

Women and partition: Short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto

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Introduction

In India we don't have any dearth of writers commemorating the trauma of partition. However, there are very few writers who could actually present us with a naturalistic portrayal without romanticizing the idea of partition. One such writer was Saadat Hasan Manto. He was born on May 11, 1912 in Punjab. He started his literary career by translating the works of Victor Hugo, Oscar Wilde, Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky.

Manto was tried for obscenity, thrice before 1947 and thrice after 1947 in Pakistan, but was never convicted. He had famously said about his writings, "if you find my stories dirty, the society you are living in is dirty. With my stories I only expose the truth". His legacy includes 22 collections of short stories, one novel, five collections of radio plays, 3 collections of essays, 2 collections of personal sketches and many film scripts. He is acknowledged as one of the finest 20th. Century Urdu writers and is the subject of a biographical film, Manto, directed by Sarmad Khoosat.

Afamed radio and film scriptwriter as well as a journalist. Manto's convincing portrayal of the situations and characters led him to become one of the best writers of undivided India ever. In fact, although hailing from Lahore, he is as much a famous personality in India as he is a treasured person in Pakistan. In this list, we shall learn about some of his most famous and endearing short stories ever. His stories originally written in Urdu are simply narrated, having an essence.

Tithwal Ka Kutta

It is a mockery on the futility of war and how it turns regular humans into suspicious beasts. It personifies the killings and sacrifice of lives through the death of a dog, which belongs to none of the warring sides. He keeps shuffling between the two enemy camps and a simple placard around his neck arouses the suspicion of both the sides. Named Jhun Jhun, the Pakistani side thinks his name carries a secret message and when he tries to return to the Indian borders, he is brutally murdered.

Toba Tek Singh

Named after a district of Punjab, this short story, one of the best by Manto is a satirical take on the effects of partition on the common people. That partition was simply a political massacre that ravaged the lives of millions was never told in any more poignant way instilled with a dose of humor. The last line of the story where the inmate of mental asylum makes the no-man's land as his divine abode is indeed much thought provoking and undoubtedly one of the best endings in Indian English literature.

Thanda Gosht

Yet another haunting saga from the era of partition this short story elaborated how this man-made massacre turned common men into heinous scavengers. The story revolves around a Sikh man who, in his last breath, accepts to his wife, his instance of raping a murdered Muslim girl- hence, the name of the story. Thanda - gosht or cold flesh. If you are yet to read this story, do read it once. You will be shocked to read about the extent of which partition created monsters out of jolly good people.

Kaali shalwar

If you want to read anything of life in metros in the modern times, read this short story that revolves around a small town prostitute Sultana and her disillusionment in Bombay, a city which inspires people to dream. It is a heartrending saga of identities, disillusionment, relationships and sheer nothingness, and is indeed one of the best reads ever. Read it now, if you are yet to. A Hindi film by Fareeda Mehta was also released with the same name in 2002.

Khol do

As always, we have saved the best for the last. Our favourite among the lot and one of Manto's best short stories ever. "Khol Do" is yet another poignant saga of the wrath of partition towards common and simple people. It is the story of a girl who loves the sight of her father during the partition and ends up being raped and gang raped again and again by the people of her own religion. That partition provoked in human approaches and evoked the eagerness of satiating one's basest pleasure irrespective of any religious sentiments has been rendered beautifully through this short story.

Conclusion

The stories of Manto expound partition, dogmas, women and society, sexuality, politics and religion. So, I think his writing style is based on the reality and things he observed in society, portaying those issues/happenings/instances in the form of stories. Mostly, I feel his writing is reflection of society that many people did not want to openly talk or write about. Hence he is regarded as one of the greatest short story writer on women and partition.

