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## **Portrayal of Cultural Restraints on Social Taboos: Selected Works of Saadat Hasan Manto and D. H. Lawrence**

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### **Abstract:**

The present paper aims at interpreting the canon of culture, ideologies and social taboos through the works of D. H. Lawrence and Saadat Hasan Manto. Writings of both the writers complement each other because of their quirk of selecting controversial topics. Based on the review of literature, the research scrutinises the depiction of social freedom, desires and personifies different colours of women's lives in a conventional society through their characters. Both Cultural and Psychological approaches have been used in the paper to explore the concept of culture concerning its relationship with the discourse of civilization, religion, everyday life, science and ideology. Saadat Hasan Manto was often compared to D.H. Lawrence who steadily wrote about the issues of typical hypocrisy in the conventional patriarchal world. The focus of this paper is on reviewing restraints on social issues. It is an attempt to conceive and recognize cultural obstructions and to access them realistically with a desire to bring progress in this field.

**Keywords: Social taboos, hypocrisy, obscenity, victimisation, women and lust.**

Every domain has certified social norms, which have to be pursued mystically irrespective of one's societal identity. A taboo is an implicit prohibition based on religious beliefs or morals. Unfortunately, for writers engrossed in exploring these forbidden topics of the society end up indulging themselves into controversies and sometimes-fatal career. Breaking a stigma in culture as a whole is highly unacceptable. However, some writers are least bothered about their reputation and dig out the realities in front of the world. They speak to the crude and unexposed part of the society. Writers like Saadat Hasan Manto and D.H.Lawrence touched these boundaries by tearing the world apart through their rebellious writings. Lawrence and Manto offer alternative visions of conventional codes, paving the way to restructure gender, class, national identities, social relations, and human geography in

general. They reflect patriarchal experiences and discourses; these writers are not trapped into the ideological limits. Battling the political representation of compassionate space-, which seeks to preserve a hierarchical, class-stratified social order by fostering a homogenized conception of the home as free from oppression, confrontation, and resistance-these writers represent domestic space as multifaceted and complex. They dig into the often-muted perceptions and viewpoints of the oppressed while at the same time representing and perverting the prevailing socio-spatial structure. Such writers are also questioning traditional activities and dogmas around the public realm. They objectively reveal the gendered division of space and limits on women's entry into the male-dominated public domain and advocate for the reconceptualisation of public realm by a thorough analysis of the popular idea of public space as a venue for self-realization and liberation.

They depicted human psychology through their characters and were admired for realistically portraying emotions and experiences. They even alarmed the world through their contributions not only in writing but also in films, radios and other technological interventions. Relying profoundly on a chronicling of these affairs, this paper portrays how these writers shape a rich and credible site, which paves a way towards the development of society by connecting these narratives to larger cultural narratives of race, class and nation. Their writings were considered loathsome because its radical attitude has crippled the so-called social taboos of society. By analyzing their works, we could interpret their point of view, which has revealed the reality of the corrupt society, and exposed the real face of politics, which has been befooling the society since ages. However, the paper raises serious questions about the nature and task of theology, faith and morality.

Saadat Hasan Manto was avowed for his short stories that proved as quite a revelation for the society. He jolted the world by exposing the truth and sentiments of the society and for this, he was acknowledged for his universal appeal. Saadat Hasan Manto was known for splintering social taboos on Indo-Pak society during partition era. Saadat Hasan Manto sticks out in a sea of people. He is one of the different, disputed, and the most loved short story writer He valiantly reviewed the real side of the society and the relationship of men and women. Manto's writings were criticized for obscenity and sexuality in them. In the words of Manto,

'I am no sensationalist. Why would I want to take the clothes off a society, civilization and culture that is, in any case, naked? Yes, it is true I make no

attempt to dress it – because it is not my job; that is a dressmaker’s job. People say I write with a black pen, but I never write on a black board with a black chalk. I always use a white chalk so that the blackness of the board is clearly visible.’

(18)

Manto’s foremost short stories for which he was charged for obscenity also such as *Toba Tek Singh*, *Open It (Khol Do)*, *Cold Meat (Thanda Ghost)*. Manto was deeply embroiled in controversies throughout his life. There are countless anecdotes about his eccentricities, his impatient temperament, and his iconoclastic ideas. The Partition of the Subcontinent in 1947 tragically altered the course of Manto’s life. Manto’s creative energy was undiminished and he spent his life writing parables of lost reason, demonic horror and unimaginable violence.

Manto died in 1955, without being able to locate his lost homeland, like his protagonist Toba Tek Singh. Published in 1953, it renders the pain and trauma of the experiences of the partition with acute sensitivity. The tragedy of the common people is powerfully portrayed in this story through the disintegration of individual psyches when political decisions are suddenly thrust upon them. Derision, bewilderment, bizarre scenes of rape, massacre, plunder and madness take over, and the boundary between the madhouses and the outside world. The protagonist, Bishan Singh, a Sikh inmate of an asylum in Lahore is from the town Toba Tek Singh. As governments of India and Pakistan decided to exchange some Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, Bishan Singh is sent under police escort to India, but upon being told that his birthplace Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan, he declines to leave. To a mental patient like him, the blazing worlds of India and Pakistan seemed illogical and insane against the simple idea of peaceful home in Toba Tek Singh. Toba Tek Singh is a representation and personification of No Man’s Land. Sympathy is evoked for the helplessness of the victim as well as the aggressor, both of whom are caught in the collapse of reason when they have wrenched away from the physical and psychological securities that have been built over generations. Manto is admired for bringing out the topic of the psyche so beautifully which was again regarded as a social taboo in the society. Here in Manto’s own words, “There is knowledge. Everything else comes and goes.”(Manto 22)

Similarly, D.H. Lawrence shunned sentimentalism and concerned himself with contemporary life and problems. His writings frequently uncover the unequal relations between different genders and classes, reversing the patriarchal discourse about gender and

space Lawrence believed that the novelist's job was to show the genuine turns of view of an individual about his personality. Such works as *Discord in Childhood*, *Master in His House*, and *Sons and Lovers* crushes the current cultural myths of domestic space as a harmonious, safe, maternal haven.

*Sons and Lovers* is one such novel by Lawrence in which he demonstrates how discrepancy develops easily in human nature, especially with love. Lawrence plans to present a different familial structure where there is a complete destitute of love and finds it staggered as it firms itself on the mother and ladylove. This happens to both his sons, William and Paul. Though William dies in the course of the novel, Paul perpetuates the struggle. With no intention of deliberately forcing her love on her sons, Gertrude Morel finds that the love of her sons for her is not natural and true for it is a reflexive upshot of the love she showers on them. This kind of love, which explores itself to severity, averts both the sons from fully acknowledging their love for their life partners. In addition, this scenario has its psychological base, which is called the Oedipus complex. Both William and Paul are emotion bound, and intellect barely incites them from their slumber. The story takes another turn when the lovers of the sons become the object of enviousness for Gertrude Morel. For the first time in this novel, the theme of Oedipus complex emerged in this manner. The psyche stretches itself and exaggerates the circumstances to hunt warmth repulsed in real life, and hence the track of life appears ridiculous. The Oedipus complex is the mother fixation. In the words of D. H. Lawrence, "Recklessness is almost a man's revenge on his woman. He feels he is not valued, so he will risk destroying himself to deprive her altogether." (191)

Both were known for their rebellious attitude of writing. They audaciously stirred the subjects, which were then examined to be taboos across their respective societies. They wrote compulsively about those affairs that lead to the demarcation of the societies and the awful agony it wreaked on innocent people. They wrote on other subjects too most notably on sex! For them, sex is a reality of life and so there is no shame to write about it. For this, both were regarded as realistic writers. They say we write what we see and so there is nothing obscene in this but still because of their dauntless attitude towards reality, both were charged for obscenity many times.

*Khol Do (Open It)*, is one such story that depicts the molestation of women during the partition era. It also portrays the cries of helplessness, the traumatic times and the social breakdown. The way Manto has presented the massacres, rape, miseries and abduction of

women in this story has never done before by any writer. This story *Open It* portrays the sexual assault of a young girl Sakina, who goes missing when the train is attacked by rioters. Sirajuddin, her father starts searching for his daughter throughout the concentration camps. He takes the help of some boys who have been assigned the task of searching women and children. It turns out they find a girl on the roadside and she is extremely frightened but tries to trust them and go with them when they informed her that her father has assigned them this task. One of the rescuers gives her his jacket:

The young men were very kind to her. They had fed her, given her milk to drink and put her in their truck. One of them had given her his jacket so that she could cover herself. It was obvious that she was ill-at-ease without her dupatta, trying nervously to cover her breasts with her arms (Manto 44)

However, men being men, gang-raped her, shattering her trust and her soul. The saddest part is that she is not traumatised and raped by some other community but by her people and her community. The concluding scene where Sakina is lying unconscious can be explained best in Manto's own words:

The doctor looked at the body on the stretcher. He checked its pulse and said to Sirajuddin, 'The window, open it! At the sound of the words, Sakina's corpse moved. Her dead hands undid her salwar and lowered it. Old Sirajuddin cried with happiness, 'She's alive, my daughter's alive!' The doctor was drenched from head to toe in sweat. (45)

Khol Do's Sakeena symbolizes a woman of today still prone to male narrowness. It is a sign of the countless women who are unceasingly perpetrators of female genital mutilation, acid attacks and other types of physical and emotional violence. It simply depicted how women have been treated as an Object during the partition time and the emptiness of ideas and faith on both sides of the border.

In Pakistan, Manto was tried twice for obscenity. In January 1952, in between trials, Manto wrote:

My mind was in a strange state. I couldn't understand what I should do. Whether I should stop writing or carry on totally regardless of this scrutiny. Truth be told, it had left such a bad taste that I almost wished some place would be allotted to me where I could sit in one corner, away for some years from pens and ink wells;

should thoughts arise in my mind, I would hang them at the gallows; and should an allotment not be possible, I could begin work as a black marketer or start distilling illicit alcohol... (18)

In the same manner, Lawrence's frank representation of sexuality in *The Rainbow* caused turmoil and the novel was seized by the police and banned almost as soon as it was published. Today it is regarded as one of the best English novels of the twentieth century. *The Rainbow* is among three generations of the Brangwen family of Nottinghamshire from the 1840s through to the early 20th century. In this sense, Lawrence's primary focus is the romantic life of his characters as he examines the forces that shape their lives, using the divine metaphors in which they find themselves. His primary focus is on the individual's struggle towards the growth and contentment within marriage and changing social outlook, which is a difficult process to flourish through the generations. Young Ursula Brangwen, whose story continues in *Women in Love*, is, at last, the central figure in Lawrence's framework of English social life's confining system and the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation on the human psyche. *The Rainbow* is also one of the most controversial novels by Lawrence, which has broken all the walls of Social taboos. This novel was banned in Britain for its obscenity. Before it was published, certain passages from it were taken out. In America, it was further censored. The story revolves around passionate love with reservations on the part of the lovers, especially females, and the eventual failure. This novel proves that women have a passion in abundance, and expect males to dance to their tunes. When males maintain their individuality, their passionate females fail and begin to seek identities. The protagonist, Ursula develops a passionate relationship with Anton Skrebensky who is in the military. The novel talked about the lesbian relationship also, which was almost next to sinning against that society. This relationship develops when Anton departs to participate in the Boer War. Anton returns and Ursula becomes passionate again owing to the renewal of relationship but she fails in academic pursuits. However, Anton gets married to his Colonel's daughter and meanwhile, her pregnancy coupled with disappointment makes her delirious leading to miscarriage. She begins to contemplate a rainbow through her window, which she believes sways away symbolically the 'corruption of houses and factories'.

Both were writing about the society they were living in. Saadat Hasan Manto wrote about culture in India and Pakistan before and after partitioning. The terror of Partition is one of the most alarming themes in many of his stories like *Sharifan* and *By God*. A woman kills her pimp in *Hundred Candle Watt Bulb*, because she had not slept in a long, long time and he

kept pushing her to sleep with clients. No one knows how long the woman's misery had been going on, who the woman was or how she met the pimp. When the woman, lamented beyond endurance by her lack of sleep, clobbers the pimp with a brick and finally sleeps, her head covered with her dupatta, lying in a bright light of a hundred-candle watt bulb, blissfully unaware. Nothing matters in the explosive end. What did this woman want from life? Sleep. In addition, the pimp stood on the way of her and sleeps. Therefore, she kills him. Through this novel, Manto has vocalised his thoughts about women being a warrior. There is a limit to her harassment and sufferings, and she can act back when it is needed.

Lawrence's works also provide extensive meditation on the inhumane impact of liberalism and industrialisation. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, teeming with fleshy descriptions this novel was causative of Lawrence's emotional setback. It was lambasted for its new descriptions. Constance is the central figure in the novel. Her husband is Sir Clifford Chatterley. He is crippled in war and resigns to a life of writing and confinement. Serving him is a bore to Constance and she falls in love with Mellors, her husband gamekeeper. They get married and are psychologically forged to defy societal prescriptions. Lawrence makes the individual cultures present themselves with their preferences, which ironically isolate Sir Clifford Chatterley. Clifford's is a post-war, exhausted and degenerate psyche while Mellors is bouncing with vitality. Constance who is Lady Chatterley prefers new life by marrying Mellors. According to Lawrence, the subjugation of reason by instinct would lead to fuller meaning in life. Through this novel, we can make out that this novel has truly alarmed the world by the description of how one married woman desires for some other man, which is one such topic that tops the list of social taboos. Lawrence finds the idea of sex very natural. He says, "Sex is just another form of talk, where you act the words instead of saying them" (Lawrence 42)

Lawrence had discussed several times the idea of setting up a Utopian community with several of his friends:

I want to gather together about twenty souls and sail away from this world of war and squalor and found a little colony where there shall be no money but a sort of communism as far as necessities of life go and some real decency... a place where one can live simply, apart from this civilisation... [With] a few other people who are also at peace and happy and live, and understand and be free... (Meyers 173)



*Thanda Gosht (Cold Flesh)* is yet another soul-crushing story for which he was again charged with obscenity and faced a trial in criminal court. This story is one of the best examples to show a real side of those men who treat woman simply as an object, and not as a living creature just like them. For them, lust and fulfilling their desire comes first before anything else in their life. They have no feeling of duty for society. For them, women are easily available to men because of their destiny to be marginalised and to be taken as other. The tale is about the brutality of the society in 1947. This purely reflects in this story where Ishwar Singh who was away from his home for almost a week, fails to make love to his wife Kalwant Kaur. She suspects him of fickleness and as if a savage animal stabs him with his Kirpan plunges his neck. While dying, Ishwar Singh admits his crime getting involved in riots, which broke in his village and looted a Muslim family of seven people. He killed six of them with the same dagger, abducted a beautiful girl after breaking in their house, and takes her to a silent place to allure her. Attempting to rape her, he found out that she was dead. Hence, the title is *Cold Flesh*. This simply proves the pinnacle to which women can be clumsily treated, abducted, molested, and the worst illustration of fulfilling a minor desire. But it is not made up story by Manto. He has depicted what society acted in front of him. Nobody can frame such a devastating situation on his own.

Home in the works of Lawrence is a multifaceted socio-cultural space filled with power imbalances between different genders and classes. Instead of providing a stereotypical picture of the home seen from the patriarch's perspective, these works uncover the suffering, labour, and agony that all family members undergo in one way or another. The view of Lawrence had its base in psychology. His novels deal with the problem of sex and the physical union, and English morals suffered a stunning shock. Because of the sexual appeal in his novels, his writings were always considered obscene and many of his novels were banned. However, these controversies did not affect him and he presented all, which were given the title of Social Taboos.

As we have shown, the views of the protagonists on public space in the works of these authors also promote a subtle criticism of the popular illusion of public space that shows how this idea affects both men and women. A focus on spatial politics, thus, helps us to understand the complex social criticism of both writers, while inviting the world to look at the gender politics of Lawrence's works from a new angle as well. Nevertheless, the focus has usually been on the issue of the self and its relationship with the other, or of the subjective rendering of the exterior world. Where it comes to politics, academics have

directly or indirectly concluded that there are disparities or oppositions between these authors.

Both of them were acknowledged not only for remarkably using their wit but also technology for bringing turmoil in the culture and mentality of society. Manto tried his hand in almost all the spheres to be a scraper of the wounds of a sick society by drifting through various jobs in All India Radio and the Bombay film industry. He loved to handle unconventional themes that had been a taboo, especially in Urdu Literature. Likewise, D.H Lawrence has contributed to culture through media and cinema as most of his novels are also made into films and has been critically acclaimed by the audience. Lawrence held seemingly contradictory views on feminism. The evidence of his written works, particularly his earlier novels, indicates a commitment to representing women as strong, independent and complex, he produced many works in which young, self-directing female characters were central. Lawrence was also extremely vocal about his political views. He says that equality can be attained by acquiring a democracy at its best.

The first great purpose of Democracy...[will be] that each man shall be spontaneously himself – each man himself, each woman herself, without any question of equality entering in at all; and that no man shall try to determine the being of any other man or any other woman. (Scherr 73)

Both of them are one of the finest writers who have worked fearlessly to break these self-framed social evils and their endeavours are unmatched. Their epitaphs on their gravestones are certainly depicting the mark, which they have left on the society.

As epitaph of D.H. Lawrence has been inscribed by these very strong wordings which says,

“Homo sum! The adventurer” (Lawrence 164)

An impudent epitaph, which Manto has written for himself a year before his death, says;

‘Here (Manto) lies buried – and buried in his breast  
are all the secrets of the art of story-telling.’ (Manto 10)

Stuffing up culture, literary conventions, and certain conceptions of decorum, both reached the hearts of millions with their compelling and completely original depiction of human fallibility. Manto and Lawrence, thereby, create a new, alternate outlook to view the already complex truth by gazing at human condition in an analytical manner. They reported

what they heard and thought, and they reported compulsively and prodigiously. They lifted their voices about any single social injustice that took place in our culture, because they claim the reality is bitter, and the community was unfair against their fiction, but it did not deter them from speaking out for their beliefs. Their measure lies in the reality that, with every passing century, their writings are growing more and more reliable.

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