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## **Satirizing Imperialism: A Post-Colonial Reading of Saadat Hasan Manto's selected Short Stories and Letters**

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**Abstract:** One of the most intelligent writers India has ever produced, Saadat Hasan Manto's words are still haunting generations because of their prophetic nature and realistic portrayals of society. This paper aims to make a detailed study on Manto's select fiction to critically analyze the strategies used by him to satirize issues like imperialism, slavery, and politics in pre-independence India. This paper looks to explore how Manto being an Urdu writer in India dared to discuss international affairs too. The discussion has been formulated by evaluating selected short stories and letters by Manto, which thought to be fit for the topic. The research takes into consideration the main characteristics in the select fiction of Saadat Hasan Manto to discover, how he makes use of his satirical wit and humor to investigate the socio-political matters, from local to global. The sole purpose of this study is to analyze how Manto took a rebellious attitude towards the ills of modernity and expressed his anti-imperialistic views of a poor inhabitant but a strong writer to the capitalists in America and wealthy politicians like Nehru. The research findings conclude that Manto was quite successful in ridiculing the superpowers like America and Russia, who are building a global market constructing a new means of dominance over the developing countries that work through consent.

**Keywords:** Satire, society, politics, nation, imperialism.

### **Introduction**

Saadat Hasan Manto was born in the second part of the twentieth century. This decade marks the conclusion of the well-considered world powers. At first, the thought of revolution and independence is the gift of the Russian Revolution to Manto. Almost all the writers in the age of Manto wrote on the same subjects but Saadat Hasan Manto is quite ahead of them all. In his pen instead of ink we see the rebellion against Imperialism and his love for freedom. He was well responsive to using his pen as a weapon. His pen was aflame, and the situations nourished it with the cruel happenings, and it turned the



writings of Manto to the volcano, very warm and hasty. The discrimination, dreadful condition of the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki disheartened Manto. Struggling with the court cases against obscenity was also costing him emotionally and economically. With all these discussions it is obvious that Saadat Hasan Manto hated suppression and wanted to attain freedom from the British Raj. He likewise directly rejected the Gandhian philosophy and ideology to obtain freedom only with the weapon of 'Ahimsa'. He wrote in a strong satiric tone against the Britishers as well as the hypocrisy of the nation's own leaders. He supported Bhagat Singh and his ideology to obtain freedom with a war spirit, dignity, and explosion. As Edward W. Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* says:

Liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. From this perspective then all things are indeed counter, original, spare, and strange. From this perspective also, one can see 'the complete consort dancing together' contrapuntally. (3-4)

The age in which Saadat Hasan Manto grew up, was the age of rebellion as a result it became one of the emotionally involved parts of his nature, thinking and writing. The number of human lives and human blood wasted in the twentieth-century wars was unmatched with the history of any era or any country in the world. The development of artilleries and missiles was on a vast scale, and the use of them was the highest in number at that time than any other time period. So how come Saadat Hasan Manto will not pay any attention to these things. With serious and sharp conciseness, Saadat Hasan Manto observed his age, the political undertakings both national and international, and presented them in front of his readers in the arrangement of short stories and another kind of creations. He had mastery to interpret the truth in a few words or sentences, sometimes in more than a paragraph. With less but piercing words he reflected things or thoughts in a surrealistic way.

This paper, therefore, intends to analyze the modernist Manto's later works specifically where he is seen as a bitter and devastating figure filled with revulsion. He along with more than a million North Indian people witnessed India's partition turning into a holocaust with their own eyes. The



letters were written to Sam Uncle in America by Manto best exemplifies his comprehensive knowledge about world politics. Manto saw both the World Wars, their later effects on the international markets and he has also witnessed the miraculous happenings of Russian Revolution, where the working class took precedence over the Russian power and broke the Soviet nation. Manto's writings question the very histories of that era. He spoke too much in few words, which made the words sharp enough to pierce through our hearts.

### **Manto's Short stories and his rebellion against injustice.**

The events described in Manto's stories deal with social fragmentation and cultural disintegration. The concept of power and punishment get functioned through the masses and mob which is very much similar to the sophisticated forms of moral policing we have in our country right now. The social veracities reflected in his short stories are the bleak realities that accompanied the long-awaited independence from the foreign rule. He portrays the misery of women suffering from the shock of kidnapping, rape, and forced prostitution featuring himself in the stories under the name of Manto. He became Saeed in the story "Bismillah", he became Qasim in the story "Sharif", also becomes Sirajuddin in the story "Open It" as a father who is delighted to find his daughter alive and ignoring the fact of her being a victim of rape.

In Manto's short stories relating to the time of partition and after Partition, the gender finishes following to the physiological aspects, for instance in his short story "Naked Voices" feminine qualities are forced upon Bholu by the perceptions of his wife towards his sexuality. For men, it has always been a sign of impotency to be attributed with any sort of feminine qualities or characteristic because of the stereotypical mindsets and conditioning that is grown in an individual since childhood in typical Indian societies. About his view on mankind, Mumtaz Sheerin, one of the best critics of Manto in her book *Manto: Noori Na Naari* (1919) significantly says,

Manto is not interested in sacred angels; Manto the writer does not have much to do with pure and innocent angels who can never perhaps commit sin. Manto's human being is neither an angel nor a devil. He is an earthly being, a creature of the flesh and blood that has the potentiality of original wickedness, mischief, and murder. But God has ordered angels to pay homage to



him. Manto is certainly “of his age” but in his fascination with the general human condition, he also goes beyond it. (3)

Manto going against the typical gender norms in some of his stories portray women as heroes during the partition of India. In the meantime they were the ones who suffered the most terrible acts such as being kidnapped; gang-raped and separated from their relatives, and yet still found compassion, patience, and spirit in themselves to help others. In his story “Mozail” the protagonist Mozail being a Jewish lady, during the bloody riots of 1947 sheltered and helped a Sikh couple to form a murderous Muslim crowd, later the Sardarji tried to woo her but she denied him. By sacrificing her life she showed mammoth courage in the moment of catastrophe and rose above the religious confines.

Giving her shawl to the Sikh women she becomes exposed and when a Muslim supporter offered her a cloth of him, she says “Takeaway this cloth of your religion. I don’t need it” (3). Similarly, some other representations of women made by Manto in his stories as being courageous, intellectual, and capable of surviving without men is completely against the flow of that time, because women had to be strictly governed by men in those days. Manto through his writings always tried to redefine the strict gender roles imposed upon people by society, which prove that Manto was a feminist too.

In another short story “Co-operation” Saadat Hasan Manto directly rejects the Gandhian Philosophy and the political ideologies about co-operating with the Colonizers and he considers it useless to complain about the violence and injustice in the country in a non-violent way. Manto being the avant-garde and a rebel supported Bhagat Singh’s ideologies to get his country free from the Britishers. Manto always opposed the politicians and their policies which were on the basis of religion for their own profit. Manto firmly rejected and spoke against the hypocrisy and deception made by his own fellow Indians too. He was less concerned about the catastrophes in his personal life but was much frightened about the diminishing communal affiliation between the two major religious communities of India. Regarding that in a satiric way Manto writes:

The Muslim Alliance is a mosque; Congress is a temple, he discovered, 'this is what people think and that is what the newspaper says as well. The congress wanted Swaraj (freedom) and so did



the Muslim Alliance. But both have separate ways and do not work together because temple and mosque have nothing in common. (9)

The same discrepancy between the All India Muslim League and Congress was ridiculed by him in his story “Three simple Statements”. As a kind of tool for excremental satire, he used the urinal near to the Congress House and Jinnah Hall to ridicule the dirty politics going on between them. He in some way paralleled the urinal to the politics which was going on only in the name of religion to divide the people into two groups. The way a public urinal is unrestricted to all, to come and answer their nature’s call, a place to dump all the wastes, political parties were spreading their hateful thoughts by their political statements and activities.

Saadat Hasan Manto’s consciousness realized the truth that even if England frees India, it will be occupied by some other kind of colonial control and it actually happened, when India won its freedom in 1947, the main advantage went to the capitalists of both sides. Common people were in distress mostly because of capitalism and this is still the same in the 21st century. From 1935 people of India and its subcontinent started to become impatient to realize the unpleasant truth that these European masters rule them with cruelty and at the same time have disapproval of them by treating them with hatred and in this way unlawfully ruled over India for so long. Saadat Hasan Manto gave a very strong voice against this through Mangu Kochwan, the central character of the story “New Constitution”, who says:

Look at them, came to the door to borrow a light, and the next thing you knew they owned the whole house. I am sick and tired of these offshoots of monkeys the way they order us around, you would think we are their father’s servants. I am sick of suffering and humoring these Lat sahibs. Every time I look at their blighted faces, my blood begins to boil in my veins. We need a new law to get rid of these people. Only that can revive us, I swear on your head. (37)

Hypocrisy is a cardinal sin towards which Manto is unforgiving in his writings. Equally, truthfulness is a redeeming feature in some of the most nauseating and wicked characters. In the short story “The Price of Freedom” the narrator takes a sardonic look at the principle of abandonment and self-restraint from sexes, which are traditionally regarded as praiseworthy. These life-denying practices, according to Manto, make people look dreadful and cause a curious falsification of their natural identities. In this story, Saadat Hasan Manto allegorically raised the question on Gandhian philosophy



'to quit' something which can be very necessary to stay alive. Was that possible for Nigar and Shehzada to live a life closing their eyes to each other and ignoring their psychological needs to have a child and to live a normal life as a married couple? Though the character of Shehezada is somehow following the Gandhian philosophy he was not great as him, who had the charisma and was ready to quit anything that could come in his way to attain his goal. In this story, Saadat Hasan Manto somehow supported the Gandhian philosophy but at the same time showed his disagreement with some of the Gandhian ideologies.

The story "The Last Salute" is a big question on nationhood, boundaries, and the statesmen who in the name of religion have divided the country and its people into two parts. Through the two soldier characters Rab Nawaz and Ram Singh, who were friends before partition and now serving for two different nations. Saadat Hasan Manto has painted the confusion of a soldier's mind, fighting for their countries, what might have been in their heads as for what exactly they are fighting in the war field for? Whether it is for Kashmir or for the Muslims, which Saadat Hasan Manto has described through the opinions of Rab Nawaz as:

For what, the Pakistani soldiers are fighting for, Kashmir or for the Muslims in Kashmir? If they were being told to fight for the security of the Muslims of Kashmir, why they have not been asked to fight for the Muslims of the states like Junagarh and Hyderabad? And if this was an Islamic battle, then why were the other Muslim countries of the world are not fighting shoulder to shoulder with them? They had been told: we are placing a gun in your hands so that you can go and combat for a country which you have yet to know, where you do not even have a rooftop over your head, where even the air and water is strange to you. Go and fight for it. (40-41)

Manto not only depicted the imperfect national reliability, but the corrupt officials and their selfish motifs, which could divide the countries, lands, rivers, mountains, and hills but cannot divide love, faithfulness, sincerity, and intimacy among people who once lived together in the same nation. Rab Nawaz is a faithful soldier of Pakistan but he didn't fire when his friend Ram Singh asked him not to do it. In the end, while dying they talk about their school days, British regiment, and other love affairs they had shared in their childhood.



He was against having leaders, where people follow one person and one belief to achieve something. Regarding this hatred he penned down his story called “Motri” reflects his disbelief in the political parties. For Saadat Hasan Manto, revolution, and freedom, these two beliefs were so influential that he wanted to see the characters like Hitler and Mussolini happening in India. Saadat Hasan Manto talked about this political culture and his resentment for politics, which comes in front of us, in the characters like Mangu Kochwan, Hawaldar Rab Nawaz, Thaila Kanjar, and sometimes as Santosh Singh.

Manto’s Politics draws its nutrition from his honest humanitarianism, his love for the oppressed, and his sense of impartiality and justice altogether. Manto’s *Letters to Uncle Sam* (2000) are a collection of nine letters to Uncle Sam and his single letter to Jawaharlal Nehru exposes his commentary on international issues at its best. His stand against the partition and social injustices, decidedly to register his existence as a cerebral figure who intervened in the public dominion through his innovative writings.

### **Manto’s satirical letters to Uncle Sam**

Saadat Hasan Manto wrote about nine letters to Uncle Sam which is of course a fictional character. He used the name ‘Sam’ sarcastically to show his anger for foreign countries, especially America for its rigid imperialistic agendas to rule over the world. In his First Letter to Uncle Sam, Manto introduces himself as:

You should know why my country, sliced away from India...My name is Saadat Hasan Manto and I were born in a place that is currently in India. My mother is buried there and my father too is buried there; my firstborn is also resting in that piece of earth. However, that place is no longer my country. Now my country is Pakistan, which I had only seen five or six times before, as a British business... I used to be All India’s famous short story writer.

(1)

Manto showed his frustration and resentment on the matter of partition and his immigration to Pakistan, as a result of it. He is the same letter showed his revulsion for the judgment with annoyance on his court trials and the anger of forced migration. Indians won their freedom but the mountain of problems was standing at the door which demanded immediate solutions. Saadat Hasan Manto described the figurative gait of the world power under the self-governing mold of view. He had sharp visualization of the





problems that India and its people were going to face right after independence. The problems like settling the immigrants, Kashmir, river water, and other circumstances demanded a complete and thorough consideration. Saadat Hasan Manto was quite aware of the circumstances, happenings and observing all those happenings well, he wrote in the letter:

Like my country, I too have become independent and in the same way. Uncle, I will not labor the point since an all known seer like you can well imagine the freedom of a bird whose wings have been clipped can enjoy...my country is poor, but why is it unaware? I am sure, uncle, you know why? Because you and your brother John Bull together is a matter I do not want to touch because it will not be an exact melody to your ears. (7)

In In the second letter to Uncle Sam, Manto talks about the issues related to World War II. Japan was the place where the first atomic bomb was released by America, to prove its supremacy over all the other countries of the world. Saadat Hasan Manto considers, the war between India and Pakistan as the result of the noisiness of the world powers and he said that we, as the result of a new revolution, made attempt to destroy each other, but in this attempt, we are damaging our own identities, the coming generation, and future. If these wars continue we would be forever fighting among ourselves. Saadat Hasan Manto severely criticized America's imperialistic agenda to indirectly control the weaker nations of the world in this letter. In the same letter, while commenting on Iran and the oil issue, he talks about the injustice towards the young nations by the powerful nations of the world especially America in a very sarcastic way. He wrote:

You have done many good deeds yourself and continue to do them. You decimated Hiroshima; you turned Nagasaki into smoke and dust and caused harm to several thousand children to born in Japan...Uncle Sam, what is this hydrogen bomb anyway? In the eighth grade, we were taught that hydrogen was lighter than air. Can you tell me what country's weight do you want the earth to be relieved of, Russia? I have heard that Russia is also making a nitrogen bomb. In the eighth grade, we were told that nitrogen was a gas human beings could not breathe and not die. I think your answer to the nitrogen bomb would be an oxygen bomb. We were taught in the eighth grade that when nitrogen and oxygen meet, they turn into water. Won't the world have fun with



all that water when the Russians throw their nitrogen bomb and you throw your oxygen bomb?  
(10-11)

In very simple words Saadat Hasan Manto pinpointed the schemas of America and Russia to have their supremacy over the complete world with their superpowers. As in the third letter to Uncle Sam, Manto writes:

American topcoats are also excellent and without them, our Landa Bazar would be quite barren. But why don't you send us trousers as well? Don't you ever take off your trousers? If you do, you probably ship them to India. There has to be a strategy to this because you send us jackets but no trousers, which you send to India. When there is a war, it will be your jackets and your trousers. These two will fight each other using arms supplied by you." (17-18)

With all these discussions about world politics it is clear that Saadat Hasan Manto was using Uncle Sam, just as a punching bag and the real aim behind all his punches was the owners of the political system of these European countries. That's the reason, he holds close their collars and one after another slaps his questions and miseries on their faces. In all the nine letters, of his microscopic inspection of the national and international politics, pre and post-independence period, we feel melancholy throughout. These letters appear to be a scream in the dark, which hold and enclose many diverse seen and unseen facets, many spoken and unspoken facts and disputes. It has been claimed frequently that, in the narrative of Saadat Hasan Manto, there is no visualization of a healthier society but by evaluating these letters with a different perspective, we can see a vision of a structure of living, in which he demanded equality for all, with no discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, customs, country, and power.

In the preface of the short story collection called "Untitled" Manto included a letter to Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru in August 1954. Manto describes the condition of India right after getting divided, as the matter of 'refugees' of Kashmir took the core attention. Manto, by his political awareness and beliefs, understood this issue clearly and in a very sharp manner, he illustrated this situation in this letter to his fellow Kashmiri, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Regarding the issue of Kashmir he writes:



The red cliff has divided the bread of India into two pieces. But alas till now we are unable to toast those bread. There you are trying to toast and here we but the flame, alas, we are borrowing it from foreigners. In Politics, I can mention your name with pride because you know well the fine art of contradicting yourself. To this very day, who can beat the Kashmiris in wrestling? Who can outshine us in poetry? But I was surprised to learn that you want to stop the rivers from flowing through our land. I regret that I am just measuring stone weighing one and a half sheer. If I were a rock of thirty or forty thousand mounds, I would have thrown myself into the river, so that you would have to spend much time consulting with your Engineers on how to pull it out? (1-2)

Manto makes immensely satirical comments on Nehru's injustice towards Kashmir and lacking sufficient determination to eradicate Kashmir's poverty. This conveys Manto's strong concern for the people and the land of Kashmir, as they were struggling between the politics of designation practiced by both India and Pakistan. Manto wrote this letter from Pakistan which came out as a result of the partition and man-made boundaries of blood. The agony of partition can also be seen in his physiological novel titled *Bagair Unwaan ke* which means 'without a title'. This leads us to the point that Manto was neither sidesplitting nor careless with whatever he penned, whether we are talking about his letter to Nehru or his novel without a title. He was unquestionably a strong critical thinker and was truthful enough about his understanding and representation of the situation of his times.

### **Conclusion**

The above discussed stories and letters by Manto take account of his socio-political awareness at its best. At the national level, the stories are bringing out a proper picture of the national politics and the leaders in precise words. On the other hand, the letters to Uncle Sam are an extensive mirror to the international issues and happenings of that era. Manto also assessed both the world wars, their effects, and after-effects exposing the demolition and the strategies on weaponry and ammunition. He raised his voice through the short stories and letters against the intent of politicians to include religion in Indian politics. Manto in these stories worked on themes built on religion, intolerance and along with it, he tried to spread compassion and humanity. He debarred politics in his fictional world, politics which was solely on the basis of religion. Almost all writers of India and its subcontinent wrote on these issues at



the same era he wrote, but Manto provided poles apart images of the same themes on politics, religion, and partition, through his writings. Saadat Hasan Manto is the creation of the decade, which was falsehearted to the core. Religious leaders, politicians, and their cunning, conjurer approaches were playing with the common people like dice on the board in that era.

When the fire of World War II cooled down, the ashes gave rise to the Cold War, in which to subsume each other, few European countries got into the production of arms and ammunition along with it hurried the import and export of these products with other countries. Saadat Hasan Manto in his letters to Uncle Sam brings down the false veil of war for the sake of defense and the production of more weapons to kill each other. He was the only daring Indian writer of that era to criticize America's selfish endeavors and its interloping on world politics and interfering in the home affairs of the less powerful Nations. He never indicated ways out for the handicapped politics, in any of his writings, as he was not a leader; he just pointed them out scarcely as a true writer supposed to do.

Manto made use of satire as a great tool to show his anti-imperialist views to discuss the happenings all over the globe at that time like neocolonialism and superpower. In short, we could say that Saadat Hasan Manto stated sardonically the boiling issues of the world with the same commitment, he wrote on psychology, society, and religion. With a heavy heart, he shifted to Pakistan after partition and died over there on 18th January 1955, which indicates that he could not endure long the reminiscence of the separation from his motherland and living in a new unknown country. Manto is as astonishingly prophetic today as he was in his own times. It is necessary to rescue and revive the realistic Manto today to challenge the historic and post-modern caricatures of his work.

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