Silenced Bodies, Speaking Trauma: Feminist Subversion and the Politics of Female Suffering in Saadat Hasan Manto's 'Khol Do' and 'Mozail'

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Abstract
This paper examines the representation of female suffering, corporeal trauma, and feminist subversion in Khol Do and Mozail by Saadat Hasan Manto. Situated within the historical context of the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent, the study analyzes how Manto interrogates the intersection of nationalism, patriarchy, and communal violence through the politicization of women's bodies. Drawing upon feminist theory and trauma studies, the paper argues that Manto transforms the silenced female body into a site of historical testimony and ethical critique. In Khol Do, Sakina's conditioned bodily response exemplifies trauma inscribed upon the flesh, revealing how sexual violence erases subjectivity while simultaneously exposing communal hypocrisy. In Mozail, the protagonist's sexual autonomy and ethical defiance destabilize patriarchal constructions of modesty and communal honor. Through narrative minimalism and moral ambiguity, Manto resists nationalist propaganda and sentimental closure, foregrounding instead the fragmented and unresolved nature of trauma. The comparative analysis demonstrates that victimhood and agency coexist within structures of systemic violence. Ultimately, the paper contends that Manto's fiction enacts a feminist subversion by exposing how women's bodies are transformed into symbolic property within nationalist discourse, while simultaneously reclaiming those bodies as sites of resistance and ethical witnessing.

Keywords: *Partition trauma; feminist subversion; corporeal violence; nationalism and patriarchy; gendered suffering; communal identity; testimonial body*

I. Introduction

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 constitutes one of the most significant and traumatic events in modern South Asian history. The division of British India into India and Pakistan resulted in unprecedented communal violence, mass displacement, and large-scale loss of life (Talbot & Singh, 2009). Among the most devastating consequences of Partition was the gendered dimension of violence, in which women's bodies became symbolic and literal sites of communal conflict. Abductions, rape, forced conversions, and honor killings were deployed as instruments of political retaliation and communal humiliation (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Within this context, literature emerged as a crucial medium for documenting experiences that official historiography often marginalized. The short stories *Khol Do* and *Mozail* by Saadat Hasan Manto provide a stark representation of female suffering during Partition. These narratives interrogate the ideological frameworks that reduce women to symbols of communal honor while denying them subjectivity. Through minimalist narration and ethical ambiguity, Manto exposes the politics underlying gendered violence. This study examines how these two stories construct female bodies as sites of trauma, resistance, and subversion within patriarchal and nationalist discourses.

II. Historical Context: Partition and Gendered Violence

2.1 Communal Violence and the Construction of the Female Body

Partition violence was characterized not only by religious antagonism but also by systematic gendered brutality. Women were targeted as representatives of community identity, and their violation symbolized the dishonoring of the opposing group (Butalia, 1998). Feminist historians have demonstrated that abduction and rape were organized and strategic rather than incidental (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). The female body functioned as a repository of collective honor, rendering it vulnerable to political manipulation. The post-Partition recovery operations conducted by both states further complicated women's autonomy. Many abducted women were forcibly repatriated, even when they had established new domestic lives (Butalia, 1998). Thus, the state reinforced patriarchal control under the guise of moral restoration.

2.2 Literary Representation of Partition Trauma

Partition literature occupies a significant place in South Asian literary studies as an alternative archive of violence. Unlike nationalist historiography, which often emphasized political achievement, writers

foregrounded human suffering and moral disintegration. Manto's work is distinguished by its refusal to romanticize communal identities (Jalal, 2013). His stories depict ordinary individuals caught in extraordinary circumstances, revealing the ethical collapse that accompanied political upheaval.

III.   Theoretical Framework

3.1 Feminist Theory and the Politics of Representation

Feminist criticism interrogates how patriarchal systems regulate female bodies and define women's value in terms of sexual purity (Butler, 1990). In contexts of communal violence, this regulation intensifies. Women become symbolic bearers of tradition, religion, and national honor. The violation of women thus acquires ideological significance beyond individual suffering. Spivak's (1988) concept of the subaltern highlights the difficulty of representing marginalized voices within dominant discourse. In Partition narratives, women often remain silent or silenced. Their experiences are mediated through male perspectives or communal narratives.

3.2 Trauma Theory and Narrative Fragmentation

Trauma theory provides a framework for understanding how extreme violence disrupts narrative coherence. Trauma resists straightforward representation and frequently manifests through repetition, silence, and involuntary bodily responses (Caruth, 1996). LaCapra (2001) distinguishes between "acting out" and "working through," emphasizing how trauma may remain embedded in the body rather than articulated verbally. Manto's narrative style reflects this fragmentation, particularly in *Khol Do*, where trauma is expressed through bodily reflex rather than speech.

IV.   Corporeal Trauma in *Khol Do*

4.1 Narrative Structure and Plot Overview

In *Khol Do*, Saadat Hasan Manto constructs a narrative that is deceptively simple in structure yet profoundly disturbing in implication. The story unfolds in the immediate aftermath of the 1947 Partition, situating its events within a landscape marked by displacement, communal riots, and social disintegration. An elderly Muslim man, Sirajuddin, is separated from his daughter Sakina during migration. The opening section of the narrative emphasizes his confusion, grief, and physical exhaustion, reflecting the broader chaos that engulfed refugees during Partition (Talbot & Singh, 2009). Sirajuddin's search for Sakina becomes the central narrative thread. In his desperation, he entrusts her rescue to a group of young men who present themselves as volunteers committed to safeguarding members of their community. Their outward performance of communal solidarity, however, conceals predatory intent. The story does not immediately disclose their betrayal. Instead, the narrative withholds explicit detail, allowing the reader to share Sirajuddin's hope before gradually revealing its tragic irony. Sakina is eventually discovered in a hospital. At this point, the narrative reaches its climactic moment. A doctor instructs an attendant to "open it" (khol do), referring to a window. Upon hearing the command, Sakina mechanically loosens the drawstring of her trousers. This reflexive gesture reveals the extent of her sexual violation (Manto, 1948/1995). The story concludes abruptly after Sirajuddin, unaware of the full implication, expresses relief that his daughter is alive.

The narrative structure is marked by compression and restraint. Manto avoids descriptive elaboration and instead relies on implication. The climactic scene occupies only a few lines, yet it carries the cumulative weight of the story's unspoken violence. The minimalism intensifies the shock, compelling readers to confront the horror without mediation or sentimental framing. The absence of explicit depiction prevents voyeuristic consumption of violence and instead foregrounds the psychological consequences of trauma. Through this structural economy, Manto underscores the disjunction between appearance and reality. The volunteers' supposed heroism conceals brutality; the father's relief masks the daughter's devastation. The narrative thus exposes the moral collapse underlying communal rhetoric and challenges the assumption that shared religious identity guarantees ethical conduct (Jalal, 2013).

4.2 The Body as Conditioned Response

Sakina's reaction to the command "khol do" exemplifies trauma inscribed upon the body. Rather than responding as a conscious agent capable of interpreting context, she acts automatically. The phrase, neutral in itself, functions as a traumatic trigger. Her gesture suggests repeated assault and psychological conditioning, indicating that her body has internalized patterns of coercion. Trauma theory provides a framework for interpreting this moment. Caruth (1996) contends that trauma is not fully assimilated at the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly through involuntary repetition. The traumatized subject may reenact fragments of the event without conscious intention. Sakina's reflex embodies this phenomenon. The repetition of compliance reveals how violence has disrupted her autonomy. The body, rather than the voice, becomes the site of testimony. Importantly, Sakina remains silent throughout the story. She does not narrate her suffering, nor does she verbally resist. Her silence cannot be interpreted simply as passivity. Instead, it reflects the unspeakable nature of sexual

violence and the social structures that deny women discursive authority (Spivak, 1988). The absence of her voice underscores the erasure of female subjectivity within patriarchal contexts.

The narrative's refusal to describe the assaults explicitly intensifies this effect. The horror emerges through implication rather than graphic detail. This strategy aligns with LaCapra's (2001) observation that trauma often exceeds representational capacity. By avoiding sensationalism, Manto shifts attention from spectacle to consequence. The reader must infer the violence from Sakina's conditioned response, thereby participating in the act of witnessing. The transformation of "khol do" from a mundane instruction into a traumatic stimulus illustrates how language itself becomes contaminated by violence. Words that once held neutral meaning acquire destructive resonance. The body responds before cognition can intervene, demonstrating how trauma disrupts the relationship between language and agency. Sakina's gesture thus operates as a corporeal archive of violence, preserving what the narrative leaves unsaid.

4.3 Patriarchy and Failed Protection

The climactic scene also exposes the fragility of patriarchal protection. Sirajuddin's relief upon discovering that his daughter is alive reflects a paternal framework in which physical survival is equated with safety. His joy contrasts sharply with the reader's recognition of Sakina's violation. This disjunction reveals the limitations of patriarchal perception. The father does not—or cannot—fully comprehend the psychological and bodily trauma his daughter has endured. Partition violence frequently invoked the rhetoric of protecting women as a justification for communal aggression (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Women were constructed as bearers of collective honor, and men assumed the role of guardians. In *Khol Do*, this protective ideal collapses. The volunteers, who claim to defend their community, exploit Sakina. Their actions expose the hypocrisy embedded within masculinist claims of honor. Communal solidarity becomes a cover for predation. Manto's portrayal challenges simplistic narratives of victim and perpetrator aligned along religious lines. By depicting Muslim volunteers assaulting a Muslim girl, he dismantles communal binaries and emphasizes the universality of patriarchal violence (Jalal, 2013). The story critiques not only inter-communal hostility but also intra-communal misogyny.

Furthermore, Sirajuddin's inability to perceive the full extent of Sakina's suffering reflects a broader social unwillingness to acknowledge sexual trauma. In patriarchal societies, the emphasis on female chastity often leads to silence surrounding violation. Survival may be celebrated, but the cost remains unaddressed. Manto's narrative confronts this evasion directly. The final image of the story—Sirajuddin expressing gratitude while Sakina lies motionless—captures the tragic irony of patriarchal protection. The daughter has been "recovered," yet her subjectivity has been shattered. Through this juxtaposition, Manto reveals the inadequacy of communal and familial structures in safeguarding women during moments of political upheaval. The body of the woman becomes the terrain upon which masculine ideals are both asserted and exposed as illusory. In *Khol Do*, corporeal trauma is not merely an individual experience but a political commentary. Sakina's conditioned response, her enforced silence, and her father's limited comprehension collectively illustrate the intersection of trauma, patriarchy, and communal violence. The story thus transforms a brief narrative episode into a profound critique of the ideological structures that render female suffering both inevitable and invisible.

V.   Sexual Autonomy and Ethical Defiance in *Mozail*
5.1 Characterization and Social Context

In *Mozail*, Saadat Hasan Manto presents a female protagonist who stands in sharp contrast to the traumatized figure of Sakina in *Khol Do*. Set against the backdrop of communal unrest in Lahore during Partition, the story situates its events within an atmosphere of suspicion, fear, and escalating sectarian violence. Yet unlike Sakina, whose subjectivity is nearly erased by brutality, Mozail emerges as a character defined by boldness, irreverence, and sexual autonomy. Mozail is portrayed as a Jewish woman inhabiting a city polarized between Hindu and Muslim identities. Her Jewishness places her outside the dominant communal binary, granting her a marginal yet distinctive position within the narrative. This marginality allows her to move across communal boundaries with relative indifference to their ideological rigidity. In a context where religious identity determines vulnerability and allegiance, Mozail's outsider status disrupts fixed categories. She does not fully belong to any of the warring communities, and therefore she refuses to internalize their codes of honor and modesty.

Her characterization resists the conventional depiction of women in Partition literature as passive sufferers. She is outspoken, self-assured, and dismissive of social conventions. Her romantic involvement with a Sikh man, Trilochan, further underscores her refusal to conform to communal expectations. She mocks his anxieties about religious propriety and challenges his insistence on outward respectability. Through these interactions, Manto constructs a female character who asserts bodily autonomy in a socio-political context that seeks to regulate women's sexuality as a marker of communal integrity (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). The social context of Partition intensifies the stakes of Mozail's independence. As riots erupt and neighborhoods become segregated along religious lines, fear governs daily life. Women are particularly vulnerable, often confined to

domestic spaces under the pretext of protection. Against this climate of anxiety and control, Mozail's mobility and audacity appear radical. Her presence in public spaces and her unapologetic demeanor challenge the patriarchal impulse to restrict female agency during times of crisis.

5.2 Subversion of Modesty and Communal Identity
Mozail's most striking form of defiance lies in her rejection of conventional modesty codes. Clothing, within patriarchal frameworks, functions as a visible marker of virtue and respectability. In communal contexts, it also signals religious affiliation and moral allegiance. Mozail's indifference to clothing unsettles male characters who equate female virtue with bodily concealment. Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity illuminates this dynamic. According to Butler, gender is constituted through repeated acts that conform to socially sanctioned norms. Modesty, in this sense, becomes a performance through which femininity is validated. Mozail's refusal to adhere to prescribed codes disrupts this repetition. By declining to "perform" modest femininity, she exposes its constructed nature. Her interactions with Trilochan exemplify this tension. Trilochan is preoccupied with his external symbols of religious identity, including his turban and beard. He embodies the anxiety of a man attempting to preserve communal honor in a volatile environment. Mozail, by contrast, refuses to invest her body with symbolic weight. She treats clothing as incidental rather than sacred. Her irreverence challenges the assumption that a woman's morality is contingent upon physical concealment.

In the broader political climate of Partition, where women's bodies were treated as repositories of communal honor, Mozail's stance acquires subversive significance. By detaching her body from communal symbolism, she resists being instrumentalized. Unlike Sakina, whose body becomes a site of coerced inscription, Mozail asserts ownership over her physical self. Her nakedness, later in the story, does not signify shame but defiance. It destabilizes the ideological connection between modesty and virtue. Furthermore, Mozail's position as a Jewish woman complicates communal hierarchies. She does not share the collective anxieties that define Hindu-Muslim conflict. Her detachment underscores the arbitrariness of communal divisions. By occupying a liminal identity, she exposes the constructed nature of the boundaries that others treat as absolute (Jalal, 2013).

5.3 Sacrifice and Ethical Complexity
The narrative reaches its ethical climax when communal violence intensifies and Tara, a Sikh woman, becomes trapped in a hostile Muslim neighborhood. Trilochan hesitates, paralyzed by fear and concern for his own safety. Mozail, however, insists on intervening. Her decision to risk her life for another woman transcends communal boundaries and challenges gendered expectations of passivity. Mozail's act of rescue represents a form of ethical defiance. In a moment when communal loyalty dictates withdrawal and suspicion, she prioritizes individual human life over collective identity. Her intervention subverts both patriarchal and communal logic. While men engage in territorial aggression, she enacts a gesture of protection that is neither possessive nor self-serving. However, her courage results in fatal consequences. She is shot while attempting to save Tara. As she lies dying, her naked body remains exposed. This image carries complex symbolic resonance. Unlike Sakina's involuntary exposure in *Khol Do*, Mozail's nakedness is not the product of coercion. It emerges from her own rejection of modesty and her refusal to conform to prescribed femininity (Manto, 1950/1995).

Yet Manto does not romanticize her death. Her sacrifice does not restore communal harmony, nor does it lead to moral redemption for others. Trilochan's reaction remains marked by confusion and belated recognition. The story resists transforming Mozail into a sanctified martyr. Instead, her death underscores the persistent vulnerability of women within violent structures, even when they exercise agency. This ethical ambiguity complicates feminist readings of empowerment. Mozail's autonomy does not grant her immunity from violence. Her defiance coexists with susceptibility. Manto thereby avoids constructing a simplistic binary between victimhood and agency. While Mozail embodies resistance, she remains embedded within a social order that ultimately subjects her to lethal force. From a trauma-theoretical perspective, Mozail's exposed body functions as a visual testimony rather than a site of silent conditioning. Her nakedness is not a reflexive reenactment but a deliberate refusal to conceal. In this sense, her body becomes a political statement, challenging the ideological systems that conflate modesty with morality.

Through Mozail, Manto explores the possibility of ethical action amid communal chaos. Her character destabilizes rigid identities and exposes the fragility of patriarchal honor codes. At the same time, her death signals the limits of individual resistance within systemic violence. The story thus presents sexual autonomy not as triumphant liberation but as a complex and precarious assertion of selfhood in a fractured world. In *Mozail*, female suffering is intertwined with defiance. The narrative foregrounds both the potential and the cost of subversion. By juxtaposing agency with vulnerability, Manto offers a nuanced meditation on the politics of female embodiment during Partition.

VI. Comparative Analysis

6.1 Silence and Speech

A comparative reading of *Khol Do* and *Mozail* reveals two distinct yet interconnected modes of female articulation: traumatic silence and defiant speech. In *Khol Do*, Sakina remains almost entirely voiceless. Her silence is not merely the absence of dialogue but a structural feature of the narrative. She does not recount her experience, nor is she granted interior monologue. Her subjectivity is mediated through the perspectives of male characters—primarily her father—and through the reader's inference. This narrative erasure reflects what trauma theorists describe as the difficulty of translating extreme violence into language (Caruth, 1996). Sakina's silence becomes a sign of psychic rupture. However, the absence of speech does not equate to absence of meaning. Sakina's body performs the act of testimony through reflex. The conditioned response to the command "khol do" constitutes a corporeal articulation of what cannot be spoken. Her body communicates the history of repeated assault, thereby functioning as an involuntary archive of trauma. In this sense, silence itself becomes a mode of expression. The story demonstrates how trauma displaces speech, transferring meaning from verbal narration to bodily gesture (LaCapra, 2001).

In contrast, Mozail is characterized by irreverence, verbal assertiveness, and refusal to conform. She mocks religious anxieties and challenges patriarchal expectations. Unlike Sakina, she speaks freely and moves publicly. Her speech signifies agency, and her demeanor unsettles male authority. Yet even in *Mozail*, speech does not guarantee safety. Her defiance exposes her to risk, and her final act of sacrifice culminates in death. The juxtaposition of these two figures complicates the binary of silence and speech. Sakina's silence is laden with traumatic significance, while Mozail's speech and laughter signal resistance. Yet both remain constrained within structures that regulate female bodies. Whether silent or outspoken, women in both narratives confront vulnerability shaped by communal violence and patriarchal control. The body, in each case, becomes the ultimate medium through which meaning is conveyed.

6.2 Victimhood and Agency

The apparent opposition between victimhood and agency dissolves under closer examination of the two stories. Sakina's experience in *Khol Do* suggests profound victimization. She is abducted, repeatedly assaulted, and rendered incapable of verbal articulation. Her conditioned response epitomizes the depth of her subjugation. Yet the narrative does not reduce her entirely to passive objecthood. By centering the climactic moment on her bodily reaction, the story transforms her from an invisible casualty into the focal point of ethical confrontation. The reader is compelled to recognize her suffering. In this sense, the narrative itself restores a form of testimonial presence to an otherwise silenced subject. Mozail, conversely, appears to embody agency from the outset. She chooses her relationships, rejects modesty codes, and intervenes decisively during communal unrest. Her actions are self-determined rather than coerced. However, her autonomy does not insulate her from structural violence. She is ultimately killed while attempting to rescue Tara. Her death underscores the limits of individual agency within a context dominated by armed conflict and communal hatred.

Manto thereby complicates simplistic categorizations of female characters as either victims or empowered agents. Sakina's trauma reveals how patriarchal violence erases autonomy, yet her body's testimony disrupts total silencing. Mozail's autonomy challenges patriarchal norms, yet she remains vulnerable to lethal force. Both characters exist within systems that circumscribe their choices and expose them to harm. This intersection of vulnerability and resistance aligns with feminist scholarship emphasizing that agency does not negate oppression, nor does victimization eliminate subjectivity (Butler, 1990). Manto's narratives suggest that women's experiences during Partition cannot be reduced to singular categories. Instead, they occupy complex positions where resistance and subjection coexist.

6.3 The Female Body as Political Territory

In both *Khol Do* and *Mozail*, the female body functions as a contested political territory shaped by communal, patriarchal, and nationalist ideologies. During Partition, women were frequently constructed as bearers of collective honor, making their bodies symbolic extensions of community identity (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Manto's stories reflect this historical reality while simultaneously critiquing it. In *Khol Do*, Sakina's body becomes the site upon which communal betrayal is enacted. The volunteers who claim to protect their community violate one of its most vulnerable members. Her body is treated as expendable, instrumentalized within a violent masculine culture that conflates dominance with honor. The absence of explicit narrative detail emphasizes how systemic this violence is; it requires no elaborate description because it is embedded within the political context itself.

In *Mozail*, the body is politicized differently. Mozail refuses to allow her body to function as a symbol of communal virtue. By disregarding modesty codes, she resists being inscribed with patriarchal meaning. Her final exposure, unlike Sakina's conditioned compliance, operates as defiance. Yet even this defiance occurs within

a space saturated with political hostility. Her death confirms that the female body remains vulnerable within militarized environments, regardless of individual assertion.

Through minimalist narration, Manto foregrounds corporeality as a site of historical inscription. The violence of Partition is not abstract; it is etched onto flesh. Bodies carry the marks of ideological conflict, revealing the intersection of gender and politics. By focusing on bodily gestures rather than extended commentary, Manto transforms corporeality into narrative argument. Ultimately, the comparative analysis of Sakina and Mozail demonstrates that female embodiment in Partition literature is inseparable from political struggle. Whether silenced through trauma or articulated through defiance, the female body emerges as the primary terrain upon which communal and patriarchal power is exercised and contested. In rendering these bodies central to his narratives, Manto exposes the intimate costs of historical violence and challenges readers to confront the ethical implications of gendered suffering.

VII. Nationalism, Masculinity, and Ethical Critique

The political significance of *Khol Do* and *Mozail* becomes particularly evident when examined in relation to nationalism and constructions of masculinity during Partition. In dominant nationalist narratives emerging from 1947, communities often represented themselves as victims of the other's brutality. Such narratives reinforced moral hierarchies in which violence was attributed externally, thereby preserving an internal image of ethical integrity (Talbot & Singh, 2009). Saadat Hasan Manto disrupts this logic by depicting violence as internal to the community itself. In *Khol Do*, the perpetrators of Sakina's assault are Muslim volunteers who ostensibly represent communal solidarity. Their role as self-appointed protectors exposes the fragility of masculine honor codes. Rather than safeguarding women, they exploit vulnerability under the cover of religious identity. By assigning culpability within the same community, Manto dismantles the moral binaries that underpinned nationalist rhetoric. The narrative refuses to endorse communal innocence and instead foregrounds ethical failure within. This strategy challenges the ideological claim that violence was exclusively inflicted by the religious "other" (Jalal, 2013). Similarly, in *Mozail*, ethical courage is detached from communal allegiance. Mozail, a Jewish woman positioned outside the dominant Hindu-Muslim divide, becomes the moral center of the narrative. Her decision to rescue Tara transcends religious boundaries, suggesting that ethical responsibility cannot be confined to national or communal identity. In contrast, Trilochan's hesitation reveals how masculine anxiety about honor and self-preservation can inhibit moral action. Through this juxtaposition, Manto critiques the alignment of masculinity with territorial and communal loyalty.

Nationalist discourse during Partition frequently invoked women as symbols of the nation—figures to be protected, avenged, or recovered. Feminist historians have shown that women were often treated as symbolic property of the community, their bodies equated with territorial integrity (Menon & Bhasin, 1998). In both stories, Manto exposes the violence embedded within this symbolic economy. Sakina's body is treated as expendable despite rhetoric of protection, while Mozail's autonomy disrupts the assumption that female virtue is tied to communal identity. Although Manto was associated with the Progressive Writers' Movement, which sought to address social injustice through literature, he maintained a critical distance from ideological simplification (Gopal, 2005). His fiction resists overt political didacticism. Instead of offering a clear moral resolution, he foregrounds ambiguity and contradiction. By depicting violence across communal lines and complicating portrayals of masculinity, he rejects nationalist propaganda and insists on ethical accountability beyond partisan allegiance.Through this critique, Manto reveals the convergence of nationalism and patriarchy. Both systems rely upon regulating women's bodies as symbols of collective honor. By exposing the fragility and hypocrisy of this convergence, his stories undermine the ideological frameworks that sustain gendered violence.

VIII. Trauma, Memory, and the Limits of Representation

A defining feature of Manto's narrative technique in both stories is restraint. The assaults in *Khol Do* are never explicitly described; the horror emerges through implication and the climactic gesture of conditioned response. Similarly, *Mozail* avoids melodramatic elaboration of sacrifice. This stylistic economy reflects the difficulty of representing extreme violence within language. Trauma theory posits that certain experiences exceed direct articulation. Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is characterized by belatedness and fragmentation; it resists full assimilation into narrative coherence. Manto's minimalism mirrors this structure. By withholding graphic detail, he allows absence and silence to convey the magnitude of suffering. The unsaid becomes as significant as the spoken. In *Khol Do*, Sakina's silence operates simultaneously as symptom and critique. It signifies psychic rupture while also indicting a social order that fails to create space for women's testimony. Her body speaks through reflex, but the narrative denies closure or recovery. The reader is left with the image of a father's misplaced relief and a daughter's shattered subjectivity.

Similarly, *Mozail* concludes without restorative resolution. Mozail's death does not reconcile communities or transform male consciousness in any definitive manner. Her sacrifice remains ethically significant yet historically inconclusive. The absence of communal harmony at the end underscores the persistence of

violence. The refusal of closure in both stories reflects the ongoing nature of trauma. Partition was not a singular event confined to 1947; its psychological and cultural consequences extended far beyond political independence. By leaving Sakina's future uncertain and presenting Mozail's sacrifice without redemptive aftermath, Manto resists narrative consolation. This resistance to resolution constitutes an ethical stance. Rather than aestheticizing suffering or offering sentimental redemption, Manto compels readers to confront the unresolved residues of violence. Memory in these stories is not stable or restorative; it is fractured and embodied. The female body becomes a site where history remains inscribed, resistant to erasure. In emphasizing the limits of representation, Manto does not abandon narration; rather, he acknowledges its constraints. His stories demonstrate that while trauma may exceed language, literature can still gesture toward its presence through silence, implication, and corporeal imagery. In doing so, he transforms narrative restraint into a mode of ethical witnessing, ensuring that female suffering is neither sensationalized nor forgotten.

IX. Conclusion

The analysis of *Khol Do* and *Mozail* reveals that Saadat Hasan Manto constructs female embodiment as a critical site for interrogating the moral and political contradictions of Partition. Rather than presenting women solely as passive victims of communal brutality, Manto situates them within complex structures where silence, trauma, defiance, and vulnerability intersect. In *Khol Do*, Sakina's conditioned response to the command "khol do" transforms her body into an involuntary archive of violence. Her silence does not signify narrative absence but instead reflects the profound rupture inflicted by sexual assault. Through minimalist narration, Manto foregrounds the politics of erasure that often surround gendered trauma. The volunteers' betrayal exposes the fragility of patriarchal claims to protection and honor, revealing how communal solidarity can mask internal violence. Conversely, *Mozail* presents a female protagonist who refuses to conform to patriarchal and communal prescriptions. Mozail's sexual autonomy and irreverence destabilize rigid constructions of femininity and modesty. Yet her eventual death underscores the limits of individual resistance within systemic violence. Her exposed body, unlike Sakina's conditioned compliance, signifies ethical defiance rather than submission. However, Manto resists romanticizing her sacrifice, instead emphasizing ambiguity and unresolved tension.

Through comparative analysis, the dichotomy between victimhood and agency dissolves. Sakina embodies traumatic silencing, while Mozail represents conscious resistance; yet both remain vulnerable within structures governed by masculine honor and nationalist ideology. Manto critiques the convergence of patriarchy and nationalism that transforms women into symbolic property of the community. By depicting violence across communal lines, he refuses moral hierarchies that absolve one group at the expense of another. Furthermore, Manto's narrative restraint reflects the limits of representing extreme trauma. Silence, fragmentation, and unresolved endings resist aesthetic closure and compel ethical reflection. The absence of redemption in both stories mirrors the ongoing psychological aftermath of Partition. Trauma remains inscribed upon the body and within collective memory. Ultimately, Manto's fiction enacts feminist subversion not through overt ideological proclamation but through exposure. By centering silenced and defiant female bodies, he reveals the ideological structures that regulate, exploit, and commodify women in times of political upheaval. At the same time, he restores to these bodies a form of testimonial power. In doing so, Manto transforms literary minimalism into ethical intervention, ensuring that female suffering during Partition is neither sanitized nor forgotten.

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