



# **Estimation of Manto's Fictional Characters Manoeuvring the Cause Of Women Inclusivity in Society**

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**Abstract:** Pre Independence India is shrouded with the haze of colonial presence. However it has witnessed some of the most stupendous ideological transitions in the same phase. Saadat Hasan Manto is a well-known name in the literary world. His writings have given some legendary fictional characters like Toba Tek Singh which are still afresh in the minds of the people. He was a magnificent author who captured some of the most lamentable episodes of India's partition in his writings. Also, he was considered an outspoken feminist who voiced the shunned voices of women. His collection of stories entitled "Bombay stories" illustrated the squalid realities of prostitutes and demanded a reputed and justified place in the society for these women. He questioned the stereotyped attitude of society about the expression of her desires by a woman. In stories like Khushiya, Siraj, Mozelle and Janaki, he terrified the male chauvinism with the intrepidity and audaciousness of his female protagonists. His writings were garlanded with extreme hatred and criticism by the champions of Patriarchal society who surnamed Manto as an outre and impudent writer.

An undaunted man like Manto never revered the society of dress makers who wished to cover all dark corners of human desires with patches of shame and concealment. He was a social archaeologist who wanted to unearth the multiple layers of the social apparatus and lift up the microbes of disparities, barbarity and religious fanaticism to reveal to people their real complexion.

This research paper would study Manto's works in the context of Women emancipation and would be solely based on primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Chauvinism, Feminist, Bombay, Prostitutes, Patriarchal.

## Preliminary Dialogue

*You can bind me in chains*

*But you cannot chain me*

*I am a spirit*

*All agile and free.*

Words synonymous to freedom and vivacity have adorned masculinity since millenniums and epithets like adorable, dutiful, disciplined and forgiving were the most precious accompaniments of a women's character. Literature of the bygone eras were motivated with the intention to attach all sorts of paradigms of sanctity with a women's character and left men with their own choices to decide their course of action. Taking a note of the few literatures belonging to different periods of time we find a similar pattern of thoughts engulfing the sentiments of each succeeding generation. Conspicuous literatures of ancient India such as-Manusmriti, Mahabharata and Ramayana have cornered the entire corpus of a women's identity by ornamenting her as the mere shadow of her man. Early Medieval Indian history garnered Kalhana as the first Historian of India as he wrote the first chronicled history of Kashmir but vehemently rescinded the contribution of royal women in administering the court affairs. History for him was only the conversations blurting out the episodes of male adrenaline rush with women having almost no place to hold. Efficacious characters of Medieval India like- Razia Sultana, Mehrunissa, Nur Jahan, Jahanara Begum and others too got their stature belittled by the disparaging tone of gendered history written during that time. The lofty ambitions of these women were considered as chimerical and was bruised with defamation and negligence. Modern India though cradled the leftist ideologies of equality, freedom and Democracy but writers who drafted the history of Indian War of Independence neatly deleted the reels of women's contribution in various Political and Social movements.

However, there were few intrepid, assertive, and conscientious like Saadat Hasan Manto, who gave voice to the utterly marginalised and demeaned folk of Indian population i.e. women, through various fictional characters of his novels and short stories. Pages of Indian struggle for freedom is embellished with tales of bravery and sanguine affection towards one's motherland. Also, it is hued with the trauma of unnatural deaths, loss of right to live and freedom to follow one's own faith. These harrowing episodes were captured comprehensively by Manto who himself was a victim of Partition. He broadcasted the wholesome and intimidating content of India's partition in his novels and most of his stories talked about the psychological impact of this episode on different sections of society, especially the most vulnerable ones. Apart from partition one can also find the fragrance of feminist ideology in his ferocious writings on women's right to choose. His stories have created a different cult of women who are independent in her decisions and are as dangerously ambitious as their male counterparts. Women of Manto's world are intrepid, outrageous, disobedient, revengeful and demanding. He has sculpted one of the most stunning portrait of twenty-first century women and have received staunch criticism as rewards from the disciples of patriarchy.

This research paper would take around six of Manto's stories which revolve around women and project them not as puppet dolls in male- made society but as genesis which nurtures the society.

## **Testimony of Veracity or an Act of Obscenity: Comparing the Literature of Manto and D.H Lawrence**

*"She was always waiting. It seemed to be her forte."*

-- D.H LAWRENCE

Manto wasn't alone in his pursuit to grope for the crevice of light in the squalid and murky minds of Indian society, who knew how to materialize women but respecting her was a jargon for them.

D.H Lawrence was one such novelist who experimented with several pre-existing ideologies of capitalist society of Europe and concluded that though Industrial Capitalism has boarded the train to progress in prosperity but has never transcended the station of progress of intellect. His novel entitled *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, published in 1928 was a revolutionary piece of writing which discussed something never had been discussed by anyone before. It was greeted with vitriolic comments and blasphemous phrases, like Manto's "**Bu**" because it unveiled the not-so-talked about sexual desires of a female. The story indeed stressed upon the extra-marital affair of a lady which made the obstinate gentry of the upper class society agape in bewilderment. Much like the female protagonists of Manto who were strong enough to comprehend and divulge their sexual and romantic feelings, Lawrence's heroine Lady Connie was trying to recuperate from the malaise of an incoherent marriage. Her husband, a war soldier was a man of the age. He possessed all attributes of a machine age man which included, niggard portion of human emotions, colossal desire for wealth, higher degree of intellect with meagre amount of sensibility and unending quest for hegemony. These chemicals were staple diet for an ambitious man but poisonous for a married man. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* cannot be surnamed as a mere love story coming at a time when the entire human civilisation is taking a sharp turn towards a different style of living, as it is a satire on the mind boggling concepts of capitalism and gendered approach of society which in the end leads to broken families and loss of love. Like Saadat Hasan Manto, Lawrence has dealt with various social inhibitions constructed only for a

woman to project her as sanguine and chaste and once she crosses the threshold to find her own piece of sky she is poked and profaned. Lady Connie of D.H Lawrence, like Saugandhi, Siraj, Janaki, Mozail and Latika of Saadat Hasan Manto was flamboyant in expressing the urges of both her body and soul. She stringently dejected to burden herself with the corpse of a failed marriage and felt herself virtuous enough to choose her own partner. There is a genuine bitter taste of veracity in the stories of Manto and Lawrence which are full of obscenity for the World but are testimonies of naked truth. The rigid, narrow and filthy thought process of a man regarding women's body and her social status is boisterous in the writings of these writers. The peculiar characteristic of these writings is that the degree of subjugation is same for an upper class woman of Lawrence and a Prostitute of Manto. The stories of such women with courage were fictitious but it dismantled the well-articulated notions of a patriarchal society which boasted of a damsel always waiting for her Beau. Thus, we find that ferocious female characters of writers like Manto, Ismat Chughtai and D.H Lawrence have played an epochal role in retrenching the weed of obscurantism and opening the doors of women inclusivity into the mainstream of society.

This research paper would discuss around nine fictional female characters sketched by Manto in his novels. A comprehensive analysis of these female protagonists would foment us to deconstruct the gendered approaches of the society towards a woman and restructure the entire paraphernalia of human community with the idea of inclusivity for all.

## HALAKAT (WILD CACTUS)

*"Love me and I will make you live in paradise,  
For Infidels!"*

*I am the face of hell”.*

Lord Ram as a ruler is celebrated for his fortitude and benevolence towards his subjects. However, his unlawfulness towards his wife Sita is most often condemned. It is quite grotesque to learn that inspite of all adversities Sita bore as a result of King Rama's decision, she was expected to accompany him to Ayodhya when he came to escort her after conducting her into an exile for twelve years. The story of Sita's refusal to accompany Rama and her assimilation into mother earth is quite a famous episode of Ramayana and yet an intriguing one. Sita, though a loving and dutiful wife denied to offer any remission to Rama for the wrong he did to her, as was always expected for a woman. The story entitled Wild Cactus of Manto is a dark tale of revenge which dissolves the stereotyped image of a woman who is supposed to forgive. Alike Sita of Ramayana, Manto's Heroine Shahina after getting enlightened about her husband's infidelity hatches a plot to take her revenge and teach her partner a bitter lesson.

The story opens up with the description of monotonous life of a young Prostitute Nawab. Writer discusses the marital desires of Nawab, who though a prostitute wishes someone to love her soulfully. Through his initial description of a prostitute's life Manto wishes to convey the urge for Platonic love in this section of the society who are compelled to get indulge into flesh trade for their livelihood. Nawab's character painted by Manto is a portrait of naiveness as she had no conscience of the profession of adultery she is involved in and thus doesn't consider herself a sinner. It is quite an evident thought that- Paupers cannot afford the tantrums of honesty and ego. Fulfilment of material needs of Nawab and her mother Sardar prevented them from introspecting the type of profession they were practising as they know they had no other shoulder to lean on. Nawab was happy with the life she

was living with her mother in the little three bed room mud house. Things took a mellifluous turn with the introduction of Haibat Khan into the scene. He was the biggest landlord of the neighbouring district and was a young man with handsome features. On the very first day he entered Nawab's house he branded the girl with his name and instructed her mother Sardar that he want no more customers for Nawab now. He gave a lot of money to Sardar and a diamond ring to Nawab before he left. The creaky sound of note wasn't something Nawab was concerned with rather it was the melody of affection coming from the Haibat Khan's diamond ring captured the strings of her heart. Manto may have included this episode in his story to help the readers to recognise the heart of even a prostitute as the heart of a woman. With each preciding visit the feelings of affection succeeded and love started to bloom in the tender heart of Nawab. Writer has boldly discussed about the sexual embellishments involved in the nurturing of this relationship. While, Nawab felt love was it the same for Haibat Khan or was he only interested in having a different experience in physical love? As the story progresses forward, Manto expresses Haibat Khan's fear of getting caught, his restlessness with Nawab, his sudden conniption of frustration and his frequent nightmares. All such incidents raise questions over the veracity of his feelings for Nawab. On one unfortunate day Nawab asks him to bring her gold bangles without knowing that it would be her last wish. Next day Haibat Khan comes accompanied by his wife Shahina who introduces herself to Nawab as Halakat. Shahina took Nawab to her bedroom and sends everyone else out. Few moments later, Haibat Khan enters to find the repercussion of his infidelity in the form of Nawab's slaughtered body. Story closes with Shahina explaining herself as the one intolerant towards infidels and admitting that she killed even her first husband because he was disloyal to her.



Story though had a traumatic and unjustified ending with the innocent getting punished but it presents before readers an avenging woman who cannot afford to forgive her man for his infidelity.

## **SHEELA (ON THE BALCONY)**

*“Loving you has given me so many scars,  
I wish I could have more flesh to have love you more.”*

Male gentry since time immemorial has used the phrase “Poor Woman” for womenfolk. The one who incubates the seed of life on earth for nine months in her womb, the one who sacrifices even the greatest joy and the slightest comfort for her family, the one who stands erect in sorrow and distress with every one of her acquaintance and the one who adds value to the life of a man as a mother, sister, wife, daughter and friend is called a woman, or more evidently a poor woman.

Manto, in his story, **On the Balcony**, has experimented with the genre of Women Psychology. The narrator of this story is a male whose contemplation and comprehension dominates the script, however the character he contemplates and comprehends is that of woman. The first two pages of the story gives a vivid description of narrator's romantic feelings for Sheela. Author has used the same old adjectives while describing a girl as has been used by author of yesterdays. He has quoted Sheela as pretty, slender, timid and innocent girl who possess attractive yet intriguing eyes. Author through the character of narrator has quoted that, “a woman's eyes can only be a woman's eyes when they are drowned in tears”. Such annotation reflects the narrow minded- gendered approach of society which expects woman to play the role of help seekers instead of help providers. Nevertheless, narrator's tone

changes when he actually sees what he was willing to experience. One evening he sees tears rolling down sheela's pale cheeks. The conversation between the two that followed thereafter is not just exemplary but enlightening too. Percy Bysshe Shelley wasn't wrong when he said that the word love has been profaned by those who doesn't understand the depth of it and so he doesn't wish to name his feeling for his beloved as Love. Sheela's lover was one such man who profaned the sanctity of love by betraying his partner and left her with welled up eyes and wailing heart. The narrator of this story comes as a rescuer who himself is in love with the lady without any temptation to receive the same in reciprocation. He tries to cherish her slackened spirits and motivates her to give up the idea of suicide. This story is nothing more than the dialogues shared between the two. The character of Sheela has been sculpted with the colours of both fire and water. Although she is weak after getting betrayed, however she sounds as tenacious as the colossal tree who stands erect when pelted with stones and promises to provide his fruits and shed even to the ones who harmed him. Her sacred determination to love and honest dedication to live only for her lover is quite impractical but heavenly. The tenacity of her love and the pain she is under after getting betrayed outpours from her hearts when she says before narrator that- this betrayal has come to her from the hands of the one she loved the most. She knew that he has destroyed her life but it doesn't matter to her because she perceive love as a game, which she played and lost. She hasn't given just the best of her life to this love but has even promised to give up her life for the sake of it. Hence, she says that she is brave enough to face death for she knew she has loved the wrong person but she has loved him righteously. The conversation continues between the two till the narrator convinces her to quit the idea of giving up her life in bereft of someone who doesn't deserve her sanguine love and makes her realise his love for Sheela. The story has a

happy ending with Sheela rising up with determination in her eyes and a new hope flickering in her heart to conceive true love.

## SIRAJ

*When the tears deny to,  
Flow down the two sides,  
So deep is the grief,  
That in the heart it resides,  
Life flows in the veins,  
But eyes appear dried,  
You must see then how nature  
Fuels to stride  
When a leaf falls,  
A sapling comes from other side*

Siraj, in the words of author was a girl of slender physique and pretty face. The most mesmerising feature of her face was her eyes which were like outsize windows on her oval face. She reminded author of a glass goblet which had been filled to the brim with strong, undiluted spirits. Her femininity was intrepid and concrete but as a human she appeared perplexed and annoyed with everything happening around her. Dhundhoo was the second lead character of this story and was the guy in mediation for bringing customers to Siraj. There are several episodes of conversation between Dhundoo and author where he describes about the eccentric behaviour of Siraj which most probably doesn't suit a prostitute. There is one incident in the story where Dhundhoo explains to author that he thinks that Siraj is still a virgin and she would continue to be even if she stays forever in this profession. This statement of him is something that speaks about the psychology of human

emotions that even if someone is having a sexual intercourse with somebody, she or he would remain a virgin if she/he isn't engrossed in that sacred ritual of love making happily. Such bold statements in a literature written in pre-Independent India where women and her desires were considered a thing of null importance is not just commendable but revolutionary indeed. Dhundoo, who presumably wasn't in love with Siraj but had a soft corner for her because she was thrown out her past workplaces as a result of her grotesque behaviour and he doesn't want the same for her in Bombay too. Unlike other ladies of her age, she had no interest in expensive gifts, food, clothes, ornaments and other such material stuffs.

Narrator finds a tone of affection in Dhundoo voice when he says that he doesn't want Siraj to go because he likes her a bit and explains her as different from other ladies in this profession who are only after money.

On a rendezvous meeting, author once went to see Siraj in person. He took her to a hotel room where he tried to elicit the anger inside her by holding her arms and sitting by side but failed. Later he gave her a good sum of money and drop her home. Author has meticulously described the features of her face after getting drunk with him. He says that her eyes though were beautiful but lost all their charm and her face resembled the look of a devastated city. Author speaks in a worrisome tone that the devastation suggests she has been plundered before and that raid has left nothing of herself in her. The robber hasn't only robbed off her with the wealth of joy and peace but has looted crux of her soul too.

After a month, author met Dhundoo once again to be startled by a surprising revelation. Dhundoo told him that the money author gave to Siraj in hotel motivated her to go to Lahore. Along with Dhundoo Siraj boarded the train Lahore. For few days both of him wandered through the streets of Lahore from doon to dine till one day their search ended. Dhundoo took the

man to Siraj, who she has asked for. When Siraj confronted that man, she grabbed him tightly and blurted out everything she had incubated in her heart for so long. She questioned him for the reason of betraying her, when he knew that Siraj has left her family, brothers and sisters and every piece of her past life to draw her future with him. The man started crying and begged for forgiveness.

If Siraj would have been an ordinary woman stereotyped by society to be forgiving, generous and dedicated, she should have acquitted her beloved for all of his sins. But, Manto's Siraj failed to correspond to the definition of womanhood suggested by the pathetic male-chauvinist society and took her revenge like a woman of spirit. In his story Manto has paraphrased this belief that,

*"As some roads never lead to destinations, so some mistakes can never be forgiven."*

*Thus, Manto's Siraj defined herself in her own words and avenged her betrayal.*

## SAUGANDHI (HATAK)

*Days have passed and turned to years  
But the pursuit has never ended without fear,  
Many tears came and many smiles died,  
But the thirst to be love was never satisfied,  
Several hurdles were born and many winters trembled,  
But the determination to smile was never pacified*

The story opens with the miniscule description of Saugandhi's room's interior. The most special of the entire discussion was the details of that wall which held the picture of Lord Ganesha. It was Saugandhi's daily ritual to rub her earnings against the picture of Ganesha with the intention to invite

good luck. The purpose of giving space to this not so uncommon religious ritual of everyone's life will expose one to the most desperate and turpitudinous attitude of society which shamelessly promotes layered society and mocks at prostitutes for following their religious beliefs by naming them as worshippers of money. This genre of thoughts don't belong to pre- Independent India but exist since generations in every society of every nation. In Bible, there is one story about a prostitute who was blessed by Jesus. Since, she was indulged in adultery so she was considered as unholy. Once, a Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him. He had all sorts of luxury in his house but what he lacked in his heart Christ found it in the selfless devotion of a humble prostitute. She came to Pharisee house when she heard of Jesus's coming and brought an alabaster Jar of Ointment with herself. The intensity of her devotion was so high that when confronted with Jesus she began to bath his feet with tears and dried them with her hairs.

The story is relatable to this episode of Saugandhi's life as it reflects the fact that prostitutes too are humans. Manto has worked hard while drawing the Saugandhi's character for he has intricately sculpted the corridors of her heart which disgruntles after receiving an expression of disgust from one of her customer, which is ferocious to fall in love and which is so magnanimous to collect money by inviting more customers for her to pay the train fares of her widowed neighbour and her young daughter to return to their hometown. Manto has also added the colour of determination, decisiveness and self-esteem in the stature of Saugandhi because when she realises that Madho, her lover, is taking advantage of her by asking a good share from her earnings regularly, she baffles him with her courage and self-ego and scratches Madho's portrait off the wall, which once used to embellish her little room, to sternly tell him that he is no more her God of love.

Saugandhi's whimsical behaviour at the end of the story exterminates the various paradigms of sobriety and courtesy preserved for women to follow exclusively. Manto's Saugandhi is not someone who can be belittled by abuses of the custodians of morality in society but she is a phoenix who knows she will make her presence felt in this world for she knows how to rise from her ashes.

## By The Roadside

*My bashfulness, my fragility, my timidity,  
All disappeared so soon,  
When a part of my soul inherited my womb.*

Motherhood is a blessing when it comes from a legitimate relationship which fulfils the criteria set up by the society, whereas unmarried mothers are cursed and welcomed with derogatory remarks.

Manto has brought to light one of the most serious injustice practiced under the umbrage of male chauvinist society i.e. to accuse a woman for being an unmarried mother without punishing the unforgivable act of adultery practiced by the fugitive biological father. Usually, it is the weak who suffers and it is quite obvious that in any society no matter how sophisticated it is, the most vulnerable and marginalised section is that of a poor woman irrespective of her caste and religion. The heart- wrenching story of a forlorn mother scripted by Manto challenges the lofty ideals of pragmatism, egalitarianism and emancipation. He raises the questions that why can't a woman live independently with her child in the society without revealing the name of child's father, why it is always a woman who is tested for the degree of morality in her character and not that man who has left her with scars and responsibilities for life. Manto's mother from his story "By the

roadside” is a loving mother like any other woman. Initially, thought of her being alone with her child facing accusation and derogation frightens her and for a while she thinks of getting rid of that debris crawling in her belly but with a fraction of seconds her motherhood regains consciousness and she gears up her spirits and sums up all her strength to shield her baby from every speck and every slice of adversity coming after him/her. She emboldens herself with the intrepid thoughts and says thinks that she will chop off all fingers raising an eye of suspicion against the identity of her child. She will go dumb to shun all voices of disgrace, she will go blind to avoid all sorts of gestures of disgust expressed by people and she will go deaf to restrict all lewd cacophony. She would only see the heavenly smile of her child, she would only listen to the mellifluous lisp of her baby and she would open her mouth only to sing melodious lullabies to her baby. The story meets with a sad ending and leaves its readers with tears in their eyes and questions in their conscience.

## Latika (A Woman of All Seasons)

*What powers do I have??*

*I am only the greatest delight for your eyes to cherish*

*And the deepest grief for your heart to sigh.*

When Didda showed her strong ambitions to annex the throne of Kashmir she was called arrogant and power thirsty woman, when Nur Jahan started taking interest in Mughal court affairs she was called as an usurper of Shah Jahan's regal rights, Razia Sultana was defamed by her court officials because they didn't want to be yes men of a lady ruler and many such episodes of history are testimonies of male intolerance towards the escalating capabilities of their female counterpart.



Manto has raised this sensible issue in one of his story through the character of an empowered, intelligent and strong woman Latika. Latika is emotionally prudent while making relationships, matured and logical in her decisions, opportunistic and optimistic in her approach. Her choice of her marital part keeping in mind the common professional interest of both partners helped her to establish an equitable relationship. With the commencement of her acting career she surprises the readers with her tenacity and hardworking attitude. Her planning to establish production house, the way she advises her husband to conduct himself into professional relations, her consistent love for gardening and the sublimity with which she handled her enormous success is generously commendable. The main plot of the story begins when people jealous of her success began to air rumours regarding her illicit connection with the heroes of her films. Her husband grew sceptic about his wife's moral character and her fidelity towards him. The story has many episodes of quarrels and arguments in between the couple and it was always Latika who remained silent and waited for the storm to pass. She was such an outstanding performer in her real life too that she accepted her descent with the same naivety with which she once accepted her upheaval. The story ends with the mourning scene of Latika's husband's death and murmurings from the studio about her hand in it.

Saadat Hasan Manto through his writings has unfolded the rusting knots of narrow minded society and has provided voices to all such unnoticed challenges faced by a woman in order to thrive. Latika, unlike the primitive woman isn't an example of pativrata woman always concerned about the daily chores of her home and kitchen but she is the face of rising civilisation. She is the beacon light to guide the ignorant ones and assist them to emancipate themselves from the shackles of serfdom of patriarchy.

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