

SA‘ADAT HASAN MANTO

## Foreword\*

THE FIRST EDITION OF THIS BOOK [*Čugbad*] was published in Bombay. After Partition I handed over the manuscript to Book Publishers Limited and left for Pakistan. From here I wrote to Ali Sardar Jafari, who was then employed at Book Publishers, saying that the only way to speed up the publication of the book was that he himself should write the foreword and I’ll accept whatever he says. He replied:

Of course, I’ll write it with pleasure. However, the book doesn’t need a foreword, much less one by me. You are well aware that our literary views are far apart. That aside, I regard you very highly and expect great things from you.

“In that case,” I wrote to Jafri Sahib, “let the book go without a foreword.” But by then, as became clear from his subsequent letter, he had already written a brief foreword and included it in the book. Regardless of its contents, it is there in the first edition of *Čugbad*. However, I’ve excised it from the present edition, not because I have, God forbid, developed a sudden enmity toward Jafri Sahib or started hating him. But in view of the absurd furor the so-called Progressives of Bombay have raised about my writing lately, I didn’t think it was proper to have their most active member become an appendix to my “reactionary” work.

I was still in Bombay when “Bābū Gōpī Nāth,” one of the stories of this collection, appeared in the literary magazine *Adab-e Laṭīf*. All the Progressives praised it to high heaven, even anointing it as the best short story of that year. Ali Sardar Jafri, Ismat Chughtai and Krishan Chandar especially applauded it. Krishan Chandar even gave it a prominent place in “Hal kē Sā‘ē.” Then, all of a sudden, God knows what got into their heads that every single Progressive turned against the story’s greatness. First they faulted it in hushed voices and condemned it in whispers. But now every Progressive

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\*“Dibā‘ca” appeared in the author’s collection *Manṭōnāma* (Lahore: Saṅg-e Mil Publications, 1990), 344–47.

of India and Pakistan has begun running it down, openly and loudly, as reactionary, immoral, sordid, and depraved.

The same treatment was meted out to another of my stories, “Mērā Nām Rādhā Hai,” though when it was first published the Progressives could not stop applauding it, beside themselves with enthusiasm and exhilaration. Anyway, when Ali Sardar Jafri penned his foreword as an offering to “progressivism,” he wrote to me:

I would like to know your opinion of my foreword. I've written it with much sincerity and love, and I'm now thinking of writing a longish article about your short stories. So far, run of the mill people have only reviled you. It is useless to expect anything better from them.

Don't these lines cry out to have every single word in them thrown in the face of all Progressives and let “reactionism” smile quietly? In the same letter, Ali Sardar went on to say: “I consider your short story ‘Khōl-dō’ a masterpiece of this period.”

The tragedy that befell the Progressives, or perhaps this story, was its publication in *Nuqūsb* (Lahore), under the editorship of His Honor Ahmad Nadim Qasimi—the guru of Pakistani Progressives and the architect of the pithy “*zindagi-āmōz-o-zindagi-āmēz adab*”—otherwise it too would have been consigned to the dustbin of “non-literature,” leaving me gawking at “progressivism’s” red face.

The only reason my book *Siyāh Hashiyē* didn't go down well with the Progressives was that Muhammad Hasan Askari, whom they'd already put on their blacklist, had written its foreword. And so, with his characteristic sincerity and love, Ali Sardar Jafri again wrote to me:

What is this I hear from Lahore that Muhammad Hasan Askari is writing the foreword of some new book of yours? I'm baffled by how on earth the two of you could hit it off. I don't consider Hasan Askari a sincere person at all.

One really must hand it to the Progressives for mounting such an efficient and speedy system of communication. News from here travels within a blink to Khetwadi's Kremlin with total accuracy. What Ali Sardar Jafri had heard was absolutely correct. The end result was that *Siyāh Hashiyē* had hardly been out before it was condemned and trashed as a bunch of “reactionary” writing. It is amazing, though, that as Ali Sardar Jafri was drafting his preface for my *Čughad*, it never dawned on him that he and Manto were two mutually exclusive entities and that our literary views were, according to him, far apart. Alas, my Progressive friends are averse to thinking! They consider it a negative act.

Let me present an example of this aversion. The magazine *Savērā*, a publication of Nayā Idāra, which is owned by Nazīr Aḥmad Čaudhry, is the “Mouthpiece of the Progressive Literary Movement.” It has blacklisted me. In its pages I’m routinely dubbed as reactionary, opportunistic, individualistic, hedonistic, and escapist. And yet Nayā Idāra advertises one of my books in the following words:

Sa’adat Hasan Manto is the standard-bearer of truth. He is armed with the double-edged sword of truth, which he brandishes fearlessly in the thick forests of the government and society, tearing asunder all their veils of hypocrisy and affectation. Abuse is heaped on him, but he smiles. He marches down a path that he alone can travel, impervious to any thought of reward or punishment.

Did I smile reading this ad in the pages of *Savērā*? No, I laughed my head off. Forget the subliminal message, “it will greatly help the readers,” rather think: aren’t the Progressives and their equally progressive publishers traveling along a path which they alone can travel, without caring a fig about their consciences. During the recent Bhopal Conference, Ismat Shahid Latif<sup>1</sup> valiantly, and at one go, openly disowned any of her stories that didn’t measure up to the standard of “progressivism.” Why don’t these progressive publishers take their cue from Ismat’s forthrightness. They should burn all the books of the “blacklisted reactionaries.” And if they were to do so, I would surely kiss their hands.

Lastly, let me say that I have no bone to pick with “progressivism.” It is rather the fanciful leaps of the so-called “progressives” that get on my nerves. □

—Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon

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<sup>1</sup>That is, Ismat Chughtai.—Tr.