

# **The Psychological Impact of Moral Restrictions in Urdu Short Stories: A Study of Saadat Hasan Manto**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research focused on analyze the psychological aspect of societal and moral constraints from the context of Urdu short stories especially the work of Saadat Hasan Manto. The primary data of short stories *Swaraj ke Liye* and *Darpoak* used for analysis. Utilized psychoanalysis and psychological literary criticism as the method of data analysis. This work focused on the problems of moral concern and derived psychopathological friction. Moral Anxiety Disorder is a subtle and profound psychological disorder that arises from the excessive, self-imposed adherence to religion, morality, social laws and regulations, legal punishments, and the values of one's respective regions and generations. This research finds out that Manto's characters engender intense psychological crisis whenever they are compelled to repress their sexual impulse in order to fit into the prescribed role of the society, thus thereby establishing a new paradigm of the moral anxiety disorder in the context of Urdu literature. Through usually broaching these conflicts, Manto depicts the society's vices that make it degrade its non-conformists to outcasts. There is no doubt that man's unruly and unrestrained desires often clash with the fabric of society. The experts in psychology and sociology agree that for societal welfare and progress, man must subject his unruly and unrestrained desires to societal boundaries as only through such discipline healthy societies are created. However, moral anxiety disorder does not stem from those desires that mirror animal instincts, but rather from the suppression of natural impulses and desires under the self-imposed notions of religion,

morality, and social values. Suppressing natural aspirations and desires under unnecessary adherence to moral values gives birth to moral anxiety disorder. Individuals suffering from this disorder, by subjecting themselves to unnecessary self-torment and repression, drift far from human nature and a balanced way of life, and for them, the normalcy of life becomes distorted. This research deals with the Moral Anxiety through Urdu short stories. From the perceptive of psychological and moral factors in Urdu fiction, this research work has go somewhat into understanding the impact of such moral restrictions on psychological experiences in a better way.

**keywords:** Urdu short stories, Saadat Hasan Manto, psychoanalytic criticism, moral restrictions, psychological conflicts, societal norms, psychological disorder, human nature

## **Introduction**

In Urdu short stories, the rediscovery of natural man is a significant theme. During the creative process of this rediscovery, Urdu short story writers have identified certain characters who have drifted far from their nature, which lead to the development of various psychological complexities. The writers have deemed any act unnatural that deviates from the fundamental behavioral characteristics of a man. In Urdu trends of short stories, they have reflected the social reality along with the glimpse at the society that struck the characters. This is a particularly appropriate genre for psychological and social studies of the tension between man's base nature and the demands of reason and law. Many Pakistani Urdu short story writers especially of the twentieth century have depicted the very critical aspects of mental diseases conflicts of right and wrongs where the characters have to struggle to accept the self they know and the roles that the society wants them to perform. This paper is concerned with the theme of "the natural man" and the psychological implications of a shift from the structural natural man in the works of some of the renowned Urdu short story writers with special reference to Saadat Hasan Manto.

When approaching the works of these writers it is important to always consider historical and cultural context that surrounded them. What existed in the earlier middle twentieth th century was intense political, social and religious transformation within the Indian subcontinent. Partition was not just on political angles but also on social change and break up of moral fabrics of the society and the Independence movement was not only search for

political freedom but also the search for one's identity. Realism of conflicts between the individual and society, and morality as an element of culture with provided a rich soil for psychology in literature. It is for this reason that characters in these stories are not only constructs of fiction but also post Slots in Search of Society, seek to deconstruct society, subjects, and selves in societies that are in the constant process of transformation.

Saadat Hasan Manto, one of the giants of Urdu literature, was as brutal in his handling of the human mind as have been few writers of any generation. His tales have always seemed to touch on the literal suppression and depression of the human spirit by the moral and cultural standards of the world. Manto depicted the social vices of the society, the forthcoming disaster which results due to purification of the natural instincts. For Manto, rejection of one's nature was not courage or righteousness: he saw it as a road to psychic disintegration and ethical upset. Hence, Manto, in his stories, exploited the leash that Pakistani society puts on its citizens' behaviors, which categorically bans any action that is regarded unnatural or perverse; they worsen the mental condition of those who cannot follow these norms of behaving appropriately.

When dealing with moral anxiety more specifically, in the context of the literature that focuses on psychology, it is possible to discuss similarities with Freud's psychoanalysis, which states that existing desires or unfulfilled impulse become a kind of pressure inside a human. The presentation of these themes is however colored by cultural and social aspects in Urdu literature. Manto saw moral anxiety in the light of the sub continental socio-political reality phase where desire and the larger societal moral code intervened. While all of Manto's characters try to face the direct repercussions of the violations or upholding of such roles, the themes in the tales expose the internal consequences to the mind as per the societal standards.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because it analyses the inner mental complexion of characters in Urdu short stories that experience complex burdens of societal and ethical constraints. Using works of Saadat Hasan Manto as well as other writers, this paper analyses how literary characters in Urdu fictional sphere represent inner conflict which stems from human passions and social norms. Thus, examining the degree and nature of moral anxiety disorder in these stories, the present research gives understanding of the authors' attitudes towards the human nature and norms as well as the

psychological effects of going against one's innate self. Besides, this research adds to the body of scholastic criticism particularly the psychological criticism in Urdu literature by focusing on human instincts that lead the characters into their acts and make them evolve. They use unnatural social and moral practices as the types of protagonists to explain how Urdu short story writers call for people to reject the polished lifestyle and embrace the natural one. This study is a useful contribution to the field of Urdu literature criticism especially where it concerns the psychological considerations in literature.

## **Methodology**

This research will employ a qualitative research methodology and to expose the psychological wars that envelop characters subjected to social and ethical dilemmas. These are the kind of episodes that are the primary material, revealing Manto's narrative of public decency and the effects of censorship on a man's spirit. In applying psychoanalytic criticism and psychological concerns popular in literary analysis, the analysis defines and evaluates such themes as nature, culture, natural, unnatural occurrences and analyzing character's reaction to imposed ethical codes. This framework enables a concrete definition of Manto's characters to be offered as well as illustrate the role of conformity to societal norms is a precursor to psychological disorder among the characters. By employing this research approach, the study identifies and discusses deep psychological meaning of noncompliance or compliance with societal norms in Urdu literature.

## **Data Collection**

The primary data of this study is original and extracted from two short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto including *Swaraj ke Liye* and *Darpoak* in which characters face a conflict within their mind because of social and moral constraints. These are the tales that go to form a basis through which the reader can begin to understand how pollutants which form part of Urdu literature shape the impact of repressing the natural drives for the virtue that the society prescribes.

## **Data Analysis Technique**

A qualitative analysis technique is used to study and understand the psychological processes, ethical concern and the character portrayals in the chosen stories as a method. Psychoanalytic criticism and psychological approaches form the basis of the study of how Manto's characters are creatures of conflict between the instincts and social norms and the unconscious cost of the struggle.

## Analysis and Discussion

Urdu short story writers have addressed not only clear and major psychological issues but have also paid attention to the delicate aspects of human nature and social prohibitions. In his works Manto depicted sexual perverts with different types of psychological disorders starting from moral repression up to mental illness due to the clash with instincts and society imposed self-restrictions. It is important to analyze these psychological features in the narrative of Urdu short stories because the story under discussion raises more general social themes of society concerning the consequences of suppression of basic human urges in the name of morality or decency. In this context, Manto's words are noteworthy:

*"Violating nature is by no means bravery. It is no achievement to starve yourself to death or stay alive. Digging a grave and burying yourself in it, holding your breath inside for days, lying on a bed of sharp nails for months, keeping one hand raised for years until it withers into a stick—neither God nor Swaraj can be attained through such circus acts." (1)*

The difference between moral anxiety and moral anxiety disorder can be illustrated through Manto's stories *Darpoak* (The Coward) and *Swaraj ke Liye* (For Freedom). The character in *Darpoak* is neither mentally ill nor does he exhibit the psychological disorder of religious or moral anxiety. He is stopped from entering the dark alley of prostitutes because of his twenty-seven years of moral and religious beliefs. Manto highlights this anxiety as follows:

*"Why is this lantern glaring at me... It's throwing obstacles in my path... His resolve had grown so intense that if mountains had been in his way, he would have clashed with them. But a blind municipal lantern, which a gust of wind could extinguish, had become a major hindrance in his path." (2)*

Though psychoanalytic theories might interpret the "lantern" in this story as a symbol of Manto's father's eyes and the "blind alley" as an unconscious metaphor for his repressed feelings of hatred towards those eyes, our local psychological criticism is still not very familiar with interpreting unconscious symbols based on the text. Otherwise, this story could have significantly unveiled the unconscious world of the author himself. The notion of restrictions for Manto's character in this story does not seem to lead to any major psychological disorder.

However, in contrast, Gulam Ali's disgust for rubber goods in *Swaraj ke Liye* reveals a psychological disorder rooted in moral, political, and religious restrictions. Ghulam Ali of Manto's *Swaraj ke Liye* and Hamid of *Darpoak* serve as illuminating examples of the distinction between moral anxiety and moral anxiety disorder.

In Manto's story *Swaraj ke Liye*, Gulam Ali is portrayed as an enthusiastic young man from the Indian subcontinent's freedom movement. On the day of his wedding, he passionately vows in front of a large crowd at Jallianwala Bagh that he will not father enslaved children, and he makes his bride-to-be take the same oath. The psychological effects of this unnatural vow are depicted through his phobia of rubber materials. Manto writes through the character's voice:

*"It's such a great thing that I stayed true to my vow—this provided me with immense satisfaction, but a thin web of rubber began to stretch over my mind... The touch of rubber clung to my brain. When I ate, the bites crunched under my teeth like rubber."* (3)

Manto often portrayed various political and literary figures of his time in his stories, with slight changes to their names. For instance, Bedi and Sitarthi appear in *Taraqqi Pasand*, and Ismat Chughtai in *Nafsiyati Mutalia*, although Manto later denied this. In *Swaraj ke Liye*, one can sense the presence of Gandhi behind the character of Babaji. Manto presents Gulam Ali as a product of the unnatural environment in Babaji's ashram. The story contains glimpses of the unnatural elements in Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, celibate lifestyle, and the political ambitions of those who followed this way of life. Beyond Babaji's political ideals, his celibate sacrifices become an ideal for Gulam Ali, and on his wedding day, he makes an unnatural decision whose psychological effects severely distort his daily life. The story portrays a stark contrast between the reactions of the crowd in the garden and his new bride to Gulam Ali's decision.

*The dry atmosphere of Jallianwala Bagh reverberated for a long time with the deafening applause. Shahzada Gulam Ali became emotional. In this wave of emotion, he addressed Nigar loudly, "Nigar! Will you bear to be the mother of a slave child?" Nigar, who was already bewildered—partly by the wedding and partly by Babaji's speech—became even more confused at this sharp tone. All she could say was, "What?"... "No!"* (4)

According to Manto, political movements that protest against man's basic and natural characteristics open several doors to mental and psychological dangers in human life. This story also reveals Manto's perspective on marriage, which, in his view, is not just about the fulfillment of instincts wrapped in plastic.

In the story, Manto gradually shows the psychological effects of Gulam Ali's adherence to his vow becoming increasingly tormenting. Manto believes that when a person deviates from their basic nature and natural way of life, their actions bring forth distorted forms of moral anxiety disorder. Referring to this disorder in Gulam Ali's life, Manto writes:

*"Slowly, I (Gulam Ali) began to feel the very painful and tormenting realization that I had paralyzed a significant and essential part of my body and soul... We were both withering away. Internally, we were losing ourselves."*<sup>(5)</sup>

While examining the psychological effects of Gulam Ali's unnatural commitment, Mumtaz Shirin writes:

*"He (Gulam Ali) had to impose such restrictions on his natural desires that he could no longer maintain normal sexual relations with his wife. This vow, as harmful as it could be for his physical health, clearly also halted his growth and the development of his personality, leaving it stunted and incomplete."*<sup>(6)</sup>

Although Manto wrote this story after independence, it vividly highlights the political movements and their leaders, followers, etc., involved in the freedom struggle before independence, with a deep political consciousness. Gandhi's non-cooperation movement became more prominent in Urdu fiction through the works of Premchand. The characters in the stories of that era are depicted as filled with patriotic fervor, courage in battling imperial forces, and a spirit of sacrifice. However, by the time Manto wrote *Swaraj ke Liye*, the political consciousness had shifted. By highlighting Gulam Ali's distorted psychological life, Manto presents the tragedy of characters submerged in the tumultuous waves of pre-independence political ideologies, expressing dissatisfaction with them. Through this fictional character, Manto appears to despise a politics whose dreams are tied to unnatural elements. For Manto, freedom is futile if it is achieved while remaining internally imprisoned.

In this story, Manto employs the delicate technique of flashback. At the beginning of the story, Gulam Ali's obsession with rubber goods is highlighted. Manto weaves together the atmospheres of both the past and present to bring out the theme of Gulam Ali's psychological disorder, the political attitudes of his era, and the value of natural impulses. A psychological subtlety in the story is the persistent presence of Gulam Ali's obsession despite his return to a healthy marital relationship. Manto's story on the delicate subject of moral anxiety disorder is not only a representative piece of Urdu literature but also one of the few stories written on this topic. Sigmund Freud had delivered several lectures on this subject in the context of psychoanalysis, which were published during his lifetime.

In the story *Panch Din*, Manto also creates the character of a professor wrapped up in self-imposed moral ideas, who is so engrossed in enhancing his persona that he drifts far from a natural way of life. His constant suppression of natural desires and aspirations, along with his pathological adherence to social and moral status, manifests as moral anxiety disorder in the form of physical ailments. Manto focuses his creative attention on the last five days of the professor's life, during which he makes confessions to Sakina.

*"Listen... I'm a lie—a huge lie. My entire life has been spent lying to myself and then turning those lies into truth. Oh, how painful, unnatural, and inhuman that was. I had killed a desire, but I didn't realize that after this murder, I'd have to commit even more. Sakina! What I'm saying now sounds like philosophical nonsense, but the plain truth is that I kept trying to elevate my character while sinking deeper into the swamp of degradation."* <sup>(7)</sup>

The professor's sense of hunger and thirst fading, and his tuberculosis, can be seen in this light that the unnatural and obsessive adherence to forced moral values affects not only his psychological state but also his physical health. The story reflects his unfulfilled natural desires. In Manto's view, such hypocrisy becomes a personal torment for characters like this.

One fascinating aspect of this story is how the professor doesn't mind sneaking a glance through backdoors, but he's terrified of openly expressing himself. His social and moral stature acts as a barrier to his natural desires. All his life, the professor suppresses his natural longings, but in his final days, he removes the guard over his soul and cries out:



*"If only I had the courage to hoist my so-called high character on a tall pole like a monkey on a stick, and beat a drum to gather people around, saying, 'Come, look, and learn a lesson.' "* (8)

Manto doesn't hate "Chadda", he adores characters like Dooda Pehelwan, he takes pride in Babu Gopi Nath, and even treasures the character in Mummy who openly expresses his desires. But Manto detests Taqi Katib's father and the professor from *Panch Din*—those who wear the cloak of hypocrisy in the name of moral values. Manto admires straightforward, honest characters, even though society may reject them. He finds them precious, like medals he proudly wears on his soul. Manto despises the likes of the professor and Ghulam Ali, who hide behind pretentious moral and social values. As Mumtaz Shireen writes about Manto's defense of human nature:

*"Manto, in his defense of human nature, rebelled against social restrictions, conventional morals, and the society that upheld them. At times, he took this rebellion too far, and his story "Panch Din" is an example of that."* (9)

Both Ghulam Ali of *Swaraj Ke Liye* and the professor of *Panch Din* eventually returning to their true selves, suggesting that one must tear apart the fabricated social and moral masks and embrace a healthier way of life. From Manto's own life, it can be seen how straightforward and transparent he was in many matters, protesting whenever he saw society hiding behind moral façades. Even his contemporaries were displeased with this. Opendrar Nath Ashk, who once wrote a biting portrait of Manto and considered him an enemy, still had the courage to say, *"I like you, though I hate you."* (10) But Manto could never like Ghulam Ali's unnatural choices or the Professor's last five days. He looked upon them with pity, hoping that characters like them would break free from their self-imposed social and moral constraints and seek a healthier life.

Fayyaz Mahmood's short stories haven't received much attention, though some of them have a certain psychological allure. His story *Aik Sauda Hi Sahi* is one example. Published in Adab-e-Latif's 1949 annual edition, this story addresses the moral and psychological disorder caused by a rigid adherence to family traditions. While most Urdu short stories explore such disorders in the context of societal and political values, Mahmood's story examines the psychological impact of personal and family values. The central character, valuing his family's traditions above all, sacrifices his love and marries where his parents wish. After marriage, a

deep sense of guilt grows within him, and he sees himself as a criminal to his beloved. This guilt manifests as psychological turmoil, resulting in hallucinations and delirium. Mahmood highlights this disorder in the following passage:

*“The electricity poles are no longer standing straight. Why are they dancing? What are they singing? .... His wife was deeply troubled by this, especially when he started singing, out of tune, during his delirium... ‘Take me... take me,’ he would often repeat... Ik Sauda hi Sahi... Ik Sauda hi Sahi... ”* (11)

Though the story isn't as strong artistically as Manto's *Panch Din*, it still holds importance for depicting the psychological effects of unnatural family traditions.

In Urdu fiction, characters connected to the tradition of Sufism often exhibit strict moral adherence, but they don't show signs of psychological disorder due to moral anxiety. Some Urdu writers, such as Manto and Agha Babar, did not embrace Sufi ideals. In 1994, Agha Babar, responding to one of my questions, said:

*“I don't read this Sufi poetry and such. To me, it's the poetry of the graveyard... grave, death, the punishment of the grave. That's not my temperament. Let this chapter continue for those who follow it, I don't object. But I don't find it appealing.”* (12)

Agha Babar's protest against the suppression of desires in Sufism appears in his story *Dil ki Basti Ajeeb Basti Ha*. This story portrays a Sufi character who, after independence, lives in the house of a prostitute in Lahore, enduring her abuse, chasing a runaway rooster all day, and yet feels no sense of humiliation because he's killed that feeling within himself. Agha Babar writes: *“What kind of new creed is this? What spiritual dimension is hidden in such tragic self-denial?”* Agha Babar's story suggests that some Urdu fiction writers viewed the self-denial of Sufi figures as unnatural, though they didn't attribute psychological disorders to them. (13)

In Urdu fiction, moral anxiety is frequently addressed, but the psychological disorder stemming from it is less explored. Rajinder Singh Bedi's story *Mangal Ashtika* offers one example. In Bedi's story, the Brahmachari priest Jio Ram, driven by the intense awareness of his social status, remains unmarried. By the time Jio Ram reaches the age of forty, the reality of his celibate life, combined with the weight of his social standing, causes him considerable

anxiety. Bedi's story doesn't depict the kind of psychological disorder evident in Manto's stories with Ghulam Ali's rubber obsession or the professor's tuberculosis and fading senses. This difference allows us to draw a line between moral anxiety and moral anxiety disorder.

*“Merely out of fear of being pointed at, he restrained himself, until, by the age of forty, this idea had become deeply fractured. Several tantalizing marriages had struck heavy blows to his obstinacy.”<sup>(14)</sup>*

Bedi's Jio Ram experiences moderate moral anxiety, in contrast to the more severe psychological disorder seen in Manto's Ghulam Ali, the Professor, and Fayyaz Mahmood's characters. Since both literature and psychology revolve around the human experience, there is often overlap between the two fields. Like psychologists, fiction writers have examined personal and social problems behind psychological turmoil. At times, they have unconsciously drawn from the psychological truths presented by Freud, Jung, and Adler. Urdu fiction writers have explored psychological disorders as both personal and social issues, tracing the factors behind these disorders in their stories.

There has always been a contentious debate between Marxist and psychological experts regarding the root causes of human problems: do they primarily lie within the individual, or can they be seen reflected in the realities of society? Many psychologists have sought to find the roots of psychological disturbances within the individual, while Marxist critics have looked to the ups and downs of society for answers. Urdu fiction writers have generally placed the cause of a distorted psychological state in society, aligning their thinking more closely with the Marxist perspective. Social restrictions are a prime example of this. In the world of Urdu fiction, the unhealthy adherence to self-imposed moral values has been considered a major cause of psychological turmoil. This aspect of Urdu fiction reveals that a significant source of psychological distress lies not in the individual but in the societal framework.

## **Conclusion**

This study shows how Urdu short stories, especially those written by Saadat Hasan Manto, explain the psychological troubles that occur when people face social and ethical boundaries. On analyzing special stories like *Swaraj ke Liye* and *Darpoak* a reader is able to understand that Manto washes all his characters between a rock and a hard place between a desire to follow ones instincts and being inhibited by the society. Manto, through providing insight into moral anxiety shows that acting a

certain way imposed by the society that one does not feel within results in psychological dysfunction. This paper establishes that Manto does not only portray straightforward psychological themes but also such latent human concerns as anxiety resulting from societal pressures and norms with the ultimate aim of questioning those whose norms endanger the natural essence of beings. Through these themes, Manto has provided his readership with a these works provide his readership with the reminder of accepting one's automatic self, as well as forcing the spectator to evaluate the ramifications of using unnatural standards. There has been an ongoing debate between Marxist and psychological perspectives on the root causes of human problems, regardless of whether it is an innate predisposition, or a result of certain sociological factors. While psychologists seek deficits inside the person for inabilities to psychological equilibrium, Marxist critics concentrate on structural explanations. Urdu fiction writers March with the Marxist approach to view that mental suffering results from social factors; notably, the ironic obsession with moral scruples underpins the unhealthy sociality which they make the primary cause of psychological turmoil. This research therefore fits into the realm of Urdu literary criticism in terms of the centrality of psychology and social enlightened values in the literary romances of Manto and contests the enduring discovery of the writer in the arena of Urdu Literature

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