. He originally wrote in Urdu but his work has been widely translated and published in Hindi, English and Japanese.

KEYWORDS : humans , politics , Indo-Pakistani, Manto , violence , identity, translation ,assertion.

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Saadat Hasan Manto has mostly been read in the context of partition and the psychological trauma it has produced in the minds of the people on both sides. In my proposed thesis I wish to analyze his work by dislocating it from the context of partition and having a holistic understanding of his fiction . Because of its subject matter and its central characters Manto's stories are unique in literature .They were written during a period in India's literary movement when only purposive literature was approved by the critics. In comparison to this Manto's storytelling had its own distinct quality. His work was influenced mostly by Russian literature and writers like Anton Chekhov.

In this paper I will try to understand his work through the framework of western literary theories and writings which have interrogated and challenged the idea of linear history, power, normalcy and space. The thesis would comprise of six chapters and a conclusion.

This paper will chronicle the journey of Manto as a writer and his growth as Saadat Hasan in the volatile background of his personal relationships and the larger outside world of brutality. He had strained relationship with his father and step brothers. Since childhood he had a fascination for the unconventional. He was a school dropout in the family of successful barristers and lawyers .He never got the approval which he sought as an individual from his father and family. Perhaps this has contributed in his understanding of the world and also shaped him as an unconventional author.

Heterotopias in Manto's fiction. Heterotopia is a concept related to physical space elaborated by Michael Foucault. According to him these spaces of otherness or undesirable bodies make the perfected version of society possible. Manto has been criticized for the representation of brothels, madhouses and prison in his stories but this thesis will argue and justify that these heterotopias of deviation makes it possible to have an idealized version of society .Manto has always asserted that all civil societies are designed to legitimize our worst impulses so instead of rejection of those impulses there should be an assimilation of 'the Other'.

Fallen women and Mutilated men. Unlike other authors of his time Manto never wrote as a Feminist or a patriarch. .His work depicts a world where men and women both are equal and assertive. There is an attempt to subvert phallogocentric social relations. They function as individuals in society instead of playing stereotypical gender roles where man is powerful and woman are naturally weak. Manto has subverted these gender roles in his short stories and shown his male characters as emotionally vulnerable and his female characters as assertive and strong.

Art and Architectonics of Manto's fiction. Short story is the oldest genre in the world. For a variety of social and economic reasons short story has been the dominant genre of Urdu fiction .Critic O'Connor suggests that the short story deals with a population group living at the peripheries of civilized society .Manto experimented with Chekhov's kind of impressionism, stream of consciousness technique and a setting which has almost no plot and inconclusive ending. His aim was to represent a single illuminating moment in the narrative which leaves the readers with jarring experience at the end of the story .This chapter will interrogate Manto's innovative technique in writing short story genre and literary style of his fiction.

Manto's Kulturlandschaft. This chapter is going to revisit Manto as a progressive writer as well as analyze his political consciousness and ideology. Even though he is associated with Progressive Writers' Movement in India, he was considered retrogressive and reactionary by the Progressives .Even in his partition stories Manto has never chosen to be a sectarian and depicted a realist unbiased understanding of society . His stories do not divide people on the basis of religion. In most of his stories he has criticized the rationale of partition. The celebration of freedom has been juxtaposed with the horror of dividing the country in haste on papers. He has always given importance to the idea of individual versus the collective, because the collective can become totalitarian in their action as it happened during partition. Perhaps this is the reason because of which he is the least celebrated and uncomfortable writer amongst his contemporaries. This chapter is going to analyze whether Manto had an ideology? Who were the anonymous masses which he represented through his short stories .Why did he denounce those who aligned one way or the other? This chapter will debate about the idea of collectivism and whether it is justified to valorize the individual above the collective.

Postmodernist Reading of Bombay Stories. Manto worked as a successful scriptwriter in Bombay. A part of his fiction depicts the inner world of movies, actors and directors of this modern cosmopolis. Manto explores the themes of poverty, industrial exploitation, abortion, urban overcrowding, inter-religious tension, misogyny, and prostitution, along

the landscape of Bombay city .The critical eye of the author is turned inwards, allowing us to see our own society in a new light.Manto persona becomes a witness to all these developments in a fast paced modern world .

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