

Urdu Studies, Vol 4 Issue 1, 2024

Description

Precarious Homes in Saadat Hassan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh:" Insanity, Illness and Displacement

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DOI <https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.13292510>

Abstract: The short stories of Saadat Hassan Manto, who is acknowledged to be one of the pioneers of the Urdu short story, have been read variously as resorting to obscenity to demonstrate the obscenity of partition and attendant nationalism. The paper examines the short story 'Toba Tek Singh' arguably Manto's most well-known and translated story, to understand the interrogation of 'home' in the post-colonial future which is perpetuated through the fiction re-interpreted across time, space, and different frameworks. By focusing acutely on traumatized and split subjectivities, Manto demonstrates the performative potential of cultural memory to serve as a testimony of the enduring power of memory. Moreover, it depicts the determination and disruption of current imaginings of a 'self' shaped by a perpetual dialectic of exclusion and inclusion, lately accelerated by the rise of muscular nationalism. Manto's short stories protest the perpetual denial and postponement of the question of 'home', and hence provide a valuable insight into the postcolonial dilemma of imagining the nation as a coherent and linear space. This paper approaches this aesthetic of denial by examining the wide semiotic range of possibilities offered by an examination of the vocabulary of Manto, and thereby illuminate the contours of Manto as a practitioner of writerly writing.

Keywords: Manto, dislocation, memory, national culture, protest, language

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Takbeer Salati was born and raised in Srinagar, Kashmir. She is pursuing her doctoral research on Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories and attempts to explore life and its marginality across Partition of South Asia. She writes short stories and fiction that are influenced by the daily struggle of life in Kashmir. Her various short stories are published in Samyukta Fiction, Muse India, Cafe Dissensus, Nether Quarterly, Life and Legends, Parcham, Outlook, Cerebration, From My Window anthology, etc. A forthcoming essay appears in the food journal *On Eating: A multilingual Journal of Food and Eating*, edited by Sumana Roy. Her work has also been longlisted in the list of Best South Asian Short Story Writers 20 under 30 in *The Bombay Review* 2021.

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Date Created

August 10, 2024

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