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COERCION AND CRUELTY: FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MANTO'S PARTITION STORIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines some Partition stories of Saadat Hasan Manto from the theoretical and historical insights gained from Urvashi Butalia, Ranajit Guha, and Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin focusing on the life and experiences of female characters--the worst victims of the colossal violence unleashed by the Partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947. In the process of analysis, the paper also utilizes ideas of Michael Foucault and Giorgio Agamben regarding the conditions of state of exception and the power of sovereign rulers who could wipe out undesirable bare life of citizens without any accountability. Close reading of narratives such as "A Girl from Delhi," "The Hundred Candle Power Bulb," "Bismillah," "The Return," "Bitter Harvest," "Toba Tek Singh," "Xuda Ki Qasam," "Mozail," "A Tale of 1947," "Colder than Ice," and vignettes like "Losing Proposition," and "Out of Consideration" shows that women suffered doubly under the heartless governments as well as the unfeeling male community. The paper argues that just as the colonial state adopted the policy of cruelty, coercion, intimidation, and dominance to control the natives, the indigenous governments and men both in India and Pakistan dictated terms to compel the marginalized women to obey them, curbed their freedom, objectified their bodies as cheap expendable commodities, displayed them in the flesh market for consumption, robbed them off their rights to life and freedom, and thus abused them as if their life had no value or dignity.

**Key Words:** Abduction, Abuse, Coercion, Female Bodies, Humiliation, Partition, Recovery

The catastrophic Partition of Indian Subcontinent into two separate nations--India and Pakistan--in 1947 devastated the life of people on both sides of the border. It uprooted and dislocated hundreds of thousands of people reducing them to homelessness, poverty, and trauma. Losing forever their ties with native soil and its culture, history, and tradition, people lived a life of ignominy and remorse distanced from family, friends, and neighbors. Those who survived the unparalleled tragedy of pain and shame, were permanently condemned to live a wretched life without identity. Massive violence unleashed at the time victimized people of all class, gender, and age, and yet the calamity fell upon women making them its "worst victims."<sup>1</sup> This paper examines some Partition short stories from the theoretical and historical insights gained from Urvashi Butalia, Gyanendra

<sup>1</sup> Khalid Hasan, in "Translator's Note" on *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*, xvi. Hereafter, *Mottled Dawn*.

Pandey, Ranajit Guha, and Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin. It focuses on Saadat Hasan Manto's<sup>2</sup> narratives such as "A Girl from Delhi," "The Hundred Candle Power Bulb," "Bismillah," "Xuda Ki Qasam," "The Return," "Bitter Harvest," "Toba Tek Singh," "A Tale of 1947," "Mozail," "Colder than Ice," and vignettes from *Black Margins* such as "Losing Proposition," and "Out of Consideration," and argues that both the state and males in society inflicted injustice upon females by curbing their freedom, objectifying their bodies as cheap expendable commodities, and abusing their life as if they had no value or dignity.

Because men used sexual violence as a weapon, women became the most tragic recipients of the cruel and horrid acts of humiliation, revenge, and retaliation. Also, since they were made pawns for asserting a "new national masculinity"<sup>3</sup> on both sides of the border, Partition devastated the life of about "75,000 women [who] were raped, kidnapped, abducted, and impregnated by men of 'other' religions."<sup>4</sup> As per the official estimate, "the number of abducted women was placed at 50,000 Muslim women in India and 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan."<sup>5</sup> Atrocious barbarity of the genocidal times trapped and mortified women compelling them to intolerable physical suffering,<sup>6</sup> madness, and death. Males mainly from the other community performed "unspeakable acts of horror against women of rival Communities,"<sup>7</sup> who were "molested and raped, passed on from man to man, bartered and sold like cheap chattel."<sup>8</sup> Additional embarrassment awaited them in their previous family, who ironically refused to welcome/accept them after their recovery. Like abduction, their rescue also violated the will of the victimized women for they had no say regarding their re-location after the recovery.<sup>9</sup> While some of the abducted women deliberately remained away from their relations, others were compelled to marry their abductors after being forcibly converted to the religion of the "other."

The plight of women both before Partition and in its aftermath resembled closely the pain of the natives in colonial India. None could perceive any improvement in their situation even after the achievement of independence, because free India too behaved with women with blatant bias, watching indifferently their suffering of "double dislocation"<sup>10</sup>—through violation of body at the private (individual) space and administrative intervention at the public (state) arena. The condition of free India was so discouraging that it elicited negative response from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who described post-Partition India as a product of colonial violence.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>2</sup> One of the most famous writers of South Asian Partition, Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) has produced volumes of short stories including *Namrood ke Khuda and Ganje Farishte*. "The Return," "Toba Tek Singh," and "Colder than Ice" constitute some of his most anthologized stories. Noted for its minimalist style, his *Siyah Hashiye (Black Margins)*, a remarkable collection of starkly realistic vignettes, boasts of powerfully encapsulating various ghastly acts of Partition violence. Manto has also written film-scripts, radio plays and essays.

<sup>3</sup> Ana V. Gatica, "Literary Representation of Women During and After the Partition of India (1947) in the Works of Saadat Hasan Manto, Khushwasnt Singh and Bapsi Sidhwa," 86. Hereafter, "Literary Representation of Women."

<sup>4</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, 34-35. Hereafter, *Other Side of Silence*.

<sup>5</sup> Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhashin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, 70. Hereafter, *Borders & Boundaries*.

<sup>6</sup> Ravikant and Saint, in Introduction to *Translating Partition*, remark that "women's bodies were often mutilated beyond recognition" (xiii).

<sup>7</sup> Sayima Aslam, "Recovered and Restored? Abducted Women in 1947 Partition Narratives," 52. Hereafter, "Recovered and Restored?"

<sup>8</sup> G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading Up to and Following the Partition of India*, 230. Hereafter, *Stern Reckoning*.

<sup>9</sup> Jill Didur, in "Unruly Alliances: Gender and the Discourse of Nationalism in South Asian Women Writers' Partition Narratives," maintains that women "were denied the opportunity to decide for themselves where they would prefer to remain after partition, and their desires were written for them by the competing patriarchal and elite interests in India and Pakistan" (279).

<sup>10</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Bonding in Difference," views the Postcolonial India as a product of "an act of violence," or "the child of rape" committed by the colonial power, about which "nothing good can be said" (19).

In his book *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (1997), subaltern historiographer, Ranajit Guha observes that the British colonial government ruled over Indians through the policy of domination, coercion, and subjugation for hundreds of years. The colonial administration oppressed the natives snatching away their fundamental rights and privileges as citizens. Although Indians were given some limited rights of franchise, they were not treated as par with the citizens in Great Britain—their counterpart in the metropolis.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the citizens in Britain, the state dealt with the natives in a prejudiced manner and ruled over them repressively through decrees and ordinances. As the government had no obligation to administer India by the execution of proper law, it relied on “Order,” one of the “most repugnant aspects of colonial rule.”<sup>13</sup> The nationalist government of India in the aftermath of Partition largely duplicated this biased British regime that robbed Indians of basic human rights and freedom.

Guha’s subaltern historiography further postulates that instead of implementing the policy of Gramscian hegemony or moral and cultural persuasion, the colonial state resorted to the dictatorial mode of dominance and subordination of the natives. If the government respected a citizen’s rights in the metropolis, it remained worse than indifferent in the case of the natives. The glaringly unequal power relationship could never establish a harmonious<sup>14</sup> relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Indeed, the British devised the strategy of ruling over vast Indian masses through an iron hand of cruelty and coercion. Guha explains that the colonialist rule suspended even the privilege of the writ of *Habeas Corpus* and acted through decrees which, carrying the force of law,<sup>15</sup> transformed a democratic government into discriminatory dictatorship. Consequently, the state behaved with the natives as insignificant beings whose body and life had no worth or significance. Such governmental discrepancies led to the division of two classes of people in independent India—one “delirious about their ill-gotten gains,” and the other “reduced to living in extreme destitution in refugee camps.”<sup>16</sup> The unfair attitude and action of the state as well as men find expression in the treatment of women in Partition stories of Manto (as well as others). The stories provide instances where men not only exploit women by controlling their activities but also by marrying them without their consent all the while making them victims of “rape, sexual assault, excision, infibulation,”<sup>17</sup> often just to satisfy their hurt male ego.

Some of the selected texts of Manto in this paper show that men do not confine themselves to abduction and abuse of female bodies but also indulge in their trade. At the time of Partition, men (esp. belonging to the opponent group) maltreated women, stigmatizing their individual purity and chastity and the honor and prestige of their family and community. In the process, they even murdered, or asked other relatives (including female family members) to kill them or incited women themselves to do so. Since the contemporary society labelled those who did not commit suicide as “cowards,”<sup>18</sup> many women killed themselves on their own volition to preserve their personal purity and protect the honor of the community. Men used force to re-habilitate some of the unwilling women or to send them back to their families in India or Pakistan by defying all sense of human

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<sup>12</sup> Guha, in *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, explains that while the British ruled the metropolis by taking the ruled into confidence, they did not do so in the case of India. They discarded Gramscian notion of hegemony while governing India (20). Hereafter, *Dominance without Hegemony*.

<sup>13</sup> Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Guha, in *Dominance without Hegemony*, quotes Gandhi who described the colonial regime as an “effective system of terrorism and an organized display of force” (72).

<sup>15</sup> Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Jalal, in *The Pity of Partition*, further explains that the masses divided into two groups giving the impression “as if two streams were flowing side by side, one of life and the other of death” (151).

<sup>17</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” 333. She also refers to women’s exploitation as when men “rape and murder. . . and strip them off literally and metaphorically” (333-358). I borrow the author’s words here even as acknowledging the fact that she has a different point (from mine) to make in her essay.

<sup>18</sup> Menon and Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries*, 54.

rights and justice. However, official history has not recorded the disturbing details of the abducted and recovered women, considering the matter to be unworthy of documentation.<sup>19</sup>

In the stories under examination, Manto not only describes the abduction, kidnap, rape, and disgrace of women but also conveys powerfully the pain, horror, and psychological trauma they and their near relations experienced “amidst the turmoil and violence”<sup>20</sup> of the chaotic times. In line with the thought of scholars that women and girls became the most awful victims of the savagery of horrific Partition, Manto grants much space to portray the harrowing experience they endured in their bodies. In his fictional works—short and very short stories—the author generally depicts the humiliation of abducted, raped, or ruthlessly violated women. The appalling barbarity of Partition kills many of his female characters, and forces others to commit murder or suicide, or to take to prostitution, or to accept rapists as husbands, or to remain traumatized throughout life. In certain stories (e.g., “Bitter Harvest,” “Mozail,” “Colder than Ice,” “A Girl from Delhi,” “Losing Proposition,” “Xuda Ki Qasam,” and “The Return”), Manto presents graphically the picture of the ominous times realistically capturing various moments of women’s humiliation and disgrace in the frenzied society.

“A Girl from Delhi” deals with the brutal side of violence and trauma women, as easy targets, experienced during the deadly riots of Partition. The text recounts the story of Nasim Akhtar, who migrates to the newly created nation of Pakistan—her assigned homeland—because of the “the crisis of her Muslim identity,”<sup>21</sup> that could lead her to persecution in native India. After she moves to the other side of the border, she realizes that thousands of poor women like her have been victimized by evil people irrespective of their religion or nationality—i.e., whether they follow Hinduism or Islam or whether they live in India or Pakistan. In other words, “A Girl from Delhi” concerns the perils of Muslim identity, betrayal by one’s own people and the suffering of poor women irrespective of their geo-political location or their religious faith.

When hostility intensifies in Delhi after the communalists kill an innocent vendor, Nasim flees to Lahore with her dance teacher, Ustad Achhan Khan. Assurance of both her old guardian, burri bai and Seth Gobind Prakash, one of her ardent admirers and “a frequent visitor to the kotha,” does not convince her of any security in her natal place (Manto, *Mottled Dawn*, 95). As Nasim assumes that India “is going to be Hindu Raj, and they don’t want any Muslims around,” she thinks it wise for individuals like her to leave the birthplace (94). Because she believes that the great leader Jinnah Sahib has “worked hard” to carve out their “own country Pakistan” for them, she emigrates<sup>22</sup> to the place with a desire to settle peacefully (94).

Ustad Khan who rents a *kotha* in Hira Mandi, a famous red-light area in Lahore, urges Nasim to follow her earlier profession much against her wish to marry and “live like a normal woman” (Manto, *Mottled Dawn*, 98). After her outright rejection of the proposal, the Ustad no longer pesters her in this matter but an old procuress, Jannatey tricks Nasim into marriage with a man who sells her to courtesans in Hira Mandi, where her teacher works as a musician. Contrary to her initial belief that relocation will improve her life, she faces hardship in Pakistan. As the recently carved nation “does not change Nasim’s destiny,”<sup>23</sup> she resumes her old job of prostitution at the Mandi. Unable to make “a break from [her] past,” Nasim is disillusioned of the new-born country that can neither satisfy her interests and aspirations for a better life,<sup>24</sup> nor fulfil her dream of living a

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<sup>19</sup> Veena Das, in *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, explains that the government neither took any initiation to memorialize Partition in the form of national monuments or museums, nor attempted “to use the legal instruments of trials or public hearings to allow stories of mass rape and murder to be made public or to offer a promise of justice to the violated persons” (19).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Alter, “Madness and Partition: The Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto,” 95.

<sup>21</sup> Basudeb Chakraborti, “Did Manto Suffer Any Crisis of Muslim Identity?” ([www.differenttruths.com](http://www.differenttruths.com)).

<sup>22</sup> Another character, Mando, the musician also expresses the desire to “go to Pakistan this very minute,” with the firm faith that his “soul will rest in eternal peace” if his bones are placed in the earth of the Islamic nation after death (94).

<sup>23</sup> Sudha Tiwari, “Memories of Partition: Revisiting Saadat Hasan Manto,” 54.

<sup>24</sup> Ayesha Jalal, in *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*, remarks, “The most striking fact about Pakistan is how it failed to satisfy the interests of the very Muslims who are supposed to have demanded its creation” (2-3).

regular and religious life (98). This brief discussion shows how “A Girl from Delhi” captures the tale of girls like Nasim who become vulnerable victims of “psychological horror,”<sup>25</sup> unable to live peacefully in either of the countries.

Similarly, “The Hundred Candle Power Bulb” describes the intolerable pain of a woman inhumanly oppressed by her man. Specifically, it recounts the story of a wife forced by her husband into the world of growing flesh trade on the pretext of economic necessity.<sup>26</sup> Giving a twist to the theme of prostitution, Manto shows the husband himself acting as a pimp and striking a deal with a customer rather than taking her proper care. The text exposes those individuals such as this husband and guardians who indulged in the hellishly bustling trade to make a living,<sup>27</sup> instead of fighting for their female relations (wives, daughters, and sisters), or making sacrifices to protect their honor.

In “The Hundred-Candle-Power Bulb,” the husband approaches his wife to respond to a client in the middle of a night. The wife, who desperately needs sleep, refuses to oblige, saying “Let me sleep,” in a “muffled, subdued voice” (Manto, *Naked Voices*, 88). When the husband insists, she pleads him persistently not to pester her: “Kill me if you want, but I won’t get up. For God’s sake, have pity on me” (88). However, the pimp does not listen to her entreaty lusting for maximum “forty rupees” that she might earn for him (90). When her repeated requests fall into the husband’s deaf ears, the sleepless, fatigued, and frustrated woman, unable to endure further indifference, strikes his head with a brick, finishing him forever.

The story illustrates how a “much-in-demand woman”<sup>28</sup> kills her husband whose greed does not allow her the most needed rest. Only after murdering the pimp cum husband that she gets an opportunity to sleep. The text also shows the “gang rape of women. . . and its ensuing disastrous consequences on the victims.”<sup>29</sup> Agonizing details of violence in the tale illustrate the extent men victimized women who “had been stripped naked in that storm. Their breasts had been sliced off” (Manto, *Naked Voices*, 85). The cruel acts that “debased women” after killing their men prove once again the low esteem of female bodies that were openly brought to the market as commodities to sell, buy and consume (85).

Manto instantiates the commodification of a girl also in “Bismillah” which exposes Muslim Zaheer, a respectable name in the society for his deception and manipulation of the titular character. The story also uncovers Saeed’s “double standards”<sup>30</sup> in eyeing lustfully the supposed wife of his friend, Zaheer. Reading the melancholy of Bismillah in her “big and sad-looking” eyes and interpreting that they desire to communicate to him about her tragic situation, Saeed makes moves to understand her plight (Manto, *Naked Voices*, 14). In the process, he frequently visits Zaheer’s home to see Bismillah even though his “conscience pricked him several times” for betraying his friend’s respect and trust (15). Despite his inability to fathom to the root of the protagonist’s despondence which he desperately desired to do, Saeed learns some important facts about her. He becomes aware of her reality only at the end of this “woman-centric story”<sup>31</sup> when he discovers that the lady is neither Zaheer’s wife nor a Muslim woman. After some suspense, the readers also get the shocking realization that she had been a Hindu girl “left behind during the riots,” whom Zaheer has used for personal gains (Manto, *Naked Voices*, 18). Manto keeps the suspense before Saeed and the readers until the moment police rescues Bismillah from Zaheer’s trap.

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<sup>25</sup> Lubna Akram, Mohamed Ali bin Hanifa, and Mohan Rathakrishnan, “Manto’s Legendary Contribution to Partition Literature of India,” 17.

<sup>26</sup> Kasmin Fernandez, in “Manto Was a Male Feminist,” comments that “a man who is supposed to fight for the honour of his wife is the one who is selling her for money” (thecsrjournal).

<sup>27</sup> Anirudh Vohra, in “Book Review: The Oppressive Nature of the World’s Oldest Profession,” maintains that “men live off the earnings of prostituted women,” who also “thrived on prostitution” (sundayguardianlive.com).

<sup>28</sup> Asif Noorani, “Review of Ruchira Gupta’s River of Flesh and Other Stories,” (newslinemagazine.com).

<sup>29</sup> Ruchira Gupta, “River of Flesh and Other Stories: The Prostituted woman in Indian Short Fiction,” (www.sangatreview.org).

<sup>30</sup> “Who Was Manto?” (indianexpress.com).

<sup>31</sup> “Who Was Manto?” (indianexpress.com).

As Marilyn Roohi Massey rightly says, in “Bismillah,” Manto provides “an indirect hint towards breaking of trust”<sup>32</sup> by Zaheer to trap the protagonist and push into the market of flesh trade, posing all along as her “loving husband,”<sup>33</sup> and a film maker who would say, “my wife shall be my heroine” (Manto, *Naked Voices*, 13). The text clearly reveals that having found stranded in the mad confusion of Partition, Zaheer has forced the girl into prostitution giving her the Muslim name of Bismillah (literally, in the name of Allah/God). Thus, like other Partition stories, “Bismillah” too testifies that women had been the worst sufferers of Partition—ignored or wronged by the government and exploited by men for their selfish purpose.

Likewise, “Losing Proposition” or “Ghate Ka Sauda” (the original title) also shows women represented as valueless beings or as cheap commercial items. The story as “a powerful critique of sexual violence against women,”<sup>34</sup> demonstrates how men viewed them as sporting items or playthings and bought and sold in the market like goods and articles.<sup>35</sup> The two men in the narrative incur loss because they have mistakenly bought a girl belonging to their own religious community, not that of the opponent. The other group has deceived them by selling the wrong item.

“Losing Proposition” emphasizes on the objectification of women who are bargained in the market by using the consumerist language of profit and loss. In the trade, the *sauda* (bargain) of “forty-two rupees” turns out to be of *ghata* (loss) as one of them realizes later that he has been cheated to have sexual relation with his own community girl (Manto, *Mottled Dawn*, 155). After he spends a night with her, the man vows revenge, saying: “The bastards cheated us! . . . selling us a girl from our own faith” (155). “Mortified to discover”<sup>36</sup> that the cheats have double crossed the friends by palming off one of their own girls, they decide to “go and return her!” (155). The casual talk of the friends about trading girls reveals men’s inhumanly mercenary dealing with the fair sex by commodifying them. This way, besides portraying women as victims of horrendous violence, the text also exhibits “how their sexuality was (ab)used during Partition”<sup>37</sup> by exposing the discomfiting barter of women.

Like the three stories just discussed (namely, “Losing Proposition,” “Bismillah,” and “The Hundred Candle Power Bulb”), “Xuda Ki Qasam” (I Swear by God) also refers to the hustling “import-export”<sup>38</sup> trade of women (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 167). Also, by portraying the fate of women during the genocidal Partition when men exploited them physically and tortured psychologically, the text raises Manto’s questions regarding the “protruding bellies” of the abducted girls and women who carry “children in their wombs for nine months” as to who would take their responsibility—“Pakistan or India?” (166). Through the representation of the woes of two Muslim women—a mother and a daughter—who have been doomed to live lonely lives separated from each other, the author illustrates how Partition “involved the death of family ties as well as of individuals”<sup>39</sup> while destroying female lives.

The “old and distraught”<sup>40</sup> mother has braved all sufferings of the hard times and survived only hoping to see her daughter, Bhagbari alive. Wandering from place to place “with a desolate look,” she has been trying to trace the young daughter. The old lady repeats almost in a crazy manner: “no one can murder my daughter,” as she cannot even conceive that anyone could kill her lovely Bhagbari (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 167). With the help of a liaison officer who works for the recovery of “abandoned” women, or those “women who had been

<sup>32</sup> Marilyn Roohi Massey, in “Manto as the Spokesperson of the Subalternised: A Feminist Reading of Selected Short Stories of Manto,” 40. Hereafter, “Manto as the Spokesperson.”

<sup>33</sup> Raskshanda Jalil, Introduction to *Naked Voices (Stories and Sketches by Saadat Hasan Manto)* (books.google.com). Hereafter, *Naked Voices*.

<sup>34</sup> Barnali Saha, “Violence, Gender and Religion: A Critical Study of Saadat Hasan Manto’s *Siyah Hashy*,” 33.

<sup>35</sup> Butalia, in *Other Side of Silence*, notes that “women were actually sold in the bazars” (141).

<sup>36</sup> Hasan, “Translator’s Note” on *Mottled Dawn*, xxiv.

<sup>37</sup> Tiwari, “Memories of Partition: Revisiting Saadat Hasan Manto,” 52.

<sup>38</sup> At one point, the narrator makes a dry and unpleasant comment that “the entire operation” of the recovery of abducted women “was being conducted like import-export trade” (167).

<sup>39</sup> Tiwari, “Memories of Partition: Revisiting Saadat Hasan Manto,” 55.

<sup>40</sup> Khalid Hasan, “Translator’s Note” on *Mottled Dawn*, xxvi.

raped and taken away," the aggrieved mother finally comes across her daughter (165-166). However, now married to her "young and handsome" Sikh abductor, the young woman turns her face aside and walks away by ignoring the agitated mother who shouts "Bhagbari, Bhagbari," and tells the officer excitedly that she has seen her daughter (169).

Aware of miscellaneous reports of girls who have either committed suicide scared to face their parents or have "lost their mental balance as a result of their traumatic experiences," the officer handles the situation carefully (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 166). The worldly-wise officer senses well the fear of the daughter to meet her "corpse-like mother"<sup>41</sup> and the end of their affectionate relationship,<sup>42</sup> and therefore, swearing on God, he declares clearly, "Your daughter is dead"<sup>43</sup>—implying the social and psychological death of Bhagbari (170). After the refusal<sup>44</sup> of the abducted daughter to recognize her and the disheartening response of the officer, the shocked mother falls "in a heap on the road," and drops down dead (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 170). The "pain of broken relationship"<sup>45</sup> exceeds her limit of endurance.

Bhagbari neither acknowledges the identity or the presence of her mother nor reveals their relationship because she does not want to go back to her original home and bear its consequence. Since she knows about the stigma<sup>46</sup> associated with abducted women, she acts prudentially in so far as her situation demands. She has already lost optimism regarding her acceptance by the family (mother) or society<sup>47</sup> because of her awareness about the contemporary social belief that the abominable act of Hindu rioters has not only stained her body but also the honor of her family and nation.

If "Xuda Ki Qasam" presents the tragedy of Bhagbari and her old, distracted mother, Manto's "The Return" encapsulates the ignominy and death of young Sakina and her mother while they are moving away from riot ridden Amritsar, India to Lahore, Pakistan. The story makes a "horrific revelation"<sup>48</sup> of traumatized Sakina, who becomes a pathetic victim of multiple rapes. In the turbulent atmosphere of Partition, old Sirajuddin's mind goes blank when he sees his wife die with her stomach "ripped open" (Manto, *Selected Stories*, 50). The awareness of his missing daughter further disturbs the stunned father who later remembers in a flash how his wife had asked him to take care of their daughter just before she "died in front of his eyes" (51). The urge of the dying mother makes Sirajuddin seek the help of eight Muslim volunteers to find his daughter who has already been raped and thrown "unconscious near the railway tracks" (Manto, *Selected Stories*, 52). Initially "very kind to her," the volunteers pick up the almost naked body of Sakina who tries "nervously to cover her breasts with her arms," take her under their custody, and rape her several times (52).

The repeated violation of her body even by the males of her own community<sup>49</sup> so traumatizes Sakina that she cannot tell the difference between the voice of a brutal rapist and that of a sympathetic doctor. Because every male utterance sounds to her like a command from a predator for sexual act, when the doctor in a refugee

<sup>41</sup> Saros Cowasjee and K.S. Duggal, "Introduction" to *Orphans of the Storm: Stories on the Partition of India*, xiv. Hereafter, *Orphans of the Storm*.

<sup>42</sup> Leslie A. Flemming, in *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, avers that Manto's "Xuda Ki Qasam" represents "death of relationships" (82).

<sup>43</sup> Leslie A. Flemming, in "Riots and Refugees: The Post-Partition Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto," rightly remarks that "more people died than simply those that were physically murdered" (106).

<sup>44</sup> Tiwari, in "Memories of Partition: Revisiting Saadat Hasan Manto," views this refusal as the "futility of the exercise of rehabilitation" project of the government during Partition (55).

<sup>45</sup> Flemming, "Riots and Refugees: The Post-Partition Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto," 106.

<sup>46</sup> Pippa Virdee, in "Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947," observes that many of the abducted and raped women "did not want to face the family because of shame and sheer embarrassment they felt" (55).

<sup>47</sup> Sayima, in "Recovered and Restored?" rightly states that women "who were raped and abducted by rival communities, were viewed as symbols of dishonour" (51).

<sup>48</sup> Sukrita Paul Kumar, *Narrating Partition: Texts, Interpretations, Ideas*, 103.

<sup>49</sup> Rosemary Marangoly George, in "(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction," remarks that "clearly both Sakina's Hindu or Sikh (it is not specified) abductors and her Muslim rescuers sexually assault her" (144). Hereafter, "(Extra)Ordinary Violence."

camp asks her father to open the window, Sakina's semi-conscious body stirs as her hands move with "painful slowness," to pull down her *shalwar* (trousers) to open her thighs (Manto, *Selected Stories*, 53). Her reflexive action of untying the garment suggestive of "an expectation that she is about to be sexually assaulted,"<sup>50</sup> ironically pleases the father who, at this moment, desires no more than see his daughter alive. However, the doctor experiences "shame and mortification,"<sup>51</sup> and breaks "into a cold sweat" clearly knowing the bleak future of the girl who will not be accepted by her family or society (53). Although she is physically alive, abduction and rape cause Sakina's social, emotional, and "symbolic death."<sup>52</sup> Her sorrowful situation represents the misery of thousands of women the communal-minded egoistic males caused during riotous Partition.

In the same vein, "Bitter Harvest" explores the dismal life of women during the devastating times of Partition. Carrying the message that violence breeds further violence, the story focuses on inhumanly cruel acts of men imprinted upon female bodies. Specifically, the story shows how the sight of the dead and raped bodies of wife and daughter severely affects a man leading to the contemplation of dreadful revenge and enactment of terrible murder. In the story, Muslim Qasim ruthlessly violates and kills the daughter of his Hindu acquaintance blinded by the sense of revenge.

Qasim becomes a witness to the ghastly sight of the "blood-soaked" dead body of his wife as well as the "nearly naked" corpse of his daughter, Sharifan which fills him with uncontrollable beastly<sup>53</sup> rage (Manto, *Mottled Dawn*, 109). Losing his mind at the unsavory sight, Qasim vows revenge and rushes out of the house axe in hand to attack the neighboring Hindus or Sikhs whom he suspects of the criminal act. He hurries through the deserted streets of the city "like molten lava" and in retaliation kills a young Sikh and three Hindu men (109). In his murderous fury, he pounces wildly on a neighboring Hindu girl of about fourteen. He attacks Bimla "like an animal gone berserk," strips her clothes, and throttles her to death uttering the name of his violated daughter, Sharifan (110). As the naked body of Hindu Bimla reminds Qasim about the violated body of his own daughter, he feels bad (perhaps repentant) and therefore tries to cover it. Just then the girl's father arrives to wail and cry "Bimla, my daughter, Bimla" as he sees the macabre sight of the mangled body of his daughter which potentially fills him with further feelings of revenge (111).

"Bitter Harvest" makes both the Hindu and Muslim fathers pitiable witnesses to the heart wrenching scenes of the desecration of the bodies of their loving daughters. Unwittingly, the fathers also become parts of an unending cycle of violence in which each kills the other's woman for revenge, to put to shame the males of the opposing community, as well as to deter the birth of "the future generation"<sup>54</sup> of antagonists. In all this bloody game of the males, the innocent and harmless daughters (also wife in Qasim's case) lose their lives as unlucky hostages.

Pathetic situation of a young girl at the hands of merciless religious fanatics, becomes the focus of Manto's vignette entitled "Out of Consideration," too. The story shows a helpless man requesting an aggressive mob not to kill his daughter: "Don't kill my daughter in front of my eyes" (Manto, *Mottled Dawn*, 162). Obviously, the scared father speaks his heart as to his inability to see his daughter's death in his presence. However, the callous mob gives a glib reply to the wretched father who must listen silently the following painful words: "All right, all right. Peel off her clothes and shoo her aside!" (162). As the title suggests, out of consideration, the rioters set the girl aside to rape her later, rather than kill her at once, illustrating how trivial women's life had turned out during the South Asian cataclysm of 1947.

Similarly, Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" takes up, among other things, the case of female persecution in the form of Bishen Singh's daughter Roop Kaur, who becomes a victim of abduction, and probably, rape, too. Fazal

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<sup>50</sup> Sukeshi Kamra, "Ruptured Histories: Literature on the Partition," 118.

<sup>51</sup> George, "(Extra)Ordinary Violence," 144.

<sup>52</sup> Sayima, "Recovered and Restored?" 55.

<sup>53</sup> Mohammad Asim Siddiqui, in "Saadat Hasan Manto's Poetics of Resistance," observes that Qasim "turns a beast in a moment of frenzy" (23).

<sup>54</sup> Tiwari, "Memories of Partition: Revisiting Saadat Hasan Manto," 54.

Din's cautious report to his friend Bishen (the protagonist) clearly conveys the message about her uncertain life and existence. In faltering language and manner, he says: "Your daughter, Roop Kaur.... Yes . . . she too is well. Went along with the rest [to India]" (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 150). Fazal's hesitant words imply that the girl has been sexually exploited by the males of opposite community (i.e., the Muslims). Her condition too epitomizes as well as reveals the victimhood of millions of uprooted, dislodged, and mishandled women whose life could no longer attract the attention of the state.

The texts discussed so far expose the discriminatory behavior of the state toward its poor citizens as well as the egoistic, unjust, immoral<sup>55</sup> practice of men who tortured even their own women through what Guha describes as "dominance and coercion." During this time of sectarian violence, both the government as well as males in society viewed females as cheap trade items and behaved disgracefully with them as if their existence made no sense or that they deserved no longer to live. Many of them were brutalized to the point of death by the indifferent (at best) treatment of the state.

In some sense, the situation of India at the time of colonization and its absurd division could be equated with what Giorgio Agamben calls a state of exception, that paradoxically suspends "the order that is in force in order to guarantee its existence."<sup>56</sup> That is, state of exception involves "suspension of the rule of law"<sup>57</sup> for the very purpose of maintaining law and order. In all these conditions, Indian masses led life as though they were non-citizens, or "bare life," which Agamben terms *zoe* and explains as natural existence, or pure biological life as opposed to *bios*, or political existence.<sup>58</sup> To re-phrase, bare life refers to a life bereft of political or legal protection, or a "life devoid of value."<sup>59</sup> This idea is a part of Agamben's larger biopolitical theory built upon Michel Foucault's concept of "biopolitics," that relates to the state's control over citizens in terms of its power to "'make' live and 'let' die"<sup>60</sup> as opposed to the nineteenth century idea of sovereignty concerning the right "to take life or let live."<sup>61</sup> The modern-day concept of life and death differs largely from the earlier one in the sense that the sovereign state today possesses "biopower" to control life and death of its subjects. Indeed, bare life of (non)citizens, or the life of *homo sacer* "is exposed to an unconditional collective threat of death"<sup>62</sup> i.e., the death of an entire population, not just an individual.

Seen from the perspective of Agamben, the stories discussed above show how women live as non-entities, without any rights pertaining to citizens under the elitist nationalist government which followed the footsteps of the Pre-Partition tyrannical British rule. The stories poignantly depict the bare life of the unnamed girls ("Losing Proposition" and "Out of Consideration"), the old Muslim woman and her only daughter, Bhagbari ("Xuda Ki Qasam"), the fatigued wife ("The Hundred Power Bulb"), Roop Kaur ("Toba Tek Singh"), Sakina ("The Return"), Bismillah ("Bismillah"), and Nasim Akhtar ("A Girl from Delhi") who, as victims of society, rather than sustain or represent life, exemplify dead or near-dead beings. The texts portray poignantly women's pointless existence in an environment of chaos, confusion, uncertainty, and intolerable suffering. For instance, Bhagbari must kill her earlier self to survive, severing her connections with her family and community. Since she wants to avoid further condemnation and dislocation,<sup>63</sup> she chooses to live away from her mother. Circumstance compels her to lead a dismal life, reduced to mere biological existence--denied access to her political and legal rights. Like her, Sakina, Bismillah, Roop Kaur, and the nameless girls lose access to normal life of ordinary citizens thus

<sup>55</sup> Massey, in "Manto as the Spokesperson," maintains that Partition compelled the "refugees to indulge in such immoral deeds that had caused death of humanity" (40).

<sup>56</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Existence*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Rohit Chopra, "Resurrection and Normalisation of Empire," 43.

<sup>58</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 139.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 241.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 136.

<sup>62</sup> Mika Ojakangas, "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power: Agamben and Foucault," (6). Hereafter, "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power."

<sup>63</sup> Butalia, in *Other Side of Silence*, maintains that women were "the only people who had suffered a double dislocation as a result of Partition,"—first, from their original home (parental home or that of their husband's), and next, from the current household, or resident (129).

belonging to the masses “subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead.”<sup>64</sup> Their death-in-life existence shows how women were at the “receiving end”<sup>65</sup> of painful violence and trauma. All the female characters in the stories lead their life as *homo sacers*, or as living corpses. Even the mother, a living-dead woman in “Xuda Ki Qasam,” who collapses on the ground ignored by her beloved daughter, personifies a mere life or bare life. Their separation from political or legal life and exposure to gruesome violence “did not even count as crime”<sup>66</sup> at the hideous time of Partition.

Similar problem of women manifests in Manto’s “A Tale of 1947,”<sup>67</sup> which portrays the painful life of sex workers<sup>68</sup> by narrating especially a touching story about the relationship between Sehai—a “die-hard” Hindu pimp, and three Muslim prostitutes—Ameena, Sakeena and Sultana (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 161). After the breach of harmonious relationship between Hindus and Muslims, when Mumtaz decides to leave India and move to Pakistan, he informs his mates including Jugal about another Hindu friend, Sehai, a professional procurer, who takes care of the daily requirements and economic needs of the Muslim girls. He has been keeping Sultana’s ornaments and twelve hundred rupees in his custody because of the insecure environment of her residence in Bhindi Bazar.

Having been fatally wounded by a Muslim assassin in the process of helping Sultana, as he lies dying, Sehai sends a message through Mumtaz that she “should leave for a safe place” away from the menacing presence of the rioters as “these are bad times” (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 164). He knows that religious fanatics have been playing with “guns and knives” threatening to exterminate the other, especially the women belonging to the rival communities (158). In this way, “A Tale of 1947” too shows the plight of women, subjected generally to dual torture—that of the callous government and the egoistic males in the neighborhood.

Likewise, “Mozail” illustrates women’s suffering and sacrifice at the most acrimonious time in Indian history, focusing particularly on the terrible effect of Hindu/Sikh-Muslim conflict on two women—Sikh Kirpal Kaur and Mozail, a dubious character of Jewish descent. Although both live under the threat of torture and death by Muslim fanatics, the titular character, Mozail takes risks to “sustain the love”<sup>69</sup> between the Sikh girl and her lover, Tarlochan. Despite her refusal to marry the Sikh earlier, she sacrifices her life to save him and his fiancée, Kirpal Kaur who lives in a locality full of ferocious and “pretty bloodthirsty Muslims” (Manto, *Selected Stories*, 33). The riot-ridden atmosphere puts the simple religious minded Sikh girl “at the risk of her life and honour”<sup>70</sup> because any Muslim hand could easily “grab hold of the soft and delicate wrist of Kirpal Kaur and push her into the well of death” (33). The hostility around obliges Mozail to step forward for the protection of Tarlochan and his naïve beloved.

In the process of helping the Sikhs, while Mozail disarms a policeman and a potential murderer, she is killed by an approaching crowd of Muslim mobsters. Just before she dies, Mozail points toward Tarlochan’s turban and asks him to “Take away this rag of your religion,” so that he covers his head to hide his short hair and protect himself from the suspicion of Kirpal Kaur or takes away the turban to “desexualize religious allegiance,”<sup>71</sup> one of the strongest causes of the conflict (Manto, *Selected Stories*, 49). Manto elevates the Jewish lady above religion by showing her as an epitome of humanitarian ideas of help, kindness, and love through her words and

<sup>64</sup> A. Mbembe & L. Meintjes, “Necropolitics,” 40.

<sup>65</sup> U. Butalia, “Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India,” 34.

<sup>66</sup> Sayima, “Recovered and Restored?” 51.

<sup>67</sup> The story is supposed to be related to an incident in Manto’s life before he left for Pakistan. See Ayesha Jalal’s book *The Pity of Partition* (p. 128), where she mentions about the connection between Manto and this story.

<sup>68</sup> Though the story, at one level, illustrates Manto’s faith in humanity through the amicable relationship of characters such as Hindu Jugal and Sehai and Muslim Mumtaz, Sultana, and others, it also reveals women’s precarious existence at the devastating time of Partition.

<sup>69</sup> Kumar, *Narrating Partition: Texts, Interpretations, Ideas*, 96.

<sup>70</sup> Vishal Ranjan, “Empowered at the Margins: Women in Manto’s Stories,” 244.

<sup>71</sup> Kumar, *Narrating Partition: Texts, Interpretations, Ideas*, 96.

actions. However, despite embodying “a utopic vision of a character”<sup>72</sup> and a lofty ideal of sacrifice, Mozail loses her life by becoming a miserable victim of communal fanatics. Her “naked, bruised” body at the end of the story repeats the same sorrowful story of women wounded the most by Partition violence (Manto, *Selected Stories* 49).

Another narrative, “Colder Than Ice” also presents the sad tale of characters such as Sikh Kalwant Kaur, Ishwar Singh’s wife, and a Muslim girl whom the Sikh abducts. As he is carried away by the sinister wave of Partition, Ishwar deceives the former and makes the latter an object of his sexual exploitation leading ultimately to the death of all. Although the story, at one level, foregrounds “the impact of violence on its perpetrator”<sup>73</sup> Ishwar Singh, it mainly concerns the tragedy of the unfortunate Muslim girl whom he rapes, and who stirs the heart and blows the mind of the readers.

The “violence-laced sexual passion”<sup>74</sup> of Ishwar reveals one of the strongest causes of women’s victimhood during the time of calamitous discord and dissent in India. Like ferocious beasts, men pounced upon the bodies of innocent women and sullied them forever. Told from young Sikh’s point of view, the following words spoken casually by him in the text clarify the abducted girl’s helpless state: “I could have slashed her throat but I didn’t” (Manto, *Selected Stories*, 23). Instead of killing her along with six others in the family, Ishwar takes the girl to a convenient place for molestation only to realize that he “had carried a dead body. . . a heap of cold flesh” (24). The young narrator becomes impotent after the “chilling experience”<sup>75</sup> of his sexual intercourse with her dead body. He turns into something “colder than ice,” when his wife Kalwant Kaur stabs him for his inability to make love to her (24).

Although Ishwar Singh and Kalwant Kaur represent the subalterns who function as “both victims and perpetrators of violence,”<sup>76</sup> it is the women once again who sustain more injury or who lose more. “Colder Than Ice” demonstrates how the Muslim girl becomes a victim of sexual exploitation not only while she is living but also after her death evident through the confession<sup>77</sup> of Ishwar himself. Through this tale, while conveying the message how Partition caused the death of individuals and their family relationship, Manto also exhibits the most tragic condition of women, evidenced by the rape of the Muslim girl. The bestiality of the times reduces a man like Ishwar Singh into an evil demon that rapes a girl even after her death.

Stories such as “A Tale of 1947,” “Mozail,” and “Colder than Ice” display the sad and unhappy life of female characters who existed as bare life during the deadly times of Partition. Particularly, the Muslim girls in “A Tale of 1947” live merely on biological plane despised and misused by the society (esp. males) and ignored and intimidated by the state. The narrator’s statement in the story conveys the idea of their lowly, debased life: “those who died were killed like dogs and those who killed, killed in vain” (Manto, *Orphans of the Storm*, 161). No one considers their life as worth living—as significant or meaningful. Also, the Muslim girl’s physical state in “Colder than Ice” literally defines what Agamben describes as “death in motion.”<sup>78</sup>

This way, Manto represents the crushed and coerced life of women and girls around the time of the Partition of Indian subcontinent. Some of the stories make men the pathetic witnesses<sup>79</sup> of the ghastly scenes of their female relatives’ exploitation; for instance, Sirajuddin in “The Return,” and Qasim in “Bitter Harvest” see the outrageous sight of the violated bodies of their daughters, Sakina and Sharifan. Similarly, the father in “Out

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<sup>72</sup> Shashi Joshi, “The World of Saadat Hasan Manto,” 150.

<sup>73</sup> Tiwari, “Memories of Partition: Revisiting Saadat Hasan Manto,” 55.

<sup>74</sup> Kamra, “Ruptured Histories: Literature on the Partition,” 117.

<sup>75</sup> Hasan, “Translator’s Note” on *Mottled Dawn*, xxv.

<sup>76</sup> Ravikant and Saint, Introduction to *Translating Partition*, xxiii.

<sup>77</sup> Gatica, in “Literary Representation of Women,” explains that Ishwar’s “perversion is made public” in the text primarily through his confession (89).

<sup>78</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 186.

<sup>79</sup> In certain stories, for instance, K. A. Abbas’s “Revenge” and Intizar Husain’s “The City of Sorrow,” men molest women in the presence of their male relatives (fathers and husbands).

of Consideration,” must endure the disgusting announcement of temporarily postponed rape/death of his daughter.

Admittedly, in some of his stories, Manto depicts resistance<sup>80</sup> posed by female characters such as Mozail (“Mozail”), Kalwant Kaur (“Colder than Ice”), and the nameless wife in “The Hundred Candle Power Bulb.” These women display their power and agency though, in some cases, only for a fleeting moment of time. The protagonist in “Mozail” exhibits strength<sup>81</sup> of intervention at least twice—first, when she makes her Sikh crush shave his beard; and secondly, when she dares attacking Muslim rowdies to save both Tarlochan and Kirpal Kaur. Frustrated and disgusted wives kill their husbands in some stories such as “Colder than Ice,” and “The Hundred Candle Power Bulb.” In the first story, infuriated Kalwant Kaur takes matter in hand and murders her rapist husband, Ishwar Singh while the wife in the next one exercises power to kill the man (husband cum pimp) who lives off her prostitution.

Notwithstanding the occasional boldness and rebelliousness of some women, the truth remains, however, that they had been badly victimized by men. Thousands of them endured in silence the most unimaginable cruelties witnessed by the horrible times. Accordingly, most of Manto’s female characters—Muslims, Hindus, or Sikhs—from India or Pakistan, lead silent life of pain and agony. Sakina, Bhagbari, Sharifan, Bimla, Bismillah, and Roop Kaur live powerless under the shadow of fear and dare not speak except in extremely rare cases, let alone raise their voice. Men treat them as mere wombs or as cheap products exhibited in markets for everyone to consume.

Having been fully aware that even a bold woman such as Mozail had to undergo insufferable torture before ultimately losing her life, Manto skillfully delves into the subject matter in his stories. Like the millions around the globe, his characters live and die as bare life—as dispensable, damaged and expendable life that “could be killed with impunity.”<sup>82</sup> The characters, *as homo sacers* had “neither the rights of a citizen nor human rights.”<sup>83</sup> They were stripped of their political significance because of the modern government’s tendency to rule in a state of exception by only caring for the life of certain group of people at the expense of the others. Thus, Manto’s female characters live like *homo sacers* victimized by the biopolitical violence of colonialism or by Partition riots. Experiencing the worst possible fate, the characters exist in liminal state between life and death, sometimes even scared of their own relations. Mostly the abducted and recovered women exemplify human beings deprived of their hope to live as citizens of independent India or Pakistan.<sup>84</sup> These women (as much as other refugees) living in refugee camps (reminiscent of the Nazi camps), closely resemble the figure of Muselmann who “inhabits extreme threshold between life and death, the human and the in-human.”<sup>85</sup>

Manto himself had to lead the existence of a *homo sacer* denigrated to the status of mere biological life without any socio-economic or legal significance that commanded respect. His condition was like that of the traumatized victims of his stories with whom he empathized. For instance, the deadly attacks on women made Manto extremely worried about his own daughters.<sup>86</sup> He himself was completely dumbfounded, when he had to migrate to Pakistan after the subcontinent split into two. Almost paralyzed by the tragic event and the

<sup>80</sup> Bishen Singh in “Toba Tek Singh” offers a classic case of resistance against the absurd decision to divide India in the name of religion.

<sup>81</sup> Gatica, in “Literary Representation of Women,” remarks rightly that lack of attachment to any social or religious group grants her “freedom of thought and action” raising her above the paralyzing influence of hate and revenge (88).

<sup>82</sup> Samuel Weber, “Bare Life and Life in General,” 13.

<sup>83</sup> Ojakangas, “Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power,” 10.

<sup>84</sup> Sayima, in “Recovered and Restored?” argues that “Partition reduced women to bare life, despite offering them hopes of life as a citizen of their respective independent countries” (49).

<sup>85</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, 47.

<sup>86</sup> Tarun K Saint, in “The Long Shadow of Manto’s Partition Narratives: ‘Fictive’ Testimony to Historical Trauma,” states that “Manto feared for his daughters at this time when women were being extensively targeted by rioters, not least in Bombay” (55).

resultant culture-shock that awaited him in the new nation, he “couldn’t think of anything.”<sup>87</sup> Incapable to make out where he was, “the whole day [he] would sit in [his] chair, lost in thought.”<sup>88</sup> That is, he became disoriented—unable properly to think, decide, or act. These benumbing days of the catastrophic Partition so affected Manto’s writing that he even happened to assume his inspiration to have dried up.

The apathetic attitude of the state severely impacted Manto, diminishing his identity of *bios* (politico-legal life) into *zoe* (natural existence without protection of law). More than others, his life could be likened to his own memorable creation, Bishen Singh (in “Toba Tek Singh”), the stranded and helpless subaltern who stands on no man’s land in between India and Pakistan as a (disposable) bare life of a *zoe* much like the figure of a Muselmann, or the prisoners at the camp<sup>89</sup> of Guantanamo— who led the most unenviable or undesirable life on earth and whom the state could wipe off any time at its will.

Reduced to a state of non-significance like the inmates of the camp, as he could not be optimistic about the post-Partition days, Manto asked: “Will independence make the circumstances here different from what they were in the colonial era?”<sup>90</sup> Manto posed the question for he saw nothing but absurdity in the division of the country and its probable consequence. Just as he suspected, the condition of India, instead of showing improvement, remained the same as in the days under the British. The country under the nationalist governance—before and after Partition—acted as Manto foresaw. In the manner the colonial site functioned not as “‘a state of law,’ but a space without law,”<sup>91</sup> the government in free India kept law in abeyance, and witnessed the unfolding violence as mere onlooker, making no genuine effort to curb or repress it. History attests to the fact that the marginalized communities in independent India and Pakistan lived almost as *homo-sacers* under their own governments, without enjoying many of their basic citizenship rights. Indeed, the administration displaced the abducted women and girls “to a state of exception by treating them as figures to be recovered rather than as individual cases to be decided in compliance with wishes of the victims.”<sup>92</sup> That is, whether in refugee camps or outside, the indigenous governments sentenced the women to live their bare lives without social, economic, and legal protection, or even psychological support.

The discussion above demonstrates that more than the celebration of a new beginning for the people of the two nations, Partition often meant enactment of horrible tragedies on the space of female bodies. The intimidating state let the bodies and life of women to suffer for the sake of its march towards modernity, the honor of nation, community, family or in some cases, for the mere satisfaction of the ego of their male relatives. Their victimization in the texts examined reveal how the attitude and action of both the colonial and the nationalist governments did not cater to the needs of their subaltern female citizens. Although the nationalist government promised fundamental rights to all citizens without discrimination, it failed most marginal women by excluding them from the mainstream path of progress. Their oppression continued against the ideals of the government which, rather than providing protection, allowed individual rights of citizens to be “abrogated *in the interests of national honour*.”<sup>93</sup>

As Guha states, the British ruled liberal India based on decrees and ordinances that obstructed the native citizens to fully exercise their democratic power to vote. By granting them restricted franchise, and limited rights and privileges, the despotically biased British regime resorted to cautious tricks of friendship and hostility, peace and violence, disdain and deference usually practiced by autocratic and aggressive rulers to govern the Indians. Just as the colonial state adopted the policy of subjugation, cruelty, coercion, intimidation, and dominance to

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<sup>87</sup> Jalal, *The Pity of Partition*, 143.

<sup>88</sup> Harish Narang quotes this in “Ideology, Aesthetics and Architectonics of Manto,” 77.

<sup>89</sup> Ewa P. Ziarek, in “Bare Life,” states that the camp served as “the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life” (171).

<sup>90</sup> Jalal, *The Pity of Partition*, 147.

<sup>91</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 51.

<sup>92</sup> Sayima, “Recovered and Restored?” 53.

<sup>93</sup> Menon and Bhasin, in *Borders & Boundaries*, further explain that the state’s enactment of the Muslim Women’s (Protection of Rights in Divorce), Bill later in 1986, demonstrates how “women’s rights could be suspended in the interests of the community” (253).

control the natives, the indigenous government and the males on both sides dictated terms which the fair sex had to obey. Indeed, women suffered doubly--under the heartless governments as well as the unfeeling male community--who not only degraded their value, disregarded their dignity, displayed them as commodities in the flesh market, but also robbed them off their freedom and made merciless demand to kill themselves.

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