

Crossroads of Sand and Self

Storyline Literature: Gabriel García Márquez (80% Magical Realism & 20% Romanticism)

The main concern of short stories in modern literature is never about providing a solution or exploration, but to help people acknowledge that an issue exists by explaining the context.

Here, I tried to give almost no closure—just like real life. Only reflection makes sense.

The Sabido Method is a social learning technique based on renowned social psychologist Albert Bandura, used by various serials to bring about positive changes, especially in developing countries where societies are collectivist and less educated.

Tell them numbers, facts, or data—they will forget within a day.
Tell them an emotional story, and they will remember it for a longer duration.

The Sabido Method, developed by Miguel Sabido in the 1970s, promotes positive social change—especially in areas like health, education, gender equality, and population control—through entertainment-education (E-E), particularly via radio and TV dramas.

The key idea is “creating intense characters” so that, even if a less educated person does not fully understand the issue directly, they start relating to the characters. Sooner or later, they discuss the characters with family and friends, which ultimately leads to discussions about the issues related to those characters.

Success Stories:

Mexico: Family planning through the soap opera *Ven Conmigo*.

India: Doordarshan's *Hum Log* addressed family size and gender equality.

South Africa: *Soul City* series addressed HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria: Radio and TV dramas promoting women's rights, child education, and health.

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Act I: Arrival & Resistance

Arvind Rao, early 40s, a hydrologist, US Citizen who migrated from India, working with NASA, arrives in Karachi for climate research in Balochistan.

Internally, he carries discomfort from childhood memories of communal riots and holds unconscious prejudice toward Urdu and Muslim cultural expressions.

He is assigned to work with Dr. Sara Baloch, professor of history at the University of Karachi. While waiting in Sara's flat, he idly browses through a book on linguistics left open, filled with handwritten charts and notes.

The content challenges his assumptions—linking Sanskrit and regional languages including Urdu and Persian.

Feeling disturbed and unable to process it, he shuts the book quickly—only 15 minutes had passed. Sara arrives; he greets her with a polite smile, hiding his unease.

Act II: The Roundtable

Arvind and Sara attend a closed-door meeting at the U.S. Embassy in Karachi.

Attendees include Pakistani military, politicians, UN delegation, NASA scientists, and BP Petroleum executives.

NASA's Dr. James leads the climate data presentation, showing alarming satellite imagery about groundwater loss and desertification.

Pakistani officials seem unsure and disengaged.

The UN delegation, led by a progressive French politician, raises strong concerns but is largely ignored.

BP Petroleum's delegation gives a slick presentation and offers financial compensation, which Pakistan's representatives quickly favor.

Arvind watches passively, choosing not to engage.

After the meeting, Sara is disturbed. Arvind, without expression, simply says, "Maybe it doesn't matter anymore."

Act III: Fieldwork & Friction

Arvind begins ground-level climate survey work in Hingol National Park, beyond satellite coverage capabilities.

The team includes junior scientists William and Watson, and Dr. Sara. Military convoy escorts them for protection.

On the second day, they visit Hinglaj Mata Mandir, a sacred Hindu site in the park.

Arvind notices script on the signs looks like Arabic or Urdu. This disturbs him due to ingrained bias.

He avoids asking questions, secretly Googles and learns it's Sindhi—written in a Perso-Arabic script.

He forces a fake smile and finishes the temple visit as a formality, lasting no more than two hours. But internally, something is stirred—a vague curiosity he can't yet explain.

Act IV: Return to Hinglaj — A Shift Begins

The next day, Arvind surprises Dr. Sara by requesting another visit to the Hinglaj Mata temple. She is puzzled, believing Arvind had no interest. The first visit was a VVIP protocol-driven one. What she doesn't know is that Arvind had a haunting dream the night before—memories of the communal riots he witnessed as a child.

With five days still left before main work begins, his request is approved casually.

This time, Sara takes him without formal security—just the two of them.

For the first time in a long while, Arvind lets go of constant logic. The contradictions in language and culture had already punctured his certainty.

He quietly takes photos on his phone, absorbing scenes without interpretation—deciding to analyze later.

He feels oddly emotional but hides it, fearing it would affect his image as a "rational" NASA scientist.

Sara begins explaining the myths and regional history of the Hinglaj Mata shrine.

Without security, Arvind is finally able to interact with local people.

To his surprise, many Muslim Baloch also visit the site—they call Hinglaj Mata "Nani Ma."

This revelation feels surreal, but Arvind decides not to process it intellectually.

For the first time in years, his mind is at rest—he is neither rational nor emotional, just present.

Act V: Depths Below the Surface

Arvind and Dr. Sara began spending time together outside of their official duties, often sharing quiet walks and evening tea at the guesthouse courtyard.

Dr. Sara grew curious about NASA's climate missions, and Arvind opened up for the first time in a personal way.

He explained his earlier research on ocean carbon absorption and how oceans are silent victims—absorbing most of Earth's carbon while suffering from acidification and ecosystem collapse.

Arvind shared his experience from a marine expedition: he saw how whales communicate across vast distances, demonstrating intelligence that unsettled his earlier notions.

He admitted he wasn't a marine biologist, but those encounters stayed with him.

Dr. Sara was fascinated—she listened with childlike awe and respect, unlike the emotionally distant scientific circles Arvind was used to.

For once, Arvind felt emotionally validated—his words weren't dissected, they were absorbed.

Though he had always seen whales as part of data models, not as sentient beings, this conversation stirred something he couldn't name.

But he didn't show any of that on the surface—he simply smiled and moved on to the next topic.

They never discussed their personal lives during these outings; the tone remained professional with an undertone of ease and curiosity.

The next day, Dr. Sara briefed Arvind about local maps, cultural specifics, and engagement strategies for upcoming surveys.

She informed him that she would be replaced by a Scientist and Geographer, Dr. Abdul, for the next phase of the research.

Just before leaving, the conversation naturally turned personal.

Dr. Sara shared she had remained single by choice—unwilling to submit to orthodox expectations around marriage and womanhood.

Arvind, with a faint nod, revealed he had been through a divorce and hadn't spoken much about it since.

Before they could say more, Dr. Abdul arrived at the door with a courteous smile.

Their moment was interrupted. Dr. Sara nodded goodbye, and Arvind simply said, "Take care."

Act VI – Unfinished Conversations

For the next 15 days, Arvind worked closely with Dr. Abdul, helping set up field sensors, coordinating with locals, and organizing the data pipelines.

The workload was intense, and there was barely any time to think beyond logistics and deadlines.

On the fifteenth day, the intensity eased. The dust began to settle—figuratively and literally.

With the lull in work, Arvind found his thoughts drifting back to Dr. Sara—their conversations, her calm presence, her fascination with the ocean.

He uploaded all the collected data onto a secure pen drive and casually posted a few photos from the Hingol trip on his private social media profile.

In the comments, there were the usual polite replies—"Nice pictures!" "Great meeting you!"—and even a brief "Thanks for the visit!" from Dr. Sara.

Yet, something lingered. Something incomplete.

Arvind found himself scrolling through Dr. Sara's profile—not obsessively, but curiously.

To his surprise, her profile was much like his own—formal, sparse, thoughtful. No personal anecdotes. No emotional outbursts. Just dignified silence.

He wondered, Why doesn't she write more? Then he remembered—free speech in Pakistan isn't something to take for granted.

Arvind had always had the privilege of writing freely, without fear of surveillance or consequence. Now he realized that silence isn't always disinterest—it's sometimes survival.

He started thinking seriously about meeting her again—maybe to visit a few historical sites in Sindh together, to learn more about her life, to finally talk beyond "hi" and "hello."

But he also knew he had 10 more days of heavy work ahead. He told himself he'd reach out after that. There was time.

Work resumed. Time passed. One month later, with most of the project completed, Arvind made up his mind to finally text Dr. Sara.

That morning, he opened the news—and everything changed.

A bomb had exploded near Karachi. Over 40 people were killed.

His phone vibrated—an urgent text from the embassy: "All foreign scientists must return immediately."

Drained and wordless, Arvind boarded his flight back to the US. He hadn't messaged Dr. Sara. He didn't know if she was safe.

Later, he found out—Dr. Sara had survived. But her sister's family didn't. Neither did the senior politician who had quietly pushed through the carbon deal.

Arvind leaves Pakistan with a heavy heart.

Act VII – A Mirror in the Storm

Shaken, Arvind confided everything to his old friend Iyer—a Principal Engineer at Google.

Iyer listened, then gave a hard but honest reality check:

You want to go back to Pakistan?

What are you going to tell the embassy in "written format" especially in this situation? That you want to learn history and linguistics from Dr. Sara?

We both know the best professors on this topic teach at Harvard, and you're one call away.

You think you love her, really?

Do you even know how to be emotionally available, Arvind?

You couldn't do that in your marriage. You couldn't even do that with yourself for years.

Now Sara's family is gone. Do you think you're a therapist? You think you can console her?

Iyer said, I tried to be your therapist for one time in the past and I failed then we found Dr Sameer.

I think, You need to talk to someone who actually knows what to do—Dr. Sameer.

That night, Arvind sat quietly with all the things left unsaid. Then he booked a session with Dr. Sameer, his long-time therapist.

Act VIII – The Path Back

Arvind visits Dr. Sameer and opens up about everything—Sara, the bombing, the feeling of connection, and his emotional conflicts.

Dr. Sameer listens, then reframes the situation:

"You weren't in love. You were finally safe to feel. That's important."

"Before you go searching for Sara, revisit yourself."

"Return to India. Visit the place where your childhood friend died in communal riots. Reconnect with that lost part of you."

Dr. Sameer tells Arvind that years of wounds can't be healed within a day just by words.

You have to face your fears voluntarily, and this time, when you go to India, try to revisit places instead of just going through the motions. Remember, I can only assist you but can't face your fears on your behalf.