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The World of Sa'adat Hasan Manto[1]

THE THREE AXES through which I would examine the relationship between the literary imagination and the rendition of the history of Manto's times, as it pours into the narrative of the Partition are: (1) the axis of cultural stereotypes, (2) the category of cultural visibility which these stereotypes impart to people, and (3) the cultural power that they appear to acquire or negate through their visibility or invisibility, respectively. We need a language beyond fixed categories of good and evil, of victims and victimizers, beyond an obsessive focus on violence as an act of insanity, barbarism, pathology.[2]

The very nature of language and narrative, which Lyotard views as agonistic, generating a discourse of conflicting oppositions revolving around a struggle,[3] can be revealed in the words spoken by characters in

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[1]The short stories discussed in this paper are available in Alok Bhalla, ed. *Stories About the Partition of India*, 3 vols. (New Delhi: Indus [Haper Collins], 1994); Leslie A. Flemming, *The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1985), translations by Tahira Naqvi; Satish Jamali, *Manṭo kī Sārvaśreṣṭh Kahāniyāṅ* (Allahabad: Satyam Prakāśan, 1991); Khalid Hasan, tr. *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* (London: Verso, 1987); Khalid Hasan and Faruq Hassan, eds., *Versions of Truth: Urdu Short Stories from Pakistan* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983); and Jai Ratan, ed. and tr. *The Best of Manto: A Collection of His Short Stories* (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987), identified and cited, respectively, as: *SPI*, *LWS*, *MSK*, *KE*, *VT*, and *BM* in the body of the text and in footnotes.

[2]Concepts such as cultural power, cultural contest and cultural assertion have been worked out in the broader framework of a struggle for cultural hegemony in Shashi Joshi and Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India: Culture, Community and Power: 1941–47*, vol. 3 (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994).

[3]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).

the Partition stories. How does conflict get deposited in, and in turn produce, cultural significations? Examining cultural stereotypes and their visibility as it is apprehended by those involved in conflict may help us comprehend how the binaries evolve.

But first, I would like to comment on Alok Bhalla's critique of what he calls "communal stories." His basic point is that these stories do not condemn both sides equally and do not uphold the principle of "correct remembrance" (*SPI*, I, p. xv).

I would go along with Veena Das and Ashish Nandy when they speak of much of the literature on the Partition as

> inauthentic, because … violence from one side was equally balanced with violence from the other. Thus, the description of violent, inhuman acts perpetuated upon those traveling by a train coming from Lahore would be matched by another description of similar, gruesome acts to which travelers coming from Amritsar were subjected. If a prostitute gave shelter to the two women whose bodies had been mutilated by rioters then one could be certain that one of these women would be a Hindu and the other, a Muslim.[4]

As for "correct remembrance," literature, I believe, cannot perform a balancing act like the legendary scales of justice. It must portray a slice—however thin—of life viewed through the eyes of its protagonist. An act of remembrance is always partial, incomplete and fragmentary. There are conflicting versions of "truth," and they have to be recounted in their one-sidedness and not inflict contrived resolutions on the reader's intelligence and sensibility.

I tend to view Manto as being almost alone in grasping the fragmentation of "truth" during his times, and that is why the authorial voice is absent from his Partition stories. The victims and victimizers could belong to any community but do not inhabit the same story and no attempt is made to establish parity among the monstrosities committed by all. Manto could well have identified with Masood Ashar's helpless conclusion: "Truth has so many faces. One man's truth can negate another man's truth. And when so many versions of truth clash, every-

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[4]Veena Das, ed. *The Word and the World* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 189.

thing becomes an absurdity, loses all meaning, all sense."[5] The result is Manto's Kafkaesque stories—most of all, "Pʰundnēṅ."[6]

More specifically, I read the three stories characterized by Alok Bhalla as communal narratives rather differently. For him, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi's "Parmeshwar Singh" (*SPI*, I, pp. 159–78) seeks "to evoke sublime pathos for the Muslims as victims" and thus caricatures the Sikh character, Parmeshwar Singh. In my reading of the story, the bond between the Sikh and the Muslim boy is palpable. The love Parmeshwar offers to Akhtar, though initially rebuffed by fear in the child's heart, gradually breaks through and the child begins to trust him. Yet, he cannot replace the child's lost world—the cultural world of his socialization, of the *azan* and the Qur'an. Nor can he substitute for the child's mother, whose memory is not an abstraction for Akhtar but a warm, sensuous memory of a woman who read the *namaz* and gave him a drink of water with a *bismillah.*

Amar Kaur, Parmeshwar's wife, who cries for her own lost son, is as real as Akhtar in her rejection of the child. Instead of her own son Kartar—hair in a bun, a comb in it—she has a child reciting *qul huwalla-ho-ahad* under her roof. Gradually, as the child's hair begins to grow, she begins to soften, and feels happy when she touches his hair, bringing out the strong physicality of the mother-and-child bond. The day he can tie his hair in a bun, she says, they would name him Kartar Singh. Nevertheless, she weeps: "Kartar is the wound in my heart which will never heal." And seeing the wildly powerful love between a mother and child in his neighbor's house, Parmeshwar begins to move towards the finale of his story in which he walks Akhtar to the border so that he can find his mother. At one level, the cultural stereotypes imbedded in the situation are too strong to be overcome easily; but at another level, the cultural symbolism that pervades our senses as we seek our emotional sustenance in familiar sounds and images is conveyed well by the story.

According to Alok Bhalla, in "Avtar: A Hindu Myth" (*SPI*, III, pp. 191–205) Ghulam Abbas

> invokes Hindu myths to suggest that since the Hindus had over millenniums betrayed their gods by indulging in the most reprehen-

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[5]Masood Ashar, "Versions of Truth," in *VT*, p. 51.

[6]Translated as "Tassels" by Linda Wentink in *Journal od South Asian Literature*, 20:2 (Summer, Fall 1985), pp. 107–12.

> sible forms of killings, their gods had now decided in disgust to abandon them and send a new avtar on earth in a Muslim household. There is, of course, no hint of the history of massacres by the Muslims. (*SPI*, I, p. xvii)

I was stunned to read this passage. The story, as I read it, poignantly brings home a truth, that within the Gods-filled cosmology of the Hindus there is no barrier of untouchability between Hindu gods and Muslim victims. The evil unleashed into the midst of the Muslims in the lonely valley ends in a fantastic, messianic dream-fulfilling sequence of the new avtar Kalki being born to a poor, besieged Muslim. It is an imaginatively constructed story that encapsulates the heartrending cry of Muslim grief in this instance. What crimes had your victims committed? That they believed in a different form of worship than yours? That their style of life was different? Is that such a big crime that they should have been exterminated?

The entire story could well have been narrated to us by Mohandas Gandhi, and no one would have called him communal. Must Abbas, because he is Muslim, square the circle of history by trying to balance his account of Hindu violence with accounts of "massacres by the Muslims"?

Krishna Sobti's "Where is My Mother" (*SPI*, II, pp. 135–39) is accused of playing upon the popular Hindu fear of the Pathan as a mindless killer. But from the outset, the Pathan is shown to be in the grip of ideology—fighting to create a new country for which the self had to be sacrificed; he was tearing across the country, with no moment to look at the moon or stars, fighting a revolutionary war, a jihad. Where is the mindlessness? In fact, Sobti's Pathan is a stereotype ingrained as a deathlike fear in the girl whom he rescues. It reveals the power of the stereotypes and of prejudice, despite the care the Pathan lavishes on her. All his attempts to reach out to her are met with paranoia. When she pleads: "Send me to the camp. They will kill me here—they will kill me …," the steel bands of his ideology snap and "Yunus Khan was forced to lower his eyes. He no longer felt like a brave, powerful and ruthless soldier. He felt miserable, helpless … weak." Compassion and pity break through his jihad. The image and memory of his dead sister, Nooran, which first compelled him to save the girl, re-emerges and fills his voice with kindness only to be met by the girl's terror of him.

To my mind, Sobti's Pathan is the counterpart to Parmeshwar Singh: the *dénouement* of both stories leaves them equally tragic figures longing for relationships they have lost.

Parmeshwar Singh's heartbreaking longing for his son, and the Pathan's tender memories of his sister, have not prevented them from going on sprees of looting or orgies of killing. The critical moments in their lives, when both adopt children from the other community, are precisely that—moments. They are seen as moments of individual weakness by those around them and, perhaps, also by themselves. Their strength is felt in their collectivity. Clearly, as long as the sense of empowerment and self-significance is concentrated in the collective, so long, too, is the humane individual in a minority. Thus, moments of "weakness" cannot change or obliterate the deep-seated fears generated by the stereotypes which, in turn, feed further terror.

"You are a Muslim—you will kill me!" screams Sobti's girl, while Parmeshwar Singh's wife and the child Akhtar exchange frightened shouts of "You are a musalla!" and "You are a Sikh!" What makes bodies of flesh and blood, with the same limbs and eyes, the repositories of collective identity? The cultural significations of their collective give them a sense of visibility and power, and the body bears their burden.

There is a close relationship between perceptions of collective cultural power, the symbols of cultural visibility and the cultural stereotypes in daily life. It is thus that the body becomes the repository of cultural symbolism because cultural visibility is possible only through the body. In sum: cultural power becomes concentrated and deposited in the signification of collective visibility, and this visibility is concretized in the body. Therefore, to violate and destroy the body is to make the culture of the other's collective invisible. Making it invisible appears to disintegrate cultural power and make it disappear as well. The mutilation and extermination of the body therefore is deeply implicated in notions of "us" and "them," and the play of power between them.

The woman's body is the site of the fiercest, most brutal contest, and women emerge in all narratives as trophies of victory or as blots on collective honor. Simultaneously, women are the greatest threats to man's stereotype of masculinity—the biggest chink in his armor. She transgresses all codes of color, race, religion, and caste the moment a man controls her body. It is in the laboratory of her body that the real mixing of blood is accomplished.

Cultural power is maintained, asserted, or negated by maintaining, asserting, or negating cultural visibility. Since cultural visibility is inscribed *on* the body in terms of cultural significations, and *inside* the body in terms of cultural stereotypes, the violation of the body becomes the key to the destruction of cultural power.

Cultural power and honor is further heightened by castrating the masculine "other," i.e., by violating and conquering "his" women. Destroying the male may negate immediate cultural visibility but cannot destroy the potential for its resurrection. The metaphor of *bīj-nāsh* is inapplicable as long as women are left unpossessed and undestroyed.

Women, in almost all the Partition stories, exist between the fixed categories of communities, their own significations dependent upon the men who possess or violate them, and appear as truly liminal figures of communal ambiguity. (See, for example, the daughter in Manto's "I Swear by God" in *BM*, pp. 102–07 and Ayesha in Ibrahim Jalees's "A Grave Turned Inside-Out" in *SPI*, II, pp. 141–52).

There is, thus, a basic conclusion to my disagreement with Bhalla and to my alternative readings of the stories: Literature cannot be "used" to "explain" a holocaust—it can only be felt as many truths, many fragments of painful reality and of actually lived lives. The most important feature of these stories that emerges, in my view, is the power of prejudice and cultural stereotypes. As I searched through other Partition stories—to see whether those in which the authorial voice expresses dismay and pain in so many words also eschew all stereotypes—I discovered a fundamental commonality in them: All the authors, despite their own obvious sorrow and alienation from the macabre reality they describe, employ the same stereotypes to portray the people and society around them. Thus, I reached another conclusion: Society is made visible only through the stereotypes and language of prejudice that prevail. Without this, society becomes invisible.

Simply because these stereotypes do not help us build a moral ending to the stories, or to assert the basic goodness and love that we desire, or to overcome the difference from the "other," they are of no less value to our understanding. In fact, they help us to penetrate the inner world of the victims and the victimizers by providing the language of insight into the times and those who peopled them.

Bhisham Sahni's "The Train Has Reached Amritsar" (*SPI*, I, pp. 147–58) is a good example of how individuals thrown together nevertheless transmit messages of their collectives. Despite rioting in a few places, the train from Lahore to Delhi finds the author among passengers full of apparent camaraderie: "[N]othing had changed in the way people talked to each other or joked together." The stereotypes, however, continue their own existence: (1) The "dalkhor" Babu is weak, says the Pathan; share our meat and become strong like us—or else travel in the ladies' compartment. (2) The Sardarji explains to the Pathans: The Babu

won't take food from them because they didn't wash their hands. (They are dirty people, goes the message.) (3) When unwanted passengers clamber into the compartment, everyone shouts at them, but "the Pathan, blind with rage" lands a kick in the woman's stomach. (4) When the train passes by a city in flames, "each passenger [is] nervous and suspicious about his neighbour." When they discover the burning city of Wazirabad, a predominantly Muslim area, "the Pathans became less tense, the silence amongst the Hindus and Sikhs became more ominous." (5) When the Babu hides on the floor in fear, the Pathan mocks: "O coward, are you a man or a woman? You are a disgrace to all men!" (6) The arrival of Harbanspura and Amritsar—Hindu and Sikh areas—loosen the Babu's tongue and he hurls abuse at the Pathans: "You dared to kick a Hindu woman, you bastard!" (7) In his "own area" now, the Babu hits a Muslim trying to get into the moving train and knocks him off.

There was an all-pervading perception of "our areas" and "their areas," even in "normal" times, as we know from history. The literature is replete with such symbolism as well: Wazirabad or Harbanspura, Khalsa Mohalla or Islamabad Basti (in Ashk's "The Fodder-Cutting Machine" [*SPI*, III, pp. 291–33]), Qadirpur or Jatunagar (in Intizar Husain's "An Unwritten Epic" [*SPI*, III, pp. 59–78]). There was a notion of cultural hegemony in one's "own area"—and it drew upon historical memory and myth. Intizar Husain's "An Unwritten Epic" captures this discourse sharply: "[F]riends put on their shrouds, asked for their mothers' blessings, committed their wives to God, and marched into the battlefield with such valour and majesty that they revived the memory of wars fought in ancient times.... Nor were the Jats wanting in character and ceremony. They came out mounted on caparisoned elephants, lighting up the night with their torches."

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's story "The Death of Sheikh Burhanuddin" (*SPI*, II, pp. 223–33) is one of the most incisive descriptions of the stereotypes of cultural visibility. Sheikh Burhanuddin's narration of his hatred for the "Sikhs' racial characteristics, the habits and customs of this strange community" bears no relation with any person's qualities or character. Both these are derived from the stereotypes imbedded in cultural symbols and their visibility: Sikhs were persons with long hair like women, but were bearded like savages; and making a public exhibition of bathing in their underpants, they poured all kinds of filth, like curds, into their hair—curd from the shop of a dirty sweetmeat seller. They were incredibly filthy—they never shaved their heads. Naturally, the revulsion at their bodily culture led to Burhanuddin's view that "all

Sikhs are stupid and idiotic." Yet, "they would not accept the superiority of the Muslim, and would strut about like bantam cocks twirling their mustaches and stroking their beards."

The *dénouement* in the story comes with the physical death of Burhanuddin's Sikh neighbor and with the metaphysical death of the Sheikh's fixed notions of good and evil communities as the Sardar cuts across communal, cultural, and political boundaries by sacrificing his own life for the Sheikh's. Contradictory subject positions emerge in their relationship with the shifting power relations of communities as the backdrop.

The cultural symbolism of Sheikh Burhanuddin's "bantam-cock" Sardar is the epitome of cultural visibility. However, anything can become the carrier of the "enemy's" cultural assertion. In Syed Waliullah's "The Story of the Tulsi Plant" (*SPI*, II, pp. 191–98), the character Modabber yells "We can't tolerate any signs of Hinduism," and points to a *tulsi* plant that grows in the courtyard of a house he has occupied. While Sohrab, the horse owned by an old Muslim, turns into a sacrificial lamb in the chronicle of riots narrated by Ramesh Chandra Sen's "The White Horse" (*SPI*, II, pp. 127–33).

In "The Shepherd" (*SPI*, II, pp. 1–40), by Ashfaq Ahmed, Pundit Chintaram—a scholar of Persian and Arabic who views himself as the humble slave of Akka-e Namdar (his spiritual teacher Hazrat Maulana), who has mastered every word of the Qur'an—must have his Hindu *bodi* chopped off with a sickle.

Bhisham Sahni's character, Pali, in the story of the same name (*SPI*, III, pp. 119–42), is, in the collective perception, a Hindu boy wearing a Muslim cap, while Qasmi's character Akhtar in "Parmeshwar Singh" is a Muslim boy wearing a Sikh's *kesh* and turban. The pain in the heart of Parmeshwar, when he walks Akhtar towards the border, and the tears in Zenab's eyes, when she sends Pali away to India, are individual sorrows. They are culturally invisible in their collectivity. The caps, the *kesh,* and the *bodi* are public statements of this collective culture and are the signs and symbols of their visibility.

These stereotypes have not only a long history but are part of a reality we do not like to acknowledge: that the mass of people in the Hindu and Muslim communities have lived a back-to-back existence over centuries. When we ask poignantly How do people forget and wipe out their past of living together?, we often don't examine the nature of their life together, their discourses and mindsets that build inclusion and exclusion deep into their psyches despite their shared daily lives. Real togetherness is a prod-

uct of generations whose hearts reach out to each other, not when their bodies mingle together at the Pir's *dargah* or in the Dussehra *mela*.

The awareness of mortality, a common human fate, and the similarity of their relationships enable people to live side by side peacefully over long periods of time. Nevertheless, to live *beside* each other is not to live *with* each other. That comes only as a culmination of a conscious project to break through inherited stereotypes. However, the power narrative is extremely strong and exaggerated between the communities of the Subcontinent. Collective assertions of power and bravery versus collective weakness and cowardice is the hallmark of their discourse and is imbricated in all literary acts.

The dialogue of the Partition stories is studded with the terms "us" and "them," "we" and "they." The discourse of their characters frames the language of the writers as they paint the men and women who people their canvas. The language of these people, as much as the events they witness, stands as testimony to the boundaries and divisions of the times.

Almost all the stories on the Partition reveal that ordinary, "normal" people are participants—or are at least complicitous—in the acts of violence or bloodshed.[7] Whether they are shaken to the core by their own bestiality, as in Manto's "Cold Meat" (*SPI*, I, pp. 91–96), or gloat bitterly when their "own" people settle scores with "the enemy," as in N.G. Gore's "A Mouthful of Water, a Mouthful of Blood" (*SPI*, III, pp. 217–28): "Did I disapprove of these things? No. Honestly, no. I myself did not loot from anyone: didn't shove a knife between anyone's ribs; didn't drag any Muslim young women into my house—that is true.… But what's the point in denying that I felt a sneaky joy in watching these neutering acts committed by others?… In every one of their acts, I was their partner in imagination."

In "Filth" (*SPI*, III, pp. 111–18), Amrit Rai's train passengers exemplify the complicity of the spectator as they narrate with "pleasurable attention" stories of abducted women while employing the metaphor of the "ghunḍa": "[W]heras in the past, only Muslim goondas had been *courageous* enough to do such deeds, now even the Hindus and Sikhs had

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[7]As Jean Paul Sartre writes, "We cannot overlook the dialectical relationship between authorized, authorizing language and the group which authorizes it and acts on its authority." See my and Bhagwan Josh's discussion of the activation and restoration of cultural memory and the connection between restored memory and its content of fantasy, in *op. cit.,* pp. 77–86.

proved to the Muslims that they were *braver* goondas!" Lakhs of men had died, lakhs of children had been orphaned, lakhs of women violated, and lakhs of people were vicarious participants through the discourse of the "goonda's hooliganism."[8]

The powerful depiction of conflict by various writers, based in cultural and historical difference, calls into question some of their stories' attempts at introducing compassionate, self-sacrificing and benign endings. Like all utopic moments, they leave us with a lingering question about how long it (the resolutions to their tales) can last in the "real" world of separateness, stratification, miscommunication, and silence.

Categories of thinking and strategies of literary construction which present the desire to make connections across boundaries, are precious and moving. But they cannot erase the materiality of divisions. The writers who faithfully recount even partial, one-sided, culture-specific narratives, need to be taken seriously if we want to deconstruct the power of different discourses of society.

Does Manto's writing steer clear of all stereotypes? The only story that describes the cultural visibility of his characters is "Mozel" (*SPI,* II, pp. 153–72). Interestingly, it is also the only one which presents a utopic vision of a character sacrificing her life for another. We are made to recognize cultural symbolism and difference in this story: "I cannot marry you," says Mozel to Tirlochen, because "you are a Sikh." Mozel, in her short hair, ugly lipstick, and frocks that barely hide her nudity, Tirlochen with his long hair, beard and turban, Kirpal Kaur the virtual, virginal, religious Sikh girl—these are all cultural stereotypes. But they are external to the bonds of love and compassion that exist between human beings.

Manto presents his characters' cultural symbols but immediately sets about transcending their visibility, and Sikh, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu loose the burden that all systems of signification carry in society. Through apprehensive Sikh eyes, he gazes at "Staunch Muslims," the "Miyan bhais

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[8]For a discussion of the stereotype of a "Muslim as a rapist" in Premchand's writings, see "Women and Sexuality in the Discourse of Communalism and Communal Violence" in Joshi and Josh, *op. cit.*, pp. 194–258. According to Sudhir Kakar, "The Litmus Test of Revivalism and Fundamentalism remains the attitude towards sex rather than power." See his *Colours of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). His understanding of power is very reductionist and overlooks sexuality as a mode of acquiring power. See my review of Kakar in *The Hindu,* 17 December, 1995.

who are mean and ruthless." Through Mozel's verbal assault on Tirlochen, Manto tears into the cultural signification of Sikhs; their "silly underwear," their beard and hair. The same Tirlochen who accuses Mozel of ridiculing his religion gets his beard shaved and his hair cut and feels "with absolute certainty that he had been carrying an unnecessary burden of hair which really had no meaning." Manto has not a shred of sympathy for cultural symbolism, but he also has no insight into what makes people do what they do.

Nevertheless, when Mozel refuses to marry him, Tirlochen begins growing his hair again and slides back into the cultural visibility of his collective. I think Manto grasped the power of cultural signification in society, though he despaired of it.

To present the core sameness in the hearts and bodies of all human beings, Manto has only to remove Tirlochen's beard and hair, slip Mozel's dress over Kirpal Kaur's head, and in an act of defiant symbolism on behalf of humanity against superficial cultural visibility, leave Mozel to die completely naked. The dying Mozel pushes away the meaningless essentialism of religion that is vested in Tirlochen's turban: "Take away … this religion of yours."

A system of signification, a world view, a discourse that links the cultural symbolism of collectives to their mass consciousness despite the individual, personal trajectories of their lives, is not part of Manto's literary imagination. The fact that the course of his own life changed so dramatically when he felt compelled to move to Lahore also did not lead him to explore these issues.

The only sane voice inside a lunatic asylum while the world outside goes mad ("Toba Tek Singh" [*SPI*, III, pp. 1–17]) is the most well-known and most obvious of Manto's constructions. More ruthless is "Open It" (*SPI*, II, pp. 69–72) in its rejection of the ideology of religious community in the face of evil. The community of the trusted protectors is an illusion, a monstrous fraud, for the fence eats the field and the revolution devours its own children.

"The Dog of Taytwal" (*LWS*, pp. 158–66) is contested territory; it was hard to say whether "he died a noble death" or "he died a dog's death." Manto mocks at the foolish gullibility and mindlessness of people vis-à-vis discourses of power and authority. There is a constant tension between dream and reality: would those who killed the dog die as patriots or would they die the death of cruel fools for their country, religion, or cause? The venom in Hindus and Muslims butchering each other did not lie outside of them; it was the result of a Pir's curse ("New Constitution"

[*VT*, pp. 22–31]). The term "curse" implies strongly an irrational force that takes over human beings.

Manto's rejection of all ideology, religious or political (see his treatment of political activity as rhetoric in "Student Union Camp" and in "Sharābī"); his irreverence for nationalism ("Do or die—*maiṅ langōṭ kā pakkā rahūṅgā"*); his irreverence for leftism (in "Bābū Gōpīnāt^{h}" (*KE*, pp. 133–47)—*"viskī tō aisē galē sē utar kar pēṭ mēṅ inqilāb-zindabād lik^{h}tī čalī ga'ī"*); his contemptuous references to drooling dervishes and swearing by *"ranḍī kā kōṭ^{h}ā aur pīr kā mazār"* in the same breath—all this assiduously creates an absolute disbelief in any ideology of power or salvation. None of his stories offers solutions to evil, neither systemic, nor individual. At most, the characters of "Jī Āyā Ṣāḥib" and "Khūnī T^{h}ūk" employ subversive strategies—the weapons of the weak.

While other writers on the Partition convey the evil and irrationality of their characters in their collective existence by treating them as distorted but recognizable beings, Manto's characters are surreal—they defy recognition because their inner worlds are hidden from us. Only their deeds bear witness to their existence. Manto's is an extremely individualistic, anti-status-quoist literary intervention carrying the impress of angry radicalism even in his pre-Partition stories. From the outset of his writing career, all his characters are lonely and isolated beings and the connections between their evil and inhumanity and their collective existence in society is not part of his intellectual paradigm. Humanity—or the lack of it—is Manto's obsession; its sociology is left to us to decipher.

What makes people leap from their existence as sons and fathers, husbands and householders, into a dance of death and destruction and become butchers and rapists before sinking back to an "ordinary" life? The link between "normality" and an apparent "pathology" is not one that he came to grips with. Far more incisive than others', with a cutting edge as sharp as the weapons used by his characters, Manto's stories provide little insight into the world view and stereotyped prejudices of the killers who people his stories.

Alok Bhalla's comments on Manto are most perceptive. Manto's world view, as it emerges from his reading and which I fully share, is the unrelieved, relentless journey of the damned. The stories, to quote Bhalla,

> are written by a man who knows that after such ruination there can never be any forgiveness nor any forgetting. Those who have seen the carnage can only stand and wait for death…. [T]he inhumanity of the partition has so obliterated the moral realm that there is

> nothing left to retrieve and nothing to hope for.... [L]anguage betrays, and ordinary people ... become ruthless killers.... [H]orror is unflinchingly observed and recorded, ... to make us understand that we are all accomplices in the making of a barbarous world and that now nothing can save us. (*SPI*, I, pp. xx–xxi)

I believe that Manto's bludgeoning impact on our minds and the emotional freezing we experience akin to the cauterizing of our arteries is because he is the voice of our times. Manto appears to belong less to the past than to the present, when all ideologies, beliefs, and language reveal little about the so-called "nature of man" celebrated and discussed in centuries past. His stories are anti-ideology, anti-heroic, anti-salvationist: the figure of the amoral, Nietzschean man, prefiguring the end of all ideology, the pitiless logic of the future growing out of his words and challenging all normal reason and rationality. The world of a Sartrean nightmare to which there is no exit fills our unconscious.

A writer such as Manto cannot thus, I believe, be a reference and a source for social scientists going about their rational activity of trying to understand the past. He can only be a reflection of the self-exiled consciousness. Manto's emotionless, deadpan, icily constructed stories testify to the iron that had entered his soul. The "so-called homo-sapiens" that Manto refers to somewhere are recognizable in their physicality but not in any moral feature of their anatomy. Such a perception of what was happening around him could only provide bleak laughter and sarcasm, as Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims chasing each other with knives and swords became hunters and prey, when blood and water mixed together on the road and reminded a child of jelly, when Sikhs were *"ḥalāl-ed"* and Muslims were *"jʰaṭkā-ed,"* when the division or *taqsīm* of loot was the first step to the *taqsīm* of bodies, and when the tearing open of a sack of sugar disgorged an image of entrails. ❒