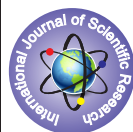


## Victimization of Women During Communal Carnage: A Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's 'The Return' and 'Colder Than Ice'



### Literature

**KEYWORDS :** Victimization, women, partition, communal carnage, riots, Manto, violence, lust, rape.

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper aims to convey to its readers the distressing and horrible conditions of women during the partition of India which resulted into the hostility between Hindus and Muslims, who started slaughtering, murdering and abandoning each others. How revenge from other community was not only based on killing their men but raping their women provided greater satisfaction. The guardians became sexual predators and mercy, pity were replaced by lust, rapes. Manto's spine chilling minute details of the carnage with the choice of words which has always been criticized for obscenity and sexual overtones makes the readers not only to feel the pain, brutality and inhumane treatment meted out to those women but also to feel ashamed, embarrassed at the extent of human degradation during that time.*

The Partition transformed for millions the very thought of home. Possibly for many, nationhood became a conscious truth only because of the Partition, when companions became rivals because they were of other religion and compelled them to escape to a land far away. The bloodshed, the sweat of horror and the tears of helplessness made the Partition of India and the conception of Pakistan all together the most signifying and the most harrowing moment in the history of South Asia. Mushirul Hasan scrutinizes:

The Partition is probably the most cataclysmic event in the history of twentieth-century India. It has had a profound impact on contemporary culture, literature, history and historiography. The impression left on the minds of those who lived through those traumatic times persists until this day. (Hasan n.p.)

What has time and again been forgotten, however, is the price paid by women and children. It will, therefore, be extremely momentous to bring to focus the miseries and sacrifices of women during the insurrections of Partition. In addition to pervasive killing, the Partition riots are also the story of rape, abduction and widowhood of thousands of women on both sides of the newly created borders. To avert capture, persecution and death at the hands of others or forced religious conversions, people murdered their own children, spouses, parents and other relatives. Some even committed suicide. The women were subjected to maximum mortification and affliction. Their misery can be judged by the fact that a number of women jumped into wells to save their honour. It is as unbelievable today as it was at that time.

David Lester brings to the surface the price paid by women for the sake of Partition in his essay, "Suicide and the Partition of India: A Need for Further Investigation":

Estimates of the dead range from 200,000 to two millions, while about 75,000 women were abducted and raped by men of the other religions and sometimes by men of their own religion. In particular, the humiliation of women was foremost, including raping and disfiguring women in front of their relatives, tattooing and branding them with 'Pakistan, Zindabad' or 'Hindustan, Zindabad'.....

The said statement shows how the people in general were stained with the spirit of vengeance, and set scores by committing excesses on the women folk of the opposite community. Unfortunately, much of the ordeals that women have undergone as a result of Partition, communal riots and the associated political and social atrocities have been either forgotten or not fully understood. But Saadat Hasan Manto has succeeded in dramatising the horrifying torments faced by women during the Partition and the communal riots through his short stories like 'The Return' and 'Colder than Ice'.

It is worth mentioning that the representations of violence in

Partition literature depends for their force on the intrinsic power of violence to rouse the reader's sense of right and wrong. If there is one sole pictogram of the Partition riots, it is that of trains received at their destinations with their travellers massacred on the way:

It was a convulsion, the sudden, shattering collapse of a society. One act provoked another, one horror fed another, each slaughter begot its successor, each rumour its imitator, each atrocity its counterpart, until, like slow-motion images of a building disintegrating under the impact of an explosion, the walls Punjab society crumbled each other.

This is depicted through the story "The Return" which in a way epitomizes Manto's work and proves that one needs nerves to tackle his stories as they deal with the gloomy and the ruthless realities of life that we, time and again, tend to look away from, for fear that they put off our peaceful world. The story is about a girl by the name Sakina, a butt of the violent riots of 1947, who is discovered and is pronounced lifeless. The abducted Sakina is at last found by her father in a camp hospital where she lies in a shocked state, raped not only by her abductors but her saviours as well. Alex Tickell summarizes the story as follows:

Here, an aged, emigrant searches for his daughter, Sakina, in refugee camp, but when the two are finally reunited in the camp hospital, the daughter he 'finds' is so traumatised after being raped that she cannot speak, and automatically unfastens her clothes in response to the doctor's request that her father 'open up' the window.

The story depicts the communal aggression and the abduction and molestation of women during the Partition of India. Trains were running from Amritsar to Lahore carrying Muslims to Pakistan and Hindus from Pakistan to India. But regrettably all the people were not lucky enough to save their life and honour during the outrageous journey. Many were killed, injured and women were raped in their struggle to reach their respective destinations, "The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon arriving at Mughalpura, Lahore, eight hours late. Many had been killed on the way, a lot more injured and countless lost." (Manto 35)

The story portrays the character of Sirajuddin and the return of his daughter Sakina to Pakistan. As the story begins Sirajuddin is shown in a state of trauma. He gains consciousness the next morning and finds himself lying on the ground with screams of men, women and children all around. He is startled and surprised and starts searching for his daughter throughout the refugee camps. Everyone is in search of their lost ones and so is Sirajuddin. He begins to recollect the incidents and episodes of the previous day and recalls that his wife has been killed by the rioters and that he has been separated from his daughter on the other side of the border, that is, India. He recognizes his daughter's *dupatta* (Shawl) in his pocket and starts doubting

what might have happened to her. Has he brought her to the station, got her into the carriage or has she become the victim of the rioters? His fear brings to focus the misery and helplessness of women during the Partition because every woman was vulnerable to become the target of rioters and lose her chastity. He recalls:

Sakina's mother was dead. That much was certain. She had died in front of his eyes. He could hear her voice: 'leave me where I am. Take the girl away.' The two of them had begun to run. Sakina's dupatta had slipped to the ground and he had stopped to pick it up and she had said: 'Father, leave it.' (Manto36)

After a few days he meets a number of young men who have been given the task of bringing back the women and children left on the other side of the border. He also gives them the description about his daughter who is extremely beautiful having big eyes, black hair and a mole on her left cheek. The rescuers couldn't find Sakina during their first trip but after a few days they find a girl somewhere on the roadside. She is extremely frightened with a pale face but agrees to go with them when she is informed about her father in Pakistan. Thus, the story could be seen as the best portrayal of the vulnerability and weakness of women and the price paid by them during the Partition. Then one of the rescuers gives her his jacket to make her feel comfortable:

The young men were very kind to her. They had fed her, given her milk to drink and put her in their truck. One of them had given her his jacket so that she could cover herself. It was obvious that she was ill-at-ease without her dupatta, trying nervously to cover her breasts with her arms. (Manto37)

Sirajuddin is an old and feeble man. He prays days and nights for the safe return of his daughter. One evening he notices four men carrying a young girl who has been found injured on the rail lines. She is being taken to the camp hospital by the rescuers. Sirajuddin follows them and sees a young woman with a mole on her left cheek. He screams "Sakina" (37) and the doctor looks at him with a weird eye. Sirajuddin tells the doctor that he is her father and has been in search of her for the last few days. The doctor asks him to open the window. The young woman is ailing with an unbearable pain. She slowly unfastens her *shalwar* (Trousers) to open her thighs. Sirajuddin yells with happiness that his daughter is alive. But the doctor suffers a gush of hesitation as Sirajuddin does not know that his daughter is a living dead body because she has lost her virginity and honour both to the rioters and the rescuers. Here one can easily feel the sufferings and atrocities faced by the fragile and feeble woman at the hands of the protesters as well as the rescuers. Manto writes:

The doctor looked at the prostate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to old man: 'Open the window.' The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her *shalwar* tight round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs. 'She is alive. My daughter is alive,' Sirajuddin shouted with joy. The doctor broke into a cold sweat. (Manto38)

This inhuman treatment meted out to the innocent Sakina is synonymous with what happens to Khushwant Singh's Sundri, "The mob made love to her. She did not have to take off any one of her bangles. They were smashed as she lay in the road, being taken by one man and another and another." (Singh 203)

The fact remains that at some places officers, who were selected to guard the women, themselves committed the poorer crime. The plight of women during the Partition riots can be felt by the account:

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru visited the village (Rawalpindi) on 14<sup>th</sup> of March, 1947, and he was told about the incidents of ladies jumping into wells. His staff photographer took photographs of the bottom of the well with the help of a flashlight. These photographs showed the decomposed limbs of the bodies.

The story, "Colder than Ice", yet another bone-chilling tale by Manto, is set during the time of Partition when women were easily available to men because abduction and dishonour was the destiny of women at that time. It is a story about a couple, Ishwar Singh and Kalwant Kaur and the interaction between the two makes explicit how women could be easily captured by men of the other community to fulfil their lust. The story shows how women were being abducted and taken anywhere to be ruined and raped.

The story begins with the description of the room where Kalwant Kaur is waiting for her husband, Ishwar Singh. He enters the room and sits silently in a corner just like the atmosphere outside in the city. Kalwant Kaur is a strongly built woman full of flesh and vitality. She begins to ask Ishwar Singh where he had been all these days. But he seems to be indifferent and exhausted. At the same time he is avoiding her fierce gaze. She asks him time and again where he has remained for such a long time of a week. But nothing seems to move Ishwar Singh as he appears to have lost all his vigour and energy. She suspects him to have looted a lot of gold during riots and hiding it from her. Manto clearly shows how easily one could rob and loot anything during the Partition Riots, "Kalwant Kaur was irritated. 'Yes, you did go to the city and you looted a lot more money and you don't want to tell me about it.'" (Manto120)

Ishwar Singh swears on God that there is nothing which he could hide from her. All this irritates Kalwant Kaur a lot and she starts screaming at him. She blames him of being a changed man, having lost all sorts of interest in her. Ishwar Singh asks her to hug him tightly to feel her warmth and they start making love to each other. But there is something wrong with Ishwar Singh because of which he is unable to satisfy her fully. She becomes desperate and suspicious to know what has happened during the last seven days. She asks him about the woman who has squeezed all his strength making him dry and useless at love-making. Like a wild and terrible animal she picks up Ishwar Singh's *kirpan* and plunges his neck. Blood splutters out like a fountain and begins to move into his mouth.

She forces him to tell her about the woman and she becomes so annoyed that she feels like cutting him to pieces. Ishwar Singh begins to groan and after collecting some strength begins to speak slowly. He tells her that he has found seven people in a house which he and his fellows had looted. Six of them were men whom he had killed but the seventh one was a beautiful young girl. He had decided not to kill her and take her to a place to ravish her:

'There was this house I broke into ... there were seven people in there, six of them men ... whom I killed with my *kirpan* one by one ... and there was one girl ... she was so beautiful ... I didn't kill her ... I took her away.' (Manto123)

He had thought that she might have lost her consciousness for some time. So, he had taken her to a canal to seduce her and disgrace her chastity. But when he had decided to finish her purpose, he had found her dead. He had carried a dead body with so much effort to ravish her but had ended up with a mound of cold flesh. It clearly shows the extent to which women were being subjected to abduction and rapes by the rioters. They were being carried away by rioters like masses of flesh to fulfil their sexual desires. They were being treated as scapegoats to cool down the spirit of revenge not only by the men of hostile religions but also by their so-called religious fellows. As Ishwar Singh says:

'I thought she had gone into a faint, so I carried her over my shoulder all the way to the canal which runs outside the city... then I laid her down on the grass, behind some bushes and ... first I thought I would shuffle her a bit ... but then I decided to trump her right away...' 'She was dead ... I had carried a dead body ... a heap of cold flesh...' (Manto124)

When he finishes his narration of this incident he asks Kalwant Kaur to hold his hand. She takes his hand into hers' and finds it colder than ice.

The short stories discussed here focus on the price paid by women for the sake of the Partition of India. The stories show how women were subjected to the highest levels of humiliation and suffering. The most appropriate example to show their helplessness is the fact that they favoured committing suicide rather than lose their chastity and honour. They were raped, disfigured and tattooed by the men of the opposite religions and many a times by men of their own communities.

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