



E-ISSN: 2706-8927  
P-ISSN: 2706-8919  
[www.allstudyjournal.com](http://www.allstudyjournal.com)  
IJAAS 2022; 4(4): 209-211  
Received: 30-10-2022  
Accepted: 05-12-2022

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## Female subjugation in Saadat Hasan Manto

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2022.v4.i4c.958>

### Abstract

In this Research Paper, a selection of Saadat Hasan Manto's writings are examined from a feminist perspective. This article delves into the theme of female subjugation in the short stories *Colder than Ice*, *Mozail*, and *The Return* through Munto. With reference to the suffering and mistreatment of women as a main concern of the chosen short stories, it investigates the feminine content. Manto depicted the experiences of women throughout the period of political unrest in the subcontinent, as evidenced through his paintings. He claims that the silence of oppressed women provides a deep understanding of society's patriarchal underpinnings. In Manto's *Colder than Ice*, *Mozail*, and *The Return*, exposure to violence plays a key role in challenging the dogmas of race, culture, and ethnicity as well as gender and sexuality. The purpose of the essay is to highlight the abuse and persecution that women experienced during the subcontinent's split. The current study examines the gendered restrictions and objectification of women in the quest of male sexual gratification in light of feminist philosophy, unravelling that once the silence speaks, women can create their own position in the world.

**Keywords:** Female subjugation, Saadat Hasan Manto, feminine content

### Introductions

Saadat Hasan Manto was depicted as a vulgar and abrasive author who openly dared to depict the darker side of the subcontinent. Women are portrayed differently in each of his stories. Every woman has a unique personality, a unique life narrative, and faces unique problems, but they all share the experience of being victimised by the male-dominated society. In the midst of extreme political unrest in the subcontinent at the time of partition, Manto's stories deal with the anarchy, violence, and immorality of the independence struggle. His writing career was fraught with difficulty due to the audaciousness of his subject matter and style. Despite all the obstacles he faced, he remained steadfast in presenting the truth about society's depravity.

Indeed, Manto's works are realistic, and it is this realism that draws sex and sexuality out from behind locked doors and into the pages of his stories. In his remarks, he exposes to the public the previously taboo realities that he unearths. In order to criticise society, the nude body, sex, and sexuality become motifs in his stories. These topics predominate in the majority of his stories: The lesbian-themed *A damp afternoon*, *Colder than Ice*, *Khushia*, and even *Mozail*.

Akhtar identifies Manto as one of the few Urdu authors to employ verbal economy. In addition, he identifies Manto's distinctive use of internal elements and abrupt endings. When Akhtar makes these points, he is in a sense lending significance to the stylistic characteristics of Manto's writing and refuting his earlier claim that meaning is not derived from stylistic beauty. According to Akhtar, Manto's writing must be interpreted within the social context of its historical setting. It is, as he implies, an undeniably valuable source that reflects the era but is also universal in its depiction of human coexistence during times of conflict. As previously indicated, sex is a prominent theme in the majority of Manto's works. I believe Akhtar conveys it with profound comprehension. Manto did not feel constrained to evoke either pleasure nor disgust, and instead presented sex as sex. In his stories, Manto did not view sexuality as a situation distinct from everyday life.

Manto superimposes the physical brutality of partition with the ideological brutality to which sex and sexuality are subjected in the Indo-Pak subcontinent's social structure. The majority of Manto's characters are not only women further marginalised due to their subjugation to men but also sex workers and prostitutes; they are marginalised to an even greater degree for not only being women but also deviant women.

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These narratives have primarily been viewed as the tales of marginalised women who are powerless in the face of such victimisation and ostracization by society and have no ability to change or influence their lives or the lives of anyone else. However, are these stories merely an acceptance of the fate that society wants these characters to accept that their situation is hopeless or does Manto depict subversive elements in his plots that can be identified through in-depth analysis? Deeper engagement with the narratives reveals that the latter is true and that, paradoxically, it is these marginalised spaces that, in some ways, deny the marginalised deviant women autonomy. Because of the marginalised spaces they occupy, the female characters in Manto's short stories, who are frequently sex workers, are not always merely victims, but can also be seen to exercise agency at times.

The term 'feminism' appears to allude to a heightened awareness of one's identity as a woman and an interest in issues pertaining to women. The subjugation of women is the primary cause of all psychological disorders in society and a central fact of history. The western feminist movement has produced feminism in Indian literature, particularly in Indian English prose. In the last few decades, a new genre of writing by women, for women, and about women has emerged. The central theme of feminism in Indian literature is the Indian woman bound between tradition and modernity, bearing the weight of the past and the hopes for the future. Manto became the voice of women in works like *Colder than Ice*, *Mozail*, and *The Return*. In the narrative *Colder than Ice*, Ishwar Singh rapes a dead girl from the rival community in a moment of rage, showing the most violent and evil side of a man. He was unable to return to normal because the recollection and his aggressive deeds were haunting him. As Manto generates a sense of justice because the abuser of a woman was thus killed by a fellow woman, his wife, Kalwant, is a personification of vengeance.

Manto paints a clear portrait of the subcontinent's immoral morals in *Colder than Ice*. Conflicts involving religion, culture, and geography make women the target of subversive indirect methods of retaliation. Ishwar Singh rapes a Muslim woman after seizing her. According to Nafisa Zargar, "the story shows how women were being kidnapped and carried somewhere to be damaged and raped" (285). Ishwar, who is filled with guilt, returns to his home. He seems to have completely lost all sexual vigor and interest. He admits to his wife Kalwant Kaur what he did to a Muslim girl, informing her about how cruel and horrible it was, and he uses the phrase 'What a creature man is' to describe himself (56).

The quiet of another woman who is cornered and subjected to relentless harassment by Tarlochan is depicted similarly in *Mozail*. She rejects his love advances on numerous occasions because she believes he is "incapable of understanding anything subtle" (67). As a male, Tarlochan is unable to comprehend Mozail's need for freedom and solitude. She is confined throughout the story so that the patriarchal subject might fulfill his own wants. A major individual is used as the object of violent and forbidden desires, very much like *Colder than Ice*. The tale is plagued by Mozail's chains of male cravings. Tarlochan contrasts *Mozail* with his future wife Karpal Kaur, saying that although the latter is a patriarchal woman, the former is unconventional. She was delicate, in contrast to all village

ladies who had turned manly by working in the fields, according to Manto. Karpal Kaur was exclusively female, quiet, and reserved (65).

Manto demonstrates the violent, sexually aggressive nature of men, who are once deaf to the cries of women and view them as passive and mute since they continue to act in such a way. "Trying to break into the flat, gathered around her in a circle, forgetting what they were here for" (15). In the narrative, the father begs the military officials to help him locate his daughter, who was taken from him during the uprising. It was eventually discovered that the rescuers, who were there to protect women and children, were actually the most vicious of all of them. After having previously been sexually assaulted multiple times by her captors, they discovered Sakina by the side of a road. She had admitted that she was Sakina, Sirajuddin's daughter, according to Manto, but instead of giving her back to her distraught father, they kept her for themselves. When the two are finally reunited in the camp hospital, the daughter Alex Tickell 'finds' is so traumatized from being raped that she cannot speak and automatically undoes her clothes in response to the doctor's request that her father 'open up' the window.

Ishwar breathes violently and trembles at the notion of revealing the incident. His hands also go cold. In search of the solution, Kalwant Kaur is enraged and resentment is seeping from every pore in her body. Ishwar is abused as she begs him to swear allegiance to the Sikh Guru. Manto's portrayal of female characters is unquestionably powerful because he shows women as the ones who are capable of fighting for their rights without needlessly elevating them or glorifying them. When Ishwar worked up the confidence to accept his attack, Kalwant attacked him with his kirpan, taking it out of its sheath and thrusting it into Ishwar's neck. His gaping wound erupted with blood.

Kalwant proceeded to weep up while berating the 'bitch,' ripping his hair, and scratching his face. Many people may find Kalwant's actions to be cruel and harsh, but Manto rightly gives his characters the strength and guts to burn an unbeliever like Ishwar Singh to ashes for betraying her. By doing this, Kalwant demonstrates that she is an authentic Sikh who is daring, audacious, and brave and who cannot put up with the lies and fraudulence of the other half. She has the audacity to accept everything in stride and destroy it. Ishwar recalls a previous incident in which he used to wander the streets at night and commit looting. Then, after killing six guys inside a house, he abducted a young, attractive female and dragged her off to a secluded area where he would rape her. He continued to describe how he transported her to a remote location to rape her when she simply slept off, but he then realized:

The story seemingly revolves round one aspect of sexual psychology, but in fact, in it an extremely subtle message is given to man, that, even at the last limit of cruelty and violence, of barbarity and bestiality, he does not lose his humanity! (6).

Manto, a crusader of his day, wrote about women from all classes, regardless of the trades they practiced, to emphasize that even if humanity threw them into dungeons, he would make those millions of images known to the world. Fahmida Riaz's statement, which serves as a fitting conclusion, reads as follows:

Mozel... In Indian parlance, she is Shakti incarnate, as she rises to save two lives. She can clearly see the dreadful hoax

religion turned into in those ghastly days of communal rioting and rejects it in last breath (9).

Manto shows tremendous sympathy and awareness toward the group of ladies who are documenting their lives and attempting to pull them out of the annoying maelstrom into which they are thrown. Although society had a backwards attitude toward women, Manto has always given her female characters a boost. Somavati, a partition survivor who saw her pains and anguish, was depicted by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin as saying,

Even today, there is no peace. Inside and out cannot coexist in peace. Even now, there is no peace. I have trouble sleeping because I feel uneasy (10).

Each character's surface lies a narrative. Manto's portrayal of women in Urdu literature stands out among all others. He never held the idea that a woman should be dressed in the likeness of a pristine, virginal deity. He set them up just the way women want to feel about themselves: independent, respected, and maintained. Manto carefully crafted her figures, presenting them as the New Woman of the day, with fresh ideas and ambitions.

Manto's narrative *Colder than Ice*, yet another spine-chilling tale, is set during the time of Partition, when women were widely available to men due to kidnapping and shame. At the time, women's fate was unknown. It is a narrative of a couple, Ishwar Singh and Kalwant Kaur, and their relationship demonstrates how easily women may be captivated by men from another culture to fulfill their passion. The story depicts how women were abducted and carried somewhere to be damaged and raped. The story opens with a description of the room where Kalwant Kaur is waiting for her husband, Ishwar Singh. He enters the room and sits silently in a corner, precisely like the atmosphere outside in the city. Kalwant Kaur is a strong-built woman full of flesh and life. She starts asking Ishwar Singh where he has been all these days. But he appears to be apathetic and weary. At the same time, he is avoiding her piercing stare. She repeatedly asks him where he has been for the past week. But nothing seems to move Ishwar Singh, who appears to have lost all verve and energy. She suspects him of looting a large amount of gold during the riots and concealing it from her.

Manto clearly demonstrates how simple it was to rob and loot everything during the Partition Riots. The women of India paid a high price for the Separation of India, which is the subject of the short stories that are explored in this article. The accounts detail the extreme degrees of humiliation and misery that were inflicted upon women during that time period. The fact that they preferred to end their lives through suicide rather than risk losing their virginity and honor is the illustration that most demonstrates how helpless they were in that situation. They were raped, disfigured, and tattooed by men who practiced different religions, as well as, in many occasions, men who belonged to their own groups.

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