

Innocence or Insanity: A Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's Virtuous Characters

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Abstract: Indo-Pakistani writer Saadat Hasan Manto is one among the greatest playwrights and Short story writers in South-Asian history. Gifted with the talent of direct language, his name and his short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics. Since his works expose the harsh realities of inner and outer world, he has been called outspoken critic. No part of human existence and experience remained untouched throughout his works. Personae in his works are innocent, who sometimes are the prostitutes, poor mothers, fathers and lovers, hence arouses sympathy in our hearts. Most of the times, they are taken from the rejected and fallen sections of society. His characters are depicted as the victims of some psychological illness, but inwardly Manto has been exploring their innocence. The present paper is an attempt to analyze his virtuous characters and their innocence, which is working behind their mental illness. The first thing to be noticed that few of his short stories have been studied for this purpose.

Keywords: insanity, innocence, sympathy, society, prostitution.

I. Introduction

Saadat Hasan Manto has remained an acknowledged writer whose life story demands our intense discussion and introspection. Beginning his career with translation, he worked upon literary giants such as Victor Hugo, Oscar Wilde and Russian writers Gorky and Anton Chekov. He gave rise to 22 collections of short stories, 1 novel, 5 series of radio plays, 3 collection of essays and personal sketches. His stories named *kalli Salwar*, *Dhuan*, *Smell*, *Toba Tek Singh*, *Mirza*, *Chal Chalre Nauzvan* are considered his masterpieces. Manto faced partition dilemma, its outcomes in the name of dehumanization and exploitation, bloodshed and killings. He was astonished to see its consequences. Being an eye-witness to such kind of disasters, he exhibited that socio-political trauma throughout his works. Being a straightforward writer, he has been tried for obscenity six times. Stories like *Smell*, *Blouse* and few others are written with vulgarity of language but Manto is not to blame since he has the convention to write truth and facts. He himself said

“if you find my stories dirty, the society you live in is dirty. With my stories, I only expose the truth (Rakesh Kumar, The Express Tribune)

He is often compared to English critic D.H. Lawrence who was charged too for obscenity. Manto's characters are decent ones who we think are the victims of some psychological trauma hence are facing mental ailment but in reality they are too innocent, far away from the harsh realities and bitter truths of the world. Ayesha Jalal is being quoted here,

“The protagonists in his stories are ordinary people who are left to cope with the monumental tragedy of millions of families being torn asunder, losing their homes and their lives. In the middle of loot, rapes and killings, Manto shows us the small rays of humanity”. (Ayesha Jalal, The Hindu)

In the ‘Mice of Shah Daulah’ we see the separation of mother and son in the name of superstition. It is a tragic tale of mother named Salima, aged twenty-one. She had not had a child. Her innocence and mother love

made her trust her friend named Fatima that she should visit shrine of Shah Daulah in Gujarat, then she would be blessed with a child, in return, her first child would be offered to Shah Daulah. She was also told that her first child would have small head hence would be the property of Shah Daulah and he would be transformed to a mouse. She visited there and continued her medical treatment as well. After two months she was pregnant and a beautiful boy was born to her. There had been a lunar eclipse during her pregnancy and he was born with a small mark on his right cheek. Having offered him to Shah Daulah, she became grief-stricken. Salima was so innocent that she trusted such nonsense and lost her beloved flower. After this loss, her behavior was queer,

“Salima saw mice everywhere, in bed, in the kitchen, in bathroom, on the sofa, in her heart. Sometimes she felt she herself was a mouse: her nose was running, she was in a chamber of Shah Daulah’s shrine, carrying her tiny head on her weak shoulders, and her antics made onlookers fall over themselves with laughter. Her condition was pitiable, her world scarred like the cratered face of a dead planet”. (Manto, 114)

It was all about her innocence which made her condition worse. After this, she was blessed with one daughter and two boys but her son and black mark on his right cheek were always in her memory. Salima has cried out for him to come back, but he never returned.

In ‘Ten rupees’ Sarita is a child prostitute who was in prostitution due to poverty of her house. She was so innocent to know the meaning of prostitution. Manto has the feminist concern for women of this line and speaks in their favor. Sarita’s mother herself says,

“My daughter’s an innocent; she knows nothing of this world”. (Manto, 25)

Though she was concealing Sarita’s reality but was right in her saying that Sarita had no knowledge of the world of prostitution. Innocent Sarita feels herself fortunate that she is in this business. She gives the impression of being insane when she puts the question about Shanta, when she enjoys her travel in the car. She appears a mad girl, means how can she be happy in the company of strangers?. It was her innocence that she was unable to know the value of ten rupees.

“The car stopped. Sarita opened the door, jumped out and began to run along the shore. Kafayat and Sahib ran behind her. In the open air, on the edge of the vast ocean, with the great palms rising up from the wet sand, Sarita didn’t know what it was that she wanted. She wished she could melt into the sky; spread through the ocean; fly so high that she could see the palm canopies from above, for all the wetness of the shore to seep from the sand into her feet and then...and then for that same racing engine, that same speed, those blasts of wind, the car from honking- she was very happy. The three young Hyderabad men sat down on the wet sand and opened their beers. Sarita snatched the bottle from Kafayat’s hand. ‘Wait, I’ll pour it’. (Manto, 36-37)

Sarita’s situation is tragic and demands our compassion. Such as Sarita, there are many characters in Manto’s stories, taken from this business of prostitution. They are seen with sight of hatred but Manto empathises with them and brought out their goodness and kindness.

“a number of Manto’s stories...have prostitutes as their heroines. Dr. Flemming argues that these are not stories about prostitutes. These stories are studies in the loneliness and despair not only of prostitutes, but of oppressed women everywhere. Given the recurrent theme of the exploited prostitute in these stories, Manto felt that the prostitute and her situation were merely symbolic of the subjugated and dependent role...forced on women”. (Coppola, 220)

His another short story ‘Toba Tek Singh’ is masterpiece, based on partition between India and Pakistan. The crucial role has been played by Bishan Singh, a harmless and god-fearing soul who suffers the most in the name of communal hatred. Manto has depicted him, a victim of mental illness but he is normal one in reality who was stunned to know about the partition of his motherland. He was deeply in love, with his roots, with his village

named Toba Tek Singh, which was now declared to be the part of Pakistan. Being a Hindu, he has to remain in India. When he learnt the exact location of his village finally, he lost his mental and physical balance,

“Hearing this, Bishansingh jumped to one side and ran off to rejoin his remaining comrades. The Pakistani soldiers caught hold of him and tried taking him to the other side, but he refused ‘Toba Tek Singh is here’ he said and began yelling loudly..Opah di gudhgudh di annexe di bedhyana di mung di dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan”(Manto, 9)

Humanism is the core of this short story of Manto. Bishan Singh is one of these characters who were socially marginalized, but he appears strong and dominating. Manto, with his unique way of expressing grief and humanity, is just supreme. In the present story ‘Toba Tek Singh’, he is dealing with the issues of identity crisis, sanity, insanity rather giving his argument on history and politics of that time.

“He did not take sides in the religious and political wars being fought around him. In his partition stories, he reflects not on politics and history but on the meanings of loyalty and dishonour, sanity and insanity, good and evil”(Ispahani, 188)

His Characters are always in demand of our sympathy for their virtuous and innocent nature whether they belong to accepted or rejected class of society. In ‘KholDo’, Sirajudin’s daughter was raped by those youngmen whom he trusted. Sirajudin has made them aware about the beauty of his daughter named Sakina, about her young age, large eyes, black hair, beauty spot on the right cheek. His condition is pathetic when he feels happiness that she is alive, unknown to the fact that she was deprived of her chastity. In ‘licence’ Manto depicts the struggle of Nesti, who after the death of her young husband Abu, decides to drive a coach to earn the bread. It was an upright decision on her part, but it was intolerable for the society. When her license of driving the coach was revoked, she requests committee officer but he replied in return,

“Go to the bazaar and find yourself a spot. You are sure to make more that way”. (Manto, 109)

Manto is again raising the voice that Humanism is above every religion and profession. Humanity should not be murdered in the name of social ideologies and beliefs.

Like Salima, Mumtaz is a pitiable character in ‘Khaled Mian’ whereas Salima suffers as a mother, Mumtaz as a father. Mumtaz has lost his only son Khaled Mian whom he never loved but adored. Manto brought out his real aches of heart, his psychological trauma when he was living in the fear of losing him, he shrieked,

“God, free me from this ordeal! If you want to kill Khaled, then kill Khaled! What torment is this?” (Manto, 65)

Conclusion

The present study explores the virtuous characters of Manto’s imagination while showing his writing style and technique. He never left the path of truth, though he had to deal with many social and political challenges

“he continued to unmask the world by never allowing his pen to be obscured by the convenience of compromise” (Vandana Shukla, The Tribune)

While reading Manto with a feminist approach, his stories never appear dirty. He has often been considered as a feminist. Fahmida Riaz truly appreciates him when she calls him ‘an Urdu feminist poet’. Manto and his deep thoughts and concerns can never be surpassed. His thoughts and beliefs are visible in his stories whereby he explores every issue of the world, every human concern, their aspirations and causes of their agony. Rakesh Kumar is right here,

“ Saadat Hasan will die one day but Manto will live on”. (Rakesh Kumar, The Tribune)

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