

Thematic Analysis of OCD in Manto's Short Story 'Ullu ka Patha

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Abstract

Saadat Hasan Manto's short story, 'Ullu ka Patha,' delves deep into the intricacies of the human psyche, unravelling the complexities of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). This literary gem showcases Manto's profound understanding of the human mind and its idiosyncrasies. In the narrative, Manto masterfully dissects the psychological aspects of OCD, painting a vivid portrait of the protagonist, Qasim, whose life is overshadowed by this condition. Manto's depiction of Qasim's obsessions is nothing short of extraordinary. The relentless urge to utter 'ullu ka patha' to someone becomes an all-consuming compulsion, an unrelenting force that dominates his thoughts and actions. Through Qasim's character, Manto skillfully explores the tormenting nature of intrusive thoughts and the debilitating impact of compulsive behaviors. Moreover, the story does not merely scratch the surface; it delves into the vicious cycle of OCD, portraying the cyclical nature of obsessions and compulsions, which traps Qasim in an inescapable web of torment. Manto's narrative not only entertains but also educates, shedding light on the often-misunderstood world of mental health, making 'Ullu ka Patha' a timeless masterpiece that continues to

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captivate readers and scholars alike.

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1 Introduction

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a disorder in DSM-5 (APA, [2013](#)), in which the individual undergoes repetitive, intrusive thoughts, sensations (obsessions), and/or urges and faces tension or anxiety to eliminate these thoughts. As a result, the individual is compelled to perform some actions that reduce the anxiety caused by the obsessions. Compulsions, the repetitive behaviors performed to reduce anxiety and compulsions, affect the normal day-to-day functioning of the individual (Leeuwerik et al., [2023](#)). These repetitive thoughts are disturbing and compulsive behaviors in OCD are rigid and compel the person to be involved in the compulsive behaviors otherwise, there would be intense consequences. Some people may have a fair insight that their obsessional thoughts are non-realistic and irrational, but still, they find it hard to resist compulsive behaviors. (Hughes & Kinderman, [2023](#)) Not every repetitive thought and recurrent sensation is related to OCD. However, obsessions of OCD are time-consuming and affect the social, occupational and other areas of functioning (What Is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder? n.d.).

The signs and symptoms of OCD start early in life and most people can get diagnosed as young adults (Zhu et al., [2023](#)). The initial symptoms and compulsions may worsen with time if proper help is not sought. Although the risk factors of OCD are unknown, genetics, temperament, environment, and childhood traumas can be one of the risk factors in developing OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive et al.).

Initially, different theories existed about obsessions and compulsions of OCD. During the 1950s to early 1960s, obsessions were considered because of weak boundaries with the id, and they needed to be satisfied to strengthen these weak boundaries (Salkovskis, [1999](#)). Another theory presented to us by Rachman, Marks, & Hodgson ([1973](#)) was based on the exposure and response prevention behavioural method. He proposed the cognitive hypothesis for obsessions, saying that the difference between intrusive obsessional thoughts and everyday intrusive thoughts lies in the perception of these thoughts (Brewer et al., [2022](#)). OCD patients perceive them as upsetting and harmful, thus evoking the need to engage in harm-preventing behavior (compulsion) to neutralize the disturbance (stress and anxiety) caused by the intrusive thoughts (Garcia et al., [2023](#)).

The cognitive theory of OCD proposes that when harm to self or others is anticipated from obsessions, anxiety or distress is caused, and compulsive behaviors are performed to neutralize them (Salkovskis, [1999](#)).

About the Author

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), marks himself as a prominent, exasperating, and controversial writer of the twentieth century. His inattentive and rebellious nature was the reason for his inconsistent educational career and involvement in alcohol addiction. By 1940, Manto published two collections of his short stories. Manto's career boomed when he started working at a radio station in Delhi. However, due to his rebellious nature, the clashes with his colleagues made him leave the radio and move back to Bombay. He moved to Pakistan after migration and settled in Lahore with his family (Tadayon Chaharsughi et al., [2023](#)).

Manto was renowned for his ability to present unconventional and unapologetic perspectives on societal norms and human behavior (Pretzmann et al., [2023](#)). He was charged with obscenity almost 3 times before and three times after partition but was never convicted. Besides writing the stories of partition, it was said that Manto only wrote about sexuality, prostitutes, and alcoholics. However, according to Ayesha Jalal, Manto's niece and famous Urdu writer, he wrote about social

hypocrisy, the dichotomy of morality, and the blurred lines between sanity and madness, invite readers to question established norms and confront uncomfortable truths. Instead of writing about imaginative fiction, Manto wrote about the societal evils, and ugly face of the society where people of marginalised groups are pinpointed, and the nobles veiled their lacking in thick cloaks of hypocrisy (Ledwos et al., [2023](#)).

Manto's literary genius and ability to address complex social and cultural issues through his short stories have established him as a prominent figure in South Asian literature. His work not only discusses the traumas faced by people at the time of Indo-Pak partition, but also tabooed topics are bluntly talked about (Cooper et al., [2023](#)). His famous short stories include 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Thanda Goshat (Cold Meat)', 'Kaali Shalwar (Black Pants)', 'Tahira se Tahir (From Tahir to Tahir)', 'Khol Do (Open It)', 'Dhuan (Smoke)', 'Ullu ka Patha', Bu (Smell), 'My name is Radha' and many more (Tandt et al., [2022](#)). Most of his stories not only reflected his own demons and darkness but also that of the society that is either masked or unmasked, discussed or undiscussed. It is also said that Manto used to be highly intoxicated while writing and he usually completed the story in a single sitting (Sharifi Bastan et al., [2023](#)).

2 Insight into the Short Story

Apart from the partition problems, many psychological themes have also been highlighted by Manto in his fiction. He talked about depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Electra complex, inferiority and superiority complex, sadism and masochism, and Oedipus complex. 'Ullu ka Patha', one of Manto's notable works, presents a compelling narrative that calls for a thematic analysis (*OCD Loves Company*, n.d.). This short story is about a man, Qasim, who has a strong, irresistible urge to say 'ullu ka patha' to someone but also has a fair insight. Till the end of the story, Qasim resisted his urge many times but was also disheartened that a random passerby girl said the same word so quickly and conveniently (Khosravani et al., n.d.). By conducting a thematic analysis, readers can contextualise the story within the historical realities of the time, examining the themes of communal tensions, loss, and the fragility of human relationships (Skarphedinsson et al., [2023](#)).

One of the central themes in 'Ullu ka Patha' is the exploration of gender dynamics and power struggles. Through vivid characters and their interactions, Manto sheds light on the unequal power dynamics that exist within society (Pham et al., [2023](#)). The story showcases the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society, highlighting their vulnerability and the limitations imposed upon them. By conducting a thematic analysis, readers can delve into the nuances of these themes, examine Manto's portrayal of gender roles, and critically reflect on the societal structures that perpetuate such power imbalances. This analysis offers valuable insights into the socio-cultural context of Manto's time and fosters a deeper understanding of the struggles faced by marginalized groups (Ponzini et al., [2023](#)).

Manto's characters in 'Ullu ka Patha' are complex and multi-dimensional, each struggling with their own demons. A thematic analysis allows readers to explore the psychological depths of these characters, examining their motivations, fears, and desires. By dissecting the themes of alienation, identity crisis, and the impact of societal expectations, readers can gain a profound understanding of the human experience as portrayed by Manto. The analysis provides an opportunity to empathize with the characters, to appreciate Manto's nuanced portrayal of their inner turmoil, and to reflect on the universal nature of human emotions.

Despite being set in a specific historical context, 'Ullu ka Patha' resonates with contemporary society, making it even more imperative to conduct a thematic analysis. Manto's exploration of themes such as social hypocrisy, gender inequality, and the complexity of human nature remains relevant today. By examining these themes through a thematic analysis, readers can draw parallels

between the past and the present, critically reflecting on the persisting social issues and drawing inspiration to effect positive change.

3 Aims of the study

This essay explores why conducting a thematic analysis of 'Ullu ka Patha' is crucial in appreciating Manto's literary craftsmanship and the profound impact of his storytelling.

3.1 Rationale

Conducting a thematic analysis of Manto's short story 'Ullu ka Patha' is essential to thoroughly appreciate his work's depth and significance. Such an analysis enables readers to understand Manto's unique perspective, explore gender dynamics and power struggles, delve into characters' psychological depths, contextualize historical realities, and recognise the continued relevance of his stories in contemporary society. By engaging in a thematic analysis, researchers, scholars, and readers can gain valuable insights into Manto's literary craftsmanship, the socio-cultural context of his time, and the enduring impact of his storytelling on our understanding of the human condition.

4 Methodology

The nature of the research study was qualitative. The story was read out thoroughly and the text was analysed. The close reading led to the selective text used in the analysis.

Discussing the themes in Manto's 'Ullu ka Patha'

This analysis was intended to explore the sublime message in Manto's short story 'Ullu ka Patha'. Besides writing about societal evils, partition stories, and women's challenges in a patriarchal society, Manto also beautifully masked and disguised mental illness and psychological distress in his stories.

In his short story, 'Ullu ka Patha' Manto wrote about a guy named Qasim, his intrusive urge to say 'Ullu ka Patha' to someone, and his inner challenges to deal with this intrusive urge and resist his compulsion. Manto talked about obsessions and compulsions, characteristic of obsessive-compulsive disorder, through the example of Qasim. He had an intrusive and recurrent urge to say ullu ka patha to someone. He tries to suppress this urge by spending more time brushing and indulging in other activities to counterbalance the obsessive thoughts. Leckman, et al. (2010) mentioned a similar description while discussing the characteristic of obsessive-compulsive disorder through DSM-IV criteria. Spending more time brushing his teeth was a safety behaviour Qasim performed to neutralise the effect of his obsessive thoughts (What Are Compulsions? | OCD-UK, n.d.).

Qasim was continuously urged to say 'ullu ka patha' to someone, i.e., performing behavior (compulsion) to satisfy his obsessive thoughts. According to DSM 5 (2013), compulsions are repetitive physical or mental acts a person feels compelled to do to satisfy his anxiety and tension caused by intrusive obsessive thoughts. It is also mentioned that these obsessions or compulsions occupy most of the day with a minimum being one hour of his daily routine. The same was seen in the case of Qasim, his obsession with saying 'ullu ka patha' protracted for more than an hour per day and was distressing for him. He had started questioning himself out of frustration as to why this thought was so dominating that he could not focus and do his daily tasks effectively.

The positive sign of Qasim's condition was his excellent insight into his problem. He discerned that these obsessive thoughts were a product of his mind and had no reality. He even called them baseless but showed powerlessness over them; he could not suppress and control them. As mentioned in DSM 5, (2013), this specifier of OCD shows a fair or reasonable insight of the patient into his problem.

Qasim's fair insight made him recognise his ego-dystonic thoughts. A person is said to have ego-dystonic thoughts when he feels that his impulses, thoughts, and behaviors are incompatible with his self (Msw, [2022b](#)). These types of thoughts are most familiar with people with OCD. Qasim also found his thoughts disgusting about saying 'ullu ka patha' to one of his house helps.

Unwanted and intrusive thoughts, distressing and disturbing, can pop up literally out of nowhere and can happen to anyone, with or without any prior mental condition. These thoughts need no trigger or activation but are so powerful that the person feels helpless and may start judging himself harshly (Msw, [2022b](#)). These intrusive and persistent thoughts cause anxiety and the person feels compelled to act upon those thoughts to reduce his anxiety. He is in a state of following a vicious cycle. As in the case of Qasim, he had that persistent intrusive thought of saying 'ullu ka patha' repeatedly. These recurrent and persistent episodes of thoughts without any trigger are the hallmark of OCD.

He associated a meaning to his compulsion of saying 'ullu ka patha' that this will bring his satisfaction. Qasim just had an urge to feel just right after saying 'ullu ka patha' to someone even just once. He also had the need of reassurance from wife while performing compulsive behavior. He wanted to perform his compulsion with the aid of a safety behavior that if he tells his wife about his obsessive thought, she will be by his side and would help him (What Are Compulsions? | OCD-UK n.d.). This will give him a sense of relief but that would be temporary.

Just like any other person, people with OCD also have cognitive distortions that make their obsessions even worse. Several cognitive distortions of Qasim have been mentioned in the story 'ullu ka patha'. Qasim anxiously felt the need to say 'ullu ka patha' to someone otherwise something might happen (intolerance for uncertainty). He had heightened sense of responsibility that he should not throw his cigarette bud in the way just because he would pick it up and such it and it would cause him illness. This shows his pattern of catastrophizing his thought anticipation. He had a habit of overestimating threats and thinking himself unable to cope, he thought that if he shared his obsessions with his wife, she would laugh and this would become a permanent joke (Cognitive Distortions in OCD, n.d.).

People who have anxiety are more likely to develop OCD later in life. It can be inferred from the article that Qasim called himself a well-thought organized and methodical person. He had urge of saying 'ullu ka patha' to someone, but in an incident when the other girl told him the same word quite easily, he kept thinking about that for a long time and at the end he just started giving himself baseless evidence to satisfy his thoughts. He used reaction making as a defense mechanism to replace his unwanted anxiety provoking thought (that he could not say 'ullu ka patha' but that girl just easily said that) with an opposite thought (that it is impossible to understand girls) (Hamidi & Motlagh, [2010](#)).

5 Conclusion

Being a remarkable writer, Manto wrote what he saw in society. Starting his career from translating works of other authors, he gradually started writing his own pieces of work. Being a prolific Indo-Pak writer, he voiced the societal dilemmas through his words. He wrote about what he thought was unjust with humanity, wrote about the injustices of the riches on the marginal groups of society. He also wrote about tabooed topics and got charged with indecency in his writings three times. Besides, he also highlighted psychological distress and mental illness through his writings.

The story 'Ullu ka Patha' being one of his writings in which Manto highlighted the concept of mental illness through the characters of his story. Others being 'Toba Tek Singh', 'khol do', 'thanda gosht', 'kali shalwar', 'uper nechay darmyan'. These are some of his writings mentioning obscene scenes and psychological illnesses.

The story ‘Ullu ka Patha’ is a depiction of a person showing symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder having a fair insight into his problem. There is a need to study other works of Manto to study his perspectives on different topics as well as his views on mental illnesses.

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