Manto and Culture: An Exploration of Cultural Code in Manto's "My Name is Radha"

Sardar Ali
M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KPK.
Dr. Mohammad Muazzam Sharif
Lecturer, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KPK.
Raees Khan
Lecturer, Department of English, University of Buner, KPK.

Abstract

This study aims to explore Manto's short story "My Name is Radha" from a cultural perspective. The purpose of the investigation is to bring the hidden meaning to the surface, which is there but not visible. Manto has used many political, religious, historical and cultural references in the story, which are significant in the understanding for the researcher. These references have deflected the norms, values, and taboos of the Indian society. These are investigated with the help of Barthes, cultural code. This code helps in cultural understanding of the story. The study finds that Manto has used many cultural elements in his text like, *bhai, behan, Raksha Bandan, kurta, sari,* and *panjama.* These words provide a vivid description of Indian people, as well as their culture. Furthermore, this study discovers that Manto has used a unique codec language to portray the way of living of the Indian people. Sometimes he has spoken directly of the cultural taboos and sometimes he has spoken indirectly of the said. The study concludes that the writer has deflected the society through different cultural elements. And these elements help in true understanding of the text.

Keywords: culture, Manto, norms, values, taboos and Indian

Introduction

Manto's short fiction belongs to the anti-partition advocacy movement. Some of his plots engage with the curses of partition directly while others engage with post-partition problems. At times he speaks loudly against the partition plan to his words and at times he remains silent and communicates the unspeakable through cultural symbols (Khan, 2020). Communication through semiotics seems more forceful, enticing, convincing, and inevitable. And it is this gestural language that has received the most, attention from critics. This study on Manto's short fiction aims at deciphering the codec backgrounded stuff using Barthes' semiotic code. The story is brim-edged in the capacity of cultural semiotic code. In this study, the researcher has endeavored to shallow the absence in the story and make it as visible as it is invisible before this reading (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2003).

Just like Manto's other short stories "*My Name is Radha*" is full of cultural symbols. The short story is about the Bombay Film industry. The protagonist of the story, Raj Kishore, is the most handsome actor in the industry (Islam, 2018). He is portrayed as a symbol of attraction. The attraction of women towards him can understand by understanding the whole culture of the film industry. In other words, his physical figure is connected with sexuality.

Raj Kishore is usually dressed in the *Khaki Kurta*. *Khaki Kurta* is allied with a certain political group. It is linked with Congress and Specifically with Gandhi. This shows his alliance with certain types of people. To understand, the underlined meaning of narrative structure, one should know the whole culture of the politics of the Sub-Continent. The story ended in the unsuccessful love of Radha for Raj Kishore. She is inclined towards him but in vain. At last, she kisses him and spoils her life. Raj Kishore has considered is a pious man in the industry but his body is a course of attraction for the ladies making binary opposites between his inner and outer self. This story raises certain questions, which cannot be answered without understanding the whole cultural scenario (Namaste, 1994).

Research Question

The study under investigation tries to answer the given Research Question in the light of Manto's *My Name is Radha.*

How far Barthes' Cultural Code is effective in terms of authentic understanding of Manto's My Name is Radha?

Literature Review

Literary text can be interpreted in so many different ways. Philosophers, linguistics, and literary pundits have put forward countless methods of analysis of a text. Different schools of thought have their ways of interpreting a text. But the twentieth century is a landmark where a bundle of new approaches emerges. Structuralism and Post- Structuralism are the prominent ones. Both are talking about the language system but are different in their ways of application. One of the methods is demonstrated by the French, philosopher, and linguist, Ronald Barthes in his book S/Z. Foster (1975) analyzed Balzac story's *Sarrazine* into five codes named is *"the Voice of Empirics (the proairetisms), the Voice of the Person (the semes), the Voice of Science (the cultural codes), the Voice of Truth (the hermeneutisms),* "*the Voice of Symbol*" (Barthes, 1970, *p.21*).

Likewise, Peter Berry in his book named these as "*proairetic, the hermeneutic, the semantic, the symbolic, and the cultural code*" (Barry, 2020). Barthes mentions that all narratives have one or all the five codes that work as "*weaving of voice*".

Manto has also been investigated by many scholars and researchers like, Ali et al., (2014) compared the subject matter and narratives of Saadat Hasan Manto and Istvan Orkney (Hungarian Jewish Writer). They find similarities between the two. Both are talking about the war and traumatic experiences. Orkney writes about the Holocaust and Manto deflected the partition of the Indian Sub- Continent. Moreover, the narratives they are using are attractive and engaging despite their topics. Their ways of writing are well responded to by the reader, although their subject matters are more horrifying and tragic. Their use of ironic and satiric devices make them helps to attract both their readers as well critics.

Manto is praised and criticized equally in Pakistan and India. His works are translated into English on both sides of the border. One of the most prominent short story *Toba Tek Singh* is translated by a Pakistani translator Khalid Hassan as well as by an Indian translator Aatish Taseer. Ahsan (2020) has done a comparative study of both the translator. She has found Taseer more authentic, true, and near to the original as compared to Hassan. Moreover, she explained that the adaptive technique used by Taseer helps in the true cultural understanding of Manto. She picked out flaws in the translation of Hassan by highlighting the omission of certain words and phrases. In addition, Hassan's work is more literal as compared to the prior one.

Jalil (2012) talks about the association of Manto with that of the Progressive Movement in the Sub- Continent. This was a movement based on the ideology of Marx and Lenin. It was the time and Manto Communism took the whole world by storm defining a line between two groups of the world as aired revolutions across the globe. She explores the influence of Russian writers on Manto like Anton Chekov and others. She further discovers the relationship of Manto with the Progressive Movement in the early age of his writing. Moving on forward, she argues that his two collections of short stories *Aatish Parey* and *Manto ke Afsane* were praised by the critics and writers of the said movement but later on his shift from the political matters made him separated from the progressive writers' movement. He was criticized by some of the members of the group

like Sajjid Zaheer. He criticized Manto, for following the European standard of writing denying cultural discipline. Although Manto has lovers and haters he is as fresh and new as he was seventy years ago. He was a keen observer and portrayed what was there.

Srivastava (2018) explores the theme of Traumatic disorders in the stories of Manto. In his articles, he analyzed three stories of Manto through this lens like *Taqseem (division/ fifty-fifty), Shaya (Shadow), Toba Tek Singh, and Khol Do (Open it).* The first one is a symbolic story of how the two characters combined to riot the box collectively. Reached a quiet place to open the box and finds a man with the sword cutting the two men into four. The hidden man with the sword might be the mental illness of their mind due to the effects of Partition of them and the Sub-Continent people. The second one is about the forced exile of Mumtaz to the newly established state of Pakistan. His close friend wanted to kill him because he heard the news that his uncle was killed in Lahore. Later on, there is a story within the story where the prostitute wanted to be helped by Saya, this shows the mind setup of people who worried about their life even though helping others. The third one is about a Sikh character reluctant to leave Pakistan after the partition. He was forced into exile by the official. He was mentally tortured in jail. At the last, he died in the middle of the broader due to this trauma that was his home town lies in the Sub- Continent either in Pakistan or India. The last one is showing the traumatic condition of a young girl Sakina. At the Hospital she lowers her shalwar when the doctor says to open it. Although the doctor is said it about the opening of the Machine. Manto has shown very keenly the mental illness of different characters due to the war and terror during and after partition. Even though people can still observe its after-shock. Though, he was criticized for the language he used in the story like *Khol Do (Open it).* But he has keenly shown us the situation at the time.

Research Methodology

There are two main types of research methods. Quantitative Research Method and Qualitative Research Method. As the name quantity means anything possible to measure. Measurement can be done in numbers. So it is important to know that usually numbers are associated with Physical and Numerical Sciences. So researchers done in fields other than social sciences are quantitative. Here one thing is necessary to know that there are also mixed methods.

Mixed methods are the combination of these two. On the other hand, qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, including social science and natural sciences. It is a broad methodological approach that encompasses many research methods. The aim of qualitative research may vary with the disciplinary background. Qualitative methods are often part of survey methodology. It includes focus groups, in-depth interviews, and reviews of documents for types of themes. Surveys, structured interviews, observations, and reviews of records, or documents for comprehensive information. Qualitative research is naturalistic. It studies the real-world situations that exist around us. In this method, the researcher is free to investigate whatever he finds regarding the study he is going to make. He has no such limits to work in. He is subjective in his approach. This study will analyze the short fiction of Manto's in way. Manto has been explored in different aspects. The study is descriptive and deductive. Deductive in nature means when we use theory and judge or infer something based on it. This study is unique in a way because, Manto's short fiction will be given an intermediate, authentic, and true analysis.

Research Design

This is an analytical, interpretive, descriptive, deductive, and qualitative study. Therefore, the required data for such types of study is soft data instead of hard data. Soft data describes the quality of things and hard data describes the number of things. In short, the information collected by words, sentences, paragraphs, passages, books, etc. is soft data. We use soft data instead of hard data because hard data, which we use in quantifiable researches. Soft data is anecdotally gathered from communicative sources. The researcher's approach is analytical. By analytical we mean how the data is intensively enquired. And then based on this inquiry the researcher comes to the conclusion or result. In this design, we usually have a theory and we deduce the results based on it. The data is keenly observed multiple time and after several observations and use of mind and energy, the researcher come to conclusions. Here in this study, the researcher has analyzed *My Name is Radha.* This fiction is analyzed in the light of Barthes' code, which helps in the true understanding of Manto, along with the Sub-Continent culture. The theory used here is Barthes

Five Code Theory but here the researcher has used only his cultural code. With the help of this code, the meaning is inferred from the text.

Data Collection

In academic researches, usually, two sources of data are required: Primary sources and Secondary sources. Our research is analytical therefore requires the data collected from the primary source includes the original work searched out by the investigators during their investigation. In simple words, the primary data are the selected short fiction. There are many translations available of Manto. He lived both in Pakistan and India. Therefore. Both Pakistani and Indian translators have translated his short fiction. He is also translated by the British people. The researcher has taken the Indian version by Atish Taser because it is near to the original text. It is also associated with the culture associated. A research study on done on the comparison of the Indian version (by Atish Taser) and the Pakistani Version (by Khalid Hassan), which concludes the Indian version is better than the Pakistani Version. Therefore, the researcher has selected the Indian version of translated collection by Atish Taser for the study undertaken. The secondary data is research papers, articles, dissertations, books, and journals, etc. The secondary data is searched on the online engines as well libraries. Many of the research articles, papers, and reviews are downloaded from different websites of Journals.

Methods of Analysis

The present study seeks characteristics and narratives of Manto's selected text. For this purpose, the text is required. The selected short fiction is the text of our research. For analyzing the text, our first step or method was close reading and the close reading of the text required the attention, examination, and perception of the researcher. It also involved personal judgment. Researchers have gone deep into the social and cultural scenarios. Close reading focuses on poetic devices for poetry, dialogue, and staging for dramas. Moreover, it focuses on plot, point of view, and character in fiction. In addition to it, meanings on the page are also important. It is the social research that belonged to Humanities. Humanities are based upon an academic discipline that studies human culture for which critical, analytical, and speculative methods are used. In the beginning, the text is examined carefully, to identify it embodies symbols and cultural references.

It was found that the story has several cultural symbols, norms, and values that may be interpreted in multiple ways: then, we divided the text into segments corresponding to the characteristics of the cultural code. This code is applied to analyze the story through its lens.

Discussion and Analysis

Feministic reading of the Manto has been the interest of researchers and critics and as it is discussed above that how women are portrayed and beautified. Women's beauty is prized in the style of "Shakespeare". Shakespeare is one of the greatest writers of time who lived in the Age of Queen Elizabeth I. There is also a reference to Tagore. The literary figure from India. Tagore is the first Noble Prize winner in Literature from Asia. Ghadi prose is also prized. He is the founder of India as well Indian National Congress. Raj was a supporter of it and in affiliation, he wore *khadi kurta* and use a khadi cloth bag.

The Indian culture is rich in traditional norms and values. It is the part of land having multicultural diversity. There are references to certain places, like Bombay, the current Mumbai city of India which is the hub of the film industry now. The places across the border are also mentioned. Rawalpindi; a city in Pakistani Punjab. Punjab is also mentioned. The territory of Punjab is divided between Pakistan and India. In the same way, Bangal is also divided into two-parts. The western Bengal, now part of the India and Eastern Bangal, Current day Bangladesh. There is also a reference to Banaras, a place in India; from where Neelam belongs to. It is a place in current-day India. These references show that the story is settled in India.

The characters are often addressed with other names like *Bhai* (brother), *Behan* sister, *Saab* (master), and Ustad (master) which are the most often used in daily life in the subcontinent context. Certain dresses are also cultural specific like *kurta, pajama, sari*. Along with that activity where females tie a thread (*rakhi)* to a man known as *Raksha Bandhan*. The word *Raksha* means care and *Bandhan* means to tie. The lady and the gentleman are considered as brother and sister then. It is specifically allied with Indian culture. There are also reference to Muslim culture as starting something from *Bismillah* or numerically 786. It means starts with the name of Allah, the most merciful and Almighty. These references help understand the true meaning of the text.

The story is full of cultural references from India and Pakistan. The glut of cultural as well religious references make it easier to understand the main theme of the story. Without these, the meaning would not be complete.

The clash between different groups either based on religion or ethnicity is obvious in the Indian culture. But here there is also two different gender i.e. Neelam and Raj Kishore. Both are from the opposite sex and gender. The actor and the actress of the movie. The whole story is about them. They are representative of many things. Like we can discuss both as actors, gender, sex, social class, etc. Raj is addressed as a handsome and well-built man while the lady is addressed as a "witch and bitch" like words. Their social image is also different. The Raj is prized in the public while the lady is always criticized by the public. Both the actors are contrasting in their appearance. Raj showcase his body while the director enforce the latter to wear tight clothes because he considered her figure is not of a "decent woman".

The writer has questioned the personality of the Raj from the very start. And he takes the readers along with him from the start till the end and reveals his true nature of him as he said "I don't like him much. I'd like to reveal my reasons to you gradually. And at the end when he came back to the house of Neelam. As described in her own words and addressed him as "the bastard" and carries on to narrate the story that "he clawed at my face"(p.89) and when she gives him a passionate kiss "he became cold as a woman resigned to her fate"(p.90). On the contrast, Neelam is mirrored as it as. From the start till the end she remains the same. She even uses these words "fierce woman and jungle cat/ wild cat" (p.89) for herself. She is a real character while Raj is a hypocrite. He has a dual face.

The theme of love and lust is evident in the story. Neelam was in love from an early age. Manto comes to the solution when he understands Neelam feeling for Raj. He has questioned it much times and at last, they find the answer to his question as he said "the disquiet in them answer my questions. She was in love" (p.78). While in opposition Raj was hungry for lust. He was just showcasing his chastity but at the end reveal his true face as discussed earlier.

The story is a combination of the binary opposite of cultural elements. And all of these contrasting elements are linked with the actor and actress of the narrative. These antithetical

elements further clarify the meaning of the text. The conflict of Neelam with Raj is; man and women, male and female, lover and beloved, belonging from different ethnicity, groups, and classes are of worth importance to the meanings of the story.

Conclusion

The focus of the code is known from the name. It is allied with the shared knowledge of history, religion, etc. of a specific culture. Manto is the writer of Sub-Continent. His writing is all about said culture and his works are rich in cultural elements. The short story *My Name is Radha* is full of cultural, religious, literary, and political references. The great literary figures of Shakespeare and Tagore are mentioned. There is an affiliation of the main character with Gandi and Congress. Sari, Pajama, Rakhi, Rakhsha Bandhan, and Bismillah are cultural and religious terms. Both Muslim and Hindu religions are referred because the majority of the character are from these religions. Furthermore, the low status of the women in the fiction is also the deflection of the Indian culture that how this society is depriving the fair sex of their rights.

References

Ahsan, S. (2020) A Comparative Study of Two Translations of Manto's Short Story "*Toba Tek Singh*". *International Journal of English Language Studies (IJELS)*, 2(1):12-27

Ali, A. H., Naz, T., Aftab, H., & Danish, M. H. (2014). Effect of Women Representation in Lux Advertisement on Pakistani Women Identity. European Academic Research,14.

Barry, P. (2020). Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory: Manchester University press.

Foster, R. (1975). Roland Barthes: S/Z (Book Review). Journal of European Studies, 5(4), 363.

Islam, A. U. (2018). *A Feminist Reading of Select Short Stories of Guy De Maupassant and Sadat Hasan Manto* (Doctoral dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University).

Jalil, R. (2012). Loving Progress, Liking Modernity, Hating Manto. *Social Scientist, 40*(11/12), 43-52.

Khan, M. H. (2020). Introduction: Literature and film: an alternative archive of the Partition of India Partition Literature and Cinema (pp. 1-17): Routledge India.

Namaste, K. (1994). The politics of inside/out: Queer theory, poststructuralism, and a sociological approach to sexuality. Sociological theory, 220-231.

Rosenfeld, S. A., & Rosenfeld, S. (2003). A revolution in language: The problem of signs in late eighteenth-century France: Stanford University Press.

Srivastava, S. (2018). Trauma and Bodies: A Study of 'Traumatic Neurosis' in Saadat Hasan Manto's "*Toba Tek Singh*" and "The Return". *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences, 8*(8), 453-463.