



Portrayal of Humanitarian Values amidst Communal Frenzy: A Study of Select Short Stories

Suresh Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Govt. College Indora, 176401

Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India

Email: vijaysuresh8890@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the portrayal of humanitarian values in select short stories that depict communal frenzy and its aftermaths. Through a critical analysis of the narratives that include *The Parrot in the Cage*, *Lajwanti*, *Toba Tek Singh*, *Dog of Tetwal*, this research paper explores how authors use literary devices to convey the significance of empathy, compassion, and human dignity in the face of communal violence. The study highlights the ways in which these stories promote social cohesion, challenge stereotypes, and foster a sense of shared humanity. Through close readings, the study also highlights how writers use personal narratives and symbolic settings to portray individuals who transcend religious, cultural, and social divides, affirming shared human dignity even in times of extreme crisis. Through a critical examination of characters and narratives, the study reveals how writers depict ordinary individuals who defy hatred, bridge religious and cultural divides, and uphold universal principles of humanity. By focusing on literary techniques such as symbolism, irony, and realism, the analysis demonstrates how these stories resist divisive ideologies and reaffirm the timeless ideals of unity and moral responsibility in society. By analyzing the representation of humanitarian values in these narratives, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of literature in promoting peace,

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Communal violence represents one of the darkest facets of human society, marked by irrational hatred and the breakdown of moral and social structures. However, amidst the devastation, individual acts of compassion and courage often shine through, reaffirming the enduring strength of humanitarian ideals. Literature, particularly short stories, has served as a powerful medium to document, critique, and humanize these experiences. Through brief yet potent narratives, writers capture the complex emotional and ethical landscapes navigated by individuals during times of communal frenzy. This paper examines how select short stories depict the triumph of humanitarian values over hatred, focusing on the literary strategies employed to highlight moral resilience and human solidarity in the face of violence.

This research paper critically analyzes Mulk Raj Anand's *The Parrot in the Cage*, Rajender Singh Vedi's *Lajwanti* and Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* and *The Dog of Tetwal* where writers project humanitarian values to combat communal hatred.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) projects Rukmani, an old woman and the parrot as the central characters in his short story, **The Parrot in the Cage** through which he depicts communal violence, displacement, isolation, alienation, a deep sense of insecurity and the anxieties of old age. The story opens with the calls of the parrot, 'Rukmaniai ni Rukmainai' (Anand 44) expressing the humanitarian and caring concern through the non-humans like the parrot in the contemporary inhuman world. The story has a setting of Lahore and Amritsar immediate after the partition of India. As Rukmani has left Lahore where she used to live and earn her livelihood by working as a maid in the neighboring household with the cage in her hands, she reaches Amritsar with her only companion, the parrot whom she considers as her son. As she sits on a fringe of the road outside the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, the parrot starts calling repeatedly periodically, "'Ni tun kithe hain?'" imitating the way her friends used to call her. She replies, 'Son, I don't know where I am' she said listlessly, in an effort to keep the parrot quiet by assuring him she was taking notice of him. 'I only know if Fato had not given me her burqah to escape with, I should not be here'" (Anand 45) When the parrot gives the third call 'Ni tu ki karni hain?' she says:

"'Nothing, son, I am doing nothing...Only waiting...' the old woman said tiredly, as though now she was holding a metaphorical conversation with her pet to keep her mind occupied. For, from



her entails arose a confusion which was like the panic she had felt at the mad mob bursting with shouts of ‘Allah ho Akbar’! Har Har Mahadev! Sat Sri Akal’ on the night of terror she had fled from the lane.

There had been flashes of blazing light; cracking of burning house beams; smoke, smoke, choking smoke...And she thought that her last days had come, that the earth itself was troubled through the misdeeds of the Kaliyug and soon the dharti would open up and swallow everything. And then Fato had come and told her she would be murdered if she did not leave. (Anand 45)

The conversation of the old woman and the parrot reveals the deep and real concern for each other amidst communal frenzy. Rukmani considers the parrot her son and the parrot remains playful with his mother like figure. The cries of the parrot serve as indicators of transcending Rukmani from present into past by bringing the visuals of violence and riots resulting from religious sentiments and shift her memory from past into present. Amidst such communal atmosphere Fato, her Muslim friend informs her that the majoritarian Muslims are killing the Hindus, raping their women, burning their properties and guides her to leave the place for India for survival and helps her escaping by giving her own burqah.

As the parrot persists with ‘Ni tun ki krni hain?’ she replies. ““Son, I am waiting for the Sahib, so that he can give some money to buy bread with. They say that the Congress Sarkar will give back what we have lost, son, they say, I heard at the station! Are you hungry my son-you must be hungry. I shall buy you some gram from that stall keeper when the Sahib gives me money’ (Anand 45-46). Hope plays a significant role in increases the life span of any living being. As Rukmani loves her pet the most, she becomes very hopeful from the government of India. It is altogether a different matter that she gets no relief there, but the gram stall keeper helps the old woman when she falls almost unconscious who does not leave the cage from her hand and also helps the parrot with grams to eat (Anand 48). The old woman blesses the gram stall keeper for balancing her and showing his concern for the parrot also. Mulk Raj Anand represents humanitarian values through the characters of Fato, Rukmani, the parrot, and the gram stall keeper while showcasing how human values overpower the communal sentiments in this narrative.

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) portrays how humanity still can thrive even when society outside breaks down due to the moral failure of political decisions like exchanging the mental patients symbolizing a larger injustice and the lunatics living without communal hatred inside the asylum through the short-story **Toba Tek Singh**. Manto presents how the lunatics react to the government's decision to exchange the lunatics recently living in the mad houses of both the countries i.e. India and



Pakistan to their own countries after the partition of India. Before this, all the citizens and prisoners were settled as per their wish of the country generally Hindus and Sikhs in India whereas Muslims were settled in the newly formed nation, Pakistan. Manto presents one case of a lunatic asylum in Lahore where the news of transfer becomes a hot topic of discussion. They attempt to understand the meaning of Pakistan and its location. All the lunatics are not mad actually, they were imprisoned for some other crimes, but presently all become mad due to over thinking and after living with lunatics for a long time. Manto projects Bishan Singh, a Sikh lunatic as the central character of the narrative who was in the asylum for fifteen years. He was a prosperous landlord before he turned mad. Although he never bathed in a month, when he knew instinctively about the arrival of some friend or relative, he used to inform the guard. On that particular day, he used to have a proper bath and would appear before the visitor afresh. From everyone, he would ask the same question about where Toba Tek Singh is and because of this, he is known popularly as Toba Tek Singh. Manto vividly describes the concern of a Muslim friend Fazaldin who exhibits universal human values as he visit Bhishan Singh before the exchange of lunatics. Manto writes as Fazaldin reaches the asylum, the guard tells Bhishan Singh that his friend has come to meet him:

Bhishan Singh gave Fazaldin a look and began to mutter something. Fazaldin came up and placed a hand on his shoulder. 'I had been meaning for a long time to come and see you, but couldn't find the time. All your folk were able safely to go over to Hindustan. I did whatever I could to help them. Your daughter... Roop Kaur...' He hesitated and stopped.

Bhishan Singh tried to remember, 'Daughter? Roop Kaur?'

Fazaldin haltingly added, 'Yes, she too... is very well... She too had gone with them.'

Bhishan Singh kept quiet. Fazaldin spoke again. 'They had asked me to come and look you up from time to time. Now I hear you are off to Hindustan. Say my salaam to dear brethren Balbir Singh and Vadhava Singh and to sister Amrit Kaur. Tell brother Balbit Singh that Fazaldin is well. The two brown buffaloes they had left me have both delivered, one a male calf and the other a female, but the female died on the sixth day. And... well, do let me know if there is anything I can do; I am always at your service... And here, I have brought you some homemade sweets.' (Manto 110)



Manto's **The Dog of Tetwal** brings out the cruelty of the National Armies of India and Pakistan on animals under the pretext of so-called patriotism. Manto satirizes the soldiers' attitude of both the countries i.e. playing with the emotions of a dog, first Indian army's efforts of befriending a stray dog, offering him biscuits to eat and hanging a board by writing 'Chapad Jhunjhun: this is an Indian dog' (Manto 175) on his neck with a rope and repeating the same pattern or behavior by replacing the words written on the boards with 'Sapad Sunsun: this is a Pakistani dog' (Manto 176) and thereafter, shooting the dog from their opposite camps. As the dog dies on the spot, Pakistani captain, Himmat Khan says in sadness, "Another martyr." Whereas Indian Corporal Harnam Singh while holding his gun says, 'He died that death that is a dog's alone' (Manto 179). With the cruel treatment of the dog in the hands of the soldiers of both countries who play with his emotions by giving him something to eat and pass their time with fun and then shoot him showing their patriotism, the writer satirizes the dual attitude of the soldiers. If the soldiers had to shoot him, they must not have entertained him by offering eatables. Moreover, the writer advocates the need to observe humanitarian values by ironically depicting the cruelty of the soldiers towards animals like dog.

Rajinder Singh Bedi (1915-84), explores the trauma, social norms, and complex emotions surrounding women who were abducted during the partition and later rehabilitated by the government in his short story, **Lajwanti**. It is set during the aftermath of the Partition of India in 1947. The story revolves around Sundar Lal, a man who is active in a social organization dedicated to the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted women. Ironically, his own wife, Lajwanti, had been abducted during the communal violence of the Partition. When Lajwanti is finally returned, Sundar Lal turns emotionally conflicted. Despite preaching compassion and acceptance for other recovered women, he struggles to fully accept Lajwanti back into his life due to the social stigma and his own wounded masculinity. In the end, he overcomes his turmoil and gives the status of "Devi" [Goddess] (Bedi 71) to Lajwanti and commits never to hurt and disrespect her. In contrast Bedi writes:

But there were some abducted women whose husbands, parents or siblings refused even to recognize them. As far as their families were concerned, they should have killed themselves. They should have taken poison to save their virtue. Or jumped into the well. Coward to cling to life so tenaciously!

Hundred, indeed thousands of women had in fact killed themselves to save their honour. But what could they know of the courage it took just to live on? (Bedi 63)

Through the above rhetorical question, the writer emphatically states that it had become really tough for the abducted women to gather courage to live on in a society where hypocritical social norms prevail in favour of a particular gender. Throughout the narrative, Lajwanti remains quiet and submissive, reflecting the societal expectation for women to be patient and self-sacrificing. The title itself is symbolic - Lajwanti stands for a modest woman and also referring to the sensitive 'touch-me-not' plant (Bedi 60) represents the fragile condition of women in a patriarchal society. Lajwanti is a powerful critique of the way society treats women, especially those affected by conflict and violence. It forces readers to confront the double standards of a patriarchal culture that expects women to forgive and forget, while denying them dignity and voice.

In conclusion, *The Parrot in the Cage*, Toba Tek Singh, *The Dog of Tetwal*, and *Lajwanti* collectively underscore the persistence of humanitarian values amidst the dehumanizing forces of communal violence and Partition. Anand's *The Parrot in the Cage* offers a moving metaphor for the emotional entrapment and societal neglect endured by women, reflecting a deep yearning for freedom, dignity, and empathy. Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* presents a scathing critique of the absurdity of political divisions through the figure of a mentally ill man who refuses to abandon his humanity despite being trapped between nations. *The Dog of Tetwal* furthers this critique, using the tragic fate of a neutral dog to symbolize the death of innocence in the face of blind nationalism. Finally, Bedi's *Lajwanti* explores the psychological and emotional trauma of women who suffered during Partition, questioning the patriarchal and moral hypocrisies that prevail in the aftermath of conflict. Together, these stories transcend the immediate horrors of Partition to reveal a deeper commitment to human compassion, ethical consciousness, and social justice. In resisting the moral collapse induced by communal frenzy, they reaffirm the central role of empathy and human dignity in times of collective crisis.

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