A Publication of South Asia Research Center of India October 2026 Vol-5 No-10

Salahiyat
صلاحیت
ਸਲਾਹੀਯਤ



Guest Editor: Zahid Khan

Writer Journalist Translator

DEDICATED TO GREAT FRIEND ACTOR SHYAM CHADDHA



Actor Shyam Sundar Chadha and Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto shared one of the most legendary and poignant friendships in the history of Indian cinema and literature.Their Bond and Friendship

How They Met: Shyam and Manto literally bumped into each other on the staircase of the High Nest building on Lady Jamshedji Road

in Bombay in the 1940s, while both were working at [Bombay Talkies].

"Hiptullha": They shared a deep, mischievous bond, famously creating an inside joke/word called "hiptullha" that grew popular in Bombay's film circles.

The Partition: When the 1947 Partition tore the subcontinent apart and Manto eventually decided to move to Pakistan, it was Shyam who accompanied Manto to the Mumbai port, waving goodbye with a final shout of "Hiptullha!" as the ship departed. Despite the border, their friendship remained unbroken.

Manto's Literary Tribute

"Shyam: Murli Ki Dhun": Following Shyam's untimely death, Manto immortalized him in a moving chapter titled "Shyam: Murli Ki Dhun" in his collection of essays, [*Stars from Another Sky*].

Famous Quote: Manto wrote of his friend: *"Shyam was a lover, but to him the act of love was not to be performed for its own sake. He was prepared to die for anything that was beautiful—and I think death must have been beautiful, otherwise he would not have died."*

The Melody of the Flute

Saadat Hasan Manto

It was the twenty-third or twenty-fourth of April—I do not recall exactly. I was undergoing treatment at the mental asylum to give up alcohol when I read the news of Shyam’s death in a newspaper. In those days, a strange state of mind had taken hold of me; I was caught in a cycle of unconsciousness and semi-consciousness. I could not quite grasp where the realm of lucidity ended and where I slipped into a state of unconsciousness. The boundaries between the two had blurred to such an extent that I felt as though I were wandering in 'no man's land.'

Consequently, when the news of Shyam’s death caught my eye, I assumed it was merely a trick played by alcohol withdrawal—something that had been stirring up turmoil in my mind. Prior to this, in a state of semi-slumber, I had witnessed the deaths of several loved ones, only to realize during moments of lucidity that they were all alive and praying for my recovery.

I remember clearly that when I read the news, I said to the madman in the adjacent room, "Do you know? A very dear friend of mine has died."

He asked, "Who?"

I replied in a choked voice, "Shyam."

"Where? Here in the asylum?"

I gave no answer. A succession of images flashed through my troubled mind—images of Shyam. Shyam smiling; Shyam laughing. Shyam, boisterous and brimming with life; Shyam, utterly unacquainted with death and its terrors... I began to think that everything I had read was completely wrong—that the very existence of the newspaper was a figment of my imagination.

Gradually, the alcoholic haze lifted from my mind, and I began to see events in their true perspective. Yet, this process was so slow that when I finally confronted the reality of Shyam's death, it did not come as a massive shock. It felt as though he had died long ago, and the blow of his passing had already been absorbed ages ago. Now, only traces remained—mere debris that I was slowly excavating. Amidst the heap of broken bricks, I would occasionally find Shyam's smile buried there, or the echo of his dashing laughter.

Outside the asylum, in the world of the 'sane,' the rumor went that Saadat Hasan Manto had gone mad upon hearing the news of Shyam's death. Had that actually happened, I would have deeply regretted it; for upon hearing of Shyam's death, I ought to have become *more* lucid. The realization of the world's transience should have struck my heart and mind with greater intensity, and a resolve to fully utilize my own life—driven by a spirit of defiance—should have taken root within me... To go mad upon hearing of Shyam's death would have been nothing but sheer insanity;

Asad, the mountain-digger could not die without his pickaxe,

He was bewildered by the intoxication of conventions and constraints.

To lose one's sanity over the death of Shyam—a man who shattered the idols of convention and constraint—would have been a grave insult to him. Shyam lives on in his two children—the fruit of his uninhibited love; in Taaji (Mumtaz), who—by his own admission—was his weakness; and in all those women whose *odhnis* occasionally cast their shadow over his loving heart. He lives on in my heart, too—a heart that mourns solely because it could not raise the cry "Long live Shyam!" at his deathbed.

I am certain of this: as he kissed the lips of Death with deep sincerity, he would have said, in his characteristic style, "Manto, I swear to God, the taste of these lips is something else entirely."

Whenever I think of Shyam, I am reminded of Sanin, the protagonist created by the famous Russian novelist Artsybashev. Shyam was a lover, not a professional wooer; he was captivated by everything beautiful. I suspect that Death must be beautiful, too—otherwise, he would never have died.

He loved warmth and intensity. People say that the hands of Death are cold. I do not believe it. Shyam had no time for cold hands; had Death's hands truly been cold, he would have brushed them aside, saying:

"Move aside, old girl... do you lack sincerity?"

He writes to me in a letter:

"The story is this, my dear: everyone here is a 'Heptala.' But the *real* 'Heptala' is far away. As for me—well, I see no reason to utter a word of complaint... Life is passing beautifully... revelry and wine-

drinking—wine-drinking and revelry—going hand in hand." Taaji (Mumtaz) has returned after a gap of six months; she remains a tremendous weakness of mine, and you know how blissful it is to feel the warmth of a woman's love! After all, I am human—a normal human being.

Nigar (Nigar Sultana) and I meet occasionally, but the primary claim belongs to 'T'.

In the evenings, I often recall your wise, rambling chatter.

In that letter, Shyam used the term 'Haptala'. Since the explanation behind it is quite interesting, let me share it with you.

I was employed at Bombay Talkies. In those days, the screenplay for Kamal Amrohi's film 'Haveli' (which was eventually filmed as 'Mahal') was being developed and finalized. Ashok, Dacha, Hasrat (Lucknawi), and I would all participate in the daily discussions and debates. During these sessions, alongside the work, there would often be lively, spirited banter. We would tease one another. Whenever Shyam was free from the shooting of the film 'Majboor', he too would join our gathering.

Kamal Amrohi had a habit of using highly literary, ornate language even in casual conversation. This posed a problem for me; if I presented a new idea regarding the story in simple, accessible language, it wouldn't fully register with Kamal. Conversely, if I expressed my thoughts using high-flown vocabulary, Ashok and Dacha wouldn't understand a thing. Consequently

...began using a peculiar, hybrid sort of language.

One morning, while on my way from home to Bombay Talkies, I opened the sports column of a newspaper. Cricket matches were being played at the Brabourne Stadium. One player had a bizarre name: 'Heptula'... H-E-P-T-U-L-A... 'Heptula'... I pondered over what this could possibly mean, but I couldn't make sense of it. Perhaps it was a distorted version of 'Haibatullah'.

When I reached the studio, work began on adapting the story for the screen. Kamal narrated a chapter of the story in his signature literary and evocative style. Ashok asked for my opinion: "Well, Manto?"

For some reason, the words that escaped my lips were: "It's fine... but it lacks 'Heptula'!"

It somehow clicked. ''Heptula'.' It conveyed exactly what I meant. What I wanted to say was that the sequence lacked punch.

Some time later, Hasrat presented the same chapter in a new way. When my opinion was sought, I deliberately said this time, "Look, Hasrat, it doesn't quite work... you need to present something with 'Heptula' in it. 'Heptula'."

After saying '*Heptula*' the second time, I looked around at everyone to gauge their reaction. The word had now acquired a specific meaning. Consequently, I used it quite freely during that session—speaking of '*Heptulity*' or the need to '*Heptulize*' things, and so on. But suddenly, Ashok turned to me and asked, "What is the actual meaning of 'Heptula'? Which language does the word belong to?"

Shyam was present at the time. When Ashok asked me this question, he burst into loud laughter, his eyes crinkling up. He had been with

me on the train when I first drew his attention to this bizarre name of a cricketer. Doubled over with laughter, he told everyone that this was Manto's new 'Mantoviyat' (Manto-ism). When nothing else made sense, he dragged 'Haptala' into the world of cinema; yet, without any forced effort, the word became current in Bombay's film circles.

In a letter dated July 29, 1948, Shyam writes to me:

"Dear Manto! You have gone silent again. This silence of yours troubles me greatly. Even though I am well aware of your mental lethargy, I cannot help but fly into a rage when you suddenly clam up. Admittedly, I am not much of a letter-writer myself, but I derive pleasure from writing and receiving letters that are of a somewhat 'different' sort... that is, 'Haptala'! But 'Haptala' has become a rare commodity here... if you write it on paper, the wretched thing turns into 'Haptali', and if even 'Haptali' isn't available—well, imagine the frustration; forgive me if I've started 'Haptolizing'... but what can one do? When realities vanish, a person can only 'Haptolize'." But I don't care what you say or don't say; I know—and you must be aware of this too—that the credit for defeating such a formidable rival in this arena belongs solely to me. Manto! It has been said that when a lover runs out of words, he begins to kiss, and when an orator exhausts his stock of words, he starts to cough.

I would add one more thing to this saying: when a man's virility fades, he begins to constantly look back at his past. But don't you worry; I am still some distance away from that final stage. Life is very busy and full, and you know that in a full life, one finds very little leisure for madness—even though I feel an intense need for it. The film with

Naseem (‘Chandni Raat’) is nearly half-finished. I have signed a contract for a film with Amarnath. Just guess who my heroine is? Nigar (Nigar Sultana). I proposed her name myself—merely to see how it feels to recreate on screen those old emotions that once belonged to the real world... back then, there was joy; now, it is purely business. But what do you think? This arrangement won't exactly be thrilling. Taji is still in my life. Nigar is wonderful, and her demeanor is incredibly gentle and delicate.

Ramola has also been here in Bombay for the past few days. Upon meeting her, I realized that she still hadn't been able to overcome the vulnerability she harbored for me in her heart and mind. Consequently, we spent some time out together. Old boy, these days I am undergoing advanced training in the art of 'flirtation.' But, my friend, this whole affair has become quite complicated. Still, I enjoy complications. The adventurous, vagabond gambler within me remains potent. I belong to no specific place, nor do I wish to belong to one. I love people, and I hate them. Life just goes on. In truth, life itself is the only beloved I cherish—to hell with everyone else! I have forgotten the author's name, but one sentence of his has stayed with me—though perhaps I am not quoting it exactly right; the essence was something like this... He loved people so deeply that he never felt lonely [in his love for them], yet he hated them in such a way that he felt utterly solitary [in his hatred].

I cannot add another word to that.

'Taji' is mentioned in these two letters. In *Khutoot-e-Vahdani*, I have already explained that this is a diminutive of 'Mumtaz.' As for

who Mumtaz is—Shyam himself has revealed that she is his weakness. Come to think of it, Nigar and Ramola were his weaknesses too. Women were, in fact, his greatest weakness—and therein lay the strongest aspect of his character.

Mumtaz is the younger sister of Zeb Qureshi (M.A.). When she accompanied Zeb to Bombay, she became deeply entangled in a passionate romance with Zahoor Raja. After some time, having extricated herself from that relationship, she returned to Lahore and began a romance with Shyam. When Shyam's financial situation improved in Bombay, she married him for the sake of their future children.

Shyam adored children—especially beautiful ones—even if they were incredibly ill-mannered. In the eyes of those who prized propriety and refinement, he himself was considered terribly ill-mannered. Some women detested him intensely because of his boorish behavior, yet he remained completely unconcerned. He never attempted to mend his ways merely to please such women; what you saw was exactly who he was. Manto... these sisters-in-law of mine turn up their noses at the things I say... they live in a world of make-up.

Yet, some women loved his brashness because it was devoid of the stale, sordid air of the bedroom. Shyam would joke openly with them, and they, in turn, would engage in conversations that polite society deemed unfit for open discussion—smiles dancing on their lips, peals of laughter erupting from their throats. Shyam would often laugh until tears welled up in his eyes, and I would feel as though, in some distant

corner, the spirit of 'propriety' was perched upon a bed of sharp nails, making a futile attempt to atone for its sins.

I have absolutely no recollection of when or where I first met Shyam. It feels as though I had already met him long before I actually did. Looking back now, I recall that my earliest meetings with her in Bombay likely took place on Lady Jamshedji Road, where my sister lived. Diamond was staying in an upper-floor flat at 'High Nest,' and Shyam used to visit her there. I probably ran into her on the staircase two or three times. Although these encounters were casual, they were marked by a great deal of informality, for Shyam had himself told me that the woman named Diamond—who was known as Mrs. Shyam—was not actually his wife; yet, by virtue of their relationship, she was something more than a wife to him. He did not believe in the institution of marriage or its public declaration. However, when he had to admit Diamond to the hospital due to a medical issue, he registered her name as Mrs. Shyam.

Much later, Diamond's husband initiated legal proceedings, and Shyam was implicated in the case as well. The matter was eventually settled out of court, and Diamond—having by then entered the film world and tasted the allure of wealth—walked out of Shyam's life. Yet, Shyam often thought of her.

I remember walking with him in a garden in Poona when he said, "Manto... Diamond was a remarkable woman. I swear to God, a woman who can endure an abortion can face the greatest hardships the world has to offer." But then, after a moment's thought, he added, "What is this, Manto... why is a woman afraid of the fruit of

conception? Is it because it is deemed a sin? But what is this nonsense about sin and virtue? A banknote can be genuine or counterfeit, but a child cannot be 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate'." It does not stem from a sudden jolt or the *Kalma* recited as the knife is drawn across the throat. Its true genesis lies in that magnificent madness first embraced by Father Adam and Mother Eve... Ah, that madness!

And he went on talking at length about his various forms of madness.

Shyam was a man of boisterous exuberance. Every word, every gesture, and every mannerism of his was pitched at a high volume; he had absolutely no regard for moderation. To him, sitting in a gathering with an air of solemnity and gravity was nothing short of a farce. Especially during drinking sessions, if someone fell silent or turned philosophical, it caused him indescribable irritation. He would get so exasperated that, at times, he would smash bottles and glasses, hurl abuses, and storm out of the gathering.

There is an incident from Pune. Shyam and Masood Parvez both lived at Zubeida Cottage. I had to stay there in connection with the sale of a story. By nature, Masood was a man of few words; after a drink, he would become even more withdrawn and stoic. One day, a rum-drinking session began in the morning. Many people came and left, having lost their senses along the way, but Masood, Shyam, and I held our ground. Shyam was in high spirits, having thoroughly enjoyed making a racket with those who had lost their composure. Yet, towards evening, he suddenly realized that Masood had remained completely aloof from the day's clamor and revelry. Squinting his eyes, heavy with intoxication, he looked at Masood and asked in a

mocking tone, "Well, Hazrat-e-Parvez... have you finished composing your ‘marsiya’ [elegy] yet?"

Masood smiled, as was his habit. Just then, Krishan Chander arrived, and Shyam forgot the impression left by Masood’s frozen smile. After a couple of rounds of drinks, Shyam mentioned Masood’s unbearable aloofness to Krishan. It took only two pegs to loosen Krishan’s tongue. Turning to Masood, he launched into a tirade: "What kind of poet are you, Parvez? You’ve been drinking since morning, yet you haven’t uttered a single piece of nonsense. I swear to God, a poet who doesn’t know how to spout nonsense can’t write poetry either. I’m amazed you manage to write poetry at all. I suspect your poetry must be utter rubbish. This state of yours—turning into a bottle of castor oil after a few drinks—that is your ‘real’ poetry."

Hearing this, Shyam laughed so hard that tears began to stream from his eyes.

After the teasing had gone on for a while, Masood stood up. He emptied all our glasses and said, "Come on, let’s go outside."

We stepped out. At Masood’s suggestion, everyone took off their shoes, stuffed them into their pockets, and started running. It must have been midnight. The streets of Poona were completely deserted. I...

Masood, Shyam, and another companion whose name I have forgotten were running about, shouting wildly—completely aimlessly, with no destination in mind.

Krishan Chander's house lay along the route; he had parted ways with us before the run began. We pestered him by making him open the door. His wife, Samina Khatoon, emerged from another room upon hearing the commotion. This embarrassed Krishan even further, so we took our leave and resumed our walk.

Poona is a city of temples; there is one to be found every furlong or so. Masood rang the bell of one such temple. Shyam and I bowed in reverence, chanting "Shiv Shambhu, Shiv Shambhu." We repeated this ritual at every temple we encountered, laughing heartily all the while. Whenever a priest emerged, rubbing his eyes, we would fall silent and quietly walk on.

By this time, it was three o'clock... Standing in the middle of the road, Masood unleashed a torrent of obscenities that left me stunned, as I had never heard him utter an indecent word before. Yet, as he spewed those coarse profanities, I sensed that the words did not sit naturally on his tongue.

We reached Zubeida Cottage at four o'clock and went to sleep, though Masood likely stayed awake, composing verses.

Shyam was not one for moderation when it came to drinking; he believed in playing an open game. Yet, he would always assess the expanse of the field before him—gauging its dimensions carefully—to ensure he did not overstep the boundaries. He used to tell me, "I prefer fours... sixes happen merely by chance." Here is a little anecdote for your amusement:

It was a few months before the Partition... Shyam had come over to my place from Shahid Latif's house. In Bombay parlance, these were

days of ‘kadki’—straitened circumstances. Yet, the drinking continued with great regularity. One evening, amidst conversation, we drank a bit too much; Raja Mehdi Ali Khan happened to be there as well. When curfew time approached, he asked for permission to leave. I told him, "Have you lost your mind? You’ll get caught."

Shyam said to him, half-jokingly, "Just sleep here. Taji isn't around these days."

Raja smiled and replied, "I won't be able to sleep. I absolutely cannot sleep on spring beds."

Shyam poured a measure of brandy into a glass—sized to match Raja’s hefty frame—and handed it to him, saying, "Here, have this; it’ll put you to sleep."

Raja downed the entire glass in a single gulp. For a long while, the conversation revolved around Taji, who had left for her sister's place after a falling-out with Shyam; every eight or ten days, the two would squabble over trivial matters. I never intervened, simply because Shyam disliked it intensely. It was as if we had a silent pact not to interfere in each other's affairs.

Taji had left as though she would never return, and Shyam had seen her off as if he would never deign to look at her face again. Yet, apart from each other, both would pine in anguish. In the evenings, Shyam would often become deeply emotional about the situation with Taji. I used to think he would surely lie awake all night thinking of her. But the wretched fellow was so overpowered by sleep that he would drift off the moment his head hit the bed. My flat had only two rooms: a bedroom and a living room. I had given the bedroom to Shyam and

Taaji, while I slept on a mattress spread out in the living room. Since Taaji wasn't there, her bed had gone to Raja Mehdi Ali Khan. It was late into the night, so we all went to sleep in our respective spots.

As usual, I woke up around a quarter to six. In my semi-conscious state, I felt as though someone was lying next to me. At first, I thought it was my wife, but she was away in Lahore. When I opened my eyes, I realized it was Shyam. I began to wonder how he had ended up beside me. Just then, the smell of burnt fabric wafted into my nostrils. There was a sofa nearby; a portion of it had been scorched by a dropped cigarette ages ago, but what could be the reason for the smell now? As my eyes opened wider, I sensed the acridness of smoke and saw faint, milky clouds of it... I got up and went into the other room. To my shock, the bed where Shyam usually slept was smoldering, while on the adjacent bed, Raja Mehdi Ali Khan lay snoring loudly, his paunch protruding.

I went closer to examine the burnt section of the bed. There was a hole the size of a large platter in the mattress, with smoke rising from it. It appeared that someone had tried to extinguish the fire, as the bed was soaked with water. However, since the filling consisted of cotton and coconut coir, the fire hadn't been fully put out and continued to smolder. I tried to wake the Raja, but he simply turned over and began snoring even more loudly. Suddenly, a bright red flame shot out from a dark hole in the bed. I immediately rushed towards the bathroom. I poured a bucket of water into the hole, and once I was fully assured that the fire was extinguished, I shook Raja awake. When I asked him about the fire incident, he recounted the

events in his characteristic humorous style, embellishing the story with plenty of dramatic flair:

"This is your Shyam Hanuman Maharaj. Last night, I fell asleep while taking a dip in a pool of brandy. Around two o'clock, I woke up upon hearing strange sounds. To my astonishment, I saw that Shyam had transformed into a massive Hanuman. Tied to his bushy tail were strips of cloth soaked in kerosene, all ablaze. Shyam was leaping wildly on the bed, spreading fire with his tail. As the flames took hold, I shut my eyes and plunged back into the pool of brandy. I was just about to drift off to sleep at the bottom..."

It occurred to me that a poor man's bed shouldn't end up burnt to ashes. So, I got up—but Shyam was nowhere to be found. When I went into the other room to warn you about the situation, I saw Shyam lying there, clinging to you in his true form. I tried to wake you up. I strained my lungs calling out to you. I rang bells. I set off atom bombs. But you didn't stir. Finally, I whispered gently into your ear, "Khwaja, wake up! A whole crate of Scotch whisky has arrived." You opened your eyes instantly and asked, "Where?"... I said, "Snap out of it... the whole house is burning... there's a fire, a fire!" You said, "You're talking nonsense." I replied, "No, Khwaja. I swear by Khwaja Khizr—there really is a fire." Once you were convinced by what I said, you calmly went back to sleep, saying, "Just inform the fire brigade." Despairing of you, I tried to make Shyam realize the gravity of the situation. When he was finally lucid enough to grasp what I was saying, he told me, "You put it out, man. Why bother me?" And then he went back to sleep... Fire is fire, after all, and extinguishing it is every human's duty. So, I immediately summoned all my humanity,

transformed myself into a fire brigade, and took that jug I had gifted you for your birthday—filled it up and poured it over the fire. Having completed my task, I left the outcome in God's hands and went to sleep. When Shyam finally woke up after a full night's sleep, Raja and I asked him how the fire had started; Shyam hadn't the faintest idea. After much deliberation, he said, "I cannot shed any light on this incident of the fire." But when Raja brought Shyam's burnt silk shirt from the other room, Shyam said to me, "Now, an investigation is inevitable."

When everyone investigated together, it was discovered that the undershirt Shyam was wearing was also burnt in a couple of places. Upon closer inspection, two large blisters—each the size of a rupee coin—were found on his chest. Consequently, Sherlock Holmes remarked to his friend Watson, "It is now conclusively proven that a fire did indeed break out, and Shyam—solely to avoid disturbing his neighbor, Raja Mehdi Ali Khan—quietly got up and came to me."

When Shyam formally married Tajee in accordance with the established norms of civilized society, I believe he hosted such a lavish banquet—driven purely by a spirit of vindictive one-upmanship—that it remained the talk of the film world for a long time. So much liquor flowed that entire casks were drained dry. Yet, regrettably, the stains on the modest bodice of 'civilization' could not be washed away.

Shyam was not merely a connoisseur of the bottle and women; he was a lover of all the bounties life had to offer. He cherished a good book just as deeply as he cherished a beautiful woman. His mother had

passed away during his childhood, yet he held the same affection for his stepmother that one would for a biological mother. He had younger step-siblings, all of whom he held dearer than life itself. After his father's death, he was the sole person responsible for looking after such a large family. For a long time, he strove with immense sincerity to achieve wealth and fame. Fate dealt him many blows along the way, yet he kept smiling. He used to say, "My love, a day will come when you will be by my side"—and that day did finally arrive after years, with both wealth and fame firmly in his grasp.

Before his death, he was earning thousands of rupees a month. He owned a beautiful bungalow in the suburbs of Bombay, a far cry from the days when he hadn't even had a roof over his head. Yet, even during those days of poverty, he remained the same smiling Shyam. When wealth and fame arrived, he didn't welcome them the way people welcome a Deputy Commissioner; when these two 'ladies' came to him, he simply seated them on his iron cot and planted loud, hearty kisses on them.

When he and I lived under the same roof, both of us were in dire financial straits. The film industry, much like the country's politics, was passing through a very precarious phase. I was employed at Bombay Talkies, while he held a contract there for a film worth ten thousand rupees—work he had secured after a long period of unemployment. However, the payments were rarely timely. Somehow, we both managed to scrape by. Had we been a married couple, there would surely have been squabbles over money; yet, Shyam and I never even gave a thought to who was spending or how much was being spent. One day, after much effort, he received a

substantial sum of money (likely five hundred rupees); my own pockets were empty. We were on our way home from Malad. En route, Shyam decided he would go to Churchgate to meet a friend. When we reached my station, he pulled a wad of ten-rupee notes from his pocket. Closing his eyes, he split the stack in two and said to me, "Hurry up, Manto... take one of these."

I grabbed one half of the wad, slipped it into my pocket, and stepped onto the platform. Shyam waved goodbye and flourished a few notes he had pulled from his pocket, saying, "You'll remember this—I had set these notes aside just for safety's sake... 'Hap-tala'!"

That evening, when he returned from meeting his friend, kebabs were being grilled. The famous film star K.K. had invited him over because she wanted to discuss something private with him. Shyam pulled bottles of brandy from under his arm, poured a large peg into a glass, and said to me, "The private matter was this... I had once told someone in Lahore that K.K. was madly in love with me. I swear to God, she was madly in love. But in those days, there was no room in my heart for her. Today, she invited me to her home and..."

...and said, "You were talking nonsense. I was never crazy about you." I retorted, "Then die right now." But she remained obstinate, and in a fit of anger, I had to punch her.

I asked him, "You raised your hand against a woman?"

Shyam showed me his hand, which was injured. "The wretched woman stepped aside at the last moment. I missed my aim, and my fist slammed into the wall."

Saying this, he laughed heartily. "The damned woman is just pestering me for no reason."

I mentioned money earlier... this was probably two years ago. Here in Lahore, I was deeply distressed by the wretched state of the film industry and the lawsuit regarding my short story, *Thanda Gosht* (Cold Meat). The lower court had convicted me, sentencing me to three months of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of three hundred rupees. I was so disillusioned that I felt like consigning all my literary works to the flames and taking up some other line of work—something still related to creation, perhaps... like becoming a customs official, taking bribes to feed myself and my family, and never criticizing anyone or offering an opinion on any matter.

My mind and heart were passing through a strange, turbulent phase. Some people believed that getting sued over my short stories was my profession. Others claimed I wrote solely because I craved cheap fame and sought to serve my own ends by inflaming people's base instincts. I have faced four such lawsuits. Only I know the toll it took on my back—the strain and stoop—to set those four fools straight.

My financial situation was already precarious. When the surrounding environment rendered me idle, my limited sources of income shrank even further. The only ones helping me to the best of their ability were the Chaudhry brothers of Maktaba-e-Jadeed, Lahore. When I began drinking heavily to drown my sorrows, they wanted to withdraw their support, yet they were so sincere that they did not wish to offend me.

During that period, I was not corresponding with anyone; in truth, I had become completely disillusioned. I would often stay away from

home, camping out at the houses of drinking companions who had absolutely no connection to literature. In their company, I was effectively engaged in a form of physical and spiritual suicide.

One day, I received a letter addressed to someone else's home. It was from the owner of Tehseen Pictures, asking me to meet him immediately. He had received instructions regarding me from Bombay—specifically, to identify the sender of those instructions. I met the people at Tehseen Pictures and learned that they had received repeated telegrams from Shyam in Bombay, urging them to find me and hand over 500 rupees. When I arrived at the office, they were drafting a reply to Shyam's latest urgent telegram, explaining that despite an extensive search, they had been unable to locate Manto.

I accepted the 500 rupees, and tears welled up in my intoxicated eyes. I tried hard to write a letter to Shyam to thank him and ask why he had sent me those 500 rupees—did he know my financial situation was precarious? With this intent, I wrote several letters only to tear them up. It felt as though the words I had written were mocking the very sentiment that had prompted Shyam to send the money in the first place.

Last year, when Shyam came to Amritsar for the screening of his own film, he also visited Lahore for a short while. He inquired about my whereabouts from many people here. However, I happened to learn of his presence in Lahore by chance; I rushed immediately to the cinema hall where he was arriving after attending a reception.

Rashid Atre—an old friend of Shyam's from Pune—was with me. As the car entered the cinema courtyard, Shyam spotted Rashid and me. He

let out a loud shout. He repeatedly asked the driver to stop the car, but the crowd gathered to welcome him was so dense that the driver did not halt. Stepping out of the car, Shyam and Om—both dressed in matching outfits and wearing white Panama hats—entered the cinema through the back door with the help of the police. We entered through the main gate. Shyam... he was the same old Shyam—smiling, laughing, and bursting into hearty guffaws.

He rushed over and embraced us both. Then, there was such a commotion that none of us could say anything of substance. Words piled up in a heap, one after another, and we felt buried beneath them. After finishing up at the cinema, he had to visit a film distributor's office; he took us along with him. Any conversation started here was immediately cut short. People were pouring in rapidly. A clamorous crowd in the market below was making a din when Shyam stepped out onto the balcony to grant them a glimpse.

Shyam's state was peculiar. He was acutely conscious of his presence in Lahore—that Lahore where traces of his romances used to be scattered across so many streets; that Lahore which was now thousands of miles away from Amritsar; and where, too, was Rawalpindi—the place where he had spent his boyhood days? Lahore, Amritsar, and Rawalpindi were all still there in their respective places, but those days were gone. Those nights he had left behind were no more; the gravedigger of politics had buried them God knows where.

Shyam asked me to stay close to him, but the sense of his agitated state of mind and heart left me deeply unsettled. Promising to meet him later that night at Faletti's Hotel, I left.

I had met Shyam after such a long time, yet instead of joy, I felt a strange, stifling sense of distress. I was so irritable that I felt like picking a violent fight with someone—engaging in a fierce brawl—and then falling asleep from exhaustion. When I tried to analyze this feeling of suffocation, my thoughts wandered far and wide.

It was a place where all the threads of my thoughts had become hopelessly tangled. This only added to my agitation, so I went to a friend's room at Flaties and started drinking.

Around nine or nine-thirty, the noise alerted me that Shyam had arrived. There was the usual crowd of visitors in his room. I sat there for a while, but no real conversation took place. It felt as though the emotions within us had been locked away, and the keys strung onto one massive ring; we would each try to pick a key from that bunch to unlock those feelings, only to fail repeatedly.

I grew restless. After dinner, Shyam delivered a highly emotional speech, but I didn't hear a single word of it; my own mind was raving incoherently at a feverish pitch. When Shyam finished his rambling, the audience—bellies full—applauded; I simply got up and returned to my room. Fazli was there. I got into an argument with him over something trivial. When Shyam came by, he said, "Everyone is heading to Heera Mandi. Come along—you should come too."

I was on the verge of tears. "I'm not going. You go, and let your friends go."

"Then wait for me... I'll be right back."

With that, Shyam left with the group heading to Heera Mandi. I hurled a string of vile curses at Shyam and the film industry crowd, then turned to Fazli: "I assume you'll be waiting here. If it's not too much trouble, would you kindly drop me home in your car?"

I spent the night plagued by bizarre dreams. In them, I found myself quarreling with Shyam time and again. When the milkman arrived in the morning, I was berating him with a hollow anger: "You've changed completely... you bloody fool, you scoundrel, you wretch... you are a Hindu." When I woke up, I realized a terrible expletive had escaped my lips, but upon closer introspection, I became convinced it hadn't been my mouth speaking; it was the mouthpiece of politics that had uttered that abuse. Mulling over this, I accepted the milk—which was one-quarter water—from him. I found great solace in the thought that while Shyam was a Hindu, he was not a 'watered-down' Hindu.

It was a time when a bloody conflict was raging between Hindus and Muslims following the Partition, and thousands of people on both sides were dying daily. Shyam and I were sitting with a Sikh family that had fled Rawalpindi; the members were recounting the tales of their fresh wounds—stories that were truly harrowing. Shyam could not remain unmoved. I understood perfectly the turmoil churning within his mind. As we took our leave, I asked Shyam, "I am a Muslim; don't you feel like killing me?"

Shyam replied with great seriousness, "Not right now... but at the moment I was listening to the accounts of the atrocities committed by Muslims... I could have killed you." Hearing this from Shyam dealt

a severe blow to my heart. At that moment, perhaps I, too, could have killed him. But later, when I reflected and grasped the vast difference between that moment and the present, I came to understand the psychological backdrop of those riots, in which hundreds of innocent Hindus and Muslims were being slaughtered every day. Not at that moment... but at another... Why? If you reflect on it, you will find the true answer to this "why" within human nature itself.

Communal tensions in Bombay were escalating day by day. When Ashok and Wacha took the reins of Bombay Talkies, key positions—by sheer coincidence—ended up in the hands of Muslims. This sparked a wave of hatred and anger among the Hindu staff at the studio. Wacha began receiving anonymous letters containing threats to torch the studio and warnings of violence and death. Neither Ashok nor Wacha paid them any heed. However, partly due to my sensitive nature and partly because I was a Muslim, I was acutely aware of the gravity of the situation. I frequently expressed my concerns to Ashok and Wacha, suggesting they let me go from Bombay Talkies, as the Hindu staff believed that Muslims were gaining entry there solely because of me. But they dismissed the idea, telling me I had lost my mind.

My mind was, in fact, becoming unhinged. My wife and children were in Pakistan. I had known the region when it was still part of India and was well aware of the sporadic Hindu-Muslim riots that used to occur there. But I had no idea what this land had become under its new identity. What did "one's own government" actually mean? Despite my best efforts, I could not even form a mental image of it.

I witnessed the events of August 14th unfold in Bombay. Both Pakistan and India were declared independent nations. People were overjoyed. Yet, incidents of murder and arson continued unabated. Slogans of "Pakistan Zindabad" rang out alongside "Hindustan Zindabad." The Islamic flag fluttered alongside the Congress tricolour. The names of both Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah echoed through the markets and streets. It was impossible to comprehend whether Hindustan was one's homeland or Pakistan, or whose blood it was that was being spilled so ruthlessly every day. Where would the bones be cremated or buried—bones stripped of their flesh by the kites and vultures of religious frenzy? Now that we were free, who would be our master? When we were enslaved, we could at least imagine freedom; now that we were free, what would the concept of slavery even be? But the question remained: were we truly free at all?

Hindus and Muslims were dying in droves. How were they dying? Why were they dying? There were varying answers to these questions—answers from the perspective of Hindustan, Pakistan, the British; every question...

An answer existed. Yet, if the question of seeking the *truth* within that answer arose, there was no reply to be found. Some said to search for it in the ruins of the Mutiny; others claimed it lay in the era of East India Company rule. Still others suggested looking even further back, into the history of the Mughal dynasty. Everyone kept retreating into the past, while the killers and butchers marched relentlessly forward, writing a history of blood and iron unparalleled in the annals of the world.

India had gained independence. Pakistan, too, had become free the moment it came into existence. Yet, in both these nations, the human being remained a slave—a slave to prejudice, a slave to religious fanaticism, a slave to bestiality and barbarism.

I stopped going to Bombay Talkies. Whenever Ashok and Vacha came by, I would make excuses about feeling unwell. Several days passed this way. Shyam would look at me and smile; he understood my state of mind perfectly. After a spell of heavy drinking, I had given up that habit as well. I would lie on the sofa all day, lost in a stupor. One day, when Shyam returned from the studio and saw me lying there, he asked jokingly, "Why, Khwaja? Are you chewing the cud?"

It used to irritate me greatly that Shyam didn't think the way I did. Why didn't the storms that raged within me—battles I fought day and night—stir his heart and mind? He would go on smiling, laughing, and making noise just as always. Yet, perhaps he had reached the conclusion that in the atmosphere prevailing around us, thinking was utterly futile. I pondered deeply but couldn't make sense of it all. Finally, exasperated, I said, "Forget it, let's just leave..." Shyam had a night shoot. I began packing my belongings. The entire night passed in this activity; by morning, Shyam returned, having finished his shoot. Seeing my packed bags, he simply asked, "Shall we go?"

I replied just as briefly, "Yes!"

After that, there was no further talk between us about the migration. He helped me pack the rest of my things. All the while, he kept recounting anecdotes from the night's shoot and laughing heartily. When the time came for me to leave, he took a bottle of brandy out of

the cupboard. He poured two pegs, handed one to me, and said, "Happy Trails."

I replied, "Happy Trails," and—laughing loudly—he pulled me into a tight embrace against his broad chest, saying, "You swine."

I held back my tears—tears for Pakistan.

Shyam raised a heartfelt slogan: "Long live Pakistan."

"Long live Hindustan." And I went downstairs, where the truck driver was waiting for me. Shyam accompanied me to the port. There was still quite some time before the ship was due to sail. He kept my spirits up by telling random jokes. When the moment of parting arrived, he squeezed my hand, said "Happy Trails," and stepped down the gangway... He didn't look back at me; instead, he walked out of the port with a firm, steady stride.

After reaching Lahore, I wrote him a letter. His reply arrived in 1948:

Everyone here misses you. People miss you and the wit you used to share with them so generously. Vacha still insists that you slipped away—fleeing to Pakistan this time without even informing him. It is a strange paradox: the very man who was at the forefront of opposing the entry of Muslims into Bombay Talkies was the first to flee to Pakistan, effectively becoming a martyr for his own ideology—or so Vacha sees it. I hope you have written to him; if not, do so immediately—common decency demands it.

Yours, Shyam.

Today is the 14th of August—the day Pakistan and India gained their independence. Celebrations are underway on both sides of the border, even as preparations for attack and defense proceed in full swing... I address the spirit of Shyam: "Dear Shyam, I left Bombay Talkies and moved on. Can't Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru let go of Kashmir? ...It's a striking parallel, isn't it?"

Source:

Author: Saadat Hasan Manto | Publisher: Saqi Book Depot, Delhi

Raja Mehendi Ali Khan was Great Frind of Sadat Hasan Monto

JANAT SE MONTO KA EK KHAT

Raja Mehandi Ali Khan

main khairiyat se hoon lekin kaho kaise ho tum 'raja'

bahut din kyon rahe tum film ki duniya mein ghum 'raja'

ye duniya-e-adab se kyon kiya tumne kinara tha

are ae be-adab kya sher se zar tum ko pyara tha

jo nazmein tumne likhin thin kabhi jannat ke baare mein

chhapi thin woh yahan bhi 'khuld' swarg ke pehle shumare ank mein

adab ki, sher ki duniya mein tum laut aaye, acha hai

are likhva lo nazmein ! phir se tum chillaye, acha hai

magar phir sochta hoon sher likhkar kya karoge tum ?

ye andaza hai mera galiba bhukhe maroge tum

ye behtar hai kisi mil mein naukri kar lo

karo tum shayari tafrih ko aur pet yun bhar lo

2

ye wah duniya hai jisne case chalvae adeebon par

bahut ki barishe-mashke-sitam kahar barpana hum khushansibon par

hua paida yahan jo nukt:daan aalochak, kala marmagya sadiyon men, saalon mein

mara sadkon pe wah ya sad gaya phir haspatalon mein

hon zinda hum to naak aur bhaun chadhakar naam dharte hain

yakayak ek din roenge ye, barsi mana lenge

ye gazi hum shaheedon ke liye jhande utha lenge

padhenge marsiye, tadpenge kar daalenge takriren !

hamara naam karne ki karenge lakh tadabiren

hamare bal-bacchon se na puchenge ki kaise ho

adibon-shayron ki kdradani ho to aisi ho

karen kya, na yeh duniya na woh duniya adeebon ki

ye duniya hai sajaon ki, woh duniya hai khtibon dharmopadeshak ki

3

zmin wale hon kaise bhi woh har dam yaad aate hain

jo duniya mein uthaye woh haseen gham yaad aate hain

zmin walon ki suhabet mein kabhi jo din guzare the

kalam likhne se kasir asamarth hai ki woh din kitne pyare the

vah galiyan bykala ki door se mujhko bulati han

vahan ke ghar ki yaadein dil mein ab tak gungunati han

mujhe us ghar mein safiya ki muhabbat yaad aati hai

mujhe jannat mein bhi woh ghar ki jannat yaad aati hai

jahan bachchon ki surat dekhkar main muskrata tha

jahan aakar main duniya ka har gham bhool jata tha

bila-naga jahan har sham tum milne ko aate the

jahan sab dost aakar ik nai jannat basate the

vo jannat lut chuki dil mein magar aabaad hai ab tak

fiza us ghar ki, vakfa-e-matam-o-fariyad hai ab tak

tum aksar ab bhi us ghar ki sadak par se guzrte ho

vah sab kuchh lut chuka bekar tum kyon aahein bharte ho ?

yahi ujda hua ghar phir basana chahta hoon main

bulandi chhodkar pasti pe aana chahta hoon mai

4

falak par main hoon aur tum ho zameen par, ji nahin lagata

jahan bhi jaaun jannat mein kahin par ji nahin lagata

main chahoon bhi to ab duniya mein wapas aa nahin sakta

khushi bankar tumhari mahfilon mein chha nahin sakta

zmin walon se ae malaun dushtatma kab todege tum naate ?

ba-aasani tum aa sakte ho zaalim, kyon nahin aate?

falak se roz main awaaz deta hoon tumhe raja

tumhe maloom hai raja ka hai ik kafiya 'aaja '

zmin se boriya-bistar uthao aur chale aao

mere ghar aao, mera bel bajao aur chale aao

karodon mar gaye chupchap lekin tum nahin marte

jo mard nek hain jeene pe itni zid nahin karte

agar kuch umr baaki hai to kar ke khudkashi aao

main hoon jab tak yahan khauf-e-jahannum se na ghabrao

main jurme khudkashi ko lad-jhagad ke bakhshva loonga

tumhara naam jannat ke har parche mein uchhalunga

chale aao, chale aao mujhe tumse muhabbat hai

chale aao, chale aao yahan rahat hi rahat hai

5

nahin main khudgarz sun lo tumhe main kyon bulata hoon

mere raja tumhe main ek khuskhabri sunata hoon

khbar yeh garm thi kuch din se jannat ki haseenon mein

tumhara naam bhi shamil hai jannat ke makinon nivasiyon mein

ye sunkar main nai aabadiyon mein daudta aaya

jo ki inquiry to is khabar ko maine sach paya

tumhara mahal bhi dekha, bahut hi khubsurat hai

ye samjho jagmagate noor aur chini ki murat hai
tumhari muntazir huren vahan bekhwab rehti hain
chaman ki andalibon bulbul ki tarah betaab rehti hain
vah mujhse puchti rehti hain batlao wah kaise hain
farishte hain ki shaitan han, woh aise hain ki vaise hain
tumhari jhoothi taarifon ke pul main baandh deta hoon
khuda se baad mein ro-ro muafi maang leta hoon
javaan huren kahin budhi na ho jaen, chale aao
ye jungle mein muhabbat ke na kho jayen chale aao
unhen chhup-chhup ke ek kambakht mulla ghura karta hai
bacha lo inko ae raja ki woh un sab pe marta hai
ye chanchal hirniyan takti hain usko bhag jaati hain
meri huron ko aakar haal apna sab sunati hain

6

bahut jo yaad aati hain ab unke naam leta hoon
zmin ke doston ke naam kuch paigham deta hoon
bahin ismat se kehna kab talak filmen banaogi
ye halat ho gai hai aah kya ab bhi na aaogi
ja yaad aa jaye ismat ki to shahid bhi chala aaye
vo ziddi aate-aati apni filmen sab jala aaye
mahindarnath ko aur krishan ko bhi khat yeh dikhlaao
jo mumkin ho to donon bhaiyon ko saath le aao

agar duniya na aati ho muwafik faiz-o-rashid ko

to unse poochhkar likho, main bhejun apne kasid ko

ne aaen gar to kehna patras ne bulaya hai

tumhari yaad mein 'taasir' tadpa tilmilaya hai

tumhe har roz 'hasrat' aur 'salik' yaad karte hain

tumhe dono akhbaron ke malik yaad karte hain

mujhe ummeed hai yeh sun ke donon daude aaenge

meri jannat mein aakar ik nai jannat basaenge

dua hai ya khuda sab zameen ke dost mar jayen .

ye jannat ke chaman, yeh ghar, yeh sadken unse bhar jayen .

NOTE:

Many anecdotes abound regarding the friendship between the renowned poet and film lyricist Raja Mehdi Ali Khan and Saadat Hasan Manto. Manto's untimely death deeply shook all his friends and admirers. Yet, the circle of his friends—whether Krishan Chander, Ismat Chughtai, or Raja—consisted of people who were truly unique, unlike the rest of the world. They neither lived like ordinary people nor did they die like them.

Remembering Manto, Raja Mehdi Ali Khan wrote: "Me, Manto, 'Kali Shalwar', and Smoke..."



Raja Mehdi Ali Khan (23 September 1915 – 29 July 1966) was an Indian poet, writer and a lyricist.

Raja Mehdi Ali Khan was born on 23 September 1915 at Karamabad village, near Wazirabad, Gujranwala District of Punjab, British India, now Pakistan. Mehdi Ali lost his father Raja Mehdi Ghalib Khan when he was four. His mother Hubia Khanum (Heebe Saheba) who was the sister of Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, a prominrnt journalist, got him educated and he completed his basic education at Islamia College (Lahore).

As he grew up, Mehdi Ali started working at the editorial staff of Phool and Tehzeeb-e-Niswan Urdu magazineas from Lahore. He was heavily influenced by the noted scholar Allama Muhammad Iqbal during his formative years, affecting his poetic writing. Then he joined as a writer at the All India Radio, Delhi in 1942. Here he got acquainted with the noted writer Saadat Hasan Manto. Manto, who was active in the Hindi film industry, asked film actor Ashok Kumar to find Mehdi Ali some kind of a job. He soon got a film called Aath Din (1946) in which he not only wrote dialogues but also acted. Sashadhar Mukherjee, one of the partners in Filmistan Studio, gave Mehdi Ali a chance to write lyrics for his film, Do Bhai (1947). Songs from the film such as "Mera Sunder Sapna Beet Gaya" and "Yaad Karoge" became instant hits.

In 1947, Mehdi and his wife Tahira decided to stay in India instead of migrating to Pakistan.

NOTE:

Raja Mehdi Ali Khan was a close, lifelong friend of the legendary writer Saadat Hasan Manto, and he paid tribute to him through heartfelt literary works that captured Manto's unique personality and genius.

How Their Friendship Began

- **First Meeting: They met around 1942 while working together at All India Radio in Delhi.**
- **Move to Bombay: Manto later moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) and convinced Raja to join him in the film industry.**
- **Bond: Despite Manto later migrating to Pakistan and Raja choosing to stay in India, their deep personal bond and mutual affection remained intact through the years.**

Writings by Raja Mehdi Ali Khan on Manto

Raja penned poignant and vivid reflections on his friend's life, style, and tragic departure:

- **"Main, Manto, Kaali Shalwar Aur Dhuwan": A famous character sketch written by Raja that blends admiration for Manto's raw, unfiltered literary themes (such as his famous stories *Kaali Shalwar* and *Dhuwan*) with personal anecdotes of their time together.**
- **"Jannat Se Manto Ka Ek Khat": A deeply moving poem written in Manto's memory, imagined as a letter sent by Manto from heaven, reflecting their shared literary soul and nostalgia.**

October 2026 Vol-5 No-10

1. **Dedicated to Actor Shaym Chaddha:The Melody of the Flute:..2**
   Saadat Hasan Manto
2. **Manto: A Great Short Story Writer or God?:.....44**
   Zahid Khan
3. **Ek Tha Manto:.....56**
   Sharad Dutt
4. **There is only one Manto in Urdu literature:.....77**
   Krishan Chander
5. **Manto is Unparalleled :.....103**
   Balwant Gargi
6. **The World That Let Him Die :.....135**
   Ismat Chughtai
7. **Keep Me Far Away from This Menace! :.....170**
   Muhammad Khalid Akhtar
8. **Come, Manto! You belong to us:.....186**
   Ali Sardar Jafri
9. **The Pity of Partition :.....190**
   Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide
   Prof Ayesha Jalal
10. **The Inimitable Mirror: Saadat Hasan Manto's Unmatched Style and Fearless Gaze :.....212**
    Jameel Gulrays
11. **Whatever he wrote was, by God, truly matchless.:.....217**
    Zahid Khan
12. **A New Reading of Manto: Substance, Affection, and an**

Empty, Desolate Train :.....229
Gopi Chand Narang
13. Radio Plays and Manto:.....258
Dr. Rajendra Toki
14. Sketching and Sa'adat Hasan Manto...:.....269
Ghulam Mohammed Ansari
15. Politics a la Manto :.....274
Naresh 'Nadeem'
16. 'Lowly' Women: As Manto Saw Them :.....293
Naresh Nadeem
17. Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai: A Tale of Friendship :.....326
Prof M. Asaduddin
18. Naakhun Ka Qarz — The Debt Owed to the Fingernails:....333
Hafeez Hoshiarpuri
19 . Interview :..... 339
(Begam Safia Manto , wife of Saadat Hasan Manto)
20. "The flaws within me are the flaws of this era": Manto:..348
(An imaginary conversation with Saadat Hasan Manto)
Mohammad Aslam Parvez
21. Hard Times Turned Me into a Short Story Writer :.....363
Saadat Hasan Manto
22. Hindi or Urdu :.....367
Saadat Hasan Manto
23. Manto's letter to Nehru :.....374
Saadat Hasan Manto
24. Two letters from Sadat Hasan Manto to Ahmad Naseem

Qasmi :.....381

Saadat Hasan Manto

25. 17- Adelphi Chamber, Clare Rd , Bombay-8:.....385

Saadat Hasan Manto

26. Story Goli By Saadat Haasan Manto :.....389

Translated into English Dr. Maaz Bin Bilal

27 .Virsa of Punjab:.....430

28 .Contributor in Performing art: 431

29. Foreigner contribution for enriching Punjabi:.....435

30..Protagonist of humanity:.....436

31.Word of the month:.....441

32. Punjabi Diggdey Dhaindey Bol:.....442

33.Great people in making Gujranwala:.....443

34.Personality of the month:.....445

35..Illustrious family of Punjab: 448

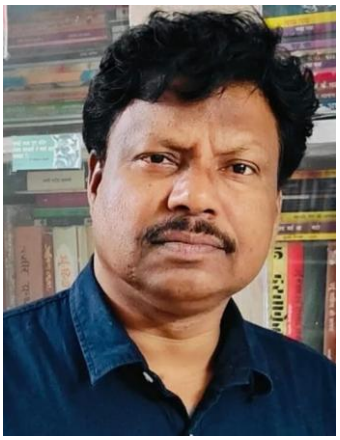
36.Treasure business.....451

37.Treasure historical document:.....452

38.Book Review: 458

39. New Book: 466

GUEST EDITOR:



Writer, journalist, and translator Zahid Khan has produced extensive work on the Progressive Movement in Indian literature during the twentieth century. Some of his significant books include 'Taraqqi-pasand Tehreek ke Hamsafar', 'Taraqqi-pasand Tehreek ki Rahguzar', and 'Taraqqi-pasand Tehreek ka Karwan'. He has edited books such as 'Shailendra: Har Zor-Zulm ki Takkar Mein', 'Balraj Sahni: Ek Samarpit aur Srijanatmak Jeevan', and 'Ritwik Ghatak: Nav-Yatharthvadi Cinema ka Kalatmak Srijak'. He has translated and edited 'Makhdoom Mohiuddin: Surkh Savere ka Shayar', 'Majaz Hoon Main, Sarfarosh Hoon Main', and 'Manto Saab: Doston ki Nazar Mein'. Zahid Khan has also transliterated (from Urdu to Hindi) and translated works such as Krishan Chander's historic reportage 'Paude', Hameed Akhtar's book 'Rudad-e-Anjuman', Ali Sardar Jafri's play 'Yeh Kiska Khoon Hai!', the short story collection 'Manzil', Krishan Chander's play 'Darwaze Khol Do', and the book 'Kuch Unki Yaadein, Kuch Unse Baatein' (focused on prominent Urdu short story writers). To date, twenty-three books by Zahid Khan have been published, along with over a thousand articles in various journals and magazines.

Zahid Khan wrote the scripts for twenty-five episodes of the popular program 'Taraqqi-pasand Tehreek ka Karwan' on the YouTube channel 'Kitabi Duniya'. He also served as the guest editor for the special issues of *Salahiyat* dedicated to Krishan Chander and Rajinder Singh Bedi. His acclaimed book *Taraqqi-pasand Tehreek ke Hamsafar* has been translated into Marathi and Urdu. He has been honoured with the 'Vagishwari Puraskar' of the 'Madhya Pradesh Hindi Sahitya Sammelan' for this book.



Manto: A Great Short Story Writer or God?

Zahid Khan

Like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Iqbal, the renowned and celebrated Urdu short story writer Saadat Hasan Manto was also a Kashmiri Pandit; his ancestors had later migrated to Punjab. Born on May 11, 1912, in the town of Samrala in the Ludhiana district of undivided India, Manto received his early education in Ludhiana and Amritsar. He completed his higher education at Aligarh University. Immediately after his studies, he entered the field of journalism. *Musawat* was the daily newspaper where Manto began his journalistic career. Subsequently, he became associated with other famous newspapers and magazines; beyond merely publishing his essays and short stories, he also worked as an editor for these publications. Manto began his literary journey by translating the works of Russian and French writers—influences that are clearly visible in the style and thought process of his early writings. During that period, he edited the 'French Issue' of 'Humayun' and the 'Russian Literature Issue' of 'Alamgir'. Furthermore, he translated Oscar Wilde's banned play 'Vera' and Victor Hugo's 'The Last Days of a Condemned Man' into Urdu under the title 'Sarguzasht-e-Aseer'; 'Sarguzasht-e-Aseer' was Manto's first book. From his youth, Manto was an admirer of Russian and Chinese literature, though before long, he developed a distinctive writing style of his own. 'Tamasha' was Manto's first short story to be published in the journal 'Khulq', which was edited by Bari Alig.

Manto's early short stories—such as 'Sho-Sho', 'Khushiya', and 'Diwali Ke Diye'—appeared in the Mumbai-based film weekly 'Musawwir'; later, he even took over the editorship of 'Musawwir'. 'Saqi' (edited by Shahid Ahmed Dehlvi), 'Nuqoosh' (edited by Muhammad Tufail), 'Adab-e-Latif' (edited by Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi), and 'Ehsaas' (edited by Hameed Anwar) were the literary magazines where Manto's short stories and essays were prominently published.

What was Saadat Hasan Manto's personality, physical build, or appearance like? A fascinating sketch of this was drawn by his contemporary short-story writer, Krishan Chander, in one of his articles: "Tall, lanky, fair-complexioned; veins standing out on the backs of his hands, a prominent Adam's apple, large feet attached to thin legs—yet not ungainly; a strange air of refinement, a look of irritation on a face that bore traces of intoxication, restlessness in his voice and in his writing, a certain sharpness in his mannerisms, and a sense of urgency in his gait—these are the impressions one gathers upon seeing Saadat Hasan Manto for the first time. Yet, another impression soon overshadows these. The structure of Manto's forehead is as magnificent as the mind within it—and just as extraordinary. Often, the foreheads of brilliant men bear a striking resemblance to the images Western painters associate with the Devil." That is, a broad forehead with the hairline receding backwards from the temples. Manto's forehead does not resemble that of the Devil; rather, it is rectangular—like a cinema screen. It is narrower at the bottom and wider at the top. His hair is straight, long, and thick. His eyes hold a wild gleam—a look of fearless candor and keen insight, as if he had peered through the very doorway of death and returned.

As for his attire, Manto preferred crisp, clean white ‘kurta-pajamas’. He wrote his short stories on high-quality paper, always beginning each one with the numerals ‘786’. What was Manto’s writing process, and how did he go about it? Manto himself explained this in great detail to Muhammad Tufail, the editor of ‘Nuqoosh’: "What can I tell you about how I write a short story? It is a complex matter. If I focus on the 'how,' I could simply say that I sit on the sofa in my room, pick up pen and paper, utter 'Bismillah,' and begin writing. My three daughters might be making a racket; I talk to them, settle their squabbles, and even prepare a salad for myself. If a visitor drops by, I attend to them—yet I keep writing the story. If I do not write a story, I feel as though I am unclothed or have not bathed. I do not write the story; the truth is, the story writes me. I am a man of very little formal education." "Although I have written over twenty books, I sometimes marvel: ‘Who is this person who has penned such remarkable short stories—stories that constantly land him in court?’ When the pen is not in my hand, I am merely Saadat Hasan—someone who knows neither Urdu, Persian, English, nor French. Occasionally, at my wife’s urging, I pick up a pen or pencil and begin to write. My mind is completely blank, yet my pocket is full; a short story simply leaps out on its own accord. In this sense, I view myself not as a short-story writer, but as a pickpocket—one who picks his own pocket and hands the contents over to you. Is there anyone else in the world as foolish as me?"

As for his temperament, Manto was blunt to the point of rudeness; he had a sharp tongue. Many anecdotes about his quick wit abound.

Once, Ahmed Shah Bokhari said to him in a patronizing tone, "Look, Manto, I consider you equal to my own son."

Manto retorted irritably, "...But I do not consider you my father!"

Manto wrote over two hundred stories. He also produced character sketches, memoirs, film scripts and dialogues, numerous radio plays and one-act plays, letters, and columns for various periodicals, and engaged in journalism. He even worked at All India Radio, New Delhi, where he was appointed as a scriptwriter. Apart from features, he wrote a vast number of plays; indeed, he seemed to have mastered the craft. No matter the subject, he could churn out a play on it in no time. His speed was such that he would write thirty to forty plays—and even feature scripts—in a single month. In an era when most writers relied on pen and paper, Manto composed his literary works directly on the typewriter. It is undeniable that his plays heralded the advent of modern drama in Urdu literature, transforming the very form of the genre. Yet, Manto remains best known for his masterpieces—short stories such as 'Naya Qanoon', 'Hatak', 'Babu Gopinath', 'Thanda Gosht', 'Mozel', 'Toba Tek Singh', and 'Khol Do'. A study of his short stories reveals characters whose gritty realism evokes those found in Gorky's 'The Lower Depths'.

In the brief preface to the short story collection 'Chughad', the renowned poet Ali Sardar Jafri offers a candid assessment of Manto's work: "Manto's storytelling is the cry of the guilty conscience of India's middle class. That is why he is the most notorious short-story writer in Urdu literature. Yet, the notoriety Manto attained—much like popularity and fame—cannot be achieved through mere effort; it

requires genuine artistic genius. Manto's genius shines like a jewel at the tip of his pen. He has portrayed characters whose humanity has been stripped away by the capitalist system." Jafri continues, "Manto has witnessed the filth of society, yet he loves humanity." He possesses the strength to protest against social and political oppression. In 'Taraqqi-yafta Qabristan' (A Progressive Graveyard), he delivers a scathing satire against capitalist society. He attaches no more importance to the ongoing conflict between Pakistan and India than to an obscenity scrawled on the walls of a public urinal. He fails to recognize his true enemy and strikes at empty air, landing no blows on anyone. Consequently, his militancy—in the final analysis—turns against the very human being whom Manto loves so deeply. Yet, it is equally possible to advance from militancy toward the goal of revolution.

Manto also faced accusations of obscenity and the depiction of nudity in his stories. Legal cases were brought against his short stories—such as Kali Salwar', 'Boo', 'Thanda Gosht', 'Upar Neeche aur Darmiyan', and 'Dhuaan'—in the courts of both India and Pakistan. It is a different matter that he was eventually acquitted of most of these charges; despite their best efforts, his detractors could not prove these sordid allegations against him in court. Between 1934 and 1947—a span of fourteen years—Manto wrote sixty-nine short stories, whereas after moving to Pakistan, he penned one hundred and sixty-one stories between 1948 and 1955. 'Atishpare', 'Manto ke Afsane', 'Dhuaan', 'Chughad', 'Lazzat-e-Sang', 'Thanda Gosht', 'Yazeed', 'Namrood ki Khudai', and 'Fundne' are among Manto's significant short story collections. In the book 'Siyah Hashiye' (Black Margins),

Manto depicts the brutality of the communal riots that swept the country in 1947, employing a style that is at times satirical and at others searingly bitter. Through thirty-two short stories—or more accurately, 'afsanachas' (micro-stories)—he chronicles the savagery to which human beings descended during the Partition. Even today, these stories leave a profound impact on the hearts and minds of readers, compelling them to reflect deeply. 'Nakhun Ka Qarz' is a book in which contemporary writers such as Abdul Rahman Chughtai, Malika Pukhraj, Imtiaz Ali Taj, and Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi have written heartfelt accounts regarding Manto's personality and literary work.

After Premchand, Manto was the first writer to transition from literature to cinema. In fact, his literary fame truly took off after his stint in the film industry. Yet, Manto eventually returned to literature from cinema and penned several masterpieces. Before fully immersing himself in the literary world, he worked in Mumbai for film companies and studios such as Imperial, Saroj, Hindustan Cine Tone, Filmistan Studio, and Bombay Talkies. He wrote stories, scripts, and dialogues for these entities and also engaged in film journalism. Manto wrote the story, script, and dialogue for films like 'Kichad', 'Naukar', and 'Begum'; notably, the story for the era's celebrated film 'Mirza Ghalib' also flowed from his incisive pen. He collaborated with Krishan Chander to write the story for the film 'Banjara'. Manto also acted in the film 'Aath Din' alongside Raja Mehdi Ali Khan and Upendranath Ashk. Manto's circle of friends in the film world was quite extensive. He shared a close camaraderie with the likes of Ashok Kumar, Shyam, S. Mukherjee, Raja Mehdi Ali Khan, K. Asif, Rafiq

Ghaznavi, Shahid Latif, and Baburao Patel. He also penned brilliant sketches of figures such as Agha Hashr Kashmiri, Ashok Kumar, Noor Jehan, Naseem Banu, Nargis, Sitara Devi, Nawab Kashmiri, Ismat Chughtai, and Shyam. All these sketches are compiled in the book 'Ganje Farishte'.

Manto did not wish to leave India for Pakistan; however, circumstances compelled him to do so. The decision to move to Pakistan was not his own. Amidst the turmoil and chaos following the Partition, his wife Safia and their daughters had moved to Pakistan and settled there permanently. Manto was left with no choice but to follow them. Various stories circulate regarding his move to Pakistan, but the playwright Balwant Gargi has recounted the entire episode in a fascinating sketch centered on Manto. When Gargi asked Manto for his explanation regarding this, his reply was—"My friends ask why I..." Why am I going to Pakistan? Am I a coward? Am I a Muslim? But they cannot understand the sentiments of my heart. I am going to Pakistan so that there might be a Manto there—someone who can expose the political depravities of that land. The future of Urdu in India is bleak; Hindi is already gaining dominance. If I wish to write, I can only write in Urdu. I want to be published so that I can reach thousands of readers. A language has its own logic; often, language embodies one's very thoughts. It is bound to one's blood. One Manto lived in Bombay; the other will be in Lahore."

Manto moved to Pakistan, yet his heart remained in India. In his first letter addressed to the American President—'Uncle Sam'—Manto articulated the anguish of his heart thus: "My country was severed to

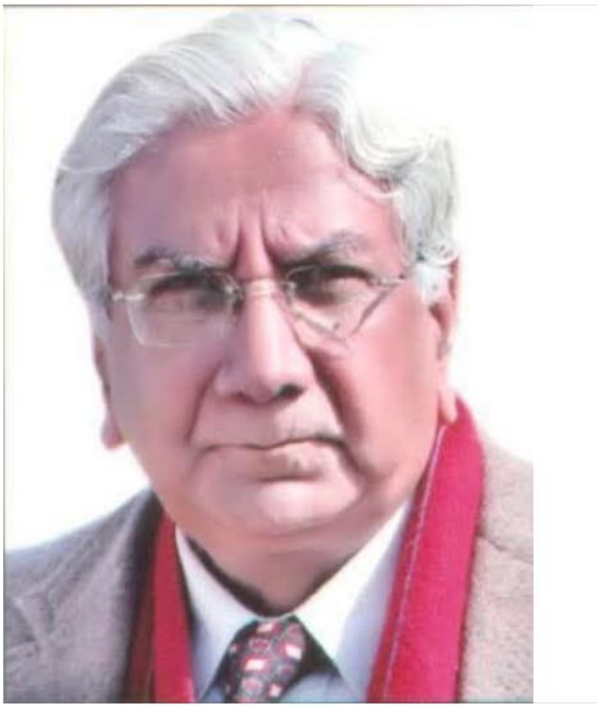
gain independence; in the same way, I was severed to become free. And, dear Uncle, a man of your immense capabilities surely knows: what kind of freedom can a bird possess if it is set free only after its wings have been clipped?" (Page 319, First Letter, 'Saadat Hasan Manto: Dastavez 4'). Nevertheless, upon settling in Lahore, Manto wrote countless stories. When the need arose, he would even pen two stories in a single day. Writing was his sole means of livelihood; he was incapable of doing any other work. Through his writing, he clashed directly with the Pakistani government and wrote fiercely against religious fundamentalists and sectarian bigots. He also wrote letters to the American President, filled with biting satire.

Every genre and every work of Manto's was the subject of extensive discussion. Yet, the letters Manto wrote to the then US Presidents—first Harry Truman and subsequently Eisenhower—though published serially in Pakistani newspapers, never became a subject of serious discussion. Critics of Urdu literature paid scant attention to them, even though these letters certainly merit discussion. They prove invaluable for understanding that specific era and the bilateral relations between the United States and Pakistan. With remarkable candor and objectivity, Manto fiercely critiqued the rulers of both his own country and the global superpower, America; he spared no one, writing honestly about exactly what he observed. Manto's apparent motive behind writing to "Uncle Sam" was to offer an indirect critique of imperialism. He wrote his first letter to the US President in December 1951 and the last in April 1954—a total of nine letters over a span of three years. Yet, to call them merely "letters" is an understatement; they are vivid, speaking portraits of the internal

conditions within both Pakistan and America. They capture Pakistan's stifling atmosphere alongside America's unbridled capitalist license; Pakistan's wretchedness versus America's hypocrisy; and Pakistan's helplessness set against America's cunning, diabolical machinations. More than seven decades have passed since these letters were penned, yet neither the image nor the character of either nation has changed. Manto's assessment of both countries remains entirely valid today; his observations hold true even now.

In his letters, Manto subjects America's imperialist policies to scathing satire. In his third letter, written on March 15, 1954, he remarks, "The military aid agreement with us is a remarkable thing; do stick to it." "Strengthen a similar bond with India as well. Send old weapons to both, for by now you must have decommissioned all the arms used in the previous war. This way, your obsolete and surplus weaponry would be disposed of, and your factories would not sit idle." In this writing, Manto fully unmasks America's imperialist face—revealing how it trades arms globally and views war merely as a business venture. Why, after all, is America so 'benevolent' towards Pakistan? Manto reveals the reason in his letter: "No matter how much India objects, you must sign a military aid pact with Pakistan, because you are deeply concerned about strengthening the world's largest Islamic state. And rightly so, for the mullahs here serve as the perfect antidote to Russian Communism." Manto possessed a fearless and rebellious spirit; he could not tolerate the lies and hypocrisy of society. After moving to Pakistan, Manto lived for only seven more years, passing away in Lahore on January 18, 1955. Though he physically relocated to Pakistan, his soul continued to wander through

the film and literary circles of India. Even seven decades after his death, Manto's writings remain alive in the minds of millions across the Indian subcontinent. Lyricist Raja Mehdi Ali Khan wrote of his friend Manto: "The most striking trait of Manto's personality was his habit of self-aggrandizement. He maintained a certain stature that he guarded at all costs; whatever he said or wrote was considered final and unassailable." Moreover, he possessed immense self-respect and self-confidence—qualities that endured until his very last breath. An epitaph is inscribed on Manto's grave in Lahore—words he penned himself before his death: "Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto. Buried in his bosom are all the secrets and nuances of the art of short-story writing. Even now, beneath mounds of earth, he wonders: is he the greater short-story writer, or is God?"



SHARAD DUTT (Born 1946 - Died 12 February 2023), prolific Hindi Writer, Film maker and former Doordarshan DDG, on his Death Anniversary today.

Shri Sharad Dutt had been associated with Electronic Media for more than 4 decades.

He Chaired the Jury of National Film Awards, 2013 for Best Writing in Indian Cinema and Assocham National Council on M&E for 8th Annual Summit on Media & Entertainment, 2014.

Shri Dutt worked as Officer on Special Duty to Directorate General: Doordarshan (2006-2007), Doordarshan Bhawan, New Delhi.

Ek Tha Manto

Sharad Dutt

786

Epitaph (Inscription)

Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto. Buried within his breast are all the secrets and nuances of the art of short-story writing. Even now, beneath mounds of earth, he ponders whether he is a great short-story writer or God.

Saadat Hasan Manto

January 18, 1954

If you happen to visit—or plan to visit—the Miani Sahib Graveyard in Lahore, you will find this epitaph inscribed on Manto's grave; words that Manto himself penned just five months before his death. There is an interesting story behind this epitaph as well. Manto had gone to Rawalpindi to attend a literary gathering. During the event, a young writer extended his autograph book toward Manto. Manto wrote this epitaph right there in that book. It was first published on the jacket flap of his famous collection, *Phundne* (Tassels), which came out exactly one month after his death. So much for the epitaph; now, let us take a look at Manto's life.

The mere mention of Manto's name sparks interest among readers—whether regarding his personality or his body of work. His short stories, his radio plays, and the time he spent in the film industry—everything about him remains shrouded in an aura of mystery. In the name "Manto," the "Saadat Hasan" part often fades into the background. He was fully aware of this; that is why he wrote about himself: "And it is also possible that Saadat Hasan might die, but Manto might not." And that is precisely what happened. His words about himself proved true; throughout his life, he remained embroiled in controversies surrounding his writing. He even had to make rounds of the courts because of some of his short stories. Critics believe that Manto possessed a deep insight into human psychology or that his stories were written ahead of their time. Perhaps this is why, even years after his death, his readership is larger than it was when the stories were originally written. The characters in his stories are drawn from family and social circles—people he encountered from time to time.

Psychology experts believe that childhood leaves a profound impact on an individual's personality. American researchers have even demonstrated through their studies that a childhood marked by deprivation is often, in some way, responsible for the misdeeds of major underworld kingpins. However, since we are discussing Manto and his writing, it is essential to consider the deep-seated psychological complexes stemming from his childhood; understanding this requires a look into his early life and family background. Saadat Hasan Manto belonged to the Saraswat Brahmin lineage of Kashmiri Pandits, who originally settled along the banks of

the Saraswati River—hence the name 'Saraswat'. Those Saraswat Brahmins who converted to Islam came to be known as 'Manto', while those who remained within the Hindu fold were called 'Manvati'. Manto's ancestors migrated from Kashmir to Punjab in the late 18th century and settled in Lahore. There, they significantly expanded their business activities, extending their operations from Lahore to Amritsar and Bombay. The demand for their Pashmina shawls grew to such an extent that his ancestors moved from Lahore to Amritsar to further their trade. It is said that Manto's ancestors amassed so much wealth that it used to be weighed on scales. In the Kashmiri language, a unit of weight is called 'Mant'. It is likely that this word—'Mant'—eventually evolved into the surname 'Manto'. Saadat Hasan even wrote a letter to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to learn more about the word 'Manto', believing that Panditji was well-versed in the history and culture of Kashmir; however, even he could not provide any information on the subject.

Manto's father, Ghulam Hasan Khwaja, was the youngest son of Khwaja Jamaluddin. He married twice and had twelve children—four sons and eight daughters. Manto was the son of his second wife, Sardar Begum. He also had a full sister, Iqbal Begum, who was much older than him. His half-brothers were also significantly older; they were educated abroad and settled there. Manto was born on May 11, 1912, in the village of Papraudi near Samrala, Ludhiana. His father was a government employee; when he was transferred to Amritsar, the family settled in Gali Koocha Vakilan. Manto spent his childhood there and received his early education in an Amritsar school. Kedar Sharma—a renowned figure in Hindi cinema known as a producer,

director, lyricist, and dialogue writer—confirmed in his memoirs that he and Manto were classmates in Amritsar and used to sit together in class. After completing his middle and high school education in Amritsar, Manto spent some time at the Muslim High School in Sharifpura, near the city. He had an immense passion for reading and would acquire novels by Tirath Ram Ferozpuri from libraries or booksellers. He spent most of his time reading novels rather than his school textbooks. Consequently, after failing the matriculation exam twice, he passed in the third division on his third attempt. The most interesting fact was that Manto failed in Urdu, yet went on to become a legendary Urdu short-story writer.

Abu Saeed, another of Manto's classmates during his F.A. studies, shared the same fate; he, too, had failed twice alongside Manto. The two also spent some time at Aligarh University. In those days, Aligarh was a hub of literature; figures like Majaz, Jazbi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Ali Sardar Jafri, and Shahid Latif hailed from there. Yet, Manto could not settle in there either. He felt suffocated by the university's strict, disciplined atmosphere, and his health suffered as a result. As his health continued to deteriorate in Aligarh, he went to Delhi for medical tests. Upon examining the X-rays, doctors informed Manto that he was suffering from tuberculosis. The doctors advised him to go to a hill s...

He was advised to go to a sanatorium to rest. Manto, suffering from tuberculosis, bade farewell to Aligarh and returned to Amritsar. Around that time, Manto's elder sister, Iqbal Begum—who was married and lived in Bombay—was visiting Amritsar; she arranged for

some funds and sent Manto to a sanatorium in Batote, near Kashmir, for treatment.

Manto took great pride in his Kashmiri heritage. Whenever he met a Kashmiri, he would invariably mention that while he was of Kashmiri origin, he was now an 'Amritsari'. It was an irony that Manto, who took such pride in being Kashmiri, never actually visited Kashmir in his lifetime; his journey took him only as far as Batote. While there for his TB treatment, he experienced a youthful romance with a girl named Begu—a name he later used for a story he wrote about her. He also wrote the story 'Paanch Din' (Five Days) during this period. After three months of treatment, Manto's health improved, and he returned to Amritsar. Manto's father, Ghulam Hasan, was a strict disciplinarian; consequently, Manto spent his childhood under very rigid discipline. During his youth, he missed out on many of the activities that children his age typically enjoyed. This strict upbringing fostered a rebellious and wayward streak in Manto's personality—traits rooted primarily in the lack of affection he received from his father. Despite this, he dedicated his first collection of short stories, 'Atishpare', to his father, inscribing it "To my late father." His mother was aware of her husband's neglect towards their son, so she showered him with immense love; this helped Manto overlook his father's indifference to some extent, though the memory of it never fully faded from his mind. Similarly, Manto could not forget the way his stepbrothers treated him; references to this appear in several of his short stories. Another notable detail is that his friends were also older than him.

This was a period marked by mental turmoil. Having failed the F.A. examination twice, he had lost all interest in his studies. He began to gravitate towards gambling and alcohol. Surprisingly, during those days of aimless wandering, he would spend hours sitting under a tree in Jallianwala Bagh, dreaming of becoming a revolutionary. He considered Bhagat Singh his idol and even kept a bust of him displayed in his room. During this time, Manto spent most of his hours in the company of Hasan Abbas and Abu Saeed Qureshi. The trio shared a passion—or rather, an obsession—for eating *chaat* and watching movies. They would relish their *chaat* with great gusto. Manto enjoyed watching the spicy, entertaining films of that era; he would often watch his favorite movies two or three times. His craze for cinema would even take him as far as Jalandhar and Lahore. Manto, Hasan Abbas, and Abu Saeed Qureshi frequently visited each other's homes. During this period, Manto also visited Jallianwala Bagh, where they would sit for hours discussing the atrocities inflicted upon Indians by the British. A sense of resentment against British rule continued to brew within them. (Manto's first story, 'Tamasha', was the result of the mental turmoil he experienced during this time.)

Manto also developed a gambling habit at the age of sixteen. This was the result of his friendship with Hari Singh, the wayward son of a wealthy man from Amritsar. Gambling sessions took place at the dens run by Deenu and Fazlu in Katra Jaimal Singh. Initially, Manto used to lose at gambling, but he soon mastered the tricks of the trade and became an expert at the game of Flush. Gambling sessions would go on day and night. This phase lasted for about a year. Then, Manto abruptly gave up gambling. He stopped visiting gambling dens. A

sense of restlessness was closing in on him from all sides; at times, life itself seemed meaningless to him. Amidst this period of disarray, his meeting with the revolutionary writer and journalist Abdul Bari Sahib proved to be a boon for Manto, giving his life a new direction. He described Bari Sahib's influence on him in these words: "During this time, I grew close to Bari Sahib. I was deeply impressed by his sobriety and profound wisdom. Sensing my mental turmoil, he steered me towards journalism and gradually introduced me to literature. Previously, I used to read the novels of Tirath Ram Firozpuri; thanks to Bari Sahib, I began reading Oscar Wilde and Victor Hugo. I developed a great fondness for Victor Hugo. Later, I realized that the French author's didactic style was reflected in Bari Sahib's own writing. Bari Sahib played the primary role in shaping the person I am today. Had I not met him in Amritsar and spent three consecutive months in his company, I would undoubtedly have followed a completely different path." (`Chand Mulaqatein Akhtar Shirani Se', `Dastavez Vol. 5, p. 30) He held Bari Sahib in the highest regard—a reverence that endured throughout his life. Bari Sahib taught Manto the nuances of journalism and encouraged him to read Russian and French literature. Consequently, he delved into the works of Oscar Wilde, Gorky, and Victor Hugo. During that period, he also translated Russian short stories; a collection of these was subsequently published under the title *Roosi Afsaney* (Russian Short Stories). At Bari Sahib's behest, he began writing a film column for the newspaper *Masawat*. After *Masawat* ceased publication, Bari Sahib moved from Amritsar to Lahore, leaving Manto on his own once again. However, Manto no longer found the same thrill in gambling and

similar pastimes that he once had; the passion for writing had taken hold of him. A few months later, Bari Sahib returned to Manto's life with a plan to launch a weekly newspaper called 'Khalq'; Manto's first short story, 'Tamasha', was published in its inaugural issue. It was during this same period that he wrote pieces on Russian and French literature for magazines such as 'Alamgir' and 'Humayun'. He also edited special issues of the magazine. It was a trying time for him; alongside financial hardships, his health was deteriorating. After a check-up, doctors suspected a recurrence of tuberculosis and advised him to move immediately to a hill station. Although he wished to go to Kashmir this time as well, he could not travel beyond Batote. He stayed there for three months, during which he wrote short stories such as 'Chughad', 'Shararat ka Mausam', 'Lalten', and 'Ek Khat'.

Upon returning from Batote, Manto attempted to settle in Amritsar. However, in 1935, at the invitation of Nazir Ludhianvi, he took up the job of editor for the weekly 'Musawwir' in Bombay. He began earning a monthly salary of forty rupees. For several months, he lived within the 'Musawwir' office itself, with two rupees deducted from his salary for the accommodation. Soon, however, through a recommendation, he managed to secure a small room in Byculla for a monthly rent of nine rupees. Manto spent his days working at the office and his nights in Byculla and Nagpada—adjacent neighborhoods inhabited largely by working-class Jews and Muslims. The area was home to 'tonga' drivers, pimps, and quacks posing as medical practitioners. Manto closely observed the lives of these residents and found inspiration for many of his characters among them. Gradually, his sphere of interest expanded to encompass the entirety of Bombay. The city—this

‘Mayanagari’ (City of Dreams)—became so deeply ingrained in his persona that he would say, "I am a walking, talking Bombay." He famously coined this phrase during a gathering in Lahore on October 28, 1951. It was three and three-quarter years after leaving Bombay—a testament to his immense love for the city—that his phase of creative writing truly began, coinciding with his editorship of the magazine ‘Musawwir’. In his own words: "I had now stepped into the realm of short-story writing. The phase of translation had ended back in Lahore and Amritsar; I had begun writing original short stories that were well-received." (‘Akhtar Shirani se Chand Mulaqatein’, ‘Dastavez’ Vol. 5, p. 35). Manto lived in Bombay from 1935 to 1948, moving to Pakistan in the latter year. During this span of nearly fourteen years, he wrote sixty-nine short stories; in this sense, these were his most creatively productive years. In the interim, he spent a year and a half working at All India Radio in Delhi, located on Alipur Road. Manto had developed a passion for films early in his childhood, a weakness that Nazeer Ludhianvi was well aware of. Nazeer was well-acquainted with Khan Bahadur Ardeshir Irani—the owner of Imperial Movietone and producer of India’s first talkie, Alam Ara—and secured a job for Manto at Imperial as a story and dialogue writer. Manto was the only Urdu writer who not only penned pen-portraits of film personalities but also incorporated them as characters in his stories. However, when a film based on one of Manto’s stories flopped, Nazeer used his influence to get him a job at 'Film City' at a monthly salary of one hundred rupees. This displeased Ardeshir Irani; citing the company's financial state, he brought Manto back at a salary of eighty rupees a month, though Manto did not last long at the Imperial

film company. Meanwhile, he wrote the screenplay and dialogues for the company's first color film, 'Kisan Kanya'. In 1938, he joined 'Saroj Movietone' and remained there until 1941.

Even during this period, Manto's life did not settle into a steady rhythm. He realized that the glamour of the film world, visible from afar, was actually quite the opposite in reality. This was certainly not the film world he had dreamed of in his childhood. He felt that the people there were regressive and averse to new ideas; artists—and writers in particular—commanded no respect. Yet, he continued working for film companies to sustain himself and soon carved out a niche among prominent figures in the industry, including directors, actors, and film journalists. Demand for his stories began to rise, and he started receiving assignments for dialogue and screenplay writing. The 'Saroj' film company had by then become 'Hindustan Cinetone'. Manto wrote a story titled 'Mud' (Mud/Sludge) for Seth Nanubhai Desai. He doubted whether a film could actually be made based on his story during the era of British rule, but Nanubhai Desai was a producer of great mettle. He entrusted the direction to Dada Gunjal, a renowned director of the time. The film was released and proved to be a success.

An actor named Nazir—who later established his own film company—played the role of a laborer in this film. 'Mud' forged a friendship between Manto and Nazir. Then, quite suddenly, in early 1941, Manto headed to Delhi and took a job as a scriptwriter at All India Radio, located on Alipur Road. At that time, All India Radio was a hub for literary figures. At that time, the Bukhari brothers held sway over All India Radio; people even jokingly referred to it as the "BBC"—meaning

the "Bukhari Brothers Corporation." When Manto arrived in Delhi, A.A. Advani was the Director of the Delhi station. Noon Meem Rashid was the Director of Programmes, Raja Mehdi Ali Khan was in the script department, and Harindranath Chattopadhyay was also present at the station during those days. Krishan Chander served as a drama producer. Against this backdrop, Manto's arrival as a scriptwriter proved to be the perfect addition—the icing on the cake. Some time later, Upendranath Ashk also joined the drama section as a scriptwriter.

Manto's stint in Delhi was highly significant in terms of his creative output. During his time there—spanning roughly a year and a half—he wrote a hundred radio plays. These included 'Jebkatra', 'Tamasha', 'Uljhan', and 'Randhir Pehalwan' (Randhir, the character actor known for his film roles, was also associated with the All India Radio Delhi drama unit at the time). ...were in that section) and high-quality dramas like 'Journalist'. During this period, he also wrote widely acclaimed radio serials such as 'Janaze' and 'Aao'. Manto's literary journey was always fraught with controversy; he occasionally faced the wrath of friends, critics, All India Radio officials, and film producers. The renowned Hindi writer Upendranath Ashk—who had the opportunity to work alongside Manto in All India Radio's drama department and at 'Filmistan'—penned a controversial, lengthy memoir titled 'Manto Mera Dushman' (Manto, My Enemy) just months after Manto's death. There is also an interesting story behind Manto's departure from All India Radio. The organization published magazines related to its operations: *Listener* in English, *Awaaz* in Urdu, and *Akashvani* in Hindi. Manto was deeply unhappy with the choice of

photographs featured on the covers of these magazines. His dramas were all the rage at the time, and he felt his photograph should appear on the cover. In the 1943 issue of 'Listener', while his photograph did appear alongside the announcement for his play 'Uljhan', it was placed inside the magazine rather than on the cover—a fact that greatly irritated him. Similarly, regarding his play 'Journalist', a producer asked him to alter some of the dialogue. Manto remained adamant that the play be broadcast exactly as written. The matter was escalated to higher authorities; Manto declared that if even a single word were cut, he would resign. True to his word, he quit All India Radio the very next day. Manto was receiving a series of letters from Nazir Ludhianvi in Bombay, informing him that Shaukat Hussain Rizvi—the director of the film 'Khandan'—was currently in the city and staying with him; Rizvi was keen for Manto to write a story for him. Manto had already grown disillusioned with his work at the radio station. Consequently, he set off for Bombay, arriving there on August 7, 1942. Nazir Ludhianvi arranged a meeting between Manto and Shaukat Hussain Rizvi at the office of Musavvir, which also served as Nazir's residence. Following this meeting, Manto wrote the story and screenplay for the film Naukar for Rizvi, though the two did not get along particularly well. At that time, 'Bombay Talkies' was a renowned name in Bombay. The banner had produced excellent social films, most notably Achhut Kanya, Jhoola, Bandhan, and Kangan. The pairing of Ashok Kumar with Devika Rani and Leela Chitnis was immensely popular, and the film Kismat had shattered all existing box-office records. However, following the death of 'Bombay Talkies' founder Himanshu Rai, dissatisfaction regarding Devika Rani's

working style began to fester among Sashadhar Mukherjee and Rai Bahadur Chunilal; this discontent eventually reached a breaking point, prompting them to part ways with 'Bombay Talkies' and establish a new company called 'Filmistan'. As Ashok Kumar was Sashadhar Mukherjee's brother-in-law, he—along with the poet Pradeep, Gyan Mukherjee, and Savak Vacha—also joined 'Filmistan'.

Nazir Ludhianvi had summoned Manto to Bombay by invoking his connection with Shaukat Rizvi; however, the film industry had changed significantly during Manto's absence. Film journalism had also undergone significant changes. Baburao Patel's *Filmindia* (in English) was immensely popular. Manto worked with Baburao Patel for a brief period as well. An English draft used to be published in an Urdu periodical named 'Caravan'. Manto began revisiting old connections. It was during this time that he met his friend from Aligarh, Shahid Latif, who was associated with Filmistan in those days. At Shahid Latif's behest, Manto also joined Filmistan. Manto wrote several stories for the studio. At Filmistan, there was a prevailing practice where one person would direct the film, but someone else's name would appear in the credits. One such film was Aath Din. Following the failure of Chal Chal Re Naujawan, Rai Bahadur Chunilal asked Ashok Kumar to produce a film. Ashok Kumar not only produced the film but also directed it, though D.R. Pai was credited on screen. Manto played the role of Kriparam, an insane retired soldier, in this film. Additionally, Upendranath Ashk (who had joined Filmistan at Manto's invitation) and Raja Mehdi Ali Khan played minor roles.

For a while, Manto worked at Z.A. Ahmed's 'Shalimar Studios' in Pune, an establishment also associated with Josh Malihabadi, Sagar Nizami, Jan Nisar Akhtar, and Ismat Chughtai. It was here that Manto met Shyam. When K. Asif conceived the project for *Mughal-e-Azam* in 1944—following the making of the film *Phool* and based on a story by Kamal Amrohi—Manto was the one writing the dialogues. In this film, Chandramohan, Veena, and Sapru were playing the roles of Akbar, Anarkali, and Salim, respectively. The film's music composer was Anil Biswas. However, in the midst of this, the film's producer, Hakim Shiraz Ali, went to Pakistan and never returned. K. Asif was forced to halt production midway. Shashadhar Mukherjee of 'Filmistan' was a man of dictatorial temperament; his insistence on discipline bordered on sadism. Consequently, the relationship between Manto and Mukherjee was one of love and hate. Then, an event occurred: Devika Rani, the owner of 'Bombay Talkies', married the Russian artist Nicholas Roerich and retired from the film industry. The condition of 'Bombay Talkies' was precarious. Savak Vacha and Ashok Kumar shared an emotional bond with 'Bombay Talkies'; therefore, they left 'Filmistan' to join 'Bombay Talkies'. Manto accompanied them. Additionally, Shahid Latif and Kamal Amrohi also joined 'Bombay Talkies'.

Manto's family had been living in Lahore even before the Partition, while Manto himself remained in Bombay. The tragedy of the Partition had left a deep impact on his mind. His own... In words: "Whose blood is this that is being shed so ruthlessly every day? Where will those bones be cremated or buried—bones stripped of their flesh by the kites and vultures of religion?" Similarly, in the short story *Sahay*,

Manto powerfully narrated the events surrounding his move to Pakistan. He was deeply shaken by the sight of human bestiality. He depicted the tragedy of Partition in Siyah Hashiye (Black Margins) using harrowing language. Manto moved to Pakistan in January 1948. There are various stories regarding his departure. One version suggests he could not tolerate the decision by 'Bombay Talkies' to produce films based on Ismat Chughtai's story Ziddi and Kamal Amrohi's story Mahal. Another account comes from Manto himself: "A few days later, when I harshly criticized a story by Nazir Ajmeri at 'Bombay Talkies' (which was later filmed as Majboor) and suggested some changes, Nazir Ajmeri told Ashok and Wacha, 'You shouldn't include Manto in such discussions. Since he is a short-story writer himself, he is stubborn...' I pondered this deeply. I couldn't quite make sense of it. Finally, I said to myself, 'Manto bhai! There is no road ahead... stop the car. Turn into the side lane here.' And so, I quietly slipped away into that side lane and came to Pakistan..." (Ashok Kumar, Dastavez, Vol. 5, p. 187).

However, these explanations lack substance; they appear entirely superficial. Regardless, Manto traveled via Karachi to Lahore and reunited with his wife, Safia, and his daughter. However, Manto remained conflicted about the Partition. In fact, he remained in a state of confusion regarding the Partition until his dying breath. His final seven years were marked by utter destitution. Lahore had long been a hub for cinema; yet, Manto—who had previously lived in the dream city of Bombay and penned the stories and dialogues for successful films like Apni Nagariya, Chal Chal Re Naujawan, and Aath Din—found no work in Lahore. Similarly, while audiences had once eagerly

awaited his radio plays on All India Radio, not a single one of his dramas was broadcast on Pakistan Radio. This devastated Manto. The last three years of his life were consumed by health issues and financial hardship, yet creatively, they were his finest years. Between 1948 and 1955, he wrote 161 short stories that scaled new heights of excellence.

Manto's alcoholism reached its peak during his time in Pakistan. Driven by financial deprivation, he began writing short stories in exchange for nothing more than a single bottle of liquor. During these final days, Manto wrote prolifically. Whether in gatherings of friends, at the offices of literary journals, at the Tea House, or in bookshops, he would challenge anyone present: "Give me a single sentence, and I will turn it into a short story right here before your eyes." The short story *Aankhein* (Eyes) was the result of one such challenge. The poet Farhad Zaidi provided the sentence: "Of her entire body, it was her eyes that I loved." Manto took that very sentence and crafted the story *Aankhein*. He wrote thirty such stories. On one occasion, an army officer spotted him at the 'Naya Idara' office located at 15 Circular Road. He offered a salute and said,

"Manto Sahib! It is widely known that you can write a story based on any given sentence!" "Can you write a play in this manner too?"

Manto simply replied, "You arrange the paper."

And so, he wrote the play 'Is Manjhdhar Mein'. Manto had written several plays upon request during his stint at All India Radio as well. He would load paper into his typewriter and ask, "What should today's

play be about?" Those sitting nearby would suggest "Randhir" (a character actor in films who was also a drama artist at All India Radio at the time), and Manto would write a radio play titled *Randhir Pehalwan*. Throughout his life, Manto remained a towering figure in literature. The publication of any of his short stories, sketches, letters, or books was a major literary event. It never happened that a significant short story of his was published without sparking widespread discussion. His public persona was shaped by his stories; his tales incited uproars, fueled debates, and led to court cases. He was perceived as a great short-story writer—an image that endures even years after his death. Manto had to face court proceedings five times over his short stories.

In Manto's own words: "Four cases have already been fought regarding my short stories; the fifth one—the details of which I am about to recount—is currently underway. The first four stories that faced litigation were Kali Shalwar, Dhuaan, Boo, Thanda Gosht, and Upar, Neeche aur Darmiyan. I was acquitted in the first three cases. Regarding Kali Shalwar, I had to travel from Delhi to Lahore two or three times. Dhuaan and *Boo* caused me considerable trouble; for these, I had to travel from Bombay to Lahore." But the case regarding 'Thanda Gosht' (Cold Meat) took the cake; it completely shattered me. Although the trial took place in Pakistan, the ordeal of navigating the courts was something a sensitive person like me could barely endure—realizing that a courtroom is a place where one is forced to tolerate every kind of indignity. God forbid anyone ever has to deal with that institution known as the 'court.' I have never seen such a bizarre place anywhere else."

The fifth case against Manto was filed in Karachi regarding the piece 'Upar, Neeche aur Darmiyan' (Above, Below, and In-Between). The background to this was that a Karachi-based magazine, *Payam-e-Mashriq*, had published the piece without Manto's permission; it had been lifted from the Lahore newspaper *Ehsan*. As soon as it appeared in Karachi, a warrant was issued for Manto's arrest. Manto had already been deeply shaken by the previous four cases. Consequently, upon entering Judge Mehdi Ali Siddiqui's court in Karachi, Manto stated, "My name is Saadat Hasan Manto. I [wrote] 'Upar, Neeche...'" ...and 'darmiyan' [in the meantime] is written. Let the sentence be pronounced upon me." Silence fell over the courtroom upon hearing this.

The judge looked Manto up and down and asked, "What is the date today?"

It was the twenty-fifth of the month; upon hearing the date, he slapped a fine of twenty-five rupees on Manto. The case was dismissed. That same evening, when Manto met Judge Mehdi Ali Siddiqui, he asked him, "Do you also consider my short story obscene?"

The judge remained silent (an excerpt from Manto's essay 'Paanchva Muqadma' [The Fifth Case], edited by Balraj Menra and Sharad Dutt). However, he later wrote an article regarding this statement. It is essential to mention two of Manto's short stories here: 'Thanda Gosht' and 'Khol Do'. When the case regarding 'Thanda Gosht' was heard in Lahore, the lower court declared the story obscene. Manto appealed

the decision in the Sessions Court, where he was acquitted. However, the case moved to the High Court, which upheld the lower court's verdict. Consequently, 'Thanda Gosht' is still legally considered obscene in Pakistan today. After 'Khol Do' was published in the Lahore-based magazine 'Javed', a six-month ban was imposed on the magazine's publication. Manto bade farewell to the world on January 18, 1955. It is also a coincidence that when Manto passed away in 1955, the film 'Mirza Ghalib'—for which he had written the screenplay—was playing to packed houses in cinemas across India. Manto crafted this story based on a letter written by Ghalib during his stay in Delhi and sold it to producer-director Sohrab Modi. In 1954, Sohrab Modi made the film *Mirza Ghalib* starring Bharat Bhushan and Suraiya, in which Manto was credited with the story. This film was honored with the first National Film Award, the 'Swarna Kamal' (Golden Lotus). The article began with a reference to Manto's epitaph; therefore, it is essential to revisit it. Exactly six years after Manto's death, on January 18, 1961, Devendra Satyarthi wrote about the epitaph: "It was as if, upon reaching beneath the earth, Manto wondered again who was the greater storyteller—himself or God. Placing His hand on Manto's shoulder, God asked, 'Did you write 'Toba Tek Singh'?'

Manto replied, 'I wrote it; so what? Just because I borrowed forty-two years, eight months, and seven days from You, it doesn't mean You are necessarily a good critic of my story... Take Your hand off me!'

A strange smile appeared on God's face. He removed His hand from Manto's shoulder and, looking at him with a peculiar gaze, said, 'Go, all your sins are forgiven!'

For a few moments, Manto remained completely silent. He was not at all pleased by this. He appeared deeply serious and somewhat resentful: 'Do You understand? You are bothering me... You lent me only forty-two years, eight months, and seven days, whereas I have given centuries to Saugandhi.'"

According to Devendra Satyarthi, Manto had given centuries to Saugandhi. But Manto accorded this same sense of justice to characters like Bishan Singh (Toba Tek Singh), 'Sultana' (Kali Shalwar), 'Bholu' (Nangi Aawazein), 'Mammad Bhai' (Mammad Bhai), 'Neeti' (License), 'Stella Jackson' (Mummy), and 'Mozel' (Mozel). These characters from Manto's short stories bear witness to the fact that he was a master storyteller. That is precisely why Manto remains alive today.



Krishan Chander

Krishan Chander (23 November 1914 – 8 March 1977) was an Indian Urdu and Hindi writer of short stories and novels. Some of his works have also been translated into English. He was a prolific writer, penning over 20 novels, 30 collections of short stories and scores of radio plays in Urdu, and later, after partition in 1947, took to writing in Hindi as well. He also wrote screen-plays for Bollywood movies to supplement his meagre income as an author of satirical stories. Krishan Chander's novels (including the classic: Ek Gadhe Ki Sarguzasht, transl. 'Autobiography of a Donkey') have been translated into over 16 Indian languages and some foreign languages, including English.

His short story "Annadata" (transl. The Giver of Grain – an obsequious appellation used by Indian peasants for their feudal land-owners), was made into the film Dharti Ke Lal (1946) by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas – which led to his being offered work regularly as a screenwriter by Bollywood, including such popular hits as Mamta (1966) and Sharafat (1970). He wrote his film scripts in Urdu

There is only one Manto in Urdu literature

Krishan Chander

Tall, slightly stooped, fair-complexioned; veins standing out on the backs of his hands, a prominent Adam's apple, large feet on lean legs—yet not ungainly. There was a strange refinement about him; a look of irritation on a face that also bore traces of intoxication; restlessness in his voice and in his writing; a certain sharpness in his mannerisms; an eagerness in his gait—these are the impressions one forms upon first seeing Saadat Hasan Manto. Yet, another realization soon overshadows these initial ones. The structure of Manto's forehead is as magnificent as the mind behind it—and just as extraordinary. Often, the foreheads of brilliant men bear a resemblance to the images Western painters associate with the Devil—broad foreheads with hairlines receding from the temples. Manto's forehead is not like that; it is rectangular, like a cinema screen—narrower at the bottom and wider at the top—crowned by straight, long, thick hair. And his eyes hold a wild gleam—a look of fearless clarity and an insight that suggests he has peered through the very doorway of death and returned. I never asked Manto about this. I heard that he once suffered from tuberculosis or some other dreadful illness. Regardless, the sorrow and anguish in those large, haunting eyes bear witness to the fact that Manto has journeyed far beyond the ordinary milestones of life and returned. It is possible there was no illness—perhaps it was a perilous love affair. And then

again, love is a sickness too. Whatever the case, the experience did not come at too high a price for Manto. This experience refined Manto, turning him into pure gold.

Like Jawaharlal and Iqbal, Manto was a Kashmiri Pandit. His family had long been settled in Amritsar. Both his elder brothers had migrated from India; the eldest was a barrister in Kenya and a member of a policy-related institution there. I have seen that elder brother—a man with a beard in strict accordance with Sharia, deeply God-fearing, temperate, and devout in his prayers. Manto was everything his two elder brothers were not. He respected his elders, but felt no love for them! The contradictions in their etiquette, conduct, and worldviews were so profound that Manto left home in his childhood to carve out a new path for himself. Aligarh, Lahore, Amritsar, Bombay, Delhi—these places witnessed the many facets of Manto. Manto, the admirer of Russian literature! Manto, the devotee of Chinese literature! Manto, the victim of bitterness and politics! Manto, the obscure! Manto, the infamous! Manto, who frequented taverns, bars, and coffee houses! And then, Manto the family man! Manto, the loving soul! Manto, the friend who helped others! Manto, who transformed discontent and bitterness into sweetness! Manto, the immensely popular Urdu writer! These milestones witnessed Manto in every shade of his being, just as he deeply experienced each of these places.

In his observation of life, Manto melted himself down like a wax candle. He stands as the solitary 'Shankar' of Urdu literature—the one who dissolved life's poison and drank it himself, only to vividly

articulate its taste and hue. People may shy away or feel apprehensive, yet they cannot deny the reality of his powers of observation or the truth of his perceptions. Just as Shankar's throat turned blue from consuming poison, Manto, too, has sacrificed his health; his life has become dependent on injections. Only Manto could have consumed such poison; anyone else would have lost their sanity. Yet, Manto's mind has managed to digest even that poison—much like those ascetics who begin with cannabis and eventually progress to consuming arsenic and letting snakes bite their tongues. The intensity and ferocity of Manto's literature, along with the scalpel-like precision of his language, reveal that his ascetic journey has reached its final stage.

I had read Manto's short stories before actually meeting him. They used to be published in the weekly Musavvir. These stories were so sharp, written in such unique and extraordinary language, and so unconventional in their approach that one was compelled to acknowledge their brilliance. I likely read stories like 'Shu Shu', 'Khushiya', and 'Diwali Ke Diye' in *Musavvir* and even wrote letters to Manto praising them. In those days, Manto lived in Bombay, serving as the editor of the weekly 'Musavvir' and writing the story, screenplay, and dialogue for the film 'Keechad'. After Premchand, Manto was the first writer to transition from literature to cinema—though perhaps it is not entirely accurate to phrase it that way, given that his literary fame actually began after his career in films. Manto is perhaps the first writer to have moved from the film world to the realm of literature, only to return to cinema after solidifying the foundations of his fame. There is something peculiar about everything

regarding him. After reading these short stories, I read his story 'Lalten' (Lantern), which is set in Batote—a place where Manto likely stayed during a period of serious illness. To me, much of this story seems rooted in Manto's own life; the nuances within it, and the melancholy and ennui that permeate its conclusion, appear to be reflections of the romantic Manto's own existence. It is as if someone had stripped away all the gentleness, softness, and sweetness from Manto's stories—or perhaps he himself had forcibly shoved these qualities out of his narratives. It strikes me that he does this under the influence of some mental anguish, a struggle, or an intense emotion:

"Get out, get out... life is bitter; there is no room here for such sentiments. It is best to leave this place."

In many of his stories, it appears as though he is deliberately shoving those emotions out. At times, he whimpers like a child; at others, he mocks them in a harsh, deeply unpleasant tone—yet no one comprehends the bitterness... Beneath that venom and sardonic laughter lies such tenderness, softness, and a yearning for life—a yearning born of an eternal hunger that is never sated.

Manto has been hungry since time immemorial; every one of his short stories echoes with a cry for human love. Do not be misled by his manner. He declares a thousand times:

"I have no love for human beings. I might love a rotting puppy, but never a human."

He would say, "I have no faith in friendship, kindness, or compassion. My only faith is in alcohol. All this talk of progressivism is nonsense. I am not a progressive. I am simply Manto—or perhaps, not even that."

He says these things out of convention—sometimes to provoke you, to taunt you, or even to deceive himself. He voices these sentiments, yet his eyes speak a different language, and so does his pen. And it is our good fortune that, unlike his tongue, his pen is not under his control. He tries a thousand times to mask his human empathy, his progressive spirit, and his love for humanity; he coats his stories with a veneer of mockery. Yet, his pen defies him, and behind the veil of every story, human love surges forth. In those days, I was editing the first volume of *Naye Zaviye*. When I asked Manto to contribute, he promptly sent a story that, in my view, remains one of the finest in Urdu literature to this day. It holds a place in literature comparable to Rajinder Singh Bedi's *Krishn* and Hayatullah Ansari's *Aakhri Koshish*. It is unlikely that Urdu will see the creation of such magnificent short stories again. I have read the Russian masterpiece *The Pit* (Yama) and several French stories on the same theme; I have also studied the character of Umrao Jaan, yet I found no character in those novels or short stories that could rival the heroine of *Hatak*. Manto has peeled away, layer by layer, the outer shell of the courtesan's life within the existing social order, revealing not just her body but her very soul—laid completely bare. You can see right through her, as if looking through glass; such is the ruthless, unsparing manner in which Manto has exposed her. Yet, every hue of this stark, unlovely portrait—despite its ugliness—creates a new kind

of beauty. One does not fall in love with the courtesan, nor does one feel pity for Saugandhi or her life; instead, one comes to believe in her innocence, her womanhood, her life, her desires, and her creative spirit. And therein lies the hallmark of true, timeless literature.

After Hatak, many of Manto's short stories were published in various magazines, and his name flashed across the minds of the educated public like a bolt of lightning. Around that time, I received a summons from All India Radio and moved from Lahore to Delhi. I had barely been there a month when I received a letter from Manto stating that he was coming to Delhi and would be staying with me. I had secured a small house in Tis Hazari, complete with a servant, so I had no cause for worry. One evening, around six o'clock, I had returned from the office and was strolling outside my house when a tall, fair-complexioned gentleman approached, walking with a distinctive, slightly slanted gait. Clutching a leather bag under his arm, he smiled at me. We recognized each other instantly.

"Are you Krishan Chander?" the stranger asked.

"Manto!" I replied, and we embraced.

Manto had arrived wearing a long coat. Once inside the room, he took off his overcoat, tossed the leather bag onto the sofa, and sat on a chair, tucking his legs up in the exact manner Kanhaiyalal would when playing the role of a pickpocket. I couldn't help but laugh.

"Here, have a cigarette," I said.

It was a rather cheap brand of cigarette that I offered him.

"Good heavens!" Manto exclaimed. "You smoke *this*? It's amazing—how do you manage to write such fine short stories while smoking cigarettes like these? With a cigarette like this, you could only manage office clerical work—get it, Krishan Chander M.A.? Here, smoke *this* one instead—a 555! And forget all about those others."

The servant brought in a plate of piping-hot *phulkis*.

"These phulkis were fried in ghee," I said. "Pure ghee, brought all the way from Punjab."

"Phulkis fried in ghee?" Manto cried out. "Good heavens! My dear fellow, you are an absolute fool. Who on earth fries *phulkis* in ghee? It completely ruins the flavor. Ghee isn't the right choice for frying; nothing beats Dalda for that. Just wait until my wife gets here—I'll treat you to phulkis that are spicy, crispy, and every bit as delicious as the ones made by the *Ghatan* women in Bombay." "Have you ever been to Bombay?"

I replied, "I've come to Delhi for the very first time. I have no idea what the world is like beyond this."

"Come to Bombay! And forget about this radio business! Here, have a drink." Saying this, Manto pulled a bottle—Solan Whisky No. 1—out of the pocket of his short coat.

Popping the cork, he said, "Hurry up! Get some glasses. We're running late."

I had never tasted alcohol before. But Manto's demeanor was so assertive and his tone so sharp that I feared he might actually strike me if I refused. I calmly ordered two glasses. Manto began pouring the liquor.

He asked, "What kind of liquor do you drink?"

I said, "Brandy, or perhaps a good English whisky."

"Which English whisky?" Manto retorted sharply. "Whisky isn't English; it's Scotch. Damn the British! They can't even make liquor—how could they possibly rule over India?"

An advertisement for an English Scotch whisky flashed through my mind.

"DON'T BE VAGUE, ASK FOR HAIG..." "Make it a double!" I said quickly.

"It's all rubbish!" Manto said. "Solan Whisky Number One—that's the finest. It costs less, and the high it gives is far superior to Veg. Don't drink Veg from now on. Only Solan Whisky Number One, understood?"

I said, "Alright, I won't drink Veg anymore."

"Shall I pour some more?" Manto asked, glancing at my glass, which was already about a quarter full.

I said, "No more!"

"As you wish."

"...Actually, pour some more!"

"So, you're going to have a Patiala Peg?" Manto asked, looking at me in surprise.

I quickly said, "Yes."

The truth was, I didn't even know what a Patiala Peg was; saying 'yes' just got me out of the spot.

"You're quite the boozer!" Manto said, looking at me with an approving eye.

I was already thoroughly buzzed from the first peg. I didn't have a second one, nor did Manto insist, because he had seen the state I was in.

Under the illusion that I was lucky, I remarked, "This is my first time drinking alcohol."

At this, Manto listed the virtues of alcohol: "The thrill of sin lies in alcohol. The glow of a woman lies in alcohol. The sweetness of literature lies in alcohol. Deliverance from worldly squabbles and hassles lies in alcohol. Look, how long are you going to play the pious scholar? After all, you have to create literature. You aren't teaching schoolchildren. If you don't experience life! Don't commit a sin! Don't brush close to death! Don't taste the bittersweetness of sorrow! Don't drink Solan Whisky Number One! Then what the hell are you going to write?"

After finishing the bottle, he too passed out. Then he began to taunt me, asking why I was "Krishan Chander M.A." instead of just "Krishan Chander."

He kept teasingly chanting, "Krishan Chander M.A.... Krishan Chander M.A.... Krishan Chander M.A.!"

To get back at him, I retorted, "Tell me, who are *you*? Manto or Mantu? What on earth is this 'Manto'? Manto... Mantu... Manto!"

He kept repeating, "Krishan Chander M.A.... Krishan Chander M.A.... Krishan Chander M.A.!"

We went back and forth like this for a while, bickering over the same point, until we fell asleep. I slept on the sofa, and he fell asleep in that very chair—tucked into the same position, with his head resting between his knees—and stayed that way until morning. When I woke up, he was still sleeping just like that. The bottle on the table lay overturned; the glasses were empty, and the *phulkis* had gone stale.

I woke Manto up: "Get up!"

As soon as he rose, he said, "If I could get just a little bit right now, the taste of the liquor would vanish from my tongue. You know, the only way to get rid of the taste of alcohol is to have another couple of sips first thing in the morning—get it? Order some liquor; I have to go to All India Radio later."

"What for?" I asked.

"I've been invited here to write plays."

"But you were sending *me* to Bombay—to work in films."

"To hell with Bombay! And stop this nonsense. Just order the liquor." Saying this, he opened his leather bag, took out a short story, and handed it to me.

"Read this. I don't show my stories to anyone—not even my own father. But you... I show them only to you." "Look, you don't write particularly well either, but there is something special about him—I admit that. Do you get it, Krishan Chander M.A.?"

We worked together at the radio station for two years. Later, Upendranath Ashk also joined us. I was a drama producer. Both Manto and Ashk wrote plays, and I had to strike a balance between the two. Both were fine writers, yet both were unyielding in their egos. The result was that some truly excellent radio plays were written during those days—plays that were not merely translations from other languages. They were the brilliant creations of fine minds. These plays elevated the status of modern drama in Urdu literature; in fact, Upendranath went on to dedicate his best efforts to the genre. It was a delightful time. The three of us would engage in literary debates and playful banter. Short stories and plays were written, and we would read our drafts to one another. Then, for a while, Bedi, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, and Noon Meem Rashid also joined the fold. Together, this group added a new chapter to Urdu literature. Nadeem wrote his long opera; Bedi turned his attention to drama for the first time; and Rashid's *Mavra* was published during that period. Devendra

Satyarthi also arrived—just wandering in casually. For a day or two, he and Manto got along famously, but the bitterness of Manto's temperament clashed with Satyarthi's insistence on speaking sweetly. Consequently, they couldn't get along for long. Manto took a dig at Satyarthi in one of his short stories, and Satyarthi retorted in *Naye Devta*. Manto was certainly stung by this; the impact of that story lingered for two or three days. Finally, he said, "These 'new gods' are fine. Let it be—forget it!"

I never discussed this subject with him.

Manto would often say to me, "I don't like this habit of yours. I want to pick a fight with you, yet you always leave me with a sense of anguish. I dislike this rudeness of yours."

I replied, "Isn't Ashk enough of a reason for a fight?"

Ashk and Manto engaged in frequent banter—often over every conceivable topic under the sun. They would critique each other's literary work so intensely that one could remain engrossed all day long. Manto owned an Urdu typewriter; he used to write all his plays by simply inserting the paper into the machine and typing away.

Manto believed that there was no machine in the world more conducive to stimulating thought than the typewriter. Words would emerge from the machine clean and polished, gleaming like perfectly formed pearls—unlike writing with a pen, where one might face issues like a worn-out nib, a low ink supply, or flimsy paper. For a writer, the typewriter was as essential as a husband... ...a wife. And then there

are Upendranath Ashk and Krishan Chander, who keep wearing out their pen nibs. "My dear fellow! Can great literature ever be created with an eight-anna pen holder? You're an ass—an absolute ass!"

I, for one, remained silent. But a couple of days later, we saw Ashk *sahab* walking in with a new Urdu typewriter tucked under his arm; he set it up right in front of Manto's desk and began clacking away.

"Hey! What's the use of just an Urdu typewriter? One needs an English typewriter too. Krishan! Have you ever seen an English typewriter? There isn't another one like it in all of Delhi. I'll bring one over someday and show it to you."

Ashk went on to buy not just an English typewriter but a Hindi one as well. Whenever he arrived at the office, the peon would follow him, carrying three typewriters instead of one. Ashk would walk right past Manto—who owned only two typewriters. Finally, in a fit of anger, Manto sold his English typewriter too. He didn't want to keep the Urdu one either, but since it made his work easier, he held onto it. Still, how long could he put up with the onslaught of those three typewriters? Eventually, he sold the Urdu typewriter as well.

He remarked, "Say what you will, a machine can never capture the essence that a pen does. The bond shared by paper, pen, and mind simply cannot be replicated by a typewriter. For one thing, the wretched thing keeps clattering away—*khata-khat, khata-khat*—ceaselessly! Whereas a pen flows so smoothly. It feels as though the ink is pouring directly from the mind onto the surface of the paper.

Ah!" "What a beautiful pen this Sheaffer is! Look at its sleek, streamlined elegance—just like a Christian girl from Bandra."

Ashk retorted with a touch of irritation, "Do you have any principles at all? Until yesterday, you were singing the praises of the typewriter; now that you own one, you've started praising the pen. Amazing! That's hardly the point—I've spent a thousand rupees!"

Manto burst into laughter. One day, he came to see me, looking very cheerful.

He said, "Look, I've received a letter from Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi. He sends his regards to you, too. Here, read this."

I read the letter; it was a lovely one. However, Manto had handed it to me because it praised his short-story writing—he had practically compelled Nadeem to write something he could show off to me. The final sentence of the letter read:

"You are the *Badshah* (King) of short-story writing."

After reading it, I opened my desk drawer and took out another letter. This one, too, was from Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi and had arrived just that day. I had read it and tucked it away in the drawer only minutes before Manto's arrival. I handed that letter to Manto.

"Here, take a look—this gentleman sent me a letter as well. Read this one."

In my letter, Nadeem had praised *my* short-story writing. The final sentence read:

"You are the *Shehanshah* (Emperor) of short-story writing."

I said, "Manto! You are merely a *Badshah* (King), whereas I am a *Shehanshah* (Emperor)—I outrank you. Well, what do you say to that?"

Then, we both burst into laughter. What a delightful joke Nadeem had played on both of us. Manto said, "Come! Let's both write her a letter and invite her here."

At that time, girls from educated, respectable families were hesitant to participate in radio dramas. When I arrived in Delhi, there were only three or four girls available to take part in our plays. However, as a new style of drama emerged—one that depicted the lives of the middle or upper classes—the need arose to expand our group. Consequently, after much effort, I managed to assemble a group of ten or twelve girls who would participate in our plays.

One day, Manto asked me, "Look here! How many girls can you bring in for your play?"

"How many? What do you mean? As many as you say?"

"Don't go around boasting! I'm asking you seriously."

"Why ask? You just write the play and include as many girls as you like; I'll bring them."

"Alright then, I'll write a play featuring only girls. I'll cast twenty-six or twenty-seven of them."

I said, "And call it 'One Man'!"

The play was written. It was broadcast, too. We found a girl for every single role. We operated in a spirit of constant competition like this in everything we did. If I wrote a good short story, Manto would write one too, and then Ashk would follow suit; Rashid would even compose a poem. If Manto wrote a play, Ashk would inevitably write one as well, and then, following their lead, I would try my hand at writing too. All my radio plays—including *Saraye Ke Bahar*—were products of those days when Manto and I were together. Those were such wonderful days; despite financial hardships, we remained very happy—and we wrote prolifically. Whatever he wrote, he wrote with freshness and full vigor—never with a weary spirit. It was during this period that Manto penned some of the finest plays and short stories of his literary career. His pen possessed an extraordinary fluidity in those days; every other day or so, he would churn out a new piece—be it a play or a short story. Despite our occasional squabbles, the three of us shared such a strong bond of cooperation that we spent our days and nights together, brainstorming ways to improve our programs. Radio artists were particularly fond of Manto. Although he rarely attended rehearsals, whenever he did show up, his witty, sparkling remarks would electrify the atmosphere, leaving an impact that lingered for hours. One can gauge the dedication and passion with which the artists broadcast Manto's plays—and the immense popularity these works garnered among the public—from the fact that

Manto dedicated one of his radio play collections to those very artists. It was also during this time that Manto and I collaborated on a film story. This was the first film-related venture I had ever participated in. It was titled *Banjara*. We had sold it to a distributor in Delhi because, at the time, we wanted to get new suits tailored, and there was no prospect of receiving any money from publishers for a long while. Yet, the most interesting aspect of this cinematic saga wasn't our new suits; for us, at least, it was the experience itself.

After hearing the story, the *Seth* remarked, "It's an excellent story. We'll buy it. But, Manto Sahib, you've portrayed the mill manager in a very negative light. He ought to be shown in a positive one—otherwise, it might have a bad influence on the workers."

"Then we'll portray him positively!"

I stared at Manto in astonishment.

I was about to ask, "How is that possible?"

He stopped me with a wave of his hand.

The *Seth* continued, "And regarding the manager's wife—what if she were his unmarried sister instead, and fell in love with the hero—sort of like a *vamp*? How would that be, Manto Sahib?"

"Excellent... simply excellent!" Manto replied.

I was dumbfounded once more. This was the same Manto who wouldn't alter a single letter—let alone a line—for anyone; his short

stories had to be published exactly as written, or he would withdraw them entirely. Was this truly the same Manto? I gazed at him in disbelief. As we stepped out of the *Seth's* office, Manto said, "Look, this isn't literature; it's cinema. It isn't in the hands of the educated, the brilliant, or the true connoisseurs of art. The critics who judge our stories are men like Maulana Salahuddin, Kaleemullah, and Hamid Ali Khan—not the likes of Sharu Bhai Tokarji Patel or Mangu, Bhangu, Jangu & Brothers." "That is why turning a mother into a sister, a sister into a beloved, and a beloved into a vamp in a film is child's play for us. You see? Serve the art, earn money from films. Now tell me, do you want the suit or not?"

"I do."

"Then the film's story will certainly undergo changes."

"It certainly will, brother!"

In terms of temperament, physique, and spirit, Manto remains a Kashmiri Pandit to this day. In many respects, he bears a resemblance to Ashk. I know reading this will annoy him greatly, yet it is far from untrue. After all, Ashk, too, is a Brahmin—a Pandit. Both are tall and lean. Both are constantly preoccupied with injections—day and night. Both possess that characteristic Brahminical obstinacy and stubbornness, their sharp intellect, and their irascibility. Both are great talkers. True, there is a bit more wit and uniqueness in Manto's conversation. Discuss any topic in the world with him, and he will approach it from a fresh perspective. The habit of avoiding the beaten path has become an intrinsic part of his nature; he cannot shake it off.

If you praise Dostoevsky, he will sing the praises of Somerset Maugham. If you list the virtues of Bombay, he will wax lyrical about Amritsar day and night. If you express admiration for the greatness of Jinnah or Gandhi, he will extol the noble character of the cobbler in his own neighborhood. If you express a preference for meat and spinach, he will tempt you with mutton. If you wish to marry, he will try to persuade you to remain a bachelor; if you consider bachelorhood superior, he will list the benefits of marriage and urge you to tie the knot. If you praise him for a favor, he will lash out at you; if you abuse him, he will go out of his way to find you a job paying five hundred rupees. Much like Manto's temperament, his friendships, enmities, and even his acts of vengeance are peculiar—yet they reveal many facets of true humanity.

His bluntness, audacity, and bitterness are merely a shell—a protective layer he has wrapped around his tender nature. His desire to appear vastly different from others is, in reality, nothing more than a mask; deep down, he is exactly like us—or rather, more wounded, more emotional, and more compassionate than we are. People have often seen Manto laughing, drinking, teasing his dear friends, and using satire to refute accepted truths and realities. But I have also seen Manto weep. He did not weep for the sorrows of the world, nor for his own; he was not grieving a lost love, nor facing a life-threatening illness. He was weeping over the death of his eighteen-month-old child. When I received the news, I rushed to his home. Manto stared at me with his bloodshot eyes, as if to say:

"So, you come now? When he is already dead? When we are taking him away to be buried? Where were you before this? Had you come sooner, perhaps my child might have lived."

His voice was choked with emotion, and his eyelids were swollen. He said to me, "Krishan! I do not fear death. I am not moved by anyone's death. But this child... and I do not say this simply because he is my child..." "That is why I say—look at him; even now, he appears so innocent, so fresh, and so lovely. I often think about what a massive tragedy it is when a new idea shatters before it can fully take shape. Every newborn child is an idea. Why did this one have to break? I have just witnessed the life ebbing from his body. I might die, you might die; the old, the young, the middle-aged—they all die. People are constantly dying. But this child! Nature should not shatter a new idea so prematurely."

And then, he broke down and wept inconsolably. The pessimistic shell he wore had been shattered into pieces. I never saw him weep again after that. Yet, those tears led me deep into that ocean within Manto—the very depths from which his literature was born. The waters of that ocean are a blend of deep green and gold; the water is salty, and sharks, octopuses, and other dangerous sea creatures... Hidden beneath the surface lie vibrant, smiling cliffs of the heart, upon whose velvety greenery rest pearls born of oysters. I have witnessed this extraordinary spectacle just once. You have seen those pearls that Manto, like a diver, retrieves from the depths of his own heart; they are the congealed droplets of his blood, which he polishes with his satire and despair before presenting to you with a touch of wry humor.

Do not be misled by his manner—these are genuine pearls. It is our nation's misfortune that we fail to value them. While India has long been a cradle of literature, refinement, culture, and the fine arts, we have shown such profound negligence toward our great artists for centuries that we no longer even realize the magnitude of our transgression. Consider the example of Saigal: when he passed away, not a single word of condolence came from the nation's eminent figures—the very people who endlessly lament the need to safeguard our culture and civilization. Yet, if you were to ask them to name India's great artists, writers, singers, painters, or sculptors—or inquire about their current endeavors—they would fall silent, offering excuses about being too busy.

Manto has no fondness for fine clothing; his tastes run to a fine home, good food, and excellent liquor. You will always find his home tastefully arranged; he is accustomed to working in a clean, pristine environment. Cleanliness, orderliness, and excellence are hallmarks of his temperament. You will not find the restlessness or sloppiness often encountered in the homes of writers at Manto's place. Nothing in Manto's home is askew; only the master of the house possesses a 'crooked'—or unconventional—way of thinking. Yet, even that follows a clear, methodical order—a secret usually revealed only at the climax of his short stories. Manto's stories are an expression of his temperament and his milieu. He crafts the attire of his stories with exquisite refinement; there are no loose folds or sloppy, unfinished stitches—the tailoring is impeccable. His stories are crisp, clean, and well-pressed. The language is polished, lucid, and simple. True, the hues of his stories are peculiar, their contours unique, and his

metaphors novel. They lack the lyrical beauty, poetic charm, or conventional prettiness that appeals to the senses. In literature, he values geometry over mere aesthetic beauty; he keeps everything precisely measured. He is acutely aware of the meaning and impact of his metaphors within their specific contexts and settings. He does not aim for unconscious beauty; rather, he seeks to create an effect through serious structure and geometric precision—and he often succeeds far better than the romantics do. Manto remains deeply grounded in reality—so close to the earth that even the insects crawling through a clump of grass become visible, revealing their every characteristic. Those accustomed to viewing life only superficially often fail to appreciate Manto's profound powers of observation and the intense dedication with which he molds the vessel of his story. Undoubtedly, there are moments when his inflated ego leads him astray. Or perhaps it happens that he cannot maintain a balance between life and literature—caught somewhere between the insects in the grass and the clouds drifting in the sky—and instead adopts a highly personal and idiosyncratic approach. Yet, such instances are rare; the vast majority of his writing lives up to the highest ideals of humanity. It reveals a sweet beauty—born of simplicity, truth, and even bitterness—that the human heart has yearned to attain throughout history.

Initially, Manto's work bore a distinct influence of Russian literature. This is hardly surprising; progressive writers across the globe—and even those with reactionary views—have drawn upon the rich legacy of Russian literature. However, before long, Manto forged a unique style entirely his own. While one can find countless imitators of Abbas,

Ashk, Ismat, and Krishan Chander, no one has ever been able to truly adopt the literary style of Manto—or, to an extent, that of Bedi. There is only one Manto in Urdu literature, and only one Bedi; echoes of other writers can certainly be found elsewhere. Manto's fearless approach to the subject of sexual behavior is unparalleled—not only in Urdu and Hindi literature but, as far as my reading of translations from Marathi, Gujarati, and Bengali goes, in other languages as well. He first stripped away the shells of shame and inhibition, then cleansed the layers of filth, and finally scrubbed the core subject until it shone so brightly that today, every one of us seems well-versed in the significance of sex, its complexities, and its myriad effects. We are indebted to Manto, to a great extent, for this sex education. He imparted this knowledge to us at the cost of his own youth and health.

From Bombay's *chawls* and taverns to its hospitals and coffee houses, Manto deeply studied the city's criminal underworld. In his quest for truth, he waded knee-deep into this mire; while his clothes were inevitably soiled, his soul remained untainted. The pain concealed within his stories bears witness to this. Few others hold a woman's dignity, honor, and domestic sanctity in such high regard. Thus, when he witnesses a woman's dignity being stripped away, her honor lost, and her domestic world destroyed, he becomes deeply agitated. Driven by restlessness, he seeks to understand why this happens. And each time his observations reveal the same recurring patterns—the same systems and societal orders at play—he is seized by an urge to strike out in anger. Manto does not believe in appeals; he believes in intimidation and slapping. Every one of his short stories ends with a slap—one that lands on the reader's face with such force

that they are left reeling, even as they curse Manto. Yet, Manto never desists from delivering this slap; he never will. What many critics interpret as Manto inflicting mental anguish upon his readers is not, in fact, an act of inflicting pain, but rather a manifestation of his own wounded humanity. You will see this reflected everywhere—in his behavior and conversation, his writing, and the alignment (or lack thereof) between his words and deeds. There are many aspects of Manto's life that could not be spoken of while he was alive, and consequently, could not be written about either. There is one incident, however, that I simply must recount here.

It happened during the time I was employed at Shalimar Pictures in Poona and had come to Bombay to attend a conference of Progressive Writers. I happened to run into Manto on the train. We spent about ten minutes together. After some casual conversation, Manto suddenly asked me,

"Say, I had sent a girl to Mr. 'Sheen' in Poona—she aspired to be an actress—what became of her?"

I replied, "She is with Mr. 'Pay' these days."

Then I asked, "You must have 'studied' her, then?"

Manto replied with utmost seriousness, "Good heavens! I only 'study' courtesans. I don't go anywhere near respectable girls."

That was Manto's signature style.

Then, pausing for a moment, he added, "To me, the poor girl seems very respectable." "But the belly is a wretched thing."

Then he remained silent for a long while. And I sensed the immense hesitation, shame, and purity of soul within that man. How deeply he yearned to see woman as clean, chaste, and a guardian of her own honor. When someone wishes to view the very source of life, creation, and beauty as something untainted by filth or impurity, there can be no doubt about the healthiness of his perspective. One is compelled to believe in his literary integrity and acknowledge the source of his selflessness. At the very least, I am fully convinced of this. It is a different matter, of course, if Manto were to write a story or two specifically to refute this claim of mine—he is capable of such a thing. Yet, such a reaction would not be a true testament to his talent, his creative output, or the intensity of his art; the greater part of his genius speaks eloquently of human beauty, human empathy, and a longing to elevate humanity. And therein lie the profound hallmarks of his literature.



Balwant Gargi (4 December 1916 – 21 April 2003) was an Indian Punjabi language dramatist, theatre director, novelist, short story writer, and academic

Manto is Unparalleled

Balwant Gargi

I first heard Manto's name in 1944. I had come to Delhi in search of a job. Due to the outbreak of the war, every BA and MA graduate was being recruited. I secured a position in the All India Radio section responsible for broadcasting war news, earning a monthly salary of two hundred rupees. Six of us colleagues would sit around a large table in a spacious room. The entire day involved only half an hour spent translating news and ten minutes broadcasting it; the rest of the day was idle. However, we were under military orders not to leave the premises. We would often close the door and swap jokes. Harichand Chadha—whose profanities somehow sounded charming—would recount fascinating anecdotes from political and literary circles. He would narrate lurid tales involving courtesies and women in the armed forces. Sometimes, he would even break into a dance on the table while we clapped along. Yet, this banter had a literary undertone. Whenever Urdu short stories came up in conversation, Chadha—from whose lips even a curse word sounded pleasant—would say:

"That 'father' of yours, Manto, has screwed the mothers of all the writers...!"

It was a winter day. A light drizzle was falling outside. A strange sense of desolation and melancholy weighed on our hearts. Chadha had

taken leave to go out for a drink. We felt even more listless and isolated; our hearts weren't in any task. Before leaving, Chadha had left behind the 'Afsana Number' (Short Story Special Issue) of the magazine *Adab-e-Latif*. I began flipping through the pages. It contained Krishan Chander's famous story, 'Annadata' (The Grain Giver), which depicted the Great Bengal Famine. It was a very long piece. I read ten or twelve pages and then abandoned it. I glanced at stories by other writers, but no literary spark ignited within me. Suddenly, my eyes fell upon the name Saadat Hasan Manto. It was a very peculiar name—Manto, like Lord Manto or Pinto. A name that seemed quite artificial and even comical. Then, I read the title of the story, and... well. Once I began reading, I finished the entire story in a single sitting. Every sentence was exquisite; the psychological and physical dynamics between the characters were rendered with remarkable clarity and a touch of magic. To this day, I remember the phrasing, the metaphors, and the very description of their breathing in that story. It left such a profound impression on me that I didn't even realize it had turned five o'clock—and my companions had already risen to leave for home. The story possessed a tangible, physical fragrance; it had a certain radiance. It held psychological depth and a sense of pleasure. There was a simplicity in the brief sentences—the kind found only in the work of a seasoned, consummate artist.

The protagonist of this story is Randhir, who spent the night with a *Ghatan* woman. Randhir was sitting by his window, bored, when he spotted the *Ghatan*—a woman from the Ghat region—who worked at the rope factory; she was standing beneath a tamarind tree to

shelter herself from the rain. Randhir cleared his throat—coughing as a pretext—to catch her attention, then beckoned her upstairs with a gesture. They exchanged hardly any words; the palpable, trembling fear within their bodies became their language. Seeing her rain-drenched clothes, Randhir offered her a fresh *dhoti*. The girl removed her wet garments, set them aside, and wrapped the *dhoti* around herself. Then, as she tried to untie the strings of her *choli*, the knots—soaked by the rain—had tightened stubbornly.

She simply said, "It won't come undone!"

Randhir gave the strings a sharp tug with his strong hands, and the *choli* came undone, leaving the *Ghatan's* dusky, shapely breasts in his grasp. Manto describes the dusky sheen of the *Ghatan's* body and her breasts:

"As if a potter had lifted unbaked clay bowls from the wheel; as if two earthen lamps had been lit in a murky pond."

Randhir drank in the scent of the *Ghatan's* body all night long; that fragrance permeated every corner of his mind. Later, when he married, his bride's beauty seemed pale and insipid during their wedding night—like curds floating in spoiled milk. The crimson silk drawstring of her garment had left deep marks on her soft, white skin—silken welts. He could not forget the night spent with the *Ghatan* or the wholesome scent of her body. Compared to that dusky fragrance, the stifled love of the middle class and the perfunctory affection shared with his wife seemed dull and lifeless. After reading the story, I began to think about modern Urdu literature

in a new light for the first time. Before this, I had read Krishan Chander's stories—set against the backdrop of Kashmir, filled with the yearning of love and the pangs of poverty. I had also had the opportunity to read short stories by other writers, but after reading them all, I had felt:

"I could write a story like this."

That was merely a notion in my mind. Perhaps I could not have written a story like Krishan Chander's or Rajinder Singh Bedi's, yet reading them gave me the feeling that the flight of my own creative imagination was higher than theirs. But upon reading Manto, I realized I could not write a story like that. If only I could write such a distinctive and magnificent story! No! I could not write a story of such greatness. Manto became, for me, the very embodiment of storytelling. Then, one day, shortly after lunch, the office peon placed an envelope on my desk. For some reason, I sensed danger in that envelope—perhaps a grave order or a disturbing message. I still vividly recall my state of mind before opening it. When I did open it, I discovered I had been dismissed from my job. I took the envelope to Major Bakshi.

He said, "We are not prepared to disclose the reason. Here is your salary for one month in advance."

He took out crisp, new ten-rupee notes from his drawer, and I returned with them. The dismissal order had been issued because the government, through its intelligence agency, had investigated my past activities. They had discovered that I had been arrested in 1944

for participating in the freedom movement. That offense was sufficient grounds for dismissal. I went to my room and broke the news to my colleagues. A Hindi writer among them wept out of sympathy. I took a crisp note from my new salary and [ordered] tea for everyone and... Pastries were ordered. Chaddha presided over that brief farewell ritual and spoke in his characteristic style:

"Oi, you motherf*ers...! You lot will keep slaving away for the government here. But this bird has flown free."**

As he was leaving, he gave me a book of Manto's stories. He had worked alongside Manto at the Delhi radio station himself and would often share anecdotes about him.

He used to say, "Manto was the master of them all. He worked here at All India Radio for just a year and a half before moving to Bombay, leaving behind a hundred plays and features. Meanwhile, Upendranath Ashk spent his entire life trying to befriend him, yet Manto never let him get close."

Manto's circle of literary friendships was illustrious; it included the likes of Krishan Chander, Ismat Chughtai, and Rajinder Singh Bedi. Yet, Upendranath Ashk could never break into that inner circle; he remained on the periphery. Despite working in the same medium—radio—he could never quite touch the heights of Manto's creative genius. Plagued by an inferiority complex, he would constantly boast, trying to prove his own greatness. Manto was a towering figure in Hindustani literature. Even then, I realized that Manto was a unique writer—a phenomenon. I knew that, years later, people would ask:

"Which café did Manto frequent? Where did he live? What kind of pen did he use? In which room of the radio station did he sit and write?"

During that time, I met people who had worked with Manto and gathered little details about him. There was a restaurant run by Sanobar Khan on the second floor of the radio station where Manto used to go for tea. He would arrive at the station carrying a small Urdu typewriter in a bag and write his plays directly onto it. He took great pride in his craft. Often, he would write plays on a wager. Once, he challenged his friends to suggest a name, a premise, or a subject, promising to write a play based on it. The wager was two dozen bottles of beer.

A friend said, "Write a play about 'Kabootari'!"

Manto fed a sheet of paper into his typewriter and dashed off the play *Kabootari*. It became immensely popular. On another occasion, while he was discussing a potential play with friends, someone entered the room asking,

"May I come in?"

Another person remarked, "Manto, it would be truly interesting if you wrote a play with that title."

A wager involving beer bottles was struck. Manto wrote the play titled *May I Come In?* Once, a writer cancelled his radio program, causing a stir about how to fill the slot. Manto was asked to write a feature or a play for it.

He retorted angrily, "I can't write it. Even a machine needs time."

He was earnestly entreated. A friend set up the typewriter, inserted the paper, and said,

"Come on, just write it! We'll wait outside."

Manto sat before the typewriter for a while, staring at the paper. Then, he set the title: *Intezaar* (Waiting). This play ranks among his finest works; in it, he experimented with both technical and psychological perspectives. A young man is writing a letter to his beloved, telling her he is sitting and waiting for her. The young man speaks from two psychological states: the conscious and the unconscious. The dialogue between them is charged with suspense and conflict. The unconscious self interrupts, restrains, argues with, and converses with the conscious self. ...and lays bare the innermost layers of the mind. This kind of dramatic sensibility and the character's own clarity were hallmarks of Manto's literary creations. Once, Mr. Advani, the director of the radio station, objected to a particular phrase in one of Manto's scripts and asked for it to be changed. A.S. Bokhari was the Director General at the time. Advani was a director who commanded great influence and authority.

Manto declared in a crowded gathering, "Advani Sahib has no understanding of writing Urdu drama—he doesn't even know how to read a drama in Urdu! Yet, here he is, finding faults in my work."

Advani Sahib was furious. He sought disciplinary action against Manto, and the matter eventually reached Bokhari Sahib.

Manto told Bokhari, "What I said is the truth. A man named Advani—what could he possibly know about Urdu?"

Bokhari Sahib laughed, and the matter was laid to rest. I moved from Delhi to Lahore. I remained unemployed for a few months. In 1942, a short Punjabi novel and play of mine, *Loha Kutt*, was published, and I was hired as an artist at the Lahore radio station. Rajinder Singh Bedi worked there. There was Apa Shamim (Mohini Das) with her captivating voice. Imtiaz Ali Taj and Rafi Ahmed Peer would come to produce plays. Malika Pukhraj would sit in the studio, chewing on water—sipping it slowly—and singing. The atmosphere was incredibly creative. Manto was often the subject of conversation in those gatherings. Chaudhry Nazir Ahmed was the editor and owner of the Lahore-based Urdu magazine *Adab-e-Latif*. Nazir Ahmed was a farmer from a village in Punjab—known simply as Nazir A. He had studied up to the fourth grade; he was of medium height, had a sturdy build and gleaming teeth, and spoke in a quintessential Punjabi style. Together with his uncle Barkat Ali, he laid the foundation of 'Maktaba-e-Urdu,' which went on to become the largest and most popular publishing house in all of India. He evolved from Nazeer A. to Nazeer Ahmed, and eventually to Chaudhry Nazeer Ahmed. Chaudhry Nazeer would personally read and evaluate every story. Manto was the only writer for whose story he would often delay the publication of his magazine. He would write letters and send telegrams to Manto; and when a story arrived from Bombay, he would laugh with delight and say,

"Now, my issue is complete."

When Manto faced an obscenity trial following the publication of his story ‘Boo’ (The Odour), he had to travel to Lahore for the court hearings. Many writers went to the district courts to testify in Manto’s favor, and it was there that I saw him for the first time—tall and slender, carrying a cane... He carried himself with a certain suppleness. He had a broad forehead, a sharp Kashmiri nose, and glasses perched over keen eyes. He was dressed in a white shirt, a *sherwani*, *lattha* trousers, and *zari*-embroidered shoes. His head was held high with pride. He glanced at us nonchalantly. He was standing near Ismat Chughtai, while we were amidst the din of the courtroom. Professor Kanhaiya Lal Kapoor introduced us all, yet no conventional word of thanks escaped Manto’s lips, nor did he betray any sign of pleasure. Just then, Chaudhry Nazir hurried over.

"Come, we’ve been called in."

As this group of writers entered the judge's chamber, they spoke of the artistic merits of *Bu* (The Odour), asserting that there was nothing objectionable in it and hailing it as a literary masterpiece.

Among the Punjabi writers, the most respected figure was Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh 'Preetlari'—a man who had himself penned love stories and raised the banner of social rebellion. Yet, when asked to testify in support of Manto’s story, he refused, declaring, "This story is obscene."

Ismat and Manto were astonished when they learned of this.

Manto remarked, "It is surprising that such writers exist in Punjabi. God alone knows the fate of that language's literature!"

The testimonies concluded, and the judge set a date for the next hearing. Manto grew weary of the atmosphere at the district court—the broken benches and iron chairs scattered about, the dust and grime, the legal haggling between lawyers and clerks, and the pervasive sense of unease and agitation. All the writers appeared to be in the dock.

Manto said, "Nazir! I'm going home. Get a tonga for me."

"Is anyone else coming along? Just one?"

I was standing nearby. I immediately stepped forward and took the front seat. We exchanged a few words on the way.

He said, "These people are making a hero out of me for no reason. I'm afraid of jail. Coming here from Bombay every time is very difficult—and very expensive. This fine is enough as it is. I was working on a screenplay for a film story when a telegram arrived from Chaudhary:

'What are you doing now?'"

I told him a little about myself. He commanded a great deal of respect from me. When we reached Neela Gumbad, I got off.

He said, "I'm going straight home. Safia is here too. I need to go and finish that short story for Chaudhary."

Then, suddenly, he added, "Come over to my place in the evening. I'll have finished the story by then."

He left after dropping me off. Once he was gone, I reflected on the entire interaction. His voice was thin yet warm, imbued with the full intensity of his personality. It was neither the voice of a leader nor that of a dervish; rather, it held a sense of restlessness and fear. He had been conversing with me entirely in Punjabi. In the evening, I went to meet Manto. He was staying at a relative's bungalow in the Ferozepur Road area. The servant asked me to wait in the drawing room, as Manto *Sahab* was busy writing a story. This was the very story that was published in *Adab-e-Latif* under the title 'Rajbhaiya', and later as 'Mera Naam Radha Hai'. In it, he had poked fun at Prithviraj Kapoor's strictness. Ten minutes later, Manto emerged from the adjoining room.

He asked briskly, "Care for some tea?"

Then he called out, "Safia, what are you doing? Come here!"

His wife appeared, and Manto introduced us. Just then, other writers arrived, including Chaudhry Nazir. There was a gathering at someone's house, and they had come to fetch Manto.

Manto said to me, "Right then! Let's meet tomorrow. I'll be at *Maktaba-e-Urdu*."

Manto didn't wield a pen; he wielded a sharp scalpel—one he used to drain the impure blood from society's veins. He was no mere physician; he was a surgeon. His keen gaze acted like a double lens,

allowing him to see deep into society. His writing was captivating; everyone knew he wrote far better than the rest. Everyone acknowledged the brilliance of his craft. I met Manto again later; he was sitting at *Maktaba-e-Urdu*, reviewing the copy for an advertisement for his book. It read:

"Manto is the greatest short-story writer of this era—a peer to Chekhov. He stirs emotions and weaves magic; his stories scale the very heights of artistic excellence."

Manto exclaimed, "Hey, Chaudhry! What is this rubbish written here?"

He struck out all the words of praise and drafted the advertisement himself.

It read: "Manto writes rubbish. People call Manto obscene, yet once you start reading him, you cannot put the story down until you've finished it."

In the advertisement, the words "rubbish" and "obscene" were printed in bold, prominent letters. He had written down the very things his detractors wanted to say, aiming to shock the public. He detested saccharine words, flowery prose, and sugary pleasantries. Once, someone introduced him to a prominent figure.

The man said, "Manto Sahib! I am very happy to meet *you*."

Manto replied, "I am not at all happy to meet *you*."

This manner—this bitter truth, this startling retort—was an intrinsic part of his temperament.

Chaudhary Nazir told me, "Manto is sitting at the Kailash Hotel. He says I should come over."

The Kailash Hotel was in Anarkali—just a three-minute walk away. I climbed the stairs to the first floor. Manto was sitting there, drinking with three writers.

As soon as he saw me, he said, "Right! Let's go now. Will you have a drink?"

I said, "No."

One of the writers said, "Manto Sahib! Your stories are amazing. 'Hatak' and 'Kali Shalwar' are masterpieces. Any story of such high caliber..."

Manto snapped, "Shut up with the nonsense! You wanted to drink, and you've had your fill. Now, get lost."

I was taken aback. The men got up and left.

Manto said, "I was waiting for you while these three bastards left their table and came to sit here. They started getting tipsy after just two pegs. They wanted to flatter me so they could have a third. Come on, shall we go?"

I went along with him. On the way, I asked, "Where are we going?"

"To see Abdul Bari." I do not recall whether we went to Abdul Bari's place or met him somewhere else. I had seen Abdul Bari at various literary and political gatherings; he was a dark-complexioned journalist who would deliver lectures citing examples from all over the world. Listening to his dry lectures, I never felt any desire to meet the man, yet Manto was always looking for him.

He told me that Abdul Bari was his literary mentor.

The three of us sat in a fine Peshawar-style *tonga*. Abdul Bari and I sat in the front with the driver, while Manto—wearing his characteristic *zari*-embroidered shoes—sat in the back, stretching out his legs. The *tonga* sped along Mall Road. It stopped after passing the General Post Office, and Bari got down. Manto took out his wallet and handed him a green banknote. Bari went to Bholanath's shop; the two of us remained in the *tonga*. Ten minutes passed.

Manto said impatiently, "This fool is wasting my time. Taking so long! Is he buying diamonds? Rubbish!"

Just then, Bari appeared. He walked back with heavy, brisk strides and sat in the *tonga*, holding the long box of a Johnnie Walker bottle.

Manto asked, "Is it all right?"

Bari replied, "Yes!"

The *tonga* sped off again. We passed the Museum and Government College, heading towards Ravi Road. Were they going boating?

Evening had fallen, and the streetlights were on. Where were they going? I had no idea that their destination was 'Heera Mandi,' the red-light district. The *tonga* stopped in the market near the Shahi Masjid. Bari paid the driver, and the three of us entered the marketplace of beauty. I had never been here before. It wasn't due to any social taboo; I was simply afraid of the environment—of the prostitutes and the pimps who ran the trade. Since childhood, I had harbored an image of these people as quarrelsome and money-obsessed—the sort of place where knives were drawn. Beneath that fear, however, lay the thrill and trepidation of stepping into an unseen, unknown world. But Manto was with me then, so I felt no fear—much like someone riding a crocodile across a river. The bazaar was alive with glitter and bustle: *seekh kebabs*, *paan*, flower garlands, and crowds of onlookers. Amidst this commotion, there were strange rustlings, silent signals, and lingering stares. Bargaining was underway in hushed tones. I noticed Bari standing to one side, conversing quietly with a Pathan; I caught sight of the Pathan's henna-dyed sideburns. Then, the two of them approached us, and Bari asked me to settle the rate for the prostitute.

Manto snapped angrily, "You settle this matter yourself—go on, you fool!"

Manto detested this sort of haggling. Just then, Bari and the Pathan returned.

The Pathan said, "Come! There's a very fine girl at that *kotha*."

The four of us climbed the stairs. Passing through the balcony, we entered the room to find a Pathan woman sitting there. She was likely in her mid-thirties, with coarse features. Her hair was heavily oiled and adorned with jasmine buds; she wore a cheap, blue-spotted silk shirt and satin *shalwar*, with a *paan* tucked in her cheek.

"Come! Sit down."

The Pathan sat down right along with us. His face—framed by bushy whiskers—wore an inviting, gentle, and highly patient expression. He was a man who lived to take orders; he was the head pimp for the prostitutes at this brothel. With a single glance, Manto took in the prostitute's flabby, heavy-set body. A servant arrived and set down three glasses.

Manto said, "Get some soda. And *tikka* and *kabab* to eat! What will you have?"

In those days, I didn't eat meat. I had tried it once, but when I chewed it, it felt like rubber.

I said, "I'll have an omelette."

Manto pulled some crisp ten-rupee notes from his pocket and handed them to the Pathan. Ten minutes later, he and his servant returned with plates of meat, *kababs*, and an omelette, along with bottles of soda and ice. There was also a plate of lemon and onions. When he tried to return the change,

Manto said, "Keep it."

Bari opened a bottle, poured liquor into the three glasses, and added soda and ice.

I said, "I don't drink."

A smile appeared on Bari's dark-complexioned face for the first time.

"Brother! Liquor is for the days of youth. Have a drink... go on, have a drink."

Manto said, "He doesn't drink."

Then, giving the prostitute's thigh a playful slap, he said, "You have a drink, my dear!"

The prostitute glanced at Manto out of the corner of her eye and flashed a broad smile. Then, she picked up the glass and began to drink. Manto and Bari quickly emptied their glasses. Then, they prepared double pegs.

After taking a sip, Manto said, "Now, show us the goods."

The prostitute signaled something to the Pathan. A short while later, the Pathan brought in a beautifully decked-up prostitute. She sat down opposite us. Manto studied her closely. I, too, watched her with interest. Slender and slight of build, with *gulal* smeared across her face and heavy kohl lining her eyes, she wore a deep purple georgette sari.

She asked with a smile, "Where have you come from?"

"From your mother's village!" Manto replied. "Where are you from?"

After a couple of questions from Manto, the first woman was dismissed; she left at a signal from the Pathan. Then he brought a second one. Then a third. Manto didn't care for any of them. Then came the fourth woman—sharp features, a sultry smile, and dark glasses. She sat down, folding her knees in the posture of *Namaz*. Manto liked her style. He asked a few questions, to which she replied with a playful, coquettish air. Manto's interest was piqued, though another impulse was also stirring within him.

He asked, "Why are you wearing dark glasses at night, my dear?"

She replied, "So that the radiance of your good looks doesn't dazzle my eyes."

Looking straight into her eyes, Manto said, "My dear, it's going to be a lot of fun in bed with you. But first, let me see—what exactly are you?"

This Saying this, he suddenly removed her dark glasses. The prostitute blinked; one of her eyes had a squint.

Manto said, "If you had come without those glasses, I would have surely fallen in love with you. I would have been captivated by that squint of yours. But I cannot tolerate deceit."

She, too, was rejected. It was past eleven o'clock at night. Meat, kebabs, and omelets had been served three times. Manto had already consumed five pegs; his pupils were dilated, yet his conversation

retained its characteristic sparkle and verve. As he began to pour a sixth peg, the prostitute grabbed his hand.

"Swear on me—don't drink any more."

I said to Manto, "Don't drink any more. She's right; she cares about you."

He retorted, "Cares? The bitch! She just wants to save four pegs for her pimp. If she were to ask openly, I'd order a whole bottle for her. But this bastard woman puts on a charade of concern."

He poured the drink and began to savor the new sip.

The prostitute grabbed his hand again. "God knows... I find you truly wonderful."

Manto slapped her thigh. "My dear! You are more beautiful than any woman in the world. You are Cleopatra; you are Helen."

Manto never kept track of the notes he handed to the Pathan; the Pathan would pocket the change every time. Manto was tossing out crisp banknotes with reckless abandon. In that moment, I saw 'Babu Gopinath' within Manto—the character from his story who visits the brothels and squanders his money, fully aware of the reality. He loved the world of prostitutes and pimps. ...or at the shrines and tombs of *Pirs* and *Faqirs*—yet 'Babu Gopinath' remained unconcerned. Manto was a reflection of him; or rather, the humanity dwelling within 'Babu Gopinath' was Manto's own soul. There was a strange desolation in Manto's soul. Living in the world of prostitutes, he

remained detached. Yet, he perceived the humanity hidden within those brothels and the woman residing in the heart of the prostitute. He saw the prostitute in the woman, and the woman in the prostitute. In the marketplace of bodies, he was a merchant of the soul. The next day, at eleven o'clock, Manto arrived at the radio station. In those days, Jugal Kishore Mehra was the Station Director—the 'Big Boss' before whom the entire staff trembled. A lithe frame, faint pockmarks on his face, wolf-like eyes, and a polished, actor-like voice; he wore a tweed coat and had a cigar in his mouth. He was accompanied by an Alsatian dog, which he would bring along to the station. I was sitting in my room, working, when the peon came and said,

"Manto Sahib is calling for you."

I had Manto's wallet—filled with currency notes—which he had entrusted to my care the previous night. As I stepped out, Manto called out loudly,

"Jugal, I'm leaving."

Just then, Mehra Sahib emerged and said to Manto,

"Wait, old chap! Let's go together."

Manto replied nonchalantly, "You go play the races. I have no interest in horse racing. It's a bore! I'm off."

I returned the wallet to Manto. He didn't count the money; he merely checked the tickets for Bombay.

He said to me, "I’m heading back this evening."

In the evening, I reached the railway station. Two seats had been reserved for him on the Frontier Mail. Safia was with him. He placed his suitcase and the bundles of items purchased in Lahore under the seats. We were both standing on the platform.

Manto said, "Chaudhary still hasn't shown up. The signal has dropped, and there’s no telling where he is."

A moment later, he spoke again, "That jackass has no sense of time. He left the village and headed straight for Lahore—still a peasant at heart. He hasn't arrived yet. I made a huge mistake handing over all my clothes for the wash—six *shalwars*, six shirts, an *achkan*. That fool still isn't here."

The guard blew the whistle.

Manto grumbled, "There’s just no trace of that jackass."

Just then, Chaudhary Nazir arrived, panting and carrying a bundle of clothes.

"I barely made it. I had to stand right there and get the clothes ironed."

Manto glared at him angrily.

"The train is about to leave, and you show up now!"

Chaudhary quickly stowed the clothes inside the train. As he stepped down, the train began to move. Once it had pulled away from the platform, he wiped the sweat from his brow and said, "He throws his weight around so much. As if I'm his father's servant."

We began to walk slowly.

He said, "He thinks he's some sort of *Nawabzada*. He takes his clothes from me, yet bosses me around. When he came here, I paid him a two-thousand-rupee advance to write a novel. He squandered a thousand of it right in front of my eyes—always rushing to pay the bill everywhere. After all, the money comes from *us*."

He kept grumbling. When his anger cooled, he said, "Balwant! I put up with this man's tantrums because he is Manto! Otherwise, why would I give a damn about any other bastard? Big-shot judges, professors, and directors come to me asking to publish their books. I don't publish them." "I publish only what I have personally vetted and deemed worthy of publication. But Manto is a god of storytelling. Perhaps I will be remembered one day simply because I once carried a bundle of Manto's clothes and saw him off on a train. He is a writer of a different breed altogether."

After that, Chaudhary went to work at 'Maktaba Urdu'. Once, Manto arrived in Lahore unexpectedly. He was sitting at 'Maktaba Urdu' with one leg crossed over the other. That day, he was wearing a silk *kurta*, a *shalwar* of coarse white cotton (*lattha*) with narrow cuffs, and *tilla*-embroidered shoes. Fikr Taunsvi, who used to sit in

the back room of ‘Maktaba Urdu’ proofreading books, said, "Manto Sahib! You didn't let us know you were coming this time!"

Tapping his heel against the floor, Manto replied, "In Bombay, when Nargis arrived at the studio, she was wearing a white sari and *tilla*-embroidered shoes. As she sat on the chair, she kept tapping her heel like this—little did she know that *tilla*-embroidered shoes aren't worn with a sari. It really bothered me. So, I came here, had this *kurta* and *shalwar* stitched, and bought these shoes. Now, I’ll go and tell her, 'Look! This is how you wear *tilla*-embroidered shoes...'". ...there was a certain regal air to his temperament. Wherever Manto lived, he would immerse himself in the local atmosphere to write his stories. Even while sitting in Lahore, I became familiar with Bombay’s Nagpada police station, the red-light district of Falkland Road (often referred to as 'Faras Road'), and the film studios. Sultana—the sex worker from the story *Kali Shalwar*—lived in a brothel on GB Road, just outside Delhi’s Ajmeri Gate. Opposite it lay a railway yard, a vast expanse crisscrossed by countless tracks. A row of brothels still stands there today, and the scene Manto described—along with the inner state of the sex worker—remains exactly as he portrayed it.

He writes: "When the iron tracks glistened in the sunlight, Sultana would gaze at her own hands, where blue veins stood out in relief, looking just like those tracks. Engines and trains were constantly moving across that wide, open expanse—shunting back and forth. The rhythmic clatter and chugging of these engines and carriages echoed ceaselessly. Sometimes, watching a solitary railway carriage—

shunted off by an engine—roll along the tracks on its own, she would be reminded of herself. She would imagine that she, too, had been shoved onto the tracks of life and left to drift—moving forward aimlessly, not knowing where. She envisioned a day when the momentum of that initial push would gradually fade, and she would come to a halt somewhere—in a place she had never seen before. Occasionally, the thought would cross her mind that the vast network of railway tracks spread out before her—with steam and smoke rising from various points—was like a colossal brothel. There were countless carriages, being shoved hither and thither by hulking engines." "Sultana often felt these engines resembled the wealthy patrons who used to visit her brothel in Ambala."

These lines by Manto have become classics in Urdu literature. The statement blends reflections on life and melancholy with the interplay between unfolding events and the shifting states of the human mind. After the Partition of the country, Manto moved to Lahore, where he wrote about Pakistan and the communal riots. He never shied away from swallowing the bitter poison of truth; he spoke his mind bluntly and never allowed sentimentality to cloud his words.

A friend once asked, "Manto, just how much of a Muslim are you?"

He replied, "When a football match takes place between Islamia College and DAV College, and Islamia College scores a goal, my heart leaps with joy. That much of a Muslim I certainly am."

Yet, when it came to friendship, such distinctions vanished. His closest friends were Shyam, Ashok Kumar, and Mukherjee—men he

frequently mentioned. He likely cited the football match anecdote because many Hindu writers—who claimed to be progressives yet harbored staunch Hindu sentiments deep down—could not bring themselves to admit such things openly. By writing about the emotions that surface from our subconscious—feelings over which our conscious minds hold no sway—Manto confronted us with a profound truth. His perspective on death was equally distinctive.

He remarked, "The death of one man is a tragedy; the death of a hundred thousand is a cruel joke played by nature."

He penned stories capturing the raw, harrowing human realities of the Punjab Partition, the massacres, and the rapes. Everyone is familiar with the greatness of works like Toba Tek Singh, *Thanda Gosht, and Khol Do. That is why, in *Siyah Hashiye* (Black Margins), he depicts the savagery of communal riots. These are 'black jokes'—short stories possessing a sharp, subversive wisdom akin to the tales of Luqman or the Panchatantra. He satirizes hooliganism, murder, and human folly. This brand of dark humor appeared in Indian literature for the first time through him. Years later, in Europe, Fellini introduced 'black humor' to cinema, while Manto had already pioneered it in literature; indeed, Manto was forging new paths on the highway of international literature long before that. Often, Manto's characters bore real names. These characters are so fascinating and unique that the distinction between their reality and their fictional persona blurs. In *Babu Gopinath*, 'Abdul Rahim Sendo' is a truly peculiar character with an equally bizarre way of speaking. He used to work as an extra in films. Even today, one could recognize an Abdul Rahman Sendo in

the film studios of Bombay. He employs nonsensical and awkward words in his conversation—words that deliver a magical, explosive impact. For instance, while introducing Manto, he says:

"Manto Sahib! He is India's number one writer. He weaves such continuity into his stories that even the greatest of masters are left dumbfounded. Isn't that right, Manto Sahib? *Anti ki penty poo!*"

These words did not belong to any established language, yet when Manto used them, they sparkled like a new invention and became a part of Urdu literature. In *Toba Tek Singh*, too, he employs such magical incantations to reveal the character's subconscious state. Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim lunatics are confined in the asylum. Following the partition of the country, they too are being divided, just like everything else. One Sikh inmate utters strange, nonsensical things.

"He is bewildered: how did he go from being in Hindustan to being in Pakistan? Where did Pakistan come from? Where did his village, 'Toba Tek Singh,' vanish to? And where is he supposed to go now?"

He constantly chants a peculiar phrase: "Oghad di gadgad di anex di bedhyanan di mung di dal of the lantern!"

These words are a reflection of his fragmented state of mind. Once, while traveling to Filmistan on a Bombay electric train, Manto read a name that was jumbled up—it likely read 'Barkatullah' or 'Hanifullah,' but was printed as 'Hiptullah.' He repeated the words to himself a few times and liked the sound of them; later, at the studio, when a film

director asked for his opinion during a discussion on a story, Manto said, "It's fine." "But this story isn't *Hiptulla*."

The word itself had no dictionary meaning, yet the heart understood the implication: the story was far from excellent. Subsequently, within the film industry, the term *Hiptulla* became a shorthand for analyzing a film's structure, dialogue, situations, and climax. In August 1947, when the orgy of bloodshed and violence erupted and riots broke out everywhere, I left Lahore for Bhatinda with nothing but a shirt and a pair of trousers. I learned later that it was the last train to safely cross the Sutlej bridge. Upon reaching Bhatinda, I found riots breaking out there as well. I did not wish to remain in that atmosphere of carnage—the very place where my childhood friends, Fazal Mirasi and his sister Nooran, had been killed. I came to Delhi, only to find bloodshed there too. After a month of idleness and facing an uncertain future, I decided to go to Bombay. I remembered Mulk Raj Anand's address. I loaded my small suitcase and bedding onto a Victoria carriage and told the driver to head for Cuffe Parade, where Mulk Raj Anand lived. He welcomed me warmly and put me up at his place. Literary and cultural gatherings were frequently held there; figures like Krishan Chander, Ali Sardar Jafri, along with Bombay's painters, dancers, and progressive intellectuals, would gather to discuss peace. Yet, as evening fell, a palpable fear would begin to creep in. Following the creation of Pakistan, Muslims were leaving, and sporadic killings were taking place. I telephoned Manto.

He asked, "When did you arrive?"

I told him about my situation and said I wanted to meet him.

He replied, "Come over this evening. You know where I live, don't you? Clare Road in Byculla."

He gave me his house number and directions to locate it. In the evening, Krishan Chander and a few other friends came over to visit. Conversation flowed, and darkness fell.

When I mentioned, "I need to go see Manto,"

everyone said, "You don't know the way around here. It's night now; it's dangerous. Go tomorrow."

I was feeling apprehensive, so I didn't go. The next day, when I phoned Manto, he spoke in a loud, heated voice:

"Hey! I waited for you all evening yesterday. Why didn't you come?"

I replied, "Krishan Chander had come over, and Mulk Raj Anand was there too. I couldn't make it."

He spoke in that same heated tone: "Hey! Who are Mulk Raj Anand and Krishan Chander? Don't you realize Manto is waiting for you here?"

I apologized and promised to come in the evening.

He said, "Have dinner with me and sleep here. The whole house is empty; Safia has gone away, and I'll be leaving soon too."

When I arrived at Clare Road in the evening, the lights were already on. I climbed the stairs and knocked on the door of his first-floor flat.

That loud, heated voice called out, "Who is it?"

I stated my name. A short while later, the cook opened the door, and I stepped inside. Manto was sitting on a wooden chair, writing something with a writing board resting on his knees. A bottle of liquor lay on the table.

He said, "I'm writing a letter to Safia. Just a few words. You sit here."

He continued writing in that same posture, with the board on his knees.

After finishing the letter, he said, "It's good you came. I was alone. Loneliness makes me very anxious. Will you have a drink?"

I said, "No."

He poured the liquor into a glass. He took a sip and said, "My cook has roasted some chicken. You've started eating meat now, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Now, listen to this. I got a letter from Safia in Lahore. She writes that she's found a wonderful flat in the 'Lakshmi Building' there—top-notch furniture, a refrigerator. She's overjoyed. Woman! Oh, you wretch! What are you so happy about? Manto is sitting right here. What use is that refrigerator without me? Rubbish! I'm burning up with frustration—I'm practically roasting like a kebab."

Then he read out his own letter. It spoke of his desolation—of the cook, the situation in Bombay, his loneliness, and his curses directed

at that refrigerator in the 'Lakshmi Building.' He was lamenting the fact that he was leaving the world of Bombay—abandoning this life of cinema and the love of friends—to go to Lahore, all for the sake of Safia and his daughters. And there she was, singing the praises of a refrigerator! The letter held the emotions of a husband and a father, and the melancholy that pervades a home left behind. His flat mirrored his state of mind: wife and children in Pakistan, while he remained in Bombay. He poured another glass. His eyes grew sharper, his mind more alert.

He said, "My friends ask why I'm going to Pakistan. Am I a coward? I am a Muslim! But they cannot understand what's in my heart. I am going to Pakistan so that there might be a Manto there—someone who can expose the political chicanery of the place. The future of Urdu in Hindustan is bleak; Hindi is already gaining dominance. If I want to write, I can only write in Urdu. I want to be published so I can reach thousands. A language possesses its own power of expression; often, language itself is thought." "It is a matter of blood ties. One Manto lived in Bombay; the other would be in Lahore."

He kept talking late into the night. I slept in that room. The next day, I stayed with Manto. A week later, I returned to Delhi. Later, I learned that Manto had moved to Lahore. In Lahore, he wrote countless stories. He clashed with the authorities and wrote against the purveyors of communal hatred. He also penned letters to America's 'Uncle Sam'—letters filled with biting satire. He possessed a fearless and rebellious spirit, a master at exposing the hypocrisy and duplicity of society. He could face any challenge the world threw at him, yet he

could not withstand a blow from a friend. In 1950, progressive writers in Pakistan issued a circular accusing him of obscenity and promoting regressive values, decreeing that no story by Manto should be published in any magazine. This circular reached Delhi as well. The most distressing part was that Manto's own close and beloved friend, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, was the general... He worked as a secretary. This had a profound impact on Manto; he became a stranger in his own world. Plagued by financial woes and the indifference of friends, he began drinking heavily. He would write a story just to secure a bottle of liquor; often, he penned as many as three stories in a single day to sell to publishers. A collection of his stories was published, in which he meticulously recorded the dates of their creation.

In the preface, he wrote, "I seek praise for the marvels my mind wrought after descending into the depths of my stomach!"

He became extremely frail; he could not digest food without alcohol. A strange, obsessive state took hold of him, and he was eventually committed to a mental asylum for treatment. Yet, even within the confines of the asylum, his creative flow remained undiminished; he continued to write incessantly. His story 'Toba Tek Singh' is the distilled essence of his personal experiences in the asylum. It stands as a masterpiece of world literature regarding a fractured humanity. Manto was well aware of his stature as a great short-story writer; he had even composed the epitaph for his own grave:

"Here lies Manto. With him, the art of short-story writing is buried."

This prophecy proved true.



Ismat Chugatai

Ismat Chughtai (21 August 1911 – 24 October 1991) was an Indian Urdu novelist, short story writer, liberal humanist and filmmaker. Beginning in the 1930s, she wrote extensively on themes including female sexuality and femininity, middle-class gentility, and class conflict, often from a Marxist perspective. With a style characterised by literary realism, Chughtai established herself as a significant voice in the Urdu literature of the twentieth century, and in 1976 was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India.

The World That Let Him Die

Ismat Chughtai

As I climbed the stairs of Adelphi Chambers, I felt a sense of nervousness—much like the anxiety I used to experience before entering an examination hall. I was always nervous about meeting new people, but here, the 'new person' was Manto—someone I was meeting for the very first time. My nervousness began to border on fear.

I said to Shahid, "Let's go back; Manto might not be home."

But Shahid dashed my hopes. "He stays home in the evenings because he drinks every evening."

Just my luck—adding insult to injury! Not only was it Manto, but a Manto who was drinking. Still, I steeled myself. It wasn't as if he would devour me; let him have a tongue with a stinging tip—I wasn't a soap bubble that would collapse with a mere puff of air. We climbed the creaky, dust-laden stairs and reached the second floor; the flat's door was half-open. In the room—which served as a drawing room—a sofa set sat in one corner. On the other side stood a large, plain white bed. Facing a large, cluttered table by the window, a man resembling a slender insect sat perched on a large chair in a squatting position. "Come in, come in!" Manto stood up with a cheerful air. Manto habitually sat squatting on his chair and appeared quite small, but

when he stood up and stretched, he revealed a surprisingly tall stature. And at times, when Manto rose in that sinuous, creeping manner, he appeared quite venomous. He was dressed in a *khaddar* kurta-pyjama and a *Jawahar-cut* waistcoat.

"Oh! I had imagined you would be terribly dark, thin, and frail—looking like a withered wretch," he said, grinning broadly.

"And I had imagined you would be an overbearing sort of Punjabi, bellowing loudly," I thought to myself—better to give as good as I got, lest he try to walk all over me.

The very next moment, we plunged into a debate with total absorption, as if we had suffered a great loss by remaining strangers for so long and were now desperate to make up for it. The conversation got tangled a couple of times, but since a shred of formality still lingered, we saved those points for our next meeting. For hours, our jaws worked like machines, trading remarks on a variety of topics. We soon discovered that Manto, like me, had a habit of cutting people off mid-sentence; he would speak up before hearing the whole thing. That last vestige of formality vanished too. The conversation turned into a debate, and the debate into spirited bickering; on the strength of an acquaintance barely a few hours old, we called each other—in the most literary of terms—fools, eccentrics, and peddlers of pointless arguments. Amidst the heated exchange, I stepped aside for a moment to observe him closely. Behind thick spectacle lenses, his large, dark pupils darted about—eyes that instantly reminded me of peacock feathers. What was the connection between peacock feathers and those eyes? I never quite figured it out,

yet whenever I looked at them, I was reminded of peacock feathers. Perhaps it was the way an irrepressible cheerfulness mingled with his haughtiness and audacity that brought the image of a peacock to mind. My heart skipped a beat when I saw those eyes. I had seen them somewhere—seen them up close. Seen them laughing boisterously, smiling gravely, shooting barbs of sarcasm, and then turning stony in the throes of death! Those same slender limbs, that shock of hair, those sunken, sallow cheeks, and those slightly irregular teeth—suddenly, while drinking, Manto choked and began to cough; a thought struck me. That cough was all too familiar. I had heard it since childhood. A sense of irritation washed over me. For some reason, I blurted out,

"That is absolutely wrong!"

And we got into a proper argument.

"You are arguing over nothing."

"This is sheer audacity."

"It's a sham, Ismat-behan."

"Why do you call me 'sister'?" I asked, annoyed.

"Just because. I rarely call women 'sister'. I don't even call my own sister 'sister'."

"So, you're saying it just to tease me!"

"Not at all—what makes you say that?"

"Because my brothers always used to taunt, tease, and beat me—or hold me down while I got beaten."

Manto laughed loudly. "In that case, I shall certainly call you 'sister'."

"Just remember, my brothers don't exactly have fond feelings towards me either. That cough of yours—why don't you get it treated?"

"Treatment? Doctors are jackasses. Three years ago, they said, 'You'll be dead in a year; you have TB.' Clearly, by not dying, I proved their prediction wrong. And now... well, I consider doctors fools." "Practitioners of mesmerism and magic are far more sensible than them."

"An elder of mine used to say the exact same thing."

"Which elder?"

"My brother, Azeem Beg! He is now resting beneath nine maunds of earth."

For a while, we discussed Azeem Beg's craft. I had come merely for a visit, but the conversation dragged on until eleven at night. Shahid, who had been watching our spirited exchanges from a distance, was growing impatient with hunger. Since it would be one o'clock by the time we reached Malad, we decided to have dinner right there. Manto asked me to take out plates and spoons from the cupboard while he went to a nearby eatery to fetch rotis.

"Just... get the pickle out of that jar." Manto quickly laid the food on the table and sat on his chair in a squatting position.

The very table that, moments ago, had been the arena for literary debates now served as a dining table, and without the usual formalities of "after you," we began to eat.

"I have been accustomed to this kind of meal for years."

A heated debate continued throughout the meal. The conversation kept circling back to tearing apart *Lihaf*—a topic that was a sore point for me at the time. I tried hard to deflect the subject, but he stubbornly persisted, picking the story apart thread by thread. He was deeply taken aback to hear that... He expressed regret over my writing *Lihaf*, lashing out at me with harsh words and calling me utterly cowardly and narrow-minded. I was unwilling to regard *Lihaf* as my masterpiece, yet Manto remained adamant in his view. Before long, we were engaged in a debate far more intense than the one about *Lihaf*, speaking with complete candor. I was amazed at how Manto could blurt out the crudest, most obscene remarks with such reasonableness and innocence that one felt no hesitation—or perhaps he simply gave no time for it. His words provoked neither disgust nor anger. As he was leaving, he mentioned Safia; throughout our time together, thoughts of her had clearly been weighing on his mind.

"Safia is a wonderful girl."

"You would be very happy to meet her."

"If you miss her so much, why don't you call her over?" I asked.

"Oh... what do you think? I can't sleep without her." He began to reveal his true self.

"One can sleep even on the gallows," I said, brushing the topic aside, and he laughed.

"Do you love Safia very much?" I asked, adopting a confidential tone.

"Love!" he exclaimed, as if I had insulted him.

"I don't love her at all." He grimaced and rolled his eyes. "I don't believe in love."

"Really? You've never loved anyone?" I asked, feigning surprise.

"No."

"...And I suppose you never had mumps or measles either. But you must have had whooping cough at some point."

He laughed.

"What do you mean by love? Love is a vast, all-encompassing thing. One loves one's mother, too." "One loves one's sister and daughter, and one's wife too. A friend of mine loves his female dog. Yes! I loved my son."

At the thought of his son, he sat up straighter in his chair. "I swear to God! He was tiny—just learning to walk. He was so lively. When he crawled, he used to dig dirt out of the cracks in the floor and eat it. He listened to me so well."

In the manner of typical fathers, Manto began trying to convince me of his son’s extraordinary nature.

"Believe me, he was only six or seven days old when I started sleeping with him. I used to massage him with oil and bathe him myself. He wasn't even a month old when he started laughing out loud. Safia didn't have to do a thing; she did nothing but breastfeed him. At night, she would just lie there asleep. I would quietly get the baby fed. Before feeding, one ought to clean the area with Eau de Cologne or spirit; otherwise, the baby gets sores in the mouth."

He spoke with great seriousness, and I stared at him in amazement—what kind of man was this? An expert at raising children.

"But he died," Manto said, wearing a look of feigned cheerfulness. "It was a good thing he died. He had turned me into a nanny. If he were alive today, I’d be washing his nappies; I’d have become a good-for-nothing—I wouldn't have been able to do any real work. Truly, Ismat-behan, I was in love with him."

As he was leaving, he added, "Safia is arriving soon. You’ll be delighted to meet her."

And indeed, meeting Safia brought me great joy. Within minutes, we had grown so close that we began whispering with our heads together—sharing the kind of intimate confidences only women exchange, things never meant for men's ears. Seeing Safia and me huddled together in hushed conversation, Manto grew irritated and

started taunting us; he had been eavesdropping on our whispers by pressing his ear against the wooden partition of the back room.

He spoke with the playfulness of a mischievous child: "Good heavens! Even my guardian angels wouldn't know that women could talk about such filthy things."

Safia's cheeks flushed crimson with embarrassment.

"And Ismat-behan, I certainly never expected *you* to gossip like the uneducated women of the neighborhood—asking when the wedding took place, how the wedding night went, or when and how the baby was born! Good grief!" he teased.

I immediately put a stop to it. "That's enough, Manto Sahib! I didn't take you for such a narrow-minded man. And to think you call these things 'filthy'! What is filthy about them? Childbirth is the most beautiful event in the world, and these whispered conversations are our training school. What do you think? Were we taught about childbirth in college? Even the old professors there would turn up their noses and exclaim in shock just like you; it was from the women of the neighborhood that we learned life's most vital secrets."

"This Safia is terribly unsophisticated. She doesn't understand literature at all and turns up her nose at everything. She is deeply displeased with your writings." "Don't you get bored talking for hours about how much turmeric goes into a korma, or about *dahi-vadas* made from *urad* dal...?"

"Oh, Manto Sahib! Turmeric isn't put in korma," Safia exclaimed in horror.

And Manto would flare up. He was adamant that turmeric should go into every dish, and if it wasn't included, it was a downright outrage and an injustice.

"I had a Rajput friend; he used to drink ghee and turmeric before working out in the winter. A real wrestler, he was."

And I would insist that your friend wasn't drinking ghee and turmeric, but mud. I wouldn't agree to add turmeric under any circumstances, and Manto would eventually have to concede. Even if Safia and I met with the intention of staying for just five minutes, it would turn into a five-hour affair. Arguing with Manto felt like sharpening one's mental faculties—as if cobwebs were being cleared away and the mind was being swept clean. Yet, sometimes the arguments would become so long and convoluted that it felt like a tangle of raw cotton slivers, effectively sweeping away the very capacity to think and understand. Still, we would keep arguing and getting entangled, and a sense of unpleasantness would creep in. I knew the art of masking my defeat, but Manto would get teary-eyed. His eyes would widen and flare like peacock feathers, and his nostrils would quiver. A bitter, acrid taste would fill his mouth, and in his frustration, he would call out to Shahid to back him up. The battle would shift from literature or philosophy to a domestic squabble, and Manto would storm off in a huff.

Shahid...

...arguing, "Why do you speak so rudely to my friend? Manto left in a huff today; he won't come to our place anymore, and I don't have the nerve to go to his. He is an ill-mannered man. If he says something harsh, our long-standing friendship will be over."

And sometimes I would feel that I had indeed said something biting to Manto. It was possible he might take offense, and my friendship with Safia—which had by then grown deeper than my bond with Manto—might also end. Manto's self-respect bordered on arrogance; he loved to assert his dominance over his friends. And if anyone—especially in front of people he had already impressed—made fun of him, he would get terribly irritated. He believed that while we could freely criticize or speak our minds to each other in private, we shouldn't take digs at one another in front of "ordinary people." He generally considered the intellectual level of his acquaintances to be lower than his own. Yet, if we quarreled in the morning but happened to meet again in the evening, he would greet me with such enthusiasm, as if nothing had happened! We would chat just as freely and intimately as before. For a while, we would speak to each other with exaggerated, almost excessive gentleness, agreeing with everything the other said. But soon, both of us would grow weary of this formality. Then, the fireworks would begin, and the verbal sparring would turn sharp and rapid-fire. Sometimes, people would egg us on just for the fun of it, only for us to reconcile and embrace. We argued for the sake of our own intellectual engagement, not to put on a show like fighting quails for others' amusement. Manto's view was that no matter how heated or chaotic our arguments were at home, we had to present a united front when facing difficulties—a

front so formidable that it would leave others dumbfounded. But usually, I wouldn't even realize I was taking a stand, and the front would begin to buzz and seethe like a hornet's nest.

I could never quite figure out whether Manto rambled because he was drunk, or drank because he was prone to rambling. I never detected a stagger in his gait or a slur in his speech; to me, there was never any perceptible difference. The only thing I did notice was that when he had drunk too much, he would insist—with maddening persistence—that he wasn't intoxicated at all.

"I'm telling you the truth, Ismat-behan! I'm not drunk at all; I could give up drinking this very day. I could quit whenever I wanted! Let's make a bet."

"I won't make a bet. Because you'd lose. You can't give up drinking, and you *are* drunk."

"What do you mean...?"

Manto would try to prove that he wasn't drunk and could quit right then and there—all it would take was a wager.

One day, exasperated, I finally agreed to the bet; Manto lost, and I won. But what did it amount to? A bet had been made, yet nothing was truly settled. Thereafter, whenever Manto was heavily under the influence and insisted on a wager—leaving me no escape but to agree—I would reluctantly accept the challenge, only for him to lose. Manto had a habit of singing his own praises, though when I was around, he would often drag me into it too. At such moments, he

acknowledged no one else in the world—save for the two of us—as a true writer. He was particularly hostile toward Krishan Chander and Devendra Satyarthi; if one praised them, he would flare up in anger.

I would say, "You aren't a critic, after all, so why should your opinion be taken as gospel?"

He would then lash out at critics, dismissing their very existence—especially in the realm of literature—as utterly insignificant.

"They talk absolute rubbish, these people!" he would say, seething with irritation. "Just do the exact opposite of whatever they say. These very people who raise objections secretly read my stories; instead of learning anything from them, they derive pleasure—and then, feeling ashamed of that pleasure, they write all sorts of nonsense."

Sometimes he would get so irritated that I would try to console him: "When you are convinced they are writing nonsense, why do you bother responding to them? If criticism doesn't help you, simply ignore it—but don't disparage people's opinions."

But he would keep fuming. One day, he arrived looking very serious and announced, "I'm going to file a lawsuit."

I asked, "Why?"

He explained, "That fellow—that man—has published a collection of my stories and yours, claiming they are 'obscene' and that the country needs to be saved from such literature. Just ask that wretch—what

kind of contradictory nonsense is this? On one hand, he's giving them publicity by publishing them in a book; on the other, he's making money off them. Why did he publish the stories without our permission? I'm sending him a legal notice demanding damages."

Then, somehow, he forgot all about it. More than boasting about himself, Manto used to brag about his friends to me. He had a strange kind of affection for Rafiq Ghaznavi—the sort that was hard to fathom. Whenever he mentioned him, he would say:

"He's a real scoundrel and a rogue; he's married four sisters, one after another. There isn't a single courtesan in Lahore whom he hasn't made grovel at his feet."

He spoke of Rafiq exactly the way children speak of an elder brother, recounting tales of his romantic escapades in great detail. One day, he suggested I meet him.

I asked, "What would I do meeting him?" "But you call him a loafer."

He said, "Oh! That is precisely why I am introducing you to him. Who told you that a loafer or a rogue is a bad person? Rafiq is an extremely decent man."

I said, "Manto Sahib! Loafer, decent man, rogue—what kind of person is he, really? I don't understand. Perhaps I am not as intelligent and experienced as you take me to be."

"You are just pretending," Manto said, sounding a bit offended. "That is exactly why I want you to meet Rafiq... he is a fascinating man. No woman can help falling in love with him."

"I am a woman too, after all," I said, looking concerned.

He looked sheepish. "I consider you my sister."

"But your sister could be a woman too."

Manto burst into laughter. "It's possible! Well said." But Manto became insistent. "You simply must meet him. Just take a look."

"I've already seen him at the station. You had filled my head with the idea that I'd run away—lest I fall in love with the wretch."

And after meeting Rafiq, I realized just how profound Manto's insight was. Despite possessing every vice known to the world, Rafiq embodied all the virtues a decent human being should have. He could be a peculiar sort of rogue—yet, at the same time, utterly honest and honorable. How and why? I never tried to fathom that. That is Manto's domain. He plucks pearls from the filth the world has rejected and cast onto the rubbish heap. He has a passion for sifting through that refuse because he places no faith in the world's self-appointed reformers—nor in their judgment or intellect. He exposes the hidden lust in the hearts of their respectable, pious wives and contrasts it with the purity found in the heart of a brothel-dwelling prostitute. To him, a washerwoman reeking of grime and sweat smells sweeter than a pleasure-loving bride drenched in perfume. In *Bu* (The Odor), there is, indeed, nothing but the body; yet, look closely, and you find

a soul within. There is the soul of the privileged class—curdled and lumpy like spoiled milk—and the reality of the downtrodden class, stripped of all pretense. It is not merely a question of class disparity, nor can it be dismissed as a purely physical matter. Manto was acutely aware of the divide between these two classes, and he took great pride in shattering the idols the world worshipped. He would always recount the exploits of his rogue friends with a sense of pride.

One day, just to tease him, I remarked, "People lie." "In reality, he neither had dealings with thousands of prostitutes nor did he ever trifle with a woman's honor."

He tried to convince me in various ways, insisting, "These people really do engage in such antics." And not just that—even more. "It's all lies!"

I began to feign disbelief: "Why won't you believe it? Anyone can go to the red-light district if they want."

"But they don't have the nerve to visit a courtesan's brothel. At most, they might go, listen to a song, and leave... but I have actually been to a prostitute's brothel myself."

"To listen to music?" I teased.

"No! To get my money's worth—and I always did."

Still, I said, "I don't believe it!"

"Why not?" He got up and sat cross-legged on the carpet right in front of me.

"Just because I say so. You're trying to lord it over me!"

"Look! I swear to God, I've been there."

"You don't believe in God, so don't drag Him into this unnecessarily."

He laughed heartily and then said softly, "But surely, you'll believe me now?"

I said, "Absolutely not."

I do not know if Manto had personal experience or if what he wrote about the prostitute was based on his own principles and convictions. For even if he did visit a brothel, he likely saw a woman's heart there—a heart that, despite being a 'worm of the gutter,' cherished the values of life. He would shatter the conventional yardsticks used to measure good and bad, using his own scales to gauge worth; he believed that even in a brazen, good-for-nothing person like 'Khushiya,' a sense of honor could stir into life. Even a gentle soul like 'Gopinath' could stake everything against the gods. Even the loftiest, most exalted deities could bow down. A Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh volunteer could be a depraved man, and a man who engaged in necrophilia could himself end up a corpse. Sometimes, the arguments between Manto and me would become so heated that it felt as though the bond between us might snap. One day, he was so provoked by something that his eyes turned bloodshot with rage.

Gritting his teeth, he said, "You are a woman; otherwise, I would have said something that would have left you utterly humbled and silenced."

"Go ahead and get it off your chest; there's no need for magnanimity," I teased. "Just let it out—if I were a man, you'd have told me."

"Go on, say it. What arrows are left in your quiver? Bring them out."

"You'd be mortified."

"I swear to God, I wouldn't be."

"Then you aren't a woman!"

"Why? Is it essential for a woman to feel mortified? Whether the feeling comes or not? It's a pity, Manto Sahib! Even you create separate rules for men and women. I thought you rose above the level of 'ordinary people'." I buttered him up, "So, go ahead—say that thing that would make me blush with embarrassment."

"I swear on my dead child—not just once, but..."

"What harm could you possibly cause your departed child now by swearing a false oath?"

And Manto sat down cross-legged right there, determined: "Today, I'm going to make you admit that I'm a whoremonger."

He called upon Safia to testify. In two minutes, I silenced Safia's argument: "It's possible he told you he was going to a prostitute's

place. And even if he did go, he might have just offered a polite greeting and walked away."

Safia fell silent. She couldn't very well say, "He just offered a greeting and left, or...!" She was left in a state of utter bewilderment. Manto, in a fit of drunken fervor, drank a bit too quickly and began to argue vehemently, insisting, "I will make you admit today that I am a confirmed womanizer."

And I retorted, "Come what may, I am not going to accept that."

There was the intoxication, of course, compounded by the natural irascibility of Manto's temperament; had he been able to, he would have torn my face apart.

Safia pleaded tearfully, "Sister! Just give in."

Shahid said, "That's enough! Let's go home now."

But Manto started teasing Shahid, declaring, "I won't let you leave until I've convinced you."

A considerable commotion ensued. With great seriousness, Manto said to Shahid, "Come on, let's go to a whore's place right this instant. If I don't convince you today, then I haven't drunk my mother's milk, but a pig's."

But I provoked him further, saying, "You won't actually go anywhere. You'll just stroll around Byculla Bridge and come back, and we still won't believe you—so what's the point?"

"!"

That remark really stung Manto; the irritation likely lingered all the way down to his heels.

Suppressing his anger, he asked, "Then how can I be convinced?"

I said, "Take us—meaning Safia and me—along with you."

"I’m not going!" Safia snapped. "You’ve lost your mind! You go alone."

"How could she *not* go?" Manto growled.

"Come on, let's go..." I winked at Safia, and the four of us set off. The two of us stepped out the door; Safia somehow managed to handle Manto. When we met again, I asked, "Are you still angry?"

"No! The anger has passed," he said with a laugh.

"Tell me, just between friends—what was that terrible thing?"

"Nothing. I don't remember anymore. It wasn't anything significant. Maybe I would have just hurled a really crude insult!"

"That's all?" I said, disappointed.

"Or maybe I would have slapped someone," he said, looking sheepish.

"It wouldn't have affected me. I’ve heard the filthiest abuses imaginable. And I can land a pretty hard slap myself. But that first time, you went easy on me because I was a woman. My brothers have slapped me plenty of times."

And so, we reconciled. One day, feeling overwhelmed by the heat at the office, I decided to go to Manto's place to rest before heading back to Malad. The door was open, as usual; when I walked in, I saw Safia lying there, sulking. Manto was holding a broom, vigorously sweeping under the bed, and then sweeping under the table while holding the hem of his *kurta* over his nose.

"What are you doing?" I asked, peering under the table. "I'm playing cricket," Manto replied, rolling his large, peacock-feather-like eyes.

"Well, look at that! I thought I'd come over and relax a bit, but here you two are, sulking at each other." I threatened to leave.

"Oh!" Safia sat up. "Come in, come in."

"What was the fight about?" I asked.

"Nothing much. I just said, 'Cooking, housework, and the like aren't men's work.' That was it! Just like he argues with you, he started arguing with me too—insisting, 'Why isn't it men's work? I can sweep right now.' I tried hard to stop him, but he fought even more. He even said, 'If that's how it is, then get a divorce,'" Safia said, looking tearful.

To get the broom out of Manto's hands, I started coughing theatrically.

"First thing this morning, the municipal sweeper choked me with dust while pretending to clean the courtyard. Now, you go ahead and satisfy your urge to sweep. I'm dying in this heat."

Manto quickly dropped the broom and went to the hotel to fetch some ice. Safia went to temper the spices in the cooking pot. Upon returning, Manto smashed the ice by repeatedly slamming a towel against the wall, piled the shards onto a plate, placed it before me, and squatted down.

"So, tell me what's new," he said, out of habit.

The aroma of the tempering spices made me gag violently. "Ugh! Safia, are you burning a corpse?" I asked, pinching my nose.

Manto looked at me, startled. He rolled those large eyes of his from my head to my toes and then lunged forward. Safia screamed from the kitchen as he dumped a *lota* of water into the cooking pot. He returned, sat on the chair looking sheepish, and then laughed in embarrassment. I just stared, feeling like a fool. When Safia came in muttering, he scolded her sharply and then asked, in a rather shy manner,

"Is there a baby in your belly?"

As if the baby were in *his* belly, not mine. I grasped the situation immediately.

"When Safia was pregnant, the smell of tempering spices used to make her retch too."

"Manto Sahib! For God's sake, don't talk like a midwife," I said, annoyed.

He laughed loudly. "Oh, come on! What's wrong with that? You must be craving sour things. I'll fetch some raw mangoes right away."

He dashed downstairs and returned with the hem of his *kurta* filled with raw mangoes, just like a child. He peeled them, seasoned them neatly with salt and chili, and handed them to me; then, squatting on his haunches, he kept smiling as he watched me intently.

"Safia! Oh, Safia!" he shouted.

Safia came out, wiping eyes filled with smoke using the edge of her sari. "What is it, Manto Sahib? Why do you shout so much?"

"You silly woman! She's expecting," he said, placing his arm around Safia's waist.

"Ugh! That is the height of crudeness. No wonder people call you an obscene writer."

At my outburst, Manto became even more animated and started offering advice typical of elderly women.

"Massaging your belly with olive oil will prevent stretch marks."

"Eating apple preserves on an empty stomach keeps nausea at bay."

"Eating dried coconut ensures the baby will be fair-skinned and the delivery easy."

"Don't chew ice in winter; it dries up the milk ducts. Isn't that right, Safia?"

"Oh, stop it, Manto Sahib! What kind of things are you saying?" Safia said, looking flustered.

And when Seema was born, Safia sat beside me, trembling. But seeing the little girl reminded Manto vividly of his own son. For a long time, he kept telling me about the child's little acts of mischief. Safia's heart melted, and within a year, Manto's eldest daughter was born. I learned of this after returning from Poona. I went to see them immediately, but Manto had moved house. After searching around, I finally reached the new place and saw him wringing out and hanging up wet baby cloths on a line in the drawing room. The new house was tiny and poorly ventilated. He had moved because the floor in the old house was filthy; if the baby crawled, she might get splinters or lick up the dirt. Here, Nikhat would be able to play happily on the floor—even though Nikhat was only a few weeks old.

"I intensely dislike children," Manto would say seriously. "They cling to your very soul. That is why I am afraid of them. They are constantly on my mind; I can't focus on any work." He would hold forth on this philosophy while washing a milk bottle.

He was very fond of my niece, Meenu. He would spend hours talking to her about dolls and swings. At her request, he would use a bamboo pole through the window to knock down tamarinds, then gather them in the hem of his *kurta*. He would even seat Seema on the potty and make 'shee-shee' sounds to encourage her. He was a man who loved children deeply—because their love...

I would feel helpless. One day, when we were living in Malad, there was a knock on the door around 12:30 at night. I found Safia standing there, breathless.

I asked, "What happened?"

She said, "I told them one shouldn't visit anyone's house in this state, but would they listen?"

Manto had arrived with Nida Ji and Khurshid Anwar.

"Who is this Safia to forbid us?"

The three of them walked in, carrying a bottle and glasses. Welcoming the party, Shahid said, "I am at your service!"

It turned out they were famished; all the restaurants were closed, and the last train had already left. They wanted to cook something themselves if they could get the ingredients—just some flour and lentils would do; they would handle the cooking in the kitchen. Safia didn't like the idea of men cooking, but they wouldn't listen. They took over the kitchen. Manto started kneading the dough, Nida Ji set upon the stove, and Khurshid Anwar was assigned the task of peeling potatoes—though he seemed more intent on eating them raw than peeling them. Then, the bottle made its way into the kitchen too. They sat right there on the kitchen floor, cooking and eating parathas—some undercooked, some well-done. Manto had kneaded the dough perfectly and cooked the flatbreads with great finesse, quickly dipping them into mint chutney. After the meal, they would have sprawled out and fallen asleep right there had they not been forcibly dragged out

to the veranda. This was the kind of life Manto found most fascinating. Around that time, the Lahore government filed a lawsuit against both Manto and me. An old wish of Manto's was fulfilled. We had a wonderful time in Lahore, too, and enjoyed many lavish feasts. This gave us an excuse to visit a place as sacred as Lahore. We went together to buy *zari* shoes. Manto's feet were delicate and fair—like lotus flowers; the *zari* shoes suited them perfectly.

"My feet are so ugly. I wouldn't buy such beautiful shoes!" I said.

"And my feet are so effeminate that I feel ashamed of them."

Yet, we bought several pairs.

"Your feet are very beautiful," I said.

"They're rubbish, my feet. Here, let's swap."

"If we're swapping, let's swap heads instead," I suggested.

"By God! I have no objection," Manto said cheerfully.

We had many arguments about the subject of love, but we never reached a conclusion.

He would always say, "What is love? I love my *zari* shoes. Rafiq loves his fifth wife."

"I mean the kind of love that springs up between a young man and a young woman."

"Yes... I get it!" Manto said thoughtfully, as if groping through the mists of the distant past.

"There was a shepherdess in Kashmir."

"And then?" I prompted, like an eager listener.

"You tell me such risqué things, yet today you're acting shy."

"What jackass is acting shy?" Manto said, looking genuinely bashful. With great difficulty, he finally said, "Well... whenever she raised her stick to herd the cattle, her white elbow would be revealed."

"I was a bit unwell. Every day, I used to take a blanket, go up the hill, and lie down." "And, holding my breath, I would wait for that moment—when she raised her arm, her sleeve would slide back, revealing her white elbow."

"Her elbow?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes! I never saw any other part of her body besides her elbow. She always wore loose-fitting clothes; not a single contour of her figure was visible. Yet, whenever she moved, my eyes would dart toward her, hoping for a glimpse of that elbow."

"Then what happened?"

"One day, I was lying on a blanket. She came and sat a short distance away from me. She began trying to hide something inside the neckline of her dress. I said, 'Show me...' and her face flushed pink with shyness. She didn't say a word. But I became stubborn. I told her, 'I

won't let you leave until you show me.' She looked on the verge of tears, yet I held my ground. Finally, after much insistence, she opened her fist, held out her palm, and buried her face in her knees out of embarrassment."

"What was in her palm?" I asked eagerly.

"A lump of rock sugar! It lay shimmering on her pink palm, looking just like a piece of ice."

"And what did you do then?"

"I just stared at it. She seemed lost in thought."

"Then?"

"Then she got up and ran off. She turned back from a short distance away, dropped the lump of sugar into my lap, and vanished from sight. That piece of rock sugar stayed in my shirt pocket for a long time. Later, I moved it to a drawer, and a few days after that, the ants ate it up."

"And the girl?"

"Which girl?" he asked, startled. "The very one who handed you that lump of rock sugar."

"I never saw her again."

"How tepid your love was!" I said, irritated and disappointed. "I had expected a far more passionate kind of romance."

"It wasn't tepid at all!" Manto retorted.

"It was utterly rubbish—third-rate, a sickly, anaemic affair! You just walked away with a lump of rock sugar. Some great feat that was."

"So, what else was I supposed to do... sleep with her? Leave a bastard pup in her lap, and today, while reminiscing about her, boast about my virility?" he snapped.

"You're right. A lump of rock sugar isn't something to be crunched and swallowed; it's meant to be savoured—sucked on slowly."

This was the same Manto—the 'obscene' writer, the man with the 'dirty mind,' the author of *Thanda Gosht* (Cold Meat). Yet, in *Mirza Ghalib*, one cannot definitively say whether the 'Fourteenth Begum' was Mirza Ghalib's beloved or not. She is, however, certainly a girl born of Manto's imagination—one he has no desire to touch, a woman for a mere glimpse of whose elbow he would willingly wait a lifetime. This was the paradox that surfaced, at different times, across Manto's various stories. On one hand, he writes *Naya Qanoon* (The New Law), and on the other, *Boo* (Odour)... in both, he pours his very soul into the writing, consuming himself in the process. People remember him only as an obscene writer, forgetting the man who so brilliantly captured the reality of the times.

...they forget. What was the conspiracy? It all boils down to the same thing: riots had broken out across the country. After the Partition, offers started coming his way too. At that time, Manto held a more or less permanent position at 'Filmistan'. He seemed quite happy; he was

receiving the kind of adulation that sustained him. His film *Aath Din* had not succeeded. For some reason, he left 'Filmistan' and joined Ashok Kumar at 'Bombay Talkies'. He was very fond of Ashok Kumar. Mukherjee must have said something to him—who knows what—that turned him completely against the man.

"Mukherjee is rubbish! A total fraud!" he would say bitterly.

After joining Bombay Talkies, he helped me get a job in the company's senior unit department a year later, and he was delighted about it.

"Now, the two of us will write a story together. It'll create a sensation. A story by you and me, with Ashok Kumar as the hero. Just you wait and see."

Manto had a story idea in mind. Ashok Kumar liked it. Before that, he had liked the story for *Majboor*, but he lost interest in it and preferred Manto's story instead. After I arrived, he took a liking to my story, *Ziddi*. Well, Manto didn't mind that at all. Ashok Kumar then asked me to work on Manto's story, and asked Manto to work on mine. The result was that Manto and I began to view each other with suspicion. Meanwhile, Kamal Amrohi arrived with the story for *Mahal*, and Ashok Kumar liked it. Consequently, both our stories were shelved. Had it merely been a matter of prestige, it would have been one thing; but the situation became such that because our stories weren't being made, our very importance vanished. We were told:

"Just sit back and relax. You'll keep getting your salaries." "Because the contract has been signed, but my story won't be the one that gets made."

Consequently, Shahid and I devoted all our efforts to getting our story, *Ziddi*, produced; *Ziddi* went into production—destined for the ranks of run-of-the-mill films—without Ashok Kumar. But Manto's story was left behind. Manto would sit in his room all day, endlessly reworking his story: sometimes turning the ending into the beginning, or the beginning into the ending; sometimes starting in the middle to finish at the beginning, or turning the middle into the conclusion. Despite these countless 'surgical operations' on the narrative, Ashok Kumar didn't like any version of it. Yet, Manto would insist,

"You don't understand Ganguly! I do. He will definitely act in my story."

"His role in your story isn't romantic; it's that of a father. He'll never do it."

And then, an argument would ensue with Manto. But here, amidst the literary discourse, I was preoccupied with my own concerns. And that is exactly what happened: *Ziddi* and *Mahal* were made, while Manto's story remained unproduced. Manto hadn't expected this, and he felt deeply humiliated. He could endure anything, but not a lack of appreciation. Meanwhile, the situation in the country had deteriorated drastically. His wife and children began urging him to move to Pakistan. Manto asked us to come along too.

"A brilliant future awaits in Pakistan. We'll get the mansions left behind by those who fled. We'll be the ones running the show there. We'll prosper very quickly."

Manto was genuinely offended by my response. We had had so many fights and squabbles, yet we had never clashed over a serious principle like this before. It was then that I realized what a coward Manto was. He was willing to save his own skin at any cost. To build his future, he was ready to lay claim to the life's earnings of those who had fled. And I came to loathe him. Then, one day, he left for Pakistan without a word or a farewell. I felt deeply slighted. Later, a letter arrived saying he was very happy—he had found an excellent house: spacious, beautiful, and furnished with expensive things. That news shook me. The film *Ziddi* had wrapped up, and we had started *Arzoo*; the hard times had come and gone. Two more letters followed; he had invited me over and held out the hope of securing a cinema allotment for me. I was deeply pained. I had always believed in his affection, but now I was compelled to acknowledge it even more. Yet, I tore up his letters, irritated by his failure to respect my principles! I hadn't stopped him from leaving; why, then, was he trying to drag me down his path? Later, I heard Manto was very happy. He had lost the house, but the new one was quite good too. Another daughter was born. And the years rolled by. Another daughter was born.

Then came a letter from Manto: "Try to get me back to India."

Next, I learned that Manto had been prosecuted and jailed. We sat idly by; no one even raised a voice in protest. In fact, the general attitude

was one of satisfaction—that his imprisonment was a good thing, as it would set his mind right. There were no public gatherings, no meetings, no resolutions passed. Then came the news that he had lost his sanity and his friends had committed him to an asylum. But one day, a letter arrived from Manto, written with perfect lucidity:

"I am completely well now. It would be wonderful if you could speak to Mukherjee and get me brought to Bombay."

After that, there was no news of him for a long time, nor did I receive a reply to my letter. Then I heard he had been sent back to the asylum. I began to dread news about Manto. I couldn't bring myself to ask. God knows where his next step might have taken him; but the step taken beyond the asylum is one from which there is no return. The accounts I heard from those arriving from Pakistan were so bitter that I grew weary. He had started drinking excessively. He would ask anyone—friend or stranger—for money. Newspaper editors would sit him down and have him write articles on the spot; if given an advance, he would squander it all. Then came Manto's last letter, in which he asked me to write a piece about him. The words that instantly escaped my ill-omened lips were:

"Now, I shall write about you only after you are dead."

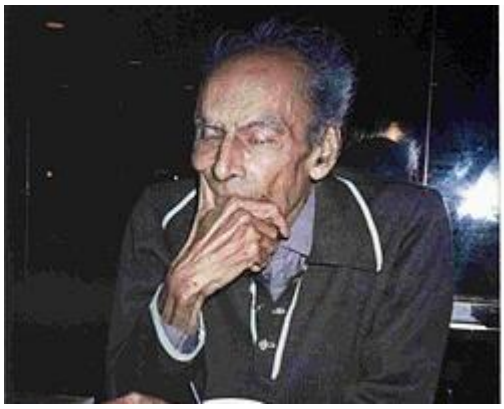
And today, after Manto's death, I am writing this. It wasn't just Manto; a great deal had died between us long before. Today, only a lingering ache remains. I cannot even tell what exactly causes this ache—is it...

Is it a sense of shame that he is dead while I am alive? Why does this burden—like a debt—weigh upon my chest? I recall no debt owed to Manto. And what was that debt, anyway? Simply that he called me 'sister.' Yet, sisters often stand by, watching their brothers breathe their last, unable to do a thing. The dying leave behind wounds that neither show nor bleed; they merely smolder in silence. Today, I miss Safia intensely. I long for us to sit close and talk, just as we did years ago in the 'Adelphi Chambers.' But those were the days of a wedding night—conversations about children and the future—whereas these are talks of death. That is why I am afraid, and my pen runs dry... Who knows what she has endured over these few years! With what heart can I ask: when the whole world had forgotten Manto, did your love remain a rock-solid support for that tempestuous soul? Or had your love grown weary and spent? Did that twelve- or thirteen-year-long upheaval shatter and defeat you, or did you remain, to the end, Safia—*his* Safia? When respectable neighbors and relatives turned up their noses at his wayward path, what did you do?

What answer did you have for those silent reproaches—those whispers of callousness and neglect—that swirled around you? It must have been suffocating. Did he breathe his last in your loving lap? Or did he depart all alone, despite being surrounded by a large family? Did the girls view their father as a madman, a pauper, a drunkard? Did he give you nothing but destitution and shame? I know nothing of it at all. Strange, isn't it? There isn't even the faintest reflection of her life in his writings. He kept attributing his hardships to his own weaknesses. He hid them away like a shameful flaw. He harbored the arrogant belief that, should he choose, he could toss aside hundreds

of thousands in earnings in a heartbeat. That is precisely why he could never quite believe that he, too, could go hungry—or that his pen could be stifled by sheer helplessness. You must be fed up with writers! They suffocate themselves and drag their loved ones into the quagmire along with them... and then, one day, they simply leave, abandoning everyone. But sister, this is not a trait unique to writers; millions of people in our country fall victim to such failure and despair in life. Be they writers or clerks—this is the life they lead, and more or less, this is the fate that awaits them. The overly sensitive among them go mad, while the thick-skinned ones merely linger on, sobbing quietly.

I know not why my heart insists that I, too, played a part in Manto's untimely death. There are invisible bloodstains upon my conscience—stains that only my heart can see. The very world that allowed him to die is my world, too. Today, it let him die; tomorrow, it will just as readily allow me to perish. And then, people will mourn. The burden of my children will weigh upon their chests like a boulder. They will hold memorial gatherings and raise funds, though no one will actually attend those meetings, citing busyness. Time will pass. The weight on their chests will gradually lift, and they will forget it all.



Muhammad Khalid Akhtar (1920–2002) was a celebrated Urdu-language novelist, short story writer, essayist, humorist, and travelogue writer from Pakistan.Biography and BackgroundBirth and Death: Born on January 23, 1920, in Bahawalpur (Allahbad Tehsil), Punjab; died on February 2, 2002, in Karachi.Education and Profession: Trained as an electrical engineer, he studied in Bahawalpur and Lahore before traveling to England in 1946 for postgraduate training.

Keep Me Far Away from This Menace!

Muhammad Khalid Akhtar

In the summer of 1951, I was staying with a publisher friend in Lahore for a few days. At that time, Manto had recently arrived in Lahore, and my publisher friend was bringing out some of his books. Manto had also agreed to edit a literary magazine published by that same firm. My publisher friend was deeply impressed by Manto; he would praise him using epithets like "a lovely man" and "the greatest human being in Asia." Such titles made no impression on me. I had moved past the age when the name of every writer carried an aura of grandeur. With a patronizing air, I would smile at my shy, diffident friend's praise and keep putting off his suggestions that we go meet Manto. Then, one morning, I was told that the "greatest human being in Asia" wanted to meet me. He wished to see me regarding a story I had written. I had penned a long story based on a journey I took to Haridwar. Like any twenty-five-year-old aspiring writer, I was convinced I had written a masterpiece. However, the editors held a different view. Consequently, the story remained unpublished for a long time. Eventually, I sent it to my publisher friend, who passed it on to Manto. Manto liked it, but he ruthlessly edited and trimmed it down to half its original length. He struck out several passages that I considered particularly impactful.

The story was selected for publication in *Urdu Adab*. But when I learned how heavily it had been edited, I was instantly furious. Who

was this Manto to hack away at my story like that? In my arrogance, I failed to realize that this piece had been crafted by a master of the art. This short story was later published in *Savera* under the title 'Khoya Hua Ufaq' (The Lost Horizon). Even now, I believe I may never write a better story than that one; it was Manto's editing and pruning that transformed it into a successful piece. I had been angry with Manto, yet when invited, I went to his home with a friend. It was one of the bungalow-style houses in a block on Mall Road; he lived on the ground floor. These small, pleasant houses were arranged around a circular green garden. The location was certainly what one would call 'posh' in English—far too posh for an Urdu writer whose livelihood depended solely on his writing. I had expected Manto to live in a cramped, dark flat with dingy balconies. I recall there was also a bamboo-and-green-shutter screen outside the veranda.

When my friend knocked, a man came and opened the door. He was a man with a large, dome-shaped head and eyes that seemed to bulge out from beneath a broad forehead. These were not the eyes of an ordinary human being; I had never seen such strange eyes in a human face. He was dressed in an immaculate white *kurta* and *pyjama*, holding an uncapped fountain pen in his hand. A glow of joy and affection lit up his face, and he shook my hand with such warmth that my aloofness and awkwardness vanished instantly. The dark, alien wall that often stands between two people dissolved like water. I knew him; he was a friend of many years. Manto sat down on the long couch. An exercise book lay open before him. Before we arrived, he had been engrossed in writing a short story. In those days, he would complete a story every day and hand it over to his publisher. He would

receive twenty or thirty rupees as payment for a story. For a bohemian with a spirited nature, this money was invaluable. It could procure the 'Kafir'—the brand of liquor he was addicted to—which offered solace against the pain of his poverty and hardships. It also ensured a comfortable life for his wife and beloved children.

Everything in the room was neat and tidily arranged. A vase stood on a small side table near the couch (containing real, vibrant flowers!), alongside an ashtray. This man has a refined sensibility and values cleanliness and decorum in all things, I thought. He is as passionate about order and precision in his real life as he is in his stories—where every word is meticulously crafted and perfectly placed. This was not the room of a typical writer; it could well have belonged to a prosperous lawyer or an office superintendent. One usually expects a sense of disarray in a writer's room—things scattered about, chaotic piles of papers and books on the table, cups of stale coffee, and cigarette butts on the floor. Some great writers have penned their masterpieces in such rooms. Balzac worked in just such an environment, content amidst the surrounding clutter. I am certain Dostoevsky wrote in much the same way. His writing room—whenever it wasn't a prison cell—was a veritable junkyard. His major novels are sprawling, tempestuous, and unedited; they are filled with brilliant elements, yet cluttered with a great deal of rubbish and debris. They lacked any trace of order or technical polish. Reading his novels is akin to entering a vast scrapyard: initially, one feels overwhelmed, but then, amidst the heaps of junk, one's eyes light upon rare treasures.

In his craft, Manto detested sprawl and disarray. He cherished refinement, orderliness, and a sense of propriety in his surroundings. Everything had to be in its proper place; everything had to be spotless. A publisher friend of mine had shared several fascinating anecdotes about his obsession with cleanliness and tidiness. Now, I was experiencing it firsthand. There, on the couch before me, his long, white fingers...

The short-statured man sitting there—holding a lit cigarette and gazing at me with large, cow-like eyes—was a stickler for neatness in his personal life as well. His clothes were impeccably white and bright. In a face of unnatural complexion, his large, expressive eyes stood out most prominently; indeed, they were almost unearthly and terrifying—as if the gods had specially crafted them to peer into human souls and mirror both their goodness and their baseness. Yet, calling them terrifying is not the whole truth, for they did not always retain the same hue or mood—unlike the hills of Rip Van Winkle's village. They could brim with joy and love—becoming the most beautiful eyes imaginable. They could turn playful and laughing, or as innocent as the eyes of a nursing infant. And then, they could become eyes of stone—cold and bitter.

When we apologized, he said gently, "No, not at all! His writing doesn't suffer because of this."

Once we left, he would resume the short story exactly where he had left off. He picked up the manuscript to show us; the final sentence was still incomplete. He did not believe in waiting for a specific mood or a moment of divine inspiration. He explained that at night, while

trying to sleep, he would struggle to find a subject for the next day's story but would come up empty-handed. Until morning, he would have no idea what kind of story he was going to write! Then, while shaving or bathing, an idea would strike him. The plot would take shape in his mind, characters would emerge, and he would sit down to write the story. Then, the characters themselves take charge of the story. Manto does not create them; they create him. He is helpless before his own characters. Manto often repeated this sentiment to his friends—and to himself. In a brief sketch published in *Nuqoosh*, he admitted, "It is sheer nonsense." In my opinion, the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. Manto would conceive the plot and the characters, but once they came to life, the characters would lead the author along, and the story would write itself.

"Hey, Muhammad Khalid Akhtar, my friend!" he said, rising and extending a packet of cigarettes toward me. "You've been unnecessarily upset with me, brother; I actually liked your piece. I didn't make any changes to it—just some trimming and editing."

I felt embarrassed by this plea. His eyes were fixed on me with affection and a hint of contrition.

"No, Manto Sahib! I wasn't angry."

"This piece will live on now!" he declared decisively.

I didn't know him well, so I took offense at this praise. Who did this man think he was?

"Alright, you're staying a while longer, aren't you? I'll come by tomorrow. I've grown quite fond of you," Manto said as he bade us farewell.

He had completely won me over. This was Manto's face... but as I mentioned earlier, he had many faces. After that first meeting, I met him several times during my brief stay in Lahore. He had taken an interest in my attempts at writing. Yet, I always harbored a nagging fear that those large, haunting eyes of his might be peering right into my soul. ...and lest he should discern the truth. Perhaps he wanted to turn me into a character in one of his short stories. The very thought made me shudder. I would have been fortunate, though, had he made me one of the characters in his tales; that way, I would have achieved immortality. The very next day after our first meeting, he came to see me at my publisher friend's place. I was lying alone that day, burning with fever. Manto spent nearly the entire day with me. I remember him making fun of my illness and forcing me to down five or six swigs from a small bottle of brandy he pulled out of his kurta pocket. Not that much persuasion was needed; I took good, long gulps. Manto assured me I would be fine soon; he had absolute faith in the curative powers of brandy. He considered it a beneficial and effective remedy for everything from the common cold to gonorrhea. I do not recall his exact words now, but yes, he kept talking incessantly to cheer me up. Manto's speech was slurred and unsteady, yet his mind remained sharp and clear, and his memory of past conversations never faltered. Hours of his conversation had left me somewhat exhausted.

The following day, he visited my publisher friend—likely to collect payment for one of his stories. That day, he was a changed Manto. His eyes were cold as stone and ice. I sat beside him and tried to engage him in conversation. In an hour, he didn't utter a single word and looked at me as if we were complete strangers. It was a bizarre experience for me. I felt as though some unseen force had taken possession of him. After collecting the money, he rose silently and left without saying a word. He returned that same evening in high spirits, proving to be a truly lively companion. The very next day, he took me on a tour of Lahore's film world. Everyone knew him there; he had played a role in the weddings of numerous directors and actors. I once witnessed his eyes blaze and a flush of anger surge across his face; it happened when, upon being introduced to Manto at a film studio, an actor admitted he was unfamiliar with that famous name. Manto also took us to a studio where one of his stories was being adapted for the screen. As we stepped outside, I saw him in a state of intense rage; his slight frame was trembling like a leaf. True to the ways of his tribe, the director had...

...had made it even more 'popular'. Manto would recite it to him endlessly, with a burning heart.

"Akhtar, this place is rubbish!"

One morning, a publisher friend took Manto and me along for some work of his. He had decided to launch a homeopathic college and wanted to request the new Health and Education Minister to preside over the inauguration ceremony. Upon reaching the Minister's bungalow, however, Manto changed his mind:

"You go ahead and meet the ministers, brother. I'll just sit here."

When we came out after meeting the Minister, Manto was nowhere to be seen. A short while later, we heard him calling out to us from the hut of a beggar woman, where he was sitting quite happily in a squatting position, reading the book of human nature. I believe this was the essence of his greatness. His experiences were firsthand, born of a deep interest in people. He was unlike his contemporaries, who gleaned their knowledge of human nature from books or traversed glittering paths while riding high horses. Around that time, two of Manto's friends had arrived in Lahore from Chiniot. I do not know how Manto had summoned them or how they had come to be his friends. Manto was incredibly enthusiastic about them:

"Akhtar!" he said to me. "Come, let me introduce you to them. They are fascinating men."

He told me that the two 'Khojas' were staying at Faletti's Hotel. They had brought a silver mortar and pestle with them, which they used to grind *bhang*. To Manto, they were like a golden treasure to a child; he regarded them as two fascinating specimens of humanity. I had not the slightest desire to meet such people. I did not accompany Manto to 'Faletti's'. However, one day on Mall Road, I happened to catch a glimpse of the two of them at a general store. One of them was dressed in an ochre-colored *lacha* and a long *kurta*. Manto was in their company, appearing both happy and proud to be among them. He had intended to write a short story about those *Khojas* from Chiniot. That story was never written, and the *Khojas*, unfortunately, narrowly missed out on the badge of immortality. A

harrowing, deeply unsettling image of Manto remains etched in my mind. One scorching afternoon, a few friends and I alighted from a horse-drawn carriage in front of the 'Chinese Restaurant' on Mall Road. Nearby, standing in front of an ice vendor's shop with a towel draped over his head and a vacant, bloodshot stare fixed on nothingness, was Saadat Hasan Manto. He was the very picture of distress and profound human solitude. Seeing him like that felt like a knife piercing my heart. Leaving my friends behind, I walked over to him. He stared at me with a completely blank, unrecognizing gaze.

"I'm buying ice," he said, his speech slurred.

The ice vendor was eyeing his intoxicated customer with a peculiar look. (Little did the poor man know that a man greater than any other would never grace his shop again.) Manto bought a large block of ice and wrapped it in the towel.

"You go on... go to the Chinese [restaurant] with your friends. You go."

He extended his long, slender arm and, clutching the towel-wrapped block of ice under his arm, walked away with weary, aimless steps. I longed to go with him, but my friends were waiting for me at Chenies.

Manto's life was as empty and desolate as that of the protagonist in Maupassant's story *Waiter, One More Peg*. He was like a ship that had snapped its anchor. For him, there was no island of peace in the ocean of this sorrowful world, and he used to fill that void with constant gulps of cheap, potent liquor. I cannot say whether it was

hardship and discontent, or the pettiness and selfishness of his own kind, that drove him helplessly to the doorstep of alcohol. Perhaps it was his own solitude—the loneliness of an artist—that was the cause of his drinking. Painting with words is an exhausting, soul-draining task. And there is no doubt that Manto was an artist in every moment. His quest for the right words was ceaseless. His large eyes would constantly probe the hearts of others, while his mind ruthlessly stored away even the minutest details. This habit of his often made his company burdensome; being with him was no ordinary experience.

I still remember that strange, terrifying day in 1951—the mere thought of it makes my hair stand on end. It was a day unlike any other in my life; it seemed to belong not to this world of bright sunshine, but to some dark, deranged realm. That same year, at Christmas, we drove to Lahore and stayed at the Lahore Hotel on McLeod Road. There were three of us friends. I shall call one of them 'Epicurus,' for he referred to himself by that name and possessed the temperament of a philosopher. The second was Peter; he was a poet and a comrade. We had arrived in Lahore in Epicurus's car with grand plans to paint the town red. I am a calm, cool-headed person—neither by habit nor by physical constitution suited for such revelry. Yet, Epicurus and Peter had dragged me along. Lahore—the Lahore of my student days—has always struck me as a captivating city. The day after our arrival, while I was at my publisher friend's shop just outside the Lahori Gate, I was told that Manto *Sahab* had just left after waiting for Epicurus and me. My publisher friend had informed Manto of our arrival date. We were still standing there when Manto and Rahi arrived in a horse-drawn carriage.

As soon as he stepped down, Manto rushed towards us: "Hey Akhtar! I've been waiting for you for ages. Ask Rashid—I've made so many trips here."

Epicurus and Peter did not appreciate this sudden intrusion. They had other plans, and it was obvious that Manto wouldn't let them go easily.

Manto said, "Come on, let's go home. But over there, Africa..."

"...had just returned, you see."

He had some relatives in Africa who ran a business in Nairobi. I noticed that his face was flushed with alcohol, and his speech was slurring more than usual. Manto got into the car, and we decided to head to the Lahore Hotel.

"But, my friend Rahi, we've run out of booze. What'll we do once we get there? We could buy some, sure, but the money? ...Oh, come on! Don't you worry about the cash." He glanced back at us. "There's our Khalid—Riaz—we'll get fifteen rupees out of them."

The prospect of parting with fifteen rupees didn't exactly thrill us.

"Manto Sahib," I said, "there's a bottle of Black & White waiting for you at the Lahore Hotel."

Peter had brought a bottle of whisky along. Upon reaching the room at the Lahore Hotel, Manto settled comfortably onto the rug spread on the floor.

"Bring it on, then!"

Peter opened the bottle of Black & White and poured some into a glass... Manto downed it in a single gulp. Watching him drink was a frightening sight; the more he drank, the thirstier he seemed to become. Every fifteen or twenty minutes, Peter would pour him another glass, and he would toss it back. His conversation was slurred and incoherent. His eyes—old, like those of an aging stag, wandering far from their horizon in search of something lost—now held the playful smile of a child. For a while, he kept teasing me about the manuscript of one of my novels:

"Hey Akhtar! I've read your novel." "Sheer rubbish, rubbish... Oh, the whole point—for which you wrote two hundred pages—could have been made in just six. Hey, you should keep writing, but just a little at a time...!"

I didn't mind in the least that my masterpiece was dismissed as 'rubbish.' Rubbish or not, Manto had actually read it. We sat there, spellbound and somewhat intimidated, listening to that strange man's rambling yet profound words. His eyes turned into burning embers. His hand began to tremble. Yet, not for a moment did he lose the clarity of his mind. For us, it was like breathing inside a nightmare. He got up several times.

"Come on, Rahi, let's go. Where would *they* be going?" He would glance at us with the suspicious air of an accuser, then sit back down.

"And what would we do if we went there? It's as if Africa has descended upon that place."

After four hours of continuous drinking, a drowsiness overcame him; he curled up on the cot like a child, shielding his eyes with his arm, and fell asleep. From that fitful, restless slumber, he would wake every half-hour and sit up in bed. Like 'Billy Bones,' the pirate from 'Treasure Island', he would fix his bloodshot eyes on us and demand another glass of the 'medicine of death.' Terrified, we dared not refuse. Once, he called out to me and Epicurus:

"Come over here and sit, friend!"

We went and sat beside him... a mix of nervousness and enchantment... "Hey Akhtar! You've written rubbish." "Write, but keep it brief—brief...!"

I happened to mention his stories; he flared up in anger, his frail body trembling.

"Leave me out of it," he said. "Don't talk about me."

He used his finger as a pen, gesturing as if writing on his other palm.

"Forget about me. If I write just one line, that is art."

He was in an egoistic mood. We shrank back, intimidated. The strange thing was, this wasn't mere boasting; his claim was one hundred percent valid. Whatever he wrote was art. His anger subsided instantly, and he said in a wheedling tone:

"Akhtar! I want to escape this endless chatter. Take me with you to the mountains—get me far away from here..."

I told him we would take him along to the Kaghan Valley.

"Keep me away from 'this' curse!" He pointed toward the whisky bottle. His eyes grew dreamy at the thought of freedom and mountain breezes. Suddenly, his face turned sad and solemn.

"My wife and children... what will become of them? Arrangements must be made for them."

He even said once, "When I die—when Manto dies—you will weep, Akhtar; you all will weep!"

As deep evening fell outside, he finally rose to leave. "Come on, let's go meet 'Africa'."

I walked him and Rahi down to the street. On McLeod Road, amidst the blue gloom, the lights of tongas and motorcars bobbed and flickered, and the colorful, fascinating, and absurd carnival of life was in full swing. Rahi hailed a horse-drawn carriage.

Manto shook my hand, saying, "Alright then, Akhtar!"

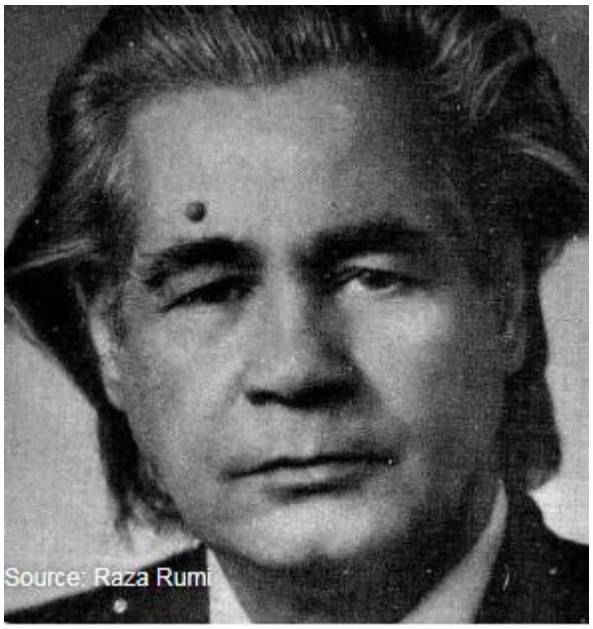
Suddenly, the barrier of unfamiliarity and reserve within me snapped, and I embraced that dear, solitary man. As I returned after seeing him off in the carriage, tears welled up in my eyes at the thought of the tragedy of human loneliness. I never saw Manto again. When his story 'Mozel' was published, I wrote him a letter of appreciation—the kind

a disciple writes to his mentor. I wrote that he was undoubtedly the greatest man in Asia. He was pleased by the letter and replied—in the only letter I ever received from him—asking me not to inflate Manto's ego so much that he would swell up and vanish into the vastness of the sky. He reiterated what he had said that night: that he did not create his characters; rather, with every new character, a new Manto was born. I have lost that letter. What wouldn't I give to recover it now! After that final meeting, I visited Lahore two or three times but did not meet Manto. I shall reproach myself for this for the rest of my life. News of him would reach me—of his illnesses, his admissions to mental hospitals in attempts to quit drinking, and his struggle to provide a comfortable life for his wife and children—but for the last four or five months, I had heard nothing about him. Then...

A bleak, wintry evening... leaves scattered across the road amidst a gusting wind, when Peter stepped out of a horse-drawn carriage, shouting with a stricken look on his face:

"Manto is dead!"

I was on my way to the station to catch a train at the time. I thought Peter might be joking—it was his habit—but the look on his face told me this was no joke. My heart sank; it felt as though the world had turned upside down. For so many of us, the flame of life was extinguished that day.



Ali Sardar Jafri (29 November 1913 – 1 August 2000) was an Indian writer of Urdu language. He was also a poet, critic and film lyricist.

Ali Sardar Jafri was born in Balrampur (in present-day Uttar Pradesh), where he spent his formative years

Come, Manto! You belong to us.

Ali Sardar Jafri

Manto's short-story writing is the cry of the guilty conscience of India's middle class. That is why Manto is the most notorious short-story writer in Urdu literature. And the notoriety that fell to Manto's lot—much like popularity and fame—cannot be achieved through mere effort alone; it requires genuine artistic genius. Manto's genius shines like a jewel at the tip of his pen. He has portrayed characters whose humanity has been stripped away by the capitalist system. Cast a glance at them: there is a 'tonga'-driver plotting revenge against a dog named Tommy; a roasted-gram vendor who, upon being abused by his landlord Seth, yearns to tear him apart but, in his helplessness, can only hurl abuse back; a pimp whose masculinity has been insulted by a prostitute; a prostitute in whose breast womanhood awakens, leading her to sleep with her dog as an act of revenge against society; a child sobbing over his father's foolishness, while the father appears truly foolish in the face of the child's innocence; a carefree young girl learning the ways of the world, desperate to give shape to the unfulfilled emotions of her heart; a wandering woman who pours oil on the bellies of pregnant women to prophesy the nature of the unborn child; and an exhausted young man who, to dispel the monotony of his lonely life, invents an imaginary beloved and immerses himself in love for her. It is a veritable gallery of portraits revealing the distorted features of our middle-class society. They

were once human, or at least possessed the potential to be so, but this society—built upon plunder and exploitation—has turned them into animals. They are animals who wear the faces of humans and possess human hearts. Struggle has restored their wealth to them, yet Manto refuses to even cast a glance their way. This is precisely why he resorts to literary rebellion; and were it within his power, he would readily engage in political insurrection too: "…..When I hold a pistol in my hand—without the fear that it might go off accidentally—I will step out brandishing it. Identifying my true enemy, I will either empty every bullet into his chest or be riddled with bullets myself. When, upon my death, a critic calls me a madman, my soul will embrace those very words as the highest medal of honor and wear them proudly upon its breast." (Preface—'Manto ke Afsane')

Manto has witnessed the filth of society. He loves humanity. He possesses the strength to resist social and political oppression. In 'Taraqqi-yafta Qabristan' (A Progressive Graveyard—an essay by Manto), he delivers a scathing satire against capitalist society. He attaches no more significance to the ongoing conflict between Pakistan and India than to an obscenity scrawled on the walls of a public urinal. He fails to recognize his true enemy and strikes at the empty air—blows that land on no one. Consequently, in the final analysis, his extremism turns against the very human being he loves so deeply. Yet, moving from extremism toward the destination of revolution is just as feasible. Whenever I read a story by Manto, I am reminded of my meeting with him. It was an incident from fifteen years ago; after reciting a poem at the Aligarh Muslim University Union, as I stepped down, a student approached me and took me to

his room. A portrait of Victor Hugo hung on the wall, and books by Gorky lay on the table.

He said, "I, too, am a revolutionary."

Today, the people of our country are marching along the path of revolution. Their enemy stands before them—the specter of capitalism, which is already faltering. And this entire caravan, this vast army, is calling out to Saadat Hasan Manto:

"Come—bringing with you the sharpness of your pen, the soaring heights of your creative imagination, and the intensity of your emotions! You belong to us, and there is no place for you in this world other than within our ranks."

(From the preface to the short story collection 'Chughad', published in the first edition, April 1948)



Prof Ayesha Jalal is a Pakistani-American historian She is currently the Mary Richardson Professor of History at Tufts University. Earlier in her career, Jalal taught at Harvard University and Columbia University. She was the recipient of the 1998 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

Jalal was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1956, to Hamid Jalal, a senior Pakistani civil servant, and his wife Zakia Jalal. She is related in two ways to the Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto. Her paternal grandmother was the sister of Manto. Secondly, Manto's wife Safia was the sister of Ayesha's mother Zakia Jalal. In other words, the uncle-nephew pair of Manto and Hamid Jalal were married to the sisters Safia and Zakia.

The Pity of Partition

Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide

Ayesha Jalal ,Tufts University

Bombay was rife with fear and foreboding. The British had wielded the partitioner's axe. Reports of horrific bloodletting in northern India, particularly Punjab, had turned the cosmopolitan city into a battleground of real and imagined hostilities along purportedly religious lines. Four good Punjabi friends, three Hindus and one Muslim, were parting company. Mumtaz was going to Pakistan, a country he neither knew nor felt anything for. His decision to leave was sudden but unsurprising. His Hindu friends' relatives in Western Punjab had suffered loss of life and property. Overcome with grief upon hearing of his uncle's murder by Muslim gangs in Lahore, Jugal had told Mumtaz that he would kill him if violence broke out in their neighborhood. After eight days of stoic silence, Mumtaz announced that he was setting sail for Karachi within a few hours.

As they stood on the deck of the ship sipping brandy, Jugal begged Mumtaz to forgive him. When Mumtaz asked if he really meant that he could kill him, Jugal replied in the affirmative and apologized. 'You would have been sorrier if you had killed me, though only if you had realized that it wasn't Mumtaz, a Muslim and a friend of yours whom you had killed but a human being. 'It is possible that my co-religionists would call me a martyr, but I swear upon God, I will leap

out of my grave and refuse a degree for which I took no exam'. Becoming more emotional, Mumtaz explained that by religion he really meant the faith that distinguishes human beings from beasts of prey. 'Don't say that a hundred thousand Hindus and a hundred thousand Muslims have been massacred', he told his friends. 'Say that two hundred thousand human beings have perished…Those who think religion can be hunted down with guns are stupid. Religion, faith, belief, devotion are matters of the spirit, not of the body. Knives, daggers, and bullets cannot destroy religion'.(1)

Mumtaz is a character and narrator in the story titled 'Sahai' authored by the acknowledged master of the Urdu short story, Saadat Hasan Manto. Partly autobiographical, the story effaces the distinction between fictional and historical narratives. Together with the broader corpus of his better-known partition stories, it establishes a riveting symbiosis between Manto's life and work at the moment of an agonizing historical rupture. For someone who liked to keep his ears close to the ground in order to weave tales out of facts gleaned from everyday life, Manto the individual and writer are ideal fare for the historian of partition. Through his up-close and personal picture of characters like Jugal, Sahai, Ram Khalawan or unnamed murderers, Manto turns short story writing into a testament of his belief that human depravity, though real and pervasive, can never succeed in killing all sense of humanity. His faith lay in that kind of humanity.

What made Manto possible? Proud and prone to displays of arrogance, he had a high opinion of his talent and place in history. Manto has been likened to Guy de Maupassant, not for consciously

seeking to emulate the French short story writer but because like him he aimed at exposing societal ills and the hypocrisies of life without losing faith in the inherent beauty within human beings.(2) Exuding a sense of destiny that often surprised his peers, Saadat Hasan Manto made sure to leave behind an extraordinarily rich archive of insights into his life, personality and writings. As he wryly commented in one of his typical tongue-in-cheek autobiographical pieces, it was quite 'possible that Saadat Hasan dies and Manto lives on', but that would be like an eggshell minus the white and the yolk. The name Manto comes from the Kashmiri word *mant*, meaning a stone weighing one and a half seer or approximately three pounds, and is thought to refer to what his Saraswat Brahman ancestors were entitled to collect as rent from the cultivating peasantry.(3) In a play on his own name, Manto commented that he was a 'one two man', who added up to three.

Saadat Hasan Manto was born a hundred years ago on May 11, 1912 at Sambrala in Ludhiana District into a Kashmiri Muslim trading family that migrated to the Punjab and eventually settled down in Amritsar. Casting a nostalgic look at his hometown, Saadat Hasan Manto started 'A Story of 1919' wondering what the events of 1947 had done to Amritsar - the center of the anti-colonial struggle where British machine gunners ruthlessly mowed down hundreds of freedom lovers. He wanted to remember those glory days. 'Forget about recent events,' he wrote, 'their memory lies heavy on my heart'. Some people blamed the British for the carnage at the time of partition, but Manto could not 'help seeing the blood on our own hands'.(4)

Recollection and forgetting are so intrinsic to the art of historical narration that disentangling the two can be a delicate and exacting exercise. The partition of India in 1947 along ostensibly religious lines is the most dramatic instance of post-war decolonization based on arbitrary redrawing of boundaries. The forced migration of an estimated fourteen and a half million people, and the murder of perhaps two million innocent men, women, and children devastated subcontinental psyches. Painful memories of displacement and the horrific killing of kith and kin left deep psychological scars that have not healed.

There has been a near obsession with memory studies among recent scholars of traumatic events in modern history. Memory as a means of historical retrieval has its limitations. Apart from the problems inherent in selective remembering, there is memory's intrinsic and complex relationship with the knotty issue of responsibility. The issue is knottier in the case of partition violence than the Holocaust. Instead of a totalitarian state orchestrating a genocidal campaign against a community, there were perpetrators and victims of a murderous orgy in 1947 among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the midst of the abdication of all sense of responsibility by managers of a departing colonial state. A recent tendency to romanticize memory and nostalgia in anti-historical representations of the past has obscured the ways in which the manipulation of memories of trauma both reinforces and advances nationalist narratives of the post-colonial state. Even when the fracturing of national imaginaries allows memories to escape the statist imprint, personal and collective memories are rarely if ever immune from the

persistence of the present in selective remembrances of the past. Without in any way minimizing the trauma of 1947, there is a need to look at the other side of partition, so to speak. Looking at the other side of partition entails cutting across the communitarian morass and foregrounding the cosmopolitanism of everyday life that bound people belonging to rival religious communities both before and after the severity of a forced separation no one had quite envisaged simply because there was no precedent for it in India's history.

A social renegade like Manto may not seem like an obvious choice for such an investigation. But his knack for plumbing the depths of the human psyche and raise ethically challenging questions makes him an intriguing case study. During his all too brief life of forty-two years spanning Amritsar, Bombay, Delhi and Lahore, Manto came into contact with many people and forged some extraordinary friendships that withstood the strains of arbitrary frontiers between India and Pakistan. His cosmopolitanism can be gleaned at one level from his keen interest in Russian, French and Chinese literature and, on another, his firm refusal to allow distinctions of religion interfere with his choice of friends. His extensive galaxy of friends and acquaintances, to name just a few, included the giants of progressive Urdu and Hindi literature, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander, Ismat Chughtai, Ali Sardar Jafri and Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi; Slide 10: icons of the Bombay film industry like actors Ashok Kumar and Shyam; producers S.Mukerji and V.Shantaram; directors K.Asif and Shaukat Hussain Rizvi; music director Khurshid Anwar and the peerless nightingale of united India and Melody Queen of Pakistan, Madam Noor Jahan. In a series of witty and brutally candid sketches entitled

Bald Angels **on some celebrities he came to know well, Manto made creative uses of his personal memory to give glimpses into the subcontinent's collective social and cultural history that have been lost sight of in the mayhem and dislocations of partition or swept aside by the torrent of selective nationalist reconstructions of the past. The temporal if not spatial immediacy of individuals and events he wrote about results in a more effective coincidence of personal memory and collective history than narrations of the past relying on the retrieval of memories several decades down the line.**

Manto's days in Bombay, where he first went in 1936, are immortalized in his own and other people's writings. The rhythms of the city, its electric cars, breathtaking ocean views, exotic eateries, foul smelling alleyways, and curious dialects struck intimate and enduring chords within him. After a stint at All India Radio in Delhi Manto came back to Bombay in August 1942 to a city sweltering in the politics of the Quit India movement. End February and early March is the time for cavorting with abandon during Holi - the Hindu festival of colors in which people belonging to different faiths sprinkle colored powder and water on one another in joyous celebration of the coming of spring. Manto's film script 'Chal Chal Re Naujawan', starring Ashok Kumar and Naseem Bano, was being shot at Filmistan. On the day of Holi, Manto was drinking with Ismat Chughtai's husband Shahid Latif on the balcony of their flat in Malad when they heard a commotion outside. A group of Filmistan employees carrying coloring gear and in a serious mood to party was at the gate. S.Mukerjee, the producer of 'Chal Chal Re Naujawan', was in the lead with his cheerful and pudgy wife - Ashok Kumar's sister, marshaling the women folk. After

protesting the intrusion momentarily, Ismat changed her mind and along with Safia joined the festivities. They started marching towards Naseem Bano's house, spraying all and sundry on Ghodbandar Road with blue, yellow, red, green and black colored powders and dyes. Looking a sight with her face and eyeglasses stained with psychedelic colors, Ismat was now the ringleader, her voice booming with a military commander's confidence as she smeared an oversized Bengali woman passing by with a thick layer of coal tar. Upon arriving at the famous film star's house, they found her in full make up in a lovely light colored sari. Somebody suggested she go and change. No sooner had Naseem Bano uttered the words, 'this is fine', that she was assaulted by the colors of Holi, turning the fairy faced beauty queen of Bombay into a frightening multicolored witch; her gleaming white teeth and big eyes looking like a painting by Behzad or Monet on which a child had splashed ink. Bored with throwing color on already grotesquely colored faces, the party turned to playing *kabadi*. The men went first, followed by the more interesting match between the women. There were peals of laughter each time the plump Mrs Mukerjee fell to the ground. With her glasses coated in color, Safia invariably ended up running in the wrong direction while Naseem remained stationary in a contrived attempt to show that she was unaccustomed to physical activity.(5)

Manto's account of the enchanting revelries in Bombay on Holi, bridging distinctions between different people through a haze of colorful merriment, are the more memorable when contrasted with the tortured memories of blood letting that saturated the city's streets just a few years later. A contrarian by choice, who looked at most

issues in novel ways, he found the mounting Hindu-Muslim tensions in his adopted home troubling and inexplicable. 'The Muslim League is a mosque; the Congress is a temple', he discovered, 'this is what people think and that is what the newspapers say as well'. From where he lived in Byculla, a long road snaked towards Mahim at the end of which there is a famous Muslim shrine. When the troubles reached this part of the city, boys pulled trees from the footpaths and started setting up roadblocks in the bazaar. When some Hindu boys began dragging a steel fence in the direction of the shrine, a few Muslims came forward and one of them said quietly, 'Look, don't go there...from here Pakistan starts' and sketched a line on the road. So the Hindu boys took the fence in the other direction after which 'no infidel made his way towards Pakistan'.(6)

Manto's final years in undivided India had none of the allure often ascribed to them retrospectively. The dropping of the atom bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki saddened him immensely. Everything seemed futile. It was as if the present and the future had become meaningless.(7) He still loved Bombay, but was far from happy with his circumstances. Defending himself against two obscenity cases was draining, emotionally and financially. Safia's companionship and the birth of their daughter Nighat in July 1946 brought much needed joy. Manto's personal friendships were another important source of comfort during these trying times, most famously with two of Bombay's top film heroes, Ashok Kumar and Shyam. In *Bald Angels*, Manto talks about his close relations with Ashok Kumar, whom he referred to affectionately as 'Dadamoni'. Manto worked with Ashok on several films at Filmistan, most notably 'Aath Din' ('Eight

Days') for which he wrote the script and made his debut acting as a shell-shocked soldier. The film was a commercial success and won him critical acclaim.

Ashok Kumar, who quit Filmistan for Bombay Talkies, persuaded Manto to join as well. On August 15, 1947, Manto started work at Bombay Talkies located on Churchgate Street after signing a one-year contract. India had been partitioned. Punjab and other parts of north India were in the grips of murderous violence. His wife and daughter had left for Lahore, partly to escape the violence but also to enable Safia to prepare for the wedding of her youngest sister to Manto's favorite nephew and English translator, Hamid Jalal. They had the first taste of what was in the offing when in early 1947 their relatives' homes were burned and looted in Amritsar's Lawyers Colony where Manto had grown up and first dreamt of revolution. The situation was tense in Delhi where there had been random stabbings whose victims included tonga drivers working in non-curfew areas. Bombay too was unsettled.

One day Ashok was dropping him home in his car when they passed through a rough Muslim neighborhood where no Hindu could dare go. A wedding party was coming towards them and the moment Manto heard the sound of the accompanying band he grabbed Ashok's hand and said, 'Dadamoni, where have you come?' 'Not to worry', was the unnervingly calm response. Manto feared that Ashok would be immediately recognized; the murder of a famous Hindu would be quite an achievement for the thugs populating the area. Unable to remember a single Quranic verse and with his heart beating fast,

Manto prayed: 'Oh God have mercy…please do not let a Muslim kill Ashok so that I have to carry the weight of his blood on my neck for the rest of my life. This is not the nation's neck, but mine, and yet it did not want to be lowered before another community for such an abominable act.' As the car approached the wedding procession, people started shouting 'Ashok Kumar, Ashok Kumar'. Manto froze but Ashok kept his hands on the wheel in silence. Just as Manto was about to blurt out that he was a Muslim and Ashok was merely dropping him home, two young men stepped forward and said calmly, 'Ashok Bhai, you won't find a way ahead, go via the side lane'. If Ashok is their brother, Manto wondered, who am I? He looked at his *khadi* clothes – the mark of a Congress sympathizer - and wondered what they had made of him. Then perhaps they had not even noticed him in the presence of their matinee idol. As the car left the Muslim neighborhood, Manto heaved a sigh of relief. Ashok laughed and said: 'You panicked for no reason; these people don't bother artists'.(8)

The much-maligned mob had more capacity for discernment than he realized. It was a vignette that profoundly influenced Manto's understanding of partition violence. His graphically honest depictions of the blood stained Holi played out on the subcontinental stage in the name of freedom was to condemn him in the courts of nationalism, whether Indian or Muslim, without the benefit of a fair trial. Recollecting the bedlam caused by Hindu-Muslim violence during his last days in Bombay, he wrote that whenever he and his friends stepped out of the house they made sure to take two caps with them, a Hindu cap and a Rumi cap. Using the metaphor of changing caps for the assertion of religious identities in times of violence, Manto

quipped, 'previously religion used to be in one's heart, now it's in caps…Politics too operates through these caps. Long live caps!'.(9)

Switching caps did not meaning changing heart. In his most sensitive and moving sketch 'Murli ki Dhun', literally the sound of Krishna's flute, in the collection *Bald Angels*, Manto writes with affection about his very dear friend, the actor Shyam who died in April 1951 after falling off a horse while shooting a film. Shyam, whose real name was Sunder Shyam Chadha, came from Sialkot. A lively and endearing personality, Shyam reminded Manto of a character in a Russian novel. They both were heavy drinkers and bonded instantly. One of the standing jokes between them was the word 'Hiptullha', an unusual name Manto came across in the sports section of a newspaper and which became an expression for anything different or out of the box. A few months before partition, Shyam came to live with with Manto in his new flat at 18 Oxford Chambers on Clare Road where he had moved just before his wife and daughter left Bombay. The two led a 'Hiptullha' sort of existence.(10)

The sharing and caring between the two friends was not disrupted by the violence that erupted with partition except for one fleeting, but weighty moment. Once they were listening to a family of Sikh refugees telling horrific stories about the killings perpetrated by Muslims in Rawalpindi. Manto could see that Shyam was extremely perturbed and understood the emotional turmoil he was undergoing. When they left the place, Manto said to him: 'I am a Muslim, don't you feel like killing me?' Shyam replied in all seriousness: 'Not now, but when I was hearing about the atrocities committed by Muslims…I

could have killed you.' Manto recalled being shocked by Shyam's words and confessed that he too possibly may have killed his best friend under those circumstances. But when he thought about it afterwards, and there was a vast difference between then and later, he suddenly realized what lay at the roots of the blood letting between Hindus and Muslims. Manto kept pondering over Shyam's words, not now, but at the time yes and the answer, the pity of partition, hit him, the answer that lay in human nature itself. The truth of what Shyam had said was the pearl Manto had been seeking to find in the newspapers every day. It left such a lasting impression on him that he reproduced his exchange with Shyam in the short story 'Sahai', if only to prove that his fiction is nothing if it does not approximate the factual.

As 1947 drew to a close Manto was finding it excruciatingly difficult to stay on in Bombay. His cosmopolitan vision could not come to terms with an atmosphere poisoned by an unabated cycle of killings, arson and rape. Manto was confused. He could not decide if India or Pakistan was his homeland. Thinking back to when Ashok Kumar was stopped in the Muslim neighborhood and told that there was no road ahead, he told himself 'Manto bhai, this street will lead you nowhere; it's best to go via side lane'. And so he decided to take the sideline to Pakistan.(11) After deciding to leave for Lahore, Manto started packing. He ran various errands like paying a visit to the washermen's colony to collect his laundry about which he wrote tellingly in the story 'Ram Khalawan'. When Shyam returned from an all night shoot, he peered at the packed baggage and nonchalantly remarked: 'Going?' Manto answered in the affirmative. Nothing further was said about

the matter. When the time came for him to leave, Shyam poured two large pegs of brandy and said 'Hiptullha'. 'Hiptullha', Manto shot back. Shyam then threw his arms around him and said 'swine'. Holding back his tears, Manto replied: 'Pakistani swine'. Shyam shouted back in earnest: 'Zindabad Pakistan'. 'Zindabad Bharat', Manto retorted before leaving for the port to board the ship taking him to Karachi. Shyam came with him all the way to the ship's deck, telling funny stories, as was his wont. When the gong sounded announcing the ship's departure, he said 'Hiptullha' out loud, stepped down the gangway and walked away without once looking back.(12)

Manto arrived in Lahore via Karachi around 7 or 8 January 1948 and spent the next three months in a state of agitated confusion. He could not decide what to write about, 'Despite trying I could not separate India from Pakistan and Pakistan from India'. Manto wrote his first short story in Pakistan entitled 'Thanda Gosht' (cold flesh). Set against the backdrop of partition violence in Punjab, it is a chilling drama about an illiterate and hyper-sexed Sikh, Ishwar Singh, who becomes impotent to the chagrin of his oversexed partner, Kalwant Kaur, after a psychologically crippling incident. An active participant in the disturbances, he kidnaps a beautiful teenage Muslim girl after killing half a dozen members of her family. Flinging the girl over his shoulders Ishwar Singh heads towards the city canal near the railway tracks, lays her down under some bushes and is about to force himself on her when he is shaken to the core on realizing that she had already died out of sheer terror. Ishwar Singh is in acute emotional agony, not because he has killed innocent people but because he cannot get over the girl's cold flesh. Faced with his lover's jealousy, he tells her the

painful story with tearful eyes, and suddenly dies - his hands colder than ice.(13)

Manto's friend Qasimi liked the story but declined to publish it, fearing it was too hot for *Naqoosh*, a collaborative endeavor he had initiated with the board for the promotion of Urdu in Pakistan. Manto took back the story quietly and told him to come back the next evening. When Qasimi returned the next day, Manto was writing the climax of 'Khul Do' (open it). Qasimi had to wait a long time as Manto took extra care to finish writing the crucial final lines of the story. Based on partition violence like 'Thanda Gosht', 'Khul Do' is the story of Sirajuddin, a Muslim father frantically looking for his kidnapped daughter, Sakina. A group of eight young Muslim men working as volunteers in the refugee camps offered to help him locate her. On finding Sakina, they gang rape her and leave her lying unconscious near the rail tracks. She is taken to a camp hospital where Sirajuddin eventually finds her, lying motionless like a corpse. When a doctor comes in and feels the girl's pulse, he motions towards the window and tells Sirajuddin, 'open it'. Upon hearing the doctor's words, the half dead Sakina responds mechanically, opening the knot of her trousers and pushing them down her thighs. Sirajuddin's wrinkled face lights up, 'my daughter's alive'; the doctor breaks out into a sweat.(14) Demolishing the myth of religiously motivated violence, the story tears at the heart, and silently jeers at the unquestioned idioms of statist nationalism. Manto watched Qasimi quiver as he read the last lines before mustering the energy to say, 'its good…I'll take it'.(15)

The historical archive of Manto's personal struggles and setbacks in Pakistan gave him a perspective on the uneasy nexus emerging between state and society, making him a particularly discerning spectator and critic of the post-colonial moment. At the height of the Cold War when the United States of America was considering signing a security pact with Pakistan in pursuit of its policy to contain the spread of communism, Manto wrote a series of letters to Uncle Sam posing as his Pakistani nephew. Manto took the liberty to write to his esteemed uncle because 'you know why my country was carved out of India and how it gained independence'. Just as 'my country was divided to get independence, I too became independent by being split up'. 'Uncle, an all-knowing sage like you would understand what kind of freedom a bird with clipped wings can enjoy'. Previously as India's great short story writer he was booked for obscenity three times; now as Pakistan's best short story writer he had been tried once. He was poorly paid and had to drink the awful locally distilled whisky. 'If this whisky was made in your country, you would demolish the distillery with an atom bomb because anyone drinking this dreadful stuff ends up in the netherworld in less than a year.'(16)

More than anything else, Manto wanted 'a tiny, teeny weenie atom bomb' that he could hurl at the Pakistani mullahs and their clones for offending his sensibilities with their coarse notions of hygiene and public propriety. Manto thought the idea of signing a military pact with Pakistan was a tour de force. 'You ought to sign one with India as well', and sell both countries discarded Second World War armaments.(17) 'Let India make all the fuss it wants to, you must sign a military pact with Pakistan because you are very worried about the

stability of the world's largest Islamic state. And why not given that our mullah is the best antidote to Russian communism. Once military aid starts flowing the first people you should arm are these mullahs. You must also send them American-made rosaries and prayer-mats…Cut throat razors and scissors should be top of the list.' Once the mullahs, with their hair trimmed by American scissors and their pajamas stitched by American machines in strict conformity with the Sharia, sat on their American made prayer rugs, the Soviets would have to suspend their activities in Pakistan.(18) In the following letter, the nephew expressed unhappiness with his 'respected uncle' for not sending his gift, the atom bomb; he had only wanted 'a tiny one'. He had also heard that the United States had made a hydrogen bomb so there could be lasting peace in the world. Manto had complete faith in his American uncle but wondered 'how many countries will need to be removed from the face of the earth' for 'this lasting peace to be established'. His niece had asked him to draw a map of the world for her. He had promised to do so after consulting his uncle to 'find out the names of the countries that were going to survive'.(19)

Manto's bantering tone should not deflect from an underlying message of considerable seriousness. A staunch Kashmiri, he found it odd that Pakistan and India were fighting over Kashmir and the United Nations was trying to mediate. 'Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is a Kashmiri [like me] and loves Kashmir as I do…like any other Kashmiri does.' If the great Kashmiri poet Mahjoor had been alive, Manto was sure there would be no need for UN negotiators like Dr Graham.(20) In one of his letters to Uncle Sam he had the audacity to suggest that

Washington gift a gun to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was a Kashmiri. It should be a gun that, in keeping with the proverb about Kashmiri unwillingness to fight, would go off on its own when placed in the sun. 'I too am a Kashmiri, but Muslim, which is why I have asked for a tiny atom bomb'.(21) Intended by Manto as a deterrent to war, if not a magical wand to persuade Nehru to be reasonable on Kashmir, the symbolism of his minute atom bomb aimed at saving lives where the conventional arming of Pakistan and India would clearly not. 'Why don't you start a war between India and Pakistan?' he had cynically told his American uncle upon hearing of the economic downturn in the USA following the end of the Korean War. 'The gains from the Korean War will be nothing compared with the profits from this one. You have your nephew's word.' India and Pakistan both would put in rush orders for American arms, giving a much-needed impetus to the US economy and, in the process, putting the subcontinent on the road to perdition.(22)

Defying the arbitrary frontiers of 1947, Manto continued to engage with literary personalities in India, commenting on their work and inviting their comments on his. Occasionally the correspondence was disrupted when one or more letters failed to reach the destination. Of those that did, it is worth mentioning one by Amrita Pritam, then in her mid-thirties, requesting Manto's comments on her novel *Pinjar*, about a beautiful young Hindu woman who is abducted by a Muslim during the disturbances of 1947 to avenge an old land dispute between their families. Thanking Manto for his letter, Pritam wrote: 'It is wonderful that a writer of your merit takes an interest in my work'.(23) Manto may well have replied that there was no reason

why he should not take an interest in her work. The *batwara*, the word he used for partition, may have divided lives and drawn lines of red in the hearts and minds of sections of the subcontinent's population. But the lines of division drawn by the British were not visible to the eye. They certainly did not extend to the domain of literature, which could never be divided. The pity of partition was not that instead of one country there were now two – independent India and independent Pakistan - but the fact that 'human beings in both countries were slaves, slaves of bigotry…slaves of religious passions, slaves of animal instincts and barbarity'.(24)

Saadat Hasan Manto died at 10:30 am on 18 January 1955 after a stormy life lasting a mere forty-two years, eight months and four days. He was declared out in Lahore during the morning session of the second Indo-Pakistan cricket test match being played in Bahawalpur. Manto had wanted to see Hanif Mohammad bat in the third test at Lahore.(25) Unlike that slow and steady compiler of a triple century, Manto had played a gem of an innings with an array of spectacular shots before throwing his wicket away. What he lacked in the durability of life is more than made up for in the folios he has left behind, pages not just of his short stories, but also plays, sketches, and from a historian's point of view, his largely ignored essays. On his deathbed he is said to have asked for a peg of whisky, a spirit synonymous with death that he had embraced as his mortal enemy.(26) He let his liver disintegrate by drinking an excess of the toxic local brew because it somehow connected him with the trials and tribulations of those whose lives were more wretched than his. The tragedy of Manto's life is in many ways the tragedy of Pakistan,

the country he reluctantly made his own but for whose cultural and intellectual renewal he exerted and eventually sacrificed his life.

On 18 August 1954, Manto wrote his own epitaph while obliging an ordinary stenographer with an autograph. Starting with his mother's recommended use of the numerals 786 that stand for 'I begin in the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful', he wrote: 'Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto. With him lie buried all the arts and mysteries of short-story writing… Under tons of earth he lies, wondering which of the two is the greater short-story writer: God or he'.(27) The pity of Pakistan is that the epitaph does not appear on Manto's grave in the Miani Sahib graveyard in Lahore where he is buried. To avoid enraging the sentiments of those posturing as the face of religious orthodoxy in the Muslim nation-state, his bereaved family instead used an alternative epitaph authored by him that was inspired by a couplet from Ghalib: 'This is the grave of Saadat Hasan Manto, who still thinks his name was not the repeated word on the tablet of time'. It remains to be seen whether there will be less controversy if the epitaph simply read: 'Here lies Manto, who is still wondering whether he is the greater story teller of the past and retriever of memories than the historian'.

References:

1Saadat Hasan Manto, "Sahai', Manto Rama, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1990, p.20.

2. Mumtaz Shireen, Manto: Noori na Nari, comp. Asif Farkhi, (second edition) Karachi: .Scheherzade, pp.150-151.

3.Cited in Dr Ali Sana Bukhari, Saadat Hasan Manto (Tehqiq), Lahore: Manto Academy, 2006, pp.7-8.

4.Manto, 'Thalia the Pimp', Black Milk, p.48.

5.Manto, Ismat Chughtai' and 'Pari Chehra Naseem Bano', Manto Numa, pp.108-109, 153-154.

6.Ibid., pp.390-391.

7.Manto to Qasimi, 1 October 1945, Manto key Khutut, Nadeem Key Naam, p.180.

8.Ibid., pp.174-176.

9.Manto, 'Batein', Ibid., p.392.

10.Manto, 'Murli ki Dhun', Manto Numa, pp.118, 122, 127, 130-131.

11. Manto, 'Ashok Kumar', Manto Numa, p.176.

12.Manto, 'Murli ki Dhun', Manto Numa, pp.137-138.

13.Manto, 'Thanda Gosht', Manto Nama, pp.404-411.

14.Manto, 'Khul Do', Manto Kahanien, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1995, pp.11-14.

15.Manto, 'Zehmat Mehr Darakhshan', Manto Nama, p.355.

16. Manto's first letter to Uncle Sam, 16 December 1951, Manto Rama, pp.356-357.

17.Ibid., pp.386-387.

18. Manto's fourth letter to Uncle Sam, 21 February 1954, Ibid., pp.393-394.

19. Manto's fifth letter to Uncle Sam, no date, Ibid., pp.402-403.

20. Manto, 'Shair-i-Kashmir – Mahjoor Kashmiri' in Saeed (ed.), Nau Adarat Manto, pp.128-130.

21. Manto's third letter to Uncle Sam, Manto Rama, pp.386-387.

22. Manto's seventh letter to Uncle Sam, 14 April 1954, Ibid., pp.419-420.

23. Amrita Pritam to Manto, 26 June 1954, Manto Papers.

24. Manto, 'Murli ki Dhun', Manto Numa, p.137.

25. Jalal, 'Uncle Manto', Black Milk, p.29.

26. Ibid., p.34.

27 ,Ibid., p.705.



Jameel Gulrays is a well-known advertising veteran, voice-over mentor, and Urdu language connoisseur based in Mumbai. He is best recognized as the founder of Katha Kathan, a prominent initiative dedicated to preserving and reviving Indian languages—particularly Urdu literature—through the medium of dramatized readings and theatre-style live performances

The Inimitable Mirror: Saadat Hasan Manto's Unmatched Style and Fearless Gaze

Jameel Gulrays

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–1955) occupies a singular place in Urdu literature and world short fiction. His prose is so distinctive that imitation collapses into pale pastiche. The courage required to hold an unflinching mirror to society—exposing its hypocrisies, sexual undercurrents, communal frenzy, and moral bankruptcy—remains almost impossible for most writers of subsequent generations. Manto did not merely describe reality; he stripped it naked and forced readers to confront what they preferred to ignore.

A Style of Stark Economy and Raw Precision

Manto's writing is defined by directness, conciseness, and vivid realism. He rejected the ornate, Persian-influenced literary Urdu of his time in favor of the language of the streets—colloquial, immediate, and unpretentious. His sentences are lean, almost staccato, yet densely packed with sensory detail and psychological insight. There is no moralizing preamble, no sentimental cushioning. Events unfold with journalistic clarity laced with irony, dark humor, and sudden emotional force.

This style draws power from extreme brevity and strategic silence. In many stories the most devastating truths are left unspoken or revealed in a single devastating image. He often begins mid-stream, strings events toward an inevitable climax, and ends with a shock that

lingers. The result feels both documentary and poetic, as if he had absorbed the compression and ambiguity of the Urdu ghazal tradition and applied it to prose.

Consider Toba Tek Singh (1955). In the aftermath of Partition, the governments of India and Pakistan decide to exchange mental asylum inmates along religious lines. Manto opens with near-reportorial simplicity: the lunatics, too, must be partitioned. Through the eyes of Bishan Singh—a Sikh inmate who has stood for years and whose only coherent utterance is a string of nonsense words ending in "of the Pakistan government"—the story exposes the absurdity of drawing borders through human lives and minds. The climax is pure Manto: Bishan collapses and dies in the no-man's-land between the two countries, on soil that belongs to neither. The prose is spare, the irony devastating, the pathos unforced. No amount of technical mimicry can reproduce the moral clarity and emotional precision of that ending.

Khol Do ("Open It," 1948) demonstrates the same economy of horror. A father searches desperately for his daughter amid the chaos of Partition trains and refugee camps. When he finally finds her in a hospital, semi-conscious and traumatized, a doctor's routine instruction—"Khol do" (open it)—referring to a window or door, triggers the girl's automatic response: she begins to undo her clothes. The story ends there. Manto refuses to explain, condemn, or soften. The implication of repeated violation—first by one community, then possibly by "rescuers" of her own—lands with unbearable force precisely because it is not spelled out.

Thanda Gosht ("Cold Meat" or "Colder Than Ice") pushes further into the macabre. A Sikh man returns from communal violence unable to perform with his mistress. Under her jealous interrogation and eventual stabbing, he confesses that he had murdered a family and attempted to rape a girl, only to discover she was already dead—"thanda gosht." As he dies, he himself becomes cold flesh. The narrative is tightly controlled, suspenseful, and free of sensationalism. It dissects how violence dehumanizes both perpetrator and victim without ever preaching.

Other stories, such as Bu ("Smell"), explore obsession and class through a man's fixation on the natural odor of a lower-caste woman, which later ruins his ability to respond to his refined wife's perfume. Stories about prostitutes (Kaali Shalwar, Hatak) treat marginalized women as fully human—complex, pragmatic, wounded—rather than as symbols or objects of pity. Manto's characters are never abstractions; they are flesh-and-blood people caught in history's machinery.

The Courage to Show the Mirror

Manto's themes were as dangerous as his technique. He wrote about sexuality, prostitution, communal rape, necrophilia, and the psychological wreckage of Partition at a time when such candor invited prosecution. He faced multiple obscenity trials—under British colonial law for stories like Bu, Dhuan, and Kaali Shalwar, and later in Pakistan for Thanda Gosht and others. He was fined, briefly imprisoned, and repeatedly hauled into court. His defense was consistent and defiant: if his stories seemed dirty, it was because

society itself was dirty. "Literature must bleed when society bleeds," he essentially argued. He refused the tailor's role of covering society's nakedness; his job was to reveal it.

This courage was not performative. Manto lived the consequences—financial strain, health decline accelerated by alcoholism, and social ostracism—yet continued writing. He rejected both progressive didacticism and conservative moralism. He could be equally scathing about religious hypocrisy, political leaders, and ordinary people swept up in frenzy. In the vignettes of Siyah Hashiye ("Black Borders"), he compressed Partition's horror into almost aphoristic sketches of casual cruelty and absurdity.

Why the Style Remains Inimitable

Many writers have admired Manto, translated him, or drawn inspiration from his subjects. Few have successfully imitated the total effect. The difficulty lies in the fusion of elements that resist replication: the exact pitch of colloquial speech that still carries literary weight; the refusal of sentimentality combined with profound human sympathy; the ability to abstract from lived trauma without turning it into ideology; and, above all, the personal fearlessness that makes the prose feel lived rather than constructed.

Contemporary writers operate under different pressures. Social media scrutiny, identity politics, institutional gatekeeping, market expectations, and the fear of cancellation often encourage self-censorship or the packaging of hard truths in safer, more ideologically approved forms. Depicting the full spectrum of human ugliness—

especially when it implicates one's own community, gender dynamics, or sacred national narratives—carries professional and personal risks that many prefer to avoid. Manto wrote as if the only loyalty that mattered was to the unvarnished human truth. That stance is rarer now, and the stylistic confidence that accompanies it rarer still.

Manto once observed, in essence, that he wrote with white chalk on a black board so the blackness would become more visible. His stories continue to do exactly that. They do not offer comfort, redemption arcs, or easy moral victories. They simply show. In an age that often prefers curated reflections to actual mirrors, the rarity of that courage only underscores how unique—and how irreplaceable—Manto remains.

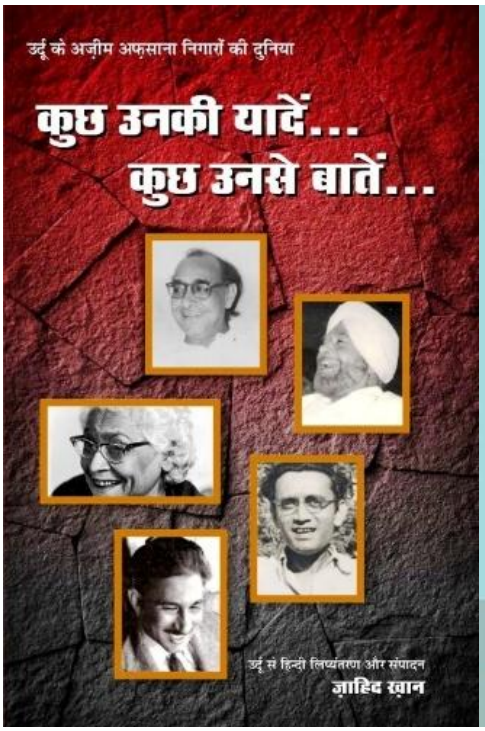


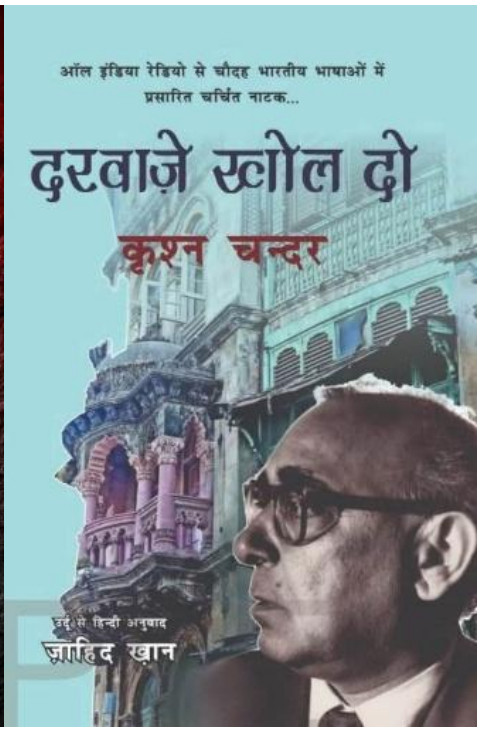
Zahid Khan

Author Zahid Khan has done extensive work on the progressive movement in Indian literature during the twentieth century. Some of his important books include: 'Tarraqqipasand Tehreek Ke Hamsafar', 'Tarraqqipasand Tehreek Ki Rahguzar', 'Aadhi Aabadi Adhoora Safar', 'Shailendra Har Zor-Zulm Ki Takkar Mein', 'Balraj Sahni:ek samarpit aur srjanaatmak jeevan(‘A Dedicated and Creative Life'), 'Ritwik Ghatak:nav yathaarthavaadee sinema ka kalaatmak sarjak (sampaadan),(Artistic Creator of Neo-Realistic Cinema' (edited)), 'Makhdoom Mohiuddin: surkh savere ka shaayar (Poet of the Crimson Dawn'), 'Majaz Hoon Main Sarfarosh Hoon Main', and manto saab doston kee nazar mein (anuvaad aur sampaadan)('Manto Sahab in the Eyes of His Friends' (translation and editing)). He has also transliterated and translated from Urdu to Hindi Krishan Chander's historical reportage 'Paude', Hamid Akhtar's book 'Roodad-e-Anjuman', Ali Sardar Jafri's play 'Yeh Kiska Khoon Hai!', Krishan Chander's play 'Darwaze Khol Do', and the book 'Kuch Unki Yaadein Kuch Unse Baatein', which focuses on important Urdu short story writers.

For his outstanding writing on gender sensitivity, Zahid Khan has been honored seven times with the 'Ladli Media and Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity' by 'Population First', a social organization in Mumbai. Furthermore, his acclaimed book 'Tarraqqipasand Tehreek Ke Hamsafar' has been translated into Marathi and Urdu. He was also awarded the 'Vagishwari Award' by the 'Madhya Pradesh Hindi Sahitya Sammelan' for this book.

Mobile: 94254 89944, Email Address: jahidk.khan@gmail.com





Whatever he wrote was, by God, truly matchless.

Zahid Khan

Saadat Hasan Manto, an unparalleled short-story writer of Urdu literature, wrote prolifically during his brief life of forty-three years; indeed, he spent some twenty to twenty-two of those years dedicated entirely to writing. Writing was his passion as well as his lifeline. Manto himself once wrote, "I do not write the story; the truth is, the story writes me." He could not have survived without it. Everything he penned remains a priceless treasure of Urdu literature today. Even six decades after his death, Manto's work lives on in the minds of millions across the Indian subcontinent. Alas! He was not granted a long life. Had he lived longer, who knows how many more masterpieces would have flowed from his pen? Upon Manto's death, another great Urdu short-story writer, Krishan Chander, paid a beautiful tribute: "The sorrow lies in the unwritten works that only Manto could have created. Urdu literature has produced many fine storytellers, but there will never be another Manto, nor anyone to take his place. I know this, and so do Rajinder Singh Bedi, Ismat Chughtai, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, and Upendranath Ashk."

Krishan Chander's words hold true to this day; despite the passage of so much time, no other Manto has emerged in Urdu literature. His place remains vacant. Many of Manto's stories stand as milestones. Every story he wrote leaves a profound impact on the heart and mind; his pen gave birth to numerous masterpieces. Examples include—

'Thanda Gosht', 'Khol Do', 'Yazeed', 'Shahdole Ka Chuha', 'Bapu Gopinath', 'Naya Qanoon', 'Titwal Ka Kutta', and 'Toba Tek Singh'. Manto wrote many memorable stories and short tales centered on the Partition of India. He passed away in Lahore on January 18, 1955. Manto's body of work was vast: he wrote over 150 stories, character sketches, memoirs, film scripts and dialogues, numerous radio plays and one-act plays, letters, and columns for various periodicals, in addition to engaging in journalism. Barring novels and poetry, he wrote prolifically across all literary genres. After Premchand, Saadat Hasan Manto is the writer who has been most extensively written about in Hindi-Urdu literature.

Every genre and work of Manto has been the subject of much discussion. Yet, the letters he wrote to the then US Presidents—first Harry Truman and later Eisenhower—which were published as a series in Pakistani newspapers, have rarely been discussed. They have received scant attention from critics, even though they are writings that certainly merit discussion. These letters can prove invaluable for understanding that specific era and the bilateral relationship between the United States and Pakistan. With remarkable candor and objectivity, he fiercely critiqued the rulers of both his own country and the global superpower, America. He spared no one, writing honestly about what he observed. The sheer boldness and severity of these letters can be gauged from a brief example: American writer Leslie Fleming wrote a page on Manto's essays—categorized under 'Topical Essays'—in the *Journal of South Asian Literature*'s special issue dedicated to Manto. She has touched upon various essays in just a line or two each. Is it not surprising that she could not write even a single

word—let alone a full sentence—about the nine letters addressed to 'Uncle Sam'? Why? Because when Manto wrote these letters, 'Uncle' Eisenhower was in power in America, and when the American scholar wrote the page titled 'Letters as Topical Essays', 'Uncle' Ronald Reagan was in power. In ...[regarding] the state of helplessness and America's cunning, diabolical maneuvers. More than half a century has passed since the letter was written, yet neither the image nor the character of either nation has changed. Manto's assessment of these two countries holds absolutely true even today; his observations remain precisely applicable. Pakistan relied on American handouts in the past, and its economy continues to run on American dollars today. Manto alludes to this in his second letter: "Anyway! Let us leave that matter aside. As long as Pakistan needs wheat, I cannot afford to be insolent towards you—even though, as a Pakistani, my government does not consider me an obedient citizen. My prayer is that, God willing, a time comes when *you* might need *bajra* (pearl millet) and *niksuk* greens, and I am alive to send them to you." (Page 327, Second Letter, *Saadat Hasan Manto Dastavez-4*). Two other things become evident from this brief passage. First, given his rebellious nature, the Pakistani government does not view him as one of their own. Despite this, Manto desires for his country to stand on its own feet and for a day to arrive when Pakistan exports its own goods to America. Yet, this wish of Manto's was never fulfilled during his lifetime, and the situation remains unchanged today; Pakistan's dependence on America has only grown over time. In his letters, Manto fiercely satirizes America's imperialist policies.

In his third letter, written on March 15, 1954, he writes: "The military aid agreement with us is a remarkable thing. Do stick to it. Meanwhile, strengthen a similar relationship with India as well. Send old weapons to both, for by now you must have discarded all the weaponry used in the last war." "Your obsolete and surplus weapons will be disposed of, and your factories won't sit idle either." (Page 322, Third Letter, 'Saadat Hasan Manto Documents-4') In this writing, Manto fully exposes America's imperialist face—revealing how it trades arms across the globe. For America, war is merely a business; if there is war, its weapons will sell. Whether it was the protracted Iran-Iraq war or conflicts between African nations, America has consistently reaped the greatest profit from such hostilities. Under the guise of military aid agreements, it continues to offload its old weaponry to this day.

In his seventh letter, Manto once again identifies America's imperialist nature. Writing with biting sarcasm, he says, "Dear Uncle! I have heard some alarming news—that trade and industry in your country are going through a precarious phase. You are, *Mashallah*, a wise man, but do hear out a fool for a moment: this commercial and industrial crisis has arisen simply because you halted the Korean War. That was a grave mistake. Just consider—where will your tanks, bombers, artillery, and guns find a market now? Undoubtedly, you were forced to stop the war due to overwhelming global opposition, but what does world opinion really matter against you? I mean, what can the entire world do to counter even a single hydrogen bomb of yours? You stopped the Korean War; that was a huge blunder. Anyway, let that be—just instigate a war between India and Pakistan.

If the profits from that conflict don't dwarf the gains from the Korean War, then I am not your nephew. 'Qibla'! Just think about it—what a lucrative business venture such a war would be." All your arms manufacturing factories will begin operating on double shifts. India will buy weapons from you, and so will Pakistan. You will be living in the lap of luxury—literally, with your fingers in the ghee and your head in the vat. By all means, keep the war in Indochina going. Keep preaching to people that it is a noble cause—to hell with the French public and the French government. If they oppose this war, let them; we shouldn't care. After all, our goal is to establish peace and harmony in the world, isn't that right, Uncle? (Pages 346-47, Seventh Letter, 'Saadat Hasan Manto Dastavez-4')

Why, after all, is America so 'benevolent' towards Pakistan? Manto sheds light on this in his letter as well: "No matter how much India protests, you must go ahead and sign a military aid pact with Pakistan, because you are deeply concerned about the stability of the world's largest Islamic state—and rightly so, for the mullahs here are the perfect antidote to Russian Communism." (Page 334, Fourth Letter, Saadat Hasan Manto Dastavez-4) In the lines that follow, Manto's satire becomes even sharper: "When lips are trimmed with American tools, *Sharia*-compliant trousers are stitched on American machines, clods of earth for ablution are untouched by American hands, and there are American 'rahals' (wooden stands for the Quran) and American prayer mats—then just watch, there will be people chanting your name everywhere." (Page 334, Fourth Letter, *Saadat Hasan Manto Dastavez-4*)

In these letters, Manto vividly describes the political situation in Pakistan. When discussing the state of affairs in his country, Manto neither fears Pakistan's rulers nor shows deference to religious leaders. He does not shy away from criticizing the contradictions inherent in Pakistanis or their blind inclination towards religion; he wields his pen ruthlessly against religious fanaticism and obscurantism. A case in point is this passage from his ninth letter: "We Pakistanis are ready to lay down our lives for the sake of Islam—yet there was a time when we were ardent admirers of Mustafa Kemal Pasha and Enver Pasha. The news of Enver Pasha's death..." other words, both eras were times of Republican presidencies. The point is understandable, and Leslie Fleming's thinly veiled embarrassment is clearly visible." (Page 366, Antim Shabd [Concluding Words], Saadat Hasan Manto Dastavez-4)

To truly grasp the significance of Manto's letters, it is essential to be familiar with the modus operandi of US President Harry Truman and the conditions prevailing in Pakistan at that time. It is often said of twentieth-century America that it was a nation always eager for war (an eagerness that, it seems, has not diminished even today). During his tenure, Harry Truman vigorously promoted American imperialist policies across the globe. Decisions such as the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan, the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe, the Truman Doctrine for the containment of communism, the onset of the Cold War, the formation of NATO, and American intervention in the Korean War can be cited as examples. Viewed in t his light, Manto's letters are deeply significant. Manto's apparent objective in writing to Uncle Sam was to offer an indirect critique of imperialism.

If one examines the prevailing conditions of that era, Pakistan was striving to forge its identity as a new nation. A Pak-US economic and strategic pact had already been concluded. To curb the rising tide of communism in Southeast Asia, the United States was seeking a pawn in the region—a role it found in Pakistan. A perusal of the content of Manto's letters reveals not only the socio-political climate of the US and Pakistan but also sheds light on America's policies toward the rest of the world.

Manto wrote his first letter to the US President in December 1951 and his last in April 1954—a total of nine letters spanning three years. Yet, to call them merely letters would be an understatement; they are vivid, telling portraits of the internal realities of both nations—Pakistan's stifling atmosphere contrasted with America's capitalist unbridledness; Pakistan's destitution set against America's duplicity. Had the news arrived, we would have all mourned and wept genuine tears. Upon learning that Enver Pasha was alive by the grace of God, we would have danced and jumped for joy and lit lamps in our homes. Mustafa Kemal and Enver were sworn enemies—a fact we were completely unaware of. The Turks had no interest in Indian Muslims; to them, we were of absolutely no consequence. We were somewhat aware of this, yet we loved them—we are such incredibly simple and guileless souls that we even love that *amla* and jasmine oil supposedly 'prepared by our Islamic brethren.' When we apply it to our hair, the pleasure is so exquisite that all the delights of the promised Paradise pale in comparison. We are a bunch of simpletons, yet truly lovable people. May God preserve our virtues for as long as

the world endures." (Page 353, Eighth Letter, Saadat Hasan Manto Dastavez-4)

In his letters, Manto takes sharp digs at American capitalism and imperialism. To highlight American imperialism, he repeatedly addresses the US President as the 'Head of State of the Seven Freedoms.' His style of satire is utterly unique; indeed, had Manto focused solely on the realm of satire, he would undoubtedly have established himself as a preeminent satirist of the Indian subcontinent. A fine example of this satire appears in his very first letter: "Brother Evelyn Waugh tells us that there, they have institutions dedicated to beautifying not just dead humans, but dead animals too. If a dog loses its tail in an accident, a new one is attached in its place." Specialist hands rectify the physical flaws of the deceased—flaws that existed throughout its life—and it is shrouded and buried with great pomp. Arrangements are even made to lay flowers on its grave, and every year, on the anniversary of the pet's death, the institution sends a card bearing a message along these lines: "In heaven, your Tommy or Jimmy is wagging his tail or twitching his ears, remembering you." The dogs of your country are better than us! Here, one dies today, and by tomorrow, it is a new day. Here, when a loved one dies, a calamity befalls the poor soul, and they cry out in the depths of their heart: "Why did the wretch have to die... If only death had come to me instead..." (Page 323, First Letter, Saadat Hasan Manto Dastavez-4)

Reading these nine letters by Manto offers significant insight into the true nature of Pakistan and America. These letters not only reflect

that era but also paint a picture of the future. What would be Pakistan's destiny in the years to come? Manto had already foreseen it. He could see it all clearly written in the sands of time. Through his letters, he warned Pakistan's rulers in every way possible. Yet, his voice went unheeded—like a whisper amidst a deafening din. Saadat Hasan Manto had foreseen the plight Pakistan finds itself in today long ago. As for American rulers and their policies—what Manto wrote about them holds true even today. In fact, their face has become far more terrifying and imperialistic than before.

(An analysis of the nine letters Manto wrote to the President of America)



Gopi Chand Narang (11 February 1931 – 15 June 2022) was an Indian theorist, literary critic, and scholar who wrote in Urdu and English. His Urdu literary criticism incorporated a range of modern theoretical frameworks including stylistics, structuralism, post-structuralism, and Eastern poetics.

Narang was born in Dukki, a town in Balochistan, British India (now Pakistan). His father Dharam Chand Narang was a litterateur himself, and a scholar of Persian and Sanskrit. In his Urdu book Urdu Zaban Aur Lisaniyat, Narang states: "Urdu is not my mother tongue. Punjabi was the language spoken in both my paternal and maternal relatives. Even after our migration to Delhi, my mother continued to speak Punjabi, a language renowned for its sweetness, softness, and mellifluous quality."

A New Reading of Manto: Substance, Affection, and an Empty, Desolate Train

Gopi Chand Narang

Saadat Hasan Manto passed away in 1955. Reading him again after such a long time, certain realizations clearly begin to surface in the mind. First and foremost, Manto was a rebel—a rebel against society, and a rebel against literature and art. He was the enemy of everything known as doxa or orthodoxy: the obsolete, outdated beliefs, concepts, and mindsets. There was a certain fire and restlessness in Manto's blood that made him instinctively and fundamentally despise anything cloaked in the guise of conventional morality and culture. His X-ray vision would instantly pierce through these facades to reach a reality that, however bitter and painful, possessed the undeniable weight of truth. He was a seeker of that stark, naked truth which dazzles the eyes when brought into the light.

Though Manto had many friends, his was the solitary journey of a restless soul. Very few truly understood him during his lifetime; in fact, he was widely misunderstood and remained the target of condemnation and disgrace throughout his life. The fire within him burned constantly, and at no point did he ever succumb to fatigue or disillusionment. The conventional social norms, moral codes, and the established frameworks of literature and art—which belonged to the elite or the bourgeoisie and had been accepted and familiar for centuries—were struck down by Manto with the full force of his creative being, shattering their so-called sanctity to pieces.

Manto possessed the soul of a wounded artist, one who appeared to be at war with his entire era. The fundamental catalyst beneath his creative agony was his absolute refusal to compromise with doxa on any level. The sparks of this rebellion flew throughout his life, and the entire Urdu literary world suffered successive shocks at his hands. During his lifetime, Manto was barely understood—or rather, he was not understood at all.

It is also evident that Manto was far ahead of his contemporaries in recognizing moral hypocrisy and doxa. Perhaps no other writer of his time possessed such a profound understanding of fiction's rebellious purpose, nature, and essence. The prevailing literary atmosphere of that era was defined by utilitarianism and moral instruction. This didactic environment had been shaped by the poetics of Hali's Muqaddama, elevated to greatness by the poetry of Akbar and Iqbal, and solidified by the idealism of Premchand. In an age when literature was generally viewed as a vehicle for utility and moralizing, Manto used it to shatter moral conventions, exposing the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of elite culture. This was a direct clash with the literary dogmas of his time, requiring a courage that only Manto possessed. Speaking of the obscenity trials against him, Manto once remarked with deep sorrow:

For the past few years, those who file these lawsuits seem to believe that after the late Allama Iqbal, God Almighty locked all the doors of literature and handed the keys over to a single pious man. If only the

late Allama were still alive! (Lazzat-e-Sang, included in Dastavez, p. 57)

From the very beginning, Manto felt an intense need to speak the truth. The obscenity trial over his short story Bu (Odor) was initiated by the Punjab government, but it was being fueled by certain Urdu newspapers. Writing with great anguish about these newspapers and their editors, Manto stated:

My only regret is that these publications are owned by men who swear by God and the Prophet while publishing advertisements for cures for male impotence. It saddens me that an honorable profession like journalism has been monopolized by such people, most of whom are mere peddlers of aphrodisiac oils. (Ibid., p. 57)
Manto was subjected to all manner of attacks from various quarters—the Raja of Mahmudabad, Mahir-ul-Qadri of Hyderabad, Hakim Mirza Haider Baig of Bombay, Hameed Nizami (the founder of Nawa-i-Waqt), and a wide array of writers and journalists. Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, however, was an admirer of Manto's art. It was Qasmi who published the short story Bu in Adab-e-Latif, and later Khol Do (Open It) in Naqoosh. Yet, the written opinion given by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, acting as the editor of The Pakistan Times, regarding the story Thanda Gosht (Cold Meat) remains on the record. He stated:

The author of the story has not committed obscenity, but neither has he fulfilled the higher demands of literature, because the story lacks a satisfactory analysis of the fundamental problems of life. This implies that the purpose of literature is to analyze fundamental

realities and to provide a satisfactory analysis—something Faiz himself never actually did. If Faiz is considered a great poet, it is due to the deep compassion and aesthetic richness of his poetry, not because he provided an analysis of social problems, let alone a satisfactory analysis, which is ultimately a highly subjective concept. Figures like Tajwar Najibabadi, Shorish Kashmiri, Abu Saeed Bazmi, Muhammad Din Taseer, and many others issued negative statements against Manto. Conversely, Bari Alig, Kanhaiya Lal Kapoor, and Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum stood by the truth, whereas Maulvi Abdul Haq did not even deign to respond. Manto also submitted the names of Niaz Fatehpuri, Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, Khalifa Abdul Hakim, and Harindranath Chattopadhyay as defense witnesses, but the court refused to allow their testimonies to be recorded. Imagining what Manto must have endured under those circumstances, even forty or forty-five years later, is enough to give one goosebumps. What else could the following statements by Manto be, if not the cries of a wounded soul?

It is said that I have women on the brain. If a man does not have women on the brain, should he have elephants instead? If male pigeons coo at the sight of female pigeons, why shouldn't a man write a ghazal or a short story upon seeing a woman? Women are far more interesting, beautiful, and thought-provoking than pigeons. (Adab-e-Jadid, Dastavez, p. 51)

Prostitutes have existed among us not just recently, but for thousands of years. They are even mentioned in the holy scriptures. Since there is no longer any room for a new revealed book or a new prophet, we

now find them mentioned not in divine verses, but in newspapers, magazines, and books—texts that you can read without burning incense or frankincense, and which you can toss into the scrap pile once you are done. (Safed Jhoot, Ibid., p. 72)

Manto was repeatedly subjected to lawsuits. He was dragged through lower courts, session courts, and high courts; he faced police searches, interrogations, and subpoenas; he was fined and sentenced. In short, he endured every conceivable form of humiliation and disgrace. When persecution crosses all limits, even the desire to defend oneself fades away. When an entire society—and its judiciary along with it—demands moral reform, welfare, and utility from literature, one is forced to respond in that very same idiom: If you cannot tolerate these stories, it means that this era is intolerable. The flaws that are attributed to me are, in fact, the flaws of the current system. (Adab-e-Jadid, Ibid., p. 52)

For those who wish to eradicate obscene literature—or whatever it may be called—the correct approach is to eradicate the conditions that give rise to such literature. (Adab-e-Jadid, ibid., p. 53) Here, Manto seemingly suggests a direct, one-to-one relationship between this kind of literature and social conditions. That is, if the conditions change, the literature will change, or perhaps literature itself is capable of changing social conditions. In other words, the purpose of literature is moral or reformative. Elsewhere, Manto has even referred to literature as a bitter medicine: Our writings may taste bitter and astringent to you... Neem leaves may be bitter, but they purify the blood. (Afsana Nigar aur Jinsi Milan, Dastavez, p. 83)

However, this stance was likely defensive. Given the circumstances Manto was facing, this was the only thing that could be said and understood. Perhaps, to avoid legal persecution and arrest warrants, he had no other choice. Saying anything else might have led to further misunderstanding and confusion. Otherwise, Manto's true path was that of an artistry that justifies itself—an artistry that cannot be subordinated to any so-called moral or reformative agenda. When it came to literature, Manto was entirely uncompromising. Among Urdu fiction writers, he was perhaps the first to insist that literature and art be recognized and evaluated strictly on their own terms. He championed the idea that literature and art (or aesthetic impact) must remain relatively independent of morality and religion, a concept that guarantees literature its distinct identity.

In other words, Manto dealt a severe blow to the prevailing notion that literature must be bound by elite values or middle-class morality. This perspective becomes much more apparent whenever he is free from the pressures of courtrooms and legal battles. Manto was acutely aware that the issues causing turmoil in his consciousness and raging within his soul were not ordinary problems. Rather, they were tied to the fundamental demands of human nature and instinct. They stemmed from the depths of the human psyche, where evil stubbornly tries to consume good, and darkness relentlessly tries to extinguish light. This inner conflict is an inherent part of the mysteries of human existence, and to this day, no one has found an easy resolution for it.

If preaching against lying and stealing just once was enough to make

the whole world abstain from them, then perhaps a single prophet would have sufficed. But, as you know, the list of prophets is quite long. We writers are not prophets. We examine a single issue or problem under various circumstances and from multiple angles, and whatever we comprehend, we present to the world. We never force the world to accept it. We are neither lawmakers nor moral censors. Law and censorship are the domain of others. We criticize governments, but we do not become rulers ourselves. We draw the blueprints for buildings, but we are not the masons. We diagnose the disease, but we do not run the pharmacies. (Afsana Nigar aur Jinsi Milan, ibid., pp. 81-82)

In another essay, Kasauti (The Touchstone), Manto states: Literature is not gold, whose fluctuating market prices can be quoted. Literature is an ornament, and just as a beautiful piece of jewelry is never made of pure gold, beautiful works of literature are never pure reality... Literature is either literature, or it is a grave disrespect. There is no middle ground between literature and non-literature, just as a human being is either a human being or a donkey. (Ibid., pp. 50/57)

These excerpts clearly demonstrate that Manto's concept of literature was entirely distinct from that of his contemporaries. In the lines above, he explicitly states that literature is neither a moral censor nor a lawmaker; its job is neither to issue commands nor to prescribe remedies. In the second excerpt, Manto also rejects the concept of absolute realism, suggesting that language and art require a certain alloy to be crafted, and that the literary quality of literature possesses its own unique nature. Manto was introducing an objective,

uncompromising vision of literature to the Urdu short story—a vision that had never existed before, and one that the Urdu literary world took a considerable amount of time to digest and accept. Having absorbed French and Russian masterpieces into his consciousness at a young age, the highest standards of fiction were ingrained in his creative mind from the very beginning.
Manto was well aware that the anguish and restlessness within him, along with his profound dissatisfaction with his surroundings, were of a completely different nature. In a 1939 letter to Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, written when Manto was only twenty-seven, his words are particularly revealing: Come what may, I am not destined to find peace. I am not satisfied with anything; I feel that something is missing in everything. (Nuqoosh Manto Number)

It is essential to re-examine Manto's art and his characters within the context of this inner turmoil and dissatisfaction. Manto tore the mask off the familiar, normalized face of reality—the side deemed acceptable and respectable—to expose the hideous face of hypocrisy and doxa hiding behind the disguise. Manto harbored a deep hatred for doxa precisely because it draped the elite's grotesque and sinful face in silken veils. A few years before the Partition, at a gathering at Jogeshwari College in Bombay, Manto expressed this in his signature style:

If a woman in my neighborhood is beaten by her husband every day and still polishes his shoes, I feel not an ounce of sympathy for her. But if a woman in my neighborhood fights with her husband, threatens suicide, and then goes off to the cinema, leaving her

husband in a state of severe anxiety for two hours, I develop a strange and profound sympathy for them both. If a boy falls in love with a girl, I don't give it any more importance than a common cold. However, my attention will certainly be drawn to a boy who pretends that hundreds of girls are dying for him, when in reality, he is as starved for love as a famine-stricken resident of Bengal... My heroine can be a cheap brothel prostitute who stays awake all night and, while sleeping during the day, occasionally jolts awake from a nightmare that old age has come knocking at her door, and that years of fleeting, broken sleep have frozen upon her heavy eyelids. (Adab-e-Jadid, ibid., p. 52)

The desire to observe and expose the unfamiliar face of reality, or the unacceptable side of truth, is the fundamental driving force behind Manto's art. When we examine certain characters of Manto in this context—namely, those fallen prostitutes whom society generally treats as outcasts—a question arises: Are these characters merely what they appear to be on the surface? And if not, then what exactly are they?

It is a rather fascinating irony of Manto studies that his infamous characters were misunderstood during his lifetime, and they remained misunderstood even after his death. The reasons for this lack of comprehension may differ, but its fundamental nature remains the same. As long as Manto was alive, the opposition he faced was rooted in intellectual prejudice. There was no humiliation, disgrace, condemnation, or infamy that he did not endure, and no insult that was not hurled at him. Most of what was written about him during his

lifetime was superficial, journalistic, and frivolous. After his death, the attitude shifted completely. However, if the earlier approach was purely disparaging, the later one became entirely eulogistic and adulatory. Where there was once absolute opposition and rejection, there was now exaggerated praise and admiration.

In other words, if the initial attitude was entirely emotional and unliterary, the subsequent attitude was equally unliterary and uncreative. Only the perspective had changed; the underlying nature remained the same. The condemnation had been purely emotional, and the adulation was purely emotional as well. Consequently, neither the former nor the latter approach possessed any true literary merit. Neither was grounded in genuine literary appreciation—that is, in careful comprehension and analysis. Both extremes were driven by intensity, and where such intensity prevails, one finds either absolute condemnation or absolute validation. True literary criticism vanishes in the process—especially the kind of criticism that requires an objective distance from the subject matter and relies on a close reading of the text.

Following Manto's death, the perspective shifted entirely. The absolute hatred of the past was replaced by a sense of victimhood and a feeling of pity. The very man who had once been condemned and reviled became sacred and revered overnight, and panegyrics were suddenly being written in praise of his greatness. Consequently, in post-Manto criticism, discussions about the commodification of sex and references to courtesans, whores, and prostitutes became a mere fashion and a formula. What was once considered objectionable was

now deemed commendable. Previously categorized under obscenity and vulgarity, these themes were now infused with a sense of self-pity and pride. In other words, this approach was just as flawed as the earlier one. Before his death, Manto was branded a purveyor of obscenity and a corruptor of morals; after his death, he was reduced to being merely the artist of brothels, prostitutes, pimps, and touts. The attention that should have been devoted to his creative agony, his inner turmoil, his profound sorrow, and his deep melancholy was entirely buried beneath these unliterary, emotional attitudes of absolute rejection and absolute acceptance.

Very little attention was paid to why Manto repeatedly emphasized the reality that, Not every woman is a prostitute, but every prostitute is a woman. (Ismat Farosh, ibid., p. 92) He notes, There must surely come a time when a prostitute strips off the garb of her profession and remains nothing but a woman. However, the ordinary man who visits a brothel has no concern for the woman; his only concern is sex. We do not go to a prostitute's brothel to offer prayers or recite blessings. We go there because, once there, we can freely purchase the sex we desire. (Safed Jhoot, ibid., p. 73)
Yet, what truly agitates Manto's creative mind is not the commodification of sex itself, but the agony of the human soul that arises when the body is reduced to a marketable good. It is the bartering away of human dignity, and the wound of utter helplessness and despair that hollows out existence and renders life absurd. A price can be placed on a commodity, but no price can be placed on the dignity of the human soul. Manto expresses profound regret that one facet of our civilization is such that, For some people, the very

existence of a woman is obscene. There are individuals in this world who can derive sexual pleasure even from sacred texts. (Written statement regarding Dhuan, ibid., p. 66)

Manto raises a poignant question: if this were true, why would God have created woman in the first place? After all, God cannot commit an impure act. Manto despised the moral code that established double standards for men and women. He repeatedly asks, Is morality not the rust that has carelessly gathered on the razor of society? While discussing vulgarity, Manto once remarked, The relationship between a man and a woman is not obscene, nor is the mention of it obscene. If I wish to mention a woman's breast, I will call it a woman's breast; I will not call it a peanut, a table, or a razor. (Ibid., p. 66)

Responding to accusations of obscenity and sensationalism, Manto once stated, I am not a rabble-rouser. I do not wish to stir up hysteria in people's thoughts and emotions. How can I strip away the blouse of civilization, culture, and society when it is already naked? Nor do I attempt to clothe it. That is not my job; it is the job of tailors. (Adab-e-Jadid, ibid., p. 53) It is no minor aspect of Manto's art that, while weaving tales of prostitutes and whores, he repeatedly draws our gaze away from their bodies to offer a glimpse of their souls. Some of Manto's critics have argued that while he attacks the hypocritical morality of the middle class, he appears to compromise with the so-called spiritual values of that very morality when it comes to women. This might appear to be the case on the surface, but the reality is quite the opposite. Manto's driving force is never physical beauty or hedonism; rather, it is the desolation and destitution of the soul. It is

that profound emptiness and deafening silence that strikes terror into the spirit, a place where the specter of death constantly hovers.

Ninety-nine percent of these women possess hearts that, despite the dark trade of prostitution, are far more radiant than the hearts of wicked men... At first glance, a fallen woman's devotion to religion might seem like a sham, but in reality, it represents that part of their soul which they manage to protect from the rust of society... The body can be scarred, but the soul cannot be scarred. (Ismat Farosh, ibid., p. 90)

There is a pressing need to re-examine Manto's fallen characters from this perspective: is Manto merely an artist of physical scars, or is he the artist who transforms the paradox of an unblemished soul into a compelling narrative? In my humble opinion, Manto is far less an artist of commercialized sex or prostitution, and far more an artist of the agony born from a woman's predicament—her inescapable fate. He is an artist of the inner landscape rather than external circumstances. No matter how much the external details and social depictions might suggest that he is merely illustrating the milieu of prostitution, the reality is quite the opposite. Between the lines, it is the landscape of the inner self that continuously unfolds and emerges. Manto seeks to fathom the depths of that profound sorrow which is the destiny of the better half of humanity. The true yearning of Manto, the artist, is the desire to creatively internalize and express the sheer tragedy of this bottomless grief. Let us delve into the texts of a few stories to see this for ourselves.

The most poignant and thought-provoking moment in Kali Shalwar occurs when Sultana has moved from Ambala to Delhi. Despite her visits to holy men and the use of amulets, her business is in a severe slump. Her last bangle has been sold, Khuda Bakhsh disappears for the entire day, and she has no one to care for her. She feels that just as God had abandoned her, Khuda Bakhsh has now done the same. She is left as a destitute, stripped, and helpless soul, wandering aimlessly back and forth along the tracks of life: Across the road was a goods warehouse that stretched from one corner to the other. To the right, under an iron roof, lay massive bales, and heaps of all kinds of merchandise were piled up. To the left was an open field crisscrossed by countless railway tracks. When the iron tracks gleamed in the sunlight, Sultana would look at her own hands, where blue veins bulged exactly like those tracks. In this vast, open field, engines and train cars were constantly in motion, moving this way and that. The chugging and puffing of these engines and carriages echoed endlessly. Early in the morning, when she woke up and came out to the balcony, a strange scene would meet her eyes.

In the dim light, thick smoke would billow from the mouths of the engines, rising toward the murky sky like fat, heavy men. Massive clouds of steam would also rise from the tracks with a loud hiss, dissolving into the air in the blink of an eye. Then, sometimes, when she saw a solitary train carriage rolling down the tracks—pushed and then abandoned by the engine—she would think of herself. She felt as though someone had given her a push on the tracks of life and left her to roll on her own. Other people were switching the points, and she

was just drifting along. Who knew where... Then, one day, the momentum of that push would slowly fade, and she would come to a halt somewhere. At some place she had never seen or known. Manto's creative gaze focuses not on the cosmetics, adornments, or mannerisms of the prostitute, but on her internal state—when, stripped of her outward guise, she remains simply a woman, a tender-hearted woman of flesh and blood. Our literary criticism has paid very little attention to the moment when Manto's art converses with the inner existence of a woman. In truth, labeling Manto a mere writer of erotica is an insult to him. His subject is never the professional prostitute or the decorative doll; rather, his subject is the existential groan of the working woman, the agony of her soul, or the profound

emptiness within her that no one can share. If one looks closely at such moments in Manto's stories, the woman's inner self begins to peek through the contamination of her decorative disguise, much like a bud blossoming as its leaves are pulled back. At such junctures, the existence of the prostitute ceases to be a limited character; instead, it becomes part of the unfathomable symphony of the universe's suffering, harmonizing with the archetype of Woman.

Saugandhi, in the story Hatak (The Insult), is one such frail and feeble woman—starved for a few words of love, drained, trampled upon, helpless, and destitute. Yet, after passing through the extremes of humiliation, she reaches a moment of self-awareness where she appears to command the entirety of a woman's existence. From the very beginning of the story, where Manto describes Saugandhi's simplicity and naivety, her yearning for a few words of affection, her

deception at the hands of Madho, and her continuous exploitation, the seed of the Mother archetype begins to sprout:
What is wrong with me? Saugandhi asked this question of everything before her eyes. The blind gas lamps, the iron poles, the square paving stones of the footpath, and the loose gravel on the road... She looked at all these things one by one, then raised her eyes to the sky bending over her, but Saugandhi received no answer. The answer lay within her. She knew she was not bad; she was good. But she wanted someone to validate this... someone... anyone... If only someone would place a hand on her shoulder right then and simply say, Saugandhi, who says you are bad? Whoever calls you bad is bad themselves... No, there was no special need to even say that. It would be enough for someone to just say, Saugandhi, you are very good!

She began to wonder why she wanted someone to praise her. She had never felt the need for it so intensely before. Why was she looking even at lifeless objects today as if she wanted to impose the feeling of her own goodness upon them? Why was every fiber of her being turning into a 'mother'...? Why was she, as a mother, getting ready to take everything on earth into her lap? Why did she feel the urge to cling to the iron gas pole in front of her and rest her cheeks against its cold metal... her warm, warm cheeks, and suck away all its coldness.

Does the face of the Janani (the Creator/Mother) not peek through the veil of these words—the one who gives birth to man, then endures humiliation at his hands, and reaches the absolute breaking point of her existence? She gathers her shattered pieces, each a symbol of

eternal pain, and then restores the dignity of her existence all by herself. This is the mystery of the cyclical process of creation. Saugandhi is a prostitute, but what is this stirring within her soul? These sentences demand a second look:

Why was she looking even at lifeless objects today as if she wanted to impose the feeling of her own goodness upon them? Why was every fiber of her being turning into a 'mother'...? Why was she, as a mother, getting ready to take everything on earth into her lap? Is this not the face of the vast manifestation of Karuna (compassion), or of maternal love—that is, the elevated creative existence of a woman—which is part of the universe's mysterious symphony? Yet, this symphony only reaches our ears when we close our eyes to the contaminations of superficial, mundane realities and journey into the soul of the text with our inner vision. This undercurrent of compassion flows through the irony of the entire narrative, continuously taking shape in the paradox of Saugandhi and Madho's relationship. Ultimately, in the mysterious silence of the late night, the blinding glare of the flashlight and the Seth's dismissive Ugh shatter the routine. A curse rose from the pit of her stomach and stopped at the tip of her tongue. Who could she curse, after all? The car had already left. Its red tail light was sinking into the darkness of the bazaar before her, and Saugandhi felt as though that red-hot ember of an 'Ugh' was drilling deeper and deeper into her chest.

Given the horrific trauma she endured, whatever happened to Madho was entirely deserved. The way Manto brings out the terror of existence and bitter melancholy here is a marvel of artistic

craftsmanship. The empty, desolate train standing in the shed of life from Kali Shalwar—which serves as a metaphor for female existence in Manto's art—is evoked here as well, creating a profound and haunting sense of emptiness and dead silence:
The mangy dog barked relentlessly, chasing Madho out of the room. When the dog came back down the stairs, wagging its stubby tail, and sat at Saugandhi's feet flapping its ears, she was startled. She looked around and felt a terrifying silence—a silence she had never experienced before. It felt as though everything was entirely hollow, much like a train that, having unloaded all its passengers at various stations, now stands completely alone in an iron shed...

It is not as though Manto's work contains only a single voice—that of the author. Rather, his art is a gallery of diverse voices. The prostitutes in his stories harbor no illusions about their profession. When Madho first meets Saugandhi, he says to her:
Have you no shame haggling over your price? Do you even know what you are trading with me? Tsk, tsk, tsk... Ten rupees, and as you say, two and a half for the pimp's commission. That leaves seven and a half, right? Seven and a half. Now, for these seven and a half rupees, you promise to give me something that you simply cannot give, and I have come to take something that I simply cannot take...

A similar dynamic unfolds in Kali Shalwar. When Sultana meets Shankar in the story, she asks him:

What work do you do?

The same thing you people do.

What?
What do you do?

I... I... I don't do anything.

I don't do anything either.

Sultana said in irritation, That makes no sense. You must do something or the other.

You must do something or the other too.

I just waste my time.

I waste my time too.

Then come, let's waste time together.

I am at your service. But I never pay a price for wasting time. Come to your senses... this is not a charity kitchen.

And I am not a volunteer either.

I am not a bloody fool either.

But that man Khuda Bakhsh who lives with you is definitely a bloody fool.

In the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, Manto's art is not monologic; rather, like Dostoevsky, it is dialogic or polyphonic. Multiple layers of thought and various voices emerge simultaneously, and the author allows the differing perspectives of his characters to surface freely. He does not try to force a false unity upon them by subordinating them to his own ideology. While Manto's characters are born of the author, they do not simply dissolve into his personal worldview. A very different and fascinating character is Babu Gopi Nath. Interestingly, the author is present as a narrator from beginning to end in this story, and the piercing sentence that paves the way for a moment of weary, remorseful irony at the conclusion belongs to him. Yet, this story is truly a dancing gallery of characters: Abdul Rahim Sando, Ghaffar Sain, Ghulam Ali, the Kashmiri dove Zeenat Begum, the teen patoti ful ful footi Mrs. Abdul Rahim alias Sardar Begum, Muhammad Shafiq Tusi, Muhammad Yaseen, Ghulam Hussain, and so on. Every character, major or minor, possesses their own attitude, style, mannerisms, and psychology, speaking from their own perspective, in their own language and idiom.

It can be said without fear of contradiction that a better example of polyphony is rarely found in the Urdu short story. Babu Gopi Nath is seemingly a bundle of contradictions, but Manto has sculpted the truth of his actions in such a way that a profound human coherence emerges. Babu Gopi Nath cares deeply for Zeenat. Every comfort is provided for her, yet there is a strange tension between the two. Babu Gopi Nath is fond of the company of mendicants and pimps. He has already decided that once his wealth runs out, he will go and sit at some shrine. A prostitute's brothel and a saint's shrine—these are the

only two places where his heart finds peace. Because in both these places, from the floor to the ceiling, there is nothing but deception. For a man who wants to deceive himself, what better place could there be? ... At a brothel, parents make their children prostitute themselves, and at shrines and tombs, man prostitutes his God. There is a strange kind of dark humour in Babu Gopi Nath's patronage of prostitutes and sycophants, as well as in Zeenat's naivety—or rather, her apathy. It feels as though Manto is ripping apart the seams of this brothel culture, examining from the inside out the very class whose ironies allow such a repulsive environment to thrive. Yet, Manto shows that even within this atmosphere of deceit and filth, there is a silver lining of cheerfulness, banter, sincerity, and sacrifice. However, this is not the kind of sacrifice meant to be flaunted or proclaimed; rather, it is a selfless devotion whose light bursts forth from within like a spring. It involves no bargaining, no transaction, no ulterior motive, and no taking—it is purely about giving.

In truth, even sacrifice is too trivial a word for this kind of emotion. It seems that Manto's art reached its zenith in bringing out the compassion and maternal instinct (mamta) buried within a prostitute's soul through the character of Saugandhi, and Babu Gopi Nath is simply the other side of that same coin—the masculine side. The way Manto has extracted this light from the darkness of the depravity, extortion, and malice of pimps and hustlers is a feat unique to him. Waris Alvi did mention this compassion, albeit towards the end of his analysis, but he failed to grasp the true spirit of this maternal instinct.

But the discussion does not end with Saugandhi or Babu Gopi Nath. In Manto's work, this coin is constantly flipped. If Saugandhi is heads, Babu Gopi Nath is tails; and if Babu Gopi Nath is tails, then Janki, Mozail, or the Ghatan woman from Bu (Odour) are heads. Generally, if maternal instinct is understood as a wellspring of love and service, then who could fulfill this expectation better than Janki? Although Janki is not a prostitute, she passes from the possession of one man to another. The mold and demands of her exploitation keep changing, but what remains unchanged are Janki's emotions, which continue to shower the essence of maternal love.

She arrives in Bombay from Peshawar. In Peshawar, she was Aziz's lover and spent day and night caring for him. From his medicines and medical treatments to his food, drink, and clothing, Janki took care of everything, and she did it all out of her own free will and devotion. After coming to Bombay, she gradually began taking care of Saeed. Aziz did not like this behavior of hers. Later, when Saeed also left her, she formed a relationship with Narayan. No matter who the man is or what his qualities might be, Janki remains Janki—an overflowing spring of love, goodness, and sacrifice.
It is worth pausing for a moment to consider whether the woman Manto searches for within these prostitute characters stems from an image hidden deep within his mind or the hazy depths of his subconscious—an image that finds its ultimate expression in such characters. Not much is known about Manto's childhood. However, the limited information provided by his biographers reveals that his father was an incredibly strict and callous man. He did have brothers, but they were half-brothers. In such circumstances, it was only his

mother, Bibi Jan, who could fill this void, and whose loving embrace served as Manto's sole refuge.

The figure of the mother is deeply embedded in Manto's subconscious. He is constantly searching for the sorrow inherent in motherhood. It is evident that, from the very beginning, Manto's mind was a crucible of pain and anguish. The inner groans of his soul can be heard in several places:

O God, O Lord of the Worlds... O Merciful, O Beneficent... take Saadat Hasan Manto away from this world... a world where he does not open his eyes in the light, but stumbles around in the dark... where he laughs when he should cry, and cries when he should laugh... (Pas-e-Manzar, ibid., p. 159)

For Manto, love, motherhood, and sorrow are not separate realities; they are different names for the same truth. The profound sense of sorrow or melancholy that repeatedly surfaces in Manto's work is not far removed from the elevated concept of karuna (compassion) found in Buddhist philosophy. As Manto wrote in one of his pieces: Sorrow is the fate of humanity. Sorrow is Saadat Hasan Manto. This sorrow is you. This sorrow is the entire world. (Kasauti, ibid., p. 86)

The fundamental truth of Manto's art is that he understood humanity through the lens of sorrow. When writing about women, Manto repeatedly asserts that the body can be scarred, but not the soul. He argues that prostitutes are far more God-fearing and compassionate than the men who come to purchase their bodies. For their salvation, these women always turn to some idol, some saint, or some deeply

held belief. Or perhaps, this kind of spiritual devotion is the one part of their existence that they manage to save from the trade of prostitution.

Viewed in this context, the existential dimensions of the story Mozail are entirely different. Mozail rebels against all religious symbols and outward displays of piety. She is a cheerful, lively, and carefree Jewish girl who constantly mocks Tarlochan and the strict, traditional appearance of the Sikh man. Yet, when the time comes, this very Mozail stands by Tarlochan. When the riots break out, she bravely accompanies him into the violence-stricken areas, and in the process of saving Tarlochan's fiancée, Kirpal Kaur, she herself falls victim to the rioters. Here, the setting is not a brothel, nor is the character a prostitute. However, through Mozail, Manto once again succeeds in proving that in an hour when barbarity has become the norm and humanity has fallen into the abyss of sin, an ordinary, free-spirited, and carefree girl can emerge as a ray of light and a savior.

To many, mentioning the story Bu (Odor) here might seem out of place, as it features neither a prostitute nor any theme of salvation. In fact, it does not even deal with questions of sin and virtue, or crime and punishment. Earlier, we discussed various characters in Manto's stories and their different attitudes, referring to them as voices. The Ghatan woman in Bu barely speaks a single word throughout the entire story. It is only when she struggles to untie the knot of her rain-soaked blouse that she mutters something under her breath in Marathi. Aside from that brief utterance, the entire story is enveloped in silence and stillness. Yet, this very silence, along with the Ghatan

woman's quiet physical presence, becomes the voice that imbues the story with profound meaning.
This story can also be read as an allegory for the changing of the seasons, the falling of raindrops quenching the earth's thirsty womb, or the cosmic union of Purusha (spirit) and Prakriti (nature). There is a strange mysticism and rapture within it. The way Manto has woven this narrative in a state of creative absorption—repeatedly mentioning the gathering clouds, the rustling of the peepal leaves, and the bathing in tiny raindrops—allows the Ghatan woman to repeatedly emerge on the canvas of the mind as the embodiment of Prakriti.

It was during these very rainy days. Outside the window, the peepal leaves... trembled like chandeliers in the milky darkness of the night... When he pressed his chest against hers, every pore of Randhir's body heard the music of the plucked strings of the girl's body. But where was that sound? That call which he had inhaled through the odor of the Ghatan girl's body... a call more joyous than the cry of a child thirsting for milk, a call that had slipped out of the realm of dreams and become voiceless.

Similarly, at the end of the story, when it is not the Ghatan woman lying beside him, but a fair-skinned girl whose body is as soft as dough kneaded in milk and ghee, the imagery of raindrops and clouds returns.

Randhir was looking out the window. Right beside him, the rain-washed peepal leaves were swaying. He was trying to look far beyond their intoxicating tremors, to a place where a strange, peculiar light

seemed to dissolve into the muddy clouds... exactly like the light he had seen in the Ghatan girl's chest. A light that was muted like a mysterious conversation, yet entirely clear.
To read this story merely as a tale of sexual gratification is an insult to Manto. Throughout the narrative, the concept of the Ghatan woman is less physical and far more transcendent.

A strange, peculiar glow had emerged upon those dusky, youthful breasts that were entirely untouched—a glow that was a radiance, yet not quite a radiance. The curves on her chest looked like two earthen lamps burning upon the murky waters of a pond.
Randhir is Purusha and the Ghatan woman is Prakriti—seemingly passive, yet holding all of existence in her embrace, both the giver and receiver of comfort and ultimate bliss.

Finally, a few brief references to some of Manto's lesser-known stories. For instance, in Sharda, Phubha Bai, and Burmi Larki (The Burmese Girl), the woman once again emerges as a wellspring of goodness, love, selflessness, and sacrifice. In Burmi Larki, the girl arrives like a breath of the morning breeze, stays in a flat with two young men for a few days, and then vanishes just as suddenly. The girl departs, but she leaves the indelible mark of her elegance, her femininity, and her maternal warmth on every object in the flat—a presence that the two young men find themselves remembering time and time again.

Unlike the Burmese Girl (Burmi Larki), both Phobha Bai (Shobha Bai) and Sharda are fundamentally mothers. Sharda's existence is even

more complete because her motherhood encompasses not just a mother, but also a sister, a wife, and a prostitute, and none of these facets conflict with one another. Phobha Bai is a far more tragic figure; she comes to the city and engages in prostitution to provide for the son she left behind. Unfortunately, her son dies, and Phobha Bai—who was trying to protect the mother within her under the guise of her profession—is utterly destroyed. Similarly, in Sarak Ke Kinare (By the Roadside), the woman does become a mother, but her motherhood remains incomplete in the sense that she cannot mother her own child and is forced to abandon the baby by the roadside in the dark of night. Regarding the wounded soul of the woman, the question Manto raises here is less sexual and more existential:

Two souls shrinking to become one, and upon becoming one, expanding with passionate vastness... is all this just poetry...? No, two souls certainly shrink to reach that tiny point which expands to become the universe... but in this universe, why is one soul sometimes left wounded...? Is it for the crime of helping the other soul reach that tiny point?

In short, this tragedy is human destiny. The shadow of this tragedy constantly hovers over Manto's creative mind, continually biting at his peace. Manto's subconscious largely carves its forms and extracts its nectar from the poison of this very tragedy. Manto's fallen women and prostitutes are born of this tragedy, forged from the blending of its poison and nectar. Time and again, this tragedy creates a restlessness in Manto where the boundaries between certainty and uncertainty blur.

Actually, these days I have reached a place where no distinction can be made between belief and denial. Where you understand and yet do not understand. Sometimes it feels as if the entire world has come into my grasp, and sometimes the thought arises that we are crawling like an ant on the body of an elephant. (Letter to Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Nuqoosh Manto Number)

From this discussion, it becomes evident that in its highest moments, Manto's art has the courage to harmonize with the mysteries of the universe, and in this mysterious symphony, Manto's note is one of tragedy and compassion. Manto discovered through life's experience that the most wounded soul in the universe is that of the woman, who is forced to sell her most precious asset in the workshop of existence. Yet, instead of holding man's moral bankruptcy and lust accountable, it is the woman who is condemned and stigmatized. Manto tears away the veil of doxa precisely to strip the elite bare. Manto's art is the art of fathoming the groans and the profound depths of the woman's wounded soul. This is why Manto's characters so often become far more real, far more enduring, and far more poignant than ordinary flesh-and-blood humans. They shock us, shake us, and pierce us. Their aesthetic impact is immortal because, in the mysterious symphony of life, they herald certain notes of tragedy, compassion, pathos, and maternal love that are part of the fundamental rhythm of nature's workshop—notes that are not easy to name.



Prof Rajiender Toki, D.Litt

Dr. Rajendra Toki (also spelled Dr. Rajinder Toki) is a well-known Hindi writer, poet, and retired head of the Hindi department from A.S. College, Khanna

Radio Plays and Manto

Dr. Rajendra Toki

Manto worked as an Urdu playwright at the radio station. It is important to remember here that Manto had entered the realm of radio after having already established himself as a writer of short stories and screenplays in Bombay. He was well-versed in the techniques of screenwriting and had already gained fame as a storyteller. Thanks to his innate talent and understanding, he mastered the art of the radio play as well. While his radio plays were a product of his employment, they were also born out of financial hardship. In the preface to the collection *Aao...* (Come...), he wrote: "These plays are the outcome of the struggle for bread—a challenge that confronts every Urdu writer in India until they become completely mentally incapacitated. I was hungry; that is why I wrote these plays. I seek credit for the fact that my mind ventured into the realm of my empty stomach to pen these few humorous plays—plays that have made others laugh but failed to bring even the faintest smile to my own lips."

It has not been possible to accurately determine the total number of plays Manto wrote, as not all of them were published, even though they were broadcast. Even if we consider Manto's own statement—"By now, I have written over a hundred radio features and plays that have been broadcast from various All India Radio stations"—the fact remains that not all of these plays and features are available today. Thus, based on the works that have survived, it can be said that Manto

wrote both excellent radio plays and lighthearted ones—much like his short stories. Manto's achievement lies in the fact that, while he elevated the standard of radio plays, he also carved out a significant place for himself among the literary plays that emerged from the 1930s onwards. Regarding radio plays, to quote Brij Premi, "In this genre too, Manto moved forward by shunning well-trodden paths and carved out a unique route for himself. His plays do not employ the techniques found in textbooks; instead, they feature a technique entirely his own—one that is both unique and beautiful." This aspect will be discussed in greater detail when we talk about Manto's plays.

While reading Manto's plays, a question repeatedly arises: do they resemble the plays of that era—works that were idealistic, upheld traditional values, conveyed messages through virtuous characters, glorified Indian culture, or masked family conflicts with a veneer of idealism? Other playwrights of the time engaged in this practice extensively. Since radio was a state-controlled medium, such themes were highly favored. Manto's plays do not follow a pre-set formula, nor did he adopt any of those conventional themes. Manto's plays are uniquely his own. He attempted to touch upon facets of life that, at the time, few—if any—dared to explore. He did not adopt the traditional approach to playwriting. Consequently, these plays evoke a sense of novelty and, from the perspective of radio broadcasting, appear remarkably bold. It is not that Manto lacked idealism, but his method of presenting it was distinctive. His idealism is never imposed; rather, it emerges organically as an integral part of the drama. Take, for instance, Manto's significant and noteworthy play, *Jebkatra* (The Pickpocket). Kashi attempts to reform himself, inspired by Vimal;

however, the decision he ultimately makes—driven by frustration with his own habits—reveals his inner morality. Yet, the irony that emerges from Vimal's perspective lends a... It emerges as a piece of satire. This is the play's most significant feature. Although reading it reminded me of O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi" and Maupassant's "The Diamond Necklace," the resemblance lies solely in the element of a startling twist at the end.

"Is Manjhdhar Mein" (In Mid-Stream) is frequently cited among Manto's finest plays. This play not only reveals Manto's psychological insight into his characters but also highlights a narrative approach that set him apart from his contemporary playwrights; such plays were not the norm in the radio drama landscape of that era. Manto has crafted this piece with great intricacy. The psychological turmoil experienced by Majeed, Saeeda, Asgari, and Amjad is portrayed beautifully. Regarding this play, Manto scholar Dr. Brajpremi observes, "A drama of this genre is not found in Manto's previously published works. In this play, Manto appears deeply influenced by D.H. Lawrence. While echoes of Lawrence's notoriously controversial novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can be heard here, the unique twist Manto gives to the subject matter truly showcases his artistic brilliance." Amjad, the play's protagonist, is physically incapacitated, much like the protagonist of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; he is unable to either receive anything from his wife or give anything to her. Manto has beautifully depicted this psychological conflict. Asgari is introduced as a maidservant, yet she is intimately aware of everyone's inner struggles. It is she who guides Amjad, leading him by the hand, and it is she who inspires him to follow the path she has chosen by

taking her own life. Asgari's existence is inextricably linked to Amjad's, making her suicide a logical consequence. Brij Premi finds Asgari's suicide unsettling—a view that is not justified.

Two of Manto's plays—'Tedhi Lakeer' and 'Salima'—serve as fine examples of the creation of complex characters. While one play highlights the intricate psyche of a male character, the other explores that of a female. Javed is so obsessed with doing something new and unique that he even abducts his own wife, thereby demonstrating a twisted nature akin to the title of his play, 'Tedhi Lakeer' (Crooked Line). 'Salima' [explores] complex female psychology ...she conceals her true identity. Wearing a mask of harshness and rudeness, she lives while hiding her poverty; she even breathes her last while maintaining this facade born of pride. 'Kamra Number Nau' (Room Number Nine) is a similar play, wherein the protagonist, Nasir, assumes the guise of the mysterious tenant of Room Number Nine to woo his beloved. Manto is a master at portraying the various facets of love; it is a subject close to his heart. Even while mocking or satirizing love, Manto captures the romance blossoming between a man and a woman from multiple angles, fully acknowledging its inherent ironies. This remains the central theme of most of Manto's plays. 'Kabootari', 'Neeli Ragen', 'Akeli', 'Randhir Pehalwan', 'Choodiyan', 'Sari', 'Mohabbat Ki Paidaish', 'Eid Card', and 'Tohfa' are among such works. These plays articulate the spirit of total surrender in love, the willingness to go to any lengths for it, and the circumstances surrounding the pursuit of the beloved. In 'Kabootari', despite being innocent, Durgi is killed by a bullet fired by her husband—a police inspector—yet it is Kambalposh who holds himself responsible for her

death; he had loved her deeply, and it was precisely because of the suspicion surrounding this love that the poor woman lost her life.

A similar situation, albeit with slight variations, emerges in 'Randhir Pehalwan'. Savitri loves Shamu. Her father, a *zamindar* (landlord), hires the wrestler Randhir Pehalwan to kill Shamu. However, since Randhir is aware of the love between Savitri and Shamu—and is himself in love with Savitri—he kills the 'zamindar' instead and reveals the truth to save Shamu from the police. Randhir's final dialogue in the play reveals its poignant nature: "No, Savitri! I am a cruel, sinful man. I have no right to love; there is a stone, not a heart, in my chest..." In the play 'Sari', the poet fails to gift a sari to the heroine, Malti; consequently, she marries a wealthy merchant who piles up saris for her. The poet then buys saris by selling his own poetry. Malti perceives this not as an act of love, but as the poet selling his verses to exact revenge upon her. This same irony takes on a new form in the play 'Akeli' (Alone). Sushila leaves the man she loves, while her former lover is bent on seeking revenge against her husband, Kishore. In *Intezaar* (The Wait) and 'Intezaar Ka Doosra Rukh' (The Other Side of the Wait), the state of mind while awaiting a beloved—the yearning to meet, the petty lies and ruses accompanying that emotional state, and the illusion of being ignored upon finally crossing paths—creates an irony that shifts the very meaning of the play. In reality, these are two scenes from the same play, written to present the perspectives of both the woman and the man.

In the play 'Tohfa' (The Gift), Jugal—a man branded a vagabond, a scoundrel, a rogue, and a lowlife—departs from the world after offering the gift of his tears to Sheila, who is Ganesh's wife. A blend

of humor, satire, and absurdity is masterfully displayed in plays like 'Commission', 'Bimaar' (Sick), and 'Main Andar Aa Sakta Hoon' (May I Come In?). While 'Commission' portrays a biting satire on politics—a theme that has emerged in an even more ironic light today—'Bimaar' targets the unsolicited advice people tend to offer. 'Main Andar Aa Sakta Hoon' (May I Come In?) is a serious play wrapped in a unique brand of satire; it delivers a scathing critique of society by revealing the male sense of ownership, ego, and entitlement, while portraying a brothel as a space free from conventional restrictions. In the play 'Karvat' (The Turn), Manto deftly exposes the brutality lurking beneath the mask of a respectable, refined social reformer.

Another of Manto's plays is 'Journalist'; it satirizes the exploitation of journalists and the socio-economic plight of those who refuse to submit to it. In the words of Brij Premi, "It is a significant play by Manto. The protagonist is Manto's friend and mentor, Bari Alig, and the play depicts the harrowing realities that defined Bari Alig's life. The truth is that most journalists in India at that time faced similar circumstances. Thus, the character of Bari serves as a representative and symbol of that class, laying bare the story of their social destitution and economic helplessness." Rooted in the realities of life, this play—instead of earning the appreciation of journalists—drew their condemnation. Perhaps Manto was destined to remain mired in controversy. People—even educated journalists—could not stomach Manto's portrayal of reality, even though they themselves were forced to live lives just as wretched, if not worse. Venturing beyond his usual themes, Manto wrote a play titled 'Rooh Ka Natak' (Drama of the Soul). It is based on the concept of the three forms of the soul; Manto

himself states, "This drama unfolds within the soul over a span of half a second." "Countless dramas play out within our souls every day, yet no one has ever presented them, nor has anyone tried to understand why these dramas occur." This is a symbolic play in which the emotional self kills the conscience; unable to fully indulge its desires and pleasures, it ultimately commits suicide driven by its own emotionality. Despite being rooted in a conceptual premise, it is a significant and unique play. In essence, Manto sought to articulate the conflict between an individual's reason and emotion through the medium of the soul. People often let emotion dictate their actions, thereby stifling their reason—a dynamic that has been dramatized here.

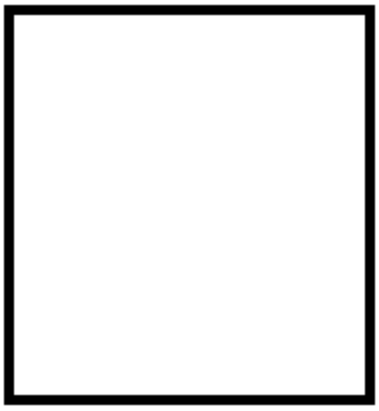
Manto also adapted one of his finest stories, 'Hatak', into a play. Beautifully crafted, this play retains the same spirit and tone as the original story. It is noteworthy that creating a play centered on a sex worker—specifically for the prudish state-run radio—was a significant achievement for Manto, capturing the inner yearning of a woman through the character of 'Sugandhi'. Manto has skillfully captured this essence in his plays. One such collection is 'Janaze' (Funerals), in which he focuses on the final moments of historical figures—kings and sultans—renowned for their tyrannical rule. The last hours of figures such as Rasputin, Napoleon, Timur, Cleopatra, Babur, Genghis Khan, Tipu Sultan, and Shah Jahan have been dramatized here. These plays reveal the depth of Manto's scholarship and his profound understanding of history. Written as allegories, they vividly unveil the aspirations, dreams, and tragic ends of these prominent figures. In these works, Manto employs historically authentic facts while

simultaneously showcasing his dramatic sensibility; the characters' dialogues align perfectly with their natures and the temperaments typical of their respective eras.

The discussion would remain incomplete without mentioning another of Manto's play collections, 'Aao...' (Come...). Although these plays are lighthearted, humorous, and—in Manto's own words—"born of the need to earn a living," they certainly demonstrate his versatility. Each play in the collection begins with the word "Aao..." (e.g., Aao Kahani Likhein [Let's Write a Story], Aao Taash Khelein [Let's Play Cards], Aao Chori Karein [Let's Steal], Aao Jhooth Bolein [Let's Tell Lies], Aao Radio Sunein [Let's Listen to the Radio]); notably, the same three characters appear in every play. These works depict various facets of domestic life. Manto's lighthearted plays offer ample evidence of his keen observation, his mastery of satire, and his artistic ability to create something significant out of seemingly nothing. The collection *Teen Auratein* (Three Women) serves as further proof of this; here, too, the same three women feature as characters in every play. These two collections by Manto—featuring characters with distinct names, behaviors, and appearances—represented a novel experiment at the time, and in a sense, they remain so today. Manto's urge to break away from convention is clearly evident here. The ending provided for the story in *Aao Kahani Likhein* (Let's Write a Story) is one that only Manto could have conceived. In *Teen Khamosh Auratein* (Three Silent Women), the three women—despite claiming to be reticent—speak incessantly, even accusing one another of talking too much; it is in this very situation that both humor and irony emerge. Such is the nature of these farcical plays.

Reading Manto's plays, one fact stands out clearly: his characters are ordinary people. Whether it is a pickpocket, the rogue Randhir or Jugal, the 'Kambalposh' (Blanket-clad man), or the characters from *Hatak* (Insult)—all are thoroughly ordinary individuals navigating dramatic life situations. The characters in Manto's short stories are equally ordinary. Impoverished, insignificant, neglected, and ostracized figures reveal their essential humanity. This lies at the very heart of Manto's message; it is precisely within these sordid, downtrodden characters that he sought and found humanity. To quote Brijpremi: "His plays feature beautiful plots, much like his short stories; through artistic mastery and eloquent dialogue, he generates dramatic action that breathes new life into them." Unlike the conventional plays of that era, Manto's plays do not have 'closed' endings or 'all's well that ends well' resolutions. Instead, they conclude at the climax of a dramatic situation, making them open-ended—a characteristic that sets them apart from other plays. Manto provided extensive stage directions in his plays. Since he personally directed the radio productions of these works, the directions are highly practical and well-conceived. He facilitated the direction of these radio plays by specifying details such as vocal characteristics (e.g., Ranveer Pehalwan's 'deep and gruff' voice; Asgari's melodious voice in 'Is Manjhdhar'; Durgi's fearful, hushed tone in *Kabootari*), cues for music volume (loud or soft), and instructions for superimposing voices and music. These dramatic cues greatly enhance the communicative impact of the plays. Manto also incorporated songs, ghazals, and poetic verses wherever appropriate. It appears that alongside works by Iqbal, Ghalib, and Daagh, Manto

penned some original poetry himself—a fact that seems to have gone unnoticed. Here too, he employed these elements only where necessary. The precision with which Manto tailored the dialogue to suit each character significantly elevates the importance of these plays; the dialogue of every character clearly… …capable of revealing [them]. The dialogue—ranging from the satirical and the psychological to the philosophical and the intensely pragmatic—enables Manto's plays to create an atmosphere perfectly suited to their themes. Today, the very existence of theatre is under threat, let alone radio drama. Television, cinema, and now mobile phones have completely transformed the structure of life; in such a context, stage plays and radio dramas have become relics of a bygone era. Even today, despite employing new technologies—such as direct messaging to mobile phones or broadcasting telephone conversations—radio continues to uphold its traditional roots. Meanwhile, FM radio has overshadowed this traditional state-run medium. Under these circumstances, who would—or why would anyone—speak of radio drama? Perhaps this is why there has been no serious research into Manto's plays, nor has any eminent scholar taken the trouble to discuss them in depth. This brief article on Manto's plays has been written simply to ensure they are not forgotten.



Ghulam Mohammed Ansari

Sketching and Sa'adat Hasan Manto...

Ghulam Mohammed Ansari

Saadat Hasan Manto was born on 11 May 1912 in Ludhiana. In this sense, the year 2012 was celebrated as "Manto Century" all over the world. Today, before we try to understand Manto as a mythicist and a contemplative sketcher, it is important to know the early circumstances of Manto's life.

Manto opened his eyes on May 11, 1912 in Samarala, Ludhiana. His father was posted in a tehsil of Ludhiana. Minto's friends called him Tommy. Manto's life remains subdued due to the presence of his step-siblings and the strictness of his father. While, Manto's mother was his supporter. Manto's interest in education was low since childhood. In 1921, Manto was admitted to MAO Middle School. But his career was not encouraging. Manto passed the matriculation examination in 1931 after failing three times. Manto also attended college but could not do anything special. However, let us first try to understand Manto as a sketch writer.

In this regard, Dr. Khaliq Anjum writes that "The art of sketching is a very difficult art. If it is called the art of ghazal in prose, then it will not be wrong. Just as a long and deep meaning has to be expressed in a ghazal, in the same way in a sketch one has to throw light on the whole personality in short words."

In Urdu, famous names like Mirza Farhatullah Baig, Patras Bukhari, Dr. Abdul Haq, Khawaja Hassan Nizami and Rashid Ahmed Siddiqui appear in the field of sketching. Continuing this trend, the way Manto has drawn the sketches, the sketches are very unique and close to reality. Manto is an accomplished fiction writer as well as a prolific sketch artist. The sketches of his subjects are rich in artistic qualities. Importantly, one of Manto's unique style was that Manto would depict the character he was sketching, with his strengths and weaknesses.

Minto wrote, "A flat face, a freckled forehead, a thick nose, dark brown complexion, disheveled hair, large eyes and a slight sadness in his features."

Manto's approach to sketching was that it should be a representation of reality. In his essay "GanjeFarishte", he condemned this method of traditional biographies and sketches. By which man is made an angel. Manto writes, "I curse the world, the country, the society, where it is a principle that every person's character after death is sent to the laundry, from where it comes washed and hang on the stake of "RahmatullahAlaihi".

One of Manto's books is "Loudspeaker". Which, contains 10 sketches. The composition and technique of those sketches is also in the style of "GanjeFarishte".But, their behavior is not like the stories. Some sketches follow general principles. For example, Dewan Singh, Muftoon, Chirag Hasan Hasrat and Noor Jahan. The best sketch is the

"Sitara". Importantly, Manto is cautious about someone he doesn't know very well, yet never lets the narrative feel weak.

Another important thing is that Manto wrote sketches on those whom he could contact directly. Only Muhammad Ali Jinnah's sketch is based on his driver's impressions. Because of these sketches many details of Manto's life are found. Especially in Lahore, Amritsar, Delhi, Mumbai and Pune, there are many things about the day and night of Manto's life that can be understood only with the help of Manto's sketches.

Another important point is that the cultural and intellectual life of that time was dominated by literature, journalism, radio and film, and Manto belonged to all these fields. Not only this, but the centers of Manto's activities, such as Lahore for journalism, Delhi for radio and Mumbai for film, Manto had close ties with all these cities. Not only this, Manto was well acquainted with Urdu writers, eminent journalists, radio artistes and eminent directors of the film world, right down to the junior staff of the studio.

Prominent Urdu critic Professor Waris Alvi wrote that"A sketch writer must have a quick memory, an interest in scandals, an ability to pick up the necessary information in gossip, and all these interests are without purpose.

Reading Manto's sketches, one is amazed at how vast his knowledge was in every field. Manto immediately remembers the names of

institutions, agencies, roads, houses and personalities." Waris Alvi has described Manto's best sketch as "Pari ChehraNaseem".According to Waris Alvi, the sketching of Manto also begins with this sketch. He further writes that Manto has succeeded in capturing Naseem's beauty with his pen. Her beauty has the dignity and power of queens.

Therefore, whatever the form of "Naseem" may be, "Naseem" in any outfit, in the studio or at home, the beauty of "Naseem" casts its magic everywhere."

Regarding "Pari Chehra Naseem", Manto said, "I saw "Naseem Bano" three or four times without make-up. So, I thought that there can be no other woman better than "Naseem" for decoration. That place, that corner, where "Naseem" sits or stands. becomes beautiful."

However, it can be said that Manto is an artist of life's bitterness and bloodlust. Unfavourable conditions of life kept Manto largely away from the sense of pleasures and joys. That is why, whether it is a story, a fiction or a sketch, Manto did not settle for the simple. Manto's innovative nature finds significance in even the smallest details and this is the reason that distinguishes Manto from other Urdu writers and from rest of the short story written across the globe.

(Courtesy: Kashmir Images)



Naresh Nadeem

Works at Poets & Writers and authored eight books, edited about a dozen and translated more than 200 books since 1984.

Politics *a la* Manto

Naresh 'Nadeem'

The present paper is an attempt to bring out how Manto was one of the finest products of the progressive cultural movement of our country and upheld its values and tradition despite all his idiosyncrasies.

THE title of the paper may sound puzzling as Sa'ādat Hasan Manto (May 11, 1912 -- January 18, 1955) was not known to have been associated with any political party or group; rather he, a maverick, was by his very nature not cut out for any such association. Yet it does not mean that he was oblivious to the political events and phenomena of his day. On the contrary, he had had very definite views about the politics of his day and he did not hesitate to express them in one way or another, in his own outspoken manner.

First of all, we need to underline that Manto was one of the four pillars of Urdu fiction that came up after Munshi Premchand (1880-1936) left the scene. These four were Ismat Chaghtāi, Krishna Chander, Rājinder Singh Bedi and Sa'ādat Hasan Manto, who all took the art of story writing to new heights. Before them, however, the publication of *Angāre* (*Embers*) in December 1932 had already created a sensation in the world of Urdu literature and while a large section decried and

condemned it, *Angāre* did give Urdu literature a new direction. A number of writers including Ismat Chaghtāi and poets like Kaifi Āzmi have openly expressed their indebtedness to this collection that included five short stories by Sajjād Zaheer, two by Ahmed Ali, a very short story and a play by Dr Rashīd Jahān, and a short story by the latter's husband, Sāhebzādā Mehmūd-uz-Zafar.(1)

As for Manto, some of his writings make it clear that he had his own prejudices against the *Angāre* team, and more so against Rashīd Jahān and her husband, but yet he appears to be the true inheritor of the *Angāre* tradition insofar as fearlessness and outspokenness are concerned. None except Ismat Chaghtāi, that tigress of Urdu fiction, stands equal to him in this regard. It is to be noted here that Manto suffered five court cases and Ismat one in their literary careers.

I

Coming to Manto in particular, we would like to begin from near the end and talk of one of his later creations, viz "Tobā Teksingh," which many people consider to be *the best* creative writing on the theme of the country's Partition. The fact is that the Partition affected four linguistic groups in the main --- those speaking Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi and Bengali. While the present writer has direct access to Urdu, Punjabi and also Hindi literature, he read the Bengali writings on Partition in translation, and he has no compunction in saying that on Partition he has *so far* not come across any such writing that could match "Tobā Teksingh" in depth or intensity of feelings. It has been correctly said that here Manto is reaping the crop below the surface. Therefore when the late Shri Bhīsham Sāhnī of *Tamas* fame edited in

Hindi a collection of short stories on the theme of Partition and titled it *Kitne Tobā Teksingh!* (*How Many Tobā Teksinghs!*), certainly there was nothing surprising in it.(2)

In this short story whose plot is set in the premises of a mental asylum, the inmates hear that a new country called Pakistan has been created, but are not able to know anything substantial about it, more so because, to the authorities, these insane people are not fit to be told anything serious, lest their ailment gets aggravated. This only adds to their agony as they have heard that there is going to take place a transfer of insane people too between India and Pakistan. It is in this situation that one of the inmates asks another: "What thing after all this Pakistan is?," and the other one solemnly replies, after an amount of serious thinking: "It is a place in India where *usture* (old style razors with wooden handles) are made."

But, was it just a joke cracked by a known maverick? In fact, *this was Manto's own way of underlining the existential meaninglessness of the very two-nation theory that led to the creation of Pakistan*, and Manto wrote these lines while he was living his last days in Lahore, the very city where the Muslim League had adopted its Pakistan resolution in 1940.

What Manto really thought about the demand for Pakistan can be surmised from his excessively short story called "Mutari," which was written some time in the mid-1940s. This story of just one page is one of his most penetrating writings, though it is not palatable to everyone and we saw in a function some high-class ladies making faces when this story was being read out from the podium.

The story has the setting of a public urinal of Bombay which is called *mutari* in the local parlance, a place where a foul odour always pervades the surrounding atmosphere, and there is no doubt that the scene of action is a very unusual one. One day a man enters a *mutarī* to relieve himself, sees on the wall facing him a slogan filthily abusing the idea of "akhand Bhārat" (undivided India) and feels that the foul smell of the place has increased manifold. Later, on some other day, he sees on the same wall another slogan similarly abusing the idea of Pakistan and he gets the same feeling once again. However, on a third occasion some time later, he sees a third slogan filthily abusing *both* the communal groups and he feels as though a fresh, pleasant wind has blown from somewhere.(3)

Manto wrote this story when the atmosphere in the country was highly surcharged. In his own words,

This was the period when the Briton was drawing maps on rough copies for India's vivisection. Having thrown a burning ember into the dried hay, this Bi Jamālo was making space for herself to stand and enjoy the spectacle.

Hindu-Muslim riots had begun when I entered the Bombay Talkies. Just as wickets fly and boundaries come up in cricket matches, people's heads were flying and fires were coming up in these riots.

This comes from his pen-sketch of the late Ashok Kumar, a noted film actor of yore who was a close friend of Manto.(4)

Manto's own agonising sense of grief over the situation knew no bounds. This comes out from many of his writings, including his pen-sketch of Shyam, another renowned film actor of the day, who was a very close friend and for some time a room-mate of our writer. Manto writes:

Hindus and Muslims were dying in droves. Questions like how they were dying and why they were dying, had had numerous answers --- Hindstani answer, Pakistani answer, British answer. There was an answer to every question, but no answer came forth when it was a question of finding out the truth in any answer. Someone would say: Search for it in the relics of the Ghadar.(5) Another would say: No, this you would find in the East India Company's rule. Someone would suggest about going still back and searching for it in the history of the Mughal dynasty. All were going back and back and back, while the murderers and the marauders were coming increasingly forward and were writing such a history of blood and iron as has no parallel in the history of the world.

Hindstan had got free; Pakistan had got free immediately after coming into existence; but man was still enslaved in both the dominions --- a slave of prejudices, a slave of religious fanaticism, a slave of animality and barbarity!

II

Why Manto quit the Bombay Talkies where he was a script/dialogue writer, has its own share of agony. When Sāvak Vāchā took in his hands the rein of this institution after the demise of Himānshu Roy

and the exit of Devikā Rāni, Roy's actress wife, he showed the mischief-mongers the door, but the situation further worsened. As a matter of chance, these elements belonged to a particular religion while their replacements belonged to another, and therefore anonymous threats began to be issued against Vāchā (and also against Ashok Kumar and some others) while Manto was being held guilty for all these changes. Ashok Kumar was in no mood to take these threats seriously and also advised others to ignore them plainly. But Manto felt concerned, stopped going on duty, and one day --- without telling anything to anybody --- he simply boarded a ship for Karachi, with only Shyam coming to the port to see him off.(6) Manto thus sacrificed himself in order to cordon off others from any possible harm.

As for the perpetrators of these riots, Manto was very clear as to who they were: *they were no mentally derailed but perfectly sane and otherwise normal people.(7)* This comes out from his excessively small writings (some of only four or five sentences) which are included in the collection *Syāh Hāshiye* (*Dark Margins*).(8) See the story "Kasar-e-Nafsī" (Humility), for example:

The moving train was stopped.

Those belonging to the other religion were put to death with swords and bullets.

Once they got free from all this, the remaining passengers were treated with *halwā*, milk and fruits.

Before the train moved on, the leader of the band addressed the passengers:

"Brothers and sisters!

"We got the news of this train's arrival very late.

"That is why we could not serve you as nicely as we had wished to serve."

This is the whole story --- without any cut.

The story "Safāīpasandī" (Cleanliness), of only 15 lines, brings this fact out no less clearly. Four lance-bearers find a person of the other religion hiding in the toilet of a train compartment, but when one of them prepares himself to kill the catch, another one advises, "No, not here…. The compartment would get dirtied….. take him out."

The question is: Does a mentally derailed person really have such a sense of cleanliness, or have the concern that the train's compartment must not get dirtied? No, these people were perfectly normal, perfectly in their senses when they perpetrated one of the biggest carnages of human history!

It was no surprise, therefore, that Manto (sarcastically) dedicated this collection

To the fellow

Who said, while narrating his blood-letting deeds, that

"When I killed an old woman,

I felt as if

I have committed a murder…."

III

There are also occasions when we see what kind of a grip our writer had on the psychology of communal killings. A case in point is the pen-sketch of Shyam in which Manto writes:

Once, when the bloody wars between the Hindus and Muslims were continuing and thousands on both sides were getting killed every day, Shyam and me were sitting with a Sikh family that had run away from Rawalpindi. Its members were narrating the fresh wounds they had suffered, and their story was really painful. Shyam could not help getting moved. I very well knew the stir that was going on in his mind. When we took their leave, I asked Shyam: I am a Muslim…. Don't you think you should murder me?

Shyam replied very seriously: *Not now*….. but I might have killed you *at that time*, when I was listening to their story of the atrocities the Muslims had perpetrated.

Hearing so much from Shyam, I felt extremely shocked. At that time I too might have killed him. But when I thought about it later, and I felt the heaven-to-earth difference between "*at that time*" and "*now*," I got the psychological background of all that rioting that was doing

to death hundreds of innocent Hindus and Muslims every day (italics added).

The same reading comes out from some other writings --- from the pen-sketch of actress Kuldeep Kaur, for example. KK, as she was generally called, belonged to a Sikh family of Lahore and once she had to travel all the way from Lahore to Bombay, all alone in her car, at the height of the riots. After she reached Bombay safe, and when she was narrating the horrendous scenes she had witnessed *en route*, Manto asked her the same question and got a similar reply.

This, incidentally, brings to our mind a scene from the novel *Tamas* (*Darkness*) by Bhīsham Sāhnī. Shāhnawāz Khān is an influential person of his area and while he is widely suspected to be the key instigator behind the riots in the area, he helps a Hindu merchant family escape to safety when there seemed to be no escape for them from the imminent death. The family leaves for an unknown place, leaves a handicapped servant behind for the safety of their big *haveli*, and requests Khān, an intimate friend, that he should now and then visit the house and take care of the servant. On one such visit, Shāhnawāz Khān kicks the servant in his back when they are coming down the stairs, and thus kills the servant whose open eyes are as if asking what after all his fault was. But why does Khān, who is perfectly calm and composed a few minutes ago, take such a step? Only because while peeping out from a first floor window, he sees in the open area behind the *haveli* a Muslim family bitterly wailing over the dead body of a young riot victim.

This was the difference Manto pointed out --- *at that time…… not now!*

To Manto, however, Gandhism provided no alternative. One of his well known but possibly little understood stories is "Swarāj ke Liye" (For Swarāj), which has as its setting the 1939 agitation(9) of the Congress against the unilateral British decision to drag India into the war. Manto says: "Marvellous were the days. The fear that pervaded the atmosphere following the Jalliānwālā Bāgh massacre, was totally absent. It was replaced by a fearless restlessness, a reckless drive that knew not about its destination."

This was the situation in Amritsar, Manto's hometown, when Shāhzādā Ghulām Ali, his childhood friend, agreed to become the "dictator" of the agitation. "Dictatorship had newly been established in two of the European countries, and there was a lot of talk about Hitler and Mussolini. Probably under this influence had the Congress started making dictators….. forty dictators were already behind the bars when the turn of Shāhzādā Ghulām Ali came."

But the real drama unfolds after a Bābā Jī appears on the scene.(10) He addresses a big meeting in the Jalliānwālā Bāgh, consecrates Ghulām Ali as the new dictator, also solemnises his marriage with his ladylove, Nigār, but also makes them take an oath that they won't think of living together as husband and wife till the country is liberated from the British. While Ghulām and Nigār take this oath at the spur of the moment, they suffer an artificially twisted life, a distorted mentality, which this oath has created and realise its futility when the movement is ebbing. Though it appears to be a real-life story, described by Ghulām to Manto after their chance meeting in Bombay, it was Manto's style of story-telling, with a rich dose of

psychology, that gives it the status of a high piece of art and brings out the tragedy of Ghulām's life --- so much so that he gets irritated at the sight of any stretchable piece of rubber, e.g. a balloon which is in itself a harmless thing.

The story "Nayā Qānoon" (New Legislation) tells us about the futility of any piece of law that fails to mitigate the sufferings of the common man. Mangu *kochwān* (*tongā* driver), after all, finds only further suffering from the much-talked-about Government of India Act (perhaps of 1935).

The story titled "Nā'rā" (Slogan/Loud Cry) brings out the tragedy of Kesho Lāl in all its painfulness. He is one of the tenants of a dirty, seven-storey Bombay *chawl* and is filthily abused by the landlord when he fails to pay the rent for two months. And what was his plea? That the "Seth" must allow him only one month's time to pay the rent. "Those two abuses, just two abuses, had as if moved a road-roller on his broad chest. Some Hindus had mistaken him for a Muslim, beaten him blue and black, and had left him half-dead during the last Hindu-Muslim riots, and yet he had not felt so much weakness as he was feeling right now." Here, Manto is at his elemental best in depicting the excruciating class inequalities of our society --- and he is far above those who derided him as a pornographer but who themselves never offered us anything better than trash propaganda in the name of art.(11)

IV

As for the post-1947 situation, we would confine to only two short stories. In "Titwāl kā Kuttā" (The Doggy of Titwāl),(12) a small puppy gets caught between the Pakistani and Indian soldiers near the line of control. One after another, each side wants to own it and wants it to make an affirmative sound on the slogan of "Long Live Pakistan" or "Down with Pakistan." As the animal fails to obey these commands, it is then renounced by both sides, and is finally killed in the cross-firing when each side rains bullets to make it go to the other side. But what makes this story pathetic is the Chekhovian paradox which Manto employs as a literary device. What does the great Chekhov do in "Chameleon," in "Vanya," or in "Death of a Clerk," for example? He narrates the story in a very jovial mood, makes it as funny as possible, but what is the result in the end? The reader feels a surge of pain. Let's put it this way --- *Chekhov's intention is to create tragedy precisely when his pretension is to create comedy.* We live a similar experience in Manto's just mentioned story.

"Ākhirī Salute" (The Last Salute) is a story of the same calibre. Rām Singh and Rab Nawāz were born in the same village and are childhood friends, just like their fathers were; they both go to the same primary school; they both join the British army on the same day and fight on several fronts shoulder to shoulder. The depth of their intimacy is such that they always greet each other in a vulgar language, and this style of greeting continues even when circumstances bring them face to face as enemies --- as an Indian and a Pakistani soldier --- somewhere along the line of control in Kashmir.

But Rab Nawāz is perplexed: Whom have I taken as an enemy for the sake of livelihood and tips? How come I am fighting against the Indian army while I was a part of the same Indian army not very long ago?(13) How come there are several Muslims in the Indian army and fighting against Pakistan? Also, are we fighting for Kashmir or for the Muslims of Kashmir? And if we are fighting for Kashmiri Muslims, why are we not fighting for those of Hyderabad or Junagarh? And if this is a war for Islam, how come other Islamic countries of the world have not joined it? Manto displays here mastery over the technique called stream of consciousness, taking Rab Nawāz to the conclusion that a soldier must not think about such finer points; rather he should be thick-headed as "only a thick-headed can make a good soldier."

However, as the fate has it, Rām Singh, as if in a joke, gets fatally injured by a bullet coming from Rab Nawāz and the latter, cursing himself for it, rushes towards Rām Singh, which gives rise to a pathetic scene. Rām Singh tells Rab Nawāz that the latter has been indoctrinated over Kashmir, but Rab Nawāz too has the same thing to tell about Rām Singh and is prepared to swear in the name of the Creator that this is so. When Platoon Commander Major Aslam gets the news and comes to the place moments before the sunset, Rām Singh agonisingly opens his eyes on Major Aslam's call, gives his former officer a last salute while lying critically on the ground, and then closes his eyes forever.

This brings out in full glare the horrors of the Partition for soldiers of the two sides --- just as ruthlessly as "Nangi Āwāzen" (Naked Sounds) does in case of the refugees.

V

Manto lived only seven years, five months and three days after the country's independence and vivisection, but he very clearly saw whither the newly created Pakistan was going under the Yankee tutelage. His nine "Letters to Uncle Sam" are not only high art but eye-opening, as they deal with the US imperialist politics in Iran (the overthrow and arrest of President Mohd Mossadiq was then a recent episode), in Africa and in other parts of the world. As for the style of his letter writing, we would quote just one instance: In the fourth letter to Uncle Sam, he advises the latter, "Uncle, hold the Mullā (Mullah, Muslim clergyman) tight in your loving embrace as he is the best antidote to Russia's communism" in Pakistan. And we are constrained to say that Uncle Sam did hold the Mullā tight in his loving embrace; it is another thing that this very embrace has now brought Pakistan to the brink of a precipice.(14)

One wonders how Manto would have reacted if only he were alive today!

Notes

1) It is pertinent to note here that the same *Angāre* team played the lead role in the formation of Progressive Writers Association in 1936.

2) Incidentally, Tobā Teksingh is a real place in West Punjab (Pakistan), and it was here that Maulānā Bhasānī, a celebrated fighter of the Bangladesh liberation war in 1970-71, had organised a big kisān conference in 1955. A delegation including the present writer was invited to the Golden Jubilee celebrations of that conference in the same town in March 2005, but could not visit it because of some technical reasons.

One may add here that this short story puts Manto at par with Gogol, O'Henry and Lu Hsun in regard to the depiction of mentally insane people.

3) This is, however, a lifeless description of the story; one has to read the original in order to grasp the full import of the story with all its intensity of feelings.

4) Bi Jamālo is a female character of folktales, known for making people fight one another.

Manto began to write a series of pen-sketches of well known people, mostly film personalities, because of the situation of penury he was facing in the post-Partition Lahore while the establishment of the newly created country avoided him as if he were some deadly disease. While he wrote only one pen-sketch before the Partition, he wrote 21

subsequent to it. These were published first in a newspaper and later in two collections --- *Ganje Farishte* (*Bald Angels*) and *Loudspeaker*. The second collection was published posthumously, though all the pieces included in it had appeared in print in Manto's lifetime.

Remarkably, the pen-sketches by Manto have the same flavour as his short stories have and, so far as Urdu literature is concerned, he is to date unrivalled in this field.

(All the translations that follow are by the present writer.)

5) The Great Uprising of 1857-58.

6) That was the time when there was no visa requirement between India and Pakistan; this liberality continued up till September 1953.

Via Karachi, Manto went to Lahore where he was a student earlier, and spent there the last years of his life in great hardship. To maintain his family and arrange for his wine, he wrote a story a day and sold it to a particular publisher at the fixed price of Rs 20 per story. That is why several of his stories are just trash though, now and then, gems like "Tobā Teksingh" also came out in this process.

7) In this regard, Manto was quite different from several of his contemporaries who depicted the Partition-related riots as the handiwork of insane people.

8) These writings are in the nature of mini or micro stories, but what makes them memorable is a penetrating vision that pervades them all.

9) Manto says he did not remember the date and year, but the description leaves no doubt as to the story's setting.

10) Manto's style of description makes this Bābā Jī appear something like a mini Gandhi.

11) For example, those accusing Manto of pornography concentrated on his style of description in "Thandā Gosht" (Cold Meat) but never talked of the fate Issar Singh, a rioter, suffered precisely because of his own action.

12) Titwāl too is a real place, like Tobā Teksingh.

13) This takes us back to "Tobā Teksingh" in which the asylum inmates are worried "whether they are in Pakistan or in Hindstan…. If they are in Hindstan, where then this Pakistan is, and if they are in Pakistan, how come they were in Hindstan a few days ago while living in the same premises?" None of these asylum inmates can say what would happen tomorrow as the very today is incomprehensible: "Sialkot was earlier in Hindstan but now one hears that it is in Pakistan….. and who knows Lahore, which is in Pakistan today, goes to Hindstan tomorrow….. or the whole of Hindstan becomes Pakistan…. And who can say with certainty whether both Hindstan and Pakistan would not someday disappear without a trace?"

14) Manto started his series of letters after the Yankees made an attempt to influence his conscience. Once an employee from the US embassy in Karachi, then the capital of Pakistan, approached Manto in Lahore and requested for a short story for the embassy's monthly

magazine in Urdu. Manto, who got only Rs 20 for a story, demanded Rs 200 --- in the hope that this high demand would make the fellow run away. But, to his surprise, the fellow said a known writer like Manto deserved at least Rs 500 for a story. When Manto refused to take 500, the fellow put 300 in his hands and left, saying that he would come on such and such a date to collect the story. On his part, Manto made it clear that he would write only what he liked to write and that nobody would have the right to make any alteration in it. Needless to say, Manto did not write anything for the US embassy, nor did any embassy employee ever come to him.

(This paper was presented at the Platinum Jubilee National Seminar of the Purogamana Kala Sahithya Samgham, Kerala (formed: 1937), held at Thiruvananthapuram on November 30 to December 2, 2012.)



Naresh Nadeem

Works at Poets & Writers and authored eight books, edited about a dozen and translated more than 200 books since 1984.

‘Lowly’ Women: As Manto Saw Them

Naresh Nadeem

HAVING spent about four years in Mumbai, and after he got fed up with the city, Manto shifted to Delhi some time in early 1941 when he got a job in the All India Radio (AIR). Here he was expected to write radio dramas for the Urdu Service of the AIR.

When Manto was asked about his qualification during his interview for the AIR job, he is *believed* to have said that he did have a thorough grasp on the life and manners of prostitutes. There is no knowing how much truth there is in the assertion that Manto gave such and such a reply --- a number of stories were indeed ascribed to him after his death, as it happens with anyone who wins the status of a legend --- though, a maverick that he was, this reply was certainly not improbable for a person like him, at least in some or other informal chatting session.

It is another thing that even without establishing the veracity of this particular piece of legend, some people sought to make a mountain out of the mole. For example, they assert: Great indeed were the people who still gave Manto a job in the AIR, despite the reply which he reportedly gave! And that no one would dare to take any such step today, etc, etc, etc.

And, then, it is still a third thing that Manto had to leave the AIR mainly because of these same "great" people.

And, then, still a fourth thing is that the "greats" who supposedly showed "great" courage to recruit him despite his embarrassing reply, showed in reality no courage to benefit the AIR or its Urdu Service from the 'qualification' which Manto had --- for the AIR, during the eighteen odd months that he worked there, Manto wrote not a single drama based on the life of prostitutes, pimps and the like. Obviously, they never dared to ask Manto, or for that matter anybody else, to write any such drama for the official broadcaster.

I

OUR concern here is certainly not what the reply was which Manto gave during his interview and what considerations procured him the AIR job. There may well have been other factors, one being that the AIR was, like many other departments, facing a severe manpower crunch in those war days. But the fact remains that when he joined the AIR, he certainly had a thorough grasp on the life of the prostitutes, their tragedies and travails --- something which his stories very amply, and sharply, reflect.

Compare the contents of the first two collections of his short stories. As we know, *Aatishpaare* (*Nuggets of Fire*) appeared from Lahore in 1936 and that it was based on eight short stories. But the thing to note is that none of these stories was on the life of the prostitutes. It is very clear that he had by that time no idea of this dark region of our collective life.

But the situation was different when the second collection of his short stories appeared four years later, from the same city of Lahore in 1940. This collection was titled *Manto keAfsane* (*Short Stories by Manto*), and it was based on twenty short stories, five of which were specifically devoted to the lives of prostitutes. While "Shaghal" (The Hobby) bears the inscription "In Memory of Maxim Gorky,"(1) the story "Pehchaan" (Discriminating Taste) has the city of Delhi as its background and it was probably the first Manto story to have done so. "Bego," "Hatak" (The Insult) and "Das Rupaye" (Ten Rupees) are the other such stories in the said collection. Moreover, stories like "Khushiya" and "Darpok" (Coward) too have prostitutes in the background, though their concern is with one or another psychological problem.

It is thus very clear that Manto acquired his grasp on the lives of prostitutes and other people related with the trade --- of the likes of Khushiya the pimp --- from the four years of his sojourn in the city of Bombay. A good part of this period was such that he, then a bachelor, passed it in the company of some renowned actors; and then there also was Raja Mehdi Ali Khan who was his friend from the Lahore days and who came to be better known as a film lyricist and almost totally lost his identity as a poet despite the fact that a good part of his poetry is quite powerful. While Manto reached Bombay some time in December 1936, his marriage took place only in April 1938 and it was still one year before his wife was sent to make a family with him.(2) It seems Manto utilised this period to the hilt to have the grasp which he assertively claimed to possess.

One can only conjecture about what gave Manto the required inspiration to probe this aspect of our life.

II

ONE thing is certain --- that the world of Indian films at that time was not the least akin to what it is today. Today, it is the provider of some of the most dazzling professions in the country and offers its participants name, fame and wealth at one go, in ample amounts. An actor or actress of today can easily make billions of rupees in his or her active professional life, can have huge and sprawling bungalows in one or another of the posh localities of Mumbai, Chennai or Kolkata, and can revel in the best of the parties of dance, wine and whatever else they like. It is therefore not surprising that some of the billionaires spend a lot of money to secure for their wards an entry into this most coveted profession, and some even go to the extent of themselves becoming a film producer for the purpose. As a corollary, however, the Indian film industry, and particularly the one of Mumbai, has become a closed world today so that it is mostly the offspring of renowned actors and directors who find a role in films, and the possible competitors from outside are very carefully and very assiduously kept where they were --- outside. The other side of the same picture is that the very glamour of the industry deceives thousands of young boys and girls from among the "wretched of the earth;" they run away from their parents and reach Mumbai with the false hope of having a share in the glamour of this "Mayapuri," the City of Illusions.(3) It is another thing that most of them suffer only

heartbreak at the end, land in various professions of a dubious nature, and some even commit suicide.

But this was not always so, and certainly not when Manto was associated with the film industry, for which loaded terms like "Bollywood" and "Tinsel World" had not yet come into vogue. Journalism is today a respectable as well as paying profession but, Manto writes, there was a time when writers, journalists and editors used to sit naked in a laundry to get their clothes washed at double the rate and led a very miserable and dusty life. Not much different from journalism was the shape of the film world, and anybody associated with films was considered to be a bad character, to have a bad character, so much so that sometimes a film personality could not get on rent a flat in a respectable locality, much less have a bungalow of his own.(4) Moreover, as could only be expected in a highly male dominated society, nobody would allow his own offspring and in particular his daughter to work in a film though, for himself, that same nobody did harbour the dream of sleeping with one or another renowned film actress.

It was thus that, in a society where itinerant theatre groups could use only males even for female roles (this is still the case with itinerant theatre groups in several parts of the country), it was mostly the "prostitutes" who came forward to kill that drawback. We desist from quoting the names, which are quite easily recognisable otherwise.But the hard fact is that many of our great --- and really great --- actresses of yore came from this very background; either they were themselves prostitutes or were the offspring of prostitutes, but they went up so

high as to earn respect from all of us by the sheer dint of their contributions. In this sense Indian Cinema did act as a Great Leveller and, to that extent, it played a really, really, really progressive role.

Manto was in the know of the film world of his day --- even when he was only indirectly associated with it while editing a film magazine and writing about the lives of actors and actresses of his day. Further, when he himself joined the industry as a script/dialogue writer, he came in direct contact with several actors, actresses and others associated with the industry, and these included those who were called prostitutes. If what Manto later said to a court judge is true --- that "A writer picks up his pen only when his sensibility is hurt" --- then it was indeed natural for a sensitive being like Manto to come out and explore the ground which many wise men feared to tread. If not always then sometimes at least, it is really the "fools" of the oft-quoted proverb who rush forward to explore the unknown grounds while the wise (or wiseacres!) sit home with their hands folded.

III

WRITING about prostitutes and pimps and the like was nothing new for Urdu writers. It was a prostitute who was the heroine of *Fareb-e-Ishq*(*Deception of Love*), a story in verse by Mirza Shauq Lakhnavi in the mid-nineteenth century. Penned by Mirza Hadi Ruswa, a contemporary of Shauq Lakhnavi, *Umrao Jan Ada* was one of the earliest novels of Urdu, and it was based on the tumultuous life of a prostitute of the same name. We come across prostitutes in the writings of Deputy Nazeer Ahmed, Pundit Ratan Nath Sarshar, Meer Amman and several other writers. And then the first major novel by

Munshi Premchand has a prostitute as its central character. Hindi-speaking readers know it as *Sevasadan* (*The House of Service*), but the original Urdu title *Bazaar-e-Husn* (*TheMarket of Beauty*) is much more appropriate and telling.

Therefore, Manto certainly broke no new ground when he began to write about the lives and travails of prostitutes. But what distinguishes him from other writers is the starkness with which he paints his pictures. One can well understand this point if one compares, for example, Turgenev with Dostoyevsky: compared with Turgenev with his high-class ladies and maidens, his chivalrous youth and his ballroom dances, Dostoyevsky's pictures are far starker. If one compares Ruswa's Umrao Jan Ada with Manto's Sultana or Saugandhi, the same difference comes out in full glare.

See the following sketch as an example:

The room was very small, and innumerable things were lying scattered all around. Three or four drying and rotting *chappals* were lying there under the bed. An eczematous dog was sleeping there with its snout on these *chappals*, and was in its sleep making faces over some intangible thing. The body of the dog had become hairless at several places because of the eczema. If only someone had seen this dog from a distance, he would have thought it was a piece of an old *taat* that one uses as a doormat to wipe his soles clean.

Items of decoration were lying there in a niche on one side --- the rouge that is applied on the cheeks, a red stick for the lips, powder, comb, iron pins that she probably used in her hairs. Close by, a cage

with a green parrot was hanging from a long peg and the parrot was sleeping with its beak hidden in the feathers on its back. The cage was full of pieces of raw guava and peels of rotting oranges. Black mosquitoes and other tiny insects were flying on these foul-smelling pieces.

A chair of cane was there near the bed; its back was getting oily and sticky as it was always used as the support for heads. To the right of the chair there was a beautiful tripod, with a portable His Master's Voice gramophone on it. The black cover-cloth of this gramophone was in a tattered shape. Its rusted needles were lying scattered on the tripod and in all parts of the room. Just above this tripod there were hanging four frames and there were photos of various people in those frames.(5)

This kind of description is certainly heavens apart from the romanticised image of a courtesan who was patronised, and often thereby monopolised, by a raja or a nawab of yore. Manto's was not an age of feudal chivalry and pompous demonstrations; it was in fact an age when capitalism with its stress on the supremacy of wealth had already started baring its fangs in India. That is why a moneybag, riding a car, could have the guts to insult a human being like Saugandhi without having a bit of concern for her sentiments. This is what leaves Saugandhi --- or Manto!? --- saddened to the core:

When she was near her house, all the happening came up in her heart like a throbbing grief, and covered all her pores like pain. Her legs again grew heavy and she again began to feel intensely that only a little while ago a man had called her out from her home, to the market,

and there he had given a slap of torchlight in her face and had thus insulted her. As soon as the thought occurred to her, she felt the pressure of someone's powerful thumb on her ribs, just like someone viewing her like a goat or a sheep --- and trying to check whether it was all hair only or was there any meat in her body.

"That *seth*….. may God….." Saugandhi wished to curse the man but then she thought what the use of cursing him was….. It would have been a thing of joy if only he would have been there in front of her and she could jot down so many curses on every particle of his existence….. that she could say for him some such words as would keep him restless for the rest of his life….. If only she could tear all her clothes, get stark naked, and ask him: "Ye had come for this very thing *na*….. Take it….. take it free, without any price….. But whatever I'm, whatever it's there inside me, even your father can't buy it, what of ye….."(6)

It is evident that Saugandhi was not so fortunate as was Umrao Jan Ada whose lover killed somebody of a humbler stock, one who was itching for her company, and then the body of that somebody was disposed of with impunity. Saugandhi could, at the best, only feel an impotent rage vis-a-vis the moneybag who had the guts to insult her.

It is this world of Saugandhi and Sultana and Niyati, of Sarita and Siraj and Shobha Bai, of Babu Gopi Nath and Mohammad Tufail and Dhudu which we see our Manto loitering in and exploring. And it is not surprising that, as was his wont, Manto --- the keen observer that he was --- explored each and every pillar, each and every post of this world that had no romance in it but only horrors and repulsions. If at

all there is anything surprising in it, it is that he reached the high status of a master craftsman so early in his literary career. The quotations given above come from the story "Hatak" (The Insult) which appeared in 1940 while the first Manto story had appeared only six years earlier, in 1934.

The fact is that if "Toba Tek Singh" has no parallel in regard to a portrayal of the horrors of Partition, "Hatak" too remains unparalleled to date in its depiction of the frightening life of a modern-day prostitute of the ordinary rut. It was said and not very incorrectly said: What if God gave Manto only forty two years and a few months and a few days to live, Manto has given Saugandhi centuries indeed. If "Mutari" (Urinal) was a very small but tightly packed story, no less tightly packed is "Hatak" --- not for a single moment has Manto lost his grip whether on the flow of events or on the stream of consciousness in this short story which is not so short after all. It could well offer a less competent writer plenty of chances to go astray.

IV

ONE of the most important Manto stories in this category is the story "License" which shows how our society, our very religious and pious and great Indian society, forces a hapless girl (here a young widow) into prostitution --- even though she wants to earn her bread by the dint of her pious labour and even though she is quite competent to do so. (Sahir wondered and challenged: Where are the ones who are so proud of India!?) Though the story was one in a collection of stories that came out in 1950, it evidently refers to a period when a license could well be procured (and granted) for prostitution, as could be in

Alexander Kuprin's immortal *Yama*. In this world of Manto, the City Committee very clearly tells Inaayat*aka*Niyati that she could not get a license to drive a *tonga* though she could of course get a license to sell her body --- if she so desired. But what of this damned City Committee; this is a world where every worthless Tom, Dick and Harry (every Mangaru, Ghurahu and Katwaru, if you want some indigenous substitutes!) won't allow a hapless widow to live a peaceful life. It is another thing that one still feels constrained to ask oneself whether any of the basics of the situation has at all changed in the last six decades, since Manto's days.

No less hapless is Shobha Bai in the story "Fobha Bai," though in a different way. While she is, so to say, the 'widow' of a deceased timber merchant who had opened a film company for her and who had given her a lot of jewellery, a car and other valuable items, after him she is living and continuing in the profession for the sake of her only son who she has left back --- incognito --- in Jaipur. But, the story says, God extinguishes even this lone lamp in her otherwise dark life, and now bereft of her only emotional support, she finally goes insane. It seems she had found a well-wisher and sympathiser in the person of Dr Khan, but that was obviously a support not so strong that it could hold her in senses.

"Ten Rupees" and "Discriminating Taste" are about the people who, out of their compulsions, throw even minor girls into the abyss of prostitution. Sarita of the first-mentioned story does not even know what an intimate physical contact between a male and a female feels like. The nameless girl of the second-mentioned story appears to be

knowing about it, but without having any idea of the aesthetic side of such a contact.

Equally hapless is the nameless woman of "A Hundred Candle-Power Bulb," and, if you ask, no less hapless is her selfish-looking husband --- or companion, whatsoever he may have been. While the man forces the woman to go out to sell her body, it is because of sheer compulsion, while the woman is unable to have even a bit of sleep, and it appears it is she who finally goes to the extent of killing her husband --- or companion, whatsoever he may have been. And the horror of horrors is that she is found having some sleep while a dead body is lying just beside her. But, true to his observation, Manto depicts this situation as the fallout of a powerful storm that has swept the subcontinent. Here he is evidently referring to the country's partition with all the horrors that it begot. The very first paragraphs of the story bring this fact out --- quite harshly and unmistakably.

Who the culprits of this haplessness are? This comes out, for example, from the story "Shaghal" (The Hobby) which does bear an imprint of Maxim Gorky's style of story-telling.

Yet another attempt at identification of the culprits is found in the story "Siraj" in which a girl of the same name elopes with her lover from her home and eventually suffers betrayal. While living amid *kotha*-owning ladies and pimps, she manages to keep her chastity intact, as it seems she still has some hope, but then..... If Siraj finally tells Dhudu that her lover is "sleeping" and that "I've put up my *burqa* on him....." there is no telling whether her lover is really sleeping or whether Siraj has finally avenged the crime she was subjected to. In

any case, at the end of it all, she has nowhere to go but to the same abyss after she comes from Lahore back to Bombay.

The compulsion to accept one's fate, so to say, is also evident in the story "Anjam ba-Khair" (It All Ended Well), in which Naseem Akhtar, a prostitute's offspring, wants to say adieu to the profession and lead a respectable life but is not allowed to do so. Like Niyati of "License," she too is compelled to prostitute herself and when she goes into it, she goes with a vengeance --- *a la* Siraj.

Another notable aspect of this story is the illusion which the demand and then the creation of Pakistan created for a large chunk of the Muslim population of the subcontinent. Naseem Akhtar says: "The Qaid-e-Azam took too much trouble to get Pakistan for the Muslims….. We should now be living there," and that "their religion" and "our religion" are not one. However, as for Naseem's decision to go to the coveted land of Pakistan because she thinks no Muslim is safe here in India, there is no telling whether it is due to her own perception or it is due to a situation which her own music teacher, Khan Saheb Achchhan Khan, contrives in his own narrow interest, in order to intensify the panic she is feeling. As we know, Manto is never so open and leaves many things for his readers to judge.

"Baghair Ijazat" (Without Permission) is a light story with not much of a gist. It only tells us that the *kotha* of a prostitute is the only place where no permission is required to go in.

Except some insights here and there, there is not much weight in four other stories either; these are "Miss Mala," "Qadira the Butcher,"

"From Peshawar to Lahore" and "A Pious and a Pros."[7] The same can be said about "Marriage" and "The Peddler Girl." In the last-mentioned story, a girl spurns the true love of one with whom she elopes, and then receives the wages of this betrayal.

However, from the story "Qadira the Butcher" we do get a meaningful insight. The story says: "At the time, the demand for the formation of Pakistan was at its peak. At last there was an announcement, and Eidan heard it on her five-valve radio set, that Hindstan had been divided into two. And then started the riots. The Hindus were killing the Muslims and the Muslims were killing the Hindus. A strange kind of situation was there. Blood was getting cheaper than water." It was in this situation that "Muslims were migrating to Pakistan in droves so that their lives could be safe," just like what Naseem Akhtar thinks in the story "It All Ended Well." But when Eidan Bai was on her way to Pakistan, "her own Muslim brethren looted her dancing costumes and the remaining of her ornaments en route." Isn't it akin to the fate of gang-rape which Sakina suffers in the story "Open It!" at the hands of her own co-religionist volunteers and supposed saviours?

The meaning is clear: If a man decides to turn a brute, his religion --- with all its moralistic pontifications --- does not and cannot prevent him from brutalising his own, less powerful co-religionists, what to talk of those from other religions!

This is what Manto had been doing all along: to fight the illusions which had gripped the people. At what high cost to himself --- this we all know.

"Dooda the Wrestler" is about a man who is devoted to his master and sacrifices even his chastity[8] in order to rescue his characterless master from a crisis which is the latter's own creation. There is no moralising here. But the story graphically illustrates, indeed,the extent which the vice of prostitution can go to, in order to harm its perpetrators and avenge their victims.

V

BUT if Gandhism provided no way out of the communal divide, as Manto stressed in his story "Swaraj ke Liye" (For Swaraj), can philanthropy, howsoever well-meaning and pure-hearted it may be, provide a cure for the vice of prostitution? In "Haarta Chala Gaya" (Losing All Along), Gangu Bai tells the nameless *seth* something very clearly:

He stopped then and there. Very slowly, as if swallowing each and every word, Gangu Bai said: "I'm very bad, true….. but w'o is good 'ere?….. Seth, you spend ten rupees to see one light off….. Jus' see aroun' 'ow many lights are on 'ere!"

He moved aside and cast a glance on the shops all along the street; all of them had similar railings. It was a non-ending line and innumerable lights were on in the dusty atmosphere of the night.

"Can you get all these lights off?"

Through his thick-lens specs he first regarded the bulb hanging over Gangu Bai's head and then the dusty face of the woman. His head hung down and he said: "No Gangu Bai, no!"

When he boarded the taxi, his heart was as empty as his pocket was.

It is very clear that the malady is sitting quite deep in the very uterus of our society, and mere philanthropic, much less cosmetic, efforts may not suffice to uproot it.

This is again a typical Manto attempt at myth-breaking.

VI

IT is in this kind of milieu that Manto comes up with a story like "1919 ki Ek Baat" (An Episode of 1919), and one need not be told that the year holds a very important place in the history of modern India. The very first story by Manto, "Tamasha" (Spectacle), was based on the horrors of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre; he refers to it in "Swaraj ke Liye" (For Swaraj) and some others of his creations, and the abovementioned story also has the same massacre as its background. One may well surmise that the massacre kept haunting our writer as ominously as it haunted tens of thousands of other Indians.

But, differently from those thousands of others, Manto saw in this very episode a rare glimpse of valour and courage to face an ominous set of rulers. Mohammad Tufail *aka* Thaila Kanjar is the son of a prostitute and the brother of two young prostitutes, but it is he who stands up to the imperialist atrocities when the moment of reckoning comes. He is killed, his body is dotted with bullets, as he refuses to run away and, when the hour comes, he avenges the helplessness of his countrymen by facing a group of the British soldiers and taking the life of one of them before breathing his last. *By any standard of the*

freedom-loving peoples, this was indeed a noble revenge **--- not like that depicted by N M Raashid in a poem "Intiqaam" (Revenge) whose lone and central character has night-long sex with a British lady and thinks that he has "avenged the helplessness of his countrymen."[9] This is what Georg Lukacs (*Writer and Critic*) would have described as an "impotent revolt" or "pseudo-revolt" --- if only he had come to know about the poem referred to here. The revolt by this "*kanjar*" (a prostitute's son) has something far nobler, far more valiant, far more laudable in it. Moreover, it is a deed which his own sisters could well have emulated but --- to Manto's grief --- didn't.**

This is another instance typical of Manto --- to search for humaneness, if only a speck of humaneness, even in the most unlikely of places and people.

Incidentally, the story referred to here offers us yet another ground to think. It says at one place:

Amritsar..... the same Amritsar that was the biggest centre of the freedom struggle, whose chest once harboured a matter-of-pride kind of injury like the Jallianwala Bagh..... what's its condition now?..... But just leave this story apart; it gives the heart great pain. The people say that the British are responsible also for whatever took place in this holy city five years before this day. Maybe it's true, Bhai Jan, but if you ask for the truth, our own hands are smeared with the blood that was shed there. Anyhow!

Here "whatever took place in this holy city five years before this day" simply means the events that took place in the period 1946-48, preceding and following the Partition.

The logic is simple: Laying the blame for everything at the door of the British rulers may have a grain of truth, but then it will remain only a grain of truth. The fact remains that it is we who are, in the main, responsible for what happened then, and that the British only took advantage of the cleavages that had already been existing in our society. This was nothing surprising for a country that "has no care for its own honour and prestige."

But if the British "didn't even realise that a pros too has an honour of her own," the case of us Indians is not very different either. In fact it was this very insensitivity of our society which dragged Manto more than once to the court. In *Yama*, Kuprin says about the same social ailment called prostitution: "The horror is that there is no horror," and we are certainly no better than what the Russians were in Kuprin's days; we too don't feel any horror over a horror. But it was this very kind of people who hated Manto, and abused Manto, and harassed Manto, for the simple reason that he tried to tell them what their ailments were --- even though he was not the proprietor of a medical clinic, as he once said about himself, and could not treat these ailments. Yet, is there any wonder that our society could not but feel incensed when Manto put his finger on the ailing vein? Great!

VII

AS we said above, what is typical of Manto literature is a search for humaneness, if only a speck of humaneness, even in the most unlikely of places and people.

Most of the stories by Manto --- whether on 'lowly' men and women or on other issues --- confirm it, and conform to this feature of his literature.

For instance, one such story is "Sharda," whose main character of the same name is not a prostitute in the strict sense of the term though we see her staying in a third grade hotel which *was and was not* a brothel at one and the same time. The first aspect of her personality, of which we get a glimpse, is of a caring sister, full of concern; if she comes from Jaipur to Bombay, it is in order to retrieve her younger sister from the flesh trade into which she has been dragged against her volition. Even though Sharda has been deserted by her husband and has thus got a bitter taste in her mouth in the name of marriage, her virtually lone desire is to see that her sister, Shakuntala, should get married to a suitable person so that she could be able to lead a life of honour.

And then comes the most humane aspect of Sharda's personality --- as the mother of a very small, one year old girl child. As a destitute young woman who has been deserted by her husband, and who has nowhere to go except her old mother, it is quite natural that she clings to the man who she sees loving her child just the way only a caring father could love. One can therefore well surmise that Sharda must have seen in Nazeer a person who could provide her a degree of security and honour in society. The importance of this point can well

be grasped if we keep in mind that in India, what to talk of Manto's days, even today a young girl finds herself surrounded by a pack of wolves who can, if only they get a chance, brutalise a girl or woman in the very broad daylight. Though Kareem, a pimp, does not represent this breed, he is no less a wolf in his own way; it is he who had got Shakuntala in his net. It is in this situation that Sharda comes to live with Nazeer when the latter's wife migrates to Lahore after communal riots start in the city. However, Whenever he pressed Sharda to his chest, she never refused but now it was not the same Sharda….. No, Sharda was still the same Sharda, but she was now something more. After a separation so long, the devotion of her body had indeed intensified manifold, she still wanted him by her heart and soul, but Nazeer felt Sharda now lacked her earlier attraction or whatever it was which she then had.

The story thus makes it perfectly clear that if at all someone has changed, it's not Sharda in fact. Let's note what Kareem tells Nazeer after Sharda leaves for Jaipur. He says: "Nazeer Saheb, Sharda was really in love with you." An equally important fact is that if Sharda comes back to Bombay, leaving her infant daughter behind in the custody of her mother, it is only because of her love for Nazeer. Thus the person to have changed is the male called Nazeer who feels, without any ground whatsoever, that it's Sharda who has lost her earlier attraction. This is in total contrast to the earlier situation when

Nazeer didn't know what love meant; he only knew that Sharda had a physical devotion and that she was the most appropriate answer to his male questions. He didn't know anything more.

At that time, in fact, "Nazeer was convinced of her physical devotion; she was purity personified insofar as the body was concerned."

As for Nazeer, what type of a man he is? One who has been deceiving his wife and does not feel anything except some momentary remorse about it!

The result of the change which Nazeer undergoes is anybody's guess. Getting humiliated by Nazeer, a male, Sharda finally leaves his house but takes with herself only whatever really belonged to her. This much self-respect she obviously has: she didn't take with her anything that belonged to Nazeer; nor did she feel any need to wait for being compensated by Nazeer in any way. At one stage in "An Episode of 1919," the narrator says (or asks!?): ".....a pros too has an honour of her own..... She can definitely have..... Why she can't have.....?" and this is no less true of Sharda who did engage in prostitution but was not, to repeat, a prostitute in the strict sense of the term.

It is in this situation that Nazeer "entered the room with a saddened heart, only to find that there was a pack of his favourite cigarettes on the tripod --- quite full." But what could be done now! Sharda had left forever, and for some unknown destination without even telling his servant where she was going. And why should she have told anybody about where she was going? Had her man left any scope for her for being that much optimistic?

VIII

NO less self-respect Shanti has --- a young girl who suffered deception in love. (She is just like most of Manto's prostitutes are: not only destitute but also deceived by a lover or a husband!). After Shanti ran away from home in Srinagar, she has been trying all along to save her soul.[10] Shanti is the prototype of what we today call a "call girl" and (unlike Sharda) she has entered the trade in a very conscious manner. But, has she really her soul in it? All along, her behaviour does tell us that she is only biding her time (just as Sahay, a pimp, was biding his time, in a story of the same title), and that she would kick the profession aside once she gets a chance. This chance she gets in the person of Maqbool:

When both sat on the bed, Shanti moved her head aside and put it in Maqbool's lap. Her tears had as if forgotten how to stop. Maqbool loved her, told her to stop crying, and she said, deep in tears, in a faltering voice: "Over there..... in Srinagar, a man had killed me..... Here a man has now..... resurrected me."

And when Maqbool offers her fifty rupees, the fee which she charges from any customer, "With much fury and hatred, Shanti picked up the notes and threw them down. Then, in great haste, she opened a drawer of her dressing table and said: Look..... see w'at is 'ere!"

It's here that we get a glimpse of Shanti's humaneness as well as her sense of self-respect. For it's a number of hundred rupee notes which were lying there in the drawer, and these are the notes which she had got from Maqbool and which she had kept safe without spending a pie out of it. Shanti then takes a handful of them and tosses them in the air: "I no needin' them now." The end of the story makes it clear that

what she really craves for is not money but a loving friend --- something which she now feels she has got.

A similar type of girl is the unnamed Burmese girl --- in the story "Burmi Ladki" --- who appears willing to go to any extent in order to heartily serve the person from whom she gets a small speck of love and concern. Who she is and where she has come from, we don't know a bit of it. We only know that she serves with full devotion the person who has brought her to his house. And then, with a sense of utmost self-respect, she leaves the place when she is told to go --- without taking from the house anything that does not belong to her. In the meantime she has of course won the hearts of the three servants as well as one of the two inmates.

Bego is totally different from Sharda, Shanti or the unnamed Burmese girl. She is a simple-hearted girl living in Batot, a hilly town of Kashmir, one who doesn't even know what it means if a man kisses her lips. But then she has the fortune of being loved by someone and then, very soon, she has the misfortune of being spurned by the same someone, and in that very state of dejection she hurls herself into the flesh trade with a vengeance --- *a la* Siraj and Naseem Akhtar. So much so that she contracts TB from some of the patients who come to her town to recuperate their health, and then meets her death. Though the story "Bego" appeared in Manto's second collection that came out in 1940, it lacks the finesse which the story "Hatak" (The Insult), included in the same collection, has. Unlike the stark realism of "Hatak," what this story betrays is a superficial romantic view of life, which we are not much accustomed to associate with Manto. It is

quite probable that the two stories must have been written in two different time zones, even if the gap between them couldn't have been more than a year or two, or three at the most.

Compared to "Bego," the story "Jaanki" brings to our view a totally different type of character. Jaanki is by no means a prostitute, whether of a brothel inmate kind or a call girl kind.[11] Jaanki appears to be a very independent kind of person --- in order to get a job in a film company, she travels all alone from Peshawar to Bombay and then to Pune, in the pre-independence period, while even today numerous (if not all) Indian girls can't dare travel alone, without the security a man provides. But the most important trait of her personality seems to be that to the men from whom she gets just a wee bit of love, she returns it in the same kind --- and in full measure, many times over. There is Aziz (a married man but having an affair with Jaanki) and there is Saeed (who has already kicked out one girl friend, before he meets Jaanki), and it is these men whom she serves with full devotion, and who she takes care of with utmost concern, and that too without any worry about a material gain in any form. But, then, what she gets in return? Nothing but humiliation, and nothing but an attempt at monopolisation --- something which is so typical of male chau….. (Readers are free to fill up this gap in any way they please.) Her disposition finally brings her to the door of death, from which she is saved by Narayan --- by the very person who she had developed a hatred for. To what extent Narayan goes in order to save her, has in itself a small bit of hilariousness --- it displays the same kind of jovial conduct which Narayan displays in the *Aao!* (*Come!*) series of radio dramas which Manto wrote for the All India Radio.

Incidentally, Manto, himself a character in this story, says at one place: "There was also a modicum of relief with the thinking that the doors of every film company were open for a woman if she was young; what was there to feel so nervous about it! She could get a place in one or another film company even without my help." This remark takes us back to our contention, earlier expressed, that the world of films in Manto's days was not a bit like what we see it today. Those were the days when anybody associated with the film line was considered a bad character, avoided by the society at large, and when nobody called respectable would allow his offspring, more so his daughter, to work in a film. It was in such a milieu that the so called prostitutes, or women like Jaanki, filled up a very serious gap in character casting.

However, compared to all these stories, the story "SarkandokePeechhe" (Behind the Reeds) stands on a totally different footing. Here the girl, who has been given the pseudonym of Nawab, does engage in prostitution, but without even knowing that whatever she is doing is prostitution and is something hated by the wider society. Manto specifically says:

Though she was by all means a lowly woman in the sense in which our respectable and pious ladies regard such women, to tell the truth, she had absolutely no idea that she was leading a life of sin. And how could she think of a sin if she knew not a thing about sin!

However, at the end of the story, and this end reads like a tale of horror, it is this simple-minded girl who is made to pay the price --- with her very life --- for the fault of someone else. Even after a gap of

decades, the present writer still and quite vividly remembers the shudder which ran through his body when he read this story for the first time.

IX

THE story "The Black Shalwar" is regarded as one of the best short stories penned by Manto. With the pre-independence Delhi as its setting, the story may be regarded as *an exercise in starkness*, with Sultana being far, far, far away from the romantic image of a courtesan *a la* Umrao Jan Ada. The poor fellow sells her body, and she well knows what she is doing, but is still unable to make the two ends meet. The month of Muharram is fast approaching but she can't even manage to have just four and a half yards of satin in order to get a black *shalwar* (female trousers with a drawstring) stitched.

By the way, like several Manto creations, this story too makes fun of "our religion" versus "their religion" kind of thinking which Naseem Akhtar kind of people cherished. When Sultana accuses Shankar that he is making fun of the holy men of the Muslim community because he is a Hindu, he very categorically says with a smile: "The Hindu-Muslim question doesn't come up in such places. If even great pundits and *maulvis* come here, they would turn gentlemen." And what is it that makes Sultana accuse Shankar of making fun of Muslim saints? It is simply that Shankar mercilessly brings his hammer down upon the superstitions which Khudabakhsh harboured: ".....in order to get the lock of his fate opened, for several days he has been going to a *Khuda-raseeda* fakir whose own fate is fixed like a rusted lock." Yet another instance of Manto's inclination towards myth-breaking!

All-time great short stories like "Babu Gopinath" and "Mummy" fall in a totally different genre, if only because the main characters of these stories do not fit in the readymade moulds. Neither is Babu Gopinath an ordinary type of customer (or "passenger"), one who goes to prostitutes in order to get his lust satisfied, nor is the Mummy (Mom) by any stretch of imagination a prostitute who is out to have in her net as many moneybags as possible. Instead, they are individuals who wholeheartedly love the persons connected with them and always worry about them. About the Mummy's house, Manto even says:

While starting from Prabhat Nagar, I had thought that it must be something like a brothel, but nothing of that house confirmed this idea. The house was as respectable as any average Christian house is.

Anyhow, without going into the details of these two personalities, who are real-life characters, we can only say that they are in fact so different from the ordinary rut that they --- or their incarnations around us --- could well serve as cases for psychological studies. The personality of Babu Gopinath is such that he deliberately prefers to be cheated but avoids calling one's bluff lest he or she is hurt.

To the query why he has a liking for the prostitutes' brothels and fakirs' hospices, Babu Gopinath very clearly and very candidly replies:

Because these are two such places where there is deception from the floor to the roof..... If someone wants to deceive himself, what better place he can have?

The logic is very clear, and very eye-opening:

…..who does not know that parents make their children do prostitution in brothels and men make their God do prostitution in *dargahs* and hospices!

Yet one must not dare forget that it was the same Babu Gopinath --- the same person who had misspent all his money on prostitutes, pimps and small or big fraudsters like the Ghaffar Sai --- who stretches ever nerve of his body to get Zeenat, a prostitute girl, settled in life. His main worry, his first priority in life, is that this simple-minded girl must get settled well before he, her self-appointed patron, leaves the world of 'wise' men and women forever; to him it does not matter whether she gets settled through marriage with a respectable person or by learning some of the tricks which prostitutes adopt to extract money from their customers. Manto, who himself is a character in this story, has no illusion whatsoever about Babu Gopinath; he specifically says that he is a person weak in faith:

As a proof of his weakness of faith, Ghaffar Sai was already there --- whom, as per Sando, Babu Gopinath had brought here as his legal advisor. By the term "legal advisor," Sando really meant that Babu Gopinath had a deep faith in Ghaffar Sai.

Yet we see the same person having a great sense of comfort when Zeenat, his Zeenat, is married to a big landlord from Hyderabad Sindh --- it is as if he, Babu Gopinath, has achieved the biggest goal of his life!

But we find the moral --- yes, moral --- of this story somewhere else, in the story "Nutfa" (The Sperm) where the unknown letter-writer says:

.....there indeed ought to be such persons (those like Babu Gopinath --- N N) *who the society could use as a slap on its own face* and on the face of the laws which it has devised (italics added).

Was it therefore any unnatural, was it without reason, was there anything astonishing in the fact that Manto had to face the wrath of many custodians of religion and their so called morality?

X

NOTHING much needs to be said about the Mummy --- the main character of the story of the same name; the better if one reaches one's own conclusion about her. Here we can only quote what Chaddha said about her, though not without daring to italicise a few words:

The government didn't like her ways. It didn't like her manner of living..... The gatherings at her house were objectionable to the administration.....*The police wanted her affections and her love as the ransom*..... *They called her "Mummy" but wanted her to act as a pimp*..... For a long time a case involving her was under investigation. The government finally satisfied itself with the police investigation and then it threw her out..... It exiled her from the city. *If she was a prostitute, if she was a broker*..... *if her existence was a threat to the society, it should have been put an end to. But why was the filth of*

Pune told that you should leave this place; that you better go somewhere else and join some other heap of garbage**….. (italics added).**

Let us recall: it was the same Chaddha whose personality the piety of that very "filth of Pune" had once purified!

Anyhow, one of the most notable things in such stories is that we do see a "Ganja Farishta" (Bald Angel) --- whose name was Sa'adat Hassan Manto --- as one of the characters in stories like "Mummy" and "Babu Gopinath" and numerous others. Is there anything surprising in it? We think not. It's not simply a case, a glaring case, of reality being more dramatic and more interesting and more telling than fiction.Isn't it that even a piece of reality needs someone to make it more dramatic and more interesting and more telling than fiction?

Notes & References

1) It may be that he wrote this story soon after listening the news of Gorky's demise in 1936; he after all was emotionally close to Chekhov and Gorky.

2) In traditional families in earlier days, a girl was not sent to her husband immediately after marriage, but only after a gap which could be anything from one year to five years, depending on the ages of the bride and the groom. This custom of sending a married girl to her husband was called *rukhsati*among the Muslims and *gauna* among the Hindus. The couple were not supposed to meet in this period.

3) According to a survey referred to by Naseeruddin Shah, a renowned actor, in his *And Then One Day*, the average number of such youth reaching Mumbai is 500 a day, which means 1,82,500 a year --- really a staggering figure!

4) One of the well-known episodes in this regard is here. When Guru Dutt, a renowned actor and director, saw that his shirt was not yet washed by the laundryman, he unwittingly picked up and wore Dev Anand's shirt and went out.Then, by chance, Dev Anand spotted him wearing his shirt --- an event that gave rise to a lasting friendship.

5) From the story "Hatak" (Insult). All the quotations in this article have been translated by the present author.

6) Ibid.

7) The last three of these stories were among the creations of Manto's daily quota of toil when he wrote a story a day. Many of these stories are really superficial.

8) This is supposed to be the most coveted thing for a wrestler who is required, before starting his career, to take a vow that he would abstain from women and wine.

9) Manto has made fun of this very poem and this kind of thinking in his story "Pehchaan" (Discriminating Taste) also.

10) We may well recall the behaviour pattern Siraj displays, in a story of the same title.

11) Who said Manto wrote only about prostitutes! No, many of them are about the women who were no prostitutes but whom our very pious society regarded as lowly.

--- *Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol 24, Issue 3-4, July-December 2017



M. Asaduddin is a renowned scholar, critic, and translator who translated Ismat Chughtai's works in the collaborative book Manto and Chughtai: The Essential Stories published by Penguin Random House India in 2019.

Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai: A Tale of Friendship

Prof M. Asaduddin, Jamia Milia

Introduction

Any celebration of friendship would become bootless without the mention of the unrivaled friendship between Saadat Hassan Manto and Ismat Chughtai. Ismat was always encouraging of Manto's work and Manto often teasingly took a jibe at Ismat as any friend would.

Their friendship demonstrates a unique diversion from the strong competition that is usually present between two contemporary writers. They strived together through the grave and unfortunate criticism attracted by their realistic short stories. Manto and Ismat's relationship of friendship was so apparent that once a gentleman from Hyderabad wrote a letter to Manto asking "How is it that Ismat Chughtai and you didn't marry?

To this Manto wrote in his essay 'Ismat Chughtai' :

"Had we thought of getting married, then instead of drowning others in wonder and agitation we ourselves would have been drowned in it. And when we would have come to our senses after the initial shock, then our wonderment and agitation would have changed not into joy but sorrow. Ismat and Manto, nikah and marriage—what a ludicrous idea!"

Ismat and Manto were both progressive Urdu writers of those times. It was a time when the society was unable to deal or was rather uncomfortable with the issues of gender and sexuality. They shared a deep understanding of human emotions and captured every emotion effectively in their stories.

In the Preface of Chotein, Krishan Chander writes: Ismat and Manto could not be more similar in their fictional art. Few Urdu writers can match them in their ability to leave a reader entirely clueless, to arouse his wonderment and suspense and then, in the end, suddenly change this wonderment and suspense into joy.

They openly defended each other's work and even faced the trial for the alleged "obscenity" in their respective stories together.

When "Dozakhi" was published in Saqi, Manto's sister read it said, "Sa'adat, how shameless this Ismat can be? She didn't spare even her dead brother! How can she write such things about him?" To this Manto replied, " if you promise to write a sketch like this after my death, I swear to God, I'm ready to die this very day."

Ismat Chughtai was defending her critically acclaimed novel Lihaaf, which explored homoeroticism while Manto was facing the same charge for his novel Bu.

Here is an interesting extract from the court trial where both of them participated together and gave us some serious friendship goals.

An extract from Kaghazi Hai Pairahan (The Lihaf Trial)

Extract from India Dissents: 3,000 Years of Difference, Doubt, and Argument. Translated by M. Asaduddin.

…We appeared before the court on the day of the hearing.

The witnesses who had to prove that Manto's story Bu and my story Lihaf were obscene, were all present there. My lawyer instructed me not to open my mouth till the interrogation began. He would answer the queries as he thought fit.

Bu was taken up first.

'Is this story obscene?' Manto's lawyer asked.

'Yes,' answered the witness.

'Can you put your finger on a word which is obscene?'

Witness: 'The word "chest".'

Lawyer: 'My Lord, the word "chest" is not obscene.'

Witness: 'No. But here the writer means a woman's breasts.'

Manto was on his feet instantly and blurted out: 'A woman's chest must be called breasts and not groundnuts.'

The court reverberated with loud guffaws. Manto too began to laugh.

'If the accused shows frivolity a second time he will be turned out or punished for severe contempt of court.'

Manto's lawyer whispered into his ear and he understood the situation. The debate went on. The witness could find no other word except 'chest' and it could not be proved obscene.

'If the word "chest" is obscene, why not knee or elbow?' I asked Manto.

'Nonsense!' Manto growled.

...The court was crowded the next day. Several people had advised us to tender an apology. They were ready to pay the fine on our behalf. The excitement surrounding the lawsuits was waning.

The witnesses who had wanted to prove Lihaf obscene were thrown into confusion by my lawyer. They were not able to put their finger on any word in the story that would prove their point.

After a good deal of reflection, one of them said: 'This phrase... "collecting lovers" is obscene.'

'Which word is obscene: "collect" or "lover"?' the lawyer asked.

'Lover,' replied the witness a little hesitantly.

'My Lord, the word "lover" has been used by great poets most liberally. It is also used in naats, that is, poems written in praise of the Prophet. God-fearing people have accorded it a very high status.'

‘But it is objectionable for girls to collect lovers,’ said the witness.

‘Why?’

‘Because… because it is objectionable for good girls to do so.’

‘And if the girls are not good, then it is not objectionable?’

‘Mmm…no.’

‘My client must have referred to the girls who were not good. Yes, madam, do you mean here bad girls collect lovers?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, this may not be obscene. But it is reprehensible for an educated lady from a decent family to write about such things,’ the witness thundered.

‘Censure it as much as you want. But it does not come within the purview of law.’

The issue lost much of its steam.

‘If you agree to apologize, we’ll pay up the entire expense incurred by you…,’ someone I didn’t know whispered into my ear.

‘Should we apologize, Manto Sahab? We can buy a lot of goodies with the money we’ll get,’ I suggested to Manto.

‘Nonsense!’ Manto growled Manto and his peacock eyes bulged out again.

‘I’m sorry. This madcap Manto doesn’t agree.’

‘But you…why don’t you…?’

‘No. You don’t know what a quarrelsome fellow he is! He’ll make my life miserable in Bombay. I’d rather undergo the punishment than risk his wrath.

The judge called me into the ante-room attached to the court and said quite informally, ‘I’ve read most of your stories. They aren’t obscene. Neither is Lihaf. But Manto’s writings are littered with filth.’

‘The world is also littered with filth,’ I said in a feeble voice.

‘Is it necessary to rake it up, then?’

‘If it is raked up it becomes visible and people feel the need to clean it up.’

The judge laughed.



Abdul Hafeez 'Hafeez Hoshiarpuri', who was born in Hoshiarpur in 1912. He was considered an Ustaad (master) poet of Urdu language and was very famous amongst the Urdu poets of his time. Nasir Kazmi, one of the renowned poets of Urdu language was his student (in poetry) and started writing ghazals under Hafeez sahib's guidance. Hafeez Hoshiarpuri died in 1973 in Karachi, Pakistan.

Naakhun Ka Qarz — The Debt Owed to the Fingernails

Hafeez Hoshiarpuri

It was about three years ago that the late Saadat Hasan Manto conceived the idea of editing a book. He proposed the title "Naakhun Ka Qarz" — "The Debt Owed to the Fingernails." At that time, the following couplet by Ghalib was in his mind:

Kāvesh kā dil kare hai taqāzā ki hai hanūz

Nākhun par qarz is girah-e-nīm-bāz kā

(The heart still urges me to probe and unravel,
For the debt of this half-open knot is yet owed to the fingernails.)

The purpose of the book was to invite people who knew Manto well to express their thoughts about his personality. In connection with this project, Manto came to me as well and said:

"The debt of unravelling the knot of my personality lies upon the fingernails of a few of my friends, and I want them to repay this debt of mine as soon as possible."

I promised him that I would certainly write something about him.

A few days later, he came to remind me of my promise and said: "You won't be able to do anything else. Just tell me the date of my death; you won't disappoint me. I shall try to die this very year."

I said, "I see no complexity in your personality. Why, then, do you feel the need for someone to unravel this knot?"

Manto replied: "No. I want those people who know me merely through my writings to become acquainted with my personality as well. And only a few of my friends can accomplish this—and you are one of them."

At this, the following couplet immediately came to mind:

Sharminda rahe sahl-pasandān-e-jahān se

Woh uqda-e-mushkil the ki āsān na hone ham

(Let us remain ashamed before those who seek the easy way; We were a difficult knot—one that could not easily be untied.)

Manto said, "This couplet is really about yourself. Say something about me too."

This produced the following couplet:

Mahdūd har gham ek na ek āfat-e-jān tak

Afsos, harīf-e-ghair-insān na hue ham

(We confined every sorrow to one affliction of the soul after another; Alas, we could never become rivals to that which is less than human.)

Manto said, "This couplet, too, applies more aptly to you."

With that, he rose and left, reminding me once again of the debt I owed him.

If someone were to ask me to express Manto's entire life and death in one of my own couplets, I would recite this:

Sukūn-e-marg bhī kam ho us ādmī ke liye
Jo zindagī mein tarastā ho na zindagī ke liye

(Even the peace of death would be too little for the man Who, while alive, yearns neither for life nor for the sake of living.)

But the finest interpreter of Manto's life, death, and art are these verses of his beloved poet, Ghalib:

Juz dar āyina na dīdam asar-e-sa'y-e-khayāl

Sāz-e-hangāma na andar-khor-e-tāqat kardam

Har qadar bahr-e-talabgārī-e-insān raftam

Tā sabuk-rūhī-e-man ranj-e-garānī na kashad

Rāh-e-mastī na ba-andāza-e-sāmān raftam

Naghma-e-naqb ba-ganjīne-e-dilhā mī-zadam

Shab-e-wasl shudam o zūd ba-pāyān raftam

(I saw no trace of the effort of imagination except in the mirror; I could not fashion the instrument of tumult according to the measure of my strength. However far I travelled in the quest for humanity,I

did not allow the lightness of my spirit to suffer the burden of heaviness. I walked the path of intoxication without regard to the measure of worldly means; I struck the melody of the pickaxe against the treasure-houses of hearts.I became the night of union—and soon I passed towards its end.)

Manto's debt is still upon me. Alas, I could not repay this debt during his lifetime. He had asked me for the date of his death:

Muzhda bād ahl-e-riyā rā ki ze-maydān raftam

(Good news to the hypocrites—for I have left the field. Today, I am finally being relieved of this debt.)

Sog mein hai fasāna-go'ī āj
Har zabān par hai ab ye afsāna
Us kā woh bānkapan huā rukhsat
Ki Sa'ādat Hasan huā rukhsat

(Storytelling today is steeped in mourning, This tale is now upon every tongue.That unmistakable boldness of his has departed; Saadat Hasan himself has departed.)

6 September 1955

Beneath the darkness of this mortal world, amid the storm of a hundred calamities of existence,

Chehra-e-shola-tāb-e-Sa'ādat Hasan

(The flame-lit face of Saadat Hasan.)

Āh, sham‘-e-shabāb-e-Sa‘ādat Hasan

(Alas, the lamp of Saadat Hasan's youth.)

1374 months

When Saadat departed from this world, Hafeez said:

"Read this chronogrammatic verse by Ghalib with a sigh—"

Tashna ze-khumkada-e-‘ālam-e-imkān raftam

(Thirsting, I departed from the tavern of the world of possibility.)

Muzhda bād ahl-e-riyā rā ki ze-maydān raftam

(Good news to the hypocrites—for I have left the field.)

Translated from Urdu to Hindi by Musawwir Firozpuri



Literary Name: Musavvir Firozpuri (Urdu poet)

Lavneesh Puri Writing Urdu Ghazal Hindi Dohe and Geet

(Courtsey: Saadat Hasan Manto's Daughter Nusrat Jalal)

INTERVIEW:



Safia Manto

Born Safia Deen, the shy, reticent Safia was nothing like her vociferous, outgoing husband, the revolutionary Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto who dared to call a spade a spade and break all the barriers, including the piercing borders dividing India and Pakistan. Yet, Manto without Safia would not only be incomplete but impossible to fathom.

Beginning as an arranged marriage, their alliance culminated into a saga of empowering love and lasting friendship that spanned their happier times in Bombay, followed by several tribulations in Lahore, leading to Manto's eventual death. While a devastated Manto took to alcoholism after the demise of their infant son and even expressed his grief through his short story, "Khaled Miyah", Safia internalised her

feelings so no one could ever comprehend the inner demons she had probably been fighting all along.

Saadat Hasan Manto’s Story, as Told by Begum Safia Manto

"I have instructed my daughters never to become writers." — Safia Manto

Interviewer: Nisar Fatima

I used to run into Begum Safia Manto quite often, yet I never had the chance to converse with her at length. However, a meeting was finally arranged during a gathering for women. Moved by the warmth and affection she displayed during that interaction, I visited her home the very next day. Begum Safia Manto still resides in the same house that Manto *Sahab* occupied during his lifetime. As we entered the premises of 'Lakshmi Mansion' and were looking around, a cobbler sitting at the street corner asked,

"Are you looking for Saadat Manto Sahab's place?"

"Yes." Upon hearing this, he began walking with us and, pointing towards House No. 31, said, "It's right there."

Before I could thank him, I turned around to find that the cobbler had already left. It was as if he were a character from one of Manto’s stories—stepping out from the pages of a book, performing his role,

and then vanishing. I knocked on the door; Begum Safia Manto opened it with a smile and ushered us into the drawing room. After some initial pleasantries, we began talking about Manto Sahab. I noticed a sudden look of melancholy wash over Begum Manto.

She said, "In all our years of married life, I came to understand that man very well. He was a truly fearless and outspoken person." Along with pointing out the flaws of others, he would also honestly acknowledge his own shortcomings. He possessed a very serious temperament. He was quick to perceive any change occurring in society and courageously brought every social evil to light, ensuring that every stratum of society became aware of it, felt its impact, and prepared itself to seek a solution. It was precisely because of this habit that Manto had to make frequent rounds of the courts. Saadat Hasan had begun writing at a young age. When his elder brother heard talk of his growing fame, he said one day, "Brother, show me too what you write." Manto handed him his short story. After reading it, his brother remarked, "The boy writes brilliantly. Had he turned his attention toward religion, he could have become a saint." Hearing this, Manto smiled and replied, "I wish to play my role in society not as a saint, but as an ordinary human being." The service Manto rendered by exposing—through his pen—the evils deeply embedded in society is even more significant than spiritual reform; to truly understand social realities, one must delve into their very depths.

Safia Manto remarked, "Fed up with the attitude of publishers, I have told my daughters never to become writers."

She added, "Many people publish Manto's short stories in magazines under various names without seeking prior permission." Citing a monthly digest as an example, she noted, "It contains four or five of Manto's short stories." She was completely unaware of the publication of these short stories, nor had any of her acquaintances drawn her attention to it. When Safia learned of this, she wrote a letter to the magazine's editor. One day, the editor himself came to see her and, while apologizing, paid the royalty amount. Saadat Hasan Manto had a vast circle of friends. Many of them now hold high positions in major institutions, yet they do nothing for his family. There is also a huge number of admirers of his work who come to meet the great writer's widow with deep respect, sincerity, and reverence. Undoubtedly, those who used to stay by Manto's side like a shadow during his lifetime are nowhere to be seen now."

Safia Manto remarked, "Manto's personality was like an institution. Even today, we continue to learn a great deal from him."

Manto's third daughter, Nusrat Manto, was five years old when her father passed away; she does not even remember her late father's face. When we asked Nusrat, "What is your opinion of him now?"

She replied, "I have read his short stories and heard about his personality from my elders. I feel a deep longing—if only I could have seen him." "Wherever I go, people treat me with great respect and ask, 'You must miss your father terribly these days, don't you?'"

Nusrat said, "Wherever I go, people shower me with love, but that love would only be truly genuine if the publisher helped us."

Safia remarked, "Manto wrote countless books; had the royalties been paid honestly, we wouldn't have had to face financial hardship."

Safia continued, "After Manto passed away, a dispute arose regarding the house—a conflict that dragged on for years. We had moved into this house in Lahore right after the creation of Pakistan. No one raised an issue while Manto was alive, but after his death, some people wanted to have the house vacated."

Eventually, Manto's brother-in-law bought the house and transferred the title to Begum Manto, thereby resolving a major crisis. Begum Safia Manto is a very simple, unassuming woman. She is quiet by nature and peace-loving. She always strives to resolve matters amicably and properly, avoiding any unpleasantness or indifference. She possesses the knack of adapting herself to the circumstances. When we asked her...

"Manto Sahib was quite outspoken and a man of principle..."

"He was the kind of man he was; how did you prepare yourself to share your life with him?"

Begum Manto replied, "Manto greatly admired my simplicity, my patience, and my gentle temperament."

Consequently, the two spent a happy life together, supported by mutual cooperation. In this context, Begum Manto cited the opinion of some of Manto's friends who felt that "Manto should have had a sharp-witted and outspoken wife like Ismat Chughtai, rather than someone like Safia." Upon hearing this, Manto would gesture in

disbelief—touching his ears as if to ward off the thought—and say, "God forbid! Had that happened, we would have been divorced on the very first day." He would add, "I am very happy with my wife; she accepts what I say and doesn't interfere much in my affairs." Manto used to say that he preferred people like her.

Saadat Hasan Manto and Safia were married in 1939 in Africa. Both sets of parents—Safia's and Manto's—lived there, and it was they who arranged the match. Throughout their seventeen years of married life, the couple never had a falling out. They have three daughters: the eldest, Nikhat; the second, Nuzhat; and the youngest, Nusrat. The two elder daughters are married. After completing her B.A., Nusrat is training in painting at the National College of Arts.

Begum Manto added, "Saadat loved his daughters dearly. If I ever scolded the girls, he would get very upset. He used to work with them sitting right beside him. No matter how much noise the children made while sitting near him, he was never bothered." Manto led a very simple life. He did not have a separate room for reading or writing; instead, he would sit on the floor in a corner of the drawing room to do his work. He was very particular about food and dining etiquette, often saying, "Even if there is only one dish, it should be clean and served properly." He was particularly fond of cabbage *rotis*, *besan* (gram flour) *rotis*, and *keema* (minced meat) cooked with tomatoes. Manto always tried to spend as much time as possible at home. He was faint-hearted and could not bring himself to attend anyone's funeral. If anyone ever insisted, he would say, "Actually, I worry about my own funeral—no one will attend it. I'll just hire four

men to carry my bier." Saadat Hasan Manto was a free-spirited man; he could not work under anyone's authority. Consequently, he never held a formal job and supported his household solely on the earnings from his writing. Manto neither held a job nor saved any money; the question of a pension or other outstanding dues never even arose. However, it was reasonable to expect the publishers of his books to support Manto's children. They could have provided significant help had they wished, but they did not make regular payments, often dismissing the matter by claiming, "Our accounts with Manto were settled long ago."

Safia says, "After Manto passed away, the publishers provided some help initially, but nothing thereafter. Nowadays, there is absolutely no assistance available. My brothers, however, have helped me a great deal." "He never let me face any kind of hardship. He bore all the expenses, from the children's education to their weddings. However, circumstances these days are such that—well, for how long can anyone shoulder another person's responsibility?" Begum Manto said, "What he has already done is a huge favor in itself."

(Courtsey Weekly: January 1956, New Delhi)

Translated from Urdu to Hindi by Musawwir Firozpuri



Literary Name: Musavvir Firozpuri (Urdu poet)

Lavneesh Puri Writing Urdu Ghazal Hindi Dohe and Geet

(Courtsey: Saadat Hasan Manto's Daughter Nusrat Jalal)



Mohammad Aslam Parvez is a well-known Urdu dramatist, fiction writer, and recognized scholar on Saadat Hasan Manto

"The flaws within me are the flaws of this era": Manto

(An imaginary conversation with Saadat Hasan Manto)

Mohammad Aslam Parvez

I once wrote that Manto's life, much like his short stories, was not only fascinating but also brief. In that short span of life, Manto gifted Urdu fiction countless unforgettable stories and characters. Yet, it was a strange irony of nature that—just as Manto, like a ruthless craftsman, would strip away superfluous details and words from his stories to make them sharper—Nature perhaps enacted that same ruthlessness by cutting out and discarding many pages from the book of Manto's life. Ultimately, the truth remains that despite spending a significant portion of his cherished life in recklessness and haste, Manto lived a full life. Beyond short-story writing, he also applied his immense talent to other genres; he wrote radio plays, screenplays, and character sketches, and demonstrated his prowess in humorous and satirical essays. Moreover, in his practical life, he experienced every joy, sorrow, and tribulation firsthand. He became as notorious as he was famous. Some branded his stories as obscene, while others crowned him a champion of humanity. Some viewed him as a degenerate writer, while others recognized him as a social analyst. Some saw him as a devil, others as a 'bald angel.' Progressives labeled him a reactionary, while reactionaries deemed him a progressive. In

short, perhaps no other short-story writer has been the subject of as many contradictory and controversial statements as Manto and his art. Yet, Manto himself once remarked that he was a "first-rate fraud."

I have been reading Manto's short stories, sketches, plays, and essays for a long time. I have also kept abreast of much of what has been written about him. Consequently, I have compiled his short stories, sketches, essays, letters, and the memoirs written by others, shaping the material into a dialogue. In essence, this is an attempt—however incomplete—to view Manto at a glance and to understand his personality and art through his own writings. Minor cosmetic alterations were made to transform the text into a conversation, but I have refrained from tampering with the original text. Here is the interview with Manto for the readers:

Question: Manto Sahib, tell me, why do you write short stories?

Answer: Why do I write short stories? (Manto repeated my question.) What can I say about why I write them? I certainly put on airs about writing short stories, but the truth is, it is merely a fraud. I might claim that countless stories are tucked away in my pocket, but the reality is quite the opposite. Even after thinking all night, when I cannot conceive a story, I get up early in the morning. I toy with the idea of extracting the essence of a story from the newspapers, but I meet with failure. I just chain-smoke cigarette after cigarette. Then I go into the bathroom. I've heard that every great man does his thinking in the bathroom. But experience has taught me that I am no great man—simply because I cannot think even in the bathroom. Finally, worn out and frustrated, I lie down like a barren woman. Since

I have already collected the advance for an unwritten short story, I feel deeply vexed. I pick a quarrel with my wife for no reason. I clear away the household clutter. I gather up the shoes—tiny little shoes scattered all over the house—and stack them in one place. Yet, the wretched story simply refuses to take shape in my mind, and I remain in a state of agitation. Eventually, to exact revenge on this state of mind, I pick up a pen or pencil. I write '786' and begin the story with the very first sentence that pops into my head.

Question: So, you have written all your short stories this way?

Answer: Not all of them, but most. 'Babu Gopinath', 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Hatak', 'Mami', 'Mozel'—all these stories were written using this fraudulent method.

Question: Alright, Manto Sahib! Now tell me, why do you consider writing short stories essential?

(At this question, Manto suddenly fixed his large, frightening eyes upon me.)

Answer: Why do I consider it essential? What do you mean?

Question: Why do you write short stories?

Answer: I write short stories because I have become addicted to the craft—much like an addiction to liquor. If I don't write a story, I feel as though I haven't put on clothes, or haven't bathed, or haven't had a drink. I do not write the short story; rather, the short story writes me. I am a man of very little formal education. Although I have written

over twenty books, I sometimes marvel—who is this person? The one who has penned such remarkable stories—stories that frequently land me in court.

Question: Manto Sahib, those cases are filed because you use words in your writing that invite objection. In fact, people regard you as deeply irreligious and obscene.

Answer: By the grace and mercy of God, that is indeed what I am. I do not offer the ritual prayers (*Namaz*), yet I have prostrated myself in reverence many times.

Question: Then why this charade of writing '786' at the top of every page?

Answer: You do not know? That is Allah the Almighty's telephone number. This man named Saadat Hasan Manto often appears to be an atheist or an infidel, yet on paper, he transforms into a Muslim.

Question: You are the greatest short-story writer in the Urdu language. But is it true that you failed the matriculation exam twice before finally passing? And regarding the paper in which you failed... Was it Urdu?

Answer: Absolutely. Whatever I am today, Bari Alig played the primary role in shaping me. The late Bari Alig held great affection for me; he was proud of me, though he never expressed it to my face. The truth is, he was the one who set me on the path of writing and authorship. Had I not met him in Amritsar, I might well have lived and

died in obscurity—or perhaps languished in prison for crimes like theft or robbery.

Question: Most of your stories deal with political and social themes, yet you have written very few that could be classified as purely political stories. Is there a specific reason for this?

Answer: I have no interest in politics. I place politicians and medicine peddlers in the same category. Both leadership and selling medicine are professions; both politicians and medicine peddlers rely on prescriptions devised by others. Anyway, the point is that I have as much interest in politics as Gandhiji had in cinema. Gandhiji didn't watch movies, and I don't read newspapers. In reality, we were both mistaken; Gandhiji really ought to have watched films, and I really ought to read newspapers.

Question: Just as with political stories, you have written relatively few stories centered on romance or affairs of the heart. Is this because, by nature and temperament, you are not a romantic person?

Answer: People often complain that I don't write romantic stories. But love is a vast, all-encompassing concept. One can love a mother, a sister, a daughter, or a wife; one can even love slippers or a pair of boots. A friend of mine is devoted to his female dog. But as for those who are consumed by romantic love for a woman—I feel a great deal of pity for them. There is an innocence even in the foolishness of these wretched souls. They would set out to solve the problems of the entire world. Yet, when faced with a woman, they would get so hopelessly entangled that—to reach a woman standing just a yard away—they

might book a ticket all the way to Peshawar, only to wonder upon arrival how she had vanished from sight.

Question: In one of your articles, you remarked, "It is possible that Saadat Hasan might die, but Manto will live on." So, as a human being and as a short-story writer, where do you place yourself?

Answer: You may call it a story, but for me, it is a bitter reality that I have yet to find my true place in my own country. That is why my soul remains restless. That is why I find myself sometimes in a mental asylum and other times in a hospital. Whatever I may be, I am certain of one thing: I am a human being. The proof of this lies in the fact that I possess both flaws and virtues. I speak the truth, yet at times, I lie. If I see an injured dog, I feel unwell for hours; yet, I have never mustered the courage to pick it up, bring it home, and nurse it back to health. It pains me deeply to see a friend in financial distress, yet on many such occasions, I have failed to offer financial help—simply because I needed to buy liquor.

Question: Like Intizar Hussain, many describe your art as a feat of "shock-value" mentality. People complain that, at the end of a story, you pull a cat out of the bag.

Answer: If they object to a cat emerging from the story's bag, I can just as easily pull out a tomcat. In any case, I do not consider the element of surprise in literature to be a bad thing. My dear fellow, why must a girl's cheeks be compared to a rose? Why not to a monkey's belly? Ismat Chughtai observed long ago that Manto is fascinated by things that create a sensation and startle people out of their slumber.

He believes that if everyone is wailing and lamenting, and you suddenly let out a loud peal of laughter, everyone will hold their breath and stare at you in amazement. That's it! You'll make your mark; you'll establish your presence. Furthermore, Mumtaz Hussain says, "In my quest for virtue, I extract a ray of light from the belly of a person from whom you would least expect it." True, it is a rather trivial act—indeed, an obscene one—to draw a ray of light from the belly of a man who contains nothing but intestines and filth.

Question: Legal cases were filed against five of your stories because some people wanted you to refrain from writing such obscene tales. What is your take on this?

Answer: It is true that the lawsuits regarding *Kali Shalwar*, *Dhuaan*, and *Boo* caused me great distress, and *Thanda Gosht* absolutely pulverized me. My friend, the courtroom is a place where one has to endure humiliation. God forbid anyone should ever have to deal with the institution known as the court. But (Manto paused for a moment, then stared at me with his large eyes and said) I am not the sort of man to back down. If *Kali Shalwar* troubles you, I will trouble you further by writing *Dhuaan* and *Thanda Gosht*. Had I intended to steer clear of this, I would have repented after the very first case and taken up some respectable profession—government service, for instance, or selling ghee, or perhaps inventing a medicine. Question: But Manto Sahib! Is it really necessary to focus on the themes of sexuality and the prostitute...

(Manto interrupted me before I could finish my sentence. I already knew—through Ismat Chughtai—that Manto had a habit of cutting people off mid-sentence. So, I remained silent.)

Answer: Look here! Writing short stories is my profession. I am well-versed in all its techniques and nuances. I have written several stories on this subject in the past, and none of them are obscene. I will continue to write stories on this theme in the future, and they will not be obscene either. A great deal has already been written about prostitutes... And much more will be written. People write or speak about whatever is right in front of them. Sex workers have been in our midst not just recently, but for thousands of years; they are even mentioned in divine scriptures. Now, since there is no longer room for a new divine book or prophet, we encounter references to them not in verses of the Quran, but in newspapers, magazines, and books—publications one can read without burning scented incense and then simply toss into the scrap heap. If mentioning a sex worker is considered obscene, then her very existence is obscene. If speaking of her is taboo, then her profession, too, ought to be taboo. Eliminate the sex worker, and the mention of her will vanish on its own. We can speak openly about lawyers. We can talk about barbers, washermen, vegetable sellers, and innkeepers. We can orchestrate a romance between a young man and a young woman; we can doom their love, have them both drink poison, and have their funeral processions emerge from separate neighborhoods. We can then—through some miracle—bring their graves together and, if the need arises, even have angels rain down flowers upon them from above. Why, then, can we not narrate the lives of sex workers? She has no need for angels or

their flowers. When she dies, no funeral procession from another neighborhood joins hers; no grave yearns to lie beside hers. The sex worker's very existence is a funeral procession that society carries upon its shoulders; as long as society does not bury it, talk about her will persist.

Question: Yes! Fair point, but a few years ago, the Raja Sahib of Mahmudabad and others passed a resolution against you.

Answer: The resolution passed by the Raja Sahib of Mahmudabad and others against this literature is utterly pointless. As for myself, I will say that I like this subject matter. Why? I just do! Consider it a perversion in my nature. And if you are wise—if you understand the context surrounding these things—you will grasp why I have contracted this malady... If you are unaware of the era we are living through, then read my short stories. If you cannot tolerate these stories, it implies that the times themselves are intolerable. The vices within me are the vices of this age. There is no flaw in my writing; the flaw often attributed to me actually belongs to the prevailing system. I do not wish to incite passion in people's thoughts and emotions. Why would I strip away the garments of culture and civilization when they are already naked? Nor do I attempt to clothe them; that is not my job—it is the tailor's.

Question: Yes... yes, but along with the Raja Sahib of Mahmudabad, the poet Mahir-ul-Qadri from Hyderabad and Hakim Mirza Haider from Bombay also...

Answer: Look here, sir, I am an artist. (Manto said bitterly) I do not care for shallow or unsightly wounds. It is quite possible that these three formed their opinions under a specific influence or for a particular motive. And then again, it is also possible that these three gentlemen are not even qualified to offer an opinion. Only someone well-versed in the nuances of the critic's craft can critique a great poet or a master of the short story. If you are determined to crack my skull, then for God's sake, do it properly. I am absolutely unwilling to have my head bashed in by someone who doesn't even know the art of doing it right.

Question: Manto Sahib! Even the Progressive writers haven't mastered the art of cracking skulls—especially yours! What is your take on the art of skull-cracking?

Answer: Precisely! Manto has become a thorny issue for their brand of literature. On one hand, the Progressives blacklisted me, branding me a reactionary, a selfish individualist, a hedonist, and an escapist. On the other, *Savera*—the mouthpiece of the Progressive movement—advertises my work with these words: "Saadat Hasan Manto is the standard-bearer of truth. He wields the double-edged sword of truth. Indifferent to blessings or punishments, he treads a path that only he can walk." When I read that blurb in *Savera*, I didn't just smile; I laughed heartily. Recently, at a conference in Bhopal, Ismat Shahid Latif—in a bold, forthright manner—publicly denounced and disowned all those short stories of hers that failed to measure up to the yardstick of Progressivism. Why don't other Progressives act with Ismat's honesty? They ought to consign all the

books by "reactionaries" on their blacklist to the flames. If they did that, I would kiss their hands. Question: Sardar Jafri and other Progressive writers have completely cast you out of the realm of literature—perhaps because you are hostile towards the Progressive movement.

Answer: I harbor no enmity towards the Progressive movement. However, the erratic antics of so-called Progressives—those who merely put on a show of progressivism—really grate on me. When my short story 'Babu Gopinath' was published in *Adab-e-Latif*, I was living in Bombay. Progressive writers praised it highly, hailing it as the masterpiece short story of that year. Sardar Jafri, Ismat Chughtai, and Krishan Chander, in particular, lauded it greatly. Yet, suddenly—heaven knows what sort of fit seized them—all the Progressives turned against the story's greatness. Initially, criticism was voiced in hushed tones; it was disparaged in whispers. Later, Progressives across India and Pakistan took to the rooftops to denounce it, labeling it reactionary, lacking in decency, and a piece of sorcery.

Question: Aks

It is often said that the elements of boldness and rebellion found in the works of Progressive writers—and in your own short stories—first appeared in the stories of the *Angaray* anthology. So, did you draw inspiration for this boldness from the stories in *Angaray*?

Answer: Not at all! I haven't even read the stories in *Angaray*.

Question: Manto Sahib! Nature endowed you with the gift of storytelling, yet you also hold a distinguished place in the realms of drama and character sketches. While you wrote plays during your tenure at All India Radio, was there a specific reason you turned to writing sketches?

Answer: As for the plays, they were born out of the struggle for a livelihood. I was hungry; that is why I wrote them. I take pride in the fact that these comic plays—which kept others laughing—couldn't bring even the faintest smile to my own lips. And the story behind my inclination towards character sketches is this: after the obscenity trial for *Thanda Gosht*, my state of mind was peculiar. I couldn't figure out what to do—whether to quit writing altogether or to keep scribbling away, completely indifferent to the consequences. I wished I could get a property allotment so I could sit quietly in a corner for a few years, far removed from pen and inkwell. If any thoughts arose in my mind, I would simply strangle them at birth. If I couldn't secure an allotment, I thought I might take up black marketing or start brewing illicit liquor. Ultimately, I didn't pursue the liquor business because I knew I would end up drinking all the stock myself.

Question: But you did apply for an ice factory, didn't you?

Answer: Yes, I did. I had even deposited fifty rupees into the government treasury with the plea: "I am a refugee from Amritsar and currently unemployed; therefore, I should be allotted a share in a printing press or a cinema house." During the interview, I stated quite frankly, "In my own estimation, I was a significant short-story writer. However, I have now realized that this line of work is beyond

my capabilities. May God bless M. Aslam and Bharti Dutt; I am stepping aside from short-story writing in their favor." Yet, someone whispered to the board members that this man—Saadat Hasan Manto—was a 'Progressive.' Consequently, my application was summarily rejected. Meanwhile, the Progressive writers branded me a 'reactionary' and ostracized me completely. It was quite an irony. Ultimately, I concluded, "God has closed one door, but opened another!" So, I picked up my pen and began to write. But before I could start, I faced a dilemma: "What should the subject be? And what form should the writing take?" After much deliberation, I decided to write about actresses. The first piece in this series was titled "Pari Chehra Naseem" and was published in the daily *Afaq*. I was pleased to have found a path that would be free from government scrutiny and would offer reassurance to those who value propriety. However, no sooner was the piece published than the *Afaq* office was flooded with letters condemning and reviling me.

Question: I hear that alcohol has riddled your liver with holes? You narrowly escaped death in late 1953.

Answer: Rest assured; I have yet to live long enough to witness many more spectacles. For years, Safia has waged a campaign against my drinking habit. When she realized that persuasion had no effect, she resorted to rationing my supply. But as everyone knows, restrictions don't work very well on me. In fact, the more restrictions imposed, the more determined I became to break them—often drinking far more than usual. The craving would strike, and I would drink again. Yet, all the while, I remained acutely aware of the limits Safia had set, and

this nagging guilt—a thorn in my soul—would torment me. To numb that sting, I would drink even more. To be honest, it is this very anguish, these deprivations, and these restrictions that have brought me to this point. Safia's experience as the wife of a writer has hardly been a pleasant one; she never came to terms with my excessive drinking.

Question: What are you writing these days?

Answer: I want to write so much. But my frailty—this constant, overwhelming exhaustion—prevents me from doing anything. If I could find even a moment of peace, I might gather those scattered thoughts that flutter about like monsoon moths. But I'll likely die one day, still caught in a web of "ifs" and "buts." And you, too, will fall silent, simply saying, "Manto is dead." It is true that Manto will die, but the tragedy is that the thoughts stored in his mind will die with him. If someone were to promise to extract all the thoughts from my brain and bottle them up, Manto would be ready to die this very day. Manto lives for Manto. But what does that matter to anyone? What, after all, is this creature called Manto? Forget it! Let's drop this pointless topic. Let's talk about something else. (Published in the 'Manto' special issue of the quarterly magazine 'Tahrir-e-Nau')



Saadat Hasan Manto (11 May 1912 – 18 January 1955) was a Pakistani writer, playwright and novelist from Punjab, who is regarded as the greatest short-story author in Urdu literature. He was active from 1933 during British rule till his death in 1955 after independence.

Writing mainly in Urdu, he produced 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio plays, three collections of essays, and two collections of personal sketches. His best short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics. He is best known for his stories about the partition of India, which he opposed, immediately following independence in 1947.

Manto was tried six times for alleged obscenity in his writings; thrice before 1947 in British India, and thrice after independence in 1947 in Pakistan, but was never convicted. He is acknowledged as one of the finest 20th-century Urdu writers

//

Hard Times Turned Me into a Short Story Writer

Saadat Hasan Manto

A few years ago, a day arrived in my life when I became acutely aware of my poverty. This realization deeply troubled me. Yet, I composed myself and took stock of my inner self to see what assets—if any—I still possessed. There lay a vast accumulation of days gone by; some were brilliantly bright, while others held a darkness that would make even moonless nights envious. There were incidents—some delightfully sweet, others so bitter that were I to write them down today, the very tongue of the paper would grow weary of spitting in disgust, yet their bitterness would remain undiminished. In one corner sat my innocence, cowering in fear; in another stood my volatile temperament, restless and agitated. There wasn't a single thing of practical use—by which I mean something that could serve a purpose in this world. After a thorough search, finding nothing of utility within myself, I sank into despair. Just as I was about to shut the door of my house forever in that state of hopelessness, I heard a faint voice. Someone was saying,

"I can be of use to you!"

I asked, "Who are you?"

The reply came, "I am a short story."

I asked in astonishment, "A short story! Where were you hiding? ...No, first tell me, how did you get inside me?"

The short story spoke in a feeble voice, "I have no idea how I entered. All I know is that I have been imprisoned in a dark chamber within you for a long time... I surmise that I was born right here, in this darkness."

I found the short story's words intriguing. When I brought him out of the dark chamber and into the light, I was utterly astonished to find that he was my exact double.

"Brother! So, you turned out to be my double... Tell me... tell me... what do you have to say?"

A faint smile played upon *Afsana's* lips.

"I have a great deal to say. But my power of speech has weakened. I

shall speak later... but tell me this: why was I invisible to you for so long? ...If you had truly closed the door and walked away, do you know what would have happened?"

I asked nonchalantly, "What would have happened?"

The reply came, "You would have been deprived of a vast inheritance."

I laughed, "An inheritance!"

The voice said, "I am your inheritance... cherish me and put me to use. Bring me out and display me. The heartbeats of your sensitivity have cradled me in their lap. Your selflessness has suckled me... The days of your past life have rocked me in a cradle... The restlessness of your temperament lies in my bed... If I were to leave you, you would be like an oyster from which the pearls have rolled out... Come here, support me. I want to step out."

I became a short-story writer. Hard times turned me into a fine short-story writer. My stories are my inheritance. I am presenting this inheritance for you all to see. I fear nothing, for this exception is immutable; no one can dislodge it from its place.

(Book: Preface to the first edition of *Manto Ke Afsane* [Manto's Stories], Bombay, 30 August 1940)



Saadat Hasan Manto (11 May 1912 – 18 January 1955) was a Pakistani writer, playwright and novelist from Punjab, who is regarded as the greatest short-story author in Urdu literature. He was active from 1933 during British rule till his death in 1955 after independence.

Writing mainly in Urdu, he produced 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio plays, three collections of essays, and two collections of personal sketches. His best short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics. He is best known for his stories about the partition of India, which he opposed, immediately following independence in 1947

Manto was born in the late British Raj at Paprodi village of Samrala in the Ludhiana district of British Punjab into a Punjabi Muslim family with Kashmiri ancestry on 11 May 1912. His trading family had settled in Amritsar in the early-nineteenth century and taken up the legal profession, with most in his family being barristers at the time of his birth. His father, Khwaja Ghulam Hasan, was a session judge of a local court. His mother, Sardar Begum, was of Pashtun ancestry and was the second wife of his father. Identifying as both Punjabi and Kashmiri, he claimed allegiance to his native Punjab and infamously remarked "Behind my Urdu, it's the Punjabi tongue that speaks" and upon his writing being accused of being obscene, he remarked "We Punjabis are madmen, but pure of heart"; and, in a letter to

Jawaharlal Nehru, suggested that being 'beautiful' was the second meaning of being 'Kashmiri'.

Hindi or Urdu

saadat hasan manto

The dispute between Hindi and Urdu has been going on for an age. Maulvi Abdul Haq, Dr. Tara Chand, and Mahatma Gandhi understand this conflict, but it remains beyond my comprehension. Despite my best efforts, its meaning has not penetrated my mind. Why do Hindus waste their time advocating for Hindi? Why are Muslims so desperate to protect Urdu...? A language is not manufactured; it forms on its own, nor can human efforts ever destroy a language. When I wanted to write something on this fresh and heated topic, the following dialogue took shape.

Munshi Narayan Prasad : Iqbal Sahib, will you drink this soda?

Mirza Muhammad Iqbal : Yes, I will drink it.

Munshi : Why don't you drink lemon ?

Iqbal : No particular reason, I just like soda. Everyone in our house drinks soda.

Munshi : So, it seems you hate lemon.

Iqbal : Not at all... why would I hate it, Munshi Narayan Prasad? It's just that since everyone at home drinks this, it has become a bit of a habit. There is no special reason; in fact, I think lemon is tastier than soda.

Munshi : That is exactly why I am surprised. Why would you leave a sweet thing and prefer something salty? Lemon not only has sweetness dissolved in it, but it also has a fragrance. What do you think?

Iqbal : You are absolutely right... but...

Munshi : But what?

Iqbal : Nothing... I was just going to say that I will drink the soda.

Munshi : Again, the same ignorance... One would think I am forcing you to drink poison. Oh brother, what is the difference between lemon and soda anyway? Both bottles were manufactured in the exact same factory. The exact same machine sealed the water inside them. If you take the sweetness and fragrance out of the lemon, what is left ?

Iqbal : Soda... salty water...

Munshi : Then what is the harm in drinking it?

Iqbal : No harm at all.

Munshi : Then take it, drink.

Iqbal : What will you drink?

Munshi : I will send for another bottle.

Iqbal : Why would you send for another bottle? What is the harm in drinking soda?

Munshi : N... no harm at all.

Iqbal : Then take it, drink this soda.

Munshi : What will you drink ?

Iqbal : I... I will send for another bottle.

Munshi : Why would you send for another bottle? What is the harm in drinking lemon?

Iqbal : N... o... har... m... at all... And what is the harm in drinking soda?

Munshi : N... o... har... m... at all.

Iqbal : The thing is, soda is just a bit better.

Munshi : But I think that lemon... is just a bit better.

Iqbal : That may be so... but I have always heard from my elders that soda is better.

Munshi : Now what can be done about that... I, too, have always heard from my elders that lemon is better.

Iqbal : What is your own opinion?

Munshi : What is your own opinion?

Iqbal : My opinion... my opinion... my opinion is simply that... but why don't you share your opinion?

Munshi : My opinion... my opinion... my opinion is simply that... but why should I express my opinion first?

Iqbal : We won't be able to express our opinions like this. Let's do this: place a lid over your glass. I will cover my glass too. Once we do this, we can sit down comfortably and decide.

Munshi : That cannot be done... the bottles have already been opened. Now we have to drink them. Come on, decide quickly. Otherwise, all their fizz will escape... their entire life force is in their fizz, after all.

Iqbal: I agree... and you also concede this much, that there is no difference between lemon and soda.

Munshi : When did I ever say that there is no difference between lemon and soda? There is a vast difference... a difference of heaven and earth! One has sweetness. It has fragrance. It has tartness. That means it has three things more than soda. Soda is nothing but fizz, and even that is so sharp it burns the nose. Compared to that, how delicious is lemon! Drink one bottle, and you feel refreshed for hours. Soda is generally drunk by the sick... and you yourself just admitted that lemon is tastier than soda.

Iqbal : True. But I never said that lemon is better than soda. Being tasty does not mean it is beneficial. Pickles are very tasty, but you are well aware of their harms. Just because something has tartness or fragrance does not prove it is very good. Ask any doctor, and you will find out how harmful lemon is for the stomach. Soda, however, is a proper drink... I mean, it helps with digestion.

Munshi : Look, this can be resolved by mixing both the lemon and the soda together.

Iqbal : I have no objection.

Munshi : Then pour half your soda into this empty glass.

Iqbal : Why don't you pour half your lemon first... I will pour the soda afterward.

Munshi : That makes no sense. Why don't you pour the soda first?

Iqbal : I want to drink Soda-Lemon mixed.

Munshi : And I want to drink Lemon-Soda mixed.



Saadat Hasan Manto (11 May 1912 – 18 January 1955) was a Pakistani writer, playwright and novelist from Punjab, who is regarded as the greatest short-story author in Urdu literature. He was active from 1933 during British rule till his death in 1955 after independence.

Writing mainly in Urdu, he produced 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio plays, three collections of essays, and two collections of personal sketches. His best short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics. He is best known for his stories about the partition of India, which he opposed, immediately following independence in 1947.

Manto was tried six times for alleged obscenity in his writings; thrice before 1947 in British India, and thrice after independence in 1947 in Pakistan, but was never convicted. He is acknowledged as one of the finest 20th-century Urdu writers

Manto’s Letter to Nehru

Saadat Hasan Manto

Pandit-ji, ‘Assalamu Alaikum’.

This is the first letter I am sending you. You are, ‘Masha'Allah’, considered quite handsome among Americans. But I believe my own features aren't too bad either; if I were to go to America, perhaps I, too, might be accorded the status of a handsome man. However, you are the Prime Minister of India, and I am a renowned short-story writer from Pakistan—there is a vast difference between the two. Nevertheless, we share one thing in common: you are a Kashmiri, and so am I. You are Nehru, and I am Manto... To be Kashmiri implies beauty, and that beauty is something I have yet to witness. For a long time, I have harbored a desire to meet you (provided such a meeting takes place in this lifetime). My elders frequently associated with yours, yet no opportunity ever arose for me to meet you. What a tragedy it is that I have never even seen you—though I have certainly heard your voice on the radio, albeit just once. As I mentioned, I have long wished to meet you because of our shared Kashmiri bond, but now I wonder: what is the need? A Kashmiri is bound to cross paths with another Kashmiri sooner or later, at some crossroads or another. You settled near a canal and became Nehru, whereas I still wonder how I came to be Manto. You must have seen Kashmir countless times; I have only ever made it as far as Banihal. My Kashmiri friends who speak the language tell me that 'Manto' means 'Mant'—that is, a weight of one-and-a-half ‘seers’. You surely know the Kashmiri

language. If you would take the trouble to reply, please do tell me the reason behind the name 'Manto'.

If I am merely a 'dedh-ser' (a small measure of one-and-a-half 'sers), then I am no match for you. You are an entire canal, while I am just a 'dedh-ser'. How could I possibly contend with you? Yet, we are both like those guns that—according to a popular saying about Kashmiris—merely go 'phut' in the sun... Please forgive me; do not take offense. When I heard this absurd saying, being a Kashmiri myself, it made my blood boil. I mention it here merely for amusement, though we both know full well that we Kashmiris have never been defeated on any battlefield. I can speak of your name with great pride in the realm of politics, for you are a master at making a statement and immediately retracting it. Who has ever defeated us Kashmiris in wrestling? Who has ever surpassed us in poetry? Yet, I was astonished to hear that you are damming up our river. But Pandit-ji, you are, after all, merely Nehru. Alas, I am but a *dedh-ser* weight. Had I been a boulder weighing thirty or forty thousand 'maunds', I would have rolled myself into that river, forcing you to consult your engineers for a while on how to remove me.

Pandit-ji, there is no doubt that you are a great man; you are the Prime Minister of India. You rule over the very land with which we have had such a deep connection. You are everything—yet, forgive my audacity, you have paid no heed to anything this humble servant (a Kashmiri) has said. Let me share something interesting with you. My father—who was, of course, a Kashmiri—would bring home any 'Hato' (Kashmiri laborer) he encountered; he would seat him in the vestibule

and serve him salty tea accompanied by 'kulcha' bread. Then, with great pride, he would tell the 'Hato', "I, too, am a Kashmiri."

Pandit-ji, you are a Kashmiri... I swear to God, if you were to ask for my life, it would be yours in an instant. I know—or rather, I understand—that you cling to Kashmir simply because, being Kashmiri yourself, you harbor a magnetic love for the land. Every Kashmiri ought to feel this way, whether or not they have ever actually seen Kashmir—as I have mentioned earlier in this letter. I have only traveled as far as Banihal. I have seen areas like Kud, Batote, and Kishtwar; amidst their beauty, I also witnessed the poverty. If you have managed to eradicate that poverty, then by all means, keep Kashmir for yourself. Yet, I am certain that despite being Kashmiri, you cannot eliminate it—simply because you do not have the time.

Why don't you do this... I am your Pandit brother; invite me over. First, I shall enjoy a meal of 'Shalgam-ki-Shab-Deg' (turnip stew) at your home. After that, I will take charge of all the work in Kashmir. These people—like Bakshi and the rest—deserve to be cast aside; they are utter scoundrels. You have unnecessarily elevated them to high positions just to suit your own needs... but why? I realize you are a leader—which I am not—but that does not mean I am incapable of understanding things. You are a writer in the English language. I, too, write short stories here in Urdu—in the very language that is being systematically erased in your India. Pandit-ji, I regularly follow your statements. From them, I have gathered that you harbor a love for Urdu. However, I once heard a speech of yours on the radio—back when India was being carved into two... Everyone acknowledges your

command over English, but when you began speaking in that affected, artificial Urdu, it sounded as though your English speech had been translated by someone who had a foul taste in their mouth while reading it out. You seemed to be retching at every phrase. I fail to understand how you agreed to read such a text... That was the era when Radcliffe had sliced India like a loaf of bread into two halves—yet, regrettably, they have not been toasted to this day. You are toasting your half over there, and we ours over here; yet, the fire in both our hearths is being stoked from the outside.

Pandit-ji, these days 'Baggu-Goshe' (It is the season for pears... I have certainly seen countless 'goshe' (pears), but I have a great craving for 'Baggu-goshe'. What a cruel thing you've done—granting Bakshi such absolute authority that he doesn't even send me a few 'Baggu-goshe' as a gift. To hell with Bakshi, but as for the 'Baggu-goshe'... no, may they remain safe wherever they are. What I really wanted to ask you is: why don't you read my books? If you have read them, I regret that you didn't offer any praise. And if you haven't, it is an even greater cause for regret, considering you are a writer yourself. I have faced several lawsuits on charges of obscenity in my writing, but it is a gross injustice that a publisher in Delhi—right under your very nose—has published a collection of my stories under the title 'Manto ke Fuhsh Afsane' (Manto's Obscene Stories). I wrote a book called 'Ganje Farishte' (Bald Angels), and an Indian publisher printed it under the title 'Parde Ke Peeche' (Behind the Curtain)—you tell me, what am I supposed to do? The preface to this book is the very letter I am writing to you now... if this book, too, gets published there illicitly, then I swear to God, I will somehow make my way to

Delhi and grab hold of you. And I won't let go... I'll latch onto you in such a way that you'll remember it for the rest of your life. Every morning, I'll insist that you serve me salty tea—with 'kulcha' bread on the side. And a 'Shab-deg' of turnips—that will certainly be on the menu every week. Once this book is printed, I shall send you a copy. I hope you will certainly inform me upon receiving this and share your opinion regarding my writing.

You will catch the scent of burnt meat from this letter of mine... You know, a poet named 'Ghani'—famous as Ghani Kashmiri—lived in our homeland, Kashmir. A poet from Iran once visited him. Ghani's doors were left open because he was not at home. He used to tell people, "What do I have in my house that would require me to keep the doors shut? However, when I am home, I do close the doors—because I am the only treasure within." The Iranian poet left his 'bayaz' (poetry notebook) in the empty house. It contained an incomplete couplet; the second line ('misra-e-sani') was written, but the poet had been unable to compose the first line ('misra-e-ula'). The second line read: 'Az libas-e-tu bu-e-kabab mi ayad' (The scent of roasted meat wafts from your garment).

When the Iranian poet returned a while later, he saw his notebook. The first line was there: 'Kudam sokhta-jaan dast ze bad amanat' (Which tormented soul has dared to touch this?).

Pandit-ji, I too am a 'sokhta-jaan' (a soul consumed by inner fire). I have reached out to you—placing my hand upon your hem—because I am dedicating this book to you.

August 27, 1954

Saadat Hasan Manto

(Manto wrote this letter four months and twenty-two days before his passing.)



Saadat Hasan Manto (11 May 1912 – 18 January 1955) was a Pakistani writer, playwright and novelist from Punjab, who is regarded as the greatest short-story author in Urdu literature. He was active from 1933 during British rule till his death in 1955 after independence.

Writing mainly in Urdu, he produced 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio plays, three collections of essays, and two collections of personal sketches. His best short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics. He is best known for his stories about the partition of India, which he opposed, immediately following independence in 1947.

Manto was tried six times for alleged obscenity in his writings; thrice before 1947 in British India, and thrice after independence in 1947 in Pakistan, but was never convicted. He is acknowledged as one of the finest 20th-century Urdu writers

Two letters from Saadat Hasan Manto to Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi.

Saadat Hasan Manto

17-Adelphi Chambers, Clare Road, Bombay-8

(February 1939)

Dear Brother,

I received your affectionate letter. Thank you for the ghazals... I was about to write a few more customary words of the same sort when my eyes fell upon a line at the bottom of your letter: "Sometimes the thought crosses my mind—why not surrender my life to a life of excess and indiscipline?" I have already surrendered three-quarters of my life to such excesses. Ever since I came of age, I have practiced no restraint; the time has now come when the very word 'restraint' has vanished from my dictionary. I feel that if life is spent in restraint, it is a form of imprisonment; if spent in excess, it is still a form of imprisonment. Somehow, we must catch one end of the thread of this woolen sock and keep unraveling it. And that is all—I have already done more than half the work; I shall do the rest gradually. For I do not wish to die just yet. The day I discover my true self, I shall not hesitate for a moment to summon death.

My life is a wall, the plaster of which I scrape away with my fingernails. Sometimes I want to scatter all its bricks to the winds. At other times, I feel like erecting a new structure upon that heap of

rubble. I remain constantly caught in this web of contemplation. My mind burns from ceaseless activity; my normal body temperature is a degree higher than usual—from which you can gauge the intensity of my inner heat. I wish to write so much more. But the weakness... that constant exhaustion which weighs me down, preventing me from doing anything. If I could find even a moment of peace, I might gather my scattered thoughts—thoughts that flutter about like moths in the monsoon rain. But... caught in this cycle of 'ifs' and 'buts,' one day I shall die, and you, too, will fall silent, simply saying, "Manto is dead." Manto may well die—that is true—but the tragedy is that the thoughts stored within his mind will die along with him. If someone were to promise to extract all the thoughts from my mind and preserve them in a bottle, Manto would be ready to die this very day. Manto does not live for the sake of Manto... but what does that matter to anyone? What, after all, is this creature called Manto?

Let us leave this pointless talk aside... let us discuss something else. Krishan Chander writes beautifully. I have had the occasion to read his short stories in magazines like *Humayun* and *Adabi Duniya*. I read your short story; it is excellent. I particularly liked this sentence of yours: "A voice rose from his heart, and he began to wonder if the Inspector, too, had heard it." I detected a touch of Chekhov in this story of yours. It will be published in the new issue of the magazine. Do keep sending your stories from time to time. Thank you for appreciating 'Mantar'. Rafiq Sahib, one of your ghazals is on the radio this month ...am singing. I saw your name in *Indian Essays*. I hope you are doing well. Khalish Sahib and Nazir Sahib send their regards.

Yours humbly,

Acknowledgment

These have been taken from the book 'Manto Ke Khat', edited by Aslam Parvez and transliterated from Urdu by Shahnawaz Alam.



Saadat Hasan Manto (11 May 1912 – 18 January 1955) was a Pakistani writer, playwright and novelist from Punjab, who is regarded as the greatest short-story author in Urdu literature. He was active from 1933 during British rule till his death in 1955 after independence.

Writing mainly in Urdu, he produced 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio plays, three collections of essays, and two collections of personal sketches. His best short stories are held in high esteem by writers and critics. He is best known for his stories about the partition of India, which he opposed, immediately following independence in 1947.

Manto was tried six times for alleged obscenity in his writings; thrice before 1947 in British India, and thrice after independence in 1947 in Pakistan, but was never convicted. He is acknowledged as one of the finest 20th-century Urdu writers

17-Adelphi Chambers, Clare Road, Bombay-8

(June, 1939)

Saadat Hasan Manto

Dear Nadeem,

I received both your letters. I wonder why you are so selfless... I am afraid. One who lives in darkness lacks the strength to gaze at blinding light. Your letter frightens me. What can I do? As I age, a childlike quality is creeping into me. A day will come when I crawl on my knees and speak in a lisping, babyish tone. People expand; I am shrinking. I have no leisure to reflect on the phase of life I am currently traversing. My life's train halts at many stations, yet—exhausted and weary of the journey since its very inception—I cannot even read the signboard that would reveal the station's name. It is a strange state of affairs; I understand nothing—and how could I? For there is simply no time to understand.

Krishan Chander wants me to write a new short story for him... I feel like sending him a fresh photograph of myself. Those with the eyes to see would find many new stories written in that image alone. You have strongly urged me to send an unpublished short story for *Naye Zaviye*. If you ask me, this business of writing short stories is utter nonsense. ...in return for which one gets nothing but thanks. My doctor, Zauhar, sends me medicine every day; besides thanks, he also demands money. Yesterday, he returned a one-rupee coin because it lacked the proper ring. I had intended to start a short story, but the

moment I placed that dull-sounding coin in my palm, all the 'ring'—the liveliness—vanished from my own spirit... Anyway, I will write the story, because you have recommended it and I am fond of Krishan Chander too. Do let Krishan Chander Sahib know that my mother has passed away. I shall dedicate whatever time I might have found to mourn her to his work instead.

The 'Maktaba' (publishing house) folks had promised to send the first installment of fifty rupees—out of the total one hundred and fifty—on the 10th of June. But I am still waiting... I am eagerly awaiting the arrival of that silver-mixed-with-copper money. Let's see when they show me some kindness. 'Qazi Ji Ka Faisla' was sent to Lucknow, but it came back. Now it has been sent to Delhi; let's see what response comes. The Hyderabad team hasn't sent any receipt or notification yet. 'Panghat Par' is scheduled for broadcast in July. 'Qazi Ji Ka Faisla' will be broadcast in August (both will be aired from Bombay).

I feel very low. I feel an urge to do something... but what is this 'something'? ...I am wondering. Right now, I am sitting at Kripa Ram Sahib's house. It is raining. Pandit Ji sends his regards; he will write a separate letter as well. Safia is well and sends her greetings. She is sitting right in front of me, preparing milk for the child. I am very sad.
(1) 'Panghat Par' will be broadcast from Bombay on July 28. The remuneration for this will be twenty rupees. It will be broadcast under the name of Khwaja Zahiruddin.

(2) The 'Maktaba' (Urdu) group has sent fifty rupees via money order today.

Acknowledgment

These have been taken from the book 'Manto Ke Khat', edited by Aslam Parvez and transliterated from Urdu by Shahnawaz Alam.



Dr Maaz Bin Bilal

PhD (Queen's), MPhil, MA, BA (Delhi)

Maaz Bin Bilal (b. 1986) is a writer, translator, and academic, based in the national capital region of Delhi, India. A commitment to multiculturalism and diversity forms the unifying thread across his creative, critical, and translation practice across different genres of writing. Having earned his PhD in modern literary studies from Queen's University Belfast in 2015, he is now working on his monograph, *Heterodoxies of Friendship in E. M. Forster: Queer and Beyond*.

Maaz has published poetry, academic essays, review articles, book chapters, political commentary, opinion pieces, as well as poetry and prose in translation in many journals,

Manto's "Gunshot" Introduction

Translated by Dr Maaz Bin Bilal

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–55) does not require an introduction in the realm of South-Asian literature. A short story writer par excellence, he is widely held to be one of the most powerful writers on the Indian partition in any language. He is widely read not just in Urdu, but by a global readership through numerous translations including those in English by Khalid Hasan, Muhammad Umar Memon, Aatish Taseer and others, and by still others into various languages of the world, including a most-recent Hebrew translation by Achia Anzi. Mantorepresents human emotion and action in their naked reality equally well in the banality of everyday life as well as the turmoil of partition. He captures the desperation and evil of the former and the madness and chaos of the latter through symbolism, stark commentary and dark satire to reachat the ineffable.

Charged with obscenity many times both in pre-partition India and then in Pakistan, Manto denied being pornographic, but claimed to write of only what he saw around him. Both in his stories about partition or of everyday life, his engagement with those at the lowest rungs of society meant he often wrote of flesh, the brothels, the rapacious, and the desperate. "Kali Shalwar", "Thanda Gosht", "Khol Do" and "Toba Tek Singh" are some of his iconic stories that engage with life in brothels, the dehumanization of sexual violence for perpetrator, as well as survivor, and the madness of partition, respectively.However, his other stories which are closer to ordinary middle-class life seem to have been sidelined as the more striking

stories of partition and prostitutionhave taken precedence for both critic and lay reader. Moreover, his oeuvre in the original Urdu has till date not been collected together in an authoritative complete works collection, which is finally, albeit belatedly, being compiled by Shamsul Haq Usmani of Delhi, but is only getting published by OUP Pakistan, without a publisher in India.

Among the relatively unknown stories of this most famous of short story writers—due to both critical myopia and difficult availability of his full work—is the story, "Goli", or "Gunshot," translated here for the first time ever. "Gunshot" is a story about a paraplegic girl, Nighat, with regards to whom the main protagonist Shafqat displays various disparaging, condescending, sympathetic, pitying, apathetic, and hypocritical reactions depending on his stage of discovery and engagement with Nighat's disability. Manto uses his characteristic ingenuity and detailed characterization to present to us this milieu of middle-class patriarchal society where the prime concern of the parents is to get the girl married, and that of the man is to prove his chivalry, while retaining a pose of sympathy.Manto's typical irony and acerbic wit leave the reader reflecting on our intentions towards the disabled, as the strong female voice of Aisha is heard loudly at the end. The story works as an exposé of attitudes towards disability as fiction best can through its open-ended critique, just as disability studies does so programmatically leadsing on to a point where the term 'disability' itself is to be questioned in its political biases.

STORY:

Gunshot

Translated by Maaz Bin Bilal; first published on *Scroll.in*

"Goli" (23 July 1950)

by Sa'adat Hasan Manto

Shafqat returned from office that day to find guests in the house. There were women in the sitting room. Shafqat's wife Aisha was busy looking after the guests. When Shafqat entered the courtyard, his wife came out and began: "Aziz sahib's wife and daughters have come."

Shafqat took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead, "Aziz sahib, who?"

Aisha replied in a soft voice, "Oh, your father's friend."

"Oh... Uncle Aziz!"

"Yes, yes, the very same."

"But he was in Africa," Shafqat said with some wonder.

Aisha kept a finger on his mouth, "please speak softly. You just start shouting. They were in Africa, but do those who were in Africa never come back?"

"Look, you've started nitpicking now."

"And you've started arguing,"Aisha cast a quick look into the room, "Aziz sahib is in Africa but his wife has come to marry off their daughter. She is looking for a good match."

The voice of Mrs Aziz was heard from within, "Aisha, why have you stopped Shafqat there? Let him come... Come, Shafqat, my son, come... It's been ages I saw you."

"Coming, aunty." Shafqat hung his hat on the peg of the hat stand, and entered the room, "Aadaab, aunty."[1]

Mrs Aziz got up to give him her blessings. She patted him on the head and sat down. Shafqat was also about to sit down too when he noticed the two fair girls sitting on the sofa in front of him. One was younger, the other older. Both resembled each other. Aziz sahib was a very handsome man. His good looks were reflected in the girls in very interesting ways. Their eyes—blue—resembled their mother's; both wore their brown, long hair in two pigtails. The younger's face had a brighter glow than the elder's, who appeared far too serious. Their mother addressed them: "Girls, go on, pay your respects to your brother."

The younger got up and said, "Aadaab." The elder bowed her head and paid her salutations while remaining seated.

Shafqat responded appropriately. Then began the endless discussion about Aziz sahib and Africa. Nairobi, Tanganyika, Dar es Salaam, Karatina, and Uganda. Which place has good weather? Where is it bad? Where do you get good fruits? At the mention of fruits, the

[1]Aadaab: A greeting which is literally the plural of adab meaning respect, culture, literature, and civilization. The greeting aadaab may be understood as "respects" at best in English.

younger girl sprung into action: "one only gets such wretched fruit in India."

"Not at all... One can find very nice fruit, provided it's the season," Shafqat tried to save the reputation of his India.

"Not true," said the younger sister, screwing up her face. "Ammijaan,[2] can the oranges you bought here yesterday compare to the caracara navels from Africa?" The mother of the girls responded, "Shafqat, my son, she is right. The oranges here cannot compete with those African navels."

Aisha asked the younger girl, "Talat, what are these caracara navels? What a weird name!" Talat smiled, "Aapa, it's a fruit like our oranges and sweet limes... I can't tell you how delicious it is... Oh, the juice! Squeeze one fruit and a glass as tall as the one on the table here will get filled to the brim.

Shafqat looked at the glass and tried to estimate the size of the fruit, "One caracara navel fills this big a glass!"

Talat declared very proudly: "Yes, exactly."

Shafqat replied, "Then the fruit must be very big."

Talat shook her head, "No, not at all... It's neither big nor small... It's just about the size of a big orange here. Its specialty is that it's so full of juice... And mother, the pineapples there.... Each slice is the size of a big roti..."

[2]Ammijaan: Literally mother-dear. As an address it indicates respect and affection.

The pineapple conversation lasted for a while. Talat was very talkative. She was in love with Africa and she liked everything connected to it. The elder sister, whose name was Nighat, remained silent throughout. She did not participate in the conversation at all. Shafqat addressed her when he realized that she had been sitting quietly all this while: "Apparently you have no interest in these matters."

Nighat opened her mouth: "No, that's not the case... I have been listening with interest."

"But you did not speak," Shafqat replied.

Mrs Aziz responded, "Shafqat my son, such is her nature."

Shafqat spoke out quite frankly: "Aunty, at this age, girls shouldn't be so quiet. Seems like the cat's got her tongue." He addressed Nighat: "Madam, you will have to speak."

Nighat's lips broke into a shy smile, "I'm speaking now, bhaijaan!"[3]

Shafqat smiled, "Are you interested in photographs?"

Nighat replied with lowered eyes, "Yes, I am."

"Come, then I will show you some albums... They're in the other room," said Shafqat as he got up. "Come."

Aisha pressed Shafqat's hand. Shafqat looked back at his wife with quizzical eyes. She tried to signal something to Shafqat that he could not grasp. He was perplexed, and thought God knows what his

[3]Bhaijaan: Literally brother-dear, but mostly used for elder brothers or other men treated at brotherly. Indicates respect and, in more personal cases, affection.

wife meant by pressing his hand like that. He was still trying to figure it out when Talat got up in a jiffy: "Let's go bhaijaan, I really like to look at the albums of others. I have a collection too."

Shafqat went into the other room with Talat. Nighat remained quietly seated. Shafqat showed Talat the pictures. Talat kept talking as was her wont. Shafqat was distracted. He was wondering why Nighat was so quiet. Why didn't she come with him to look at the pictures?When he asked her to come with him, why did Aisha press his hand like that? What had she meant to convey by that look?

The album came to an end. Talat picked it up and said to Shafqat, "Let me show them to Baji, she is very fond of collecting photographs."[4]

Shafqat wanted to ask if she were so fond of it, then why didn't she come with them to look at the pictures, but Talat had left the room with the album. Shafqat entered the sitting room to find Nighat looking at the album with great interest. Each photograph made her visibly happy.

Aisha was busy talking to the mother of the girls. Shafqat kept looking at Nighat from the corners of his eyes. Her face, which was earlier clouded by an unnecessary solemnness, was now cheerful. It seemed as if the pictures that were perfect examples of art provided her with a reprieve.Her eyes shone. But when she came to the picture of a horse and a healthy woman than the light of her eyes dimmed. A moan started from her chest but was quickly stifled.

[4] Baji: Address for elder sister.

Nighat turned towards Shafqat when she had gone over all the pictures and said very sweetly, "thank you, Bhaijaan."

Shafqat took the album from Nighat's hands and kept it on the mantelpiece. His brain went into a tizzy. He figured that there must be a great secret connected to this girl. It could be a romantic affair or some psychological trauma.

With the arrival of tea, Shafqat also addressed Nighat: "Please, come, make tea. This is the privilege of ladies." Nighat remained silent but Talat got up in a trice, "Bhaijaan, I will do it."

Nighat's face was enveloped by a fog again. Shafqat became more intrigued. She got uncomfortable by his unwitting stares. Shafqat regretted such an uncouth act on his part.

All sorts of topics of conversation continued to flow over tea. Talat participated in these most actively. At the mention of tennis, Talat proudly declared that she was the number one tennis player in Nairobi and had won 15–20 trophies and cups. Nighat continued to remain silent. Her silence was exceedingly gloomy.It was clear that she was aware of her continuing silence.

Shafqat also noted that Mrs Aziz was more caring towards Nighat. She got up herself to pass the cream rolls to Nighat with great affection. Gave her a napkin to wipe her face. Her love for Nighat showed through all their conversation. It appeared as if even through her speech she laid a loving hand or a gentle kiss on her head.

When it was time to say farewell, Mrs Aziz got up, picked up her burqa and hugged Aisha. She blessed Shafqat, and went over to Nighat, and said, "Come, darling, let's go."

Talat jumped up. Mrs Aziz held on to Nighat's one arm, as Talat held on to the other, and together they lifted her. Shafqat saw that her lower body was paralyzed.For a moment, his mind froze, his heart stopped. When he recovered, he felt a throbbing pain inside him.

With unsteady legs and the support of her mother and sister, Nighat was taking some uncertain steps. She touched her forehead in respect and said aadaab to Shafqat and Aisha.A beautiful gesture.

To Shafqat it seemed as if that hand had punched his heart. The whole mystery had been unravelled. His instinctive thought was, "Why is nature so cruel? Such a beautiful girl—treated so cruelly, so ruthlessly. What was this innocent's fault that she was punished so harshly?"

The Aziz women left. Aisha went outside to see them off. Shafqat went on philosophizing. Then his friends arrived, and he was unable to talk to his wife about Nighat. He got so engrossed in playing cards with his friends that he forgot all about Nighat and her affliction. As night fell, Aisha sent the servant to call Shafqat for dinner. Shafqat felt guilty at having forgotten of Nighat for the sake of a game.He mentioned this to Aisha too, who replied cutting him short, "You have your dinner, we'll speak at length later."

The husband and wife always slept together. They had never been parted since their wedding night. They were now nearly six years into their marriage, but did not have any children yet. Doctors were

of the opinion that the fault lay with Aisha, but that it could be cured with an operation. But she was very scared of this. The couple was leading a life of great love and affection without any rancour whatsoever.

When they lay together as usual that night, Shafqat remembered Nighat. He asked his wife with a sigh, "Aisha, what ails that poor girl?"Aisha also sighed and said with a concerned tone, "She was a three-year-old, little girl when she got typhoid and her lower body was left paralysed."

Shafqat's heart was filled to the brim with endless sympathy for Nighat.

He hugged the back of Aisha to his chest and said: "Aisha, why is God so cruel?"

Aisha made no response. Shafqat started remembering all of the day's events."When I had told her to come look at the albums with me, then you had pressed my had because..."

"Yes, yes, of course. What else? But you kept at it."

"By God, I didn't know."

"She is very conscious of the fact that she is disabled."

"Now that you say this I feel as if someone has shot an arrow into my chest."

"When she came, I swear, I felt terrible. The poor girl had to urinate—the mother and sister went with her, undid her pants and tied them up again."

"She is so beautiful. You can't tell at all that she is paralyzed when she is sitting down."

"She is very intelligent too."

"Really?"

"The mother said that she told her that she wouldn't marry but remain single."

Shafqat remained silent for some time. Then he spoke with great distress: "Then she feels that no one will agree to marry her."

Aisha spoke as she continued to play with Shafqat's chest hair with her fingers, "Shafqat sahib, who will marry a paraplegic?"

"No, no, don't say that Aisha."

"Who will make such a grand sacrifice, Shafqat sahib?"

"You're right."

"She's beautiful, from a well-to-do family, everything is fine, but..."

"I understand, but..."

"Men know no compassion..."

Shafqat turned on his side, "Don't say that, Aisha."

Aisha also turned on her side, and both came face to face, "Please find a man who will marry him."

"I don't know anyone, but..."

"She is the elder sister. Poor girl, must feel so bad that they are arranging the wedding of the younger one."

"You're right."

Aisha took a deep sigh, "Will she be vexed like this all her life?"

"No," said Shafqat and sat up.

"What do you mean?" Aisha asked.

"Do you have sympathy for her?"

"Of course."

"Swear on it?"

"Oh, what's the need to swear on this! All humans must show sympathy to her."

Shafqat said after the silence of a few moments: "Then I have decided."

Aisha responded excitedly: "What?"

"I have always thought of you as a high-minded woman. Today, you have proved my impression right... I... May God keep me firm in my resolve... I have decided that I will marry Nighat... You will get all the rewards in heaven for it."

Silence reigned for a while. Then, it seemed as if a bomb had exploded.

"Shafqat sahib, I will shoot you dead if you marry her."

Shafqat felt as if he had been hit hard by a bullet, and being dead he buried himself into his wife'sembrace."

SAADAT HASAN MANTO

FAMILY MAN







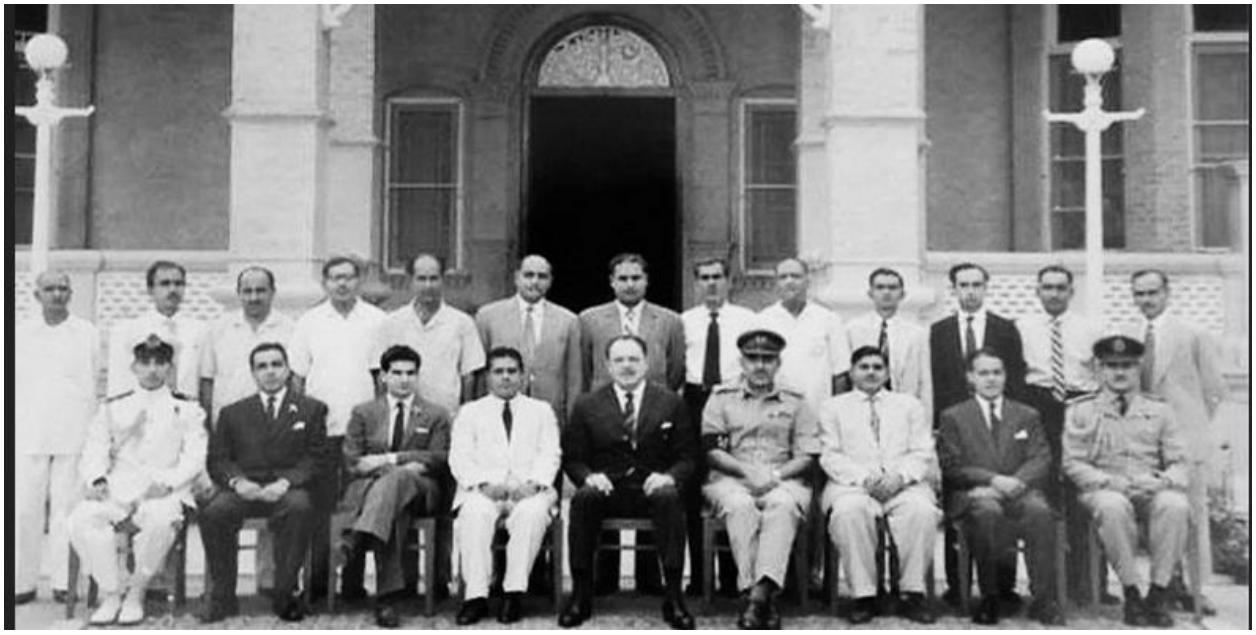
SOCIAL MAN











AWARDS AND HONURS:



بسم اللہ الرحمٰن الرحیم

میں، بحیثیت صدر اسلامی جمہوریۂ پاکستان

جناب سعادت حسن منٹو مرحوم

کو ادب کے شعبہ میں امتیازی مرتبہ حاصل کرنے پر

نشانِ امتیاز

کا اعزاز بعد از وفات عطا کرتا ہوں۔

(آصف علی زرداری)
صدر

مقام: اسلام آباد

تاریخ: ۲۳ مارچ ۲۰۱۳ء



بسم اللہ الرحمٰن الرحیم

جناب سعادت حسن منٹو (مرحوم)

اعزاز : نشانِ امتیاز (بعد از وفات)

شعبہ : ادب

جناب سعادت حسن منٹو اردو زبان کے افسانہ نگار تھے۔ آپ کے بہترین افسانوں میں ٹوبہ ٹیک سنگھ، ٹھنڈا گوشت اور بو شامل ہیں۔ منٹو نظم اور ریڈیو کے اسکرپٹ نگار اور صحافی بھی تھے۔ آپ کے افسانوں کی ۲۲ کتابیں، ریڈیو ڈرامے کی پانچ کتابیں، مضامین کی تین کتابیں اور شخصی خاکوں کی دو کتابیں شائع ہو چکی ہیں۔ آپ نے اپنی فنی زندگی کا آغاز عظیم انقلابی شخصیات جیسے ولادیمیر لینن اور روسی مصنفین چیخوف اور گورکی کے تراجم سے کیا۔ آپ نے ابتدائی تعلیم مسلم ہائی سکول امرتسر میں حاصل کی۔ آپ نے سکول کی تعلیم ۱۹۳۱ء میں مکمل کی اور ہندو سبھا کالج امرتسر میں داخل ہو گئے۔ ۱۹۳۲ء میں آپ کے افسانوں کا پہلا مجموعہ "آتش پارے" ۱۹۳۶ء میں ۲۴ سال کی عمر میں شائع ہوا۔ آپ تقسیم پاکستان کے بعد جنوری ۱۹۴۸ء میں پاکستان آ گئے۔ منٹو نے لاہور میں رسائل میں لکھنا شروع کیا۔ آپ نے اشاعتی کام بھی شروع کیے۔ آپ نے روزنامہ مغربی پاکستان میں چوتھم روتن کے عنوان سے لکھنا شروع کیا۔ آپ نے اپنا بہترین تخلیقی کام لاہور میں کیا جس میں شامل ہے اس منجدھار میں، موذیل اور بابو گوپی ناتھ۔ آپ کی نگارشات درج ذیل ہیں: آتش پارے، پھندنے، منٹو کے افسانے اور ڈرامے، لذت سنگ، سیاہ حاشیے، یزید، شیرینی کا خاتمہ، خالی بوتلیں، انسان کی خدائی، ٹھنڈا گوشت، بیچ، پردے کے پیچھے، سرکنڈے کے کنارے، بغیر عنوان کے، بغیر اجازت، برقعے، پھندنے، سرکنڈوں کے پیچھے، شیطان، ڈارلنگ، ڈارلنگ، ٹوبہ ٹیک سنگھ، رتی، ماشہ، تولہ، کالی شلوار، منٹو کی بہترین کہانیاں اور طاہرہ سے طاہر۔ منٹو کا انتقال ۴۲ سال کی عمر میں ۱۸ جنوری ۱۹۵۵ء کو ہوا۔

ادب کے شعبہ میں آپ کی شاندار خدمات کے اعتراف میں صدر اسلامی جمہوریہ پاکستان نے جناب سعادت حسن منٹو کو "نشانِ امتیاز" (بعد از وفات) کا اعزاز عطا کیا ہے۔

مقام : اسلام آباد

تاریخ : 23 مارچ، 2013ء



ENTIRE WORKS:

BOOKS BY SAADAT HASAN MANTO 104



Aao

1957



Aao

1957



Aap Ka Saadat Hasan Ma...

2012



Atish Pare Aur Siyah Ha...

1954



Afsane Aur Drame

1943



Aik Khat

1950



Anar Kali

1952



Anarkali

2005



Atish Pare

1936



Badshahat Ka Khatma

1955



Baghair Ijazat

1957



Baghair Unvan Ke

1954



Baghair Unvan Ke

2005



Banjh

2005



Banjh

1953



Baqiyat-e-Manto

2002



Buddha Khoosat

1955



Burqe

1952



Chor

2003



Chughad

1954



Das Rupy

2005



Dastawez

1952



Dhuan

1951



Dhuan

1951



Ganje Farishte

1952



Ismat Chughtai



Izzat Ke Liye



Janaze



Janki



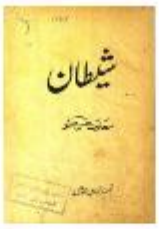
Kali Shalwar



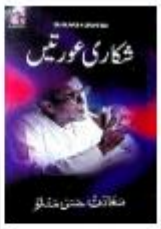
Shaghl
Kulliyat-e-Manto Afsane (V...
2006



Shaitan



Shaitan
1954



Shikari Aurtein
2020



Shuoor
1955



Siyah Hashiye



Talkh Tursh Aur Sheerin



Talkh, Tursh Aur Shireen



Teen Aurtein



Thanda Gosht



Neeli Ragen
Manto Ka Drama
1954



Noor Jahan Sarvar Jaan
1953



Parde Ke Piche
1953



Phaha
Kulliyat-e-Manto Afsane (V...
2006



Phundune
1954



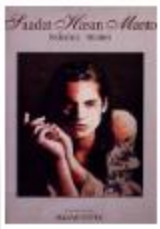
Rati Masha Aur Tola
1954



Rati, Masha, Tola
1953



Rusi Afsane



Saadat Hasan Manto
Selected Stories
1997



Sadak Ke Kinare
1953

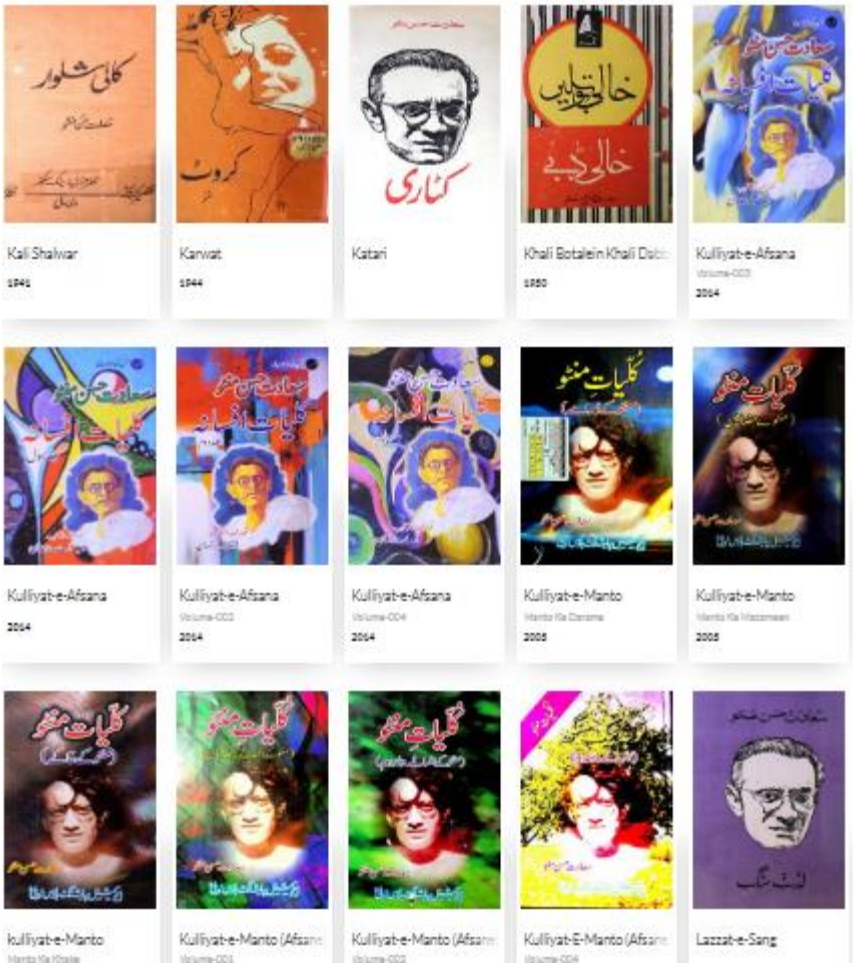








شادی


کالی شلوار
کروٹ
کٹاری
خالی بوتلیں خالی ڈبے
Kali Shalwar
1941
Karwat
1944
Katari
Khali Botalein Khali Dabe
1950
Kulliyat-e-Afsana
2004
Kulliyat-e-Afsana
2004
Kulliyat-e-Afsana
Volume-003
2004
Kulliyat-e-Afsana
Volume-004
2004
Kulliyat-e-Manto
Manto Ka Darama
2005
Kulliyat-e-Manto
Manto Ka Mazmoon
2005
kulliyat-e-Manto
Kulliyat-e-Manto (Afsane
Kulliyat-e-Manto (Afsane
Kulliyat-E-Manto (Afsane
Lazzat-e-Sang



Loud Speaker



Loudspeaker

2005



Loudspeaker



Manto Aur Filmi Shakhs

1960



Manto Ke Adabi Mazam

1972



Manto Ke Afsane

1960



Manto Ke Behtarin Afsa



Manto Ke Drame



Manto Ke Fahesh Afsane



Manto Ke Gum Shuda A

1992











His WORKS TRANSLATE IN FRENCH ITALIAN CHINESE JAPANESE CROATIA





Letter from the Chairman's Desk

By Sunil Bhatia PhD

My father was only thirteen or fourteen years old when he witnessed Partition. He was, therefore, a first-generation victim of Partition. One day, he called a family parliament.

It was the usual practice in our family that whenever an important or serious matter had to be discussed, everyone was invited to give their opinion. We believed that the best decision could be reached only after considering the views of every member of the family.

Even buying a refrigerator in the early 1960s was a serious matter for a family of Partition victims. My father was strongly against taking any loan. He also disliked borrowing things from neighbours, even though it was a common practice at that time. If a guest arrived unexpectedly and there were not enough vegetables to prepare a proper meal, people would often ask a neighbour for some vegetables. Serving a guest with only one vegetable was considered disrespectful in our family.

Anyway, several family meetings were held, but in the absence of consensus, no decision was taken.

We, the children, were desperately looking forward to having cold water, ice and ice cream. My brother had told us that a refrigerator could prepare many desserts that required a cold temperature.

Ultimately, my mother exercised her veto. She warned my father that if he did not bring a refrigerator home that evening, no food would be served for dinner.

Her strategy worked.

We got our first refrigerator, and, as far as I remember, it was the first refrigerator in our locality.

Whenever a guest visited a nearby house, the moment our neighbour knocked on our entrance door, we understood that they had come to ask for ice or cold water to serve their guests.

As a small child, I used to prepare coloured sugar water, freeze it and distribute the sweet ice cubes among my friends. They would stand close to our window , but we were not allowed to go outside in the scorching heat.

During one such family meeting, my father advised us:

"I am in a position to provide you with shelter and basic food, but I cannot afford any sort of luxury. I hope that you do not keep high expectations from your parents for a comfortable life.

"We have left our immovable property in Gujranwala. Do not think about agricultural land. That option will never come in my life. My income is adequate to meet your expenses, but I have no savings with which to start a business from scratch. If anyone is looking for that option, it is out of the question.

"The only option left for you is education. For that, I will work beyond my regular service to bear your expenses."

He concluded from his own experience:

"Partition has taught me never to take pride in immovable property. It can be taken away in a moment. You are innocent victims of players who were playing a game to win at the expense of their stakeholders. It was a game of protecting vested interests, and Punjabis paid a heavy price for it."

His words remained with me.

In world history, the middle class has often revolted against rulers in the hope of building a better state. Punjab was an exception in a tragic sense. It revolted against rulers for freedom, but in the absence of a clear roadmap for the future of the state, and with the majority of stakeholders deliberately kept in the dark, the situation eventually invited anarchy.

The leaders of different parties could not imagine that Punjabis would behave so violently towards their own people in the name of protecting their respective religions.

Religion appeared harmonious on the surface, but underneath there were deep differences and hatred for one another. Wherever religion establishes its presence, it can also carry caste and social hierarchy with it, sometimes becoming a means of establishing supremacy.

Caste and class differences, together with religious divisions, have created havoc throughout human history.

It was not a struggle for systematic economic development and all-round growth for the benefit of everyone. Instead, many people preferred a shortcut to becoming wealthy through unfair means and by taking advantage of the wealth of others. Everyone looted , raped and killed for gaining others wealth.

Enjoying someone else's wealth without making an effort to create one's own can never be lasting.

There is a Punjabi saying about a young man who spends money without thinking:

"Lagda nava-nave peo mareya hai,

Tey bedardi naal kharch da paya."

It means that the young man has not experienced the pain of earning or losing wealth and therefore spends it carelessly.

I have seen the ups and downs of life and faced challenges that I wish you should never have to face. The greatest wealth is education, and education commands respect everywhere in the world.

Kabhi arsh par, kabhi farsh par.

Kabhi tere dar, kabhi dar-badar.

Yeh zindagi, tera shukriya, tune jahan-jahan roka mujhe,

Main wahan-wahan se nikalta gaya.

Kabhi roshni mein tanha, kabhi gooshaa-e-sehra,

Main junoon ka humsafar hoon, mera koi ghar nahi.

My father would often say:

"Padhai kar lo, jis di saari duniya kadar kardi. Science subject saari duniya vich ik hai, te saari duniya apna laegi je tusi kujh ban sakde ho."

In other words:

"If you study subjects that are closely connected with the administration and management of your own state—such as law, accounts and other humanities subjects—you may find opportunities within that system. But science has a universal character. There is demand for scientific knowledge throughout the world. It is not tied to any particular land. If you become exceptionally capable, people from other countries may even invite you to become their citizen."

He would give examples of scientists who had been born in the Punjab region but later found opportunities abroad to pursue advanced research.

In the middle of our discussion, there was a knock at the entrance. We found that my father's best friend was standing there, waiting to be welcomed.

As we greeted him, he sensed that an important discussion was taking place. My father briefly explained what we had been discussing. As the family meeting was being dispersed, he told us:

"The final decision is yours. Take this as advice, not as an imposition upon you."

His friend added:

"Science is the new religion of the world. There is not one holy book. Every subject that exists today has many books that are treated as authoritative, and teachers who specialize in a subject are like priests.

"The beauty is that no priest of science can claim that his knowledge is the ultimate knowledge, unlike the claims sometimes made in the name of religion. Science has no figure who is omnipotent or omnipresent, yet its principles operate everywhere in the universe.

“Scientists engaged in research should be treated with great respect.”

He became emotional and continued:

“It is perhaps the best path for deprived or suppressed individuals and communities—women, oppressed castes and others—to train themselves, understand the world and overcome the limitations imposed by existing social structures.

“Science exists through modern education. It gives us the strength to understand the world better. One does not need a temple, mosque or church in order to pursue knowledge.

“Those who accept science and use it for the benefit of humanity are, in the real sense, serving humanity.”

My mother served tea and light snacks, and the family meeting came to an end. My parents and their visitor began discussing other matters.

I overheard his pain about Partition.

“Yeh daagh-daagh ujaala, yeh shab-gaziida sahar,”

“Woh intizaar tha jiska, yeh woh sahar toh nahi…”

Translation:

“This stained, blemished light, this night-bitten dawn…”

“This is not the dawn we had been waiting for…”

My father's words stayed in my mind.

He believed that nations investing all their energy in old religious conflicts in an effort to prove themselves superior to others would

eventually fall behind those that chose science and education. He feared that the ultimate outcome would be complete ruin.

Our father provided us with a second-hand bicycle. He repaired its brakes and replaced the tyre tubes so that we could use it for commuting to college.

He would give us four annas—twenty-five paise—not for spending, but to keep as an emergency reserve in case the bicycle got a puncture and needed to be made functional again.

I am thankful from the bottom of my heart that my parents placed us on a path that was appropriate for the demands of the time. It is another matter that I could not achieve everything I had striven for in life.

My mother once told me the story of the Khurana family from a village near Gujranwala. They had been so wealthy that they established a new market in the town and became owners of cotton mills, flour mills and other businesses.

Their elder son brought home an imported motorcycle. His neighbours shouted:

"Kayee jai ghodi, na khadhi tey na pindi, bus douddi jandi."

They knew how to create wealth from wealth, but they never gave much importance to education.

Then Partition came.

Suddenly, they were forced to leave behind all their wealth.

When I encountered members of such families later, I found that although they were not reduced to begging, they were certainly no longer living the life they had enjoyed before Partition.

It was a frightening story, but its moral was clear:

EDUCATION IS ABOVE ALL WEALTH.

Material wealth can be taken away, but education cannot easily be snatched from a person. It remains the best means of earning a respectable livelihood anywhere in the world.

I remember Sahir Ludhianvi's lines from *Waqt*, which convey a similar warning about the sudden transformation from riches to poverty:

"Aadmi ko chahiye waqt se darr ke rahe,
Kaun jaane kis ghadi waqt ka badle mizaaj."

We are an uprooted generation, and I do not want my children to become another failed generation.

We were victims of political actions wrapped in superficial patriotism and justified in the hope of building strong nations. The final outcome was something that nobody had adequately prepared for or expected. We were completely ruined.

Even a culture that had developed over centuries of living together could not save us. Instead, in the atmosphere created by Partition, many of those old social relationships became part of the process that destroyed communities, leaving people with little time to escape unharmed.

There were also individuals, belonging to different religions, who saved the lives and humanity of others. Such examples must be remembered. But they cannot be generalized to the whole experience.

My parents taught us never to assume that religion or a political system would automatically protect ordinary people.

The human cost of Partition was enormous. More than a million people are widely estimated to have died, while millions were displaced and countless women suffered sexual violence. Many people disappeared without any trace.

Are We Refugees?

We are often described as refugees.

I have always questioned that label.

We migrated from the old India to the new India after Partition. How, then, should we understand the word *refugee* when we were moving from one part of the country to another within the civilizational space in which we had lived?

For us, the word carried a psychological burden in addition to its administrative meaning.

Hausale toote hain to gussa laazmi hai,

Manzil na mili to yeh rusvai laazmi hai.

Par yaad rakh, ae dil,

Is aag ko hathiyar bana,

Nakaami ko mitaane ke liye yeh chingari laazmi hai.

My Parents' warning for second generation about living in place that was not familiar with us and there was a kind of constant fear that pressure was visible in their actions when interact with local person.

My parents warned us that local people enjoyed certain advantages compared with outsiders. They advised us never to indulge in activities that might invite trouble.

They believed that the system could look at us with suspicion because we had no long-established local network or family history in our new surroundings. We could become easy targets for blame if something went wrong.

Politically, we had little influence, and socially, without strong public relationships, there might be no one to support us.

My parents' advice was simple:

"I do not want you to become involved in any dispute. Live peacefully and grow.

"Culturally, socially or politically agitated communities rarely grow as well as communities that remain composed, avoid unnecessary provocation and focus on what they want to achieve."

We followed our parents' advice and settled into our new environment. We contributed to wealth creation and public administration and, over time, some of us were rewarded with responsible positions within the system.

A meeting across generations is great to remember. Years later, I was sitting in my office when my peon informed me that a middle-aged man was waiting outside to meet me.

I immediately asked him to come inside.

He explained who had referred him to me, and I realized that he was the son of my father's friend.

He said:

"I have no specific purpose in coming to meet you, but my father has kept insisting that I should meet you."

I offered him tea, as I usually did to anyone who visited me.

While having tea, he asked:

"I have no nostalgia for our ancestral place in Gujranwala because I never knew it personally. But my father still believes that one day there will be peace between the two countries and that we may be able to visit without restrictions.

"Do you believe peace between the two nations is possible?"

I replied:

"Why, in the first place, were the countries divided on religious lines? Slogans such as 'Pakistan ka matlab kya? La ilaha illallah' became part of the political atmosphere surrounding Partition.

"Once a new country has been created and its geographical boundaries have been accepted internationally, changing those boundaries becomes extremely difficult. History has witnessed changing borders, but examples of two divided nations eventually reunifying are rare, with Germany being an important example.

"Whenever a leader has tried to move towards a peace agreement, that leader has often faced opposition from sections of his own

population. Political interests can make reconciliation extremely difficult.

"For decades, political agendas have sometimes encouraged hostility to such a degree that returning to an atmosphere of trust appears almost impossible.

"Yet it would be too simple to say that political leaders alone determine the relationship between ordinary people. There have also been deep human connections between people on both sides."

He was about to get up from the chair when he concluded:

"If peace can eventually be established, then why did Partition of Punjab happen, and why did it leave behind so many crimes and wounds?"

The People We Fail to Understand

I remember these lines:

Jis jis ko main samajh na saka,

Nek tha woh shakhs.

Jis jis ko main zara sa samjha,

Fareb tha.

Aaya aur jhat se mere paon pad gaya,

Muddat ke baad yeh uska taza fareb tha.

It was culture collaps as fall out of political ideology was overshadow with religion. Once a political system collapses, the foundations of culture can also be shaken. During Partition, religion took a leading

position in the crisis because religious identity was being used to define communities and political futures.

Many of the proposed solutions to a religious crisis were therefore also sought through religion.

But that did not solve the problem. Instead, it aggravated it many times over.

This is precisely what happened during Partition. People were forced to seek refuge according to their circumstances and whatever they believed was the best available solution. A majority ultimately surrendered themselves to fate.

Political leaders on both sides have rarely admitted that Partition involved political mistakes and failures. Instead, responsibility has often been shifted towards particular groups.

Today, many people believe that the political class bears considerable responsibility for the continuing difficulty in relations between neighbouring countries. Others believe that people-to-people contact may provide a path towards better understanding because of our common heritage, culture and languages.

As the Punjabi lines express it:

"Tusi dharti paadi, darya paade,

par saadi rooh nu unj hi rehn ditta…"

A political confession that shook me Once, a political leader told me rather satirically:

"We never work for the welfare of the public. We work for the welfare of our own class."

He continued by explaining his view of the relationship between political power, investigating agencies and ordinary citizens.

I do not know whether his cynical interpretation was correct, but the statement stayed with me because it reflected a wider question: Who ultimately protects ordinary people when political systems fail?

"Ahle watan ko jashn-e-azadi mubarak."

("Happy Independence Day to all fellow countrymen.")

Independence Day is celebrated as *Yaum-e-Azadi* on August 14 in Pakistan and as Independence Day on August 15 in India. For both countries, the day represents national pride, freedom and hopes for the peace, safety and progress of the homeland.

For my generation, however, Independence also carries another memory.

We inherited freedom together with the wounds of Partition.

My father's generation lost property, security and an ancestral home. My generation inherited the responsibility of rebuilding life from almost nothing. What my parents could give us was not wealth, land or property. They gave us education, discipline, caution and the determination to stand on our own feet.

That was their greatest inheritance.

And perhaps that is the lesson I would like to pass on to the next generation:

Property can disappear. Borders can change. Political systems can collapse. Wealth can be taken away. But education, knowledge, character and the ability to rebuild one's life remain with a person.

That is what my parents taught us.

It was fascinating meeting with father's friend's son

While taking to him he helped about my lost faith that philosophy in current times is not dead but it has shifted to a few .

With regards

Dr. Sunil Bhatia

South Asia Research Centre of India

www.southasiaresearchcentre.in

dr_subha@yahoo.com ,

Telephone-91-11-27853470®



Forthcoming Issues

November 2026Vol-5 No-11



Raza Naeem is an award-winning Pakistani researcher, translator and dramatic reader based in Lahore. He has been trained in Political Economy from the University of Leeds in UK, and in Middle Eastern History and Anthropology from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, USA. He has engaged with the Middle East since the last two decades now and widely travelled in and reported from Egypt, Yemen and Turkey over the last decade or so. He contributes regularly to *The Wire* and *Outlook* in India and *The Friday Times* in Pakistan. He has curated and moderated a first-ever edition of Banned Books Week in Pakistan in Lahore in September 2014, and five successive editions since then, in collaboration with Olomopolo. His translation and dramatic reading work has been showcased internationally at the Lucknow and Delhi Literature Festivals in India (both in 2014), and most recently at the Winnipeg International Writers Festival (Canada, September 2017), one of Canada's largest

literary festivals; and locally at many TEDx (most recently at TEDxLUMS, Lahore, April 2018) and Model United Nations (most recently at LUMUN 17, Lahore, January 2021) events at some of Pakistan's most prestigious universities and schools. He is the recipient of a prestigious 2013-2014 Charles Wallace Trust Fellowship in the UK, awarded for his translation and interpretive work on banned Pakistani writer Saadat Hasan Manto's essays, and most recently a runner-up/finalist for the inaugural 2017 Jawad Memorial Prize for Urdu-English Translation (India), awarded for his translation of 'Bahaar' (Spring), a short story written by Abdullah Hussein. He is currently the President of the Progressive Writers Association (Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Musannifeen) in Lahore. He is presently completing a manuscript on Sahir Ludhianvi and Lahore, forthcoming in 2021 (to coincide with the 100th birth anniversary of the poet).

December 2026 Vol-5 No-12



Dr. Robina Yasmin currently holds the esteemed position of Chairperson in the Department of Pakistan Studies at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Her academic journey includes serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Pakistan Studies at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, for a distinguished period of over eight years. Dr. Yasmin earned her Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree from the prestigious Punjab University, with her research area focusing on the Sikh period in the Punjab. Her scholarly contributions are well-documented, with a remarkable tally of more than twenty-four articles in HEC-recognized journals. Notably, she authored a compelling book titled "Muslims under Sikh Rule in the Nineteenth Century, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Religious Tolerance," which was published under the reputable Bloomsbury England

imprint. Dr. Yasmin has been recognized on both national and international platforms, where her expertise and insights have been sought after, earning her invitations to participate in conferences at the international level.

Januvary 2027 Vol-6 No-1



Prof Dr. Surinder Kumar Deweshwar, M.A. (Punjabi & History); M. Ed., Ph.D, Emeritus Fellow , University Grants Commission, New Delhi, 2017-2019 will be Guest Editor and special issue theme will be PUNJABIAT.

Feburay 2027 Vol-6 No-2



Prof Dr Ronki Ram, Punjabi University will focus on minority role in Partition and their political social status

APPEAL:

We are publishing monthly issue of Salahiyat in English, Shahmukhi and Gurmukhi and authors are contributing article in their comfortable language and we need to translate in other two

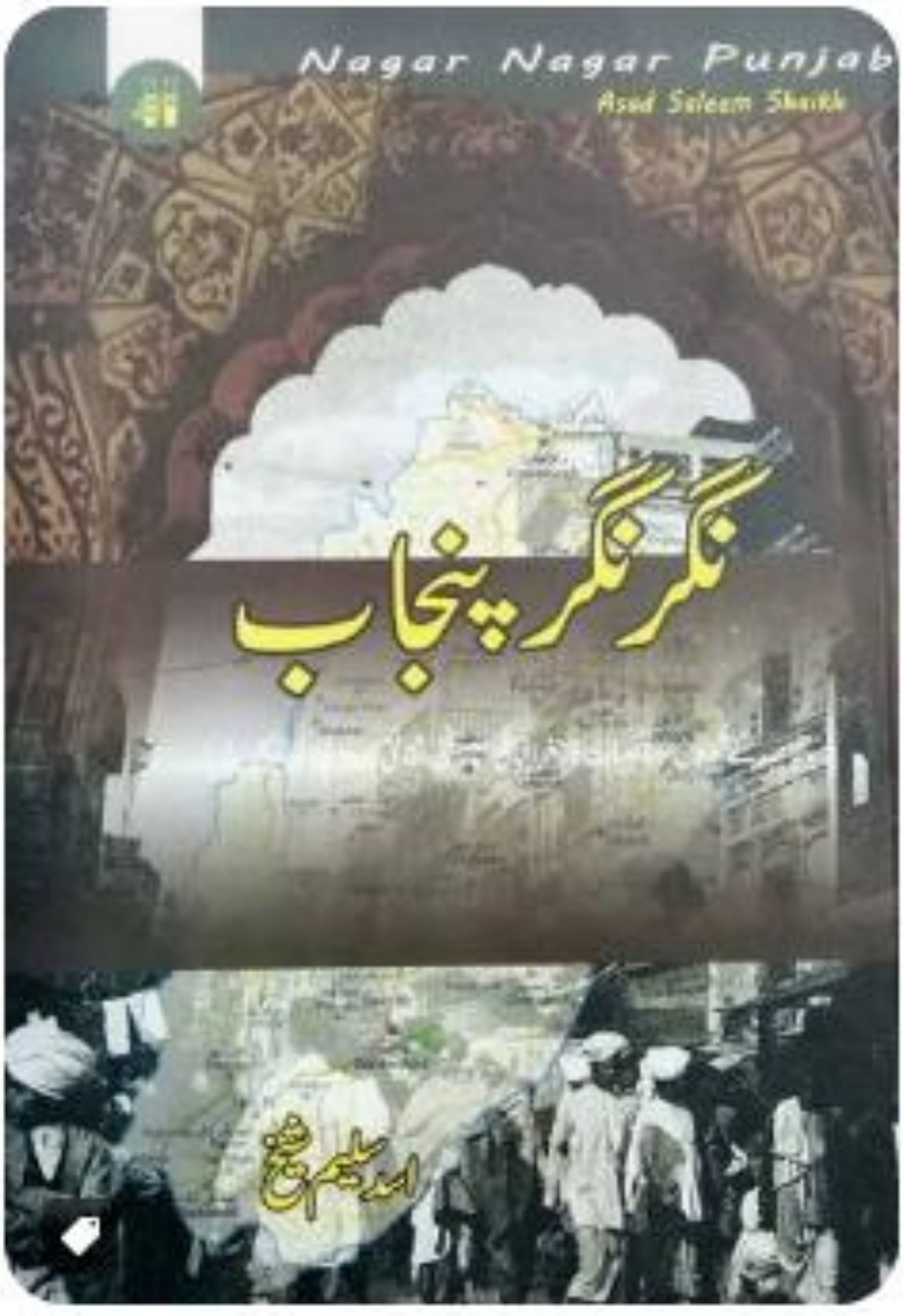
languages.

It is our appeal for volunteers to register with us for translating articles at email:

dr.bhatiasunil@gmail.com or dr_subha@yahoo.com

It will be great service for Punjabi Culture.

Virsa of Punjab: NAGAR NAGAR PUNJAB BOOK BY M ASAD SALEEM SHEIKH



Contributor in Performing art of Punjab: ISHWAR CHAND NANDA, FATHER OF PUNJABI DRAMA



Ishwar Chand Nanda (30 September 1892 – 3 September 1965), often credited as I.C. Nanda, is universally recognized as the "Father of Punjabi Drama". He single-handedly laid the foundation for modern, realistic Punjabi theatre by shifting away from traditional mythological and folk plays toward realistic depictions of contemporary social problems.□ Early Life & Academic CareerBirth & Background: Born in the village of Gandiyan Paniyar in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab. Facing financial hardships after his father's early demise, Nanda persevered through sheer academic brilliance.Education: He completed his B.A. Honors from Dyal Singh College, Lahore, and later completed his M.A. in English from Punjab

University, Lahore.Profession: He served as a distinguished professor of English at Dyal Singh College, Lahore, until the partition of India in 1947. Post-partition, he relocated and settled permanently in New Delhi.

100 years of Subhadra, IC Nanda's play on widow remarriage

Subhadra, IC Nanda's play on widow remarriage, was termed revolutionary in talking about the rights of a woman who had lost her husband



The Catalyst: Norah Richards

Nanda's journey into playwriting was deeply inspired by Norah Richards, an Irish actress and theatre enthusiast known as the *"Grandmother of Punjabi Theatre"*.

- **While Nanda was a student at Lahore, Richards organized a localized playwriting competition to encourage original Punjabi scripts.**
- **Nanda participated with his maiden script, *Suhag* (also known as *Dulhan*) in 1913. It won the first prize and became celebrated as the first modern stage play in the Punjabi language.**

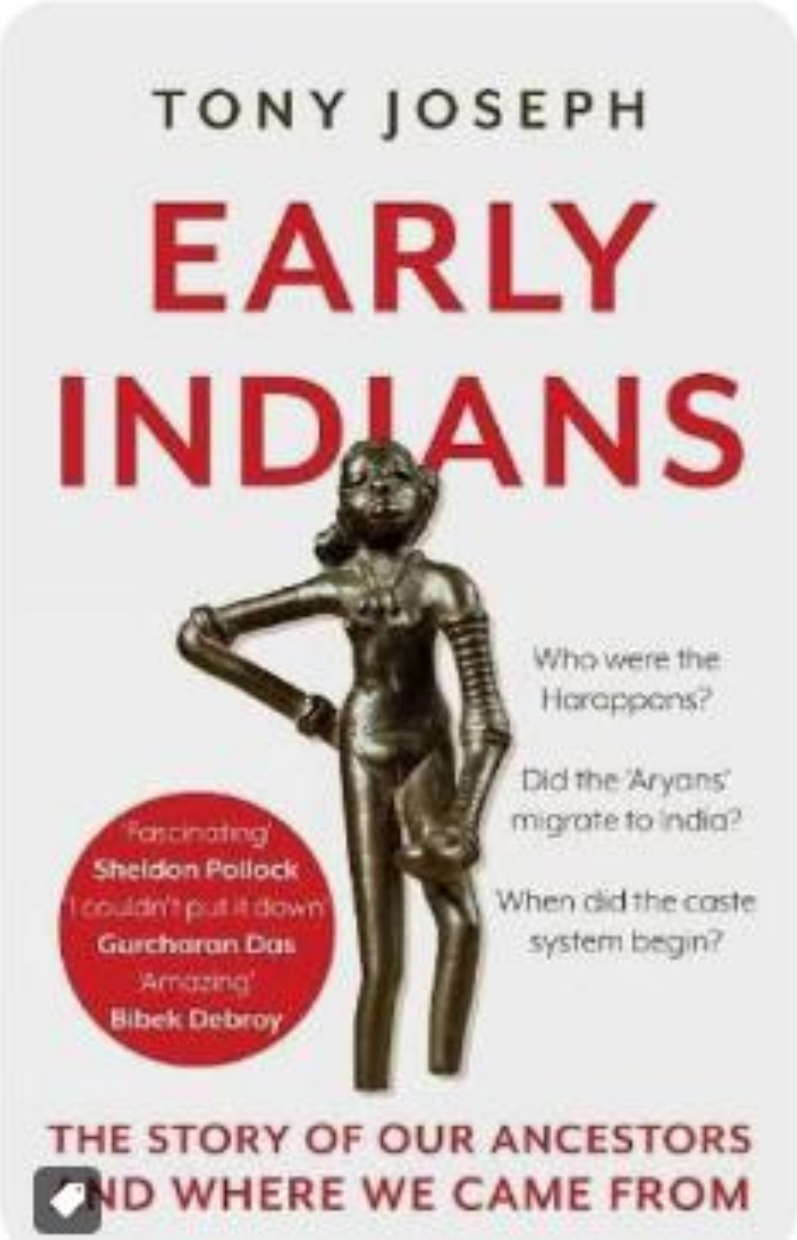
Major Literary Works

Nanda wrote three landmark full-length plays and over a dozen one-act plays. His notable works include:

- ***Suhag* / *Dulhan* (1913): A pioneering one-act play focusing on child marriage and the exploitation of young girls.**
- ***Subhadra* (1920/1922): His first full-length three-act play. It broke absolute ground by advocating for widow remarriage following the high casualties of World War I.**
- ***Bebe Ram Bhajni* (1914): A sharp satire targeting the hypocrisy of religious shamans, blind faith, and traditional orthodoxy.**
- ***Var Ghar* / *Lily Da Viah* (1930): A narrative contrasting love marriages with forced arranged marriages.**

- ***Shamu Shah* (1928): An adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, localized beautifully to explore the exploitation by local money-lenders (*shahukars*).**
- **Play Anthologies: His shorter scripts were compiled into famous volumes titled *Jhalkare* (Reflections, 1949) and *Lishkare* (Flashes, 1956).**

Foreigner contribution for enriching Punjabi: EARLY INDIAN AUTHOR TONY JOSEPH



Protagonist of Humanity: My Great Grandma's Partition Story

My great-grandma lived through Partition; her name was Mansur Faatimah Shah. I grew up listening to many stories of her endurance and bravery, about how she made her journey to Pakistan during the violence and disorder of Partition. She was born in pre-partition India. She lived in Kapoorthala village, Sheikpura Bohoi in the state of Riasat, current day India, with her family, the Kazi family, who earned their name due to their profession as judges during the Mughal empire. By the time my great-grandma was born, her family were agriculturalists. Their ancestral lands included a large portion gifted to them by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for educating his children Dara and Aurangzeb. They lived a life of happiness.

She was married in 1945 to a man called Ali Ahmed Shah, who lived in Sultan Shah, which straddled India and modern-day Pakistan, an area in Punjab. One of my favourite stories of her youth is that her father borrowed an elephant from the raja at the time to ride during her wedding procession. In 1947 she was pregnant with her first child, and according to tradition at the time, she returned to her family home in Kapporthala village to see out her pregnancy there. In August, while she was still with her family in Kapporthala and five months pregnant, partition occurred, and violence broke out. Her father, due to his status in the village in dealing with local legal cases, was the target of a lot of anger, and therefore, as a Muslim in a now

Hindu majority India that was in turmoil, was killed, as was his wife Hayat Bibi, my great grandma's mother and her two sisters.

While we don't know the whole story of how she was the only survivor in her immediate family, my grandfather's family believe that her father's friend, a Hindu man called Ram Ashra, took her to the train station. He also found a young boy called Fakir Hussain, my great grandma's nephew, who we learn some of her story from, hiding in the fields of their wider village area. He also took Fakir Hussain to the train station, where my great-grandma was. They boarded a cargo train together. As my grandma was heavily pregnant, she needed assistance to board the train, a man named Ismail, who she often spoke about due to his kindness, bent down so she could use his back to leverage herself onto the train. They hid in empty coal boxes to avoid detection. The train, at one point, was intercepted by mobs, and many of the people on it were violently murdered. The police arrived before the violence reached my great-grandmother's cabin, so she was spared.

Ram Ashra was tasked with the safekeeping of the family's gold and jewels, which we know he buried in the ground, and which no one ever returned to recoup. When I think about it, this wealth was left in the blood-soaked mother land, which was ripped apart to give birth to a new country and all of its trauma. The land reminds me of my great-grandma and all the sadness she felt and saw as a pregnant woman herself. She was heavy with the promise of a new life and the burden and sorrow of the one that was violently taken from her.

The train eventually came to Lahore, and as they reached safety, they discovered other nieces and nephews of my great grandma and Fakir Hussain's siblings. It is likely the children were given safe passage by someone to get to the train station. Fakir Hussain was reunited with four of his older sisters – Mahmooda, Nasir, Naseem and Zara, as well as his cousins Ishrar, Jaaji and Sajad. My great-grandma described the hunger she felt during her tumultuous journey, she was given a plate of roti, pickle '*achar*' and cool water when she arrived at the station, and despite her upbringing of wealth and luxury, she described it as the best meal she'd ever had. What she discovered was her husband's family had come to the train station every day in anticipation of her arrival. I can only imagine what a relief it was for all of them on the day she did finally arrive.

In the aftermath, she was traumatised by the horrific events that she witnessed and endured. When I spoke to my great Aunt, Zia Shah, my great-grandmother's third daughter, she mentioned that her sisters' children, who had also reached safety with her, provided some comfort and solace from what had unfolded.

They all settled in an area called Zafar Ke in Punjab. Eventually, the government repatriated a portion of their expansive lands within the newly formed Pakistan as recompense. In December, after this traumatic and life-shattering event where she lost everything she knew, she gave birth to a healthy young boy called Hassan Shah, my grandfather's oldest brother. Her early life in Pakistan was spent on her husband's ancestral lands in Sultan Shah. She moved to the city

of Kasur, Punjab, along the Pakistani and Indian border, to ensure her children had the best possible education. This included her youngest son, my own paternal grandfather Khalid. Their home in Kasur was originally a converted stable that they owned. She went on to have six children, one of whom died in infancy, and two sons. She lived till she was in her eighties.

My paternal grandma Qouasar lived in London; her mother went to Pakistan in 1974 in search of her husband and was recommended a young law student, my grandfather, Khalid. They married in 1976 after my great-grandma met my grandmother Qousar. Her first question was whether my grandma could make butter. My grandma answered, regrettably, no. They went on to have four children, the third of which is my dad, Adnan. My grandma Qousar lived for some time in Pakistan after she got married, and she heard these stories of my great-grandma's bravery. My grandma also told me that my great grandma was a herbalist; she had a great book with lots of natural medicines and remedies. One entry my grandma told me I thought was very interesting because it used shed snake skin, ground and mixed with *makkan* (butter). My great aunts would return home to my great grandma whenever they had a scar to apply some of this balm to speed up healing.

Growing up, these stories were valuable because they helped me to piece together my own story as a young British Pakistani Muslim. It is important to me to document and record this so her story is heard and not lost forever. As my grandma has dementia, the stories she tells

me about her mother-in-law are losing detail and sequence. As the great Fakir Hussain also gets older, I worry I will never learn things about her life. I feel a responsibility to write these stories down, so the history of partition can be seen in the way my great grandma, the true hero of the story, experienced it, and not just through the eyes of the powerful decision makers – who didn't face the consequences of their actions.

(Courtesy: Everyday Muslim)

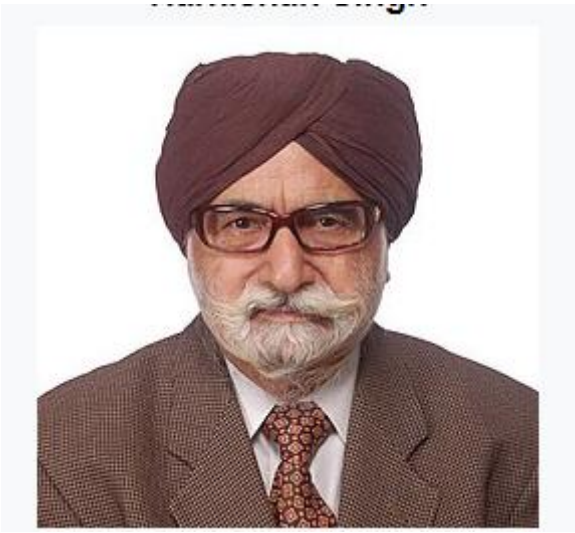
Word of the Month: Labour

1. **WIGÁR**
2. WAGÁRÍ
3. **sepí**
4. **ROJANDÁRÍ**
5. **ROJANDÁR**
6. **PUHURIÁ**
7. **MUSHAKKAT**
8. **MIHNATÍ**
9. **MEGH**
10. **MAJÚRÍ**
11. **MAJDÚR**
12. **láwí**
13. **KHADINÁ**
14. **KULÍ**
15. **KÁMMÁ**

Punjabi Diggdey Dhaindey Bol:

Word	Popular	stumbling /falling
1 Headstrong	Ziddi	Achpal
2. Cheat	Dhokha	Munna
3. Headache	Sir peed	Sarwah
4. bulackcart	thela	chakda
5 Vomit	Ulti	Kay
6. Purse	Batua	Guthali

Great People in making of Gujranwala: Scientist Prof Harkishan Singh



Harkishan Singh (25 November 1928 – 20 March 2020) was an Indian pharmaceutical chemist and professor at Punjab University known for his research and teaching in India, United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and China. Singh specialized in organic Chemistry meical chemistry, and the study of natural products, making contributions to each field. During his career, he led the research group responsible for developing candocuronium (also known as chandonium iodide, HS-310), a clinically useful synthetic azasteriod designed as a skeletal muscle relaxant

He was born at Gujranwala (now in Pakistan)in 25 november 1928 and died 20th march 2021 in India

Neuromuscular blocker candocuronium

The research group led by Singh atChandigarh, designed and synthesized candocuronuim iodide, initially called chandonuim. Pharmacological testing was conducted at the university of Strathciyle.

As a result of these comprehensive studies, the drug, a non-depolarizing neuromuscular blocker with a short duration of action, was approved by the Indian Goverment for manufacturing and clinical use. The WHO assigned the drug the International Nonproprietary Name (INN): candocuronium iodide.Singh lectured on his research at several institutions and conferences in India USA Cnada UK and China. Singh was also a science historian, and he examined the history of pharmaceutical developments in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The topics of his history research included pharmacopoeias and formularies, pharmaceutical education, pharmacy practice, biographies of pharmaceutical luminaries, and pharmaceutical journalism. He published more than fifty articles. In addition to his scientific and historical research papers, Singh authored or co-authored eighteen books and nearly two dozen review articles, including several book chapters. He wrote extensively on educational, scientific, historical, and professional issues. He published more than 300 works. Singh supervised nearly 50 masters and Ph.D, supporting the growth of many pharmaceutical scientists. He also published 125 original scientific research papers, and had 14 patents granted.

Professor Singh served on several academic, scientific, professional and governmental bodies.

Personality of the month: Alice wife of Faiz Ahmed Faiz



Alys Faiz (September 1915 – 12 March 2003) was a Pakistani poet, writer, journalist, human rights activist, social worker and a teacher. Alys was born in London, but she later became a naturalized citizen of Pakistan. She was the wife of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and the mother of Salima Hashmi and Muneeza Hashmi.

Alys George was the daughter of a London bookseller, and she joined the Communist Party as a teenager. She and her sister, Christobel, were active in leftist circles in the 1930s and were close to Indian intellectuals based in London. Alys served as an unofficial secretary to Krishna Menon, the secretary of the Free Indian League. Christobel married Dr. M. D. Taseer and joined him in India where he was the principal of a college. Alys traveled to India in 1938 to visit her sister, and, when World War II broke out, she decided to make the subcontinent her home.Marriage and life in Pakistan

The nikaah (marriage deed) between Alys George and Faiz was solemnized by Sheikh Abdullah in Srinagar in 1941 at Pari Mahal, the summer palace of Maharaja Hari Singh and where M D Taseer, then the principal of S.P. College was living. Upon marriage, Alys converted to Islam and Faiz gave her the Muslim name "Kulsoom". Alys Faiz joined Pakistan Times newspaper's editorial staff in 1950 where Faiz Ahmad Faiz was already serving as the newspaper editor. She looked after the women's and children's section of the newspaper.

She was the aunt of Salmaan Taseer, the son of her sister Christobel.

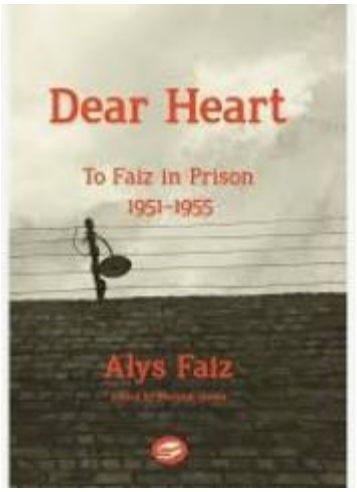
Alys had two daughters with Faiz: Salima Hashmi and Muneeza Hashmi. The artist Adeel Hashmi is her grandson.

After her death, Habib R. Sulemani wrote in The Dawn newspaper, "During my decade-long stay in Lahore, as a silent observer of the literary-scene, I was fascinated by her life-story which made me believe that women are stronger than men and have an immense power and talent for reconciliation and bridging the gaps between two families or nations. Alys gave courage to many western women who were married to Pakistanis and now live here as citizens. Alys gave many sacrifices. Faiz Ahmad Faiz's life and poetry have influenced hundreds of thousands of people in one way or the other, but Alys has shaped his life and poetry. A study of Faiz, as a person and a poet, cannot be complete without a study of Alys. Rather I should say she needs a special treat on her own right as a writer and a poet.

A recent dramatic Production 'Chand Roz Aur Meri Jaan' focused for the first time on the relationship between Faiz and Alys. 'Chand Roz

Aur Meri Jaan' presents the hitherto unknown aspects of their life together with the help of letters exchanged between them, particularly during 'Rawalpindi Saazish' days. In one such production at Amritsar, renowned theatre actress Suchitra Gupta portrayed the role of Alys with Danish Iqbal. So, apart from a few newspaper articles and interviews in books, this production is the first ever attempt to pay tribute to the silent role played by Alys in shaping the life of Faiz."

Alys Faiz died on 12 March 2003 in Lahore, Pakistan, at a hospital at the age of 87. She had been unwell for some time and was confined to her house after suffering a fracture of the hipbone in a fall. She was taken to the emergency department of a local hospital for treatment and did not survive. She was buried in the Model Town, Lahore, graveyard by the side of her husband Faiz Ahmad Faiz who had died earlier on 20 November 1984.



Illustrious Family of Punjab: Freedom Fighter Islamic Scholar Molana Habib-ur Rehman Ludhanvi



Habibur Rehman Ludhianvi (3 July 1892 – 2 September 1956) was an Islamic scholar who served as the third president of the Majlis-i Ahrar-i Islam from 1935 to 1939.(also known simply as the Ahrar, is a religious Muslim organisation in the Indian subcontinent that was formed during the British Raj (prior to the Partition of India) on 29 December 1929 at Lahore.The group became composed of Indian Muslims inspired by and supporting the Khilafat Movement, which cleaved closer to the Congress Party. The organisation was based in Punjab and gathered support from the urban lower-middle class. Chaudhry Afzal Haq, Maulana Habib-ur-Rehman Ludhianvi, Syed Ata Ullah Shah Bukhari Muhammad Ali Jalandhari were the leaders of the organisation.)

He belonged to an Arain tribe and was a direct lineal descendant of Shah Abdul Qadir Ludhianvi, the freedom fighter against British Colonial rule during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Shah Abdul Qadir

Ludhianvi was an early Islamic scholar and freedom fighter from Punjab who led a multi-faith rebellion against the British East India Company during the 1857 Indian Rebellion.

Key Details of His Role in 1857

● Leadership & Force: Belonging to an Arain family in Ludhiana, he organized a large, multi-communal fighting force comprising Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus.

● Expulsion of British: His forces drove the British out of both Ludhiana and Panipat.

Habibur Rehman Ludhianvi's grandfather Shah Abdul Qadir Ludhianvi led an armed rebellion against the British East India Company during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and was among the first ones to rebel against them from the Punjab.[citation needed] He gathered a large fighting force that drove the British out of not only Ludhiana but also Panipat. This fighting force included Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. He then proceeded to Delhi to support the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah II. He gave his life fighting along with thousands of others at Chandni Chowk, Delhi in 1857.

Habibur Rehman Ludhianvi was born on 3 July 1892 at Ludhiana, British India He married Bibi Shafatunnisa, the daughter of Abdul Aziz.

Ludhianvi was one of the founders of Majlis-e-Ahrar-ul-Islam, a nationalist movement that wanted an end to the British rule in India.He chose to stay back in East Punjab, India to represent thousands of Muslims still remaining there, after the partition and the

independence of Pakistan on 14 August 1947. He argued, at that time, that the remaining Muslims in East Punjab should not be abandoned. Ludhiana is considered a major industrial city of Punjab, India. A large number of working Muslims from the provinces of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar also come there to work.

Habiburrahman Ludhianvi who gave shelter to Bhagat Singh's family

Everyone kept distance from Bhagat Singh's family due to throwing bomb in the assembly and no one was willing to give shelter to them. At last Maulana Ludhianvi came forward and gave shelter to them for months in his home.

Treasure Business: Layllpur Cotton Mills

Lyallpur Cotton Mills was established in 1934 by Sir Shri Ram as an important regional expansion of Delhi Cloth & General Mills (DCM).Origins and Industrial

ContextEstablishment: Founded in 1934 in Lyallpur (now Faisalabad, Pakistan) as part of DCM Group's major diversification into the textile and manufacturing sectors across British India.

Significance: The mill marked a vital milestone in the early industrial growth of the region, which was rich in cotton cultivation ("white gold").

Post-Partition Era: Following the independence and partition of India in 1947, the mill found itself located across the newly formed border in Pakistan, where it continued to operate and represent a prominent part of the region's early large-scale textile infrastructure.

Corporate Legacy: Archival records from DCM note that leadership figures, such as Dr. Bharat Ram (then Chairman of DCM), actively participated in local events like the Lyallpur Cotton Mills Mela in 1958, highlighting the cross-border industrial footprint maintained during the mid-20th century

Treasure archival documents:

Document of the Week: Amritsar Massacre, 1919



CHAP. V.] THE MARTIAL LAW (AMRITSAR). 55

Q.—When you got into the *bagh*, what did you do ?

A.—I opened fire.

Q.—At once ?

A.—Immediately. I had thought about the matter and don't imagine it took me more than 30 seconds to make up my mind as to what my duty was ?

Q.—As regards the crowd, what was it doing ?

A.—Well, they were holding a meeting. There was a man in the centre of the place on something raised. His arms were moving about. He was evidently addressing. He was absolutely in the centre of the square, as far as I could judge. I should say some 50 or 60 yards from where my troops were drawn up.

The General had admitted that there might have been a good many who had not heard of the proclamation. So Lord Hunter asked, "On the assumption that there was that risk of people being in the crowd who were not aware of the proclamation, did it not occur to you that it was a proper measure to ask the crowd to disperse before you took that step of actually firing" ?

A.—No, at the time I did not. I merely felt that my orders had not been obeyed, that Martial Law was flouted, and that it was my duty to fire immediately by rifle.

Q.—Before you dispersed the crowd, had the crowd taken any action at all ?

A.—No, Sir. They had run away, a few of them.

Q.—Did they start to run away ?

A.—Yes. When I began to fire, the big mob in the centre began to run almost towards the right.

Q.—Martial Law had not been proclaimed. Before you took that step, which was a serious step, did you not consider as to the propriety of consulting the Deputy Commissioner who was the civil authority responsible for the order of the city ?

A.—There was no Deputy Commissioner to consult at the time. I did not think it wise to ask any body further. I had to make up my mind immediately as to what my action should be. I considered it from the Military point of view that I ought to fire immediately, that if I did not do so, I should fail in my duty.....

Q.—In firing was it your object to disperse ?

A.—No, Sir. I was going to fire until they dispersed.

Q.—Did the crowd at once start to disperse as soon as you fired ?

an extract from the testimony of General Reginald Dyer, presented in the *Report of the Commissioners Appointed by the Punjab Sub-Committee of the Indian National Congress* (1919). Dyer's testimony offers a harrowing insight into one of the darkest chapters of British colonial rule in India—the "Amritsar Massacre" (also referred to as the "Jallianwala Bagh Massacre") on 13 April 1919.

With pro-independence movements gaining momentum, in March 1919 the British colonial government passed the Rowlatt Act. This gave authorities extensive powers to curb nationalist and revolutionary movements in India. Essentially, it gave the colonial government the power to arrest anyone suspected of terrorism and to hold them for up to two years without trial. It also restricted the freedom of the press. The Rowlatt Act was met with widespread opposition across India, with Mahatma Gandhi calling for a nationwide "hartal" (suspension of work) on 6 April 1919, along with other peaceful protests. However, these quickly turned violent after two prominent Indian leaders, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr Satyapal Singh were arrested and banished to a secret location. In a bid to suppress any backlash, the British imposed martial law in Punjab on 13 April 1919. Under this legislation, public gatherings of more than four people were banned.

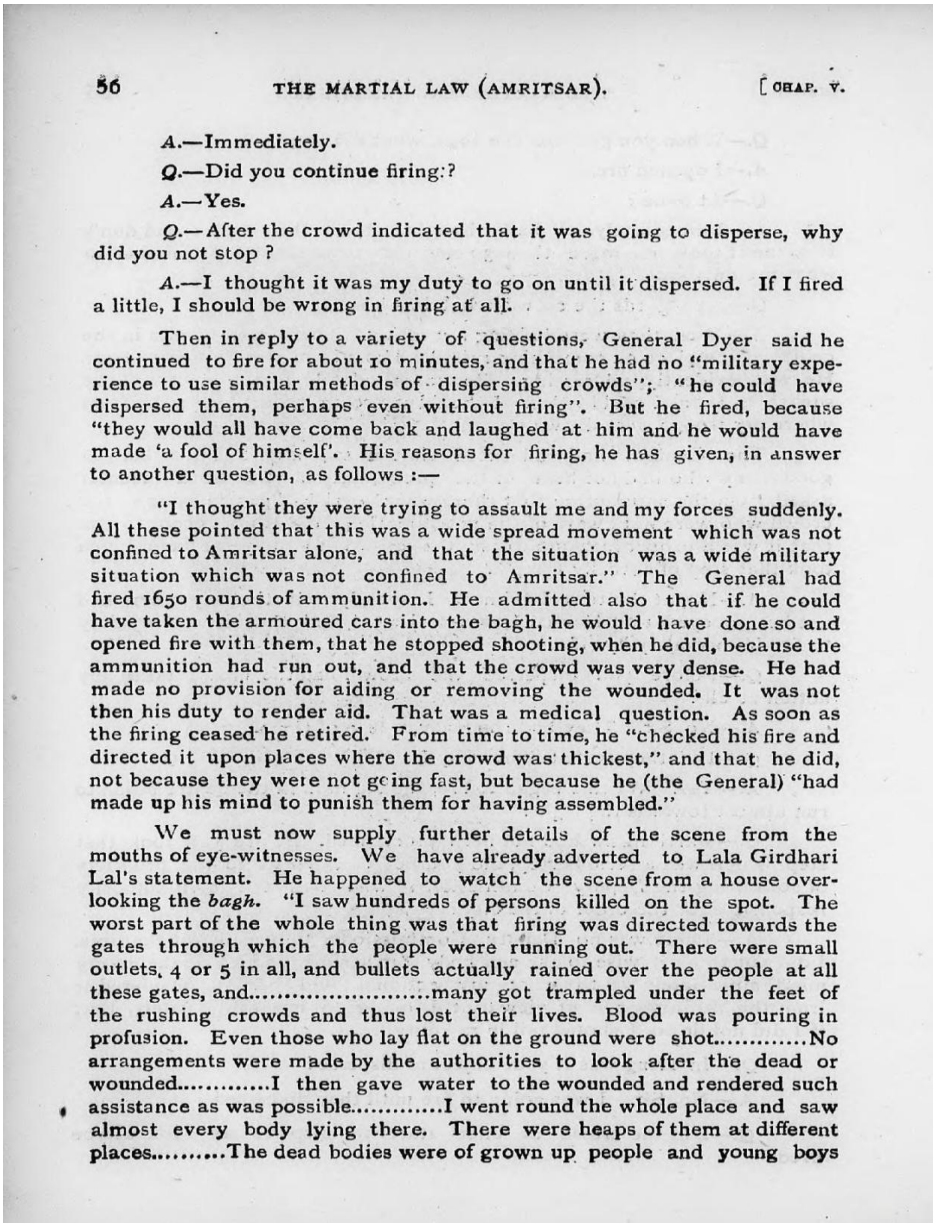
That very afternoon, thousands of people gathered in Jallianwala Bagh, a walled public garden in Amritsar, to protest peacefully against the arrests and to celebrate the Punjabi festival of Baisakhi. Many in the crowd were unaware that martial law had been imposed and that

public gatherings had been banned. Some of the crowd were merely passing through the Bagh on their way home from worshipping at the nearby Golden Temple. Without issuing a warning or making any attempt to disperse the crowd peacefully, Dyer marched in with fifty soldiers, blocked the narrow exits, and ordered his men to open fire. What followed was ten minutes of continuous gunfire, during which 1,650 rounds of ammunition were discharged into the unarmed crowd. Civilians, including men, women, children, and elderly people were killed or severely injured. The official death toll was reported as 379, however, the actual number killed is believed to be much higher. Among the victims was a seven-month-old baby, one of the massacre's youngest casualties.

In his testimony, Dyer admitted to taking the decision to fire almost immediately, proudly stating that it took a mere "30 seconds to make up" his mind. He justified his actions by insisting that he was carrying out his military duty and that if he did not act decisively, he "would fail in [his] duty". He acknowledged that it did not occur to him that the crowd might not have known about the imposition of martial law just hours earlier. Dyer made no effort to consult local authorities or to issue a warning to the crowd. He believed that any sign of hesitation would have undermined British authority. He later claimed that "they would all have come back and laughed at him and he would have made a 'fool of himself'".

Dyer's goal was not to warn or to control the crowd, he had simply "made up his mind to punish them for having assembled". His

complete lack of remorse was evident when he stated he would "have taken the armoured cars into the Bagh" and "opened fire with them" if the entrance had allowed. Dyer concluded, chillingly, that he only stopped "when he did because the ammunition had run out".



56 THE MARTIAL LAW (AMRITSAR). [CHAP. V.

A.—Immediately.

Q.—Did you continue firing?

A.—Yes.

Q.—After the crowd indicated that it was going to disperse, why did you not stop ?

A.—I thought it was my duty to go on until it dispersed. If I fired a little, I should be wrong in firing at all.

Then in reply to a variety of questions, General Dyer said he continued to fire for about 10 minutes, and that he had no "military experience to use similar methods of dispersing crowds"; "he could have dispersed them, perhaps even without firing". But he fired, because "they would all have come back and laughed at him and he would have made 'a fool of himself'. His reasons for firing, he has given, in answer to another question, as follows :—

"I thought they were trying to assault me and my forces suddenly. All these pointed that this was a wide spread movement which was not confined to Amritsar alone, and that the situation was a wide military situation which was not confined to Amritsar." The General had fired 1650 rounds of ammunition. He admitted also that if he could have taken the armoured cars into the bagh, he would have done so and opened fire with them, that he stopped shooting, when he did, because the ammunition had run out, and that the crowd was very dense. He had made no provision for aiding or removing the wounded. It was not then his duty to render aid. That was a medical question. As soon as the firing ceased he retired. From time to time, he "checked his fire and directed it upon places where the crowd was thickest," and that he did, not because they were not going fast, but because he (the General) "had made up his mind to punish them for having assembled."

We must now supply further details of the scene from the mouths of eye-witnesses. We have already adverted to Lala Girdhari Lal's statement. He happened to watch the scene from a house overlooking the *bagh*. "I saw hundreds of persons killed on the spot. The worst part of the whole thing was that firing was directed towards the gates through which the people were running out. There were small outlets, 4 or 5 in all, and bullets actually rained over the people at all these gates, and.....many got trampled under the feet of the rushing crowds and thus lost their lives. Blood was pouring in profusion. Even those who lay flat on the ground were shot.....No arrangements were made by the authorities to look after the dead or wounded.....I then gave water to the wounded and rendered such assistance as was possible.....I went round the whole place and saw almost every body lying there. There were heaps of them at different places.....The dead bodies were of grown up people and young boys

Eyewitness accounts, recorded in the report, paint a picture of unimaginable horror. Lala Girdhari Lal, a resident who watched the massacre unfold from a rooftop, described how "hundreds of persons [were] killed on the spot" and how bullets "actually rained over the people" near the gates. The exits were targeted deliberately, trapping people inside the garden. "Even those who lay flat on the ground were shot", Lal reported.

The "Amritsar Massacre" sparked outrage across India and abroad. It became a turning point in the Indian independence movement, hardening attitudes towards colonial rule. Dyer was never tried in a court of law, though he was relieved of his command and eventually retired. 106 years after the massacre, Britain has still not issued a formal apology.

This document stands as a powerful reminder of the brutality of British rule and the resilience of those who resisted it. Dyer's cold and unapologetic attitude in his testimony speaks volumes, not only about his own intentions, but also about the wider mentality of colonial rule.

Where to find this document

This extract can be found in our collection, *The British Raj: Resistance and Reform in India, 1879–1920*. This consists of letters, diaries, and official reports. The records relate to two viceroys who acted as representatives of the British monarch in India: Lord Curzon and the

fourth Earl of Minto. These sources allude to growing anti-British sentiment amongst the Indian population during the opening decade of the twentieth century and evidence how the viceroy responded. Visit the collection page to learn more.

Authored by Nishah Malik

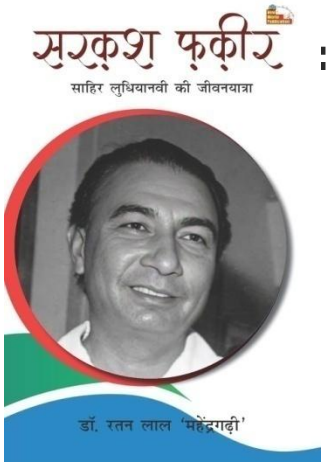


Nishah Malik

Nishah Malik is Editor at British Online Archives. Nishah gained a Masters in History from the University of Derby in 2020. Her research interests centre around South Asian culture and heritage, as well as the history and experiences of the South Asian diaspora. She also has a keen interest in women's history.

(Courtsey BOA)

Book Review:



Book Review: 'Sarqash Faqir: Sahir Ludhianvi Ki Jeevan-Yatra' (Biography); Author: Dr. Ratan Lal Mahendragarhi; Publisher: New World Publication, New Delhi; Price: ₹699; Pages: 400.

'An Authoritative Biography of Sahir Ludhianvi

Zahid Khan

There are few admirers of Urdu poetry and Hindi film songs who are unfamiliar with the name and work of Sahir Ludhianvi. Sahir's fame extends far beyond borders; the magic of his poetry—be it *ghazals*, *nazms*, or film lyrics—remains captivating. Although a long time has passed since Sahir departed from this world, his popularity has not waned. Even today, fresh research is being conducted on his poetry and film songs from new perspectives, and new books continue to be published. Early this year, Dr. Ratan Lal Mahendragarhi's book *Sarqash Faqir: Sahir Ludhianvi Ki Jeevan-Yatra* was released, and the recent book by senior journalist Rajesh Badal, *Zindagi Ka Saath Nibhata Chala Gaya*, serves as another significant addition to this body of work. *Sarqash Faqir* is a biography of Sahir Ludhianvi,

penned by Dr. Ratan Lal Mahendragarhi with immense passion and dedication. The author's research, zeal, and hard work are evident throughout the book. He has approached the life and literary works of this Urdu poet with great authenticity. This is not merely an "authentic" biography in the sense of a label slapped onto a book cover; it is a work of genuine substance and credibility. Dr. Ratan Lal Mahendragarhi has put in immense effort and perseverance to achieve this. Despite being unfamiliar with the Urdu script, he has skillfully utilized the available Hindi and Urdu material on Sahir to craft a magnificent biography. It is a life story so vivid that it brings Sahir and his entire era back to life. This is truly a wonderful gift for Sahir Ludhianvi's admirers—one they will cherish forever in their hearts and memories.

This is not the first book written with Sahir Ludhianvi at its core. Sahir Ludhianvi can already be understood quite well through various books—such as *Main Sahir Hoon* (Chander Verma, Salman Abid), *Sahir Ludhianvi: Shakhs aur Shayar* (Naz Siddiqui), *Nakame-Mohabbat: Sahir Ludhianvi* (Azhar Javed), *Naye Adab ke Meyar: Sahir Ludhianvi* (Kaifi Azmi), *Pal Do Pal Ka Shayar Hoon: Sahir Ludhianvi* (Amarnath Verma), *Sahir Ludhianvi: Hayat aur Shayari* (Dr. Saeed Jaiyor Rahman), *Sahir: Yaadon ke Aaine Mein* (Krishna Adeeb), *Har Pal Ka Shayar* (Surendra Deol), *Sahir Ludhianvi ke Hindi Geet* (Sunil Bhatt), and *Jaag Uthe Khwab Kayi: Sahir Ludhianvi* (Editor: Murali Manohar Prasad Singh)—as well as special issues on Sahir in magazines like *Beesvin Sadi* (Editor: Zia-ur-Rehman), *Adabsaz* (Editor: Nusrat Zaheer Ahmed), *Fan aur Shakhsiyat* (Editor: Sabir Dutt), *Naya Path* (Editors: Arjumand Ara, Ravikant), *Udbhavna* (Editor: Jankiprasad Sharma), and *Amravati* (Editor: Waseem Farhat Alig). Despite all this, a sense of incompleteness remains; it is hoped that *Sarqash Faqir* will prove helpful in quenching this thirst. This book covers Sahir Ludhianvi's entire persona, life, family, friends, his unrequited love, and his literary and cinematic achievements in great detail. Furthermore, there are details here that many readers might not be aware of. For instance, Sahir Ludhianvi was fascinated by the plays of Agha Hashr

Kashmiri during his childhood; like other promising poets, he too began writing poetry at a tender age. Initially, his work was published in newspapers and magazines under the name 'A. H. Sahir.' His early poems not only reflected the hardships and struggles of laborers and farmers but also mirrored the ongoing battle for independence.

One of Sahir Ludhianvi's poems from this period is titled 'Mujhe Sochne De' (Let Me Think). In it, he writes: "The scene of youthfulness upon the swaying fields / Yet neither lamp nor smoke in the farmer's hut / Why is this so? What is this? Let me think / Who is the God of man? Let me think." Meanwhile, in the poem 'Gurez' (Evasion), he writes: "Once again, a laborer's young daughter was sold / Once again, the pride of youth bowed low at a threshold / Once again, upon a gathering of farmers, the privileged class / Rained fire from machine guns." This was the era of Sahir Ludhianvi's youth, a time when a movement for independence was sweeping across the nation. The atmosphere was alive with revolutionary slogans; strikes by workers and agitations by farmers were commonplace. In such a turbulent environment, Sahir was hardly one to remain silent. Addressing workers and farmers, he wrote: "From this day forth, O workers and farmers, my songs belong to you; / O starving souls, my melodies and tunes are yours. / As long as you remain hungry and unclothed, these songs shall not fall silent; / I harbor no regret if the world does not acknowledge me as an artist." His progressive outlook was reflected not only in his *nazms* and *ghazals* but also in his film lyrics. There are numerous songs by Sahir that mirror his progressive ideology. "Here, there are disputes over language or region; / There, conflicts arise over race or caste. / How can one seek traces of love in your city? / One cannot even find a human being, / Let alone God, in your city." In another song, he writes: "The methods you have devised are grotesque; / Mills weave cloth, yet bodies remain naked. / Grain lies hoarded in the cellars of the wealthy, / While the hungry sleep on pavements in your cities." Apart from these, the book contains several *nazms* that were not included in any of his published collections—such as *Mehfil-e-Raqs-o-Sarod*, *Marghat ki Sarzameen*, *Lamha-e-Ghanimat*, *Shahzade*, and *Aakhiri Burai*.

Sahir Ludhianvi... *Adab-e-Latif*, *Savera*, and He also served as the editor of *Shahrah*. Throughout the book, the author cites significant excerpts from Sahir's editorials, which offer insight into his ideology and mindset. The book provides a detailed account of the activities surrounding the Urdu conference held in Hyderabad, as well as various other conferences and *mushairas* (poetic symposiums) in cities such as Ahmedabad, Banaras, Malegaon, Lucknow, Allahabad, Hyderabad, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar. The paper Sahir Ludhianvi presented at the Hyderabad Urdu Conference is also included in the book. It also sheds light on the nature of Sahir Ludhianvi's relationships with prominent figures of Urdu literature from his era—such as Majaz, Kaifi Azmi, Krishan Chander, and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas. The book records several fascinating anecdotes in which these personalities appear in all their brilliance. For instance, when Sahir mentioned Majaz's drinking habits in his column 'Jaan-Pehchan' in an issue of *Savera*, Majaz wrote him an angry letter; Sahir published the letter verbatim in a subsequent issue of *Savera*, and the full text of this letter is included in the book. Furthermore, the book reveals the nature of Sahir's connection with Allahabad. The book begins by introducing Sahir's father, Chaudhry Fazal Mohammad, followed by an account of Sahir's struggling childhood, his early education, his days at Government College, Ludhiana, and his active involvement with the All-India Students Federation as well as peasant and labor movements. It covers his unrequited love for Mahendra Chaudhry and Ishar Kaur, his enrollment at Dayal Singh College in Lahore, the literary atmosphere of the city, his inclination towards literature and the subsequent start of his poetic journey, his emerging identity as a poet, the publication of his first book *Talkhiyan*, and his editing of the literary magazine *Adab-e-Latif*. The narrative also details his meeting and romance with Amrita Pritam, his brief time in Mumbai prior to Independence, the breaking off of his engagement to Khadija Mastoor, the Partition of the country, his move from Bombay to Lahore amidst communal riots, his editing of the literary magazine *Savera*, his return to India, his time in Delhi, his editing of the magazine *Shahrah*, and his move from Delhi to Bombay. It further chronicles his struggle to establish himself in the film industry, his participation

in *mushairas* (poetic symposiums) across the country, his journey to success as a lyricist, the creative process behind his superhit songs, his rising fame, his relationships with film producers and music composers, and his deep emotional bonds with his mother, Sardar Begum, and his maternal cousins, Sarwar Shafi and Anwar Sultana; as well as his associations with figures such as Ahmad Rahi, Hameed Akhtar, Krishan Adeeb, Ibrahim Jalees, Prakash Pandit, Janisar Akhtar, Bharat Bhushan, and B.R. The account of Sahir Ludhianvi's friendships—with figures such as Chopra, Ramkrishna Ashk, Devendra Satyarthi, Amarnath Verma, Sabir Dutt, Qateel Shifai, and Ajaib Chitrakar—and the description of his final days are presented so engagingly that the narrative unfolds like a film before the reader's eyes. Readers remain captivated until the very end—a hallmark of a fine biography.

The author, Dr. Ratan Lal Mahendragarhi, has provided details regarding Sahir based on highly authentic sources. Those familiar with Urdu literature—and who have read works such as Hamid Akhtar's *Aashnaiyan Kya-Kya*, Qateel Shifai's *Ghunghru Toot Gaye*, Gopal Mittal's *Lahore Ka Jo Zikr Kiya*, Ibrahim Jalees's *Do Mulk Ek Kahani*, Amrita Pritam's *Rasidi Ticket*, Shorish Kashmiri's *Chehre*, Satyapal Anand's *Katha Char Janmon Ki*, Krishna Adeeb's *Sahir: Yaadon Ke Aaine Mein*, and Shaukat Kaifi's *Yaadon Ki Rahguzar*—will recognize the origins of the passages described in the book. In particular, the depiction of Lahore is drawn verbatim from Gopal Mittal's *Lahore Ka Jo Zikr Kiya*, although these sources are duly acknowledged throughout the text. However, had the author employed greater creativity and imagination, the book could have achieved an even higher standard. A positive aspect is that Sahir's famous ghazals, nazms, and songs are not merely mentioned but reproduced in their entirety; for readers who admire Sahir's poetry and lyrics, this book offers a wonderful, comprehensive package. Readers will greatly appreciate this collection, which features not only Sahir's biography but also his popular ghazals, poems, and songs. Moreover, this book serves as a gateway to other works and special magazine issues focused on Sahir. In a sense, the book—titled

***Sarkash Faqir: Sahir Ludhianvi Ki Jeevan-Yatra* (The Rebellious Mystic: The Life Journey of Sahir Ludhianvi)—acts as a comprehensive reference work on Sahir, making it invaluable for researchers.**

The book provides detailed accounts of not only Sahir Ludhianvi but also figures such as Amrita Pritam, Devendra Satyarthi, Hameed Akhtar, Prakash Pandit, Anwar Sultana, and Nigar Sultana. Given how modern politics has widened the chasm of alienation and mistrust between the nation's two major communities—Hindus and Muslims—it is both surprising and heartening to learn that humanity and brotherhood did not vanish entirely during the Partition of 1947. There were individuals who, even in such a volatile atmosphere, set remarkable examples of humanity. The book recounts how, amidst communal riots, Sahir Ludhianvi's mother and grandmother were rescued by his friend, the painter Bawri, while Devendra Satyarthi, Ramprakash Ashk, and—in one instance—actress Achala Sachdev stepped forward to ensure Sahir's safety. Furthermore, when Sahir's mother and grandmother were trapped in Lahore during the riots, Prakash Pandit brought them to Delhi. Sahir never forgot this debt of friendship; whenever his friends faced adversity, he would readily step in to help. The book also mentions instances where Ramprakash Ashk and Prakash Pandit were afflicted by serious illnesses ...so Sahir arranged for his treatment. Another touching aspect of the book is that, even after scaling the heights of fame in Bombay, Sahir Ludhianvi never forgot his hometown of Ludhiana or his old friends; his affection for Ludhiana endured to the very end. He even remembered Jagga Bhikhari.

These are the merits of the book *Sarkash Faqir: Sahir Ludhianvi Ki Jeevan Yatra*, but regarding its flaws and shortcomings, the language lacks consistency throughout. At times, the text employs Hindi infused with Arabic and Persian, while at other times, it uses Sanskritized Hindi—a jarring contrast. For instance: "Once Sahir read a critique of Kaifi Azmi's poetry... poets do not prove themselves based on poetic standards" (Page 108). Furthermore, the flow of the language would have been enhanced had the author used terms like *mamu* instead of *mama*, *phuphi* instead of *bua*, and

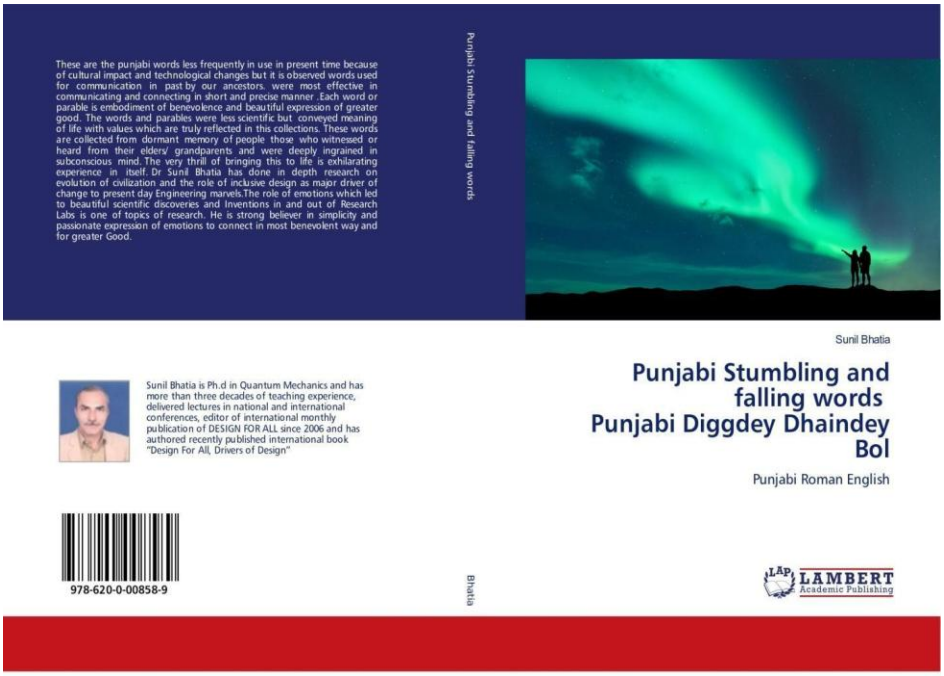
***nabalig* instead of *avayask*, or words like *rehnumai* alongside *margdarshan*. Moreover, some sentences are poorly constructed. A major reason for this is the author's lack of command over the Urdu language. Examples include "...numayan kiya jaane laga" (Page 108) and "Jo bhi vyakti namaz kar raha ho, use saaf chadar de di jaaye" (Page 258). In several places, words contain spelling errors. Examples include *Lazzat-Lijjat*, *Muflisi-Maflisi*, *Muazzaz-Maujiz*, *Tasdeeq-Taskeed*, *Mumtaz Mufti-Mumtaz Mufti*, *Jazbaat-Jazbaaton*, *Ishar-Ishwar*, *Boribandar-Poribandar*, *Murat-Murt*, *Balkeshwar Road-Balkeshwar Road*, *Aashnai Kya Kya-Aashna Kya Kya*, *Malegaon-Maligaon*, *Lala Rukh-Lal Rukh*, and so on. In one instance, the name appears as "Nadeem Ahmed Qasmi" instead of "Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi" (page 81), and in another, a location in Bombay's Madanpura area is referred to as "Mutala Ghar" instead of its actual name, "Awami Idara." Furthermore, diacritical dots are missing in several places. Another aspect of the book that feels jarring is the lack of respectful phrasing when mentioning figures like Sharad Dutt, Kashmiri Lal Zakir, and Ali Ahmed Fatmi; the use of plain, matter-of-fact verbs—such as "...came," "...went," or "...met"—alongside their names feels inappropriate. The author concludes the book with a poem by Zohra Jamal, but the accompanying details about her were unnecessary; since the book is about Sahir Ludhianvi, he should naturally remain the central focus. All in all, the book's conclusion could have been handled better. It is hoped that the shortcomings and errors pointed out here will be rectified in the next edition. The final chapter of the book is titled 'Shraddhanjali' (Tribute), in which friends of Sahir Ludhianvi have offered their heartfelt tributes. However, it omits several prominent figures from Sahir's era. Had the author made the effort, their views could certainly have been found; this would have required scouring the newspapers and magazines of that time. Clearly, the author has fallen short in this regard. At the end of the book, alongside the meanings of complex Arabic and Persian words, there is a detailed account of the sources consulted for the biography. The bibliography lists the Hindi, Urdu, and English books, magazines, and newspapers from which material was gathered. The book also includes a complete**

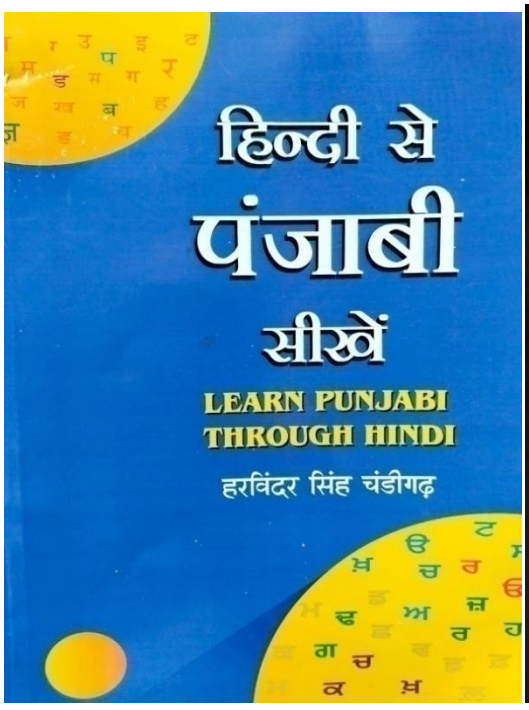
list of the films for which Sahir Ludhianvi penned lyrics. Published by 'New World Publication,' the book is visually appealing—from its cover design and paper quality to the printing itself. Ultimately, 'Sarkash Faqir Sahir Ludhianvi Ki Jeevan-Yatra' is an important book for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the beloved Sahir Ludhianvi—as a human being, poet, editor, and lyricist—and it is a must-read. Dr. Ratan Lal Mahendragarhi has truly accomplished a significant task by writing this book.

Mahal Colony, Shivpuri-473551 (M.P.)

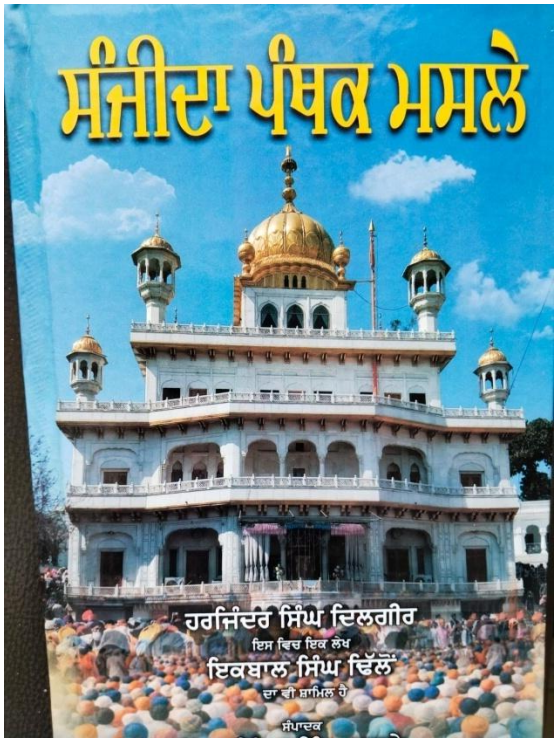
Mobile: 94254 89944

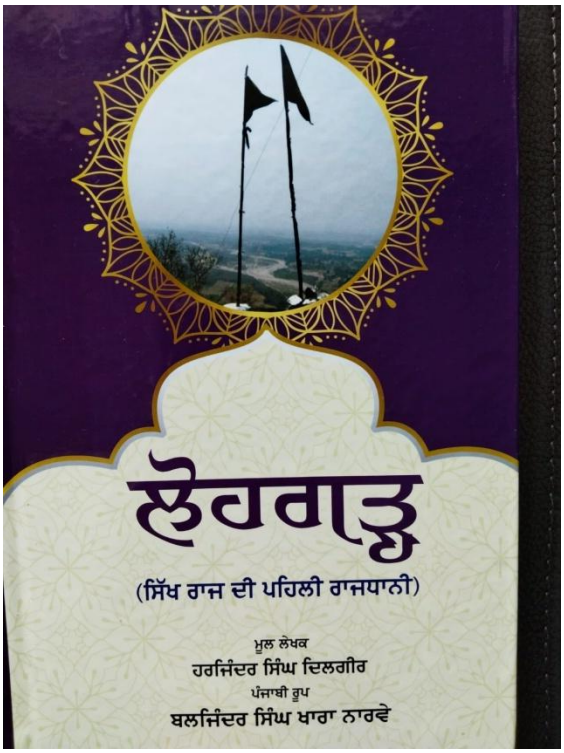
New Book:


These are the punjabi words less frequently in use in present time because of cultural impact and technological changes but it is observed words used for communication in past by our ancestors. were most effective in communicating and connecting in short and precise manner .Each word or parable is embodiment of benevolence and beautiful expression of greater good. The words and parables were less scientific but conveyed meaning of life with values which are truly reflected in this collections. These words are collected from dormant memory of people those who witnesed or heard from their elders/ grandparents and were deeply ingrained in subconscious mind. The very thrill of bringing this to life is exhilarating experience in itself. Dr. Sunil Bhatia has done in depth research on evolution of civilization and the role of inclusive design as major driver of change to present day Engineering marvels.The role of emotions which led to beautiful scientific discoveries and Inventions in and out of Research Labs is one of topics of research. He is strong believer in simplicity and passionate expression of emotions to connect in most benevolent way and for greater Good.
Punjabi Stumbling and falling words
Sunil Bhatia is Ph.d in Quantum Mechanics and has more than three decades of teaching experience, delivered lectures in national and international conferences, editor of international monthly publication of DESIGN FOR ALL since 2006 and has authored recently published international book "Design For All, Drivers of Design"
978-620-0-00858-9
Bhatia
Sunil Bhatia
Punjabi Stumbling and falling words
Punjabi Diggdey Dhaindey Bol
Punjabi Roman English
LAMBERT Academic Publishing


हिन्दी से
पंजाबी
सीखें
LEARN PUNJABI
THROUGH HINDI
हरविंदर सिंह चंडीगढ़


ੴ
ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ
ਦੀ ਕਥਾ
ਪ੍ਰੋ. ਡਾ. ਬਲਜਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਰਵੇ

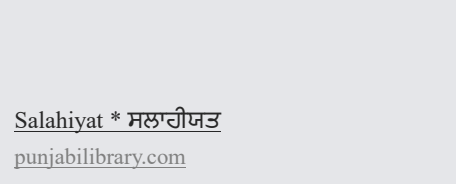

ਸੰਜੀਦਾ ਪੰਥਕ ਮਸਲੇ
ਹਰਜਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਦਿਲਗੀਰ
ਇਸ ਵਿਚ ਇਕ ਲੇਖ
ਇਕਬਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਢਿੱਲੋਂ
ਦਾ ਵੀ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਹੈ

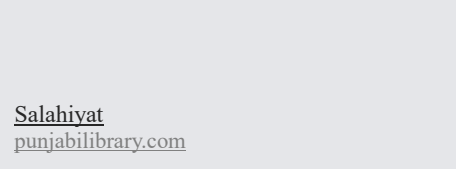

ਲੋਹਗੜ੍ਹ
(ਸਿੱਖ ਰਾਜ ਦੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਰਾਜਧਾਨੀ)
ਮੂਲ ਲੇਖਕ
ਹਰਜਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਦਿਲਗੀਰ
ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਰੂਪ
ਬਲਜਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਖਾਰਾ ਨਾਰਵੇ

News:

1.

Our esteemed readers can also download the issues of Salhiyat free of cost from www.Punjabilibrary.com.





ਨਵਤੇਜਸਿੰਘਅਟਵਾਲ

Entry Free

Seating- First Come First Basis

Venue: Randhawa Auditorium
Kala Bhawan, Sector-16 ,Chandigarh

Sifat
... From uprooted Civilization

Chandigarh Citizens Foundation

ਮੁਫ਼ਤ ਦਾਖਲਾ

ਬੈਠਣ ਦੀ ਵਿਵਸਥਾ - ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਆਓ, ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਆਓ ਦੇ ਆਧਾਰ 'ਤੇ

ਸਥਾਨ: ਰੰਧਾਵਾ ਆਡੀਟੋਰੀਅਮ
ਕਲਾ ਭਵਨ, ਸੈਕਟਰ-16, ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ

DATE: 22nd March 2026(Sunday)
TIME-11 A.M (Morning)- 1.0PM(Afternoon)

ਮਿਤੀ: 22 ਮਾਰਚ 2026 (ਐਤਵਾਰ)
ਸਮਾਂ-11 ਵਜੇ (ਸਵੇਰੇ) 1.0 ਵਜੇ (ਦੁਪਹਿਰ)

TOPIC: ਵਿਸ਼ਾ

1.Krishan Chander (23 November 1914 – 8 March 1977)Greatest Punjabi Urdu writer - 6 Minutes
ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਨ ਚੰਦਰ (23 ਨਵੰਬਰ 1914 – 8 ਮਾਰਚ 1977) ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਮਹਾਨ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਉਰਦੂ ਲੇਖਕ-6 ਮਿੰਟ



Krishan Chandar
ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਨ ਚੰਦਰ

2. BASHEERAA Film by Ritika Singh on short story of Author Nav Tej Singh -14minutes
ਲੇਖਕ ਨਵ ਤੇਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੀ ਛੋਟੀ ਕਹਾਣੀ 'ਤੇ ਰਿਤਿਕਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਬਸ਼ੀਰਾ ਫਿਲਮ -14 ਮਿੰਟ



Author Editor Nav Tej Singh
ਲੇਖਕ ਸੰਪਾਦਕ ਨਵ ਤੇਜ ਸਿੰਘ

Short Story 'Bistra Bandh' of Author Nav Tej Singh , Reading by Poonam Singh , Editor Preetlari -14 minutes
ਲੇਖਕ ਨਵ ਤੇਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੀ ਛੋਟੀ ਕਹਾਣੀ 'ਬਿਸਤਰਾ ਬੰਧ', ਪੂਨਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਪੜ੍ਹਿਆ, ਸੰਪਾਦਕ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਲੜੀ - 14 ਮਿੰਟ



Balraj Sahni (born Yudhishthir Sahni; 1 May 1913 – 13 April 1973) film and stage actor, Writer' ਬਲਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਨੀ (ਜਨਮ ਯੁਧਿਸ਼ਠਿਰ ਸਾਹਨੀ; 1 ਮਈ 1913 – 13 ਅਪ੍ਰੈਲ 1973) ਭਾਰਤੀ ਫਿਲਮ ਅਤੇ ਰੰਗਮੰਚ ਅਦਾਕਾਰ, ਲੇਖਕ



Life and Journey of Balraj Sahni" Written & presented by Sohaila Kapur , 'Three Arts Club' and Katyayani Production. 85 Minutes
"ਬਲਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਨੀ ਦਾ ਜੀਵਨ ਅਤੇ ਯਾਤਰਾ" ਸੋਹੈਲਾ ਕਪੂਰ, 'ਥ੍ਰੀ ਆਰਟਸ ਕਲੱਬ' ਅਤੇ ਕਾਤਿਆਨੀ ਪ੍ਰੋਡਕਸ਼ਨ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਅਤੇ ਪੇਸ਼ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ। -85 ਮਿੰਟ

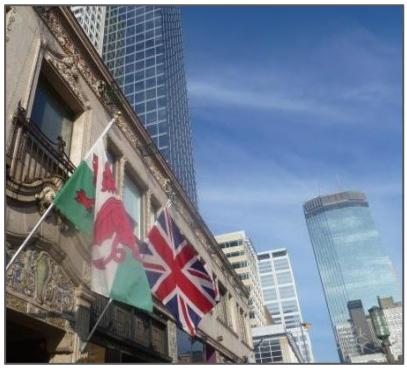


SOHAILA KAPUR
ACTRESS, JOURNALIST TELEVISION PERSONALITY , THEATRE , DIRECTOR , PLAY WRITE
ਸੋਹੇਲਾ ਕਪੂਰ
ਅਦਾਕਾਰਾ, ਪੱਤਰਕਾਰ ਟੈਲੀਵਿਜ਼ਨ ਸ਼ਖ਼ਸੀਅਤ, ਥੀਏਟਰ, ਨਿਰਦੇਸ਼ਕ, ਨਾਟਕ ਲੇਖਕ

IN COLLABORATION: CHANDIGARH CITIZENS FOUNDATION READERS AND WRITERS SOCIETY OF INDIA
CHAIRMAN SWARANJIT SINGH SAVI
PUNJAB ARTS COUNCIL, CHANDIGARH
VICE CHAIRMAN PROF YOG RAJ ANGRISH
PUNJAB ARTS COUNCIL, CHANDIGARH
SALAHIYAT

Center of India

Programme and Events





Advertising:

To advertise in digital Newsletter
.in**advertisement@southasiaresearchcentre.in**
Acceptance of advertisement does not mean our endorsement of the products or services by the South Asia Research Centre of India
News and Views:
Regarding new products or events or seminars/conferences/ workshops.
News@southasiaresearchcentre.in
Feedback: Readers are requested to express their views about our newsletter to the Editor
Feedback@southasiaresesrchcentre.in



Forthcoming Events and Programs:
Editor@southasiaresearchcentre .in

The views expressed in the signed articles do not necessarily reflect the official views of the South Asia Research Centre of India.

Supervision: (Scripts of English, Gurumukhi and Shahmukhi)



Prof Hardev Singh Virk
Professor of Eminence (Honorary), SGGS World University, Fatehgarh Sahib.India

Chief-Editor:



Dr.Sunil Kumar Bhatia Faculty Member,
A/2/70 Sector-18, Rohini , Delhi-110089, India
E-mail:dr_subha@yahoo.com

Editor:(English version)



Shri L.K. Das
Former Head Industrial Design Center, Indian Institute of Technology (Delhi), India, Visiting faculty Design Department , Delhi Technological University, Delhi
Email:lalitdas@dtu.ac.in (Official)
E-mail: lalitdas@gmail.com

Co-Editor (English version)



Prof Dr. Ronki Ram
Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chair Professor
Dept. of Political Science
Panjab University, Chandigarh (India)
Email: ronkir@pu.ac.in(official) Email: ronkiram@yahoo co.in
Editor: (Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script version)



Jaspal Singh Sandhu
Journalist, Author and social activist, Kendri Singh Sabha, Chandigarh, India
jaspal.sdh@gmail.com
Associate Editor: (Punjabi language, Gurumukhi script version)



Dr. Raminderjeet Kaur,
Assistant Professor, Punjabi University, Patiala, India
jitraminder75@gmail.com(official)
Editor:(Punjabi language and Shahmukhi script Version)



Prof Dr. ASMA QADRI

Institute of Punjabi and Cultural Studies Oriental College
University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan
Email: 1aasmaqadri@gmail.com

Associate Editor:(Punjabi language, Shahmukhi script version)



Dr. Irfan Malik
Panjab University, Chandigarh (India)
Email : irfanmalik941@gmail.com

In- Charge of Publication



Dr. Khushhal Singh, Chandigarh, Master's Degree in Sikh Studies and PhD in Sikh Purab, Punjabi University, Patiala.General Secretary - Central Sri Guru Singh Sabha General.

Editorial Board:



Prof Dr.Gaurav Raheja, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India Email: gaurav.raheja@ar.iitr.ac.in(Official) ,gr.iitroorkee@gmail.com



Prof Dr. Sugandh Malhotra, Indian Institute of Technolgy, Mumbai, India,Email: sugandh@iitb.ac.in(official)

Special Correspondent:
Ms. Nemisha Sharma,
Mumbai, India, Nemisha90@gmail.com

Address for Correspondence:
A/2/70 Sector-18 Rohini, Delhi-110089, India
Material appearing in this journal may be freely reproduced. A copy of the same and acknowledgement would be appreciated.

This journal is published monthly for free for benefits for readers, by South Asia Research Centre of India A/2/ 70 Sector-18 Rohini, Delhi-110089 (INDIA) and publisher name Dr. Sunil Kumar Bhatia, address A/2/70 Sector-18 Rohini, Delhi-110089 Tel: +91-11-27853470®, 011-45793470® ,E-Mail: dr_subha@yahoo.com

This publication is completely free .We do not charge anything for published items in this journal from contributors .

Disclaimer: ***While every effort is made to check the accuracy of the contributions published in Salahiyat, the publisher do not accept responsibility for the view expressed which, although made in good faith, those of the authors are alone***

Web site: www.southasiaresearchcentre.in

Special request should be addressed to
Dr_subha@yahoo.com