



## RESEARCH PAPER

## Speaking for the Silent: A Postcolonial Analysis of Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, *Loosen up* and *Black Salwar*

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## ABSTRACT

The present research aims to explore a selection of three stories by the acclaimed author, Saadat Hassan Manto. The selected stories include, *Toba Tek Singh*, *Loosen up* and *Black Salwar* as translated by T. Naqvi. This data has been analyzed by using the theoretical framework, namely "Subaltern" by Postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak. The present investigation adopted the Qualitative mode of inquiry. The data extracted from the short stories were analyzed by using the textual analysis method. The study goes on to depict the portrayal of the subaltern in different contexts of the post partition era. The findings of the study reveal that an extraordinary amount of the writer's efforts is focused on pointing out and highlighting the subaltern status of the people from different strata of society. The element of the Subaltern was manifested in the insane, the sane, the powerful, the helpless and the Anglo- Indians.

**Keywords:** Subaltern, Partition, Anglo-Indians, Oppressed, Short Stories

## Introduction

The end of the British raj in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, led to the partition of the geographical boundary of what was ruled by the British. The plan according to which the partition took place is called the Mountbatten plan. In this plan a decision was made to distribute the land in accordance with the religious affiliation of most of the population of each state. This was merely the beginning after this began a wave of extreme violence and dislocation. This wave was marred with violence seldom seen in human history, thousands were killed on both side of the newly drawn border hundreds of thousands had to move seeking safety in religious majority.

After this the world saw the largest mass migration in the history of the world. This was the time of Manto, he writes about a time soaked in blood and violence. Many of his stories either talk about the time of this event or the consequences of this event on the ordinary and the nonpolitical masses who hardly had any say in the matter but had to pay a huge price. Hence, we see how he gives a voice to the voiceless.

Saadat Hasan Manto is widely regarded as one of the most significant literary voices of the South Asian subcontinent, particularly for his uncompromising depiction of the socio-political trauma surrounding the Partition of 1947. His short stories vividly capture the human cost of colonial withdrawal, communal violence, displacement, and psychological fragmentation. Rather than presenting grand historical narratives, Manto foregrounds marginalized individuals whose lives are fractured by forces beyond their control, thereby offering a counter-narrative to dominant nationalist discourses (Manto, 2014; Jalal, 1995).

Postcolonial literary studies have increasingly emphasized the representation of marginalized voices, often conceptualized through the notion of the subaltern. Coined and theorized extensively by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the term "subaltern" refers to those

groups who are socially, politically, and discursively excluded from hegemonic power structures and whose voices remain unheard or misrepresented within dominant narratives (Spivak, 1988). In the context of post-Partition South Asia, groups such as refugees, women, religious minorities, the mentally ill, and Anglo-Indians can be understood as occupying subaltern positions.

Manto's stories such as *Toba Tek Singh*, *Loosen Up*, and *Black Salwar* exemplify this condition by portraying characters who exist on the margins of society. These narratives present insanity, sexuality, powerlessness, and ethnic ambiguity as sites where subalternity is both produced and exposed. Despite the richness of Manto's engagement with marginalized identities, there remains a need for focused critical inquiry that systematically applies postcolonial subaltern theory to his translated works, especially in the context of Partition literature.

Although Saadat Hasan Manto's fiction has received considerable critical attention, much of the existing scholarship tends to approach his work through themes of realism, obscenity trials, violence, and humanism. Relatively fewer studies have explicitly examined his short stories through the lens of subaltern theory, particularly by employing Gayatri Spivak's conceptualization of subalternity. As a result, the nuanced ways in which Manto represents silenced, marginalized, and socially excluded figures across different strata of post-Partition society remain underexplored. The problem this study addresses is the lack of a systematic qualitative textual analysis of selected Manto stories that foregrounds the subaltern condition of diverse characters such as the insane, the sane, the powerful, the helpless, and Anglo-Indians. By focusing on English translations by T. Naqvi, the study also engages with how subaltern voices are mediated and represented in translated texts. This research seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how Manto's narratives expose the complexities of subaltern existence in the socio-political aftermath of Partition.

## **Literature Review**

Saadat Hassan Manto is one of the most prominent voices of the of south east Asia when it comes to general rights of people with a special focus on the effects of Imperialism as they were felt by the everyday rustic or the normal people. In the view of Chatterjee, arguably Manto is one of the greatest modernist prose writers of the subcontinent (2001).

He has an extraordinary insight into human psychology and was brave enough to challenge the socio-political norms and paid the price for it as he was always persecuted and spent a lot of his years trying to defend his art and his perception against charges of "obscenity and immorality". He once commented on one of trials and said that the judge of one of his trials was of the view that literature should be separate than society. Manto portrays a world of madness and terror in the aftermath of colonization. Chatterjee remarks that while reading Manto, as she started to take in the full force of his deadly irony, she realized that she was experiencing the beauty of the words of a great craftsman (2001).

## **Material and Methods**

The present study adopts a qualitative research design, as it seeks to interpret meanings, themes, and representations embedded within literary texts. The primary data consists of three short stories by Saadat Hasan Manto—*Toba Tek Singh*, *Loosen Up*, and *Black Salwar*—as translated into English by T. Naqvi. These texts were selected purposively due to their strong engagement with themes of marginalization, displacement, and identity.

A textual analysis method is employed to closely examine narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, and thematic patterns related to subalternity. Passages from the texts are interpreted in light of postcolonial theory to uncover how marginalized voices are constructed, silenced, or problematized. The analysis remains interpretive and

descriptive, aligning with established qualitative approaches in literary studies (Creswell, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in Postcolonial Subaltern Theory, primarily drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). Spivak argues that subaltern groups are systematically excluded from epistemic and political representation, and even when they appear to "speak," their voices are often mediated or appropriated by dominant discourses. The framework emphasizes issues of voice, silence, representation, and power relations within colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Applying Spivak's theory to Manto's short stories allows for an exploration of how subaltern identities are portrayed across varied social positions. Characters such as the mentally ill inmates in *Toba Tek Singh*, the exploited female body in *Black Salwar*, and the helpless victims of communal violence in *Loosen Up* exemplify different manifestations of subalternity. Through this framework, the study examines whether these characters are able to articulate their suffering or remain trapped within structures that deny them agency and voice.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Analysis of *Toba Tek Singh***

*Toba Tek Singh* is the story of a character called Bishan Singh who has been in a mental assignment for the last 15 years "Two or three years after the Partition, it occurred to the governments of India and Pakistan that along with the transfer of the civilian prisoners, a transfer of the inmates of the lunatic asylums should also be made." Naqvi, & Manto, (2007) and "hasn't slept a wink" in the whole time and yet he never sits down he stands on his feet even though his feet are swollen and his muscle's are in constant agony. Bishan Singh and the other inmates are visibly shaken by decision of the exchange of the inmates in the mental asylums of both newly emerged countries India and Pakistan. "The news of the transfer resulted in interesting speculation among the inmates. The inmates investigate where Pakistan is and how is it possible that where they are now is still where it was yesterday but is now in Pakistan.

According to Ashcroft et al (2006) Imperialism is the plan of ruling over the economic, cultural, geographical resources of others, through the means of power (2006). Imperialism does not just leave the cracks of being colonized but also leaves behind the marks of being reduced to a place where the will of the colonizer is a command for the colonized. Manto points out how the trickled-down effect of colonialism makes life difficult for even the most victimized, these lunatics are the ones who should be protected and saved by the sane, but instead we see that they are the ones most deeply affected. In this regard Manto's setting of the story and it's opening line which talks about the decision of partition and then the distribution of criminals and later on even the mad as assets or as burdens to carried by the respective religious parts, is an extraordinarily powerful way of pointing out that the people suffering from the effects of Imperialism were even the ones who had otherwise no stake in the outcome.

Bishan Singh's repetitive talk of "where is *Toba Tek Singh*" tells us about how psychologically attached he is to his roots, they are the fiber of his being, his identity and now he has to follow the orders of the many unseen masters who have no sympathy or empathy for the people they make decisions for, the oppressed are completely insignificant for the for the decision makers. In their efforts to rid themselves of the responsibility of the "mad" forget the one's who are displaced and they have no say in decisions that leave no option for them but to die. The decision makers play "God" to the subalterns.

Manto depicts the idea of otherness in the context of how all of a sudden Bishan Singh a Pakistani all his life is becomes the "other" or the "outsider" as Toba Tek Singh is no longer India. The request that Bishan Singh makes to the man who thinks he is God and begs him to give necessary orders to solve the problem of where Toba Tek Singh is, and when he doesn't get the right response he in his gibberish complains about the partiality of god towards the Muslim

We see Manto's portrayal of citizenship as we see all the inmates of the asylum being worried about leaving a place that they believed until now to be their own and now they have to leave it as it no longer belongs to them even though they haven't done anything. Bishan Singh is so attached to his home town that the whole asylum knows him not by his name but by the name of his village which is Toba Tek Singh. The whole crust of Bishan Singh crumbles when he is asked to leave the place that he sees as his identity, his friends tell him his daughter and the rest of his family are all in India but he is not interested, the only thing of interest to him is his "Toba Tek Singh" and he kept repeating it. Grewal remarks that dislocation of peoples is defining trademark of the last century, the consequences of this action hardly ever fall under the critical eye of the scholars (2008).

This short story is a wonderful example of subalternity; it echoes the voices of the otherwise insignificant. Manto in this short story has given a voice to probably one of the most neglected and what are usually thought of as the most dispensable people of society. He has used these people as a tool to identify how the decisions made by the ones considered most sane make decisions which reflect insanity, and how the insane are the ones who suffer. The loudest voice among such voices is Bishan Singh who had no way to express himself, no way to shout out to the world that he was Toba Tek Singh other than to die and remain who he knew himself to be. Mallot says that Mapstend to tell one side of the stories; other versions of a past are mostly erased or ignored (2007).

Bishan Singh does not speak much but in his attempt to be taken seriously has created a beautifully constructed amalgamation of Urdu, Punjabi and English. This unique blend of languages serves two purposes for Manto, for one it communicates his confusion as a citizen as to what is required of him and what should be the right way to communicate in this region, which has a mother tongue which is Punjabi, then there's Urdu which is the language of the previous colonizer, and then there is English which is more valuable now since it is the language of those now in power or the more recent colonizer. And so Manto gives him a gibberish consisting of all three and he makes apt use of it by sometimes changing a few words and conveying what he is actually feeling. *"Upur di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di daal of the Pakistan Government."*

The voice of the women in the asylum and the voices of the Anglo- Indians who were still in the European ward, who were given a different breakfast were also equally upset but their concerns were more shallow but nevertheless they had to live a life which was less privileged than they were used to. Bishan Singh's inner voice referred to several times in the story, is shown to be silent after he finds out about his expected displacement. He no longer knew when someone was coming to see him as opposed to how he could foresee any visitors earlier on, his sixth sense seemed to have numbed after he was informed of the upcoming event, which is his being sent to an unknown strange place which was now to be his home.

The story of Hindu lawyer who was angry at the leaders for distributing the country geographically and making him a Pakistani and his beloved an Indian as she lived in Amritsar.

The story of the man who reads the newspaper every day and considers himself as an intellectual, also tells us that even the comparatively wise were confused about the emergence of a new state and could not tell Bishan Singh where Pakistan was. Another interesting story told is the story of the man who showered several times a day and after he

received the news of the exchange of the lunatics, suddenly stopped bathing and climbed on a tree and declared that he would neither live in India nor be a Pakistani and would rather live on this tree and this would be his country from now onwards. So, we see that Manto even in such a brief story, tells us the stories and perspectives of so many people and so many characters.

Another very important concept that Manto exploits is the idea of Binarism. Binarism is the idea that, when one concept is mentioned, it indirectly signifies its opposition, for example when the word colonized is used, it refers indirectly to the colonizer, and likewise in case of primitive, it signifies to civilized and white to black. So, we see that Manto makes excellent use of this idea as he mentions one extreme and points to another. Manto talks about the lunatics and by showing them he wants to show the ugliness we see in the sane. He also talks about the two religious extremes, the asylum is predominantly house to either the Muslims or the Hindus, we see that the two oppositional boundaries are so final in their position that there is no middle ground. We see that Bishan Singh dies on no man's land between the two boundaries and that adds to the tragedy as he is one of those people who don't want to be on any one particular side and it is unfortunate that the human society hardly acknowledges such voices and the political system has no patience for the likes of Bishan Singh. So we see that Binarism as Manto depicts is the distinctive feature between good and bad, right and wrong and the grey areas in between are completely insignificant and absolutely intolerable.

Hence, we see that Manto gives a voice to a class of victims, which can easily be defined as subalterns. These wretched souls are the ones that everyone chooses to avoid, they are the ones who do not have access to any representation and the ones representing them whether in India or Pakistan have absolutely no respect for their opinion as they are insane, they have no rights. Toba Tek Singh ends with the death of Bishan Singh, in a very tragic manner where he is being sent to India and he asks one of the guards, where "Toba Tek Singh" is now, and he is told that it is in Pakistan. Bishan Singh runs back to the other side of the border, persecuted by the soldiers from both sides and the last line is most meaningfully portrays his agony, "and there lay Toba Tek Singh". He died and for the first time people saw him sleep, he died on no man's land which represents that he was not just sent from one country to another, but he was made homeless and country less. The grotesque pain was even felt by the insane Bishan Singh, who could not tolerate it. McLain beautifully explains about the ending of this story that this ending of the story is important in this regard as it brings down the division between object and subject, between matter and mind, this is an ambiguous conclusion, in which "Toba Tek Singh" refers to both place and the man (2001).

### **Analysis of *Loosen Up***

The second story selected for this research is called "khol do" or open it. Here we see Manto talk about the population of the subalterns. In the opening lines of the story, quoted below, we see here that although special trains were arranged to transport the nameless millions from India to Pakistan and from Pakistan to India, yet there was nothing special them. The way these victims, most of whom did not even want to move, were treated is a tragedy in itself. They were left unattended and the camps which were set up to help them were void of all the necessities of life. The following lines by Manto, captures the agony, "A special train starting from Amritsar at two in the afternoon reached Mughalpura after a nightmarish journey lasting eight hours, marked by shrieks, bloodshed, loot and assault. On the way hundreds of passengers were butchered, thousands wounded and many more cast adrift from the main herd, in an attempt to save their lives and were heard of no more. The lucky ones who reached to safely through this holocaust thanked God for His benevolence and scattered away, finding shelter where they could" (Pg 89).

What could be more powerful a tool to show that these people were subalterns than the words Manto uses such as “many”, “a lot more” and “countless”. These words show the insignificance of these people and yell out that these unfortunate people were too many even to be counted and no one had an interest in what happened to them.

“In the morning when Sirajuddin opened his eyes as he lay on the cold ground of the refugee camp and looked around, he found himself surrounded by a surging sea of men, women and children.” Pg.89

Again, here we see a character which was like a leaf floating on the surface of a stream called fate, with no one to call out to. Sirajuddin the old man who has travelled here in search of a safe haven, seems to have woken up from a state of unconsciousness. But all around him are more like him who have lost so much and so many that every one of them is so confused that nothing seems to make any sense and all they have around them is chaos, marked with pain and anguish.

“At last, utterly exhausted, Sirajuddin sat down by the side of the camp and tried to recall when and at what point of the journey Sakeena had strayed away from him”.pg. 90

Sirajuddin, one of the subalterns in this case, looks all over for his lost daughter, Sakina yet another example of subalterns, a girl who had been lost after being pursued by the enemy. There was nothing, Sirajuddin could do to look for his daughter, and this was just one man, Manto here talks about so many other families who were in the same agony of having lost their loved ones. Sirajuddin’s helplessness is visible in the words that then he gave up, he gave up the search for his only daughter, his only family.

“Do you mind throwing open that window?” he said. “Yes open it!”

As the doctor uttered these words, Sakeena’s lifeless body suddenly stirred/and her hand limply travelled to her salwar. She loosened up its cord and pushed down her salwar exposing her naked thighs to view.

Old Sirajuddin cried with joy: “She’s alive! My daughter is alive!” The doctor trembled from head to foot and sweat broke out on his body.” Pg 92.

In these lines Manto’s sharp wit and his irony are at their best. In these lines we see that both Sirajuddin and his daughter Sakina have no choice but to surrender to whatever has been done to them. Sakina’s painful compliance to what she thought was meant by opening it and Sirajuddin’s shout at seeing that his daughter is alive is a perfect example of subaltern’s status and fate. Here we also see the issue of representation of the subalterns that no one is minutely interested in representing these people, no government holds itself responsible for their well-being, even the volunteers who were supposedly their caretakers did such acts of violence and inhumanity that it became impossible for these poor people to make out between friends and foes.

### **Analysis of *Black Shalwar***

The third story sampled out of Manto’s work for analysis, relates the sufferings of a prostitute, named Sultana. She has just moved to Delhi in hopes of bettering her financial position; and is finding it really hard to make ends meet. The man she lives with, called Khudabaksh, had drawn a very bright picture of their future in Bombay but things had not worked out as she had expected.

To her great dismay, she finds out that no one was paying her the wages she used to get which were ten rupees, and she finds herself surrendering to the forces of economics. Sultana realized that like a commodity her price had fallen, and her buyers had set her price

at three rupees, which to her disappointment seemed to be the collective view regarding her worth.

“She had realized, to her great chagrin, that all of them had uniformly rated her worth at three rupees only. Hence, when the sixth customer showed up in her room she herself said that she was not prepared to accept anything less than three rupees. “Not a piece less than three rupees.” Pg 11

The lines are very beautifully phrased as in the beginning she resists being sold at this price but we see that she gives up on her insistence once she is reminded over and over again of her value. Here we see that when put down by society several times sultana starts to believe that she is in fact only worth three rupees and then only asks for the amount which she now believes is her fair price. Here Manto shows us how the subaltern has no self-worth and that if he or she argues about her situation it is totally useless as the people who have the power are actually the one who decide the worth of their labor even if it sells their body.

Another important factor in this story is the fact that sultana never wanted to move to Delhi but the man who was in a position of authority over sultana, to whose hegemony she had willfully surrendered, had brought her here and now had almost forsaken her. Hence again we see the Manto shed light on the issues of a subaltern.

“Sometimes a detached bogey, getting an initial push from the engine, kept running on the track under its own momentum. Sultana would feel that an invisible hand had also given a push to her life and would feel that an invisible hand had also given a push to her life and then left her to fend for herself. Like the bogey which switched from one track to another under a locking device manipulated by an invisible cabinman, an invisible hand was also changing the course of her life. And then a day would come when the momentum would spend itself and she would come to a dead stop at some unknown spot where there would be no one to take care of her.” Pg 15.

These lines are a wonderful way to show the sentiments and feelings of a subaltern. Here we see that sultana’s innermost thoughts have been articulated in these lines, the use of a comparison between her life and a detached bogey are nothing short of genius. Sultana here stands at her galleries and sees the railway yard and feels like that is how life has treated her. It seemed to her that someone had given her an initial push and then she was left on her own, with no control over where she was going or what direction the push sent her to. The use of the metaphor for a bogey whose tracks are shifted from one place to the other by an invisible cabin-man are so realistic and sad at the same time, sultana’s life seems to be driven by the forces which are invisible to her eye. She is forced into positions and situations which she never opted for, her life is completely and utterly being driven by the forces which are nowhere to be seen. These lines are a perfect example of the subaltern status as they are completely at the mercy of society, and Manto beautifully puts their condition in words.

“The tailor delivered it today,” Sultana replied. Then her eyes travelled to Makhtar’s ears. “Where did you get these earrings from?” she asked. “I bought them today,” Mukhtar replied.

Both stood wordless for a while”. Pg. 23.

This line is also a clear identification of the subalterns. Here we see that both Sultana and Mukhtar have been cheated by Shanker into believing that he loved them. He took complete advantage of these women both physically and psychologically, and both the women realized that all Shanker did was to take Sultana’s earrings and gave it to Mukhtar and took her Salwar and gave it to Sultana who wanted it more than anything else. The silence that these women share at the moment of discovery is so symbolic, as both are left

speechless and even if they could what else was left to say. They both knew that they had been manipulated and that too in the name of love and friendship. So here again, Manto shows us that the subaltern, even when aware of his or her situation, seldom retaliates. Manto brings out the element of subaltern with ultimate beauty.

### **Findings**

The three selected stories bring to surface the essence of agony, experienced by the subalterns and Manto has appeared to have done a great social service by giving voice to the oppressed strata of society, which according to the theorist, Spivak, no one bothers about. It can be concluded from the data analysis that Manto in all his short stories selected for this research one way or the other, gave voice and representation to the most neglected, oppressed and even forgotten individuals of society. His stories for example "Toba Tek Singh" and "Black Salwar" and "Loosen up" are full of subaltern representation not only through words but also through signs and symbols. In other stories as well there are ample examples of Manto being the mouthpiece of the voiceless. These findings affirm (Daruwalla, 1996) views regarding Manto. According to him, Manto rise to fame was because of the genius, the exceptionality of his vision and the provocative nature of his style of writing. The middle class of India ever disposed to a mix of narrow-mindedness and pretense in the middle of the century was stunned out of its wits. The findings are further strengthened by the comments of Kumar that feminist critics have by now popularized the necessity for giving a voice to the absent, the inarticulate and the silenced. And even after nearly fifty five years now since a noteworthy writer in Urdu had the vision to show living glimpses of the unseen and hushed woman, the woman who had lost her position in the eyes of the mainstream society of respectable ladies and gentlemen (Kumar, 1996).

It is therefore seen that what Gayatri Spivak states in her essay, is a situation seen all around and Manto in his exceptional skill not just sees the subaltern but makes the subaltern a subject for his stories. This further gives validity to Spivak's idea that there are classes of the oppressed and that although all subalterns are oppressed but not all oppressed are subalterns.

The images portrayed in these stories have given a voice of sanity to the insane. So we see that the marginalized subalterns, who have no access to the power structures and hence have no control over what happens to them, and no one has any interest in what they have to say get a voice and the ironic daggers used by Manto to point the subalterns, pierce the sensitive through and through.



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