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**PARTITION'S FORGOTTEN DOUBLE: RECEPTION  
HISTORIES AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF  
MANTO'S STORIES ON THE PARTITION**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of  
Master of Philosophy.*

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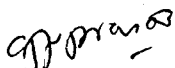
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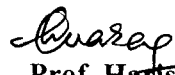
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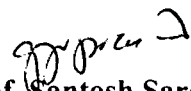
CERTIFICATE

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Certified that this dissertation titled, Partition's Forgotten Double: Reception Histories and Cultural Contexts of Manto's Stories on the Partition, submitted by Saikat Ghosh, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is his original work and has not been submitted, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university/ institution. This may, therefore, be placed before the Examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of master of Philosophy.

  
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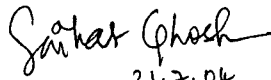
  
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This dissertation titled, Partition's Forgotten Double: Reception Histories and Cultural Contexts of Manto's Stories on the Partition, submitted by me to the Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma in this or any other university or institution.

  
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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction: Rethinking the Tragic Circumstance

*"I have known,...as a whole culture has known, a tragic action framing these worlds, yet also paradoxically and bitterly, breaking into them: an action of war and social revolution on so great a scale that it is continually and understandably reduced to the abstractions of political history, yet an action that cannot be finally held at this level and distance, by those who know it as a history of real men and women, or by those who know, as a quite personal fact, that the action has not yet ended."*

----- Raymond Williams in *Modern Tragedy* (13)

### I

In the Preface to the first available anthology of Partition Stories, the historian, Mushirul Hasan, insisted that the fictions constituted an alternative archive of the event (*India Partitioned vol.1: Preface* 9). As against a banal and repetitive recital of statistical facts, these narratives were seen to be affirming an experiential domain in which the event unfolded itself as an "epic tragedy". This particular piece set the tone for an entire range of consecutive reflections on Partition Literature that have presumed that experience, unmediated by the 'grand narratives' of political history, is the sole legitimate key to comprehending the pathos and suffering that surrounded the Partition. Such a way of constructing an opposition between conventional historiography and literary or other subjective accounts appears to be factored by the importance that scholars have attached to a certain notion of 'experience' that Partition Literature is seen to embody. Of course, to that extent, one would have had to assume that Partition stories are homogeneous by virtue of this intrinsic and peculiar quality of experience, otherwise inaccessible. To question whether such an assumption is tenable is to simultaneously demand a close consideration of the history in which the emergence of an identifiable category of 'Partition Narratives' as an object of discussion and study lies embedded.

Mainstream histories of modern India are perceived to have confined themselves to a mere formal elaboration of the postcolonial nation-state and its coming into being with the Independence from British colonial domination.<sup>1</sup> Revisionist scholars have argued that their exegetical thrust and near-complete dependence on government documents have betrayed their statist bias. In a self-conscious euphoria about Independence, the discipline of history has been found guilty of inadequately and indifferently investing itself in a critical remembrance of the Partition. A contemporary scholar of Partition Literature, Ravikant, feels that a cultural field around the event has been created precisely in opposition to such an occlusion of people's voices:

The Partition, here, is not just a clinical, administrative exercise: it is the price some people have paid for freedom. Independence and Partition are not two mutually exclusive tropes, but are linked with each other in an inseparable manner, products of the same historical processes. Literature, in this sense, represents a space where voices resistant to elite national narratives find expression. (Ravikant and Saint 70)

While he rightly draws our attention to “invisible” (Nandy 156-211) ways in which Partition has played an equally crucial role in shaping our postcolonial destiny, his position also presumes a problematic separation of codes and values between the governing and the governed. In other words, the ‘popular’ becomes here, an abstracted and reified space peopled by innocent victims hurled into the vortex of a nightmare by self-seeking politicians, faceless bureaucrats and fanatical agents of communal hatred. Such an imagination recurs in most other mechanical generalizations about the event. In a more recent essay, “On Narrativising Partition”, Sukrita Paul Kumar states:

It is a well-known fact that many people, particularly in the rural areas, in their simplicity and unawareness of the reality of political division, had never anticipated the havoc of Partition. (Settar and Gupta 230-31)

Posing as axioms, these opinions elide the specificities of a larger social crisis that Partition signifies and also do not offer any insights into the spread of a communal

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<sup>1</sup>Gyanendra Pandey, a historian of the Subaltern Studies Collective, has been most stringent of the nationalist models that govern historiography in school and college text-books. See Pandey. “In Defense of the Fragment” in *A Selected Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995*. Ed. Ranajit Guha. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1998. 3-9

ideology that contributed to it. Instead, they argue for a certain essential unison of cultural voices by soliciting superficial regularities in fictional patterns. As M. Asaduddin informs us, “The majority of these stories are anchored in the ‘composite’ Indian culture and history and are set against the background of the high politics of Partition” (Settar and Gupta 315) without studying the particular ways in which such a compositeness is narrated and how the agents of its destruction are represented. This possible basis for the creation of Partition Narratives as a separate discursive space has been, for the most part, responsible for a narrow association of the “collective and individual tragedy” (228) with a romanticized subaltern subjectivity.

In order to understand why fictions of a cohesive popular, non-urban India have, in the last few decades, so strongly influenced academic interpretations of the reality of the South Asian division, one has to note the context of a perceived split between the teleology of the State and that of its people during the time when an interest in studying the causes and effects of the Partition was being revived. The perception of democracy in the earlier Nehruvian decades had been inextricably linked to the fortunes of the nation state. With the passing of that era, our society witnessed widespread civil insurgency and the crisis of a state imposed Emergency. The general disenchantment suffered by the country’s intelligentsia which had hitherto been the strongest votary of the Congress inspired vision explains how this split got modeled into a crude state/civil society dichotomy. Much of the academic reflection on those times chose not to formulate the crisis in terms of an available set of dialectical oppositions that are endemic to the structure of a bourgeois society; instead, the state and the people were represented as two mutually independent and conflicting entities. The innumerable studies of State apathy and repression or social resistance reveal this kind of representation. Even so, this drastic transformation in the conceptualization of democracy does not explain why Partition narratives should be seen as offering us a predominantly experiential and ‘immediate’ sense of the event compared to political history that renders an impersonal and exteriorised account. The assumed spontaneity of the idioms through which most narratives have explored the experience of Partition is questionable, not only because modern Narratology has sufficiently attended to the interdiscursive nature of all literature,



but also because the Partition has, in **noteworthy** instances, been narrated **through** a mixture of devices, some of which **resemble** the prevalent ones used in **media and** government documentation.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, **there** is enough evidence, like in the case of the All India Progressive Writers Association, of macro-political interests **impinging upon** the ways in which writers have chosen to refer to or depict the Partition. In spite of **these** obvious markers that Partition Narratives contributed variously to the domain of **high** politics and have been, in turn, informed by developments in the same, scholars have most often read such literature without seeking the correspondence of meaning **between** culture and political nitty-gritty, instead choosing to relegate politics to the “background” against which the “existential absurdity of hatred” is dramatized (Settar and Gupta 314).

Ideas of culture, argues Partha Chatterjee, have been sanitized of political questions at most crucial junctures in the process of acquiring our national identities. In his work, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee notes that the history of anti-colonial resistance in South Asia had to be negotiated through a unique structural split created in native discourses about society in order to facilitate a particular nationalist consciousness. This split between an “inner” sacred core and an “outer” transforming appearance was in response to the anthropologised absolute difference between the East and the West that underlay all forms of colonial governance. The nationalist elite modeled a national imagination on the basis of this division where the public/outer dimension was a politically mediated and therefore, changing one while the private/inner identity was made into a repository of timeless tradition. Chatterjee observes:

...anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains of the ‘outside’, of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed...and the ‘inside’ or the spiritual, on the other hand, is a domain bearing the

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<sup>2</sup> Ganda Singh’s “A Diary of Partition Days” cites newspaper reports appearing in *Tribune* and *Dawn* to establish the authenticity and objectivity of his own testimony. See the same in *Journal of Indian History* 112.1 (1960): 205-80

essential marks of a cultural identity. (6)

In Partha Chatterjee's argument, this model becomes a premise for the strongly policed boundary between the 'home' and the 'world' in a colonial society which, in turn, has been used to resolve questions of culture and codes of dignity structuring the modern sensibility. One feels that the view of 'experience' as an unmediated core of this sensibility; as something more real and concrete than the political location and social being of the subject stems from this problem. Thus, we witness a strategic distancing of experience from history itself and measuring this very distance is a phenomenology of the postcolonial subject who considers politics to be a remote structure of relations that shares nothing with his inner world. Most theorists of Partition Narratives have hence tried to have us believe that an experiential processing of the event can find its legitimate form only in artistic and literary genres that are not as firmly grounded and limited in historical periods as other discourses and forms are.

It is true that in many fictional accounts of the Partition, the event is seen as disruptive of a seamless tradition of communal harmony and organic inter-community relationships. In more idealized variants, ethical actions constitute a reinforcement of the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh solidarity even at face of peril. In their book on Partition Literature, *Orphans of the Storm*, Saros Cowasjee and Kartar Singh Duggal have eloquently described this desperate attempt on the part of writers to circumvent the emergent political reality connected with the League's demand for the political autonomy of Muslims from the Indian State as an ambiguous gesture that lacked creative confidence:

Almost all the fiction on the Partition by Indian writers ignores Mohammed Ali Jinnah's two nation theory...Is such an omission a failure on the part of writers to keep pace with the ever-changing face of politics or is it because the two nation theory appeared too parochial a subject? Whatever be the reason, many Indian writers and a good few Pakistani writers did show Hindus and Muslims as one people. Ennobling as the subject seemed, its execution often ended in a stereotyped plot in which a Hindu or a Muslim rises defiantly above communal and group feelings to embrace his opposite number in everlasting brotherhood. (Introduction: xvii)

The agony of loss and helplessness felt by the victims in these stories is often evoked through particular forms of lyricism that refer to either an idyllic link between man and nature that has been severed or the vision of a golden past. These narratives carry a definite experiential charge but the experience is obviously an abstracted, idealized one. The abstractions in these cases are perhaps more subtle than the vacuities of political history but are also more dangerous precisely because they are able to disguise themselves in everyday attitudes and popular or folk idioms. In order to reveal the structure of feeling present in such ostensibly 'common' experience, Dipesh Chakrabarty studies a range of accounts of rural pasts, written after the writers, Hindu-Bengali refugees, have had to flee their village homes in East Bengal during Partition and settle down in Calcutta. In the essay titled "Remembered Villages", Chakrabarty notes that the trauma of victim hood and violence invariably expresses itself as nostalgia for the pre-Partition past. This past is an impression conveyed primarily through the trope of kinship with both nature and 'other' men (Hasan 323). The impression itself is constructed as a simple and necessary opposition to the complex and alien reality of the urban space (318-19). Of greater importance in Chakrabarty's discussion is his recognition of several allusions to Hindu myths that enable the writers to organise the image of their pastoral unity. Even though the Muslims are represented as a part of this kinship, they are made to fit into a dominant Hindu culture and are not much more than mere functions in the narratives (333). Chakrabarty concludes that this idyllic construction of the past 'home' "only emphasizes the inexplicability of communal violence and the sense of trauma that the violence produced" (333). This example shows one of the ways in which the Partition is constantly disengaged from any real historical process and is presented in an aura of ruin and interiority.

In the recent past, critics have pointed out that more than any other genre, Partition novels have repeatedly tried to contrast social disintegration leading up to the event to a harmonious, even amicable inter-community past.<sup>3</sup> There are two issues connected to this peculiarity of the novelistic discourse, as it figures in early twentieth century India, that

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<sup>3</sup> Rupinderjit Saini analyses the patterns in a large number of Partition novels conforming to the 'progressive' strand of cultural nationalism and concludes that the "failure of the Partition novel to grapple with the relationships between the communities is not just an artistic deficiency" but was "tactically unsuitable". See Saini. "From Harmony to Holocaust: A Study of Community Relations in the Partition Novel." *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (1994):103-112

need to be engaged with if the relationship between novels and the literary representation of the Partition is required to emerge with some clarity. Firstly, why does the novel, which is forward looking in its narrative resolutions, celebrate the past as a positive origin and present the contemporaneous in images of ruination? Secondly, how does the sentiment of kinship and stable relations get reconciled with the modes through which the novel individuates its characters? One can explain the first contradiction of pattern by noting that the native Indian novel, functioning as an imaginative carrier of a nationalism which is also directed against British Imperialism, seeks to reflexively narrativise an emergent diversity of identities within the framework of a colonial hegemony as an obstruction to the goal of a sovereign social unification.<sup>4</sup> Thus, change is read as disintegration in the novel's transformation of the present into a sign of the unacceptable. For a perspective on the second problem, let me start by examining a position that attempts to justify the sentiment. In one of his early reflections on mainstream modern Urdu novels referring to the Partition, Aijaz Ahmed writes:

The event of the partition of the subcontinent as in fact it occurred, meant a sudden break with ancestral homes and history for which the writer was not prepared, not emotionally. The price of the romance was a readjustment in the terms on which one lives with one's past and the memories of that past. The writer had now to choose new, partly arbitrary, attitudes towards his memories. Since the future was going to be so consciously different from the inherited past, the past had to be reconstructed, its meaning recaptured, so that one could again be reconciled with it. Nostalgia was a totally necessary and conscious creative act, perhaps the only one possible. (qtd. In G.C.Narang)

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<sup>4</sup> The novel is known to be the only modern genre that creates its own legitimacy by offering it through the logic of its narrative structure. In this sense, it resembles the epic which, though, is a pre-modern form. Hence, writings on realism have famously referred to the novel as a modern epic. Linking the project of the novel to the consolidation/expansion dynamic of Imperialism, Edward Said reminds us: "...the novel's consolidation of authority is not simply connected to the functioning of social power and governance, but made to appear both normative and sovereign, i.e. self-validating in the course of the narrative. This is paradoxical only if one forgets that the constitution of a narrative subject, however abnormal or unusual, is still a social act *par excellence*, and as such has behind or inside it the authority of history and society." See Edward Said. "Narrative and Social Space." *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994. 92

There are certain crucial things that have been left unsaid here. Firstly, Ahmed does not tell us the institutions and codes that “nostalgia” refers to. Secondly, while making a necessity of arbitrariness, he conceals the point that the writers’ craft could not afford to be arbitrary as they had to follow a certain narrative logic imposed by the prevalent notions of the genre within which they were working. This logic revolved around the sentiment of nostalgia for a golden past that, if we read Ahmed against the grain, had to be posited as the promise of a nationalist future.

In an important comparative study of the novelistic representations of the Indian national movement in British and Indian Literature, Teresa Hubel takes up the case of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers!*, which was published in 1947. While it is generally considered to be a representative work of Progressive school, this novel also exhibits all the historical evasions that, according to Hubel, are a regular feature of the realist Indian novel of the Twentieth century. She points out that despite the proximate history of Congress corruption in the electoral politics of 1937, the widening fissures in the freedom struggle between Hindus and Muslims, Bhattacharya chooses to paint the Congress as a symbol of people’s unity resonant of a lost civilisational unity of the past. This is where the nostalgia is seen as determining the formal closures of its narrative. The heroes of this novel are middle-class, ‘enlightened’ Indians who typically sacrifice a life of material well-being in order to lead the poor countryside lot towards the sacred service of the motherland. All the conflicts in the novel are between personal interests and the sense of duty towards a great collective. These conflicts finally get resolved, quite predictably, in favour of the need for unification against the British. The hero, Rahoul, possesses a majoritarian understanding of the nation which is revealed in the way he imagines the problems faced by the Indian masses as expiation of the sins that they had committed in their past lives, ignoring thereby that the “moral tradition” thus invoked overlooks the Muslim non-endorsement of the Hindu conception of the “*samsara*” (Hubel 206). Likewise, the general native culture posited in the novel is recognizably constituted through Hindu practices “masquerading as a pan-Bengali culture” (206). She further comments:

The righteousness of the Indian fight for freedom being the principal

theme of Bhattacharya's novel, a ferocious British enemy must be posited, against whom patriotic Bengalis can demonstrate their solidarity. That the ferociousness of the British and the solidarity of the Bengalis was open to question by the time he wrote *So Many Hungers!* compels Bhattacharya to evoke nostalgia to make his point. But it is actually the nostalgia in these novels that alerts us to the details of their particular construction. For nostalgia implies a certain dissatisfaction with the present and the present, for Bhattacharya, is not an evolutionary step forward but an inevitable decline. (183-184)

The only oppositional forces in the novel are the colonizers and a homogeneous mass of toiling and starving people, led by middle class revolutionaries. The novel is strategically set, not in the present but a few years earlier, during the Bengal Famines of 1943-44. Representing the famines as a sole handiwork of the imperial masters, the author conveniently elided the mention of the upper and middle classes' role in black marketing and hoarding of food grains (198). Moreover, the otherness of the peasant women is completely denied as they become one of the middle class hero's family, "analogous to his mother or sister and belonging to him, the eldest son and heir, in the same way that they might" (200-01). That Bhattacharya was writing this novel when the Partition riots had already begun is surprising because there are no references to it. The reasons, as Hubel explains, are its formal limitations which have hitherto prevented him from exploring the historical contingency of resolutions, the newly visible social complexities and the diverse implications of colonial and postcolonial modernity. On the other hand, the famines provided the narrative scheme with an adequately dramatic moment in history that nevertheless helped conceal the growing consciousness of heterogeneity in mass politics:

That in the midst of this carnage Bhattacharya could write a novel about the peaceful unity between Congress and the peasants of Bengal, implying that such harmony existed throughout India, indicates his powerfully nostalgic vision. Unable to create a golden age around him, he creates an era when there was one. He is looking for innocence and solidarity, and he turns to a famine to find these virtues because famines – with their disastrous

urgency and enormous need – seem to strip issues of their complexities. But innocence and solidarity exist in his **Bengal** of 1943 only if readers, following Bhattacharya's paradigm, narrowly define conflict in pre-1947 India as purely anti-imperialist in scope. (207)

Thus, we see how the realist tradition of the Twentieth century, developing under the surveillance of Progressive stalwarts like Mulk Raj Anand (197), did precious little to distinguish itself from the nationalist fiction of the earlier century and was almost as limited by the narrowly envisioned fight against imperialism as was the reformist naturalism practiced by the Nineteenth century pioneers of the South Asian Novel. This skewed engagement with the reality of social experience rendered the realist novel incapable of signifying the layered and contested meanings that the Partition held for people who were affected by it.

The Partition, as writers like Joginder Paul (*Kwabrau*, 1990), Raza (*Adha Gaon*, 1966) and Jeelina Bano (*Aiwan-e Ghazal*, 1999) have revealed, also saw the breakdown of a feudal order of social relations in many parts of rural India (Majeed and Ehtesham 50-51). With life under the aegis of the two newly formed nation states, urban settlements of refugees and a new system of bourgeois contractual relations within which all the hopes and failures of survival had to be played out, the protagonist of the novel very often became someone who could provide the reader a sense of the involvement and continuity, however frayed, with those ways of life that had either disappeared or were being threatened. In the light of Ahmed's statement, it need only be recapitulated that his nostalgia is for a past fashioned inside a belief structure that is invested with familial ideals. Historically, the family has been an emphasised idea in the interests of a middle class that otherwise, due to growing individualism and competition, encounters a hostile and estranged world. The family becomes the site of reconciliation and closure; stable meanings can be taught as all values and ideals are made to discover their sociality within the space of the family. Numerous eighteenth and early nineteenth century English novels

are a case in the point.<sup>5</sup> In Partition novels, the reality surrounding the event is also a period of transition from a settled, familiar world to a dislocated, unfamiliar one. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, the only vision of continuity is available through the prism of the family, within which characters become measurable, subject to moral scrutiny, socialized and thereby individuated. The gradual displacement of characters and the ruin of the family become the only images through which the novelist can lament the Partition.

The Partition has proved to be a tragedy in a wider sense than what novels, with their totalising scope, have been able to represent it as. The violence of the event has touched people in ways much worse than can be imagined by simply reading about the dissolution of stable communication between people, estrangement in families and other social groups based on language and regional culture, loss of lives, property and honour and a confusion of identities. Harmonious traditions, celebrated by most writers, often prevent us from gauging the extent and variety of violation. For instance, Urvashi Butalia has recently made us aware of the atrocities committed against Sikh women in Thoa Khalsa, Rawalpindi district, by men of their own families and community to keep the feudal encoded sense of honour and dignity intact (Hasan 178-207). One does not find incidents like these accorded a tragic place or even a situation that questions our conventional notions of tragedy in the Partition novels that one reads. Niaz Zaman, in her work, *The Divided Legacy* (2000), contends that novelists writing about the time of the Partition, notably Qurratullain Hyder and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, either evaded completely or kept the event at a distance, not exploring its minutiae but using it to qualify our pride at Independence (59-61). It should be noted that these evasions and points of silence are not the negative expression of suffering but the formal inability to render or describe violations that fall outside the scope and access of the ethical conflicts visible in the narrative space of the novel. We have to remind ourselves that the nostalgic attitude towards a familial past cannot only be seen as emerging from the pressures that the

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed and rich analysis of the ways in which political ideas get mediated through familial structures in a bourgeois world and its corresponding novel, refer to Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987. 96-161



Partition exerted on the writer as it has been structurally inherent in the entire process of creating the dominant semiotic of the nationalist motherland.

Of immense significance is the fact that rather than the novel, the form that has, in recent years, caught the attention of scholars engaging with various issues related to the fictional representation of the Partition is the short story. This is not surprising, considering that the most complex and ambivalent rendering of the event has been glimpsed in writers who have chosen to write in this particular form. However, the short story and its relationship with the novel at the crucial juncture marking the birth of the two postcolonial nation states have hardly been critically examined. More importantly, the predominant views regarding the role of fiction in the ways we choose to remember the Partition seem to have been influenced by the novel. Conjecturing that the novel has been the most important and widely accepted literary index of modern Indian history, the short story is understood to be basically derivative of the novel and therefore not requiring of a separate framework of study. This perception ties up, in all probability, to the larger process of privileging the novel as the sole legitimate narrative mode of history and of conflating realism with reality. One cannot argue for or against this idea without discerning the ways in which the two forms have previously positioned themselves in relation to the nation and the relationships between people, languages, communities and interests that dominant currents of South Asian nationalism have encoded. Nevertheless, one can use as a starting point, the awareness that the form of the novel in India itself limits our imagination of tragedy by inscribing the sense of the tragic within conservative institutional beliefs that are then not seen as giving way to newer structures but are rather caught up in an apocalyptic vision of collapse. Tragedy is realized in a society in its consciousness of the irreversible movement of time and history. Of course, the tragedy associated with the Partition can be sensed in its fullness only when the event is understood as part of an historical process and not as an aberration or interruption to a process. The novel, having developed within a body of 'national literatures' sanctioned by dominant strands cultural nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is unable to lend us this consciousness. Scholars of Partition narratives have nevertheless chosen to privilege the experience of the novel in their comprehension of all that

constitutes the tragedy of the times. Raymond Williams has warned us against this myopic acceptance of conservative forms as true reflections of experience:

The tragic meaning is always both historically and socially conditioned, but the artistic process in which a particular disorder is both experienced and resolved is more widely available and important. The essence of tragedy has been looked for in the pre-existing beliefs and in the consequent order, but it is precisely these elements that are most narrowly limited, culturally. Any attempt to abstract these orders as definitions of tragedy, either misleads or condemns us to a merely sterile attitude towards the tragic experience of our own culture. (Williams 52-53)

The novel has been discussed in these pages not as the most visible form in Partition Literature but as a structural paradigm that has influenced both the mainstream fictions of the event and our reception of them<sup>6</sup>. In my opinion, there are short stories that have inherited the prejudices and propensities of the novel and have not been able to deviate much from the formal conventions as well. We should remember that many famous fiction writers of those times, for instance, Krishan Chander, Upendranath Ashk, Ismat Chughtai, Vishnu Prabhakar and Bhisham Sahni, wrote novels as well as short stories. In their stories, Partition violence is either depicted through clichéd images like corpse laden trains journeying across borders and riots that are orchestrated by civil society's 'others': "goondas...criminal classes...not the ordinary residents of towns and villages, hard working and God-fearing Hindus and Muslims - in a word, not people like us" (Arnold and Hardiman 200-01) or through silence that is supposed to render an essentially incommunicable trauma. In referring to clichés as tropes, traditional criticism chooses not to address the question of how certain effects and their design, i.e. how the tropes themselves have been used to certain political interests. In other words, tropes have to be seen as developing in specific situations and contexts. According to Arjun Mahey, most Partition literature makes the magnitude of pain inaccessible to the readers' imagination and therefore, a matter of speculation, by displaying it as "silence" (Ravikant and Saint

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<sup>6</sup> There are novels that are considered to be representative of Partition Literature and broadly define the paradigm. See Khushwant Singh. *Train to Pakistan*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1986. See also Bapsi Sidhwa. *Ice-Candy Man*. London: Penguin, 1989.

138). This silence, he further adds, has also revealed itself in the inability of almost all major writers to write about the partition till the event was safely past and lodged in people's memories. Mahey writes:

For a number of years after the event, no writer of any renown on either side of the new border rescued an adequate sense of lucidity to approach the issue. Something had been permanently lost, and the inadequacy of mere words was discerned throughout the north of the country in an understood code of silent mourning. (138)

This tells us that not only were most writers unsure of how the Partition had effected the people of South Asia in its widest social sense and therefore did not want to come across deviant or controversial, but also that later criticism has accepted their silence without questions as a clear signifier of loss.<sup>7</sup>

We have surely come across enough evidence where pain has not found suitable expression in language, where language and its ability to communicate trauma have been doubted. However, our wider apprehension of tragedy has compelled us to seek writings that have not relied on silence, that, in situating themselves within a radical intuition of history, have transcended limitations and exposed the description of pain to altered linguistic and formal possibilities arising from radical change. Saadat Hasan Manto's Partition stories, in their formal diversity and unconventional content, have offered the scope for this re-examination of the relationship that fictions share with tragic events in history.

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<sup>7</sup> That silence has often been strategically employed by dominant interest groups to suppress marginal voices and interpretations of the event, much like the silent maneuvering of a changing social reality in novels, has been strongly argued in many recent works that have chosen to revisit the event from the perspective of gender and marginal political interests. Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin and Sudesh Vaid have been some of the pioneers in this project.

A later historian, Ayesha Jalal, writes: "If women had been intrinsic to the rearticulation of social identities and the reapportioning of domestic space under colonial conditions, they were of key significance to the projects of the new nation-states of South Asia. Symbols of communitarian identity turned ornaments of national sovereignty, women's fate has been so interwoven with the discourse on citizenship rights underpinning the balance between state and civil society in the subcontinent as to stand out as a metaphor for the unfulfilled claims of Pakistani [and] Indian national narrations. The reconfiguration of state and civil society, public and private space, as well as the individuals and the community, was sought to be based on silencing and erasing the sufferings of these women." See Ayesha Jalal. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1350*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2001. 565

## II

*Siyah Hashiye* (Black Margins) is a collection of extremely brief, anecdotal and ironic pieces focusing on Partition violence. Published in 1948, it offers its readers a unique quality of description that has never quite been encountered again in Partition Literature. Employing the form of news briefs and short reports, the writer sketched the everyday reality of that time in dead-pan, ostensibly neutral tones. Though this collection has been featured in most anthologies of Partition Literature in the last few years, critics in its own time hesitated to analyse its literary merits. Of critical interest is the fact that *Siyah Hashiye* happens to be the first creative fiction attempted on the Partition; it had the event as its sole reference point (Khalid Hasan xix). The sketches in the collection have no plot or development; they are fragmentary and offer situations replete with irony and suggestion that demand a reflective distance on the part of readers. Animating the situations are many voices belonging to different social registers – all participating in giving the situations their fullness, and therefore all of them culpable in the predominant atmosphere of horror that the situations convey – creating an overwhelming polyglossia. I use the term ‘polyglossia’ intentionally as language representative of different idiolects corresponding to various social types are used to dialogically signify the situation, with the result that different meanings often collide with each other, taking the shape of “puns” (Flemming 73) that create a “contrast between the characters’ understanding of the events...and the reader’s deeper (and on reflection, horrified) understanding of both characters and incidents” (73). Without developed characters or narratives, the sketches render an expressionist mood of the Partition wherein the ‘backdrop’ of the event assumes the primary importance. In the sketch “Taqseem” (Division), two fellow thugs have agreed to divide their booty, a looted trunk, equally and are devising ways of executing the partition when a stranger leaps out from the trunk and cuts them up with his sword (Khalid Hasan 184-85). The community affiliations or motives of these characters are not stated and as readers, we are not allowed to share a moral or emotional intimacy with them. Likewise, all the other sketches also illuminate aspects of the event without ever letting the violence objectify any particular identity. Neither is the witness’s position ever revealed. However, not once is the reader drawn into trivializing the enormity of the horror.

The author of this collection, Saadat Hasan Manto, has since then been the target of numerous attacks and varied accusations from his own contemporaries, fellow writers and later critics (Wadhawan 75). While Progressive writers of his time felt that the sketches were unable to adequately comment on the human condition and were instead invested with the unqualified hatred of an anti-humanist, later critics regarded Manto's attitude towards the grim events as "flippant" (Flemming 74). Leslie Flemming described the collection as symbolic of the writer's non-engagement with ethical questions surrounding the event:

In short, all of these anecdotes, despite their themes, are ultimately jokes, which depend for their effectiveness not on the chilling horror of their themes, which are clearly secondary, but on the readers' understanding of the puns and verbal ironies which they contain. (74)

In order to comprehend this vitriolic reaction against Manto, one has to look at the ways in which the literary establishment around him was responding to the specific historical moment.

We have to remember that no writer in any Indian language had attempted a literary depiction of the Partition as early as Manto had. The riots were far from over and wounds were fresh. The literary world felt incapable of taking stock of the holocaust and of representing it within conventional linguistic and plot formats. Besides, the dominant group of writers, poets and artistes who had hitherto worked for a social vision of an independent, democratic and united India came to perceive the Partition as a shocking betrayal of that vision. In an interview given to Alok Bhalla, a prominent Progressive writer from that era, Bhisham Sahni, recollected:

What puzzles me, however, is that in a highly civilized society...that up to 1947 no one could have imagined that such a holocaust could have occurred...In 1947, every assumption we had about ourselves as a people and a culture – about the restraints and mutualities which governed our daily behaviour – suddenly collapsed. Why did that happen? Incidentally, the same thing happened over the same period of time in a highly civilized society like Germany. What is puzzling about Germany, as it is about India,

is that the collapse into barbarism takes place during a time when the intellectual discourse is about how to make a rational society even less vulnerable to violent collapse. (Hasan 347)

The perplexed state in which most writers and intellectuals found themselves was also a state of personal shame. They had claimed to have represented the socio-political reality of the country accurately till the time of the Partition when the reality was suddenly discovered to have slipped out of their hands. This perhaps goes some way in explaining why the progressive intellectuals of South Asia chose to see the Partition as an aberration or a mistake.<sup>8</sup> Besides, an inherited sense of culture and time consciousness was completely at odds with the new reality. We will have ample occasion to discuss this aspect in later chapters when we examine Manto's departures from the Progressive brand of realism, but for now it shall suffice to state that these sundry circumstances produced a condition of paralysis for writers. Partition scholars have interpreted this as a response of mourning but one needs to look beyond the apparent and note that this period of lull was more a time of self-guardedness for the literary institutions that were faced with extreme uncertainty, not only about their own futures but also about the progressive agenda. That Manto refused to abide by the general and implied code of silence and wrote the sketches was in itself seen as a transgression. The criticisms and accusations leveled at him were, by any standards, harsh and only one critic who was a staunch anti-Progressive, Muhammed Hussain Askari, defended him (Wadhawan 76). The animosity was compounded by the dispassionate and cold tones in which the sketches were penned. The controversies surrounding his earlier stories were again revived in order to establish a continuum of sensationalism in his writings. The cumulative infamy was brought back to bear on the interpretations of *Siyah Hashiye* and this resulted in people labeling Manto a "pornographer of violence" and his fiction, a "dossier of barbarity" (Pandey 62).

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<sup>8</sup> Memorable in this regard is Faiz's poem, "Subah-e-Azadi", where the poet has lamented the moment that he and his friends had always longed for. Bilal Hashmi and Nawaz Gardezi have pointed out that the role of Muslim intellectuals in the twenties and thirties had been a "synthesizing one" in response to the rapidly spreading view that the Muslim community represented sectarian interests and communalism. While communalism was seen as the strongest hurdle to nationalism by the Congress, the secular intellectuals of the Muslim community rallied around the vision of a composite national culture without paying adequate attention to the problem of a politically majoritarian democracy. See Hashmi and Gardezi. "The Structural and Cultural Context of Intellectuals." *South Asian Intellectuals and Social Change*. Ed. Yogendra K. Malik. New Delhi: Heritage, 1982. 217-232

There is adequate evidence available to conclude that Manto did not remain **unaffected** by the Partition. His fictional masterpieces like “Toba Tek Singh” and “Khol Do” obviously attest it but even his essays written immediately after he migrated to Lahore in 1948 reveal his disturbed mental state. In the article that became the introduction to his collection *Thanda Gosht*, “Zahmat-e-Mehr-e-Darakhshan”, Manto wrote:

For three months, I could not decide anything. It seemed as if a number of films were being projected on to the same screen at the same time. All mixed up: sometimes the bazaars of Bombay and its streets, sometimes the small, swiftly moving trams of Karachi, and those slow moving mule-carts, and sometimes the noisy humdrum of the restaurants in Lahore. I simply could not make out where I was.

(qtd. in Bhalla 77; transl. Harish Narang)

In fact, the experience of the Partition left an indelible scar on Manto’s psyche, to the extent that he had to be treated for lunacy and in his final years, which did not go much beyond the event, he waged a losing battle against alcoholism which finally claimed his life. In his biography of Manto, Jagdish Wadhawan felt that the last phase of the author’s life, spanning the years after the Partition till his death in 1955, was marked by an inwardness that gets reflected in his writings (Wadhawan 171). While this claim is debatable and does not seem to be based on adequate evidence, it can still be read as hinting at a prolonged period of loneliness that the writer suffered from, after shifting to Pakistan. Surviving letters that Manto wrote to one of his closest friends, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, testify to this. (cf. Issar: “Qasmi ke naam Patra” 279-281). Ismat Chughtai has also rendered a poignant description of the intense emotional suffering that Manto went through after shifting to Pakistan, in her essay, “My Friend, My Enemy”(Chughtai 239-40).

The details concerning Manto’s personal life have been brought back, time and again, by critics who have wanted to read his last stories in terms of his own pathologies and anxieties. A romanticized portrait of the author, that emerged as a result, clouds our perception of the historical and political relationships which Manto shared with the post-Partition nation-state and its official culture which constitute the objective basis of some

of the meanings in his last literary endeavors<sup>9</sup>. On the contrary, no critic has, to my knowledge, paid any serious attention to a deep intellectual crisis that informs the experimental energy of his last stories: the crisis of having to necessarily withdraw himself from the pain and yet not become insensitive to it. From another point of view, this can be looked at as the problem of having to objectify the Partition through his writings and yet not take recourse to any myth or a sentimental reverence towards the past.

Most studies of Manto's fiction have discussed his ambivalent relationship to the Progressive Writers' Association. Some, like Leslie Flemming's *Another Lonely Voice*, have attributed this ambivalence to the author's inability to take consistent and well-thought out stands and have even gone to the extent of seeing an evasion of politics altogether in his later writings (Flemming 75-76). The fact that Manto had sometimes been invoked as the literary guru of writers and critics who practiced a formalist, psychological and withdrawn brand of *Jadeediyat* or Modernism (his later association with the anti-progressive group, 'Halka-e-Ardab-e-Zauq' has encouraged this view) gave critics the opportunity to see Manto's later works as consciously apolitical and even anti-humanist (Ashk 37). At best, he has been portrayed as a romantic humanist who slipped into moral cul-de-sacs in many of his stories (Azeem 81). All critical reception contemporaneous to Manto's time seems to agree that his treatment of human subjectivity is esoteric and untranslatable in terms of a social exteriority.<sup>10</sup> His stories were seen to be revealing of an overwhelming egoism which, according to critics like Hanif Ramey, helped make "heroes out of dictators like Napoleon who made the satisfaction of his ego, the sole end of his life" (cf. Issar 33). A narrow theoretical grasp of Phenomenology and its tensions with Marxist representations sometimes gave rise to facile descriptions of

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<sup>9</sup> In an essay published on the occasion of Manto's death, "Badzabaan", Ali Sardar Jafri wrote: "He had to go to the madhouse twice because he was sensitive. Being outspoken, he had to be tried in court several times... Because he was fiercely independent, he had to starve... You ask why he was foul-mouthed? Because the world had abused him and a million others like him!" See Jafri. "Badzabaan". Mantonama. Ed. Devendra Issar. Delhi: Indraprastha, 1981. 313 (translation mine)

<sup>10</sup> The Progressives were not the only ones who felt this way. In "Hashiya Aarai", Muhammad Hussain Askari opined that *Siyah Hashiye* was not the study of the Partition but an aesthetic triumph in the delineation of pure motives and fundamental moral forces that govern the 'oppressor' and the 'oppressed'. See Askari. "Hashiya Aarai." Ibid. 238-39



Manto as an existentialist<sup>11</sup>. Stories like “Bu” (Odour), “Dhuan” (Smoke) and “Hatak” (Insult) are cited as examples of the author’s expression of an experiential view of life that transcends its mundane manifestations<sup>12</sup>. Even if one agrees with critics on this count, how can this view be reconciled with the stoic recording tone of the horrific daily rhythms during Partition in *Siyah Hashiye*? Why is the transcendent, overarching subjectivity of the author missing from it? Why is there no experiential unity in this work? These are questions that have yielded no answers for those who have tried to impose continuity on Manto’s works without paying due attention to their breaks and rough edges, without situating these in a context where history shares a troubled relationship with meanings. In my assessment, it is precisely this context that Manto was engaging with in his sketches. His understanding of the experience of Partition was first and foremost premised on a radical reassessment of cultural signification in our society, which, in not changing itself to suit the requirements of a drastically transformed reality (Pakistan and India were two nation-states not only claiming autonomy in terms of political territory but culturally and historically as well), disabled the mimetic endeavour of art and literature. I argue that perhaps the political deconstruction of an *a priori* subjective experience was what Manto realised to be the pressing need for creating a new ethical *topos* from where Partition could be sensitively narrativised.

As an example of what I have conjectured, I shall briefly discuss the sketch, “Jelly”. A child, accompanied by his mother, is crossing a neighbourhood street where a lone ice stall stands. We are told that the man who used to sell ice from this stand had been

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<sup>11</sup> In an essay on modernist developments in Urdu Fiction, Devendra Issar argues that Manto has influenced the existentialists by thematically foregrounding the dissolution of a culturally recognizable selfhood and the alienated subjectivity. In his opinion, Manto’s search for the ‘lost self’ marked his formal innovations. See Issar. “Adhunik Urdu Kahani: Gumshuda Vyakti Ki Talaash.” *Adhunik Urdu Sahitya*. Eds. Devendra Issar and Maheep Singh. New Delhi: Abhivyanjana, 1981. 12

<sup>12</sup> Critics like Mumtaz Shirin and Gopi Chand Narang have ascribed to this view. Narang has gone a step further and generalized Manto in the following words: “Manto, in his finer moments, is attuned to the symphony of the mystery of creation, and in his symphony his dominant note is the note of sorrow. The sorrow of existence, the loneliness of the soul, and that unfathomable suffering, *dukha*, which is part of the music of the infinite. Many of his protagonists turn out to be more than life-size, more durable, more lasting than mere frail men and women of flesh and blood.” See Narang. “Manto Reconsidered.” *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Ed. Alok Bhalla. Shimla: IAS, 1997. 12

My opinion is that these views about the writer serve to mystify his fiction and work collaterally with other rigid modes of interpretation towards building up, for the reader, a view of the author as a man alienated from political concerns and indifferent to the social dimension of tragedy.

murdered early in that morning. When his body was taken away by the police, the strewn slabs of ice and the blood that had dribbled onto them stayed. On spotting the coagulated blood on the ice, the child exclaims, "Look mummy, jelly" (Khalid Hasan 192). The obvious interpretation of this sketch is that the horror of the situation cannot be comprehended by the innocent child. However, on examining it more closely, one recognizes that the signifier "jelly" which is otherwise meant to refer to an aesthetically experienced innocence is displaced in order to capture the violence that shocks a civil society and its culture that constructs an association between children and innocence in the first place. Apart from this, Manto also used signifiers like 'hospitality' and 'non-violence' in "Modesty" (201) and "For Necessary Action" (188), respectively to question cultural identity and to sever experience from the naturalizing impulses of a civil society that had, through its 'public' institutions, come to claim an identification with the entire nation. As an insider to this civic culture, Manto seemed compelled to address its linguistic and experiential registers which would always create tendencies to see the violence of Partition as an irrational disruption of its own cherished ideals. This critique remained unnoticed till much later when, after fifty years, Alok Bhalla pointed it out:

Part of the fascination with these stories seems to lie in the fact that, while other writers about the partition often find a place in a place in their narratives for moral men who refuse to abandon their belief that it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it on others and who refuse to accept a politics without rules of virtuous conduct, Manto mockingly asserts that all civil societies are designed to legitimise our worst impulses and rejects man as a creature who has any ethical sense. (Bhalla: Introduction xi)

This is undoubtedly an interesting and confident moment in Manto criticism but it still shows the problems of an inadequate historicism. Bhalla is not able to point out the specificity of Manto's writing and despite locating his critical emphasis, ends up offering the readers a portrait of active cynicism. It is noteworthy to remember that Manto's accusations are not leveled at "all civil societies" but a specific one at a crucial point of time in our history. Secondly, Manto could only be seen as rejecting the ethical aspect of humanism at the cost of paralyzing his own subjectivity and its creative intentions. Manto's case was as unique as the historical juncture in which he was writing and any



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forced attempt at salvaging a universal truth for his works is bound to expose a methodological shortcoming. Seeing the tragic experience of the Partition manifest itself as cynicism in Manto is not far from describing his works as an “encyclopedia of terror” (Bhalla, qtd. in Pandey 63). Gyanendra Pandey replies to this charge by questioning the ahistorical assumptions that it is based on:

Does the proposition that violence made the Partition of British India what it was – a critical (traumatic and repeatedly re-cited) moment in the establishment of two nation-states and the life of their newly constituted peoples – automatically amount to “telling stories of violence” and accumulating a “dossier of barbarity”?...Has the eternal (natural) character of our moral being been too easily assumed? (Pandey 63)

During the time that Manto was preparing his sketches for publication, he was also prolifically writing non-fictional pieces for various magazines and newspaper columns in Pakistan. It can be said that through these, he was reflecting on his own shifting location from within an educated, tradition-conscious middle class consciousness to its limits. In articles like “Savere Kal Jo Aankh Meri Khulein” (When My Eyes Opened, Last Morning), he mourned the transformation of his beloved and lazy Lawrence Bagh into a restless and crowded space, renamed as Jinnah Bagh (Issar 232). Nevertheless, his fictions acknowledge the historical change that underlay this metamorphosis of known and secure spaces, associations and lifestyles into alien entities and experiences. That the sense of tradition and familiarity is also the proprietorial illusion of a bourgeois world is not left unregistered in them. In a later story, “Sahae”, Mumtaz who leaves Bombay because he has to transcend a familiar world in order to understand tragedy in its larger social implications echoed Manto’s own tragic need to distance himself from Bombay and move to Pakistan; a journey which no friend or close associate could plausibly explain, considering the fact that Bombay had been home to the writer for years.

Of the Partition stories that Manto wrote during the last five years of his life, many are hailed as products of rare genius. Some, though, are seen to be flawed and examples of the writer’s peculiar inconsistency. One feels that the immediate success of “Toba Tek

Singh” was, therefore, partly due to what many readers and critics have seen as the most poignant self-assertion in modern literature in the form of the madman, Bishan Singh. His ‘no man’s land’ situation became Manto’s, especially since Manto himself remained torn and divided between his adopted nation and the one that he had had to give up. We are aware that this plight was not his alone and this awareness should help us deflect our attention from the singular heroism of a character like Bishan Singh to a collective sense of tragedy when we read and speculate on the possible meanings that “Toba Tek Singh” offers. This has often not been the case. In the introduction to an edited volume of Manto’s stories, M. Asaduddin interprets the final image of the story:

The reader vividly recalls the ‘demented’ Sikh lying between barbed wires marking the borders of India and Pakistan, in the so-called ‘no man’s land’, refusing to accept the division of the country... It is the image of a no-where man, an existential exile, a marginal man whose fate is decided by the politics of attrition indulged in by short-sighted politicians. (*For Freedom’s Sake*: Introduction i)

Note how stereotypical descriptions such as these impose the burden of an ethical courage on a peripheral subject whose situation denies him such a possibility. At the same time, the critic insists that this obstinate heroism of the character has a meaning that challenges any political meaning of the Partition. Such an invocation of tragedy either depoliticizes a society or it glosses over the pathos of a madman. One is not hinting, here, at an isolated instance of misreading. For long, Bishan Singh’s character has been catapulted to the status of a hero in Partition Literature by individuals and establishments who have not wanted to see their own implication, their own part in the tragedy stand exposed. Sukrita Paul Kumar’s reading is also content at pointing fingers at culprits and further proposes that all those who could not ‘achieve’ the moral stature of Bishan Singh should be ungenerously seen as people standing opposed to the ‘exalted’ appeal of Universal Reason:

The last scene of the story rejects Partition outright by making ‘sanity’ lie flat on no-man’s land, while those who seem to accept the new boundaries by migrating, even though under pressure, remain lunatics.

(Settar and Gupta 230)

Manto may not have intended to confuse our notions of sanity and lunacy in this story. Read in the light of his wider oeuvre, one can argue that Manto was aware of the historically contingent and changing distinctions between madness and reason. The only reason why Manto should have used Bishan Singh and the lunatic asylum in the story is that he wanted to show a picture of the society that has lost its collective sanity, its control over moral decisions. In mimicking the outside world, the lunatic asylum never claims a greater sanity. Moreover, the focus of the story is Toba Tek Singh: a divided place, and not Bishan Singh himself. In the final moment of the story, the place where Bishan Singh falls is a no-man's land not because it is untouched by the reality of division but because it is indeterminate and symbolic of the uncertain destinies of most people. The no-man's land exists by virtue of the division and constantly draws our attention to it. Toba Tek Singh becomes the emblem of a recurrent nightmare of Partition that threatens its victims. It is questionable whether the story shows that the world of lunatics is morally superior to that of the sane. After all, Jinnah and Master Tara Singh and their divisive rhetoric are replicated by the 'impersonators' within the space of the asylum in the last anxious moments that madmen spend before the process of exchange begins. In fact, it challenges the more conventional notion that the politics of the sane do not effect the insane. The prejudices and contentions of the world outside prevail within the asylum space as well and show that a historical tragedy claims victims among everybody.

Literary criticism of Partition stories have frequently searched for universal meanings and images of suffering. This way of looking at literature robs it of its historical voice. Though being made to stand before us as an icon of Partition narratives, Manto is a casualty of such efforts. Once established, these meanings and images have contributed to a general way of writing about and referring to stories of the Partition. If it is unfortunate that writers like Manto have been made to fit into the logic of a sensorium or a range of impressions that Partition narratives are made out to be offering, then the critical responsibility of recovering the historical nature of meanings in their stories also stays with us. This is only possible if we recognize that the troubled relationship that Manto has shared with his critics is a part of that history too.

## III

Saadat Hasan Manto has been made available to our time not only through re-editions of the stories, essays and plays he had written but also through all that has been said or written on these works, on him, his life and leanings, successes and failures. There is a sufficiently vast body of discourse that creates and structures the revival of Manto today. Biographies, textual criticism, edited correspondence – all of these help us recognize that which is ‘characteristic’ about Manto’s writing and that which is not. Through this we are encouraged to pay close attention to the relevance and cultural importance of the characteristic Manto and to forget all that does not resemble the constructed persona. Hence, the moment one starts considering how Manto as the author is placed in a specific relation to his texts, one encounters certain urgent theoretical problems.

Firstly, what helps us establish Manto as the author of particular texts? Is the ‘author’ a natural figure that one comes across in any given text or is it a certain function that makes possible the organisation of a cluster of texts into an oeuvre? The author signifier is supposed to refer to a particular truth value and cannot, under usual circumstances, be used interchangeably with the ‘writer’ or ‘narrator’ of any fictional piece. Michel Foucault, in his work, “What is an Author?”, informs us that the author is a juridico-legal term that emerged in a context where attributions of literary works became doubtful and contested. He also reminds us that the work’s “status as property is historically secondary to the penal code controlling its appropriation” (Foucault 124). This implies that in conditions where a text cannot be used indiscriminately, the author becomes a necessarily regulative function. The much publicised five court trials where Manto had to defend his stories against charges of obscenity point to the ways in which a legally identified authorship assists juridical regulations on discourses that are considered to be “transgressive” (124). The author also plays a related but different role in the construction of a discursive field around literary texts. The critical discourse of literature does not establish authorship by simply attributing a certain piece of writing to an individual. It does so by creating, firstly, a division between the narrator of a piece and the author to ground an integrated perspective and consciousness of the entire current of narration and

secondly, by explaining the moments of contradiction in that current as either inconsistencies or as unreliability of the narrator. Therefore, Foucault further adds:

It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the 'author-function' arises out of their scission – in the division and distance of the two. (129)

The direct agency of the author here becomes as tenuous an issue as is the ego's control over all the three levels of consciousness in Freudian suggestions. Nevertheless, political criticism cannot completely ignore the author's agency in giving a direction, however contingent, to his or her created text. It creates a structural distinction between the author and the narrator and examines the construction of the author as a historical act that is revealing of certain political interests in criticism as much as it is of the ways in which a social order chooses to remember a writer at any given point in history. For Foucault, the writer is a figure who slips away from critical focus because of the insistence on the 'author'. While his ideas seem challenging enough in the contexts of early New Criticism or Structuralism, historical criticism anticipates the general problematic of the author-function by seeing the 'author' as a historical site where the moral, legal, and political discourses of a society converge momentarily. The implicit demolition of the 'author' in Foucault's essay also amounts to the denial of this historically contingent moment. On the other hand, Foucault does not help us to see that the writer is a periodically biographed figure lending critics a basis to argue their version of stability in given texts. The symbiotic relationship that the writer and the author have shared in traditional criticism points towards the possible ways in which the author helps us understand and revise our perceptions about the writer from time to time. Therefore, in Manto's case historical criticism has to address the critical establishment of the author and writer as an act of subject-creation by studying both the form in which he chose to narrativise his accounts as well as the critics' perception of the social forces that converge in the site of his subject creation within the texts. For instance, does the short-story let us invent an author-subject identical to the one presumed in the case of a novel? If not, then what are the new ways in which we can start talking about the author in the context of this specific form? On the other hand, the problem of agency itself requires relocation in this thesis whereby its premise, whenever discerned, will be shifted from the individual writer to the

society that he has written in and about. This premise, even if it is not clear, has to refer to the explored conditions of historical possibility that make certain writings lend themselves to moments of radical objectivity even in their discerned fragments. It is only in the vision of such a society that we may witness the strategic effacement of the writer and the emergence of the truth of his writing.

Through a study of the contexts that link up Manto's stories of the Partition to their interpretations, I seek to reflect on the historical meanings of the tragedy and on the society as the main actor in the tragedy. The image of this society, very much present in Manto's works, is a material double to the author himself – forgotten every time we have sought to read these works without being sensitive to the objective relationship that we ourselves share with them. Such a relationship is still in the making and the conclusions that the study can yield are far from final. The issues it will engage with, for instance, the link between criticism and ideology, between history and our ways of thinking about the nation, identities and communal conflicts, between self-representation and the 'other' - are not settled ones either and so, the study itself is bound to be partial and contingent. However, the effort will not be wasted if historicity is restored to the meanings that surround Manto and his stories are found compelling enough to make us rethink the history of the Partition.





## CHAPTER 2

### Subjects of the 'Real': Biographical Criticism and the Early Stories by Manto

*"Please don't go by the manner of his words."*

--- Krishan Chander on Manto; "Urdu Adab ka Shankar"

The first collection of Manto's short stories, *Atish Pare*, appeared in 1936. That very year, the inaugural conference of the All India Progressive Writers' Association was held at Lucknow where the famous writer, Premchand, delivered the presidential address. Though the AIPWA's manifesto announced an unambiguous emphasis on the role of Literature as a medium of social justice and also revealed its aim of leading a socialist cultural revolution, Premchand made a plea, in his speech, for the relative autonomy of literature from programmatic politics (Majeed and Ehtesham v). He appealed to other writers to strike a balance in the depiction of the inner and outer worlds of their characters, explaining that the individual's experiences, feelings and aspirations are not simply reducible to social problems. There are two apparent reasons why he may have felt the need to do so. Firstly, the AIPWA was a conglomeration of writers with diverse influences, who had agreed to write from a single platform because they felt that the culture of that time needed to take an explicitly democratic, anti-elitist and anti-imperialist turn. The strength of this diversity could not be jeopardised by encouraging proscriptive intentions to take hold of the Association. Secondly, Premchand's own writing had begun to acquire a new complexity in so far as his earlier largely simplistic portrayal of the nationalist sentiment was beginning to get nuanced in the new problem of Dalit identities and other marginalized subjectivities that he had started exploring (vi). It can be assessed from later stories like "Kafan" (The Shroud) that Premchand's later phase was marked by a certain literary ambivalence towards the question of nationalism (cf. Rubin: *The World of Premchand* 14).

Almost as an ironical testament of Premchand's anxiety, the Progressive Writers Movement grew to eminence in the next decade and held an unprecedented sway over the entire nation but its decline occurred with alarming rapidness thereafter, finally resulting

in a complete dissipation of its energies. This happened because it managed to come under the indirect control of the Communist Party that tried to impose a Soviet- realist agenda on the writing. By the late forties, most talented writers had drifted away from the organisation. Manto was close to many Progressive writers and his own writings have been considered by most critics as being in broad conformity with the Progressive agenda. However, he himself never became an official member of the Association and instead, in his later years, shared a stormy relationship with it (Wadhawan 7-8).

The context of the Progressive Writers' Association becomes significant in understanding the ways in which Manto's image as an author had been constructed by his contemporaries and later critics because his literary career has often been biographed in relation to the movement. For instance, in her book length study of Manto's works, *Another Lonely Voice*, Leslie Flemming has devoted a chapter to a description of the author's life, wherein she has initially shown how Manto came close to the Progressives through his early stories, influences and his days as a student in Aligarh; in the second half of the chapter, she depicts his steady estrangement from the movement due to the changing emphases in his writings and his inability to persevere as a realist story teller (cf. Flemming 2-21). In Abu-Said Quraishi's *Manto* (1955) and Upendranath Ashk's *Manto: Mera Dushman* (1956), the pattern is pretty much the same wherein his life is measured in accordance with the moral standards of a later, dogmatic 'Progressive' phase and he is ultimately found wanting in sensitivity and commitment – a fault ascribed to his proud and solipsistic nature. Before one starts mapping the pattern in detail, a brief recapitulation of the history of intersection between modern Urdu Literature and the Progressive movement seems in order because Manto, despite having no formal affiliations with the latter, inherited such a history.

Historians of Urdu Literature claim that there have been two moments of watershed in the development of modern Urdu fiction.<sup>1</sup> The first one refers to the time immediately following the Mutiny of 1857 when, with the first tidal wave of nationalism, literature

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<sup>1</sup> See Ralph Russell. *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1992. 77-82; 191-193

was felt by its arbiters to be requiring a more definite social function. Muslim reformist leaders like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan propagated the use of Urdu literature in social upliftment, cultural modernisation of the Indian Muslims and the active dissemination of the nationalist sentiment in their imagined collective consciousness. Though this period can be seen as the start towards the identification of Urdu as a specifically 'Muslim' language, that is, as a linguistic register of the Muslim identity, its still undifferentiated usage by the masses in the United Provinces meant that Urdu had a significant, though sometimes ambivalent, role to play in the construction of a 'national literature' (cf. Aijaz Ahmed; 1993: 19-35). Thus, *fin-de-siecle* Urdu literature acquired a socially aware and reformist character. Departing from the earlier tradition of the prose romance or *dastaan*, the didactic novels of Nazir Ahmed employed easy and accessible language to cater to the students and women of the Aligarh community. However, Ijlal Majeed observes that the first sign of maturity in Urdu prose fiction can be glimpsed in Mirza Hadi Ruswa's novel, *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899). Majeed writes:

Bringing together both the traditions of romance and didactic literature, Mirza Hadi Ruswa created the first novel in Urdu, titled *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899). All the important features of the novel, especially a unified and powerful plot structure and individuated characters, can be found in this work. Despite having a moderate tone of didacticism, it manages to be an aesthetically fulfilling creation. (ii) (translation mine)

Besides being acknowledged as the first fully developed novel in Urdu, *Umrao Jan Ada* also bears significance in helping shape the cultural relationship that Urdu has shared with other Indian languages, primarily Hindi, since then. Written at a time when the cultural sphere in North India was becoming steadily nationalised, the novel presents a protagonist who is a courtesan: a structural anti-thesis to the 'mother-image' constructed in most nationalist fictions.<sup>2</sup> The figure of the courtesan dislocated the familial myth of nationalism and in doing so, decisively revealed the problematic relationship between the

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<sup>2</sup> In an interesting piece of discourse analysis, Uma Chakravarti studies the references to women in fictions as well as non-fictional reformist literature and concludes that the image of the 'Bharat Mata' was culled out from numerous select emphases on Vedic texts recovered by the Orientalists. See "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past." *Recasting Women*. Eds. K. Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989. 27-87

Urdu/Muslims and the Hindi/Hindus which would further continue to fester and settle in as the darkest side to South Asian Nationalism. If the desexualized image of the mother became the primary symbol of a nationalist ideology<sup>3</sup>, then, as Aamir Mufti assesses, “the trouble that ‘Muslim’ represents for nationalist discourse is enunciated through the excessive and ‘improperly’ sexual figure of the prostitute” (Chatterjee and Jegannathan 5-6).<sup>4</sup>

The figure of the prostitute, recurrent in Manto’s fiction, can be seen as a strategic borrowing from Ruswa’s novel, not only because it militates against the mother-figure but also because it helps shed light on the network of mercantile-capitalist relations within which nationalism was being developed.<sup>5</sup> To begin with, the prostitute draws our attention to the sexual division of labour in the society by becoming a figure of transference of the woman from the domestic space to the economy of labour circulating in the market, or as Kumkum Sangari puts it, “from customary structures of

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<sup>3</sup> The year after the publication of Ruswa’s work, Saratchandra Chatterjee’s novel, *Devdas*, had begun to be serialized in the Bengali nationalist magazine, *Bharatvarsha*. It appeared in the book form in 1917. In *Devdas*, the prostitute lover of the hero, Chandramukhi, gives up her occupation and this act becomes the index of her high moral character. The contemporaneity of the two novels and the rise of a cultural nationalism during that time make the contrast an interesting case for the articulation of cultural difference. For this point, I am indebted to a discussion with my friend, Moonis Ijlal of *The Indian Express*, New Delhi. Incidentally, Saratchandra Chatterjee was a signatory to the AIPWA’s inaugural session, along with Rabindranath Tagore, Pramatha Chaudhuri and Nandalal Bose from Bengal. See Sudhi Pradhan, ed. *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents 1936-1947*. Calcutta: PPH, 1979. 21

<sup>4</sup> Recent studies of South Asian Nationalism have drawn our attention to the fact that the nationalists decided to close ranks on the question of women as this was perceived to be the most negotiable issue in the cultural politics raging between the British and the emergent native bourgeois elite. Not having to stand in stark opposition to the colonial government’s legal reforms regarding sati and widow remarriage, the bourgeois nationalists could now start codifying the ‘modern’ Indian woman whose primary allegiance to the family and nation would be through the self-sacrifice of desire and an emulation of the ideal of motherhood and generation. See Partha Chatterjee. “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question.” *Recasting Women*. Ibid. 233-253

<sup>5</sup>We obviously have to remember that Umrao Jan’s context was the declining feudal order of Lucknow. In that sense, the novel did not thematically confront its contemporary nationalist fictions written in other languages. The courtesan Umrao had a much more central role accorded to her by the culture of Lucknow. In many cases, real life courtesans corresponding to Umrao’s character had a say in administrative appointments and political relations within the nobility. Besides, they certainly were the most important arbiters of the *Lucknawi* fashions and trends. This courtesan, unlike Manto’s prostitutes still cannot be seen as the excluded other of a national community. However, this literary precedence of Umrao as a novel’s protagonist becomes a strategic point of reference for the historical meaning of Manto’s constant engagement with the realities surrounding prostitutes in the growing metropolises of South Asia. For a historical representation of the courtesans’ life in nineteenth century Lucknow, see Veena Talwar Oldenburg. “Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow.” *Lucknow: Memories of a City*. Ed. Violette Graf. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1999. 136-37

availability...to public availability in the market through exchange” (Sangari 358). The nationalist critique of a ‘decadent’ colonial society has often vilified the prostitute as a symbol of self-willed commodification and thereby concealed the realities of prostitution as dictated by the same set of patriarchal arrangements which were used to conceptualise the domestic realm of a national culture (359). In Manto’s “1919 ki Ek Baat”, the narrator’s condemnation of Thaila’s sisters, who took money to perform a show for their brother’s killers, is an example of this tendency of concealment. The discredited narrator’s unwilling admission of this incident to his co-passenger and his subsequent abuse for the sisters reveals the hollowness of his earlier nationalist pride. This narrative moment becomes an effective critique of the dominant and patriarchal ideation of the nation. The ‘Muslim’ as emblematic of separatism in later nationalist discourse is also a figure that, like the prostitute, does not yield to a voluntary association with the nation as family. Mushirul Hasan has pointed out that the image of a backward and fanatical Muslim, largely derived from colonial representations of Indian Muslims, was used by the Hindu nationalists to mark the entire community as an obstructive force in the way of progress and secular unity (Ludden 203). The communal problem, he further argued, was a result of the dominant Hindu nationalism’s refusal to accommodate the cultural difference of the Muslims into its vision of a politically democratic nation-state. Ruswa’s novel marks that radical point in the development of Urdu literature when the semantic adjacency of the ‘prostitute’ and the ‘Muslim’ gets formally registered. Of course, the relatively empowered courtesan thriving on feudal patronage cannot be considered as identical to the helpless prostitute plying her trade in the *petit-bourgeois* market place of Manto’s fictions but Umrao Jan can definitely be seen as a worthwhile precursor to aid the interpretation of Sultana’s character in “Kali Shalwar”.

The War interregnum and the rise of Fascism in Europe changed the experience of Urdu literature once again. Writers combating the cultural forces of imperialism used the experience of European anti-fascist fronts to visualise a revolutionary goal for literature. In keeping with this vision, the AIPWA was founded by luminaries like Sajjad Zaheer

and Mulk Raj Anand in 1936.<sup>6</sup> Prior to this, Zaheer and his friends, Ahmed Ali, Rasheed Jahan and Mahmud-uz-Zafar, had published their own stories in a collection titled *Angaarey*. The collection was marked by a starkness of depiction that not only purported to realise the moral and political imbalances and inequalities of the colonial society but also expose the burdens of a repressive and decadent tradition on the natives. *Angaarey* was a call for moral revolution among the middle classes and quite predictably, the colonial government banned it. The stories were not unique in their literary merit and imagination but the circumstances of the collection made it stand as an example for many young writers who constituted the Progressive movement. The staid readership of Urdu fiction had been given a jolt by two controversial literary efforts in 1935: Premchand's "Kafan" and the collection we have been discussing thus far. Between them, they had presented a range ideation and criticality in Progressive fiction. Hence, the movement became a platform for all writers who wanted to depict their society in realistic and candid terms, exposing the various forms of exploitation in it, its sexual and moral hypocrisy and its retrogressive norms. However, this apparent freedom was not unconditional.<sup>7</sup> The literature emerging from under the Progressive banner had to be explicitly nationalist and also had to present the poor and the marginalised in a glorious light. One of the Association's spokespersons, Hasrat Mohani stated the normative pursuit of Progressive Literature in the following manner:

Our literature should...support and defend workers, peasants and all oppressed people. In it, the joys and sorrows of the people, their best desires and wishes, should be expressed in such a way as to increase their revolutionary potential and allow them, once they are united and organized, to be successful in their strivings. (qtd. in Flemming 25)

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to Carlo Coppola. "The All India Progressive Writers' Association: The European Phase." *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature*, vol. I. Michigan: Michigan State University, 1974. 1-31

<sup>7</sup> Mulk Raj Anand saw the Movement as a vehicle for the assertion of a people's nationalism and encouraged its members to recover past traditions, linguistic systems and idioms of culture. Premchand did not agree with this view of glorifying tradition as he thought that its cultural indices were also a measure of social hierarchies. For him, the fundamental challenge facing the Progressive writer was whether he/she could herald a new consciousness which shared little with tradition. For a documentation of this debate, see Rajarshi Dasgupta. *Marxism and the Middle Class Intelligentsia: Culture and Politics in Bengal 1920s-1950s*. Unpublished D.Phil. Dissertation; Oxford University, 2003. 94-95

There were two necessary fallouts of this demand for Urdu writers. Firstly, Muslim intellectuals writing in Urdu had address a pan-Indian readership and its interests which meant that Progressive Urdu Literature would not reflect the real and crucial anxieties of Indian Muslims who were feeling increasingly alienated by the majoritarian rhetoric of the nationalist Hindu leaders like Sardar Patel and the rising visibility of organisations like the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha in the politics of cultural nationalism (Jalal 370-385). Secondly, the charitable romanticisation of the subaltern as toiling masses that are essentially beyond petty self-interest and sectarian intentions implied that Progressive literature would not be able to thoroughly explore the processes of subject formation and the spread of divisive ideologies within the national movement. This of course never meant that Progressive writers ceased to be sensitive to the reality surrounding them but it did mean that a narrow definition of secular unity within the Progressive paradigm resulted in a limited access to reality on the part of the involved writers. In fact the pressure on the writers to relentlessly portray poverty at the expense of most other issues during the great famine of the forties resulted in inane and simplistic pictures of a rapidly transforming Indian society. Commenting on a wide range of Progressive fiction published during this time in a leading Hindi journal, *Hans*, Alok Rai made the following observation:

Many of the poverty stories...are characterised by a kind of rhetorical excess, an apparent uncertainty as to whether the scenes of misery amid which the 'progressive' imagination is constrained to wander are really miserable enough, the horrors sufficiently horrible. This leads to a kind of sentimental flagellation which provokes not so much the generous human responses which it is intended to provoke but, rather, cynical parody...(Hasan 358)

It is at this point of time when the appeal and influence of the Progressive Movement in Urdu literature started waning. Nevertheless, the movement had proved to be a boon for modern Urdu writing as it acquainted this field with the best international writing of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries and also helped it search for new modes of representation as well as new idioms of expression (cf. Qamar Raees 42-63).



Saadat Hasan Manto belonged to a generation of writers who had broad sympathies with the Progressives, even when they were not a part of the movement. It is easy to understand that social realism and an anti-establishment spirit were the chief impulses for most literature during his time and therefore, these impulses seem to have driven his writing as well. Whether Manto failed to conform to the rigid standards of realism set by the movement or whether the Progressives themselves were inadequate realists as compared to Manto is not the question that can help us understand the emphases in the early realist criticism of his stories.<sup>8</sup> Instead if, as critics have claimed, Manto's writings were significantly different from those of the Progressives, one is required to situate this difference in the cultural history of that period in order to extract meanings that enable readers to assess his contribution to a connected but radically dissimilar trajectory of Urdu fiction.

### **Social Consciousness and Questions of Realism**

In her exhaustive study of Manto's works, Leslie Flemming sketches a continuous pattern in the author's writing from an earlier, explicitly realist phase to a later, abstract one in which Manto is perceived to have divorced himself from all political concerns and concentrated on rendering a purely psychologised view of the life around him. This transformation, in her estimation, is paralleled by a change in the author's own life from the optimism and revolutionary zeal of youth to a "disillusioned" and pessimistic outlook that characterised his later life (Flemming 38-55). The stories in *Atish Pare* are based on the political reality of colonialism and Manto ensures that his characters are made to confront the questions of power, justice and patriotism. In stories like "Tamasha" (The Spectacle), where the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919 is examined from the point of view of a child, Flemming feels that Manto's writing benefits from a wide awareness of reality and a belief in the solidarity of the oppressed (39). However, the same collection also contains stories like "Inquilab Pasand" (The Revolutionary) in which, as Flemming points out, the isolation of man and the corruption of political will are depicted with an

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<sup>8</sup> Later critics, largely responsible for putting the writer back into critical focus, have defended what they thought to be a vigorous realism in his stories. Some have even hailed him to be a greater realist than Krishan Chander and Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi. See, for instance, the essays by Harish Narang and Ashok Vohra in *The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Ed. Alok Bhalla. Shimla: IAS, 1997. 69-89; 129-140

engaging intensity (40). The critic is not able to reconcile these two tendencies in the early Manto and concludes that the latter propensity to portray the estrangement of the individual from collective politics and the resulting sense of despair is one that gradually developed through Manto's literary career and marks all the stories of his 'mature' phase.

Between 1936 and 1942 (the year in which his third collection, *Dhuan*, appeared) Manto wrote a number of stories that dealt with the relation between the bourgeois oppressor and the labouring, hapless poor. Stories like "Khooni Thukh" (Bloody Spit), "Jee, Aya Sahab" (Here I come, Sir) and "Imtahan" (Examination) were some of these which foregrounded the contested issues of caste, servitude and unemployment respectively. Critics have usually felt that these stories are limited to commenting on the particularities of hierarchical relationships and that they are not able to illuminate the systemic flaws that help perpetuate such instances of control and subordination (cf. Flemming 41). This charge can be held true but one must be attentive to the available definitions of 'system' in Manto's time as well. For the native intelligentsia living in colonial India, the 'system' was an alien one on which all that was apparently going wrong – all the anomalies of our culture – could be blamed.<sup>9</sup> Seen in this context, the inadequacy of Manto's initial stories

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<sup>9</sup> One example of this point of view concerns the issue of communalism. Whereas an earlier stage of Indian Nationalism actively supported the crystallization of community identities in the name of tradition, in the Nehruvian 'moment of arrival', it consistently disassociated itself from any communal agenda in a bid to establish secularism as a firm foundation for the modern national society. Communalism became nationalism's 'Other' in this final phase. For a more elaborate argument, see Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1990.

While there is a general view that sees communitarianism as different from communalism, Pandey argues that the modern constructions of the communities have been informed by enumerable differences between one and the other. Communitarian support systems like the various reform societies often insidiously spread communal antagonism through discourses on the nation and communitarian political sovereignty. See also, Saumya Gupta, "Vartman: The Daily Reality of the Partition." *Translating Partition*. Ed. Ravikant and Tarun Saint. New Delhi: Katha, 2001.

The largely 'secular' analysis of communalism was based on the awareness of erroneous and exploitative economic policies pursued by the colonial government. Economic disparity became the cause, so far as causality could be attributed to such sticky issues, of the spread of communal interests. For the enlightened class, communalism was an affliction limited to the professional classes employed by the Government. In this regard, Ainslie T. Embree quotes Nehru from his speech given on the occasion of the Punjab Provincial Congress of 1928: "Communalism is an outcome of anger and passion, and when we regain our tempers it will fade into nothingness. It is a myth having no connection with reality and it cannot endure. It is really a creation of our educated classes in search of office and employment" (qtd. in Embree 79). See her book, *Utopias in Conflict: Religion and Nationalism in Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1992.

Nationalist historiography has also endorsed this view while explaining that the colonial model of industrialisation and its practice of discouraging rural artisans brought about an immense and negative cultural transformation among natives that resulted in the steady erosion of age old symbiotic rural bonds

does not become excusable but neither does the demand, on the part of critics, for a wider and more basic illumination of the system remain beyond suspicion. In the third collection which featured stories like “Naya Qanoon” (The New Law), “Kali Shalwar” (Black Trousers) and “Dhuan” (Smoke), Manto ostensibly wrote the last of his stories that could be described as conforming to the realist mode. Critics like Leslie Flemming and Alok Bhalla have interpreted two stories from this collection, “Naya Qanoon” and “Narah” (The Slogan) as signs of Manto’s disillusionment with politics. It is interesting, however, to note that the same critics have agreed that in these stories, Manto had taken pains to develop his characters and not settle for ideal-typical representations of the subaltern figure (45). Distancing itself clearly from the realist tradition of its days, “Narah” tells an impressionistic story of a down and out peanut seller in Bombay, one of the teeming millions who migrated to the city from villages in North India, with dreams of prosperity metamorphosed into the nightmare of a rootless survival in the uncaring and unforgiving atmosphere of the metropolis. The peanut seller has been unable to pay his room rent to his landlord as all the money he earned in a month has been spent in buying medicines for his ailing wife. He meets the landlord and explains his situation, hoping to be forgiven, but the insensitive “seth” abuses him and violates his sense of dignity. The story chooses to depict the utter isolation of the man through impressions in which the objective reality of sounds, smells and sights in the Bombay streets become hideously transformed as internalised details of his alienated ego. Though he considers avenging the insult by roughing the “seth” up and robbing him of his cash, he ends up giving a vent to his ire by shouting an empty, pathetic slogan which is lost in the noisy humdrum of the city.

Censuring the author for a psychologised maneuvering of the narrative, Flemming argues that the story fails to offer any political vision. She reasons that Manto’s lack of interest in exploring the protagonist’s fate through social criticism and his glorification of anarchic desires makes the story an example of inferior realism and surface criticism:

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between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and brought about a sense of competition with regard to ownership of resources and the opportunities for livelihood. Accordingly, the tensions created in this new culture presumably got translated as communalism. See, for instance, Bipan Chandra. *Communalism in Modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1984.

Where the story is weak, however, is in the kind of solution it proposes for Gishu's difficulties. In the course of his ruminations following the seth's curse, Gishu considers a number of possible courses, including joining a revolutionary group. He rejects all of them...not only does Gishu not consider any change possible, but that the course of action that appeals to him the most is that of personal revenge against the seth. (49-50)

The strangely adamant demand on the part of the critic to make the writer mould his character's destiny in ways that bring out the promise of a mass social revolution is reminiscent of the iron-handed control that writers were subjected to during the later progressivist phase. Here, one can discern that the critic herself forces the reader to firstly include the story in a codified realist stream of literature and then invites him/her to find it wanting. A similar but more aggravated problem of forced reading is glimpsed at in the available critical interpretations of "Naya Qanoon". Here, the central character, Mangu, a tonga-driver, reacts to his own hopeless circumstances by thrashing a white officer and is jailed for this offence. The story is set in 1935, the year in which the India Act was passed. To the uneducated man, the knowledge of the India Act implied a freedom from slavery under the British. On the first of April, when the act is finally passed, Mangu awaits the transfer of power and ultimate sovereignty with great enthusiasm. Considering himself to be a true patriot, he resents the anxieties of his Marwari customers who discuss the implications of this act on their business. When Mangu finally realises that nothing has changed, his disappointment compels him to resort to violence.

While early interpretations have described Manto's portrayal of Mangu as militant and individualistic, later critics like Harish Narang have argued that the portrayal of Mangu is a completely realistic one and despite being betrayed by the country's elite and urban middle-class constitutional politics, the protagonist's heroism comes through in the "qualities of selflessness and feelings of nationalism" that the author endows him with (Harish Narang 70). Even while holding seemingly different opinions about the story, both Narang and Flemming stand for a position that implicitly agrees on the author's presumed identification with the character and furthermore, that the story carries the weight of Manto's own anger against high politics. Though the question of realism has

not been the converging point for critics in this case, authorial intention has been perceived to be a potentially simple matter for establishment. As one measures the distance between early and later criticism on Manto, one also learns to see a closeness, based on Manto's image as an author, shared between the two. Flemming has continued with the allegation that this story, among others, directs the anarchism inherent in Manto to its logical but dangerous conclusions:

Despite the fierce hatred of the British expressed through the character of Mangu, a glimpse of Manto's political disillusionment, which was so clearly apparent in his later essays and stories, is already visible here in Mangu's pessimistic pronouncements, his disparagement of the Congress, and in the illusion-shattering ending of the story. (Flemming 45)

Early critics have felt the same with regard to his supposed predilection for individual violence and the portrayal of incomprehensible passions in his characters. While Abu Said Quraishi and Ali Sardar Jafri have branded him a "terrorist" (*Manto* 13), Upendranath Ashk felt that this particular feature of Manto's fiction reveals the author's reactionary nature. In his view, Manto depicts man's degeneration into a perverted brute with great gusto and vividness but is negligent in his understanding of the importance of collective culture and social refinement and is therefore constantly anxious to naturalise the anarchic inclinations and primal passions of life (Ashk: *Manto: Mera Dushman* 103-04). Further, he felt that Manto refuses to contribute towards man's eternal struggle against his animal tendencies- a struggle symbolized in his own time by the conflict between progressive political currents and the imperialist or capitalist forces. Hence, by implication, Manto's oblique slandering of the nationalist movement is unjustified and as Jafri noted in his review of Manto's stories, it signifies the possibility that "Manto, despite being a sensitive soul, cannot identify his *real* enemies and, instead, chooses to lash out at windmills" (qtd. in 105). Ashk declared:

[B]ut Manto does not know that man's biggest enemy is man himself, i.e. his animal tendencies that have manifested themselves in this age as capitalism, but have always struggled to overcome his socially conscious and responsible self in the form of anarchy. (104)

I argue that in both the rejection as well as appreciation of the story by the critics, the irony of Mangu's portrayal stands overlooked. If we pay attention to the development of the character within the story, we can recognize a rather unconventional rendering of the subaltern figure and the meanings that have been associated with it begin to seem different. Firstly, it is questionable whether the author or even the narrator identifies with Mangu. The tonga-driver is presented before us as a hardworking but garrulous man who considers himself to be superior from his colleagues by virtue of being more knowledgeable about politics and history. However, his knowledge has been built up with scraps of information and gossip picked up from here and there and he adds more spice to these while circulating them among fellow-workers. This makes him opinionated but does not necessarily give him the ability to assess situations accurately:

“A holy man cast a curse upon the people,” he began philosophically, “which is why the Hindus and the Muslims are always fighting each other. I have been told by my elders that the Emperor Akbar once made a holy sage angry and was in turn cursed with ill-luck by the holy personage. “Go,” the man said, “There will always be strife in your Hindustan.” And as you all know, there has been unending strife in the country after Akbar's reign came to an end.” Ustad Mangu paused, sighed deeply and resumed his discourse. (Naqvi 290)

His judgment of events is not based on deep convictions but rather from an arbitrarily connected string of rumours:

Also, Ustad Mangu had, in his mind, linked the movements of the red-shirts in Peshawar and some other cities with that same “Russian king” and everything, as far as he was concerned, became one with the new law. In addition to that, whenever he heard that people were being arrested for making bombs, or that someone somewhere was being tried for treason, he naturally assumed that all of this was a prelude to the birth of the new law. He was overjoyed. (292)

It is clear that at this point, Manto is mocking the protagonist. He stands at an ironic distance from Mangu and sketches a portrait that puts the character's credibility and genuineness into doubt. Of course, the story does show a wide gulf separating the commonly held view of nationalism as a people's concerted struggle to overthrow the

yoke of slavery and achieve political as well as spiritual freedom, from the everyday reality and prejudices of the common people during that time but it does not provide any grounds to argue that the writer identifies himself with such a character. Neither does it help us conclude that the writer is interested in morally condemning his 'protagonist'. There are two kinds of awareness that rear their heads up towards the end of the story. Firstly, the fact that there must have been countless people like Mangu who had been forced to resort to such an act. And secondly, the violence that pervaded the psyche of the populace, a violence also visible in characters like Thaila Kanjar and accompanied both the popular retaliations against the British as well as the Partition riots, which has been foregrounded in this story.

The lack of conviction, the dependence on rumours<sup>10</sup> and the absence of a strong nationalist culture that bound common people to their leaders have often been explained as reasons behind such violence but they are not offered in the story. Neither does the writer divest the common people from all blame of pettiness and reaction in his representation of violent events. On the contrary, the satirical tone of description in this story is clearly used to expose the opportunistic violence that Mangu and characters like him are capable of inflicting on other people to release their own frustrations. Likewise, in "Narah", the protagonist's feelings of revenge cannot be seen as justified or idealized by the writer. These stories give us a glimpse into the specific details of our nation's history which we otherwise have learnt to recognise in its broad contours. The irony is built in to the effect of Manto's writing because his ambivalent subject position with regard to nationalism is able to enter the narrative space and vex the dominant perceptions about it. Since the meanings in these stories clash with the meanings of nationalism provided by realist literature, they are not normative: they do not suggest remedies and resolutions for the problems that they are attentive towards. Manto's stories lend us the critical awareness of the fact that resolutions, or the ways in which one is trained to think about and expect them, are also specific to the form of writing that can be attributed to 'Progressive' realism

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<sup>10</sup> For the key role that rumours have played in fanning Partition violence, see Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 79-84

Perhaps this non-committal representation of reality is what has irked critics like Flemming and Ashk. Even so, the accusation that Manto naturalises the violence in his characters is unfounded and is based more on the critics' own opinions about the writer's nature culled from details of his personal life than from a serious engagement with the stories. In an essay titled "Communal Violence and Literature", Ismat Chughtai expressed a very different opinion on Manto. She wrote:

Manto can be many things, but he cannot be bigoted, and won't be forced by anyone to become so; he won't approve of violence. A man whose heart melts at the plight of the most despicable whore scorned by the whole world, who can look into the heart of a human being as debased as a pimp...such a man cannot jump up and down over corpses and let out a boisterous laugh.

(Chughtai 455)

The question is not whether Manto approved of anarchy in his personal life or not. It is whether his personal life can be brought in to establish the historical meanings of his texts. For readers who are distanced from Manto's times by more than half a century, Manto is less an *enigma* than Rajinder Singh Bedi or Krishan Chander. Their lives seldom impinge on the meanings that critics read into their stories. Despite the generally admitted fact that Manto's life is the least known of the three, one finds continuous references to it in the discussion of his stories. Surely, no text can be said to be completely independent of its author's intentions. However, every modern fictional text has its own material force in the form of the language that comprises it, which in its dialogic nature, stands for the objective material relations of society at that point of time.<sup>11</sup> The tradition of realist practice in criticism has been aware of basing the meanings of a text on individual motivations. Even critical writings on Chughtai have not emphasised the meanings of her stories on the basis of biographical evidence of her otherwise colourful life. What is one to make of this largely biographical criticism of Manto's writings, practiced by his early critics?

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<sup>11</sup> The elaboration of this theory of dialogism as the basis of a new poetics of modern prose fiction can be found in Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on nineteenth century novels and short-stories. He defines the modern fictional discourse as imagined on an object that, in the first place, "occupies a socially tense location" (276). See Bakhtin. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Transl. Michel Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Cambridge Massachusetts: Massachusetts UP, 1981. 258-422



Instead of seeing this as an anomalous instance of failing on the part of critics to deal with Manto, we have to see how his stories have consistently posited open meanings that have stood in defiance of the Progressivist reverence towards a nationalistic future and the textual resolutions that such a reverence demands. In other words, at those very moments that critics have felt pressed to bringing in his life in order to sustain the coherence of their interpretation, we must try and recover the ambivalence that dislodges the “terms of the attempted nationalist resolution of the question of collective selfhood and belonging” (Chatterjee and Jegannathan 3). In one of his essays, Manto himself has attempted an explanation of sorts to answer the alleged lack of voluntarism in these stories:

We writers are no prophets. Whatever we understand, true or false, we present to our readers; we do not insist that the readers should accept it as the only truth... We criticise the law but we are not law-makers. We criticise the political system, but we do not lay down the system; we draw the blue-prints but we are not builders. We speak of the malady, but we do not write out prescriptions. (Menra and Dutt: *Dastavez*, vol.4. 81-82)

It would be worth taking note of the fact that the writer is not speaking solely for himself here; he is making a claim for other writers like him. However, going by the dictums of the AIPWA, we know that the dominant belief among writers of that time was that they were more than mere interpreters of society: they were its cultural leaders. Manto is here obviously not referring to all writers of his age. He is only commenting on short story writers who work with a commonly shared sense of form. Barring a couple of remarkable short stories of that age, most experiments in the genre made by his ‘progressive’ contemporaries bear an unmistakable influence of the novel. Most writers of Urdu short stories, Krishan Chander, Bedi, Chughtai and Rasheed Jahan, to name a few, also wrote novels. Their writings do not reflect a separate consciousness of the short story form. Manto, however, wrote only plays and screenplays besides his stories. Therefore, his approach to the short-story was specific and independent of an impress of the novelistic discourse. The “we” in the extract just quoted above may have been a purely imaginative collective but it helps the writer to formulate a model of literary reference that goes

against the fundamental presuppositions of the Progressive opinion on literature. Manto remained loyal to the short-story and critics themselves have agreed that the Urdu short-story has acquired a character that distinguishes it from the novel, solely in the writings of Manto.<sup>12</sup> This distinction becomes more crucial when one compares Partition novels to the short fiction narratives of the event, based at the same time.

The short-story, as Manto makes it clear, does not inscribe a totality, i.e. it does not include a moral horizon of the present. The novel, on the other hand, does precisely that – it makes the present situation a part of a morally meaningful process and thereby *interpellates* its readers as subjects of that process. Therefore, the novel makes a selective interpretation of the present: it chooses to foreclose only those aspects that link the present to an ideal future. As Walter Benjamin had reflected, “The ‘meaning of life’ is really the center about which the novel moves. But the quest for it is no more than the initial expression of perplexity with which the reader sees himself living this written life” (*Illuminations* 99). The perplexity arises because the novel offers the reader a vision of totality that is otherwise not experienced in the reader’s isolation. It transforms real time into the epic time of memories and hopes (Lukacs 122). It is through the novel that the individual learns to see the force of a larger destiny entering into the still life of autonomous isolation:

When life *quae* life finds an immanent meaning in itself, the categories of the organic determine everything: an individual structure and physiognomy is simply the product of a balance between the part and the whole, mutually determining one another; it is never the product of polemical self-contemplation by the lost and lonely personality... The series of adventures in which an event expresses itself has weight in so far as it is significant to a great organic life complex – a nation or a family. (Lukacs 66-67)

This is not to say that the short-story is not an ethically significant piece of narration. While the novel conceives the totality of a moral universe, the short-story challenges the

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Tejwant Singh Gill. “Manto and Punjabi Short Story Writers.” *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Ed. Alok Bhalla. Shimla: IAS, 1997. 113-128

assumptions underlying that totality and **either** displaces it or presents it as a **questionable** one with the help of irony.

The short-story is a fragment of the novel. As a fragment, it has its own **autonomous form** which must be appraised through values that **are independent** of the ones found **within the** narrative space of the novel. It is, however, **always comparable** to the novel **because its** primary referent is the same “system” as Manto puts it, except that it **defamiliarises this** system for the reader. Hence, the short-story cannot exist exclusively as a prose fictional form in a society. In the history of South Asian literature as well, the beginnings of the modern short-story can be said to lie in the early **decades** of the Twentieth century **when** writers like Premchand and Tagore felt **compelled** to experiment with form even after they had written several successful novels. Current research shows us that a nation is **not** an organic community. A certain form of **governance**, of which **empirical rationality** forms the fulcrum, gives birth to the need for a new political sovereignty called the ‘nation’ (cf. Partha Chatterjee: *EPW* 34-35). Hence, the only way that a short-story can question a nation’s posed organicity is by **undermining** the realism that a novel claims for itself and by using the fragment as an idiom of **irony** that “exorcises” our perspective of the totality:

The Urdu short-story takes (such) an **exorcising stance** with respect to the narrative of Indian selfhood. Its staging of **that selfhood** remains ambivalent. Moreover, the fragments it isolates from the **stream** of life and elevates into form do not merely point to a totality, however **subjective** of which they are part. It puts the terms of this totality into **question** and holds at bay the **resolutions** whose ‘end’ is the form of consciousness **that is an abstract citizen subject**. It is this ambivalent relationship of Urdu to the **forms** of national culture that Manto’s work exemplifies. (Chatterjee and Jegannathan 12-13).

When Flemming writes that “the explicit criticism in these stories are not of the system itself but of the misuse of power within the system” (Flemming 41), she is not aware of this ambivalent relationship that Manto’s short-stories share with the realist novels of his time. Written at a time when the South Asian nation-state still represented, for its secular-nationalist intelligentsia, the fulfillment of a collective political invention, her judgments

seem trapped in the fallacious conflation of the imagined community with the actual nations that came into existence with Partition.

Such a conflation also broadly characterised the Progressive lament of the Partition. We have to critically remind ourselves that a nation was not divided into two with Partition. If 1947 witnessed the birth of India as a sovereign nation, it also saw the realization of Pakistan as an independent national sovereignty. Partition refers to the division of a colonial territory and the consolidated communities and cultures that existed within it. It also refers to the division of homes and families into two nations, as many recently publicized testimonies suggest. However, these communities, families and homes cannot be seen as identical with the nation.<sup>13</sup> If it were so, then we would find it impossible to sensitively respond to the innumerable pleas of people who want to re-establish links with their estranged families even though they possess separate national passports<sup>14</sup>. I am not suggesting that boundaries and borders are simply *shadowlines* or mental constructs. On the contrary, one needs to be aware of the immense burden of their reality. Nevertheless, historical evidence proves that they have not been able to restrict the different categories through which people define themselves. The nation is only one of them. Even so, the reasoning has more often than not been that Partition divided India and not an India that was idealized in the National Movement or codified as a 'system' in realist novels. The nations that came into existence were different from the *experience* of national sovereignty that energised nationalist representation.

As this awareness of the difference between the imagined community and the actual nation enters into our interpretation of Manto's early stories, we are able to access the historical significance of their open plots that question mainstream accounts of the nationalist struggles in the subcontinent. Where Manto has failed, in the eyes of his early critics, is at these crucial moments that resist closures to the meanings that his works yield. Not able to successfully pin-point meanings in his stories, criticism has been forced

<sup>13</sup> For a similar argument, see Sudipta Kaviraj. "The Imaginary Institution of India." *Subaltern Studies VII*. Eds. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997. 1-39

<sup>14</sup> For an elaboration of this argument, refer to Priya Kumar's analysis of Shyam Benegal's film, *Mammo*, in her essay, "Testimonies of Loss and Memory: Partition and the Haunting of a Nation". *Interventions* 1.2 (1999): 201-215

to gather evidence from publicised bits of his life to declare his political intentions suspect.

### **Scandalous Difference and the Narration of (Be)longing**

In this section, I propose to locate the precise points at which Manto's stories depart and deviate from nationalism that otherwise informed his own sentiments. More than any other writer in his age, Manto explored the possibility of literature becoming the critical index of national culture. In the essay, "Kasauti", Manto wrote: "Literature is the pulse of a nation, a community – literature gives news about the nation, the community that it expresses; its health and its illness" (Menra and Dutt: *Dastavez*, vol.4. 61). After migrating to Pakistan, the writer suffered from frequent bouts of depression and these he revealed in his letters to his friend, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi. In one such letter, Manto bemoaned the fact that his literature could not be considered of any use to his nation. He further added, in metaphoric terms:

Since long I have felt...that I am the redundant fifth wheel of a carriage.

I wish I could be of use to someone. What more if I could be a brick in a wall under construction than one lying uselessly in a ditch. I have no peace of mind...All the time I feel that there is something lacking in me, that I am incomplete. (qtd. in Wadhawan 180)

In this passage itself, Manto's desire to be a recognized part of independent Pakistan's national culture is undercut by the image of a wall, reminding the reader of the Partition which became the point of origin for the two nation-states, the one he exiled himself from and the other that he adopted. His own cognitive juxtaposition of the words 'nation' and 'community' in the earlier extract becomes a problematic, even untenable, one. This is possibly where lies the key to our comprehension of the fact that despite approaching the progressive theory of literature, his writings never completely converged with it. To refer back to our discussion of Progressive realism as reflected in the standards set by the indigenous novels written during the colonial period, to a large extent, community and nation were experienced in a unity in most fictions. The nation, however, as a modern political category is associated with a sense of belonging that is voluntary and politically negotiated. The community, on the other hand, fosters a very different sense of

belonging: one that is non-negotiable and made absolute by virtue of birth or fate. The narrative self description of nationalism tried to superimpose the latter sense on the former and present the imagined nation as a community. In many stories written by Manto, especially the ones featuring prostitutes, we find this communitarian codification of the nation ironically undercut by social experiences that reinforce the liminality and ambivalence of modern identities.

It may appear fair to conclude that Manto's professed interest in the national character of literature was not contradictory to the conspicuous absence of a narrative of the national movement in many of his stories. The absence is not alarming considering that in all probability, Manto was probing the question of national belonging in its present political sense and not, as is detected in the case of the forms that nationalist fictions employed, in an assumed transparency of a moral sense. His stories, read alongside the other stories congratulatory of the national movement, present an oblique and different view of the society that was waking up to the nation's moment of arrival. Even in stories that are not overtly political, the question of national belonging is interwoven with otherwise ambiguous plots that, if not read politically, tend to lend themselves to flimsy psychoanalytical readings. For instance, in "Dhuan", the child experiences his own sexuality through a near incestuous incident in which he is made to participate by getting him to feel duty-bound towards attending to his elder sister's comforts. Socialised into the familial structures of allegiance, he seeks parental security to escape from feelings of confusion only to discover that his parents have retired to the bedroom for an afternoon of intimacy. Inside the consciousness of a modernity where privacy and marital intimacy are valid practices within an otherwise strongly consolidated family setup, the child's expectations, arising out of his trained sense of belonging, are annulled and his world is forcibly rendered absurd. In "Kali Shalwar", Sultana's make-believe bond of domesticity with her lover, Khuda Baksh, is a cruel predicament of deferred hopes and aborted desires only till she meets the disarming stranger, Shanker. Finally, her abandonment of pretensions to a family life becomes the basis of a stronger bond between her and the stranger. Such instances abound in stories like "Hatak" (Insult) and "Sharda". However, such were the times and tempers when Manto wrote these stories that his fellow-writer

and an acclaimed Progressive, Krishan Chander, made these very stories the basis of his judgment that Manto was perfectly capable of being sensitive to the cause of a 'natural' social order and women's place in it:

Every story bears evidence of his intense love for humanity. Please don't go by the manner of his words... He also has unparalleled respect and sensitivity towards a woman's honour, her womanhood and her desire for domesticity. (Issar 30)

From the other camp of critics, those who consistently defended Manto against Progressive accusations of obscenity, Mumtaz Shirin wrote in her essay, "Manto Humaara Maupassant":

Manto has always presented the prostitute sympathetically, keeping in mind the fact that she can also embody a mother's instinct for nurture. In Manto, too, motherhood is the essence of a woman, but society strangles this possibility with effective cruelty. (Issar 310)

Read in this manner, not only does the political critique marking his stories get concealed but the moral unease of his readers, the readership that is addressed in his works, is also lost to our focal length.

If the community was a pre-nationalist theme appropriated by the imagination of a nationalist modernity, the idea of its spatial or territorial roots was the result of a sleight of hand that South Asian nationalism performed imaginatively with the help of a distinctly modern set of available resources for independent travel. In other words, one of the chosen strategies for the effective communication of the sense of belonging and roots was, paradoxically enough, travel and mobility through the political geography of the imagined community.<sup>15</sup> Many novels and even some short-stories used the panoramic view afforded by travel to formulate a link between political sovereignty and space. In this regard, Satish Deshpande writes:

...nationalist spatial strategies attempted to translate the 'facts' of geography into matters of patriotic faith and, ultimately, received experience. These

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Van der Veer has extensively examined the trope of travel in the construction of the imaginative Hindu motherland. See *Religious Nationalisms: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1996.

included conscious efforts to anthropomorphise nature...through insistent and widely disseminated patriotic songs and writings, the physical features of the subcontinent – mountains, rivers, oceans and regions – were transformed into a common national heritage over which every Indian, even if s/he had never seen that particular part of the country, was invited to feel a sense of proprietary pride. (Chatterjee and Jegannathan 175-76)

In Manto's stories, characters are forbidden by their circumstances to enjoy any voluntary mobility. Their oppression is sketched in the vivid scenes of stasis from which they are unable to move out and take control over determining their own proximities or remotenesses to the world of objects, nature and other places. The strong imagistic element in these stories may lead the reader towards seeing a phenomenological delineation of reality, but the stories possess an expression of pathos that is directed towards the characters who are forced to start experientially negotiating their reality in their own sense of stasis. In that sense, Manto does not tell the story unconventionally. He uses a tried and tested ploy of omniscient narration. This should be kept in mind by those who feel compelled to describe him as a modernist or avant-garde writer. For the characters, the places to which they are rooted become oppressive and hostile by denying them their desire for movement. They move but in ways that do not manifest themselves as sensuous experiences. Like Joyce's Duffy who lived "at a little distance from his body", their movements seem involuntary to themselves, the destinations unknown or uncertain. In "Kali Shalwar", Sultana is imprisoned, confined in a small flat in Delhi by her lover Khuda Baksh, much against her wishes. She gradually begins to lose her sense of the world around her and feels utterly isolated from it. Manto describes her as someone who cannot find her way back home. She is not convinced about the reasons that brought her from Ambala to Delhi in the first place. Standing in the balcony of her flat, everyday, she muses:

There was a big open maidan on the left in which were laid innumerable rail lines. When these rail lines shone in the sun, Sultana would look at her hands which were exactly like the rail lines. In the big, open maidan, engines and trains would move about the whole day. Sometimes hither, sometimes thither. The *chukk-chukk* and *phukk-phukk* of the engines would resound the



whole day. Early mornings, when she got up and came to the balcony, she would see a strange sight. Thick smoke billowed in the mist, rising to the hazy skies in the shape of fat and heavy men. Big clouds of steam too which were emitted noisily vanished into thin air in the twinkling of an eye. Sometimes when she saw the coaches of a train that had been pushed loose by an engine, moving about on the rails, she thought of herself. She would think that she too had been pushed and let loose onto the rails of life by someone and she was moving automatically. Other people were shifting the points and she was moving ahead – where to, she did not know. (qtd. in Bhalla 81) (transl. by Harish Narang)

While critics have acknowledged this passage to be one of the most powerful representations of loneliness in modern Urdu fiction (cf. Bhalla 7), they have chosen not to comment on the minutiae of the symbols and how these symbols assume historical meanings. At a time when the railways was not only a symbol of modernity but was the most significant mode of movement for nationalists, this particular image of a rail yard inscribes a sense of cultural difference that is usually not associated with the marginalized people in fictions of that society. The invisible hand of modernity in moving the rail coaches is not fated to be discovered by the socially alienated prostitute. Unlike Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan*, Sultana cannot visit other places of her own accord. The spatial regimentation that she is subjected to becomes the ironic underside to the nationalist narration of space.

The reality of movement around her becomes arbitrary and assumes the sign of deception. Her sense of space and time seem to be fading away, quite like the chronotopic immateriality we encounter in Bishan Singh's predicament in "Toba Tek Singh". At a time when collective destinies were being predicated on the sense of national belonging, the prostitutes, madmen and other social minorities in Manto's stories and in history were not being offered the choice of belonging at all. Manto's clear articulation of this counter-memory took place in stories that he wrote after the Partition. Not all of them were about the event, though a motive of trying to comprehend the larger historic dimensions of the events has been sensed in some of them by later critics like Priyamvada Gopal, Devendra Issar and, to an extent, Alok Bhalla himself. The need to

get a fresh perspective of common people's relation to the national movement is felt by the writer because in retrospect, the movement for unification had necessitated a violent division of both space and time.

In the story, "Swaraj ke Liye" (For Freedom's Sake), the narrator views the national movement from the prism of divided space-time. The story, unlike others, covers a long span of time from the twenties to the post-independence era. It does not mention the Partition though many points in the story are giveaways. For instance, the narrator begins telling the story by describing the charged atmosphere among nationalists of many hues, which prevailed in a post-Jallianwala Bagh Amritsar. The tragedy has almost been forgotten in the excitement generated from an anticipation of the possibility that the British were finally losing their vice-like grip over the subcontinent. In an overwhelming ambience of daily demonstrations, arrests and political campaigning, the narrator experiences a strange sensation in his heart. He describes the feeling as one of sublime uncertainty – "just the way one feels when one is playing a game of flash" (Mohan 75) (translation mine). The metaphor of gambling is not only used to reveal the narrator's own psyche but it also helps hint at the disaster that the movement was hurtling towards. Available translations have overlooked such small hints and not translated fully, minor but richly significant moments in the story (see Asaduddin 56-57). Mohammed Umar Memon's selective translation of the story into English fails to convey the sense of irony in the narrator's contemplation. The narrator's friend, Ghulam Ali, a budding Youth-Congress leader, has fallen in love with a fellow party worker. The lover is a slight, young nurse called Nighar. Halting the description of the events that surrounds the fate of the two lovers, the narrator reflects on Nighar. The following passage in my translation reads:

Partly her khadi outfit, partly her involvement in the Congress fervour, and the ambience of the hospital had somewhat dimmed her Islamic demeanour – that sharpness which gets manifested in a Muslim woman's habits. As a result, she had softened a little.

She was not beautiful, but in her own way she was a peerless expression of womanhood. The blend of modesty, obedience and faith that characterises

an ideal Hindu woman, had left a **slight** hint in her personality, thereby making it radiant. I would not have **thought** of this earlier but now when I recall Nighar, she seems to me to be a deceptive mix of the *namaaz* and the *aarti*. (Mohan 77-78)

This tongue-in-cheek description is not so much telling about Nighar as it is about the narrator's perception of the composite culture posited by the Congress in the national movement. Though Aijaz Ahmed is right in arguing that the freedom struggle was not a monolithic movement involving homogeneous interests (*In Theory*;1992:118-19), he does not address the literary evidence concerning people's retrospective perception of it while reviewing the case of modern literature in South Asia. The narrator realises that the earlier sense of a composite cultural identity is spurious. This passage obliquely draws attention to the steady Hinduisation of even 'secular' nationalist spheres and the way this process increasingly appropriated the society's sense of femininity into the dominant Hindu symbol of womanhood, the Mother India. In the story, it is also important that both Ghulam and Nighar are Muslims because their later disillusionment from nationalist politics needs to be seen in the context of the political disenfranchisement of the sub continental Muslims even when the Hindu Mahasabha had not yet begun to directly orient the mainstream political sphere with its communal interests.

Later in the story, a Gandhi caricature, Babaji, who was a mass spiritual and nationalist leader visits Amritsar. The couple decides to **get married** at this point of time. When they meet Babaji and seek his blessings, he forbids them from a physical consummation of their union. Though he apparently advises them to refrain from giving birth to a child in an India that was not yet free, he holds up celibacy as a norm that governs his own nationalist self-description. History tells us that Gandhi's insistence on celibacy and a desexualized relationship between men and women was a part of the cultural and spiritual myth in which he framed the political struggle.<sup>16</sup> The dominant mythos of nationalism and the effects of exclusion that it tended to create have not seriously been questioned in the realist narratives of the Progressive phase. In fact, one of Manto's close associates and a Progressive writer himself, Upendranath Ashk, felt that "Swaraj ke Liye" was an

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<sup>16</sup> See Judith Brown. *Gandhi: A Prisoner of Hope*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1980. See also Partha Chatterjee. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* London: Zed Books, 1986.

unnecessary addition to Manto's later works, puerile in its examination of the protagonist's hatred of rubber contraception, though ingenuous in a forced and extravagant sense (Ashk 42). Whatever may the author's general intention be, the story makes us aware that Muslims ceased to belong to the dream of an independent India as soon as nationalism sought out a set of cultural codes to define its moral practices (Jalal 377). In *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey feels that the mythic representation of the nationalist struggle<sup>17</sup> replaced a political and democratic sense of identity with a majoritarian and a seemingly 'organic' one:

To present an argument about belonging as a political argument would be to concede that the nation was a political project, first and foremost, and to acknowledge its historicity. The progress of the nation could not mean exactly the same thing to all parts of that imagined community. To acknowledge this, however, would be to foreground the question of political power and to what end that power should be used – which in turn would defeat the nationalist claim that the nation was a natural moral community. (160)

The story of Ghulam Ali and Nighar is, as critics have rightly pointed out, a tragedy of self-negating desire (cf. Salim Akhtar: "Is Manto Necessary Today?" 6-7). However, the tragedy is not limited to just the two lovers. The self-negation is played out in terms of a fraudulent desire for naturalizing a moral community in the name of nationhood. It is this inscription of an oedipal complex in the desire to realise a free 'motherland' that carries over into subsequent Progressive readings of the tragedy of Partition as a tragedy of 'fratricide'.<sup>18</sup> If there is a different interpretation of the Partition that makes itself available in his stories, that difference has been a scandalous one for the intelligentsia and authorities alike. The rabid propaganda against Manto from both the political Right as

<sup>17</sup> See the depiction of Gandhi in Raja Rao. *Kanthapura*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1938.

<sup>18</sup> The word has often been used by not only the secular intellectuals who survived the Partition but also by later writers and scholars of Partition Literature. For instance, see Jason Francisco's review article, "In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly." *Inventing Boundaries*. Ed. Mushirul Hasan. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000. 370-393

The writer states: "In wider perspective, the Partition stands as the archetype of what I would call nationalist fratricide, the conflict between people of a common cultural heritage – usually also the common subjects of foreign domination – in competition as 'nations' for political control of land and government." (372)

well as the Left attests the insecure moral situation in which his stories were read and received.

Very often, those stories that cannot be comfortably slotted as either realist or fantastic/fabular have raised heckles among critics of all kinds of persuasions. Some of Manto's Partition stories walk this ambiguous terrain. They have usually not found a place in critical discussions of his Partition stories but their names are occasionally dropped in order to cite instances of his celebration of the bizarre that corroborate a shared interpretative position which sees in Manto, a socially maladjusted and lonely individual. One such story is "Padhiye Kalima" (Read the Kalima). If examined carefully, this story comes across as a masterpiece of the crypto-realist form: a narrative that renders its own reality ironic. Moreover, it also reveals the already tenuous relationship between realist criticism and literature that is rendered even more indeterminate and slippery in the case of Partition Literature. Manto certainly uses the effects of the event in his readers' minds in a crafty manner to convey its historical irony.

The story begins with a petty Muslim rent-collector, having been rounded up for murder, beseeching the police authorities to listen to his "version" of the incident. He swears by the religious *Kalima*, as he begins, that although riots were taking place everywhere, his crime had "nothing to do with Pakistan" (Khalid Hasan 147). He confesses to having killed a Hindu man, Tuka Ram, but reiterates that the killing bore no relation with the riots. Pushed further, he reveals that he had taken part in killings related to an earlier riot but he again swears in the name of his religion that he had played no part in the Partition violence. When his story begins unfolding, we learn that in the building where he used to collect rents, lived a Hindu woman called Rukma, with her husband Giridhari. Rukma had apparently given him signs that she was interested in having a clandestine affair with him in Giridhari's absence. The confessor periodically halts his narration to lustily exclaim his desire for her and it is evident that his story is also a mode of fantasizing about her body. A little later we discover that Rukma had killed her husband and then invited the narrator over to make love to her in the presence of the corpse. Unbelievable as this situation may seem (the narrator is aware of the incredulous effect it has on his

inquisitors), he accepted the invitation, explaining his action as induced by the hypnotic hold that she had managed to have on him. He constantly describes her as a “witch” (148-150) and therefore tries to justify his complicity in the act of the subsequent disposal of Giridhari’s corpse by insisting that he had been bewitched. In the midst of steady rioting, he dumped the body into the compound of a mosque which was later burnt down by a Hindu mob.

His story moves towards a twist when on a fateful night, while sleeping over at Rukma’s place, he discovers that she has been attempting to strangle him to death. He realises that Rukma has been cheating on him and inviting over another man, Tuka Ram. Before she can successfully stage a repeat of the Giridhari episode, he retaliates and manages to escape by throwing the woman down a window. When Tuka Ram threatens to tell on him, he follows the man to a urinal and stabs him to death. At this point in the narration, his rage against Rukma is at its peak and he mouths foul abuses for her. As the story ends, he is back to swearing by God and the *Kalima* that his actions have no relation to the Partition riots.

Manto has played many ironic games in this story. Firstly, on closer discernment, the story has everything to do with the Partition riots as they are used as a ‘safe’ pretext for enacting this private drama of violence. Secondly, the narrator himself has confessed taking part in previous communal riots and his description of the story suggests that Rukma appealed to him in the first place by virtue of ‘belonging’ to the other community. Hence the first level of irony in the story is directed towards the narrator himself. The Partition is present as a range of possible motives in the story. The next level of irony is directed towards his realist critics. The story seems to be sufficiently realist, prompting readers to look for the reality of the event in the direct description of the narrator. Though the narrator is a suspect, realism does not help question the reliability of his version. In an interpretation of the story, Ayesha Jalal has written:

Without denying the communitarian dimension of the [Partition] killings, the possibility of personal violence being passed off as ‘communal’ cannot be discounted simply because of the presumed convenience of the term in both colonial and nationalist discourse... this was at best a crime of passion

and at worst an act of self-defense. What it could not be described as was 'communal violence'. (Jalal 505)

Such an interpretation shows that the realist reception of Manto's stories has taken their writer's interest in abnormal instances of violence for granted. The question that immediately crops up with the story is why should Manto focus on an isolated and special instance to comment on the meanings of Partition violence? This cannot be answered if we try and make sense of the story as a realist one. There is an undeniable element of the fantastic in the character of Rukma, while at the same time; the writer plots her as a woman from a particular community in historical time. Neither can one totally deny the possibility of women like Rukma having existed during the Partition. The narrator's description of her has a misogynist dimension that cannot be ignored while reconstructing such a character. The misogyny is rendered specific with the placing of the drama in the midst of Partition riots. As has been mentioned, the narrator is nevertheless fascinated by Rukma because she happens to be an easy catch from the 'other' community. The evenly rough tone of the confession suggests that the narrator's interest was not in developing a liaison with the woman but in violating her. Rukma herself does not develop any sentiments for the narrator. Her comprehension of the situation is one of the most important information about the story that is hidden from the readers. If the story's connection to its historical placement has to be considered then Rukma's 'version' has to be reconstructed with the help of the little suggestions and inferences that can be gleaned from the narrator's testimony.

Rukma knows that the community's identity is marked on her body by the patriarchal gaze. Her desire is also representative of an effacement of this imprint. Instead of killing herself, she decides to render her own identity as a woman belonging to someone or some community, ambiguous. Despite having apparently nothing to do with this instance, the Partition riots decisively impinge upon the story in this sense. The conventional stories of Partition violence doing the rounds in Manto's time were stories connected to the rape and abduction of innocent women from either community. "Padhiye Kalima" successfully inverts the Ur-story to the woman's advantage. She kills her husband because she is seen as belonging to him, and then she tries to kill the narrator because she

cannot be seen as his trophy as well. She enlists his help in murdering her husband and disposing off his body because he is a known criminal whose name can easily be connected to the rioting. She embarks on a killing spree because the Partition makes her aware of her status as a helpless woman in the society as well as an opportunity to turn this oppressive reality upside down because her helplessness in such situations is encoded as unquestionable. The story acquires its meanings only if the reader is willing to suspend realist codes and see how Manto problematizes the meaning of 'belonging' in relation to people who are almost always helpless to choose. Read otherwise, it only becomes an eccentric documentation of the general atmosphere of violence that pervaded the event. At any rate, Manto was aware of the Progressive nationalist understanding of the event and has subverted it in this story to assert a formal, aesthetic and intensely political conception of difference, albeit one that is drastically singular. Women in his stories, especially "fallen women", to borrow a phrase from Sukrita Paul Kumar<sup>19</sup>, are used to question nationalist arrangements of reality because women belong in two senses to the nation/community complex, argues Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan:

Women exist and are conceptualised as belonging to religious, caste and linguistic/regional communities in ways whose complexity is indicated by the double and contradictory sense of the term "belonging to" as meaning both "affiliated to" and "owned by": the one indicating voluntary and participatory membership, the other secondariness, functionalism and a merely symbolic status. (Sundar Rajan: Introduction 4)

In an essay on the theme of sexuality in modern literature, "Afsana Nigar aur Jinsi Misail", Manto clarified his own intellectual position regarding the Partition. He wrote:

If the bloody curtains were lifted from the present conditions of war then you would only perceive the hunger of nationalism behind the storm of corpses. (Issar 299)

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<sup>19</sup> Sukrita Paul Kumar argues that the radicalism in Manto's storytelling, which is seen clearly in his depiction of women characters, lies in the fact that his stories defy the responsibility of reproducing a system while creating new structures of experience. See "Fallen Women in Manto's Fiction." *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Ed. Alok Bhalla. Shimla: IAS, 1997. 101-112



In his explicit condemnation of nationalism as it existed before him, he was not abandoning his own quest for the determination of a truly national literature. He felt responsible towards pointing out that his idea of a national society did not correspond to the nationalist one. He held, to some extent, the Progressives complicit as their call was an open support to the cause of nationalism as it stood at their time with the imaginative force of the Congress and other parties. Invested with a deeply urbane sensibility which made him regard reality not as organic but as an artifice; which formed his imaginative relationship with language and made him attentive towards the liminality of modern existence, he realized through his stories that literature cannot express both nation and a traditional idea of community simultaneously in modern times. In his own opinion, the value of newness significantly gets attached to his work. The essay just quoted above explored this value of newness in modern literature. This newness was necessary to acknowledge and pursue because the nation and its realities were new and therefore could not be represented with or examined by older forms. The Progressive movement, in its last, gasping stages, did not face up to this challenge of creating new forms and exploring subjects through which political and humanist concerns could be framed and studied afresh.

### **Conclusion**

The early realist criticism of Manto's fiction suffered from inadequate historicism in that it mainly chose to contextualize the meanings of his works and the perceptions they offer in details of his own life rather than the wider historical moment around him. This, it did as it did not have the confidence to distinguish between Manto and his contemporary Progressive writers, with whom he shared a broad affinity, if it only focused on the experience of that time. It clearly lacked the ability to generalise the conditions that produced the singular qualities of Manto's style and themes. Later realist criticism, while not being biographical, has retrospectively justified and even helped reveal to us the fears of the early realist critics. In their writings, the formal and aesthetic as well as political distinctions between Manto and other committed writers of his time are not available. While Leslie Flemming happens to be, in some sense, the last of the biographical critics, even later realists have taken recourse to a biographical emphasis in their discussions of

the writer's world view and politics. Hence, biographical criticism informs a large part of the examination of Manto's works.

As has already been noted, when the same realist critics have written on Manto's contemporaries, they have not felt the need to hanker after the personal details or impressions of their lives. We come to know very little of the lives of writers like Bedi, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Krishan Chander, Devendra Satyarthi or even Ismat Chughtai through critical pieces on them. It is understandable that Manto's idiosyncrasies were too many to simply rely on the history of his time, but a disproportionate stress on his life has prevented criticism from paying adequate attention to the formal aspects of his stories which could have been explained historically and more fruitfully. Instead, a sole focus on the variety of themes that he wrote on has helped build and sustain the image of Manto as the essential literary freak of his time.

Biographical criticism also poses some serious theoretical problems that any history of criticism cannot choose to overlook. Firstly, As Frederic Jameson makes us aware, the history of this kind of criticism in the West is intimately linked to the history of the impact of psychological theories on Literature which helped presume the existence of a transparent and centered individual subject who authorised the meaning of life that surrounded him. This understanding of the author or characters as internally consistent subjects traceable in the process of the work, as has been discussed in previous pages, is built around the aesthetics of the realist novel (Jameson 179-182). Hence the use of such a critical technique not only cheats the readers' attention away from the work to an *a priori* subject who finally decides the correct reading of the work, but it also imposes the aesthetics of a particular form, the novel, onto the evaluative framework of other forms of writing, in this case, the short-story. The formal autonomy of the short-story is denied to it in biographical criticism. Secondly, biographical criticism is also a deeply individualistic approach to a historical text. It effectively points towards a belief that history is manipulated and ordered in its course by individuals and not collective forces. Hence, Gandhi becomes the author of passive revolution in colonial India or Nehru, the reason why we are a secular State today or for that matter, Jinnah, the mastermind of the

separatist interests that prompted the eventuality of the Partition. This may seem to be a crude reduction of this kind of criticism which has, at times, been able to generate extremely sophisticated forms of textual understanding. It is admittedly so, but true at the level of the general implications of this critical practice.

In Manto's case, biographical criticism has prevented one from seeing how the singular attributes of his writing can be connected to larger currents of awareness that also contributed to the historical crisis of representation which Progressive Realism had to encounter in the decade after the Partition and which finally paved the way for modernism in Indian, and specifically, Urdu literature. Italo Calvino has reminded us that it is criticism's responsibility to anticipate that "simply because of the solitary individualism of his work, the writer may happen to explore areas that no one has explored before, within himself and outside, and to make discoveries that sooner or later turn out to be vital areas of collective awareness" (Calvino 99). In this sense, historicism examines the historical conditions that give rise to a form of creative awareness and the meanings that get transformed within it. It probes the limits of the rule rather than relegating works to the realm of exception and at the same time, cares to accord a work its due share of uniqueness.

The development of realist criticism on Manto has also seen the parallel rise of the writer to the status of a cultural icon. Having occupied earlier positions of a hack-writer in the popular imagination, a stranger to the high literary establishment by virtue of his transgressive themes, he is now almost representative of his generation in Urdu short-fiction. Does this indicate a failure on the part of his realist critics who started out by vehemently opposing the merits of his work? On the contrary, realist criticism of Manto is what has gone on to build his larger than life image. However, it has neither solely distanced Manto from the general cultural concerns of South Asia nor completely made him familiar to us in doing so. It has done both from time to time, as tags like Quraishi's "*rehm dil dahshat pasand*" (kind-hearted terrorist) suggest. However, Manto's Partition stories have all been consistently made out to be alien to our climate of thought and emotion, our sensibilities. Though they pull at our heart strings, these stories have either been signs of genius or have stood for a supposed corruption of the writer's sensitivity.

The task of a historical analysis of this literature is to bring it back to the purview of common lives and then look into the historical reasons for the particular trend that academic reception of these stories have shown. The relationship between the writer and his critics is also the contested space of meanings that the event yields for us today. If Manto has become almost synonymous with Partition Literature then our denial of complicity in fashioning the historical truth of Partition is also our way of forgetting a Manto who compels us to deal with the event on familiar terms.



## CHAPTER 3

### The Partitions of Flesh and Blood: Writing, Responsibility, Excess

*"What is there worth saving and holding on to between the extremes of exile on the one hand, and the often bloody-minded affirmations of nationalism on the other? Are they simply two conflicting varieties of paranoia?"*

---Edward Said in "Reflections on Exile"; *Granta* (61)

It is difficult to find answers that can explain how the Progressive-nationalist dismissal of the importance of Manto's Partition stories resonates in even apparently sympathetic readings of the same works, fifty years later. While critics have been able to discern figures of liminality and the consciousness of exile in them<sup>1</sup>, there still seems to be an acceptable guardedness in specifying the particularities that help distinguish from, and yet connect these stories to much of the fiction written by Manto's contemporaries. Even as he is considered to have been a major writer, he is read as being singularly representative of an intense pessimism that goes against the spirited tenor of the Progressive Age. While one finds suggestions of a parasitic relationship between the writer and the event in the evaluations made by his early critics, later criticism has paid more serious attention to the complexity of representation in his stories. Today, Manto stands as almost synonymous with Partition Literature. Yet, his stories continue to be read as passive documents of the horrific deeds and mass insanity that popularly characterise the Partition. As recently as 1997, Alok Bhalla described these stories as:

They are terrifying chronicles of the damned which locate themselves in the middle of madness and crime and promise nothing more than an endless and repeated cycle of random and capricious violence in which anyone can become a beast and everyone can be destroyed. Manto uses them to bear shocked witness to an obscene world in which people become, for no reason at all, predators or victims...Manto makes no attempt to offer any historical explanations for the hatred and the carnage. (Bhalla 28)

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<sup>1</sup> A strongly argued position that presents Manto as someone primarily involved in expressing the subjectivity of exile can be found in Devendra Issar's essay, "Manto: The Image of the Soul in the Mirror of Eros." *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Ed. Alok Bhalla. Shimla: IIAS, 1997. 184-190

If this is true about Manto's fictions of the Partition, it begs the question as to why the writer should still be regarded as a master of the craft and aesthetics of short-story writing and at least a couple of his Partition stories, paradigmatic. After all, if the reportage of indiscriminate and irrational violence is all that the stories contain, why should there be any dimension of perspective, tone or plot attached to the criticism of them? Of course, a more urgent skepticism is also attached to the issue of calling Partition violence irrational<sup>2</sup> and thereby separating communalism from the historical conditions that have shaped our national movement. The answers are still being looked for in the history that the post-Partition societies in South Asia continue to make. However, the purpose of this chapter is to attempt some preliminary observations about how the preceding criticism of Manto's fictions of the Partition reveals the remembering subject of the event – in other words – how critics have inscribed their own remembered Partitions into their interpretations of Manto's stories.

An esteemed student of Holocaust narratives, Berel Lang, has often described all fictions about events of socio-political rupture as “aspiring to the condition of history” (Leak and Paizis 19). Even so, as this imagination of a shared ethical relationship between fact and fiction suggests, history is not a self-evident epistemological category. Like any other form of knowledge, it is also premised upon the world-view and presumptions of the historian who writes it. In the name of historicism, Partition scholars have often regarded history as a stable form of knowledge against which fictions have to be judged for their accuracy. As a result, the relationship between history and literature continues to remain strained with each standing “guard over their respective territories, wary of abuses that either may commit upon the ‘other’” (ibid. 10). The presumed stability of historical categories like ‘communalism’ have been seldom challenged while indexing judgments at

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<sup>2</sup> Gyanendra Pandey's recent work on Partition violence has challenged this very notion and has sought to demonstrate how the available instances have all contributed towards the formation of new national and community identities as well as the redefinition of inter community relations in the interests of the new national elite. It is often interesting to question the ways in which such instances have been narrativised by the press, government reports as well as local rumours. The frequent urge to describe such widespread moments of violence as madness lends itself to the scrutiny of ethical philosophy. However, as many cases have proved, such an urge arises from the sheer unwillingness on the part of the intelligentsia to accept the charge of moral and ideological complicity. See Pandey, *Remembering Partition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.

narratives with their help. At the time of the Partition, communalism was held as descriptive of the Muslim League's separatist politics which, in turn, was perceived to be solely responsible for the disintegration of colonial India. K.L. Tuteja and O.P. Grewal have pointed out that most of the available historical work on 'communalism' has been obliquely informed by this erstwhile sentiment. They have written:

...a large proportion of the work on the subject of communalism has concentrated on the analysis of its genesis and growth as an obstructive trend which created complications in the achievement of the nationalist goal of the country's independence and eventually led to the Partition.

(Banga and Jaidev 36)

The writers have further argued that nationalism did not by and large see Hindu communal consciousness consolidated by the Arya Samaj, RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad as obstructive. In fact, the nationalist rhetoric of leaders like Lal Lajpat Rai and Neki Ram Sharma tried to cement a bond between Hindu communitarian consciousness and the nationalist goals whereas, on the same anvil, the Muslim communitarian consciousness was hammered in as communalism. The truth, according to the writers, is that in early Twentieth century, the emergence of Muslim communalism only mirrored the Hindu communal interests inherent in the rise of the nationalist-communitarian ideology. The historical problem, they conclude, lay in the fact that the difference between Nation and Community was not clearly articulated by the national movement (49-57). Only with an objective linking up of the sway that communal-fascist ideologies have had on the character of our State and governance with the aiding role played by the majoritarian nature of our democracy that came into existence in 1947, have recent researches started viewing the national movement differently. As has also been recognised of late, the contestation of voices and interests within the space where the national movement has sought to be represented to people of the succeeding generations is the sharpest indication of the fact that the Partition resulted in a radical redefinition/reconstitution of subjectivities and identities and their relationships, active or otherwise, with the State. Very little of this change, however, seems to have concerned the critics' opinions on Manto's short stories on the Partition when they have sought to assess the force of history in these texts. Instead, critical writings have usually tried to



glean the universal predicament of a distressed humanity or the extent of “barbarity of Partition as a plain and simple descent into the heart of darkness inherent in man” (Asaduddin and Memon: “Introduction” xxix). On the other hand, the reflex, often crude, employment of terms like ‘communal’ to describe stories that have either tried “a balancing act” (Ibid. xxx) between one instance of violence and another or have not suggested an ethical way out of the hatred and antagonism in civilisational terms<sup>3</sup>, shows the extent of inadequacy and narrow frames of reference with which literary criticism has responded to the questions of creating critical fictions of the Partition that can liberate the ‘facts’ around it or extend their implications. In order to gain a perspective on the insularity of critical opinion on Manto’s Partition stories and the refusal to bring contemporary concerns into the frame of numerous studies of the writer’s portrayal of Partition violence<sup>4</sup>, it is necessary to sketch rough patterns that convey a history of reception and then analyse the critical subjectivity such readings emerge from.

As has already been stated in the first chapter, Partition Literature emerged as an object of study alongside critiques of nationalism in the last decade of the Twentieth century. The critiques themselves were articulated from various quarters of ideological and cultural interests and did not express a homogeneous viewpoint. However, one can generalise as to the social conditions that made such critiques possible in the first place. A waning belief in the authority of the nation-state and a resurgence of cultural nationalism with religious-fundamentalist overtones within the mainstream polity as well as the general breakdown in law and order and issues of civic interest after the Emergency can be counted as some of them. As the two largest nations of South Asia

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see “Introduction.” *Stories about the Partition of India*. Ed. Alok Bhalla. Delhi: Indus Harper Collins, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> As a concern, it was first voiced by Suvir Kaul in his essay, “Pokhran and the Phobia of Partition”, which appeared in *The Times of India* (28th August, 1998). Demonstrating the fact that the officialese released by the defense establishments of the two nations on the wake of the nuclear tests echoed the justifications of rioters during Partition, Kaul argued that the Partition had indeed played a most important political role in fashioning the two nation-states. He wrote: “The nuclearisation of India and Pakistan is an extraordinary moment in the narrative of Partition...As the bombs exploded, first ‘ours’ over two days, then ‘theirs’ over a few more, it seemed hard to avoid a feeling of déjà vu: you kill one of ours, we’ll kill two of yours, you explode five, we’ll explode six. Hadn’t we heard this vocabulary in 1947, and suffered its apocalyptic effects even then? An eye for an eye, a neighbourhood for a mohalla and now, potentially, a nation for a nation?”

For the full text, also refer to *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*. Eds. Tai Yong Tan and Ganesh Kudaisya. London: Routledge, 2000.

geared to celebrate fifty years of their sovereign existence, attention shifted to the price that had to be paid in the form of Partition. From the point of view of its survivors, many of who had faced immense difficulties in relocating themselves within the mainstream, the event had marked a traumatic moment of eternal exile from their places and cultures of birth. Fear of persecution and estrangement had created a monster of indifference, the post-Partition bureaucratic nation state, a sign of betrayal of the nationalist ideal of unification.<sup>5</sup> The continuing alienation of the intelligentsia and middle-classes from mass politics in either country also resulted in an overwhelming disillusionment and an aborted sense of social agency. The masses, undifferentiated in their socio-cultural inclinations and histories, could now be imagined as casualties of the nation's high politics, exiled away in order to serve the interests of power.<sup>6</sup> While Partition narratives were made the medium for the cultural re-assertion of 'people's voices', they were also scrutinised by critics who wanted to ensure that the event was condemned in these narratives as "an irresponsible and avertable tragedy" (Mahey: Ravikant and Saint 143). There is reason to suggest that issues, such as these, became circumstantial in shaping the direction that critical evaluations of Manto's stories on the Partition have taken. All that Manto wrote on or around the theme of the Partition has hardly been reviewed or studied by precursors of the critics who started examining the writer's works around this time. The paucity of extensive critical works on his Partition stories before the nineties significantly limits the scope of a comprehensive historical survey as well as a broader understanding of the writings in the recent phase; at the same time, it also means that the following

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<sup>5</sup> For a philosophical discussion on the consciousness of exile in modern societies and a corresponding paranoia, defined as the fear arising from a loss of original rights and authenticity, see Victor Burgin. "Paranoiac Space." *Visualising Theory*. Ed. Lucien Taylor. New York: Routledge, 1994. 230-241

<sup>6</sup> Power, as an idea, since then has come to connote a negative and repressive social force in the prevalent middle-class imagination. This has to be historically contrasted with the early decades of independence, when the Indian middle-class self-construction, following Progressive and Nehruvian orientations of modern culture, relied on its own agency in nation building as popular films of that era like *Naya Daur* attest. See Ravi Vasudevan. "Dislocations: The Cinematic Imagining of a New Society in 1950s India." *Film and History Workshop Reader*. Ed. Ravi Vasudevan. Delhi: Sarai, 2003. 420-434

Realism in Indian cinema can also be traced back to its beginning in this era. At the time when Manto was writing for the film industry, the only available genres of cinema were romance/melodrama and mythological or traditional drama. None of the Progressive writers writing for films were commissioned by producers to write realist stories. Interestingly, an earlier effort at introducing realism in Bombay cinema through the film, *Mazdoor* (1934), conceived and written by Premchand, was throttled by the trading and mill-owners lobby of Bombay who prevented the film's producer from finding any distributors in the city. See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya. "Writing and Money: Munshi Premchand in the Film Industry, 1934-35." *Contemporary India (Journal of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library)* 1.1 (2002): 87-98

observations are only contingent and subject to revisions or modifications as we gain on our hindsight.

### **The Interpretive Community**

A simplistic conclusion drawn from the fictions that Manto penned during his last years perhaps best illuminates the exiled sensibility:

Truth has many faces. One man's truth can negate another man's truth.

And when so many versions of truth clash, everything becomes an absurdity, loses all meaning, all sense. (Khalid and Faruq Hasan: *Versions of Truth* 51)

When Masood Ashar wrote this in his review of the writer's works, he was not merely being axiomatic. He was communicating a fear with which the culture of exile has confronted the world of meanings. This world of meanings is a perennially contested one but in the specific instance of the Partition, Ashar felt that one man's truth had the intrinsic capacity to destroy that which did not conform to it. The result, as the critic thought could be perceived in the outcome of Manto's stories, is a world that has betrayed rationality completely. One of the reasons why critics have insisted on the logical incapacity to gauge the suffering that Partition's victims underwent is that they have refused to see any meaning behind the gross images of violence, humiliation, trauma and loss, all of which can be found in abundant measure in Manto's stories. This is also a reason, if one may argue, why there is a dearth of critical engagement with his Partition stories.

Having said this, one may add that the generation which has experienced and survived the rupture of the holocaust is the one that has invested a Herculean effort in reviving Manto's forgotten writings, translating them into more popular languages and consolidating a wide readership which continues to be moved and intrigued by his stories. Their historical experience cannot be seen as separate from their efforts at re-reading Manto. Even in their pronouncements about the lack of stable meanings in his fictional world, they have sighted a truth powerful enough to critically engage with it. They have seen this fictional world coming alive and being replicated in innumerable instances of riots and inter-community conflicts that have carried the echo of Partition, over these

years. As a result, even while being attentive to the formal departures from realism in his narrative style, these critics have sought out and defended a broad realist concern in Manto's stories. In this regard, Shamim Hanfi's comment in his essay, "Manto – The Person and the Myth", is telling:

Every meaningful story that can stand on its own carves a niche in our consciousness. It determines how it is to be read and understood. It lays down the standards for its evaluation which cannot be easily rejected... Purity of purpose, learning and the author's sincerity can hardly take a story too far. The significance of a story depends solely on our understanding of it. The writer does not want to prove anything to us nor does he want to produce pigeons from his hat. A story cannot stand on the strength of its intellectual arguments. In contrast to the progressive writers, Manto has endured because in his fiction, he has not relied on learning, beliefs, ideology or trickery. His strength is not his scholarship or ideas but his genuineness and truthfulness, his experience and understanding. His stories never tell lies and are thus disconcerting for the reader. (Bhalla 192)

While beginning to consider the history of criticism on Manto's Partition stories, one must bear attention to an associated urge, on the part of the critics, to follow the trail of a truth, the experience of which lies beyond the domain of ideas and political observations. This urge reveals itself in most of the available interpretive emphases.<sup>7</sup> It will also be worthwhile to note that in this search for 'pure' experience, the stories have not been examined for historical depth or inter-textuality. Criticism of Manto's short stories on the Partition chose not to comment on the early interpretations of his stories, on the basis of which, he had been charged with political non-committalism by the Progressives. The politics of writing seems dissociated from the ethics of representation, which critics have searched for, in Manto.

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<sup>7</sup> In his concise biography of Manto, Jagdish Chandra Wadhawan has divided Manto's works into three neat phases: the first phase of a romantic revolutionary which lasted till 1937; the second phase which reflected his political disillusionment but established him as a writer of repute, as lasting till 1948; finally, the last phase in which Manto is seen to have graduated from being a mere professional writer to the stature of a true artist. Wadhawan recalls that in this time, all his writings reflected an "inward spiritual journey" that had very little to do with the political aspect of his calling. See Wadhawan. *Mantonama*. Transl. Jai Ratan. New Delhi: Roli Books, 1998. 171

As different from his early works for which his interlocutors have either been literary critics or fellow writers, Manto's Partition stories have attracted intellectuals from various disciplines who have tried to use them to underline their own analysis of the event. The earliest of such efforts in India was made by the sociologists, Veena Das and Ashis Nandy, in their essay, "Violence, Victimhood and the Language of Silence" (1985). Turning away from conventional modes of sociological analysis, this structuralist study chose to focus on the linguistic and symbolic dimensions of the culture in which Manto's stories were embedded. The authors cited "Khol Do" (Open It) as an example to argue that Manto's stories on the Partition are about the loss of signification that results in a widespread silence around the event (Das and Nandy 177-195), a silence that is exploited by the language of the State, bureaucracy and high politics. In their opinion, this loss of signification occurred because people had managed to make themselves the "subject, object and instrument of violence, all at the same time" (194). In the fictional world, this silence is created in order to communicate the enormity of pain which, at the same time, is bound to remain incommunicable. There are other moments in similar stories written by the author that support this interpretation. In "Toba Tek Singh", Bishan Singh cries out but is not able to communicate his anguish in its entirety. In "Sharifan", Qasim weeps uncontrollably over the corpse of a Hindu girl he has just hacked to death. The reader can only speculate about his state of being. Still, to say that these moments of silence are the result of a loss in faith in language's ability to signify is to wipe out the very basis of Manto's own creative experiments in language. In order to understand them, readers have to consider that Manto dared to write stories about the sufferings inflicted on people during the Partition even when he realised that words, by themselves, are insufficiently able to represent such times accurately. Moreover, if such violence had become an untranscendable impulse of human life, its destructiveness also had to be measured as total. Das and Nandy draw a general picture of misery and confusion in which one person's suffering appears to be notionally indistinguishable from another's. In the midst of the deep destruction, the reasons for communicating ideas seem to lose their legitimacy completely. Cries of pain carry no appeal in them, it is so understood, and they gradually merge into the silence of images. On the contrary, the evidence from

Manto's writing makes such conclusions seem suspect. In the beginning of the story, "Sahae", the narrator muses:

Don't say that one lakh Hindus and one lakh Muslims have died – say that two lakh human beings have been killed – and it isn't really too tragic to say so. The tragedy has befallen those who, having killed others, could not fulfill their ends. Killing so many Hindus, Muslims must have thought that they have wiped Hinduism out. But Hinduism is still alive. Likewise, Hindus must have been convinced that after murdering a lakh Muslims, they have managed to put an end to Islam. The reality before you is that Islam continues to thrive – they are fools to presume that beliefs can be hunted down by guns. Beliefs don't reside in bodies; they inhabit our souls. How can they be destroyed by the help of knives, daggers and bullets? (Mohan 433-434) (translation mine)

Read in its context, this passage has more to say than its apparent naïveté suggests today. As a prefixed comment to the story's build-up, the narrator shares his realization of the fact that Partition cannot destroy everything that matters in human relationships. It can, of course, make us redraw our boundaries and limits but it cannot fully confine humanity in its dark consciousness and terror. In other words, alternative possibilities of psychic regeneration and recuperation cannot be annulled. In isolation, this passage may stand as a defense of religiosity but once the story has been read, its structural location as wisdom supplementing the meanings in the narrative, as well as deriving from them, is revealed. Such moments of radical optimism which are inseparable from a profound faith in change and progress do help us expand the implications of a world otherwise beset with nightmarish necessity and these moments are, if read closely, not few in Manto's Partition fictions. However, one finds that they have consistently been neglected in a critical practice which has tried to project its own subjective experience of history onto the texts.

The reaches of the mind, as Bhisham Sahni had confessed, did not concern the interests of writers whose works were committed to the cause of Progressive-realism (Bhalla 173). In a brief essay titled, "Saadat Hasan Manto: A Note," Sahni had recalled that Manto's

distance from the Progressives had increased due to his failure to understand the point that the Progressive emphasis "was not on character realisation but on protest" (Ibid.). However, unlike other writers of his creed, Sahni was closer to the critics of a later generation who saw Manto as a worthwhile precursor of literary modernism in Urdu. He asserted that the interrogation of reality in Manto's stories primarily takes place in the realm of the psyche where important cultural truths are deposited and processed. Since this complex space cannot be narrativised with the help of conventional externalities, Sahni pointed out that Manto had often used a world of "make-believe" (172) or illusion that mirrored the character's intentions. The conflicts in Manto's fictions, according to him, would always be staged between the real world and the illusory one created by the characters themselves. This observation, it should be confessed, does not derive from any Partition story that Sahni discussed (in fact, he chose not to comment on Manto's representations of the Partition at all) but it can be used to refer to many signs of obsessive fear that characters display in Manto's fictions about the event. For instance, in the story, "Nangi Awaazen" (Naked Voices), Bholu, a petty artisan surviving in a squalid refugee colony after the riots, is driven to madness when he discovers that his imagined world of privacy with his wife is rendered precarious by the absence of resources with which he could have ensured it. Exiled from the state where his preferred moral codes had relevance, Bholu is unable to shed his guilt and fear even when he gets married. His deluded mind creates voices and sounds that seem to rob him of his peace and privacy. The paranoia grows to a point where his wife is compelled to leave him and go back to her parents. Bholu ends up roaming the streets stark naked. The absurdity of Bholu's world does not so much arise from the negation of his truth but from the fact that he is unable to adapt himself to a changed set of circumstances and his fear tries to deny a reality which cannot be negated. The echo of this paranoia is as much present in the perpetrators of Partition violence as it is to be found in its victims as characters like Ishar Singh in "Thanda Gosht" (Cold Meat) reveal. Nevertheless, a future of relentless terror is not what Manto promises. The implicit meaning offered by glimpses of such failings is that the possibility of a regenerated but differently understood humanity lies beyond the fragile shells of familiarity in which many of those affected by the Partition chose to live.

In refusing to be attentive to the ironical motifs with which Manto often structured his plots, critics like Alok Bhalla have also revealed their own adamant denial of the need to redefine political as well as subjective ethics in accordance with the changed nature of reality that the Partition affected in South Asian society. He was right when he thought that Manto's partition stories exhibit a "radical erasure of all social, moral or religious reasons which normally inform civilisations" (Bhalla: "Introduction" xii). This can be explained by Manto's unwillingness to rest humanity's case on the imagination of a self-evident civilisation that has disintegrated with the Partition.<sup>8</sup> For Bhalla, such a reason did not exist and therefore, Manto's gesture remains true but unsatisfactory:

It is not surprising, therefore, that his stories are fragmentary and discontinuous. They merely record instances of terror and cries of pain, violations and pleas for mercy, brutal sexuality and cynical laughter. As fragments they offer no consolation, no hope of emergence into a saner and kinder world. Instead, they prophesy endless days of misery, torture, ruin, madness and waste. (Ibid.)

Searching for a new ethical consciousness of the 'human' that is emergent within an old one is a risky cultural undertaking. Historically, Manto's risks were compounded by the fact that the older system of beliefs became a casualty during the Partition, brutalized by the very humanity whose social self-consciousness it had cradled. The rude shock that most well-meaning people had suffered from during the Partition could not simply be disregarded. After all, the writer himself was party to that suffering. It was a time that demanded sympathy for the distressed. Yet, Manto also realised that the tragedy could not be monumentalised. Manto has obliquely confessed in his essay, "Saadat Hasan", this was almost like walking a tightrope while "people expect him to fall flat on his nose, any moment" (Issar 20-21). As recent historians have rightly pointed out, the paranoid subjectivity of victimhood played a key formative role in consolidating religious and

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<sup>8</sup> In the essay, "Kasauti", Manto underlines the salient features of a Modernism that, he felt, should be endorsed by literature that undertook to "grasp the force behind the change." A writer's job, in his view, was not to let his joys, anxieties and sorrows express themselves in the stories that he would write but to understand social changes impartially and seek collective stakes. Literature's function was not to prescribe solutions but to only "diagnose the health and sickness of a nation or society." See Saadat Hasan Manto. "Kasauti." *Mantonama*. Ed. Devendra Issar. Delhi: Indraprastha, 1981. 306-09



identitarian hatred because its nostalgia for a pre-modern past helped sow the seeds of revivalism and social insularity.<sup>9</sup> In the context of Partition, the abandonment of property, social respect and communitarian honour have shared the expression of exile. The enormity of the event, as has already been argued, also lay in the magnitude and arbitrariness of transition from a settled past to an uncertain future. Owing to this, the agony of separation and end was too overwhelming for any sensitive mind to try and circumvent it. Manto chose not to do so. A dying order of relations and hierarchies always laments its own end. Ideally, the ones who have been its sufferers welcome this revolution. But at the slow turning point of culture, the responses are more involved and layered. Manto's stories empathise with the pain but do not sanctify it as absolute. Suffering in exile is kept negotiable in his stories. The negotiation is cloaked in the irony that often selects for us, the final perspective of pain. To perceive this irony, the historian, Shashi Joshi, has suggested that "we need a language beyond fixed categories of good and evil, of victims and victimizers, and an obsessive focus on violence as an act of insanity..." ("The World of Saadat Hasan Manto"; Ibid. 141).

### **"Khol Do": Silence of a Possible Outcome and the Ethics of Reading**

This section will attempt to read the controversial stories that take place around the moments of violence and separation during the Partition and try to understand the nature of these controversies in the relationships that these stories shared with the State, the literary culture of their time and also the body of critical work that exists on them. By implication, the exercise will tread upon some ethical zones where the difference between the private narratives of the characters and the public life of the nation-state can be seen as strategically bargained or negotiated. The stories studied here have witnessed the instance of direct State intervention in the form of prosecution on the charge of obscenity. They are namely, "Khol Do" (Open It) and "Thanda Gosht" (Cold Meat). The common ground that both these shocking narratives of violence share is found in the absence of a

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<sup>9</sup> The point is well made that the support for fundamentalist organisations in urban centers like Delhi and Karachi increased after the Partition due to the burgeoning refugee populations resettled in them. The present profile of the BJP in Delhi and the MQM in Karachi has also been studied to argue this claim. See, for instance, Tai Yong Tan and Ganesh Kudaisya, eds. *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*. London: Routledge, 2000. 202. Also see Urvashi Butalia. "The Persistence of Memory." *Civil Lines* 5. Ed. Kai Friese and Mukul Kesavan. New Delhi: India Ink, 2001. 169-198

judgmental narration. The moral ambiguity and silence are formally built in, putting the onus of meaning on the reader.

The story that has most consistently raised the moral heckles of many readers and critics and yet has been considered as an example of Manto's artistic triumph is "Khol Do". It was first published in the magazine, *Nuqoosh*, by its editor, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi in 1948 (Wadhawan 101). Initially hailed as a masterpiece by Progressive reviewers in both India and Pakistan, the story caught readers' attention within a very short span of time and became a source of nation wide debates on morality in Pakistan. Its fate in India remains relatively unknown. Owing to the pressure exerted by religious and cultural institutions, the Government of Pakistan banned the story for six months and ordered a court trial. Manto was prosecuted on the charges of obscenity and inflammation of communal passions and fined a hefty sum. "Khol Do" opens with a line, matter-of-factly informing its readers that "The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon, arriving at Mughalpura, eight hours later" (Khalid Hasan: "The Return" 11). As Michael Jauch has rightly observed, this line does not inform the reader about the normal time that it took for trains to traverse the distance between the two mentioned cities, i.e. four hours and therefore by giving information that is locally known, it establishes a motif of silence separating the reader who is familiar with the experience from the one who is not. This separation is not just a horizontal one but, according to Jauch, can be read in terms of time as well. In other words, the silences in the story are more palpable for a reader of our time who is separated from the moment by fifty odd years (*Annual of Urdu Studies* (1998): 197). This implies that in constructing this silence, the story invites the reader to contribute to it.

The Partition is not mentioned in the story even once, though it is evident that Sirajuddin and his family had been attacked while they were fleeing from India to Pakistan. His daughter, Sakina, had been abducted by people from the 'other' community though this is not made explicit. Youths volunteering in the refugee camp where Sirajuddin finds himself offer to find his daughter and re-unite the family. The story describes the recovery of the daughter but there is a crucial lapse of time before Sirajuddin manages to

see her. Here again, silence lodges itself as a wall between the readers' urge to know what happens after the youths find her and Sirajuddin's agony of separation. **The threads** are picked up in the final scene where the **Sakina** is discovered lying in a heap on **the rail tracks** skirting the camp. She is brought to **the local hospital** in a **piteous condition** and seems to be barely alive. When the doctor orders for the windows of the **examination chamber** to be opened, the girl stirs and loosens her pyjama strings. **Seeing her** movement, Sirajuddin shouts with joy that his **daughter** is still alive. The entire **meaning** of this scene is left to the readers' inference. The fact that the youths do not bring her back and instead, she is discovered in a **brutalized state** means that something **untoward** happened between the time that they found her and the moment of her 'return'. As is **easy** to infer from the scraps of information in the story (After finding her, the youths **neither** brought her back to the camp nor did they inform Sirajuddin about the **successful** discovery when they met him next), the youths had repeatedly raped her and in her **half-conscious, traumatic state**, the doctor's "**Khol Do**" sounded identical to their **command** for her to strip. While early critics have **shared the doctor's shock** at the **denouement** and have described the experience as simply **unspeakable** (cf. Flemming 80), later **ones like** Shashi Joshi have tried to acquire a minimum historical insight by recognizing that **one of the points** made in the story is that the "**community of trusted protectors is an illusion**" (Bhalla 152). Even she has been unable to build on this and fallen back on **the readings** that her fellow critics like Alok Bhalla and **Masood Ashar** have endorsed:

The consistent theme underlying Manto's writing is, on the one hand, that one cannot find rational explanations for human actions. The impenetrable recesses of human souls offer no simple answers, therefore he is not interested in going into them. If one man can rape and kill, all men can do so. (Ibid. 154)

There are contexts within which the story can **be made** to speak beyond such closures. To remember these volunteering youths as people involved in the recovering and helping the distressed is also to bring back the context of the official program for 'Recovery of Abducted Women' which was run by both the Indian as well as Pakistani governments. While this entire operation was justified by the two States in appeals addressing the moral

and communitarian concerns of their people, the story exposes the hypocrisy of the entire undertaking. What has escaped the notice of critics is the questioning of a gendered consciousness of honour, purity and chastity which, as feminist surveys of the program have shown, were exploited by the newly formed governments to establish their moral legitimacy through the organization of such spectacles. In an important study of the implications of such an operation in India, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have written:

The Recovery Operation of the Government of India, albeit humanitarian and welfarist in its objectives, was nevertheless articulated and implemented within the parameters of two overriding factors: first, the relationship of the Indian Government with Pakistan and second, its assumption of its role of *parens patriae* vis-à-vis the women who had been abducted. As the former, it was obliged, as a 'responsible and civilised' government of a 'civilised' country to rightfully claim its subject-citizens; as the latter, it was morally bound to relocate and restore these same subjects to their family, community and country. This dual role and responsibility simultaneously cast Pakistan as the abductor-country and India as the parent-protector, safeguarding not only her women but, by extension, the inviolate family, the sanctity of the community, and ultimately, the integrity of the whole nation...it was this, more than anything else, that enabled the Indian State to define itself in opposition to the Pakistani one. (Hasan: "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance" 227)

Manto's story shows that the reality in Pakistan only mirrored the Indian one. However, underneath the surface of government policies lay the real picture where even within the apparently safe bounds of the community, women could be subjected to such atrocities. Within its communitarian orientation, the program could be seen as justifiable because it responded to the hurt pride and loneliness of the victims and tried to restore familial unity. The story interrogates this very justification from the inside in order to hint at the possible ways in which the corrupt nexus between the State and community that underlay the institution of recovery practices was also working towards ensuring that the Partition's historical truth stayed confined within a narrow sense of loss suffered by the traditional social order.

The shift that takes place in Sirajuddin's character throughout the story is also noteworthy. He is helpless but has faith in the youth who, he knows, belong to his community and by extension, are well-meaning. He innocently goes on to describe his daughter's beauty, not suspecting that such a description could carry different connotations for them. It is not that Sirajuddin is unaware of the sexual violence that women were vulnerable to at that time. In fact, while analyzing the story, no critic has paid attention to the fact that he had initially been more concerned about his daughter's shame and honour than her life. Readers will remember that when their train is attacked and Sirajuddin's wife is killed, he and his daughter decide to run away. At that moment, Sakina's *dupatta* (a cultural symbol that no Indian critic can miss) had fallen off and putting their life to peril, despite her exhortations to the contrary, Sirajuddin had gone back to retrieve it. Consequently, he had lost sight of her and was left clutching on to her *dupatta* (Khalid Hasan 12). The patriarchal sense of order is shown in collusion with the sentiment of filial love in this moment of narration. However, with the volunteers of his community, Sirajuddin does not feel threatened. His trust is betrayed but importantly, the story does not move into an emotional closure-zone at this point. The final scene in which critics have sensed nothing but pathos in Sirajuddin's exclamation has to be re-read in this light. It is not that Sirajuddin is oblivious of what has transpired but he is now come to a realization that Sakina's life has a more profound significance than the state of dishonour. The alternative emphasis, on the part of most critics, on the emotional rupture of communication and the breakdown of language reflects their own pessimism that Sirajuddin's joy defies. Here is an example. Reading the story again, a decade after she had used it to argue the urgency of social collapse, Veena Das is able to be more self-reflexive:

On deeper meditation, I think there is one last movement that I did not comprehend. In giving the shout of joy and saying "my daughter is alive", the father does not speak here in personalized voices of tradition. In the societal context of this period, when ideas of purity and honour densely populated the literary narratives, as well as family and political narratives, so that fathers willed their daughters to die for family honour rather than live with bodies that have been violated by other men, this father wills his

daughter to live even as parts of her body can do nothing else but proclaim her brutal violation. (Das et al 77)

Considering that this interpretation happens to be the only one of its kind among all the available critical readings of "Khol Do", one cannot simply attribute the failure of other critics to see this as a failure to fully contextualise the story. After all, contexts are not entirely made available for scrutiny either. Since most critics have shared the earlier interpretation of the story made by Das and Nandy, the invisibility of the context that in this case, Veena Das draws our attention has a historical meaning. The point that needs to be reiterated here is that on closer inspection, a politics of robbing texts of their specificity and insisting on their universal appeal always reveals itself as suspect.<sup>10</sup> A text's universal appeal can be convincing only if it is able to become self-referential and self-evident. There is no need for the critic of such a text to decipher meanings according to its contexts. The desire to see such a universalism in Manto's stories has also been a desire to see a whole, unified experience of the Partition expressed in them. Alternatively, it has been a desire to see one's experience of the Partition and the presumed meaning of its tragedy as solely valid and universal. It is surely no exaggeration to say, then, that the early criticism of Manto's Partition stories betrays little interest in addressing such issues.

The reasons as to why such a story should be considered obscene have not been examined by these very critics who proclaimed Manto as the finest story-teller of the Partition. None of them have endorsed such a charge but neither have they tried to make political sense of the court trials. Barring the occasional defense condemning the conservatism of the establishment, the critics have not shown any inclination to provide a different perspective on the writer who was attacked on this count by both Progressives

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<sup>10</sup> A good example of this is Tejwant Singh Gill's comparative essay where he is of the view that Manto's stories manage to transcend the local nature of experience connected to the Partition and lend the tragedy a universal force. About "Khol Do" he wrote: "The story shows that Pakistani society, from the moment of its inception, had turned brutal despite the theological ideals held forth in its defense. By making Pakistan the locus for this horrendous incident, Manto does not exonerate *the rest of India*. The fate of Sakina was not exceptional. But for it to occur in Pakistan was *an inexcusable crime*. Manto believed that brutality could not extinguish human concerns, *particularly those which drew sustenance from filial or fraternal feelings*. Whether they could bring a derailed society back on the path of humanity is, however, a problematic question." See Gill. "Manto and the Punjabi Short Story Writers." *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Ibid. 116-117 (emphasis mine)

as well as mullahs. Arguably, such a perspective is indispensable for a critical interpretation that seeks to understand the historical nature of moral insecurities prevalent in a society and thereby gain an insight into the appeal that a story like “Khol Do” carried in its own times. For example, in the essay, “Manto Mere Adalat Mein”, Magistrate Mehdi Ali Siddiqi confessed having told the writer that even though the story was a true examination of reality, it had a negative social impact as it could potentially inflame passions of the people (Issar 293-94). Who could the people get angry on? Siddiqi conceals this piece of information. However, one can infer that his oblique reference was to the fact that the State’s authority would become questionable in the minds of the people who would read this story if it was not banned immediately:

It is precisely Manto’s attempt to work out the necessary relation between an individual’s critical processing of his own experience and the socio-political order at large that a newly entrenched political and legal system came to see as an untenable challenge; therein lay the obscenity of Manto’s work. (Gopal: “Bodies Inflicting Pain” 246)

In another story, “Khuda ki Kasam” (Swearing by God), the narrator observes the busy bustle of volunteers in refugee camps and their earnest toil in recovering abducted women. He sarcastically wonders why the State, which had not intervened during the riots, should be so hard pressed and driven to ensure that families are re-united with their missing womenfolk. The described speculation is interesting because the language weaves images that evoke the predatory instinct of animals as well as the moral urgency of human society; it juxtaposes these and then uses the effect as a reference for God who, he sardonically reminds us, pervades all the righteous intentions and deeds of the volunteers:

Seeing them so involved in their work, I felt pleasantly surprised – it meant that God wanted to wipe out the traces of evil deeds committed by men. The ones who had been robbed of their faith, he wanted to rescue. Why? So that his own conscience may not be full of stains? So that he may quickly lick the blood off his fingers and settle down to break bread with his children? So that while others still keep their eyes shut, he may

stitch up the torn fabric of faith with the thread and needle of human sympathy?

(Mohan 442) (translation mine)

If one replaces the word 'God' with 'State' (translating the metaphor of agency into a temporally situated term), the relationship between Power and Subject appears worked out. Even while the State is the custodian of authority, the people are the agents of its ends. Agency is produced through moral implication or faith. This faith is premised upon the connected will or order in society. Repairing a fractured will requires restoration of order. However, as the passage tells us, the order is sustained only through appearances. It warns us that the State's initiative on such occasions is limited to appearances with which it can reinforce its own moral legitimacy. "Human sympathy" or humanitarianism (Manto uses the word "*insaaniyat*" in the original) is one such appearance that conceals the predatory impulse of the society. There is no real hatred for bloodshed, it is implied, as blood can be 'licked' off with the help of a morality based on appearances. When a woman has been abducted and raped, the personal humiliation and torture suffered by her means little, the narrator concludes, if it cannot be seen in terms of ignominy or dishonour of a community:

When I would think about the recovered women and girls, I would be haunted by images of their bloated stomachs. What would happen to them? Who would own up to the lives these stomachs carried – Pakistan or Hindustan? And those nine months of suffering? Will Pakistan cough up the remuneration or will Hindustan do so? Will all of it be recorded in the accounts of nature and chance? Are there any empty pages in them to fill?

Recovered women were coming. Recovered women were being sent away.

(Mohan 443) (translation mine)

The story intervenes at the point where it captures the processes by which the suffering of women in flesh and blood is being abstracted and given a new meaning in accordance with a 'mythical' narration of a nation's birth. The narrator's contemplation can be read alongside numerous stories and songs that celebrate mass suicides by women of a particular community who 'voluntarily' did so in order to safeguard the familial honour as well as purity. For those who did not, their existence was precarious and threatening to the stability of the myth. They could not be symbolically figured within the



representational structure of the nation. Disowned by their families, many such women have had to spend the rest of their lonely and scarred lives in mental institutions and 'charitable' homes run by the State or voluntary trusts. Only through such institutions have they become identifiable in the processes within which historians have sought to represent the social and cultural history of the nation. Their relationships with communities and the nation-state get forever mediated through the 'scandal' of their sex (cf. Ray 135-36). This emphasis on the carnal nature of socially sanctioned relationships like family and community and by extension, the communitarian nation during Partition is hinted at in all stories that were understandably proscribed by the government and the broad judicial establishment.

"Thanda Gosht" (Cold Meat) was considered even by the sympathetic establishment of *Nuqoosh* to be "dangerous" and provocative of volatile reactions (Wadhawan 102). It was finally published by the magazine, *Javed*, in 1949. The predictable reaction occurred and the magazine lost its office. The story became an anathema to the Pakistani civil society and even drew reproaches from Progressive writers (Ibid. 103). Copies of *Javed* were confiscated by government officials from roadside bookstalls and newsstands to prevent further circulation. In the essay, "Zahmat-e-Mehr-e-Darakhshan", Manto narrated an incident in which, while a meeting of the Press Advisory Board was in progress, someone mentioned the story. A British journalist, F.W. Bateson was present on the occasion and as commotion ensued, Chaudhary Muhammad Hussain, a board member, proceeded to enlighten him about the story. In his words, the story was about the belief that "We Muslims are so shameless that the Sikhs didn't even forego our dead girls" (Mohan 50) (translation mine). While this was a ridiculous way to read the story, it was a harbinger of the troubles that the writer would have to face on its account. After a protracted trial in which fellow writers came together in a surprise support of Manto, the magistrate, A. M. Saeed read out his judgment:

It is true that improprieties, sensual tendencies and sexual activities, and crudeness are to be found in everyday life. But if literature takes on these standards as acceptable, as the witnesses for the defense have testified, then presenting different aspects of the real may be good literature, but it

will be opposed to the moral condition of our domain. (qtd. in Gopal 259)

By distinguishing the social "domain" from the reality that the story purported to describe, the State could be seen as deliberately disclaiming something that it otherwise considered to be dangerously influential and prevalent in the "everyday life" of its society. What was it that the State did not want to own up to? Was it the degenerate masculinity that aggressively went around winning back a bloated sense of pride for the community as millions of Muslim and Hindu women, trophies and repositories of honour, were raped, killed and raped after being killed? Or was it a scarred masculinity, tortured by its own negation, seeking to ethically reconstitute itself and in the process, unsettling the paranoiac arrangements of chauvinism in subjectivity?

While debating about the complete absence of humanity or its reassertion in the character of Ishar Singh, most critics have not paid adequate attention to the dense symbolism of the story.<sup>11</sup> The foreplay to the lovemaking between Ishar Singh and Kulwant Kaur is described as a shuffle of cards. While praising the linguistic ingenuity in this extended metaphor, critics have not commented on its meaning in the light of the entire story (cf. Bhalla 80). Both the lovers are also engaged in a game of holding something back from each other. In Ishar's case, it is the knowledge of his tragic experience of necrophilia whereas in Kulwant's case, it is her increasing hatred for Ishar which finally intensifies to the point where she feels compelled to kill him. Therefore, the erotic scene is also a game of chance as the cards suggest. The invitation for Ishar to throw the card is also ironically a call for him to confront his own impotence which he, thus far, has been running away from. Chance is an important motif in the story as it is also by chance that Ishar discovers

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<sup>11</sup> Ashok Vohra is judgmental while undertaking to defend Manto against the charge of obscenity. In his comments on "Thanda Gosht", he uses the cover of realism to justify Manto's lurid depiction of Ishar Singh's character: "His descriptions are intended to expose the oppressors who demean women. The object is not to titillate but to arouse in the reader a sympathy for the victim and disgust for the perpetrator." See Vohra. "Manto's Philosophy: An Explication." *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. 139

Please note that this conclusion is not sufficient for the justification of a suggestive love-scene between Ishar and Kulwant Kaur that is narrated in the story. Moreover, the claim that Manto had penned such descriptions with a realist neutrality is reminiscent of Hazira Masrur's comment in her essay, "Manto: Ek Bebaak Kahanikaar." She had written: "After reading Manto's infamous descriptions of naked characters carefully, I am convinced that no *normal* person can feel titillated by them. On the contrary, these descriptions produce evoke a sharp disgust for sexual intercourse... This can be attributed to the fact that Manto does not colour his characters with either metaphors or suggestive language." Refer to an excerpt of the essay in *Mantonama*. Ed. Devendra Issar. Delhi: Indraprastha, 1981.27

the beautiful Muslim girl and decides to abduct her. Her chance death brings about the peripatetic movement of the tragedy. This, Ishar Singh accepts with resignation because he recognizes the force of fate in it. His death at the hands of Kulwant Kaur may well have seemed an unnecessary melodramatic turn for Keki N. Daruwala (cf. “The Craft of Manto: Warts and All” in Bhalla 55-68), but it necessarily fits into the larger symbolic structure. The critic, like many others, has also called this story sensational and grossly violent (Ibid. 57) and has refused to see any meaning in it. He has argued that stories like “Thanda Gosht” are the reason why the serious writings of Manto have not received sufficient critical attention as they have proved to be distractions. Daruwala, himself, does not seriously consider why the writer may have written such a story and risked a court trial whereas, according to the critic, he could have written stories that were less sensational and apparently more meaningful.

Narendra Mohan, in his “Introduction” to the modest but commendably edited, *Manto ki Kahaaniyan* (2003), is more sympathetic in his understanding of the implications of the story. He has written:

This story is has a deep psychological impact; it ransacks the consciousness, and fuels a disturbance in the psyche through its ideas. But this unease is not merely personal; it is related to the unease of the nation and community. (9)

If we link this up to Manto’s famous proclamation in his essay, “Afsana Nigaar aur Jinsi Misail”, that “It is not that Modern Literature has tried to rake up matters related to sexuality, it is the other way round; matters related to sexuality have given birth to Modern Literature” (Issar 303), we get a straight entry-point into the narrative significance and choice of subject. It is now “axiomatic that nationalism was a gendered and sexualised process” (Gopal 244). This aspect is also invested in the struggles over the meanings of community and morality in the context of nation-formation. Alongside the female subjectivity, masculinity was also subject to change. The Partition violence threatened a secure sense of masculinity as much as it threatened the desexualized virtue of a constructed femininity. In scores of stories about violence, a popular mode of organizing aggression was the appeal to a threatened masculinity. Nevertheless, the masculine norms cannot be held to have been homogeneous for every member of a

community, irrespective of caste and class. The protagonist of “Thanda Gosht” is clearly not among the well-heeled members of the Sikh community. His sense of masculinity is a more sexualized one as compared to the upper-class, upper-caste male-Sikhs. In *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey has shown that while the socially respectable male members of a community understood their masculinity in terms of the duty to protect and strategise, the men of the street were made to see theirs in terms of sexualized aggression. Pandey further noted that violence “happens – and can only happen – at the boundaries of community. It marks those boundaries. It is the denial of any violence ‘in our midst’, the attribution of harmony *within* and the consignment of violence to the *outside*, which establishes community” (Pandey 188). The story focuses on the subjectivity of a person who has been pushed out to inhabit the boundaries of his community. In his reckless participation in violence, there is also a self-negating urge.<sup>12</sup> The force of *Thanatos* drives Ishar Singh’s constructed masculinity towards tragic self-realisation. Having attempted to rape a dead woman, Ishar’s maleness is rendered impotent. The urge to violate the ‘other’ is also an effort to cut off all links with the human society that has condemned Ishar Singh to embody an aggressive and anxious male subjectivity. However, his impotence brings him face to face with the fact that a complete separation from humanity is only possible through self-negation. Ishar Singh is helpless because he has grasped the unconscious movement of his desire but he is transformed at the moment of his death. The story, therefore, argues the profundity of human inter-connectedness beyond social role-playing and it also pushes the case for ethical relationships and associations between human beings based on such a realisation. On careful consideration, the possibility of such a life affirming psychic transformation could only have been glimpsed at through an intense ethical involvement with the sufferings as well as renewed hopes that marked the lives of people during the Partition. This is where the story is able to rescue the readers’ sense of tragedy from its narrowest

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<sup>12</sup> Psychic self negation is also given a representative form in the story, “Phundanein” (Tassles). The stream of consciousness quality in narration has alerted critics towards Manto’s modernist inclinations. It is a bizarre study of self-inflicted violence and masochism. Images of suicide and cannibalism also contribute to the atmosphere of the story. There is no conventional plot movement and the scenes are episodic. Its overall likeness to the then contemporary experiments in European Expressionist art and drama is striking. There are no available critical interpretations of this story.

associations by offering an ethical possibility beyond the consciousness of victimhood and alienation as well as restore for the Partition, its historicity.

Both the stories that have been analysed above are narrated through techniques that cannot be called realist. Novels and even stories of the Partition that used realism as their narrative principle did not employ ironical silences and symbols to add to the literal meanings in them.<sup>13</sup> Stories like Ismat Chughtai's "Roots", Yashpal's "A Holy War", K.A. Abbas's "Revenge" and Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" are either emotionally simplistic or spectacular. Many of them graphically describe violent incidents of rapes, genocides and rioting. None of these were banned or proscribed by either State. On the other hand, the magistrate who convicted Manto for "Thanda Gosht" effectively argued that realism, when used to describe things that are not in moral conformity with the norms of a society, will not be tolerated by the State. The critics' evident inability to see this gross discrepancy in judicial opinion and conviction is also associated with a possible blindness towards the departures from conventional moralist representations that Manto's stories were attempting. Despite a surfeit of violence in them, the realist stories were spared whereas Manto's stories, which only carried scars, memories, suggestions and traces of the violence that had occurred, were considered to be 'dangerous'. The realist tone, as its practitioners have reminded us, was one of flat condemnation for the perpetrators of the violence that it represented. This resolute rejection was acceptable to the State as it carried the message, in no ambiguous terms, that violence of this sort was principally evil. The sole recipients of the moral censure were characters who were directly responsible for the violence. In doing this, the realists saved themselves of the effort to understand the historical and cultural nature of the violence and therefore were oblivious of the State's and community's culpability in engendering the conflict, sustaining its escalation and choosing its sacrificial victims. The evil of violence, abstracted from history, became a symptom of the existential derangement of man and civilization. The social order, by extension, was seen to be a

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that the question of truthfully representing the Partition was so daunting a task even for avowed Progressive realists like Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi and K.S. Duggal that they too had to stray way from the simple realist mode of narration towards more complex symbolist or expressionist forms in order to problematise the issues of perspective and subjective consciousness. Bedi's "Lajwanti" and to a lesser extent, Krishan Chander's "Peshawar Express" are examples of this.

victim of madness and greed. In choosing not to replicate the authoritative tone of realism, Manto showed that he was interested in bringing the tragedy back to its historical context. This compelled his stories to sympathetically examine the subject of the violence, explore his inner life and extend the social implications of his psychic necessity. This exercise not only jeopardized the State's efforts to represent the Partition as a black and white conflict between 'us' and 'them' but also risked revealing its complicity in the violence. It threatened the stable basis of communitarian identity and traditional hierarchies that gave the State its political and moral legitimacy. Obviously, therefore, Manto's stories had to be prevented from being read in their historical immediacy. Therefore, it can be concluded that the lack of a loud and clear moral censure for the damned in Manto's stories was enough to alert the State about the complex narrative energy invested in the Partition. Not that the State had competent interpretations to offer on his stories; far from it. Still, it could grasp the fact that his stories had fought against conventional closures and, therefore, could be read in many ways.

### **Conclusion**

The two dominant emotional surfaces on which the Partition has been recounted in fiction are an uncritical nationalism and exile. Both of them co-exist and mutually feed off each other in terms of tropes that narrowly range from nostalgia to betrayal. In many cases, the anxiety of nationalism and that of exile have been found overlapping. The reference to Partition's tragedy in these two registers is a homogenizing one in which the 'culprits' belong to one world while the victims belong to another, the only difference being that the consciousness of exile also points accusing fingers at nationalism for severing people off from their native cultures, communities, customs and myths. The ethical intervention that writers like Manto have constantly tried to make at this point is to rescue the event from the narrative of *destiny* that the betrayed and self righteous nationalists and the morally overwhelmed subjects of exile have resigned themselves to and signify it as *historical necessity*. Nevertheless, the ahistorical perception of Partition has been so strongly endorsed by its victims that the social picture which emerges in Manto's stories seems equally pessimistic if it is not rigorously contextualized. As an

example of how his stories have been flattened into conforming to the hopeless voice of exile, I will quote from Jason Francisco's review:

Manto's achievement – and the reasons for treating him foremost as a writer of rupture – is to place his readers in the beat of depraved, senseless and twisted universes from which he offers, in what is perhaps his own vengeance, no clear escape. We are left only with speed and violence coursing in the blood of his characters, spun off without soothing messages or disclaimers. (Hasan 385)

Unlike his contemporaries, Manto has not described the violence and indifference as beastly or demoniac or barbaric.<sup>14</sup> The hypnotic effects that, according to Francisco, his stories have on its readers are because we are not able to distance either the victimizers or the victims from ourselves and the moral universe that surrounds us. Despite having committed unpardonable crimes against humanity, his characters are shown to be 'all too human'. There are some, like Indra Nath Chaudhury, who have identified a humanist concern in such stories but have interpreted it as the writer's faith in Man's "elemental humanity" (Bhalla 219). This position misreads him because the humanism of his stories is found in the instances of ethically negotiable freedom from despair which are premised on the characters' deep realisation that the 'self' and the 'other' are implicated in a historical moment in equally tragic ways. The possibilities of psychic redemption that his stories generate do not however diminish the sense of historical divide which separates people from not only one another but also from their own reflective and imaginative being. The two things go hand in hand and are simultaneously present in the socially and culturally constituted subject. This dialectical conception of human tragedy is the result of a radical awareness of history that emerges from the best and the most shocking of his Partition stories.

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<sup>14</sup>Most prominent among such disclaimers is Krishan Chander's collection of stories about the Partition, *Hum Vehshi Hain* (We are Savages).

## CHAPTER 4

### Conclusion: Partition's Forgotten Double

"Lost in water,  
Blood falters; then swirled to roses, it salts the slaughter."

--- Agha Shahid Ali in "A Villanelle"

#### I

In the effort to distinguish Manto from the Progressive current raging in his time, one runs the risk of overlooking the closeness of view that he shared with Progressive writers on the matter of commitment. In an essay titled, "Taraqqipasand Sochaa Nahin Karte" (Progressives Don't Think), which appeared as the introduction to the second edition of *Chughd*, the writer suggested this intimacy while explaining the basis of not reproducing an earlier introduction that the communist poet, Ali Sardar Jafri, had written for this collection:

It is strange that when Ali Sardar had agreed to write an "Introduction" for *Chughd*, he had not given a thought to what possibly binds us together, even when, according to him, our views on Literature are radically different. But my Progressive friends don't think. They consider thinking to be a vice.

(Issar 305)

Regardless of whether Manto leveled a sincere accusation or not, one cannot deny the enormity of literary ambition and imagination that was invested into the Progressive writers' movement. They were the first to identify a problem in having middle-class literature parade itself off as National literature. Their explorations were vast and troubled. Even the death of poor, starving masses had meaning in their lives and culture. As socialists who saw hope in an egalitarian future, their writings were haunted by the anxiety of de-classing and social transcendence. Their literature measured the distance that lies between the big and the little. Just to remind ourselves about Hasrat Mohani's resolution in the Lucknow Conference as well as several other views on the nature and objectives of the movement, they had specifically claimed to give voice to the world, aspirations and desires of the poor lot who were involved in struggling against forces of oppression in society. In order to fulfill this, the writers' responsibility towards searching



for the literary potential within languages and dialects that came in everyday public use was emphasized. The aim of communicating with literate people from the working classes was offered as a reason for this. Their active support of a political society implied that their appeals would have to stretch beyond the domain that they themselves inhabited. As a careful reading of words like “allow” used in the resolution suggests, this domain was pedagogic in character. Writers, poets, artists and critics were seen as teachers who could school society into desiring and accepting the change that was about to come. Their commitment to the cause was total. However, the history of this domain of teachers was not new. Among the very few of the modern institutions that the Empire had replicated in its colonies was a restricted civil society. Acting as the most powerful agent of modernity, the civil society had long ago assumed its pedagogic role. As early authors of ‘the dismal science’, economics, have pointed out, the problem of optimum utilization of resources is inseparable with the growth and spread of the civil society. Civil Society’s cultural forms, therefore, had to express economy. Social Realism is believed to have been at its widest reach when it has successfully created types.<sup>1</sup> For the radical inheritors of this form, the battlefield of cultural politics could be won with the possibilities inherent in the problem of Representation.

For the best writers among the Progressives, this problem also posed a question of self-reflexive empathy: how to best understand the reality that separates ‘us’ from ‘them’. Political economy, after all, could not simply be economics. It is unreal to depict this cultural crisis as devoid of modernist concerns. The implicit assumption that lay behind their social critique is that the ontology of the privileged self determined its exploitative relationship with the dispossessed. Therefore, their literature reflected self-criticism.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the Progressive writers saw themselves as a cultural vanguard responsible for guiding the masses towards a realisation of their own nationhood. This underlying problem of representation was usually approached by imagining a radical force of moral

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See the discussion on this in “Realism and Desire: Balzac and the Problem of the Subject” in Frederic Jameson. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Methuen, 1981. 151-184

<sup>2</sup> This point has been demonstrated ably by Ralph Russell in the essay, “Leadership in the All India Progressive Writers’ Movement”. *How Not to Write a History of Urdu Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1999. 75-78

evolution in which both the writers and their readers, the masses, could participate. In this way, they could sever their moorings with the rich and middle-classes as well as acquire legitimacy as writers and perform the duties of civil society in the most productive way. The Partition was a shock for many of them because it had falsified the distance which they had imagined as existing between the masses and themselves: the distance that they had always desired to bridge. It was seen as betraying the cause of moral evolution itself. In the midst of carnage and killing, many wondered how ordinary lives could be valued so cheaply and how society could so easily be propelled towards self-destruction (cf. Chughtai: "Communal Violence and Literature" 445-446).

The inability, on the part of most Progressive writers, to do anything beyond registering their protest against the Partition seems strangely echoed in what Ali Sardar Jafri had to write regarding Manto, in his work, *Taraqqi Pasand Adab* (1951):

The difference between Krishan's and Manto's stories is this, that Manto's heroes are mutilated men; therefore they cannot be representative, because they cannot represent the evolution of life. Krishan's heroes are courageous and conscious builders of life. They express evolution; therefore they are representative. (qtd. in Flemming 28-29)

While most of Manto's characters did not belong to the privileged classes, neither were they participants in the national political society which the Progressive writers sought to represent. They did not fit into the civil society's newly politicised agenda. In other words, his stories did not express the economy of representation that the Progressive movement was geared up to explore. Also, the characters' circumstances, deeds and desires could not be used to map the distance between the writers themselves and the people about whom they were writing. For people like Jafri, Manto's stories suffered from a lack of realism. Explaining the basis of such a conclusion, Leslie Flemming singled out the writer's Partition stories:

Whereas the experiences of characters like Saugandhi and Sultana, low castes though they are, lead us to ponder on the position of all women, those of Ishar Singh and Kulwant Kaur neither allow for more generalised application nor provide us with new insights into our own

social relationships...Because of this it **still remains** a highly individualistic, unrealistic view of the Partition events, in comparison to the Partition stories by other writers. (Flemming 78-79)

While the distinction that Progressive writers **implicitly** made between civil society and political society has to be kept in mind, it is also worthwhile to go through **another** manner of distinction made between these two domains in recent reflections on our postcolonial democracy. One of the main **features** of political society, according to contemporary writings on the subject, is the **epistemic** category called 'population'.<sup>3</sup> As against the idea of a law-abiding and enlightened civil society, whose chief characteristic are its numerous associational forms where **contestation** regarding norms takes **place** through debates and discussions based on the notion of rights and responsibilities, the population is defined as a faceless mass of people whose welfare is seen to be premised on a rationalisation of desires. This rationalisation is undertaken by the civil society on behalf of the State. Further, according to Partha Chatterjee:

Many of the mobilizations in political society which makes demands on the state are founded on a violation of the law...It is not that they are associations of citizens who have merely **violated** the law; the very collective form in which they appear before the state **authorities** implies that they are not proper citizens but rather population **groups** who survive by sidestepping the law. (Kaviraj and Khilnani 177-78)

This definition is interesting and more resonant **when** we study the social bases of Manto's characters who are often criminals, squatters and prostitutes. It would seem from this that rather than marking the imaginative **convergence** of middle-class radicalism with subaltern desire, the political society is an **oppositional** site where the process of subject formation is incomplete. It constantly reveals an **improper** excess, a lack of **management** and order, thereby presenting itself as an object of **knowledge** and civic governance. Is it

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<sup>3</sup> The 'population' was first defined as an object of **governmentality** by the French social philosopher, Michel Foucault. While describing the changing mechanism of **governance** around the population, Foucault wrote: "The population now represents more the end of government than the power of the sovereign; the population is the subject of needs, of aspirations but it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, vis-à-vis the government, of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it." See Michel Foucault. "Governmentality." *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984, vol. 3*. Ed. James D. Faubion. London: Penguin, 2001. 201-222

so, then, that the difference between Manto and Progressive writers is merely due to differing notions of political society?

In one of Manto's stories titled, "License", the widow of a tonga-driver seeks a license to drive her deceased husband's tonga in order to make a living after his death. The authorities refuse her, citing the 'reason' that they do not see it feasible to let a woman carry on such a trade. When she asks them to consider her need for sustenance, they sarcastically advise her to trade her flesh "like many other women." In her desperation, she finally becomes a prostitute. This story reveals an interesting fact. Law-breaking is often a form of forced negotiation that occurs between the State and its subject population. It is at the boundary between State and the population where the economy of modernity gets disturbed. Another aspect of this 'illegal' negotiation is that it is also gendered to reproduce patriarchal control. Moreover, there are also enough instances in Manto's writings which show that the civil society is not constituted by a uniformly law-abiding collective of people. "*Why do we think that we don't break laws?*" is the rhetorical question posed here. Similarly, violence as a form of legal violation is also a negotiating action between the authorities/civil society and the 'population'. In the larger historical context of the national movement, this does not mean that violence was responsible in creating a radical political society as opposed to a moderate civil one. It is often in the bargains struck between the nationalist elite and the subject population that violence came to acquire a negotiational meaning.

Implicit in many stories by Manto, is a critique of civil social aspirations. However, it does not mean that Manto shifted the onus of violence from the population and located its natural inherence in civil society. This is where it becomes important to note that Manto's critique of violent nationalism, as critics like Alok Bhalla have opined, is made to fall in line with Gandhi's critique of civil society (cf. Bhalla: "Introduction" xii). As an instance, I would like to offer some arguments about Bhalla's reading of the story, "1919 ki Ek Baat" (A Tale about 1919). The story operates within two time frames: the year 1919 which is being narrated and the year after 1947 when the narration is taking place. A man, whose identity is not revealed throughout the story, is traveling by train between

two unknown places. In the middle of the journey, he strikes up a conversation with a fellow-passenger who we do not know, as well. Despite the fact that one is a stranger to the other, the sudden impulse to speak is noticeable. Bhalla points out that in the political context of the Partition, silence was considered to be more prudent (Bhalla 35). Hence, such an impulse is positively significant as a “gesture of in-gathering and community making” (37). Bhalla may not have intended to read too much into this moment but it surely needs to be noted that conversations do not make communities. The flimsy insistence on such a metaphor misses a more important point that orients the subjects of this story in their context: ambivalence. Ambivalence, a word often used to describe the condition of the post-colonial subjectivity<sup>4</sup>, philosophically denotes the parallelism of different, often conflicting, ways of imagining the relationship between the self and the other.

The narrator’s need to account for himself before a stranger arises from a partial, unclear understanding of his own situation after the Partition. The relationship between the narrator and his stranger-companion is neither moral nor obligatory but necessitated by a mix of both impulses. As Zygmunt Bauman has clarified:

The stranger undermines the spatial ordering of the world – the fought after co-ordination between moral and topographical closeness, the staying together of friends and the remoteness of enemies. The stranger disturbs the resonance between physical and psychical distance; he is physically close while remaining psychically remote...[he] represents an incongruous and hence resented synthesis of nearness and remoteness. His proximity (as all proximity, according to Levinas) suggests a moral relationship, while his

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting theoretical diagnosis of ambivalence in the post-colonial subject formation has been put forward by Homi Bhabha in his study of Frantz Fanon’s text, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Taking a cue from the psychoanalysis of Lacan, he has argued that identification or identity is not a pre-given “self-fulfilling prophesy”. It is the process of knowing oneself as existing *for the other*. Therefore the representation of the self always happens in the differentiating order of otherness. Bhabha further writes: “The desire for the other is doubled by a desire in language, which splits the difference between Self and Other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself.” This is what he means by ambivalence: the exposure of lack and the desire to “account for ourselves – but only partially – within a political theatre of agonism, bureaucratic obfuscation, violence and violation.” See Bhabha. “Interrogating Identity: The Postcolonial Prerogative.” *Anatomy of Racism*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. 183-209

remoteness permits solely a contractual one: another important opposition compromised. (Bauman 295)

In the story, the narrator points out that the unsung heroes of 1919 were people like Thaila, a petty criminal, who gave his life in a street-fighting bid to avenge the police atrocities committed on those who had opposed the Rowlatt Act. While Bhalla is critical of the narrator's attempt to naturalise the violence and present it as an inextricable aspect of the national movement, he himself considers the endorsement of violence to be endemic to a modernity that Gandhi had opposed. The reference to Gandhi punctuates Bhalla's text and serves as a foil to the "bloody tracks" (Bhalla 29) through which nationalists led themselves. For example:

The narrator, as the rest of the story makes clear, is respectful towards Gandhi and is yet fascinated by the politics of violent revenge; he wants to believe that the protesters in Amritsar were peaceful, but longs to justify those who fought the British in the streets. (43)

According to the critic, the story offers a "retrospective intelligibility" (29) about the national movement. However, its focus is more than this. The narrator, in muddling his account of 1919 up, reveals the confusion in his mind regarding violence. The story is a comment on the ambivalent subjectivity and not on his exposure of a political muddle. Bhalla denounces the narrator's valorisation of Thaila as "sentimental nonsense" and "in Gandhian terms, an abdication of ethical and political will to the whims of a hooligan" (49). While Gandhi's suspicion of nationalist modernity cannot be examined at any length in this chapter, it will suffice to ask how the fact of Partition historically impinges into the narrator's subjective endorsement of violence in the national movement. Bhalla answers this in a limited fashion by pointing out a steady continuity between the violent dimension of the national movement and the Partition:

For Manto...contemplating the partition from Lahore in 1951, there is a physical, moral and political logic which links the profane desires of the narrator, the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, the prurient delights of the British soldiers and the fatal fraternities of mobs from 1919 to 1947. Together, they form a random anthology of incidents in an awful and inexorable tragedy of a degenerate society. (52)

The impatient dismissal of the ambivalence that structures the narrator's situation collapses the specificity of violence that the story foregrounds. The narrator's flawed account endorses the violence because he is drawn to functioning at the limits of community in being compelled to strike up an uneasy conversation with the stranger. The violence is not candidly glorified. It should be noted that while the narrated events had been taking place, the narrator himself had not directly participated in them. He had, like many other confused youngsters of his kind, been caught up in the chaos that had followed the arrests of the activists. The story of Thaila's death is not of a didactic sort; instead the narrator is constantly seen as offering the criminal's 'human' side to his companion. The mixing up of motives that govern Thaila's violence with the rest of the peaceful agitation cannot be attributed to Manto. Clearly, this is done by the narrator in his fumbling negotiations with the immediate circumstances that surround him. He is desperate to point out the inexplicable compulsions that drive human beings into committing violent acts. It can also be seen as his effort at deflecting attention away from the Partition. However, as the story shows, the reader's attention keeps getting dragged back onto the Partition. "1919 ki Ek Baat" gives us a glimpse of the processes through which Partition violence took shape inside the subjectivity of the people who were at pains to determine the distance as well as the simultaneous correspondence between their communitarian and national identities.

## II

Manto's stories contain representations that are in excess of the economy that was sought to be formally consolidated by the Progressive movement. This is so because in these stories, the lives of the characters are defined by the excess in their negotiations with an oppressive reality. This 'excess' is certainly a tragic one. Like the woman in "License", the narrator of "1919 ki Ek Baat" has also been forced to reckon with too many odds. All these extraordinary characters have not left trails of justification behind their deeds because Manto realised that history had never been made available to men as a comprehensive unity. When you look at a story, there is always an invisible flip-side. He showed through his stories that the entire truth about the Partition could never be told

without implicating oneself in it. Truth, in its entirety, had been striven for by the Progressives but when it came to the Partition, most of them could not manage to implicate themselves. The Partition had been too close to them. This opposite acknowledgment of the closeness can be seen as, for want of a better word, modernist.<sup>5</sup> Manto's stories argue that Partition was inflicted upon us by necessity. This necessity was considered to be the best revealer of the nature of social conflict prevailing upon the reality that surrounded him. Only those who could free themselves of this necessity could turn the clock around.

Mozel in the story "Mozel" is a Jewish girl, staying in suburban Bombay.<sup>6</sup> She walks into a mischievous affair with Tirlochan Singh, a Sikh residing in her building. Through Tirlochan, she is dragged into the brutal atmosphere of the Partition. Attempting to save her friend and his fiancé, she chooses to bargain her death with it. She is the only one with moral clarity in the midst of the tremendous confusion because she is an outsider, free from the necessity shared between those who belonged to the warring communities. But she has also approached the lives of these other people with a desire for communion. As an ironic aside to this, the dog's fate in "Titwal ka Kutta" (The Dog of Titwal) can be read as another way of looking at "Mozel's" predicament. It is unable to be either a "martyr" or an "enemy" and therefore gets a "dog's death" (Ravikant and Saint 10). The barter of death with love is not a heroic thing for Mozel. It is a shame for us. The ethical conclusion that his stories provoke is that Partition does not have any heroes, only victims.

Whereas Progressive fiction poses a duality between the self and its object, the masses, Manto's stories try to dislodge this duality by creating instances where the self and the masses are inextricable and mutually involved aspects of each other. They draw attention towards the fact that reality was being created as a self-conscious process within the very

<sup>5</sup> An excellent realization of this can be found in Walter Benjamin's studies on Brecht's theatre. The modernist irony, according to him, is not "didactic". "It only reflects the philosophical sophistication of the author who, in writing his plays, always remembers that in the end the world may turn out to be a theatre." See Benjamin. "What is Epic Theatre?" *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. 153

<sup>6</sup> The story, along with some others written by Manto himself, counts among the few available representations of the lives of small minority groups like Anglo-Indians and Jewish within the city of Bombay, in the literature of that time.



civil society which writers and critics have presumed was on the safer side of the distance that separated them from the dispossessed. As an antidote, Manto has offered a disarming charm in his story, "Yazid." Reality is cruel after the Partition, Karimdad confesses to his fellow-villagers, and he names his son 'Yazid', the very epitome of cruelty in Islamic cosmography. He jocularly hopes that this son will free them from the tyranny of the times. Despite ordinarily meaning a tyrant, the name can, he is sure, mean something else at another point of time. Regardless of the name given to it, the death of Karimdad's father during the riots will be just that for him. There is a choice that has been exercised in this story. This choice not to see any meaning of his father's death beyond its immediacy is limited; nevertheless, it reflects his necessity. With the naming of his child, the fight against this necessity begins anew.

In the story, "Sau Candle Power ka Bulb" (A Hundred Candles Power Bulb), the narrator notes that Lahore's Qaiser Bagh has changed irrevocably after the Partition. He has returned to the city after a couple of years and is dumbstruck at the sight of misery and ruin all around him. He cannot compare it to its past images of prosperity and is only able to wonder, with horror, at all that it must have taken to rob this place of its fortune:

Such a transformation in two years! He could not believe it. Through newspapers and friends who had lived in the town, he had got an inkling of the storm that had struck the town – that had made men kill their fellow-men; subject women to the grossest indignities; but the havoc that this storm had played with even the woodwork of buildings and the brickwork was unbelievable. It had denuded them of their elegance. Everything now looked naked and deprived of its youth. (Madan Gupta 45-46)

In the course of the story, the narrator has a chance meeting with a prostitute who lives in one of the dilapidated buildings. In her bare room is a bright bulb that keeps burning all the time, even when she tries to sleep. Her pimp will not let her just because he has to earn some more money through her. The narrator feels like killing the pimp and escorts the prostitute to a hotel. Here, she discloses that she had recently arrived in the city, probably as a refugee, and had not slept since. Whether she did not get the opportunity to do so or whether sleep wouldn't come to her is not told. The horrible look of despair on

her face compels the narrator to turn his back on her. After he drops her back to her building, he relates the incident to his friend, wondering what the need for burning such a bright bulb could be. The next day, the narrator's friend goes into the building to satisfy his curiosity about the prostitute. He finds her sleeping on a mat, beside the corpse of the pimp whose head had been crushed with a brick. The bright bulb is still burning. Unable to comprehend the situation and yet repelled by it, the friend runs out and escapes. In a story which threatens the reader with its absurdity, the hundred candles power bulb survives as the sole but mute trace of the prostitute's struggle against the darkness of her circumstances with its intensity, her sole weapon. The bulb's brightness is an illusion, a drug that perhaps helped her survive. In its ability to go on burning and denying sleep, it reflects back the horror of those who cannot see its compulsion in the life of the prostitute. Just as it does in the case of those who are shocked by the child identifying the tell-tale amalgamation of ice and frozen blood as "jelly" in the sketch, "Jelly". The crisis of not being able to see in excess of the economy that a certain order imposes is reflected within the very civil society, Progressive literature had been functioning from. Manto acknowledges his own *locus standi* within this civil society as a writer. He confronts the concealed nature of its problems and seeks to transcend them. His perceptions of reality are different from that of the Progressives, but not opposite to them. In fact, his writing seems to be constantly aware of the limits, imposed by the representational economy, which most Progressive Literature has perhaps been indifferent towards. Manto and his generation of writers were faced with the same problem. However, whereas for most of the Progressives, this problem lay outside of their own domain, Manto experienced it as something internally determining his writing. This is what one often forgets when one reads his stories as examples of a creative principle that may have stood in complete opposition to the crises defining the literature of his times.

The social picture which reveals itself in Manto's stories is one in which civil and political societies do not enjoy a separate ontological existence. They are mirror images of each other signifying the condition of loss. What the political society does not have is that which makes the civil society insecure. Read in the context of Partition, his stories present each as doubling the 'other'. Just the way the author, limited by the economy

within which he is forced to function, and his texts – signifying an excess over this economy – are doubles of each other. Manto’s awareness of this can be perceived while reading his soul-searching essay, “Saadat Hasan” (cf. Issar 19-22). Saadat Hasan is not Manto and Manto is not Saadat Hasan, though they have been born together. While Manto, the writer, is described as a “fraud” because he says that “he does not think the story; rather, the story thinks him” (20), Saadat Hasan, his writing, fears that it may die and Manto may continue to live on. “If that happens then it will be as if the egg shell survives without the yolk” (19) (translation mine).

### III

In my engagement with Manto’s stories, I have tried to deflect my attention away from the meaning of the author’s life to the meanings that the stories themselves may have independently carried. Having recognised the intertextuality of texts early enough, I decided to read through the criticism that has been penned on him and his stories. In doing so, I have received insights about the ways in which the meanings in his stories have been read/interpreted and discussed at various points of time and how these interpretations themselves have been informed by experiences that have factored much of our present history. It is reassuring to note that much of the critical writings on his stories that have appeared fairly recently and are still being noticed, are self-conscious about their own distance from his times. This has obviously contributed to the criticality of these studies. However, I have also, time and again, felt the demands for a broadly emotional approach that early evaluations of his writings have voiced. This approach cannot be dismissed at all because it has reflected the continuation of a sense of urgency in people’s experiences of the Partition, till date. It can easily vouch for the long shelf-life that Manto’s fictions have had.

I am aware that my reception history reflects a need for a wider frame of references. An ignorance of the Urdu script (though I have read the originals as transcribed into the Devanagiri script) and the relative brevity of allotted time have proved to be limitations in my attempt to be comprehensive. Nevertheless, the critical writings that have been discussed in this study have claimed to be representative ones and therefore it is hoped that the crucial debates between them have been addressed here. After long consideration,

I decided to reserve an evaluation of the various existing translations of Manto in Hindi and English as interpretations. They have seemed to me to be whimsical and not based on any coherent principle or theory of translation.<sup>7</sup> I have also used translations on the basis of their comprehensiveness and have undertaken some myself wherever I felt that existing ones have been inadequate or on the occasions when particular things that I have had to cite have not been hitherto translated. While critical writings have proved to be a powerful index of how Manto's stories have been remembered vis-à-vis the Partition, a wider archive could include the various instances of adaptation of these stories into performances and films. Restricting myself to the study of meanings that get negotiated within critical reception, I have chosen to be silent about many more issues that otherwise make themselves heard in our everyday debates about the times in which Manto wrote. For instance, the debates on secularism, an issue which has been brought back in recent years with great urgency by disturbing occurrences in our polity and society, have not been included in the frame of references that guide my readings of Manto's stories. Far from being resolved, the issue's gravity demands a greater clarity based on more developed research.

A noticeable fact that surfaced during my research was the sheer absence (barring Aamir Mufti's essay) of work on the significance of forms and genres in Partition Narratives. Most critical pieces written by scholars of Partition Narratives are solely focused on the 'contents' of the stories. The recognition of the fact that Partition has been an event with immense historical implications is, therefore, weakened in the available critical studies on its fiction. Much has been written on the imagined spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the European Novel and how they contribute to the generic staging of a historical and cultural unity.<sup>8</sup> There has, however, been little serious investment in the study of the

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<sup>7</sup> Mohd. Asaduddin and Alok Bhalla have attempted a couple of evaluative essays on the translations but have not been able to offer any cogent reasons for particular ones. See Asaduddin. "Manto in English: An assessment of Khalid Hasan's Translations." *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*. Ed. Alok Bhalla. Shimla: IAS, 1997. 159-171

See also Alok Bhalla. "The Politics of Translation: Manto's Partition stories and Khalid Hasan's English Versions." *Pangs of Partition vol.2*. Eds. S. Settar and Indira Gupta. New Delhi: Manohar, 2002. 241-259

<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson's work has been the most successful of such efforts. See Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1981.

historical evolution of novels in India<sup>9</sup> and next to nothing on the history of writing short stories in various Indian languages. In Manto's case, it becomes difficult to follow the intricate forms of remembering employed in many of his Partition stories: the symbols that give little away, the narrator's incomprehension of things, etc. unless we are able to assess the experience of spatially divided time and how it required, for the more ambitious, to work with a generic mutation in their stories. As Amitava Kumar has identified the problem:

The problem of time. In India it means that the country's date of birth is also the date of its partition. The trauma of 1947 partitions time, but not into a before and after – though it does that too, in the psyches of the survivors. Rather, what I'm trying to argue for is a different process of remembering. Instead of locating the trauma and fetishizing it in a singular, painful event, we need to remember time as always already partitioned. In that remembering, time and its tensions persist in a whole series of events, often repeated. (Kumar 115)

If we are unable to transform this awareness into a cognitive point of entry for Manto's post-Partition writings then we stand a chance of missing the representational emphasis of a story like "1919 ki Ek Baat". Irony is of course generic in the modern short-stories but even its specific usage has to be historicized. Otherwise, we misplace its particular meaning in these stories like Alok Bhalla does. Rather, the impression one gets from reading most of the published criticism on Manto is that the 'contents' in the stories are self-evident and have an existence autonomous of their forms. There are very strong reasons behind this tendency to disregard 'Form' but I am not sure that all of them impinge into our consideration of Partition Literature.

Broadly, I have chosen to work within the paradigm of historicism. It is plain that today, the term 'historicism' does not connote all that which it used to in the early years of its theorization. Its meanings have changed with every subsequent crisis in Marxist literary criticism. Nevertheless, historicism has always implied an attention to the material

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<sup>9</sup> Pioneering attempts by Meenakshi Mukherjee, for instance, have not been followed up. See Mukherjee. *Realism and Reality*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1985.

conditions within which texts are produced and received. Questions of political economy have been foremost in their importance within the cognitive apparatus of this kind of criticism. My engagements are more oriented towards discourses. Nevertheless, this rough effort at historicism does try to express the contours of a political economy, however preliminary, which played a key role in cultural production during the Partition.<sup>10</sup> That the meanings in Manto's stories have appeared limited to his contemporaries reveals the force of this economy. Still, it is to the credit of the literature of those times that it continues to be read, analysed and written about today. The works whose freshness survives till date are the ones that have carried the possibility of defying the rationalizing economy of meanings in their times. Such works are inseparable from the struggling currents in the history that they point towards. Despite their apparent pessimism, they disclose a will to move things forward.

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<sup>10</sup> Surprisingly, none of the Progressive writers have left written evidence of their consideration of the correspondence between their writing and its conditions of production: the publishing, distribution and circulation networks which they made use of, the money that they earned through their published fictions, the functioning of print establishments, channel institutions like public libraries, etc. Again it is only Manto who has at least drawn attention towards writing as a professional compulsion and the writer being guided, to an extent, by the demands of his publishers. In "Main Afsana Kyunkar Likhta Hoon" (How I Write my Stories), he has confessed that when nothing inspires him, the publisher's advance in his pocket is his sole source of ideas. See the essay in *Mantonama*. Ed. Devendra Issar. New Delhi: Indraprastha, 1981. 40-41



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