In Minor Mode: A Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's Radio Plays

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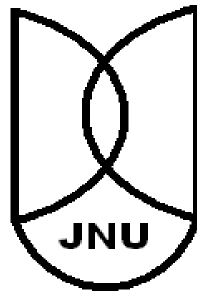
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Girija Suri



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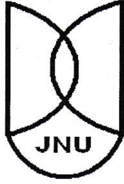

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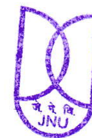

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Picture 1: From *Indian Listener*. 22 Mar. 1939 (Courtesy: All India Radio, New Delhi)

In Minor Mode: An Introduction

> No matter what artistic direction he chose to give expression to his creativity, Manto was sure to create a *hungama* one way or the other (Menra and Dutt 3: 336).[1]

About a hundred years ago, the pre-eminent Urdu writer, Saadat Hasan Manto embarked on the ambitious journey to become, in his own words, "the god of storytelling" (qtd. in Hasan, *Kingdom's End* 10). His words mirror the kind of popularity and interest that would only grow by leaps and bounds, not only in the South Asian subcontinent but also abroad, owing to the shock-value of his stories and even more controversial literary and personal life. Implicit in his grandiloquent invocation of himself as an artist comparable only to the Supreme, are three things: his unbridled ambition, his "real" achievements, and the Manto myth that borders on a cottage industry in contemporary times. It is the proliferation of the latter that, however, prevents a clear and balanced perspective on the former two aspects, and therefore demands a close critical attention. Manto's transformation from an uncomfortable presence within the influential All India Progressive Writers' Movement that dominated the socio-cultural and literary scene in the 1930s and the 40s, to a nearly mythical figure, constantly appropriated and eulogized by select custodians of cultural and literary morality, marks a lacuna in an honest critical assessment of the writer and his works. Manto's mystique as an author owes to his irreducibility to any particular ideological compartment, but ironically, the aesthetic value of his wide and variegated literary and popular corpus seems to largely emanate from the Left-Liberal discourse that insists upon a particular minority consciousness as their sole focus. Though Manto's reputation is larger than life, he has usually been read in a stereotypical, even reductive way as the purveyor of scandalous and salacious works.[2] The scandal that was Manto thus overwhelms all other

[1] All references to Manto's radio dramas are taken from *Dastavez* and *Manto Ke Dramay*. See Menra and Dutt 3 and Mohan, *Manto Ke Dramay*.

[2] Six of Manto's short stories were slapped with cases of obscenity. These were "*Kali Shalwar*", "*Dhuan*", "*Bu*", "*Khol Do*", "*Thanda Gosht*" and "*Ūpar, Neechay Aur Darmiyañ*". Out of these, the last three were written in Pakistan where the Progressive writers ultimately ostracized him for being reactionary. His story "*Bu*" (1942), was

perceptions. Part of the complication that Manto creates is his own compulsions as a "professional" writer who made his living by writing. There is a great deal in his work that shows how this ugly necessity pops up its head every now and then, forcing him to pander to market or publishers' demands in order to write something saleable. All along, one must also keep in mind how Manto counter-maneuvered these compulsions with his own creative genius. This dissertation turns its gaze precisely towards this immense aesthetic complexity that animates his literary endeavors, by recuperating and pushing forth a study of his hitherto neglected collection of dramas meant for radio broadcasting in the 1940s. At the very outset, they can be distinguished as non-scandalous in terms of their content, and commercial, even "low-brow" in their generic classification, hence making them a unique vantage point to enter into Manto's difficult poetics, if not merely politics in its most restricted sense of conformity to a particular ideology/ies. Through an analysis of these dramas, one could argue that Manto demands to be read politically but frustrates reductive attempts to do so. This thesis postures itself differently from the larger discursive tradition of Manto criticism in order to delineate his politics that arises out of a very profound and unique aesthetic gift that exceeds his simplistic straitjacketing as a chronicler of Partition, the singular voice of the downtrodden and the favorite subject of subaltern criticism. It is this vexing of familiar terrains of criticism around Manto, in its choice of the aesthetic over the narrowly ideological that constitutes the "minor" reading of the author's radio-dramas, and provides a fresh perspective to view the relevance of Manto and his oeuvre at large.

Irony abounds the manner in which Manto has been at the receiving end of ideological exclusion as well as appropriation stretching from the hey-days of his literary career, to his afterlife in the form of research papers, stage plays, television series, radio-programs, talks and movies.[3]Manto's almost obsessive dwelling on the gritty conditions of life coupled with undiluted portrayal of sex taken to its absurdist extremes,invited censure from literary doyens such as Sajjad Zaheer, who condemned him for not towing the line of "cultural discipline"

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publicly condemned by luminaries such as Sajjad Zaheer in 1945, contributing to his alienation from the Progressive Writers' Movement.

[3] Manto's Partition stories constitute one of the most riveting chunks of Indian Literature and Partition Studies components in various universities' syllabi. Radio broadcasts of his stories by RJ Sayema have been successful in popularizing Manto. A sensitive biopic *Manto* (2015) by Pakistani director, Sarmad Sultan Khoosat has been well appreciated, and so has been the recent one by Nandita Das, named *Manto* (2018). His stories continue to be performed on stage and many have been adapted for online platforms such as Youtube. Manto thus circulates across media in various forms, more than ever before.

prescribed by the influential Progressive Writers' Association (252). Sardar Jafri repudiated Manto's characters for not being "representative" enough, "mutilated" as they were, in comparison to those of his colleague, Krishan Chander, "courageous and conscious builders of life", expressing a healthy evolution from their circumstances (qtd. in Jalil, *Loving Progress* 318). Jafri's reading of Manto's characters and their milieus could be elaborated further to dwell on the author's objective to locate the struggles of the subaltern as an aspect of the larger crisis of a modernizing society that he seeks to engage with. Nevertheless, these shuttling positions vis-à-vis Manto can be located in the trajectory of criticism that extends to the contemporary era, where the Left Liberal stance has focused precisely on the areas of the author's life and works that have been marked by scandal, trial as well as the predominance of what Ibadat Barelwi terms as the "little person" (qtd. in Jalil 315).

The palpable presence of a large number of characters belonging to the marginalized sections of society in Manto's short stories has led to its convenient identification as a literature essentially of and about the subaltern subjectivity. Aligned to its concerns is an engagement with the prostitute figure, the horror and aftermath of Partition, and ultimately a scathing attack on the idea of a collective nationhood. It is no surprise that chosen as a befitting example that facilitates postcolonial and subaltern critiques of the nation-state, the narrow focus on the above mentioned themes of Manto's works has culminated in their designation as a "minority cultural practice" that functions as "a critique of dominant culture and its majoritarian affiliations" (Mufti 3). If such readings are analytically inclined towards the crisis of sensibility of a religious minority, then others have explained "Manto's choice of prostitutes and pimps and people living on the periphery of society" as an essential facet of his ideology—one that foregrounds the "lives of the marginalized and the subaltern with the clear objective of not only changing the course of the majority discourse but to subvert it" (Narang 87).Manto's radio- dramas testify that the latter position is not only exaggerated but also false in its extreme proclamation of a promise of complete social transformation in Manto's works. As enumerated then, the central problematic structuring Manto's literary endeavors is not the opposition set up between a national culture and "minority locations" that offer "ethical counterpoints" to it (Mufti 188). It is also certainly not the straightforward indictment of bourgeois culture and values, as critics seem to suggest.[4] Rather, it is somewhat closely linked to what Mufti suggests—"his elevation of doubt and

[4] See Menon 419.

"betrayal" to something like the imperative of an ethical life" (207-8). To put it differently, this thesis argues that Manto's work is an immanent enumeration of conflicts that face his characters—social, familial, ethical or personal, which remain furtive at best, and never fully acknowledged. In this sense, his narratives are marked by acute ambiguity, even betrayal, which must be untangled to question their oft-celebrated straightforwardness to reveal the seams along which they flee into escapist narrative modes. Manto's radio dramas are excellent examples which help to pinpoint such locations of flight from their central conflicts through comic banter, romantic climax, increased sentimentalism and melodrama, and an almost compulsive chronicling of the subaltern "alternatives" that ultimately do not hold their own in a rapidly modernizing society.

Some specific instances of such conflicts in his radio-dramas can be enumerated as follows: in *Aao*, Lajwanti and Kishore's conflicting ideas about a modern, companionate marriage are trivialized as a part of the humdrum of daily life. The dramas divert attention from the contradictory ideals, expectations and responsibilities that the husband and wife envision in a modern marriage, towards a cataloguing of the specificities of consumer culture of which these characters are a part. The activity in question in each drama, whether playing cards, or concocting a story etc. is rounded off with a comic twist veiling the tensions that characterize their marital relationship. Similarly, in plays like "*Randhir Pahalwan*" and "*Jebkatra*", the mediating voice between the lover (subaltern figure) and the beloved (member of the bourgeoisie) is absent—the portrayals of both are susceptible to stereotypical melodrama and sentimentalism and the actual nature of dilemmas faced by the latter leading to failure of relationship is either not enumerated or dispersed half-way through the drama. The subaltern narrative of farmers' protest articulated by Shamu in "*Randhir Pahalwan*" fails to make any lasting impression and seems to exist solelyas a reason for Savitri's rejection of the kind-hearted but criminal Randhir. Even in his problem-plays, the dramas that ostensibly foreground specific social problems as their subject, the utopian ideals of social transformation are imbued with deep suspicion and fail to achieve their purported mission as in the case of Bari in "*Journalist*". In a play like "*Karwat*", a drama that most forcefully pits the bourgeois family against a brothel within a single spatial matrix, the conclusion hardly resolves the prejudices of the two sides and instead augments them with an even brutal force. Finally, in "*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu*", it seems that unable to find any aesthetic resolution to the existential crisis faced by the middle-

class protagonist, Naeem, there is a contrived attempt to introduce a prostitute's house as the ever-welcoming haven for rejected individuals. The presence of the prostitute in this play hardly appears as a part of the play's narrative logic, but rather as an escape from the dreary and alienating crisis in which Naeem finds himself.

Such examples, delved deeper in subsequent chapters, nudge us to ponder over the significance of these dramas in formulating a methodology, which unlocks the relationship of the author (and his politics) with the aesthetic dimensions of his oeuvre through a theoretical framework of minor literature. The use of "minor" in this thesis is strategically deployed to map the creative way in which its conventional meaning is mutated into a radically new perspective to approach Manto's radio-dramas and literary corpus at large.

Leslie Flemming, one of the first Manto scholars to draw attention to his various 'minor' writings has dismissed Manto's radio-dramas as lacking "any profound thought" or clear articulation of themes ("Other Reflections" 136). Similarly, Waris Alvi attacks them for their excessive sentimentality and romantic strain (29). What is overlooked in such critical appraisals is their difference from a peculiar imaginative world that has become synonymous with that of Manto—the dark underbelly of a metropolis as the setting of his stories, the crude shock of human depravity in the face of violence, the sorrow of displacement as a result of Partition of the country, and debased nature of sex in story after story. Alok Bhalla argues, "there is hardly a story of his which doesn't make one shudder or leave one with a feeling of shame and disgust" (xi). Radio dramas, however, sometimes lacking in exquisite sophistry characteristic of his short stories, do not consistently evoke the same measure of revulsion or shock and are perhaps, erroneously though, considered unworthy of critical attention. One may therefore question the merits of unveiling this forgotten archive whose even fact of existence, is reduced only to a rare mention in Manto's biographies. In recuperating these radio-dramas for the purpose of Manto's reassessment, this thesis is inspired by the key argument put forth by Makarand R. Paranjape in *Another Canon* that delves into the radical possibilities of reading less-celebrated, even minor works of major authors. Paranjape argues, "Not all books help us realize our "inner self" to go back to Gandhi's phrase, but many of them try to do so and some actually succeed. The challenge is to read them in such a way as to show how, even when they fail they still make an attempt that is laudable" (167).

Reading these neglected radio-dramas is, therefore, significant for atleast two reasons. First, the very fact that these plays lack the clinical gaze of his stories and are devoid of the momentous contexts of Partition of 1947, establishes their variance from his familiar works. Many of these radio-dramas are set in bourgeois contexts rather than those of the marginalized and thus offer another way of approaching Manto's literary creations. Secondly, in their tenuous deployment of comic, melodramatic, romantic and even serious polemical modes of storytelling, they help in laying bare the fissures along which the crisis faced by the characters be exposed. In their often truncated resolutions, and shifting from the real dilemmas of their principal characters to comic or romantic climaxes, they help in marking the specific moments of rupture in narratives that are symptomatic of the author's ambiguity vis-à-vis the contentiousness of times he was living in. This approach which focuses on such texts that fail to achieve their full potential is in fact worthy because it helps one to account not just for the strengths of a difficult author such as Manto but also his limitations in terms of what he could represent faithfully and what only remains at the subliminal level in the text.

Having said that, one may ponder over the nature of this crisis that is being referred to here in order to arrive at full implications of a "minor" reading of these dramas. In a paradigmatic shift from the standard analysis of Manto's stories as a reflection of the vulnerabilities of the marginalized, this thesis argues that such an engagement erupts from the author's unsettled relationship with the majoritarian discourse of the middle-class in colonial India. The personal and romantic predicaments of the characters in the dramas are a manifestation of the ethical and social breakdown in which the middle class finds itself in the late colonial period. The proliferation of public spaces, forms of technology and rise of the urban metropolis contribute to the rapidly transforming notions about emancipation of women and their mobility across the public and private spaces. The middle-class is increasingly gripped by a desire to scale heights in their personal and professional lives, signaled by their ability to partake of the consumer culture that bombards modern living. This move towards modernity however is laced with increased skepticism and contradictoriness as there is a paradoxical anxiety to clutch on to the old, indigenous ideas about frugality, hard work, the ideal position of women within the safe confines of home and above all, the defining essence of middle-class honor that rests on the concept of "respectability" or "*sharāfat*". The tenuous hold of the middle-class on such ideals is reflected in Manto's radio-dramas—not in the sense of a deep exploration, but in a curious

manner, throbbing just under the surface of hiswriting, here meant to provide entertainment to the masses. Symptomatic of his writings as a whole then, Manto is a "minor" writer not because there is a sustained critique of the exploitation of the most disenfranchised and marginalized but the fact that the mutual imbrications of categories such as public and private, home and the world, respectability and vulgarity, hero and villain, and moral and immoral, belies conviction in the dubious acts of the characters negotiating their middle-class identity. More importantly, it underscores the author's disquietude over the plausibility of their moral and ethical choices especially in a milieu animated by heated debates in the public sphere about modernity, national collective identity and clamoring for greater aesthetic focus on the problems of peasants, workers, students, women and other subaltern groups influenced by the Progressive, "brave air of socialism" (Abbas 97).

Manto, who qualified as a member of the Progressive Writers' Association for atleast a brief period, evinces an ambiguity about his true responsibility as an artist. While in stories such as "Mozel", there is a degree of heroism that characterizes acts of sacrifice of characters, those in radio-dramas are either defeatist in nature or cast purely in stereotypical mold, as the analysis of "*Kabootri*", "*Randhir Pahalwan*" and "*Jebkatra*" shows in this thesis. Moreover, even where the imperative seems a confrontation or challenge to particular social issues such as capital punishment ("*Jurm Aur Saza*"), alienation ("*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu*") or exploitation of editors ("*Journalist*"), the dramas fail to provide an alternative narrative as a resolution to the conflicts enumerated. It is as if the dramas are propelled by a strong desire to record stories but dwindle mid-way before they could put forth and confront the problematic they embody. Thus, instead of pursuing such crisis, the writer seems to be caught in ennui—a degree of incapability of responding to it in constructive terms. A careful consideration of what Manto believed to be the mission of a writer as well as the particular mode in which he struggled to compose and defend his literary creations also supports this argument.

A lot has been commented upon Manto's view of literature expressed in his essays, especially "*Adab-e-Jadeed*" (1944) delivered at Jogeshwari College, Bombay, where he spoke about the need and ability of literature to change with time and elaborated his thoughts on the much-debated idea of the 'progressive'. He has also drawn attention towards his ability to write with a white chalk against a black board to present the reality of a grim and dark world in a stark contrast. Defending himself against charges of obscenity in '*Tehreeri Bayān*', he confidently

declares, "his pen hardly errs on the side of indiscretion" (Wadhawan 97). Yet, Ashk, in his memoir, compares Manto to Anton Chekhov, whose influence on the former has been pointed out by various scholars, and wonders at the world of difference between Manto—the artist storyteller, and Manto—the man, the latter avoiding any discussion of his literary pursuits, the aims of his writings or even the logic guiding them; at best he would sidetrack or trivialize them in jokes, humor, wayward ramblings and anecdotes that would lack a semblance of seriousness that characterized his literary productions (62).

This ambiguity surfaces as a running thread across his letters, sketches, stories, and more pertinent to this discussion, his radio dramas. While he candidly admits to being a man of conflicting predispositions[5] who always walks on a tightrope, he is still proud of never losing his balance. On one hand, stories come naturally to him, as so evident in his prompt compositions at All India Radio, on the other hand, he desperately runs like a hunter after the ever-elusive words which fly away like butterflies ("Saadat Hasan" 219). More importantly, in his letter to Qasmi, he reveals himself to be a man troubled by the questions of human existence—"the complex that could not be expressed in words", occupying a liminal space between "the perfect comprehension of the outside world and its complete obscurity" at the next instance (186-7).[6] In the same letter, he also confesses about thinking deeply about the meaning of love, the presence of the opposite sex and the mystery of womanhood that preoccupied him, coming close to the lead character Sayyid's thoughts in the play "*Neeli Ragein*" ("Blue Veins"). The letter, expressive of the confusion and lack of self-confidence of the author serve as a foil against his grand claims in the studios of All India Radio—"Manto is an institution!" (qtd. in Ashk 56).

The repeated claims to truth-value of his writings, their avowed realism and the boldness of their author to present life "as it is" and not as it was or ought to be are, however, undercut by his warped notions about the role of an author and his writings. This terrible unrest coupled with deep realization about his weaknesses and a desire for "something else" in place of what inhabited his heart (187) is symptomatic of a deep crisis in his sensibility as an author. It seems that Manto oscillates between his intention of curating other imaginative worlds, a plethora of possibilities on one hand, and his inability to do so in truly enduring terms. In "*Kasauti*", Manto argues that each writer is born for a special purpose in life, which sustains and nourishes him

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[5]See Manto's own sketch, "Saadat Hasan" in Rakhshanda Jalil, ed. *Naked Voices: Stories and Sketches*. New Delhi: Roli, 2008. Print.

[6]All references to his letters are taken from *Dastavez* (Part IV) unless otherwise specified. Translations mine.

(61). He even emphasizes the transformative agenda of literature by arguing that it is not a disease but rather its alternative (61). Yet, his own belief in the responsibility of art to provide viable and parallel worlds strikes a discordant note when he identifies the objective of his "obscene" stories as nothing more than mirroring the facts of existence. It is, therefore, evident that the central problematic in Manto's works emerges out of this contradiction that relates to his true vocation as an artist. Despite the sophistication of his stories, and the unabashed assertion of what he believed were his principles as a writer, Manto seems to evade the full implications of the same. Manto's unsettled creative self, therefore, begs a deeper engagement in order to situate the fundamental crisis in his works as a function of his inability to overcome tremendous suspicion and loss of faith in possibilities out of the present degradation. There is an acceptance about the limited agency as an artist who could do nothing more than document the lives of misery and sorrow in his stories rather than responding to them with an overall transformative vision. It is in these contexts that a study of radio-dramas is proposed as a method to upend the lens through which Manto's aesthetic struggle with the concerns of his era can be understood.

In Minor Mode

One can sum up the objective of this dissertation as culling out of a certain neglected body of Manto's writing, viz. his radio dramas, as a presumably 'minor' but set into motion for a major task. This task is to understand Manto in an atypical fashion, one that dispenses away with his image as a "writer of low-life fictions whom conservative critics sometimes scorn for his choice of characters and milieus" (Rushdie 52). Afia Aslam perceptively argues, "The literary and academic conversation around Manto has tended to remain fixated on one or two aspects of his life and writing, mainly the way he wrote about Partition, women and sexuality, and the obscenity trials" (n.p.). At the core of this dissertation's hypothesis is an acknowledgement of great thematic and formal diversity in Manto's storytelling spread across an assortment of letters, stage plays, screenplays for movies, translation of novels, personality sketches and radio plays—a mélange that is dubbed, even by his most astute critics as his "minor writings" (Flemming, "Other Reflections" 131). In selecting his radio dramas composed mainly for All India Radio during his eighteen months' stay in Delhi from the beginning of 1940 to August 1942, there is an attempt to accord them a unique value whereby not only do they reveal something hitherto unknown or ignored about Manto and his celebrated works but also provide a methodological key in order to reinterpret them. In conceding to their inability to achieve their full potential,

there is something to be gained: an understanding of Manto's poetics that emerges not out of a simplistic dwelling on the unsavory or the squalid, nor out of an unabashed reformist impulse. Rather, it erupts out of his reservation about coming to terms with the contradictions of the bourgeoisie or middle-class that was increasingly becoming powerful in late colonial India. This very anxiety, as discussed above is related to his troubled understanding of his role as an author—one who is compelled to write stories about the circumstances he finds himself and his class in, and his inability to envision a larger programmatic impulse in his fictional endeavors. Looking askance at Manto through his radio dramas, the treatment of his characters in the situations they find themselves in, this dissertation benefits from the definition of "minor literature" as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986). As they spell out:

> The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature (18).

Manto's literature, and specifically his radio-dramas are an example of minor literature because he deterritorializes Urdu—a major language which in the 1930s and 40s was staking national-secular claims; it was the dominant language of the public sphere constituted by journals and magazines; All India Radio and Bombay film industry were almost overridden with the presence of Urdu writers, not to mention their predominance in what was celebrated as the literature borne out of All India Progressive Writers Movement (Mufti 180). Manto deterritorializes this language by writing a literature that sits at odds with any of such prevalent 'formulas'. Manto chooses to write in this language but injects it with certain degree of 'apartness'—a point of view of an outsider who is constantly negotiating the finitudes of literary movements and their ethos as also changing dispositions of the milieu he was a part of, i.e. the middle class. Such a reading allows us to grasp Manto's project as a political one, which however cannot be slotted into a particular ideological trend.

In a crucial departure from previous readings, therefore, this thesis designates Manto as a minor writer not because he composes tales about the minorities. Infact, as discussed earlier, a recurring anxiety about the middle-class's ethical and social dilemmas forms the core of his

artistic engagement to which he is unable to provide sustainable and wholesome alternatives. In his reading of a similar crisis in Amitav Ghosh's fiction, Makarand R. Paranjape redefines the constituent feature of a minor literature that stands for, among other things, "a collective of individual crises, not of individuals who form a collective" (370).As the analysis of his radio-dramas show, Manto creates a world of different characters—housewives, journalists, pickpockets, wrestlers, dancers, poets and artists, servants as also prostitutes negotiating their subject position in world, their crisis tying up to those of society at large. However, what we witness is an assemblage of individual acts of heroism, sacrifice and ambition that do not necessarily add up to a collective call or agenda of path breaking change. This does not amount to arguing that Manto has no investment in the cause of the lives he delineates, no worthy insights to offer. Keki N. Daruwalla correctly recognizes Manto's commitment to truth as absolute and opines that "His worst enemies can't accuse him of sectarianism. […] His heart was in the right place, and his scorn for the hypocritical and the sanctimonious was unmitigated" (56). But so as to be fair to the strengths and weaknesses of his writing, one could argue that this noble intention is not translated without recourse to stereotypes, romanticization, melodrama and to an extent, liberties with the overall logic of the narratives he curates.

It is precisely at these points where "a rupturing or heterogeneous line appears" that the critical thrust of a minor methodology rests (Deleuze and Guattari 7). It is by looking into such moments of evasion, as argued earlier, that one could identify "points of undoing" that lead us to effect a disruption in the conventional manner in which Manto is hitherto perceived. This reading is at a variance with much of what is made of Manto in academia and increasingly in popular space, for it neither aims to uncritically celebrate or condemn his literary creations, but rather tries to make "*a map, and not a tracing*" that "fosters connections between fields" of his various writings (*A Thousand Plateaus* 13-14). In Manto, we recognize a reluctance to posit wholesome propositions for the conundrums of his characters and thus an uncomfortable resorting to "an entire micropolitics of desire, of impasses and escapes, of submissions and rectifications" (*Minor Literature* 10). In the course of subsequent chapters, "Comedies", "Romances" and "Problem Plays", there is an attempt to break through these impasses, the deployment of these modes itself considered to be subterfuges that must be uncovered so as to stumble upon "multiple entryways" to understand how the rhizomatic map of Manto's literary and authorial sensibility is modified from the existing one (*A Thousand Plateaus* 13-14).

Most notably, the use of "minor" allows us to express or map the shift from Manto's synonymity with a handful of themes to one who is fascinatingly complex and defies convenient lessons. The word "minor" goes back to the Latin word "*minuere*" which means to lessen or to diminish. It designates something as inferior, unworthy, secondary, even second-rate and second-class. Manto's radio-dramas have been at the receiving end of such a negative critical appraisal not just by literary critics but by their author himself. This new approach to study Manto, therefore, not only challenges this pejorative denunciation of radio-dramas on account of their commercial, even 'low brow' status, but transforms this conventional identification as minor into a worthy methodological tool itself. It is through establishing the difference of these dramas, in respect of their themes as well as the author's way of tackling them, that these plays are proposed as a mode of active process, necessarily incomplete, at times rudimentary, but adding and transforming our knowledge about Manto and his works on the whole. It, perhaps, sheds greater light on the author who is deemed to be controversial and sleazy, in midst of a deep personal and aesthetic crisis, embodying within him several shades of artistic merit than those which are visible through mere readings of "*Toba Tek Singh*", "*Khol Do*" or "*Kali Shalwar*". To use Deleuze and Guattari's term, this effort in injecting a certain "adjacency"[7]of perspective in approaching Manto, so to speak, thus takes away from the discourse around him the perennial identifications as sleazy, iconoclast or a champion of minority rights.

Unveiling the Archive

A minor reading of radio-dramas is an exercise in textualizing them in order to rescue them from a pool of critical deficit that surrounds Manto's literary oeuvre. This critical deficit relates to two aspects: first, the reductive way in which the recurrent themes of his works have been identified, and secondly, the privileging of certain forms and genres of study as amenable to serious academic analysis. The latter is the case of radio-dramas, which by virtue of their generic nature and denunciation by Manto himself have been relegated to inattention. Radio is traditionally seen as a 'blind' medium that depends solely on one sensory faculty in order to create an aural experience. Its conventional perception as a medium defined by a lack affects the reputation of radio-drama as essentially an inferior form of dramatization than its counterparts on stage. To complicate matters, the debased, 'low brow' nature of radio dramas derives from its increasing popularity as a means of entertainment and nothing more, especially during the war

[7]*Towards a Minor Literature* 17.

time periods of history. In the Indian context, their roots in Parsi dramaturgy led to sharp bifurcation in social and moral attitudes around such productions, these being judged as merely commercial, catering to the 'philistine' tastes of an uncultured public. These prejudices along the trajectories of 'popular', 'literary', 'ordinary', 'major' and 'minor' have led to the marginalization of an entire genre that enjoyed great popularity in colonial India, in addition to providing a sought after work opportunity for some of the most celebrated authors such as Krishan Chander, Upendranath Ashk, N.M. Rashid and Manto, writing in the 1930s and 40s.

The dearth of secondary literature on Urdu radio-dramas in late colonial period owing to complications around canonization of forms is not the only impediment in their recuperation. There are also historical reasons that account for an'absent archive' around these productions. Narendra Mohan notes that the plays in Manto's time were produced 'live' and hence no oral recorded archive exists at the disposal of a researcher trying to study these dramas.[8]None other than Manto's grandniece, Ayesha Jalal, has confirmed the unavailability of original scripts that may be housed in All India Radio and Radio Pakistan archives.[9]Some commentators explain this loss as "a result of Partition" (Mullick, *Tangled Tapes* 74). Others blame it on the bureaucratic control and general lack of archiving culture that plagues a national institution such as All India Radio, adding to the difficulty of accessing even secondary material on the subject, let alone original scripts.[10] Although there are a series of recent productions of Manto's radio dramas emanating out of AIR and weekly broadcasts of his short stories, the inconsistency and the miniscule nature of such an 'archive' rules out their analysis from the perspective of performance.[11]However, this same logic lends an air of urgency to what is possible in terms of their interpretation—a textual research that is not only viable, but also crucial to open up the discursive space around authors like Manto, whose literary-oeuvre is as large as varied across genres.

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[8] Mohan, Narendra. Telephone interview. 26 December 2016.

[9] Jalal, Ayesha, Jaipur Literature Festival, 28 January 2016.

[10] Observation made by Santosh Nahar, Programme Executive at AIR.
Apart from recent productions, there is only one production of "*Randhir Pahalwan*", broadcast from Delhi in 1982, twenty seven years after Manto's death. This was when S.S.S. Thakur, who was associated with the AIR as late as 1975, was serving as Producer Emeritus (1982-85). Interestingly, it was Thakur who as a staff artist at AIR had lent his voice to the lead character of this play in its first ever production, working closely with Manto.
Nahar, Santosh. Personal Interview. 15 January 2016.

[11] Five productions of Manto's radio-dramas, viz. "*Jebkatra*", "*Randhir Pahalwan*", "*Kabootri*", "*Karwat*", and "*Hatak*" were broadcast from Bhopal in 2012, Manto's birth centenary year. I am in indebted to Kumud Malik of Commercial Division (Vividh Bharti) for sourcing the recordings of these dramas for me.

In this respect, this dissertation uses two key texts, namely Narendra Mohan's *Saadat Hasan Manto Ke Natak* (2012), and a dedicated volume of Manto's radio dramas in *Dastavez* (1993), composed by Balraj Menra and Sharad Dutt as its primary source. These are translations and transliterations, respectively, of select radio-dramas by Manto into Devnagari. While these texts provide meticulous information about the historical and bibliographic contexts about the collections of dramas published by Manto, remaining secondary works on the same are not just few and far between, but also highly descriptive and pejorative in their outlook[12]. There have been efforts to translate sundry dramas of Manto but except for a literary study of "*Iss Manjhdhar Mein*" by notable critic, Muhammad Umar Memon, there is much that is wanting in terms of critical contextualization and analysis of these dramas[13]. Memon's essay is valuable because it directs its attention towards the literary dimensions of the drama, analyzing it with respect to its classification as a 'melodrama' by Manto. Memon, through a close examination of the play, argues that Manto's use of melodrama is a subterfuge to deal with an uncomfortable and probably controversial subject such as adultery in marriage. Thus, the context of non-seriousness enables the author to fictionally present the liaison between a married woman and an unmarried man, to get "the message across but avoiding the dire consequences that might follow" ("A Note on Manto's "In This Maelstrom" 22). Memon's analysis of this drama is also inspirational for a research such as this, which hypothesizes the presence of impasses and deceptive covers that cast a shadow over the real concerns of these dramas. The chapters in this thesis draw upon this premise in order to categorize radio-dramas into "Comedies", "Romances" and "Problem Plays".

The classification of Manto's radio-dramas into "Comedies", "Romances" and "Problem Plays" is based on their heavy deployment of these 'formulas', presumably to cater to the

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[12] Leslie Flemming's essay, "Other Reflections: The Minor Writings of Saadat Hasan Manto" (1985) on Manto's minor writings is a good summarized entry-point into some of Manto's radio-dramas. Worth looking at is Ravikant's essay, "*Apun Ka Manto*" (2012) for insightful comments on a few plays from *Aao* series. There are dissertations in Urdu that have used Manto's radio drams as their subject. Though helpful, they are descriptive in nature and do not provide a worthy methodological structure in which to contextualize them. These are Tufail Azad's "*Urdu mein Radio Dramay Ka Aghaaz-o-Ertaqa*" (1992) and Simmi's "*Saadat Hasan Manto Ke Radio Dramon Ka Tanqeedi Mutala*" (2010).

[13] Khalid Hasan has translated into English Manto's stage drama, "Iss Manjhdhar Mein" as "In This Vortex". See Bitter Fruit (2008). Muhammad Umar Memon first published his essay "Melodrama or…? A Note on Manto's "In This Maelstrom" in 1982, later anthologized in the seminal book, *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto* (1997). He has published an English translation of this drama as a part of *My Name is Radha: The Essential Manto* (2015). Harish Narang has recently translated "*Aao Kahani Likhen*" as part of his anthology on Manto, titled as "Come Let's Write a Story" (2016).

broadcasting demands of a certain type of writing. Moreover, these classifications are also meant to designate Manto's use of these as narrative modes which allow him to conceal the ambiguous moral and ethical choices made by his characters. The chapter on "Comedies" examines Manto's highly popular series of one-act plays, titled *Aao*. This chapter situates the overall theme of the series revolving around the fabrication of sundry tasks, such as reading, playing cards, stealing, etc. within the overall social, cultural, commercial, gendered and familial discourses that animated bourgeois life in the contemporary era. It is argued that by focusing on the trivialities and humdrum of daily life, Manto explores the crisis amidst which Kishore and Lajwanti find their marriage. This crisis is evaded in an endless invention of 'tasks', the genuinely witty and satirical repartee that makes *Aao* into a successful broadcast production, while relieving Manto of the pressure to offer his own philosophy about modern marriage.

Similarly, in "Romances", the theme of love and impediments to its realization is only a veneer to successfully truncate the implications of moral, ethical and class conflicts that face their characters. This chapter studies six plays, viz. "*Intezar*", "*Kamra No.9*", "*Terhi Lakeer*", "*Jebkatra*", "*Randhir Pahalwan*", and "*Akeli*" to show how themes of alienation, defamiliarization in love, peasant rebellion, patriarchal authority and female desires are ultimately contained by the diversion of the narrative towards sentimental melodramatic and comic modes. By arousing sympathy for the oppressed characters, the narrative nevertheless does not provide any pointers for the alleviation of their misery, nor does it flesh out the compulsions of bourgeois characters that form the love-interest of the protagonists.

The last chapter, "Problem Plays", designate those bunch of dramas that articulate a specific social problem, such as female sexual exploitation, or oppression of the journalists ("*Journalist*"), or the position of prostitutes in society. This chapter, particularly, brings to focus the fact that even when Manto brings us one with the deplorable lives of the subaltern, his concern is truly in the unsorted moral and ethical positions of the bourgeoisie, that is unable to come to terms with its own fragmentary and fissured nature of reality. Thus, as the chapter shows, the prostitute's house and body exist solely as a sanctuary for those bourgeois individuals who are only trying to come to terms with either the experience of alienation in a modernizing world ("*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu*"), or their own conflicting notions about respectable female sexuality ("*Hatak*"), as well as their role in reformation of those they consider as debased ("*Karwat*"). Similarly, even when social problems such as rape, as in "*Jurm Aur Saza*", are

considered with an approach that seeks to tackle it, the narrative soon veers off towards a moralizing conclusion that builds around a love relationship between the victim and her well-meaning revenge hero.

In an attempt to contextualize literary and intellectual trends in which these radio-dramas proliferated, the first chapter provides a historical background of the development of radio broadcasting in colonial India, a crucial aspect of which was the association of biases and prejudices towards its ‘low brow’, pedestrian nature. This chapter locates the historically inferior position of Urdu drama, bearing heavy influence of Parsi drama companies, as well as the negation of radio drama as unamenable to methods of scholarly research. The rich historical, cultural, linguistic, political and literary contexts converge to add to our understanding about the position of Urdu radio drama within a milieu that throbbed with the influence of Progressive writing in prose and poetry as well as the developments in cinema. The chapter provides a brief survey of the popular radio productions of the time, including talks, historical drama, operas, etc. as also the position of Manto’s radio-writing within this milieu.

Overall, the study of these radio dramas as a specimen of ‘minor’ literature is meant to alter our understanding of Manto as an author and reinterpret his works in terms of their central problematic that cannot be conflated simply with minority chronicles. It raises the question of the validity of equating an author with particular genres and themes that are profitable for ideological agendas. In reading Manto as a “minor” writer, his much-discussed boldness of personality and writing is subjected to a sobering analysis. There is identification with subtle, even clandestine ways in which Manto circumvents his suspicion, critique and ultimately his defenselessness against the overwhelming reality of a class he was nevertheless a part of. His “minority” chronicles, though well intentioned, are part of a discursive texture that depends upon them for a flight from the crisis of the middle-class that Manto cannot pose resolutions for. At the same time, hardly content with the Progressive, socialist polarization between the bourgeoisie and the subaltern, Manto collapses these categories in order to rupture the façade of hypocrisy and irresponsibility across classes of people in a society. Manto’s radio-dramas, conventionally deemed lesser and “minor”, with their excessive romanticization, melodramatic conventions, comedies and unrealistic closures to social problems, therefore, alert us to a network of subterfuges in his corpus that bring us one with his unsettled dilemmas and a marginalized

world-view increasingly at odds with the turbulent intellectual, social and cultural trends of the times he lived in.

Chapter One

Locating Manto In the World of Radio

The particular socio-cultural and historical milieu in which radio dramas such as those of Manto proliferated was one that was informed by acute urgencies. The particular exigencies related to the nature of popular dramas and the lightening speed at which they were churned out linked up to the avowed purpose of radio broadcasting on the whole, especially during the war period in colonial India. As forms of entertainment, they were meant as diversion of the populace as also invested in their upliftment. Closely braided into this history, are messy debates about language, the strict control and censorship of broadcast material and the position of radio drama within it as well as in the larger ambit of Urdu drama. This chapter provides an overview of such linguistic, political and cultural developments within the history of radio broadcasting in India that provides a contextualized background in which one could locate Manto and his radio dramas. It also surveys the different kinds of radio productions that were commissioned by the All India Radio during this time and helps one to situate Manto's features, talks, comic one-act plays, romances, and dramas on topical issues within the contemporary trends in radio broadcasting. More importantly, it examines the reasons for bias surrounding these dramas as springing from a traditional disdain for the 'vulgar' origins of Urdu radio drama as well as the perceived handicapped nature of radio dramas. These prejudices account for a widening gap between the perception of the 'literary' and the 'popular' and the writers' preference for the former over the latter. The last section of this chapter ties up these various strands in the growth of radio drama in colonial India with Manto's career in the All India Radio. It describes his larger-than-life persona during his years in the world of radio that provides a fresh peek into his life, much more zealous and invested than his often talked about last phases of penury and alcoholism in Pakistan. It also surveys his dramatic oeuvre offering arguments about ways of 'reading' them.

I

The Beginnings of Radio Broadcasting in the Indian Subcontinent

On 23 July 1927, at the inauguration of the newly established Bombay station of the Indian Broadcasting Corporation, or the IBC as it was called, the then Viceroy Lord Irwin proclaimed:

> India offers special opportunities for the development of broadcasting. Its distances and wide spaces alone make it a promising field. In India's remote villages there are many who, after the day's work is done, find time hangs nearly enough upon their hands, and there must be many officials and others whose duties carry them into out-of-way places where they crave for the company of their friends and the solace of human companionship. There are of course, too, in many households, those whom social custom debars from taking part in recreation outside their own homes. To all these and many more broadcasting will be a blessing and a boon of real value. Both for entertainment and for education its possibilities are great, and yet we perhaps scarcely realize how great they are. Broadcasting in India is today in its infancy, but I have little doubt that before many years are past, the numbers of its audience will have increased tenfold, and that this new application of science will have its devotees in every part of India (qtd. in *Report* 1).

Recognizing the need and scope of the newly emergent wireless medium, Lord Irwin's vision of broadcasting in India spelt out some of the concerns that were to shape its turbulent early history bogged down by financial constraints, exorbitant cost of radio licenses that kept it out of bounds for a considerable population, and the suitability of its contents for the Indian populace. Its possibilities as a medium of instruction and education, as Lord Irwin points out to, continues to guide a range of its contents and policies and in fact contributed to the early debates about the preferred model of broadcasting—commercial or public service.

H.R. Luthra in his book *Indian Broadcasting* discusses the debates dating back to 1922 that raged over commercial and centralized models of broadcasting. He specifies that in 1922, the Department of Industries and Labour appealed to the Government of India advocating the introduction of "free broadcasting" as opposed to "toll broadcasting" in order to support commercial advertising, competitive fee charges levied on each broadcast transmitting station and receiving sets and ultimately, generating a good sum of revenue through sale of licenses (4). This call for a commercial broadcasting license was directly in opposition to the more stable, centralized, licensed monopoly along the lines of the "British model" envisioned by John Reith, General Manager of British Broadcasting Company.

Alasdair Pinkerton in his formidable essay "Radio and the Raj: Broadcasting in British India (1920-1940)" quotes the private correspondence between Reith and the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead in which the former, perhaps suitably cautioned by the ascendency of the anti-British sentiment in India, opines that "The erection of broadcasting stations would provide a connecting link between all parts of the Indian Empire, bringing the most remote outlying districts into close touch with principal cities" (qtd. in Pinkerton 170). Sharing this view of the monopolistic control of information and broadcast material, Lord Birkenhead too saw the benefits of this "public service" model that enabled reaching a much wider audience, notably, the rural population comprising Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Bengali-speaking inhabitants who not only needed to be educated or entertained in their vernacular tongue but also be strategically controlled through government propaganda in the face of growing resistance to the State. Nevertheless, on 13 September 1926, the agreement was signed between Government of India and the IBC—the latter described by Eric Dunstan (chief executive of the IBC) in his letter to Birkenhead as a "genuine Indian company" under which the government gave it "a five-year monopoly and promised to pay it 80% of all license fees received on account of wireless stations in British India (excluding Burma) from the date the broadcasting service started" (qtd. in Pinkerton 173).

Soon after its inception and the subsequent inauguration of stations at Bombay and Calcutta, the Company ran into problems, chief of which were financial exigencies. To begin with, the number of radio licenses had plummeted by 1929 while the sale of wireless equipment too was not considerable. A fair amount of expenditure incurred on the setting up of the radio stations along with declining revenue became a serious concern for the company. Pinkerton suggests that

> The IBC's broadcasts suffered both in terms of 'range' and 'reach'. While the costs of expanding wireless networks beyond the urban centres of Bombay and Calcutta was prohibitively expensive, the root of the problem lay in the IBC's failure to achieve and consolidate sustainable audiences…in those spaces where their transmissions were already audible" (174).

Thus, what started out as a pioneering effort to capture the airwaves via commercially sustained model faced the brunt of being localized to the English and westernized Indians failing to capture the attention of a large mass of population that could neither afford to pay the exorbitant radio

fee nor could understand its sophisticated content. The company ultimately went bankrupt in 1930, taken over by the Government of India under the Department of Industry and Labour, newly designated as The Indian State Broadcasting Service (ISBS) inaugurated on 1 April 1930. Overcoming its initial hiccups and fears of another dissolution, ISBS witnessed increased sales of licenses touching over 8000, steadily rising from 1932 onwards till the end of 1937, bolstered by the introduction of the BBC's Empire Service in 1932 and the able leadership of Lionel Fielden between 1935 and 1940.

Lionel Fielden as the Controller of Broadcasting thoroughly committed himself to revitalizing radio broadcasting in India, to make it robust, entertaining and relevant for the Indian masses. His *Report on the Progress of Broadcasting in India: Upto the 31st March 1939* (1940) and his autobiography *The Natural Bent* (1960) are invaluable documents about the functioning of radio broadcasting, the types of programmes and policies governing them, radio-stations, technical and administrative information, licensing regulations and most importantly, his vision about the aims and purpose of radio broadcasting in India. His ideas were to lay the foundation for his successors—the Bokhari brothers under whose charismatic leadership, artists like Manto and others became increasingly popular.

Nihal Ahmad in *A History of Radio Pakistan* (2005) suggests that Lionel Fielden successfully managed to bring together divergent approaches to broadcasting, balancing entertainment with a social and moral edge. According to him, Fielden was "in favor of raising public taste and appreciation of finer programming without losing the interest of the average listener" (32). This rings true when Fielden writes:

> It is clear that our knowledge of the art of broadcasting, which has been in existence for less than twenty years, is as yet imperfect, and that many problems of its proper use and production are still, therefore, matters of conjecture…Like the films, it has to make its appeal to the masses, and not to the selected few; but unlike them, it has assumed distinct and frequently official functions of information and education, and not entertainment alone (17).

Fielden strove to harmonize these objectives through the recruitment of ideal broadcasting staff—"men with sufficient integrity to rise above class or caste or communal jealousies", men who were "generalists" rather than "specialists" adept at handling numerous types of programme assignments, constantly "adjusting to the conflicting claims [of the audience] as best they may"

(qtd. in Luthra 123). It was under Fielden that recruitments for the Delhi station took place and among several distinguished personalities, A.S. Bokhari, Z.A. Bokhari and N.M. Rashid became names to be long associated with radio broadcasting in India as well as Pakistan. Within a year of assuming his charge as the Controller of Broadcasting, Fielden had brought about re-designation of the ISBS as "All India Radio" on 8 June 1936 that made into a catchy acronym as the AIR. The Delhi station went on air on 1 January 1936 and A.S. Bokhari became its first Station Director on 14 March 1936. About two months later, he assumed his charge as the Deputy Controller of Broadcasting with his brother replacing him as the Station Director of Delhi. They were together nicknamed as the Bokhari Brothers' Corporation (BBC) and invited numerous controversies primarily relating to language debates, their 'anti-Hindi' stance as well as favoritism in selecting people for prominent positions in the radio industry. Note must also be made of Rashid Ahmed, one of A.S. Bokhari's students at Government College, Lahore, who was first chosen as the Director of Programmes (Delhi station) before becoming the Director of Lahore radio station in later part of 1937. Both Bokhari and Ahmed were ultimately to play an instrumental role in Manto's alienation from the world of radio, both prior to and after the Partition in 1947.

Censorship, Control and Language Debates

Since its inception, radio broadcasting has been bogged down by questions of control and censorship of various materials emanating from it. In its initial days, debates regarding the Reithian public service model versus commercial nature of broadcasting in India also influenced official concerns about the extent of censorship of broadcast material. Official control of all broadcast programmes reached its peak during the war years beginning 1939 onwards in the wake of powerful propaganda from Japan and Germany compounded by threatening clandestine broadcasts closer at home by members of Congress Socialist Party. H.R. Luthra states that around 1926, there already were enquiries from India Office regarding restrictions imposed on the dissemination of political matter with proposals for the appointment of senior police officers or collectors of districts as censoring officers at the local level (37). Furthermore, in order to effectively control the menace of piracy, the government passed the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act (1933) making such persons liable to imprisonment or heavy fine as those who did not possess license for their wireless transmitter as per the provisions of Indian Wireless Act, 1885.

The culture of vigilantism in Indian broadcasting was only to heighten in the following years despite Lionel Fielden's more sympathetic attitude towards freedom of broadcasting political matters. Nationalist wave in the country that had fervently begun with Civil Disobedience Movement under Gandhi in 1930s had completely overtaken public opinion in its direction by 1940s with Quit India Movement further making the Government increasingly anxious about the catastrophic possibilities of oppositional discourse emanating out of radio. Fielden's attempts to broadcast speeches of Indian political figures such as Nehru and Gandhi was vehemently refused not only by the colonial government which severely opposed any subversive discourse on air but also the nationalists such as Gandhi himself who were suspicious of radio as an instrument of imperial control and power. E.M. Jenkins, Deputy Secretary Department of Industries and Labour in a note dated 13 January 1936, to the Home Department ordered "a very careful scrutiny" of talks and miscellaneous programs given by government servants and a strict censorship of all political broadcasts in order to keep controversies, debates and discussions "within reasonable bounds" (qtd. in Gupta, *Power, Politics and the People* 466). Joselyn Zivin succinctly explains the confusion characterizing the government's policy regarding broadcasting in this context—"characteristic of the Government's attempts to act as if it were initiating, rather than reacting to, India's evolving public culture, officials intended to control tightly what might be broadcast while still acting as if the radio was evidence of imperial progress" ("'Bent'" 199).

Despite all their efforts to wrest control over the airwaves—from banning broadcast of patriotic songs and Indian national anthem, reviews of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* to fund curtailing of political speeches and lectures, the government saw itself grossly challenged both on the domestic as well as international front.[14] Although the central government penalized public dissemination of German and Russian broadcasts by private license holders in their neighborhoods, radio waves often gulled the authorities, rendering all their efforts to literally and figuratively 'jam' radio signals of Axis powers hopelessly futile. The BBC surely started its Empire Service programs broadcast not only in English but also the Indian vernaculars such as Hindustani, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali and Gujarati, but its efficacy remained a suspect. While S.N. Roy in 1940 officially confirmed to the wide listenership of German broadcasts in English

[14] See Gupta, Partha Sarathi.*Power, Politics and the People: Studies in British Imperialism and Indian Nationalism*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2002. 447-80. Print. Contains discussion on the controversy over review broadcasts of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and Eugene Lyon's *Assignment in Utopia*.

and Hindustani in India (qtd. in Gupta, 469), underground broadcasts started by radical leaders of the Congress such as Ram Manohar Lohia and Hindustani broadcasts on Azad Hind Radio from Berlin were also reported. Zivin has accurately explained the situation:

> Indeed, the very instrument of modernity that Fielden brought with him posed great dangers to imperial prerogatives. The distances that broadcasting could cover and the boundaries it could transgress, the mass society which it was expected to cultivate, and the novel expertise it demanded…all violated what little was left of the 'Imperial Idea' (196).

Radio, therefore, became an integral medium upon which challenges to the imperial authority of Britain were enacted out. Oppositional voices became increasingly accessible to the Indian public in the form of Radio Moscow and German broadcasts with nationalists under Gandhi prohibiting its use while radicals trying to jeopardize imperial propaganda through underground broadcasts. The predominance of nationalist hegemony, the growing power of its international opponents and the poor administrative situation at All India Radio with no clear-cut policy on broadcasting compelled it to commission programs of high entertainment value which could wrest the imagination of people preventing them to tune on to rival stations and reposing their faith in the noblesse of the government that was to educate, entertain and uplift the masses.

The bureaucratic control over the airwaves was not just a matter of official discussion and correspondence but also defined the daily workings at the radio stations—the latter's agency being closely scrutinized in terms of its recruitments and broadcast material. According to Zivin, it was not just Fielden who as the Controller of Broadcasting would be censured for his close proximity to Indian nationalists such as Gandhi and Nehru as well as his attempts to schedule programs with and about them; all recruitments at AIR headquarters in Delhi and at provincial stations would be subject to similar restrictions in order to keep such dubious connections at bay (206). In addition to the advance schedule of talks sent to the provincial governments for their record, 'cut-out' switches were used as emergency devices to switch off objectionable programs in the middle of their live broadcast (Luthra 127-8). It is in this context that growth and nature of not only radio programs but even music, talks and discussions as broadcast material can be studied as a cultural milieu to situate Manto's and his contemporaries' dramas.

Drama on Air

Lionel Fielden in his *Report* states "the experience of All India Radio shows that successful radio plays, and even successful dialogues attract more appreciation from listeners than any other item. Even in the villages this holds true" (31). The popularity of radio plays, or broadcast drama as it was called could be gauged from the response of approximately 1500 license-holders in and around Delhi in 1936 who almost "unanimously expressed a general desire for good drama in comparison to talks, music and news" (Fielden 71-2). Several factors contributed towards the craze for broadcast dramas and even if its beginnings in the Indian subcontinent were slow and haphazard, it soon became the favorite means of entertainment for the radio listeners and a lucrative career for a large number of artists who became increasingly aware of the possibilities afforded by this new medium.

Sisir Kumar Das in the *History of Indian Literature:1911-1956* suggests that:

> One of the most conspicuous features of Indian literature of this century is the numerous configurations of the existing literary forms as well as the growth of new forms. This was caused mainly by the endless experimentations by the writers themselves and also because of the interactions between the genres indicating new possibilities (173).

This holds true for radio-drama, which in its infancy bore heavy influence of Parsi dramas extremely popular in their time attracting the audience through melodrama, romance and songs enacted on the proscenium stage. Fielden tells us that weekly theatrical nights were adapted for radio in states like Bengal since 1928 but almost all of these theatrical productions tended to be three hours' long transferring stage techniques on to the radio (31). He also draws attention to the meager rewards at the radio in comparison to stage drama, which could explain lack of motivation and effort on the part of playwrights. Gradually, however, the advent of sound films in 1931 which strongly challenged live theatres, combined with the renewed vigor in the radio industry with Fielden and later Bokhari brothers at its helm, ensured that radio-drama received considerable air-time, attention and interest of dedicated artists. Writing for popular new media such as radio and cinema flourished in full swing along with "literary" productions such as the short stories, poetry and essays in magazines and journals, often by the same artists.

Leonard Maltin in his book *The Great American Broadcast* (2000) suggests that "In the earliest days of broadcasting, there were no rules, and there certainly were no precedents. No one

had ever devoted themselves to the purpose of providing hours of daily entertainment" (12). As we have seen, this held true in the Indian context especially in the early years of radio broadcasting. However, as the popularity of radio-dramas grew, there came to be committed discussions on the craft of producing radio-dramas as a distinct form of art. In July 1936, there was a radio play writing competition organized on the recommendation of the Delhi Advisory Council in order to meet dearth of good radio scripts (*Report* 77). Although, none of the scripts could merit an award, there ensued a crop of writers whose plays were aired repeatedly from AIR stations and received mention in Fielden's *Report*. Among them were Hindustani plays such as Imtiaz Ali Taj's *Qurtaba Ka Qazi*, the highly successful series of satires on the English stage namely *Moonshine Theatrical Company of Kathgodam*, a Punjabi play named *Ankhen* by Rafi Peer, Manto's *Us Ka Ramu* and *Aao Kahani Likhen* and one of the most successful plays of Urdu drama-*Inder Sabha* (33-4). Upendranath Ashk wrote *Sat Khel* while Krishan Chander composed *Darwaza* (1937) specifically for radio broadcasts, making these plays instant hits with the audience.

The introduction of radio broadcasting engendered the publication of a spate of radio journals such as *Betar Jagat* in Bengali (1929), *Vanoli* in Tamil (1938), *Vani* in Telegu (1938), *Awaz* in Urdu (1938), *Sarang* in Hindi (1938) and *Indian Radio Times*, later renamed as *Indian Listener* in English (1935). These journals, especially, the *Indian Listener* carried numerous articles on the popularity and experimentation of radio-drama explicating its form and uniqueness to a wide reader base. In addition to these articles, it also carried the detailed schedule of radio broadcasts highlighting popular ones with brief synopses. Richard J. Hand and Mary Traynor in *The Radio Drama Handbook* suggest, "The immediacy of radio meant, perhaps, that everything [now] had the potential to be "dramatic"—not just the obviously dramatic genres" (9). A careful survey of the issues of *Indian Listener* reveals that the dramatic quality of radio broadcasting, indeed, became the defining feature of various on-air programmes. This spirit of experimentation received further impetus in the context of war propaganda in order to influence public opinion in favor of the British as well as to repose their faith in radio as an instrument of colonial modernity.

Serious talks on the subject of war such as E.M. Forster's on Nazi culture and Manto's mentor A.A.Bari's review of world affairs of 1940 in Hindustani continued to be aired in addition to the more innovative "sound news" or "news plays" which "broadcast in dramatic

form the new items of the day”.[15]The broadcast of world affairs in a dramatized form became popular not only in English but also in the vernaculars such as Hindustani, Marathi and Gujarati and gave rise to the experimental feature series called “Playhouse” broadcast first from Bombay. Playhouses, whose production demanded a space of seven studios, are described as a “theatre on the air, complete with audience, interval, orchestra and villain. In it is presented a variety of oriental and classical plays based on current news and world affairs”.[16]Popular ones included reworking of *Sindbad the Sailor* and *The Three Musketeers* that made use of verse rhythms in dialogues, satirical commentary on contemporary morals and clever mixing of sound effects and ran for about forty-five minutes of airtime.[17]

Initiatives were taken to cater to the audience’s penchant for musical dramas and melodramas that had been popularized by Parsi and Urdu theatre. Mirza Amanat’s *Indra Sabha* (1853) composed in verse with a lavish spread of songs was considered quite suitable for radio and was occasionally broadcast as the “earliest Urdu musical comedy”.[18] In 1941, the *Indian Listener* published an article “Indian Opera” which announced the introduction of operas in Indian vernaculars adapted for the radio such as *Anasuya: A Short Radio Opera in Four Parts* (broadcast on 4 April 1939) and the more famous, *Raqqasa* broadcast from Lucknow starring Umra Zia Begum, Akhtara Fyzabadi, Mohammad Ashraf and Gauhar.[19] Folk tales, fantasies and melodramas made up for a large chunk of radio broadcasts with Pandit Hari Chander Akhtar giving a talk on *Qissa Hatim Tai* and interestingly, Krishan Chander parodying *Arabian Nights* in a talk broadcast from Lahore.

Commenting on the early development of radio-drama in the West, Hand and Traynor argue for the significance of bed-time storytelling for children over radio as not only serving the purpose of “technology as babysitter” but also “helping to improve the quality of day-to-day life of families” ultimately contributing to the evolution of radio drama as a form (14). This is particularly true in the Indian context, where All India Radio was making concerted efforts to

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[15] *Indian Listener*. 22 Oct.1940: 1615. Print.
An article named ‘Background to the War’ published in the same issue gives information about a series of programmes broadcast to elucidate contemporary situation on the occasion of the first anniversary of the war. In addition to talks by Forster and Bari, it also mentions sound-news written and presented by Aubrey Menen and John Rowdon. For Bari’s talk aired in December 1940 from Delhi, see *Indian Listener* 22 Jan. 1941: 37. Print.

[16] “Theatre on the Air.” *Indian Listener*. 22 Dec. 1940: 5. Print.

[17] Ibid.

[18] *Indian Listener*. 22 Dec.1938. Print.

[19] While “Anasuya” was broadcast on 4 April 1939, “Raqqasa” went on air on 25 February 1941. See *Indian Listener*. 22 Mar.1939. Print; *Indian Listener*.7 Feb. 1941. Print.

appeal to the sensibilities of the indigenous population both for entertainment as well as for social upliftment. Children's programs like *Ek Tha Raja* and *Ladio Ploglam* composed in Gujarati and Marathi were a daily feature of radio broadcasts and were also liberally advertised.[20] Women's programs such as Janak Kumari Zutshi's *For Women Only* dwelled on the characteristics, problems and issues of colonial women.[21] The impetus to and demand for "family-oriented" programs and those relevant to women would have certainly influenced Manto whose *Aao* and *Teen Auratein* series seem to be ostensibly about middle-class households and the nitty-gritties of everyday life. Manto's *Aao Jhoot Bolen* was publicized as "A Hindustani Sketch by S.H. Manto" and was broadcast from Bombay on 2 April 1939.[22]

Indian Listener tells us that another type of programs that attracted a huge listenership were "topical plays" that responded to the contemporary interest in melodrama. Playwrights such as Rafi Peer and Raja Mehdi Ali Khan of Lucknow wrote features that combined music, commentary and drama as well as radio-dramas proper on ancient fables, romances and the lives of famous personalities. Rafi Peer's *Fareb-i-Ajal* and *Qahira Ki Shaam*—the latter set in Cairo revolving around the love-story of Haseena and her dutiful lover, Subedar, were particularly popular and were aired from Delhi in 1940.[23] Manto's series of topical plays later published as *Janaze* became instant hits. *The Death of Shahjahan*, *The Death of Timur* and *The Death of Babar*—all received description in the *Indian Listener* and were broadcast from Delhi in 1941.

Radio Drama: Forgotten or Minor?

The spawning of a spate of radio programmes that ranged from music to talks to dramas and features with the latter being the most cherished of all by the audience, ushered in an era of unparalleled excitement bringing in technologized form of entertainment right into the domestic realm. Would it not justifiably make us ponder over the absence of any discussion of this form that continues to occupy a significant place in Indian and Pakistani broadcasting formats but has lost much of its artistic vigor and appeal? The need is to account for the reasons for its dismissive appraisal and collective amnesia that can be traced along two trajectories—the literary and the cultural, both influencing one another in the traditional association of Urdu drama with the libertine and the debauched. Its corrupt status gets further hit with Urdu getting mired in

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[20] *Indian Listener*. 22 Mar.1939: 500. Print.
[21] *Indian Listener.* 22 Jan.1939. Print.
[22] Ibid. 6
[23] *Indian Listener*. 22 Feb. 1941. Print.

language controversies that narrowly conflated them with communal identities, interestingly with radio at the center of these developments. Related to these are the apprehensions regarding radio itself as a lesser medium, a notion that has contributed to a lack of recognition of its role in revitalizing drama and its influence on mediums such as television. These shared historical, cultural and literary contexts enable us to situate Manto's plays in their modes of production and reception.

Literary critics have pointed out the misguided perception of Urdu drama as obscure, deficient in realism and short-lived as responsible for its historically minor position within Urdu literature (Narang, *Biswi Shatabdi* 185; Flemming 131). Beginning as translations of classical Sanskrit dramas such as Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, Urdu drama embraced performative forms such as the *nautanki*, *ramlila*, recitals and imitations from the episodes of the Ramayana and various other legends. Literary historians opine that since Islamic orthodoxy prohibited an engagement with any type of imitative arts such as sculpture, painting, music, dance and drama, the latter had to bear the brunt of literary secondariness (Saxena 346). It continued, however, under the patronage of Wajid Ali Shah (1822-87) whose court was steeped in opulence, luxury and newer forms of entertainment. It was Shah's readiness to allow his courtiers to dabble in 'foreign' art forms such as the opera that gave rise to the supremely successful *Indra Sabha* composed by Mirza Amanat in 1853 staged at Qaisar Bagh replete with songs, dance sequences and opulent poetry.

Gradually, Urdu drama received considerable impetus from the profit-driven Parsis who with their travelling drama troupes established drama companies in Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, most notable of which were Seth Pestonji Framji's 'Original Theatrical Company' and Agha Hashar's Indian Shakespeare Theatrical Company. These dramas, though huge commercial successes, invited serious criticism for lacking any literary or aesthetic merit as well as their cultural association with the less 'respectable'. Saksena not only laments the absence of any dramatic tradition that Urdu could have inherited from Sanskrit or Persian, but also dismisses Parsi theatre as "crude and immature performances" which could not impress an audience that was growing fond of English theatres (353). Quite severe than Saksena is Mohammad Sadiq who almost with an unabashed elitist disdain rebukes Urdu dramatists as "needy adventurers" devoid of creativity, the actors for these plays "recruited from lower ranks of society" by the licentious

owners and patrons who were "dissolute young men, prostitutes, rakish members of the aristocracy…hooligans, and city riff-raff" (398).

The literary and cultural association of Urdu drama of the Parsi companies with the commercial and the marketplace could be read simultaneously with the development and popularization of new media such as cinema and radio, which further bolstered contesting notions of bourgeois respectability, aesthetic standards and the legitimacy of Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani. The last of these, namely, the debate over languages was to animate aesthetic projects both in radio and cinema where Perso-Arabic Urdu indexed a Muslim identity while Sanskritic Hindi became symbolic of the Hindus. The common terrain of Hindustani that comprised a mixed form of everyday Hindi and Urdu connoted not just a common language but more importantly worked, as Madhumita Lahiri suggests, as an idiom of Hindu-Muslim unity, "an aspiration…the dream of a shared, syncretic culture, crafted from the speech genres of everyday life" (60).

Hindustani was bogged down by problems of definition right from the start. The Orientalists such as Gilchrist tried to "formalize" it through dictionaries, while the nationalists such as Nehru wanted to create a "Basic Hindustani", a project that was similar to the creation of Hindi-Urdu lexicon under the auspices of the AIR.[24] The cultural and linguistic fluidity that Hindustani represented was, however, being increasingly rejected by hardcore practitioners of Hindi and Urdu dismissing the project of Hindustani as erroneous, ill founded in facts and history. Both cinema and radio tried to respond to the politics of language in their own ways with the former, according to critics such as Lahiri, truly embracing Hindustani as an ethos of shared values and culture with its dialogues and songs seeped in a colloquial mixture. Radio, on the other hand, could not sustain Hindustani because "all programming was carefully written (and censored) before being broadcast, the language of radio became inextricably tied to that of literary language: the aural form of an originally textual linguistic expression" (81).

[24] In 1785, John Gilchrist published Hindustani dictionary while in 1800, efforts were made to canonize it at Fort William College, Calcutta. Gradually, Hindustani became the subject of nationalist debates with Gandhi declaring it as the lingua franca of India at The All-India Hindustani Prachar Sabha, Wardha in 1945. Hindustani along with Hindi and Urdu was used to label the titles of both silent films and talkies. Nehru advocated for a Basic Hindustani consisting of about a thousand words strategically chosen as best representative of both the languages. Fielden in his *Report* testifies to Hindustani as alanguage of convenience that would at best keep communal controversies at bay with audience deciding the language of particular programs as Hindior Urdu. Responding to the languagedebates, Hindi writer Saccidananda Hirananda Vatsyayan 'Ajneya' and Urdu author Chaudhuri Hassan Hasrat were commissioned to construct a pool of precise Hindustani words that would ultimately form an All India Radio Lexicon.

Lahiri's assessment of the medium of radio as adverse to the project of Hindustani and the values it represented can also be attributed to the biases of those at the helm of broadcasting. While the apex power at the top, represented by Fielden, seemed to project a 'neutral' view of Hindustani coupled by factors such as availability of artists in a particular language, area of broadcast etc. influencing it, the Bokhari brothers, though well-versed with language philosophies of I.A. Richards and Ogden, engendered orthodox and elitist views about Urdu as the language of prestige, sophistication and knowledge. Pitras Bokhari's younger brother, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Bokhari in his autobiography *Sarguzasht* has denounced Hindustani as the language of the Congress and promoted only chaste Urdu full of Perso-Arabic vocabulary as the ideal language of broadcasting—a language for which only Muslims were best-suited to compose and broadcast.[25] This could well-explain the presence of several Urdu writers such as Upendranath Ashk, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Chaudhuri Hassan Hasrat, Imtiaz Ali Taj and Manto in the world of radio broadcasting.

This biased and unitary linguistic discourse emanating from the world of the airwaves did not go unnoticed by the Hindi literati, and public in general. Demands were made to make the language of radio simple and comprehensible to the maximum number of listeners. Dularelal Bhargava, editor of Hindi journals such as *Madhuri* (1922-50) and *Sudha* (1927-41) advocated a more conciliatory attitude towards language and more importantly, drew attention to inaccuracies relating to Hindi pronunciation as well as absurd expressions such as "*Begum* Sita" or Urdu greeting "*adab arz*" on the occasion of Hindu festivities (qtd. in Nijhawan 87). As a remedial measure, broadcasts on radio attempted to clarify the nature and meaning of Hindustani by organizing a series of six talks under the series "What is Hindustani?" The speakers, Dr. Tara Chand, Maulvi Abdul Haq, Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Zakir Husain, and M. Asaf Ali tried to chart out the complicated terrain of multiple and mixed languages questioning "Are these [words] in Hindi or Urdu or Persianised Hindi or Hindified Urdu? Which words would you retain replace, modify or banish?"[26] Although the speakers agreed that the language of radio should be closer to the

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[25] In "Urdu on the Radio", Tariq Rahman discusses Z.A. Bokhari's views on the issue of language as well as language in radio before and after Partition. See Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu* 358-65.
[26]*Indian Listener*. 7 Feb.1939. Print.
While the advertisement of the talk schedule in the *Indian Listener* spells out the above mentioned names of speakers, Z.A. Bokhari in *Sarguzasht* claims Pandit Brij Mohan Datatria Kaifi as the speaker, instead of Acharya Narendra Dev (qtd. in Rahman 354).

commonly understood, spoken language not only of the cities but also of rural India, for Bokhari, according to Rahman, it still remained a battle in which only Urdu won (354).

However, not much could be remedied on the language front during this phase with the unperturbed Bokhari determined to make radio broadcasting more and more literate and Urdu-dominated further adding to the already growing demand for separate radio broadcasts in Urdu and Hindi realized around 1945. Meanwhile, the Urdu journal of AIR, *Awaz*, had already been bifurcated into Urdu-Nastaliq and Hindi-Nagari in 1938, the latter being named as *Sarang*.

With its unique blending of various shades of Urdu and Hindi, Hindustani as a hybrid form posed a challenge to rigid insistence upon 'chaste' versions of these languages that could pedestalize them as erudite, elevating and highbrow. As Kathryn Hansen has pointed out, Parsi playwrights in the mid-nineteenth century had turned their gaze towards Urdu—"the cosmopolitan version of Hindustani" towards the north because not only did it enrich their plays with rich poetry and music but also the fact, that advocacy of 'chaste' or 'proper' Urdu "marked playwrights as erudite and bolstered the claims of a popular theatre to bourgeois respectability" (82). Although at this stage, the move was driven more by commercial and aesthetic concerns rather than linked to specific communal identities, it was just a matter of time that language not only became the domain of cultural, aesthetic and linguistic rivalry, but also one between different religious communities. Nevertheless, despite the prevalent linguistic currents and counter-currents, it was only in the realm of popular culture with its harnessing of the oral and colloquial forms of expression, that Hindustani could realize much of its potential.

Cinema and radio's negotiations with language gave rise to a new type of filmic or radio writing that saw 'serious' writers with sufficient literary and aesthetic backing behind them to experiment and create new trends in language. Amidst numerous language controversies, Bokhari articulated the difficulty that surrounded AIR in recruiting writers could churn out dramatic material suited for this relatively new and experimental medium of radio. He considered the inappropriateness of the type of dramas written by, for instance, Agha Hashr Kashmiri and, therefore, pondered over the budding genre of radio-dramas in *Sarguzasht*, "Who would write them? Who would format them? Who would produce them? (qtd. in Narang 211). Bokhari's speculations about the viability of this new form of broadcast drama were not unwarranted, for writers like Ashk and Manto who witnessed the most stable phases of their careers in radio, apparently could not regard it fully as an art and often differentiated it along

with their work in film from the socially-relevant and artistically-superior 'literature'. Linked to their notions of what constituted 'literature' was also the unique status of radio as a medium that relied solely on the extension of one sensory faculty, that of the sound, to curate an imaginary experience.

Ashk in his memoir about Manto, *Manto: Mera Dushman*, argues that an ideal drama is one that can be adequately performed on the stage (54). He believes that although the popularity of radio-drama was exceedingly higher in comparison to stage-plays in pre-partition days and carried an immense potential for experimentation, what it lacked was originality. He argues that stage dramas, with proper modifications, could be adapted successfully for radio, as surely Manto did with some of his productions and therefore did not demand special effort or talent (54). Ashk's notions about the aesthetic durability of radio drama as a form were not one of their kinds. Dermot Rattigan has argued that radio as a medium has often been wrongly dismissed as "blind" or "invisible", as the "embryonic precursor of television drama incapable of visual development, or an incapacitated vocal rendition of live stage drama" (120). The challenges of execution and of making this new dramatic form intelligible to mass audience was recognized by none other than Lionel Fielden himself, who in his *Report* enumerates some of his concerns:

> Broadcasting is both public and intimate. The voice addresses millions, but speaks only to the unit of two or three…the broadcast speaker, musician or programme maker must project his material towards an audience already engaged in reading, writing, talking, eating, dozing, working, dressing or cooking…thus in broadcasting many accepted standards fail. The ear divorced from the eye makes new demands. The infectious enthusiasm of an audience is absent. In the intimacy of the listener's home, the great singer, so popular at music conferences has not after all so good a voice, the orator who so easily sways a crowd becomes a bellowing nuisance, the academician who holds so many degrees is unexpectedly dull and tedious. The honours of broadcasting go only to those who can present their material effectively (17-18).

In addition to the persistent pressure of arresting audience's attention, Fielden also highlights the problem of recognizing and sustaining talent that could experiment and perfect the new technique of working solely with words and sounds. This was because of meager monetary incentives in radio in its early days (31). An article titled "The Voice of the Actor" in *Indian*

Listener further pointed out to the characteristics of radio-drama which came "somewhat in the nature of a bombshell" replacing dress, scenes and gestures with the emphasis on voice freeing "the dramatist and the actor from the limitations of the stagecraft" (3).[27] It was, however, with the creative efforts of Z.A. Bokhari and the likes of Rashid, who despite harboring linguistic prejudices, ushered in new ways of conceptualizing and producing dramas that would weld the divertissement demanded by radio as a medium with artistic subtlety garnering approval both from the government and the audience. In this context, censorship protocols however, had to be duly kept in mind and care was taken not to broadcast any overtly political material.

Drawing from his training experience at the BBC, Bokhari sought to shorten the two-hour long plays into a compact time frame of thirty to forty-five minutes. He also argued for fewer songs and musical elements in the plays but traditionalists in the sphere of drama and radio, accustomed to full-length musicals severely critiqued both these suggestions (qtd. in Narang, Gopichand 210). The drive to modernize radio-drama saw a rise in the number of one-act plays capitalizing upon innovative devices that could provide powerful sonic contexts nestling these productions in the minds of the audience. Manto's *Aao* plays are a fitting example of the same. In an article named "Aids to Realism" that appeared in *Indian Listener* in 1941, the editor S.N. Ghosh highlighted the importance of sound-effects in radio broadcasting—"the life-breath of all plays, dramatized news and features put on the air" (3). It was agreed that good voice manipulation was not always enough in plays and therefore, must always be supplanted with sound-effects to arrest the imagination of the audience; to give perspective to the "mental eye" akin to a "sort of frame on which to hang the words heard." In its preliminary days of trials and errors, there slowly emerged ways of "faking" sound effects—electrical or acoustic, within the studio, which later on benefitted from recording technology and easily superimposed in programs as such or through "mixing" and "blending". Apart from electrical effects created by sound engineers, Ghosh tells us that manual "effects" too could be produced, for instance, coconut shells to convey galloping of a horse on a hard road, or whacking a rubber sponge to create a broadcast version of a fight. Indian musical instruments such as *sarangi* could be effectively used to create sounds such as creaking of a door. One could safely say that this sonic apparatus could have helped artists like Manto in formulating architectonics of their radio-dramas. For instance, in Manto's play *Journalist*, the central character Abdul Bari's shift of

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[27] *Indian Listener*. 7 Mar. 1941. Print.

profession from a schoolteacher to a journalist is signified in a transitional scene marked by the following sound instructions—"the sound of a moving train…this should gradually be superimposed by the sound of a printing press. The volume should now be reduced to minimum and the sounds of the printing press should recede to the background. The following dialogue should be superimposed over them" (3:136).

The above discussion of the improvisational mode of production of radio dramas helps us to cast a fresh gaze at their overlooked status in literary histories and critical scholarship on the 'major' works of the authors engaged herein. While one concedes to the inability of Urdu drama's survival against time, one needs to bear in mind that the argument holds true for literary drama meant to be performed on stage and not its various other forms which not only have survived well into the present but continue to grow with newer forms of inter-sectional media, especially the internet. In this context, radio, perhaps, is the forerunner that gave a fresh lease of life to Urdu drama not only engendering a spate of productions meant for its broadcasts but also inspiring future generations to carry forward its themes to television. Alan Desoulieres in his analysis of Kamal Ahmad Rizvi's supremely enjoyable T.V. series *Alīf Nūn*, based on Agha Nasir's (himself associated with Radio Karachi) play establishes a genealogical link between filmed stage play, radio drama and television drama arguing that all three invoke an important interplay amongst each other along with literature (55-84). Z.A. Bokhari's drama *Dumbaz Dumsaaz*, itself inspired by the world-famous Laurel and Hardy, was adapted by Intisar Husain for radio and presented by Nasir on Radio Karachi; even more interestingly, Rizvi and Nasir collaborated for their television production titled *Aao Naukri Karein* based on Manto's *Aao* series, bearing uncanny resemblance with the titles of the original (qtd. in Desoulieres 68). Today, Urdu televised dramas have recently become even more popular across the globe with channels like *Zindagi*, sensitively portraying slice of life situations and social issues of the day. Important for our immediate context, in addition to numerous stage drama productions of Manto's popular stories available as videos over the Internet, a television series on Manto has immediately put the author into a dramatic context weaving his life and literary characters together.[28] In this context, it becomes imperative to re-evaluate our understanding of radio-drama

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[28] Notable among them is a movie *Manto* (2015) by a Pakistani director by Sarmad Sultan Khoosat who plays the lead role of Saadat Hasan Manto and Sania Saeed as Safiya Manto. It has been adapted as a televised series for Geo TV, Pakistan. Also mentioned earlier is the Indian film production on the author starring Nawazuddin Siddiqui, and directed by Nandita Das (2018).

as best a passing phase in popular culture and literary history of the subcontinent in favor of a view that considers it not only as a crucial link in the history of Urdu dramaturgy as a whole, but also privileges modes of expression (that includes a trove of unique themes, language, sound-effects etc.) that sought to radicalize it from within.

Sajjad Zaheer in his book *The Light* reflects that "experience told us that while a job in All India Radio might fulfill stomachs, it weakens the literary conscience of writers" (185). Lack of literary merit, as we have seen, in the arguments put forth by Sadiq and Saxena, have long been seen as reasons for the poor status of Urdu drama in general. In case of radio drama in particular, aesthetic criteria seem to have been compromised on account of extreme governmental control over broadcast material. While Bokharis favored 'tasteful' literature, their linguistic biases, as argued before, tended to make the dramas obscure to the larger audience. However, what is extremely important here is that drama, out of all the broadcast material such as talks or news, embodied the ability to mirror the lives of the people; as the theater playing at the level of public and the individual, it was capable of functioning as, what Neil Verma has termed as the "theater in the mind" or imagination of the audience (2). The stupendous success of radio-drama across the sections of society tells us that as a particular broadcast form, it was directed not only to the literates but also to the ones who could not partake of the sophisticated language of short stories or prose composed by writers such as Manto, Bedi or Ashk. It is here that an examination of Manto's plays becomes important to probe into their themes and language which could explain their immense popularity but the author's dissatisfaction with them at the level of literary excellence.

This brings us to the question of 'value' of radio-dramas in general and Manto's plays in particular. As has been exhaustively argued above, censorship, governmental control and language politics were major reasons that despite the financial stability that it offered and the scope of technical innovation it could partake, radio could not latch on to the many luminaries of the literary world who turned to it during their careers. Whether this collaborative industry was able to achieve the objectives of upliftment of the *socius* and entertainment at the same time remains to be seen. Is radio-drama merely a tweaking of existing works, as Ashk suggested, or could we locate within it seeds of worthy ideas and literary exploration? In a milieu where Progressive writing was swaying the public through its short stories, articles in journals, songs and slogans, how could radio-drama and its authors be seen as ones with literary integrity? Such

questions could only be answered fully only if the genre is studied as a whole, comprising dramas of several authors that could reveal an engagement with common themes and concerns. As for a research like this, that initiates a journey into this uncharted terrain, theoretical foregrounding of one of these author's dramas is meant to forge a valuable link between two massive parts of his literary output.

Manto's dramas may have been discarded as rudimentary but when located in this complicated history of radio broadcasting, they can be seen as negotiating its various pressures. As Neil Verma, in his study of American radio drama has suggested, "radio dramas are always reinforcing the system of which they are appendages, but no status quo is perpetuated without leaving a remainder" (11). Manto's dramas are composed in Hindustani, deploying a mixed Urdu-Hindi language that tempers elite Urdu's hegemony. Furthermore, one could argue that the use of songs, and sensitive themes relating to censorship, poverty or sexuality would have constituted little but significant pricks in the stiff fabric of colonial broadcasting. One must keep in mind that the earliest qualms about the obscene commercialism of dramas of travelling companies, its associations with the pedestrian and the cheap, also informed the attitude to radio in its earliest days when musicians and singers were looked down upon with a Quaker-like attitude and radio itself was considered as encouraging prostitution.[29] Ironically, the ones at the receiving end of these charges such as Bokharis, tried to reform the radio but harbored similar contempt for the linguistic idiom of the masses—as an embodiment of the marketplace, the bazar and the lowbrow. Nevertheless, as the next section shows, radio, just like film, became a composite 'site' whereby authors engaged in raging debates, experimented with writing, often worked through each other's prejudices as were visible over 'vetting' dramas, and above all, functioned as a collaborative industry of technicians, musicians, writers, actors, presenters and producers, encountering the unaccustomed everyday guided by the exigencies of live broadcasting. As we shall see in the next section, Manto may or may not have derived creative gratification out of his radio-dramas but his tenure at AIR, New Delhi, however brief it may be, ushered him into a project of colonial modernity.

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[29] Lionel Fielden in his autobiography, *The Natural Bent*, discusses the attitude toward radio in its early days (185). Also see Krishan Chander's essay, "Saadat Hasan Manto" in Ashk, *Mera Dushman*.

II

Locating Manto in the World of Radio

Applying to All India Radio for a position as a staff artist, Manto boasted of his "rich" experience of the lives of the prostitutes, their professions, and their environment.[30] Manto's bold statement seemed to echo the very attitudes attached to radio and its people, and his sarcasm could be read as his unique spirit of subversion that he tried to bring in the prudish space of radio broadcasting. In the 'Preface' to his collection of radio-plays "*Manto Ke Dramay*" (1944), Manto hails himself as a forerunner in the field of radio-writing, who has not only written prolifically in a brief period of about a year, but has also endeavored to shape the form of radio-drama.[31] He urges his readers to not only read but also, preferably, listen to these plays in order to better evaluate them for this was his own method too in order to improvise. He further notes that "till new techniques are discovered", there was no use to attack his experimentations meant to aid change of scenes in radio production and that he was fully aware of the criticism it would invite from both professional critics and orthodox reviewers.

Manto's confident self-assessment as supremely talented and successful dramatist here is in contrast to what he considers as his motivations behind the successful radio series, *Aao*. In the Preface to *Aao*, broadcast from All India Radio, Bombay, in 1940, Manto describes them as "a product of the daily struggle to feed my stomach […] I was hungry and so wrote these dramas" (qtd. in Jalal 96). This difference between Manto's appreciation of his creative and inventive power to adapt to a new form of writing on one hand, and his acknowledgement of financial exigencies affecting his endeavors as a writer serves as good entry-point to probe into the nature of his dramatic works written for radio both independently as well as in relation to his entire oeuvre. This ambiguous self-appraisal acts as a trope to map the tensions that characterize both his writings and his persona. What we witness is Manto—a writer torn between his vocation as a *professional* writer, a role he pejoratively dubbed as "*munshi*" or a hack-writer, and as an independent artist-thinker; his dramas at once feeding into the very systems of ideology of which they are a part on one hand, and yet attempt to subvert the normative, albeit through clever strategies of concealment in an environment rife with censorship and control. As argued earlier,

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[30] See Menra and Dutt, *Dastavez 3*. 350.

[31] Quoted in Menra and Dutt, *Dastavez 3* 354-5. Also see, Jalal, Ayesha. *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times and Works Across the India- Pakistan Divide* 106.

these strategies of concealment are of primary interest here, for they are crucial in their analysis as a specimen of minor literature.

Notwithstanding Manto's dissatisfaction with the compulsions structuring his work at All India Radio, it was a phase that not only gave him financial stability but also a considerable standing in the world of art and entertainment. Critics such as Flemming have hailed his short interlude in Delhi as the "golden period" of his life (*Another Lonely Voice* 12). Ayesha Jalal notes that "the world came to know of him…of who Manto was through the radio" and contrary to the popularity of his films and short stories, it was his radio-dramas that made him a "household name".[32] Manto, himself in his letter to Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi testified that his health had improved since he shifted from Bombay to Delhi and got a considerable salary of one hundred and fifty rupees a month (Menra and Dutt 3: 190).

Even before formally joining AIR, his plays had been aired on various stations and on 23 April 1940, his drama *Uljhan* was broadcast from Delhi.[33]Manto's dramatic sensibility can be traced back to his school days, as he himself recounts in an anecdote in his sketch on Agha Hashr Kashmiri. Along with his few friends, he had tried to set up a dramatics club and produce one of Hashr's plays but was severely reprimanded by his father who did not approve of such activities (Menra and Dutt 5:19). Enamored by European writers such as Chekhov, Gorky, Maupassant and Maugham, Manto had begun translation of Hugo's *The Last Day of a Condemned Man* (1829), pushed by his mentor Bari Alig.

Studies on Manto have focused on his later years in Lahore where he lived in grim circumstances, alienated from friends and writers, often composing stories in editors' offices in exchange of a paltry sum of money enough to buy him his daily quota of cheap whisky[34]. The emphasis on his ailing health, financial degradation and severe depression often clouds his early phase, especially in Delhi, which is where he met people like Krishan Chander, Miraji and Ashk, who were to later join him in Bombay film industry. It was here that he wrote his massively successful film *Mirza Ghalib* and collaborated with Krishan Chander in writing *Banjara* ("*Khali Botal*" 179). It was also the phase where despite altercations with his seniors and fellow writers, and occasional phases of financial stringency, Manto remained a part of a spirited group of

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[32] Jalal, Ayesha. Interview by William Dalrymple. Zee Jaipur Literature Festival.*Youtube*. N.p. 28 January 2016. Web. 6 March 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHC1Clrlg1w&t=744s .

[33] *Indian Listener*.7 May 1940.

[34] See Jalees, Ibrahim "Let's Take a Bottle to Manto" in *Manto Sahib*

writers, musicians, voice-actors, technicians and composers who not only debated effervescently but also wrote copiously and powerfully (Chander, "Saadat Hasan Manto" 169). Krishan Chander further recounts that the plays produced during his period were not to be found in literature of other languages and were infact of high merit produced by people of acknowledged literary status; they filled in the lacuna in Urdu literature by producing technologically advanced radio dramas that could inspire future efforts at the same too (169).

Manto's years at AIR are fondly remembered by his colleagues who remained in awe of Manto's talent and uninhibited personality. His nephew, Hamid Jalal (in his sketch "Uncle Manto"), and fellow writer Ashk, have noted his typical instantaneous mode of writing plays on almost "any" topic, directly typing them on his Urdu typewriter (contrary to his handwritten stories), keeping his writing in step with his thoughts (Jalal, "Uncle Manto" 684; Ashk 5).His plays such as *Intezar* and *Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu* were written in a similar manner, creatively making use of daily situations as cues for his dramas (Wadhawan 157). The shortage of actors, especially female artists, was always to be kept in mind while composing dramas but competitive spirit and zeal for their craft enabled these writers to overcome any hurdles. Manto wrote a play "*Ek Mard*" (One Man), which had only female characters—about twenty-five of them. Chander managed to source all the female actors and ensured that the drama was not only adequately composed but also duly broadcast ("Saadat Hasan Manto" 171). Manto's close associations with the voice-actors and musicians at AIR can be gleaned from the fact that he chose to dedicate *Manto Ke Dramay* to them, acknowledging that he may have written these dramas but "only these artists carried them over" to the audience with their skill and talent (qtd. in Menra and Dutt 3: 354).

Manto was crowned as the "king of dramas", though his immense popularity was construed by Ashk as his proclivity for entertaining sycophants and flatterers who boasted his ego, reverently addressing him as "Manto Sahib" (*Mera Dushman* 25). Manto remained unparalleled in the world of radio, his close circle of friends like Krishan Chander, Chirag Hasan Hasrat, Hafiz Javed, Balwant Gargi, Harindranath Chattopadhyay providing him a stimulating environment to brainstorm ideas and churn out dramatic material consistently. Abu Saeed Quereshi went to the extent of comparing Manto's unique charm in the audio world as similar to Charlie Chaplin's in the world of films (qtd in Mohan, *Manto Zinda Hai* 84).

Manto's dramatic oeuvre is vast and varied, including those meant for both stage and radio, features, as well as film screenplays included in his drama collections. Manto's first collection of ten plays is titled *Aao* (1940), the Preface to which was composed in Amritsar. These plays are purely radio-plays, and according to Menra and Dutt, were broadcast from Bombay (3: 351)[35]. Aao was a successful series of one-act plays that made use of humorous slice-of-life situations to direct criticism towards the foibles of society. In 1942, he dedicated his *Janaze* to "the one who would write a similar play at his death" (3: 351). These were primarily radio-features, eight in number, rather than plays, dramatizing the deaths of famous rulers such as Rasputin, Changez Khan and Cleopatra. As has been discussed before, Manto's features were often highlighted in the issues of *Indian Listener*, and were stupendous successes because they were "reflective both of increasing popular interest in Indian history and nationalist sentiment" (Flemming, "Other Reflections" 133). Manto exploited the use of palpable formula for popular entertainment and like the *Aao* plays, he wrote five dramas for the series—"Teen Auratein" ("Three Ladies"), which have often been published as stories. Just as *Aao* focuses on Kishore, Lajwanti and Narayan's interactions over a particular 'act' (For instance, playing cards, reading a newspaper, etc.), "*Teen Auratein*" revolves around three ladies, "Three Beautiful Ladies", "Three Fat Ladies", and so on, and their interactions with one another. It is possible that they were adapted to radio as Menra and Dutt inform about their broadcast from Delhi between 1941-2 (3: 353). Manto dedicates his next collection *Afsane Aur Drame* to Tasneem Saleem Chattari, a writer, who fondly addressed Manto as her brother.

Some of his best radio-dramas, however, are to be found in the two collections, *Karwat* (1944) and *Manto Ke Dramay* (1944). Manto dedicates the former to "all his bad habits", probably referring to the ostensible concern for the lowly and maligned in most of the dramas in this collection, including plays such as *Randhir Pahalwan*, *Hatak*, *Rooh Ka Natak* and *Saleema*. Finally, in*Manto Ke Dramay* (1944), he chose eighteen plays marking them as innovative and technologically advanced. Manto considered them to be representative of the best that could be written for radio dramatization, keeping in view the hurdles posed lack of alternatives in presenting broadcast material effectively. This thesis chooses select plays out of these collections that form the core groups of romances and problem plays. Manto did write some plays even after

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[35] Valuable details about the production and publication of Manto's plays can be found in Volume 3 of *Dastavez*. See Menra and Dutt 3: 351-60.

he left All India Radio and after Partition, some of which survive while the majority have been lost to us.

Ayesha Jalal notes that Manto's years in Delhi could have been "a near perfect phase" in his life "if not for the death of his son [Arif] in April 1941" (108). This personal tragedy had been augmented by several other reasons that Jalal points out. Ashk was known for his disapproving attitude towards Manto's plays and his personality. Not only had he criticized his brazen nature and charged him for plagiarism in his plays such as *Karwat* and *Neeli Ragein*, he had little regard for radio-plays as a form itself, as we have seen above. During this period, Manto also had to defend himself in court against charges of obscenity on his short story *Kali Shalwar*, published in *Adab-i-Latif*, in 1942 (Jalal 109). With Chander's transfer to Lucknow and N.M. Rashid's elevation to the position of Programme Director, Ashk contrived with the new Programme Assistant to have Manto's play *Awāra* vetted. Manto could no longer conform to this "interference" and in extreme rage, left AIR in 1942, never to look back at the city again. His personal altercations had taken such a turn that Manto could not eke out a living out of Radio Pakistan in Lahore after Partition too, owing to his open differences with Zulfikar Bokhari over new broadcasting rules in a sensitive political climate. As Zia Mohyeddin in his blog *Baithak*, notes, there were many who could recommend Manto in Radio Pakistan but "they dared not to offend Bokhari Sahib. Manto remained a persona-non-grata for Radio Pakistan in his lifetime".

One could conclude by saying that situating Manto fervent, but short stint at All India Radio within the social, cultural, political axes of radio broadcasting in colonial India, one gets a peek into the particular professional ambience that stood for opportunity as well as experimentation for budding writers like himself. It helps us to contextualize Manto's endeavors in an art that gave him name and prestige, in addition to a livelihood—all of which Manto would only have a tenuous grasp towards the later stage in his life. His first brush with some of the Progressives would have a lasting impact on him, reflected both in his professional life and aesthetics.

This extensive contextualization, however, also points to its own limits in approaching the literary merit of these radio dramas. Paucity of secondary literature on them, as also primary performative sources, one therefore, must turn to the aesthetic strategies that would be instrumental in locating their purported value. Consideration of stringent and censorious atmosphere prevalent in broadcasting, and its dual mission to entertain and educate a varied

audience provides us with an understanding of the external exigencies that affected the nature of these dramas. In order to tease out the aesthetic implications of the same, therefore, one must turn to the theoretical basis on which they could be categorized—comedies, romances and problem plays—which no doubt deploy these prevalent formulas only to conceal the difficult poetics and politics of their author.

Chapter 2

Comedies

Manto's stories and essays on the defense of his art have often been celebrated for their satirical edge and dark humor that heightens the pathos and enormity of their themes. His witty letters to the fictional Uncle Sam are an example of his deeply serious intellectual engagement with the politics of Pakistan—a nation that he was to ultimately adopt as his "home" after the Partition, his assessment of the idiosyncrasies of a people enamored with the American way of life and his criticism of war violence. However, little has been written about Manto specifically as a writer of comedies, a genre that seems to have been buried under the weight of serious tragedies of Partition and exploitation. In this context, a collection of eleven radio-plays, namely, *Aao* ("Come") (1940) not only introduces us to his brand of domestic comedies but also alerts us to the manner in which humor displaces the crisis of modernity as experienced by the principal characters onto the banalities that constitute their daily life. It seems that Manto, in these dramas oscillates between a simplistic mission to portray a middle-class home in all its 'realism' on one hand, and directing his critique towards tendencies that he believed to be hypocritical and undesirable, albeit in an underhand style.

Manto wrote the preface to these plays, "*Aao Suno*" ("Come Let's Listen"), in Amritsar where he had stopped for a short while before formally joining All India Radio in Delhi (Jalal 95). In his inimitable style, Manto confesses that these plays are"a product of the daily struggle to feed his stomach, a challenge that confronted every Urdu writer in India until he was completely paralyzed mentally" and therefore he seeks nothing more than appreciation "for the few humorous dramas my mind has produced via my stomach, and which have made people laugh but not brought the faintest smile to my lips" (qtd. in Jalal 96). Apart from the author's own disparaging view of his art, literary critics too have been condescending towards their any purported value. The plays are criticized for lack of action, flat or stereotyped characters and excessive reliance on formula (Flemming 132; Alvi 26-7). However, this chapter argues that the justification for taking recourse to a formula and typed characters in routine domestic situations lies in the author's practice of "minor literature". The use of comic one-liners, razor-sharp witty dialogues, and verbal jugglery, timed to perfection are the means through which the crisis in each play is evaded. Infact, it is important to note that in several dramas, it becomes increasingly

difficult to recognize a palpable conflict between characters beyond their differing surface opinions about contemporary matters. These trivial details, however, are intricately braided into the texture of the central characters' relationship with one another that symbolizes a collective crisis in the sensibility of middle-class men and women negotiating the new challenges of modernity as well as the old patriarchal trappings.

Within their structure of comic banter and farcical situations, *Aao* plays do launch an attack on the mimetic nature of modernity that the middle-classes tried to aspire to. However, the far-reaching implications of the changing dynamics in modern marriage arising out of several factors such as the emergence of 'New Woman' in late colonial India, are deliberately averted in these dramas. The contradictions of bourgeois modernity evidenced in institution of marriage, the commercial nature of human existence, and division of gender roles can therefore mapped onto the author's own inhibition or self-censorship to tackle them at the level of text, without being able to posit a clear-cut rationale or answers to them. A minor reading of these dramas directs its focus on their key moments that inscribe such authorial and aesthetic tensions within the comic language and overall milieu of an everyday life, so as to expose the fractured nature of reality that evades the comprehension of their author. In reading Manto thus, one encounters his own ambiguous stance on the 'truth' of a modern marriage, where his skepticism about its restrictive structure, its deceptions and banalities does not translate into any sustainable or viable philosophy as an alternative to it. Rather, we evidence an unconvincing flight from such pressures, an escapist retaliation that results in confusion of categories—between the wife and the bar dancer, between the 'rationalist' husband and the 'superstitious' wife, and between the sacrosanct 'private' home and the 'public' world of bars, office and cinema. Such blurring of boundaries, particularly the latter, that are characteristic of a collective crisis in a modern worldis, however, reduced to Lajwanti, Kishore and Narayan's individual acts—petty reactions to petty situations that are reinscribed in the conventional logic of these dramas that dwells on the humdrum of daily, middle-class life, without enabling a confrontation with their deeper confrontations and challenges. Nevertheless, to be fair to Manto's skill as a satirist, he camouflages such tensions skillfully by imbuing interesting shades of wit, liveliness of spirit and an intense curiosity to his domestic heroine, Lajwanti, whose enthusiasm and energy provides a foil to her husband Kishore, who appears to be fatigued and resigned to his role as a mere economic provider to his wife and children.

In the following sections, this chapter introduces *Aao* in terms of their structure, followed by a brief discussion of the Urdu comic tradition as well as forms of radio comedies. The first part of the chapter analyzes four plays, viz. "*Aao Radio Sunein*", "*Aao Akhbār Padhein*", "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*" and "*Aao Behes Karein*" with respect to their creation of an everyday social-cultural ambience complete with its commercial underpinnings: the creation of public sphere through radio and newspapers, the flooding of branded goods as part of daily needs and the emphasis on hard work and frugality in expenditure. The second part of the chapter deals with the plays namely, "*Aao Chori Karein*", "*Aao Jhooth Bolein*" and "*Aao Kahani Likhen*" in which the last one is proposed as a methodological key to interpret the obvious depiction of Lajwanti and Kishore's marital relationship in way that exposes contradictions underlying their marriage which are skillfully disguised or dispensed with the former dramas. This minor reading of the dramas is further facilitated by an examination of "*Aao Khoj Lagayen*" in which the character of the thief, presumably portraying Manto, the narrator, through his tongue-in-cheek comments reveals the artifice that constitutes not just Kishore and Lajwanti's relationship, but more importantly structures his own actions, and thus by extension, the writing of these radio dramas.

Introducing *Aao*

Leslie Flemming has referred to *Aao* plays, along with Manto's other two collections of plays and features named *Teen Aurtein* (*Three Ladies*) and *Janaze* (*Funerals*) respectively, as formula-plays with essentially the same plot which "differ only in the initial invitation which provokes the argument" ("Other Reflections" 132). The plays revolve around three middle-class characters—Kishore, who probably works in a government office, Lajwanti, his quarrelsome but intelligent wife, and Kishore's friend, Narayan. Within this formulaic characterization, there is an introduction of a few other characters also such as Savitri, Narayan's wife, Durga, the servant ("*Aao Chori Karein*"), Kishore's father, and brother, Gopal, an unnamed neighbor ("*Aao BaatToh Suno*"), the whimsical but philosophical thief who is a central character in "*Aao Khoj Lagayen*", and finally, occasional references to Lajwanti and Kishore's son throughout the series. The plays involve a comic exchange of dialogues between the husband and wife over either's invitation to engage in some past-time activity or role playing —reading a newspaper, listening to radio, playing cards, stealing, weaving a story, fabricating lies, debating, reading out a letter, carrying out an investigation and so on. The structure of each play depends upon its plot where the dialogic interplay either stems from the activity being indulged in or is a resultant of some

past context, which gets revealed in the subsequent role-play. For instance, in *Aao Khoj Lagayen*, Kishore's call to investigate discloses the fact about a robbery in their house a few days back. It is from here that the narrative proceeds with a subsequent introduction of the thief who ultimately tricks the central characters through his philosophical verbal jugglery. Similarly, in *Aao Chori Karen*, Kishore tempts Lajwanti to steal, if nothing else, contents of Narayan's parcel delivered at the former's address. The play unfolds as a series of revelations about lies and tricks deployed by spouses to wrest control over each other. *Aao Khat Suno*, *Aao Jhooth Bolen* and *Aao Kahani Likhen* are also some of the plays composed in such a manner.

In contrast, other plays originate from the activity that is called forth and in the process conjure up an acoustic landscape of dialogues interspersed with myriad informative details about the quotidian, enlivened by the provocations and conciliations of the principal characters. For instance, *Aao Baat Toh Suno* progresses from the point where Lajwanti implores her husband to fetch her some medicines. The play becomes a sketch of a middle-class man precariously balancing the demands of his office with the routine responsibilities towards his friends and family. *Aao Radio Sunein* and *Aao Akhbaar Padhein* are more deftly crafted plays that weave in the activities of listening to radio or reading a newspaper with the immediate social and political contexts of war, position of women, inflation and therefore helpful in understanding the creation and negotiation with the public sphere in late-colonial India of which the middle-class were a significant player.

***Aao* As Radio Comedies**

Urdu has a long tradition of humorous prose and poetry often used for making satirical observations about society.[36] Ali Jawad Zaidi in *A History of Urdu Literature* draws our attention to the tradition of "*hajv*" which he defines as "a generic term applied to wit, humour and satire alike" which "satirized both the collective and individual incongruities" (418). One of the early practitioners of this satiric mode was Zafar Zatalli whose Rekhta verses became popular during Aurangzeb's reign. Zatalli's *she'ers* and couplets were mostly vulgar, even scatological in some instances but did contain a satirical edge to some extent.[37] In contrast to Zatalli, satire acquires literary refinement in Mirza Ghalib's ghazals, couplets and letters that are a specimen of delicate, sophisticated humor.

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[36] For detailed discussion on Urdu satire and humor, see Oesterheld, Ansari and Zaidi.
[37] See Oesterheld.

Critics such as Nami Ansari and Zaidi agree that it is, however, with the publication of the satirical Urdu journal, *Awadh Punch*(1877), that humor and wit become increasingly popular, though not literary enough, modes of journalism. It has been highlighted that *Awadh Punch* provided a model for a spate of journals whose veracity and literary standards were mostly suspect, as was merely evident from their notorious titles such as *Sheikh Chili*, *Chalta Purza* and *Mulla Dopiaza* (Jalal, Ayesha, *Self and Sovereignty* 56). Nevertheless, one of the most notable figures associated with *Awadh Punch* is Akhbar Allahabadi (1921) whose incisive satirical poetry ("*Kibla Kibli*", "*Maulvi Madan Ki Si*" etc.) against the unthinking imitation of the West has been hailed as great examples of wit and verbal jugglery. Ratan Nath Sarshar (famous for *Fasanah-e-Azad*), Falak Paima (*Ek Sawal*), Azim Beg Chugtai (*Koltar*) became other important names to reckon with as far as creative use of humor was concerned. Mention must be made of Imtiaz Ali Taj who composed a comic sketch named *Chacha Chakkan* in addition to supremely successful *Anarkali*, and Shaukat Thanvi whose essays, comic sketches and parodies such as *Sudeshi Rail*, *Kutiya*, *Sasural* and *Sheesh Mahal* were well-received. Eminent critic, Gopichand Narang, has identified growth of literary humor and satire along two streams—the light-hearted humor of Pitras Bokhari and Kanhayyalal Kapoor on one hand and 'serious humor' of the likes of Rashid Ahmad Siddiqi and Mushtaq Ahmad Yusufi (qtd. in Nami Ansari 328). Bokhari's *Lahore ka Jughrafiya* and *Pitras Ke Mazamin* display a cultivated sense of humor, replete with light-hearted joviality rather than incisive satire; Kapoor's parody of Faiz's "*Tanhai*", and satirical attacks on the explicit Marxist leanings of artists such as Sahir Ludhianvi and Krishan Chander are well-known.

Manto's own popular brand of humor is associated with dark or black humor of his partition vignettes and sharp, incisive satire of his lectures, essays and more famously, *Letters to Uncle Sam*. He is known for his inherent ability to present even the most sordid realities of the word in the form of an ironic joke. However, the energetic humor of *Aao* plays is at variance with these celebrated works and bears affinity with his other short formulaic series named *Teen Aurtein*, composed as stage dramas. Their brand of humor is "situational and conversational", much like *Aao*, and "genuinely enjoyable" (Flemming, "Other Reflections" 133). *Aao* plays occupy a singular position in the Manto corpus for they exemplify a blend of the witty repartee, pleasant exchange of jokes, and verbal jugglery reminiscent of his literary predecessors, but molded with his particularly urbane, modern outlook. Perhaps, *Aao* is the only piece of Manto's

writing that gives us a glimpse of his felicity with words from Hindi, Urdu and even Punjabi—a complex of everyday, Hindustani of Northern India that is replete with commonly used idioms and witticisms. The spirit of jesting includes raillery, mistaken identities, irony, silly arguments and even parody. Waris Alvi has adequately captured the defining quality of Manto's humor in *Aao*:

> He knew all the secrets of storytelling—to convert a small talk into a discussion and a discussion into a mighty fuss; a conversation into an argument, a routine verbal exchange into an altercation; the bickering of a husband and wife into a fight and ultimately a fight into an interesting drama (25).[38]

Thus, in their characteristic departure from the Mantoesque dark humor, *Aao* offers us a fresh glimpse into the author's ability to paint life in pleasant, amusing colors without making drollery the ultimate end of his work. Manto often imbues his comic plays with a tinge of subtle irony or a parodic interplay of words to give voice to a host of issues that are of contemporary relevance. Even more pertinent is the fact that these were originally composed as radio-texts, in the genre of comedy, and therefore, their particular brand of humor must also be contextualized within the entertainment forms particularly available to broadcast media i.e. radio and later on, television.

It is worth noting that the official schedules of these programmes identified at least three of them as sketches or skits, even playlets.[39] The predominance of sketch comedy in broadcast media that later on provided a basis for sit-coms or situation comedies has its origins in vaudeville performances and while one cannot be sure of Manto's familiarity with these Western forms, the categorization of his dramas as such demands some explanation.[40] Frank Krutnik and Steve Neale in their study of broadcast entertainment forms suggest that sketches and later on, situation comedies made use of "self-contained plots and a setting that was closer to the interests and aspirations of the middle-class family" fulfilling the task of "'domesticizing' leisure and

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[38] "*Baat se baat paida karna, baat ka batangad banana, baatcheet ko behes mein, kaarobaari baatcheet ko jhadap mein, pati-patni ki nok-jhonk ko jhagde mein aur jhagde ko rochak natak mein badalne ke sab gur usse yaad the*."

[39] "*Aao Kahani Likhen*" was advertised as a "playlet" and "*Aao Jhooth Bolen*" as a sketch. "*Aao Bahas Karen*" has been described as a skit and as a sketch corresponding to its two different broadcasts. See Appendix for detailed programme descriptions

[40] Jack Gladden has suggested that "sketches of domestic life printed in American mass-circulation newspapers of the 1870s and 1890s" were often populated with ordinary characters, usually husband and wife, while conflict of action arose out of domestic situations (qtd. in Krutnik and Neale 227). These "forms of repeatable narratives" were subsequently adapted for full-fledged sitcoms meant for television broadcasting (227).

entertainment" through radio broadcasting in both America and Britain (*Popular Film and Television Comedy* 210, 230). In the Indian broadcasting context (which in its earlier stages was heavily influenced by the BBC), as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, a move from the Parsi theatre inspired lengthy performances to more compact narratives seems to have been facilitated by a range of similar improvisational, domestic comedies. In this respect, Manto's *Aao* series is clever example of situation-based humorous narratives that capitalize on the familiarity of common day-to-day activities such as playing cards, writing a story, reading a newspaper or listening radio. This enables him to reproduces images for the average middle-class, family audience, meeting the criteria of making them at 'at home' with a technology that stood for foreignness and elitism of its British and later on, Indian Muslim masters. Moreover, in faithfully mirroring the customary lifestyle of middle-class with their peculiar consumption patterns and their daily quibbles, it seems that Manto wants to remove their prejudice about radio as a space of moral degradation replacing it with a pleasant perception of it as an echo of their very own hopes and fears (Ravikant, "*Apun Ka Manto*" n.pag.).

The labeling of *Aao* as sketches further has an implication of it being seen as simply normative, unable to rise above its populism, which is a crucial requirement to draw in the audience and make the business of broadcasting viable. Afterall, Manto himself has famously admitted to having written them for want of money rather than out of creative inspiration. Speaking of sitcoms on television, Gillian Swanson has argued that these forms of comedy reaffirm "cultural systems of propriety, or norms of acceptability" and "presupposes certain inhibitions the transgression of which implies marginality, an identity outside the norm" (qtd. in Neale and Krutnik 242).[41] By this argument, it would seem therefore, that *Aao* plays as sketch comedies embody nothing more than clever play of words and witty repartee meant solely to entertain and in comparison to his sophisticated writing for short-stories, they merely reinforce rather than challenge the status quo of existence.

This chapter aims at problematizing this perception and argues for a nuanced reading of the plays' formula of deploying a combative couple amidst situations arising out of the domestic scene, usually 'resolved' through Narayan's intervention followed by a comic, twisted closure. As a specimen of narratives composed throughout in colloquial Hindustani rather than the

[41] Swanson, Gillian. "Law and Disorder." *BFI Dossier 17: Television Sitcom* Ed. Jim Crook. London: British Film Institute, 1984. 34.

cultivated Urdu of his literary works, *Aao* demands serious attention towards its creative and political use of language that largely differentiates it from the other works in the author's corpus. The linguistic idiom of the everyday coupled with the richness of satire available in Urdu literature, Manto's radio comedies are a remarkable specimen of Manto's 'minor mode' of engagement with the contemporary reality of his times. Krutnik and Neale have argued that the unity of "sequentially presented acts" lies in three factors i.e. "in a time span, a distinctive structure, or in the recurrence of a particular performer or performers across otherwise separate acts and items" (179). This argument bears significance in the case of Manto's radio comedies for it points out the need for devising an alternative model of interpretation that takes into account their original ephemeral location in the medium of radio and their almost forgettable afterlife in the realm of textuality.

From the available archival evidence of three *Aao* plays, it is clear that they were broadcast in the evening and night slots usually categorized as 'prime time' or 'family hours' rather than as women's programmes as Leslie Flemming has suggested ("Other Reflections" 132). Programme synopses in the issues of *Indian Listener* reveals that the same artists—R.N. Mehra (Kishore), N. Shakil Ahmed (Narayan) and Kusum Deshpande (Lajwanti) lent their voices for "*Aao Jhooth Bolen*" and "*Aao Behes Karen*".[42] However, the incompleteness of such information with respect to the plays' time frame and particularities of sound actors leaves us only with one out of the three aspects spelt out by Krutnik and Neale, namely the distinctive structure of the plays, available to us, not in their original format as sound broadcasts or radio scripts but as dramas published for *reader* consumption. It thus becomes imperative to devise an interpretative method, literary in nature, which does justice to their potential for subversion, their observations and reflections on various aspects of the institution of marriage in a consumerist, bourgeois society of late-colonial India.

The purported unity, and the author's composition of these plays as minor, becomes evident when we read them not merely as disjointed, stand alone dramas but as several pieces in a puzzle such that each one of them acts as a potential key to understanding the larger import of their apparent subject-matter. In this respect, some plays help us to contextualize them in the rich framework of life in urban and semi-urban metropolis, nuclear families, increased emphasis on the workplace, rising tide of commercialism, the growth of technology such as telephone and the

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[42] See Appendix B for details.

radio, the outbreak of war and inflation, the contemporary debates about women's education and the booming of biomedical discourse about men's sexual health in the world of advertisements facilitated by the vibrant public sphere of newspapers, journals and magazines. "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*", "*Aao Radio Sunein*" and "*Aao Akhbar Padhein*" are some of the plays that help us place some of these developments in perspective with respect to the principal characters of the series. On the other hand, plays like "*Aao Kahani Likhen*", "*Aao Chori Karein*" and "*Aao Jhooth Bolein*" allow us an opportunity to read beneath the surface structure of a comedy sketch to identify the points that unravel the tensions and fractured sensibility that seems to guide modern relationships such as marriage. Manto, therefore, plays with comic language, so to speak, expressing a desire to enunciate the crisis of a community but deterritorializing it with a perspective that itself is deeply skeptic, wary of the status quo but also ultimately resigned to it. This constitutes *Aao*'s worth as 'minor' literature, in providing us with an interpretative lens to view Manto's negotiation with modernity not through fierce rebellion or confrontation but a crooked glance towards its problems.

Constructing the 'Everyday' in a Middle-Class Home

Perhaps, much of the defining quality of *Aao* plays stems from their very rootedness in the day-to-day milieu of urban middle-class Hindu households in the transitional years of late-colonial era in India. In contradistinction to 'low-life' characters spread over Manto's fictional universe, Kishore, Lajwanti and Narayan lead financially comfortable, though almost prosaic lives. All of them come across as educated, bilingual colonial subjects constitutive of the emerging middle-class which Sanjay Joshi identifies as "a group of literate, relatively well to do but hitherto politically insignificant group of men [who] came to define a new moral, cultural and political code" (*Fractured Modernity* 45). While Kishore works in the office, the responsibility of the house and of their son is Lajwanti's domain. Narayan, on the other hand, probably works at an optician's shop ("*Aao Khat Toh Suno*" 39). Neither a part of the traditional elites nor of the lower rungs of the society, Manto replicates in these characters the probable audience of his dramas—the 'respectable' class of people, conscious of the world around them, up-to-date with the recent advancements in technology, enamored with not only instruments of colonial modernity such as radio, or the telephone but also, somewhat, uncritically emulating western habits and behavioral patterns. "*Aao Radio Sunein*"("Come Let's Listen to the Radio"), "*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*" ("Come Let's Read a Newspaper"), "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*" ("Come

Listen") and "*Aao Behes Karein*" ("Come Let's Debate") serve as appropriate entry points to situate some of these themes as they emerge out of the comic series.

"*Aao Radio Sunein*" and "*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*", which may be read as companion plays in terms their similarity in structure, plot and overall theme, revolve around leisure activities of reading newspaper and listening to radio. Radio and newspaper in these dramas invoke a discourse around bourgeois domesticity in urban cities, symbolic of technological progress constructing and representing contemporary political, social, cultural and economic values. Not only do they symbolize newer technologized and accessible mode of entertainment and information, they are fairly rooted in a particular historical moment of Indian history where radio and newspapers were spaces of debates and political opinion especially in relation to women's education, their greater visibility in professional jobs, the biomedical discourse around male and female sexual health and hygiene, and the implications of war looming over everyday consumer goods shortages.[43] In the fairly restrictive space of a radio broadcast, Manto briefly touches upon these issues through the metaphor of radio broadcasts and news headlines.

In "*Aao Radio Sunein*", Manto puts to use the vocabulary and jargon of the radio-world as if to mimic the commonplace attitudes to radio, the varying preferences of males and females with respect to its programmes, and even the prevalent radio license policy. The play begins by Lajwanti demanding Kishore (who has returned from work, exhausted) to listen to radio with her. She eagerly proposes tuning on to Akhtari Bai Fyzabadi's ghazals whereas Kishore expresses sheer disinterest, fed up, as he seems being at the receiving end of his boss's orders:

> Kishore: I have had enough of Saheb's Drupad today…I cannot listen to any more ragas now! (59).
>
> *Kishore: Jo Drupad aaj bade sahib se sun kar aaya hun, wahi kafi hai…ab mujhse koi aur raag na suna jayega* (59).

From here on begins the verbal play on each other's musical preferences serving as a vehicle to taunt and complain about each other. Kishore is fond of classical music and wants to hear Khan Saheb Aashiq Ali Khan while Lajwanti prefers Saigal's film tunes such as "*Balam aaye baso mere mann mein*". The debate over stations and music—Delhi or Lahore, Khan Saheb or Saigal makes for a witty repartee where each wants to outdo the other:

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[43] See Joshi 23-96; Das 1-106; Burton 3-31; and Daechsel.

Lajwanti: If you want to listen to Aashiq Ali Khan's song then I should better leave […] how does this Khan sahib sing… as if a wounded man is about to die.

Kishore: You only like Saigal's song—"*Balam aaye baso mere mann mein*"…like a drowning man gulping water in and out... (60).

Lajwanti: *agar tumhe uss mooye Aashiq Ali Khan ka gana sunna hai toh main chali.* […]*kya haal karte hain yeh Khan sahib…yeh bhala kya gaana hua ke sunnewala samjhe, koi ghayal dum todta hai.*

Kishore: *tumhe toh bass Saigal ka gaana pasand hai "balam aaye baso mere mann mein"...jaise doobne wale ke mooh mein pani kabhi andar jata hai kabhi bahar aata hai…*(60).

In a matter of great disappointment to Kishore, Khan Saheb's song has just finished on Lahore station and is followed by the announcement of daily rates of vegetables. This occasions a fresh argument by Lajwanti about Kishore's carelessness in timely procurement of the *Indian Listener*, All India Radio's programme journal, which would have ensured that they could listen to their favorite programs on time. She insists on trying out different channels till they chance upon something interesting.

Manto inserts sound instructions about switching on and off of the radio set, the creaking noise accompanying change of channels and various radio announcements in between Lajwanti and Kishore's exchange of arguments. Whether it be a transition from Khan Saheb's Malkauns raga to the bazar's daily rates, Saigal's film numbers or Punjabi music on Lahore station or even the talk of Shreepat Deshpande in Marathi on Bombay station, Manto creates an ambience of radio broadcasting world with its numerous stations, their particular programs in regional languages and the eagerness of public to know about their schedules. He even inserts his own play within the course of this dialogic interplay thereby lending a unique intertextuality to his drama:

Radio: This is Bombay. You were just listening to Shreepat Deshpande's talk in Marathi. Now you will be listening to Mr. S.H. Manto's drama, "Radio" (62).

Radio: *Yeh Bambayi hai. Abhi aap Shreepat Deshpande se Marhati zabaan mein taqreer sun rahe the. Ab aapko Mr. S.H. Manto ka likha hua drama "Radio" sunaya jayega…*(62)

This fictional drama "Radio" uses technical radio terminology such as 'atmospherics', 'make' of the radio etc. in order to poke fun at the wife. In the drama being played, the 'atmospherics' or the background noise has been transferred from the radio to the wife who, therefore, starts chattering incessantly. Indirectly referring to Lajwanti's talkative nature, the play instantly arrests Kishore's attention who seems to be enjoying it thoroughly till Lajwanti abruptly switches it off:

Lajwanti: Absurd! Disgusting! Foolish! Have these men lost all shame…wives are no more than playthings for them! Laughed at in films, teased in novels and disparaged in poetry. Since only radio is now left, so you may start degrading them on it too (62).

Lajwanti: *behuda, wahiyaat, namakool…koi sharm haya nahi rahi in mardon ko….biwiyon ko toh bass khilauna samajh liya hai…filmon mein unke saath mazak, novelon mein un bechariyon ke saath chhed-chhad, nazmon mein unki mitti paleed…ab yeh radio baki reh gaya tha, so iss par bhi unko bura-bhala kehna shuru kar diya…*(62).

Keeping with the comic intention of the play, the seriousness of the argument is soon undercut by Kishore who tries to pacify his wife and tunes in to K.C. Dey's song. Lajwanti threatens to break the radio-set with a paperweight when the issue of radio-license is brought in. While Kishore is informing that the radio has been brought on approval for four hundred and sixty rupees, Narayan makes his entry with a radio inspector in tow. Narayan explains the need of a license for radio to Lajwanti who cannot fathom the logic behind it—lakhs of rupees are required to build radio stations, to pay for its electricity, to relay news from all over the world, to pay prominent radio artists and singers and so on (65). Lajwanti immediately hands over ten rupees to Narayan who bribes the inspector with half the amount and uses the rest to watch a film along with Kishore.

Ravikant suggests that it is perhaps singular to Manto's wit and intelligent use of words that a play such as this just falls short of becoming a mere advertisement of government's

broadcasting over radio ("*Apun Ka Manto*" n.p.). What is perhaps even more important is that the comic-argumentative mode of radio-comedy offers a peak into Kishore and Lajwanti's characters—the two engage in debate on a level-playing field where Lajwanti, the one confined to the house seems not only zealous but passably acquainted with the larger world facilitated by the possibilities of broadcasting. It appears that she is fond of radio because it offers her sheer entertainment through its songs and dramas; she excitedly waits for the *Indian Listener*, which not only equips her with the knowledge of programme schedules but also keeps her up-to-date with the consumer items of the day as they were liberally advertised in the journal.[44] Her fondness for these items is further alluded to in plays such as "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*", "*Aao Behes Karein*" and "*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*", thereby pointing to contexts of urbanized popular culture in which women were becoming active participants as consumers.

"*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*" similarly opens with Lajwanti's invitation to Kishore to read a newspaper together. The extended discussion on news headlines about war provides an overarching framework that helps to locate the husband in the realm of the "outside"—the world as it were, constituting latest developments in politics and international affairs, and Lajwanti—as the modern, urban woman albeit confined to the inner, domestic world of the home. Kishore rummages through the newspaper to find something "interesting" to read amidst columns of "Hitler's nonsense" (76). Lajwanti has often heard gossip around Hitler from none other than the local washer man and wonders if the person in question is an outcaste. She is filled with immense curiosity as she learns from Kishore that he is not an ordinary person but a "dictator". Dictator sounds much like an editor or an actor to Lajwanti who is now piqued enough and wishes to know what a dictator does and what are the implications of his actions. The absurdity and inversion of logic that guides mindless exercise of dictatorial power is explained by Kishore through a homely comparison, where he as the patriarch of the family gets the freedom to arbitrarily control and overturn the routine dynamics of the everyday:

Kishore: Just imagine that I will become a dictator…now when I have become one, I would have the right to call potatoes as tomatoes

[44] A survey of issues of the *Indian Listener* reveals several advertisements that mostly occupied the front and the last pages of the journal. Some of the items that were regularly advertised included radio sets of various brands (Fairbanks Morse, Chicago Radios etc.), radio batteries, musical instruments especially gramophones, electrical goods and home appliances, watches, crockery, cars, tyres, beauty or grooming products, medicines and potions etc. Often advertisements for cloth, biscuits and other essential and imported items of everyday use carried apologia for shortages of supplies owing to war circumstances. See *Indian Listener*.22 May 1942. Also see special issue on "India's Contribution to War". See *Indian Listener*. 22 May 1945.

and tomatoes as clocks […] morning's breakfast will be eaten at the midnight, dinner will be eaten in the morning, lunch at night…tea will be mixed with soda lemon…*salan* would be eaten before and *roti* later… (77).

Lajwanti: Enough! Have all the lunatic asylums been locked? Do they have no more places left? (77).

Kishore: Bass yun samajh lo ki main dictator ban jaunga…ab jab main dictator ban jaunga toh mujhe iss baat ka adhikar hoga ki main aloo ko tamatar kehna shuru kar du, tamataron ko ghadiyan […]*subah a nashta raat ke barah baje ho, dinner subah ko khaya jaye, lunch raat ko ho…chai, soda lemon mila kar pi jaye, saalan pehle khaya jaye aur roti baad mein…*

Lajwanti: Bass bahut ho chuka…kya pagalkahanon mein taale lag chuke hain, kya pagal khanon mein ab aur koi jagah nahi? (77).

The discussion soon digresses into a chain of circular arguments where each of them keeps leveling complaints against one another until Lajwanti purchases a new copy of the newspaper and urges Kishore to read it out to her. Much like the broadcast-within-broadcast that mimics Lajwanti and Kishore's household in "*Aao Radio Sunein*", here, there is a reference to news about a husband who has chopped off her wife's nose for being too quarrelsome (79). This piece of news is intended to mirror the current dynamics of the submissive Kishore and extremely argumentative Lajwanti who is now visibly irked by the misogynistic undertone of such reportage. Kishore, on the other hand, fearing further arguments, tries to pacify her through excessive flattery until Narayan makes his entry and is immediately drawn in to the discussion. He proceeds to reading out the latest headlines:

Narayan: Let's read about what's happening in the world…

(rustling sound of the newspaper)

'Dark clouds of war loom over Europe…'

'Peace negotiations by League of Nations…'

[laughing]

'This League of Nations is a nuisance, I have not understood anything about it till now (80).

Narayan: *Kya likhte hain yeh sab…? Bahar ki duniya mein kya ho raha hai?*

(panne ki khadkhadahat)

'Europe ke aasmaan par jung ke siyah baadal…'

'League of Nations maidan-e-amal mein…'

[hansi ki awaz]

yeh League of Nations kya bala hai, meri samajh mein abhi tak nahi aaya (80).

What is to be noticed is that Manto quite deftly weaves in the topicality of war with the stuff of the everyday. War is a subject matter of casual discussion wherein each character puts forth his own opinion and in keeping up with the overarching formula of the series, it is Kishore who expresses sound knowledge of the latest developments in international affairs and its associated concepts. While Lajwanti is educated and well aware, the task of enlightening her about the larger affairs such as politics and economics is mostly Kishore's. Lajwanti often taunts her husband about his assumed sense of superiority over such matters:

Lajwanti: As if you are the only one who knows everything of the world…all the wisdom is stored only in your head…Can you just explain me the meaning of the League of Nations? (81).

Lajwanti: *jaise duniya bhar ki sab cheezein aap hi jante hain, saari hikmatein sirf aap hi ke dimag mein jama hain…bhala bataiye toh League of Nations kise kehte hain?* (81).

The deliberation over League of Nations and then Disarmament, resembling that over the meaning of a dictator, seems to be an enlightening discussion not only for Lajwanti but also the audience in general as evident in Kishore's choice of comparisons. He carefully selects from the local equivalents of the English word 'League'— the Arabic '*jamiat*', Hindi word '*sangathan*' and finally zeroes on an easier and more accessible signifier from the rural context—the '*panchayat*', to loosely explain the idea of forming a council or an association to amicably solve disputes. Even more vibrant is the style in which a mock-Disarmament conference is mulled over—items of daily use such as crochet needles, sticks and kitchen knife are galvanized as each character's ammunition. As the bid to surpass each other becomes more competitive, the list of arms also becomes more sinister—it now includes hunting knives, pistols, rifles, poisonous gases

and ultimately even bombs which would, in Narayan's words, ensure that "complete peace" finally prevails in the house! (83).

In a master-stroke of exaggerated comparisons and satire, Manto lays threadbare the propaganda around war, the absurd fascism of dictatorial leaders, the procedural formalities to secure peace at the expense of mindless possession of weaponry and more importantly, its incomprehensibility to the common man who was nevertheless affected by shortages of goods and inflation. The topicality of war and its ensuing inflation, censorship of news and broadcast material, and exploitation is also a motif in Manto's romances such as *Eid Card* and political plays such as *Journalist* discussed in the later part of this thesis. But the humorous contexts of other *Aao* plays too, indirectly weave in the immediacy and pendency of war. In "*Aao Behes Karein*", Narayan compares heated arguments between Lajwanti and Kishore to the violent war conflict between China and Japan (73). Similarly, in "*Aao Khoj Lagayen*", Kishore informs Lajwanti that his silver cigarette case, that has been unfortunately stolen, would cost much higher these days as compared to its pre-war value (48). Even in his essay, "*Taraqqi Yaftan Qabrastan*" or "Our Progressive Graveyards", written shortly after his mother's death in 1942, Manto famously declared "War has brought inflation even to our graveyards" lamenting that even solemn places such as the graveyards are not untouched by the financial crisis of the war (100).[45]

The satiric component of the play, however, does not remain limited to the events in contemporary politics. A particular instance in this play helps as a good example to transition towards Manto's treatment of the onslaught of modernity, its particularly commercial nature, the ambivalent tendencies of the middle-class towards the consumerist patterns manifest in biomedical discourse and daily habits, and ultimately lifestyle in the urban metropolis that was increasingly being transformed by technology, newer ways of family organization and the debates about gender in the public sphere constituted by radio, journals, newspapers and magazines. In the opening scene of the play, Lajwanti taunts her husband for turning into an Englishman day-by-day. A whole repertoire of habits that Lajwanti finds 'English'—smoking a cigarette, using an after-shave lotion, wearing a hat and even reading a newspaper— however, according to Kishore are fairly part of their daily existence:

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[45]All references to the author's essays are taken from Aakar Patel's translations of the same, unless otherwise specified. See Patel.

Kishore: What do you say about becoming angrez, the English! One who smokes a cigarette after a meal is an English…if he applies an after-shave lotion, then too he is an English…if he dons a hat, then he must be an English. If he speaks a word or two of English language, or reads a newspaper over his daily breakfast, he is nothing but an English. Fine! Let him be one. After all, it is not an abuse that I should be irritated. It was only you who got annoyed with me when I called you an English lady, a *mem* (75).

Kishore: *Yeh angrez bante chale jane ki bhi ek hi kahi…khana khane ke baad jo cigarette piye, veh tumhare nazdeek angrez…shave karne ke baad jo chehre par after-shave lotion lagaye, veh bhi angrez…sar par hat rakha toh angrez. Bhoole se baat-cheet mein do-ek shabd angrezi ke bol diye, weh bhi angrez. Nashte par akhbaar padhne bhi angrez…chalo bhai angrez hi sahi. Yeh gaali thodi hai jo chirh jaun…weh toh tum hi ho jo uss roz mujh par bigad gyi thi jab maine tumhe mem kaha tha* (75).

Kishore's irritation with Lajwanti over her allegations is symptomatic of the normalization of 'western' or Anglicized ways of living across the middle-class households the members of which continually tried to fashion themselves as products of modern education, global awareness of material goods and the superior knowledge of scientific discourses around body and health. In this context, Sanjay Joshi argues:

> […] With the British also came a novel intrusive government which sought to direct almost all aspects of urban living, from the consumption and sale of intoxicants to the location of burial and cremation grounds from size of latrines to the size of religious processions (Oldenburg 1989 xx). Life could hardly be the same as it was before any urban dweller after the advent of British rule in India (25-6).

This mimetic agenda was lampooned much earlier by the likes of Akbar Allahabadi and later on by Shivanath Sharma and Sajjad Husain in newspapers such as *Oudh Punch*, *Oudh Akhbar* and *Hindustani* (49). Manto too in "Our Progressive Graveyards" satirizes the extent to which British had made the "uncivilized Indians" or indigenous people of the country "progressive" and had

"brought modernity not just to our hotels, clubs and cinema halls, but also to our burial grounds" (90). This essay welds the concerns around modernity and its excesses into a narrative about search for an appropriate burial space for his deceased mother. The increasingly commercialized nature of living and the infiltration of the laws of the marketplace in spaces such as the burial grounds make for a cynical attack by the author. Similar theme of bourgeois commercialism is extended in two other dramas, "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*" and "*Aao Behes Karein*"that can be read concomitantly with "*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*".

According to Menra and Dutt, "*Aao Baat Toh* Suno" differs slightly in its fundamental structure from other plays in the series.[46]The play not only introduces us to Kishore's father and brother, it also departs from the pattern of debate and role-playing that is a stock situation in its counterparts. *Come Listen* opens with the following lines:

> Kishore: (simultaneous sound of typing) *Please note that the payment of Rs. 24/8/- and not that if Rs. 49/4-, will be made to you in due course…yours faithfully…Copy to Accountant for information.* (sound of releasing paper from the typewriter; then heaving a sigh of relief) Thank God! This humungous task is finally completed (341).
>
> *Kishore:* (*type karne ki awaz ke saath saath*) Please note that the payment of Rs. 24/8/- and not that if Rs. 49/4-, will be made to you in due course…yours faithfully…Copy to Accountant for information. (*Typewriter ki giraft se kaagaz azad karne ki awaz; fir itmeenan ki saans lene ki awaz) Shukr hai, yeh pahad-sa kaam aakhir khatm ho hi gaya*(341)

Lajwanti arrives on the scene and complains that her husband hardly has time for his family even on a Sunday. Kishore on the other hand expresses his helplessness at being overburdened with office work that leaves him no time or energy to invest in his home. His mundane, clerical job has frustrated him completely and sapped him out of physical strength and mental agility:

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[46] Menra and Dutt have included this play in an appendix rather than as part of the complete *Aao* series stating two reasons for the same. First, they argue that by Manto's own admission, this play has been taken from the works of another artist. Secondly, it differs fundamentally in its structure from other plays in the series (3: 341). Since no verifiable historical data can be found with respect to the first argument, I have nevertheless included it as part of this thesis' critical analysis.

Kishore: (sound of covering the machine) Lajwanti, I know very well that having worked for five years in the office…yes, five years, typing "Yours faithfully" and "Yours obediently", my manly strength has turned absolutely frigid (342).

Kishore: (machine par dhakna rakhne ki awaz ke baad) Lajwanti, main jaanta hun ki paanch saal daftar mein…. haan, paanch saal daftar mein Yours faithfully *aur* Yours obediently *type karte karte meri mardana shujaut bilkul sard parh chuki hai* (342).

On the other hand, Lajwanti who is clearly disturbedcomplains of cough and cold and hands over a list of herbal medicines to Kishore to fetch from the market. What follows hereafter is a series of situations where Kishore is assigned a never-ending list of items from his wife, brother, father, neighbor and ultimately, even Narayan. As the cycle continues, the play seems to resemble an advertisement of a variety of household items with their identifiable brands in vogue that constitute the daily needs of urban middle-class households. Lajwanti's list consists of Umbrella soap, washing soda, Lipton Green Label tea, sugar, matchsticks and castor oil. Just as he is about to leave, his brother Gopu further adds a number of stationery items to the list—rough copies, pencils, world maps and even a pair of slippers! Kishore, mind-boggled by a catalogue of items, struggles to register them in his mind, which is when his father heaps up his demands of a pair of shoelaces, Minadex tonic, some tobacco, postal stamps and tooth powder. Kishore barely heaves a sigh of relief when his neighbor hands him money for purchasing a sack of wheat and some rice. Not yet done, she then hands over her sick husband's prescription of medicines too.

At this stage of the play, the audience is only curious to know whether Kishore, literally shot by a volley of 'to-do' lists, would be able to faithfully complete these sundry tasks. Signaling the passage of time, an announcement is made:

Sound: (in an imposing tone) This drama from the world of sound resumes afterfour hours (345).

Ek Awaz: (Roab ke lehze mein) Chaar ghante baad, awaz ki duniya ka yeh khel phir jari (345).

After four hours, having purchased all the items, Kishore reaches Narayan's house, out of breath and completely exhausted. Resigned against his situation, all he asks from his friend is some rat poison. He blurts out:

Kishore: (in a weary tone) what can I say? Am I even worthy of saying anything? I am no more than an ass who must bear the burden of the world, a donkey, nothing more!

[pause]

Please give me some water, Narayan…my throat has gone completely dry…*Uff*, *Uff*, What is this kind of life…for god's sake, give me some rat poison…I want to go (345-6).

Kishore: (bezaari bhari awaz mein) main kya keh sakta hun…! Kya main kuch kehne ke kaabil raha hun…! Main toh bojh uthane wala khacchar hun, gadha hun, kuch bhi nahi hun…

[Vaqfa]

peene ke liye thoda-sa pani do…mera halakh sookh gaya hai Narayan…uff, uff…kya zindagi hai…parmatma ke liye mujhe choohe maarne ki teen-chaar goliyan de do…main jana chahta hun. (345-6)

The moment of Narayan's sympathy towards his friend's pitiable condition soon gives way to the final farcical situation. Narayan fears that a similar fate at the hands of his wife, Savitri, would befall him next Sunday and therefore cannot give rat poison to Kishore, saving it for himself. Instead of alleviating Kishore's plight, Narayan has his own set of assignments—his talkative Belgian parrot and an overcoat have to be dropped at Mr. Kashiram's house. Left with neither patience nor any way out of his predicament, Kishore threatens that he will not spare the parrot and ensure that he shrinks the overcoat into a waistcoat! The play draws to a close with peals of laughter as Kishore repeats the huge list of items with the parrot imitating him line by line, hailing a Sunday gone waste—"*Bol miyan mithu, itwar ki jai*!" (348)

The play, no doubt, revolves around a simplistic plot, a slice of life that derives much of its humor from the no-exit situations in which Kishore finds himself. The play stimulates interest, though not enough curiosity as in other *Aao* dramas, through a range of items that Manto introduces us to. Whether it is Singer sewing machine, or Lipton tea or Umbrella soap, Manto

vividly captures the elements that make up the lifestyles of middle-class Indians. Douglas E. Haynes and Nikhil Rao suggest that in the late-colonial India, especially in the post-war period, there is a "flourishing of the office in workplaces" whose employees are largely middle-class "who defined [their] identity by purchasing and using new kinds of modern consumer items made and advertised by corporations—soap, tonics, vegetable oil, ready-made clothes, and even some electrical goods" ("Beyond the Colonial City" 326). *Aao Baat Toh Suno* seems to perfectly echo this sentiment in its obsessive cataloguing of consumer goods, tinges of which are common to "*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*" and "*Aao Behes Karein*". More importantly, the nature of Kishore's frustration that emanates out of excessive workload and expectations from his family is a significant cue to his marital relationship with Lajwanti. He expresses his stressful situation:

Kishore: the buzzing of flies, the sound of typewriters six days in a week in the office…. 'do this, don't do this', and now these problems on a Sunday…wife has caught a cold, brother's shoes are torn, the plaster in the bathroom has flaked off (346).

Kishore: Daftar mein cheh din makkhiyon ki bhinbhinahat, typewriteron ki awaz… 'yeh karo, veh na karo' ki rut, aur itvaar ko yeh museebat…biwi ko zukaam ho gaya hai, bhai ka joota fat gaya hai, gusl-khane ka palaster ukhad gaya hai (346).

The ineffectual complaints of Kishore at one level are a source of humor in the play, while at the deeper level, draw our attention to a man who not only finds it difficult to strike a balance between his work and life but is also being adversely affected by it physically. He experiences shortness of breath, his shoulders have drooped and he has lost his capacity to think and reason (346). Manto sneaks a small but crucial detail in the form of a side remark by Kishore's father who asks him why he needs to take Okasa tablets everyday.[47]This notable detail pin-points to both a state of physical and mental impotency that becomes a source of extreme anxiety to middle-class males like Kishore. This minute information is an instance that guides us further into the precarious nature of Kishore and Lajwanti's marriage, in which matters of sexual fulfillment and spousal fidelity are important concerns, albeit presented as insignificant joke so

[47] Okasa, or Okasa Gold was a popular German drug to cure erectile dysfunction imported into India for the first time in 1931 along with German typewriters and sewing machines by Khwaja Abdul Hamied. With the funds generated by selling these items, he founded the Chemical, Industrial and Pharmaceutical Laboratories, now known as Cipla, in 1935. During the Second World War, the imports of medicines from Germany were stopped and Cipla went on to manufacture the tonic out of its own laboratory situated in Bombay. See Panchal and Ghaswalla.

as to deflect their somber implications or larger commentary on the nature of middle class marriage. "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*" therefore deliberately invokes an imagery of daily humdrum of life, its customary pressures and more importantly, the overall governance of middle-class lifestyles by an increased commercialization in order to dissipate in humor their full aesthetic and ideological import. In another drama, "*Aao Behes Karein*", Manto similarly portrays Lajwanti's earnest desire to partake of modern forms of dress and entertainment but projects it in highly conservative terms of female greed and vanity in contrast to male responsibility and temperance.

Aired in 1939 from Bombay and Delhi, *Aao Behes Karein*'s theme as summarized in the *Indian Listener* is "a discussion for the sake of discussion" that interestingly begins with Lajwanti chastising her husband for disclosing to their neighbors the fact that she has got herself photographed wearing latter's trousers (737). The matter of debate is not only amusing but also a refreshing glimpse into Lajwanti's desire to foray into the new and unconventional. The battle of the sexes begins with the following questions—does the wife marry the husband or vice versa? Does the daughter belong to the mother and the son to his father? And ultimately, why do people marry at all? Much in the predictable fashion of the *Aao* series, the sequence of arguments soon takes a personal color where Lajwanti complains about Kishore's nitpicking over household matters. On the other hand, Kishore rebuts her claim that a husband's house is a prison by asserting that it is only the stern, nagging and watchful wife who ultimately is its gatekeeper. Her obsessive control over her husband would not allow natural freedoms to the husbands such as toeven interact with the other sex (71). Implicitly inscribed in these allegations are notions about the role and position of men and women in domestic spaces, the dynamics of managing a household and the extent to which modern consumer culture infiltrates the space of home—the bastion of traditional cultural values of harmony, monogamous fidelity and happiness.

In the course of the play, Kishore is frustrated because Lajwanti hardly spares effort to nurture him after a day's work. Rather, she not only whiles away enough time, but also spends lavishly in order to entertain her friends:

> Kishore: Madam is only concerned with looking after and serving her friends. Rounds of fruits are being done, bottles are being opened…I am the only drudge here who like a donkey can do nothing but bear the weight of everything (72).

Kishore: *Devi ji ko toh saheliyon ki khatir-madaaraat se kaam hai. Fruit par fruit chale aa rahe hain, botlon par botlein khul rahi hain…main mazdoor jo gadhe ki tarah bojh dhone wala mil gaya hun* (72).

Therefore, much of Kishore's disappointment emerges from his perceived lack of love on his wife's part, her never-ending material demands and her fierce nature that has probably put him at odds with his family and relatives that echoes an instance from "*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*":

Kishore: […] I was thinking that you do not love me at all…for your sake, I fought with all my dear ones, left my relatives, became your slave…sold off my car so that you could buy your gold bangles. I always used to relish halwa at Hindustani Dawa Khana but I stopped that too just so that you could treat your friends lavishly. I have made so many sacrifices but I am still deprived of your love, that love which nourishes every man's heart. For god's sake, please tell me the price of your love…

[a distant voice: 'in one *aana* , one *aana*…]

Kishore: […] *main yeh soch raha tha ki tumhe mujhse bilkul prem nahi hai…tumhare liye main maine humsaayon se ladayi mol li, apne rishtedaaron ko chorha, ghulami ka tauk pehna…motor bech di ki tumhari choodiyan ban jayen…sardiyon mein hamesha main Hindustani dawa khane ka bana hua halwa khaya karta tha, par iss saal maine weh bhi na liya ki tum apni saheliyon ki daawat kar sako…maine itni kurbaniyan ki, par tumhara prem…weh prem jo mard ke dil ki giza hota hai, mujhe abhi tak nahi mila…parmatma ke liye aaj mujhe yeh bata do ki main tumhara prem kis keemat par khareed sakta hu…*

[*dur se ek aawaz: 'ek aane mein, ek aane mein…'*] (78).

Taken together, several shades of middle-class's construction as well as negotiation with bourgeois modernity of the mid-twentieth century can be examined in these three plays. Reading the semiotic import of some of the popular brands of this period, Markus Daechsel, in his book *The Politics of Self-Expression*, has analyzed the advertising campaigns of atleast two brands that

Manto's "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*" directly alludes to—the popular tea brand Lipton, and Okasa drug for male impotency. Regularly advertised in Urdu dailies and *Indian Listener*, Lipton satisfied its customers with an "indigenous-conventional" flavor "but with an upwardly-mobile tinge", at once being the "sign of taste and refinement but at the same time easily accessible to a social stratum which had—for whatever reason—not opted for the appropriation of Western luxuries as a marker of class" (181). On the other hand, Okasa, a product popular with primarily upper middle-class, relied on the vocabulary of Western scientific discourse to explain its efficacy "with reference to the activity of glands and hormones, not in terms of humoural medicine" (179). These examples serve to establish the fact that marketing of such products in a particular language indexes distinct types of social identities that relate to a simultaneous preference for sophistication, superior western medical discourse and urban lifestyles signifying larger aspirational project of the middle-class. On the other hand, the widespread suspicion of 'inauthentic' modernity that these branded goods, certain forms of dress, habits and mannerisms could signify, especially in 'westernized' hubs i.e. the cities, remains a running subtext in advertisements, movies, women's magazines, journals and not surprisingly, radio broadcasts.

The middle-class self-fashioning, therefore, is process that is ridden with an unresolvable crisis. It is bifurcated or fractured between a desire to occupy the upper rungs of society, not in the sense of traditional elites, but as 'respectable' citizens who could partake the fruits of modernity such as technological progression or shift to nuclear families, and yet subscribe to the traditional ideas of economic discipline (largely the reserve of the housewives) and hard work (linked to new forms of work in office spaces). The middle-classes in their contradictory desires however, could not conceal the fact that "the new economic order was never only about a 'protestant' ethics of self-control, hard work and frugality; it was also about the joys of consuming. […] It did not only entail a shift from use to exchange value, but also a new and exuberant drive towards the appropriation of commodities as a form of self-fulfillment" which could only be justified by stressing on the "use value" of such products and therefore as mere essentials (Daechsel 7).[48]

[48] During the war years, emphasis on frugality was even more heightened. Interestingly, women as the prime upholders of such values is reiterated in public sphere, as can be witnesses in several advertisements issued by the Information and Broadcasting in the *Indian Listener*. One such ad titled "Defeat Scarcity by Frugality" symbolically showed a housewife deeply engrossed in jotting down her monthly household budget in order to discharge her moral duty as the keeper of household economy. In contrast to such an example, Lajwanti is often projected as a spendthrift, intemperate woman. See *Indian Listener*. 10.11 (1945): 7.

Both Lajwanti and Kishore have appetites for consumption, though the former's case is quite explicitly stated in the series. In all the examples discussed above, Kishore is characterized as a middle-class husband who as the sole struggler works tirelessly in office so as to not only maintain the lifestyle demanded by his wife but also to meet the requirements of his son, father and brother. And yet on the other hand, Kishore too, is not untouched by the allure of greater power and mobility that the exchange value of money affords him. His penchant for gambling, drinking and engaging in forms of entertainment is fulfilled by the proliferation of spaces such as the dance bars, gambling clubs, cinema and theatres in the metropolitan hubs such as Bombay and Delhi (where these plays were aired from). Their consumption patterns as a family, evident especially in branded consumer goods such as Lipton tea, Okasa tablets or Lajwanti's preference, on the other hand, for more 'desi' or indigenous medicines is largely reflective of the contradictory attitudes towards consumerism and the project of modernity.

Lajwanti's choice of indigenous medicines in "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*" (as opposed to 'foreign', biomedical ones) coexists with her desire to wear Kishore's trousers, which, as a western dress, "in particular, was symbolically loaded as alien to Indianness and as colonial" (Ramamurthy, "All-Consuming Nationalism" 164). Kishore's recourse to scientific, western, medicinal products in order to improve his sexual performance is tied up to his desire to fulfill "masculine political and social obligations" (Haynes, "Selling Masculinity" 800). His anxiety to satisfy his wife sexually is coupled with his disquiet about Lajwanti's intemperate proclivity for expenditure, as evident in her desire for expensive jewelry ("*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*") or elaborate entertainment of her friends ("*Aao Behes Karein*"). His question about the price of Lajwanti's love and fidelity in "*Aao Akhbaar Padhein*" is humorously though uncomfortably glossed over by the interrupting voice of the newspaper-hawker—"in one *anna*" (78). The vocabulary of commodity-exchange is thus, not purely a matter of humorous banter but an uncomfortable symptom of their marital relationship which itself seems to be under the pressure of new challenges thrown up by a culture in transition.Kishore articulates his need to realize conjugal satisfaction through a vocabulary of commodity-exchange. Manto's depiction of excessive consumerism, thus, signals its power as a "structural force that refashioned the fundamental logic of social communication" (Daechsel 167).

Taken together, the plays discussed in this section exhibit Manto's creation of a middle-class milieu that replicates their lives and professions within the transforming social, economic,

cultural and technological discourses. He describes these developments in an all-encompassing sweep—from the use of media like the radio and newspaper, to discussions on war and its vocabulary, to the growing penchant for sophisticated, branded goods to the hectic workplace. These heavy descriptions, however, cloud the deeper unrest of the author with the contemporary project of middle-class modernity. These plays, with their considerable investment in the creation of an external world that solely seems to stand for its reality foregrounds a hitherto unexplored relationship of Manto's sensibility with it. Mufti has analyzed his momentous story, "*Kali Shalwar*", in terms of the subaltern's tenuous relationship with the "bourgeois project [of] […] technologized modernization" (192). He argues that the poor Sultana's hold over modern technologized spaces such as the modern toilet is at best tentative, and her lover-pimp, Khuda Baksh, who photographs English soldiers in Ambala for survival, balances his attempt to "domesticate a foreign technology" while relying on the 'modern' ethic of hard-work as well as the 'irrational' grace of the saints he worships (191). However, *Aao* shows that Manto's portrayal of this frail grasp over modernity is not merely a reflection of the subaltern's coming to terms with it, but a deeper skepticism and doubt about the particular way in which it is embraced by the bourgeois society, of which he is a part.

Manto, in these dramas, is unable to respond critically to such contradictory developments in a modernizing world. Infact, it may seem that in contradistinction to the confusion characterizing poor Khuda Baksh and Sultana, or the extreme cynicism of the narrator in *Taraqqi Yaftan Qabrastan*, the protagonists of *Aao*—Lajwanti, Kishore and Narayan seem to be very comfortably ensconced in their particular milieu. This impression is however, misguided as Manto sways between two kinds of representations of their home. The first set of dramas, discussed above, foreground the protagonists' desire for upward-mobility in through the possession of specific 'modern' consumer goods. These dramas are locked in chains of descriptions that cleverly conceal inferences that could be drawn with respect to the challenges of their lives. Thus, whether it is Kishore's struggle with his failing mental or sexual health, or the debilitating pressures of the modern workplace, or Lajwanti's desires for what lies beyond the confines of the house, such questions are absorbed in the verbose mimicking of middle class lifestyle as it is, without an involved engagement with their consequences. The tensions that relate to the very commercial underpinnings of their own relationship or lack of love between them are thus deflected, albeit through genuinely funny conversations of the everyday.The

urgency of concerns ultimately wears off as the dramas proceed on to convert these significant moments as those of comic repartee or heated arguments between the couple, steeped in conventional stereotypes. In the second set of dramas discussed below, there are series of situations in which Lajwanti and Kishore vie for an upper hand in marriage but ultimately reveal themselves to be equally duplicitous and subject to conventional prejudices about each other's roles. Manto, the author, once again dramatizes their arguments to comic effect but the narrative betrays a radical blurring of such boundaries that can, ironically be achieved only in the world of make believe, rather than as concrete solutions.

Scripting the Idiom of Marriage

If the above-discussed plays help us to ground the characters of Lajwanti, Kishore and Narayan in a specific Indian middle-class milieu of mid-twentieth century increasingly being defined by its commodity-culture, it is through plays such as "*Aao Chori Karein*", "*Aao Jhooth Bolen*" and "*Aao Kahani Likhen*" that the reader gains a deeper insight into their public and private personas, the motivations that drive their actions and their mutual relationship with one another. Writing of housewives as the new heroines of literature, who had displaced the highly cultured courtesans of Ruswa or Sarshar, Ismat Chugtai in her essay "Heroine" draws attention to a changing social landscape in which they displaced not only the worlds of finesse and grandeur hallmarked by a celebrated *tawa'if*culture, but had managed to reign over another threat to her power, i.e. the *memsahib*. These *memsahibs* and Parsi women could well be "typist[s] sitting far away from [men] in the office, the manager's daughter […] and other similar heroines, to warm his body" (28). Her observations provide an uncanny context to Lajwanti and Kishore's conversations that somehow, always return to the questions of love, fidelity and control with the latter frequenting actresses and *mems* and Lajwanti's exaggerated, hyperbolic complaints. Lajwanti and Kishore come close to Chughtai's portrayal of the new marriage scenario, where the housewife-heroine could "overturn a hornet's nest" and though not "educated, could occasionally administer blows and box your ears" (29). The husband, like Kishore, with a "meager salary and daily hardship" is nevertheless, intrigued by "a lively, mischievous wife who makes troubles disappear in a snap" (29). Within this idiom of marriage are also scripted the various tensions that are a product of their respective affiliation to old and newer ideas about love, fidelity and control over one another. Manto exploits the power of words and realism alone to render these issues as a matter of truly enjoyable surface comedies. However, one can argue

that it is only when one scratches the surface of everyday humor that these pulls and pushes become evident. What follows is therefore a reading of the plays to analyze these issues to foreground their minor reading facilitated by "*Aao Kahani Likhen*" and ultimately by "*Aao Khoj Lagayen*" which helps us to reorient our understanding of their marital relationship as depicted through the overarching framework of a proposed activity that sets the action rolling.

"*Aao Chori Karen*" is a classic comedy of errors where Kishore and Narayan attempt to expose a secret plan hatched by their wives against them. In a farcical turn of events, however, the play ends up unraveling a similar plot contrived by the husbands against their wives that results in total mayhem and chaos. Kishore's proposal for an act of stealing has an air of innocent frivolity about it with a simple motive— to befool his friend Narayan by 'stealing' his parcel, and then undermining the entire act as a joke. Lajwanti on the other hand, has her reservations about stealthily sneaking into somebody's personal belongings and then facing the brunt of embarrassment. She believes that Kishore, as opposed to her poor skills as a thief, has quite an experience in this field since his school days and leaves out no opportunity to extract profit or pleasure out of petty acts of thievery (85). Much in the digressional format of *Aao*, Lajwanti starts listing amusing specimens of Kishore's 'robberies': he has stolen *zari* or gold threads from her sari and sold them; drunk away bottles of brandy that had been prescribed to his wife as medicine; carelessly spent money reserved for electricity bill and finally, unable to overcome his temptation, he has often eaten away the entire portion of sweets (85). Anyhow, she relents after much apprehension and the two ultimately cut open the parcel, unraveling its contents—an envelope containing a letter, and a small bottle.

Kishore reads the letter, sent by a certain Swami Ramprakash of Haridwar, to Lajwanti informing that the said person in question seems to be Narayan's friend, and the bottle, presumably, is a medicine for hair-growth. Finding it difficult to believe her husband's words, Lajwanti snatches the letter and starts reading the contents aloud. In the letter, Swami Ramprakash acknowledges the receipt of Narayan's letter along with ten rupees in the exchange of which he has now sent a certain "mantra" or chant as requested by the former (87). Kishore clearly becomes uncomfortable at the mention of the chant and tries to dissuade Lajwanti from reading "somebody's private letter" (87). This chant is revealed to possess certain properties such that whenever a person recites it eight times on a no-moon day, it will hypnotize whomever he wishes to exercise his control upon. Furthermore, the medicinal hair-oil too will act as a wish-

fulfilling agent for its user. As if these revelations are not enough to infuriate Lajwanti, the letter also states that the similar chant desired by "a certain Mr. Kishore" will reach him in a few days (87). Unable to defend himself, Kishore tries to convince Lajwanti that he himself had mailed this parcel in order to befool Narayan and herself but to no avail.

As the argument starts heating up, Narayan, along with his wife, reaches their house. Lajwanti does not hand over the letter to Kishore but, however, agrees not to divulge a single word related to the matter. From here on begins a chain of misconstrued meanings and incomplete revelations that keeps the listener/reader on tenterhooks as to the motives of procuring these magic chants and oils. Furthermore, boundaries between fact and fiction get increasingly blurred through the presentation of entire matter as a mere trickery. The act of stealing as stated in the beginning is intended to get a good laugh by successfully playing a joke on Narayan, which however, turns on its head by the revelations of the letter. The verbal duel starts as Lajwanti greets Mrs. Narayan and compliments her for being a "modern lady"—broad-minded with a logical temper who hardly believes in superstitions such as magical chants or formulas. The situation takes an unexpected turn as Mrs. Narayan testifies to her exactly opposite personality from what Lajwanti described her as, and Kishore, now clearly embarrassed, is left searching for appropriate excuses:

Kishore: […] Hello, Mrs. Narayan…welcome. Please Come. What…what was I saying, Lajwanti?

Lajwanti: You were saying that Mrs. Narayan is a very liberal lady. She considers things like magic, chants etc. as complete nonsense.

Mrs. Narayan: Mr. Kishore, who told you all this? Infact, I have an unrelenting faith in all these, what do you say Lajwanti? (88).

Kishore: […] *aaiye Mrs. Narayan…namaskar…tashreef rakhiye…main…main…kya keh raha tha Lajwanti..*

Lajwanti: *Yehi ki Mrs. Narayan badi raushankhayal khatoon hain. Jadoo-toney, mantar-jantar ko bilkul fizool samajhti hain.*

Mrs. Narayan: *Mr. Kishore, yeh aapse kisne kaha…? Mera toh in cheezon par bada etkaad hai, kyon behen Lajwanti?*(88

Lajwanti now leaves no opportunity to fold in a reference to these magic chants and superstitions in her conversations with Mrs. Narayan, which makes Kishore increasingly

anxious. Amidst discussions, Narayan enquires from Kishore about his parcel in a hushed tone, which is exactly when Lajwanti makes a reference to Swami Ramprakash in another context:

Lajwanti: Sister Lajwanti, have a look at this intricate sari. It's embroidery is beautiful…(in a louder tone) Swami Ramprakash of Haridwar is really a famous person.

Kishore: (abruptly) Lajwanti! (89).

Lajwanti: *Behen Savitri, sari ka yeh palla bahut hi nafees hai. Tille ka kaam bahut acha hai… (zara oonchi awaz mein) Swami Ramprakash Haridwar wale kafi mashhoor aadmi hai…*

Kishore: *(ekaeki) Lajwanti!* (89).

Lajwanti's remark about Swami Ramprakash results in a brilliant confusion of sorts that alerts both Kishore and Narayan while Savitri is unable to comprehend either the misplaced references to Swami or her husband and Kishore's incongruent responses. Both Narayan and Kishore profess that they do not have any knowledge about the person Lajwanti is talking about and therefore plead innocence. On the other hand, Savitri confides in Lajwanti, saying that there ought to be a parcel on its way that ultimately results in each character responding haphazardly in his or her situation. Lajwanti smartly interjects clues in her answers fuelling a confrontation between Kishore, Narayan and Savitri, ultimately divulging Kishore's original plan of stealing and her own protestations over opening the parcel. Just as Savitri shifts the load of responsibility on Kishore, Narayan too tries to escape from the scene when he is stopped by Kishore who argues that his friend will have to "clear his position" first (91). Narayan, on the other hand, argues that contrary to Kishore, he has an exemplary relationship with Savitri that needs no external stimulators or remedial measures of the likes of dubious chants and oils. It is here when the reader is in expectation of some customary admonition or argument between Savitri and Narayan that the author introduces the final twist to the entire situation.

Narayan reveals that the letter is not addressed to him but infact, to Mrs. Narayan, i.e. Savitri. Opposite to what was expected, it appears that the two ladies had planned to literally 'tame' their husbands and it was Lajwanti who had fabricated the lie replacing Narayan's name in the place of Mrs. Narayan and Kishore's in the place of her own. Furthermore, Narayan mocks Kishore for being extremely dim-witted for not even being able to argue that males like them hardly believe in such superstitions, which seems to be an exclusive reserve for women. At this

stage, the play seems to be headed towards closure but for the final farcical moment when the maidservant Durga fetches a letter addressed to Narayan from Swami Ramprakash from Haridwar, yet again!

According to Waris Alvi, the acclaimed critic of Urdu literature, *Aao Chori Karen* is the best play of *Aao* series, for it is here that the requirements of a good *hasya* drama are truly met (*Saadat Hasan Manto* 26). Tense, knotty situations arising out of Kishore's mock-robbery that baffle the characters, combined with witty dialogues keep the audience engaged in unraveling the manner in which Lajwanti, Kishore, Narayan and Savitri evade unmasking of their contrived plots and meander their way out of them. Lajwanti's detective-like persona that is consistently invoked throughout the series, often through comparisons with Sherlock Holmes, is reiterated here in her subtle but effective clues interjected at a flawless timing in the play. Much in line with her character, she asserts in the beginning that she never indulges in any argument till she possesses sufficient proofs for the same (85).

The idea of secretive plotting, however, unlocks something deeper about the marital relationship between the characters. It acts as a device to look askance at the sort of ideals upon which the characters' married life is founded upon. It is not hard to observe that behind the cover of farcical situations, Manto satirizes the lack of love and communication between the couples who can go at any lengths, even taking a recourse to ridiculously superstitious means such as magic chants and potions, to gain control over one another. The stereotypical conflation of superstition with female identities is at once invoked and debunked, especially towards the end of the play when Narayan's confident assertions of male rational temper are met with the arrival of an equally questionable letter by the same Swami Ramprakash addressed to him. Equally complicit in taking refuge under superstitious remedies, the husbands just like their wives are desirous of seeking dominance over them. Moreover, the motivation for the characters' dependence on irrational methods is the palpable need for control and influence over their partners rather than natural, healthy instincts of love and affection as is clearly evident in the language of both the letter and the arguments of the characters.[49]

Kishore-Lajwanti and Narayan-Savitri in their game of befooling their partners reveal each other as their mirror image. Narayan's proclamations that his relationship with Savitri is

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[49]The words used to describe the effects of the potion are: "*tabedar*" (someone who unquestioningly obeys the orders), "*mureed*" (disciple; here used for someone expressing complete devotion), and "*lattu karna*" (mesmerized). The words, no doubt, carry humorous connotations in the context of their usage in the play. See 3: 87, 92, and 93.

impeccable fall flat on his face when he finds out that the letter is addressed to none other than his wife who has plotted against him. It seems at one level that the play ridicules dominating wives such as Lajwanti and Savitri who have a debilitating effect on the aggressive masculinity of their husbands (which reminds us of Kishore's repeated complaints of similar nature discussed earlier) and selfishly want to fulfill all their wishes by tricking them:

Narayan: Savitri, this chant…this chant to wither away shreds of manliness that I am left with? And this oil that will make all your prayers come true! (93).

Narayan: *Aur Savitri, yeh mantar…meri rahi-sahi mardangi door karne ka mantar…aur fir yeh tel jisko lagane se tumhari sab muradein poori ho jayengi…* (93).

By feeding into the stereotypes of conniving, watchful wives, Manto overtly directs the joke on a conservative model of marriage where the wives, instead of being a source for emotional or intellectual succor, cannot rise above the pettiness that constitutes obsessive control, jealousy, greed and irrational belief systems. Lest, the play become yet another misogynistic lampooning of the womenfolk alone, the author introduces an unexpected twist towards the end that inverts the story on its head, making both the husbands and the wives equally responsible for the jeopardized state in which their marriages stand. The play then becomes an insightful exploration into the marital relationships in general, infested with the malaise of suspicion, indifference and poor dialogue with one another.

The duplicitousness and artifice that colors Kishore and Lajwanti's marriage is further explored in "*Aao Jhooth Bolein*" where Lajwanti's proposal, first to Kishore and then to Narayan, to fabricate lies leads onto an ironical drama between deception and faith, truth and untruth. It is in the mood of play and make-believe that the reality of the characters' investment in each other truly emerges. The drama initially unfolds largely through the dialogues between Lajwanti and Narayan who seems to be taking her side while all the while making a case for his friend, Kishore. The drama revolves around the central question of where Kishore is headed to in the evening. Lajwanti is almost certain that her husband wants to visit none other than the actress Urmiladevi who he has been recently introduced to and expresses her disdain for her in no uncertain terms:

Lajwanti: At least let it out from your mouth! I will believe your lie too as a truth. Come on just say it.

Kishore: I love you dearly.

Lajwati: Oh! Now you start with your flirtatious overtures! Well, I accept…but what of that witch, that godforsaken clever woman, whose photo you keep stuck in your pocketbook…? (96).

Lajwanti: *Tum muh se toh footo…main tumhare jhooth ko bhi sach samjhungi. Lo, ab keh daalo.*

Kishore: *Mujhe tumse bahut prem hai.*

Lajwanti: *Ab lage chonchle bagharne…chalo, bahut kiya toh maan bhi liya…par weh chudail, veh mui harrafa, jiska photo tum apni pocketbook mein chipkaye rakhtey ho…?* (96).

Uncharitable references to Kishore's visitations to actresses and dance girls in clubs have been made in several other *Aao* plays as well where Lajwanti contemptibly addresses them as "*pichchal pariyan*" (witches) or "*laal-moohwali bandariyan*" (red-faced monkeys) (33). Her disregard for certain 'types' of women that emanates out of her assurance as a 'respectable' married, middle-class woman is sought to be undermined during the course of the play. Her single-minded devotion and allegiance to her husband is exposed as a mere construct existing solely as subservience to traditional norms of a monogamous marriage rather than as organic emotions of genuine love and companionship.

In an exchange of ironic dialogues, Lajwanti and Narayan enact a typical scene of what happens when Kishore returns home after a hard day at work. Narayan states that Lajwanti being an absolutely dutiful wife makes her husband comfortable who returns the favor by profusely thanking her—"*aapne ek pativrata stree ki tarah iski khidmat ki aur isne ek ache pati ki tarah aapka shukriya kiya*" (99). In this fictional account, Kishore goes on to describe the travails of his life as a stenographer who is but a mere slave to the demands of his authoritarian boss. Therefore, despite his deep wish to spend some time with his wife, he would have to obey his boss's command and be present at his residence in the evening. Lajwanti, on her part is extremely considerate and maturely responds to the situation encouraging her husband to prioritize his work. At this stage a sound instruction signaling the passage of time slaps the reader as well as Kishore back into a disappointing reality, where the latter quite unbelievably

amazed at his wife's generosity or "*shauharnawazi*" is in for a rude shock. Lajwanti and Narayan decide to now only speak unadulterated truth, "in which there is no speck of lie" (100).

Narayan continues, now with his completely "true" version of the story, provoking Kishore by repeatedly referring to the latter's fondness of actresses. As opposed to Kishore who may not be "scared of his wife", Narayan argues that he can never dare to visit any such "*wahiyat*" or atrocious women (100). Incensed beyond control, it is here that Kishore no longer wishes to speak lies and blurts out of what he considers to be the curbed nature of his existence:

> Kishore: The question is that what good has speaking lies been so that I may leave the path of truth? This goddess who is sitting next to me is nothing short of a martial law over my life! If I speak a lie, it gets censored, and if truth is what I speak, then that too is charged with section 144. What should I do? (100-01).

> Kishore: *Par sawaal yeh hai ki jhooth bolne se mera kaun-sa kaam ban gya hai jo ab main sach bolna chorh du…yeh devi ji jo mere paas baithi hain, mere jeevan par martial law ban kar reh gyi hain…jhooth bolun toh weh bhi censor ho jata hai aur sach bolun toh uss par bhi dafa ek sau chawalis lag jati hai…ab bolo, main karun toh kya karun…*(100-01).

Inserting probably a tongue-in-cheek reference to the censorious environments of All India Radio that stilted the creative freedom of expression of fierce writers such as Manto, the author nevertheless paints the picture of a typical household with dominating partners who in their obsessive monitoring of each other's lives hardly foster desirable qualities of a companionate marriage. Lajwanti's obviously authoritarian attitude described as a martial law recalls the severity of her 'ordinance-like' decisions in *Aao Behes Karein*[50]and poses her in contrast to Kishore who is supposedly more timid of the two and appears as a conventionally hen-pecked husband. However, the strength of the play lies in author's unequivocal critique of both the tendencies embodied by Kishore and Lajwanti. In this present game of truth and lies, both these players are "false liars" in as much as they initially sport the roles of conventionally 'good' partners (98). In their spirit of dissembling, they both embody the desirable versions of

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[50] In *Aao Behes Karein*, there is a discussion between the characters as to whether the sons belong to fathers and wives to daughters. Kishore refrains from making any explicit claim, presumably in fear of countering his wife and states that whatever she decides would be a "new ordinance" for him. See *Dastavez 3* 69.

themselves, which are unfortunately lost in the real world of lack of understanding, deceit and conventionally orthodox ways of responding to each other's public lives.

Moving further with their 'true' stories, Kishore asks Lajwanti to ready his dinner-suit that he is supposed to wear to his boss's house. Lajwanti reveals that she has already gotten the suit altered to their son's requirements and hence Kishore would have to cancel his plans of going out of the house. This infuriates Kishore who can no longer bear Lajwanti's stubbornness and repents giving an unnecessary long rope to her—" *tumko dheel de kar maine sakht galti ki* […] *main khoob muft ka tumhare haath lag gaya hu…aakhir yeh kya tamasha hai…*?" (103). The possibility of a long-winded argument at this moment is interrupted by a telephone call answered by Lajwanti. Her responses to the caller make Kishore quite uneasy and Narayan, sensing the nature of impending climax excuses himself out of the situation. Lajwanti keeps Kishore (and the audience) in a heightened state of suspense before announcing that the caller was none other than the film actress Urmiladevi who is upset with her for ruining Kishore's visit to her house. This concocted story is enough to leave Kishore both embarrassed and helpless as Lajwanti smartly demolishes his much-anticipated programs—neither could he spend time with his actress-friend nor be present at the house of his boss as commanded by him. The final twist to the entire drama comes in the form of Durga, the maidservant's entry, who informs Kishore that his dinner-suit has been properly laundered as instructed by Lajwanti and ready for use. Kishore is dejected and finding no way to escape from the web of lies constructed by both of them, instructs Durga to take his dinner-suit to the tailor and be altered into for their son's shorts and coats. The play's ending once gain establishes Lajwanti's perceptive knowledge of her husband's movements and interests. Her cleverness and wit is evident in the spontaneous nature of her comical yet knotty verbal traps that push Kishore into confessing his mischievous plans. Lajwanti's comment towards the end is laced with sarcasm – "*Kyun, chor kaise pakda…yeh Urmiladevi…*" (What say? How did I catch your lie? This Urmiladevi?") (104). It comes as a sharp contrast to the ostensibly weaker and ineffectual defenses put up by Kishore throughout the length of the play.

Perhaps, much of what has been attributed to the characters of Lajwanti and Kishore until now—manipulation, watchful control, and the self-assured logic on one hand and timidity, escapism and irrationality on the other respectively, are thrown into a curious play in, what can be called as the most complex plays of the series, namely "*Aao Kahani Likhen*" (*AKL*). The

entrenchment of the characters in a certain bourgeois social-cultural and economic milieu that affords them self-assured perception of respectability is rendered here as tenuous and shifting in nature. The play is hinged around the central proposal of writing a story in which Lajwanti and Kishore engage in a fictional discourse about a character named Babu Saligram who has reached home quite late at night and is overcome with fear. It is through fleshing out Saligram and his wife's story that the supposed 'truth' of Lajwanti and Kishore's marriage too is supposed to be unfolded. The rigid drawing of their roles as husband and wife in a monogamous marriage that represent the domains of the private and the public respectively is thrown open to speculation by the end of the story/drama.

True to its title, the play capitalizes on the motifs of writing—the conceptualization of characters and their actions in as realistic manner as possible. The play is constructed as a tussle between Lajwanti and Kishore in their respective roles as writers and the extent to which they can agree to exercise their imaginative liberties. At the beginning of the play, Kishore begins to narrate a story that is built as a sequence of queer events:

Kishore: Listen: Once there was a girl named Nani. Her sister was named Nahaani. Her brother was Bisaula who set up three villages. Out of these, only two could be set up and the third could not be. Three potters visited the one that could not be set; two were lame and one did not have a hand. The one who did not have a hand made three utensils- two broken and one without its base. The one that did not have a base was used to make three grains of rice…(19).

Kishore: *Suno: ek thi nani, uski behen thi nahaani, uska bhai tha Bisaula…usne basaye teen gaon; do gaon basaye, ek basa hi nahi…jo basa hi nahi, usme aaye teen kumhar; do langde-looley, ek ke haath hi nahi…jiske haath hi nahi, usne banayi teenhandiyan; do tooti-taati, ek ka tala hi nahi…jiska tala hi nahi, usmein pakaye teen chawal...* (19).

Harish Narang has analyzed this scene as an example to "'know' Manto's mind about the craft of constructing stories. At each stage an unusual element is introduced" and usually the last of the given choices "is picked up to compound the bizarre elements" ("Lord Shiva or the Prince of Pornographers" 86). It is argued that contrary to Lajwanti's interruptions, it is the creative flow

of Kishore who "always manages to give it an unexpected twist to foil her expected continuation" that lends the story its imaginative richness (87). However, it could be argued that Manto's method of story writing entails not only introducing unanticipated spins on Lajwanti's 'commonplace' logic but also embedding a secondary narrative in the drama that is somehow not allowed to complete.

AKL works as the story of Kishore and Lajwanti's protagonists—Saligram and Kamla respectively, who vie for their own version of events that transpired on a particular evening. Saligram is infact intended to be a carefree bachelor, indulgent, given to the pleasures of playing bridge and being careless with his money. It is only on the insistence of Lajwanti that he is conceptualized as married man who is much intimidated by his wife. The parallel and ultimately divergent rendering of Saligram-Kamla story by Lajwanti and Kishore is eventually a contestation between their respective narratives out of which only one would supersede the other and become the dominant voice of the drama. However, it is argued that it is the secondary or the 'minor' narrative that constitutes the unsaid part of the drama and acts as a methodological key to unlock radical attributes of the fictional story helping us to cast a fresh gaze at Lajwanti and Kishore's relationship on the whole.

At this stage, it does well to summarize the plot of the story being concocted in order to flesh out the argument made above. Saligram has spent an entire evening at the United Club enjoying the performance of a dancing girl and at last returns home late at night. He is gripped with fear, supposedly of his nagging wife who would be predictably upset with his fondness for 'licentious' women and long absence from home. As a matter of coincidence, just as he is about to reach his house, he meets his neighbor who returns him a stick that he had borrowed for doing some household errands. The story advances towards its climax as Saligram reaches his house holding, rather 'armed' with a stick and sees his wife clutching a pair of *ghungroos* or anklets, shivering and trembling. The suspense heightens over the possibility of what might happen when this encounter finally takes place. Will Kamla unleash her wrath on Saligram? Will Saligram be able to invent a plausible excuse? Could Kamla be pacified through some measure? Both Kishore and Lajwanti keep adding layers to the narrative that leads to this final moment. There are noticeable points at which they try to enforce their particular narratives that favor their respective protagonists' stories.

Once it is agreed that Saligram is married and is returning home after having watched a dance in the bar, Kishore focuses on Saligram's deep fascination with the dancer's beauty and states that the sound of her anklets keeps resounding in his ears. On the other hand, according to Lajwanti, Kishore, defensive and scared as he is, is preparing himself to face the noisy "scoldings and abuses" which his "wife was hiding within herself" (23). Kishore further insists that since Saligram "deeply loved his wife", he was not fearful of her but rather "disturbed by some other matter" (23). Instead, Lajwanti argues that such speculation is only a clever ploy to save Saligram from his wife's fury, an attempt that, however, would remain unsuccessful. It seems, therefore, that Lajwanti tries to push forth a story that is traditional in its outlook and reiterates the stereotypes of aggressive wives and wayward husbands who must be 'tamed' or disciplined. Such a reading also seems to mimic Lajwanti's own character as is apparent through the dramas discussed above. On the other hand, the reader is given an impression that it is Kishore who in his creative sway has a far more interesting story to narrate but one which is repeatedly interrupted and overthrown by Lajwanti's stubborn insistence.

Furthermore, Lajwanti tells Narayan (who takes over Kishore's role of a writer) that now "the story must be completed in one way or the other" and tries to hasten towards the conclusion. Kishore, however, considers such a move to be abrupt and tries to delay the narrative. As the story reaches its climax and the mood of the play becomes tense in anticipation of an inevitable clash between Saligram and Kamla, Narayan/author introduces an unforeseen spin on the entire situation. In Narayan's fictional yarn, Kamla, upon seeing her husband, trembles not because of anger (as Lajwanti would try to interpret it) but out of an immense sense of guilt and shame for it was none other than she herself who danced away at the United Club in exchange of a sum of money that would help him to repay his debts. Narayan weaves the following story:

Narayan: No. She was shivering because her husband was steadily walking towards her, clasping a stick in his hand. She ran forward and fell at his feet. The anklets clasped around her fingers were instantly undone and were scattered across the stony floor (27).

Narayan: *Ji nahi…veh kaamp rahi thi…uska pati danda haath mein liye mazboot kadmon se uski taraf barh raha tha…veh daud ke aage badhi aur apne pati ke kadmon mein gir padi…uski ungliyon mein*

fanse huye ghungroo dhaage ke bandhan se aazad ho kar
pathreele farsh par taaron ki tarah bikhar gaye (27).

The imagery invoked in this scene is pertinent. In a single stroke, the perception of a dominating wife who could, perhaps, exercise a moral control over her husband for neglecting his duties, is brutally demolished. Rather, in its place, Kamla is exposed as the one who has clearly overstepped her permissible limits as a 'respectable' housewife such that moral demarcations between the 'woman of the house' and the 'woman of the marketplace' are no longer tenable. Her position at the threshold of the house is extremely suggestive and so is the unstringing of her anklet bells that are scattered over the stony floor, much as her own pride and righteousness in being a chaste, faithful wife. The texture of her confession contours the drama in a rather traditional manner where Kamla's recognition of her culpability emanates not only from crossing her boundaries but also doing so without the consent of her husband—"*main aaj United Club mein tumhari ijazat ke bagair naach ke aayi hun…*" (27). Saligram's reaction to this secret is one of extreme horror and disbelief. A "helpless shriek" ("*beikhtiyaar ek cheekh nikli*") escapes his mouth as Kamla reveals her truth to him (27). The play, nevertheless, draws to the close with Narayan stating that both Saligram and his wife "happily retreated to their room and slept" while "their ears resounded with the tinkling of the anklet bells" the entire night (27). The finale to what is an extremely somber, confessional moment seems somewhat artificial for it cannot conceal the deeply patriarchal undertones of Kamla's guilt, her eventual lack of agency that is enforced by her compulsion to admit to her 'sin', and ultimately her conditioned belief in the need for husband's approval in matters of public conduct of her life. Kamla's story straddles between two conventionally constricting tropes that define a woman in marriage—the nagging, possessive wife given to ill-temper, jealousy and control on one hand, and the '*patrivrata stri*' or the chaste, virtuous, devoted wife on the other. However, the test of the play lies in circumventing its critique of the institution of marriage within its structure that seems to uphold traditionally constricting stereotypes attached to men and women in matrimony.

The forced ending of the play demands a deeper engagement with its politics that is accomplished through its clever narrative structure. What one has discussed so far is primarily Kishore's (and later on Narayan's) rendering of the story with certain changes that are enforced by Lajwanti. On the other hand, the secondary narrative is that of Lajwanti which can be read as separate from Kishore's. One may read Saligram and Kamla's story backwards to identify how

Lajwanti's interruptions and insistences are precise and well-thought of, since in the context of the play's 'truth' as revealed at the end, it seems that it is Kamla rather than Saligram who needs a secretive cover for her actions. Lajwanti desperately tries to conceal the fact of Kamla's transgression by pushing the story towards the route of a daily domestic quarrel. This concealment is also a clever strategy on the part of Manto who controls Lajwanti and Kishore's actions for a particular purpose.

The play does not allude to an instance of adultery in marriage (as for instance, in his other distinguished play—*Iss Manjhdhar Mein*) but a radical violation of 'decencies' that define a monogamous marriage. In the blurring of the designated space of 'home' and 'dance bar', there is an attempt to throw open the hypocrisy surrounding bourgeois value-system undergirding modern marital relationships. The space of home as that of secure relationships and material comfort is put into question as Kamla struggles to arrange money for her debt-ridden husband. In the moment where Kamla dons the garb of the enchanting dancer Radha, she exchanges her private identity as a wife (duty-bound, chaste and loyal) for that of one who straddles the public world of the marketplace, which promises her economic, sexual and moral liberation, however precarious it might be. It is ironical that she can fulfill her desire, even duty, to help her husband out of a financial exigency only through this barter of identities in the outside commercial world. Yet, the means to materialize her intention is symbolic of her, perhaps restricted, but unconventional, individual choice. It is possible that the brevity of radio-drama form does not allow the author to elaborate on Kamla's motivations behind her actions, the options available to her and the attitude of her husband in face of economic stringency. But it leaves no question about the radical nature of her overstepping the domestic threshold out of monetary considerations.

Kamla is as much a protagonist of Lajwanti as the latter is of Manto in this play. In her desire to keep the fact of Kamla's 'sin' a secret, Lajwanti proves herself to be capable of maintaining her sovereignty and confidence in her bold decisions. Her ability to safeguard her (as well as Kamla's) personhood recalls, in contrast, another protagonist from Progressive literature, namely Indu, in Rajinder Singh Bedi's "Intermittent fever". Indu, as opposed to Lajwanti, upholds the ideal of traditional marriage where she feels obliged to share her deepest secrets, even that of her pre-marital relationship with Nabha, with her husband. Lajwanti, as Manto's heroine, risks the reputation of a scheming woman who nevertheless, is sharp and

unapologetic about treating herself as an individual with an independent will of action. She is astute enough to understand that only as long as she is able to fabricate tales about conventional marriage and its daily fights that she could keep her protagonist's 'infringement' hidden. The mundane predictability or the commonplace logic of domesticity that seems frivolous in contrast to Kishore's 'deeper' narrative is therefore Lajwanti's only creative ploy, her weapon to 'rescue' Kamla from the consequences of her actions which would be judged in no other way than as morally corrupt. Using stock husband-wife arguments also allows her to demand some sort of accountability from the menfolk (such as her own husband who shares much with Saligram's character.) who can afford the luxury of leisure activities such as gambling or drinking at a dance-bar while the women solely bear the responsibility of household chores and rearing children. Thus, Lajwanti rhetorically argues that should not a woman fight for her rights ("*aurat kya apne hukook ki hifazat na kare?*"), instead of silently accepting her oppression ("*kuch na kahe, ghul-ghul ke mar jaye*") whereas men squander away their time and money outside home (23).

It becomes important to note that this radicalism with respect to male and female roles in marriage is ultimately undercut by the stark imagery of Kamla's tears of repentance. She wallows in guilt and can no longer contain this secret that Lajwanti as the creator of her story has been trying to protect so efficiently. Lajwanti's narrative is curtailed and instead of Saligram being at the receiving end of his wife's reproaches (which too are true), it is Kamla who is relegated well within the folds of bourgeois domesticity. Even more importantly, her agency is further shown as limited and eventually circumscribed by the norms of heterosexual middle-class matrimony. The restoration of patriarchal order is achieved through clever narratorial plan that does not seem without a design in the case of an author like Manto.

***Aao* as "Minor" Comedies**

Aao is a collection of domestic radio comedies meant for family audiences that were aired usually at night when all the family members could afford an hour of radio entertainment. *AKL*, for instance, was aired at 10:30 P.M. in 1939 from Lucknow.[51] To broadcast a play that blatantly corrupts the genteel decorum of the 'lady of the house' could inevitably result in a moral censure amounting to censorship as well as danger to the author's position as a writer in the AIR. In order to escape the restrictions of broadcasting, it seems that Manto curates a 'safe'

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[51] See Appendices for details about programmes.

language of the majority—that of the middle-class audience, but deterritorializes it by suffusing it with interruptions, side remarks, threats, mockery, teasing and diplomatic manipulation that makes these plays radically 'minor'. These linguistic tools primarily work in the plays as sources of tongue-in-cheek humor but embody within them different interpretations contingent upon the subject position of the audience.

The deployment of comedy framework is essential for it allows the author to exploit radio broadcasting as a medium where 'light-hearted' plays such as these are hugely popular without abandoning his progressive politics. He successfully delivers to the medium by taking advantage of the average audience's tendency to believe in the cheery frivolity of its dialogues and its absolute realism in depicting the humdrum of daily life. Another factor that retrenches the possibility of a sustained intelligent engagement with the dramas is their ephemeral nature in time as has been initially discussed in relation to their affinity with sketch comedy forms. Broadcast on different days and time, with a run-time of about twenty minutes, these radio-comedies could have served no other purpose than to provide entertainment to an audience already drained out by the day's work. If their location in commercial broadcasts precludes an extensive deliberation over their radical potential, then on the other hand, a decontextualized reading of them in the textual realm has often been in relation to the bare minimalism of the author's short stories that have the defining ability to shock and startle. Making use of neither of these approaches, these plays demand a unique critical assessment that can only be accomplished by reading into the mechanics of the artistic camouflage used as a literary device to dwell on the subject of marriage, consumerism, the rise of the workspace in modern cities and the hypocrisy that surrounded the project of modernity as a whole.

Contrary to his short stories, *Aao* plays are successful as radio broadcasts precisely because what they provide is a perfect reflection of the middle-class society—this complete identification or mirror that actually acts as the artistic camouflage. Unable to see the forest from the trees, the listener/critic gets so involved in the trivial details (such as of consumer items, radio broadcasting, daily discussion of news headlines etc.) that he is befooled into believing the stereotypical attitudes of the characters at their face value. It is also important to note that the plays reveal their nature as minor literature in the textual realm only when they are read as a composite series rather than disparate plays as they were aired over the radio. Since we cannot access the oral nuances (intonation, gestures etc.) of the plays, the continuum of the written word

helps us to string the various experiences (especially marital) of Lajwanti, Kishore and Narayan as rooted in a particular socio-cultural-economic milieu which the author looks at obliquely. Thus, several moments into *Aao Akhbar Padhein*, Lajwanti digresses from the topic of reading a newspaper into a grave mulling over her current life. This scene is written as a small digression that highlights a rare moment of self-reflection rather than routine cribbing that is usually associated with Lajwanti. She harks back to her days before marriage and her false hopes that all her "dreams will be fulfilled in this house" only to realize that she is forever captured in the mess of burdensome reality (76). Kishore too is sympathetic to his wife struggling with similar feelings:

> Kishore: This life seems rosy in the beginning. But when children are born and other struggles begin, one starts to feel weary. However, this is also one of the shades of life (76).
>
> *Kishore: Shuru shuri mein yeh zindagi bahut achi maloom hoti hai lekin jab baal-bache paida ho jate hain aur jab doosre dukh dard shuru ho jate hain toh ek thakawat mehsoos hoti hai. Par yeh bhi humare jeeven ka ek rang hai* (76).

This exceptional moment of mutual contemplation highlights ennui and boredom that has set in the married life of this couple. Not only that, it also symbolizes a degree of hopelessness on the part of the author himself, who is at a loss to envision such relationships other than in these conventional terms. The above dialogue points towards a sense of exhaustion towards a life beset with responsibilities, changing modes of work and the race for acquisition of material wealth that is increasingly becoming the criteria of self-definition of the middle-class. The relentless pursuit of material goods that are no longer a novelty, but rather the necessities of a comfortable life, also brings with it the responsibility of earning the means to attain them. Thus, the inventory of goods that borders on a caricature in "*Aao Baat Toh Suno*" can result in peals of laughter on the radio, but when read alongside the example of lassitude discussed above, begs a deeper reflection on what the advent of consumer modernity could entail for a class of people already grappling with debates over gender roles, changing dynamics of the family and men-women relationships.

While the above example is constructed in the play as a digression, there are others that allude to the traditional division of gender roles in a family, which were however, subject to

debate in the contemporary milieu. Lajwanti is shown as fussing over washing clothes ("*Aao Khat Toh Suno*"), cooking and cleaning the house ("*Aao Behes Karein*") while Kishore, as discussed earlier, complains over his situation as an overburdened beast whose sole function in the family is to earn money. Yet, Manto exposes this division of roles as nothing more than expectations of society, which were nevertheless becoming increasingly conflicting, especially for women in the transitional years of India's modernity. Kishore's failing sexual and physical health are not merely matters of casual discussion but are meant to draw attention to forms of social life in which increasing pressure to maintain adequate lifestyles becomes a marker to superficially define masculine roles within marriage. On the other hand, deeply entrenched notions about the responsibility of the home and the hearth resting squarely with the women is now coupled with a 'modern' desire to educate them so as to make wives compatible with their well-educated, urbane husbands.[52] Lajwanti voices the modern notions of womanhood when she talks of swapping small but time-consuming activities that comprise their daily routine—what if Kishore would toast the bread or make tea in the morning so that the she can devote her time to 'worthwhile' pursuits such as reading a newspaper? (75) Lajwanti straddles the world of the old and the new, who reads *Fasana-e-Azad* ("*Aao Khat Suno*" 38), one of the first modern novels of Urdu, is eager to listen to radio, don western dresses but the one who at the same time must fulfill her role as a caregiver and nurturer. It is out of deeply ingrained notions about manhood and womanhood and their often-conflicting versions that were circulating in the contemporary society, that Kishore, in *Aao Taash Khelein*, could so easily admonish his wife when their son falls sick:

> Kishore: What will you think? Can you even think? If you had a faintest ability to think then our child would not have been suffering from sickness. He would not have turned this yellow like turmeric (40).

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[52] Issues of *Indian Listener* are replete with a list of programmes that allows us to glean these notions about women's role in the house and the public sphere. One can notice that a series of daily afternoon programs such as "Living More Beautifully", "Auraton Ki Dunya", "Men Please Switch Off" and "*Ae Mao, Behno, Betio*" aired under the "For Women" hours often comprised talks such as those about making "the home and hearth more pleasant" (4.2: 166) or decorating the home "on a three-figure income" (4.2 (1939): 272). In contrast to these Victorian "Angel in the house" kinds of housewifely responsibilities, there were talks, debates and general programs aired at night that spoke of more progressive ideal of womanhood. Debate topics could range from higher education for women, or whether they could be successful as lawyers (4.2 (1939): 113; 4.1 (1938): 22). Questions about newer forms of dress and beautification were discussed as topical matters of debate ("A plain woman is more attractive than a painted one", 4.1 (1938): 66). Irawati Karwe thus identified the educated young woman as one "holding fast to the old social virtues and to all that was good and attractive in the older order of things" but welcoming "her new freedom of thought and action with a naïve flush" in a "wider sphere of social activity." (4.8 (1939): 598).

Kishore: *Kya sochogi tum? Kuch soch bhi sakti ho? Agar tumhare dimag mein soch vichar ka madda hota toh aaj munne ko dast pe dast na aate. Uska rang haldi ki manind peela na padta* (40).

The instance where Kishore sarcastically makes fun of Lajwanti's lavish expenditure on food items in order to treat her friends (*Aao Behes Karein*72) or her recalcitrant attitude towards purchasing gold bangles (*Aao Akhbar Padhein* 78) function as comic moments and are able to evoke moments of laughter for they embody within themselves self-identification of the popular audience with their particular beliefs about men and women, their reality of married lives. It is only when one analyzes this very language of admonishment, ridicule and sarcasm as a creative mask that it starts to denote much more than merely Lajwanti's argumentative nature and Kishore's frustration. It is through the 'minor' use of such language of conventional domesticity that the author lays bare the uneasy connotations of the modern imaginings of male and female familial roles as contradictory. Men like Kishore are trying to fulfill their traditional role of being the breadwinners while also being expected by their wives to lend a supporting hand in housekeeping and providing emotional and sexual satisfaction to them. On the other hand, Lajwanti may desire greater exposure to the public sphere yet must retain her quintessential traits relating to domestic order—frugality, efficiency and modesty as opposed to unabashed freedom of expenditure, clothing or abdication of her duties as a wife and mother.

Perhaps, the greatest thrust of Manto's engagement in these plays is with the nature of Lajwanti and Kishore's marriage itself. In this regard, two observations can be made. The first one is the repeated comparisons of Lajwanti with Sherlock Holmes that is source of great humor in the dramas. Often ridiculing Lajwanti's over-inquisitive mind, Kishore in *Aao Kahani Likhen* confides in Narayan:

Kishore: I was thinking that today she has guessed about your arrival, merely from the sound of the bell. Who knows whether tomorrow she will know that on the pretext of visiting a doctor, I play cards with you? It will be very difficult to lead a life such as this. She is becoming Sherlock Homes day-by-day (21).

Kishore: *Main yeh soch raha tha ki aaj inhone ghante ki awaz se pehchaan liya ki tum aa rahe ho…kal yeh meri awaz se pehchaan lengi ki main doctor ke paas jane ka bahana karke tumhare yahan taash*

> *khelne jar aha hu…zindagi yun basar na ho sakegi Narayan…yeh Sherlock Holmes ban rahi hai din-b-din* (21).

Lajwanti is described in a similar vein of comedy as "*dhartidhamak*" ("*Aao Behes Karein*" 68), literally describing her earth-shattering arguments, and as "*aatishbaazi ka ek chakkar*" ("*Aao Kahani Likhen*" 24) referring to her verbal fireworks. On the other hand, Lajwanti's berating of "*bazari*" women such as actresses or dancers is an oft-repeated element in the dramas. Both these 'complaints' are treated in a humorous manner and often cut-short in between for the overall narrative to proceed. However, their construction as nagging or sarcasm points towards a linguistic deception that conceals extreme anxiety on the part of both Kishore and Lajwanti. The latter, as a rational woman can see through the 'feminine' values of modesty, politeness and complete devotion as patriarchal constructs and does not shy away from questioning her husband, be it regarding topical issues of the day or even his whereabouts. The exaggerated tone of these arguments and Kishore's ridicule is a strategy to push forth a domestic scene that serves to conceal Kishore's disquiet about her wife's outgoing demeanor and spirit of enquiry that serves as a threat to his own masculine power as the 'man of the house'. Kishore's defensive attitude also springs from his low self-esteem that is linked to his waning sexual performance further linked to his only partially successful endeavors to discharge his familial and professional commitments as a man.

On the other hand, Lajwanti's highly suspicious attitude towards Kishore's outings and her condescension of actresses and dancers is symptomatic of her own deep-seated desire to break free the fetters of traditional domesticity. This wish is expressed in subtle but humorous passing references such as her wanting to know the number of women in a pack of cards in comparison to men in *Aao Taash Khelein*. As has been discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, she also expresses her anger over the misogynistic portrayal of women in various mediums such as novels, films and ultimately radio. Her extreme jealousy for the women of the marketplace is reflective of her own aspiration to cross the threshold and find individual autonomy in the world outside of the four walls of the house. Her refusal to tow the line of typical wifely duties is evident in *Aao Jhooth Bolen* where the ideal of a "*pativrata stree*" (devoted wife) can be realized only in the unreal world of make-believe. The final example is of course, *Aao Kahani Likhen* where Lajwanti through her protagonist Kamla, actually traverses the distance between a housewife and a bar dancer—the very embodiment of the marketplace which

Lajwanti has strived hard to ‘other’ from her sanitized, bourgeois persona in order to uphold her ‘self-respect’.

The radical negotiation with ideas such as self-respect, independent social life of the woman and her sexual expression, male dominance and doubts over their supposed masculinity are however contained within the overall format of a domestic comedy. Lajwanti, Kishore and Narayan are puppets in Manto’s hands—the unreliable narrator who shifts his dramatic persona from one to another, from play to play. The fact that *Aao* plays have been deemed as lesser and morally compromised to an extent, is a testimony to Manto’s shrewdness to cloak his deep engagement with a host of issues in favor of a commercially successful broadcast of his plays that depended on harnessing popular, easily digestible sentiments. His narrative technique is to guide the reader/audience only through a single account buttressed by jokes, interruptions, sudden entry of Narayan and melodramatic exaggerations that create an illusion of a classic domestic comedy. The deliberate formula of a husband-wife quarrel is a trap to make us believe in the monotonousness of their experiences and yet beneath them is the author’s dexterous attempt to untangle the ‘truth’ of middle-class marriages. It seems that just as the plays are constructed as a veritable battle of the sexes with no clear-cut answers with respect to its winner, Lajwanti and Kishore’s marriage too is ultimately a balancing act between contradictions inherent in their aspirations.

Manto gives us several clues in these plays that point out the strained nature of their marriage and yet it is important to keep in mind that nowhere do they actually put the institution itself into question. Their frequent quarrels, Lajwanti’s threats to leave the house, Kishore’s excessive ridiculing of his wife and his wantonness, and finally Narayan’s entry almost as a buffer seem to be desperate attempts to make of whatever little is left of their marriage. For instance, in “*Aao Khoj Lagayen*”, it is explicitly revealed by a slip of tongue that the two do not sleep on the same bed (51). The author does not let this miniscule detail slip away in a single moment and as a result Narayan rhetorically confirms the genuineness of this claim. The matter is, however, completely buried as Lajwanti intervenes and changes the topic to the recent thievery in their house. Thus the possible narrative about lack of physical intimacy between the couple is only briefly alluded to and not allowed to flesh out in detail. Similarly, following a heated exchange of arguments in *Aao Behes Karein*, Narayan, in what seems to be the narrator’s voice, gives his advice to the couple on the subject of marriage —“It takes two to

clap…marriage is nevertheless accomplished and marriage is, well, just marriage" (70). Narayan's advice here is uncannily similar to Manto's reflections on marriage in his famous essay, "*Do Ghadde*":

> I often feel that the relationship of the State with its citizens is much like that of a husband and wife in a troubled marriage. […] As a writer, I find this relation very intriguing. […] The wife does as she pleases and so does the husband. Both of them do not discharge their duties honestly. Despite that, however, they are husband and wife. They may fight over trivialities […] but their relationship forever remains intact (Translation mine).
>
> *Main toh baaz aukat aisa mehsoos karta hun ki hukumat aur riaya ka rishta roothe huye khavind aur biwi ka rishta hai* […]*mujhe ba-haisiyat afsananigar yeh rishta bahut dilchasp maloom hota hai.*[…] *bivi apni manmaani karti hai, shauhar apni manmani. Dono hukooke-zaujiyat ada nahi karte, lekin iske bawajood jan va shauhar hai. Apas mein nikammi baaton par jhagde hote hai.*[…]*, magar inka rishta jun-ka-tun boda rehta hai* (Menra and Dutt 4:283)

Manto's analysis of persistent, unrelenting partners in marriage seems like an accurate description of Lajwanti and Kishore and throws light on the author's view on marriage as an institution. Manto may have been famous for proclaiming that an ordinary housewife can never be the heroine of his stories but this statement can be re-analyzed in the light of Manto's great interest in the subject of marriage and his investment in exploring, as we have seen, the facetiousness that comes to define the everyday lived reality of married couples. Unable to pinpoint any compelling social or personal imperatives for entering into wedlock, the author, through the dramatic persona of Narayan cites Chekhov stating that people marry when they don't know what to do with themselves (70). When seen in the context of weariness and doom that seems to be have crept in Lajwanti and Kishore's marriage, it seems that Manto is at a loss to suggest a radical escape from such a conundrum. His characters are firmly grounded in the contemporary contradictory technological, sexual, feminist and commercial discourses and within this immediate context, also grapple with the age-old question of what the husband and wife mean to each other. Even when Manto might advocate for unconventional forms of responding to each other's lives as a prerequisite for a healthy marriage, there is an ultimate acceptance of the absurdity and lack of motivation that forms its basis.

Manto, therefore, offers us no clear-cut answers as the plays tread a slippery path between conventional morality and a reflective critique of the staid routine and slavish roles that are demarcated for men and women. Thus, on one hand, Lajwanti may hardly be a character worthy enough to match the stature of Jankis, Saugandhis or Kulwant Kaurs spread across the Manto corpus, but on the other hand, the realism with which she is drawn as a living, breathing, energetic housewife says something about her singularity. Ironically, it is only within her limited arena of the domestic space that she can redeem herself by putting into use the weapons available to her— witty arguments, ramblings, threats and diplomacy, in order to counter her husband's authority, to make herself at par with the decision-making process in the house and ultimately to work her way to fulfill her desires—whether to wear pants or read a newspaper or even taking recourse to superstition if it enables her to secure the attention of her wanton husband. Manto's validation of these compensatory qualities in Lajwanti comes through a small but significant remark dubbed as flattery in the last play i.e. "*Aao Khoj Lagayen*".

It is in *Aao Khoj Lagayen* that a fourth character, that of a thief, is introduced and it is he whose dramatic persona comes closest to Manto—the author's. Reading this play at the end of the series reveals the artistic intent of the author behind composing the kind of comedies that he has for the radio. The thief comes across as an enigmatic personality, who speaks perfect rhythmic Urdu in contrast to the colloquial Hindustani spoken by Lajwanti, Kishore and Narayan. He also proclaims to be drawn towards any artistic impulse—whether inherent in an object or a woman. He confesses that he is highly impressed by Lajwanti's choice of adornments and her tendency to sleep deeply—probably a reference to an occasion where he took advantage of her slumber and stole her belongings:

> Thief: Your taste is undoubtedly very refined. The choice of your cosmetics is a proof of it […] Ladies who like to sleep deeply and possess an artistic flair have a great stature in my eyes (53).
>
> *Thief:* *Aapka zauq yakeenan bada acha hai…aapke singaar ki doosri cheezein iski gawah hain...[…] gehri neend sone wali khatunon aur* artistic *intkhab karnewali aurton ka rutba meri nigahon mein hamesha buland raha hai*(53).

It is through his perplexing talks that he is further able to land Lajwanti and Kishore into yet another argument while he in the meanwhile steals their belongings and vanishes from the

scene. In the midst of this, the thief explains his 'art' of stealing that requires the same qualities as that of an artist—the ability to think, weave, reflect and invent (56). More importantly, this author-as-a-thief differentiates himself and his class from that of his audience, which in this context are the principal characters of the series. He sarcastically comments that while middle-class 'moral' people have "laws, locks, guns, swords, police and telephones" as weapons to safeguard themselves, artists like him have at their disposal nothing but agility of action, intelligence and forthrightness to compete with people (55). Furthermore, he also reflects on the ethics of his profession and argues that no temptation of a good station, expensive gifts or even a woman's passion can lead a "true thief" astray from his chosen path—"*Achi mulazimat ki peshkash, keemti se keemti tohfe, hatta ki aurat ki mohabbat bhi usse vargala nahi kar sakti*" (55). What sustains him in his work is its very ability to thrill by its exposure to the unknown that holds the promise of inexplicable happiness, even spiritual vitality—"*ek kaif, ek vazd, ek na-kabile-bayan tarang*" (55). This is also what explains Manto as the radio dramatist who may find creative ways to escape the censorship at the hands of moral custodians of radio broadcasting but would never be led off his commitment to engage with the reality around him. He believes that real "laughter is one that comes on its own" rather than the one which is a prejudiced demeaning of an alternative worldview (55). He, therefore, devises a strategy to present his art to those like Kishore who may laugh at the expense of the thief's valorization of his craft but have "no truck with things like literature" (55). Even in "*Aao Behes Karein*", through the dramatic persona of Lajwanti, the author states that a debate can only take place where there is a possibility of a disagreement rather than a situation where all such conflicting matters are nipped in the bud—"*aise logon se kya khaak behes ho sakti hai jo baat ki gardan hi daba dein*" (68).

It is in these constricting circumstances that Manto curates *Aao* as a specimen of minor literature. It is a matter of deep, though perhaps, unintended irony, that Manto seeks to enunciate the crisis of a society that was too engrossed in its banal lives to be able to step back and reflect on the contradictions inherent in their own aspirations. It is worth noting that as a member of this class, Manto offers no solutions, no way outs, but only bleak endorsements of certain qualities that he believed to be the hallmarks of true living. In his practice of *Aao* as 'minor' comedies, Manto marshals arguments, jokes, descriptions and above all, the very framework of make-believe, an invitation to concoct an act, through which he tries to enunciate middle class' fragile claims to modernity. As an imaginative trickster, he does read the pulse of his audience to

perfection, and thus provides them a reflection of their own lives. But by deploying comedy as an artistic camouflage, he is also able to evade the compulsion of 'interpreting' the contradictoriness of contemporary bourgeois culture. Perhaps, Manto is aware of this abdication of writerly responsibility on his part. At one point in *Aao Behes Karein*, Kishore reflects this concern with domestic privacy —"*ghar mein aise kayi chuhal-tamashe hote hain…par doosron se inka zikr thode kiya jata hai*" (68). Manto cocks a snook at this very tendency to keep the reality of their conflicted lives under the wrap of respectability and propriety by making the subject matter of his plays nothing but these "*chuhal tamashe*" or "trivial dramas" of the everyday, literally broadcasting them to the world. At the same time, he announces through Kishore's comment on the thief—"*usne yeh shosha hi isliye chorha tha ki hum log iss bakwas mein parh jayen aur weh aaraam se chala jaye*" i.e. he has triggered accusations only to baffle them in nonsense and run scot-free (57). Manto on his part, therefore, does not articulate any particular philosophy of an institution such as marriage, nor does he provide methods of reading rising bourgeois commercialism as an ethic undergirding marriage. In their very verbosity and dramatic utterances, these dramas embody inherent tensions emanating out of changed family structure in suburbia, the shift in men and women's conduct in domestic spaces, the conflicting discourses being invoked in the public sphere and the writer's own jostling between different compulsions arising out of the clash between the old and the new. Manto does not propound his beliefs about these developments unabashedly and in this very hesitation, is able to imbue these dramas with a degree of skepticism about the conflicting nature of the crisis amongst which a commercially driven, upwardly mobile middle class finds itself in.

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Chapter 3
Romances

Introduction

Manto's most famous, non-serialized radio-dramas are the ones found in two collections, namely *Manto Ke Dramay* (1944) and *Karwat* (1944). These are a motley mix of dramas that critics have identified as bearing affinities to the author's creative investment in the thriving Bombay film industry of the contemporary era. Leslie Flemming has identified at least one drama, *Randhir Pahalwan*, as inspired from an early film-script ("Other Reflections" 134). On the other hand, Waris Alvi opines that out of the twenty-six dramas in*Karwat* and *Manto Ke Dramay*, most of them are "suspense, thrillers, and dramas written in the style of films" (26). Narendra Mohan shares a similar view and suggests that most of these dramas were written at a time when Manto was collaborating with the well-known names in the film industry, churning out scripts for movies.[53] The influence of film writing on his radio dramas was inevitable for both these forms catered to the audience as popular modes of entertainment albeit with minor variations. To critically engage with them then, requires an identification of thematic patterns and narrative tropes that resonate with their filmic counterparts either wholly or partially. This is most evident in a section of dramas that deal with love and romance narratives presented variously as melodramas, comedies or even as self-enclosed tales locked in heavy symbolism and metaphors.

Most of these dramas, however, have not garnered a favorable opinion of literary critics who have denounced them on accounts of frivolity and obscurity. Waris Alvi has argued that:

> Most of these plays make use of strange coincidences, striking events, unforeseen conclusions, dramatic utterances and stimulating situations. These dramas fail to rise above the level of entertainment. Their characters lack psychological or philosophical depth and fail to embody moral or ethical conflicts. Even if these

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[53] Mohan, Narendra, telephonic interview, 20 Dec 2018.
Manto was a salaried film writer between 1937 and 1948, working for Ardeshir Irani's Imperial Fim Company and Sashadhar Mukherjee's Filmistan. He also collaborated on a few films produced by Hindustan Cine Tone, Chitra Productions, Taj Mahal Pics and Sunrise Pictures. Some of the films for which he is credited as a writer include *Kisan Kanya* (1938), *Apni Nagariya* (1940), *Chal Chal Re Naujawan* (1944), *Jhumke* (1944/46), *Begum* (1945), *Naukar* (1945), *Aath Din* (1946) and *Shikari* (1946). For a detailed study of Manto's films, see Mukherjee, Debashree.

> characters try to emerge distinctly from their types, they still remain well within the readily identifiable representational frameworks set forth by the world of films (26-7). (Translation mine).

On the other hand, Flemming has divided plays from *Karwat* and *Manto Ke Dramay* into problem-plays that touch upon "various social or moral issues", and romantic comedies that "depict the vicissitudes of young love" (134). She argues that except for a few serious plays, most of them fail to articulate their core concerns successfully and hence, "no clear themes emerge" from them (136). Furthermore, the romantic comedies, though being light-hearted enjoyable pieces are inferior to the romantic short stories that strike a deeper note of loneliness of its protagonists (136). This chapter aims to relook most of these dramas by categorizing seven of them as "romances" not in the strict literary sense of a genre revolving around a quest for love, a clearly identifiable social or personal obstacle to the union of the lovers which finally culminates into a happy ending; a narrative that presents life as "fantastic, adventurous, or heroic than actuality" (Abrams, M.H. 303). Rather, it is used loosely in the sense of designating those dramas in the author's corpus whose themes dwell on romance plots or their characters' struggle with the questions of love and desire. This is done with the purpose of identifying the bifurcation of the author's use of romance to cater to the broadcasting requirements of entertainment through popular narrative tropes on one hand, and covertly undermining them at the same time through his critical engagement with characters' dilemmas around class ("*Jebkatra*", "*Randhir Pahalwan*"), patriarchal authority ("*Kabootri*"), sexual desire ("*Akeli*") and alienation ("*Intezar*", "*Kamra No. 9*" and "*Terhi Lakeer*") in the modern world. These plays, which seem to endorse the dominant ideological patterns around love and romance, do embody particular transgressive moments for their characters, but this transformative potential is ultimately curtailed by resolutions that appear romanticized, far-fetched and impractical. The crises, whether that of alienation, or failure to unite with the lover, or female sexual desire, are ultimately presented as individual predicaments that are sought to be contained within the overall structure of romance, which functions not merely as a genre but also a subterfuge to conceal this irresolvable tension beneath the trials and tribulations of love.

Romance in Manto's Oeuvre

Manto's stories have become almost synonymous with a creative expression that is simple, at times even sparse, straightforward and brutally outspoken. It is celebrated for its satiric

thrust that does justice to a wide variety of themes such as violence, religious fanaticism, workings of the Bombay cinema and the seamy realities of prostitutes' lives. It is claimed that his stories are ingeniously crafted, unique and singular. Sukrita Paul Kumar writes that Manto "did not weave any formalistic patterns, nor did the experiences of his stories seek the support of any mythology or romance. There is an unusual directness about his stories in which he presents a specific kind of consciousness of women sobbing without tears, remaining out of general sight" ("Fallen Women" 103).

Yet, the difficult posturing of Manto's corpus proves that a sweeping generalization of this sort is misleading. Though Manto may have despised tried and tested conventions of literary writing, he does take recourse to romantic stereotypes in at least his earlier short stories which are in sharp contrast to his other celebrated works that register a powerful impulse for social change. Priyamvada Gopal points out with regard to his early stories where "male sexuality seems to have no apparent representational function; it neither provides metaphors for social exploitation nor functions as the point of departure for social critique" (93). Similarly, Flemming argues that although in starkly realistic stories such as "*Kali Shalwar*" and "*Hatak*", Manto attacks the mystery around sex, he nevertheless "seems to implicitly support it" in a story like "*Khushiya*" (*Another Lonely Voice* 57). This somewhat romanticized, if not morbid, interest in the romantic and sexual is an aspect that is even more prominent in his radio-dramas than his short stories. For instance, a play such as "*Neeli Ragein*" ("Blue Veins") depicts the woman protagonist who is also the poet-hero's creative muse, solely through the metaphor of blue veins of her cold hands, glowing like a shiny blue sapphire against the white snow. The almost metaphysical imagery and metaphors of the play signify her mysterious charm and beauty but also stereotypically typify her as frigid and unfathomable.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that this "refuge" in romance conventions does not seem to exist without a design; it reflects the author's desire to contemplate and engage with the questions about nature of romantic desire, the conflict between idealized notions about it and the crude reality of baser instincts, as well as the defining role of factors such as class and patriarchal oppression in the realization of romantic love. Flemming makes a similar argument with respect to his pastoral, romantic stories such as "*Mishri Ki Dali*", "*Shiru*" and "*Mausam Ki Sharārat*", which are about a young man's fascination with a mountain girl. She contends that one could dismiss his romantic stories as "another product of youthful,

romantic idealism, ultimately peripheral to his real concerns as a writer" had he written only a few of them (*Another Lonely Voice*59). But the fact that he persistently wrote and reworked them over years suggests that the "portrait of a "natural", innocent, girl and its theme of youthful unrequited love has considerable appeal for him" (59). Furthermore, this "essential goodness of unfulfilled love" serves to underline the "fundamental loneliness of his protagonists" that populate his stories (60). However, Manto is unable to concretize such questions in terms of a clearly identifiable objective, or even a sustained critique. As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, Manto had confessed to be deeply disturbed about the meaning of relationships between men and women, as also the power of love and desire in human life. But it is his inability to achieve a breakthrough in these complicated ideas that reflects in either his retreat to conventional narrative tropes such as melodrama or heightened sentimentality, or a reconciliation of moral conflicts that are at best unrealistic, idealized or simply undirected towards a change of underlying situations responsible for the crises in the dramas. Manto in torn between engaging with and brushing off the social, moral or ethical concerns in these dramas which point towards a deeper schism between his purported responsibility as an artist rooted in the values of his contemporary times.

This tension, or schism between curating a socially relevant, even programmatic, fiction on one hand, and a retreat into the escapist and the morbid can be mapped onto the radio dramas that deploy the romance narrative with a 'seeming' intent to present nothing more than wholesome entertainment through their broadcast. The plays chosen for study, viz. "*Intezar*", "*Kamra No. 9*", "*Terhi Lakeer*", "*Kabootri*", "*Randhir Pahalwan*", "*Jebkatra*", and "*Akeli*", paint a differentiated landscape of love as idealized, mysterious, capricious on hand, and also attempt to explore social issues of poverty, exploitation, patriarchy and alienation on the other. To do so, these plays borrow from the highly popular romance motifs visible across a range of Bombay films of the time.The plays in consideration here can be seen as relying upon two components—situational humor and melodrama. Sanjit Narwekar argues that usually comedy is one of the elements that constitutes the drama of Bollywood films and is largely situational—"in which a character is suddenly placed in a strange situation, where he is uncomfortable" (*Eena Meena Deeka* ix). He further suggests that the comic aspect of the films emerge from the classic scenario of mistaken identities or its variation, the exchanged identities (ix). Manto's romantic comedies such "*Kamra no. 9*" and "*Intezar*" capitalize on this formula—in the former, there is a

confusion about the real identity of the mysterious neighbor whereas in the latter, the protagonist's awkwardness becomes a source of humor as he struggles to "kill" time waiting for his beloved. On the other hand, dramas such as "*Jebkatra*", "*Kabootri*" and "*Randhir Pahalwan*" are melodramatic in their presentation of unfortunate circumstances that prevent the protagonists to find fulfillment in love.

In his book, *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2002), Vijay Mishra studies the dominant genre of Bollywood cinema broadly as a "sentimental melodramatic romance" whose meanings can be linked to several signifiers repeated in films across different time spans and narrative plots (99). Analyzing the filmic narratives of love in the mid-twentieth century, such as P.C. Barua's *Devdas* (1935), V. Shantaram's *Achhut Kanya* (1936), Nitin Bose's *President* (1939), Raj Kapoor's *Awara* (1951) and Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* (1957) amongst others, Mishra identifies several repetitive idioms associated with the popular hero and heroine of a love story. The most pertinent of these is the "melancholic lover" whose "dedication [is] such that he abrogates his right to live" reminiscent of the tragic hero of all times—Devdas (104). In a slightly similar vein, the romantic ideal of "an artist in isolation" popularized in Guru Dutt's films, is that of one who is "riddled by philosophical doubts (and is effectively antisocial), becomes totally incompetent, and is excessively sentimental" (113). Most often, melancholic romantic heroes are the ones finding themselves in agonizing *vipralambha*, separated from their beloveds or "detached from the world" (6-7). Their renunciation of the world and material desires is meant to evoke *karuna*, "the dominant rasa of all Indian literature", as well as a "*becārā* complex, the complex of self-pity that produces the condition of the melancholic hero" (113; 6-7). Whether it is the melancholic poet-lover Kambalposh in *Kabootri*, the self-destructive Kashi of *Jebkatra*, or the idealized Randhir of *Randhir Pahalwan*, Manto plays into these recurrent tropes from the world of cinema to weave highly popular dramas that resonated with the cultural imagination of a majoritarian audience. At the same time, it allows him to transpose the conflicts—between the inability of the pickpocket Kashi to renounce his 'immoral' profession and the exploited but morally 'upright' Bimla, or the class difference that leads to a conflict in "*Randhir Pahalwan*" that operates at different levels, or the complete lack of female agency between the competing claims on her by a jilted lover and a patriarchal husband in "*Kabootri*". Manto meticulously expresses the pathos inherent in these situations through irony but 'resolves' them in such a way that it arouses nothing but pity and helplessness towards the

end, rather than positing a powerful critique of circumstances or ways of tackling them. What remains though, is Manto's desire to project such narratives that cross his thinking mind onto a public medium in a way that fulfills its formal demands while circumventing such tensions through a clever, and interesting camouflage such as romance.

Romantic "Comedies"

In many of his radio plays, Manto puts to use the standard formula of light-hearted, delightful situations to foreground the budding relationship between the romantic hero and the heroine, thus composing successful "romantic comedies". Plays such as "*Mohabbat Ki Paidayish*" and "*Matchis Ki Dibiya*" revolve purely around innocent attraction of the hero towards the heroine without much profundity. In the former play, dialogues become cloying and hackneyed, failing to evoke even genuine laughter, let alone a spark of thought. A young man Vedi tells his friend Pal:

> I want that you should love, I should love, and everyone should fall in love … whoever lives in this world must love… […] love…love…it seems that my soul is playing with the wind brushing against the gentle dew on the morning grass…(207).
>
> *Main chāhta hu ki tum muhabbat karo, main muhabbat karun, sab muhabbat karein…duniya mein sab muhabbat karne wale basein….[…] muhabbat…muhabbat…aisa malum hota hai ki meri aatma shabnam se ladi hui ghaas par subah ki hawa se khel rahi hai* (207) .

Similarly, in "*Mohabbat Ki Paidayish*", the hero, Khalid has no qualms about renouncing his college education and reputation as an eligible bachelor for the sake of Hamida's love. Upon learning the truth, Hamida is immediately drawn to his Khalid's selflessness and decides to resume her own studies too with him, therefore, symbolically accepting his love. In the light of such plays, one may be disposed to read several other dramas such as "*Kamra no.9*", "*Eid Card*" and "*Intezar*" too as facile tales about instantaneous infatuation with the beloved, accompanied with a certain degree of wide-eyed, romanticized notion about the idea of love itself. However, when read concomitantly with dramas such as "*Terhi Lakeer*" and "*Intezar Ka Doosra Rukh*", one can argue that Manto, through these dramas, Manto not only pokes fun at the trivialities experienced in a budding romantic relationship, but also grapples with the task of comprehending the true nature of human relationships, especially the romantic ones, but is

unable to put forth with clarity or conviction anything radical about the same. In plays like "*Terhi Lakeer*" and "*Kamra No. 9*", we are presented with characters who express their desire to break free from the norm, and are particular in their idiosyncratic approach to love and life. This desire however, fails to culminate in anything significant or remarkable. The 'problems' are answered in terms of escapism—the protagonists running away from the situations so as to jerk or unnerve the audience momentarily, with a deep-seated acknowledgement that no other 'real' possibilities exist for them, apart from such isolated acts of rebellion.

"*Kamra no. 9*" and "*Terhi Lakeer*" present in their different narrative modes, the idea of seeking novelty from the sameness and ennui of life. The characters in these plays are individuals who think differently from those around them and their desire for a life of risk and jeopardy also hints at their refusal to customarily follow the orthodox pattern of love culminating in marriage. Thus, while "*Kamra no. 9*" comes across as a conventional comedy, it acquires a deeper tenor when its theme is read alongside Javed's thoughts in "*Terhi Lakeer*". On the other hand, "*Intezar*" and "*Intezar Ka Doosra Rukh*" testifies to Manto's readiness to explore the gamut of emotions experienced by the hero in the endless span of waiting for his beloved in a narrative style that is inextricably tied with the form of radio drama contingent upon the power of sound and its broadcast within a stipulated time frame.

Manto wrote "*Intezar*" as a substitute play for a writer who did not arrive for his broadcasting schedule. His colleagues had coaxed him to write a play at the drop of a hat because no one other than Manto could be trusted with a task such as this (Wadhawan 158). As such, "*Intezar*" does not seem to be borne out of a careful mulling over a particular problem to be represented in the drama. Rather, much in the fashion of its instantaneous mode of composition, it captures a never-ending tussle in the mind of a young man, Mantazar, who is waiting tediously for his beloved, Bilqees's, arrival. The entire action of the drama spans merely aroundhalf an hour during which the protagonist experiences an ebb and flow of hope and despair that constitutes the comic potential of the play. On the other hand, in "*Intezar Ka Doosra Rukh*", Manto presents the flip side of the story written from Bilqees's perspective as to why she gets late in meeting her lover. Bilqees must complete a mountain of tasks at home assigned to her by her parents and siblings before she can venture out of the house on the pretext of attending a school function. While "*Intezar*" focuses on the internal conflict in the mind of Mantazar,

"*Intezar Ka Doosra Rukh*" is a perspective on the external situations that obstruct the union of the lovers (Alvi 28).

The characters in "*Intezar*" include Mantazar on one hand and his rational or conscious self on the other, engaged in a perpetual combat. As Balwant Gargi points out, "He expresses himself at two simultaneous but distinct levels: the conscious and the subconscious. The dialogues at both levels mutually conflict with each other and generate a great deal of fascination" ("A Solitary Soul" 256). The sound instructions at the beginning of the play direct that Mantazar's voice must be imbued with restlessness while the rational self should speak in a heavy tone (72). Furthermore, it is instructed that the tic-tock of the clock must continue in the background from the beginning to the end of this feature drama. The tic-tock sound effect in the drama deserves attention for it helps to amplify the passage of time—minute by minute, as the protagonist perceives it. The play begins as the clock strikes eight and Mantazar, overcome with excitement of meeting Bilqees, proclaims—"Half an hour—just half an hour more and after that—this last drowning dong was so sweet—and…and…" (72). The protagonist, thus, anxiously keeps a count of the time passing and the background sound of the clock mirrors the condition of his mind.

On the other hand, the rational self that keeps injecting doubt and skepticism in him rudely checks Mantazar's immensely hopeful self. The latter is visibly agitated and wants to make sure that everything in his house is in accordance with Bilqees's taste. Therefore, he arranges a vase full of flowers, sets the records and gramophone and also tries not to smoke too much. The rational self first mocks him by reciting a cryptic couplet that compares prospects of meeting his beloved to a rare chance of finding heaven. In other words, he tries to convince Mantazar's excessively emotional self of the bleak possibility of Bilqees actually meeting him. The perturbed protagonist now tries to kill time by inventing things to be done—smoke a cigarette which will pass ten minutes, spend another three minutes listening to a gramophone record, compile monthly budget and finally, write a letter. Throughout its length, the play documents his frustrating efforts to dispel the overwhelming paranoia that surrounds meeting his beloved by contriving 'meaningful' tasks for himself. In each case, however, he becomes indecisive owing to his rational self's intervention that points out the futility of such actions and the long hour of waiting that still looms large over him. Thus, Mantazar at this stage becomes an embodiment of contradictoriness, who at once compels himself into 'doing' work and thereby

actively take control of his emotional self finally surrendering to the pervasive sense of ineffectuality of his actions. At one point, he tries to reason to himself:

> It is only few minutes past eight, which means—why am I being so impatient—she'll come—it is such things that make people so uppity. I will not wait for her at all. Let me sit on the chair. There's a paper on the table. Let me note down this month's expenditure—yes—cigarette—five rupees…cigarette five rupees… (74).
> *Abhi aath baj kar kuch minute huye hain toh iska matlab hai main—main itna betaab kyun ho raha hun—she will come—aisi baaton hi se toh in logon ka dimag saatvein aasmaan par pahunch jata hai. Main uska intezar bilkul nahi karunga.Kursi par baith jata hun. Mez par yeh safed kaagaz rakha hi hai. Iss par iss maheene ka hisaab likhna shuru kar deta hun—haan—cigarette—paanch rupye—cigarette paanch rupye* (74).

By this time, the drama in his mind has heightened considerably. When the rational self mocks his counterpart's letter, he tells him that he shall narrate its contents in person. The former, however, once again instills suspicion:

Mantzar:	[…] There's no need for a letter. I will tell her all this in person.
Rational Self:	Well on one condition—if at all she comes.
Mantazar:	What's this condition? She will definitely come.
Rational Self:	If…if…
Mantazar:	No, no.
Rational Self:	You never know if something happens!
Mantazar:	What an ugly thought!
Rational Self:	If she doesn't come?
Mantazar:	She will surely come.
Rational Self:	We will see… (75).
Mantazar:	*[…] khat ki koi zaroorat nahi. Main usko zabaani bata dunga.*
Pratiroop:	*basharte ki who aa jaye.*
Mantazar:	*yeh shart kaisi—veh zaroor aayegi.*
Pratiroop:	*agar…agar…*

Mantazar:	*nahi…nahi.*
Pratiroop:	*ho sakta hai aisi koi baat ho jaye!*
Mantazar:	*kaisa behuda khayal hai.*
Pratiroop:	*agar veh na aayi toh?*
Mantazar:	*zaroor aayegi.*
Pratiroop:	*dekh lenge* (75).

The incomplete and disjointed sentences in these dialogues reflect Mantazar's foggy mental state. As he is lost in the mess of his own thoughts, the doorbell rings for the first time. Hearing it, he is caught in panic, fumbles over his cigarette case but on the insistence of his rational self, tries to gain his composure. As the supposedly climactic moment draws near, and the door is finally opened, there stands in front of him a newspaper hawker—an anti-climax that irritates Mantazar considerably. There is a contrast built up between his cantankerousness on one hand and the complete befuddlement of the hawker who is unable to comprehend his words or actions.

The protagonist's extreme impatience with the newspaper hawker amplifies his sense of anxiety to the extent that he not only becomes awkward but also obsessed with his inability to wait until Bilqees's arrival. It appears that his disheveled mental state is well beyond is voluntary control such that it interferes with his normal life—he is unable to read a book; when he accidentally clashes his foot against a chair, he mistakes it for a knock on the door (77). Manto portrays in these scenes a man for whom regular patterns of anxious wait for a beloved have taken a serious turn. The jovial dialogues at the beginning of the drama that characterize his confused state now give way to a more grave situation where the protagonist's haphazard, and racing mind starts influencing his physical being—his heart sinks, his mouth goes dry and cannot even walk steadily. He tries to reason that his condition on this day is unusual and he has not experienced such restlessness before:

Rational Self:	Why is my heart sinking?
Mantazar:	How do I know…let me drink some water […] I think she will come at the nick of the moment—at eight thirty sharp—(surprised)…is it still not eight thirty…I…I will sit down for some time (77).
Pratiroop:	*dil baithta kyun ja raha hai?*

Mantazar: *Kya maloom…pani peeta hu [...] mera khayal hai theek waqt par aayegi—poore sadhe aath baje—(chaunk kar) abhi sadhe aath nahi baje—main, main baith jata hu* (77).

Mantazar seems to be losing his sense of comprehension of events around him. The sonic aura of the play is such where Mantzar's mental restlessness is mapped onto the singular sounds around him that shoot through the pall of dead silence—the sound of the seconds now ticking at prolonged intervals, the strong gush of wind and the flapping of calendar pages as a result of it or the banging of utensils on the ground in the neighbor's house (78). All these verbal signals express Mantazar's extreme sensitivity to the slightest of sounds around him—his expectation of the doorbell ringing anytime and Bilqees coming to meet him. In midst of this, when the bell finally does ring, there is, much to his chagrin, another unwanted guest at the door—Mantazar's friend. Unable to respond coherently to his friend's talk, Mantazar tells him that he is unwell. As if to aggravate the situation, his friend insists on not leaving his side till he improves which makes Mantazar increasingly helpless and out of joint. His condition is desperate and tells his friend to leave him and instead find a doctor—"My condition is very bad—my—condition—is very—weak—please go—(voice gets more feeble)" (79). It is at this stage that the play is headed for its final moment.

The sound instructions become elaborate to signal the eventual countdown. Manto guides the following directions:

> [The clock tic-tocks at a normal pace—this should continue for at least a minute and a half—it should then make a creaking noise and then sound a loud dong for some time—tic-tock sound should cease and there should be complete silence for a few seconds—now there should be a sound of the door opening and he who is being awaited, enters] (79-80).
>
> *[ghadi asli haalat mein tik-tik karti hai—kam se kam yeh awaz dedh second tak jari rahe—aakhir mein clock mein kharkharahat paida ho kar aur ek tan ki awaz aaye. Uski tan ki goonj thodi der tak sunaya deti rahe—ghadi ki tik-tik band ho jaye aur ek second tak poori khamoshi chayi rahe—iss khamoshi ke baad darwaza khulne aur jiska intezar kiya ja raha hai, veh aaye]* (79-80).

The pervasive mood of the drama that has focused on the hyperactive but inchoate mental state of Mantazar now culminates into a climactic instance signaled sparsely by the above sound instructions and the final dialogue by Bilqees:

> Just see how this gentleman sleeps in peace—as if he does not have the slightest inkling of my coming here—he is sleeping quite deeply—god knows from where has he come back so tired. (Angrily) Then so what—why should I keep standing here as an uninvited guest!
>
> [Sound of the door closing slowly] (80).
>
> *Dekho toh kis mazey se janaab so rahe hain—goya inko maaloom hi nahi main aa rahi hun—kafi gehri neend so rahe hain—khuda jane kahan se ghumte-ghumate thakk kar aaye honge. (gusse se) toh mujhe kya zaroorat padi hai ki yahan bin bulaye mehmaanon ki tarah khadi rahun!*
>
> *[haule-haule darwaza band karne ki awaz]* (80).

The suspense of Bilqees's arrival and finally the moment of Mantazar's relief is rendered ironical in the final anti-climactic moment when towards the end, Bilqees finds him fast asleep. Mantazar's overwhelming thoughts have impinged significantly upon his physical composure giving way to sleep, or perhaps a collapse. In "*Intezar*", Manto cleverly uses the frame of romantic, even flippant love in which the lover obsesses over seeing the beloved, pays heed to the minutest of details about her preferences, not to mention pangs of feverish excitement. However, this narrative reconfigures itself to a more somber portrayal of a man for whom his psychologically turbulent condition can manifest into serious ramifications. The quest for dominance between his active, desiring self that is also ridden with obsessive anxiety and his thinking, rational mind takes away the semblance of sweet pleasure that is usually associated with little experiences in love relationships. Manto does not dwell on any particular reason about the significance of Mantazar and Bilqees's meeting that may account for his stress. From "*Intezar Ka Doosra Rukh*", the reader knows that Bilqees too shares the same eagerness to meet him, though her dilemmas are much straightforward and directed externally onto the multiple household chores that act as hindrances to her reaching Mantazar's house on time.

Manto presents in Mantazar an image of an individual for whom the most frivolous or puny situation, such as the act of passing half an hour, may acquire epic proportions. In such a scenario, each second is amplified as the protagonist struggles to wrest control of Time and his

reality, engaged in a debilitating fight against his own mind. Balwant Gargi writes, "*Intezar*" is an "evidence of the technical and psychological experiments that Manto overtook" ("A Solitary Soul" 256).The peculiarity of this play as meant for the radio is significant for it weaves the power of its sound to the reverberating drama of conflict in the mind of the protagonist and by extension, the audience. Thus, without the elaborate need of characterizing two states of mind on to the stage, radio broadcast with its machinery of voice modulation as also the broken, incoherent dialogues, echoes the fragmentariness of the mind's state. "*Intezar*" depicts the helplessness of this isolated protagonist to keep his obsessive-compulsive thoughts at bay. In an almost absurdist fashion, it seems that the hope of Bilqees's arrival is the only sustaining impulse for him and any thought of her absence or delay becomes a matter of great psychological torment for his cognitive state. Curiously reminiscent of Beckett's Godot, here too, the focus of the play remains on waiting—signifying inaction and the endless delay of the arrival of the ultimate one who is being waited for, i.e. Bilqees. The consciousness of this act reinforces doubt and skepticism and is countered by Mantazar's emotional and rational selves in different ways. Setting flowers, playing gramophone, jotting down the budget, writing a letter are all sundry activities that must be conjured up till each seems meaningless and unworthy in the face of a bleak reality—the possibility of love object not turning up ultimately.

However, this deep note of anxiety and torture is undermined by the author and rendered as a comic interlude that turns it into a matter of delightful suspense for the audience. By composing "*Intezar*" and "*Intezar Ka Doosra Rukh*" as companion plays, Manto diverts the psychological conflict between a man's rational and irrational self onto a confusion between two young lovers whose flurried state of mind becomes a source of amusement to the audience. The psychological underpinnings of the drama lies in curating an alienating situation amidst which a lonely protagonist must confront a barrage of emotions that threaten to thwart his coherence of the external word, and more importantly of his own thought process. Yet, Manto takes from the play its contemplative edge and by providing it a comic spin in the form of Bilqees' story and ultimate disappointment with him. What could be a serious exploration of the psychological implications of a mental conflict, is reduced to a drama about petty hindrances in the meeting of lovers and silly confusions that make for an enjoyable, lighthearted romantic comedy on radio.

If "*Intezar*" and "*Intezar Ka Doosra Rukh*" highlight Manto's engagement with psychological conflicts within a man's subconscious, recalibrated into popular romantic patterns

of hope, excitement and desperation of meeting one's love interest, a play such as "*Terhi Lakeer*" moves onto the territory that delves into the experiences in love relationships that are estranging yet necessary to its sustenance. The theme of "*Terhi Lakeer*" is similar to another drama, namely "*Kamra no. 9*" but both of them are written in different narrative modes. "*Terhi Lakeer*", also written as a short story, testifies to Manto's preoccupation with the idiosyncratic thoughts of individuals who seem to be unconventional and thereby, 'misfits' in a traditional society. Manto, however, dilutes the force of such a thought in a drama such as "*Kamra no. 9*" by composing it as an endearing romantic comedy about two individuals caught in the game of suspense ensuing from a playful change of identities.

"*Kamra no. 9*" revolves around a young, vivacious girl, Shireen's fascination with a neighbor who has recently shifted to her locality. The more Shireen tries to delve deeper into details about his family, profession and habits, coaxing her maid to do the same, the mystery around the man becomes even more puzzling. Her brother, Zamaan, considers her curiosity futile given Shireen's usual nonchalance about men around her. Zamaan suggests her to divert her attention to Nasir—a man who seems to greatly admire and love her. Shireen, on the other hand, gets increasingly fascinated by the unnamed neighbor and his offbeat habits—he dislikes furniture and compares them to men with scrawny legs, does not prefer to put down his real name on rent agreement and obsesses over cleanliness. In contrast to the neighbor's unusual personality, Nasir, though a decent man, is conventional and predictable. She explains to Zamaan that Nasir is like a well-cooked dish which however, lacks the relish of salt; a drama that ends in an insipid climax—"*veh bahut acha paka suha salan hai jismein namak kam ho. Veh ek aisa drama hai jismein climax phusphus ho kar reh jaye*" (130). She further explains that Nasir possesses good values as well as attractive looks but what he lacks is the "originality" of a magnetic personality. Shireen states that in a human being, there must be a degree of "*haivāniyat*" or an unbridled instinct that exists in opposition to a staid, orderly mode of being and which brings the thrill of the unknown to life—"*magar insaniyat ke alawa thodi-si haiwaniyat bhi honi chahiye. Yani ek aisi cheez jo insaan mein ek kism ka anokhapan paida kar de*" (130). Shireen's inquisitiveness peaks towards the last part of the drama and in order to satisfy her wish, Nasir offers to introduce her to the neighbor. As a matter of unbelievable surprise to Shireen, upon reaching Room no. 9, Nasir recites Daag Dehlvi's couplet—the same that was often read aloud by the neighbor and had enamored her. Nasir reveals that the person

staying in this room is none other than he himself. The play ends on a note of pleasant revelation to Shireen signifying a happy ending for both the characters.

"*Kamra no. 9*" derives much of its amusement from Zamaan and Shireen's conversations in which the latter is shown to be a witty, full-of-life, garrulous girl who holds her opinions about men and their personalities with great confidence. She reads English sonnets, desires adventure and is a well-aware, modern woman as is reflected in her dressing style indicated by the tapping of high-heeled shoes in repeated sound instructions. However, Shireen's desire for novelty and mystery in her life that threatens Nasir's love for her is ultimately contained in the dramatic resolution that locates this potential in none other than the male love-interest in the play. The play is sanitized of any overt consequences that such an unorthodox attitude may result in. In composing what seems to be a romantic comedy, Manto makes use of the relatively common ideas in literature and films of impersonation, mistaken identities, disguise, and masquerade to woo the beloved, constituting the aesthetic as well the semiotic meaning of the drama. The masquerade here briefly touches upon the theme of desire for the unconventional, presented endearingly as an aspect of Shireen's vivacious personality, ultimately balanced by a neat and aesthetically satisfying conclusion that is predicated upon the pleasantly surprising union of lovers. However, this theme resurfaces and is problematized in "*Terhi Lakeer*" that not only foregrounds its protagonist, Javed's idiosyncratic personality, but also helps us to re-read the inherent loneliness of a character such as Nasir in "*Kamra no. 9*", an aspect that could be easily glossed over amidst the play's thrust as a romantic comedy.

"*Terhi Lakeer*" is composed both as a short story and a radio-drama where the latter is tweaked to some extent to focus on what is the climactic moment in the former. The story is a third-person narrative where Abbas narrates the tale of his friend, Javed, who embodies a unique worldview of life and a proclivity to observe it askance. The beginning of the story succinctly encapsulates Javed's personality claiming that were the ways of the road a straight line, then his steps would have become unbearably heavy—"*agar sadak seedhi hoti, bilkul seedhi toh uske kadam mano bhari ho jate*" (Menra and Dutt 1: 271). While the story narrates several instances of Javed's eccentricities but also child-like wonderment towards life, the play dives straight into his conversation with friends about the meaninglessness of arranged marriages.

As the play opens, Javed compares marriage with the din of orchestra that begins loudly, even noisily, and then fades off completely—"*Baajon ke iss shor mein aur shadi mein kitna*

taalmel hai—dono shuru mein shor machete hain aur fir ahista-ahista yeh shor gayab ho jata hai" (99). He further compares a priest ("*mullah*") as worse than seasonal toadies in their mindless croaking of wedding rituals, rain or shine. He severely questions the institution of marriage that comes with the paraphernalia of rituals and ceremonies that turn it into a social spectacle rather than a consensual decision of two individuals deciding to spend their lives together:

> Javed: Please explain whether it is essential to earnestly stick to traditions—the need for marriage is understandable because there's a woman out there and there must be something done of her. This "something" has been given the name marriage…even if marriage takes place, why must there be scores of rituals along with it? If I want to choose a girl as my partner and she too is ready for it, then why must a *mullah sahib* be present on that occasion? Why should sundry people be a part of it? Why should *pulav* be cooked and band played and other thousand weird things take place…and the wedding invitation (laughing)…I swear this wedding invitation too is an unusual thing (100).
>
> *Javed: aap yeh farmaiye ki rasmon par itni shiddat se chipke rehna kya zaroori hai—shadi toh khair hui yani iss cheez ka matlab issliye samajh mein aa jata hai ki aurat maujood hai, iska kuch na kuch toh zaroor hona chahiye. Iss kuch na kuch ka naam aapne shadi taye kiya hai…shadi agar ho toh saath hi saath rasmein kyu hon yani agar main kisi aurat ko jeevansathi banana chahta hun aur weh bhi mujhe apna jeevansathi banana ke liye tayyar hai toh usme mullah sahib ka aana kyu zaroori hai….isme doosre log kyu shamil hon aur fir pulav kyu pakein—baaj kyu bajein aur doosri ek hazar ootpatang batein kyu hon…aur shadi ka paigam---(hansta hai) bakhuda yeh shadi ka paigam bhi ajeeb cheez hai* (100).

Javed considers wedding invitations as unimaginative as film advertisements wherein the name of the 'play' and his players is clearly specified. These invitations too partake in the song-and-dance routine that is the standard fare of films and thus, are nothing more significant than casual

entertainment for those attending it (101). His radical stance over marriage is, therefore, one aspect of his distinct personality that strives to question clichéd, long established and orthodox ways of being in the world. His proclamations, however, sound shockingly hollow to his friends when ironically, after a gap of ten months, Javed returns and announces that he is soon going to marry, that too in the presence of a priest and in accordance with traditional rituals.

His decision no doubt stupefies his friends, Aslam and Altaf, but also gives them immense satisfaction of having their radical friend ultimately return to the time-tested ways of life. Javed's staggering confidence and boldness that had often put them at unease is now thrown into question. Altaf taunts by saying that he would be curious to see how Javed could talk to them eye to eye anymore. In the short story, Abbas confesses that deep inside his heart he was happy because "finally he had to return to the limits in which others were leading their lives" (Menra and Dutt 1: 275). Uninterested in their repudiations, Javed however harbors different plans. In a curious turn of events, he reveals that he soon going to kidnap a girl and hence, requires money to execute his scheme. He bitterly tells them that he owes no one any further explanation since the girl is ready for what will inevitably be termed by others as abduction. The news of the girl, who is none other than his fiancé, eloping three days before her marriage reaches Javed's friends who find it difficult to justify this crazy act of Javed to her brother-Abbas. Abbas on the other hand, is overcome by shame and unaware of Javed's intentions, finds himself answerable to him about his sister's act.

The truth of the act baffles everyone including Abbas who cannot comprehend the need for an elopement. Aslam expresses his bewilderment and incomprehension of his friend's motives:

> Aslam: That is the question in my mind as well—the marriage had been solemnized. She was his legally wedded wife. He could have taken her with him any time he wanted and yet why did he feel the need kidnapping her? Why did he run with her at night? And as you say, you didn't know anything—god knows how would you have spent all these days—and he—what should I call him?
>
> Abbas: Crooked line—see this, there are crooked lines drawn on this letter—what could be the meaning of this? (108).

Aslam: *yehi toh main bhi sochta hu—nikah ho chuka tha. Biwi uski thi. Weh jab chahta usse apne ghar le jata magar yeh agua karne ki zaroorat usse kyu mehsoos hui? Raat ko weh usse bhaga kar kyu le gaya? Aur jaisa ki aap kehte hain, aapko kuch pata nahi—khuda jane aapne yeh din kaise guzare honge aur weh—aur weh—ab main usko kya kahun?*

Abbas: *Tedhi lakeer—yeh dekhiye na, khat par tedhi lakeerein khichi hui hain—iska kya matlab hai?* (108).

Javed believes that his eccentric act of elopement with none other than his wife is a statement about his individualism, his craving for constant rejuvenation and defamiliarization. Javed's belief in his ideas that do not fall in straight line is complete as he identifies himself as a "crooked line that is always bigger in comparison to the linear one" (102). He has no patience with the pretenses of a civilized society and thus, in the story, cannot fathom why people customarily express their immense happiness at meeting people who are complete strangers to them (Menra and Dutt 1:273). Javed's forthrightness in voicing his inability to tow the line echoes Shireen's reservations, in "*Kamra No. 9*", about Nasir, who is extremely self-conscious and trapped in formalities that do not allow his thoughts full expression. His studied mannerisms leave little scope for any originality and remain like "an application written in legal jargon" (132).

However, the moot point of these dramas is not merely the indiosyncrasies of characters such as Javed or Shireen, or even Nasir, as argued below. It is rather the course of action that such a worldview results or not that should draw one's attention. In both these dramas, what is perhaps, overlooked is a submission of these protagonists' to the power of conventional logic, and a cynical belief that their actions could not be interpreted other than freakish. There is also an overwhelming sense of loneliness that grips these characters and points towards their inability to curate effective and alternative trajectories of actions or methods of thought that would truly express their unique personalities. For instance, in the story, Abbas tells us that Javed's will to experiment, and disregard for the trodden path is often misconstrued by people around him as his deliberate attempts to seek attention, consequently converting him into an object of ridicule and suspicion —"*baaz log samajhte the ki weh danistan apne aapko nirala zahir karne ke liye aise khayalat ka izhaar karta hai*" (Menra and Dutt 1:272). His friends, though well-meaning but

distant, express their perplexity by pointing out to him the unfeasibility of his thoughts in the world they inhabited.Aslam had goaded him by saying that if he considered marriage nonsense, religion worthless, education as useless and even friendships frivolous, then he "must invent a separate world for himself" where he could formulate laws of his choice and originate something else even in the place of woman who could fulfill man's desires without the need for marriage (99). Javed fails to precisely invent this another world, either through his actions or through his ideas. Infact, he responds to such criticism by further distancing himself from those whom he wishes to establish his difference from. His criticism of tradition and conservative ideas that affect the society as a whole sound hollow, when he feels compelled to justify his radicalism as directed to no one but himself. He, therefore, states that "he is no thief or dacoit" and if he ever loots a place, it would only be his own house (102). His crooked glance at the world dwindles into his self-absorption, severed from any meaningful social collective, and failing to communicate his thoughts, the seed of what is presumably an effective social change or transformation. Javed has, thus, abdicated his prerogative to address those issues of society as a whole that seem to consume his persona fully. Rather, he is reconciled to his isolation, his desolate self is content to ignite or douse the fires that rage within his heart. This self-absorbed play, which is full of thrill and interest is enough to sustain him and means no harm to anyone else—"*Mere andar chand diye raushan hain. Main unko hi jalane bujhane ke dilchasp khel mein mashgool rehna chahta hun. Iss par kisi ko kya aitraaz ho sakta hai aur tum jo mere dost ho isme kya aib dekhte ho*?" (102).

It is this narrative of willed submission to circumstances of idiosyncratic individuals that remains submerged beneath instances of their particular actions that aroue surprise, curiosity and shock in different measures. According to this interpretation, Javed comes comes closer not to Shireen but infact, Nasir. In "*Kamra No.9*", the comic thrust of the drama revolving around Shireen's quest to uncover the identity of the mysterious neighbor camouflages the latent implications of Nasir's concocted tale about his real self. Manto does use the formulaic structure of a romantic comedy sustained by a masquerade to introduce notions about love and choice of partners that try to challenge the time-honored values around it. But more importantly, it masks Nasir's gnawing loneliness that speaks of his distance from the people around him. Left with no other option, he often takes recourse to Daag's couplets and recites them with utmost pathos.

There is a reference to his sudden bouts of crying, which he explains thus to Rani, the maid, in a highly cryptic expression—"Crying is that which does not call you back" (134).

Both Javed and Nasir, therefore, respond to their alienation from society, not by actively seeking to communicate with it, but rather foreclosing any possibility of realizing their innermost desires. More importantly, especially in "*Terhi Lakeer*", the crisis between the individual and the society remais limited to only the former axis of the problem. Javed may express his dissatisfaction with the smooth, well-trodden paths of life, and by extension, the 'systems' of the world as it were, but cannot suggest any meaningful methods that may lead to different or better forms of living. His response to these collective problems is a stand-alone, individual act, a retreat into an elsewhere that may shock people around him but will ultimately be discarded as something 'deviant', 'off the mark', a "crooked line". His act of subversion, no doubt, is individualistic but insufficient to register a mark amidst the collective malaise that he voices his impatience for. As for "*Kamra No.9*", the question of love, desire and romantic relationships as free, unrestrained by social, moral, or even commercial limitations is ultimately 'resolved' through Shireen and Nasir's union, while completely glossing over the latter's dissatisfaction with his life which he manages to counter only by curating falsities and a world of make-believe.

Negotiating Romantic Melodrama

Manto's use of romance formula in some of his most popular plays viz. "*Randhir Pahalwan*" and "*Jebkatra*" is hinged upon a careful balance between the portrayal of love through melodramatic conventions on one hand, and its aspiration to radically confront socio-economic realities of an underclass hitherto considered inappropriate as the subjects of romance. His impulse to do so can also be explained in part by his exposure to the current trends in the film industry of the 1940s that tended to experiment with working-class films.It seems that Manto harnesses the popularity of a genre such as romance that could absorb his desire to construct socially relevant narratives while at the same time deflecting its dangerous consequences by constricting its semiotic import to the unflinching and sacrificial power of love of its protagonists. This not only makes for a creative tension in his dramas but also significantly expresses silence about the manner in which these conflicts do not reach their ultimate closure or logical resolution. At best, conflicts of class and patriarchal authority are presented in such a way that the attention of the audience is directed towards a highly sentimentalized romance saga rather than the uncomfortable subtext that lies beneath its veneer.

Debashree Mukherjee in her essay, "Tracking Utopias: Technology, Labour and Secularism in Bombay Cinema (1930s-1940s)", argues that the "representation of class conflict through romance plot was hardly an invention of the 1940s Bombay cinema; being a recurrent trope in literature, theatre and films from the subcontinent and abroad. However, there is a particular activist zeal and programmatic impulse in the films from the 1940s" (88). Mukherjee analyzes the film "*Apni Nagariya*" (1940), written by Manto, to explain the shift from an earlier romantic dynamic that portrayed social inequalities but resisted their transformation to the one that actively aspired and celebrated a socialist reality, utopian though it may be (89). This move was symbolized strongly by "*mazdoor*" or "working-class heroes" who represented "subaltern agency and revolutionary potential" (89-90). The "heroes" of both the radio plays in consideration here do not strictly belong to the working-class but do share similar conflicts around class, identity and exploitation. However, in contradistinction to these films, the analysis of these dramas shows that that even when their protagonists happen to be society's "subalterns", the narrative fails to project them as models of revolutionary action, depriving them of considerable agency that could effect a transformation of their particular circumstances, let alone of leaving a mark on very systems that produce those of their ilk in the first place.

"*Jebkatra*" and "*Randhir Pahalwan*" are dramas about a pickpocket and a village wrestler (who is also an outlaw) respectively. Both the plays revolve around their unfulfilled love for women who are socially and morally superior to them. Flemming suggests these plays "portray a character who surfaced in Manto's later short stories: the good-hearted criminal" ("Other Reflections" 134). In her opinion, they present highly "romanticized, idealized character[s]" and inscribe optimistic logic in their theme of "redeeming powers" or "all-conquering power of love" (134). It can be argued that this idealization may be read in terms of the particular narrative mode deployed by the author that supports romantic strain in these dramas, i.e. the use of melodrama and sentimentalism in dialogues and sound effects. More significantly, in a "minor" reading of the diegesis of these plays, idealization of subaltern figures is a retreat from the knotty questions of class and agency that are faced not just by the "heroes" of these dramas but also their love-interests who belong to the "respectable" echelons of society, i.e. the middle class. The poignant ironies in these dramas are foreshadowed by a melodramatic excess that takes away from them the power of social critique that may offer a comment about the morally dubious but arrogant ways of the bourgeoisie. Rather, the focus on a melodramatic,

romantic mode reduces these dramas to yet another type of narratives about overcoming class barriers for the sake of love.

Wimal Dissanayake in his book *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* defines melodrama thus:

> According to the early nineteenth-century use of the term, melodrama meant a romantic and sentimental play that contained songs and music deemed appropriate for enhancing the situations presented on stage. […] In later times, […] the term came to signify a form of drama characterized by sensationalism, emotional intensity, hyperbole, strong action, violence, rhetorical excesses, moral polarities, brutal villainy and its ultimate elimination, and the triumph of good (1).

Additionally, Christine Gledhill has recognized the centrality of characters' subjugation in the melodrama genre.[54] Manto's dramas in question contain several elements that lend a strong melodramatic strain to them—use of songs in "*Randhir Pahalwan*" and "*Kabootri*", the emotional and rhetorical excesses of Kashi, Bimla and Randhir's dialogues, as well as heightened sentimentality that is meant to wring sympathy for its underdog characters from the audience. As pointed out earlier, in doing so, Manto exploits the attraction of the popular romantic trope enumerated by Mishra—that of the hero as a sufferer, the test of whose true love hinges upon renunciation or sacrifice. A complex of pity, and *karuna* (pathos) is generated towards the suffering hero—forlorn and even wronged by external forces of society. However, significantly enough, Manto does tweak the conventional patterns of melodramatic romance by destabilizing the Manichean world order of the good and the bad, noble and evil, and the hero and the villain by imbuing shades and nuances of moral certitudes to its characters such as Kashi or Randhir. Paradoxically, the same cannot be said for a play like "*Kabootri*" in which Manto fully gives himself to creating a drama seeped in melancholia, longing and violence which Mishra alludes to in his discussion of a characteristic melodrama.

"*Kabootri*" ("Female Pigeon"), as the name suggests, is a story about a young woman, Durgi, engaged to a police officer and a poet-singer, Kambalposh, who deeply loves her. Durgi, however, ultimately gets married leaving Kambalposh devastated. One day, as Durgi and her husband go down the woods for a walk, she recognizes Kambalposh's voice singing at a distance. In a moment of brief absence of her husband, he finally expresses his love to Durgi. But

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[54] See Gledhill, Christine, and Linda Williams, eds. *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media and National Cultures*. New York: Columbia UP, 2018. Print. ; Gledhill, Christine, ed. *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. London: The British Film Institute, 1987. Print.

before she can respond to him, her husband sees the two and fires at her. In her last moments, Durgi tries to reveal that the heinous crime has been committed by none other than her husband, but ultimately succumbs to the circumstances. Before she could complete her words, the police officer manipulates the situation by claiming that he was forced to shoot at an eagle that had clutched a weak female pigeon. Durgi understands the full import of her husband's words and ultimately dies. At the climactic moment of the play, Kambalposh enters and renounces himself as Durgi's killer.

Unlike the layered characterization of Randhir and Kashi, "*Kabootri*" inscribes a sharp moral divide between the characters of the melancholic lover, Kambalposh, and Durgi's entitled husband, the police officer. "*Kabootri*" is an example of a drama where Manto completely relents to the formulaic demands of a sentimental melodramatic romance. The play is replete with the conventional imagery around young village girls enamored with their friend soon going to be married to a stern police officer, Kambalposh's hyperbolic declarations of love and an almost sudden but violent murder of Durgi by her own husband. The overall mood of the drama is synchronized with music such as the sound of the temple bells and a wedding orchestra that symbolize two phases in Durgi's life—her brief meeting with the Kambalposh at the temple before she gets married. More importantly, it is Kambalposh's songs that not only explicate his feelings for Durgi but also add to his characterization as a melancholic lover.

The gentle melancholy of autumn season, "the rustling autumn comes" ("*khad-khad pat-jhad aayi*") wraps Kambalposh's songs and the crackling dry leaves reflect his crushed hopes of being with Durgi. The desolation that has set in this season of his life is implied in his splintered dreams—"dreams of glass are shattered" ("*kaanch ke sapne toote*") (53). He compares himself to a denuded autumnal tree ("*rund-mund ped*") that is now barren and lifeless. At one point in the play, Kamlo, Durgi's friend, tells him that people in the village feel that he is like a saint who has renounced the material world and absorbed himself in penance in the wilderness of the forest (53). Kambalposh's character recalls Mishra's description of melancholic, lovelorn romantic heroes in Indian cinema who are not only isolated from the mainstream but also whose extreme sentimentality is symptomatic of their ineffectuality. Thus, Kambalposh confesses that he has lost his capacity to reason or act and his mind is completely fogged by his overwhelming thoughts—"*Main toh jidhar bhi dekhta hu, udhar mujhe apne hi vichar nazar aate hain. Main*

inhe hi ghoor-ghoor kar dekhta hu […] mere vichar har cheez par kohre ki tarah chha jate hain (52).

In "*Kabootri*", the conflict is articulated in fairly staid terms: Kambalposh's love for Durgi is unacceptable because she is engaged, and later on, legally wedded to the police officer. In this simplistic drama, the conflict plays out between male romantic desire for a woman and its egotistical control over a woman's autonomy. In this conflict between competing claims to her, the drama gives Durgi no agency or capacity to decide for her own life. The drama, towards the end, may uphold Kambalposh as the true renunciate figure and establish his unflinching love for Durgi, but in its complete formulaic resolution, it fails to deal with the notions of middle-class respectability that rests on the fidelity of women, which when violated result in extreme reactions such as that of the police officer. His jealousy as well as bruised ego triumphs over the goodness of Kambalposh, evoking nothing but pity and sympathy for him. The play, in upholding Durgi as a metaphor for innocence, does not provide any valuable form of social critique nor of change but only caters to the demands of a tragic melodramatic tale for the emotional gratification of a popular audience.

In contrast, "*Jebkatra*" is constructed as a romance narrative between a pickpocket, Kashi, and Bimla, who is a schoolteacher. The scene opens amidst the humdrum of a busy market where Kashi and his friend Girdhari skillfully steal Bimla's purse. As Girdhari counts the stolen money, Kashi chances upon a letter inside Bimla's purse, reading which he is overcome by extreme guilt. He resolves to search Bimla who is now unable to bear this loss and attempts suicide by jumping into the sea. Kashi saves her and gradually falls in love with her. Bimla on the other hand, convinces him to give up pickpocketing and offers to help him in getting rid of his addiction. Kashi tries with great effort but to no avail, finally breaking his vow in order toto gift Bimla an expensive pen. This incident strains their relationship with Kashi promising to return only when he has completely reformed himself. Meanwhile, Bimla is involved in extricating herself from the clutches of a shrewd pundit who has been blackmailing her for money in lieu of her secret letters. At this stage, the play heads towards its (anti) climax as Bimla, overcome by the precarious situation, decides to take Kashi's help in the matter. The play ends in a shockingly ironic anti-climax where Kashi, after a long pause, reveals that he has chopped off his fingers and is now, finally, a "good man".

"*Jebkatra*" as a play invests considerably in Kashi's tormented self that is at once vulnerable to the humane love of Bimla and hardened against his unchanging habits that he has acquired as a result of his circumstances. The opening scenes of the play establish the physical milieu that Girdhari and Kashi inhabit—the cramped marketplaces drowned in the din of motorcars and rickshaws making their way through a swarm of people jostling against each other. It is out of these places that Kashi and his friend make their livelihood through petty thefts, sharing perfect coordination and planning in executing their act:

> Kashi: (laughing) The size of these carts might be enlarged or reduced, but our work will go on…what do you say, Girdhari?
>
> Girdhari: That is right…but I must appreciate how cleanly you fell that woman's purse down.
>
> Kashi: And how swiftly could you examine her movements! (80).
>
> Kashi: *(kehkaha laga kar) bazaar aur chakkde bade kiye jayen ya chote, humari gaadi toh chalti hi rahegi…kyun Girdhari?*
>
> Girdhari: *Veh toh theek hai, par daad iss baat ki do, kis safayi se uss laundiya ka batua neeche giraya.*
>
> Kashi: *Aur bande ne bhi kis furti se uska pet chaak kiya* (80).

The play makes an effort to stress that although Kashi may be an expert in illegal activities such as pickpocketing, he nurtures deep human compassion in his heart. His conscience is not immune to a certain degree of ethical concern even when his profession is morally questionable. The emotional intensity of his guilt at having stolen money from a woman who is in dire need of it, is conveyed both through dialogues as well as through elaborate sound effects. He explains to Girdhari that it is his profession that is evil and not his heart and by putting Bimla through an unbearable crisis, he has unleashed unforgivable tyranny upon her:

> I have committed a great deal of wrong, Girdhari…she is in dire need of money…my profession is evil but my heart is not…I am shocked…God knows…I am deeply hurt…that woman is really sad, you don't know how miserable she is…I am such a tyrant…what should I do? (182).
>
> *maine bahut bura kiya hai Girdhari…usko rupyon ki sakht zaroorat hai…mera pesha bura hai, par mera dil bura nahi hai…mujhe sadma hua hai…bhagwan*

> *janta hai, mujhe bahut dukh hua hai…veh aurat bahut dukhi hai, tum nahi jante, veh kitni dukhi hai…main bada atyaachari hu…ab main kya karun?* (182).

Furthermore, the subsequent sound instructions melodramatically map his remorse onto the voice of his alter ego that seems to reinforce his guilt and inability to mend the damage done to Bimla. The crazy clatter of the market merges into the noise of the sea that symbolizes the moral dilemma played internally in the mind of Kashi, as distinct from his wry job as a pickpocket. His resigned state is reflected through the superimposition of "tired footsteps" onto the rumbling seawaves as the alter-ego in his "thick and repulsive" ("*moti aur ghinawni*") voice taunts him—"You are so cruel" ("*tum bahut zaalim ho*"), "you could not search her" ("*tum usse talaash nahi kar sake*"), "what would she have felt after opening her empty purse?" ("*jab usne purse khali paya hoga toh uski kya halt hui hogi*?") and finally, "you are a devil…you have tormented a vulnerable woman" ("*tum rakshas ho…tumne ek bekas aurat ko dukh pahunchaya hai*") (183). The narrative style here becomes that of heightened drama much like the zoomed-in, repetitive shots of a film. While the above dialogues are rendered as an overpowering echo in Kashi's mind, they are once again spoken in his anxious voice as a soliloquy before he unexpectedly finds Bimla on the verge of drowning in the sea.

The overwhelming guilt in Kashi's mind is relieved only temporarily. When Bimla compares her life spent in perpetual fear with the supposedly unabashed but unethical one of the pickpocket, Kashi is once again confronted with the tussle between his emotions and actions. He reiterates that he is only a humane person whose fingers, unfortunately, are predisposed to evil acts and therefore begs to be noticed for his innate goodness—"*main sab ka sab acha hun, ik sirf meri ungliyan buri hain…main chahta hun, yeh bhi achi ho jayen, magar…*" (185). The language of these dialogues is redolent with sympathy and helplessness. It is meant to forge a sense of identification with his pitiable situation that makes Kashi juggle between his will to reform himself to become worthy of Bimla's love on one hand and his compulsive need to steal on the other. Not just the texture of these dialogues but also the repeated use of the sound of the sea waves reinforces the portrayal of Kashi, the "hero" in need of Bimla as well as the audience's consolation. This emotional pitch raises a notch higher when in the course of reprimanding Kashi for his stubbornness, Bimla draws attention to her own economically strained life.

If Kashi's character treads the slippery slope between well-intentioned love and insurmountable addiction, Bimla struggles to live her life with dignity and security. Manto paints

her as a hapless victim of circumstances who grapples with one jolt after another only to be blackmailed by a sly pundit for money. The author does not plumb into her character's depth or complexity of her circumstances in entirety—one is never told the nature of secret contained in the letters; her love for Kashi is never stated in clear-cut terms and focuses primarily on her willingness to reform him into a responsible citizen. Bimla's resignation against her trying state of affairs is expressed in her sense of fear and vulnerability. Her lover who had illegitimately impregnated her has deserted and this trauma overwhelms her being. Thus, when Kashi saves her life, she feels that her troubles have aggravated instead of being alleviated because he too, like others, would loom over her like a devil trading her secrets, and instead of picking pockets would prick her heart in unbearable ways—" *main darti hun ki tum bhi mere jeevan par kale bhoot ki tarah chha jaoge…tum bhi mere raaz ka sauda karna shuru kar doge…tum jebein katarna chorh doge, mera dil katarna shuru kar doge…tum sabkuch jaan gaye ho*" (184-5). At one stage, Bimla also draws attention to her doubly disadvantaged situation as a single woman whose existence is forever threatened by the presence of predatory men around her:

> The love is far gone but its weariness lingers on, my daughter has died but my love for her is alive…she wanted to live for a few days clasping these two corpses to her breast but even this had a price fixed to it, because the world runs on business…here, even the sorrows don't come for free…a woman's small weakness is much more profitable than a four storeyed house. If a calculative man exploits this weakness, then he can reap heaps of benefits out of it every month (185).
>
> *Mohabbat mit gayi lekin uski thakawat baaki hai, bacchi mar gyi magar mamta abhi tak zinda hai…in do laashon ko seene se lagaye weh kuch din jeena chahti thi lekin iski keemat talab ki gayi, issliye ki duniya byopar par chalti hai…yahan dukh bhi muft nahi milte…aurat ki ek kamzori chaumanzila makaan ke mukable mein zyada nafa baksh hai…yeh kamzori kisi byopari mard ke haath mein aa jaye toh weh uss se maah-b-maah kiraya vasool karta rehta hai* (185).

Thus, Bimla's life is portrayed as a battle between the weariness that her failed love has left behind, along with the quashed dreams of motherhood. The twin traumas have an enormous emotional impact on her being, and thus, the lives of both Kashi and Bimla seem to be bound in their suffering and poignancy.

As pointed out earlier, suffering as an essential prerequisite of melodramatic narratives, is therefore, adequately deployed by Manto. The emotional tenor of the dialogues and overall ambience of the drama peaks towards a crucial moment when Bimla wallows in self-pity and once again draws attention to her circumstances, pointing out she has curbed her desires to an extent that purchasing a mere fountain pen seems like a luxury to her—"*meri mazlumiyat ki inteha yeh hai ki ek nikamma fountain pen bhi nahi khareed sakti*" (187). The appeal to heightened emotion in this dialogue impacts Kashi deeply who cannot but think about it in relation to his own inability to be of any significance to Bimla, much like the "fifth wheel" in a vehicle (188). In keeping with the melodramatic mode of the play, Bimla's words keep echoing in the background against the traffic noises of the bazar. Pressed by his gnawing instinct, when Kashi steals a pen and gifts it to Bimla, he implores her to look deeper into his turmoil. Excessively sentimental, Kashi cannot control his tears and reiterates the purity of his heart despite his corrupt actions:

> Please try to think…please try to search deep within my heart…[…] my eyes were filled with tears…I have never cried in my life but that day I did…[…] how do I explain what goes inside my heart…I understand that I have committed a mistake…I have again disappointed you, but what can I do…when I saw this pen in the pocket of a man walking by, it was as if my fingers experienced a sensation…and the pen was with me…I am deeply repentant…I am very embarrassed (190).
> *tum zara socho…yani jo kuch mere dil mein hai, uska toh khoj lagao…[…] meri aankhon mein aansu aa gye the…main kabhi nahi roya tha lekin uss roz mein ro diya…[…] main apne dil ka haal kaise bayan karu….main janta hun, maine galti ki hai…maine tumhe fir naummeed kiya hai, magar main kya karun…raah chalte huye aadmi ki jeb mein jab maine yeh kalam dekha toh apne aap meri ungliyon mein harkat paida hui aur…kalam mere paas tha…mujhe bahut afsos hai…main sakht nadim hu* (190).

Through Kashi's heart-wrenching appeal, Manto wrings the audience's sympathy completely towards him. Ultimately, however, deliberate sound effects of the sea waves, din of the market and emotionally hefty dialogues do give way to a startling irony that characterizes the well-crafted climax of the drama. While the play draws attention to Kashi's supreme sacrifice as a

symbol of his humanity, what must also be noticed is the manner in which it maintains a dubious stance over the bourgeois protagonist's compulsions in the face of economic exploitation.

Bimla's constant implorations to Kashi for a morally righteous life are rendered suspect as she finally decides that the only way to defeat the pundit at his game would be to unethically dupe him with the help of none other than the expert pickpocket, Kashi. Bimla has been positioning herself in opposition to people of Kashi's ilk who have never "earned their bread" in contrast to herself who "works" hard for her livelihood. However, her final choice underscores the contingent nature of moral values that interchangeable in the modern world. The same Kashi who has been castigated as an immoral person, towards the end, becomes capable of a tremendous leap of faith that leads him to amputate the very cause of his devious ways. But it is in fact Bimla who must confront her moral and ethical dilemmas that arise out of her specific position in the "respectable" middle-class of the society. Bimla ultimately does find Kashi "useful" or worthy, ironically, only in relation to what she has always sought to eliminate in him—his skill as a thief. The bewildering climax of the play hinged on profound irony, ultimately fractures the Manichean world order that had till now been melodramatically supported by Bimla's righteousness despite her trying circumstances, and Kashi's immoral profession as a pickpocket. More so, in making Kashi an invalid in the end, the play posits his literal and metaphorical lack of agency to 'improve' himself. The final act, therefore, underscores his helplessness rather than a creative negotiation or change of his conditions. It points towards a bleak 'solution' to such deviancies that neither provides a model of action worth emulation nor a conscious confrontation of his circumstances. Rather, in a manner of utter resignation, there is an attempt to 'cast away' or 'wish away' the very 'problem' that acts as an impediment to his personal goal, the very threat to his affection for Bimla—his incorrigible fingers. Similarly, with respect to Bimla, Manto imbues her character with economic and personal compulsions, but is hesitant to lay them bare fully. In an inconclusive end to the drama, there are no final answers with respect to Bimla's reciprocation of Kashi's love or atleast an empathetic attitude towards his compulsion as also her final escape from the clutches of the pundit.

In what seems to be the conquering power of love, to borrow Flemming's words, the play alludes to an all-pervading moral crisis resulting out of social and economic exploitation that explains not only the subaltern subject's questionable ways but also that of the bourgeoisie.While

Kashi's lack of education is held responsible for his morally suspect life, Bimla's sexual exploitation as a woman at the hands of irresponsible and predatory men forces her to turn towards what she has abhorred and condemned in the kleptomaniac, Kashi. At the beginning of the drama, Girdhari jokes to Kashi whether they would still be picking pockets were they educated enough—"*agar padha-likha hota toh aaj kya jebein kaat ta?*" (181). The moral crisis in the drama, therefore, is a grim consequence of poverty, lack of education and sexual exploitation faced both by Kashi and Bimla. Through the use of melodramatic mode of sentimental dialogues and wistful tenderness of sea waves to mirror the external and internal narratives of the characters, the play keeps its thrust on the possibility of Kashi's reformation and Bimla acceptance of his love. However, these individual crisis that are parts of a collective one, are averted through the suffering, sentimental hero's sudden change of heart that hardly offers a hope of change of circumstances in the first place.

According to Menra and Dutt, even if Manto had composed only one *Jebkatra* during his entire tenure in Delhi, it would still make his stint at the AIR no less historic (3: 336). The play, exalted for its liberal humanism, no doubt celebrates the essential goodness of each human being. However, beneath this surface of a "heart of gold" and undying love is an uncomfortable interpenetration of moral values that are bifurcated as good and bad. Manto does this by making Kashi, a poor, uneducated, unattractive pickpocket as the protagonist of his radio drama who challenges the configurations of a hero and the villain—the one who must be exalted versus the one who must be despised. However, because of his reservation in fleshing out the details of Bimla's sexual exploitation or the nature of secrets that she wishes to keep close to her, the play remains silent on the real nature of her ethical dilemma. This lacuna in the drama is cleverly shifted to the subaltern figure, Kashi, whose suffering and sentimental change of heart hinged upon a melodramatic excess and hard-hitting irony would be enough to cater to the needs of public entertainment. It, thus, absolves Manto to confront the deeply troubled mental states of the characters by means of reflection or critique, and instead deflects the audience's attention towards a highly romanticized notion of a criminal who redeems himself by being the paragon of sacrifice and kindness.

If "*Jebkatra*" exposes us to the tragic complexity of a pickpocket's emotional compulsions, "*Randhir Pahalwan*", one of Manto's most successful radio dramas, narrates the story of a ruthless wrestler Randhir, who struggles to come to terms with his true identity as a

human being beneath the façade of his unsparing personality. Randhir loves Savitri, the daughter of the village zamindar, who in turn loves a poor laborer Shamu. Randhir, however, is unable to acknowledge his feelings to his own self and denies any possibility of either such an emotional impulse or the feasibility of it in his life. Shamu is "hot-tempered and radical minded" ("*tez mijāz jawān khayāl*") and is fully aware of the insurmountable class difference that is an impediment to his affection for Savitri (167). He nevertheless becomes actively involved in leading a peasant protest against the exploitation of the village zamindar that further puts him at odds with Savitri who seems to be torn between her love for Shamu and duty towards her father. Meanwhile, Randhir is summoned and heavily bribed by the zamindar in order to quell popular unrest against him by killing Shamu:

> This Shamu has started troubling me since a few days—he is rousing the farmers against me which is making the collection of tax very difficult—[…] I said that our wrestler can mend Shamu merely in a snap of his fingers—what do you say, *pahalwan*, isn't this a cakewalk for you! (172).
> *iss Shamu ne kuch dinon se mujhe tang karna shuru kar diya hai—kisano ko mere khilaf uksa raha hai jisse lagaan vasool karne mein mushkil paida ho gyi hai—[…] maine kaha, humara pahalwan jo hai, veh Shamu ko yun chutkiyon mein theek kar dega—kyu pahalwan, yeh tumhare dayein haath ka khel hai na!* (172).

Randhir, bound not only by his loyalty towards the village head but also his jealousy towards Savitri's lover, is committed to the task of eliminating him. However, in a twisted turn of events, the zamindar is murdered and Shamu is arrested as the main accused. Savitri is devastated and begs Randhir to save him. Randhir is overcome by his love for Savitri and takes the onus of murder charges upon him, symbolically registering his true love for her in fulfilling all her desires.

The rather simplistic plot of the drama concerns the spirit of sacrifice that moves an apparently cold-hearted man that becomes instrumental in the happy union of lovers, Shamu and Savitri. Randhir's renunciation of his love evokes the "becārā complex" that Mishra points out, resulting in pity for a man who seems to be wronged by his circumstances and fate in romantic love. This use of popular motif in contemporary romance narratives is also used as a device to delve deeper into Randhir's troubled self-perception that results from his external reputation as a village rogue feared by one and all. Quite from the beginning of his play, Randhir seems to deny

his feelings for Savitri and expresses this inner tumult as anger and jealousy towards her lover Shamu. When Madho teases him about his fascination with Savitri, Randhir angrily confesses:

> How many times should I tell you, Madho, not to tease me […] but you still do not listen—I am a wrestler. I can do strenuous push-ups and swing heavy clubs. What truck do I have with something like love—I am the one who eats and drinks heavily. The government counts me amongst notorious criminals. I have gone several times to the jail (169).
>
> *Kai baar tumse keh chuka hun Madho, tum mujhe na cheda karo […] par tum talte nahin—pahalwan aadmi hun. Dand pelta hu—mugdar ghumaata hu.Mujhe ishq se kya kaam—sharabi-kababi hu.Sarkar mujhe das numberiyon mein ginti hai. Kayi baar jel ho chuki hai* (169).

Randhir's history of unscrupulous murders, his inviolable physical strength, intemperate drinking and irascible nature are meant to invoke abhorrence and dislike towards him in the play. His own self-consciousness in this regard is somehow meant as a justification that denies him the right to love. His firm grounding in the seedy village underworld has painted him in the broad strokes of a criminal—the shackles of an identity that he cannot escape from. Thus, on one hand, when Savitri hits him in an attempt to protect Shamu, Randhir is unable to control his wrath and rages that she should have known that he is not an ordinary being but Randhir Pahalwan, the "one who can suck the blood" out of any person—"*Tune samjha kya tha mujhe. Randhir Pahalwan hun, Randhir Pahalwan. Khoon hi pi jaya karta hun*" (176). In contrast, his heart melts to see Savitri in tears and when she curses him, is forced to confess his love for her. Randhir's world of conflicting emotions is contrasted with the simplistic worldview of Savitri for whom Randhir signifies nothing but the ugly face of aggression and evil who should rightly be bereft of the privilege to love anyone—"*tujh jaise paapi ko prem karne ka kya adhikār hai?"* (177).

The climax of the play becomes a moral test of Randhir's values which by extension also puts into question the opposing grounds of the good and the evil. The play never clearly establishes the fact of zamindar's real killer. There are hints given with respect to Shamu's involvement in the same but he refutes the allegations. In the haze surrounding the real murderer, Randhir's owning up to the crime that he has not committed becomes not only a mark of his sacrifice and love for Savitri but also coming to terms with gentle compassion that resides in his heart. One of the refrains in the play is that deep inside Randhir "is no heart, but a cold stone"

("*tere pehlu mein dil nahi, patthar hai*") (178). In his spirit of renunciation, Randhir changes this perception and shows that beneath his stony exterior lies a humanitarian, genuine and empathetic soul that is immeasurable through his identity as a village outlaw. When he "confesses" to his "crime", he ironically lays claims to the same ideals of aggressive masculinity and fear that automatically designate him as inhuman and barbaric. He reasons that a timid and frail person such as Shamu can never muster the courage of murdering someone. It can only be done by the one whose "arms are full of strength":

Randhir: (laughing) […] Constable sahib, I am speaking the truth. Shamu is innocent—such a coward and weak person can never be someone's murderer. The only person who can kill is the one who possesses strength in his arms—how can this weakling murder anyone? (181).

Randhir: *(hansta hai) […] thandedār sahib, main sach kehta hu, Shamu nirdosh hai—aisa darpok aur buzdil kabhi kaatil nahi ho sakta. Katl veh kar sakta hai jiske bāzuon mein shakti ho—yeh murdār bhala kisi ko kya mārega?* (181).

Ironically, it is not just Randhir's physicality that represents virility but the largesse of his heart that truly makes him capable of courageous love and human compassion. The play's end, like "*Jebkatra*" however, is inconclusive as the apparently neat resolution of the zamindar's murder and the love triangle seems to throw open more questions than explanations.

Randhir's transformation from a known goon to a law-abiding, gentle citizen seems to be externally forced by his concern for Savitri. But strength of the play lies in documenting the occasional ruptures in the indomitable guard of physical prowess and unscrupulousness that characterize his identity both as a wrestler and the village outlaw. The repressed impulse of humaneness and love expresses itself in the rare moment of self sacrifice and forces one to question the validity of moral centers qualified as such. In making Randhir, the hero of the play, tread the slippery slope of the morally upright and the corrupt, the author destabilizes the dichotomies of the virtuous and the unlawful usually upheld by the dominant vocabulary of a melodramatic romance.

In dramatizing Randhir's oscillating states of mind as well as the innocent love between Savitri and Shamu, "*Randhir Pahalwan*" deploys the heightened emotional effects sought from a

number of village folk songs. While in "*Jebkatra*", there is a reliance on sentimental dialogues and sound effects of the sea, "*Randhir Pahalwan*" makes liberal use of songs to foreground the moods of the principal characters. "*Randhir Pahalwan*" is one of the few literary compositions by Manto that have a rural setting and the author imbues it an ambience that does justice to it. The play begins with the noises of the cattle grazing in the fields, the tinkling of the bells tied around their necks and the background sounds of village girls. It is followed by a romantic folk song about singing of the adventures of the legendary lovers, Heer-Ranjha,that foregrounds the innocent love between Savitri and Shamu. The soundscape is filled with romantic bliss that surrounds the lovers through the sound of lashing raindrops and lightening. During the course of the play, Shamu sings a song about overcoming the fear of death for his beloved ("*marne ka nahi karta dhadka*") while Savitri's intense longing for Shamu is repeatedly mapped onto melancholic melodies such as "The world seems a poison without you" ("*tere bina yeh duniya saari zeher dikhayi de*") or "I am longing for a sight of my beloved" ("*Main daras piya ko tarsi hun*") (170, 174, 176). The musical refrain in the play is, however, that of Randhir who often sings "Turn me mad if that's what you need to" ("*Deewana banana hai toh deewana bana de*"). Randhir's singing is often a matter of surprise to people around him such as Madho who are amused to see the light-hearted and traditionally romantic side of the wrestler. His song is also used to characterize the mental upheaval that his love has effected in him. A confusing madness has literally set in him that jostles with his actions and temperament as a wrestler. The liberal presence of songs helps in situating "*Randhir Pahalwan*" as a sentimental melodramatic romance that dramatizes the tragic love of the hero, Randhir, who turns out to be as emotional, if not more, as he is violent in his means.

The identification of the drama with the sacrificial and latent kindness of Randhir facilitated by melodramatic emotionalism however, distances us from larger crisis that pervades "*Randhir Pahalwan*". The conflict in the play hinges around specific class struggles that operates at two levels, the personal and the social, both feeding into each other rather than being independent. At the personal level, the play documents a visible class difference between Shamu and Savitri—the relationship between a poor laborer and the daughter of a wealthy zamindar is unfeasible which both Shamu and his mother recognize as matter-of-fact. At the outset, Shamu tells Savitri that their love has put them in a deep predicament because of their class difference—"Love is bad headache—here I am a poor worker, and she the daughter of a zamindar" ("*kahan*

main ek gareeb mazdoor, kahan who ek gaon ke zamindar ki bitiya") (168). Shamu's mother too explains to Savitri that it is for the sake of her honor and larger good of their families that she must stop meeting Shamu (171). Randhir too, as discussed above, is constrained by his own disreputable position in the social hierarchy that relates to his belonging to a class of poor criminals and hence no match for a woman hailing from a "respectable" section of the society.

The difference of class is played out even more significantly at the larger social level in the play. The conflict in the drama arises out of zamindar's fear of the growing unrest against his exploitative ways, spearheaded by none other than his daughter's lover, Shamu. Shamu, hotheaded as he is, tries to mobilize the collective rage in the poor peasants and channelize it into a full-fledged rebellion against the zamindar. "*Randhir Pahalwan*" is perhaps one of the very few radio dramas to allude to a collective action as a response to social crisis—in this case the farmers. The radical power of subaltern agency that Shamu represents, is however, dissipated in the drama, for the narrative proceeds to document the zamindar's murder followed by Savitri's plea to Randhir to save her accused lover. These events take place in quick succession and therefore, the class conflict between the peasants and the zamindar that could have reached its full confrontation, is thereby truncated. Similarly, Randhir brings to focus the world of criminality that he inhabits. This world is at once sustained and contained by the state powers at the helm, symbolized in the play by the zamindar. The cunning zamindar wants to squash the rebellion by using Randhir who is a mere peg in his larger treacherous scheme. To immunize himself from Randhir's defection or suspect charges, he ultimately plans to get him killed by someone else. As his accountant advises—"Randhir must kill Shamu and someone else must finish off Randhir*" ("Shamu ko Randhir maare aur Randhir ko koi aur saaf kar de*") (178). Thus, low-level, poor criminals, of the ilk of Randhir are used as pawns in the blatantly exploitative system that is sustained by those having economic prowess as well as social sanction of a 'respectable' class. This dynamic between crime and state power is represented through the differing narratives of the radical Shamu on one hand, and the morally dubious 'villain', Randhir, on the other. The play does not devote a larger narrative space in order to delve deeper into these exploitative structures and the power equations they result between the principal characters, and is instead camouflaged by its thrust as a romantic narrative reinforced through songs of love and longing.

Moreover, even within the confines of a romance plot scheme, Savitri as a love-interest, and the virtuous daughter of the village zamindar is only incidental to the drama. Manto paints her in a way that she represents nothing more than naivete in a world that is increasingly manipulative, exploitative and ruthless. She neither is able to provide any insights nor is able to intervene effectively within the problematic dynamics between her father and her lover. Her characterization exposes Manto's inability to portray the dilemmas of a bourgeois woman in a nuanced manner, robbing her of depth and reasoning and thus, pandering to the expectations of a formulaic romance saga complete with its conventional tropes and motifs. Savitri's life is marked with acute personal and moral crisis—she loves a man whom she cannot legitimately accept due to her class position; to compound matters, it is allegedly this lover who has even murdered her father. Savitri must undergo the test of her conflicting loyalties—towards her moral self that must stand up for the justice of her father's murder, and towards her true love for Shamu, who also allegedly happens to be the culprit. Furthermore, she must seek Randhir's help in order to rescue her lover, a village rascal whom she despises as cold hearted and unworthy. All these dilemmas that should cross Savitri's mind are simplified to such an extent that even after her father's death, all that her reaction includes, is an agonizing plea to have Shamu bailed out of his crime. In what could have been a confrontation between the moral choices that Savitri faces, there is a veering off these uncomfortable situations towards the establishment of Randhir, the subaltern's character as a paragon of kindness and romanticized self-sacrifice.

Perhaps, such lapses could be explained in terms of Manto's composition of this drama in order to cater to specific broadcasting needs. "*Randhir Pahalwan*" was aired in 1942 from Delhi under the program section, "For Villagers Only". In creating a rural ambience replete with folk songs, rustic dialect and the feud of the village zamindar with the poor peasants represented by Shamu as well as its exploitative use of people like Randhir Pahalwan, the play fulfills the requisites of reaching out to a larger rural audience through broadcasting. In making sure that the drama records a high emotional pitch by wringing utmost sympathy for Randhir, it skillfully camouflages the rough edges of class conflict, social hierarchy and criminality that are intricately bound with notions of respectability and moral responsibility espoused by the bourgeois characters in the drama, especially Savitri, on whose individual role, the play maintains an uncomfortable silence.

Subverting Formulas

Manto's proclivity to challenge the normative codes of art registers itself as a complex process in his radio dramas. The readiness to use popular storytelling modes of melodrama and sentimentalism co-exists with his attempt to suffuse them with a critical edge which makes for a creative tension in his dramas. In the final segment of this chapter, there is an attention paid to the manner in which Manto cleverly dismantles the use formula that is precariously held by the previously analyzed plays. His play, "*Akeli*" is a good example of how Manto takes liberties with the very tropes of renunciation or self-immolation, pain and pity in love that animate his popular dramas in *Karwat* and *Manto Ke Dramay*. "*Akeli*" is thus different from the rest of the plays discussed above because it challenges the dominant form of storytelling with its conventional idioms of love and romance. However, similar to the central problematic in Manto's plays, "*Akeli*" too brings us one with a woman who cannot fulfill her numerous desires in the world without carrying the barrage of alienation and sacrifice. Susheela is confident and dignified in the face of trying circumstances but is ultimately unable to secure for herself love and worthy relationships. This sense of doom and entrapment out which there seems to be no significant way out, is expressed at the beginning of the drama which points to the unchanging questions of life that come to haunt in a cyclical fashion. Equally significant is the recurring metaphor of the train that runs along the trails of life—incessantly but alone. The play, therefore, underscores the inevitability of circusmtances and inability of characters to meaningfully extricate themselves out of it, and thus points to a skepticism rather than affirming the potential of a human being to effect change.

"*Akeli*" ("The Lone One") is an intriguing drama about a young woman named Susheela and her life-altering experiences with the two men in her life—Kishore and Moti. Both men can provide her with different things in life but it seems that neither of them possesses the key to her innermost desires. The play opens with Susheela, standing alone on a railway platform having been duped and deserted by her lover Mohan. Kishore, a wealthy man, sees her in this vulnerable condition and takes her to his house. Susheela's loneliness is established right at the start of the play through the metaphor of a speeding train that stands for life itself. Like the hastening wheels of this train, life has the capability of carrying on irrespective of the travails of childhood, youth and old age; the best laid plans of life will forever clash with the irreverent ways of destiny and no matter the war between hope and despair, the train of life will keep running ahead ("*tadbeer*

takdeer se takrati rahegi, ummed aur yaas baham asto-gireban hoti rahengi") (196). Amidst this imagery of a shunted but still running train, the radio commentary lays out what seems to be the overarching theme of the play—"one woman and one man, two women and one man, two men and one woman—this predicament has been since creation and shall continue to do so" ("*ek aurat aur ek mard, do auratein aur ek mard, do mard aur ek aurat—yeh gardān azal se jari hai aur abad tak jari rahegi*") (196).

Susheela is an ambitious woman and had run away with Mohan, a thief, in search of better economic prospects. After he deserts her, Susheela turns to dancing in Kishore's palatial house and garners the attention and appreciation of his guests. She is however, not satisfied to be confined to the luxuries of Kishore's house ("the eight big and desolate rooms, a small lawn and the service of three four hunchbacked servants" 198) and harbors an unquenchable desire to be exposed to the outside world:

> Susheela: Since two years, I have been fearfully listening to the sad tinkling of anklets in this desolate house…I want to hear something else too…[…] I want a swarm of people around me…I want to get surrounded by them…I want to drown myself in their noises…I want many things (199).
>
> *Susheela: do baras se main iss khauf naak taur par sunsaan makaan mein in ghungruon ki udaas jhanjhanaahatein sun rahi hun…main kuch aur bhi sunna chahti hu…[…] main chahti hu , mere ird –gird hujoom ho…main un hujoomon ke andar ghir jana chahti hu…main awaazon ke samandar mein dubkiyan lagan achahti hun…main bahut kuch chahti hu* (199).

Kishore fulfills Susheela's desire and she soon becomes a popular dancer raising war funds and conducting her concerts. A resounding orchestra effect in the background establishes the enthusiasm of her enormous clout. However, it seems that Susheela has still not been able to fully come to terms with what she acutely desires. When Kishore asks her about this apparent void in her life, she points out that Kishore might have showered her with all the material comforts but does not love her. Kishore seems to understand only a single role reserved for him, which is that of a provider and cannot appreciate the finer nuances of affection, appreciation or love:

Susheela: What do I lack that you never thought of loving me…those looks that make a woman realize her femininity, those that tell her that she is a woman, and not a lump of clay…[…] I want to ask you the motive of bringing me here…you could have got a monkey, or a mynah which could have been caged (200).

Susheela: mujhme kya nuks hai jo aapne mujhe mohabbat bhari nazron se dekhna gawaara nahi kiya…veh nazrein jo aurat ke andar niswaniyat bedaar karti hain, jo aurat ko batati hain ki weh aurat hai, mitti ki dheri nahi…[…] main poochti hun, mujhe yahan lane ka kya matlab tha…aapne koi Bandar paal liya hota, koi maina pinjre mein daal li hoti" (200).

Kishore's world, though full of material security but inert, is contrasted with that of Moti, a man who Susheela has fallen in love with. Susheela and Moti meet secretly in the dead of the night, whispering into each other's ears, carried away in passion. Moti showers praises on Susheela and tells her how he got enchanted watching her dance on the stage. There is a sensual buildup in their conversation, their breaths mingling into each other, getting heavier by the moment. The passionate intensity of this scene is further heightened when Susheela expresses her desire to be in an "elsewhere" place—a space where she could dance freely, where her anklets break free and exhaust all their tinkling sounds, and more importantly, where she reaches a moment where motion and stillness becomes one with each other. Susheela's language here is full of erotic charge bringing together her desire to realize her dream as a dancer, with the vigor of passionate love that touches the core of her real existence. This vocabulary of female love is at variance with the romance idiom that is inscribed in plays discussed earlier. In a play like "*Kabootri*", female desire exists in no real terms except as a threat to male honor in a heterosexual marriage that must be punished towards the end in order to restore social and moral order of the fictional universe. More importantly, it is never clear to what extent Durgi in *Kabootri* or Bimla in *Jebkatra* actually love the men who are ready to sacrifice their lives for their sake. It seems that these women characters exist in the plot only so that the compelling motivations of their brooding lovers could be explored more fully. Even in a play like "*Neeli Ragein*", the female character, Surayya, is mystified in metaphorical terms as an extremely beautiful but mysterious, distant woman—an *objet d'art* beyond the comprehension of men. It is

on this account that “*Akeli*” stands out from its counterparts in portraying active female desire in its complex and flawed nature.

Susheela’s desire for Moti remains unfulfilled because he is already engaged to another woman, Chapla. Chapla is the bearer of conventional, middle-class morals who feels that Susheela, as a single woman is a homebreaker, a vamp who has destroyed her prospects of marriage to Moti. She places herself on a higher moral ground and considers that she has risked her reputation in coming to meet a ‘loose’ woman like Susheela—“I have broken all the ties of tradition in coming to meet you” (“*main rasmon-rivaz ke tamaam bandhan torh kar yahaantumhare paas pahunchi hun*”) (206). She demands Susheela to leave her fiancé and thus save him from his father who is soon going to disown him. Chapla also confesses that she, unlike Susheela is not a woman of the world and has led a cloistered life in the confines of her house. Susheela agrees to leave Moti for the sake of Chapla but cannot promise to unlove him. As time passes by, Moti plans to capture the share market and Kishore’s finances and Susheela, though unattached to him now, discreetly helps him by withholding important information from Kishore. As the play heads towards its climax, Susheela breaks the news of his downfall to Kishore and also the reason why she left Moti despite being in love with him. She reveals that she has ‘offered’ Moti to Chapla just as women like to gift their clothes to other women taking great delight in seeing them wearing those (213). Her renunciation of Moti is not in a similar vein as that of Randhir or Kambalposh that emanates out of self-pity or a complex troubling of one’s inner self. Rather, Susheela makes this conscious choice with a degree of moral aplomb that never allows her to be seen as an object of pity, although immensely lonely. When destiny offers her a chance to be of help to Moti, she accepts it at the cost of Kishore. On the other hand, in what is a surprising twist in the story, Kishore, in his nonchalant way admits that he gladly accepts her “gift” of sympathy towards Moti that has ironically unleashed destruction upon himself:

> Kishore: […] Why did you leave Moti if you really loved him?
>
> Susheela: Women are fond of giving their saris to other women as gifts…[…] I picked up my love, that belonged to someone else, made her wear it and became happy…I feel that by receiving my gift, she might learn the art of loving.
>
> Kishore: (calmly) There is one gift that you have given me too.

Susheela: I have forgotten about it…which gift?

Kishore: (smiling) You forget so quickly…I have gladly accepted the gift of pity that you have showered upon your worthless friend…do you want a proof?

Kishore: […] tumhe Moti se muhabbat thi toh fir usse chorh kyu aayi?

Susheela: auraton ko yeh shauk hota hai ki weh apni sariyan doosron ko tohfe ke taur pe de den…[…] maine kisi ki amanat, apni muhabbat uthakar kisi aur ko pehna di aur khush ho gyi…mera khayal hai, mera tohfa le kar usko muhabbat karne ka saleeka aa gaya hoga.

Kishore: (pursukoon awaz mein) ek tohfa tumne mujhe bhi diya hai.

Susheela: Main bhool gyi hun…kaun sa tohfa

Kishore: (hans kar) kitni jūd farāmāsh ho…apne uss anādi dost par tumne jo taras khaya hai, maine tohfe ke taur pe kubool kar liya…suboot chahiye kya? (213).

Thus, the idiom of renunciation that Manto inscribes in *Akeli* differentiates both Susheela and Kishore from the protagonists of other romantic plays read above. Kishore had earlier explained to Susheela that he is far removed from the world of love and the intricacies of a woman's heart because he only fathoms a language of material business. He does not have the fine ability to distinguish between fondness for an object and deep love for a woman (201). It is this very person, however, who accepts his destruction at the hands of Susheela as a benevolent gift from her. At this stage, Susheela feels as if her journey has started afresh, back from the same railway platform, standing alone, when Kishore offers her his helping hand. The act of renunciation on the part of Kishore and Susheela in this play acquires an intriguing quality, removed from the melodramatic excess of the earlier plays.

The mapping of desire for the unknown and the unfamiliar, the alienation and anxiety of characters such as Mantazar, Shireen or Javed dealt as romantic comedy again surfaces in "*Akeli*" as a narrative that metaphorically explores the solitary journey of a single woman whose life seems to be an endless pursuit for love and the desire to be loved. It revolves around the exposition of female self, negotiating the complex terrain of her deepest wishes. However, the fundamental problem in "*Akeli*" is similar to the dramas discussed hitherto. Manto presents in this drama questions that are of perennial significance, as he states at the beginning of the drama.

The age-old questions about the nature of relationship between men and women are raised throughout the course of the drama but are brought back to their initial point without having discovered anything new about them. The universality of the problem is tackled only by way of individual negotiations, without a compelling rationale behind them.

Patriarchy demands that Susheela must accept her moral degradation in loving a man who is soon going to be legally wedded to another. However, in this face-off between Chapla, the symbol of chaste, homely virtues and Susheela as a single woman, the latter in her dignified confidence challenges the force of this moral insult. She does not undermine her prerogative to love and desire a man of her choice and thus tries to safeguard the integrity of her self, exhibiting a moral confidence that differentiates her from her counterparts such as Savitri and Durgi. However, her explanation as offering her love as a 'gift' to another woman betrays a sense of helplessness that seems insurmountable. Though Susheela acts out of her own volition, Manto's heroine accepts her circumstances and negotiates with the men in her life in highly dubious terms—she is left in lurch by Mohan at the beginning of the drama, and it is through Kishore's help that she begins her life afresh. Her attitude towards Kishore is sympathetic and critical in equal parts, and though he supports her ambitions—material, emotional, or sexual, their real nature is obfuscated through the course of the play. Her search for primal love and social acceptance, a popular trope in literature, remains incomplete, without gleaning any useful lessons in life. Susheela, to be fair, guards her inviolable self never bordering on self-pity or loathing. Her ultimate secondariness to the overwhelming reality is expressed in irrational actions that appear unrealistically in the drama—Moti's sway over the share market and Susheela's role in reducing Kishore to a pauper. The motivations behind such actions are never fully expressed and even though they are referred to as instances of her love towards Moti, it does little to illuminate the perennial problems of desire between men and women as raised in the beginning of the drama. Equally unconvincing is Kishore's happy reconciliation to his altered fate at the hands of a woman he claims only to 'like', given his apparently simplistic psyche that does not comprehend of such heavy questions as that of love. The play, therefore, fails to provide viable modes of living to Susheela, who must ultimately walk on, alone, estranged, shunted on the rails of life, adhering to the limited scopes of self-fulfilment that are available to her.

Romance Dramas as "Minor"

Manto's treatment of romance through comedy and sentimental melodrama gives an impression of his somewhat schizoid approach towards art as a means of entertainment. There is an unmistakable deployment of formula in the plays discussed so far that suggests that the author's investment in them is far from superficial as simply products of his vocation. John G. Cawelti in his essay "The Study of Literary Formulas" explains the allure of subscribing to literary formulas with respect to two factors, i.e., the "audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form" and that for creators, "the formula provides a means for the rapid and efficient production of new works" (*Adventure, Mystery and Romance* 9). The popularity of comic and melodramatic formulas in popular entertainment through cinema has been discussed before which to an extent also accounts for similar narratives broadcast over radio as a means of diversion. Also, Manto's profligacy in composing dramas, almost instantaneously is visible in the spontaneous composition of plays such as *Randhir Pahalwan* (named after a staff artist Randhir in AIR), *Intezar* (while waiting for another writer) and *Kabootri* (written after being coaxed by his colleagues to compose a play of the same name). Thus, these plays are borne out of a loose idea that strikes the author at the spur of the moment and therefore are susceptible to borrowing predictable and popular conventions around love and romance. Yet, as this chapter has shown, the use of these formulas allows Manto to veer his dramas towards the overarching theme of love, sidetracking or curtailing the narrative space for a creative resolution of the conflicts that bog the characters. These conflicts relate to envisioning a form of love unattached to traditional marriage, alienation and sense of ennui in individuals, increasingly blurry moral categories that differentiate a thief from a bourgeois schoolteacher, the total loss of female agency in the face of male proprietorial control over her, the rebellion of peasants against the zamindar, and the lack of viable alternatives for a single woman trying to fulfill her wishes in a world structured by patriarchal beliefs and exploitation.

It was Shahid Ahmed Dehlvi who had proclaimed, "The fact of the matter is that Manto hated pretense of all kinds. And as far as he himself was concerned, there existed no contradiction between his inner and external selves" ("A Few Literary Encounters" 186). Manto's romance plays, however, renders Dehlvi's assessment misplaced. These plays with their striking appeal to dominant storytelling formulae on one hand, and a subdued reference to matters of social relevance expose Manto's limitations as well as potential as an artist. Manto's

skill lies not only in crafting superbly popular plays by using the formula of romantic comedy and sentimental romance to perfection, but also using them to masterfully gloss over the problematic underpinnings of each drama. The task of a literary interpretation that draws upon their status as "minor" has been to show the specific conflicts that are not logically pursued by the author. For instance, Javed's repudiation of arranged marriage and paraphernalia of rituals culminates in a shocking elopement with his wife—an act that is bound be seen as nothing but eccentric. Even though Manto may have used it metaphorically to describe him as a "crooked line", it lacks the tinge of ironic force, which is characteristic of say "Toba Tek Singh", where deviance or 'abnormality' becomes a critique of the madness of Partition. What Javed voices his dissatisfaction with, are the malaise of a community—its excessive dependence on meaningless rituals, its insistence on arranged marriages that are restrictive in many cases and so on. His sole act of 'rebellion' is suspect because it exists in isolation from the practices he wishes to voice against. His desire for defamiliarization is expressed in a lone act, with a deep seated concession to the limitations of his own ability to effect change. Similarly, in "*Kamra No. 9*", the emphasis on Shireen's vivacious nature deflects from the deeper state of dilemma in which Nasir finds himself, and indulges in a playful exchange of identities for the lack of any better way to counter his uncontrollable bouts of crying. Just as these two characters, Mantazar's psychological turbulence is handled not by way of a creative engagement but rather a distancing from the community, as well as by turning it into an instance of romantic flippancy between two lovers.

Manto's use of sentimental romance is similar. Manto alludes to the subaltern agency of the peasants but their rebellion is truncated; Bimla's insistence on Kashi's 'reformation' betrays her own dubious moral standards that are a threat to her bourgeois ideals of respectability; the secrets contained in her letters for which she is ready to stake her morals are never revealed; Savitri's responsibility in bridging the gap between her zamindar father and rebel lover is never considered; Durgi's extreme silencing and subjugation to an aggressive ideal of male control and those of fidelity to the husband are overshadowed by Kambalposh's 'sacrifice', and so on. The problems in these dramas are therefore collective in nature—class conflict, bourgeois hypocrisy, widespread alienation etc. but the dramas tackle these issues through particular instances of renunciation and self-pity accentuated through the use of sentimental dialogues, melancholic songs and wringing the audience's sympathy for the underdog figure. There are no plausible answers to be found to questions such as Kashi's lack of education, or peasant's exploitation at

the hands of state power, or Randhir's status as an outlaw. These social concerns are deflected, through skillfully and with immaculate use of the formula.

The strengths of these dramas, however, lies in the small but significant ways in which they deploy unintended ironies that characterizes each play's conclusion blurring the boundaries between the noble "hero" and the evil "villain", thereby dismantling one the primary bulwarks of a sentimental romance. In their very fissured nature, they become a collage of individual crisis, each of them being looked at by Manto askance, with a degree of skepticism. They help us to mark rather than overlook the author's inadequacy to comment on the collective malaise of a bourgeois world that he inhabited, thereby taking recourse to comic or sentimental romance narratives. In doing so, he however, renders suspect the totality of moral universe of his middle-class characters who tread slippery paths of life unable to find any concrete alternatives to it.

Chapter 4
Problem Plays

Introduction

Manto's singular position in Urdu literature is attributed to his unrestrained forays in the lives of the marginalized occupying liminal spaces in the society. The affinity of thematic concerns of his stories made them highly suitable to the agenda of the All India Progressive Writers' Movement of the 1930s and 40s which emphasized on the role of literature in the upliftment of the masses by depicting and positing solutions to the professed problems of the contemporary age. His gaze has been touted as decidedly urban, which in its account of the city turns towards its 'problems'—literally those subjects who fail to be incorporated within its dominant and hegemonic 'respectable' ways of being, as well as the questions of existence and exploitation which they are embroiled in. Gyan Prakash in his essay, "The Urban Turn" argues as follows:

> For Saadat Hasan Manto, the contradictory and heterogeneous world of the city, not the organic and familial space of the village, was the chosen site for his fictions about the struggle for modern identity and justice. He treats the city as a place for negotiating social difference, as an emblematic space for the encounter with the other, the different, not as a symbol of progress and modernization. From a 'minor' point of view, his short stories - several set in Bombay- offer a counterpoint to the dominant discourse of the nation. His fiction represents everyday life in the city as a space enframed by capital and the state, but it also identifies traces of other practices, memories, and desires in this arena (6).

In thus focusing on relationship between the self and the other, the dominant and the marginalized, rather than an uncritical celebration of industrialization and progress, Manto ironizes the experience of modernity, a concern that actively animates his dramas for radio broadcasting—another dominant mode of production of a national imaginary.

Manto chooses subjects like crime and its suitable punishment, the freedom of expression of intellectuals especially in critical and censorious times like the war, and the complicated

subject position of the commoditized and sexualized figure of the prostitute, for the purpose of radio broadcasting entertainment. The setting of all these dramas is the urban city that brings into oppositional contact an alienated man with unwelcoming social spaces, the prostitute and her bourgeois client, a maidservant and her rapist, the son of her rich master, and the struggling intellectual journalist with his corrupt newspaper proprietor. These ‘problem plays’, in dealing with the individual predicaments of these characters also point out to the problems that stare the contemporary society as a whole. In his exploration of these issues, there appears to be a tension between a wholehearted depiction of the grim situations of these characters on one hand, and a degree of curtailment of linguistic explicitness that lends depth and realism, especially to the nature of sexual exploitation referred to in these dramas. This schizoid nature of the dramas taken as a whole also point towards Manto’s unsettled, though not conventional, opinions about the circumstances surrounding his times. Much to the disappointment of his fellow Progressives, Manto does not seem to unequivocally espouse constructive solutions to the problems depicted in these dramas. But in their very serious treatment, effected not just through discursive techniques such as irony, but also creative use of music, effects and poetry, he makes the perplexing environments and lives of such characters a relevant subject matter of national entertainment, and by extension, reflection. These problem-plays, in contrast to romances and comedies, do not resort to a restricted structure of a formula but choose particular social polemic as their thematic focus, which however is bogged down by unrealistic solutions, pessimism and moralistic endings. What follows in this chapter is a two-part discussion of these radio dramas divided as “Prostitute Plays” and ‘Social Plays”, designed to arrive at an understanding of their collective meaning with respect to the negotiation of the self and the ‘other’ in the rapidly transforming space of the modern city.

Prostitute Plays

At a time when a profession in radio broadcasting was considered akin to selling one’s body, Manto ensured that his own radio writing did not fail to touch upon an oft-discussed and debated subject of his stories, i.e. the prostitutes. Veiled references to female bodies in the marketplace are strewn across his radio dramas, as discussed in the previous chapters, but at least three plays bring alive the various facets of a prostitute’s existence in the contemporary socio-cultural milieu over the airwaves. Muhammad Umar Memon opines, “the greater number of Manto prostitutes really do not behave as one might expect them to. In the end, they vehemently

resist categorization into a particular type" (*My Name is Radha: The Essential Manto* xviii). They may not be reducible to flattened character types, but Manto's literary oeuvre certainly evinces recognizable patterns of prostitute narratives that differently portray them as paragons of compassion and motherly care who nonetheless embody an earnest longing to be desired and accepted. In a slightly more radical vein, Manto's "impoverished and exploited prostitutes" also dismantle the stereotypes associated with their traditional portrayal as Muslim courtesans or *tavāi'ifs* who represent elite, high cultural forms (Mufti 179). However, through the radio dramas under scrutiny here, namely, "*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Huñ*", "*Hatak*", and "*Karwat*", there is examination to the different ways in which they draw upon these motifs in order to say something significant about the lack that threatens not the prostitute but the bourgeois society.

"*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu*"

"*Kya Main Aa Sakta Hun*" is a unique radio drama that interestingly does not dwell on a visceral depiction of the prostitute or her environs. Infact, the reference to her is situated towards the end of the drama and is evoked as a metaphor for the sole embodiment of warmth, affection and inclusion. The play draws upon the stereotype associated with the golden-hearted prostitute and in doing so composes a narrative of the city, again stereotypically so, which redeems itself through the kindness of its most marginalized citizen, the courtesan.

The play revolves around the central character, Naeem, identified as an "open-minded young man" ("*ek azad khayal nav yuvak*") who happens to visit several places in the city that enthrall his imagination (346). Each time, however, his magical tranquility is rudely broken as he is made to realize that he is a mere trespasser who is not allowed inside any of these places. Ultimately, Naeem becomes cynical and loses his sense of belief in himself. In each of the instances, there is a discordance between the external social reality and his inchoate thoughts that is plotted through a creative use of sound effects, poetry, and music.

Naeem first visits a beautiful garden and is absorbed in its lush greenery and fragrance. He is surprised at never having known this place and is completely enchanted by it. The mood of the drama is further accentuated through Iqbal's ghazal, "*Phir charāgh e Lāla se*". However, there is a sudden disruption effected in his stream of thought by the unexpected entry of the owner, signaled by the screeching noise of his car, who orders him out his property. There is an incongruity set up between Naeem's detached philosophizing about beauty on one hand, and the owner's anger at seeing an intruder in his private space. He directs his attention to the signboard

that explicitly mentions “Do not enter” and finally drives Naeem out of his garden (348). Similar experience is encountered in the next two places that Naeem visits—an art exhibition and a private club near the beach. On all these occasions, the frightening signification of the “Do not enter” board magnifies to an extent that when Naeem finally reaches his own house, he absurdly seeks permission from his servant, Fazlu, to enter. His fanciful dreams give way to a cynical introspection whereby he confesses that he is now too scared to embrace anything that is beautiful (352). He concludes that whatever is pleasurable and desirable in the world is out of bounds for him and since his home is a place of belonging, it too must not be his (352).

In the play, as Naeem’s traverses through the three distinct places in an urban metropolis, his unsettling experience throws light upon facets of a modernized, mechanized life that has imposed new rules of social behavior and decorum upon the individual. In the second place that he visits, i.e. a private art exhibition, he is surrounded by numerous unnamed men and women, possibly the urban elites, for whom the purpose of this occasion is more than just aesthetic appreciation of the paintings on display. The hushed conversations in the gallery revolve around matters that are of utmost significance to the bourgeoisie—the suitable match-making of their daughters and striking a profitable business deal through coveted partnerships (349). In this context, an anonymous person, i.e. Naeem’s unsolicited opinion about the beauty of a certain painting raises eyebrows. He is identified as an outsider who does not carry the sanction of an exclusive invitation and is thus debarred from participating in the affairs of what seems to be a coterie group. Finally, in the third instance, Naeem visits a private club by the beach and chances upon a young girl caught in her own thoughts. He wishes to strike a conversation with her but she refuses to interact with him till he seeks permission from her father. The latter angrily dismisses his intrusion and similar to the previous scenes, points to the signboard indicating “Do not enter”. The next sound instruction spells out these words to be played intermittently in a thick voice till Naeem reaches his house.

It seems that walking through the dizzying streets of the urban metropolis, Naeem, is severely alienated from his surroundings. Even as his gaze is directed to the spontaneous moments and vistas of beauty that are sketched onto the landscape of a chaotic city, these are at best fleeting and illusory. Manto evokes the peculiar beauty of a modern city that is wrapped in certain quietude in the evening, carrying distant reverberations of the hustle and bustle of its traffic and goings-on of life. Yet, its imposing buildings and the tall electric poles dotting the

moist sandy beach symbolize the dehumanization that has become the essential nature of the urban city. Its speed and mechanization has ironically, resulted in a sense of ennui in the alienated protagonist who wanders from place to place in search of a fulfilling human experience. As the examples of his visitations explicate, modern, bourgeois living presupposes a certain distance that must inform social relations. Naeem's informality in inviting the garden's owner to lie down next to him and discuss philosophical matters, or his naiveté in letting his emotional impulse to talk to an unknown girl a free run, and finally, his transgression of social decorum in offering unwanted opinions as an intruder in a particular social class, certify him as an outsider, a misfit in the modern society who must occupy only its fringes.

Naeem is now devoid of a sense of meaning in his life and is skeptical of venturing out anywhere without the threat of being censured as a trespasser. He is, however, taken aback by the courtesy extended to him when he visits a brothel, drawn by the melodies of *thumris* playing in its premises. In contrast to the rude interjections of the people in the previous scenes, the prostitute warmly welcomes him and much to his surprise, assures him that there are no special requirements or sanctions needed to enter her territory:

Naeem: May I come inside?

(Orchestra continues. The prostitute stops singing).

Prostitute: Please come; please come inside—*Saheb*, what's the need to seek permission? (352).

Naeem: Kya main andar aa sakta hun?

(sāz bajte rahein. Tawai'f gaana band kar deti hai)

Tawai'f: aayiye, aayiye, tashrīf le aayiye andar—sahib, ijāzat lene ki kya zaroorat thi! (352).

Naeem, bewildered by the rare gesture of being welcomed instead of being spurned off, perceives the prostitute's place as a beautiful one. The latter feels as if he is mocking her and draws attention to the utter depravity of her den. However, Naeem explains her that the second-hand pictures hanging on the walls of her brothel, and the wilted, foul smelling flowers in a cracked vase seem to be mocking another reality altogether (353). In their utter ugliness, they seem to ridicule the counterfeit beauty of the privileged parts of the city. It is ironically only the filthy brothel of a prostitute, which bears the semblance of genuine human interaction.

"*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu*" then teases out the connection between the experience of depravity in an urban metropolis and the ultimate metaphor of its physical and moral manifestation, i.e. the prostitute. The urban, bourgeois spaces of a modern city are defined by their insularity, arrogance, entitlement and selfishness and thereby in stark contrast to the space of the brothel that is held up as a protective one. The alienated individual of a modern society, such as Naeem, ultimately drift along its margins and can expect to find refuge and consolation only in another space defined by its subjugation—that of the brothel. These red light areas are not governed by the snooty mannerisms or selfish control of private spaces such as the art gallery or a beautiful garden as demonstrated in the drama. Instead of inducing fear, anxiety or hostility, the brothel is welcoming to individuals, irrespective of their social markers of caste, class or creed.

Manto's portrayal of the unnamed prostitute in the drama, contrary to his feted shorter narratives does not, however, delve into the complexities of her psychology or motivations. Rather its representation of the whorehouse and the prostitute is highly idealized setting it up as an ethical and humane counterpoint to the ruthlessness of the seemingly genteel societal spaces in a modern city. Such a narrative finds its resonance even in his celebrated essay, "*Ismat Farōshī*"[55], where Manto describes her life and profession as one whose "doors are open for anyone with cash in his pockets, cobbler or sweeper, lame or disabled, handsome or repulsive" (414). "*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu*", then, in its focus on the prostitute's unconditional embrace of anyone willing to pay the paltry price of the commodity exchange in the market, does not merely elevate her as the embodiment of wholesome human values. But rather in doing so, it also touches upon the familiar stereotype of the prostitute with a heart, and perhaps, a hearth, of gold, who freely welcomes anyone at her doorstep with complete disregard for the paraphernalia of social appropriateness and boundaries that signify modern capitalist society. The play thus, puts into question traditional sweeping generalizations about Manto's portrayal of the prostitute figure as completely extraordinary and objective.[56] It draws attention to the fact that while he endeavors to engage with the relevant social, economic, moral and psychological dimensions of commercial female sexuality as also advocates for their upliftment, his work does betray a

[55] All references to this essay are from its English translation by Memon. See *My Name is Radha* 412-21.

[56] One such example is Memon's reading of Manto's prostitute narratives. He claims, "His portrayal of them, far from adhering to the stereotyoical formula of a "prostitute with a heart of gold", is both complex and penetrating" (*Black Margins*, "Introduction" 24). The author's uneven literary oeuvre however, proves that blanket claims such as these are not only erroneous but also blind us to the fissures that threaten its range.

conditioning of certain stereotypes and tropes that animate such lives. More importantly, it seems that Manto posits the prostitute and her house as the last resort for a middle-class person who is alienated in a modern cityscape, rejected and spurned off by those who are insular and consumed by a sense of ownership. For Manto, solutions to this pervading alienation are ruled out; as Naeem's experience shows, meaningful engagement is no longer possible and thus, all what can be hoped for is a refuge, a shelter, which invariably turns out to be the prostitute and her house as the last resort in Manto. Thus, more than a telling commentary on the benevolence of the prostitute figure, it becomes symptomatic of the lack within the bourgeois society that fails to throw up models of compassion and humane values.

One could argue that even an eponymous narrative such as "*Hatak*", when read as a drama, reveals that Manto's engagement in it, through the protagonist's crossing of the psychic threshold from passivity to self-knowledge, seems to be with the bourgeois ideals and the crisis in its own sensibility that emanates from its self-assured but hypocritical notions of honor, purity and respectability. This idea is augmented in "*Karwat*" that ultimately locates its antithesis—the brothel within its own space, the middle-class neighborhood, thereby engendering a disruption in its workings, becoming not so much a statement about the determined will of the prostitute but the conflicting value system of the middle class with its insistence on reform along with distance from those they wish to 'emancipate'.

"*Hatak*"

Manto's short story, "*Hatak*" is not only one of his most critically acclaimed works but also whose protagonist, Saugandhi, the writer in his essay, "I Too Have Something To Say", has tenderly alluded to.[57] It has also been composed as a drama for radio, deploying the same plot as the story but differing considerably in terms of narrative style and voice. These changes are significant for they point out towards the exigencies of broadcasting that unfortunately, seize some of the most essential but indecorous aspects of Saugandhi's life as a prostitute, that Manto painstakingly evokes through the mediation of a third person omniscient narrator in the short story. Manto was aware of the limitations of broadcasting art while claiming to have discerning

[57] In this essay, Manto lovingly calls the protagonist of "*Kali Shalwar*" as "my Sultana" and Saugandhi, "a sister of Sultana". See Memon, *My Name is Radha*: *The Essential Manto* 427-30.

knowledge about the suitability of narratives as prose and drama.[58] In this context, composing what was one of his most masterful stories as a broadcast drama speaks of his compelling urge to subvert the existing paradigm of popular entertainment by suffusing them with a radical energy of his narratives that seem to stare the intended middle-class audience and their prejudices in the face.

"*Hatak*" hinges on the precise moment of a rich *seth* (businessman) client's scornful rejection of the poor prostitute, Saugandhi, that unleashes a crisis in her sensibility, a tumult of emotions brewing inside her for a while which finally vent out as a result of the humiliation faced by her. Saugandhi is a sensitive prostitute who craves love and care from the men who frequent her brothel. She falsely believes Madho, her rich client from Pune, to be her true well-wisher, infact her lover, whereas the former only uses her for extracting money. One night when her pimp, Ramlal, takes her to a car where a prospective client is waiting for her, she undergoes a life-changing experience. Spurned by the client, the rejection serves as a turning point for her as she comes face-to-face with her reality and strives to stand up for a dignified existence. She thus, breaks her ties from Madho, rejecting him and symbolically, her belief in fantasies and untruth. The story has been celebrated as a specimen of what Manto believed is the key requisite of writing stories about women—one has to "become a woman" in order to write about them (Qasmi "The Minister of Literature" 205).

The story is structured as an enquiry into the mind of Saugandhi, her psychic and physical being in routine existence and the subsequent dramatic collapse with a hint of rejuvenation of her sensibility hereafter. In doing so, especially in the first half of the story, Manto curates memorable images, a bursting of sensory experience that authentically creates an ambience of Saugandhi's workplace-cum-abode, as also her persona, depicted vividly in its physical and emotional complexity. These instances establish Saugandhi both as a unique individual as well as a member of the larger society in general which she longs to become a part of. These two aspects of her personality relate to her awareness of her physical self on one hand, and the psychic terrain of her thoughts that make her akin to any other woman. It is important to note that while the former is brought out richly in the short story, it is almost obliterated in the radio drama.

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[58] Kamal Ahmed Rizvi recounts that when he sought Manto's permission to dramatize his story, "*Bādshāhat Kā Khātmā*", Manto retorted, "Why would I write a story if I had thought it could make a play? Do you think I don't know playwriting?" See Husain n.p.

The short story begins in *medias res*, at the moment when her client, the municipal superintendent has just left, explicitly showing Saugandhi "dead drunk, after a prolonged session of stormy sex which had left even her bones aching" (18)[59]. The reward of her labor, the silver coins, tucked securely in her blouse, "clinked a bit with the rise and fall of her breathing" and seemed to melt into her bloodstream (18). Furthermore, the narrator describes Saugandhi's overworked body—her grainy and bruised flesh as "the skin of a freshly plucked chicken" (18). A little later in the story, Jamuna teases her about her well-endowed body and the narrator reveals Saugandhi's own pride in her sexual attractiveness—"Saugandhi was particularly fond of her breasts" (20). She also boasts of her mastery of several tricks of the trade in order to impress and control men. Such instances become significant in the context of invoking multiple dimensions of Saugandhi's physical self. The graphic description of the moments right after the 'act' of prostitution and the literal marks of her profession that are a testimony to the use and abuse of her body portray the protagonist's character as a seasoned professional of 'flesh trade'—an experienced prostitute who has witnessed the ways of men through the years. Furthermore, the explicit language of the story is also used to draw attention to the unique manner in which Saugandhi has embraced not only her physical self but also the routine act of sex itself. At one point, the narrator expresses that "Although her mind considered sexual intimacy patently absurd, every other part of her body longed for it" (21).

The glaring omission of these descriptions, owing largely to the absence of the third person omniscient narrator in the radio drama, does rob it of the rich strokes with which Manto minutely paints Saugandhi's persona. The almost indecent introduction to the protagonist in the story, and the bold references to her physicality, is dispensed away with in the dramatic version of "*Hatak*", which begins with Saugandhi's instructions to a "*baharwala*" or a restaurant boy to fetch tea and tobacco, symbolically setting the stage for Madho's entry to her room. In the drama, therefore, the emphasis shifts from an extensive enquiry into Saugandhi's real and imagined physical self to her perceived relation with Madho and, in variance to the story, the superintendent. Her interaction with these men serves two purposes—to recreate the sordid conditions of her living and to bring out her state of physical exhaustion, both serving to implicitly critique the pretense of love professed by them to sustain their self-interest.

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[59] All references to the short story, "*Hatak*", taken from Memon's translation. See Memon, Mohammad Umar, trans. *My Name is Radha: The Essential Manto*.

Aamir R. Mufti points out that "Exploited, abused, and exhausted, the women in Manto's stories nevertheless continue to manufacture within their lives the signs of ordinary existence—religious-ritual observances, the pangs of human attachment, even love and longing" (200). Perhaps, all three aspects of such a life are visible in Saugandhi's story, suggested forcefully through the creation of her private space as a receptacle of the paradoxes that define her. Manto describes her room in minutest of details, creating a synesthetic[60] ambience that results in a sensory experience evoking more revulsion than beauty. Her room is as suffocating as filthy in which multiple objects jostle for space—a flea ridden dog, a parrot sunk inside its own feathers, an overused, grimy chair, rotten fruits with insects hovering over them, posters of semi-nude models and a shelf of makeup. Amidst this muckiness, is also to be found, a small portrait of Ganesha, near an ash-strewn greasy rack. Finally, the four striking framed pictures of her 'lovers' hang above her large teakwood bed, whose limited expanse symbolically provides her warmth and shelter amid the cold indifference of the world outside.

This extended description in the story maps the chaos of the room onto the debased reality of Saugandhi's existence. The seamy living conditions however, have not extinguished her hope in the benevolence of the greater power of God, and ironically the men whom she has falsely believed to be her protectors. In the drama, however, Madho and the superintendent only allude to these details with a certain derision that betrays their distance from the actualities of Saugandhi's life. Thus, in his drunken banter, the superintendent mocks her pets, the featherless parrot and the mangy dog—"*Saugandhi, yeh kaise jānwar pāl rakhe hain tune… (hañsta hai) sālā kutta hai toh uske badan par ek bāl nahiñ…sālā yeh totā hai toh iske par nahiñ*" (159). The disturbing repugnance of Saugandhi's room that is emphasized through the narrator's description in the story serves as an entry point to her mindscape, only later to be commented on by Madho as a gesture of concern. However, in cursorily wading through Madho's comments about the dirtiness of her room, the drama shifts the focus from the individualistic setting of Saugandhi's circumstances to the manner in which the agents of bourgeois hypocrisy perceive them. It seems that the drama rushes towards establishing Madho's character at the expense of foregrounding Saugandhi's in her immediate milieu—a milieu that is almost as pornographic to the somber demands of broadcast entertainment as it is to the pretentious nobility of Madho.

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[60] Harish Trivedi uses this term in his discussion of "*Boo*", "*Hatak*" and other stories. See "Manto, God, Premchand and Some Other Storytellers" 64.

Madho's presence in Saugandhi's life ironically accentuates the void that gnaws her very being. Saugandhi feels that out of all the men who visit her, it is only the kind-hearted Madho who provides her the hope of being cared for affectionately as well as monetarily. The story plumbs into the depths of Saugandhi's loneliness and through an extended commentary, portrays her immense need for love and companionship—to embrace a man in her lap and sing him lullabies (22). Her desire to love and be loved, her wishful thought, being deeply touched by Madho's hollow words, that "she was already a havildar's wife", establishes one of the key themes of "*Hatak*"—the concoction of lies and the protagonist's false belief in them. This theme is rendered convincingly in the short story through the narrator who seems to fill the gaps left between Saugandhi's imagination of a make-believe world and her external reality. One is told, "For the most part Saugandhi lived inside her own mind" (21). It is this aspect of her story that primarily undergoes a change in the drama.

As demonstrated above, it becomes clear that the dramatic version of "*Hatak*" is sanitized of the overt significations that characterize Saugandhi's personality and profession. It seems that unable to imbue the drama with the same level of explicitness and narratorial intervention that could map the interiority of the protagonist, Manto then chooses to focus on those aspects of her story which could be amenable to the resources of radio dramaturgy such as sound effects, music, and dialogue. Through these narrative strategies, Manto explores the themes of Saugandhi's craving for love, the callous hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and finally the intense reaction that follows the moment of insult. In doing so, the conceptualization of Saugandhi's character also undergoes a change. Critics such as Flemming and Gopal have commented on the role of Manto-the narrator in the short story and how his mediation into the prostitute's account is justified both on account of the inarticulate nature of the protagonist as well as the moral authority accorded to himself to speak on her behalf. Flemming argues that radio-drama is a genre unsuitable for telling stories about "characters unable to speak for themselves" and therefore, Saugandhi too as an inarticulate woman cannot be portrayed effectively without the aid of the third person narrator ("Other Reflections" 135). In a slightly different vein, Priyamvada Gopal emphasizes that Saugandhi's immense desire to seek validation for herself by someone else is "taken up by the writer himself", "who must succeed where other men fail" and hence must "establish himself as the new consciousness of the times" (99). In the drama, however, it is this notion of the female protagonist who must be spoken for rather than the one

who speaks for herself is subverted. "*Hatak*"- the play, exteriorizes the whirlwind of thoughts in Saugandhi's mind through a combination of dialogue, effect and music, the realism of which might seem diminished when compared with the formidable stream of consciousness that structures the short story. But its strength lies in presenting a first-hand account of a prostitute protagonist's inward journey, her insecurities and her perception in the eyes of those who make up her world—the pimp Ramlal, the customers such as Madho and the superintendent and finally the *seth* who insults her, directly to the audience of the radio drama.

The initial scenes in the drama focus upon Saugandhi and Madho's relationship, where the latter's dialogues establish his concern for her surroundings as well as her own health. It is through Madho's remarks that the ambience of her room is established, his long rants being interjected by her flea-ridden dog's barking. These scenes that take off from the *baharwala*'s exit signified by the characteristic clanking of cups and saucers draw upon voice modulation and sound effects that Manto diligently instructs in the drama. The action in this scene revolves around tearing off lewd pictures in Saugandhi's room and Madho's rightful commands to Saugandhi to forsake her profession as well as her debased lifestyle. These dialogues are balanced between his fake tenderness and snickering whereby he taunts Saugandhi of attempting to conduct business with him that is of no use to either of them. He remarks with contempt that Saugandhi should feel utter shame for putting a price on herself and making the same public (154). Highlighting the incompatibility of their needs, he stresses that he could be satisfied with the company of any whore but it is Saugandhi who must think with whom she wants to be with:

Madho: For a mere sum of seven and half rupees, you promise to give me that thing which is not in your power to give…and (laughing) I have come here to purchase that which I cannot really take.

Saugandhi: Then why have you come here?

Madho: […] The thing is that you have never thought…I can do with any women, but do you really need me? […] you fool! After all what actually binds us? […] Your mind is fixed somewhere else and mine on another (155).

Madho: *In sadhe sāt rupyon mein tu mujhe aisi cheez dene ka vachan deti hai jo tu de nahi sakti aur …aur (hañsta hai) aur main aisi cheez tujhse lene aaya huñ jo main le hi nahiñ sakta.*

Saugandhi: *fir tu aaya kis liye hai?*

Madho: *[…] baat yeh hai ki tune aaj tak kabhi socha hi nahi hai…mujhe toh koi bhi aurat chalegi, par tujhe kya main jãchta huñ [...] pagli tera-mera nātā hi kya hai [...] tera mann kuch aur sochta hai aur mera mann kuch aur* (155).

As Mufti explains, Madho's "feigned interest in her life, his formulaic insistence that she turn her brothel into home, draws Saugandhi to him and strengthens her love" (186). While the third person narrator dives into the deepest recesses of the protagonist's psyche in fabricating a world of make believe, the drama deploys the character of Saugandhi's friend, Kanta, to enable such a reflection. In a key moment in the drama, her internal conflict is also soliloquized to amplify the sense of isolation that haunts her—the point where she erroneously fantasizes about already being validated with attention and respect as Madho, the havildar's rightful wife, who inhabits a home, her very own heaven (157). In contrast to the story, where the narrator's voice foils Saugandhi's illusions, in the drama, it is Saugandhi herself who underlines her compulsion to harbor lies and believe them. Moreover, in contrast to the mind-numbing conflicts that play out solely in her mind in the story, here, Saugandhi's paradoxical reality also finds a confidante in her friend, Kanta. The following conversation between the two is significant:

Kanta: Love…love…every damned person who comes here says this: "I love you…" I know very well, this talk of love!

Saugandhi: What does it matter? Let them speak lies…it is not as if we speak the truth, do we? Our work is such. They are compelled to lie just as we are. (157).

Kanta: *Prem…prem…sālā jo koi bhi aata hai: "main tujhse prem karta hun…" sab janti hun, yeh prem kya bala hai.*

Saugandhi: *humara kya jata hai…bolne do jhooth unko…hum kab unse sach bolti hain…yeh dhanda hi aisa hai; unko bhi jhooth bolna padta hai, humko bhi jhoot bolna padta hai* (157).

Saugandhi is driven by a rationale that leads her to accept the lies that have become synonymous with her existence. The narrator of the story explains that neither Saugandhi nor Madho ever spoke about their duplicitous relation as, "Both knew well enough how things were" (24). Yet Saugandhi never seems to as clearly acknowledge this fact as she does in the drama. It is

Saugandhi, not the narrator, who reflects, "those who cannot get real ornaments to wear, do settle for fake ones" ("*jinheñ sache gehne pehenne ko nahiñ milte, veh jhol chadhe jhoote genhoñ hi se apna mann parcha leti hain*") (157). Her already deplorable existence is alleviated in a small measure by these happy illusions through which she keeps her personhood intact (157). The scene draws to a close with Saugandhi taking Kanta in her lap and singing a lullaby to her, her wish that is alluded to in the story, underlining the melancholy and infinitude of her isolation. Soft, elegiac music and a lullaby song successfully map this tumult of Saugandhi's emotions in the drama.

If Madho represents parasitical 'love' that wrongfully gives rise to and sustains Saugandhi's deceptions, then the unnamed municipal superintendent functions as the embodiment of male sexual privilege that allows him to uphold the façade of a dutiful husband while freely indulging in promiscuity outside of marriage. In the story, he sets the action rolling which begins after his exit, but in the drama, "Daroga" as he is referred to, is provided an entire scene that foregrounds Saugandhi's desultoriness this particular night and the former's complete lack of understanding of her state. Saugandhi is inebriated and her head explodes with pain. Daroga, too, heavily intoxicated, offers to apply balm on her forehead but instead digresses into random banter about his undying love for his wife. He claims that his wife is a good human being and he loves her dearly. These professions turn almost into incantations, reverberating incongruously in the current circumstances and setting, that of a poor prostitute reeling under pain in her brothel. Some instances include, "My wife is very good Saugandhi…very good…I love her very much" (158); "I could have spent more time with you Saugandhi, but I deeply care about my wife…she must be waiting for me" (159).[61]

Daroga's proclamations, that strike almost a jarring note in the context of Saugandhi's condition, lay bare the contradictions that structure patriarchal male privilege. In the drama, therefore, Manto no doubt constructs a world of make-believe where Saugandhi tries to traverse the distance betwwen the woman of the marketplace and that of a bourgeois home. But his investment is even more in exposing the conflicting moral dispositions of the bourgeois characters in the drama—Madho and Daroga, whose unthinking ways cannot be aligned to any one wholesome ideal of marriage, womanhood and above all, the feted respectability or honor.

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[61]"*Meri biwi badi achi hai, Saugandhi…badi achi hai…mujhe usse bahut muhabbat hai*" (158); "*Main tere paas aur theherta Saugandhi, par mujhe apni biwi ka khayal hai…mera intezar kar rahi hogi*" (159).

Both Madho as well as the Daroga are repulsed by what Saugandhi and her abode stand for, and yet return to them for their intended benefit—extraction of money and sexual pleasure respectively. While it could be argued that the latter is the term of exchange that animates the working of a brothel, it is primarily the inherent problematic attitude of the middle-class towards its value system that the drama draws attention towards.

Prostitution registers its difference from marriage precisely in representing the public, commercial, independent form of female sexual behavior that also abrogates the higher purpose of the latter, i.e. procreation and motherhood and is hence, illegitimate and obscene. Thus, the Daroga might be sympathetic to Saugandhi's pain and even offer her help, but he must also leave because as a 'respectful' member of the society, he must uphold the ethics of matrimony that carries the sanction of religion and tradition. Similarly, Madho tries to convince Saugandhi that although she is a noble person, her profession is one that is at best given up. He thus counsels her—"Leave these tricks and start living with respect and dignity" ("*yeh dhandha chorh aur izzat-aabru ke saath reh*") (156). Finally, both Madho and Daroga, assert their superior social position as a mark of their influence. The Daroga in his drunkenness repeats his designation as the municipal superintendent, and threatens to kill, absurdly enough, Saugandhi's innocuous pets—the intermittently barking dog and the couched parrot—that have been adding to the gloominess of the situation as well as his irritation. More damaging than the Daroga's warnings, however, are the tall promises that Madho makes by virtue of his well-paying stature as a havildar or a police officer in Pune. Daroga's scene with his repetitious dialogues serves to accentuate the theme of Saugandhi's exploitation at the hands of self-serving clients, but more importantly make an ironic reference to the artifice of its its vocabulary that references the oppositional, and supposedly morally superior, sacred space of the bourgeois family. In contrasting the values upheld by the sanctimonious men with Saugandhi whose genuine virtue is proven through her help to a needy client and a fellow woman in the profession, the "prostitute herself is held up as an ethical figure, a tenuous and temporary icon of an alternative conception of human community and attachments" (Mufti 187).

Nevertheless, the drama now inches towards the main event of the story, i.e., when Ramlal takes an exhausted Saugandhi to a prospective client's car in the hope of bargaining a deal. When the client, i.e. the *seth*, takes a closer look at her, he rejects her by simply uttering the word "*Unh*!" which expresses his utter revulsion and consequently, Saugandhi's unbearable

humiliation. Much of the significance accorded to "*Hatak*" is attributed to the immaculate description of Saugandhi's tumultuous feelings that ensue the moment of insult, his "plunge into the vague unconnected territories of mind" (Kumar, Sukrita Paul, "Fallen Women" 106). Manto evokes the desolate physical surrounding of the street with its gas lamps, cobblestones and lamp posts that seem to be the sole witness to Saugandhi's unacknowledged goodness. He also describes her aching existence that seems to reveal itself through her exhausted, sweaty body and an even more fatigued mind. Several images are conjured up by the narrator here—her flimsy sari mingling in the breeze, the brush of cool wind against her balm-smeared, makeup-laden face, the throbbing headache and her wet eyes, all of which seem to converge upon the resounding indignity imposed upon her through a singular expression of abuse- "*Unh*!" These dives into the microscopic changes that take over Saugandhi's being are, however, considerably shortened in the drama. Flemming opines, "The impact of the story of Saugandhi and her reaction to the rich man's insult rests both on the physical setting of the tawdry redlight district of Bombay and […] on the full expression of Saugandhi's feelings", both taken care of by the third person narrator (135).

Manto feels compelled to physically dramatize some of the scenes whose semiotic import is self evident in the story. One particular instance is when the *seth* flashes the torchlight towards Saugandhi's face that is switched off in an instant as the word "*Unh!*" escapes his mouth. In the drama, this small but crucial scene is created through Ramlal as well as the *seth*'s dialogues, which is complemented with the sound of switching on and off the torchlight and the car's engine. More important than that is a slight variation in *seth*'s word of insult. Instead of the sparse but unsparing "*Unh!*" of the story, the *seth* utters the following: "Is this the girl you have brought for me? (With hatred) Driver, let's go…Huh!" ("*yeh chhokri lāya hai tu…(intihāyi nafrat bhari awaz mein) Driver, chalo…unh!*") (163). The brief but full nature of the *seth*'s rejection is thus explained in this dialogue, at the very instant of its occurrence, whereas the story emphatically stresses on Saugandhi's complete bafflement at the rapid turn of events culminating in a cryptic "*Unh!*": "The intense light from the torch was still lodged in her eyes. She hadn't even seen the *seth*'s face properly. What had happened? What was the meaning of that 'Oh no!" which was still ringing in her ears" (26). Hereafter, much of what runs as an internal monologue in the story is rendered as dialogues between Saugandhi and Ramlal, nevertheless, replicating

"an almost mantric repetition of words" that acquire unfamiliarity in her heavy circumstances (Mufti 187).

Manto focuses on Saugandhi's intense reaction to her insult in terms of the myriad ways of revenge that haunt her mind. The narrative is now condensed and relies heavily on the range of emotions experienced by her, to be essentially conveyed through voice modulation. The play is provided with specific instructions in this regard in order to fully express her gamut of thoughts. Thus, the expressions vary from shock, perplexity, grief, and anger as also her acute vulnerability. The language that had hitherto, been cautiously censored in terms of physical descriptions is now loosened, deploying expletives and vulgar expressions that inscribe Saugandhi's repressed sense of betrayal. She urges Ramlal to call the *seth* again, so that the incident could be replayed, and she could wildly attack him—as he flashes the light on her, she would brutally scratch his face, pull out his hair, tug him out of the car and strike him with her fist (163). She taunts her own self of crudely resembling a witch or a rat who could not but deserve such a rebuke—"*Unh! Yeh chhokri lāya hai tu…yeh chudail, yeh chachundar…unh*!" (163). Her rage is suddenly transformed into a sense of victimhood where she dwells on her waning youth and loss of family. The moment of insult slaps her into a new consciousness, one that enables her to differentiate the futility of her consideration of others' needs or misbehavior on one hand, and the innate goodness that defines her being. She wishes to mock the shallow power of *seth*'s money by exposing her nude body to him, making him realize that this is all what it could buy him, and not her real self—the core of her being that ironically, has been rendered apart by one single refusal contained in the indecipherable "*Unh!*":

Saugandhi: I feel like hurling an abuse, such an abuse that…but what purpose will it solve? I shall only say one thing to him if he comes in front of me…I shall tear my clothes and stand in front of him, stark naked, and say…what can I say or cannot? I can't understand anything…His "*unh*" has put my entire body in commotion…(164).

Saugandhi: Jee chahta hai, aisi gāli duñ, aisi gāli duñ…par gali dene se kya hoga…veh mere sāmne ho toh main uske sāmne nangi khadi ho jaun aur kahuñ…kya kahuñ, kya na kahuñ…kuch samajh mein

> *nahi aata…mere sāre sharīr mein uski 'unh' ne hulchul macha dī hai…* (164).

What is important to notice here is the note of resignation that textures Saugandhi's reaction to her insult. Te palpable anger gives way to a conscious realization of her victimization at the lands of self-seeking clients, but cannot fathom effective ways of a befitting rebuttal. The words, "what purpose will it solve", or "I can't understand anything" in the dialogue quoted above, prove that Saugandhi is ultimately resigned to her exploitation as well a the unfortunate facts of her life—her diminishing beauty and age that is soon catching up, making her hold on her profession even more tenuous. At a loss for any method to direct her warring emotions towards her culprit(s), Saugandhi consoles herself with the thought that an approval from someone else should no longer matter to her. Her goodness is a fact that is inviolable, unlike her physical body that has borne the scars of time and the crudities of her profession. After Ramlal leaves her, Saugandhi makes peace by repeating these thoughts in her mind, conveyed through a soliloquy, and finally reaches her room, only to find Madho eagerly waiting for her.

The final scene begins with an eerie precision in Saugandhi's words, even as Madho's florid talk of his dream sequence echoes his characteristic husbandly propriety established at the beginning. It is as if all that is required is a reference to Madho's urgent need of money to settle a court case, for Saugandhi to blurt out the flood of indignities heaped on her all this while. Saugandhi's words are piercing, mirroring her embittered and shattered self but also marshaling a new awareness, a promise of transformative agency that now guides her, even though temporarily. Arjun Mahey in his interpretation of Manto's stories draws attention to the peculiar moment of 'epiphany', "the instant of (sometimes) self betrayal" ("Some Observations" 156). It is a focal point, "a complex moment of recognition" where an individual "finds herself in a position where her entire identity is being defined by the rules of someone else's game" (143). The moment of '*hatak*' or the insult for Saugandhi is indeed this— it is no longer significant that "her self-perception does not include the definition that others had foisted upon her" (144). The wretched moment of insult has now passed, and so has the interstitial space of reflection of her circumstances. The epiphanic moment has unleashed a new realization of the self—Saugandhi is not the cherished wife of Madho she would like to believe herself to be; she is not the one who could command Daroga's time or affection when she required it, and finally she is not as clever and irresistible as she would consider herself in moments of vanity or confession to her friends.

She is simply the object of men's lust who could accept or reject her as per their whims. When this realization finally dawns upon her, it results not only in simply a laying bare of the facts as they are, but "an internal tectonic shift" which ensures that she "cannot capture the integrity of the past again, anymore than she can rescue the future" (144). Thus, Saugandhi's reaction to Madho's yet another plea for money is at variance with her emotional breakdown immediately following the *seth*'s refusal. It is her last, forceful attempt to 'settle her score' as it were, for it is the most that she could do amidst a reality, which seems unchanging—bourgeois men would continue to exploit poor prostitutes, and the latter would have to depend on them for their survival. This pervasive problem of bourgeois hypocrisy is therefore counterbalanced, not by a systemic or a fundamental change in their value systems but through inevitable, and solitary acts of rebellion and courage such as Saugandhi's as a desperate measure to guard her selfhood.

Saugandhi now starts tearing the pictures of the four men that occupy her room who have routinely made her the object of their judgment and greed. The narrative is punctured with the sound of glass frames splintering on the ground, symbolically attesting to Saugandhi's rejection of the lies she has been harboring in her life. Saugandhi turns Madho into a laughing stock by explicitly drawing attention to his hideousness—his hairy face, his filthy body, and so on (167). In an appalling mimicry of Madho's voice, Saugandhi mocks his age-old queries about the rent of her filthy room, his demand of her giving up her profession and the promises of financial security. The sting of her taunt is not lost on Madho who now panics and tries to leave, except that Saugandhi makes sure to deliver the last word, rather a string of abuses that seem to shut the facetiousness of men around her, atleast momentarily:

Saugandhi: What Saugandhi! Why have you even come here ? Does your mother live here, who will happily hand over fifty rupees to you? Or are you some suave, handsome man on whom I would drool? You dog! you scoundrel! Do you think you can order me around? You beggar! What do you think of yourself? You thief! You lecher! You rogue! (168-7).

Saugandhi: Saugandhi ke bacche! Tu aaya kis liye hai yahan…maa rehti hai teri iss kholi mein jo tujhe pachās rupaye chupke se degi yā tu koi aisa gabru jawān hai jo main tujh par ashiq ho gayi huñ…kameene kutte, mujh par ro'b gaañthta hai…bhikkmañge, tu

apne aapko samajh kya baitha hai…chor uchakke…lafangey…shohdey…badmāsh… (167-8).

The violence in this final scene is a mark of the decisive shift that has occurred—Saugandhi's resistance is a meaningful crossing of a threshold that in the words of Priyamvada Gopal, marks a "rewriting of, if not her circumstances, then atleast what she makes of them and those around her" (99-100).

In sum, "*Hatak*" the drama manages to deliver the coming-of-age of a protagonist whose life seems too controversial to be held up as model entertainment in accordance with the conventional standards of radio broadcasting. As has been demonstrated, the physically explicit aspects of the short story are expunged in the drama, as are the reflections on her circumstances truncated. The adherence to propriety that entails composition of art for national institutions such as AIR then negates the possibility of full representation of those lives that cannot be neatly absorbed into the realm of bourgeois culture premised on the values of respectability, chastity and ties of filiation and marriage. However, the value of Manto's endeavor to broadcast his sophisticated piece of prose fiction as a drama lies in expansion of the limits of what could be permitted in the ambit of popular entertainment controlled by the state. He does so by activating the devices central to radio dramaturgy, viz. sound effects, voice modulation, dialogue, music and song to depict the spectrum of emotions and change of scenes in the story.

The supposedly inferior or lesser status of "*Hatak*", the drama that compromises on the realism in depicting her milieu, that of the red light area, as well as the curtailment of her narrative due to the absence of a third-person narrator, however, illuminates what perhaps is the real focus of such a narrative. "*Hatak*", no doubt, is the tale of an exploited prostitute but the drama, in giving a larger narrative space to the members of the bourgeoisie—the Daroga and Madho—is reflective of the larger crisis that affects not the subjugated prostitutes but the middle-classes. As external agents of her misery, the actions of both these men reveal a contradictory set of moral and ethical values that privilege female sexuality in a monogamous marriage but continue to partake of 'other' sexual economies for their greed. "*Hatak*" registers its response to the callous ways of the bourgeoisie through Saugandhi's grim realization of her circumstances, which had hitherto been clouded by her desire to be loved and accepted by those who frequented her brothel. Her mocking of Madho that has been interpreted by Sukrita Paul Kumar as her "psychic rebellion", is however symptomatic of her penultimate attempt to secure

for herself a mental satisfaction of having conveyed to her 'well-wisher' her new knowledge of her circumstances. This 'rebellion' is far from a radical departure from her realities or even a metaphor for social change. Rather, latent in this rebuke is a detached awareness of her own subjugation, of the bleak chances of tables turning in her favor, or the impossibility of a utopian overhaul of society's cultural, moral, ethical and sexual values, controlled by the bourgeoisie. Thus, inherent in Saugandhi's abuses and fierce rendering apart of the hollow, double-faced and brutally selfish ways of the so-called respectable members of the bourgeoisie, is a deep sense of helpnessness and futility of individual action, as shown by the above reading of the drama.

"*Karwat*"

If the logic of a prostitute's desire to be loved and acknowledged guides the theme of "*Hatak*", then "*Karwat*" overturns this paradigm in its characterization of its prostitute protagonist, Sundari. Sundari represents the consciousness that Saugandhi only comes to terms with after the devastating epiphanic moment of (self) realization. In "*Karwat*", Sundari has recently shifted to a respectable neighborhood of middle-class families that has resulted in an awkward commotion amidst the residents. In this context, an older married man, Miyan, takes it upon himself to 'reform' Sundari and lead her to a path of virtuous livelihood. Towards the end of the drama, Sundari is shown as rejecting such aspirations and continues to practice her profession. However, the final comment by Miyan's wife, though intended as a comment on the debased and stubborn ways of the prostitute, becomes an ironic reflection of the middle-class' subject position that forever tries to balance the ideals of *noblesse oblige* for the downtrodden while harboring a deep contempt for their lives. Thus, "*Karwat*" is not merely a narrative about a particular prostitute's courage to keep her livelihood intact, but about the deep-rooted prejudices of the bourgeoisie who cannot abdicate their roles as custodians of social morality while being unable to overcome their own crisis in sensibility in order to posit a healthy overturning of debilitating circumstances unleashed by modernity.

One of the most striking aspects of "*Karwat*" is its unsettling plot, i.e. a prostitute who decides to shift to a locale traditionally restricted to her. In his aphoristic reflections on the figure of the prostitute and her representation in literature, Manto has emphasized upon the artistic freedom to write about them, "these drains and gutters that carry away the filth of our bodies" ("I Too Have Something To Say" 427). In another essay, he similarly opines, "These women are like dreary, desolate gardens; open sewers running by garbage piles" who are nevertheless,

"absolutely necessary" as "they carry away our dirt, our filth" ("*Ismat-Faroshi*" 414). Using the metaphors of contamination to refer to the prostitute and her dwellings, Manto, thus, suggests the manner in which power is regimented in an urban cityscape—a precise bifurcation of its spaces into the elite and the subaltern. The distance between these locations is premised upon and reinforces the difference based upon class, gender and status—the markers of 'inferiority' that traditionally define the problematic figure of the prostitute. The prostitute and her body are therefore conflated with the unseemly, indecorous and inappropriate in the collective imaginary of the respectable bourgeoisie represented by the unit of the family, and its macrocosmic equivalent i.e. the community or the neighborhood.

"*Karwat*" radically destabilizes this dichotomy between the private space of the home and the public one of the brothel. Manto transplants the icon of debasement and profanity right into the sacred space of love, belonging and middle-class morality. "*Karwat*" therefore does not evoke the seamy environs of Hira Mandi or the chawls of Foras Road described memorably in Manto's short stories, but instead uncomfortably sneaks inside the somewhat imperious and sanitized domain of a middle class neighborhood. In doing so, "*Karwat*" introduces Sundari as a threatening figure to the moral and cultural economy of those she has come to live in midst of, underscoring the unsubsumability of unguarded sexual desire within the matrix of traditional value system. Miyan's wife explains precisely why Sundari is at best an aberration in their community— the crude fact that she is a "*bazari*" woman (141). The intrusion of the "bazar" or the market forces embodied in the commodification of Sundari's sexualized body brews a sense of insecurity amongst those who would prefer to relegate it to its designated margins of an urban metropolis. This discomfort is highlighted in the drama through the reactions of Miyan's wife and daughter, and Sundari's complaints of the same.

Sundari reveals to one of her clients that her presence is like a blot on the neighborhood's landscape. She is not only signaled to vacate it but is also made an object of bullying and exploitation. Thus, young boys litter her terrace with garbage and her landlord extracts heavy rent from her (144). Her reclusiveness has no bearing on their prejudices and she continues to be tormented by the residents. On the other hand, Miyan's wife expresses her disapproval of Sundari's 'cheap' activities—the noise of drunken men in her house, the blaring vulgar songs, and the disturbance caused by restaurant waiters going in and out of her brothel. Finally, his daughter negates the idea of breaking ice with this 'other' woman and infact, urges him to

request the landlord to evacuate her from this particular locality (143). It seems then that Sundari's existence ushers not only chaos and disruption in the workings of a bourgeois society but also becomes a source of anxiety to those who represent the morally oppositional and supposedly superior form of female sexuality—i.e. the chaste, domesticated sexuality legitimized through social contract of marriage. It is in a large part this insecurity that also prevents Miyan's wife to let him invite Sundari over a meal to their house as a mere gesture of social courtesy, if not an as an attempt of reform.

Miyan postures himself, much like the third-person narrator in "*Hatak*", as the voice who must not only speak on behalf of the exploited prostitute, but also whose humanistic impulse must be directed towards a positive reform. When opposed by his wife and daughter, Miyan questions the basis upon which a prostitute's entry to their home must be denied, which is that of her identity as a woman of the marketplace. On the contrary, he stresses that extending a gesture of solidarity to Sundari will provide them an opportunity to better themselves. He emphasizes the humanistic impulse that guides most of Manto's literary creations, expressed as follows:

> Miyan: […] I have told you both that a man can be reformed at any point of time in his life […] The dark recesses of the minds of most dangerous criminals too can be kindled with the inner light that resides in them. This *vaishya*, who has come to stay next to our house since a few days, is only dirty as far as her body is concerned—the soul is a pure thing. It is incorruptible (142).
>
> *Miyan:* *[…] main tum dono se kayi baar keh chuka hun ki insān ka har waqt sudhar ho sakta hai […]. Khatarnāk se khatarnāk mujrim ke seene mein bhi kisi kone ke andar noor ka ek zarra hota hai jise agar cheda jaye toh uske syah dil ko raushan karne ka sabab ban sakta hai. Yeh vaishya, jo thode dinon se humare pados mein aayi hai, sirf jismani taur par kharab hai—rūh ek pakeezah cheez hai.Usse koi taakat maila nahi kar sakti* (142).

Miyan's belief in the possibility of human goodness that resides in the heart of people makes him view Sundari beyond her identification as woman of the marketplace. Miyan's answers to his daughter and wife echoes Manto's proclamations about the essential purity of the heart that characterizes the prostitute figure, irrespective of the debasement that her body

symbolizes. For instance, in "*Ismat Faroshi*", Manto reflects that in her business, a "vaishya trades her body, not her soul" (414). He also pinpoints the hypocrisy of the society in shirking to present and see the face of those, who nevertheless are a thriving part of it. He asserts that, "Unless [the prostitute] is interred for good, there will be talk of her" ("I Too Have Something To Say" 429). "*Karwat*" dramatizes such popular, condescending attitude towards the prostitute figure through Miyan's wife's demand to shunt out Sundari from their neighborhood. Miyan draws his wife's attention to the futility of such an act, for even if Sundari leaves from here, she would inevitably set up her brothel in another location. He advises that instead of shifting the garbage from one house to another, one must strive to eliminate it altogether (143). Miyan, thus, appears as a voice of reason who tries to delve into the root of the problem—here the prostitute and her profession and thus rules out the possibility that her eviction from their premises would result in the desired transformation. The wife, however, is unable to shrug off her prejudices and is content with the thought that at least Sundari shall be gone from their immediate vicinity. Thus, the drama in projecting the conventional scorn for the subaltern embodied by Miyan's wife repudiates her as a typical specimen of female jealousy and egotistical self-absorption who must be shown mirror by her husband, Miyan, the one who forces her (as well as his daughter) to acknowledge in humane terms the existence of that which they dare not have any concern with.

Miyan's solidarity with Sundari, however, is premised on his implicit belief in social morality that sets up an opposition between the virtuous and the evil mapped on to female sexual propriety. The fine balance between his humane, probably genuine, concern for Sundari, and his insistence on the need for 'reform' of the prostitute, nonetheless, exposes his affinity to men like Madho in "*Hatak*". In their unthinking espousal of a particular way of being and living for the prostitute, they reveal their distance from her real consciousness, desires, motivations and circumstances. Perhaps, the remarkability of Manto's reflections about prostitutes is their almost clinical gaze at their profession—their "*ismat faroshi*" or selling of sexual virtue is considered beyond the pale of conventional morality and viewed simply for what it means to the woman selling it—a source of livelihood just as any other, where what happens to be the terms of exchange is no other object but her body itself. This idea is expressed strongly through Sundari's character, which at variance with her counterparts like Saugandhi, cherishes no myths about receiving validation, sympathy or even help from the outside. More importantly, her complete disregard for others' attempts to ameliorate her conditions points out to a much more self assured

consciousness who would rather boldly accept the freedom afforded to her in a brothel than an emotional and financial dependence on those incapable of real affection.

Thus, Sundari explains to one of her clients her initial hesitation in accepting Miyan's invitation emanating from her fear of being subjected to moral opprobrium and didacticisms or being sadistically mocked at the expense of her self-respect—"*jaati toh mahīn-mahīn chutkiyan lekar ya toh naseehatein deta ya fazeehatein*" (144). When Miyan further insists on inviting her to his house, Sundari spells out her job and what it entails as it is. His holier-than-thou attitude deeming her drunken clients as her 'brothers' and extending an invitation to them too clearly makes Sundari uncomfortable, and she minces no words in stating to him that they are no more than first-rate dissolute men—"*awwal darjey ke sharabi-kabābi*" (145). Sundari has a clear-eyed understanding of her profession and expects Miyan to recognize it as such—that she is a whore, a "*bazari aurat*", a "*vaishya*", and the ones whom he terms as her brothers are infact her clients who purchase her for a night and sustain her livelihood: "*yeh mere grahak hain. Main inke paas apna aap bechti hun [...] main ek bāzāri aurat hun*" (145). She finally spurns Miyan by clearly telling him that her "shop is well-decorated and ready" and she could serve him only in a way that is befitting to a prostitute like her. The linguistic idiom explicitly foregrounds the attendant activities in a brothel, such as drinking alcohol, that serve as a foil to the moral fastidiousness of Miyan:

> Sundari: I do not go to any one's place. My shop is well decorated and ready—people visit here on their own. If you wish to purchase what I sell, then please come—sit here with your brothers—order a bottle of whiskey, have it and offer to others as well… (145).
>
> Sundari: *main kisi ke ghar nahin jaya karti. Meri saji-sajayi dukān maujūd hai—log khud chal kar yahañ aate hain…jo maal bechti hun, tumhe khareedna ho toh aao, apne in bhaiyon ke saath baith jao—ek botal sharāb ki mangao, peeyo aur pilao…* (145).

Thus, "*Karwat*", far from being a valorization of 'voice' of the subaltern, is an exploration of the jumbled world-view of the middle class, whose representative in the drama is Miyan.

The narrative now moves towards an explicit conflict between Sundari and Miyan as the latter's unsolicited insistence precipitates a breakdown of Sundari's real feelings. Already provoked by another neighbor's physical attack on her, when Sundari sees Miyan intervening in

the matters, she blurts out on him as the representative of those who deem themselves "*Shareef*" (147). She criticizes them for making a mockery of her circumstances and feigning concern in an attempt to camouflage the very conditions of injustice for which none but they are responsible. Thus, she states that though they profess the need for her to change her ways, it is they who have sown the seeds of her perils in the first place—"*yeh kāñte tumhare hi toh boye huye hain*" (147). Though her tirade is directed specifically to Miyan, it addresses itself to members of the society at large whose moral posturings are at best suspect and unwelcoming to all forms of social and sexual behavior unamenable to conventional morality. Her anger now gives way to even more vulgar language that is intended to capture the extent of her frustration and helplessness in putting up with everyday bullying that has almost become a part of her living. Addressing herself in the derogatory common parlance as a "*randi*" or a slut, she not only boldly owns up to her identity as one but also makes claim to her right to live and conduct her business with freedom and peace, vowing to settle scores with any person who wishes to threaten her—"*randi se ulajhne ka maza na chakha diya toh mera naam Sundari nahi*" (147). As a final blow to their ego, she warns them about taking their noble and "virtuous wives" ("*nek biwiyon*") to task and thereby infiltrating the sacred space of domesticity and marital relationships (147).

Sundari does temporarily decide to leave the neighborhood after her wrecking emotional meltdown. She even considers giving up prostitution and instead working as a servant. However, Miyan's visit at this crucial time results in her realization of the indispensability of her trade in providing her the means of sustaining herself both financially and otherwise. Miyan tries to persuade her to continue staying in this very locality and assures her that she would no longer be exploited, now that she has gotten rid of the sole 'vice' that afflicted her. Projecting himself as the arbiter of her moral values, Miyan expresses his satisfaction with Sundari's decision and implies that her life will be smooth and comfortable hereafter, and will take an altogether new turn, "*nayi karwat*", for good (151). However, Miyan's sermon is laced with sly intention whereby he tries to offer himself as her lover. The crisis in the play thus, reveals as one which relates not to that of the prostitute, who has full clarity of her profession as well as her perception by others. The play, rather, exposes the tenuous and shifting moral grounds of Miyan, the bourgeois 'reformer' who confuses the 'reform' of a prostitute's circumstances as a willing renunciation of her means of livelihood and an acceptance of the former's selfish ways. It seems that all his talk of humanity and empathy was ultimately designed to win Sundari as his love-

interest, not in full acceptance of her individuality but through her vital reformation in compliance with the moral standards of the society he is a part of. Sundari, however, is no Saugandhi, who shall be fooled into such promises of an idealized but impractical future. Her reaction is instantaneous, befittingly obstinate and extremely precise:

Miyan:	[…] Your life will take a new turn now…[…] Sundari, you don't realize how beautiful you are!...I was so hurt to see you with those promiscuous men…but now…why are you silent…say something…please speak…
Sundari:	(Suddenly stands up. Wants to say many things, but cannot) Please leave from here.
Miyan:	But…But..
Sundari:	Please leave (151).
Miyan:	*[…] tumhari zindagi ab ek nayi karwat badlegi…Sundari, tum nahi jānti ki tum kitni sundar ho…tumhe bure-bure aadmiyon ki sangat mein dekh kar mujhe kitna dukh hota tha…lekin ab…tum khamosh kyun baithi ho…kuch bolo…kuch kaho…*
Sundari :	*(ekdum uth khadi hoti hai. Bauht kuch kehna chahti hai, magar keh nahi sakti) chale jaiye yahan se.*
Miyan:	*lekin…lekin…*
Sundari:	*chale jao yahan se.* (151).

The very fact that Sundari itches to vent out the multiple emotions that haunt her but cannot express them through the available vocabulary, points out to her disappointment. Her reaction, however, to this crisis does not mark the epiphanic shift that envelops Saugandhi's being from ignorance to knowledge but rather, an unembellished coming to terms with a reality that she has already known all this while.

The world of "*Karwat*" thus pits an endeavor of reform or rehabilitation of the debased subaltern figure of the prostitute with the inherent contradictions and limits of the middle-class sensibility that seeks to effect it. If "*Hatak*" represents the prostitute's desire for sympathy from her bourgeois clients by escaping into a world of make-believe, then "*Karwat*" introduces Sundari, as someone who is inured with her circumstances. In dramatizing her matter-of-fact acceptance of her profession of prostitution, however, "*Karwat*" argues that the one amidst moral

and ethical crisis is not Sundari, but Miyan, who is far removed from a clear understanding of her need for a profession such as this. Sukrita Paul Kumar draws attention to the motivations behind prostitution indicated in "economic exigency combined with the lack of a social structure for destitute women, and the callousness of so-called 'sensitive' fellow human beings" (107). Thus, when Sundari requests Miyan to employ her as a maidservant in someone's house, he negates the requirement of the same and instead persuades her to accept him as her lover. Miyan's intentions to 'reform' and 'sympathize' with her are thus revealed merely as thoughts that cannot effectively translate into practical transformation. He cannot offer her financial security nor prevent her exploitation by checking its forces that germinate within his own socio-cultural-economic milieu. Although Miyan tries to foreground his humanistic vision in his conversations with his wife and daughter, his ultimate setting up as a lover of Sundari is in a manner that betrays his conditioning and prejudices that insist upon rules of female sexuality defined by domesticity, and chastity in marriage. It is precisely because of his indifference to her lived reality that he believes that nobody will trouble her anymore now that her life has taken a new turn, which is that of sexual virtue. Thus, Manto exposes the middle-class hypocrisy that tarnishes attempts of rehabilitation and sensitization as merely a scrutiny that harks back to the debilitating moral differentiations that fail to take cognizance of the particular nature of problems encountered by the subaltern subject, but more significantly its inability to come to terms with its prejudices and contradictions.

Sundari's refusal to pander to Miyan's overtures signified through her measured response, lays bare his lack of self-reflexivity and overestimation of his knowledge about her predicaments. In her absolute refrain from communication with him any further, she asserts her ability to tackle her emotions, profession and the problems therein. At the end of the play, Miyan's wife sarcastically comments on her husband's efforts to advise Sundari by saying, "It would be too good if she were to finally understand!" ("*bahut khushi hogi agar weh samajhjaye*") (152). Meanwhile, the drama fades out with the raucous laughter of Sundari's drunken clients complemented with the vulgar songs blaring in the background. The implicit suggestion in the final scene underscores the fact that Sundari has not, and will not 'understand' the 'respectable' ways of society that seeks to subjugate her on account of her financial and emotional exigency. The recurring strain of vulgar songs in the drama establishes Sundari's, and by extension, the author's attempt to incessantly uncover those aspects of social existence that

are a product of its inertness towards injustice, exploitation and duplicitous moral standards. These songs are not the melancholic lullabies or elegiac tones of "*Hatak*" but rather the sexually-provocative, upbeat tunes that truly reflect the nature of Sundari's personality as a fun-loving, and reasonable prostitute whose unconventional life keeps puncturing the prudish façade of her neighbors. Infact, Miyan's wife's sarcastic comment towards the end directs the ironic joke towards her own class, for it she and those like her who must sort their moral priorities and clarify their subject-positions vis-à-vis those whom they either wish to reform or simply 'wish away'. The play ends on a note, similar to "*Hatak*", where the insistence of the prostitute figure to not accept the benevolence of their middle-class benefactors does not exalt them as subaltern "heroines". Rather, it is a comfortless acceptance of their subordinate lives, which, through individual acts of 'rebellion' such as those of Sundari or Saugandhi, keeps rearing its head amidst the hyprocisy of the bourgeoisie.

Taken together, Manto's portrayal of prostitutes in his radio dramas reveals his serious engagement with not only her oppression and degradation, but in fact, those who require the marginal location of a brothel as a means of fulfilling their own emotional, sexual and moral desires. Whether it is Naeem alienated from the dehumanized excesses of modernity, or the selfish Daroga and superintendent in "*Hatak*" or Miyan who cannot clarify his own moral stand on the 'virtue' of a woman as a prostitute, all these dramas reveal a fissure in the middle class sensibility about their celebrated '*sharafat*' or respectability. The crisis in the private world of the bourgeoisie, whether it is Daroga or Miyan's house or the sophisticated but restricted art galleries in an urban city, is therefore transferred onto the easily available alternative, i.e. the much-maligned public abode of the prostitute. Manto's various portrayals of these prostitute figures, progressing fromthe stereotype of the courtesan with a golden heart, to the one who battles her existential crisis juggling between the demands of her emotionally exacting profession and her innermost desire to be loved in "*Hatak*", to finally presenting a much evolved consciousness of the protagonist in "*Karwat*"—all are consistently marked by this significant moral and ethical crisis of the middle class. The narrative of the prostitute, therefore, seems to take the attention away from middle-class' own complicity in the perpetuation of the former's seamy lives and their abdication of a real engagement or responsibility towards the betterment of their lot. This task must ensue from the beginning, i.e. their acknowledgement and attempt to come to terms with their own conflicting moral dispositions and a refusal to heap their burdens

on what are the most dispossessed sections of the society. In each of these plays, the crisis of middle-class that plays out speaks of a collective problem, which is however, only momentarily, ruptured through worthy but individual challenges thrown by Saugandhi or Sundari. In fact, in a play like "*Kya Main Andar Aa Sakta Hu*", the protagonist is completely at odds to comprehend his life in meaningful terms, and lost in the blinding indifference of the world, can only seek an escape, not a solution; a last resort, which thus appears in the form of a prositute's house.

Social Dramas

While much of Manto's literary work can be described as 'social' in its outlook, the two specific dramas under discussion here mark their difference in terms of their unique themes that do not seem to have been explored in depth either in the former or even in the short stories. The first of these is "*Jurm Aur Saza*" ("Crime and Punishment") which touches upon the sensitive issue of a maidservant's rape and its consequences, and the other is "*Journalist*" which is inspired by the life of Abdul Bari, and is a scathing critique of the exploitation of journalists at the hands of their bosses. While the radical potential of the former is somewhat curtailed by the restoration of the moral universe of the drama, without quite resolving the central question of capital punishment, "*Journalist*" maps the journey of an ambitious intellectual whose idealism, however, farcically ends him at a point that implies incessant struggle to interpret it in terms of practical action.

"Jurm Aur Saza"

In several stories written by Manto, a woman's sexualized body is represented variously, as evoking the mysterious sensuousness of the rustic girl, as the site of communal violence, as an illegitimate entity that has been violated by the predatory men who callously abandon it. In "*Jurm Aur Saza*" ("Crime and Punishment"), Manto dramatizes yet another example of female sexual violence that function as a trope to lay bare the pervasive class inequality as also the degeneration of legal systems that sustain such acts in the first place. The play attempts to respond to the nature of crimes committed—rape and an ensuing murder, by mulling over the desirability of reform over retribution, a belief that Manto also expresses in his later essay "*Qatl-o-Khoon Ki Surkhiyan*" ("News of a Killing").

In "*Jurm Aur Saza*", Kamla works as a maidservant in the Seth Magan Lal's house who is city's richest businessman. One is told that before working in his house, Kamla was a poor beggar who was sheltered by Shankar, a young newspaper reporter. Except for Shankar's

protective presence in her life, Kamla is practically a destitute living merely at the mercy of her master. One day, Magan Lal's son, Kundan, upon the pretext of helping Kamla when she is sick, rapes her. When Shankar learns the truth of the incident, he resolves to seek justice for her by murdering Kundan. As the narrative proceeds towards a retributive closure of Kamla's rape, the play raises the question of the psychological and social nature of the respective crimes of Kundan and Shankar and the adequate 'punishment' or corrective that must commensurate with it.

Kamla's rape at the hands of Kundan within the space of a domestic household enunciates an unfair play of power that derives its legitimacy from a gendered and economic hierarchy that pervades it. The play does not elaborate on Kundan's character beyond his profile as one who embodies within himself a false sense of pride that emanates from his status as an entitled man whose cultural and economic privileges sanction him a willful violation of a slave woman's body. When Shankar interrogates him about his heinous act that breached Kamla's consent, Kundan hardly admits to his crime and rather tries to bury it by offering a bribe to him (330). Kamla's predicament as a maidservant then is a function of her inferior subject position that guarantees her neither a life of safety or dignity nor the hope of justice in the institutions of law. Her victimization at the hands of patriarchal authority and corrupt judicial system is brought out by Shankar who argues that Kundan could dare to commit such an act because "he is the son of the city's biggest aristocrat, while [she] a poor beggar. [she] has no one to help [her]" ("*weh shahar ke sabse bade raees ka ladka hai aur tum gareeb bikharin ho. Tumhara koi madadgār nahi hai*") (328). Shankar also seems to imply that as the vulnerable one in the exploitative relationship between the master and the slave, her sexualized body blurs a categorical notion of consent or choice. Kamla is therefore, a victim with no agency ("*bekas*" and "*bebas*") whose marginalized body must be predated upon and bear its aftermath of pain, humiliation and social ostracization (328). Moreover, the indifferent juridical-legal system ridden with corruption relents itself only to the power of money, unlocking its doors through gold and silver keys, further excluding those from the ambit of justice who have been wronged by both the privileged and the law (328).

Shankar, disillusioned as he is with the farcical, dishonest ways of the law courts realizes that his burning desire to avenge Kamla's rape can only be achieved by inflicting punishment directly onto Kundan. He plots to murder Kundan by forcing a confession out of him and then

choking him to death. The confessional or suicide note is publicized the next day in newspapers that provides a failsafe cover to Shankar's crime while assuring him that the "world is now rid of atleast one sinner" (332). He becomes the arbiter of justice who asserts to Kundan that it is not the luster of his father's wealth but the test of humanity that rules his court of law. Hence, in Shankar's eyes, Kundan is the biggest offender in the world who must be punished with a death sentence:

> Kundan: Since these law-courts can be blinded by the shine of your father's jewels, I have decided to judge your crime on the touchstone of humanity myself. I declare you the biggest criminal and charge you with punishment by death (33).
>
> *Kundan: yahan ki kanūni adalaton ki aankhon mein tumhare baap ke jawahraat chaka-chaundh paida kar sakte hain, issiliye tumhare jurm ko insaniyat ki kasauti par maine khud parkha hai. Tumhein sabse bada mujrim yakeen karte huye main tumhein maut ki saza deta hun* (33).

Ironically, this death sentence is not announced is the lawful proceedings of the court but is rather carried out in secrecy by blackmailing and finally murdering Kamla's rapist. This revenge fantasy is further heightened in the drama when Shankar, on purpose, fuels suspicion in the mind of the police inspector interrogating the case. He rehearses the same mode of intimidation that precedes the murder and makes the police realize that "a person can also be made to commit suicide. This can also be one method of murder" ("*insān se khudkhushi karwayi bhi ja sakti hai. Qatl karne ka ek yeh bhi tareeka ho sakta hai*") (333). In this mock challenge to the perceived nature of Kundan's 'suicide', Shankar draws attention to the facile procedures of "blind" law and interrogation that rely on surface truths without engaging in the complexities of an incident (333). It seems that as a revenge hero, Shankar directs his vengeance not only against the perpetrator of Kamla's rape but also the entire judicial system that loses its credibility in the face of laxity and corruptible power of money.

The play inches towards its central thematic focus that dwells on the ramifications of crime and 'punishment' by death as a moral and social corrective to it. In his aggressive pursuit of revenge, Shankar replicates an equally barbaric act as Kundan, thereby failing to alleviate the moral universe of the drama of the evils of violence. Kamla's denunciation of Shankar's blind

vengeance is an implicit plea for a reformatory approach to crime, one that seeks to abolish the sin and not the sinner. Kamla tries to make Shankar realize that in his imperceptive vigilantism, he has lost sight of his primary motive that was propelled by Kundan's abominable act of rape rather than his intrinsic personality. Thus, he eliminated a person while keeping the evil inside him intact ("*aapne pāpi ko māra hai, pāp ko nahin*") (337). Kamla also argues that by murdering Kundan, he deprived him of the chance to wallow in guilt and perhaps, reform himself through repentance and apology ("*aapne usse acha banne se pehle maut ke ghat utār diya*") (337). Thus, by a condemnation of Shankar's retaliatory act, the play cleverly undermines the moral self-righteousness of his agenda while throwing the semantic import of crime and punishment into question.

In dramatizing the conflicting approaches to crime, i.e. Shankar's retributive aggression on one hand, and Kamla's advocation for a more humane, rehabilitative response to criminal acts, the play represents Manto's implicit critique of capital punishment. Ayesha Jalal points out that as a "firm opponent of capital punishment, Manto had an aversion to state prisons" which he believed, "turned convicts into hardened criminals by making them immune to punishment, jeopardizing the security of law-abiding citizens" (145). Manto's criminal characters, especially in the context of Partition are often shown as results of their grim circumstances implying the role of external factors, such as poverty, discrimination or exploitation, in producing and sustaining crime in society. However, in "*Jurm Aur Saza*", one of the few plays to raise a social problem and suggest its corrective too, there is an eerie silence maintained on any possible psychological reasons that could explain Kundan's criminal act of rape. One can only infer it as a manifestation of his perverse desire to control the weaker sex through his lust. On the other hand, while Shankar's offence can be explained in terms of a revenge trope, there is another justification that is spelt out in the drama.

Kamla is bogged down by her inability to clarify her own thoughts as to why she lied to the police inspector about Shankar's culpability. Furthermore, she questions him that if crime and criminals exist in all places and in all times, then why must Shankar single out Kundan and murder him. His answer points out towards another dimension to crime and revenge that suggests that it is only when those offensive actions that seem routine yet distant strike a personal tragedy do they acquire an epic resonance with the affected. Thus, Shankar confesses to Kamla that he took upon himself the task of punishing Kundan because there is not much

difference between him and Kamla (336). By making Shankar resort to crime in order to come to terms with his sense of personal injustice, the play strives to argue that there is a propensity to sin in all human beings that can be checked not by punitive procedures but through sensitivity, reform and rehabilitation. In "*Qatl-o-Khoon Ki Surkhiyan*", written post-Partition, Manto had written that he does not favor punishment by death or imprisonment but in fact, advocates those reformatories where people can be guided the right path. Manto argues that in this age of science where atom bombs can be prepared and hate be spread, such reformatories can be found in "*ruhāniyat*" or spirituality, in the peaceful but enlightening discourses of "namaaz, and roza and aarti and kirtan" (79).[62]While the advocation of spirituality in his later part of life can be explained in terms of his disillusionment with Partition violence, the similarity in denunciation of disciplinary force in order to curb crime in both the narratives is a testimony of Manto's unequivocal pacifist tendencies and desire for reform from within.

It is important to note that while the play excoriates the loopholes in judicial-legal system through the compelling subject of rape, it weakens on two accounts. First, in what is essentially a narrative deliberation over the question of crime and punishment, Kamla, the victim of rape is strapped of any possible agency in matters of her fight for justice. As discussed earlier, it is largely the function of her marginalized social identity that prevents her from expecting a fair treatment at the hands of law. However, the subaltern voice of this slave woman is further drowned in the maddening revenge that propels Shankar who must speak *for* Kamla rather than enabling her to confidently voice her own concerns. The narrative of victimology strains the overall tone of the drama that relies on the burdensome stakes of sexual violence that stare a helpless woman like Kamla. The exact nature of sexual violence is never explicitly spelt out in the play, but rather alluded to through conventional comparisons and imagery. For instance, Shankar refers to Kamla's loss of honor as the robbing of "her life's biggest gift" ("*zindagi ka sabse bada daan*") and "the most expensive ornament of her lifetime" ("*jeevan ka sabse keemti gehna*") (328). He also states that in raping her, Kundan has snatched all the dreams of her youth ("*kunwari duniya ke tamām suhāne sapne*") (329). This language of representation of sexual violence at once invokes the paraphernalia of purity, honor and shame associated with female chastity and its violation respectively. At the same time, it marks the anxiety of a bourgeois male member's refusal to speak of sexual violence in its actual terms. Likewise, the obfuscation of

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[62] For an English translation of the essay, see Patel, Aakar.

female sexuality in a conventional, patriarchal terminology is symptomatic of an implicit anxiety to inscribe in textual or popular form the shocking truth about female sexual exploitation by the author, who seems to share, with Shankar, his reservations about the fluctuating moral codes of his middle-class subject position.

Secondly, as the narrative of rape leads to the larger, and possibly controversial question of capital punishment, there is a contrived attempt to couch the arguments in terms of a budding romantic relationship between Kamla and Shankar. As pointed out earlier, Kamla's lie and Shankar's revenge are two sides of the same coin that are explained as the outcome of their love for each other. This angle of romance seems to aid the restoration of a morally sound world in the play, where Shankar realizes his folly and sacrifices himself at the altar of law, and by extension, his love for Kamla. Thus, in what could be a pronouncement of a wholesome philosophy about crime and its punishment, a vociferous attack on capital punishment and the debilitating effects of torture, or a severely subversive critique of female exploitation, becomes a romanticized portrayal of the haplessness of the subaltern victim and the sudden reformation of her bourgeois lover. The project of crime against the subjugated and the measures to control social ills is left behind. The play is ultimately ends with a note of resignation and pathos, with the question of jutice to the victim veered off to Shankar's confession of love and his crime resulting out of it.

"*Journalist*"

"*Journalist*" (1941) is inspired by the life of Abdul Bari Alig, a "peripatetic socialist journalist-cum-historian", who significantly contributed to Manto's foray into the world of writing as a full-time vocation (Jalal 37). It was under Bari, who initially worked for *Musawat* in Amritsar, that Manto, along with his friends Abu Saeed Qureshi and Hasan Abbas, not only established an informal Free Thinkers' circle but also read with great fervor Russian classics and revolutionary texts.[63] Manto translated Oscar Wilde's *Vera* and Victor Hugo's *The Last Days of a Condemned Man* before publishing his first Urdu short story, "*Tamasha*", in none other than *Khalq*—a literary journal edited by Bari in 1934. Manto admits that "He it was who set me on the path of writing. Had I not run into him in Amritsar, I would have died unknown" (Manto,

[63] In his early days at Amritsar, Manto seemed to be enamored by radical icons such as Bhagat Singh and his comrade friends, as also the subversive spirit guiding the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. See Jalal, Ayesha, *The Pity of Partition* 37-45; Qureshi, Abu Saeed, "The Compassionate Destroyer" 130.

"Bari Alig: The Armchair Revolutionary" 439).[64] Understandably, Bari's socialist ideas and revolutionary zeal shaped Manto's sensibility as an artist to a considerable extent, at least in his early days. One can glimpse this adulation for his mentor in "Journalist" which dramatizes Bari's personal and social travails as he transitions from being a schoolteacher to a journalist across several years of his life. At the same time, "Journalist" remarkably uses this personal testimony as a resource to establish political significance of popular art such as radio drama. Through a narrative of the lead character Bari's polemical journalism and its ultimate curtailment at the hands of powers that be, Manto not only launches a biting critique of the financial and cultural powers that pull the strings of honest journalism, but also clamors for a wider sensitization of the uneducated and the unaware about the significance of their voice to the larger socio-political scenario. It is this protest against the corrupt newspaper proprietors as well as the powerful call for the subversion of the status quo that its "broadcast created an uproar and every Urdu newspaper wrote editorial notes denouncing it" (Manto, "Bari Alig: The Armchair Revolutionary" 434). Manto points out that it was indeed an irony that the "very journalists whose plight [his] play had described had been used to denounce [him]" (434). The play, nevertheless, puts into question the limits of such 'revolutionary' ideals as Bari's personal efforts and lofty ideas are unable to bring a semblance of change amongst those who surround him. Thus, what appears to be a a polemical drama about freedom of expression is also an inward-looking tale about the dilemmas, confusions and misplaced idealism of the protagonist that incorrectly envisions it as an answer to the enormous problems of modern living.

"*Journalist*" as play revolves around the protagonist's fiery zeal to freely and unabashedly propagate his ideas to a wider public and his ultimate disillusionment with the institution that he thought supposedly provided him an opportunity to do so. The play opens amidst a general commotion of a classroom where young students are memorizing multiplication tables. The repetition of these tables that represent rote learning methods serves as a foil to Bari's belief in the value of experiential learning and independent thinking. Bari considers that as a schoolmaster he is forcibly acting like a stern father to five hundred children teaching them geographical terms—"*yahan iss school mein paanch kam sau ladkon ka main zabardasti baap bana baitha hun*", only in the bleak hope that it would have an impact on them in future (216). However, his job as a teacher neither affords him any creative or intellectual satisfaction nor

[64]References from Khalid Hasan's English translation. See *Bitter Fruit: The Very Best of Saadat Hasan Manto*.

signifies meaningful upliftment of students. Bari mulls over the futility of imposing himself or his ideas over those who are merely at the receiving end of tried and tested knowledge. Finally, he decides to quit his profession as a teacher and embarks on a new journey towards the world of journalism, a world that will presumably offer him scope to expand the frontiers of his thoughts and disseminate it to a wider public:

Abdul Bari: I curse this profession…! If one needs only to communicate his thoughts, and advise others then why not take up journalism! Whatever one writes today appears in print the very next day…each person has a newspaper in his hands these days…*Wallah*! Journalism can spread the most sensational things, and gives you respect and money too!

Abdul Bari: Laanat hai aise peshe par…! Agar apne khayalat ka prachar hi karna hai, doosron ko sabak hi dena hai toh kyun na journalism ikhtiyar kiya jaye. Aaj jo kuch likha, kal chhapkar saamne aa gaya…har shakhs ke haath mein akhbaar maujood hai…wallah! Journalism kitni sansani failane wali cheez hai, aur fir rŏ'b aur vakaar alag… (217).

When Bari assumes his new charge as the editor of *Khalq*, he is shown as fully in grip of his profession, in contrast to his drab occupation as a teacher. The roaring sound of the printing press along with echoes of news headlines establishes Bari as a prominent figure of political journalism. In this segment, the audience is introduced to the uncompromising, foresighted and astute journalist that Bari is, one whose flight seems unconstrained and brave. As an editor, he unflinchingly manages hoards of tasks—clarifies the questions of his staff, takes care of the advertisements and public complaints that need to be published, not to mention the sole job that commands him immense respect, i.e. curating headlines about events big or small. The play emphasizes Bari's staunch safeguard of his right to express opinions and more importantly, the dignity of his job by refusing to oblige or compromise the power of his pen under the capitalistic influence of the dominating newspaper proprietor. He thus declares that "I am an editor, not a machine" ("*main editor hu, machine nahin*" 220), who will in no way color petty personal grudges held by his boss against someone in false political tones ("*kisi dost ki shikayat […] main isse siyasi rang mein pesh karne ke liye hargiz tayyar nahi*" 220). What seems to be a fulfilling

experience of an idealistic journalist is however, interjected by the central conflict of the play that hinges around Bari's financial exploitation at the hands of the newspaper proprietor.

It is only when a local cigarette-shop owner refuses to hand him any more on credit that Bari recognizes a similarity with his own predicament as an underpaid, rather, unpaid editor of *Khalq* since four long years. Bari's demand for his remuneration is replete with justifiable anger and deep sense of having been exploited, a final moment of self-realization that marks his progression from a simple schoolteacher aspiring towards radical but somewhat romanticized career as a fierce journalist to his crashing disenchantment with the same. He draws attention to his circumstances in which he struggles to make his ends meet, left with no choice but to curb his wishes which are natural to any person:

Abdul Bari: […] I never receive dues for my services on time, rather I am never paid at all. In the last three months, you have only given me sixteen rupees. Fear Lord! I am a human being, not a rock…I too get hungry, sometimes I too feel like eating sweets…You had made me an editor of this newspaper, not a saint or mendicant who has renounced this world (222).

Abdul Bari: […] *iss khidmat ka muavza mujhe kabhi waqt par nahi milta, balki yun kahiye ki milta hi nahin…pichhle teen maheenon mein aapne mujhe sirf solah rupye diye hain…khuda ka khauf kijiye, main insaan hun, patthar nahin hun…mujhe bhookh bhi lagti hai, kabhi kabhi mithayi khane ko bhi mera ji chahta hai…mujhe aapne iss akhbaar ka editor banaya tha, koi sadhu ya sanyasi nahi banaya tha jo maine duniya tyag di ho* (222).

Bari's boss is immune to his difficulties and refuses to pay anything more than a paltry sum of seventy-five rupees in order to settle his account. Bari thus resigns from *Khalq* and even resolves to quit the profession of journalism itself.

Manto's depiction of the callous, self-seeking ways of the newspaper proprietor in "*Journalist*" is in tune with his sustained belief in the potential of active subversion by the responsible youth of the country in ushering equitable social and economic systems, whether in

politics, film industry, journalism or creative writing. Manto's lifelong defense of the value of his art and his right to pen down stories and essays that spoke of the usually unspeakable can be seen as a valuable context in which a play like "Journalist" can be read critically. Written in the forties, it forms a part of Manto's literary and critical corpus that vociferously champions the cause of writers, editors, storytellers as also young filmmakers, actors and actresses.[65] It uncannily echoes the impassioned plea of Manto—the narrator, of his essay "*Mujhe Shikayat Hai*" ("I Have a Complaint") where he declares that neither are essayists mentally debauched nor the storywriters some charitable hospitals which must exist at the mercy of the benevolent few ("*Mazmuun nigar dimagi ayyash nahi; afsananigar khairati haspatal nahi*" n.p.). Infact, the new writers of this age, such as Bari, embody astuteness, originality and profundity of thought that can herald a new social order—" *[weh] naye zamane, naye nizam ke paighambar hain"* ("*Mujhe Shikayat Hai*" n.p.). Therefore, when Bari, having abandoned journalism for a while, hears the shocking news of the war in Europe, he is roused towards his participatory responsibility in responding to what could be as-yet-not-realized a global catastrophe. Unable to convince the drunkards around him in a local bar, he is overcome by a moment of self-realization, an awareness of himself as a man who must accomplish the lofty purpose of his life by contributing significantly to the political affairs of his nation ("*tum nahin jante, main kaun hun aur siyasi duniya mein meri kis kadar ahmiyat hai*" 228).

Towards the final segment of the play, Bari comes into his own, asserts his identity as "*Maulana Abdul Bari, editor* "*Roznama Khalq*"" and proceeds to vehemently critique the violence of war looming over Europe and the attendant discourses of hatred and greed that seem to propel the lamentable mass genocide in Germany (228). He explains that he had already predicted the possibility of a second world war having read Hitler's books and following his political moves, an observation that however, was not heeded seriously by his colleagues and seniors. The play on the whole alludes to war not just as a creative backdrop to explore Bari's professional journey but also serves as an important causal element that helps to surface intellectual energy that brews within him. Early in the play, as the printing press doles out prominent headlines of the day, there is a significant one that predicts Second World War in

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[65] Leslie Flemming in her essay, "Minor Writings" briefly discusses some of Manto's incisive essays in *Manto Ke Mazamin* such as "*Hindustani San'at-e- Filmsazi Par Ek Nazar*", "*Sharif Aurateh Aur Filmi Duniyah*", "*Ek Ashk Alood Appeal*" etc. and suggests that the "subject matter of the essays in *Manto Ke Mazamin* is almost identical to that of the early short stories", such as "*Matami Jalsah*", "*Istudent Union Camp*" and "*Inquilab Pasand*" (139).

Europe ("*Europe ke aasmaan par jung ke maheeb badal*" 218). In one of the scenes, Bari churns out a headline mocking Hitler without mincing words, "Germany's juggler stages an astonishing game!" ("*Germanyke madaari ka hairatangez khel*") (218). Following such an instance of unabashed journalism, there an indication given that *Khalq*'s supposedly inflammatory criticism has irked those in power—"*Assembly ke ijlaas mein 'Khalq' ki tanqeedon ka tazkira*" (218). Through the creative use of war news headlines as a sonic clue to Bari's unconstrained vision of political events as also the discomfiture they lead to, "Journalist" establishes a milieu of public discourse that is rife with censorship of alternate opinions, a scenario ultimately unconducive to necessary criticism and analysis of socio-political issues. It is no paradox that the play that underscores the necessity of artistic freedom in the face of political and institutional censorship is ultimately taken down by All India Radio on the demand of furious journalists. The play's censorship can safely be explained in terms of the dynamics structuring the closely monitored environs of the AIR that had become an unparalleled mouthpiece of war propaganda. It was, in a large part, its political and nepotistic interference in matters of creative broadcasting (much like Bari's frustration in *Khalq* as depicted in the play) at whose receiving end, Manto found himself. In the play, Bari struggles in a similar situation, and is ultimately moved by his latent power as an intellectual, who must at once give up his newly adopted life of indolence, and fulfill his responsibility as a writer-journalist in educating people about the horrors of war violence. He thus expresses the awful circumstances of his time and the compulsion to pick up his pen once again:

> Abdul Bari: […] this war is very frightening, very dark…I shudder to think of its consequences. This war will result in not one but many earthquakes in Europe…and countless storms. Big and beautiful cities will be reduced to nothing but rubble…thousands of families will be rendered homeless…I want to write, I want to write about this horrifying war… (228).
>
> Abdul Bari: […] *yeh jung bahut khaufnaak hai, bahut bhayanak hai…main jab iske natayij ka tassavvur karta hun toh kaamp uthta hun…yeh jung Europe mein ek nahi, sainkdon zalzale paida kar degi…hazaron toofan aayenge…bade-*

> *bade khoobsoorat shahar malbe ka dher ban jayenge…hazaron khaandaan beghar aur bedar ho jayenge…main likhna chahta hu, main iss holnaak jung ke muttalik likhna chahta hun…* (228).

Manto's diagnosis of the nature of violence that renders apart communities and nations is visible from "Journalist", written six years before Partition, and commands relevance across spatial and temporal frameworks. Bari perceptively points out that heightened racial and religious violence has led to a precarious social situation which is that of "war-like peace, and then peace-like war" ("*pehle jungnuma sulah, fir sulahnama jung*" 229). He spells out the story of the twentieth century, as it were, of an uncivilized, barbaric and unprincipled world where blood is cheaper than water, a man vies for another man's life and a nation pitches against another (229). Bari's criticism of war progresses towards a call for action that seeks to tap the unbounded energy of the youth that alone has the capacity to reform societies from within in consonance with the changing ethos of a modernizing world. Bari's summon for "*Inquilab*" or revolution is expressed in his resounding slogan—"Change the course, or perish!" ("*karwat badlo ya mit jao*") (231). The socialist overtones of this lengthy monologue reverberates with the agitatory zeal of the narrator in "*Mujhe Shikayat Hai*" who similarly draws attention of his "sleeping brothers" to wake up and organize under a flag, give up writing for a while till their rebellion brings the empire of letters to their feet (n.p.). Here, the narrator complains against miserly editors and powerful literary doyens who nevertheless plagiarize from the poor but talented writers, as also writers who fail to respectfully uphold their own by selling their creativity for free. This similar will to propel reform and revolution animates Abdul Bari, who towards the final part of the drama, seems to be torn between his compelling urge to create awareness through his writing and the absurd reality that surrounds him. In a bewildering twist at the end of the play, Bari finds himself back to his initial existence as a schoolteacher—as idealistic but equally ineffectual in translating his morals into worthy action.

Manto's thrust on social criticism of war, violence and exploitation now gives way to a broader comment about a middle-class intellectual like Bari, who juggles between an awareness of his intellectual superiority, moral beliefs and ambitious will to usher reform on one hand, and his reality that is marked by economic, social and professional uncertainty. This discordance between his inner, contemplative self and the practical world out there is fleshed out in the final

scene of the play. Bari is heard laughing, as he believes that his thoughts are spreading far and wide. This misplaced self-assurance is incongruously juxtaposed with the crude reality that is alluded first by the harsh noise of the fodder cutting machine, eventually superimposed by the rapping of the ruler on a table in a classroom full of students concluding the play, paradoxically, at the very point from where it began. The symbolic meaning of Bari's actions resulting into nothing, a farcical repetition of a life full of struggle reinforced through an open-ended closure points to the voids that blur his endeavors.

In his sketch of Abdul Bari, Manto terms him as "*runcchor*", a word that literally translates as the one who abandons the battlefield ("*Bari Sahab*" 43). This dodginess is emphasized in the play in atleast two instances—first, when Bari sets up a fodder-cutting machine in a small village and second, his desperation to 'educate' the drunkards in a local bar who seem to be lost in their own world of fooleries. When Bari tries to imitate the rural, carefree lifestyle of Chaudhry, it signifies his urge to miraculously 'solve' or rather, escape the burdens of his life that a meager paying job as a journalist cannot. He readily makes the choice of leading a life that guarantees him assured income and minimal worries but in the same breath also entails a willful ignorance of the larger questions that grapple him as an intellectual. However, expressing his contentment with this newly bartered life, he laughs loudly (similar to the one referred earlier) and happily shares this "secret" with all those journalists and editors who seem to be aloof of it (224). The audience hears another laughter soon in the next scene set in a local bar where Bari is in the company of drunkards creating ruckus through jokes and songs. As Bari tries to "enlighten" them about the war, the drunkards utter more nonsense and diffuse the gravity of his moment of self-realization. Bari once again asserts what he believes to be his superior intellectual status only to be ridiculed by the men around him. Bari claims that he is extremely well versed with the politics of the world ("*mujhe duniya ki tamaam siyasat ka ilm hai*") being an editor who has safely preserved his reading glasses as well as his political vision (229). This desperation is met with a fellow drunkard's caustic laughter labelling him as nothing but a "*ghanchakkar*" or a foolish person, who is now drunk beyond his limits (229). In both these instances, the narrative draws attention to the fragmented political ambition of Bari who oscillates from one profession to another, and embodies contrasting expectations from his life. His psychological journey is one riddled with doubts and distanced from the actualities of the world that lead him to an exaggerated estimation of himself. Well-intentioned, Bari does seem to

have intense moments when he piercingly critiques the lopsided power structure that prevails in society, only to embark on a life that does little to convert his political philosophy into larger good. In his initial argument with the newspaper proprietor, he points out that his resignation shall not douse anything but his personal grudge because he realizes that the former is the master, and he merely his slave ("*aap aaka hain aur main ghulam*") (221). Yet, unfortunately, his political rhetoric sets him on nothing but a path of escapism resulting out of his sense of desperation as well as unsettled self.

"*Journalist*" combines Manto's admiration as well as honest criticism of a man he loved and respected. In contrast to several other radio dramas that are limited in terms of space and time, "*Journalist*" fictionally maps the professional life of Abdul Bari spread across several years that come full circle ambiguously. More importantly, it abundantly taps into the aural resources of radio drama to dramatize Bari's journey from a simple schoolteacher to an idealistic, fearless journalist to a man starting to lose sight of his motives and reality. In this respect, one can point out two narrative strategies deployed by Manto—the use of technical sound effects and dark comedy. The use of war news headlines (discussed earlier), Bari's dialogues and the plethora of contrasting sounds of the fodder cutting machine, printing press and finally the ruler in a classroom reinforce his ludicrously disjointed view of reality. This is further compounded by the dark comedy of the drunkards' and Bari's misplaced laughter that establish him almost as a caricature unable to understand himself, least of all understood by others. The sonic landscape of the play moves from the resounding energy of the world of journalism to a suffocating but surreal one, where Bari symbolizes exploitation, desperation, insecurity and ultimately the unfortunate futility of misplaced ambition of a man who despite his well-meaning intentions, wavers from a clear-eyed vision of his role as an intellectual.

In doing so, "*Journalist*" presents Manto's nuanced tackling of the question of the role of an intellectual-reformer, one that faced him through different points of his life. The essay referred to earlier, "*Mujhe Shikayat Hai*", straightforwardly advocates the use of mass rebellion as a solution to the exploitation of the literary community. In contrast, "*Journalist*" treads a more careful path that no doubt, uninhibitedly castigates the oppressive powers that be, but at the same time points out to the necessity of establishing hold over ground realities as a requisite for social change. Tendencies of escapism and fear that animate the actions of revolutionaries such as Bari are detrimental to any meaningful change, despite the force of astute political thought or will to

reform. This "armchair revolutionary" was, according to Manto, a "big coward", a man who "was fond of becoming a reformer" but always "looked for escape routes" ("Bari Alig: The Armchair Revolutionary" 432, 445, 435). "*Journalist*" in its use of dark comedy suggesting the futility of his actions highlight Manto's this very perceived view of his mentor—a man who repeatedly performed his "moral dry-cleaning" in order to keep professing and upholding what merely remained words without lasting significance in the world (445). Thus, "*Journalist*" is one of the most well-crafted dramas of Manto that carries a seething criticism of war violence, censorship and exploitation of creative artists. At the same time, the absurdity of a cyclical return to the very beginning of the protagonist's professional and intellectual life, after an arresting dramatization of his fierce idealism can be interpreted as the author's comment on the nature of social protest that sustained the vocabulary of the 'progressives' and Marxist revolutionaries of the time. It was only later in his life that Manto was completely disillusioned by the increasingly suffocating and restricting impulses that guided the otherwise hugely celebrated Progressive Movement in India.[66] But even an earlier play like "*Journalist*" hints at his uneasiness over high-sounding political discourse that often lost sight of the actual suffering of the common masses, the agenda that shepherded Progressive literature in Urdu in the 1940s. Manto's caution against such a tendency can be summed up in his own words that conclude his sketch of Bari:

> Socialist writer Bari, my friend, my mentor, my guide who kept pasting major and minor headlines in the book of life, but never got down to writing under those headlines the stories that came to birth in his head and disappeared like steam in

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[66] In his essay, "*Jaib-e-Kafan*", Manto launches a searing attack on the so-called 'Progressives', most of whom were self-professed communists. In his disillusionment with the 'red', he attacks them for championing the cause of the poor peasants in a way that "impelled them to incite the farmer to demand his wages before he'd shed even one drop of sweat"; of ushering in a "literary revolution" that only planned to "transform machines into ghazals". More importantly, he expresses his impatience with "their frequent manifestoes, long-winded resolutions and effusive statements—the substance of which came straight from the Russian Kremlin to the Bombay Khetwadi and then on to McLeod Road". Therefore, by condemning the derivative nature of knowledge production amongst the Progressives, he questions the feasibility of "just spreading red seeds imported from the Soviet Union" rather than producing "our own intellectuals" (437). See Memon,"Afterword" 437. It is plausible to argue that what Manto categorically dismisses about the Progressives in this later piece, are the concerns that also spread across his literary oeuvre, including these radio-dramas, namely the hasty and shallow "solutions" propounded to what are some of the most grave problems of our society. He stresses the indigenous nature of these problems that could not be effectively captured merely by the Progressive "formula" of manifestoes and declarations that they seemed to pass off as literature. Although, his periods of literary production coincided with the heydays of Progressive movement in India, an early play like "*Journalist*" portrays his deep affection for his communist mentor but also registers an objective assessment of the ineffectuality of such endeavors, concomitantly revealing his own skepticism about the holistic and all-encompassing virtue of harboring such a sense of intellectual superiority.

the charged atmosphere of Lahore's restaurants and bakeries ("Bari Alig: The Armchair Revolutionary" 446).

Summing Up

The representation of only incomplete fulfillment of the intellectual's labor in a play like "*Journalist*" provides the necessary trope that structures the fractured nature of Manto's dramas that are overtly polemical in nature. There is a tension at the discursive level of these dramas to present the problems of modernity—alienation of an individual in a city, the degradation of the prostitutes, female sexual exploitation, as well as the violence of war and questions about freedom of expression. As has been described, the recourse to popular stereotypes such as the prostitute with the golden heart or the camouflaging of the act of sexual exploitation in a language redolent with orthodox imagery about the prized preservation of female chastity, betray the author's self-censorship of the matters deemed to be too controversial or threatening to the conventions of nationalized broadcasting. This censorship is not merely a product of broadcasting restrictions, but Manto's own inability to portray fully the actions of his middle-class protagonists. Naeem, Daroga, Madho, Miyan, Shankar and even Bari are all members of the bourgeoisie who are unable to face the crisis of their own class—whether that of being spurned by their fellow men, or the juggling between the private, respectable space of home and the 'immoral', public one of the brothel, their need to bring about a reform but their cold indifference to the ones they seek to change, and ultimately their misplaced estimation of the worth of their individual acts of revolution that is unable to bring about an overhaul in circumstances.

Comparing his works before and after Partition, Gopal argues, "Manto moves from a descriptive interest in something like 'the human condition' to discussing the psychic and political potential of *humanism*" (120). One could extend this reading by arguing that these two tendencies struggle with each other across Manto's early writings, including his radio dramas. The 'human condition' in Manto's works has often been read as a revolutionary interest in the lives of the subaltern and the author's unequivocal sympathy with the underdog. In these problem-plays, however, it becomes evident that these underdog protagonists, for instance, the prostitute and the maidservant, only serve to amplify the crisis amidst which the bourgeois sections of society finds itself, which however, is not explicitly fleshed out by Manto. Thus, these subalterns exist as the only alternatives upon which the anxieties of this class can be

foisted, including those of their writer, who inscribes this writerly hesitation, if not outright abdication of his responsibility. Manto's deployment of language oscillates between the radical and the conventional and in this very fracture, draws attention to the facetiousness of his own claim to being the sole spokesman[67] or the authentic voice of the downtrodden. It thus conceals the unconvincing ways in which the purported alternatives to these problems are retrenched within the social, cultural, economic and sexual matrices while diverting attention to the seamy sides of reality of the subalterns, which therefore erroneously becomes the sole point of identification of Manto's oeuvre. In reading these plays as 'minor', this chapter has shown how even his prostitute dramas can reveal an engagement not merely with this much maligned figure, but the schizophrenic semiotic baggage that the bourgeois characters and the author, cannot come easily to terms with. It is because of such an evasion that we witness her abode as the sole refuge in a maddening city, the increasing disquiet to reform her so as to force one's unsettled notions about respectability, and ultimately a disparaging of their lives so as to counter one's own selfish interests that cannot be fulfilled within one's own milieu. Manto's anxiety in such matter, therefore, ironically reflects itself in his presentation of a middle-class intellectual whose efforts are ultimately reined in owing to their incompleteness and frail grounding in the true realities of existence. This skepticism about the author's role that shuttles between being a diagnostic and/or a lawmaker[68] can be inferred from Bari's ultimate failure to either educate those around him or validate his own endeavors through mere ideation. These radio-plays, therefore become crucial in throwing open to deeper reflection, his much-vaunted humanistic impulse that however, fails to categorically face the dilemmas that structure his own subject position as a middle-class intellectual.

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[67] In his essay, "*Pas-e-Manzar*", written as a conversation between two critics, one of them explains why Manto writes about the "wretched of the earth". He describes that "Where everyone is dressed in spotless white, he wants to go covered in mud and slime and make a nuisance of himself" (n.p). See "Background", Patel, Aakar ed. *Why I Write*

[68] Manto himself, in his essay, "The Short Story Writer and Matters of Sex", makes this famous comparison. He posits that, "We're not lawgivers, not even inquistors. Framing laws and keeping track of people's morals is for others. Of course, we take the government to task, but we never aspire to become rulers ourselves. Yes, we draft plans for buildings, but we aren't builders; we diagnose ailments, but don't run hospitals" (424). See Memon.

Conclusion

This thesis began with an invocation to an epitaph that Manto composed for himself a few months before his death, suggesting that latent in it, is a reference to his “real” achievement as an artist. Manto’s real achievement lies in being a ‘minor’ writer who brings his unique, but marginalized worldview into his literary oeuvre. This perspective is unique, not because it is fissured in its approach towards the articulation of middle-class crisis, or because there is a widespread presence of the subalterns across his writing. It is singular because Manto suffuses his work with an energy and creative potential that subscribes neither to the dominant Progressive formula, not to the principles of detached art. Manto uses the preferred and dominant language of Urdu, and imbues it with a degree of skepticism and spirit of questioning, in his inimitable creative style, which deterritorializes the language, freeing it from the hegemony of ideological appropriation that may seek to use it for their own purposes.In attempting to understand Manto’s political project through a theorization of minor literature by Deleuze and Guattari, not only does one has to reorient his conventional understanding of this difficult author but also account for his writings that have been selectively read and canonized. In this unprecedented analysis of Manto, this thesis has culled out his radio dramas as minor literature, which by virtue of their play between exposition and concealment, reveal Manto’s real concerns as well as hesitations in tackling the dilemmas of not the minorities, as has been traditionally seen, but those of the bourgeoisie.

Deleuze and Guattari enumerate that “what […] does down below, constituting a not indispensable cellar of a structure” in high literature, becomes a valid subject of the ‘minor’ (*Minor Literature* 17). Therefore, “what is there a matter of passing interest for a few, here absorbs everyone” (17). Thus, it is Manto’s radio-dramas, traditionally viewed as possessing no academic or literary worth, that become ‘minor’, embodying those themes and narrative strategies that are not clearly evident in Manto’s short stories. By classifying his works as comedies, romances and radio dramas, this thesis has posited a new methodology to comprehend Manto and his works. In contrast to scholarship that has straightforwardly held up Manto as a vociferous champion of minority hardships and their lives as an oppositional discourse to that of the ‘majority’, this thesis has tried to complicate this simplified terrain of the elite and the

subaltern, majority and minority, oppressed and the oppressor. It proves what Arjun Mahey suggests is Manto's universe—"the rich and variable kingdom of moral uncertainty" (148).

Far from embodying his popular persona as bold, and straightforward, reading his radio-dramas proves that his authorial sensibility is one that is characterized by a sustained, but extremely troubled engagement with the contradictions of his own milieu, the bourgeois, respectable society, with its emphasis on *sharāfat* that could at once mean "decency, nobility of character, [and] social respectability" (Mufti 195). Manto is deeply aware of this schism in his understanding of his role as an author, but is compelled to respond to the challenges of his times solely by writing. In his radio dramas, we have seen dead-ends, impasses, "points of undoing" where a "rupturing or heterogeneous line appears" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor Literature* 7). These include comic one-liners, melodramatic or sentimental modes of sacrifice on the part of lovers, or the cyclical nature of reality as that of Susheela in "*Akeli*" or Bari in "*Journalist*". All these modes are mobilized to communicate the inefficacies of characters to find constructive solutions to their predicaments, or of their author to envision truly sustainable parallel worlds. Thus, far from defiant attitude that is usually associated with Manto, his radio plays reveal a desire that is "*already submissive and searching to communicate its own submission*" (10). Thus, reading Manto in this manner critiques the lumpenization of his concerns that inevitably project his storiesas an unwavering challenge to the majority discourse of the nation.

Recognition of instances of flight, subterfuge, romanticization and idealization through formulas in radio-dramas, may lead one to question if this retreat solely is the defining feature of Manto's writings as a whole. It may also ponder us to think whether Manto has any reliable insights to offer, if not about the subaltern project, then about the paradoxes of middle-class values. Manto's investment in the contemporary value system is one that spares no form of hypocrisy in society. One may turn to an instance of his characteristically honest appraisal of life and art. In in his essay "*Hindustani Sanat-e-Filmsazi Par Ek Nazar*" ("What Bollywood Must Do"), Manto expresses his disapproval of "angelic" heroes, "goody-goody heroines" and "villains who are villains in every role" (271). He argues for a "move beyond stereotypes" and confronting the tendency of "childishness, laziness, this sentimentalism" which has "no place in first rate literature" (272-3). His beliefs about the true nature of art invariably stress upon its ability to venture into the uncharted and difficult terrains. In following his own proclamation and thus, dispensing away with the indolence in reading Manto in reductive ways, this thesis has

tried to show Manto's preoccupations with the world around him as deep, though marked by an intense suspicion, and at times, incomprehensibility. Manto's radio dramas help us to glean an insight into these complicated endeavors of the author, "inferior, dominated, always in becoming, always incomplete" (Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* 4).

Most notably, radio-dramas render suspect those interpretations of Manto that hail him as speaking the "bitter truth in the most forthright manner, without subterfuge and exaggeration" (Memon, *Black Margins* 25). As befitting a minor literature, they undermine the hegemony of a "fully constructed signifier" (*Minor Literature* 7). Rather than being conclusive narratives, they highlight the meaning of Manto's craft in terms of an incessant struggle that presents itself in the compulsive need to curate fictions. As he writes in "*Terhi Lakeer*", it is only by treading the meandering, difficult paths that an author can discover those elements that are worth his art. The subject matter of his narratives does not arrive in full clarity, but rather as a fuzzy problematic, "*koi dhundla sa vichar*", that may leap into his consciousness as he mulls over the constituents of his art (101).

Another fundamental way in which this thesis contributes to the Manto industry is by opening up the field to an entirely unexplored body of his work that is essentially discarded because not only is it seen as 'low brow' and inferior, but also unsuitable for an analysis of Manto that invariably looks for depictions of Partition violence or yet another statement about his obsessive fondness and sympathy for the prostitute figure. This research successfully recuperates and contextualizes these dramas within their historical, cultural, social, linguistic and intellectual trends, locating Manto as a part of a literary-creative circuit including those such as Bedi, Ashk, Rashid and Satyarthi. While this contextualization helps to explain the self-censorship at work in his dramas as a result of the restrictive environs of All India Radio, the thesis focuses on what is the most pertinent aspect of their study, i.e. imbuing them an afterlife through their textualization in terms other than scandal. It has, thus, not only rescued them from a pool of critical deficit but also accorded them value as minor writings that lay major claims upon the understanding of Manto. Thus, as minor literature, they "unleash the fettered or creative potential of a given agency", thereby lending us methods to view Manto as a writer trying to negotiate the difficulties of modernity through his art (Biti 278).

Manto's radio writings, above all, alert us to the curious ways in which Manto offsets those aspects of his work that arise out out demands of the market, with an intense engagement

with the socio-cultural issues around him, albeit skirting them through humor, melodrama and sentimentalism through his artistic genius. It is a mark of his consummate skill as a professional writer, who does not lose sight of his commitment towards art beyond the compulsions of money. As we have seen, this balancing act is most evident in his radio dramas that carefully balance conventional narrative modes and social attitudes with his acute recognition of the moral, ethical and social confusions grappling his protagonists. The latter might veer off towards indeterminate ends, but nevertheless help us to mark the author's desire to record them in his fictions, even in fiction meant for commercial broadcast.

Thus, the image of Manto and his works that emerges out of this research is a complex and critical one. It completely does away with his reputation as a deliverer of the subalterns from their grim circumstances. It also dispenses with the idea of Manto as an author who is supremely confident of his craft, and therefore nudges us to view even his famous procalmations about himself with a degree of ironic detachment. The radio-dramas, in presenting us not with clarity of Manto's thought process but of its bewildering perplexity, have alerted us to his unsettled authorial self, that keeps looking at himself and his art with a degree of suspicion, a wariness of an outsider. Even when their rough edges are smoothened over by improbable, and escapist 'solutions', they offer us a rare insight into Manto's mind. It would be befitting to express that experience in the words of Edgar Allen Poe, as providing "A peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought […]at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view", but at moments of incomprehension, futility and despair ("The Philosophy of Composition" 676).

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Appendix A

S. no.	Radio Production	Type	Date/Day of Broadcast	Air-Time	Place of Broadcast	Series	Description as in Source	Source	Issue Number/ Date	Page no.	Remarks
1	Aao Bahas Karein	Drama	26 May 1939 (Friday)	9:50 P.M.	Delhi	NA	A Skit by S.H. Manto *[69]	Indian Listener	Vol. 4, No. 10 (7 May 1939)	737	
			28 May 1939 (Sunday)	8:15 P.M.	Bombay	NA	A Hindustani Sketch written by S.H. Manto. *	Indian Listener	Vol. 4, No. 10 (7 May 1939)	746	
2	Aao Jhoot Bolen	Drama	2 April 1939 (Sunday)	7:23 P.M.	Bombay	NA	A Hindustani sketch by S.H. Manto. Performed by the A.I.R. Artists.*	Indian Listener	Vol. 4, No. 7 (22 Mar 1939)	486	
3	Film Ki Taiyari	Drama	10 April 1939 (Monday)	12:45 P.M.	Bombay	NA	A Hindustani sketch written by S.H. Manto, produced by the A.I.R. Artists.*	Indian Listener	Vol. 4, No. 7 (22 Mar 1939)	520	
4	Aao Kahani Likhen	Drama	1 May 1939 (Monday)	10:30 P.M.	Lucknow	NA	A Playlet in Hindustani by S.H. Manto. Performed by	Indian Listener	Vol. 4, No. 9 (22 April	623	

[69] Entries marked with asterisk contain short descriptions that accompanied program schedules or a special mention in the "Highlights" of the journal, titled "On the Air". See Appendix B for details.

							Lucknow radio artists.		1939)		
5	Matches Ki Dabiya	Drama	20 February 1939 (Monday)	9:15 P.M.	Bombay	NA	A Hindustani Sketch written by S.H. Manto. Performed by the AIR artists.	Indian Listener	Vol. 4, No. 4 (7 Feb 1939)	288	
6	Talluwwan	Drama	3 January 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Play in Hindustani. Production by Saadat Hasan Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 1 (22 Dec 1941)	41	
7	Naqsh-i-Fariyadi	Drama	7 February 1942 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Play in Hindustani by S.H. Manto. Production: Krishan Chander. *	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 3 (22 Jan 1942)	49	
8	Mirza Ghalib	Drama	16 February 1942 (Monday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Radio Sketch composed of a few glimpses from the life of the great poet. Script by Sadat Hasan Manto. Produced by Krishan	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 4 (7 Feb 1942)	29	

							Chander				
9	Intizar Ke Do Rukh	Drama	28 February 1942 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Feature Programme in Hindustani Script: Saadat Hasan Manto. Production: Krishan Chander	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 4 (7 Feb 1942)	77	
		Drama	1 May 1943 (Saturday)	9:45 P.M.	Delhi	Today's Special Features	NA	Times of India (Bombay)	1-May-43	05	
		Drama	16 May 1945 (Wednesday)	8:30 P.M.	Lucknow	NA	Play in Hindustani: Script: S.H. Manto; Production: G.M. Shah	Indian Listener	Vol. 10, No. 10 (7 May 1945)	27	
		Drama	27 May 1952 (Tuesday)	8:30 P.M.	Delhi	Today's Highlights	NA	Times of India (Bombay)	27-May-52	06	
10	Intizar	Drama	11 December 1939 (Monday)	7:15 P.M.	Bombay	NA	NA	Times of India (Bombay)	11-Dec-39	03	
		Drama	9 November 1942 (Monday)	12:00 P.M.	Bombay	NA	"Intizar": Comedy (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	9-Nov-42	03	

11	Humour in Hashr	Talk	28 April 1942 (Tuesday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	In Memoriam	Humour in Hashr: Featurised Talk in Hindustani with illustration from the Playwright's works; Script by Saadat Hasan Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 8 (7 April 1942)	81	
12	Shahjahan Ki Maut	Drama	29 April 1942 (Wednesday)	6:25 P.M.	Delhi	For Women	Shahjahan Ki Maut: Play in Hindustani by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 8 (7 April 1942)	85	
13	Randhir Pahalwan	Drama	18 May 1942 (Monday)	8:15 P.M.	Delhi	For Villagers Only	Randhir Pahalwan: Play by S.H. Manto: Production by Abu Said Qureshi; Ragnian: Ram Dia	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 10 (7 May 1942)	37	
14	Ek Mard	Drama	23 May 1942 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Play in Hindustani by Saadat Hasan Manto. *	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 10 (7 May 1942)	57	
15	Salima	Drama	3 June 1942 (Wednesday)	6:25 P.M.	Delhi	For Women	Salima: Play in Hindustani by S.H.	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No, 11 (22	37	

							Manto		May 1942)		
16	Pani Ki The Mein	Feature	11 June 1942 (Thursday)	9:30 A.M.	Delhi	For Schools	Pani Ki The Mein: Feature Programme by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No, 11 (22 May 1942)	69	
17	Mamta Ki Chori	Drama	30 January 1945 (Tuesday)	6:45 P.M.	Lucknow	Behnon Ke Liye	Mamta Ki Chori: Play by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 10, No. 2 (7 Jan 1945)	79	
18	Adab	Talk	21 February 1945 (Wednesday)	7:00 P.M.	Bombay	Nai Kasouti Par	Adab: Talk in Hindustani by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol.10, No. 4 (7 Feb 1945)	48	
19	Napoleon Ki Maut	Drama	29 March 1941 (Saturday)	8:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Short article in the section 'On the Air'*	Indian Listener	Vol. 6, No. 6 (7 March 1941)	77	
		Feature	31 October 1943 (Sunday)	8:00 P.M.	Peshawar	NA	Nepolean Ki Mot: Feature in Hindustani by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 8, No. 20 (7 Oct 1943)	81	
20	Babar Ki Maut	Drama	20 September 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Babar Ki Maut: Play in Hindustani. By Saadat Hasan Manto. Short article in the section “On the Air”*	Indian Listener	Vol. 6, No. 18 (7 Sep 1941)	49	

21	Timur Ki Maut	Feature	6 December 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Short synopsis the section "On the Air"*	Indian Listener	Vol. 6, No. 23 (22 Nov 1941)	05	
22	Miss Lee	Drama	1 May 1942 (Friday)	7:30 P.M.	Delhi	For Women	Miss Lee: Play in Hindustani by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol.7, No. 9 (22 April 1942)	33	
23	Jurm-o-Saza	Drama	20 June 1942 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Jurm-o-Saza; Play by Saadat Hasan Manto; Production: Krishan Chander	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 12 (7 June 1942)	45	
		Drama	10 August 1941 (Sunday)	12:00 P.M.	Bombay	NA	Jurm-o-Saza-Play (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	9-Aug-41	09	
24	Roos Ki Larai	Feature	22 June 1942 (Monday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Roos Ki Larai; Feature in Hindustani; Written by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 12 (7 June 1942)	53	
25	Kamra No. 9	Drama	7 April 1945 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	"Kamra No. 9" Play in Hindustani by Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj, Produced by: Mohammad Iqbal	Indian Listener	Vol. 10, No. 7 (22 March 1945)	49	

		Drama	11 April 1945 (Wednesday)	10:00 P.M.	Peshawar	NA	Kamra No. 9; Play in Hindustani by S.H. Manto: Production: K.G. Ali	Indian Listener	Vol. 10, No. 7 (22 March 1945)	65	
		Drama	7 April 1942 (Tuesday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Kamra No. 9; Sketch in Hindustani. Script: Saadat Hasan Munto. Production: Krishan Chander	Indian Listener	Vol. 7, No. 7 (22 March 1942)	57	
		Drama	22 November 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Kamra Numbar Nau (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	22-Nov-41	11	
26	Salgirah Ka Tohfa	Drama	10 June 1945 (Sunday)	10:00 P.M.	Bombay	NA	Play in Hindustani by Saadat Hasan Manto: Produced by: Balraj Sahni	Indian Listener	Vol. 10, No. 11 (12 May 1945)	66	
27	Cleopatra Ki Maut	Drama	11 October 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Cleopatra Ki Maut-Play (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	11-Oct-41	11	
		Drama	11 October 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Madras	NA	Cleopatra Ki Maut-Play (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	11-Oct-41	11	

		Feature	22 October, 1943 (Friday)	10:20 P.M.	Lucknow	NA	Cleopatra Ki Maut: Feature Programme in Hindustani. Written by S.H. Manto; Produced by Ishrat Rahmani	Indian Listener	Vol. 8, no. 20 (7 October 1943)	47	Played as an electrical recording
28	Journalist	Drama	12 July 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Journalist (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	12-Jul-41	11	
29	Akeli	Drama	13 December 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Akeli: Play (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	13-Dec-41	11	
		Drama	11 June 1944 (Sunday)	9:45 P.M.	Peshawar	NA	Akeli: Play by S.H. Manto	Indian Listener	Vol. 9, no. 11 (22 May 1944)	61	
30	Jebkatra	Drama	26 July 1941 (Saturday)	10:00 P.M.	Delhi	NA	Jeb Katra (H)	Times of India (Bombay)	26-Jul-41	08	

Appendix B

Program Synopses and Descriptions as in *Indian Listener* Radio Journal

1. **Aao Behes Karein (Delhi broadcast)**

   Description in program schedule:

   "AO BAHAS KAREN

   A skit by S. H. Manto

   Come on, let us hold a discussion forthe sake of discussion and sharpen our wits, says the wife. The husband is willing to discuss; but as is inevitable, he is no match for her, and the woman says the last word. What do they dis-cuss? What a husband and wife willdiscuss: who is the aggrieved party? Poor husband—why does a man marry—yes, why did he enter wedlock, he asks and quotes Chekov in reply that a man marries when he does not know what to do with himself.

   CHARACTERS

   Kishore The husband

   Lajvanti The wife

   Narain The friend"

2. **Aao Behes Karein (Bombay Broadcast)**

   Description in program schedule:

   "AO BAHES KAREN

   A Hindustani sketch written by S.H. Manto

   CAST

   Kishore R.N. Mehra

   Narayan N .Shakil Ahmad

   Lajwanti Kusum Deshpande

   When the husband and the wife choose to have a debate, the subjects are not wanting. Does the woman marry the man or does the man marry a woman? Does the son belong to the father and the daughter to the mother? Or is it vice versa? There's a saying in Sanskrit that through dis- cussion we arrive at the truth. And here's the discovery of one more truth

'Husband should become Washerman '. If you are unable to swallow the truth, then listen in to the debate tonight."

3. **Aao Jhooth Bolen (Bombay broadcast)**

Description in program schedule:

"AO-JHOOT-BOLEN

A Hindustani sketch by S. H. Manto

Performed by the A I R Artists

CAST

The Husband	R .N. Mehra
The Wife	Kusum Deshpande
A Friend	Shakeel Ahmed

Married happiness is curiously elusive. How much of it depends on husbands telling lies to the wives, only bachelors can tell!"

4. **Naqsh-i-Fariyadi**

Synopsis in "On the Air:

"*The Composer's Fancy*

GENIUS inspired by his love for a girl and later haunted by the creations of his own fancy is the theme of a psychological play which AIR Delhi will broadcast next fortnight. Entitled "Naqsh-i-Faryadi, it is a biographical sketch portraying in sombre colours the tragic fate of the composer who, alter creating many immortal works of music, ultimately found himself frustrated in love, when his compositions seemed to take shape and pursue him like the furies. The author is Saadat Hasan Manto and the play will be on the air on February 7, at 10.0 p.m."

5. **Timur Ki Maut**

Synopsis in "On the Air":

"The Death of Timur"

Interest in AIR Delhi's forthcoming feature in Hindustani entitled"Timur Ki Maut", will be heightened by the recent news of the reported find of the great conqueror's grave, somewhere in Western China. The varied adventures of Timur, or Tamerlane as he was popularly known, included the conquest of most of Persia and Caucasia, the invasion of India, the capture of Aleppo and Damascus and the defeat of the Turks at Angora in 1402. His death, while

invading China, closed one of the most memorable chapters in the history of Asia. A dramatised version of events leading up to his death will be broadcast from Delhi on December 6."

6. **Film Ki Taiyari**

   Description in Program Schedule:

   "A Hindustani sketch written by S.H. Manto, produced by the A.I.R. artists
   CAST
   Seth: R.N. Mehra
   Director: Shakeel Ahmed
   Story writer: Kazi
   Manager: Aziz Siddiqui
   The film world has always been an object of great curiosity and glamour to the world outside. Apart from its glamour, the Indian film world is quite an amusing place, especially with a staff such as you find in this play."

7. **Ek Mard**

   Synopsis in "On the Air":

   "The second play- "Ek Mard"- has a mystery theme. A few girls, talking leisurely in a college hostel, receive an anonymous letter from a man. The letter is full of paradoxical epigrams and brave new ideas. No wonder it strikes their imagination. But what do they do about it? This, again, is a mystery which will unfold itself on May 23, at 10 pm, when the play will be on the air."

   Description in Program Schedule:

   "Play in Hindustani by Saadat Hasan Manto
   He loved them. Did he? There were many who were skeptical about this Sacred Passion. There were others who took it laughingly, and he who loved, didn't know what to do about it. He attempted to come in to the play and find out things for himself. Once he was very near stumbling in to the play but somehow couldn't succeed.
   Production:- Krishan Chander."

8. **Napoleon Ki Maut**

   Synopsis in "On the Air":

   "Death of Napoleon

There are few who, face to face with death, can maintain the courage and poise that might have marked their earlier life. Some even among the so-called high and mighty are known to have trembled on the threshold of the great beyond. Napoleon may be said to be one of these: atleast he was not quite sublime on his death-bed. He suffered from a growing peevishness, interspersed with fits of hallucination of his summer glory. Yet there was an element of grandeur in his last living moments. This dramatic aspect has been cleverly emphasised in S.H. Manto's Hindustani play, "Napoleon Ki Maut" to be broadcast by A.I.R. Delhi on March 29."

9. **Babar Ki Maut**

Synopsis in "On the Air":

"The Death of Babar

A spirit of romance & adventure generally pervaded the life of the founder of the Moghul empire. But the episode most remembered today is the one connected with Babur's death, when he thought of a terrible way of saving his son, Humayun laid up with a serious illness. Based on this incident, A.I.R. Delhi will produce a very realistic play entitled "Babar Ki Maut" which will be broadcast on Sep 20, at 10 p.m."

10. **Intizar Ke Do Rukh**

Description in "On the Air"

"IN S. H. MANTO'S PLAY "Inti- zar Ke Do Rukh", the lover, highly strung, is waiting for the loved one to arrive. At last he exhausts himself with worry and falls asleep. That is how she finds him when she arrives. No wonder she is piqued because there's another side to the picture: she had to apply all kinds of tricks to surmount almost insuperable obstacles in getting away from her home. The play presents both these sides of the picture (AIR Lucknow; May 16)."

11. **Talluwwan**

Description in "On the Air"

"A woman's caprice is the theme of the Hindustani play "Talluwwan", to be broadcast from Delhi on January 3. Nilam has two admirers. One is a poet, the other is not. Nilam does not like the poet because of his bohemian ways, and erratic tempera- ment, but likes Jamil, who behaves like a normal, sensible man of the world. But one day the poet does something very strange which puts Nilam into a capricious mood. The play is packed with developments of

much psychological interest."