

ISSN-2249 5460

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INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL OF  
MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES,  
TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITIES

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*InternationaleJournals*

International Journal of Mathematical Sciences, Technology and  
Humanities 5 (2016) Vol. 6, Issue 3, pp: 51 – 56

***Sensitivity, Madness and Fervor: the Varied Hues of Nationalism in Manto's  
Characters***

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**Abstract:**

Saadat Hasan Manto has been considered as a writer of verisimilitude. His stories are based on the platform of Partition and his characters portray an array of emotions and feelings. Manto's writings are not only a fine specimen of creativity but also zealously depict his personal experiences and incidents. His characters possess a multitude of emotions, ranging from *Nationalism* and fervor to madness and senility. His writing style and language are very reflective and portray the truth and nothing else; however crude it may be. Each word in Manto's story pierces the reader like an unsheathed sword and leaves him bleeding for days to come. This paper will examine how the ingenuity of Manto's language brings to life the emotions in his characters and how each character is similar to the other in more ways than one. The theories of *Nationalism* and Social Identity will be used to further comment on the form and pattern of Manto's writing and how his characters suffer from similar phenomena. It will also bring to light that the occurrence of Partition was agonizing to everyone irrespective of their religion, country or gender.

**Keywords:** *Nationalism*, Madness, Fervor, Zealousness, Sensitivities.

Saadat Hasan Manto was a Pakistani writer. He was born in Samrala in pre-independence India in the year 1912. He moved to Lahore after the Partition and died in the year 1955 at the age of 42 in Pakistan. Manto was considered a writer of acclaim and controversies. His writings were like a microscope that highlighted the plights and predicaments of the local people whose voices were muffled due to the ever-deafening pandemonium around them. There was turmoil and mayhem all around him and Manto could not stop himself from penning them down.

His writing style and language are as reflective as a mirror. His stories reflect the truth without distorting them, irrespective of the rejection that he faces from his own country later in life. Each word in Manto's story will pierce you like an unsheathed sword and leave the reader bleeding for days to come. His climaxes will render you speechless, not because of its exquisiteness or magnificence, but because of its abruptness and the naked truth that it unveils.

Unlike Manto, his characters are very unwavering and determined in what they do, whether it is an act of good deed or a kill. A hint of *Nationalism*, a touch of madness and an abundance of fervor is prevalent in all his characters. In the stories like '*Khol Do*' and '*Thanda Gosht*', the characters portray a strong sense of *Nationalism*. It should be mentioned here that the notion of *Nationalism* in times like these (during and after the partition) had taken on varied meanings and connotations. *Nationalism* was different for everyone. Everyone was passionate not about *Nationalism*, but the idea of it.

The concept of *Nationalism* is almost impossible to define and explain in a linear text. It is as obscure a term as Culture and accumulates in itself the ever widening and all encompassing spirit of Politics and World Geography. The concept of *Nationalism* is very dynamic in nature because it shifts according to the perspectives of each individual, each state and each nation. It also changes in accordance to what is considered as 'national', through which stems *Nationalism*. The very rigid political geography of the world and the wars fought in keeping those boundaries intact, govern the genus of *Nationalism* today.

In the story '*Khol Do*' (*Open It*) by Manto, the take on *Nationalism* is very mortifying. It testifies that *Nationalism* had become a farce by the very people who swore to protect it. The story opens by Sirajuddin regaining consciousness on a refugee camp site. As he opens his eyes he is disillusioned by the mayhem and trauma all around him. Later when his disillusionment ebbs away he realizes that while leaving Punjab and coming to Pakistan his only daughter Sakina has gone missing. He is unable to recall when and where did Sakina get separated from him. But, every time he tries to think about the past, his wife's bloody corpse obscures his vision and he is unable to think any further. He looks for Sakina everywhere, but is unable to find her.

The entire narrative is an account of Sirajuddin's disillusionment and the turmoil he suffers on account of the loss of his daughter. Finally he takes the help of "*eight young men armed with guns*" who have been deployed by the state as '*volunteers*' to help people locate their lost family members. Sakina is finally found by the volunteer men but is not immediately returned to Sirajuddin even after repeated enquiring on his part. By the end of the narrative, Sirajuddin finds out that a girl has been brought to the camp who matches the description of his daughter. He rushes to the doctor's chambers only to find a dead-beat body lying on a gurney. He is not sure what to make of the sight in front of him, when the doctor appears in the room.

*"I am her father," he stammered. The doctor looked at the prostrate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man: "Open the window." The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her salwar tied around her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs. "She is alive. My daughter is alive," Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into a cold sweat.*

(Manto, Trans. Alok Bhalla, Source: Web)

In the entire narrative, Manto has not given any voice to Sakina. The reader never identifies or comes to know what exactly had happened to Sakina during her absence and Sakina's voice is muffled and mute in the entire account of mayhem that is going on around her. With the usage of two words by Manto in the narrative, the reader can only imagine what Sakina would have gone through with her abductors and later, her so called '*protectors*'. Sirajuddin is the protagonist of the narrative, and the whole story revolves around the fact that he as a father was feeling incredibly guilty that he was unable to take care of his only daughter even after the brutal death of his wife. His daughter was the last shred of his past life that he desperately clung to. Sirajuddin is in agony, he is in pain, he is restless and in trauma.

As a first time reader of the story, all you would like to know at the end of the story is whether Sakina is alive and whether she would be ever reunited with her father. The worst climax that you could possibly imagine would be that Sakina is dead and Sirajuddin would never see her again. But as the climax creeps in you are stunned to silence by the use of just two words by Manto- '*Khol Do*'. The action that these two words evoke is unthinkable. A single gesture by Sakina at the end of the story opens up various faces of reality that Sirajuddin at that point of time is absolutely blind to. Sakina's gesture painfully and mutely tells you the kind of torture, rape and humiliation that she would have suffered since her abduction. Language and speech eludes her and she very painstakingly gives in to the situation. Her relationship with language and people has been so distorted in just a few days, that there is only one meaning of '*Khol Do*' for her.

Where in this entire narrative is the fervor of *Nationalism* that those eight men swore of? What does *Nationalism* mean to a girl who has been abducted and raped repeatedly? Where in those few days of Sakina's life does *Nationalism* fit in? What would *Nationalism* mean to you when you do not even have the voice to speak out for yourself? When Sakina saw the lorry approach her in the fields, her first reaction was to run away. But the men made her feel like they were her protectors and not her abductors. Sakina gave in and went with them with the belief that finally she would be able to go back to her life where all these fears and humiliations would be left behind. Sakina did return, but only after the men had had their fair share off her already weak and mutilated body. As a result Sakina was almost dead by the time she was returned to the camp.

Likewise, in the story '*Thanda Gosht*' (*Cold Meat*) Ishwar Singh has a slightly different take on *Nationalism*, but one that is equally humiliating and degrading. Ishwar Singh calls himself a Nationalist and in the name of *Nationalism* he believes that it is alright to kill people because they do not belong to his religion or country. He and a group of men rob people and kill them afterwards. The loot is then distributed equally among all the members of the gang. Ishwar Singh gifts these jewels to his wife Kulwant Kaur who is very much aware of the fact that these jewels have been stolen. Kulwant's reaction evokes a sense of vivacity in you wherein she seems to be quite proud of her husband's charades. Both Ishwar Singh and Kulwant Kaur are shown to be very dominating and strong characters in the narrative. Unlike Sakina, Kulwant is given a very strapping voice in the narrative by Manto. She is very sturdy in her built and does not seek refuge in her husband's charming words and coaxing tone.

One day when Ishwar Singh returns home after a few days, Kulwant is worried about him and demands for an explanation. Ishwar Singh has been stunned to silence by something that had

happened a few nights ago and is unable to forget the incident. After a lot of wheedling and threatening by Kulwant, he finally spills the beans and admits that he had slain an entire family and abducted a beautiful young woman. But before he could kill her he decided to satisfy himself. Only after he had penetrated her did he realize that the woman was already dead and that he had slept with a corpse. At the end of the narrative Ishwar is as cold as the dead corpse he had slept with.

In both the narratives Manto leaves the reader in a cold sweat. He leaves the reader to question the very ideals of identity, national pride, existence and *Nationalism*. In 'Khol Do' Sakina's gesture is so debilitating that it leaves the doctor stunned to silence. In 'Thanda Gosht' when Ishwar tells Kulwant the entire episode, Kulwant touches Ishwar's hands and finds them to be dead cold against her warm hands. Both the narratives though written in a very simple but strapping prosaic style leaves you naked and exposed, as if a lot of layers have been suddenly stripped off your body and a cold wind just blew past you and has left you cold, numb and bitter.

If *Nationalism* is to be preliminarily defined, it is said to be the love of an individual for one's own country and people and also the idea of national independence, pride and the sense of identity that it carries with it. When one talks about *Nationalism*, he/she is fully aware of the situations in his/her country, be it political or otherwise, but still has a sense of devotion towards the country. History has taught us that through the years, people have waged wars and killed masses in the name of *Nationalism*; they have fought battles and mutilated innocent people in the name of national pride; they have raped young women and looted the wealthy in the name of identity and individuality. But the question remains, is this *Nationalism*? Is this the sense of National pride and identity that the freedom fighters or soldiers struggled for? Is this what we strove to achieve always? If yes, then where does this carnage end? If no, then what is this *Nationalism* that we are striving to achieve? The answers to these questions are as obscure as the conceptual understanding of *Nationalism* itself.

In the light of these two narratives by Manto, the idea of *Nationalism* takes on an unusual turn; a turn that enables an individual to break away from the preconceived notions of *Nationalism* and the Nation and brings to fore the other forms that the idea has taken up through the years. Both Sakina and Kulwant are quite unwillingly part of the effects and pitfalls of *Nationalism* and the fervor that it brings with it. Sakina a woman of sixteen would never have expected to be part of a struggle as big as partition and her to be caught up in the middle of this quagmire. She would have never imagined fleeing a country that she believed to be her own and going away to a country which people said was supposed to belong to her. How could one be part of a nation one day and belong to another nation the next? How could people decide which was their home based on some lines on a map? What were these boundaries people were talking about?

Even in the story 'Toba Tek Singh', the asylum inmates were immensely confused as to why were they suddenly being shifted to another country that they knew nothing about and that they would never call home? Why were they being told that they didn't belong to this country anymore when since decades this had been their home? How could this country be the home of their parents but not theirs anymore? No one had answers to such questions and probably no one stopped to think about them too. The madness and fervor of *Nationalism*, national pride and identity had consumed the minds of many and had left them inhumane and merciless. Kulwant too had to live with the fact that her husband was not only a thief, but also a murderer and a rapist. She had wanted to believe that

there was a greater good that her husband was working towards, but that belief was soon fading to nothingness. *Nationalism* comes up here as an opposition to the already existing norms of the society wherein Kulwant is stunned to silence by the very realization that her husband is no longer the 'Nationalist' that she believed him to be, but a criminal of greater proportions than she had realized. For Sirajuddin, *Nationalism* becomes a cause of conflict, because as he realizes that the men whom he had so trusted with the life and honor of his daughter, were the people who had deceived him.

*Nationalism* thus comes up in various forms; as a cause of conflict, as a source of opposition, as an opposition to cooperation and as a determinant power. It is more of an ideology than a form of behavior (Kellas, 43). In more ways than one *Nationalism* answers a lot of questions and deals with the preservation and creation of a nation, if used in a form that is viable for the development of a nation. It is a whole process of forming and maintaining nations, it deals with consciousness, language and an ideology (Smith, 181) which gives way to a more nurtured form of nation that we have today.

Manto has thus answered a lot of questions and dealt with problematic grounds in most of his narratives; whether consciously or unconsciously, is for the readers to decide. But the wounds in his narratives have a tongue and a voice of their own. They speak out in ways that is shocking and outrageous at the same time. The narratives bathe you with an abundance of emotions, which you would not know what to do with. Only with the passage of time, do the emotions seep in, realization hits you and the wounds begin to heal. There seems to be no conclusions to Manto's stories, there is only a reality; a reality that Manto could no longer ignore or accept.

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