

SAADAT HASAN MANTO

Hindi and Urdu^{*}

THE HINDI-URDU DISPUTE has been raging for some time now. Maulvi Abdul Haq Sahib, Dr. Tara Singh, and Mahatma Gandhi know what there is to know about this dispute. For me, though, it has so far remained incomprehensible. Try as hard as I might, I just haven't been able to understand. Why are Hindus wasting their time supporting Hindi, and why are Muslims so beside themselves over the preservation of Urdu? A language is not made, it makes itself. And no amount of human effort can ever kill a language. When I tried to write something about this current hot issue, I ended up with the following conversation:

MUNSHI NARAIN PARSHAD: Iqbal Sahib, are you going to drink this soda water?

MIRZA MUHAMMAD IQBAL: Yes, I am.

MUNSHI: Why don't you drink lemon?

IQBAL: No particular reason. I just like soda water. At our house, everyone likes to drink it.

MUNSHI: In other words, you hate lemon.

IQBAL: Oh, not at all. Why would I hate it, Munshi Narain Parshad? Since everyone at home drinks soda water, I've sort of grown accustomed to it. That's all. But if you ask me, actually lemon tastes better than plain soda.

MUNSHI: That's precisely why I was surprised that you would prefer something salty over something sweet. And lemon isn't just sweet, it has a nice flavor. What do you think?

^{*}"Hindī aur Urdū," *Manto-Numā* (Lahore: Saṅg-e Mil Publications, 1991), 560–63.

IQBAL: You're absolutely right. But ...

MUNSHI: But what?

IQBAL: Nothing. I was just going to say that I'll take soda.

MUNSHI: Same nonsense again. I'm not forcing you to drink poison, am I? Brother, what's the difference between the two? Both bottles are made in the same factory after all. The same machine has poured water into them. If you take the sweetness and flavor out of the lemon, what's left?

IQBAL: Just soda ... a kind of salty water ...

MUNSHI: Then, what's the harm in drinking the lemon?

IQBAL: No harm at all.

MUNSHI: Then drink!

IQBAL: And what will you drink?

MUNSHI: I'll send for another bottle.

IQBAL: Why would you send for another bottle? What's the harm in drinking plain soda?

MUNSHI: N ... n ... no harm.

IQBAL: So then, here, drink the soda water.

MUNSHI: And what will you drink?

IQBAL: I'll get another bottle.

MUNSHI: Why would you send for another bottle? What's the harm in drinking lemon?

IQBAL: N ... n ... no harm. And what's the harm in drinking soda?

MUNSHI: None at all.

IQBAL: The fact is, soda is rather good.

MUNSHI: But I think that lemon ... is rather good.

IQBAL: Perhaps, if you say so. Although I've heard all along from my elders that soda is rather good.

MUNSHI: Now what's a person to make of this: I've heard all along from my elders that lemon is rather good.

IQBAL: But what's your own opinion?

MUNSHI: And what's yours?

IQBAL: My opinion ... hum ... my opinion. My opinion is just this ... but why don't you tell me your opinion?

MUNSHI: My opinion ... hum ... my opinion is just this ... but why should I tell it first.

IQBAL: I don't think we'll get anywhere this way. Look, just put a lid on your glass. I'll do the same. Then we'll discuss the matter leisurely.

MUNSHI: No, we can't do that. We've already popped the caps off the bottles. We'll just have to drink. Come on, make up your mind, before all the fizz is gone. These drinks are worthless without the fizz.

IQBAL: I agree. And at least you do agree that there's no real difference between lemon and soda.

MUNSHI: When did I ever say that? There's plenty of difference. They're as different as night and day. Lemon is sweet, flavorful, tart—three things more than soda. Soda only has fizz, and that's so strong it just barges into the nose. By comparison, lemon is very tasty. One bottle and you feel fresh for hours. Generally soda water is for sick people. Besides, you've just admitted yourself that lemon tends to be tastier than soda.

IQBAL: Well that I did. But I never said that lemon is better than soda. Tasty doesn't mean that a thing is also beneficial. Take *achaar*, it's very tasty, but you already know about its harmful effects. The presence of sweetness and tartness doesn't prove that something is good. If you consulted a doctor he would tell you the harm lemon does to the stomach. But soda, that's something else. The thing is, it helps digestion.

MUNSHI: Look, we can settle the matter by mixing the two.

IQBAL: I have no objection to that.

MUNSHI: Well then, fill this glass halfway with soda.

IQBAL: Why don't you fill half the glass with your lemon? I'll pour my soda after that.

MUNSHI: Makes no sense. Why don't you pour your soda first?

IQBAL: Because I want to drink soda-lemon mixed.

MUNSHI: And I want lemon-soda mixed. □

—*Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon*