

SA‘ADAT HASAN MANTO

## The Revolt of Monkeys\*

THE ALARMING NEWS that “monkey-ism” was on the rise was trickling in from all parts of the country. The government turned a blind eye to it at first but when it noticed the matter threatening to become serious it immediately sprang into action.

It is appropriate that the reader should be told up front what “monkey-ism” or “apishness” stood for. Of course we can’t go into much detail here because it’s a fairly long story, but briefly, the apish movement was set in motion by none other than the monkeys themselves and was squarely directed against humans.

Their gripe was: “Now, when it’s an unassailable fact that humans are our descendants, why do they treat us so coldly, and not just coldly but entirely contrary to the manner of apes. They tie ropes around our necks and have us dance to the tune of their *dugdugies* [kettle-drums] in every lane and by-lane while they stick out their hands to beg for money ... as though we’re humans ... Furthermore, while it is indisputable that we’re their ancestors and that our blood flows in their veins, it is pretty dubious to say that they have climbed up the evolutionary ladder to become humans. If there is such a thing as evolutionary stages, then why didn’t we billions of monkeys (you may call us a minority if you like, but if a census were ever taken, we would outnumber humans by far) go through them?”

The monkeys maintained: “Why should these evolutionary stages remain the exclusive prerogative of only certain monkeys? Evolution, huh, it’s pure hogwash. Hell, they haven’t evolved at all; if anything, they’ve regressed. They failed to hold on to the status that was bestowed on them; they tumbled so far down from apishness that they became humans.

“Their evolution thus spells their downfall. We want these fallen monkeys to revert to their original apishness all over again. We’ve started this movement to do just that, bring them back to the fold. We bear them no ill will or enmity; in fact, we consider them our siblings. The purpose of

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\*“Ṭavēlē kī Balā,” from the author’s collection *Manṭōrāmā* (Lahore: Saṅg-e Mil Publications, 1990), 423–31.

our movement is that these monkeys who strut around as humans nowadays, and who've grabbed power and influence because of our laxity, should recognize their true primary nature and return to our social habitat."

Speeches were given publicly, out in the open, and in the privacy of homes, sometimes even in clandestine meetings. In essence, they underscored the point that vigorous protests should be made against the tyranny and violence the monkey had unleashed in the guise of man and that demonstrations should be staged in every part of the city raising the cry *Down with humanity! Long live apishness!*

At first humans thought this was some kind of comedy show and had a hilarious time of it. Gradually, though, the monkeys' speeches, their irrefutable arguments, and their point of view began to find a place in the hearts of some humans. As a result, the powers discovered from the reports of the secret police that several humans had become the monkeys' disciples, and, as trustworthy sources verified, scores had renounced their humanity and returned to being apes, that is, they had sprouted long tails and started walking on all fours.

High officials in the government took this to be pure nonsense. That a monkey can become human is an established fact, but how can a human become a monkey? Such a reverse progression has never been seen or heard. So, after consulting their higher-ups, they countered the monkeys' claims by unleashing an equally relentless propaganda campaign of their own: a human can never morph into a monkey.

There was no dearth of able and resourceful personalities among the monkeys. To squash the government propaganda their savants came up with the ingenious argument that if in this time man can be transformed into woman and woman into man, why not man into monkey, which is his true form.

Still man's arguments didn't fail to have an effect on the monkeys. Those humans who hadn't yet completely transformed found themselves hesitating about whether to complete the process of transformation or revert to being humans. But the monkeys' powerful rejoinder sustained them in their wavering mental and physical state.

The monkeys' propaganda secretary promptly mounted an especially vehement campaign. The one incontrovertible truth was that "humans have come forth from us, and only because of some regrettable deviationist streak. Can they deny that they are a distorted form of us?"

In truth, humans had no answer to this crushing argument. But they kept babbling: "Well, no, we don't deny that we were once monkeys. But we had to toil hard and go through difficult stages to achieve our status as humans. It was our granite willpower, our protracted effort, our spiritual

awakening, our thought and action, our evolutionary struggle that has brought us to this sublime and lofty state ... a race that we won and others lost. The losers are still wallowing in their simian state. When these lower primates see us in our lofty state, they burn with jealousy. So let them stew. We'll march ahead on our evolutionary path until one day, who knows, we might even become gods."

Quick and fast would come the answer from the apes' camp: "Brethren, what lofty state have you reached? As we see it, you're plunging ever deeper into the depths of degradation. Evolution is something we don't deny, but just tell us, where do you stand today after climbing so many steps of the evolutionary ladder and after centuries of setting up one society after another? Your entire history is filled with warfare and carnage, murder and bloodshed, with rape and the defilement of women's honor, with ruling others and being subjugated by them.

"On the other hand, look at our—your ancestors'—history. Can you cite one such dark episode throughout our history? Yes, we frisk about from branch to branch, but have we ever fought over it as our property? You, you humans, have been writing story after story about us in your books—including the well-known story of how we grabbed on to one another's tails to build a bridge over the river. You also build bridges, so massive that your human brains are knocked out in astonishment. And then you blow them up. But who can blow up the bridge we devised? Not a single monkey's tail has behaved treacherously to this day, nor has a single monkey's wife gotten into bed with another monkey. Our wives pick lice from our bodies and comb our hair daily, but they don't forfeit their rights thereby, these continue to be the same as ours. You're not unaware of the way your wives idle away their time, nor are your wives unaware of how you mess around. What you imply by calling us monkeys applies more appropriately to you. Conversely, "human" is an apt description of us in the meaning you give it in describing yourselves. The plain fact is that you belong to our race. The same blood runs in our veins. No wonder if at times some resemblance should crop up and, equally, no wonder that it should result in the kind of row that has erupted between us now. We invite you to return to our fold. Come back to us, raise the cry *Down with humanity! Long live apishness!* You'll be the better for it."

The retort from the humans' side came loud and clear: "These monkeys, they're shouting nonsense. They're green with envy that we've reached such glorious heights. A single story we wrote about them under God knows what perverse influence, and that too only for our children, cannot be taken as the definitive word about them. Otherwise who isn't aware of the kind of justice this monkey doled out to two cats regarding their quarrel

over a piece of cheese? He weighed the piece on his scale and, little by little, gobbled it up himself.”

The monkeys rejoined: “Scales and weights are human inventions; we don't use them at all, we don't even know how to use them. Now, if you want the truth, it was no monkey who swindled the cats out of their cheese, it was flat out a human. There's no wonder that he would dupe the poor cats. We can show thousands of such cats that these humans, once our brothers, are feeding on lentils and cauliflower instead of their natural diet of sinews and membranes and thus, having already screwed up their own nature, are hell-bent on destroying that of others. Instead of ridiculing our justice, have a look at the institutions of justice you've created. Don't your courts ride roughshod over any notion of justice every day sending hundreds, indeed, thousands of people who have committed no crime to the gallows. We say again, they are our brothers who have somehow gone astray. Our arms are forever open to take them back, our prayers forever for them. We wish to take no revenge.”

Gradually this amicable call changed and, instead, this cry rose from the monkeys' camp: “We want to take revenge ... for this evolution ... for this so-called progress these monkeys have foisted on themselves and turned into humans.”

The humans took severe measures of their own. Thousands of apes were taken into custody. Hundreds were dragged to the courts and subsequently hanged. But the movement in support of apishness continued unabated, until, finally, the human government declared it illegal. As a result, out of the total population of apes, some were arrested, but the rest melted away into the trees, frustrating every attempt to apprehend them. Who had the mind or the foolhardiness to chase after them in their jungle hideouts? Some monkeys, rumor had it, settled in the trees around the bungalows of some high officials, where they were well looked after and provided every comfort. This because those officials were themselves secret partisans of apishness, but loathed embracing it openly for fear of losing their high positions.

This went on for quite some time. Arrests continued, gallows were erected in the middle of chowks, the culprits were whipped, skinned, and made to crawl on their stomachs. Numerous acts and ordinances were put into effect. Nothing worked. The monkeys were not about to call it quits. They stubbornly stuck to their position.

Now and then they organized agitations, got together and stormed humans, chewed through electric cables, snatched bread from people's hands, smashed the little *dugdugies* which their monkey-masters made them dance to the beat of, chewed through their ropes and fled.

They secretly converted several humans over to apishness, detonated homemade bombs, spread terror and, as often, risked their lives. Though the powers had broken up their organization, still they were as relentlessly united and as well organized in their dispersal as ever. When man is faced with this sort of situation, he nearly goes mad. I say this because I too am one of the humans. But the strange truth is that the monkeys appeared smugly impervious to any change. They remained what they had been all along—monkeys. Their antics lost none of the playfulness. They would swoop down and snatch from the hands of humans whatever caught their fancy. Grab a gun from someone and march on like an army cadet. Batons, tear-gas grenades, nothing stopped them. They were, one might say, as restless as mercury. You draw a gun on them, take aim, and fire, but they take a leap and, before you know it, are sitting comfortably on your shoulder laughing their monkey heads off. You throw a tear-gas shell at them, they jump and quickly turn it toward you.

The government was thoroughly fed up with their antics. A secret intelligence service report had it that this monkey movement, or conspiracy, or whatever, could never have been launched by the monkeys themselves. A group of influential humans, supporting apishness just for kicks, must be working behind the scenes and, on further investigation, this fact has been established beyond the shadow of a doubt. This disclosure was even more upsetting for the government; some officials panicked lest they should fall into the trap of apishness and, after reaching the top of the evolutionary ladder, lapse back into being apes, a state their forefathers had fought long and hard to escape.

In spite of the government's countless strategies, the rising tide of the monkey movement couldn't be stemmed. Some monkey or other would appear on a rooftop or a steeple somewhere in the city several times during the day or night and shout through his megaphone: *Down with humanity! Down with dugdugies! Long live apism!*

One day the matter got out of hand. An audacious monkey stole into the living room of none other than the country's highest authority, opened the cigar box, picked one up and started puffing away leisurely. His Honor became furious, the monkey screeched at him. His Honor scolded and threatened. The monkey couldn't care less and leapt, landing on the sofa. The next moment he took another leap and alighted on one of the chairs, leaving His Honor with the distinct feeling that the monkey's movements were mimicking his own image in the mirror. He felt so riled up and incensed, writhing inside with anger and utter helplessness, that he finally broke down in tears.

We heard about this episode from our special sources, otherwise the

next day's papers had a different story to tell: *An audacious monkey made an attempt to break into the government palace but the sentries gunned him down on the spot. After the incident, all pertinent government departments have been issued strict orders to take whatever steps necessary to quell the uprising of the monkeys.*

The chief of the secret police wasn't worried so much about the monkeys. He called together his subordinates and told them, "These antics of the monkeys don't scare me. What I'm afraid of are the humans who have already reverted to being monkeys. I'm a man of keen intelligence. I think that if we can, as the descendants of monkeys, kick up so much trouble in the world and wreak such utter chaos, what might we do if we ever went back to being monkeys. Evolution, even in reverse, cannot but spell danger, no matter how one looks at it. So my instruction to you is this: go and ferret out the humans who have embraced apism. If you can round them up, that will kill apism."

Now the secret, as well as the ordinary, police zeroed in their entire effort on apprehending the neo-monkeys who were wreaking havoc every night with one mischief after another. Several monkeys were caught and were given the "third degree" inside the fort to make them squeal the whereabouts of the neo-monkeys. But they didn't let a word slip out of their mouths and put up with the harshest torture with fortitude. They didn't relent even when their females were raped before their eyes. Exasperated, the police mowed them down and their corpses were doused with kerosene and set afire.

The next morning cyclostyled copies of a poster appeared everywhere in the city. In moving language it revealed the atrocities humans had committed and appealed to those who felt compassion to abandon their humanity and return to the fold of the monkeys, which was their original place.

Within minutes the posters were pulled down, but by then thousands of humans had already seen them. As a result hundreds of them joined apism. None of the countermeasures of the government worked. All the zoos, now converted into prisons, were filled with monkeys. One count put the figure of 30,000 behind bars, but the incarcerated monkeys couldn't be happier.

The authorities were caught in a strange predicament: if they turned a blind eye to the monkeys, it was feared they would unleash a veritable revolution; if the authorities tightened their control and resorted to torture and atrocities, more and more humans would feel disgusted and turn against the government—after all, the same blood flowed in their and their ancestors' veins.

At long last, the authorities felt pressed to collectively think the matter over and devise some way that the ban on the monkey organization could be lifted; and further, the monkey leaders were to be invited to a conference and asked to explain their point of view so that some step toward reconciliation might be taken. □

—*Translated by Mubammad Umar Memon*