



## SYMBOLISM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONVOLUTIONS IN MANTO'S STORIES

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### Abstract

Manto as a unique phenomenon belied all defined moulds of literary creativity and interpretations, an *avant garde* revolutionary whose insinuating disclosures and irreverent treatment of social duplicities extracted brazen criticism and charges of obscenity from the contemporary orthodox community.

The current paper deals with the psycho-sexual interpretations of various characters coupled with Manto's use of varied symbols as embodiments of deep proto-myths ranging from the omni- venerated *Ficus religiosa* to perennial monsoons in short stories 'Smell', 'Blouse' and 'My Name is Radha'. In psychological terms the human mind has three components, id, ego and super ego. Libido is the pure life force that drives our psychic existence. Radha's persona is symptomatic of Id overriding the super ego, an unbridled powerhouse of life force bereft of all moral dilemmas occasionally punctured by the shadow of reality of her existence. Manto had an excellent penchant of describing the hidden motives and blurred narratives of his characters with the same brevity with which he portrays the settings, the milieu of his stories. Like psychologists he delves into and out of all three different levels of human consciousness, the conscious mind, the subconscious mind and the unconscious mind as in the case of Momin whose confused self is struggling to come to terms with the biological changes of puberty.

Keywords: psychology, symbols, spiritual, dilemma, consciousness, narrative.

*Smell* deals with an adventurous youth who learns through his escapades the one poignant lesson of life i.e. traditions are sometimes at variance with individual freedom, an eternally repeated motif of many a dramas and yet Manto's use of symbols make it a refreshing retelling of the same old tale. Peepal tree has great significance in different religions. In Hinduism it is considered sacred and people are scared of it too at the same time. In Buddhism the tree has great importance as Sidhartha attained Nirvana under the most pious Peepal tree in Bodh Gaya (erstwhile Uruwela), the most revered place for pilgrims from around the world. The tree came to be venerated as the Bodhi

Vriksha. So from spiritual-cultural point of view Peepal is probably the most important tree for humanity.

The peepal tree also can be a symbol of reincarnation, of rising from ashes in historical context as the anecdote goes that one of Ashoka's younger queens got the sacred Bodhi Vriksha destroyed but in due course of time it regenerated from its remaining roots. Later on a zealot king from Bengal caused harm to the tree and yet it revived back to its pristine glory.

Similarly, rains are an eternal symbol of nature's frolic spirit, of reinvigoration, of breaking

the bounds. Monsoons are phenomena unique to Indian subcontinent. Starting by June in Kerala, the rains cover all of the country in next seventy odd days. Everywhere the animals and humans along with the flora get a new lease of life with the falling droplets, being liberated from the oppressing heat waves called *loo*. Rains also entail growth, transcending one's limits; the plants incorporate the message from Mother Nature and take to optimize their potentials in this season.

Window has double significance in this story, firstly it is a via media through which Randhir can look out at the world beyond his confines, the Peepal and the rains; and also it helps him to get in communion with others, (women). It is through his contact with the outside world that he gives some sense to his life. Without the window, neither nature nor women are accessible to him. In a way the window is a representation of one's desire to communicate, interact and get in tune with the rhythm of life and death outside, "absolute consciousness" (Banerjee 288). The interplay of rain and Peepal symbols provides the background to this amazing story of cultural confines versus free human spirit. Peepal is the spiritual entity which gets washed with fresh rain drops taking away all the dirt and impurities accumulated during the previous cycle of Karma signifying a new start. This is how things should work, tradition must face, accommodate the fresh currents of ideas and practices representative of change, and the new order too must accept the age old wisdom imbibed in rituals of past. This conglomeration can take place only when the self, the being transcend its personal boundaries and through the window of its intellect goes out in the world of experience. Randhir while looking out of window on a rainy day contemplates how the Christian girls who once were easily accessible have flown away to white soldiers' beds and how his brown skin has become an impediment in securing a Christian girl in current times. He thinks of the girl downstairs, her demeanor, arrogance and his (inordinate) desire to seduce her. Suddenly he spots a simple looking dark girl on the road; she was probably a worker in some factory nearby. He makes some gestures and invites her upstairs. They spend the whole night in each other's arms with sporadic

rainfall outside. The one thing that struck Randhir, that permanently etched the girl in his memory, was her smell. It was the unique smell of her brown flesh, her sweat. It was something he would not forget in times to come. She is a traditional lower class girl with firm body, youthful; pure nature, no pretensions. In a new monsoon, a new lady lies on his bed, same as the Marathi girl the last monsoon, naked white flesh but his soul was still ensnared by the smell which emanated from the dusky Marathi girl. This new girl is his wife, from a supposedly well off background and with white skin, a fetish among Indians! She is everything parents hunt for in an arranged marriage- pedigree, wealth and culture! Her henna represents the sacrosanct nature of their relation. Yet Randhir finds her body unresponsive and her henna dull. Here the binaries of white/privileged/superior and dark/poor/marginal seem to get misbalanced. A poor girl of dark complexion seems to control the heart and mind of the man while he inhales the "deathly scent of henna" (Manto 158). In his narrative, Manto seems to break the moulds of societal norms and patterns. A tradition represented by henna of a bride can force people in incompatible relations for life but can it really banish the true nature? Nature always finds ways and means of manifestation, like Peepal saplings growing in concrete and cement on rooftops. What society created or creates is not what is real or truth but what is acceptable to the majority (or ideally to the majority of thinking public). Beauty and truth are inseparable from nature and shall always prevail over and above social norms as the preamble reads: SATYAM SHIVAM SUNDARAM. The smell of the Marathi girl shall forever haunt and traverse every sphere of Randhir's existence. *My Name is Radha* is an amazing panorama of interceding psychic behaviors of a single character named Neelam and Radha alternately. As per psychoanalysis, Id consists of pure libido, the life engendering energy that can not differentiate between right and wrong, socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, moral concerns etc. Super ego is that component of human mind which is govern by social and ethical considerations, it drives the metaphysical concerns in a human being. Ego is the driver of the chariot; it

has almost synonymous meaning as self. Its prime function is to maintain balance between Id, 'the wild, untamed self' and superego, 'the other worldly, spiritual, aesthetic component of being'. Momin in *Blouse* is a boy next door travelling through the enigmatic alleys of transformation from childhood to adulthood vividly portrayed through his ambiguous reactions to encounters with teenage girls of the household where he serves.

A criminal would have a misbalanced personality in the sense that his Id would dominate over his superego and make him act in most anti-social patterns without any concern for moral uprightness of his conduct. A person with saintly attitude too has an imbalanced self in psychoanalytical terms as his ego would be governed by superego which would ignore the worldly significant aspects of personality like taking care of material resources and relationships. Such a persona would be more content with spiritual upliftment and issues like mystery of existence, nature/God, moral fabric of human life etc. making him a social misfit. According to the psychologists, the overwhelming part of our mind is unconscious to which we have limited access. It is this powerhouse that exerts insurmountable influence on the conscious mind which in turn interacts with the unconscious thoughts via the subconscious. There are various mechanisms through which our unconscious thoughts come to fore. For instance, slip of tongue, dreams. Neelam during her playful interaction with Sadaq about Raj Kishor inadvertently exposes her subconscious thoughts. Of course one would have to be a bit attentive to get the exact sense of what she's saying because she means exactly opposite of what she speaks. The narrator's apparent indifference towards Raj Kishore's magnetic persona or rather his derisive tone is symptomatic of inferiority which he won't admit publically. The way he downplays Kishore's writing skills while describing latter's diary also brings to light the same anxiety that the writer-narrator wants to evade out of reader's view. Although he tries to balance the narration by praising Kishore's Rawalpindi accent and his support for Congress, though not without a jibe when he says that he suspected that Raj loved his own self more

than his country. Once he gets the hint of Neelam's growing affinity with Raj, he further derides him of being a double faced fellow who's wearing a mask of nobility and gravity to hide his debauched self. Raj is the classic macho man of his times. He is well built, with great muscles, good manners, great oratory skills, heartthrob of girls and above all a man of infallible morals. This very contradiction in his personality irks the narrator beyond reconciliation. He can't bring himself to believe that a man with such charm and charisma would be so naïve in relation to girls as to call every lady his sister. This very thing irritates Neelam when she first notices his habit. But here we have a man of such divergent qualities, a man too good to be real. Is he really posturing, remains a conjecture for the rest of the story apart from a hint of his clouded sneer when he visits Neelam taken down with Malaria to celebrate the festival of brother-sister bond of love, the Raksha-bandhan. Raj, it appears, has a dual personality; one for the people around and his fans and second his real self. His insistence on calling every heroine his sister obviously raises doubts as Sadaq points out. Now split personality is a phenomenon which occurs when someone represses their socially unacceptable desires deep inside their unconscious and when at some point in time the urge of libido overpowers the ego, these unbridled emotions take control of the mind and start getting manifested in form of dual or split personality wherein a person starts behaving like different persons at different occasions. This particular behavior is more apparent in the character of Radha or Neelam, as she is called on the silver screen. When Sadaq points out that she could spell his true name even then she keeps calling him Sadaq, her reply was romantic to problematic in range. She said that she does not correct a mistake once made. In routine the readers may find it a fantastic reply and might feel it to be one of her idiosyncrasies, after all she is an actress given to pampering and brazenness. Upon observing other incidents of the story, her response could be termed as serious reflection of her desire for disorientation and split personality. Neelam is the daughter of a Benarasi courtesan, a girl who has seen much trouble in life and obviously has many things to

repress from her routine memory so as to carry on as a normal human being. Her real name is Radha and she does not use it for movies because she finds it sacred in some peculiar sense beyond religion as we are told that she is an atheist. The only explanation could be the connotations of her name and her association with it make her feel valued amidst her real life experiences as the daughter of a prostitute and an actress who has little value in people's eyes apart from her body. Hence, what she can do with being Neelam, she can't even dream of doing as Radha. Radha is the epitome of piety, no one can ever even dare a lecherous glance at her, every male would respect her from the core of their heart; in short, she's in utopian settings where everything is primordially fine with the world and women are respected and not objectified; a utopian world where zests of "simple life" (Palmer 378) are celebrated. This is too good a thought for a girl who has little respect in society, whom every second male tries to seduce and considers loose and this is why she keeps her real name out of the real world. On another level, her own libidinous desires of love, of carnal pleasure need satisfaction, not in dreams but in real sense but who would marry her, a corrupt woman, not Radha but a lady of dubious background? The only outlet for her is by becoming Neelam and let loose her bounds to get what she desires. Even here things are not that simple as Radha too resides in the same body and would definitely intervene. She gets attracted towards Raj Kishore but is dilly dallying in accepting her real emotions in front of Saadat who is too well versed in these matters, being a writer himself. She refuses to be called sister by Raj and yet when he goes to her home for Raksha bandhan, she quietly ties the rakhi on his wrist. The crisis comes when he returns to her house, alone to take back his bag, ostensibly forgotten during the last visit. The scene is rather absurd on first look; instead of handling the bag to him she starts applying lipstick in front of her dressing table, then gets up to bolt the door and suddenly pounces on him like a wild cat. They fight and fight wildly, tearing into each other and finally she kisses him, a long wild kiss and leaves for Sadaq's house. She is a single girl, of marriageable age, forced to subdue her physical needs in pursuit of

earning bread for her family. Her desires are flamed by the welcoming behavior of the doubled faced, married man who is himself a confused character, unsure of his intentions. What Neelam did was all she could in face of the immense pressure from society, the restrictions from her own alter ego, Radha and her "discontent" (Hoffer 33). Eventually, when the story ends, Neelam finds a workable balance with her other self, when in moments of calm she proclaims to be Radha!

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