

Manto's stories Gendered violence and trauma

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Abstract

Abuse, exploitation, and the representation of the human body are only a few of the many facets of the human experience that may be powerfully explored via literature. Indian literary writers usually use rich imagery and symbolism to illuminate these enduring issues in a complex way. Although some contend that these depictions sensationalize or glorify violence and objectification, others think they are effective means of starting discussions about significant societal concerns. This essay examines how Saadat Hasan Manto's chosen short stories depict the intricate depiction of sexual exploitation and abuse of human bodies.

Manto is regarded as one of the greatest Urdu authors of all time. His short pieces "Colder Than Ice" (Thanda Gosht), "The Return" (Khol Do), and "Odour" (Boo) are examples of incisive investigations of the relationship between violence, desire, and sexuality. He challenges prevailing social norms with these stories, exposing the commodification and vulnerability of the human body—particularly that of women—in the face of abuse and exploitation. Manto's narratives, which are set against the backdrop of India's 1947 Partition, describe the widespread bloodshed, relocation, and psychological anguish that occurred during this tumultuous time.

In the majority of his works, the human body postures itself as a location of eroticism and brutality, blurring all conventional ideas of morality and normalizing sexual abuse by tying together personal suffering and larger societal failures. This research offers a thorough analysis of issues related to gender-based violence and psychological burdens placed by the command of cultural mores by examining Manto's unapologetic depiction of sexual assault and its psychological effects.

Keywords: violence, sexual exploitation, abuse, human body representation, and relocation.

1. Introduction:

Millions of people migrated across the recently formed borders, millions were pulled and there was wide collaborative violence which led to huge loss of life and property. This was a situation of complete chaos and lawlessness, as fueled by strong religious sentiments and communitarian abomination the Hindus and Muslims were bent on killing each other. Manto's short stories

serve as a chronicle of the trauma and pain in the fate of Partition and recite the horrible situations of mortal debasement when brazened with such an unanticipated dislocation of social and political structures. His stories present first-hand prints of the acute agony and morbidity faced by his characters attesting to the gross injustice and cerebral torture in the wake of the recently achieved Independence which came with an irreplaceable loss. There's a huge corpus of Partition literature produced by several prestigious pens like Ismat Chughtai, Khuswant Singh, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, etc. but what differentiates Manto's art of story-telling is that he strikes at the central whim-whams inspiring a plethora of painful feelings and recollections that cannot be ignored in the converse of Partition.

Literature is an expressive medium that emphasizes our common humanity by fostering connections that transcend personal experiences and acting as a vital instrument for advocacy and awareness. It serves as a potent prism through which to examine the nuanced truths of human experience, particularly as they pertain to sexual abuse and exploitation. Authors illuminate the sometimes unseen hardships of those who experience such transgressions by crafting stories that explore the subtleties of human sensitivity. Literature criticizes the social institutions that permit such abuse to persist in addition to depicting the psychological and physical effects of exploitation. Authors challenge readers to confront difficult realities and develop empathy for these important concerns by emphasizing the human body as a location of both identity and exploitation.

Particularly during the 1947 Indian Partition, the Progressive Writers' Movement was distinguished by its audacious and uncompromising depiction of socioeconomic reality. These authors stressed the topics of class conflict, gender concerns, and the human condition while using straightforward language. The direct narrative approach used by authors like as Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander, and Khadija Mastoor aimed to question social conventions and stimulate thinking. Their dedication to use literature as a tool for social change frequently reflected the turbulent cultural climate of their age.

One of the most controversial authors in South Asia, Saadat Hasan Manto, made a name for himself in Urdu writing with his graphic portrayals of sensuality, violence, and human misery. For women in particular, who were frequently used as collateral in acts of communal retaliation, the bloody Partition of India left an enduring legacy of trauma. His tales "Colder Than Ice" (Thanda Gosht), "The Return" (Khol Do), and "Odour" (Boo) force readers to face the hardships

of women ensnared in this era of social disintegration rather than erasing the cruelty of Partition. In addition to dividing an area, the brutality of the Partition caused a rift in society, turning women into metaphorical battlefields.

Women were "abducted and taken anywhere to be destroyed and raped," according to Nafisa Zargar (283), highlighting the extent to which their pain was entwined with revenge from the community. According to Manto, the patriarchal systems that permitted and even condoned this kind of suffering are to blame for the systematic brutality against women. Manto questions social norms by focusing his novels on this marginalized group, forcing readers to face the "living testimonies of partition's brutality" (Sattar et al. 218) via his female protagonists.

It is possible to analyze how sexual exploitation, abuse, and the human body are portrayed in Saadat Hasan Manto's short tales by fundamentally establishing the analysis on both trauma theory and feminist viewpoints on the representation of the body. Understanding Manto's stories is enhanced by the feminist critique of systematic female silence and bodily exploitation, especially as it relates to how patriarchal systems influence women's suffering in times of crisis. Manto's tales highlight the hardships faced by underprivileged women, whose suffering is frequently disregarded because of patriarchal conventions. This marginalization is a potent indictment of the significant role society plays in neglecting women's pain.

Manto not only addresses the atrocities of Partition but also poses crucial queries on the social conscience that permits such brutality by incorporating feminist insights into silence and Freud and Caruth's theories of traumatized memory. Manto eventually exposes the interlocking mechanisms of trauma, sexism, and societal complicity that make personal suffering a universal human condemnation through his bleak portrayals of the human body. Through Ishwar Singh's acts, Manto's "Colder Than Ice" explores the psychological and physical aspects of violence, exposing a troubling intersection of trauma, aggressiveness, and masculinity. Ishwar Singh, a man shaped by dominant social standards, is a prime example of how communal violence during Partition distorted gender roles, turning males into both psychological trauma sufferers and perpetrators.

In her work "The Body in Pain," Nafisa Zargar draws attention to this perverted representation of masculinity by pointing out that Manto's male protagonists frequently use women's bodies as targets for retaliation in order to channel their dormant hostility into "sanctioned acts of violence" (283).

Manto's stories, which are set against the horrific backdrop of Partition, portray both psychological and physical brutality as well as the moral decay brought on by intercommunal strife. Manto opted to depict the horrors of Partition in their unvarnished and disturbing reality, in contrast to other authors of his day like Ismat Chughtai and Rajinder Singh Bedi, who sugarcoated them. Musharraf Ali claims that Manto's portrayal of corpses is a "reflection of the moral bankruptcy that partition evoked" in his article "Saadat Hasan Manto is Still Alive" (205). The "silence of marginalized women" and their struggle within patriarchal frameworks are also articulated in Manto's stories, according to Fizra Sattar and others (217). The marginalized women's silence demonstrates how structural injustice forces women's pain to the periphery of public consciousness.

2. A Few Saadat Hasan Manto's Stories:

In his works, Saadat Hasan Manto explores masculine violence and the psychological effects it has on both women and men. Ishwar's violent behavior in "Colder Than Ice" betrays a deep internal conflict, and the story's conclusion emphasizes his desensitization and loss of masculinity, which challenges the acceptance of sexual violence as a means of control and power.

Ishwar's emotional detachment after his crime represents both regret and an inability to balance his roles as the attacker and the victim. Ishwar's breakdown, according to Alex Tickell, blurs the distinction "between perpetrator and victim," portraying male trauma as a crisis that undermines one's sense of self and social duties (Tickell 360). Tickell goes on to note that Manto's male protagonists frequently display "psychic numbness," which subverts traditional masculinity by revealing men's inner turmoil within the group violence (Tickell 359). The narrative illustrates Ishwar Singh's numbness by showing how he is unable to get thrilled when making love to his mistress:

Like a kettle on a hot burner, Kalwant Kaur started to boil with intensity. However, there was a problem. Despite his intense attempts at foreplay, Ishwar Singh was unable to sense the fire that precedes the ultimate and unavoidable act of love. He used every tactic he knew to light the fire in his loins, but it escaped him, much like a wrestler who is being outwitted. He was chilly. (34)

Manto exposes the terrible repercussions of trauma on the human psyche as well as the morals of society by depicting masculine aggressiveness as a manifestation of repressed guilt and a broken identity, challenging the cultural valorization of masculinity.

The story's final sentence, "Kalwant Kaur placed her hand on his," reveals Ishwar Singh's suppressed remorse. Compared to ice, it was cooler (36). Manto's works force readers to confront the unsettling truths of human brutality by attesting to the psychological wounds inflicted on both individual bodies and the collective mind. Ishwar Singh's portrayal of the lovely girl in the novel "Colder Than Ice" makes readers aware of the uneasy masculine collective conscience surrounding women: and one girl was present. She was so lovely. I didn't murder her. I removed her. [...] I can't even begin to express to you how stunning Kalwant Jani was. I had the option to cut her neck, but I chose not to. I told myself... You overindulge in Kalwant Kaur every day, Ishwar Singh. How about some of this delicious fruit in your mouth? [...] I had intended to move her about a little. but I immediately made the decision to override her. (36) Through his unusual reluctance to indulge in romanticized descriptions, like in the novella "The Return," Manto captures the shattered, terrible truths of women's lives during the Partition, challenging readers to confront the moral decay of the time head-on.

Through the horrific experience of Sakina, a little girl who is torn from her family and abused by those entrusted with her protection, Manto examines the depth of human cruelty and society apathy in the narrative. When Sirajuddin, Sakina's father, eventually locates her and observes her automatic reaction to the order to "open it," the narrative reaches its horrific conclusion. According to Alex Tickell, this reunion highlights Sakina's status as a victim of Partition's collective failings by exposing "the cruel irony of a society desensitized to violence," where her body has been violated rather than protected (Tickell 358).

3. Gendered Trauma:

In many societies, social norms about gender reinforce the idea that women and girls should take care of the home and act as their families' caregivers, while men and boys are expected to work productively outside of the home. Other stereotypical perceptions support the idea that men must use or be willing to use violence to defend themselves and those around them (EL Jack, 2003). Gender identities are therefore a vital factor in explaining women and men's experiences and roles as victims and perpetrators of violence worldwide. In both conflict-affected and peaceful environments, violent masculinities and femininities are shaped by socially constructed and

perpetuated norms related to the use of violence (EL Jack, 2003). With that said, it is important to highlight that the relationships and boundaries between men and women in the social spheres vary across societies (Leslie, 2001) and that in most cases, the roles and activities associated with the domestic realm (roles performed by women) are usually ascribed lower status which gives women less access to power in the public realms of society. Such gender boundaries can be illustrated under apartheid in South Africa where gender played a experiencing oppression. Women's subordinate social status under the apartheid regime intersected complexly with class exploitation and racial oppression that made black women particularly vulnerable to various forms of abuse (Sideris, 1998). To reiterate on the complexity of oppression and exploitation, it is significant to consider that differential gender organization principles also play a role in and regulates subjective expressions of distress as observed in testimonies of Mozambican women refugees who illustrate how socio-historical experiences and socially structured relations between men and women impact their understanding and expression of distress. Manto critiques a society that lets women like Sakina suffer the most from its collective trauma by using this instance to show how intercommunal disputes transform women's bodies into places of exploitation. Her actions demonstrate how identity is fragmented by physical and psychological violations, making it impossible for her to discriminate between a dangerous and a safe situation. Manto's intricate stories are based on Sigmund Freud's theory that traumatic memory is a "psychic wound" that alters the self. Manto's portrayal of female characters who, while being mute, nonetheless exhibit the psychological and physical effects of their trauma is consistent with Freud and Breuer's definition of trauma as "a state of fright that continues to operate as a foreign body" (Freud and Breuer 6).

Sakina responds to the doctor's order to open the window in the novella "The Return" by acting robotically out of memory. She just follows the voice's instructions while laying still on the stretcher without saying a word. The character of Sirajuddin, who is content just that his daughter is alive, also reflects the pain in this instance. "She's still alive! "My daughter is alive!" said Sirajuddin joyfully (64). He no longer understands or cares that her daughter has been raped and mistreated.

Sakina's disjointed reaction to her pain serves as a metaphor for the dissociative impact of trauma, which Freud saw as the mind dividing to protect itself from the full force of experienced

violence. Important queries concerning the nature of memory and identity following trauma are brought up by this disassociation. In what ways do people recover their story when recalling is too painful? Sakina's answer also demonstrates the profound effect that trauma may have on a person's sense of agency and control, emphasizing how memories can take over present reactions and cause people to behave in a rather robotic manner. Manto challenges the societal silencing of women's suffering by analyzing these silences.

Manto depicts a complicated interaction between victimhood and agency by showing female characters who, while being violated, refuse to completely give up their dignity. His characters are able to transcend their status as icons of misery thanks to this nuanced representation, which calls into question both public involvement and apathy in upholding the systems that tolerate such violence. The way that Sakina's alleged rescuers portrayed her violation highlights the moral breakdown and acceptance of sexual assault in emergency situations.

In his novella "Odour," Saadat Hasan Manto contrasts desire with disgust as he examines the body via the sensory world of olfaction. Psychoanalytic notions of latent desire and repressed sexuality are consistent with the story's sensory approach.

In keeping with Freud's theories of repression and the dual nature of desire, Manto's depictions of scent and sensuality imply how society controls, suppresses, and frequently censors human instincts. The story's opening alludes to desire and the commercialization of women. "He had had enough of being alone." Randhir had a number of liaisons with the most well-known hookers from the Taj Hotel and the Nagpara region before to the war" (80).

Manto deviates from conventional depictions of desire in "Odour," using olfactory components to examine forbidden urges that go against social conventions. Manto uses smell to reveal a world of want that cannot be represented visually, enabling the sense of smell to serve as a metaphor for suppressed and socially undesirable desires.

According to Alex Tickell, Manto's emphasis on sensory imagery highlights how society tries to repress these urges while exposing the "intensity of forbidden desire" (Tickell 361). The story's protagonist's interest is roused by an unexpected smell, signifying both his aversion and his dormant urges, reflecting social norms around sexuality. In the narrative, the sense of smell serves as a thought-provoking metaphor for the line separating private desire from societal acceptance. Manto challenges society standards that try to repress such emotions by employing

smell as a metaphor for desire, therefore upending preconceived notions about sexuality and purity. In the novella "Odour," Randhir's olfactory triggers stand in for a yearning that defies moral restraint:

He gave her another glance. Her scratched white skin made him think of spoiled milk. The scent of her perfume made him shudder. His thoughts returned to the night when the black girl had been lying next him, her smell overpowering his senses. Far sweeter than the perfume his spouse wore, it sprang out of her body at him with primordial intensity. He recalled how the black girl's scent had pierced his body like an arrow. Randhir felt nothing as he ran his hands over her white body. (83–84).

Randhir, the main character, is married to a lovely, attractive, and intelligent woman, but he still yearns for the impoverished girl who has the peculiar smell.

The act of employing our senses to become aware of the things, people, and events around us is known as sensory perception, according to Sigmund Freud. However, when there is an unconscious battle between the forces suppressing the inner wants and the urges themselves, aberrations will manifest in perception. Manto's use of fragrance to arouse latent desires is supported by Freud's theory of sensory perception. This concept is consistent with Manto's depiction in "Odour," in which the protagonist is unable to consciously face feelings that are ordinarily evoked by olfactory clues. By addressing the core of human desire, Manto is able to portray a closeness that transcends outward appearance.

Using odour to explore the character's suppressed impulses, Manto challenges traditional techniques of corporeal representation by emphasizing sensory rather than visual signals.

In the story "Odour", the protagonist Randhir finding the poor girl's body odour strangely pleasurable is symbolic of his suppressed desires, but he did not have the courage to marry her as she did not belong to his social class. His strong affinity towards the poor girl was strongly related to the scent of her sweat, which Randhir routinely detested. Cathy Caruth also talks on similar lines about sensory memory which adds depth to this reading of "Odour," suggesting that sensory experiences often access "hidden emotional layers," making them especially potent in revealing latent psychological conflicts (Caruth 19). The story, thus, becomes a narrative that questions not only the limits of societal expectations but also the boundaries of human perception itself, using sensory cues to illuminate the complex interplay between desire and repression. The

writer examines the collision between public morality and private desire, exposing the inner conflicts that arise when personal impulses are constrained by social expectations.

The way that Saadat Hasan Manto depicts Randhir's mental conflict over repressing his feelings for the impoverished girl exposes the hypocrisy ingrained in cultural perspectives on sexuality. Randhir felt nothing as he ran his hands over her white body. Randhir could as well have missed his bride's presence, despite the fact that she was a college graduate, the daughter of a judge, and the object of her peers' affection (84). The protagonist's suppressed needs are accessed through the olfactory trigger, illustrating how societal taboos turn innate drives into prohibited, guilt-ridden desires. The protagonist is forced into an inner conflict between self-control and suppressed desire as a result of the sensory-driven revival of emotion, which defies social norms.

In "Odour," Manto thus reveals how suppressed sexuality lingers beneath the surface of public morality, challenging readers to confront the deep-seated tension between individual desires and societal repression.

Manto explores the harsh consequences of Partition in both "Colder Than Ice" and "The Return," highlighting the depersonalization and desensitization that people experience as a result of collective trauma through sexual assault. According to Tickell, Manto's portrayal of violence in these tales exposes the "depersonalization that communal violence imposes on individuals," emphasizing how persons lose their uniqueness and become insignificant objects in the context of a larger cultural conflict (Tickell 358). Characters like Sakina in "The Return" and Ishwar in "Colder Than Ice" are enmeshed in a never-ending cycle of objectification and cruelty, demonstrating how community violence methodically dehumanizes its victims. This loss of uniqueness lies at the heart of both works.

"The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her shalwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs" (63-64).

Sakina's disassociation in "The Return" and Ishwar's emotional numbness following his crime in "Colder Than Ice" are not isolated incidents; rather, they are representations of a larger societal apathy. Manto's experiences, according to Nafisa Zargar, demonstrate the "numbing of empathy," which develops as a response to the severe losses caused by Partition and causes

people to justify or overlook violence (Zargar 284). Manto reveals how Partition has deprived society of its capacity for empathy by presenting characters who are both victims and passive players in their pain. By eliminating the emotional boundaries that normally prevent violent behaviors, this loss of empathy makes aggressiveness appear like an unavoidable result of suffering as a society.

Alongside the desensitization issue, the stories "Colder Than Ice" and "The Return" offer a terrifying depiction of society's cooperation in sexual abuse. Ishwar's act of violence, driven by his inability to confront his emotions, reflects the warped masculinity that emerges in times of crisis:

I broke into this home there. I used my kirpan to murder each of the seven individuals inside, six of them were guys. and one girl was present. She was so lovely. I didn't murder her. I removed her [...] How about a bite of this delicious fruit? I asked myself. [...] I had intended to move her about a little. However, I immediately made the decision to override her. (36) As a result, Sakina's mistreatment in the narrative "The Return" highlights the negative aspects of community protection, as those who are supposed to save her really make her misery worse.

As suggested by Tickell, Manto's writings analyze how acts of community violence turn people into instruments of retaliation, with victims suffering as stand-ins for the pain of the entire group (Tickell 358).

Manto's protagonists in "The Return" and "Colder Than Ice," who are torn between trauma and survival, represent a culture that has lost interest in the integrity of the human body and soul. Manto uses the two stories' depictions of sexual violence as a narrative device to explore the psychological effects of Partition, arguing that community violence destroys not just physical life but also the moral and emotional foundations of society.

Through these tales, Manto exposes readers to the horrific consequences of cultural numbness and calls for an understanding of how unbridled violence destroys both individual and communal humanity.

Saadat Hasan Manto's depiction of female characters demonstrates a sophisticated examination of agency and remaining silent while victims are around. His tales "The Return" and "Colder Than Ice" demonstrate how women frequently deal with their pain with a fortitude that challenges conventional feminist views of autonomy, even in the face of physical and

psychological abuse. Although the female characters in each of Manto's works endure horrific exploitation, their survival and silence show a kind of subversive silence against a patriarchal culture that expects them to be subservient.

Sattar and others argue that these characters exhibit "a resilience that redefines traditional notions of female agency," using silence as a subtle form of resistance (217).

Through his female characters' silence, Manto illustrates a resilience that, rather than conforming to victimhood, resists societal expectations, suggesting that agency can exist even in seemingly passive forms. In the story "The Return," Sakina's silence is significant; her inability to respond conventionally to her trauma does not render her powerless. Instead, her silence represents an inner strength that survives where words might fail. The trauma she endures is brutal, yet her quiet endurance reflects an unspoken resistance to fully succumbing to her suffering. While, in "Colder Than Ice," the absence of a female voice in Ishwar's memory of violence serves as a haunting reminder of the muted agency women possess even in victimhood. Sattar and others describe this resilience as a form of "agency through silence," suggesting that the ability to endure without surrendering entirely to trauma is, in itself, an act of resilience within a patriarchal society (217).

In addition to being a narrative device, Manto's criticism of cultural desensitization is reflected in the silencing of women's pain. Despite their tenacity, Manto's female protagonists live in a society that does neither acknowledge or accept their suffering, exposing a civilization more concerned with protecting itself than with healing the moral scars it has caused. Society separates itself from the reality of its own violence by denying women a voice, which feeds a cycle of silence that both tolerates and encourages abuse. In addition to criticizing social shortcomings, Manto's work demands a better comprehension of resilience and control in the face of systemic trauma through these silent survivors.

4. Conclusion:

Manto depicts a civilization shattered by moral deterioration, desensitization, and the fight for life in "Colder Than Ice," "The Return," and "Odour," revealing the unbreakable connection between sexuality, exploitation, and the human body. He creates a narrative background full of trauma themes by depicting the human body in a variety of states, such as violated, mute, or

sensory. This not only depicts personal pain but also criticizes the social systems that make such suffering concealed.

Given that the female body still bears the burden of institutional, cultural, and community violence in the modern world, Saadat Hasan Manto's unapologetic depictions of gendered suffering during the Partition are unsettlingly contemporary. In addition to documenting historical horrors, his tales provide light on the recurring trends of moral decay, emotional numbness, and silence that influence our current situation. As a result, Manto's stories have the potential to be used as tools in trauma studies and literary pedagogy, assisting readers, scholars, and students in understanding not only the lasting effects of past violence but also the moral imperatives of justice, empathy, and remembrance in the fractured modern world. In order to clearly recognize the confluence of trauma and gender, we need look for many perspectives as we continue to grapple with issues of gender violence and other forms of oppression. Numerous civilizations have a localized knowledge of gender and trauma and have reactively created different approaches to dealing with them over time. Given this, it is important to consider and create intervention programs that address power dynamics, which are inextricably linked to the gendered experience of trauma. Recognizing the different conditions in which oppressive systems function and the potential pain they may cause is crucial. This thought could help us comprehend the pain that survivors endure and how it might be addressed and given a forum during peace negotiations and nation-building efforts. Those in charge of creating treatments must take into account the varying needs of survivors and, more crucially, be aware of how gendered power dynamics silence the voices of certain victim groups in order to implement a gendered analysis of trauma.

In order to achieve significant change and advancement, community empowerment—which is frequently targeted at women—needs the active involvement and engagement of all stakeholders. We must shift the conversation away from one of "protection" and toward one of "participation," in which individuals who are impacted and involved actively participate in defining what it means to be free and safe.

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