

Faculty of English

Telling Fragments:
Politics of the Short Story in Late-Colonial India

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Telling Fragments: Politics of the Short Story in Late-Colonial India

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Arguing with dominant understandings of the novel as a form best suited to respond to the urgencies of anticolonial nationalism and the challenges of secular democracy, this thesis stakes a claim for the short story as a form that played a vital role in instilling a radical consciousness in the period leading up to the Independence and Partition of India in August 1947. It also argues that within the frames of reference for the short story, and especially the *bhasas* (Indian-vernacular) short story, the ‘nation’ must not be treated as the epochal ideology or the only conceived category for literary and cultural radicalism.

In order to understand the politics of the short story in late-colonial India, there needs to be a deeper engagement with the historical, material, and print-cultural contexts in which these texts appeared, as well as with the institutional sites and circuits through which they are received in the comparative academy. Starting with the publication of the 1932 pamphlet *Angaarey* (Embers) and going through to Manto’s *Siya Hashiye* (Black Marginalia) in 1948, this thesis is a comparative study of short stories written in three prominent languages in North India—English, Hindi, and Urdu—in the 1930s and 1940s. Some of the writers considered in the thesis are Mulk Raj Anand, Ahmed Ali, Rashed Jahan, Sajjad Zaheer, and Sa’adat Hasan Manto. This thesis also places European short story theory in dialogue with the *bhasas* with the help of Premchand’s collection of essays, *Kahanikala* (The Art of the Short Story, 1922).

The thesis demonstrates that by examining the ‘politics’ of the short story form, we can complicate settled critical narratives about nation and nationalism, and further reconstellate the ideals of body, sexuality, self-identity, freedom, and resistance forged under colonial rule and communal violence in late-colonial India. I propose here an approach to reading the ‘postcolonial text’ that goes beyond reading texts as mere testaments to their politics. I study the way these texts are radically invested in their aesthetics, their ethics, and the materiality of their production, thus disrupting many privileged assumptions within postcolonial studies about aesthetic form and ethical thinking.

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1. Telling Fragments: An Introduction

THE PRESENT THESIS is both a critical history, and a critical account of the way we write history. It examines the mercurial and relatively unattended form of the short story in late-colonial North India, particularly during a period marked by cosmic political shifts across the country, leading up to the tragically intertwined events of Independence and Partition in 1947. This 'late-colonial era', by which I mean the decades of 1930s and 1940s (though interpretations vary) left behind a trail of events, metaphors, and artefacts that have come to define the contemporary South Asian imaginary. Many academic studies on the rise and fall of progressive cultures, social reform movements, or the ideals of anticolonial nationalism and secular democracy, are grounded in these decades. And yet, such is the historical density in this period that much of the scholarship looking into it can be characterised as performing an innately recuperative task. This thesis, too, aspires to recuperate something. The only question is—*why* the short story?

Firstly, the short story, of all literary forms and genres in India, and for this matter even beyond, needs a recuperation of its own. 'A literature in search of critics', according to F. Odun Balogun, the short stories from the post-colonial world have lived, for the most part, behind the glare of the novel.¹ Within both literary academies and university departments, defined altogether by an uneven concert of awards, canons, curricula, and booksellers fairs, the novel has reigned over the short story even when the latter has enjoyed comparable prestige and popularity, not least within the context of twentieth century decolonisation and liberation movements. In his elegiac opening to what was, at the time in 1991, the only noteworthy book-length study of the short story in the post-colonial world, Balogun refers to an obscure 1978 conference paper by Helen O. Chukwuma (appropriately

¹ Fidelis Odun Balogun, *Tradition and Modernity in the African Short Story: An Introduction to a Literature in Search of Critics* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

titled 'A Prose of Neglect') as 'the most significant study of African short stories *as a body*'.² Too much to do with the short story remains neglected even today. But to be generous to past scholars, there are daunting challenges to studying this form, starting with its definition, then moving over to nebulous questions of style and technique, and then even structural questions of its proper nomenclature and its correct citational/archival practice. This is especially seeing how they often appear in newspapers and periodicals before being reprinted in literary anthologies. To make matters worse, the category of the 'short story', even in a given context, is far too heterogenous to be neatly defined. As early as 1927, Ruth Suckow called it 'fundamental stupidity' to labour on *what* the short story is, a question that had dominated short story studies in its early years as a field of formalist intrigue, and in some quarters of scholarship, continues still to do.³

So much contemporary scholarship on the short story begins, more as a matter of convention than real interest, with a review of its current and past 'definitions' that it would make a redundant exercise to go over them here.⁴ Today, we have come to accept that the short story simply *is*, that the name is going to stay, and that delving into it is invariably awkward, with too many unknowns. Then, to take a cue from Chukwuma, perhaps one elementary question as to whether the short story is a form, genre, mode, or style, may be delayed immediate engagement, if we might talk of them, at least to begin with, *as a body*. This is to assume that 'short stories' constitute a singular and defined corpus, operating as a collective at a national or regional level, with at least one property—of its brevity—shared across the board. In this sense, we may also speak of *the body* of Indian short stories, written in both English and in India's literary vernaculars now referred to as the *bhasas*, as 'a prose of neglect'. And it is also in this sense that I call this whole body of work *telling fragments*.

² My emphasis. Balogun, p. 3.

³ Ruth Suckow, 'The Short Story', *Saturday Review of Literature*, 4 (1927), 317–18 (p. 317).

⁴ A good overview, which includes both conceptual forays, such as by Edgar Allan Poe and Brander Matthews, and retrospective appraisals such as by Charles E. May, Ian Reid and Clare Hanson, may be sought from Per Winther and others, 'Introduction', *Narrative*, What is a Short Story? Problems of Definition, 20.2 (2002). Another useful source is Austin M. Wright, 'On Defining the Short Story: The Genre Question', in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, ed. by Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 46–56.

A Prose of Neglect

There is wide belief that it was the short story and not the novel, the elder cousin to which it is relentlessly compared, which proved, in the context of India, the dominant form through which the radical politics of the late-colonial period were articulated and even shaped. Amitav Ghosh, whose defence of the *bhasas* short story has proved prescient for postcolonial studies in more than one way, notes that ‘the Indian short story was consistently in the literary vanguard in the decades before and after the Independence of India’.⁵ Francesca Orsini notes that in the context of Hindi, one of the largest reading demographics of all of the *bhasas*, ‘the major forms were poetry, drama and the short story’.⁶ Elsewhere, she has also argued that the short story was ‘practically what made journals sell’.⁷ In the context of Urdu, which was the second-largest reading demographic in pre-Partition India, Aamir Mufti has famously argued that the short story swapped places with the novel, becoming (in Georgy Lukács’s touchstone phrase) ‘a minor ‘epic’ form [enunciating] the major claims of nationalism as the only way of being in the world, thus lending to those claims an air of contingency’.⁸ This pattern, where the short story winds in and out of different reading demographics with the help of magazines and journals, and even comes to supplant the major form of the novel to express the ‘contingent’ claims of (nationalist) politics, repeats itself in many contexts that are historically framed by the rise of ‘third-world’ nationalism. The primary critical concerns of this thesis could be staged as an interrogation of the *politics* of the short story with respect to this frame, examining the disciplinary inclinations that have led to it, underscoring both the ways in which it enables, and the ways

⁵ Amitav Ghosh, ‘The Indian Short Story’, *Civil Lines*, 1.1 (2003), 38–55 (p. 38). Moreover, as Bishnupriya Ghosh has shown, Amitav Ghosh’s Arthur C. Clarke Award winning science-fiction novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) weaves several short stories by Hindi writer Phanishwarnath Renu into the narrative as a master-text. Those who have read may even recall a train station in the novel called Renupur. A recommended reading: Bishnupriya Ghosh, ‘On Grafting the Vernacular: The Consequences of Postcolonial Spectrology’, *Boundary 2*, 31.2 (2004), 197–218.

⁶ Francesca Orsini, ‘India in the Mirror of World Fiction’, *New Left Review*, 13, 2002, 75–88 (p. 79).

⁷ Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 56.

⁸ Aamir R Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 183. See also Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 30–31.

in which it occludes, sustained engagement with the Indian short story—be that the category refers here to texts produced in many languages which have each their own idea of what the short story is. While examining this frame, often deployed today to read these texts from what is called the ‘third-world’ (even though the notion remains fraught with many internal contradictions)⁹ this thesis charts an approach to the politics of form that is inherently translational, based in textual and paratextual (rather than just generic and institutional) criticism, and tries to recuperate something missing from postcolonial theory’s belated turn to the short story—a turn still encumbered, as I show in these first few pages, by its formidable legacy.

Inevitably, a ‘recuperation’ of the short story form will entail an internal reckoning for the English Humanities, especially when it comes to its critical posturing towards global literary configurations. Within postcolonial studies, a field geared towards the study of cultural production from outside the West, there is no dearth of allusions to the dominance of the short story in literary *practice*, that is to say, in its actual reach and propagation. And yet, there exists so little engagement with the short story, as compared to the novel, that it piques interest into the internal workings of the postcolonial field itself as a canon-creating system. In most elaborations within these contexts, the ‘story’ of the ‘short story’ (a common witticism in short story criticism) appears more or less the same, with allied themes and concerns. Indonesian literature, to E.U. Kratz, is ‘a literature of short stories, a magazine literature (*sabasta majala*)’.¹⁰ In Gaza, short stories are so essential to literary life that, to contemporary Palestinian writer Atef Abu Seif, Gaza was ‘an exporter of oranges and short stories’.¹¹ In Ireland, whose post-colonial status still invites some debate, Ronan Macdonald notes that ‘the short story has proved remarkably congenial for the emergence of political literatures’.¹² In Egypt, to quote

⁹ See Aijaz Ahmad, ‘Literary Theory and Third-World Literature: Some Contexts’ in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso Books, 1994), p. 43.

¹⁰ E.U. Kratz, ‘The Indonesian Short Story after 1945’, in *The Short Story in South-East Asia: Aspects of a Genre*, ed. by J.H.C.S Davidson and H. Cordell (London: SOAS Publications, 1982), pp. 139–97 (p. 139).

¹¹ Rahul Verma, ‘The Book of Gaza Focuses on the Reality of Daily Life beyond the Conflict’, 2014 <<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/the-book-of-gaza-focuses-on-the-reality-of-daily-life-beyond-the-conflict>> Date Accessed 23.10.2020.

¹² Ronan McDonald, ‘Strategies of Silence: Colonial Strains in Short Stories of the Troubles’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 35.1 (2005), 249–63 (p. 250).

Sabry Hafez, 'the [Arabic] short story has a political valency that is inherent to the form itself'.¹³ Within the context of Pakistan, to quote Neelam Srivastava, 'short story [became] a medium to articulate the social concerns of the new nation'.¹⁴ Within Caribbean literatures, going with Kenneth Ramchand's materialist evaluation, 'the preference for the short story genre is in part a function of living and working conditions'.¹⁵ What causes the short story to be so tightly woven into the political and yet be left on the peripheries of a field historically invested in foregrounding the political dimensions of literature?

Several of these allusions to the a) quantitative dominance of the short story form; b) relationship of the short story form to nationalist politics and (nationalist) print cultures, and c) emergence of the short story in the rupture of nationalist politics, are made with one eye on the fundamental irony of postcolonial studies, which is that a disproportionate amount of attention is still bestowed upon the novel, when in fact, short stories, even in such belatedly acquired postcolonial domains as the *bhasas*, have played an equally significant role in sustaining (and critiquing) the unresolved paradigms of the nation as an 'imagined community'—recalling here Benedict Anderson's emotive sobriquet for what is an ultimately contrived political idea.¹⁶ An explanation for this irony is commonly sought in the brevity of the short story, noticeably a measure of its length rather than its form, which makes it an agile and penetrating political messenger, allowing for rapid publication and swift translations within various ephemeral (and soon to become obsolescent) mediums, such as literary pamphlets (*parcha*), popular magazines (*patrika*), newspapers (*akbhar'at*), and journals (*risab'al*).¹⁷ As Orsini has argued in the case of Hindi magazines like *Saraswati* (est. 1900) and *Madhuri* (est. 1913), these

¹³ Sabry Hafez, *The Quest for Identities: The Development of the Modern Arabic Short Story* (London: Saqi, 2007), p. 13.

¹⁴ Neelam Srivastava, 'Minor Literature and the South-Asian Short Story', in *South-Asian Fiction in English*, ed. by Alex Tickell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 253–71 (p. 14).

¹⁵ Ramchand also makes here the comment that 'there are no West Indian novelists, only short story writers in disguise' (p.25). See Kenneth Ramchand, 'The West Indian Short Story', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 1.1 (1997), 21–33 (p. 23).

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1983).

¹⁷ Unless made otherwise clear in the text, the words in the bracket always refer to Hindi and Urdu translations throughout the thesis.

mediums often drew a readership of millions, posing many challenges to the critical perception of the short story as a local, atemporal or ephemeral form. But even as the short story tended, when it came to the dominant era of nationalist politics in the 1930s and 40s, to produce locally and linguistically specific responses to the many uncertainties of nationalism, its broad and varied readership meant that it came to constitute at best a scattered literary and historical archive (at least when compared to the novel) for retrospective evaluations of nationalist politics within literature.

Philip Holden, elucidating further upon this irony, notes: 'the short story exists at the interstices of late-colonial society [responding] to the politics of nationalism [but] its status as a commodity good cannot be easily set aside; it circulates in flows of capital beyond the nation's grasp'.¹⁸ Perhaps it may be added that it also circulates in flows of *knowledge* beyond the nation's grasp, surrendering critical ground to the novel, which has become, in Leela Gandhi's assessment vis-à-vis postcolonial studies, 'a sort of proxy for the nation'.¹⁹ It may also be stated that the novel today serves as much as a proxy for the nation in colonial and post-colonial contexts as it had once served as a proxy for the Empire within imperial contexts, in both cases, testifying to a function of colonial textuality that makes the novel outshine the short story within crucial segments of English scholarship. Timothy Brennan, among other critics asking for a review into this predilection towards the novel, observes that 'the novel has been an elitist and minority form in developing countries when compared to poem, song, television or film [...] a form through which a thin, foreign-educated stratum (however sensitive or committed to domestic political interests) has communicated to metropolitan reading publics'.²⁰ It needs to be stated that while this thesis does not wish to step on the novel's toes, it aims to reconstellate, in light of the short story, some aspects of a scholarly field so invested in the novel. It does so by questioning rather than reversing the hierarchies of genre that structures postcolonial studies today. After all, the novel has perhaps done, despite its elite and canonical status, more than what could be unambiguously described as catering to a thin and foreign-educated stratum. A quick

¹⁸ Philip Holden, 'Reading for Genre: The Short Story and (Post) Colonial Governmentality', *Interventions*, 12.3 (2010), 442–58 (p. 445).

¹⁹ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 180.

²⁰ Timothy Brennan and Bhabha Homi, 'The National Longing for Form', in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 44–70 (p. 56).

survey of scholarship in the last few years can attest to the centrality of the novel (and relatedly the nation) to the field's overarching propositions: Benedict Anderson recruits the printed form of the novel to examine the emergence of nationalism in his 1991 treatise *Imagined Communities*; Franco Moretti deploys the novel throughout his career (Stanford Literary Lab, 2010; *The Modern Epic*, 1996; *The Novel*, 2006) to study global literary movements; Pascale Casanova dedicates the most significant portion of *World Republic of Letters* (2006) to the novel; Elleke Boehmer notes that the 'important signifiers of imperial values were laid down in the novel'; Edward Said famously places his pin upon the novel form to explicate how 'Europe formed a textual attitude towards colonized nations'.²¹ The novel has been, for both Empire and the colony, a way of textualising the dialectic of colonialism; its 'totality' of expression, its political authority, its specific interpretations of (post) colonial space and time, all acting today as a textual synecdoche for the nation, as they had once done for the Empire. By implication, the short story, whose emergence as a modern form within once-colonised cultures is tied to the current of nationalism, is presented as far too short, fragmented and discontinuous to articulate nationalist politics. This is what partly explains its neglect within the dominantly nation-centric frame of postcolonial theory.

The Issue of Language

Despite its role in the development of what is today an extraordinary literary fraternity, the short story, and especially the *bhasas* short story, has not had many takers within even Indian scholarship, (by which I mean scholarship on India within the 'area studies' framework which is arguably more located in the vernacular) as well as within the emergent World Literatures framework. While there are certainly those who have worked on Indian short stories, they have not worked on 'The Indian short story' as such; there are no, to quote Pravinchandra, 'vocal spokespersons' for the postcolonial short story, such as there is for drama (Helen Gilbert) or poetry (Jahan Ramazani)—also considered peripheral with respect to India.²² It is the Indian-English novel, and especially the surge it exhibited

²¹ See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). See also Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 25; Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 93.

²² Shital Pravinchandra, 'Not Just Prose: The Calcutta Chromosome, the South Asian Short Story and the Limitations of Postcolonial Studies', *Interventions*, 16.3 (2014), 424-44 (p. 8).

in the Salman Rushdie-era (1980s and 1990s), that has defined Indian literary criticism and Indian literary politics. The influence of the novel is so large that any mention of the short story still gets subsumed under the generalised appellation 'prose fiction', a tendency also present within the wider humanities. This also accompanies another, though not unrelated, error of postcolonial assimilation: *bhasas* literatures themselves get subsumed under the category of 'Indian literature', the conventions and criteria of which are dominated by Indian-English writing. As a result, Indian literature appears, despite allusions to the contrary, as a literature of primarily English novels. As Rosemary George notes, 'the currently dominant postcolonial framework cannot easily accommodate work fuelled by concerns other than the struggle for national independence and the poignant disillusionment with the new nation that followed it in the post-colonial era'.²³ Abdelatif Akbib, illuminating here the case of the Moroccan short story (though the refrain is common to many postcolonial contexts), writes:

The fact is that the national movement was the womb in which the modern cultural movement was conceived [...] and it was in the cradle of this cultural movement that the short story was reared. It is not a coincidence, then, that one of the main factors leading to the birth of the short story was the widespread circulation of newspapers and magazines [...] used primarily for militancy and ideological purposes.²⁴

The short story in India also owes its rise and apotheosis to a similar insurrectional streak in the 1930s and 1940s, helped by a simultaneous growth of print and periodical cultures, even though the extent to which this body of work was invested in a nationalist frame of expressing its politics will be put to the test in the forthcoming sections of this thesis. To think of these Indian short stories is to think of the work of writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Ahmed Ali, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Raja Rao, Ismat Chughtai, Vaikom Mohammed Basheer, Agyeya, Muhammad Hasan Askari, and so on. It is to think of the belligerent pamphlet *Angarey* (Embers) published in 1932 and censored only a few days later by the colonial government; it is to think of Anand's stories on the struggles of the peasant

²³ Rosemary Marangoly George, 'Where in the World Did Kamala Markandaya Go?', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 42.3 (2009), 400–409 (p. 400).

²⁴ Abdellatif Akbib, 'Birth and Development of the Moroccan Short Story', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 2000, 67–87 (p. 69).

classes and the outcastes; it is to think of Jahan's fight for an equality of gender, and Ali's recalcitrant litigations with the firm conventions of Euro-american modernism. But it is also to think of the way in which these short stories have defined the ideals of realism, of modernism, of representation, and of experimentation—of the place of literature itself within the tense alcoves of nation-building in post-colonial South Asia—all within a literary language that, to quote Shital Pravinchandra, is part of merely 'peripheral production'.²⁵ Pravinchandra's telling observation in 2014 that no short story writer until Alice Munro in 2013 had won the Nobel Prize, 'the ultimate means of international literary consecration', may point to an attitude of touch-and-go towards the short story form in the wider literary humanities, but it is in the contexts of India, where the ratios of production between the short story and the novel lean overwhelmingly in favour of the short story, this attitude needs to be brought into particularly close quarters, to be addressed from a crucial point of view: language.

To be sure, the short stories considered in this thesis hold a central place in the literary histories of their own languages (even a quick glance, for instance, within the practice of literary histories in Urdu, called *tehbreek*, will ascertain this point). But they do not feature favourably in the landscape of World Literature, which, in David Damrosch's frequently scrutinised pronouncement, requires its constituent writers to wear their own regional and linguistic contexts 'rather lightly'.²⁶ The primacy of 'World Literatures' today has meant that those texts which are heavily indebted, in terms of both form and content, to the material, social and political situations of their own production, are not as frequently found within metropolitan scholarship, rendering them subpar, parochial, even beyond the pale of the modern. In the particular case of India, the multilingual interconnectedness of Indian literatures, made up by often overlapping strands of languages and (print) cultures coming together to create a prismatic literary system, means that regional and linguistic contexts are wound too tightly around *bhasas* literatures for them to lose these contexts without also losing a crucial connection to their place and time. As Rita Kothari and Judy Wakabayashi have argued: 'Indians moved within a multilingual structure, not necessarily thinking of these languages as different languages, but rather as different registers of the same language ... In India, moving from one language or dialect to

²⁵ Shital Pravinchandra, 'Short Story and Peripheral Production', in *The Cambridge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Ben Etherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 197 (p. 197).

²⁶ David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 139.

another did not seem to constitute an act of translation, but merely a confirmation of a multilingual world not overtly conscious of its own multilingualism'.²⁷

Most of the writers that I have considered here are bilingual—English being a colonial tongue to many—and several among them are even trilingual. But within the postcolonial discipline, where Anglophone literatures (and particularly the English novel) are used almost universally to flank, in Priyamvada Gopal's assessment, 'privileged conceptual categories' of hybridity and ambivalence, the material conditions that exclude these writers (including their exclusion via culturally appropriative use and reductive translations) are often paid scant attention.²⁸ At times when notable short story writers from the *bhasas* are introduced to the postcolonial 'teaching canon', such as to be a proxy for a specific political or ideological message, they 'are first made fit for refined theoretical company' (3), as in the case of Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016), one of Bengal's pre-eminent short story writers and radical feminists, known however to the academy through the towering work of comparative critic and translator Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.²⁹ Devi's short stories in the decades of the 1970s and 80s (from collections like *Aganigarbha*, tr. Womb of Fire, 1978 and *Murti*, tr. Idol, 1979) are today frequented within both postcolonial and translation studies, but the critical lens deployed to study them continues to gravitate towards post-structuralist theory, once (and arguably still) the talismanic framework of postcolonial studies in its institutional 'English' formation. Neil Lazarus's oft-cited lament for the limbic state of postcolonial studies perusing the literatures of the 'third-world' with a leading (though, since then, an increasingly apprehensive) Anglocentric focus, is worth recalling again: 'To read across postcolonial literary studies is to find, to an extraordinary degree, the same questions being asked, the same methods, techniques, and conventions being used, the same concepts mobilized, the same conclusions drawn, about the work of a remarkably small number of

²⁷ Judy Wakabayashi and Rita Kothari, *Decentering Translation Studies: India and Beyond* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2009), p. 12.

²⁸ Priyamvada Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.

²⁹ See '[Mahasweta Devi's] text must be *reconstellated* to draw out its use' (p.244, my emphasis) in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2012). Quoted in Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 3.

writers'.³⁰ To overstate the case, by his own admission, Lazarus writes that 'there is, in a strict sense, only one author in the postcolonial literary canon. And that author is Salman Rushdie, whose novels—*Midnight's Children* [(1981)] and *The Satanic Verses* [(1988)]—are endlessly and fatuously cited in the critical literature as testifying to ... the ideality of nationhood, the ungeneralisable subjectivism of memory and experience, the instability of social identity, the volatility of truth, and the narratorial constructedness of history' (772). There is no denying the significance of some of this scholarship to the history of postcolonial critique, but from a more practical standpoint, the writers that I will consider in this thesis have so far been unsuccessful in finding their own place within the postcolonial 'teaching canons' precisely due to the ascendancy of these questions, both as something which postcolonial studies are 'about', and as an apparatus to evaluate, apprehend and even translate the texts and contexts of the global South to the readers of the English metropole.³¹ This apparatus is not always responsive to the short story—a form that, in a maze of quarrelling definitions, owes, at the very least, its existence to its aesthetic innovations and political aptitudes, rather than to rough hews of a national 'ideality' forged from postcolonial studies' habitual (though fast-receding) Anglo and novel-centrism.

It is precisely this Anglocentric and novel-centric tendency that once prompted Salman Rushdie, in an introduction to an anthology of Indian short stories with all texts but one in English, to make an ill-judged pronouncement that '[Indian-English literature] is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 official languages of India, the so-called 'vernacular-languages''.³² This thesis is a response to that comment, aligning itself with those sections of postcolonial scholarship that tend to favour a pluralist and multilingualist approach to studying Indian literatures (with an s). In the recent edited volume *Indian Literature and the World* (2017), Neelam Srivastava and Rosella Ciocca have decried, in no unclear terms, 'a schizophrenic

³⁰ Neil Lazarus, 'The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism', *The European Legacy*, 7.6 (2002), 771–82 (p. 772).

³¹ 'Postcolonial studies has not typically been *about* literature' in Lazarus, p. 772.

³² 'Introduction' in Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, 1947–1997* (London: Vintage Books, 1997).

view of Indian literature as divided between literatures in the *bhasas* and literature that is produced in English'.³³ They further write—

Rather than approximate Indian literature to the fashionable centre-periphery model adopted by critics who have used world-systems theory to restructure the modern literary field, we look at its enduring engagement with the public sphere and with political resistance through a variety of narrative and poetic forms which defy any categorisation within a singular model of literary modernism and which emanate from the capitalist centres and are reappropriated by the peripheries.³⁴

As will gradually become apparent, this thesis builds upon this approach, borrowing ideas from the work of scholars like Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, who are both part of the path-leading Warwick Research Collective (WReC). In placing English writers like Anand outside the two folds of colony and metropole (as 'a man of many worlds' in Chapter 3), as well as alongside *bhasas* writers like Jahan and Manto (Chapter 4 and 5), this thesis attempts a translational and historicist approach to these texts, considering them as literary *and social* forms that co-produce the heterogenous corpus of the short story within a complex and multilingual literary system.

What are Telling Fragments?

The writers that I will consider in this thesis are most easily grouped under the conventional category of realist writers, with explicit political commitments, in their own individual ways, to the ideals of freedom, equality and democracy. But to study these literatures as just political documents also risks expediency. As Joseph Farag observes in the beleaguered context of the Palestinian short story, 'there is an attendant danger in the recourse to the political significance of literary aesthetics as an argument or justification for its importance [as] such an argument risks reinforcing precisely a reduction of literary texts to mere sociological documents [...] giving the impression that the issue of literary

³³ Rossella Ciocca and Neelam Srivastava, *Indian Literature and the World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 3.

³⁴ Here Ciocca and Srivastava are quoting *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, ed. by Sharae Deckard and Neil Lazarus (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 14.

aesthetics is important because of its broader political significance'.³⁵ While aesthetics and aesthetic theory, implicated at some level in the marginalisation of postcolonial literatures in the European academy, have at best been regarded so far with suspicion within postcolonial studies, scholars like Bill Ashcroft, Geeta Kapur, Timothy Lewes, Deepika Bahri, and Elleke Boehmer are calling for a renewal of aesthetic interests alongside political interests within postcolonial studies.³⁶ In her influential 2010 essay 'A Postcolonial Aesthetic: Repeating Upon the Present', Boehmer mulls over what may constitute aesthetics within the postcolonial literary tradition: 'one could argue it is the language of postcolonial writing that embodies more or less what we mean when we refer to a postcolonial aesthetic [...] critics [Jean-Marc Moura and Ismail Talib] foreground the post-imperial struggle with voice and language as the defining feature of a putative postcolonial writing. Here the voice of the oppressed finds expression in the mutated language of the oppressor'.³⁷

Central to the concerns of this thesis, therefore, is the dialectic between literary form and politics. In fact, the principal proposition which underlies the critical rubric of *telling fragments* in the title of my thesis is that the form of the short story is constitutively fragmented, and that it is in the nature of this fragmentation that a dialectic between the text and its context emerges. What these fragments *tell*, in each of the contexts in which they are placed, be it Anand's interest in narrating the condition of working mothers in colonial-era Jute mills, or Manto's shuffling of the pack of realist scrapes to textualise the violence of Partition, is a *literary* account of history, rather than a historical account of literature. An interest here in the formal attributes, as well as in language, both as a medium and as a cultural resource, represents the view that literary textuality is not formed in a political void, but is a 'worldly' phenomenon, taking from Edward Said the idea that literary texts are 'enmeshed in time,

³⁵ Joseph Farag, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), p. 16.

³⁶ See Bill Ashcroft, 'Towards a Postcolonial Aesthetics', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51.4 (2015), 410–21; Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000); Deepika Bahri, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

³⁷ Quoted in Catherine Noske, 'A Postcolonial Aesthetic? An Interview with Robert Young', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50.5 (2014), 609–21 (p. 614).

place and society'.³⁸ Hence, every act of outward narration contains within it a multitude of inward narrative acts, each interlocuting with its social, political and material 'worlds' to produce meaning. In turn, the 'form' of the text, that inscrutable aspect of its literariness which Raymond Williams once enigmatically called 'structures of feeling', comes to be shaped by the affective (as well as the political) forces that press upon these texts.³⁹ And while the texts themselves may represent political (even nationalist) resistance as acts of outward narration, they are also formally complex, with deep, affective entanglements with history concealed in their uses of 'language' as form, rather than just political ones. As I show through this thesis, anguish structures Manto's use of language, empathy arises from Anand's, a sense of melancholia impregnates Ali's. It can scarcely be denied that writers like these are seldom, if ever, engaged at a textual or affective level in their own linguistic contexts. To quote Pravinchandra, two book-length studies, Priyamvada Gopal's *Literary Radicalism in India* (2004) and Toral Gajarawala's *Untouchable Fictions* (2012), may be considered 'rare specimens ... insofar as they are ... studies of Indian *bhasas* literature produced by academics working in Anglo-American university literature departments [that] foreground the short story'.⁴⁰ Even though these works pave the foundational approach today to the study of postcolonial radical literatures in India, and even somewhat for the short story, they gloss over any particularities of form. The question on what, if any, formal, generic, or modal distinctions exemplify the short story, particularly the *bhasas* short story, is altogether absent.

I build significantly on these works in the sense that I demonstrate that the idea of literary form, even for writers who are overwhelmingly committed to the aims of political representation, is more than just what mimetic suppositions about 'politically engaged' literature allow for. The idea of form exceeds, in meaningful ways, what Jean-Paul Sartre, when commenting on aesthetic form, dismisses

³⁸ Edward W Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 35.

³⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1977), p. 133. Other places where Williams discusses texts as 'social forms' may be useful reading. See Raymond Williams, 'Literature and Sociology', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso Books, 1980), pp. 11–30 (pp. 23–24).

⁴⁰ Pravinchandra, 'Short Story and Peripheral Production', p. 204. See Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*. Toral Jatin Gajarawala, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

simply as ‘a matter of knowing what one wants to write about, whether butterflies or the condition of the Jews [...] and then *how* to write about them’.⁴¹ *How*, among these fragments, is not always a matter of knowing, but also a matter of telling. As will gradually become clear through this thesis, ‘literary form’ acts here as a flexible heuristic to refer to a set of interlocutions that occur between a text and its material world that have a particular ability to *tell*, when read in highly contextualised settings, history as it gets encoded within literature. Although, to some extent, these interlocutions remain hermeneutically sealed within their original historical contexts, contextual and retrospective readings can unearth scraps, missing arcs, and loose bits that do not fit ‘major’ (nationalist) historical narratives. It is in this sense that I call literary form fragmentary—an illusion of something always incomplete, and yet something that holds telling information about the past and the way in which it is reconstructed. What is told is equally the *process* through which the past is reconstructed as the past itself. And that brings richly into view the realm of aesthetics as interlaced with politics.

To be clear, this conception of the literary fragment is still different from the ‘fragmentary point of view’ privileged in subversive historiographical modes within the many off-shoots of postcolonial studies, most notable among them Subaltern Studies. In his combative 1992 article ‘In Defense of the Fragment’, Gyanendra Pandey argued that ‘part of the importance of the ‘fragmentary’ point of view lies in that it resists the drive for a shallow homogenisation and struggles towards other, potentially richer definitions of the ‘nation’ and the future political community’.⁴² Pandey, who here is writing within the highly particular context of communal violence, a theme that recurs in many sections of this thesis, does not quite define what this fragment is in material terms. These historiographical fragments are simply ‘the fragments of Indian society—the smaller religious and caste communities, tribal sections, industrial workers, activist women’s groups, all of which may be said to represent ‘minority’ cultures’.⁴³ Inasmuch as the short story is a document that circulates within ‘minority cultures’ with remarkable agility, bearing a potential to disrupt what Pandey has himself criticised as ‘mainstream nationalist cultures’ (28), the short story, too, may be called a fragment.

⁴¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 15.

⁴² Gyanendra Pandey, ‘In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today’, *Representations*, 37 (1992), 27–55 (p. 28).

⁴³ Pandey, p. 28.

But the commitment of the historiographical fragment is to historiography, not to form, not to an understanding of the way in which literatures and their constitutive textualities are entangled in history. So while it cannot be denied that many short stories may serve as fragments of tremendous historiographical value and are indeed frequently summoned by historians as a ‘minor’ archive (and even by anthropologists as ethnographic material) it is not the method used in this thesis.⁴⁴ In spite of the fact that historiographical and anthropological methods are far more adjacent with literary criticism today than they have ever been—which is thanks in no small part to the exalted ‘cultural turn’—they tend still to major discourses (‘potentially richer definitions of the nation’), functioning, as per Pandey himself, ‘in a context where the rhetoric of nationalism is of central importance’.⁴⁵

Thomas Palakeel, among other critics, has resisted the notion that the short story can be read, as the novel has so far been, as an allegory for the nation, rightly tracing the origins of this critical disposition in Fredric Jameson’s controversial remark on the nature of ‘third world’ literature itself, where ‘the story of private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society’.⁴⁶ Adrian Hunter, in *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story* (2007), a book that sets its smallest section aside for the postcolonial short story (placing writers like Chinua Achebe oddly alongside writers from colonial/settler societies like James Kellman, Frank Sargeson and Alice Munro), also notes that the short story ‘is and always has been disproportionately represented in the literatures of colonial and postcolonial cultures’.⁴⁷ The reasons presented here are formal as well as material. On one hand, according to Hunter, short stories speak directly to the

⁴⁴ I think here not just of folktales, epics and classical literatures which have complemented the study of history in particularly sparse archival conditions, but also the work of modern short story writers like Sa’adat Hasan Manto (Indian Partition) and Daniel Corkey (Irish War of Independence).

⁴⁵ Pandey, p. 28. Too many exceptions to this rule can be made, of course, due to the fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of contemporary academic scholarship. Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) and Veena Das’s in *Life and Words* (2006) are extraordinary examples of fugitive ethnohistorical research with remarkable literary and poetic value.

⁴⁶ Thomas Palakeel, ‘Third World Short Story as National Allegory?’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 1996, 97–102 (p. 99). For the original see Fredric Jameson, ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’, *Social Text*, 15, 1986, 65–88.

⁴⁷ Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 138.

'ruptured condition' of colonial societies, where 'the sense of self, region, state or nation is insecure', and on the other, the emergence of magazines, newspapers and periodicals in cultures 'with small or non-existent publishing infrastructures' has meant that short stories were favoured over longer forms of writing due to 'reasons of space and means of production'.⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russel, in *The Postcolonial Short Story* (2012), arguably the only collection to have made an attempt to bring short story theorists and postcolonial critics under the same roof, also gravitate towards themes of rupture to explain the rise of the postcolonial short story. Emphasizing a sustained presence of orality in these texts, they argue that the form acts 'as an expressive medium for themes of fragmentation, displacement, diaspora and identity'.⁴⁹ While these thematic brackets may allow for indexing the short story a global (and even distinctively postcolonial) genre, they may inhibit context-specific inquiries into the aesthetic and political form of the short story, attributing the rise of the short story always to rupturous nationalism and booming print cultures, and declaring its demise, as Stephen Alter has hastily done, in 'the decline of Marxist Socialism'.⁵⁰ In Hunter's book, to take only one example, Achebe and Kellman are placed under the same header, because the short story has proven for them both (African and Scottish to bear in mind) 'an effective medium for communicating a sense of chronic inconsequence that attends those excluded from the schemes of law and power'. Nobody could argue with the fact that Achebe and Kellman were quite different in the way they found themselves excluded from schemes of law and power.

This remains the dominant outlook towards the short story; like mushrooms that grow under conditions of stress and rupture, the short stories of the 'third world', by virtue of their wide reach and popularity among readers, have come to stand in for the instability and insecurity of all that denotes (self, region, nation) the enmeshed spheres of private and public within the third world itself. As a result, a regrettable sense has pervaded short story scholarship as to the supremacy of the novel form in the well-tended gardens of the West, where political referents are taken as more stable, and publishing infrastructures and common readers' literary budgets are taken as abundant. Of

⁴⁸ Hunter, p. 138.

⁴⁹ Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell, 'Introduction: The Short Story and the Postcolonial', in *The Postcolonial Short Story* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1–14 (p. 3).

⁵⁰ Stephen Alter, 'The Short Story in India', *Wasafiri*, 10.21 (1995), 26–28 (p. 26).

course, the political upheavals of decolonisation, and in India's context, communal violence and religious separatism, created conditions of rupture that were very unlike those in the West, perhaps even laying the ground for a shorter and more laconic form to take the reins from the novel. But these threadbare associations between form and politics, especially to justify what is an outstanding leap of one genre over the other, can risk taking the spotlight away from the aesthetic autonomy of the short story. Undeniably, as it stands today, a context in which the short story has most enjoyed sustained critical attention, especially into its formal and aesthetic features, is literary modernism in Europe and America. The short story in Europe and America is now regarded as a 'genre' that differs from the novel in the measure of its form, style, technique, and aesthetic or political aims, and not just length. To defer to Mary Louise Pratt's milestone essay in 1981 on the history and practice of comparing short stories to novels in order to explain, and sometimes even gloss over, autonomous features of their form: 'shortness cannot be an intrinsic property of anything but occurs only relative to something else'.⁵¹ The 'something else' is the novel, 'historically the more powerful and prestigious of the two genres'. Striking a chord with Pratt, Frank O' Connor's assertion that 'in the short story, there is a difference of kind, not length' also merits note.⁵² And who could ignore Nadine Gordimer's poetic 'light of the flash' comment: whereas for the novelist 'contact [with human life] is more like the flash of fireflies, in and out, now here, now there, in darkness ... short story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of—the present moment'.⁵³ One question to which this thesis at large, and the next chapter in particular tends, is to what extent do these enduring meditations on the form of the short story apply in the case of the *bhasas*.

The Structure of the Thesis

Without laying the requisite theoretical and contextual groundwork, a lot may appear mismatched between the writers considered in this document. Consider that, apart from Premchand (who wrote in Hindi and Urdu), and who I will study in the next chapter as a *bhasas* interpreter of the form (and

⁵¹ Mary Louise Pratt, 'The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It', *Poetics*, 10.2 (1981), 175–94 (p. 180).

⁵² Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 14.

⁵³ Nadine Gordimer, 'The International Symposium on the Short Story', *Kenyon Review*, 30.4 (1968), 457–64 (p. 459).

the context in which this form emerged) in late-colonial India, the short story writers that feature in textual depth are Mulk Raj Anand (English), Sajjad Zaheer (Urdu and English), Rashed Jahan (Urdu and English), Ahmed Ali (Urdu and English) and Sa'adat Hasan Manto (Urdu). Premchand, the oldest, was born in 1880, with his most prolific output between 1912 and 1934, while Manto, the youngest, was born in 1912, writing his grim stories on the Partition, often referred to in *bhasas* scholarship as *fasadat ke afsane*, or the 'riot short stories', in the decade of 1950s. Texts considered here are predominantly between the length of a paragraph and 30 pages, read with attention to not only the form, but also their immediate material and ephemeral contexts. These contexts span nearly half a century between the publication of Premchand's *Soz-e-Watan* (The Dirge of the Nation) in 1907 and Manto's palm-sized *Siya Hasbiye* (Black Marginalia) in 1955. In this fateful half-a-century, which I refer to as 'late-colonial-era', all of these writers became 'post'-colonial, transitioning (both in their lived sense, and in the sense of their appraisals in academic scholarship) from being colonial 'subjects' to post-colonial 'citizens'. After having started their careers as Indian writers, half of them came, through iniquitous fate, to be known as Pakistani, sharing between them a common linguistic and cultural heritage. Ironically, each of the writers that I study in this thesis, barring Manto, are also better known for their novels than for their short stories. While Premchand may be considered a writer of 'rural' fictions, Manto wrote his best stories about the violence that becomes visible when carousing in the urban metropolis. Anand, who wrote in English and lived in London, is considered at once colonial and anticolonial, elite and subaltern. And nearly all of Ahmed Ali's short stories are now out-of-print, relegated to the 'archive' where they are considered testimonies to India's radical literary heritage, with not much existing in way of their literary appraisal as short stories.

What, then, brings this diverse group of writers together? What are the politics of the short story within both the *bhasas* and the English academies? How is this form defined and delimited within not only the complex terrain offered by late-colonial India—a period, no doubt, of great historical density—but also within the norms, discourses, and assumptions of postcolonial theory in which the short story form, if not the notion of 'form' altogether, continues to lumber on the margins. In the first chapter, by placing the 'short story' in *bhasas* theory and context with the work of Premchand's *Kahanikala* (The Art of the Short Story), I introduce the (multilingual) ground upon which these writers are grouped together, the methodologies that are deployed to read their short fiction, and

the social, political and ethical questions that will be asked of their writing. I argue here that even at the height of the Independence struggle in India, short stories were invested more in the issues of caste and class, rather than a desire for nationhood. Realism, itself, became a way for the *bhasas* short story to reconfigure the nation as a contested ground.

In the second chapter, I examine the work of Mulk Raj Anand, the only predominantly English short story writer considered in this thesis. I read his short stories according to his own theoretical aphorism that they spring out of the folktales of India and can be called 'neo-folktales'. Considering the author's own location in a literary field marked by a pernicious exchange of power between the colony and the metropole, I historicise the literary practice of deploying the aesthetic resources (and the orality) of folk as a subversive mode and medium, illuminating the contradictions that are present within such a practice. The third chapter is a sustained textual engagement with the work of Ahmed Ali, Sajjad Zaheer, and Rashed Jahan, which appeared in *Angarey* (Embers), a pamphlet that served almost as a spiritual guide to progressive writing in late-colonial India and paved the way for a new, critically aware *afšana*. Here, I examine the pamphlet (*parcha* in Urdu, *kahani-sangrah* in Hindi) not only as a collection of individual literary texts, but also as a singular and composite material text with a political and social agency that gains in its collectivity. I study how the writers of *Angarey* use this insurgent pamphlet to draw formal relationships between space, servitude, and the idea of a literary community as a self-institutional system.

In the fourth chapter, I turn to *fasadat ke afsane*, or the riot short stories, published in the wake of the Partition of India in 1947. These texts responded to the gendered and sexualised violence of the riots which accompanied the partition of India into two (and later three) nations along communal lines. The writer I consider in depth in this chapter is Sa'adat Hasan Manto. His short stories, having served as a striking textual archive of Partition's communal violence, had nevertheless evaded a close appraisal vis-à-vis the ethical demands of representing this violence within the short story. Building upon the provocative work of feminist historiography in the context of Indian Partition, I examine Manto's deployment of the quality of 'rumour' within his short story sketches (called *afsananch*) to 'mobilise the mob' and to grapple with the brutal and spectacular violence of riots. I conclude this thesis with a Coda, a short essay on my personal encounter with India's enormous ephemeral archive, outlining the dangers they face, and what they mean for the criticism of the Indian short story.

2. Premchand's *Kahanikala*: Short Story in *Bhasas* Theory and Context

PREMCHAND, often considered the 'emperor of storytelling' (*katha samraat*) in India, wrote several theoretical essays on the art of the *kahani*, the short story form emergent at the turn of the twentieth century, responding to the social, cultural and political demands of a new national community that rose against the evils of casteism, prejudice, avarice and alien rule. Many of these essays (compiled as *Kahanikala*, or *The Art of the Short Story*) place an emphasis on a particular notion of the form's affirmative relationship to its reading classes. In these essays, published between 1912 and 1922, he writes:

उपन्यास वे लोग पढ़ते हैं जिनके पास धन होता है; और समय भी उन्हीं के पास होता है जिनके पास धन होता है। आख्यायिका साधारण जनता के लिए लिखी जाती है, जिनके पास न धन है और न समय। कहानी तो वह ध्रुपद की तान है, जिसमें गायक महफ़िल शुरू होते ही अपनी संपूर्ण प्रतिभा दिखा देता है, एक ही क्षण में चित्त को इतने माधुर्य से परिपूरित कर देता है जितना रात भर गाना सुनने से भी नहीं हो सकता।

Novels are read by people who have money, and those who have money have time. Short story, however, is for those who have neither money nor time. The short story is that kind of a *dhrupad* concert, in which the artist exhibits the totality of his remarkable talents at the moment of opening; the truth of that moment cannot even be matched by listening to the singing all night.¹

Although controversial, it is widely held that Premchand's seditious 1907 pamphlet *Soz-e-Watan* (*The Dirge of the Nation*), published when Premchand was still called by his original name Nawab

¹ I have translated Premchand's use of *madhurya*, sweetness, as truth, to draw the parallel with the Anglophone short story theory's invocation of the notion of the 'moment-of-truth'. For the original see Premchand, 'Kahani Kala', in *Kuch Vichaar* (Allahabad: Saraswati Press, 1985), p. 29.

Dhanpat Rai, was the first collection of short stories published in Hindi or Urdu. Of course, many writers of the English language at the time were already practising the form, but not with any particular distinction as short story writers. The problem was almost taxonomical: there is still no singular, consolidated way to refer to the short story in the Indian context as in the English language in which it is a consecrated, albeit still marginal, area of literary production. In Premchand's own evaluation of the short story in the excerpt from *Kabanikala* above, the terms *akhyayika*, *katha* and *kabani* appear interchangeably to refer to the short prose form of writing fiction. Of these three terms, only *akhyayika* (meaning 'small part' in classical Sanskrit) bears any resonance with the idea that the form is short in length, portable, brevilouquent. All other designations, like in French (*conte*) or Spanish (*cuento*), appear to eschew the measure of length for signification, instilling instead in its vocabulary, a difference of kind, of technique, of narrative, and of aesthetic properties. In Urdu, to illustrate my point, the short story is the *afsana*—the same word as for a daydream or a reverie, an altered experience of reality itself. In Hindi, literature itself becomes *sahitya*, which elicits the idea of a community. These designations are not merely proverbial idioms but carry within them critical knowledges on the nature of the form itself, shaped as it is by a long intermixing of languages and cultures, and of the ways in which reality is perceived and mediated in their specific realms of writing fiction.

Sisir Kumar Das, an imposing historian of Indian literature in its great multilingual complexity, notes about many short story writers in the twentieth century that 'the story was a thing to them ... but they were unsure about its shortness'.² Premchand's comparison of a *katha* to a *dhrupad* concert echoes, in fact, some of the restlessness around defining the short story purely in terms of its length. And yet, length is what gives the form its most eminent, even inescapable, distinction. The form is, as in Premchand's own assessment, for the literary consumption of a class that had 'neither money nor time' and would have needed therefore to consume the whole text in one sitting (*ek hi baithak me sunne jaane योग्या हो*)—one seating being Edgar Allan Poe's own enduring catechism for the short

² Sisir Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature, 1911-1956*, History of Indian Literature, 4 vols (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1991), III, p. 262.

story in the English context.³ Several of these short, single-seating consumables were in wide circulation in India's popular literature, much of which, according to Das, 'is completely lost'.⁴ This constitutes pamphlets, zines, periodicals, and 'genre' stories published in local dialects by small, regional printing-presses, and circulated 'particularly on the railway platforms, because they could afford delight to the readers like a fleeting picture' (257). Though there are some overlaps at the fringes, the writers considered in this thesis do not quite fit this description of popular literature. Although most of their prolific outlook was in small and portable literary journals, their ideal reader was a more conscious political citizen, and their choice of subject-matter was often not determined by editorial commissions and booksellers, but by their own political, aesthetic and intellectual affiliations. It was alongside this popular press-driven movement that this more critically-aware short story emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, helped in no small part by the arrival and wide propagation of avant-garde literary journals like *Saraswati*, *Hans* (co-edited by Premchand himself) and *Indu*. By the 1930s, especially with the progressive movement, the short story form gained such popularity with the Indian readership that it spawned a generic identity understood as one with shared properties across languages, cultures and different modes of dissemination (such as serialised, anthologised or pamphleted with daily newspapers).⁵ In *bhasas* criticism, which has its own indigenous forms (*tanquid*, critique; *tehrreek*, history, and so forth), the short story is seemingly everywhere. As Shital Pravinchandra notes, 'South Asian criticism abounds in volumes dedicated solely to the discussions of the short story, which is unsurprising given that entire literary movements in South Asia have hinged on the short story form.'⁶

³ See Edgar Allan Poe, 'Twice-Told Tales by N. Hawthorne' (p.576) reprinted in Edgar Allan Poe, *Essays and Reviews: Edgar Allan Poe*, Literary Classics of the United States (New York: Library of America, 1984).

⁴ Das, III, p. 257.

⁵ The most authoritative survey of Hindi journalism and magazine culture, especially in relation to the nationalist movement in India, remains Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*.

⁶ Pravinchandra, 'Not Just Prose: The Calcutta Chromosome, the South Asian Short Story and the Limitations of Postcolonial Studies', p. 9.

And hence, the crux of the controversy over whether Premchand's exalted pamphlet was the first short story collection to emerge in the *bhasas* cannot so much be a controversy over whether the short prose form, defined in this loose sense by its brevity, had existed before it, but over the formal, modal and definitional aspects of the form to which Premchand's contributions are considered so pioneering as for it to be considered the first of its kind.⁷ The emergent questions were (and still are): what the short story was, what made it different to the short forms of prose writing before it, why the sudden surge in readership and a sudden claim to such high stakes in the literary and public sphere of colonial-era India. In every colonial or postcolonial context, fraught with the intersections between languages and cultures, made further unwieldy by the category of 'nation' and the longing for 'national' literatures, these are some of the questions often asked of the short story, as well as of any critical scholarship that attempts to situate itself along the meridians of this shapeshifting form. Unlike a scholarly inquiry into a specific period, theme or 'genre', which will normatively focus on the novel (and sometimes on the short story but without any specific focus on the properties of the form itself, such as is evident in almost every other book-length study of Progressive literature in India), any attempt to trace the scope of a work that looks into short stories will be faced with an unenviable problem of defining the form itself. On one hand, the short story—even when looked at within just the English language—is too heterogenous to be defined without risky and tiresome essentialisms. And on the other, the problem is compounded by the fact that this thesis looks into the short story form within—as I will show in the next section—this exceptionally diverse category of 'Indian' literature, and in a period in which India, as it is known today, had yet to come to exist.⁸

Although I do not get closer to the texture of Premchand's short stories in this thesis, mostly on account of the fact that he is already the most well-attended *bhasas* short story writer in India, my invocation of his compendium of essays *Kahanikala* (1922), an extraordinary theoretical exposition

⁷ The claim is made in so many places in both English and *bhasas* scholarship that it hardly needs any citational evidence. See, for instance, Mehr Farooqi, *Urdu Literary Culture: Vernacular Modernity in the Writing of Muhammad Hasan Askari* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 76. See also, 'Soz-e-Watan pioneered the Hindi-Urdu short story' (p.167) in Shormishtha Panja, *Many Indias, Many Literatures: New Critical Essays* (New Delhi: Worldview Publications, 1999).

⁸ See 'Indian Literature: Notes Towards the Definition of a Category' (p.243) in Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*.

in the *bhasas* on the nature of this historically and geographically variegated form, is a way to both introduce the context of short story production in India, and a way to lay ground for a dialectical conversation between the evaluation of this form in *bhasas* discourse, and its critical appraisal within the greener and more well-known pastures of Western scholarship (such as within 'genre' theory, or within the rich context of work on (Black) American, Irish or South African writers, for whom the short story has played a vital role to literary life). This is so as to mitigate some of the blind-spots (particularly those pertaining to the universalising and essentialist tendency) of short story theory in the European and American context, particularly when used for the assessment of the *politics* of the short stories from what is now called the third-world. Before we go into some of these more nuanced questions of form, it is important to consider this context within which this thesis presents most of its material.

The Late-colonial Indian Context

Although my own proficiencies are limited to English, Hindi and Urdu, I present in this section a brief historical overview of the parallel and interconnected emergence of the short story in several literary vernaculars in India, so as to give a sense of how established the form was in this colonial period. The first votaries of the short story form were bilingual writers like Rabindranath Tagore, whose Bengali short stories written in the early 1890s such as 'Kabuliwala', 'Samapti, and 'Nastanid' have today become curricular to literary education in Indian primary schools, both in Bengali and in translations into English and other Indian languages. Tagore's *Galpaguccha*, the collection of short fiction considered as towering as his Nobel-winning verse collection *Gitanjali*, contains 84 stories written between 1891 and 1933, a period in which the 'story' was to become the dominant literary form to articulate, among other things, the burgeoning nationalist struggle in almost all of India's major *bhasas*.⁹ In English, the short story came to be with the triumvirate of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, who had, between them, written over 500 short stories that were published in journals and anthologies all through the decades of 1920s to 1950s. Collections like *Malgudi Days* (1942), *Dodu and Other Stories* (1943) by Narayan, *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944)

⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Galpaguccha* (Kolkata: Ratnabali, 1946).

by Anand, *The Cow and the Barricades* (1947) by Rao, have practically never gone out of print and are considered 'classics' of Indian literature.

It was in Hindi and Urdu, languages that have so much in common, that the short story form, called *kabani* or *afsana*, had even supplanted the novel in terms of both its prestige and circulation. In a short essay published in *Civil Lines*, contemporary Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh looks back upon the vernacular short story, stating that the 'Indian short story' was 'consistently in the literary vanguard in the decades before and following the Independence'.¹⁰ A lot of this popularity can be attributed to the progressivist movement of the 1930s and 1940s, when literary periodicals like *Saq'i*, *Alamgir*, *Naya Adab*, *Adab-i-Dunya*, *Lotus*, *Naya Daur*, *Prabhat* and others, several of them supported by strident left-wing political parties and groups including the Communist Party of India (CPI), came together for the project of launching the short story form as a vehicle for affecting social change due to its penetrating ability and portable nature. In 1936, when the All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) was established, Premchand, at the time one of India's most senior writers, was asked to deliver the opening address to their first assembly. In this address, according to historian Carlo Coppola 'one of the most important documents of India's literary history', Premchand marks out the *kabani* to be the form that would dominate Indian literatures in the decades to follow.¹¹ Where *madhyakal*, the Middle Ages, was a period of great epic forms and drama, the prose forms of

¹⁰ Amitav Ghosh, p. 38.

¹¹ Carlo Coppola's three volumes of historical material on the Marxist literary and cultural movement in India is today indispensable to the study of Indian literature during the Independence struggle, and especially in the context of the AIPWA. See Carlo Coppola, *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1974), I-III. For a historical background on Premchand's address in 1936, see Carlo Coppola, 'Premchand's Address to the First Meeting of the All-India Progressive Writers Association: Some Speculations', *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 21.2 (1986), 21-39.

India, according to Premchand, 'had long being neglected', and were now starting to see a new *uddesya* (purpose) in service of a *sabhya* (reformist) literature.¹²

It was to this task of reform that the progressives were to turn to the short story, with an eye on literature's renewed ethical ambition: 'to evoke in us, a resolve and energy to act against both the internal and external causes that have forced us into this state of lifelessness [*neerjeevita*] and wretchedness [*bras*], and which makes us strive to remove them'.¹³ The AIPWA Manifesto, drafted in London by Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand, themselves prolific short story writers, also uses a similarly militant language to rally Indian writers to hold forth for a new kind of progressive realist literature, inspired in no small part by the emergent Popular Front activity in the aesthetic domain around the world: 'All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and un-reason we reject as reactionary [sic]. All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive'.¹⁴ Zaheer and Anand were both present at the Lucknow Assembly where an ailing Premchand, who died only a few days later, spoke of this revolution in light of a critical humanism (*manavataavad*), his own art of short story occupying something of a transitional space between the romantic idealism of a bygone era, and the socialist realism of younger revolutionary progressives like Anand, Zaheer and Ali. As Fatima Rizvi notes, the Progressive short story in Urdu (*taraqqi-pasand afsana*) was 'essentially humanistic in tone', exhibiting interests in 'radicalism, gender issues, cultural mores and problematics of Partition ... [it worked by] coalescing traditional and vernacular literary genres with

¹² See the section 'The Aim of Literature' (p.6) in *The Oxford India Premchand*, ed. by Francesca Orsini (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). The term *sabhya*, though literally translated as civilised, holds a contested meaning in relationship to the progressive literary movement in India. While, in most of Premchand's essays, the term is frequently used to demarcate a socially conscious literature from the *asabhya* literatures, such as the cheaper, more popular 'genre' fiction (romance, crime, pornography), the term can hardly be applied to the more belligerent camp of progressive writing such as the *Angarey* collective, which I will study in the third chapter of this thesis.

¹³ Orsini, *The Oxford India Premchand*, p. 15.

¹⁴ The Manifesto was first published in *Left Review* (Paris, 1935) and translated to Hindi by Premchand himself in *Hans* in 1936. For a comparison, see Coppola, I-III.

Western literary tendencies'.¹⁵ The Urdu *afšana*, certainly the progressive movement's *chef d'oeuvre*, jumped out in that political moment, from a transition of older, more didactic styles characterised by ornate and prolix Perso-Arabic prose into the clarity and restraint of Hindavi-Urdu.¹⁶ This was a shift that also absorbed, as critics like Priya Joshi and A.J. Zaidi have shown, influences from the industrial scale of translations done by the colonial translational machinery, especially the ignominious Fort William College, 'osmotic at large' in developing modern Urdu prose by bringing work of several European modernists to readers in the *bhasas*.¹⁷

Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of the *Hindustani Kabani*, an expression for the short story in the early twentieth century that appears frequently in Premchand's essayistic corpus, is that it moved away from the conservative ethos of the previous century and aimed for a kind of writing that could touch the masses, and resonate with the realities of struggle (*sangharsh*) in the period that ultimately led to freedom from colonial rule. As early as 1939, the shift towards socialist realism in Hindi and Urdu prose genres had caught critical attention, evident in Shaista Akhtar Suhrawady's watchful remark that 'while the earlier tendency had been to promote submission, patience and endurance; revolt and defiance were now the norm'.¹⁸ Stephen Alter, a noted anthologist of colonial era Indian short prose, has also noted that 'most writers of [Premchand's] generation chose the short story as their preferred genre' (26). These short stories constituted at large 'a literature of social protest ... with a deeply felt social conscience', the socially relatable figures and characters within

¹⁵ Fatima Rizvi, 'The Progressive Urdu Afsana: Toward a New Aesthetic', *South Asian Review*, 33.1 (2012), 91-111 (p. 92).

¹⁶ For further reading, see Aijaz Ahmad, *In the Mirror of Urdu: Reconstructions of Nation and Community, 1947-65* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993). The most authoritative philological history of Urdu, though still limited by its focus on verse, is Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, 'A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 1', in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. by Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 806-63.

¹⁷ See Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). See also Ali Jawad Zaidi, *A History of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 18.

¹⁸ Shaista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy, *Handbook of Urdu Literature: Including a Critical Survey of the Development of Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2003). See also the original 1939: Shaista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardy, 'A Critical Survey of the Development of Urdu Novel and the Short-Story' (unpublished PhD Thesis, SOAS University of London, 1939).

them seen as often resisting ‘the oppressive constrictions of society, colonialism, and bigotry’.¹⁹ In his ‘Sahitya ka Uddesya’ (The Aim of Literature)—the title of Premchand’s address in 1936—he himself alludes to the realist-humanist (or what he has elsewhere ponderously called idealist-realist, translated from the original Hindi as *aadarashmukhi yatharthavadi*, or a realist vision of an idealist and moralist world) aims of the short story writer in India:

वह कहानी लिखता है पर वास्तविकता का ध्यान रखते हुए; मूर्ति बनता है ऐसी की उसमें सजीवता हो और भावव्यंजकता भी। वह मानव प्रकृति का सूक्ष्म दृष्टि से अवलोकन करता है, मनोविज्ञान का अध्ययन करता है और इसका यातना करता है की उसके पात्र हर हालात में और हर मौके पर, इस तरह आचरण करे, जैसे रक्त मांस का बना मनुष्य करता है। अपनी सहज सहानुभूति और सौंदर्य प्रेम के कारण वह जीवन के उन सूक्ष्म स्थानों तक जा पहुँचता है, जहाँ मनुष्य अपनी मनुष्यता के कारन पहुंचे में असमर्थ होता है।

[A writer] writes short stories [*kahani*] but with an eye to reality; he makes sculptures that resemble life and bear life-like expressions. His labour is the absolute surveyal of human condition, which includes an assessment of the psychological state of being a human. His characters, in every circumstance, will behave as humans do in flesh and blood. This is why stories are a work of empathy; it is through a writer’s empathy and love for simple truths that he unearths those concealed secrets of the human condition, which humans, even in their humanity, are unable to do without literature.²⁰

Premchand’s emphasis on the ‘assessment of the psychological condition of being human’ is in fact a thinly veiled disavowal of the short prose form of the earlier decades, which focused on classical, fabulous and monarchic tropes, keeping safely away from any activity in the public or political sphere and resigning itself to the sphere of the unreal (*naqali*) or magical (*tilism*). In his essays, Premchand

¹⁹ Alter, ‘The Short Story in India’, p. 26.

²⁰ Translation is mine. For the original Hindi see Premchand, “Sahitya Ka Uddeshya” [The Aim of Literature], in *People’s Art in the Twentieth Century* (Kolkata: Jana Natya Manch, 2000), pp. 74–87. For alternative translations of Premchand’s address see Orsini, *The Oxford India Premchand*, p. 10. See also ‘The Aim of Literature’ (p. 142) in Sudhi Pradhan, *Marxist Cultural Movements in India: Chronicles and Documents, 1943–1964*, 4 vols (Calcutta: Santi Pradhan, 1979), III.

even marks out some of these texts which formed the bulk of short story readership until the turn of the century and underscores their literary accessibility (*sabajta*) as a model for his ‘modern’ Indian short story. In essence, the modern short story writer was to leverage the simplicity of this form—evident in classical works of ‘entertainment’ (*ras hi ki pradbanta hai*, where entertainment ‘rules’) such as *Bag O Bahar*, *Sahasra Rajani Charitra*, *Jatakakatha*, and *Baital Pachissi*, and hijack its large readership to illuminate the social evils of a society that was undergoing rapid changes.²¹ The project not only placed the short story in an almost beguiling light, a covert instrument of permeating the spirit of Indian resistance, but also attributed its aesthetic genealogy to classical short prose forms of the continent.

Christina Osterheld even proposes that the whole of modern Urdu prose fiction, which was later to have such luminous practitioners as Qurratulain Hyder (1927-2007) and Intizar Hussain (1925-2016), owes itself to the preponderance of classical short prose forms in the eighteenth-century: *qissas* (anecdotes), *lata’if* (witticisms) and *naqaliy’at* (fables). These forms had historically dominated longer prose genres such as travel-writings (*safar-namah*), autobiographies (*kbudnavisht*) and essays (*inshaiyah*), and this had also meant a dominance of the *afšana* until there came a resurgence of the Urdu novel in the 1950s.²² Too little is known of the ‘near disappearance’ of the novel form from Hindi and Urdu fiction in the late-colonial period, especially after such early and illustrious path-breakers as *Umraon Jaan Ada* (Muhammad Hadi Ruswa, 1899) and *Anandmath* (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, 1882), though speculations routinely point to the interest taken by resistance movements in deploying the short story over the novel to reach the common reading classes.²³ Stephen Alter’s explanation is the one that will best resonate with Premchand’s emphasis on the affirmative relationship between the short story and the reader ‘who has neither money nor time’—‘whatever the aims and intentions of its author, a novel is designed, published and marketed as a form of private property, whereas a story that appears in a journal or newspaper, is available to a more collective

²¹ Premchand, ‘Kahani Kala’, p. 74.

²² Christina Osterheld, ‘Enlightenment and Reform: Urdu Narrative Genres in the Nineteenth Century’, in *India’s Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Vasudha Dalmia and Stuart H. Blackburn (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004). Quoted in Rizvi, p. 93.

²³ See Aamir R Mufti, ‘A Greater Story-Writer than God: Genre, Gender and Minority in Late Colonial India’, *Subaltern Studies*, 11 (2001), 1-36 (p. 9).

audience'.²⁴ This agit-prop formulation of the short story does not usually offer any guidance to its textual and formal critique, (equally, the unqualified implication that the novel was always a bourgeois form also constrains the view of its political functions), but it is nevertheless a fact that in political contexts where propagation of a political ideal is the aim—such as in the progressive context in late-colonial India—the short form has been successful in finding readers, writers, editors, and publishers far more easily than the novel. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Urdu context. As Amir Mufti notes in his *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 'Urdu [was] unique in its emphasis on the short story ... in the Urdu language, the hierarchical relationship of the novel to the short story that is expected of any major tradition, is reversed'.²⁵ As I will show in the later sections of this chapter, Mufti perhaps overstates how unique Urdu was in its emphasis on the short story form, and is also wide of the mark in stating that the 'major' tradition always privileges the novel to the short story, even though that is true of several major *critical* traditions, foremost among them canonical postcolonial studies where the privileging of the novel over the short story is intertwined, as I have earlier alluded to, with its disproportionate investment in questions of nationalism and nation-building.

Elsewhere, the primacy of the short story in the late-colonial period is explained using its status akin to a commodity good; this was, after all, a period marked by an upsurge in literacy, the rapid spread of print-capitalism, and the emergence of the magazine as an established medium of literary transmission. Francesca Orsini recognises 'a radical phase in the first half of the twentieth century, during which most journals became platforms for a wide-ranging and hard-hitting questioning of Indian society, of gender roles and spheres of activity, and also became a vehicle for politicisation'.²⁶ Alongside magazines, pamphlets, particularly in Urdu, came to be produced almost locally. Sajjad Zaheer, who was later to become the leader of the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPM), was one among four writers (others being Ahmed Ali, Rashed Jahan and Mahmuduzzafar) whose pamphlet *Angarey* (Embers, 1932) served as a catalyst for not only the Progressive Writers Association but also short story pamphlets (*galparcha*) in several Indian languages in the 1930s. It was, as in Mehr

²⁴ Alter, 'The Short Story in India', p. 26.

²⁵ Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, p. 182.

²⁶ Francesca Orsini, 'Domesticity and Beyond: Hindi Women's Journals in the Early Twentieth Century', *South Asia Research*, 19.2 (1999), 137–60 (p. 137).

Afshaan Farooqi's superlative assessment, 'a metaphorical flame that would burn the Indo-Muslim society's prejudice down to the ground and would help to build a new social and political structure'.²⁷ The pamphlet was banned on the basis of its alleged profanity by the British colonial government, pressured by the deeply religious and conservative Muslim high society. But the significant extent to which the critical spirit of *Angarey* became a model for Urdu short prose writing in the 1930s is made evident in the flood of pamphlets that came out in the wake of it, many of which, published by seditious presses in Lucknow, Aligarh and Delhi, not only shared its subjective themes and choice of content, but also contained similar, subtly-referenced titles: *Sholay* (Flames), *Chingari* (Sparks), *Mohabbat aur Nafrat* (Love and Hatred), *Manzil* (Destination), *Anokhi Musibat* (Unusual Calamity), *Aurat* (Woman), and so on.²⁸ The 1936 Lucknow progressive assembly, in fact, saw participation by many writers who wrote in the same register as the *Angarey* collective, and are today considered canonical in *bhasas*, but have not seen an equivalent uptake in postcolonial English scholarship.²⁹ A brief ride along the rich and prolific lanes of the history of short prose writing in Urdu, and indeed Hindi 'before the divide', would throw up names like Sa'adat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991), Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (1916-2006), Rajinder Singh Bedi (1915-1984), Yashpal (1903-1976), Kamleshwar (1932-2007), Krishan Chander (1914-1977), Upendranath Ashk (1910-1996), Sajjad Zaheer (1899-1973), Mumtaz Mufti (1905-1995), Syed Mohammed Ashraf (1914-1964), Muhammad Hasan Askari (1919-1978), and Jamila Hashmi (1924-1981).³⁰

In Sindhi and Punjabi, accessible literary journals like *Prit Lari* (edited by Gurbaksh Pritlari) and *Phulbani* (edited by Nadir Beg, 1891-1940) published short fiction in the early 1920s which dealt

²⁷ Mehr Farooqi, p. 76.

²⁸ One of the best Urdu language surveys of the short story boom following the publication of *Angarey* is Ali Ahmad Suroor, 'Urdu men Afsana Nigari,' in *Urdu Afsana Rivayat Aur Masa'il [The Good and Bad in the Urdu Short Story]*, ed. by Gopi Chand Narang (New Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1981). See also Gopi Chand Narang, 'Major Trends in the Urdu Short Story', *Indian Literature*, 16.1/2 (1973), 113-32 (p. 115).

²⁹ See Alter, 'The Short Story in India'.

³⁰ For a study of the Hindu-Urdu language divide, see Francesca Orsini, *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010). See also *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Stuart H. Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

with both classical (*Sufi*) and modernist (*navi*) themes.³¹ It was *Prabhat*, a magazine (also publishing work in English) founded by Marxist writer Sohan Singh Josh that brought the Punjabi short story (sometimes called *galla*) into closer thematic affinity with the Progressive movement by publishing writers like Nanak Singh (1897-1971), S.S. Narula (1917-1990), Sujan Singh (1909-1947) and the controversial Kartar Singh Duggal (1917-2012).³² Punjabi short stories such as ‘Kitan Andar Kit’ (Worms inside Worms, 1936, Sant Singh Sekhon), as well as work from political pamphlets like *Sard Abum* (A First Winter, 1939, Govind Panjabi) and *Registani Phool* (Desert Flower, 1944, Govinda Malhi), normally features alongside work in other *bhasas* in any contemporary anthology of Indian short fiction, found often in English translations by international publishing companies like Penguin, Viking or Orient.³³ In languages like Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil, Oriya and Marathi, the short story flourished in the decades of 1930s and 1940s. In the Tamil language, *Manikodi* (est. 1933), a journal dedicated entirely to the publication of this ‘new’ short form, published work from writers like Putthumaipittan (1906-1948) and Ku. Pa Rajagopalacharan (1878-1972) and left an indelible impression on the history of the form in the Indian context.³⁴ As with Tamil, a tremendous linguistic barrier prohibits me from going into further specifics of the form and its thematic and critical interests in any of these languages except English, Hindi and Urdu. Some accents, however, are recognised across the continent, thanks to the work of translators, editors, and anthologists.

In Malayalam: *Jivitha Sahitya Prashthanam* (tr. ‘literature’s first duty is to life’), often associated with the output of Marxist writers Vaikom Mohammed Basheer (1908-2004), Uroob (1915-1979), and Thakazhi Sivasankaran Pillai (1912-1999); in Telugu: the work of Veluri Sivaram Shastri (1892-1967) and Adavi Bapiraju (1895-1942); in Oriya, the popular *galpa* form, as in Fakirmohan Senapati’s *Galpa Svalpa* (1917), not to mention the rich work of the *Naba Yuga Sahitya Samsad* (New

³¹ For further reading, see Sawindara Singh Uppala, *Punjabi Short Story: Its Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Pushp Prakashan, 1966).

³² Das, III, p. 272.

³³ See Stephen Alter, *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories* (London: Penguin UK, 2001). *Best Indian Short Stories*, ed. by Khushwant Singh, 3 vols (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2004). See also Sanjay Balurav, *Panorama: An Anthology of Modern Indian Short Stories* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1986).

³⁴ Das, III, p. 265.

Age Literary Forum), which appeared a year before the PWA wearing similar emancipatory aims, and linked often with the work of duo Kalindi and Bhagvati Charan, especially their stories focusing on the Adivasi struggle, such as 'Jangalee' (In the Forests, 1929) and 'Shikaar' (The Hunt, 1936); in Marathi, where the extent of the proliferation of the short prose form was second only to Urdu, the work of V.V. Bokil (1903-73) and D.R. Kavethekar (1900-78) who wrote frequently in journals like *Ratnakar* and *Yasvanti* made first inroads into realist short prose, though the 'modern' story (*nava-katha*) came only to be with the work of writers like Arvind Gokhale (1919) and P.B. Bhave (1910-80).³⁵ Overall, these writers represent a collective consciousness and a critical and resistant spirit enshrined in the progressivist ethos of the time, drawing their revolutionary energies from both the anticolonial struggle, and the promenade of peasant and tribal uprisings that accompanied it.³⁶

The short stories that I will consider in this thesis are in English, Hindi and Urdu. And while I am aware of the discursive hegemony of Urdu prose (second perhaps only to English) in the study of late-colonial Indian literature, I am limited by the demands of comparative translational practice, which is that these texts be considered duly in their material and ephemeral contexts, and in their original print-cultures and languages. Although the writing considered in the following few pages may be apportioned into English, Hindi and Urdu, it may equally be viewed as approximate in the sense that these languages often flow into each other to create a hybrid linguistic form, such as in Mulk Raj Anand's use of 'folk', or in Manto's deployment of the dialectal quality of 'rumour'. These were all short story writers guided by the spirit of progressive writing; although dominantly realist in their narrative practice, theirs' was a spirit that sought to deploy language and its representational power as an innovative and penetrating affective weapon, smudging the lines between realism and

³⁵ Das, III, p. 263.

³⁶ Too much bibliographical work is still needed to be done to trace the emergence of the 'short story' in India's minor dialects. And likewise, literary work in several Adivasi languages in the late colonial era is yet to be translated. Though not always the most illustrative from a critical point of view, the work on Indian literatures in this period commissioned by the Sahitya Akademi, India's national academy of letters, is very useful. See, in particular, essays on the short story: 'Hindi' (p.572) by Bhisham Sahni; 'Malayalam' (p.775) by M. Achuthan; 'Tamil' (p.815) by S. Sivapatha Sundaram; 'Urdu' (p.829) by Joginder Paul; 'Punjabi' (p.708) by Gurcharan Singh in Karimpumannil Mathai George, *Comparative Indian Literature*, 5 vols (Thissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1984), II.

modernism. The thesis examines, therefore, through comparative translational practice, a body of literature that sought to reconfigure and challenge the concept of nation as a community, accounting for the voices that were seldom included by the nationalist elite in their privileged articulations of what ‘nation’ (and therefore national citizenship) would mean for some of India’s most historically disenfranchised communities, like the peasant classes, outcastes, and subalterns. Although this is a heterogenous group, the writers examined here agreed, in a crucial sense, on the significance of this laconic form—the short story—to the literary revolution that would accompany the fight for decolonisation, including the (ongoing) struggle against the inequalities rooted within Indian society along the obstinate lines of caste, class and gender.³⁷ Commenting on the thematic twists and turns of the short story, Mufti finds ‘narrative becoming a staging ground for a vision of national life as a secular social landscape: the life of India’s ‘eternal’ villages under the onslaughts of modernity, the psycho-sexual tensions and crises of middle class homes, the multi-layered energy and movement of the modern cities, each with its range of social types and problematics’.³⁸ In a broad sense, this thesis is a study of these ‘types and problematics’.

Premchand himself was by no means a revolutionary, writing in a letter to critic I.N. Madan that he believes in ‘social evolution [*samajik uttakraanti*] ... revolution [*samajik kranti*] is a failure of saner methods’, but his formal and thematic innovations in the domain of short prose writing had sparked a kind of aesthetic and thematic revolution in its own right.³⁹ Premchand’s editorship of the journal

³⁷ The close relationship between the nationalist Congress and the progressive literati of 1930s and 1940s is evidenced, among other things, by the participation of nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru in the meetings and events organised by literary groups like Hindi Sahitya Parishad (Hindi Literature Assembly) and Anjumann Taraqqi-Pasanda Musannifin-e-Hind (League of Progressive Writers, the Urdu precursor to the PWA). In Premchand’s correspondence with Zaheer in the lead up to the Lucknow Assembly, a matter frequently discussed is Nehru’s prospective chairmanship of the PWA itself. Some of the early editions of *Hans* contains (perhaps Premchand’s own) translations of Nehru’s addresses at these literary conferences. It is also well known that Gandhi presided over several meetings of the Hindu Sahitya Parishad in the 1920s and 1930s. For further reading, see Coppola, ‘Premchand’s Address to the First Meeting of the All-India Progressive Writers Association: Some Speculations’, p. 23.

³⁸ Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, p. 181.

³⁹ ‘Premchand to Indar Nath’ in Indar Nath Madan, *Modern Hindi Literature: A Critical Analysis* (Benaras: Minerva Book Shop, 1939), p. 210.

Hans, as well as his own short stories like ‘Uddhar’ (Debt), ‘Sudra’ (Untouchable), ‘Thakur ka Kuan’ (The Landlord’s Well), ‘Sadgati’ (The Deliverance) and ‘Satranj ke Khiladi’ (The Chess Players), published in the 1920s, paved a way for adoption of new content into the classical reserve of Indian prose. Known for her translations of not only Premchand’s work but also many of his contemporaries like Intizar Hussain and Phanishwarnath Renu, Rakshanda Jalil notes: ‘The injustices of the caste system, the vicious circle of poverty, social ostracism, usury, and the evil moneylender; these motifs became almost synonymous [with Premchand]’.⁴⁰ The themes, atmospheres, subjects and motifs rendered in these stories were picked up by various strands of progressive culture, with dramatic and cinematic adaptations of these stories appearing frequently. Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, two of India’s most widely acclaimed filmmakers of the twentieth century, also associated with the Indian Progressive Theatre Association (IPTA), adapted texts like ‘Satranj ke Khiladi’ (The Chess Players) to both the screen (1976) and the stage (1951).⁴¹

The short story flourished after Independence in both Hindi and Urdu. With Hindi writers like Nirmal Verma, Mohan Rakesh, and Bhisham Sahni, more experimental and less radical styles like the ‘Nayi Kahani’ (the new story) took centre-stage, wresting the short story away from the strict dictums of socialist realism, and towards a late modernism—referred to in Hindi as *aadhuniktaavad* and in Urdu as *jadidparast adab* or *jadidy’at*. In Urdu, the *Halqa* (or *Halqa-e-Arab-e-Zauq*), an anti-doctrinaire wing of the progressive front which split away from it in 1939, launched an opposition to the *taraqqi-pasand afsana* along the lines of form.⁴² The movement is often associated with the work of short story writer (and according to Farooqi, Urdu’s first literary critic) Muhammad Hasan Askari, who published his pamphlet *Jazirey* (Islands) in 1943. Other names associated with the

⁴⁰ See ‘Preface’ in Premchand, *The Temple and the Mosque: Best of Premchand*, ed. by Rakshanda Jalil (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012).

⁴¹ Regrettably, there is no notable book-length study of the culture of adapting progressive *bhasas* short stories to screen (and radio) in the colonial context, but a useful reading from a formal perspective is Anuradha Sharma and Abhishek Chandel, ‘A Study of the Cinematic Adaptation of Premchand’s Shatranj Ke Khiladi.’, *Language in India*, 18.10 (2018).

⁴² The heyday of the *Halqa* movement, to which these writers were only ambivalently attached, and which was far stronger in Pakistan than in India, came in the 1950s and 1960s, and falls outside the direct scope of my thesis, but one of the best surveys in the English language is the biography of Muhammad Hasan Askari by Mehr Afshaan Farooqi. See Mehr Farooqi.

movement were Ali Sardar Jafri (the founding editor of the influential *Naya Adab* in 1936), and even writers like Miraji, Noon Meem Rashid, Ahmed Ali and Sa'adat Hasan Manto, who all slowly strayed away from the progressivist front—Manto even lampooning it as 'Bombay's Kremlin'—even though, it is conjectured, that this had more to do with personal differences and party politics than with any shift in their literary proclivities.⁴³ As Jalil has shown in her *Liking Progress, Loving Change* (2014), the critical spirit very much lived on in much of their writing even after the decline of the PWA as an organised front. Writers like Miraji and Manto continued to write politically engaged fiction until the ends of their literary careers in Pakistan.⁴⁴

A Politics of Form

But what does 'political engagement' entail for the short story writer? Is it Premchand's *sangharsh* (struggle) where the politics of realist representation may tend barely to the depiction of resistance against oppression? After all, Premchand's essays in *Kabanikala* are rather forceful in impressing the importance of this *sangharsh* as what gives power and agency to being (*humari aatma ko shakti kahan se mili hai—shakti sangharsh me hai*) and literature as but a 'harvest' of this resistance (*sangharsh se sabitya upajta hai*). Or is it tragedy? Mulk Raj Anand, another short story writer that I consider at length in this thesis, explained his take on a politics of social realism at a convention in Calcutta in 1938 as 'a portrayal... of all those tragedies in the obscure lanes and alleys of our towns and villages ... taking us from the infancy of our six thousand years to millenniums [sic] of an elemental struggle for individual perfection'.⁴⁵ Ahmed Ali, diplomat, critic, professor, translator of Quran, fluent in several languages such as Indonesian and Japanese from which he translated into Urdu, articulates his politics of literature as 'an intellectual revolt against the outmoded past, the vitiated tendencies

⁴³ For the 'Bombay's Kremlin' comment, see Manto's column 'Progressives Socha Nahi Karte' in *Nuqoosh* (1954). Even Miraji used the term *haqiqat-parast* (worshipping reality) to describe a strict social realist style limited by mimesis.

⁴⁴ See 'The Decline of the Progressive Movement' (p.339) in Rakhshanda Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014). See also 'Sustaining Faith: The Legacy of Progressive Writing' (p.146) in Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, p. 184.

in contemporary thought and literature, the indifference of people to their human condition, against acquiesce to foreign rule, enslavement to practices and beliefs, both social and religious, based on ignorance, against the problems of poverty and exploitation, and complete inanity to progress and life'.⁴⁶ But from what grimaces may these political aims suffer when representation itself asks for a confrontation with tragedy, not simply of roads and alleyways, or of poverty and destitution, but of a holocaust like the Partition in 1947? What, then, becomes of the politics of the short story? The fourth writer I consider in this thesis is, in fact, Manto, arguably the most virtuosic practitioner of the Urdu short story, renowned for narrativizing the violence and trauma of Partition in a language at once grave, boisterous, and to say the very least, controversial.

The politics of Manto's short story—especially his most defiant form *fasadat ke afsane*, or 'the riot short stories'—is perhaps best encapsulated in his sharp remark, made famous by several films on Manto's life and times: 'I am not a sensationalist; I just make no attempts to dress up the society, which is, in any case, naked ... So if you want to finish off modern (*jadid*) literature, or progressive (*tarraqi-pasand*) literature, or 'obscene' (*fabaish*) literature, or whatever you want to call it, you need to first finish off the circumstances that created them'.⁴⁷ This may seem like a dogged defence of social realism, but it is Manto's *afsana* that most threatens the category of realist short prose in the late-colonial Indian context. Tried for obscenity (*fabaishyat*) by governments in both India and Pakistan, Manto's unflinching treatment of sexual exploitation and violence has been a mainstay in the study of Partition, an event which continues, in spite of recent fugitive-historical forays from scholars Veena Das, Urvashi Butalia, Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon, to suffer from great historical amnesia and attrition.⁴⁸ This is because of the nature of Partition's violence, which was highly

⁴⁶ Quoted in Joshi, p. 202. Joshi further goes on to describe this statement as 'both a manifesto for, and against modernity' (p.207).

⁴⁷ Sa'adat Hasan Manto, 'Modern Literature', in *Manto My Love*, trans. by Harish Narang (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2006), p. 200.

⁴⁸ The work of feminist historiography, as I reiterate in Chapter 4, is foundational for the discipline of Partition studies. A survey of this work, described as 'a new outlaw genre ... [of] feminist intersubjective historiography', can be sought from the review essay: Paola Bacchetta and others, 'Review: Reinterrogating Partition Violence: Voices of Women/Children/Dalits in India's Partition', *Feminist Studies*, Points of Departure: India and the South Asian Diaspora, 26.3 (2000), 566–85.

gendered and sexualised, as well as the significance of the woman figure as a national referent in both countries, demanding that the violence upon its body must be effaced to preserve national and familial honour. As I will examine in more depth later, the fragmentary form of Manto's short stories is a lucid example of how the unspeakability of Partition's gendered violence, as well as the uncommunicative nature of Partition memory, turns realist expression into a form of *witnessing*, posing a hermeneutic challenge to a persistent 'realism-modernism' divide of the Europhone world. By drawing upon the culturally and linguistically specific modes of utterances, remembrances, and even forgetting, Manto attempts, in stories like 'Khol Do' (1951), 'Phundne' (1955) and in sketches from the experimental prose collection *Siyah Hashiye* (1952), a language that sits at the very limit of realist representation. Harish Trivedi, in an essay comparing Manto with Premchand, identifies the former's style with 'a surreal intensity of physical observation and description of detail ... [with] an acuteness of sensory perception and representation that goes beyond simple realism'.⁴⁹ Such is the feeling of synonymy between 'literary progressivism' and 'literary realism' in the context of Indian literatures, that a departure from the realist underpinnings of the progressive short story, evident in Manto's *fasadat ke afsane*, has precipitated a large debate in South Asian scholarship on the meaning of realism itself; its referents, its precedents, its antecedents, its relationship to the nation.

Although a writer of exceeding significance in his own right, when Manto's work is studied in short story criticism's reiterative anthological mode, he is placed alongside writers in Urdu, Punjabi and Bengali to constitute the category of the 'riot story'. Alok Bhalla's four volume anthology is an indicator of the kind of writing canonised under the umbrella term 'riot short story' in the context of Indian Partition: 'Separated from the Flock' by Syed Mohammed Ashraf, 'The Exiles' by Jamila Hashmi, 'Lajwanti' by Rajinder Singh Bedi. Often, several writers who have written more recently on the subject of Partition such as Khushwant Singh (1915-2014), Attia Hosain (1914-1998) and Salman Rushdie (b. 1947), come along to constitute the prolific category of Partition literature from

⁴⁹ Harish Trivedi, 'Manto, God, Premchand and Some Other Storytellers', *Social Scientist*, 40.11/12 (2012), 63-73 (p. 65).

India.⁵⁰ Although most of these writers made adaptations to their brands of realism to grapple with the scale and nature of this tragedy, the lens through which these ‘riot stories’ are considered in the academy today is largely testimonial, with a dominant historiographical and social function. In other words, the texts are read mostly as realistic and mimetic inscriptions of the riots. To speak here of a politics of the short story ‘form’ is to allude either to form as a generic choice (as in asking why these writers turned to the short story—and not the novel—to inscribe the violence of Partition) or form as an aesthetic choice (albeit relevant only for its capacity to bring to the fore political conditions, as realism tends to do, reiterating that form refracts politics of the time in which a text is written). To be sure, both these allusions to ‘a politics of form’ can be productive alleyways, but a discussion of the politics of the short story form must go beyond the speculative and undetermined framework of ‘choice’. If literary form is what *is*, it is also what *is not*, and what *cannot be*. ‘Manto’s short stories’, according to Alex Padamsee, ‘[represent] a collapse of formal systems ... a dissolution of criteria’.⁵¹ Within the context of Partition, while under a tremendous burden of bearing witness to the mutual holocaust of over two million people, the politics of literary form cannot be articulated just in terms of artistic choice and ‘innovation’. To pause and think of Theodor W. Adorno’s provocative remark on the barbarity of poetry after Auschwitz, here too the whole autonomy of literary form is brought into question.⁵² Is the short story merely, as generic or aesthetic choice, a means to bear testimony? Or do these choices, sometimes forced, *tell* us something else about the historicity of the event or phenomenon it records in ways that other forms of narration (including historiographical narration) cannot?

⁵⁰ See *Stories about the Partition of India*, ed. by Alok Bhalla, 4 vols (New Delhi: Indus, 1994). More recently, Anna Bernard has proposed a collective paradigm to study short stories from the Partition in different contexts, such as from India, Ireland and Palestine. See Anna Bernard, ‘Forms of Memory: Partition as a Literary Paradigm’, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 30, 2010, 9–34.

⁵¹ Alex Padamsee, ‘Uncertain Partitions: “Undecidability” and the Urdu Short Story’, *Wasafiri*, 23.1 (2008), 1–5 (p. 3).

⁵² See Klaus Hofmann, ‘Poetry after Auschwitz—Adorno’s Dictum’, *German Life and Letters*, 58.2 (2005), 182–94.

Calling the Urdu *afsana* ‘a concrete modern bid to give [...] ‘subjective freedom’ a form’, Mufti makes some headway into the politics of the short story form in the late-colonial era.⁵³ In arguably the most secular period in the history of Urdu literature, where, as Mufti has shown, writers could not address a primarily Muslim audience (as many like Iqbal had been able to do only a few decades earlier), the very decision to write in a language can be read as a component of form. This is the first level at which there is, so to speak, a formal politics to the Indian *bhasas* short story. Consider that *Angarey* was written in Urdu by Oxbridge-educated English writers; Premchand was writing all through the 1920s and 30s in both the Nastaliq and Nagari scripts (at the time the principal markers of Hindi and Urdu); Manto turned to the Urdu short story after a career, albeit short, in scriptwriting and translation; Ahmed Ali himself translated most of his English work into Urdu and vice-versa. The choice of language in the context of Indian multilingualism (where languages exist as ‘different registers of the same language’, to recall Kothari and Wakabayashi) is often a marker of form—it is choosing not only a given readership, but also conventions, etiquettes and codes that are available to a given linguistic repertoire.⁵⁴ In this sense, language becomes, perhaps more so than in monolingual contexts, a component of form and of formal politics rather than a functional-expressive medium in which anything such as a ‘pure aesthetic form’ could be realised.

Form is therefore an inherently translational concept in the context of Indian writing. Although Mufti himself does not make this point, it is something that could be inferred from his observation that Manto’s act of writing in the Urdu *afsana*, ‘itself a ‘minor’ genre that is made to do the work in Urdu [...] of a major one’, has an implicit connection to that overexamined aspect of Indian literary politics in this period—nationalism. Mufti states that ‘what is implicit in [Manto’s] practice of the short story form [is] an immanent critique of nationalism’s divine ambitions, of its claim to God-like perch above society’.⁵⁵ While there is no denying that formal and linguistic choices in a decolonial context can be *immanent* critiques of larger political movements and formations, the claim that the *afsana*, and the realist mode within which it operated in that period, can be alternatively or even better spoken of as ‘national realism’ (184) is perhaps overreaching. Several of the short stories that

⁵³ Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, p. 178.

⁵⁴ Wakabayashi and Kothari, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, p. 183.

I study in this thesis would appear to speak to the locatedness and ephemerality of this form, to how their textual qualities have been shaped under colonial and communal politics, rather than to their commitment to placing their 'secular-national' subjects in a relationship, be it even subversive, to the 'Indian' nation as such.

Interpreting the short story's politics of form and language as a function of nationalist currents also risks narrowing discussions of the short story beyond the sociological role it played, as part of what Srivastava and Ciocca have theorised as the 'literary public sphere' of India.⁵⁶ Such interpretations may conceal subtler and more nuanced ways in which a spirit of political resistance is present within the intractable workings of the Indian short story. There is no denying that these literary texts exist in a relationship to the public sphere, 'a notion with which to interrogate the role of literature and the media in their interplay with society and politics' (14). But it is essential in examining the way literature is formally structured within the public sphere that the public sphere itself is not treated as a category of negation, but rather, as a domain in relationship to which the narrative articulates its aesthetic, political and ethical concerns. There is a tendency within postcolonial studies to label realism, not as a formal or modal category of aesthetic production, but as a container for reformist and revolutionary tropes. In *Literary Radicalism in India*, even Gopal makes the confrontational claim that 'realism [...] is less a specific aesthetic technique than a philosophy that brings together an affective sense of justice, fairness and harmony with an understanding of all that violates that sense'.⁵⁷ While there was, indeed, a strong philosophical and affective ethos guiding realism that succeeded in consolidating many contrary writing styles of the period within the Indian progressive movement, 'realism' also spawned a significant aesthetic debate with real consequences for the what and how of representation. One of the reasons it is disappointing to note that Premchand's essays *Kahanikala* has remained entirely outside the sight of English scholars on Indian literatures is that these essays elucidate upon several incumbent debates in the field, such as upon the significance of realism as a specific mode in Indian progressive writing. Premchand writes—

⁵⁶ Ciocca and Srivastava, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 27.

कहानी में जो सामग्री उत्पन्न हो वह नग्न यथार्थ न होकर यथार्थ जैसी लगनी चाहिए क्योंकि उसका पटल अत्यंत संक्षिप्त होता है जबकि नग्न यथार्थ वितृष्णा उपजाता है। पात्र अपने जीवन में कभी सुख कभी दुःख की अनुभूति करता है तो इसका प्रस्तुतिकरण लेखक कलात्मक व औचित्यपूर्ण ढंग से करे जिससे पाठक भी सहमत हों। साहित्यिक न्याय इसे ही कहते हैं।

The material that is produced in the short story should not conform to naked realism (*nagna yathartha*) but a form that is only like realism, because a veil (*patal*) over reality is most evanescent (*atyanta sankshipt*) while naked realism leads to a sense of ending (*vitrishna*). Characters (*patra*) who show emotions like joy and grief must render out with sensuousness and artistry, so that readers may also be satisfied. There is literary justice in this.⁵⁸

What is evident in Premchand's doctrinaire conception of a form that is like realism, but not naked realism (*nagna yathartha*), is a view that mere representation of reality does not by itself constitute literariness, but that it is within a text's self-consciousness as a text (where such a self-consciousness is only thinly and evanescently foregrounded, as opposed to, say, modernist texts, where literary texts are acutely aware of their status as texts) as well as its reliance upon affect (*auchityapurna dhang se...*) and technique (*kalanatmak*, literally 'as art') that a 'just' reality may present itself. Elsewhere in the essays, he writes:

कथा के बीच में जड़ता का वह पर्दा नहीं होता, जो मनुष्य के हृदय को दुसरे मनुष्य के हृदय से दूर रखता है। और अगर हम यथार्थ को हू-ब-हू खींच के रख दे तोह उसमे कला कहाँ है? कला केवल यथार्थ का नक़ल का नाम नहीं है। [...]

कला दिखती तो यथार्थ है पर यथार्थ होती नहीं। [...] कला का रहस्य भ्रान्ति है, पर वह भ्रान्ति जिसपे यथार्थ का आवरण पड़ा हो।

There is no such veil of insensitivity in the short story that separates a human heart from another human heart. And yet, if you haul up reality and present it as it is in a text—where is art? Art should appear like reality, not be it [...] The mystery of art is delusion (*bhranti*); but a form of delusion upon which is laid a cover of reality.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Translation is mine. Premchand, 'Kahani Kala', p. 14.

⁵⁹ Translation is mine. Premchand, 'Kahani Kala', pp. 33-34.

For such a rare and capacious articulation of literary realism to exist in 1920s India (note that the original sequence of the publication of essays in Premchand's *Kahanikala* is unknown) points to an awareness of realism as more than just a progressive rhetoric within the literary intelligentsia of the time. Realism, for the short story writer, was a ground upon which complex artistic claims could be staked. This is not a mimetic engagement with what Ciocca and Srivastava (borrowing actually from Habermas's 1989 concept) have called the 'public sphere', but represents a political alertness to how an aesthetic entity such as the *kahani*, striving towards justice rather than its own betterment, is able to positively and retroactively shape the public sphere.⁶⁰ In the very next line, Premchand goes on to further assert the status of the short story as first and foremost a work of art, but one that is still capable of changing society: 'a story must contain only what is capable of social development (*samaaj nirmaan*); alongside it however, it must, through representation (*patha-pradarshan*) be able to engage affectively with the reader (*sundar bhaav va aatma santushti jaga sake*).'⁶¹ Some other formulations of what realism meant in the period also speak to the pervasiveness of 'realism' as an aesthetic debate in the vernacular. Manto's take on realism, to take only one example related to this thesis, was vastly different to Premchand's in *Kahanikala*. There, the trope of nakedness appears as a signifier of what needs to be uncomfortably foregrounded, rather than what needs to be 'veiled'—

میں اس معاشرے کے اپر کیا کپڑا ڈالو جو پہلے سے ہی ننگا ہے

Main uss maashre ke upar kya qapda daalu jo pehle se hi nanga hai

What clothes shall I put on this society (*ma'ashra*) that is already naked?⁶²

The differences can of course be attributed to Manto's and Premchand's vastly different politics of literature, evident in Premchand's aversion to deviant matters of sexuality and sexual oppression and regressive views on the representation of Indian womanhood. Yet, for such forceful articulations of realism to exist within a discourse that was dedicated to the short story meant that there also existed, at the time, a sense of realism's generic distinctions—what all was to be included within the content of realist representation specifically in the Indian short story?

⁶⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Berger and Frederik Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

⁶¹ Premchand, 'Kahani Kala', p. 14.

⁶² Sa'adat Hasan Manto, 'Jaib-e-Kafan [The Shroud's Pocket]', *Manto Nama*, 1990, 221–29 (p. 224).

Several parallels in *bhasas* discourse may be drawn with Western scholarship invested in charting the politics of this form. Frank O' Connor's remark about the distinctive psychological content of the short story—'always in the short story, there is a sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society'—may find its reflective double in Premchand's formulation of *kahani's* '*vishaya vastu*' (subjects and objects); 'the modern short story' according to Premchand, 'fulfils itself through a psychoanalytical portrayal of the issues of the masses' (*jana sadharan ki samasyaon ka manovishlesh-natmak chitaran*).⁶³ Likewise, Nadine Gordimer's 'art of the present moment' may see its reflection within *bhasas* in Premchand's notion of the present (*vartaman kshana*) within the 'meaningful story' (*saarthak kahani*).⁶⁴ But despite there being a clear concentration on a politics of form in the *bhasas*, a critical prescript that reduces realist literary texts from the *bhasas* to mimetic representations of the conditions of the public and political sphere, consequentially abbreviating their 'performativity' as works of art, has dominated contemporary criticism. In this 'post-realist age', writes Ulka Anjaria, one among many critics committed to the 'performative dimensions' of realism, 'criticism has tended to favour the 'social' over the 'realist' within the 'social realist'.⁶⁵ It could be said that a politics of form, in its most routine interpretation, seeks to do the opposite—it examines the significance of social realism, more or less a period concept for the Indian short story, 'not only for the radical contents of its forms but also for the forms of its content'.⁶⁶

An inclination towards content over form within late-colonial (and indeed more recent) literary texts emanating from the global South may be partly explained, according to Anjaria, by a prevailing sense that 'the aesthetic project of social-realism [was] inseparable from an awareness of the belatedness, and thus critical insufficiency, of any aesthetic project under conditions of colonialism'.⁶⁷ It was this tendency to studying content over form that had, in the first instance, turned the novel into a 'pedagogical' tool for examining and teaching the politics of nationalism. Not only did the novel quite simply have more content over form compared to short story, but even critical estimates of

⁶³ O'Connor, p. 19; Premchand, 'Kahani Kala', p. 14.

⁶⁴ Gordimer, p. 459.

⁶⁵ Ulka Anjaria, 'Staging Realism and the Ambivalence of Nationalism in the Colonial Novel', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 44.2 (2011), 186–207 (p. 186).

⁶⁶ Anjaria, p. 186.

⁶⁷ Anjaria, p. 187.

'totality', 'linear temporality' and 'fixed rationalities' of its form, deriving from the work of heavily influential structuralist critics like Georgy Lukács, had left it to be swiftly associated with the flux of nationalism in the third-world. A clear summary of this specific phenomenon can be sought, in fact, from Homi Bhabha; if, for Lukács, the novel could capture 'a socialisation of the individual' (while the short story—a minor epic—could only capture the fleetingness and ambiguity of human life), the novel could also textualise the process of nationalism through its 'continuist, accumulative temporality'.⁶⁸ The short story, however, 'insinuate[ed] itself into the fabric of history at decolonization's moment, its repetitious, recursive pages ... dwelling on the scraps, patches and rags of daily life in an uncertain, passing contemporaneity'.⁶⁹ A move towards a politics of form may break this circuit, not only resisting a reading of literary texts as discursive accompaniments to the triumphs and challenges of nation-building in all decolonising contexts, but also, in particular, freeing the short story from its cage as a chronically neglected 'novelistic fragment' with yet to be leveraged nationalist pedagogies and totalising (read historical) narratives.

How will these politics of form then appear through the rest of the thesis? As both a conclusion to this chapter and a prologue to the next three, I am drawn to Walter Benjamin's melancholic essay on the work of Nikolai Leskov, a titan of the realist short story, not so much for any practical guidance it may offer for reading the short story, but as a suggestive elaboration of this move towards a politics of form. Published in the same year as the founding of the PWA, 'The Storyteller' claims that the figure of the storyteller is always 'someone who has come from afar'.⁷⁰ No space is made for notions of fixity or linearity that are so palpable in discussions of the novel. No distinctions are made even between the novel and the short story. Storytelling, for Benjamin, was a form reared among trading peasants rather than rooted citizens; a form that was so lastingly oral that even in its eventual shift onto the written page, there was, in Benjamin's characteristically poignant words, 'a sanction of death': '... death is a sanction of everything the storyteller writes. He has borrowed his authority

⁶⁸ Brennan and Homi, p. 297. As quoted in Holden, p. 455.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Holden, p. 455.

⁷⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov (1936)', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2006), p. 2.

from death'.⁷¹ Noteworthy here is the use of a similar metaphor (*vitribna*, tr. extinction) in even Premchand's melancholic formulation, when one thinks of it, of the tenets of storytelling in India. These exegetical, time-lagged conversations between the *bhasas* and European scholarship may also be said to constitute, at some level, a politics of form.

⁷¹ Benjamin, p. 11.

3. The Folk Forms of Mulk Raj Anand, A Man of Many Worlds

MULK RAJ ANAND, who was at the time one of India's leading writers in the English language, confessed in a letter to his editor Atma Ram that the prose forms he is credited to have made popular amongst India's English-speaking classes were, in fact, sourced by him from the 'alleged non-literary material' of the continent:

I felt for the first time, you could go to the sources of the alleged non-literary material and bring to surface the consciousness of those in the labyrinth depths, I mean the folk. It may help you to know that I began my writing career by rendering Punjabi folktales told to me by my mother. I think the folk tales of our country are some of the most perfect literature of the unlettered life and the in-between feelings of people, with a vital sense of life and death.¹

Incidentally, Anand is talking here about his First World War trilogy, which is made up of three novels, *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1939) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942).² Some of these assertions, however, also apply to his wider corpus, which includes his many short stories. This chapter will probe whether Anand etches upon his short fiction a form and mode of 'consciousness' that is found only in the 'labyrinth depths' or 'in-between' feelings of people; people who lead, as he claims, 'unlettered' lives while producing 'non-literary' material. Although touched upon here

¹ *From Anand to Atma: Selected Letters of Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. by Atma Ram (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2005), p. 18.

² For a detailed study of First World War literatures and cultures in the Indian context, see Santanu Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Santanu Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Songs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For a textual study of how Mulk Raj Anand responds to Eurocentric historiography of the First World War and tries, if only partly, to reclaim the multiracial dimension of war memory, see Trevor Dodman, 'Sepoy Shell Shock, Mulk Raj Anand, and the Indian World War I Novel' in *Shell Shock, Memory, and the Novel in the Wake of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

only briefly, the notional concepts of the *in-between* and the *unlettered* have today become central to the study of the aesthetic form of the short story in English. They evoke the conceptual frameworks of *liminality* and *orality* through which the short story, especially the English short story, is widely read and examined. In the specific period in which Anand wrote these texts, an emergent political and literary identity was that of the anticolonial nationalist. Anand is frequently categorised as a writer of anticolonial nationalist fiction, particularly as he was active in both the Indian Independence movement and the Spanish Civil War, the two movements that lent impetus to the 1930s anticolonial and antifascist struggle. An issue at hand in this chapter is that this assessment, though not at all overreaching, is made predominantly with respect to Anand's novels, where the emphasis is mainly upon his subjects and characters, or the ideological positions they exhibit. An emphasis is also laid here upon a particular ethico-political question around class and caste representation. Did Anand, who was an elite writer writing mostly about the poor and outcaste, recognise the agency of these 'subaltern' subjects, as well as the significance of their voice, in the emergence and propagation of a radical nationalist movement? Or did he participate in only the representational politics of the elite?

His short fiction, even for his marginal oeuvre, remains largely neglected. It is my claim that, at a political level, these texts, written in the late-colonial period in India, can problematise widely held assumptions about Anand's political as well as ideological stances, especially vis-à-vis the nationalist movement. Whereas, at the formal level, these stories can shed light upon the aesthetic form and stylistic nature of the short story in Indian-English. I will study some of Anand's short stories written in the decades of the 1930s and 40s to examine how nationalist and anticolonial 'consciousness' registers within the textual bounds of the short story form, adding new tenets and dimensions to what is commonly understood as anticolonial or nationalist writing. I will also inquire into what constitutes, in the first instance, the 'textual bounds' of the 'Indian-English' short story, a hybrid form to which Anand gave the self-congratulatory distinction 'neo-folktale'.³

³ Madhukar Krishna Naik, *Selected Short Stories of Mulk Raj Anand* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1977), p. 32. For original, see 'Letter to Atma Ram, 30 August 1979' in Ram, p. 42.

What forms of exchange, mediation and reproduction of knowledges, epistemes and experiences go into the formal development of this neo-folktale? By demonstrating how it exists *liminally* at the 'in-between' (the in-between of the elite and the proletarian, the literate and illiterate, the 'Indian' and the 'English') and how it exists *orally* within the unlettered (such as by embodying the aesthetic and formal conventions of the oral folktale), I will examine how Anand's short stories sit within and respond to the debates on the representational struggles of the subaltern classes. These debates were to become, in the 30s and 40s political culture in India and abroad, the backdrop for the constitutive promise of nation-building, and much later around the 80s, with perhaps the same kind of clamour, the straws upon which were erected the dense scaffolds of postcolonial theory.

In a rare 'non-postcolonial' sort of appraisal for some of Anand's short stories, Shruti Amar takes a textualist approach to illustrate how they could be located 'within the folk boundaries of his native state [of Punjab]'.⁴ Amar's essay considers a small but telling sample of Anand's short fiction that had a self-declared lyrical provenance: 'Lullaby' and 'Five Short Fables'. Having made a few scattered appearances in the 1940s, these were recompiled in the 1959 anthology *The Dark Gods and Other Stories* when Anand's interest in the oral traditions of India had been helped significantly through his curatorial work with the newly instituted national academy of letters, the Sahitya Akademi. In 1946, Anand, who was soon to become the Akademi's first ever Director, wrote in the collection *Indian Fairy Tales*: 'although I have taken in much new psychology into my own writing of the short story, I have always tried to *approximate* the technique of the folktale'.⁵ Many such confessions about Anand's own ideals of the short story form as rooted in the folktales of Punjab are catalogued by Amar in her 2019 essay; in a 1977 letter to Ram, Anand states that 'the folktale is the most perfect form of literature', and in *Seven Summers*, an autobiographical work, he recreates the figure of his mother as the folk storyteller and a primitive influence on his art of writing fiction.⁶ The song of Raja Rasalu, a famous Punjabi folktale, is also paid homage to by Anand in the same 1977 letter to

⁴ Shruti Amar, 'Folk Imagination and Singing Women in the Short Stories of Mulk Raj Anand', *Interventions*, 21.8 (2019), 1139–56 (p. 1139).

⁵ Mulk Raj Anand, *Indian Fairy Tales* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1946), p. 1.

⁶ Amar, p. 1139.

Ram, in which he admits the direct influence upon his trilogy of the tale, both of which were set in Punjab's Sialkot.

Yet, it would be wrong to have an over-instructive lean on the conception of folk as constituted by the aesthetic and linguistic elements of a necessarily *oral* storytelling medium. Although Anand had much to gain in his craft of the short story (or the neo-folktale) from being a 'listener' of these folktales, it is also important to consider how, and through what colonial processes, did he come to be a 'reader' of these tales. Therefore, taking Amar's work as a starting point, I will bring into our discussion many nineteenth and twentieth-century transcriptions of Indian folk cultures by colonial anthropologists and geographers that contribute to such an *'approximation* of the technique of the folktale' which Anand hails as his *coupe de maître* as a short story writer. By doing this, I will raise questions about the ethics and politics of 'drawing from the alleged non-literary material' in order to forge a modern literary form to address a politics of self in relation to the new nation—a politics of Indianness.

The Folktale as a Political Lament

One of the stories considered in Amar's essay is 'Lullaby', first published in the 1944 collection *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories*. This text serves to identify a constellation of key critical and thematic interests that could introduce some aspects of Anand's short story writing. As if taking a cue from Frank O'Connor's memorable idiom of the short story being a 'spokesperson for a submerged population group' instead of a proper hero, where 'all human agony emerges only at moments from that maze of irrelevance, as though it were the voice of the submerged population', Anand's 'Lullaby' appears to be structured entirely as a metaphor for the agony of those who are submerged, marginalised, and rendered irrelevant under patriarchal capitalism.⁷ Whilst O'Connor's 'submerged' characters (a 'bad phrase' that he is using 'in want of another') are the nameless officials, serfs, doctors and prostitutes that appear frequently in the stories of Gogol, Turgenev, Chekov and Maupassant, Anand's submerged characters sit as much at the peripheries of society as those of the

⁷ O'Connor, p. 21.

firm conventions of literary representation in the novel-centric European world.⁸ In 'Lullaby', the submerged figure is that of a singing peasant woman, a manifestation of what Santanu Das has called 'the singing subaltern' which produces, through different forms of embodied oralities, which include their essential silences, a powerful discursive critique of the oppressive forces that are imagined by the literary and academic elite to be beyond the scope of subaltern reasoning.⁹

The text revolves around the singing of a peasant woman called Phalini. Anand's short stories do not always name their main characters, so the name's meaning bears noting: Phalini is a plant with medicinal properties. We are told through a clever emplotment technique that she is a single mother who has recently given birth to a child called Suraj Mukhi—the sunflower. The child is one year old, 'his flesh ... so warm that she [Phalini] could feel the heat of his little limbs on her thighs, a burning heat which was mixed with a sour smell. He must be ill' (118).¹⁰ Phalini, like the child, is also ill: 'her throat going hoarse with the jute fluff she had been swallowing since she let the fold of the apron rag ... fall loose in the factory' (119). Although it is not directly told to us, it is clear from the description of the elements around her that she works in a Jute Mill, which should, of all spaces in the colonial-industrial era, command a markedly gendered interest, since the workers were mainly peasant women. Phalini is also desperately poor, as is evident from her 'hollow cheeks' (119) and the fact that she has recently had to pawn off a nose-ring which she received as dowry from her mother-in-law (a sign of bad omen).

At the heart of the text, as is commonplace in Anand's writing, is a *machine*, presumably from its description a single-shaft twisting-machine used for the manufacture of jute-twines. On first reading, the way in which this machine registers its presence in the text as a callous creature would appear to be the 'point' of the story. This machine is inserted into the prose text, acting as a 'lullaby' to a starving child and his poor mother, its onomatopoeic expressions giving the text a clearly oral dimension:

⁸ For the relationship between the novel form and anticolonial nationalism, see Edward W Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Paperbacks, 1994); Jameson; Anderson.

⁹ Santanu Das, 'The Singing Subaltern', *Parallax*, 17.3 (2011), 4–18.

¹⁰ 'Lullaby' (118) in Mulk Raj Anand, *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944). Page numbers to this reference are cited in-line.

the engine chuk-chukked, the leather belt khup-khupped, the bolts jig-jigged, the plugs tik-tikked; the whole floor shook like hard wooden seat of a railway train (121).

As Amar observes, it 'creates a fraught sonic space in which life becomes slave to a machine'.¹¹ This is typical, if not also imitative, of proletarian fictions written in the once-coveted socialist-realist register in the 1930s: the trope of a soulless and purblind article of industrial capitalism embedded within a space of poignant and impending death. But a closer reading of the text reveals more complex, overlapping strands of aesthetic and linguistic heritage in Punjabi folktales. Evocative of Anand's own stance on his mode of writing as a form of 'poetic realism' rather than socialist-realism (which he saw as dogmatic), the text draws from the poetic resources of Punjabi folk songs to enact 'a swap of bodies' between the machine and the singing peasant.¹² Phalini is singing a labour song as she is feeding 'handfuls of jute' into the 'gaping mouth of the machine' (120). The machine, the much-maligned but enduring source of intrigue in the factory-space, is represented in the text as a monstrous creature with a life of its own. But the singing peasant woman, acting as a trope for the mechanisation of labour, is reproduced in the text *as* the machine, different parts of her body given mechanical distinctions. The 'feeble cry' of the dying child stirs 'the black night of Phalini's soul as the air stirs the water' (a common Punjabi colloquialism, 119). Phalini's singing voice was 'whispers of a broken reed' and she could even feel 'an oily taste in the mouth with bile under her tongue' that would fall into the 'swollen pitcher of her belly' thus recreating (as in the prodigious works of D.H. Lawrence, which Anand deeply admired) a cult of the sensate and nauseous body mechanised and instrumentalised like an industrial artefact (120).¹³ The jute machine, on the other hand, is a 'monster' with a 'gaping mouth' which produces, every so often, a 'dithyrambic hum' (119-120). Through this poetic swap of bodies, an alternative reality emerges, expressed through the method and the metaphor of the folk.

¹¹ Amar, p. 1151.

¹² For further reading on Anand's 'poetic realism' see KD Verma, 'Mulk Raj Anand and Realism', *South Asian Review*, 32.1 (2011), 137-51.

¹³ In a letter to Atma Ram in 1977, Anand writes 'in my case, the dark gods of the Indian earth were not forgotten, because Mr Eliot lectured against the dark gods. The admiration for D.H. Lawrence had sustained a passion for folk in me as well' as quoted in Amar, p. 1142. For the original see Ram, p. 42.

Amar argues that the text is a critique of ‘mechanization, through maternal lament’.¹⁴ And indeed, by deploying the performative reality of oral songs, Anand here draws upon the poetics of women’s lamentation, a subject of wide ethnographic study in the metropolitan West, to enact a form of protest against the dominant caste and gender hierarchies of India that were thrown into sharp relief during the nationalist movement.¹⁵ The text also enacts a form of protest against what were, at the time, the firm conventions of the Anglophone short story. Even within its small narrative frame, it offers a sense of how Anand encodes a complex ‘colloquial’ aesthetic pedigree (framing his comment about drawing from the alleged non-literary sources) alongside a conscious political and emancipatory intent. Amar’s reading of Phalini’s singing identifies the sense of ‘agony and frustration’ that is manifest in it, but the precise hermeneutic mode through which this sense is registered by the reader bears much significance.¹⁶ Phalini’s song, ‘Roller / Roll / Spread jute / Open mouth / Rise jute / Fall seeds / Work into cloth’, is presented in the text as a ‘work-song’ but it is instantaneously reminiscent of a popular mother’s routine trying to feed a child by distracting it – a lullaby of sorts. Following just the staccato rhythms of the way the song is broken down in the text, one could hear a Punjabi lullaby underneath its syntactical and grammatical structure.

Especially in the light of the machine’s anthropomorphic ‘swap of bodies’, the slow and cadential progression from ‘open mouth’ to ‘rise jute’ to ‘work into cloth’ signifies an instruction to chew, not unlike when a child is being lulled to eat. There is an unmistakable emphasis on orality; the pauses, digressions, hesitations, and acoustic sensibility of Phalini’s song not only draws upon the reader’s presumptive familiarity with this popular feeding ritual, but also, as is common to Punjabi lullabies,

¹⁴ Amar, p. 1150.

¹⁵ A significant archive of ethnographic writing about women’s lamentation, especially within the context of grief and grieving, exists in contemporary cultural anthropology. The work of Veena Das in the most notable in the context of Punjab. See Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2006). Also see Rita Brara, ‘Punjabi Inscriptions of Kinship and Gender: Sayings and Songs’, in *Worlding the World: Veena Das and Scenes of Inheritance*, ed. by Roma Chatterjee (New York: Fordam University Press, 2015), pp. 236–57. Another context in which oral folksongs are given wide berth in the critical academy is indentured plantation workers’ labour songs. See Vijay Mishra, ‘Plantation Diaspora Testimonios and the Enigma of the Black Waters’, *Interventions*, 17.4 (2015), 548–67.

¹⁶ Amar, p. 1152.

transform the metaphorical space in which it is being sung and the metaphorical bodies that are singing or listening to it. In the first passage of the text, Phalini's coarse singing was equated with a brassy, reed-like machine, whereas the machine is equated with a monstrous creature. But slowly, upon re-reading, one notices that as the delirium of sleep (in this case, an impending death) takes over, the 'work-song' which was treating the machine as a mere instrument of labour becomes the lullaby which begins to treat it like a child. In the final scene, while trying to cradle her actual child, Phalini realises that 'the effigy lay still, dead' (122). The machine however went on: 'the engine chuk-chukked...'

It is evident that, beyond mere agony and frustration, Anand's use of the generic orality of lullabies creates a metaphorical condition for Phalini within which she is able to speak subversively. Even as Phalini turns to lulling the monstrous machine from lulling her own child, her song *domesticates* the violent, gendered 'factory-space' of a colonial-era Jute mill. Such a reading of Anand's 'Lullaby' owes an intellectual debt to Gayatri Spivak's own reading of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri's 1926 suicide in the closing sections of her profoundly influential essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988).¹⁷ While, in Anand's text, the meaning and the political intent of the text register by mixing with a prior grasp of the oral and linguistic repertoire of folk, which includes its standard-motifs, characteristic images, and its philosophical or cosmological contents, Spivak's essay foregrounds the colonial epistemic conditions under which the lamenting voice of the 'historically muted subject of the subaltern woman' comes to be seen as unhearable, provoking therefore the titular question of the essay, 'can the subaltern speak?'. The parallels between Bhaduri's 'menstrual lament' and Phalini's 'maternal lullaby' are clear. These are voices that *cannot* speak, not for they are drowned or rendered mute, but because their political agency is undermined by what can be called an interpretive medium forged by a web of patriarchal, nationalist, and capitalist knowledge-systems, including those which pertain to the conventions of storytelling. These voices themselves remain subject to, in Spivak's words, the 'cathexis of the elite'.¹⁸

¹⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Die Philosophin*, 14.27 (2003), 42–58.

¹⁸ Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', p. 57.

In Bhaduri's case, this cathexis pertains to the social text of *Sati* (the practice of widow-immolation in India), to which scholarly readings of Bhaduri's suicide have invariably been drawn. The normative reading, which maintains that Bhaduri's suicide was a case of illicit pregnancy, is made tenuous by Bhaduri herself in her decision to wait until she started menstruating before hanging herself in her father's apartment in 1926. This was also a 'displacing gesture' because in the practice of *Sati*, the widow is supposed to wait four days after menstruating before she walks into the burning pyre (57). The political agency of Bhaduri's suicide, the part of her menstruating voice that Spivak argues remains unheard, is that she was an insurgent—a girl of sixteen or seventeen who was tasked with a political assassination as a member of an armed group fighting for Indian independence from the British—ultimately unable to 'confront the task' (58). Therefore, in her final act of suicide, Bhaduri's 'menstrual lament' becomes a political act that rewrites the subaltern woman's political consciousness upon the 'social text' which is designed to suppress and stigmatise it. This historical act thus destabilises the narrative of patriarchal nationalism—the suicide of a menstruating insurgent belongs neither to the cast of women who are killed to protect patriarchal honour, nor to the cast of men who are martyred as insurgents for the nationalist cause. It is in the same way, I argue, that Phalini's 'maternal lullaby' too becomes a disruptive political gesture, in which, through a folksong, she *domesticates* the factory-space. Phalini writes the consciousness of a single peasant mother upon the sociohistorical text of motherhood within the oppressive space of a colonial-era jute mill.¹⁹

A panoramic view of this social text, by which I mean the political economy of labour in relation to colonialism and the jute industry, is offered by Samita Sen's *Women and Labour in Late-colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (2004). Through the 1920s and 1930s, which culminated in the retrenchment of women's labour in factories and mills, a discourse of maternity and maternity-benefit was being adopted by the working and peasant classes in addition to the middle-class working women of India. Ever since the 1919 Washington Convention, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) had been working towards ascertaining new forms of state accountability towards working mothers, which included maternity leave, sickness leave and medical aid. But for mill owners,

¹⁹ Samita Sen and others, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). In particular, refer to Chapter 4, 'Motherhood, Mothercraft and Maternity Benefit Act' (142-177).

the efficiency of the Indian labour system lay in its flexibility and lack of accountability. The tenets of the Washington Convention, which were adopted in India with the 1924 Maternity Benefit Act, would, in Sen's words, 'militate against their [mill owners] efforts to maintain the flexible character of the workforce' (171). She further notes that 'the biggest stumbling block to a Maternity Benefit Act was felt to be the 'non-domestic' character of the jute mill labour' (172). Therefore, even in the 1920s, it was not uncommon, as one H.H. Brailsford observed in 1928 in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 'to see a woman at work with her infant at her breast' (173). Like Phalini and her child, several women worked at jute mills while cradling their children, in total constituting over 14 percent of the workforce in jute mills, second only to the plantations, and highest of any other formal-industrial sector.²⁰ The 'non-domestic' character of the jute mill also grated against the nationalist discourse of motherhood in late-colonial India, where women stood as a metaphorical repository of tradition, domesticity and familial life. There was a 'general valorisation of motherhood' which worked in tandem with the colonial-pedagogical project of 'mothercraft' where women were reared by training as good mothers rather than workers, their children being considered as 'national resources' (146). As a result, in Sen's words, 'explanations of maternal and infant mortality were sought not in poverty, environment or lack of medical services but in working mother's neglect, carelessness and ignorance' (148). When combined with the rise of eugenic thinking in industrial Europe, wherein a scientific basis was already being chased to prohibit women from working in factories so as to evade maternity and welfare obligations, a new 'social text' of the factory-space emerged, where women's labour became something to be vilified and exploited simultaneously. It is upon this social text that Phalini's voice registers what Amar calls its 'agony and frustration'. This is not, I would add to Amar's criticism, merely the agony and frustration of a mother having to work in a factory, for that would only agree with the patriarchal-nationalist lament of shame about 'factory mothers', but an oppositional lament—a disruptive and political act which reclaims the mill itself as a domestic space. To render

²⁰ As Sen's book illustrates, the report of Dagmar Curjel is one of the most significant documents which provides a close overview of the working conditions of women in jute mills. See Dagmar F Curjel, *Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour: Womens Labour in Bengal Industries (No. 31)* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1923).

this for the reader through the specific medium of folk, is also a disruptive narrative act on the part of Anand, though not without its own ethical problematics.

But first, what *is* this medium of folk? Is it simply a residual trace of orality in a literary text? Or does it have a stronger presence within its formal and modal structures? As Paul March-Russel notes in relation to the short story, 'orality [particularly as it relates to folk] is more than the sometimes mysterious conception of 'voice''.²¹ In the section 'Memory, Modernity and Orality' in *The Short Story* (2009), March-Russel makes a clear distinction between orality and voice; where the entity of voice is immutable to any form of narration, orality describes how 'inflections within tone and register, accent and idiom, are embedded within an underlying cultural and social context that pre-determines spoken narration as *mutable*, open-ended, compromised, fragmented, shifting' (my emphasis, 26). In other words, while voice would seem to elicit a particular critical conception of agency and power, orality is strictly the aesthetic feature of the medium of speaking, and, in the case of Anand's deployment within the *neo-folktale*, a political choice too. And yet, in the context of the 'submerged', 'in-between' and 'unlettered' lives that Anand attempts to reproduce in his writing, the two entities of voice and orality show a critical interdependence. The orality of the text 'Lullaby' may be located in the register of Phalini's singing and its drawing from Punjabi folksongs, but the question of Phalini's voice is deeply entangled with the question of Anand's own, for this is vitally a question of agency and of who has the power of interpretation over whom.

In his reflection on subaltern singing, Santanu Das, referring to folksongs as a 'subcutaneous layer of memory', conceives of something called a voice-consciousness: 'with what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?'.²² Is Phalini *conscious* of her voice as agency, as a subversive force that reclaims the mill as a domestic space? Or is it a lament only in the sense of its orality, which makes it less a political and more an aesthetic choice on the part of Anand as a writer? How does Anand's own subalternity intersect with that of Phalini, him being a writer of English short fiction tussling with the conventions of a European form to admit a fragment of subaltern life, but her being a figure of the peasant mother created out of a writerly consciousness, a projection of voice that will never

²¹ March-Russell Paul, *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 26.

²² Santanu Das, 'The Singing Subaltern', p. 5.

truly be hers? The aesthetic and political choices made in such a representation are mired in and undermined by Anand's own position, as well as by the problematics of translation. As Spivak herself notes in 1999 on the predicament of subaltern voicing: 'it [the subaltern consciousness] is effaced even as it is disclosed'.²³

In the preface to *The Barber's Trade Union*, Jack Lindsay notes how Anand 'felt for new strands of method and material linking the folk forms and their poetic resources with contemporary issues' (26). Writers from several progressive fronts were beginning to adopt these 'folk forms' as their primary material. Notable among them is the Indian Progressive Theatre Association (IPTA), a cultural front of the Communist Party of India (CPI) that had strong global affiliations with many antifascist and anticolonialist movements in the arts of the 1940s. For the IPTA, the folk traditions provided a way to turn to the interests and experiences of common people, as well as to a proletarian politics at risk of erasure from elite nationalist discourse on the arts. In both the theatre and cinema, a reimagining of the folk as a form of popular culture opened up many possibilities for political praxis, especially after the 1942 Quit India resolution.²⁴ The folk tended to become, particularly for the middle-class intelligentsia of the country, a way to measure up to the primacy and the perceived authority of colonial modernity and create an alternative national modernity that could stand up to it as both a contrast and an opposition.

As Geeta Kapur has argued in her seminal work *When was Modernism*, this particular relationship between 'folk' and 'national' culture was already being established in the late-colonial period. It was evident in vernacular tracts, pamphlets, theatre, film, and art spanned by the progressive revolution. But an aspect of this relationship is also what she equates to plunder: 'There is a kind of plunder

²³ As quoted in Santanu Das, 'The Singing Subaltern', p. 5.

²⁴ Indian Progressive Theatre Association (IPTA) emerged in 1942 as a significant arm and a sister organisation of the AIPWA to which Anand was closely associated. For further study on IPTA see Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker, *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India since 1947* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005); Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, pp. 124–29. Pradhan, III. remains a valuable compilation of material pertinent to the IPTA and the AIPWA in the 1930s. Anand's own 'Indian Folk Theatre' is found in the pamphlet 'The Indian Theatre' published just before his death in 2016. See Mulk Raj Anand, *The Indian Theatre* (Kolkata: Read Books, 2016), p. 32.

involved in the living use of tradition along with a continual replenishment of its own desacralized resources'.²⁵ Such a plunder of the 'traditional' poetic and aesthetic resources of a civilization, where tradition is defined against the modern, in order to fashion a new national iconography, may be seen as a kind of inward-looking Orientalism. In Anand's own words, his writing was to 'discuss, criticise, and re-mould our ideals and develop our own national culture'.²⁶ We also know today that Anand, among a few other writers of the time, wanted to create a unified national dialect in place of all the vernacular languages, with a unified Roman script, bearing the freight of India's Indigenous and vernacular linguistic cultures but acting somehow as a consolidating progressive force. The emergence of this difference between the traditional (folk, *bhasas*, *qissa*) and the modern (such as the English), terms best appreciated according to Kapur as 'notations within the cultural polemic of decolonisation' (267), is linked to the imperatives of progressive nationalism in many ways. 'To put it another way' Kapur adds, 'they can be seen to not only mediate but in fact fashion the cultural self-image of a new nation declaring its resistance towards imperialism through a homogenizing representational schema of its own' (273).²⁷ The IPTA, remarkable for recognising the progressive, as indeed nationalist potential of this representational schema made up of traditional, popular, and folk influences, grew out of the context. Vasudha Dalmia rephrases this as 'a new emphasis on Indianness, a new enthusiasm for the culture of the people'.²⁸ But the 'traditional', 'popular' and 'folk', remained a contested aesthetic and political terrain, with competing claims of definition. While in the 30s and 40s, there was an interest in folk as a consolidating force, a newly imagined nation's own traditional heritage cutting across distinct yet similar linguistic, poetic and dramatic cultures, the 50s saw, as again in the words of Dalmia, 'a return to the folk as a rural deviation from the nation's

²⁵ Kapur, p. 273.

²⁶ Mulk Raj Anand, 'On the Progressive Writers Movement', in *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, ed. by Sudhi Pradhan, 1979, I, p. 12.

²⁷ On some aspects of the use of folk in 'national' modernism, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Guha-Thakurta; Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁸ Vasudha Dalmia, *Poetics, Plays, and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 153.

classical and Sanskritic heritage' (180). By the 1970s, the plundering of India's folk heritage to create appropriative aesthetic forms, such as Anand had done earlier in that century, was considered, in Kapur's words, 'as anachronistic as it was unscrupulous'.²⁹

Despite the transcendent criteria to which they often refer, a discourse of 'purity' and 'authenticity' (both of which are recurrent in Anand's work as they relate to 'folk' as the purest or the most perfect form of 'unlettered' life) is salient when talking about the particularities of the folk. The folk as a 'popular' form was often problematised, as Partha Chatterjee has noted in his seminal study of Indian nationalism, 'as a repository of natural truth, naturally self-sustaining and ... timeless'.³⁰ Adopting a wider definition than normal, I define the folk as a complex code of meanings that can relate to a continuous linguistic and cultural practice, such as idiomatic or colloquial expressions, art or artisanal methods, and the cross-referencing of hermeneutic and epistemic modes based in specific historical, material or philological inquiries into the past or the recurring present. Here I borrow the idea of the 'recurring present' from Kapur's own model of folk as 'tradition-in-use'. These linguistic and cultural practices form what she has called 'the semiotic substratum of a given civilization' (268). And it is important to consider that to delve into these practices in order to create a representational schema or a national iconoclasm, is a political and an ideological project, enfolded in a historical condition it wants to escape – the condition of the native, of Indianness. But in the process, it is also re-articulating and reshaping the contours of an alternative modernity, one that is rooted in the oral and the traditional; one that is realised by the popular not the elite; and one that deftly resists the mechanical rhythms of colonial modernity but accedes to its logic as it repackages and renews the folk as a new form of modern. This new folk form is steeped in a discourse of hybridity, emanating from the steadily accumulating faith that underneath the ruins of the Empire, there was always something like a nation—an age-old community of many faiths and creeds.

²⁹ Kapur, p. 153.

³⁰ Chatterjee also notes that minority cultures, sometimes including Islam, is often problematically mobilised in India's popular cultural production using the same criteria of the folk as timeless wisdom. See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 73.

On account of literary merit, which is often guided by the usual formalities of canonical rigour, such folk-enriched short stories as 'Lullaby' often appear overly simplistic, and, to stick with the Jute metaphor, run-of-the-mill. Anand is studied within the corpus of Indian writing as a 'run-of-the-mill' anticolonial and nationalist writer, much better regarded for his non-fiction than his fiction. Priyamvada Gopal's *Literary Radicalism in India* (2005), which remains one of the most dependable surveys of 30s and 40s radical writing in India, and which maintains a clear though undeclared emphasis on the short story, justifies the omission of Anand by stating that 'if the work of Mulk Raj Anand is a notable absence in this book, it is quite simply because very few of his forays into fiction can be said to be on par with that of the writers discussed here – even though he remains one of the most interesting critics and essayists of the time'.³¹ Despite being one of the founders of the radical progressivist movement in India in 1936, Anand does not enjoy, in any literary sense, much acclaim as a radical progressivist writer. Even abroad, as a modernist, Anand dwells eternally at the margins of a movement still in search of its multiracial and transnational components. This is in part why his short fiction (even more so than his novels) has not been studied much at the level of form, or for its experimentalist stakes. Anand's short stories are resigned, for the most part, as realist samples of subaltern life and struggle in late-colonial India just as it scurried along a path to nationhood. This is an outlook on Anand's work that mirrors the outlook on Anand as a literary figure. Perhaps, then, it may be useful to consider in depth the position accorded to Anand by the Indian and the European academies, as well as the biographical (and indeed autobiographical) aspects of his life that speak, perhaps more so than the other writers considered in my thesis, to the aesthetic and political choices that he makes in reproducing this subaltern struggle. In the next section I will read Anand's well-known short story 'The Barber's Trade Union' against the backdrop of his life as 'a man of many worlds', pointing towards the editorial, academic, political and practical pressures he faced as a writer of the English language trying to carve his place between India and literary Bloomsbury. This will be a study of what shaped his investment in the folk traditions of India, and how.

³¹ Writers discussed at length in Gopal's book being Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai and Rashed Jahan, as well as the cinema of K.A. Abbas. See Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 10.

A Man of Many Worlds

On Anand's use of the English language in particular, George Orwell had views that he may have regretted today. Although he was to praise the clarity and laconic vision of some of Anand's later fiction, he reviewed the novel *The Sword and the Sickle* in 1942 and took a gravely ill-fated view of what would become of Indian-English writing: '[English] might survive in dialect form as the Mother Tongue of a small Eurasian community, but it is difficult to believe it has any literary future'.³² Anand's writing career would span over 75 years, in which he would write over 35 books, witnessing along the way the emergence of the phenomenal Indian-English novel of the 1980s and afterwards. While Anand's distinction as a modernist writer may not be so well-established, his prolific output as a writer of over one hundred short stories, twelve novels, several years of broadcast radio, and a six-volume autobiography which included a splendid, if also fanciful, recreation of the time he spent in Bloomsbury, has earned him a reputation that is quite his own. Succinctly summarising the highly curated 'in-between' life and persona of Mulk Raj Anand, Rosemary George warns that Anand's literary career, at least from first reading, will make him seem like 'a man of many worlds'.³³ It is perhaps telling of the way in which Anand is approached in the academy that the autobiographical *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (1971) remains Anand's most successful text (in both commercial terms and its academic uptake) after of course the prodigious 1935 novel *Untouchable*, which, with the crusty endorsement of E.M. Forster, has come to be known today as a token of Anglo-Indian modernist writing in the interwar period. The novel, only 180 pages, commands, even in the face of the great flooding of the Rushdie-era, tall order on the canon-shelf of Indian-English fiction.³⁴ From the point of view of this canon, which is already inimical to the short story form,

³² George Orwell, 'Review of Mulk Raj Anand's *The Sword and the Sickle*', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, ed. by Ian Angus and Sonia Orwell (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), II, 555.

³³ Rosemary Marangoly George, *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 92.

³⁴ Forster's preface to the first edition of *Untouchable* states that the novel 'has gone straight into the heart of its subject [the untouchables of India] and purified it' (iv). Several critics have since critiqued the preface as a suggestion of the 'inherent impurity' of the Untouchable castes, a notion that was, and to date continues to be, rampant in Brahminical Hindu discourse. See also Mukherjee Meenakshi, *Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, 1974).

Anand's novels claim a place alongside the works of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, with whom he forms the patriarchal triumvirate of Anglophone Indian literature, albeit, to quote one M.K. Naik, still one who had 'considerably less magnificent talents'.³⁵ Anand's short stories are often considered drifting fragments that are stylistic impressions of his more canonical works.

The liminality and the in-betweenness of the short story form are almost witnesses, in Anand's case, to the in-betweenness of his political location between the colonial Empire and the colony. Since Anand's father was a clerk in the British Indian Army during the Great War, he acquired a full scholarship to study towards a Doctorate in Philosophy in London, which was awarded to him in 1929 for a dissertation on Bertrand Russell and Empiricism. It was in these years that Anand made the acquaintance of many intellectuals from the period, from Virginia and Leonard Woolf to T.S. Eliot, working as a corrector at both the Hogarth Press and the *Criterion* Magazine in the early 1930s. In India, just as the struggle for Independence from British rule was gaining momentum, Mahatma Gandhi, who frequently visits Anand's fiction as a character, emerged firmly as a revolutionary figure. In Spain, the fight against Fascism had mutated into a bloody civil war, and although having enlisted first for the military, Anand was to participate in the Republican effort only as a journalist and broadcaster between 1933 and 1936. Upon his return to London, Anand worked for the BBC as a scriptwriter, in that period writing many short stories, essays and memoirs that were published in small journals like *New Left Review*, *The Comrade*, *Our Time*, *Fact No. 5* and *New Writing*. The short stories, many of which were recompiled in the books *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934) and *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), received only lukewarm reception from the metropolitan readership.³⁶ Even his major fictions from this period, such as the short novels

³⁵ Madhukar Krishna Naik, *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English: Presented to Armando Menezes* (Karnatak University, 1972), p. 155.

³⁶ Of course, several of these short stories were republished in the monumental 1946 collection *Indian Short Stories* which was co-edited by Iqbal Singh, Mulk Raj Anand and Krishna Menon, and marked the proper arrival of the South Asian Short Story Collection in the English-speaking metropole. The book was launched at the meeting of the India League and the Progressive Writers Association (PWA) at Swaraj House, London on 23 October 1946. See Mulk Raj Anand and Iqbal Singh, *Indian Short Stories* (London: New India Publishing Company, 1946).

Untouchable (1935), *Coolie* (1937), and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) fared only slightly better.³⁷ His 1942 epistolary novel *Letters on India*, commissioned by the Labour Book Service for its anti-colonial and insurgent rhetoric, was met, however, with a bit more opprobrium. It was published at a time when the literary and cultural effort was carefully steered by the ministry propaganda that Britain needed her colonies to show selfless duty to the war effort. This was also the time when a renewed project of liberation for India's women, minorities, lower classes and outcastes (Dalits) had emerged as a parallel 'national' question alongside the demand for national independence. Naturally, Anand's debt to the PWA, as well as PWA's debt to Anand, is noted by most literary histories of the period.³⁸

Most of Anand's forays into short fiction appeared after several years of writing books that served as cheap 'anthropological glimpses' into India for the British bourgeoisie, such as *The Hindu View of Art* (Allen and Unwin, 1932), *Persian Paintings* (Faber, 1930), *Curries and Other Indian Dishes* (Harmondsworth, 1932) and *Studies of Five Poets of New India* (John Murray, 1934). Anand's writing turned seriously on Indian readership only with works of fiction like *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1939) and *Coolie* (1937) both published by Lawrence and Wishart. They accompanied novels like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935) in shaping the literary diet of 1930s India. This diet was taking over from a litany of English novelists which traced their lineage to the monkish colonial taste of the Fort William project, many of them notably more popular in India than in Britain itself. Anand recalls a horrifying exchange with Virginia Woolf in *Conversations* in which he confesses to admiring George W.M. Reynolds, the writer of working-class English

³⁷ Anand's own views about the reviews of his work also bear significance. His letter to Malcolm Darling in April 1942 announces that although he worried that 'the recital and essay element threatened [his] attempt to achieve, as far as possible, an authentic novel, a dramatic novel' which allowed his characters (in this instance, Munoo from *Coolie*) to show their 'condition humaine', he was 'relieved that the reviews were so favourable.' BBCWA, letter to Malcolm Darling, 22 April 1942 in *Contributors Talks File 4, Files and Transcripts from the BBC Eastern Service 1939-49*, BBC Written Archives Centre, London.

³⁸ Talat Ahmad's essay remains a good historical introduction to Anand in relation to the Progressive Writers movement in English. See Talat Ahmad, 'Mulk Raj Anand: Novelist and Fighter', *International Socialism*, 105 (2005), 40-63. For further reading on the birth of the PWM, see 'The Critical Spirit: Decolonisation and the Progressive Writers Association' (pp. 13-28) in Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*.

fiction. The exchange is not only worth all its wincing, but also points to the specific pressures of assimilation faced by Anand within that milieu:

‘Who on earth is George W.M. Reynolds’ Virginia Woolf said, sweeping me with a broad smile from her embarrassed face, in a strained voice controlling itself from becoming the measure of my vulgarity ... ‘I find the same about Rider Haggard who wrote *She*, and Marie Corelli and Charles Garvice’ I said, persisting in the folly of my lowbrowness ... [Leonard Woolf intervenes] ‘Hardly ever mentioned here ... the fodder on which the subalterns chew the cud in the cantonments of the empire’.³⁹

‘The fodder on which the subalterns chew the cud’ is perhaps all too accurately representative of the metropolitan illusion of India’s reading preferences in the late-colonial era, and suggestive also of the nature of the literary and anthropological interest that the English-speaking West took in Anand’s fiction, and also, of the lack thereof in Anand’s short fiction. A lot of this neglect has continued to this day in the academy, and an explanation can be sought from Anand’s social position in India’s caste society. Born in Peshawar in colonial India (now Pakistan) in 1905, Anand was a *kshatriya* at birth, the warrior caste which is second in the four-step ladder of the Hindu caste discourse—a detail ever so significant in the criticism of his portrayal of the marginalised outcaste subjects, but also for the critical explanation of why Anand’s writing, despite exhibiting a strong progressive intention, is not considered as an authentic subaltern voice. Anand’s subjects were far from the cud-chewing Reynolds-reading ‘subalterns’ of Woolf’s tropical imagination, where, it is presumed, the ‘subaltern’ refers to the military rank rather than to the Gramscian category of the proletariat.⁴⁰ The implication here is that Anand’s reading preferences were only as good as the English soldiers who lived in the cantonment towns of colonial India—a class insult, which, if true, is aimed equally at Anand as at Reynolds. Anand’s subjects were beyond the burnish of English literacy, embodying a subject-position that he wanted to endow with a sense of political and agential power through language, form, and medium of his fictional worlds. An outstanding example of this

³⁹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 105.

⁴⁰ The term ‘subaltern’ as used frequently to avoid postal censor by political theorist Antonio Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks* (1939) was of course not in scholarly circulation as a standing term for the socially cut-off proletariat until much later in the twentieth century.

is one of Anand's most well-known short stories 'The Barber's Trade Union'. The date of original publication could not be ascertained, but it is known that the text was republished without revision in the collection *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* published in London by Jonathan Cape in 1944.

'The Barber's Trade Union', which is dedicated to John Lehmann, who was at the time the editor of *New Writing*, begins with a certain expression of urgency.⁴¹ The narrator insists that 'Chandu', whose low-caste status is established because he was a barber and because 'he wore a piece of rag in the middle of his naked, distended-bellied body', will inevitably be denied his right to be known as 'one of the makers of modern India' if the narrator does not press for the 'recognition of his contribution to history'.⁴² Even within this text in which Anand bestows upon a low-caste barber boy the credit, as the title anticipates, of founding India's first ever Trade Union, a pronounced first-person voice creates the sense that a certain inscriptive and historical authority still lies with the politics of high-caste narration. Since Chandu is never to know 'the full significance ... of his exploit' and since he has 'no exaggerated notion of his own importance' it falls burdensomely upon the narrator to inscribe upon the history of nation-building (note the stentorian opening line 'among the makers of modern India') what he thinks is Chandu's 'peculiar claim' to the founding of India's Trade Unions movement (7). The text is a careful reconstruction of the emotive economy of shame, envy and pride in the friendship of a low-caste barber boy who ultimately, with the assistance of a *machine* (a Japanese Bicycle that allows the young barber to travel out of his village, itself a recurring motif for colonial modernity in Anand's writings), mobilises the Barbers of nearby villages against the casteist system of forced occupation. The bulging aesthetic features of the text are its deliberate accentuation of the marvellous aspects of village life, and its sharp deployment of folk and colloquial idioms to achieve a form that is adequate to Anand's political expression.

⁴¹ Several of Anand's stories have such dedications, to John Lehmann, Roger Burford, (the memory of) Edward J. O'Brien, G. Stuart Gelder, Kanwar Singh Brijesh of Kalakankar, Arthur Marshall. Not much could be said to the purpose of these, except perhaps to speculate that they were another exercise in Anand's highly curated self-persona as 'a writer of many worlds'.

⁴² Anand, *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories*, p. 7. Further references to this source are cited in-line.

Chandu is a genius at ‘catching wasps, and at pressing the poison out of their tails, at tying their tiny legs to cotton threads and flying them’, whereas the narrator is only good at ‘doing sums at school’ (7-8). An emphasis on sartorial clothing rituals that encode caste in village society, which is quite typical of Anand’s narration, is felt in the text. The narrator is ashamed of his ‘red caste mark’ on the forehead, presumably the *tika*, and his Brahmin caste is given away by the ‘formalised pattern of *uchkin*, the cotton trousers ... silk turban’ (8). Chandu’s clothes are described as a ‘spectacular conglomeration’ for they are presumably ones discarded by others. The narrator envies Chandu’s freedom to not be at school, for Chandu is forced into the caste-occupation of cutting hair following his father’s early demise, thus having escaped the ‘ordeal of having been flogged to death by school masters’ (8). Chandu himself envies several others in the village and their clothing styles, among them the Dentist, who is known for ‘performing miracles in the village ... fixing people with rows of teeth and even new eyes’ (9). Although narrating in this child-mode, the text conveys a sense of colonial wonderment as ‘the modern India’ is coming face to face with different forms of colonial modernities; the dentist’s ‘starched shirt, ivory collar ... *Angrezi* leather bag’ are themselves elevated to the parody of awe. Unfortunately, at first, Chandu the barber boy too claims a similar pride in his profession, so decides to dress up as the Dentist, showing up at the narrator’s door one day in ‘a white turban, a white rubber coat (a little too big for him but nevertheless very splendid), a pair of pumps ... and a leather bag in his hand’ (9). But from there on, the text follows a series of insults by upper-caste Hindus whose homes the barber boy would go to to cut their hair. In these encounters, Anand meticulously codes their caste-position in their sartorial or somatic details.

Bijay Chand, ‘the Jagirdar sahib’ (landlord) has ‘a sacred thread ... hung over his ear’ which indicates that he is a Brahmin who has just been to the lavatory (10).⁴³ He is enraged that Chandu has brought a cow-leather bag into his house, thus defiling his religion. The landlord is heard shouting Hindi insults which Anand awkwardly adapts to English: ‘son of a pig’ (*su’ar ka bacha*), ‘you have no fear of anyone now that your father is dead’ (*baap mar gaya toh kisi ka darr nahi*) (10). Likewise, Thanu Ram, the village grocer, and Pandit Parmanand, by his name the village priest, also insult

⁴³ The sacred thread is the *Yagnopavitama* (one that purifies yagna, or yajna, the organs responsible for bodily excretion) which every Brahmin is made to wear around the waist when he starts his education as a priest, called the *Upanayanama* ceremony (opening of the third eye).

the boy 'spoiled by school education' for his 'disguising [himself] as a clown' (10-11). The text has clear parallels with Bakha's desire to wear Angrezi clothes in *Untouchable*, and the model of employment deployed in the story is a neat miniaturisation of the longer 1936 novel, for Bakha's day-in-the-life is also about collecting insults from different caste-Hindu for his 'gentleman behaviour'. The plot-parallel for the novel's much exalted flush toilet system is Chandu's 'machine' the Japanese Bicycle, in which the young Barber boy sees the way to escape the village and open a salon. The boy fits the bicycle to the needs of his caste-profession: 'Won't I look grand? Riding on a machine, with my overcoat, my black leather-shoes, and a white turban on my head, especially as there is a peg in front of the two-wheeled carriage for hanging my tool-bag?' (12). Ultimately, as Chandu learns to ride the bicycle, he, realising that he is the only barber in the village, goes on strike, thus leaving the landlords and the priests in disarray, 'looking like leper with a brown tinge of tobacco on their beards' (15). As the rumours of Chandu's strike spread, he convinces his cousins from nearby villages to open a salon with him, rather than 'dance attendance upon their lords' (16). Therefore, as Anand felicitously concludes, 'Rajkot District Barber Brothers Hairdressing and Shaving Saloon had been followed by many other active Trade Unions of working men in our parts' (16).

Anand recreates the village as an arena, a multitudinous spatiality that is made from marvellous objects and characters that do not properly feature in the short story but register a strong presence in their typecasts. The writer here leverages the liminal and fragmentary nature of the short story, where the investment is not in creating narrative unities and explanatory lines, but in creating an entropy of the kind that draws upon the features of the present moment while shining light on absent histories and unseen prejudices. The gambling son of the village barrister Lala Hukam Chand sells Chandu the Japanese Bicycle, renewing an age old trope of bureaucratic corruptibility, whereas the landlord Bijay Chand's wife threatens to run away with someone else if the village peasants keep laughing at his beard, 'struck by the contrast of the big thick moustache (which ... the landlord dyed) with the prickly white bush on his jowls', drawing upon the old trope of the effeminate Brahmin (15).⁴⁴ Several phrases in the text are time-honoured idiomatic Hindi expressions forced into the Indian-English dialect, such as 'dance attendance' (16), 'white bush on his jowls' (15) and 'peals

⁴⁴ One wonders if the brief presence of Lala Hukam Chand in the village of 'The Barber's Trade Union' is the same barrister Lala Hukam Chand from Anand's *The Village* (1939).

of laughter' (14). In a scene where the narrator cautions the boy Chandu on the way he was learning to ride the machine, Chandu's on-the-ball response is what is often characterised in public as the village *haazir-jawabi*: 'your father is a top-heavy baboon, while your mother is a long-legged spider ... I was born ... my mother tells me, upside-down'. Therefore, he appropriates a caste-insult that all *Shudras* (fourth *varna* of the caste system) are born upside-down.

The way in which Anand encodes these oral exchanges of power between occupants of different social positions within India's complex caste-class structure, points to the necessity of formulating a politics of language and form which is attentive to the nuanced minutiae of aesthetic, intellectual, ethical and political debates of the period in which these short fictions were written. The frame within which such an understanding of the politics of form is achieved is necessarily comparative. That is, it takes a panoramic view of the circumstances of its production: linguistic and dialectal registers of folk, political debates on nationhood, intellectual debates on the ideas of freedom and selfhood, as well as the ethics of narrating with a marginal voice. It is evident from 'The Barber's Trade Union' that despite being a writer of English fiction with a penchant for experimentalist forms and methods popular in interwar Europe, Anand was not completely acquiescent to the conventions of the English short story emergent in the 1930s. His dedications to European writers, editors, poets and intellectuals at the beginning of each of his short stories point to a tense exchange of ideas about what the politics of the short story will come to mean for an immigrant anticolonial writer writing in English. Anand's English is stylistically shifting, mutable, subversive and fragmented, marrying the dialectal orality of the Punjabi folk register with the 'cantonment-cuds' of the colonial English detritus to enact a gesture of aesthetic subversion. This gesture, both in want of living up to the literary conventions of 'Thirties' London and to the cultural location of a writer like Anand, creates an aesthetic form that is sculpted by the political pressures of *survival* for Anand in England. A set of questions emerges from this assumption: Are then the singing peasants, the sonic rhythms, the oral traces, the chafing 'squalor' of Anand's subaltern subjects, simply a function of colonial survival? What kind of epistemic and representational violence do these enact upon the subalterns themselves? What are the politics of the aesthetic choices made to 'survive' in the industry of colonial knowledges, forms, genres?

A Politics of Survival

We must first revisit Rosemary George's earlier caution that Anand will seem like 'a man of many worlds' provided the 'narrative glosses over certain problematic details, erasures and exaggerations' (92). Her contention, in the main, is that Anand had a tendency to fictionalise and misrepresent a lot of his life, and many of his autobiographical works, including *Apology for Heroism* (1947), which was written in the aftermath of his public falling out with London's literary elite, is misread as authoritative, as opposed to what it is: semi-fictional.⁴⁵ On more than one occasion, Anand alludes to the autobiographical and auto-documentary impulses in his own work, such as in a letter to Malcolm Darling in 1949, stating that his 'mind is autobiographical as well as novelistic' (BBCWA).⁴⁶ In *Conversations*, whose fictional element comes clearly from its narrator being a young Mulk Raj Anand, despite him having written the book forty years later in 1970, he comments that his writing is 'deeply confessional ... in which [he goes] via memory lanes, through the ever-changing selves, towards myself, transform myself into a self' (12). This textual act of transforming one's self into a self – any self – raises a set of intriguing questions about the toilsome way in which Anand self-fashioned as an artist and a public intellectual. They point to a critical possibility that there is more value in seeing Anand's body of writing as an expression of a privileged subjectivity soaking up the elements of this new radical-nationalist ideology. The consequence of this was a sustained critical interest in Dalit and peasant emancipation (though not always or equally a clear or inceptive understanding of the experiential qualities of Dalit or peasant life) as opposed to the cavalier and strenuously debated notion that Anand, as an English-speaking writer, gave a form of 'voice' to the 'subaltern self' which had otherwise been excluded from the discourse of nationalist politics and historiography. It is my argument that before the debate lands upon questions of whether and what kind of 'voice' Anand 'endows' upon the subaltern characters in his novels and short fiction, it is important to consider what kind of 'voice' Anand had himself, and what kind of expression was afforded to him. Ambreen Hai, in *Making Words Matter*, a study of the concept of literary agency in postcolonial

⁴⁵ Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism: A Brief Autobiography of Ideas* (London: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, 1975).

⁴⁶ Letter to Malcolm Darling, 26 March 1941, *Contributors Talks File 4, Files and Transcripts from the BBC Eastern Service 1939-49*, BBC Written Archives Centre, London.

texts, makes a prescient remark on the need to centre a writer's own status in relation to the pressures of colonial survival when talking about the agency of (and in) his work:

Writers can worry about the agency of their writing only if they have the agency to think about their agency. They can be concerned with the degree to which their work is imprinted by (or can contest) circumstantial forces only if they have the independence to think about their deviation from some norm.⁴⁷

In her influential 1991 essay 'Mulk Raj Anand and Autobiography', Marlene Fischer undertakes a close study of the way in which, almost like Montaigne's letters, Anand appears at once as the author and the subject 'matter' of his autobiographical corpus.⁴⁸ This corpus includes not only his 'memoir-fictions' like *Apology for Heroism* and *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, but also his confessional novels like *The Village* (1939). Anand's close editorial liaisons with his biographers, interpreters, critics and translators can be felt by studying several letters he exchanged with Atma Ram, Saros Cowasjee, Inez Holden and Stevie Smith, leading to their own appraisals of him as a writer. In a letter to Ram in 1970, Anand urged him to write a literary biography of him 'in about 250 pages' but also warned that 'about the biography of Mulk Raj Anand, the difficulty will be the English part of my background'.⁴⁹ He fears that this part would need to pay scrupulous attention to his 'relationships' with figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Louis Aragon, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Pablo Picasso, Henry Read, André Malraux, Christopher Caudwell and George Orwell. Not much exists besides Anand's own diaristic retellings, which Fischer has theorised as mere 'instances of recreated self-history' so as to corroborate these relationships, let alone map them out clearly.⁵⁰ 'It is in part a problem of record', Kristin Bleumel argues further, showing in her rigorous historical work that although there exists some critical evidence of Anand's place in the 1930s British literary

⁴⁷ 'The Unspeakable Body of the Tale' in Ambreen Hai, *Making Words Matter: The Agency of Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), p. 12.

⁴⁸ Marlene Fisher, 'Mulk Raj Anand and Autobiography', *South Asian Review*, 15.12 (1991), 12-17 (p. 12).

⁴⁹ Ram, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Fisher, p. 14.

intelligentsia, it remains unclear how marginal or central this place was.⁵¹ Of the writers Anand suggests in his letter to Ram must be made to feature in his 250-page biography, Bleumel wonders ‘whether all these relationships were personal, or if some were simply intellectual’ (190). George too notes that Anand, who was ‘prone to exaggerating his ... arena of influence’, was nonetheless done ‘the disservice of being left out of the memoirs and writings of most of his associates in the very years in which he claimed an association with them’.⁵² It is perhaps this ‘vagueness’ of Anand’s claims to ‘many-worldliness’ that makes George issue a caution to both the historian and the reader about Anand’s nationalist and revolutionary writing: while there might be *some* accuracy to each of his worlds, she believes ‘he was distinctly marginal in most of his literary/political endeavours’ (93). A reading of Anand’s life through several sources, which include his own exchanges with his infinitely patient correspondent Atma Ram, reveals an anxious dwelling within both the Indian and the British literati. There is a pressure upon Anand to perform Indianness, and to create formal and aesthetic paradigms that present themselves as sufficiently Indian, but still with an eye to their reception in the metropole, such as the laborious details of sartorial and somatic rituals of India’s caste society in ‘The Barber’s Trade Union’. This becomes as much the aim of the text as the political affirmation of the low-castes uprising against the Brahminical status-quo (once again considering Anand’s early dabbling in colonial anthropology). To the Indian readership, as well as to contemporary critics on India’s Dalit and peasant literature and social movements in the colonial era, this manoeuvre, along with the very politics of writing about outcastes in English at the time, weakened Anand’s claim to authenticity as an Indian writer who was committed to a true struggle for national liberation from the British.

In a 1971 essay, Anand himself says that the purpose of his writing about his subaltern ‘heroes’ was to evoke ‘*karuna* ... sympathy’ from his readers. These readers were presumably metropolitan, seeing as he was talking in this essay about Bakha and Munoo, and that *Untouchable* and *Coolie* were

⁵¹ See Kristin Bleumel, ‘Mulk Raj Anand’s Passage Through Bloomsbury’ (67-102) in Kristin Bleumel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London* (Springer, 2016), p. 67.

⁵² George, *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature*, p. 90.

both first published in London and then in India.⁵³ A major point of ideological contention in almost the whole of Anand's pre-Independence corpus is the version of nationalist discourse he was echoing and textualising. Gandhian doctrines of nationalism were based in the benevolence and superiority of the caste-Hindus, whereas the actual Dalit, peasant, and tribal proclamations of self-rule altered the very discursive contours on which Gandhian *swaraj* was built. These proclamations, produced in writing and circulation but also through protest chants, folk songs, and other expressive forms, transformed not only the ideas of freedom, independence, and nationhood as collective processes, but even the experiential and subjective conceptions of individual citizenship and selfhood.⁵⁴ Apart from the study of Anand's novels, his political affiliations with the AIPWA, the Indian League, the Indian National Congress, the Quit India movement, the Swaraj House, the British Labour Party, together with his strong commitment to anti-imperial and anti-fascist causes in Spain and Britain, have firmly established his place in the radical Indian canon as a writer who pioneered a language and an idiom for social change.⁵⁵ These have also cemented his place in the teaching-canon of 'World Literatures' as a nationalist writer from India, someone who wrote Jamesonian allegories of the 'embattled' nation and society, serving up scenes of destitution and social poverty. Often seen as a writer to whom the aesthetic and intellectual liberation of Indian writing was just a 'rebel code' for national sovereignty and independence, it is also not uncommon to see Anand being read as a Gandhian, his

⁵³ Mulk Raj Anand, 'Why I Write?' in Krishna Nandan Sinha, *Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi: Heritage Publications, 1979), p. 7.

⁵⁴ For further reading on Dalit activism in colonial India, see Ramnarayan S. Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Gajarawala.

⁵⁵ See Shyam Asnani, 'The Socio-Political Scene of the 1930s: Its Impact on the Indo-English Novel', *Commonwealth Quarterly*, 6.21 (1981), 14; Gillian Packham, 'Mulk Raj Anand and the Thirties Movement in England', in *Perspectives on Mulk Raj Anand*, ed. by K.K. Sharma (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1978), pp. 52-63; K.K. Sharma, *Perspectives on Mulk Raj Anand* (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1978).

somewhat apocryphal story about his spiritual encounter with Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram used as both an ideological and a historical credential.⁵⁶

Several academic histories, attending mainly to Anand's novels, have encouraged his perception as a nationalist writer imbued with a definitive streak of Gandhian secular consciousness. Gopal's *Indian Novel in English* (2009) claims that Anand, 'the socialist', was 'yet another writer to come into the *spell* of Gandhi' (my emphasis); Ruvani Ranasinha's *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain* (2007) labels him as 'an early nationalist writer'; and Amir Mufti contends in *Enlightenment in the Colony* (2015) that Anand's *Untouchable*, along with such early works of the nationalist canon as Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946) and Premchand's *Godan* (1936), demonstrate a commonness of theme that strikes as distinctly Gandhian in rhetoric: 'the representative self that is the object of the narrative has a secular-nationalist consciousness as its defining characteristic'.⁵⁷

But stories like 'The Barber's Trade Union', in fact, complicate the view that such a representative self, which becomes the object of the narrative, attains always the Gandhian version of the secular-nationalist consciousness. A striking difference between 'The Barber's Trade Union' and the novel *Untouchable* is that while Chandu the barber triumphs in the short story, the novel ends with a scene of resignation and confusion for the outcaste Bakha. This point is generative of a significant debate about subaltern representation, and answers to a set of problematics that underlie Anand's criticism in comparative scholarship. They reveal how Anand's politics ties into what Gopal, using Antonio Gramsci's theory of a historical conjuncture between governance and revolutionary ideals, has called, in the context of late-colonial India, 'the conjunctural terrain of nation-formation'.⁵⁸ The hegemonic

⁵⁶ Whether this meeting actually happened is widely disputed in scholarship. Anand has himself given no less than four dates for this meeting in his autobiographical writings, prefaces to books, and interviews. Two of these dates (April 1927, March 1929) can be ruled out as Gandhi was traveling away from Ashram. The final date (April 1932) can be ruled out as Gandhi spent the year in prison. Rosemary George's 2011 email correspondence with Saros Cowasjee further problematizes whether this visit is true or made up. For further reading see George, *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature*, p. 128.

⁵⁷ See Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 50; Ruvani Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2; Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, p. 189.

⁵⁸ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 18.

histories and the discourses of the Indian struggle for Independence, as several scholars have shown, characterise it as an elite struggle, a struggle for the transfer of power from British colonial rule to the Indian National Congress, ending ultimately with the now-famous Nehruvian declaration of an awakening of a nation from slumber—'the dawn of a new era'.⁵⁹ However, the struggle here was also for a renewed self and subjectivity that would define, enrich, and endow itself in relation to, and often against, the competing priorities of the political project led by the Congress elite. In between the triumphalism of the Congress and its demand for power and the radical consciousness of the subaltern and its demand for freedom, emerged what is now understood to be Anand's typical hero: the Bakhaesque character, a subaltern figure caught in a crisis field of 'nation' that Gopal insists must be reconceptualised as 'a terrain of struggle rather than a unitary given' (4).

Gandhi's own stance in this terrain of struggle, which was marked by the conflicting promises of emancipation by Congress, colonial modernity, and a people's revolution, is a subject of wide debate and scrutiny, but the presiding view is well articulated by Chatterjee, who claims that a particular achievement of Gandhian nationalism was 'the political appropriation of the subaltern classes by a bourgeoisie aspiring for hegemony in the new nation state'.⁶⁰ Many critical forays into Gandhian nationalism concur on the idea that its salient ideological feature was a frame of representation which appropriated the identity and agency of the subaltern.⁶¹ This is made very clear in B.R. Ambedkar's own 1935 polemic 'What Gandhi and the Congress have done to the Untouchables' in which he criticises Gandhi's derision of the Dalit and the way Dalits interpreted for themselves the struggle for national freedom, calling him 'an enemy of his people'.⁶² Gandhi's 1931 fast, now enshrined in

⁵⁹ 'The dawn of a new era' from Nehru's radio broadcast at midnight on 15 August 1947.

⁶⁰ Chatterjee, p. 20. as quoted in Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 19.

⁶¹ This is of course notwithstanding the way in which the subaltern classes, including Dalits, peasants and Adivasis, also often did appropriate the name and the figure of the 'Mahatma' to gain support for their political action. It is beyond the province of this chapter to consider the way in which this occurred, but Shahid Amin's intervention in favour of the significance of the critical and discursive processes through which the Mahatma registered in this consciousness is noteworthy. For further reading see Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁶² Baba Saheb Ambedkar, *What Congress & Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (Delhi: Gautam Book Center, 1946), p. 272.

the sombre historical accounts of the nationalist struggle, as well as the struggle against the practice of untouchability as a kind of saintly sacrifice, is also rightly criticised by Ambedkar in the vociferous document: 'The fast was not for the benefit of the Untouchables. It was against them and was the worst form of coercion against a helpless people to give up the constitutional safeguards ... and agree to live on the mercy of the Hindus. It was a vile and wicked act'.⁶³

As such, the political and intellectual intersections that are at play in the short fictions of Anand in the late-colonial period, as well as the personal and historical factors that had propelled his choice of styles, subjects and milieus, can be studied only by attending to what George calls the 'actual messiness of authorial affiliations even in texts [such as 'The Barber's Trade Union'] which were written at the height of specific nationalist struggles'.⁶⁴ Although often given the epigrammatic (if also paternalist) distinction of being 'India's Charles Dickens', Anand wrote ultimately as a male, middle-class, upper-caste Hindu writer on the sociocultural afflictions to which he had no claim to experience, much less any claim to victimhood. Bakha in *Untouchable*, Munoo in *Coolie*, the barbers and the cobblers of his short stories, all occupied a position in India's social strata which Anand could not call his own, although his writing, with its deeply embodied narratives and colloquial retellings, is recognised as an intimate representation of the challenges and discriminations faced by the subjects most marginalised in Indian society.⁶⁵ The terms upon which this intimacy is gained remains a subject of passionate debate in the criticism of Anand as a 'nationalist' writer.

⁶³ See Ambedkar. Also see M.K. Gandhi, *Gandhi's Great Fast* (Lahore 1932) sometimes republished as 'My Great Fast' in which Gandhi claims, as he did often at his rallies, 'I am a self-proclaimed *Harijan*' (61).

⁶⁴ George, *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature*, p. 94.

⁶⁵ So much of the early scholarship on Mulk Raj Anand, both Indian and metropolitan, champions this view that it hardly needs any citational evidence. One could take a look at K.R.S Iyengar's introduction to Mulk Raj Anand in the 1943 All India PEN history of Indian-English writing: 'Anand's sympathies are with the masses and the underdogs ... in unredeemed India'. See KR Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, 5th edn (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1984), p. 46. To get a sense of Anand's 'curricular' reading as a Gandhian writer, a selection of essays is best sought from Hilda Pontes, 'A Select Checklist of Critical Responses to Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 23.1 (1988), 189–97. See, in particular, Rama Jha, 'Mulk Raj Anand: The Champion of Gandhian Humanism', in *Gandhian Thought and Indo-Anglian Novelists* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1983).

While, on one hand, K.R.S Iyengar, among other critics, has insisted that there was ‘no laborious exercise of the self-conscious proletarianism’ in Anand’s writing, several other critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee in *The Twice Born Fiction*, have been opposed to affording Anand much merit on account of his social position.⁶⁶ The decades of the 1930s and 40s, which Iyengar characterises in the same passage as being ‘filled with the dust of politics’, was also, according to him, a period of resurgence for a new Dalit literature, a more ‘authentic’ literature on casteism in India.⁶⁷ As such, Mukherjee’s contention is that Anand enforces his own political convictions on his characters, thereby making them ‘mouthpieces of the author’s ideas ... stuffed with his own beliefs’.⁶⁸ Such critiques are made of Anand’s writing with a limited purview of his two novels, *Untouchable* (1936) and *Coolie* (1939), whose protagonists Bakha and Munoo were created under the influence of what the author himself recalls as ‘a feeling of guilt ... an ‘obsession’ with the ‘abjectness of the subaltern’.⁶⁹ Ben Conisbee Baer notes in his own remarkable study of *Untouchable* that many harsh critics of the novel have played down Anand’s anticolonial-Marxism because it invariably leads to ‘a fatal conjunction with [his] inherited caste/class superiority’ and creates a paternal and elitist representation of the ‘abject subaltern’, something that stands as ‘a detached vanguard’ (577). Their critique of Anand’s position is invariably that of his detachment from the struggle on the ground. This was where the nationalist movement was not a tug of pacts and roundtable conferences between the elite and the British Raj but an indispensable movement to realise a radical consciousness that could unshackle the subaltern self from the colonial condition which had become embodied as the everyday.

⁶⁶ Iyengar, p. 337.

⁶⁷ ‘Authentic’, as in Rosemary George’s point that Anand was ‘inevitably overtaken by more authentic subjects [such as Dalit writers] who better embodied the project under way’. See George, *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature*, p. 98. For further reading on Dalit activism in colonial India, including a critique of New Dalit writing movement in Marathi, as well as peasants writing in Bengali and writings from the Sangram, see Rawat.

⁶⁸ Meenakshi, p. 78.

⁶⁹ The quotation is from Anand’s 1967 article ‘The Story of My Experiment with a White Lie’ published in Naik, *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English: Presented to Armando Menezes*. Here it is quoted as it appears in Ben Conisbee Baer, ‘Shit Writing: Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable*, the Image of Gandhi, and the Progressive Writers’ Association’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 16.3 (2009), 575–95 (p. 586).

A particular failure of Anand's, according to this critique, is that his novels were distanced from any such ground-consciousness, and as in *Untouchable*, the very process of this realisation of self is represented with aloofness, mediated via registers of language that do not show much interiority. Bakha, to take only one instance, was modelled as a character after Anand read a piece by Mahatma Gandhi in *Young India* whose protagonist was a young Untouchable called Uka. Some critics have gone even as far as to suggest that the conspicuous 'U' in *Untouchable* is an acknowledgment of its debt to not only Gandhi's Uka but also Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), with which the short novel has many similarities.⁷⁰ Anand as good as authorises his own debt to Joyce in an afterword to a 1970 edition of the novel, stating that he feels his 'sweeper-boy hero was rather like the new people whom these Irish writers wrote about' (177).⁷¹ These points emphasise that Anand's 'sweeper-boy' is born out of his erudition, or a projection of his erudition to the Western world, dispensed further into a character-mould whose aim, as Anand himself recalls in *Conversations*, was 'to show the concave mirror to the Western intellectuals who seemed overly sanguine about their complicity with imperialism'.⁷² A lot of Anand's political writing and aesthetic choices are thus outward-facing, often laboured responses to genteel colonial stances, responding to a particular violence enacted by gestures of denial and colonial indifference, rather than his own lived experience. These pressures significantly problematise discussions of agency and autonomy in Anand's literary work.⁷³

⁷⁰ The most obvious being that its fictional time is only one day in the life of Bakha, who wanders, not unlike Leopold Bloom in the city of Dublin, around the British cantonments, marketplaces, and Brahmin households of the military town of Bulandsher.

⁷¹ Interestingly, the Afterword does not re-appear in any subsequent edition of the novel. For this 'Afterword', see Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (New Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1970). For further reading on the confluences between the styles and politics of Mulk Raj Anand and James Joyce, consider the work of Jessica Berman. See Jessica Schiff Berman, 'Comparative Colonialisms: Joyce, Anand, and the Question of Engagement', *Modernism/Modernity*, 13.3 (2006), 465–85. See also, Paul Saint-Amour, 'From Ulysses to Untouchable: Mulk Raj Anand's Joycean Transmigrations' (presented at the International James Joyce Symposium, Dublin, Ireland, 2004).

⁷² Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, p. 169.

⁷³ Anand states in a 1967 essay, 'all my novels and shorter fictions arose from a long confession of nearly two thousand pages, which I wrote from the compulsion of a morbid obsession with myself and the people who possessed me, deep in my conscience' (29). See Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Story of My Experiment with a White Lie', *Indian Literature*, 10.3 (1967), 28–43.

While some critics like Priya Joshi and Saros Cowasjee have praised Anand for opening up the Anglo-Indian literary repertoire to these marginalised characters, spaces and subjectivities, others like Arun Mukherjee and Suresht Ranjan Bald see the pernicious terms of this ‘opening up’ to be at the crux of the problem. An inclusion of Dalit and peasant spaces, according to them, on colonial terms dictated by the metropolitan English register, ‘makes no space for oppositional voices from the subaltern’, ‘denies power and agency to the subaltern protagonist’ and, what ought surely to be the most grievous charge for a radical writer, ‘masks the real political activity of the ‘Untouchable leadership’ in 1930s India’.⁷⁴ Bald goes a few steps even further in his polemic aimed at elite and metropolitan forms of revolutionary discourse: ‘The Indian revolutionaries of Mulk Raj’s variety present the incongruous example of elites rebelling against their elitism, yet unable to forget their apartness from the ‘people’’.⁷⁵ For Mukherjee, it is not so much a matter of incongruity on the part of the elite, but on the part of the elitism of those discourses which valorise the resistances proffered by ‘Mulk Raj’s variety’ while simultaneously masking their blatant collaborations with colonialism and colonial institutions. Lambasting Anand’s writing for its ‘ideological complicities’ with colonial discourse, even as it may appear to mount a form of resistance to those very colonial discourses, he writes that the novel’s language serves only to ‘reassure its bourgeois readers ... that the simmering unrest among the untouchables would not lead to a violent destabilization of the status quo. In the discourse of the text, the untouchable himself remains mute, the object of bourgeois discourses about what to do about him.’⁷⁶ How does this problematic then apply to his short stories?

I want to revert here to my earlier deployment of the idea of a ‘voice-consciousness’ to examine the representation of subalternity in the fictional mode. On the subject of ‘remaining mute’, as well as on the subject of Anand’s personal stakes in writing novels like *Untouchable* and short stories like ‘The Barber’s Trade Union’, a question emerges around the nature of the short story and the kind

⁷⁴ See Baer, p. 592. The quotations are from ‘two best-known critiques of Anand’ according to Baer. See Suresht Renjen Bald, ‘Politics of a Revolutionary Elite: A Study of Mulk Raj Anand’s Novels’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 8.4 (1974), 473–89; Arun P Mukherjee, ‘The Exclusions of Postcolonial Theory and Mulk Raj Anand’s “Untouchable”: A Case Study’, *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 22.3 (1991).

⁷⁵ Suresht Renjen Bald, p. 489. See also Suresht Kumari Renjen Bald, ‘Indian Novelist, 1919–1947: A Study in Political Consciousness’ (unpublished PhD Thesis, Radcliffe College, 1962).

⁷⁶ Arun P Mukherjee, p. 42; Arun P Mukherjee, p. 47.

of interior representation it allows for in the first place. Many of the critiques of Anand's character-sketches, such as around their lack of interiority or radical consciousness, cannot be directly applied to his short fiction. This is not because this form does not allow for an exploration of interiority, but because such an exploration does not depend only on flushing the text with more psychic streams or inner voices. To ask if Chandu was conscious of his 'voice' in his organised defiance of caste-society, or if Saudagar, from Anand's 'The Cobbler and the Machine' which I will read in the next section, was ever in control of his agency, is also to ask of Anand the authority with which he might have been permitted to weave the fabric of subaltern life, the autonomy that he enjoyed in his own literary endeavour as a first generation Indian short story writer in English. It is a crucial point that none of Anand's short stories, to my best knowledge, is narrated from the point of view of the subaltern. The writer preserves his own voice as a high-caste re-teller of past events. In the plot and structure of this retelling, the subaltern characters maintain however a perpetually central position. There is already a tension between the writer's need to centre subaltern experience to the clearly political aim of emancipation, and his discomfort at doing so as a high-caste voice writing about social evils that affect the outcaste and peasant classes. Still, if Anand's novels are about untouchability, unorganised labour, exploitation, servitude and abjection, the short stories are not, in any sense, 'about' these things. To go back once again to Nadine Gordimer's incisive comment about the form: whereas for the novelist 'contact [with human life] is more like the flash of fireflies, in and out, now here, now there, in darkness ... short story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of—the present moment'.⁷⁷

What becomes evident in Anand's writing is that there is an attraction to the present moment, to its lightness, and its ability to isolate itself from the ethical baggage of representing or recreating a subjective experience which is not lived by the author. It is noteworthy that *Untouchable*, although 180 pages in length, manages to meet almost every criteria of being considered a short story apart from the abstract and unformalized criteria of brevity.⁷⁸ It follows Bakha through the course of only

⁷⁷ Gordimer, p. 459.

⁷⁸ Saros Cowasjee also refers to the novel as having the qualities of the short story. See 'The Making of a Novelist' in Saros Cowasjee, *So Many Freedoms: A Study of the Major Fiction of Mulk Raj Anand* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 42.

one afternoon—a present moment. Texts like ‘The Barber’s Trade Union’ too attempt to encase within the fleetingness of the present moment an imagined resistance, a radical fantasy. The present moment appears always to contain movements that are larger than life. Chandu’s glorious resistance (as ‘a maker of modern India’) is fleeting, individual, and yet *national*. Phalini’s maternal lament as it regenders the jute mill as a domestic space is also *national*, insofar as it can be read as a lament for maternity rights and humane working conditions in the new nation. Although these interpretations are not a direct answer to some of the other questions of Anand’s problem of place (his liminality, his in-betweenness) and his tendency to ‘plunder’ (to use Geeta Kapur’s invective) and appropriate folk cultures and subaltern subjectivity to self-fashion as a radical nationalist, they still point towards a way in which a writer like Anand, whose own fictional voice was an already truncated version of the liberationist discourse he championed in his essays and broadcasts, found nonetheless a refuge in the formality of the short story. It was here, in this minor form that Mufti had called ‘a concrete modern bid to give subjective ‘freedom’ a form’, that Anand too finds a kind of subjective freedom.⁷⁹ It is by leveraging the representational ease within the short story that Anand tries to evade the dangers of betraying the subaltern, striving to find a voice of his own as a writer of revolutionary nationalist fictions. This was a voice that was fortified by what he could (or could not) articulate of his characters’ true marginality; therefore, to conclude with the simplistic view that Anand was a member of India’s literary vanguard who wrote *on behalf* of the untouchables, the mill workers, the women, the Dalits, and the peasant classes of the country, and who usurped their voice and agency to further his own literary career, would be falling short of explaining the telling contradictions and coincidences of his own position as ‘a man of many worlds’. The experience of colonialism produces, as in Rushdie’s phrase, ‘identities that are at once plural and partial’. As a result, they also produce perspectives both sympathetic and critical, styles both self-effacing and surviving, and forms of resistance that dwell always outside these tiresome binaries. In the final section of this chapter, I venture to examine how Anand’s ‘neo-folktale’ both draws from, and recuperates, textual resistance from the deep lanes of colonialism’s transactional histories—histories that challenge these binaries even further.

⁷⁹ Mufti, ‘A Greater Story-Writer than God: Genre, Gender and Minority in Late Colonial India’, p. 3.

De-Scribing the Empire

If Anand's marginality within the radical Indian canon was predicated on his detached vanguardism, Anand's place in metropolitan London, presumed to be the heart of that vanguard, was also ignored entirely, or represented in a leadenly reductive manner, such as by deploying the tiresome metaphor of the *passage*. Anand's writings are often characterised as a *passage* through Bloomsbury.⁸⁰ It is not difficult to imagine that the persistence, if not the origin, of this metaphor is in some way linked to Anand's friendship with E.M. Forster, whose preface for *Untouchable*, in conjunction with his own 1924 novel *A Passage to India*, has probably spurred the idiom that Anand would not have merited any mention within the history of English literary modernism had it not been for his sympathetic patronage.⁸¹ But to dismiss Anand's presence in Bloomsbury as transitory or fugacious would be to re-provincialize altogether those global and far-reaching aspects of literary modernism that have, in recent years, lent themselves to several productive areas of postcolonial criticism. In the period that followed the publication of Anand's novels and short stories in London, Anand's use of the English language and his modality of fiction, alongside of course his subjects and political attitudes, received anything from complete indifference to blistering criticism. Anand was either the 'native informant' of the truculence and inhumanity of colonial subjects, in which case, the politics or aesthetics of his language were trivial points, or he was the bold critic of imperial plunder and depredation, in which case his prize was split between those who satirized him as an anticolonial nationalist (the position, as Anand explains in *Conversations*, invited screech from many quarters of British intellectual life in 1940s) and those who saw his work as treasonous to the colonial project of English-writing in which he partook. In the final section of this chapter, through a reading of two short stories, 'The Cobbler and the Machine' and 'The Lost Child', both of which appear in *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), I will examine the profoundly historical ways in which Anand's folk-enriched short

⁸⁰ See, for instance, 'A Passage Through Bloomsbury' (pp. 67-102) in Bluemel.

⁸¹ For a detailed analysis of the 'Politics of Collaboration' in eminent British authors writing prefaces and introductions to books by colonial novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Jean Rhys, see Anna Snaith, 'Introducing Mulk Raj Anand: The Colonial Politics of Collaboration', *Literature & History*, 28.1 (2019), 10-26.

story form survives an imposition of colonial textuality by a process of ‘de-scribing’ the Empire and imperial structures of knowledge.⁸²

When *Coolie*, a novel that Anand wrote as a response to Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1900–01), was first published in 1936, many colonial biases and common tropes against ‘native writers’ came alive. Samuel Townsend Sheppard, for instance, praised Anand’s ‘intimate knowledge of the details of Indian customs’ but condemned him for a ‘caricatured depiction’ of British. John Charles Molony called him a ‘veritable artist in a language which is not his own’ (1937) for writing *Two Leaves and a Bud*.⁸³ An exasperated reviewer went even further in *Times Literary Supplement*: ‘penny wise, pound foolish, is an Indian, not an English characteristic’ (22). The novel was banned in both Britain and India. For the most part, these compelling divisions and faultlines are still fossilised within the vast archives of Bloomsbury’s editorial cultures, in particular the Lawrence and Wishart Archives which contain the letters that Anand exchanged with his publishers, the BBC Written Archives where the transcripts of his radio broadcasts with Orwell on such programmes as *Voice* (1942–1945) are kept, the papers of E.M. Forster in the Cambridge University Library, and the India Office Records in St Pancras, apart, of course, from Anand’s own papers in Kolkata’s National Archives.⁸⁴

It is clear that Anand’s ‘unique position’ straddles both coloniality (since he was an upper-caste Indian writing in English) and subalternity (since he was the racialised other in Britain needing still the colonial endorsement to even get published). He dwelled somewhere in the knowledge-field of

⁸² Again, the dates of first publication remain unknown but ‘The Lost Child’ is regarded as one of Anand’s very early forays into writing fiction, appearing once in a 1936 edition of Eliot’s *Criterion* magazine.

⁸³ Interestingly, Molony also wrote the exact same thing for R.K. Narayan’s *Swami and Friends* (1937) which was published, following similar course to Anand’s novel except for the endorsement of Graham Greene instead of Forster. His review stated that the novel would be praiseworthy for an Englishman, but since ‘Mr Narayan was writing in a language that is not his own ... [the novel] is more than praiseworthy’. See Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation*, p. 20.

⁸⁴ It is unfortunately beyond the province of this chapter to demonstrate precisely how the colonial dynamics played a part in framing Mulk Raj Anand as a ‘native informant’ but a scrupulous look is offered by Ruvani Ranasinha in her *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-century Britain* (2007) which considers Anand alongside several other Indian and Ceylonese figures from the literary and broadcasting world to present a ‘historicised account of [their] publication and reception’ (7). See Ranasinha, *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation*, p. 7.

positions that Ranasinha theorises in her study of early South Asian writing in Britain as ‘authentic insiders’ (writers like himself, Rao, Narayan) and ‘privileged insiders’ (English writers who spent time in Colonial India like Forster, Kipling, Orwell) (15). This points to a very particular pressure of colonial ‘survival’ that is often overlooked when studying the emergence of Anglophone writing in the late-colonial period. Just as Anand’s fiction was being published simultaneously in India and Britain, and via translation in Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, and as his broadcasts, (with the emergence of short-wave radio) were sounding over both the East and West, there came a need for the colonial intellectual, particularly a writer of political and engaged fiction, to find an aesthetic niche that could leverage the position of authenticity yet speak to (and sometimes with) the prejudices of the privileged insiders. Anand’s use of the ‘authentic resource’ of the folk medium in his short story, was hence simultaneously engaged with a process of *de-scribing* the Empire. If not in the technical norms of the colonial avant-garde, Anand’s ‘neo-folktale’ was significant in its subversion, in its control, in its appropriation, and in its domestication of the very medium of folk (just as well as of English) to *occupy*, and even to survive, the ‘insider-outsider’ position accorded to it by the colonial-editorial apparatus (for which Forster may be seen as just one among a long lineage of ‘scribes’).

I take the notion of ‘de-scribing’ here as it appears in much postcolonial scholarship, which is as a way for many anticolonial and postcolonial writers to identify, intercept and subvert the textual processes of colonial rule. Several notable scholars, such as Peter Hulme in *Colonial Encounters* (1986) and Gauri Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest* (2008), have emphasised language as a colonial representational system which plays a central and not a peripheral role in creating and propagating conditions of domination and subjection.⁸⁵ Most notably, the term appears in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson’s *De-scribing the Empire* (1994). The influential work describes colonialism as ‘an operation of discourse [that] interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation’ (3). As the book states further, ‘even though colonial rule was initially established by guns, guile and

⁸⁵ See Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986); Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

disease, it was maintained ... in its interpellative phase by textuality'.⁸⁶ For such a colonial textuality to exist, there needs, in the first place, to be a 'scribe' – an agent or alibi of the colonial apparatus with an investment in creating an ensemble of language-based practices that can appropriate, distort and erase the cultural paradigms of a subject population (the trope of the great colonial photograph comes to mind, of course). Anand's short story form, already existing in that liminal space between the metropole and the colony, engages with this 'scribe' at a very intimate level. By looking into the density of his language, his formal deployment of literariness (by which I mean the condition of the written record) in addition to the orality of the folk, we can examine the way in which the short story form, as it exists for Anand, refracts and re-enacts the textual agency of the colonial 'scribe' in order to remake itself. But who is this colonial scribe? And how does it relate to the question of folk? In what way, and under what conditions, can the reproduction of colonial textuality act as a form of its own subversion?

The relationship between the colonial scribe and folklore is deeply historical. Significant here are thick volumes of colonial transcriptions of India's folk cultures compiled by such decorated English anthropologists and geographers as Richard C. Temple, William Crooke and George Grierson.⁸⁷ The very question of folk, the 'alleged non-literary material' in the wisdom of peasant hearts which Anand draws from, is mediated so significantly by this colonial endeavour that to be free from it in the register of the English language is difficult, even impossible, at any aesthetic or linguistic level. For a colonial subject, as postcolonial theory has so vigorously argued, it is impossible to circumvent

⁸⁶ *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*, ed. by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 3.

⁸⁷ See the journals *The Indian Antiquary* edited by Richard Temple from 1882-1899, as well the significant corpora of colonial folklore anthropology: Richard Temple, *Men and Events of My Time in India* (London: J. Murray, 1882); William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folk-Lore of Northern India, Vol. II of II* (London: Archibald Constable, 1896), I; William Crooke, *An Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Allahabad: Government Press, North-Western Provinces and Oudh, 1894); George Abraham Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life: Being a Discursive Catalogue of the Surroundings of the People of That Province, with Many Illustrations from Photographs Taken by the Author* (London: Trubner and Co., 1885). A good historical survey of the genre of Indian folklore studies is Sadhana Naithani, 'Political Ideology and Modernisation of Folklore A Study of Three Contemporary Indian Artists', *Jahrbuch Für Volksliedforschung*, 41 (1996), 74-78.

or escape the cognitive patterns of speech and language through which the colonial world has been structured. The very medium through which a writer accesses the orality of their own storytelling or folk tradition is contaminated here by the way in which the more pernicious and intrusive aspects of colonialism had already once before them seized control of it, deferring it to the hierarchies of value that enshrines the written tradition as pre-emptive, richer, and all-encompassing, while reproducing the oral through standardised colonial-vernaculars (and their entrenched orientalist representational paradigms). Interesting to me in these compilations of folk is a figure who already appears as a result of a dialectical transaction between folk-knowledges (often categorised in colonial discourse as *lore*) and the colonial anthropologist; a figure that embodies the exigent and subversive nature of survival within the colony—the *spirit sahib*.

The spirit sahib appears in many forms and iterations in colonial anthropological writings under such headings as ‘beliefs in ghosts and spirits’ or ‘superstitions and lore’ which provide a discursive overlay over what is essentially an anticolonial act of narrative subversion. The *spirit sahib* is the stealer of children’s skulls, the collector of boats and taxes, the colonial Master perceived to various degrees of nefariousness within epistemic criteria of the folk that often seem superstitious, irrational or fantastical to the colonial anthropologist (who is also, in this case, the colonial administrator and the ‘scribe’). Consider, for instance, this selective and highly mediated interpretation offered by William Crooke of this particular ‘lore’ about the eating habits of the spirit sahib—

‘The nails of the *European*, like those of the *Rakshasa*, distil a deadly poison, and hence he is afraid to eat with his fingers, as all respectable people do, and prefers to use a knife and fork’ (recorded in Crooke 1892, 9).⁸⁸

An emphasis on body parts, which are animised (or demonised, with the comparison to *Rakshasha* in this case) in order to show an embodied colonial condition is retained across the many Crooke recordings. To go back briefly to our first reading of ‘Lullaby’, any reader of Anand’s fiction that is well-versed with the poetics of folk in India will find that the representation of Phalini’s body in

⁸⁸ The folktales I will be reading in this section, unless otherwise indicated, were first compiled from Crooke, Grierson and Temple volumes by Sadhana Naithani. See Sadhana Naithani, ‘An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India’, *Folklore*, 112.2 (2001), 183–88. All page numbers to this source are cited in-line.

'Lullaby' as a Cartesian frame working together to feed bags of jute into the machine (the machine being the demonic *Rakshasa*-like figure with a gaping mouth that demands to be fed even as Phalini's child starves) is evincive of the many palimpsestic imaginaries of the folk. These imaginaries are as much their own epistemic constructs of reality as they are simply narrative subversions of it. It could be said that Anand's *demonisation* of the twisting machine in the short story text, easily mistaken in passing as metaphor for its (industrial) despotism, finds in the Crooke manuscripts, a connection with a long and fraught historical process. The Crooke manuscripts may be seen as living transcripts of the process behind the literary metaphor. It could be theorised as an aesthetic and textual *routine*, where I use the term routine as used by René Girard in attempting to describe the steps behind the act of observational mimicry that underlie all forms of textual reproductions.⁸⁹ Through a series of essays, critics like Homi Bhabha have also pointed towards understanding the significance of the liminal space between the metropole and the colony, and how it is occupied by a 'self-in-conflict'.⁹⁰

As Tiffin notes about the nature of colonial modernity as an inscribed process: 'the whole estate of colonialism is a breeding ground for fractures and flaws and a series of anxieties within European modernity itself that are taking longer to recognize than those within the forever-altered world of the Other' (7). Where the *sahib* (the colonial or the feudal Master) was once the demon in the vast fund of folklore in India, the Anandian 'machine' (if you will allow this distinction for its recurrence in Anand's many short stories) follows a textual *routine* into a kind of mimicry: a metaphor of the Master as an embodied machine is therefore produced equally through reproductive textuality of the colonial media (including its violent erasures and its own ethos of self-preservation) as it is produced by growth and cyclical iteration intrinsic to oral transmissions. Many aspects of this deeply historical textual process reside deep beneath the fabric of Anand's short stories, and therefore, the mode that is deployed to excavate them must take into account concrete instances of the 'surviving' exchanges between the two sources, which are Anand's own location in the folk traditions of India as a 'native'

⁸⁹ Moreover, Shruti Amar in her 2019 essay, records many literary instances in which Anand confesses to the aesthetic development of his folk forms as a young student listening to his mother narrate folk tales, which is eerily along the same lines as understood in the theory of Girardian mimesis in a child. See *Rene Girard and Creative Mimesis*, ed. by Pablo Bandera (London: Lexington Books, 2013).

⁹⁰ Homi K Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1 (1985), 144-65 (p. 142).

writer, but also his location within the colonial traditions of folklore anthologism, linguistic surveys, cartographies, enforced vernacularisation, and standardised translations. The folk forms of Anand carry therefore an imperial debt, problematising any notions of the authenticity of this 'unlettered' medium. It is, in fact, only in the way in which this imperial debt is paid off by Anand through its clever encoding within his own writing that an autonomous claim of resistance is made in his fiction, not simply in his plunder of the folk resources of India.

Appearing only as M.R.A for reasons unclear, Anand served as the series editor for the volumes *Folk Tales of India*, writing the editorial introduction to one slender volume *Folk Tales of Punjab* (1974) in the preface to which appears a telling confession of this debt: 'I have benefitted from the learned commentaries on world folk tales of the great English antiquarian, Sir Richard Temple'.⁹¹ On the flip cover of the volume is a brief dedication 'to the memory of the English storyteller A.E. Coppard who put me on the way to folk tales as models for my craft' (1974). The influence of Richard Carnac Temple (as well as, though to a lesser degree, of Coppard) on Anand is not to be taken lightly: it sheds light on what Anna Snaith has called, in the purview of Anand's anticolonial fiction, the 'colonial politics of collaboration' and on a particular aspect of the ontology of Indian-English short prose in the late-colonial period which is often ignored.⁹² This is an aspect of its aesthetic and linguistic heritage that points us to the opposite stream of cultural exchange which, as we saw in the previous section, received Anand's fiction to opprobrious reviews in the canonical heart of London: the import of British fiction (and British 'Asiatic' anthologies of folk) into colonial India, which would come to play a significant role in creating the cyclical economy of aesthetic and formal innovation that sculpts Anand's art of representation within his short fiction.⁹³ Some of these transactions register in the way in which the 'machine' is represented in the short story 'The Cobbler and the Machine' which appears in the 1944 Cape edition.

⁹¹ Mulk Raj Anand, *Folk Tales of Punjab* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1974).

⁹² Snaith, p. 11.

⁹³ Among other works, Priya Joshi's remarkable *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel in India* (2002) traces, in unprecedented depth, the 'reading cultures' of fin de siècle India, including a critique of the ignominious work of the Fort William and Macmillan Colonial Library projects that played a very significant role in abetting and commissioning the work of folklore anthologism in colonial India. See Joshi.

The larger plot structure of the text is consonant with Anand's (almost Gandhian) distrust of the machine as a figure of debasement and colonial modernity. Although, in the end, the text absolves the machine of directly murdering a poor cobbler, shifting the blame onto social and cultural inequality that fails the peasant protagonist as he tries to pay off the debt the machine has incurred him, the representational, symbolic and formal choices still portray the machine as a mysterious, enigmatic and perilous object. Anand co-opts the language in which the India's folklore, as first literalised by the colonial scribe, had once described the 'spirit sahib', in order to *de-scribe* coloniality. The text begins with Saudagar, the village cobbler, fantasising about a leather sewing-machine. He had first seen a machine of the kind with the village tailor: 'a grimy, black hand-machine in a casket, decorated with a tracery of leaves in yellow paint that nibbled at yards of cloth like a slimy rat at terrific speed'.⁹⁴ The narrator and the cobbler are united by their interest in the profusion of colonial machinery in India, both in the hands of the merchant classes and the factory owners: 'the great big railway engine whose *phuff-phuff* I had learnt to imitate, the phonograph from which I hoped to hear my own voice one day ... the intricate mass of wheels and pistons that lay hiccupping in the powerhouse at the junction of two canals [electric generator]; the roaring monsters of iron and steel that converted the cotton and wool of our village into cloth [diesel-powered loom]' (84). Saudagar has never himself seen a leather sewing-machine but has faith that such a 'contrivance' (85) must exist for sewing boots if it exists for sewing clothes. The opening scene of the story signifies only a certain but mixed arrival of colonial modernity and its 'contrivance'—a word for the machine that itself suggests some kind of a cruel scheme. The use of adjectives, modifiers and ironies of language in describing the machine as a devilish figure with a life of its own, points to Anand's deployment of the evacuating power of language in 'othering' the machine, and by extension colonial modernity, as the troublesome Other. This is an act of narrative resistance, a direct subversion by a signification of colonial authority; whereas, in the Temple volumes, the colonial scribe records the spirit sahib as a mystical and fearsome figure for the oriental consumption of the West, Anand turns the modality of mysticism, superstition, and awe, onto the colonial machine itself. In many ways, this is Anand's project of the folk form—a culture, once Othered, ogled, consumed, distorted, and commodified,

⁹⁴ 'The Cobbler and the Machine' (84-95) in Anand, *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories*, p. 84. All further page numbers to this source are cited in-line.

threatening to expose its knowledge as complete and beyond the discourses of Europe through the subversion of those very discourses. As Saudagar dies in the end, overworking the sewing machine, unable to pay off the loan he had taken to acquire it, the narrator tells us of the verdict of the villagers, which is that he was ‘killed by the devil disguised as the machine’ (94). In most of the folk recordings of the colonial antiquary the devil is usually disguised as the colonial master, the spirit sahib. Before I read the final text of the chapter ‘The Lost Child’, let us consider a few more examples of folk anthologism around this figure of the spirit sahib.

George Grierson, the celebrated Anglo-Irish linguist known for his work in what is today India and Iran, leaves an amusing trace of his confusion as he encounters the ‘rumour’ concocted by the villagers when he was conducting a linguistic survey in Bihar: ‘Grierson Sahib is counting boats and cattle in order to take them away for the Government’s war in Egypt ... Children are being counted to be buried in the foundation of the bridge that the government is constructing over the Ghatak river’.⁹⁵ The highly selective and mediated colonial interpretation, to which I called attention earlier, is the trope of ‘superstition’ that extracts the narrative and aesthetic agency of these lore, something that Anand, by re-inscribing them within his fictions, attempts to give back to them. As Naithani argues, ‘these discourses are *partisan*, not superstitious’ (my emphasis, 187). R.C. Temple’s frequently cited claim that ‘a miracle in India does not strike much wonder and is looked upon as a natural incident in everyday life’ (as quoted in Naithani, 186) could also be read perhaps as an observation of an epistemic and narrative paradigm that lingers at the limit of the settler imagination (and thus perception of the nature) of reality. Temple goes on to narrate a similar lore:

[it is believed that ...] a boy, the fatter and blacker the better, is caught, a small hole bored in the top of his head, and he is hung up by the heels over a slow fire. The juice or essence of his body is in this way distilled into seven drops of the potent medicine ... It is further believed that a *European gentleman* ... has a *contract from government* of the right of enticing away suitable boys for this purpose. He makes them smell a stick or wand, which obliges

⁹⁵ As recorded in Naithani, ‘An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India’, p. 4. For the original consult Grierson.

them to follow him, and he then packs them off to some hill station where he carries on this nefarious manufacture.’⁹⁶

My *emphases* in both of the above excerpts, compiled in Naithani’s critical essays, represent pressing instances of the knowledge amongst the colonised of the imperial ‘other’ and the imperial state apparatus. The work of Richard Temple on the folk tales of India issues a number of critical concerns about agency, voice and the very politics through which knowledge-formation, within the realms of both imperialist and anticolonialist discourse, takes place. At stake, also, is a question about a poetics of exclusion: whose voices are excluded, whose voices are claimed, whose voices, to use O’Connor’s term, ‘submerged’, and whose voices are misappropriated when the orientalist enterprise of folk anthologism, takes place? How do these voices persevere, or come alive again, as they are re-inscribed within the formal and philological milieus of some of these earliest examples of the Indian-English short story?

A reading of ‘The Lost Child’, one of Anand’s earliest short stories, shows an aesthetic *routine* that can be understood within the epistemic context offered by the Temple volumes where a *spirit sahib* with a *contract from government* is making children smell a stick or a wand in order to seduce them to some hill station or cantonment. These folktales, such as even in Grierson’s account of children being stolen to build foundations for the colonial bridge over Ghatak river, demonstrate a deep historical consciousness of imperialist-epistemic violence that undergirds the acquisitional and assimilative logic of orientalist museology (the theft of children’s skulls for building museums is indeed a constant feature in all these antiquarian volumes). An awareness of the increased density of colonial presence in ‘hill stations’ or ‘cantonments’ is also felt within these folktales, with a recurring psychotropic element, such as is common in Persian *qissas*, being the magic wand, a tool of colonial magic that is replete with many alluring smells, sounds and colours that could entice away a colonial subject from the plainlands on to the colonial hill station. ‘The Lost Child’ can therefore be read as consonant with the anxieties of being lost around these psychotropic attractions, within which lies

⁹⁶ The source is Temple, p. 177. Quoted on p.6 in Naithani, ‘An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India’. Emphases are mine.

concealed, if we see through the subversive folk epistemologies, the figure of the *spirit sahib*. The text was first published by J.A. Allen in 1935, making it one of Anand's earliest short stories.

The child in the text is going to be lost during a spring-festival, where 'a gaily clad humanity' has filled a distinctly colonial-era space: 'some walked, some rode on horses, others sat, being carried in bamboo and bullock carts' (35).⁹⁷ Anand is lyrical, even belabouring, in the description of the scene: 'a bowering mustard field, pale as melting gold' sweeps across one side of the textually created space, whereas on the other side 'stood a cluster of mud-walled houses, thrown into relief by a dense crowd of yellow-robed men and women from which arose a high-pitched sequence of whistling, creaking, squeaking, roaring, humming noises, sweeping across the groves to the blue-throated sky like the weird, strange sound of Siva's mad laughter' (36). The clever tabulation of meaning between Lord Siva's *mad laughter* and the sounds of the yellow-robed men registers the intruder presence in the text: a presence so unfamiliar that it is elevated to the acroamatic presence of *Shiva*, the destroyer of worlds. The colonial-settlers are never mentioned by name or description in the text, and indeed they *survive* only within the suspicious hermeneutics of those readings that have waded first through folklores of India.

The descriptions and metaphors, the off-balance rhythms through which the 'scene' of the text unfolds slowly 'in ascendance' (to quote Richard Temple is his remark about folktales of India being always *in ascendance*) also point to the oral mode of the text.⁹⁸ 'The Lost Child' appears to be written as a text that is meant to be *read to* the reader—a cornerstone of the Indian storytelling tradition. The animist folk styles are applied to natural elements around the child as he is traversing through this seemingly outlandish spatiality of the spring festival, a kind of Girardian mimicry at work. These elements soon turn nefarious as the spirits in the folk tales do, tempting the child away from his

⁹⁷ The admission here is Anand's own in a 1970 essay: 'Later, when my novel *Untouchable*, rewritten in Sabarmati Ashram, where I had gone to stay with Gandhi to deepen my book, was turned down by nineteen publishers, the Sculptor Eric Gill, who befriended me in my misfortunes, printed *The Lost Child* and the other two pieces, on his hand press in Pigotts, in an edition of 200 copies, with an engraving by him' from Mulk Raj Anand, 'About the Lost Child and Other Allegories', *Indian Literature*, 13.1 (1970), 26–32. All references to the text here are however from Naik, *Selected Short Stories of Mulk Raj Anand*.

⁹⁸ Naithani, 'An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India', p. 186.

parents ‘by whining round his ear’ as ‘one bold black bee’ does: ‘come child, come, come on to the footpath’ (37). Richard Temple records an instance in 1884 when the villagers refused to step on to the newly constructed tarmac for transport of goods through carriages, ‘armed with belief that their feet will be forever stuck onto the *pavement*’ (Temple 1882, 311). An old banyan tree in the text also ‘outstretched its powerful arms over the blossoming jack and jaman and neem and champak and scrisha and cast its shadows across beds of golden cassis and crimson gulmohar as an old grandmother spreads her skirts over her young ones’ (37). Any scholar of Asiatic history will be struck by the use of distinctive colonial spellings in Anand’s writing: *scrisha* for *sheesha*, *jaman* for *jamoona*, *cassis* for *kashish*. The text supplies, on close reading, a set of evidence of a ‘drawing’ from the ‘alleged non-literary material’ of the continent, but as first *literalised* by the colonial project of vernacular standardisation and folklore anthologism.

Like all of Anand’s stories, ‘The Cobbler and the Machine’ and ‘The Lost Child’ carry dedications to notable European intellectuals presumed to be Anand’s acquaintances from his time in London, such as the British communist author Arthur-Calder Marshall and his wife Ara-Calder Marshall. Although not a constitutive part of the narrative textuality of his short stories, these dedications could themselves be read as an attempt to *de-scribe* the Empire, thinking back to the ways in which the colonial scribe (the colonial explorer, surveyor, naturalist or writer) invariably aimed to locate itself in a hierarchical and supremacist relationship to the practical knowledge of the native. Such a tense dynamic is evident from the retaliatory anonymous review which Anand (alongwith writers of the *Indian Writing* collective Ali, Shevalankar, Singh and Subramaniam) wrote for *New Writing*, whose editor John Lehmann appears, among others, in *The Barber’s Trade Union* dedications. The review is especially straining to be harsh on the journal’s English contributors, who, ‘in spite of their undeniable competence and power can often seem to develop on stereotyped lines and lack any compelling interest [... looking] in vain for illumination [...] in the dreary neo-metaphysics of Day Lewis, the sentimental effusion of Spender, pseudo-elegiac tortuosity of George Baker [and] the

facile and facetious topicality of Auden'.⁹⁹ Indian writers, among other Asian and African writers in *New Writing*, possessed however 'greater individuality of observation and expression'.¹⁰⁰

The whole enterprise of recording folklore, in fact, is rooted in the colonial fantasy of conquest, of assimilating as yet unaccessed knowledges that the native already but does not have. Citing the moving example of the reportage on the monumental conquest of Mt Everest in 1953, Tiffin and Lawson note how 'the European can discover the place only if it is not already known, so the indigenous guide must know and yet not know. His paradox is implicitly resolved in textualizing the event by rendering the guide's knowledge pragmatic rather than conceptual and strategic'.¹⁰¹ From Charles Darwin and his work with Aboriginal scholars on HMS Beagle, to the work of Temple, Crooke and Grierson on the folktales of India, the guiding, enabling, but always *marginal* knowledge of the native is only ever acknowledged in the gratuitous areas of literary and scholarly production, such as letters, notes of thanks, dedications and remembrances. What Anand, a native, but also an English writer, does by writing dedications to European intellectuals at the start of each of his stories, is he turns the allegory of conquest and of subordinate knowledge on the Englishman, reclaiming hence the ideas of literary modernism, proletarian realism, and narrative experimentalism, as also products of legitimate colonial transactions but in which the proverbial 'conquest', for once, is led by the native writer. As in the trope of Asiatic expedition and discovery which became the mantelpiece of the English colonial project, Forster's 'discovery' of Anand's literary brilliance was punctuated by his repeated emphasis on a certain 'uniqueness of position' occupied by him: '[*Untouchable*] could only have been written by an Indian and by an Indian who observed from the outside' (9).¹⁰² Little did he know that one who was observing from the outside had also been inside in some ways, attuned to

⁹⁹ Anonymous, 'Commentary', *Indian Writing*, 1.1 (1940), p. 61. Quoted in Ruvani Ranasinha, 'Establishing Material Platforms in Literary Culture in the 1930s and 1940s', in *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 132–47 (p. 142).

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, p. 61.

¹⁰¹ See the original in *News Chronicle*, 12 June 1952 (British Newspaper Archives, British Library, St. Pancras, London). Here it is cited in Tiffin and Lawson, p. 1.

¹⁰² E.M. Forester, 'Preface' in Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable. With a Preface by EM Forster* (London: Wishart Books, 1935).

the pressures of surviving, in a literary sense, a location that was most precarious, a location that existed at the border between two uneven cultures.

As such, one of the main reasons for my use of the politics of survival to study what is essentially an aesthetic form that emerged in the particular case of Anand's late-colonial era short prose is that unlike other models of material and epistemic exchange between colonising and colonised cultures (such as those now deployed for the revision of literary modernism as a globalist, internationalist, cosmopolitan movement), the politics of 'survival' make visible the structures of colonial power that were, over many centuries, destructive of the textuality of one source (for instance the orality of folk by imposition of English or standardised vernaculars) to preserve the textuality of another (such as the bureaucratic language and customs of colonial English). What emerges from it is a form and a language that *survives*, not the one that trails behind the metropole. Such an aesthetics of form and language, evident in the 'neo-folktales' of Mulk Raj Anand, is therefore what *survive* from a world that exists at the *limits* of colonial imagination, not the one defeated at the shores of its expeditions. In spite of Anand's connivance and complicities, and in spite of his plunders and benefactions, the *neo-folktale*, on close textual inspection, reveals itself to be an autonomous form waiting to expose a culture of Indian-English writing at its alterior, adversarial and antagonistic beginnings. In the next chapter, I turn to the Urdu short story, the *afsana*, in perhaps its most adversarial iteration.

4. Insurgent Pamphlets: Space, Servitude and Material Form in *Angarey*

AHMED ALI, in a 1972 letter to biographer Carlo Coppola, sheds light on the cultural and political atmosphere of the 1930s Lucknow where *Angarey* (Embers), the infamous pamphlet, was published to blistering criticism from several quarters, laying the oppositional current that arguably led to the formation of the Progressive Writers Association in 1936. Ali writes:

We knew the book would create a stir, but never dreamt that it would bring the house down. We were condemned at public meetings, and in private, bourgeois families hurried to dissociate themselves from our us [sic] and denied acquaintance with us, especially Rashed Jahan and myself, and even Sajjad Zahir's [sic] mother (a dear old lady) accused me of spoiling her son. People read the book behind closed doors and in bathrooms with relish but denounced us in the open. We were lampooned and satirized, condemned editorially and in pamphlets (I have many of the original cuttings and articles).¹ Our lives were threatened; people even lay in wait with daggers to kill us. The Provincial Assembly created a furore of denunciation; deputations were sent to the Governor and officials of the Province. The book was banned eventually by the Government of U.P. and the orthodox and God-fearing heaved a sigh of relief. But *Angarey* grew into the Progressive movement ...²

¹ These original Urdu cuttings were later shared with Shabana Mahmud of the British Library. See Appendix 1 (p.461) in Shabana Mahmud, 'Angare and the Founding of the Progressive Writers' Association', *Modern Asian Studies*, 30.2 (1996), 447-67.

² Owing to the discontinuation of the Twayne World Authors series and even Ali's own denunciation of the final manuscript, the biography by Carlo Coppola was regrettably never published. Some of the recordings and exchanges between Carlo Coppola and Ahmed Ali, however, were published separately later. See 'Four Letters' in Mehr Afshan Farooqi, *The Two-Sided Canvas: Perspectives on Ahmed Ali* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 190.

The small pamphlet contained two short stories by Ahmed Ali, 'Mahavaton ki Ek Rat' (A Night of Winter's Rains) and 'Baadal Nahi Aate' (The Clouds Don't Come); five stories by Sajjad Zaheer, 'Neend Nahi Aati' (Sleep Doesn't Come), 'Jannat ki Bashrat' (The Tidings of Heaven), 'Garmiyon ki Ek Raat' (One Night in Summer), 'Dulari' and 'Phir Ye Hangama' (Again this Commotion); the only short story of Mahmuduzzafar's literary career, 'Jawanmardi' (Virility); and a story and play each by the debutante Rashid Jahan, namely, 'Dilli ki Sair' (A Tour of Delhi) and 'Parde ke Peeche' (From Behind the Veil). Of these 'enfant terribles' of the 1930s Urdu letters, Ahmed Ali would be the only one to have a distinguished literary career, coming to be known better than the rest for his epochal 1940 novel *Twilight in Delhi* and short story collections like *Hamari Gali* (Our Lane, 1943).³

According to Priya Joshi, the publication of these short stories in Urdu (as opposed to English) was an 'unusual event, for Urdu till then had a scarce tradition in the short story'.⁴ Yet, as I have shown in Chapter 2, by the time the PWM was established in 1936, the short story had become the dominant genre of literary production across all of the *bhasas*, not only Urdu, testifying perhaps to the significance of this group of four writers to short prose and pamphlet production in India in the late-colonial period. It is equally possible, as Rakhshanda Jalil has noted, that some of the stories, such as Mahmuduzzafar's 'Jawanmardi' (Virility), were first written in English and then translated into Urdu by Sajjad Zaheer himself.⁵ Shakeel Siddiqui, in a preface to a 1990 translated edition of *Angarey* notes that several texts in the collection were directly influenced by the time spent by the leading writers Zaheer and Mahmuduzzafar, both from highly privileged backgrounds, in England, where the former studied law in London and the latter studied English at Balliol College, Oxford. Ahmed Ali, at the time, was teaching English at Agra College having just finished his M.A. in 1931

³ Sajjad Zaheer would have a career in politics and diplomacy, though is also noted for his memoir on the birth of PWM, *Rosbnai* (Light). Rashed Jahan, a doctor, and Mahmuduzzafar, a lawyer, would eventually marry. Their autobiographical writings on the history and motives of the PWM are also worthy of note. See Mahmuduzzafar, 'Intellectuals and cultural reaction' in Sajjad Zaheer, *The Light: The History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, trans. by Sajjad Zaheer (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴ Joshi, p. 206.

⁵ For more on this, see Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu*, p. 109.

from Lucknow University. It is also hard to know, Siddiqui further states, whether ‘the vision for *Angarey* or an anthology like *Angarey* was conceived in London or in Lucknow’.⁶ But it was in Lucknow, with Ali’s significant input that a lot of the practical and intellectual work towards its publication was carried out. As Ali writes further in his letter to Coppola—‘In India it fell to the lot of two young friends [Zaheer and himself], with the association of the third [Mahmuduzzafar] though not a writer, to start the movement, not as a deliberate ideological effort, but the spontaneity of creative urge and youthful idealism that knew no bounds’.⁷ Upon Mahmuduzzafar’s return from Oxford, the venue of the preparatory meetings shifted to Rashed Jahan’s room in Lucknow’s Lady Dufferin Hospital where she was training to be a doctor. In his version, Ali convinces both Rashed Jahan, ‘a young woman ... emancipated with few inhibitions’, and Mahmuduzzafar each to write a story on the same day. These entries were met with ‘youthful appreciation’ by everyone, and thus, as Ali recounts, ‘*Angarey* [sic] was born and published in 1931-32’ (189). Not long after, British colonial government cracked down on the pamphlet, the Police Department of the United Provinces stating in a circular:

In exercise of the power conferred by section 99A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (Act V of 1898), the Governor in Council hereby declares to be forfeited to His Majesty every copy of the book in Urdu entitled ‘*Angare*’, written by Sayed Sajjid Zahir [sic], Ahmad Ali, Rashid Jahan, Mahmudul Zafar [sic]. . . on the ground that the said book contains matter the publication of which is punishable under section 295A of the Indian Penal Code.⁸

⁶ Shakeel Siddiqui, “Aaj Bhi Sulag Rahe Hai Chah Dashak Purane *Angarey*” [Even Today Glows Four Decades Old Embers], in *Angarey, Translit. from Original 1932. Lucknow, Nizami Press*. (Delhi: Parimal Prakashan, 1990), p. 12.

⁷ We know that Ahmed Ali later splintered from the group and the relationship between him and the rest of the progressives soured. In the same letter, he criticises Zaheer’s *Roshani* (first published in 1947) for having given ‘a prejudiced and one-sided account of the facts [of the birth of PWM] ... very much like the first Dictator of Pakistan Ayub Khan’. Mehr Afshan Farooqi, p. 189.

⁸ As reprinted in Khalid Alvi, *Angare* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1995), p. 112. The original source is United Provinces Gazette, 1933. India Office Records. V/11/1511 as quoted in Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 155.

Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code punished ‘deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of His Majesty’s subjects’.⁹ Among the stories which invited the most scorn from conservative Muslim society and religious leaders was Zaheer’s satirical ‘Jannat ki Bashrat’ (The Tidings of Heaven) in which a Maulavi (a religious preacher) called Dawood, finds it impossible to resist the sexual urges he encounters in his dreams, finding himself upon waking up on the ‘revelation day’, *Shab-e-Qadar*, to be hugging a ‘—’ (presumably, the Holy Quran). Although several reprints and translations have replaced the name of the book with a dash, the original 1932, a rare copy of which is with Rakhshanda Jalil, makes no attempt to gloss over this detail.¹⁰ Zaheer’s use of the name of the book serves oddly as a paratextual element in the original pamphlet, working to disclose the prejudices and contradictions present in each reprint as they relate to conservative Muslim sentiments and religio-authoritarian dogma and censorship. Rashed Jahan’s text ‘Parde ke Peeche’ (Behind the Veil) too invited sharp scrutiny for violating the spaces ordained for Muslim women writers, a category within which Jahan found little company at the time. The text, written as a play but showing more in common with the short story, talks about womanhood, motherhood, polygamy, misogyny, domestic abuse and the medical profession. Rashed Jahan’s language is the unadorned female voice of North India, making the story relatable to the masses. As Gopal notes, ‘[Jahan] had made a pioneering inroad into the literary public sphere by claiming for herself—and for other women—the authority to speak, not only about women’s bodies and sex, but also about modernity, science, progress, ethics and epistemology’.¹¹

In many ways, these were the critical interests of the *Angarey* collective. As many have observed, the reason it did not sit well with religious zealots and conservatives was because it introduced new liberationist ideals of feminism and progress in a language that opposed the conservatism of the traditional Urdu themes and subjects. It was also an anthology of short stories, containing portable and easily circulated texts—a form considered distinctively Western for the 1930s. In an interview with Jalil, Urdu critic and translator Raza Imam notes that *Angarey* was a pamphlet that adjoined a

⁹ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 32.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Rakhshanda Jalil for our discussions over the original *Angarey* and for directing me to the private collections of Noor Zaheer and Orooj Ahmed Ali.

¹¹ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 32.

particular interest from young readers better conversant with Western literary traditions. He states that it ‘reflects the impact of modern English writers like D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolfe [sic] who were at the time in a state of revolt against the staid Victorian and Edwardian traditions and exploring radical new possibilities in style and content. The authors felt the urge to do something to expose the hypocrisy and stagnation in their own literature and society’.¹² Some of the other stories in the collection, such as Mahmuduzzafar’s ‘Jawanmardi’ (Virility) or Ahmed Ali’s ‘Mahavaton ki Ek Rat’ (A Night of Winter’s Rain), in fact, vernacularise the Western short story in a distinctively Urdu way, by deploying the unity of a short story’s effect and critical impression to shed light on the hypocrisies and entrenched prejudices of Indian society. ‘Jawanmardi’, sometimes translated as ‘Gallantry’, is a retrospective interior first-person narration by a rapacious though self-flagellating man who becomes the cause of his wife’s death in his need to prove his masculinity. Ali’s stories, even the titles of which foretell what would become for the author a lifelong creative engagement with the relationship between affect and weather, are technically the most complex. Although their political subjects and motifs are similar to others—poverty, destitution, hypocrisies and internal contradictions of religious institutions—their artful and lyrical treatment of melancholy, grief and anguish shows exceptional formal experimentation by Urdu prose standards of the time.¹³

In this chapter, I will argue that these texts expose an intricate relationship between space (defined by spatial divisions of private and the public, home and abroad, domestic and foreign) and ‘servitude’ (stratified identities and both overt and covert exchanges of social power) in a way that leverages the distinctive formal features of the short story form, including its tendency to create fragmented and collective authorial overlaps in the ‘anthological’ mode. I argue that *Angarey* does all of this by using the ‘short story pamphlet’ itself as a material form with disruptive political potential.

¹² The interview was recorded in person. See Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers’ Movement in Urdu*, p. 144.

¹³ Ali’s was a short story tradition that would be developed further in the decades of 60s and 70s by writers like Intizar Husain, Qurratulain Hyder, and even Naiyer Masud. See Narang, ‘Major Trends in the Urdu Short Story’. For Urdu readers, a good source on the ‘new’ Urdu short story (*afsana*) is Gopi Chand Narang, ‘Naya Urdu Afsana Intekhab [Choosing the Urdu Short Story]’, in *Tajziya Aur Mababis* (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1995).

The Insurgent Materiality of the 'Pamphlet'

As I have already noted, *Angarey* spurred a pamphlet movement in the Urdu for the publication of the short story, emerging as a strong and independent competitor to journals (*risabals*) which often chose not to publish risky and controversial material due to their collective stakes and higher chances of financial fallout from government censorship. From Premchand's seditious *Soz-e-Watan* in 1907, to Rajashekhar's satirical *Gaddalika* in 1924, Ugra's *Chaklat* in 1927 to Agyeya's *Roz* (Gangrene) in 1935, many of India's *bhasas* saw an uptick in the publication of short story anthologies (called *kahani-samgrah*, *galparcha*, or simply *parcha*) in the early half of the twentieth century. *Angarey* was, however, 'possibly the first anthology of short stories published in Urdu, a collection that is of short stories by different authors included within one cover'.¹⁴ The controversy and ban in March 1933 signalled that any writer (or a group of them) with the right entrepreneurial spirit can publish their individual and authentic work without editorial tampering or fear of rejection and even have them circulated within factious networks under pseudonyms.¹⁵ Ahmed Ali's own ambiguous memory of the year of *Angarey*'s original date of publication to be '1931-32' points to an important detail about its original ephemeral form that is overlooked by many critical studies of its politics, contents and themes. Before Lucknow's Nizami Press republished the book in 1932 and attracted the censorious eye of the British colonial government, the pamphlet was already in underground circulation. As Ali recalls, Oyama, a classmate of Ali from Aligarh, had designed the first edition cover (nowhere to be found today) and the book was copied by hand and circulated among young college-going readers.¹⁶ Ismat Chughtai, herself a renowned Urdu short story writer, in her memoir about the court trial of her short story 'Lihaf' (The Quilt, 1942), recalls how, as a young student in Aligarh, she witnessed first-hand the reaction drawn by the circulation of *Angarey* as a flimsy pamphlet at the Aligarh Girls College: 'Some zealous cleric ... descended upon the college and demanded that the 'whorehouse'

¹⁴ Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu*, p. 109.

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that many authors of these 'insurgent' pamphlets who did not belong to privileged backgrounds like the *Angarey* collective chose to conceal their real names. Premchand was Nawab Dhanpat Rai, Ugra was Pandey Bechan Sharma, Agyeya was Sachchidananda Hirananda Vatsayan, and so on.

¹⁶ For further reading see Carlo Coppola, 'Interview with Ahmed Ali, 3 August 1975, Rochester, Michigan', *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 33.1/2 (1998), 117-94 (pp. 130-31).

be shut down; he displayed some hostile cartoons depicting Rashid Jahan and her fellow writers'.¹⁷ All copies of the book were confiscated from Nizami Press in Lucknow and destroyed, and only five were kept under the provision of the Press Regulation Act, 1890. According to Jalil, three of these were taken to be kept in the custody of what is now the National Archives of India (NAI), and one is in British Library.¹⁸ *Angarey*, as a short story pamphlet, is therefore also rare in the sense that it is more talked about than actually read—a fact that is true for today as it must have been, in fact, for even the 1930s.¹⁹

Beyond questions of form and content in *Angarey*, which all revolve around its explicitly sexual themes and motifs and to which I will attend in the next section, there are some primary questions pertaining to the materiality of the pamphlet itself and what that tells us about the short story in the reactionary political climate of 1930s India. The difficulty in acquiring a copy of this pamphlet even after its apotheosis as the founding document for the progressive short story movement in the 1930s testifies perhaps to the 'quasi-ephemeral' materiality of the pamphlet. It occupies the loosely defined and liminal territory between print-cultures and literary-cultures; it is both ephemeral and literary; and although it contains 'literary texts', its parent form derives from a hybrid mix of historical and political ephemeras, belonging ambivalently to both commodity and counter-cultures. Moreover, it is also a material form that is designed to disobey regimes of censorship and colonial erasure. It is a form that displays a self-consciousness as a literary vehicle of sorts: its purpose is to package 'other' literary forms within it and transport it to a political audience, rather than self-identify as a singular

¹⁷ M Asaduddin, 'Ismat Chughtai: Kaghazi Hai Pairahan', *Indian Literature*, 46.4 (2002), 90–101 (p. 94). Alternative translation quoted in Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 32. Ahmed Ali, in fact, first translated some of Chughtai's stories into English, such as 'Genda' (The Little Mother) that appeared in *Folios of New Writing* alongside writers like Virginia Woolf and George Orwell, in London, 1940.

¹⁸ To trace the copy in British Library consult p.465 (Appendix II) in Mahmud. I learnt on my visit to NAI in July 2018 that no copy of the original pamphlet now existed with them.

¹⁹ Interestingly, the first reprint of *Angarey* appeared in Switzerland as late as 1988, and that followed translations by Snehal Singhavi, Khalid Alvi and Vibha S. Chauhan in 1990. Obviously, the publishers feared *fatwas* and government censorship. For this chapter, I am consulting this (highly sanitised) translation of the original Urdu: Ahmed Ali and others, *Angarey: 9 Stories and a Play*, trans. by Khalid Alvi and Vibha Chauhan (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2014).

literary entity. The pamphlet often provides its authors the solidarity (and even anonymity) of the collective voice, while still preserving the authorial autonomy of each of its constituent stories, plays or poems. In what way does this materiality, always at threat from colonial erasure, enable what was the leading political intention of the *Angarey* collective, which was to shock society out of inertia and into seeing its own cultural and religious hypocrisy? For an act of ‘shocking’ is undoubtedly an active and interventionist project, quite apart from the soft reformist vision of Premchand’s stories or consolidatory and ethnographic impulses of Mulk Raj Anand. To quote one awakened Maulavi Mohammed Ali, rather as irony, ‘*Angarey*’s purpose is neither reform nor study ... When things have come to such a pass that God, the prophet, the angels, the rituals of religion, and moral principles of law are ridiculed only and only for the sake of cheap humour, then one should not wonder why things have become so bad and how they can be rectified. In our opinion, this [pamphlet] is due to the bad upbringing to those young people [a possible dig at S. Zaheer’s well-known father].’²⁰ The actual article appears, in fact, on 24 February 1933, in *Sarzugasht* (Lucknow), the title of which is the rather enduring: ‘Aag dekhi, pani dekha, aur Angarey dekhe’ (we saw fire, we saw water, now we see embers).²¹ What Maulavi Ali had seen was only a copy of the ‘filthy pamphlet’ on display in an Aligarh *Numaish* (fair).²²

The trope of the pamphlet as a belligerent and dangerous ‘object’ is recurrent in many extensive critical takedowns of *Angarey*, obviously because the actual textual content of the short stories was not to be repeated on grounds of obscenity and blasphemy. Therefore, Maulavis, Islamic scholars, religious fanatics and members of Indo-Muslim bourgeois society who were angered by the texts of the pamphlet frequently referred to it as an object with various corrosive powers (*Angarey: Ek Fabash*

²⁰ Khalid Alvi, *Angarey Ka Tareekhi Pasmanzar Aur Taraqqi Pasand Tehreek [A Progressive View and History of Angaarey]* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1995), pp. 86–86. Here it is in Jalil’s translation.

²¹ Alvi, *Angarey Ka Tareekhi Pasmanzar Aur Taraqqi Pasand Tehreek [A Progressive View and History of Angaarey]*, p. 86.

²² Maulavi’s claim that pamphlet was being displayed at a fair could equally have been to stoke public panic against it. According to Coppola, Ali had received a letter on 27 February 1933 from Jamia Book Depot in Delhi returning all copies of *Angarey* for fear of ‘irreparable damage’ to their business, showing that the pamphlet was already considered notorious by the book industry by the time (February 1933). For more see Carlo Coppola, ‘The Angare Group: The Enfants Terribles of Urdu Literature’, *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 1 (1981), 57–69 (pp. 62–63).

aur *Malbadanah Qitab*, an obscene and blasphemous book, said *Medinah* on 13 February 1933). In her own historical study of the response to *Angarey*, Jalil notes that ‘it is interesting that newspaper reports and articles described the book as a ‘pamphlet’ ... many of those who wrote long excoriating critiques against it had not read it and therefore did not know that it was a work of fiction.’²³ This is an interesting distinction, though I wonder if it is a productive one. Many of those who defended (or criticised it, but on literary grounds rather than upon grounds of blasphemy) also saw *Angarey* as a pamphlet (*parcha*).²⁴ While not to deny the historical significance of the moment, it is crucial to also see *Angarey* as part of a widely emerging tradition within the *bhasas* of the publication of fiction within the ‘pamphlet’, its political agency deriving from it being a text and an object, a distinction I will elaborate upon. Many of the colonial records of proscribed material (such as anticolonial books and ephemeras) in the late-colonial period would seem to locate the emergence of pamphlet culture in the need to disseminate insurgent nationalist poetry and slogans, especially as they related to the Quit India movement raging in the 1930s.

A 1985 British Library volume of material edited by Graham Shaw and Mary Lloyd asserts that several Imperial proscription policies (many of which specifically targeted pamphlets and newspaper supplements, such as the Newspapers Act, 1890; Press Regulation Act, 1890; and the Indian Press Act, 1910) cracked down on material criticising British policies, or showing support for nationalist, Pan-Islamic movements of the period.²⁵ As several scholars have noted, it was rare for the British to ban pamphlets just on the charges of obscenity, the stated grounds for the ban on *Angarey* in 1933

²³ Consult pp.164-181 (‘Reactions in the Press’) in Jalil’s *Liking Progress* for a historical overview of the reception and controversy of *Angarey* in the Indian Press. These are expertly collated from British Library’s India Office Records ‘Reports from the Native Newspapers’, the reports from the Legislative Councils of the United Provinces, Ali’s newspapers cuttings as they appear in Mahmud’s 1996 article, and the Oral Histories Archive of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). Since Jalil has reproduced these reactions in their fullness and in excellent translation, I do not go over the reactions to the pamphlet here.

²⁴ Noon Meem Rashid, later to join the *Halqa-e-Arab-e-Zauq* (Circle of Men with a Discerning Taste) states in an interview that ‘if at all, [Angarey] should have been banned for its banalities rather than its obscenities’ (91) in Ahmed Ali and N. M. Rashid, ‘The Progressive Writer’s Movement in Its Historical Perspective’, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 13.1/4 (1977), 91–97 (p. 91).

²⁵ See ‘Preface’ in Graham Shaw and Mary Lloyd, *Publications Proscribed by the Government of India* (London: British Library Research Publications, 1985).

(even though 'obscenity' was often the primary cause for censorship within Britain). It mattered neither to the religious critics nor the British government whether *Angarey* was fact or fiction, poetry or short stories, text or object. From a purely administrative viewpoint, it was a provocative thing bound in paper that had a potential to challenge the colonial state, the situation in the Provinces, and add fuel to the perceived reactionary fire of communism and socialism. Even to literary detractors of the book, it quickly took the form of an object, its material attributes as 'a 132-page bundle of filth' reigning over its controversial textual content. According to Alvi, one Hafiz Hidayat Husain, cleric and civil servant, even called the book 'paper embers' (*kagaz ke angare*) instead of referring to it by its name.²⁶ Of course, this may all be down to the scurrility and vituperation towards the book at the time, but my point is that under a repressive sociocultural, religious and governmental regime, the censorship of an 'insurgent' text follows only its own erasure as text within that language. *Angarey* must first form itself into 'a 132-page bundle of filth that must be trampled underfoot and thrown into a garbage heap' in order to be seen (or unseen) as a blasphemous text (86). Inarguably, if these stories appeared in a journal or a newspaper, the regime of proscription (constituted by the police, the state, the religious institutions) would have instead targeted the offices, printing presses, patrons, and distributors. No insurgent text, not least a small-press pamphlet, remains hence unmediated by its material form and the material processes of its production. It derives, in fact, its insurgent power, its subversiveness, its non-conformity, from its materiality itself. The question is, how does the radical materiality of the 'insurgent pamphlet' then interact with the radical textuality of the short story?

Ironically for *Angarey*, the word 'pamphlet' derives from the Greek *pamphilos*, meaning 'loved by all'.²⁷ The question of what, after all, constituted a pamphlet was taken up by George Orwell in 1948. In his essay 'Pamphlet Literatures', Orwell felt sorry that more writers had not realised the political potential of the pamphlet, 'a form for the age like our own'. He continues:

A Pamphlet is a short piece of polemical writing printed in the form of a booklet and aimed at a large public. Probably a true pamphlet will always be somewhere between five hundred and ten thousand words, and it will always be unbound and obtainable for a few pence. A

²⁶ Alvi, *Angarey Ka Tareekhī Pasmaṅzar Aur Taraqqī Pasand Tehreek [A Progressive View and History of Angarey]*, p. 86.

²⁷ Apparently after a twelfth-century love poem and publication, *Pamphilus seu de Amore*.

pamphlet is never written primarily to give entertainment or to make money. It is written because there is something that one wants to say now and because one believes there is no other way of getting hearing. Pamphlets may turn on points of ethics or theology, but they always have a clear political implication.²⁸

Pamphlet, today, is an umbrella term for so many literary and documentary forms and genres that it would be impossible to arrive at a narrow definition. As Alexandra Halasz has observed in his book on early modern pamphlet cultures *The Marketplace of Print* (2008), '[pamphlet] functions as a floating signifier in the heterogeneity that characterises the opportunities made available by print'.²⁹ It derives its authoritativeness and political agency through material resemblances with the book form but has always shared a dialogic association with political speech. The purpose of the pamphlet, in this sense, was to inscribe acts and events that were oral or speech-driven, where there could not have been any single author due to threat of political persecution. Even in the late-colonial Indian context, as Shukla Sanyal has observed, the underground pamphlet press served to educate the civil society and public about the aims and methods of anticolonial revolutionaries and militants.³⁰ Still, some parameters to do with physical and material features are necessary to delineate what is meant here by the 'materiality' of the pamphlet, the notion of pamphlet as an 'insurgent object' in itself. In his provocative study of the dependence of all print-media upon capital, Nicholas Thoburn reframes the small-press pamphlet as a 'communist object', borrowing from the Marxist theory of the object as 'comrade', as something that exceeds its uses in profoundly liberatory ways.³¹ He writes:

²⁸ George Orwell, 'Pamphlet Literature', *New Statesman and Nation*, 9 (1943), 23–24 (pp. 7–8).

²⁹ Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 3.

³⁰ Shukla Sanyal, *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). In this regard, British Library's Shaw and Lloyd have also noted that apart from the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the one event to generate the biggest flood of proscribed seditious pamphlets was the execution of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh in 1931. See Shaw and Lloyd, p. viii.

³¹ 'Communist Objects and Small-Press Pamphlets' (p.62) in Nicholas Thoburn, *Anti-Book: On the Art and Politics of Radical Publishing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

In its resistance to conventional circuits of exchange and use, the pamphlet qua communist object necessarily circulates with a degree of autonomy and contingency ... Pamphlets are discursive fragments, isolated units that tend to be disseminated without the intellectual and institutional authority of an established and sanctioned discourse. This observation on the discursive form of pamphlets is simultaneously an observation on their circulation as objects. Lacking the institutional infrastructure, distribution, and temporal pacing that order and distribute periodical publications through time and across space, pamphlets tend instead to be circulated by varied and discontinuous informal flows and associations—friendships, chance encounters, political events, and the bookfair margins of the book trade.³²

For Communist Zaheer, and his leftist comrades Ali, Jahan and Mahmuduzzafar (who had however refused any Party affiliation), *Angarey* was also a project that represented a rare interest among the progressives in the materiality of the short story ‘pamphlet’ as a medium to create what Thoburn has theorised as ‘a self-institutional system’, one that emerges from these discontinuous informal flows and associations.³³ The ‘self-institutionality’ of the pamphlet here represents not only its autonomy and contingency, but also its ability to mobilise its own transitory and fugitive reading publics, its ability to forge a radical community around urgent political or aesthetic aims, and even its ability to ‘shock’. A pamphlet, like the gathering of a political mass to which it serves as an inscriptive double, is committed to generating its own context, its own paratexts, and its own (invisible) legacies.

The fact of *Angarey* being more talked about than read is not so much an anomaly as it is a function of its material ambition, its premeditated project of ‘shocking the society out of stagnation’, and its commitment to finding a contingent and spontaneous audience, rather than creating its own literary legacy. In this sense, perhaps the ‘anti-book’ form (to borrow from Thoburn’s theory) of *Angarey* is intricately linked to the fact of it being a collection of short stories. The short story, after all, is a textual form that is reliant on its ephemerality, as well as the spontaneity of its reading public, for its effect. Even its political commitments are to making its material interventions in its own transitory

³² ‘Fragmented Circulation and Compacted Folds’ (p.86) in Thoburn.

³³ Thoburn (a sociologist doing ethnographic work with radical small-presses) makes the assessment vis a vis Infopool, a Communist Small-Press.

contexts rather than in building a textual legacy or a nationalist canon.³⁴ As Sujaan Mukherjee has argued, albeit for late-colonial Bengal, ‘pamphlets often allude to people, events, texts or comments (here orality makes a re-entry) ... which make it [sic] more relatable to the present moment but also inscribe its inevitable ephemerality’.³⁵

Gender, Space, Servitude

In Jamaica Kincaid’s 1990 novel *Lucy*, Lucy the protagonist remarks ‘I was not a man; I was a young woman from the fringes of the world, and when I left my home I had wrapped around my shoulders the mantle of a servant’.³⁶ Lucy is an *au pair* from the West Indies, coming to work in the household of a wealthy American family. In this remark, I find a provocative place to introduce the three themes that structure my reading of short stories from *Angarey*, written in an entirely different context, and for an entirely different audience: gender, space, servitude. Lucy’s comment articulates a set of economic, affective and power entanglements between a domestic servant, an *au pair*, and their masters, owners, surrogate parents or custodians. I am interested in how the stories in *Angarey* enact these gendered entanglements as divisions of space—inside and outside, domestic and foreign, Western and Indian, private and public—so as to foreground how these spaces themselves create conditions of circumscription and exploitation. A sense of diminished self, evoked here by Lucy’s melancholic interior comment, also points to the continuities that exist between cultures of domestic servitude, and of the more blatant forms of labour appropriation like slavery and feudal indenture.

In their influential study of domestic servitude in the South-Asian context, Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum define a ‘culture of servitude’ as ‘one in which social relations of domination / subordination, dependency and inequality are normalized and permeate both the domestic and public spheres’.³⁷ In

³⁴ For an excellent comparison between the ephemeral/material (original) form of the short story and its reproduced (anthological) form, see Neelam Srivastava, ‘Anthologizing the Nation: Literature Anthologies and the Idea of India’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46.2 (2010), 151–63.

³⁵ Sujaan Mukherjee, “Give It a Definite Literary Flavour”: Humphry House’s Experiments with the Pamphlet as Genre’, *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry*, 6.2 (2020), 85–97 (p. 90).

³⁶ Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (New York: Plume, 1990), p. 95.

³⁷ Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum, *Cultures of Servitude: Modernity, Domesticity, and Class in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

late-colonial India, as several debates on conditions of labour raged at the national level, it fell to the marginal form of the pamphlet to incite interest in the conditions of labour at the domestic level, the more private and individual space. The figure of the ‘servant’, which Ambreen Hai, in her study of ‘postcolonial servitude’ calls ‘the other of the other, the serving people of a formerly colonized, newly emergent bourgeoisie’, is represented in most colonial literature through tropes of care-givers, aids, helpers in adventure and discovery, and even romanticised as grateful subordinates.³⁸ Here, Hai studies the short stories of contemporary Pakistani writer Daniyal Mueenuddin, who, like the four writers of *Angarey*, writes from a privileged social background, one very different to the servants he is talking for in his critically acclaimed short story collection *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2010). Several questions to do with agency and the prohibitions of voicing the servant as a ‘dehumanised subaltern individual’ are also dealt with by Hai in defending Muenuddin’s position and perspective narrative voice. Persuasively arguing that to write about the interior worlds of ‘servants’ within the intimate confines of domestic spaces is not transgressive for a writer whose aim is to foreground and draw attention to the invisible oppression of these ‘cultures of servitude’, Hai deploys the notion of a ‘border-crossing fiction’ to examine the politics of Muenuddin’s short stories.³⁹ In what way, then, do stories in *Angarey* participate in such a border-crossing, an act of ethical transgression, by writing about servants from an evidently bourgeois perspective? Through a reading of three texts from the collection, Zaheer’s ‘Dulari’, Ali’s ‘Mahavaton ki Ek Rat’, and Jahan’s ‘Parde ke Peeche’, I will study how *Angarey* deploys the ephemeral form and spontaneous audience of the pamphlet to unmask the

³⁸ Ambreen Hai, ‘Postcolonial Servitude: Interiority and System in Daniyal Mueenuddin’s *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*’, *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 45.3 (2014), 33–73 (p. 36). An excellent example here is the British film *Victoria and Abdul* (2017) starring Judi Dench as Queen Victoria. Based on a book by the same name by Shrabani Basu, the film depicts Abdul, Queen Victoria’s Indian (and Muslim) servant as a docile but charming person who becomes to her a confidante, care-giver and best-friend. The film obviously romanticises and erases the colonial subject-master relationship. For further reading on the tradition of representing the figure of servant in British literary and film culture, see Bruce Robbins, *The Servant’s Hand: English Fiction from Below* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

³⁹ The theory comes from Shameem Black’s *Fiction Across Borders* (2010), which emphasises upon the ethical significance of a writer speaking for others. See Shameem Black, *Fiction across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late-Twentieth-Century Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

perverse and interlocking systems of power that control the gendered figure of the servant.⁴⁰ I argue that these short stories, especially seeing the marked absence of nationalist motifs, show a critical awareness of hegemonic labour politics outside the spheres of the national in the late-colonial era, and within the more intimate spheres of home, where labour is not just conceived in terms of capital, but also reproductive and emotional labour.

Zaheer's 'Dulari' (sometimes translated as 'Darling') is a text about an adopted girl from whom a rich, bourgeois family extracts a lot of caregiving, emotional and domestic labour. In the text, she is introduced as a 'laundi', Urdu slang for a young housemaid (10). Her labour in the household is to serve primarily Begum Sahiba, who was 'alive and active ... an absolute sovereign of the woman's quarters' (10). Right from the start in the short story, Zaheer brings up to the gendered divisions of domestic spaces—this is a feature of many texts in *Angarey*. Dulari occupies the space controlled by the Begum-sahiba, which is the woman's quarters, the *zenana*. Adopting at times a narrative tone that mocks bourgeois society, the writer narrates the everyday reality of Dulari with condescension. She had nothing to complain about, her 'childhood was untroubled', she was much 'better off than other maidservants ... despite being born into a class that was inferior to not just the *bibis* ... but even to the maidservants'. Other servants in the house frequently mocked her: 'At least I am not a laundi like you' to which 'Dulari would have no reply'. There is a clear suggestion here that conventional forms of wage-labour within the household existed tensely in relation to forms of liege labour, such as Dulari's, who is locked in this system because 'she has known no other world' (11). This was an instance, according to Gopal, of 'familial systems ... responding to the penetration of capitalism'.⁴¹

A comparison of Dulari's class to *bibis*, the wives of the household, is suggestive of a blurring of lines between the labour of a maid and the labour of a wife. In spite of his direct and unexceptional prose style that relies on common tropes, Zaheer illustrates how exploitative forms of labour overlap and are even permeated by the normative discourses of familial trust, gratitude, reproductive roles, and what is at best an illusion of female autonomy in the *zenana*. Dulari remains mute in the text—

⁴⁰ All page numbers to follow in brackets are from Alvi and Chauhan's 2014 translations. See Ali and others.

⁴¹ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 34.

no speech is assigned to her—but her diminished sense of self is conveyed by a feeling of emptiness as she grows up, comparing herself to *choti-sabibzadi* (young daughter) who was her own age. The text also sexualises Dulari early on: ‘beautiful ... Nature had gifted her long limbs and a rounded, curvy body’. This foreshadows the classic trope of middle-class wrongdoing: Kazim, the eldest son of the house, falls in love with Dulari and indulges her. But as a year goes by, Kazim’s own marriage is settled with a reputable someone else. On one of the busy ceremonious nights of Kazim’s wedding, Dulari runs away from the household, only to be found later in the prostitute’s quarters.

From here, most of the text is a snapshot of the way members of the household who were earlier supposed to be committed to her welfare respond to Dulari’s re-entry into the domestic space. She is brought back by a conscientious old man who is ignorant of the fate awaiting her as she re-enters the *zenana*. Sympathies from Hasina-Begum, the *choti-sabibzadi* who was Dulari’s childhood friend is short-lived. Begum-sahiba is relieved for Dulari’s return since ‘the chores of the household weren’t being satisfactorily taken care of since the day Dulari had left’. Kazim, her lover, emerges from his room with his ‘beautiful bride’—a contrast with Dulari who is presented as disgraced and unchaste. Defying his own memory he scorns Dulari: ‘leave the unfortunate girl alone’ (16). The story ends with Dulari leaving the house once again, presumably for the prostitute’s quarters, swapping therefore the ideals traditionally assigned to these spaces. While the domestic sphere of welfare, goodness, dignity and familial honour, is reframed as a place of oppression, the prostitute’s quarters, traditionally the space of indignity and depravity, is reframed as a place to escape to. Although judgments of literary value must be stayed away from when presenting a text like this in translation, it can scarcely be denied that Zaheer’s prose is wearisome and reliant on stock characters and motifs. As is so often the case for the short story, the merit of ‘Dulari’ is in its paratextual presence within the pamphlet. Its subversive effect lies in its enunciative and performative modality, communicating hence to the ‘spontaneous audience’ of the pamphlet a fact of their ‘present moment’ in a way that is uninhibited by textual experimentation. If the pamphlet were to derive its force from material resemblances with the book form, the short stories contained within derive their force from textual resemblances with realist fiction. Zaheer’s is a mode of writing far more committed to reality than to the aesthetic and narrative practice of fictionalising it.

Ahmed Ali, who later fell out with Zaheer, was however more committed to realism as art.⁴² Even his early work in *Angarey*, such as ‘Badal Nahi Aate’ and ‘Mahavaton ki Ek Rat’ derive from many experimental prose forms developed in the West, such as the stream-of-consciousness, popularised in Urdu by Muhammad Hasan Askari in the 1940s.⁴³ Ali’s ‘Mahavaton ki Ek Rat’ was first published in 1931 in *Humayun* after it was scouted by its editor Miyan Bashir Ali in Lucknow, and is the only text in *Angarey* to appear as a reprint.⁴⁴ The text, which is aesthetically far more complex, also deploys space, and especially the constriction of space, to represent conditions of oppression and destitution, but shows more interest in the psychic interiority of its subjects by stringing together a sequence of dreams, awakenings and remembrances. Through these transitions, the reader is transported to what may be called spatial geographies of mind—an old living room, a boat with a lighted lamp, flowing rivers of milk. Gopi Chand Narang observes: ‘Ali’s stories are different. A cursory analysis of his two *Angarey* stories shows that neither of them reflects an abundance of social consciousness ... which the stories of the other *Angarey* authors do’.⁴⁵ In what way, then, do these ‘cultures of servitude’ in relation to space come to the fore in Ali’s stories?

While the essayistic qualities of many *Angarey* stories is often alluded to in Urdu discourse, with their form being called *mazmoon-numa-afšana* (essay-like short story), Ali’s prose style is much less invested in bringing forth essayistic critique; it works instead through affect. ‘Mahavaton ki Ek Rat’ is written as an interior stream-of-consciousness of a mother huddled up with her children in what is presented as a run-down and dilapidated 24 feet by 24 feet hovel. It is a night of winter’s rain (the title of the story) and the roof is leaking water upon everyone. The children are hungry and there is hopelessness all around. Ali’s prose is written in what Urdu readers will identify as the difficult to translate *Dahlavi taqsali zaban*, or the forthcoming style of Delhi’s Urdu (fresh as mint, *taqsal*). In

⁴² ‘Our differences arose over our approaches to literature and to life ... at the beginning we were all one but he hurt me afterwards [reference to *Roshnai*]’ (131) in Coppola, ‘Interview with Ahmed Ali, 3 August 1975, Rochester, Michigan’.

⁴³ See Mehr Farooqi, pp. 77–89.

⁴⁴ The original will be available online with the completion of British Library’s Endangered Archives Programme project EAP839; <https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP839>

⁴⁵ See ‘Short Stories of Ahmed Ali’ (p.211) in *Studies in the Urdu Ghazal and Prose Fiction*, ed. by CM Naim and Muhammad Umar Memon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

the text, which lacks much emplotment, Ali prises open the dichotomies of private and public spaces in representing a destitute family upon which ‘it looked the sky [was] going to crack open’ (73). We are told through a sequence of images in the mother’s interior stream of memory, that the family that now ails in poverty once belonged to the aristocratic class. A division between the private and the public is the focus of these rapidly shifting and interrogative sequences, a technique uncommon for Urdu prose and representative perhaps of its evolution in dialogue with aesthetic movements in the West.⁴⁶ In one of the dream sequences, the mother, whose name as we are later told is Mariam, conjures up a different time (*auqat*) for the family.⁴⁷

‘There was a time when we had palaces and carpets, servants and bedsteads. My room, ah! A high, royal bed with golden coverlets; velvet sheets and pillows of soft cotton ... the numerous maids who milled about, pestering me with questions: Bibi should I massage your head? Your feet? One oiled my hair, another kneaded my hands ...’

It is hard to know if these recollections are meant to be truthful, for they are interlaced with unreal and magical recollections of floating boats and graceful swans in lakes of milk and so on. Unlike in Zaheer’s prose, the narrator clearly does not wish the reader to develop crude pity but is aiming for a different kind of affect—where a sense of melancholy and helplessness is realised with the motifs of stormy weather and cracking walls. Several passages focalise the constriction of space, divisions between the inside and the outside breaking open as ‘the ceiling disappeared every now and then, only the wooden beams visible in its place’. The day of judgment, *shab-e-bahar*, which is an event that appears in every text in the collection, comes with ‘an impenetrable darkness’.⁴⁸ As in Anand’s short stories, which according to Priya Joshi pales in comparison to Ali’s Urdu prose, onomatopoeias are used liberally (with most translators reproducing them as such). ‘Garrard, garrard, tup, tup’, an

⁴⁶ See Frances W Pritchett and Sheldon Pollock, ‘A Long History of Urdu Literary Culture, Part 2’, in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 864–911. See also Joshi, p. 231.

⁴⁷ *Auqat*, from *Waqat*, is an allusion to both time and social status, the underlying idiom being that anyone’s social status can change with a passage of time.

⁴⁸ Some have suggested that *Angarey* was published on ‘Shab-e-Qadar’, fifteen days before Ramazan, but I have not been able to establish this.

atmosphere of heavy rains forms a contrast with Ali's other text 'Badal nahi Aate' in which 'clouds do not come' and sights of people pining for water upon arid lands are plentifully if also esoterically strewn around. The story ends with a scene in which there is a dissolution of space itself. Everyone goes on languidly and fearsomely into the night as hunger rages on. In a text that contrasts with the rest of stories in *Angarey* in many ways, Ali appears more committed to instilling a sense that this, after all, is a literary project, too. These are the lines along which we know he would later fall out with most of the stalwarts of the progressive literary movement. But instead of reading Ali's fiction as simply a sore thumb in *Angarey*, it is more productive to examine the role it played in co-creating the formal identity of the pamphlet. The treatments of space and spatial geographies of mind in the text underlie a sense of the perishability of these spaces as well as their reliance upon masculine roles and wealth for their renewal. At the end of every sequence, a thunder or a clap jerks the mother out of reminiscing about her old house, her old living room, and even her old husband, assumed dead by the reader, into a 24 feet by 24 feet room in which the family of three is cramped together as the ceiling spills like a sieve and walls crack open with flashes of light. To the extent that there is any critical subtext at all in the short story, it functions in relationship to the other texts to create a sense of the evanescence of those spaces in which other texts present their concrete plots.

Rashed Jahan's 'Parde ke Peeche' and Mahmuduzzafar's 'Jawanmardi' are both texts that critique not only the way in which cultures of servitude entrap those socially designated as 'servants' but also those who are not overtly implicated in a relationship of servitude in their social roles, for instance the relationship of wife to husband and the spaces they occupy. Both texts here critique a culture of servitude and oppression that is fundamentally inscribed within the institution of marriage (as well as of 'remarriage') in the Indo-Muslim context. 'Jawanmardi' begins with the narrator's recollection of her chronically ill wife who is now estranged from him: 'instead of intimacy and love, her eyes reflect ... a hatred for me' (53). The reader is told that the cause of this hatred is a still-borne child. It is also presumably the cause of his wife's deteriorating health. The text deploys several masculine tropes of protectiveness and responsibility to emphasize that there was nothing that was left to do. The sincerity of these words is however tested when the narrator shifts his stream of thought and ponders that he has never, in fact, fallen in love with his wife: 'And how could I? The tracks of our lives did not intersect. My wife lived in the narrow and dark lanes of tradition while I walked the

broad and well-lit roads of the new age'. The division (and indeed gendering) of spaces is therefore presented in terms of tradition and modernity. While the wife is ailing in the darkness of tradition, the husband, who we later learn has been living abroad, 'six thousand miles' away (54), occupies the well-lit roads of modernity. As Gopal notes, 'only men traverse the public spaces of modernity, the wife stays at home in India while the narrator goes to live in Europe for a while'.⁴⁹ I pause to note here that most of the negative reaction to the pamphlet, especially by religious clerics, underscored the 'corrupt' Western education of its authors.⁵⁰ And yet, as the text breaks from its narrative flow to reproduce a self-detracting letter from the ailing wife, the narrator begins to indulge in 'artifices of nostalgia'⁵¹, claiming to have found, yet again, an 'irresistible desire to meet her' (54). The meeting, however, falls short of expectation: 'the recollection of the tedium of daily life knocked out my desires and my enthusiasm ... the old nostalgic world I had conjured up in my dreams did not exist anywhere ... the world was narrow, orthodox, dark, illiterate and cruel' (56). A good sense of the narrator's disgust at the cruelty and orthodoxy of Indian society is presented: 'most of the people who came to receive me at the station were vulgar, deceitful, ignorant, worthless ruffians' (56).

Although *Angarey* was written to gather and 'shock' an audience of dogmatists and conservatives, perspectives within the pamphlet turn the critique inward too. The narrator of 'Jawanmardi', just as Mahmuduzzafar does himself, belongs to a reformist family: 'My liberated lifestyle constantly needed my in-laws' (60). But the story is also a critique of the way reform, especially male reform, is susceptible to patrician masculine protectionism and gendered subjugation that places the female gendered role of the 'wife' within a culture of servitude. The narrator's ailing wife lives, for the most part, inside a room, the gendered space of ailment and servitude which the narrator visits 'twice a day' to honour his role as a husband. It is only when the narrator's masculinity is brought to question by his friends that he takes his wife out of this space and onto the hills, where the reader is made to believe that she swiftly recovers her health. Several tropes of male fertility and familial dignity are set forth in the text, the narrator 'fully confident of emerging victorious' (61). The wife becomes

⁴⁹ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 37.

⁵⁰ See Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu*, p. 170.

⁵¹ Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*, p. 37.

pregnant again, but the process of labour is painful: 'Muazallah save me!'. At last, the narrator turns the critique inwards—'her restlessness, her writhing, her screams were ... an unmistakable proof of my Jawanmardi' (61). The text leaves the reader thinking about the virulence and lethality of the codes of masculine heroism that were deployed in both private and public spaces, in both domestic and nationalist discourses, be it of being a husband or a martyr. Like the rest of *Angarey*, nothing in the text is actually graphically obscene or explicitly sexual. The language is courteous and suggestive, and a code of pity and honour, such as is common among religious reformers and clerics, is liberally deployed to mask its alarming content.

The upheavals caused by the 'filthy pamphlet' is part of its political project, then. Apart from in Zaheer's 'Jannat ki Bashrat' (even where, mind, the Holy book is only being 'hugged') there are no explicit scenes of obscenity, impiety, or lewdness. With nothing to turn to, the authors projected that the uproar against the pamphlet will only emphasize the truth behind the discomfort it causes. The lewd interpretations will evince only the lewdness of the reader. As they wrote in *The Leader* in April 1933:

'The authors of this book do not wish to make any apology for it. They leave it to float or sink of itself . . . They have chosen the particular field of Islam not because they bear it any 'special' malice, but because, being born into that particular Society, they felt themselves better qualified to speak for that alone. They were more sure of their ground there.'⁵²

The stance is enabled certainly by the tonality of writing, which often appears nothing more than an ordinary middle-class voice concealing the cruelties of class and gender with a language of 'good tradition', honour, welfare, and the patriarchal guardianship of social institutions. No better example of this subtext exists than Jahan's 'Parde ke Peeche', the last short story (although presented as a 'one act play') in the entire collection.⁵³ The title 'Behind the Veil' immediately evinces the spatial division

⁵² Alvi, *Angarey Ka Tareekhī Pasmaṅzar Aur Taraqqī Pasand Tehreek [A Progressive View and History of Angaarey]*, p. 102.

⁵³ An alternative, and to my assessment, far better translation of Rashed Jahan's 'Parde ke Peeche' is by Ralph Russell. The page numbers here, however, are from Alvi and Chauhan's translation. See Ralph Russell, *Hidden in the Lute: An Anthology of Two Centuries of Urdu Literature* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995), p. 34.

of the private and the public. Even though *parda* is translated as 'veil', it can mean both a curtain in the house, and a covering over the face worn by women. The veil, of all artefacts in Indo-Muslim culture, is perhaps the most potent symbol of the gendering of space. Women have to wear the veil in public as they trespass into spaces upon which they have no autonomy but can uncover their faces when sitting within the *zenana*, which is itself 'veiled' from the outside world by a curtain. In the text, Rashed Jahan, who was training to be 'a lady doctor' (a euphemism for a 'gynaecologist', a rare figure of modernity that is allowed to infringe the private domains of Indian womanhood), stages (from her own presentation) a dialogue between Mohammadi-Begum and Aftab-Begum. The two women are married to brothers, and the conversation, in large part, is about their husbands. Jahan brings to the surface the matter-of-factness with which reality of oppressive domestic life is talked about between the two women, through her use of the privacy and intimacy of the space 'behind the veil'. Indeed, there are many moments in the text when this space is transgressed. In one instance, a maidservant leaves the door ajar as she leaves after complaining about how *nanhe-miyan*, one of the ten children Mohammadi-Begum is forced to bear through the years, is making trouble. To this, she retorts: 'He's a butcher ... A scoundrel ... like father, like son [*jaisa baap waisa beta*] ... Arre close the door at least. Whenever they go out of the room, they leave the door open' (87). Jahan is using tools from drama to recreate the restless and private space of the *zenana* where the door must never be left ajar—

'The room has white marble flooring. A mattress is spread in the centre of the room. A woman, lying back on bolsters, is seated on the mattress. She looks sad and tired. Next to her is a *surahi*, containing water, which is placed upon a silver plate with its mouth covered with a small metal bowl ... she is slicing betel nuts. On one side lies a round box and on the other lies a spittoon' (83).

From the back-and-forth conversations between the two Begums, we learn about the trials faced by Mohammadi-Begum in her life. She has had multiple miscarriages in the past but has still born a child every year. There is no empathy from her husband who threatens to remarry if she is not able to fulfil his sexual needs. Glimpses of Begum's relationship with servants in the house are shown to the reader through the use of disruptive commotions in the conversation: 'We keep so many *haram-zadi* maids, but the children make a racket all the time. It would be better if God just ended my life

and freed me of this world's problems' (86). We learn several other features of how sexual violence against Begum is normalised in the code of a wife's sexual servitude to her husband. The children of the house are pale and malnourished because Begum is forced to keep a 'wet nurse' to care for them (87).

The complete truth, is of course, more complicated:

'My husband is a decision-maker ... He says that I need not bother with all this when, with God's grace, we have the money. As far as he is concerned, all pleasure is limited to his own lust. His only worry is that he will be inconvenienced if a child stays with me' (88).

Aftab-Begum responds to this with ridicule: 'Mohammadi-Begum, you blame your poor husband for everything. If he employs maids, he becomes a villain and if he doesn't, he is a scoundrel ... Bua, chant Allah's name' (88). Jahan points here to how employing maids and 'wet nurses', invariably a marker of class, is considered such a patriarchal good and a feature of honourable husbands that it does not seem to matter the sexual violence extracted in place of these deeds. In fact, when *Angarey* was published in 1932, Jahan was the one to take most of the abuse, coming to be known as *Angareywali* for bruising what were essentially patriarchal sensibilities of the 'right' and 'honour' of being a husband.⁵⁴ In the entire collection, the text is the boldest portrait of the way wives are also locked in what Ray and Qayum have called 'a culture of servitude', domestic and sexual violence against them normalised in a way that can be compared with violence against the much more clearly demarcated figure of the servant (such as Zaheer's 'Dulari', or prostitute, *randi*, which was to become a feature in the work of later story writers like Sa'adat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai).⁵⁵ Aftab-Begum's dismissal and apparent lack of empathy for the plight of Mohammadi-Begum reveals the way in which forms of dependency which permeate the social and sexual life of women *as wives* have come to be considered acceptable under a pernicious 'culture' of domestic servitude. Cultures, as Ray

⁵⁴ See 'Gender, Modernity and the Politics of Space: Rashed Jahan, Angareywali' (pp.32-64) in Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*. See also Rakhshanda Jalil, *A Rebel and Her Cause: The Life and Work of Rashid Jahan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁵ For a reading of the metonymic processes through which the figure of the prostitute, *randi*, comes to take the place of the courtesan, *tavaif*, the traditional female stock figure of Urdu literature, see Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, p. 179.

and Qayum assert, are ‘a form of hegemony in operation’.⁵⁶ And as an acculturated form of labour, ‘domestic servitude often confuses and complicates the conceptual divide between family and work, custom and contract, affection and duty, the home and the world’.⁵⁷

As I have shown, these concealments, complications, and blurry lines between social tradition and servitude are set forth by *Angarey* in the themes, motifs and spaces delineated across its many short stories. The texts’ relationship to each other, as well as to the spontaneous and fugitive audience of the pamphlet is generative of its prose form, style, and address. Acting, in many ways, as a collective literary text within the materiality of the pamphlet, *Angarey* critiques the filial and familial traditions that gender spaces as ‘servile’ or ‘dominant’, ascribing not only social and cultural roles to those who occupy these spaces, but also interpellating them within the hegemonic systems and discourses of maintaining power and control within them. As we see towards the end, Aftab-Begum is so deeply interpellated within the hegemonic discourse of wifely duty and dependence that even upon learning that an ailing Mohammadi-Begum has undergone a life-endangering surgery not for birth-control but for providing better sex to her husband, she is unfettered: ‘Bua, it’s time for afternoon *namaz*. I got so engrossed with chatting that I just forgot about everything else ... your brother, poor thing, will be waiting’ (101).⁵⁸ To this Mohammadi-Begum replies with proverbial and exercised gratitude: ‘Aapa, thank god, you came today. I could at least unburden myself ... do keep coming’. The story leaves us with a piercing image of how the role of the ‘servant’, of a figure essentially trapped within a system that offers no easy escape and functions without any contractual arrangements or defined exchanges of economic, sexual, or affectual labour, is actually a role frequently and invisibly fulfilled

⁵⁶ An anthropological study of the operation of hegemony in the context of domestic servitude in South (and South-East) Asia is offered in Kathleen M Adams and Sara Ann Dickey, *Home and Hegemony: Domestic Service and Identity Politics in South and Southeast Asia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

⁵⁷ Ray and Qayum, p. 4.

⁵⁸ The reader is led to assume this is some form of labiaplasty or vaginoplasty. It is noteworthy that Jahan is writing this text as a doctor. Although not much thinking exists around these procedures in the context of misogyny in India, a lot of work on labiaplasty in relationship to race and colonial imagination exists in the context of North America. See Deirdre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

by women ‘trapped’ within the social institution of marriage. As Jalil observes, ‘no attempt is made to bring it [the knowledge of Mohammadi-Begum’s surgery] into the public sphere and to examine it or go beyond the diagnosis stage’.⁵⁹ This recurs in almost all of the stories in the pamphlet, acting therefore as a critical exposition of the way in which the private sphere holds the normative codes for practices that make sexual violence acceptable within a culture of servitude.

It is critical to reemphasize, as a conclusion, the significant absence of nationalist themes in these short stories, their complete eschewal of the way labour, gender, space, and servitude are conceived in the broader nationalist imagination, and especially their lack of care for the emergent problematic of minority citizenship for Muslims in 1930s India. *Angarey* addresses a local readership, invested in radically challenging the roles and customs of domestic and familial life which are thought to lie far outside the province of national debate. But this is by no means a provincial audience. The critical force of *Angarey* can be felt even today, and its relevance to studying both the sociality and materiality of a text and its capacity for political change is well underscored through many retrospective revisits to the clamour it first created in 1932, and the wheels that it set clattering towards a radical, socially-conscious literature in both the *bhasas* and English writing. I have attempted to reconsolidate in this chapter these many critical forays into *Angarey* and place them in a relationship to its materiality as a pamphlet, as well as its cumulative textuality as a collection of short stories. In the next chapter, I turn to the short stories of Sa’adat Hasan Manto on the sexualised violence of the Partition of 1947, studying the ways in which Manto also leverages the materiality, cumulative textuality, and fugitive audiences of the short story form to gain the ethical distance needed to represent genocidal sexual violence of 1947.

⁵⁹ Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers’ Movement in Urdu*, p. 142.

5. The Riot Story: Rumour, Realism, and the Ethics of Narrating Violence in Manto

SA'ADAT HASAN MANTO, the writer of short stories now deified against his wishes on both sides of the India-Pakistan border, left a now-famous epitaph at the time of his death in 1955: 'Here lies Manto. With him lie all the secrets of short story writing. Under tons of earth he lies, still wondering who the greater short story writer is—him or God?'¹

A slew of books, anthologies, and film adaptations have established Manto as the most illustrious practitioner of Hindi-Urdu prose fiction, writing—as portrayed by several biopics—in a period of great tumult for the subcontinent. But in a certain sense, Manto lies buried still. Fewer than forty of his over 300 short stories exist in English translation, and the rest are scarcely to be found in the original without trawling the 'archives' where they are embodied within the journals (*risab'al*) and newspapers (*akbbar*) in which they appeared for the first time. Today, these stories, written between 1930 and 1955, are commonly included in anthologies on sweeping subjects like 'Indian', 'Urdu' or 'Partition' fiction, Manto having arguably become the archetype writer for each category. The British Library's Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) has digitised several journals in which these short stories first appeared, like *Saqi* (est. 1932), *Alamgir* (est. 1940), *Adabi Dunya* (est. 1950) and *Naya*

Note: This chapter contains descriptions of both ethnographic and fictional instances of sexualised mob violence, including instances of rape and genital mutilations. In keeping with the convention in Partition Studies, I have used the capital 'Partition' to refer to the partition of India in 1947. I have also at times used the term 'India' to refer to undivided India before 1947, as it was called then, rather than the contemporary formulation 'South Asia'. It is in this sense that I have called Sa'adat Hasan Manto, among others, an Indian writer rather than a South Asian or Indo-Pakistani writer.

¹ Translation mine. For the original Urdu, see Sabha Lakhnawi, *Manto: Ek Kitab* (Lahore: Maktaba-e Afkar, 1994), p. 66..

Adab (est. 1936).² When these stories appear in translated English anthologies, there is no mention of the year in which they were written or first published, which is a symptom of the wider critical approach to *bhasas* short fiction as piecemeal literature—to be consumed without any specific historical context but as adumbrating a whole and essentialised history. In this sense, one slice of history for which Manto has played such an ‘adumbrative’ role is the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947—the tragedy that displaced more than 12 million people, including Manto, and claimed the lives of nearly one million others as a result of riot violence between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. There was no particular location of this violence, no extermination camps, no use of the military, no state authority of power or coercion, and no single group of witnesses. The riots erupted in the cities, and as the news of the Partition travelled, the violence, as though carrying a life of its own, went up through the streets, train routes, and the tracks between villages where columns of newly displaced refugees were travelling in the caravans, called the *kafilas*. Just as villages were being torn apart by communal strife, these channels became sites of murder, abduction, disfigurement, mutilation, and forced conversions. Naked bodies were inscribed with nationalist slogans and made to appear amid jeering crowds. Fathers killed their own daughters in order to ‘save’ them. Special trains intended for the peaceful exchange of refugees exchanged only corpses. There is no consensus on the number of women who were molested, nor on those who were abducted by the rioters, but figures normally range in tens, if not hundreds, of thousands.³

The short stories that form the primary material for this chapter are collectively called *fasadat ke afsane*, or the ‘riot short stories’—Manto being the most famous, and indeed the most controversial writer to be associated with the form. In his 1953 essay *Jaib-e-kafan*, Manto stated that he wrote these stories, several of which deal with gendered violence at very close quarters, as ‘an insight into [his own] inner state of mind (*dakhaliyat*)’.⁴ The critical fate of these stories, especially in the metropolitan postcolonial context, has however been quite the contrary. Due to the paucity of written first-person accounts of Partition violence, the reasons for which are in themselves provocative, the

² See British Library’s EAP programmes: EAP566, EAP830, and EAP660.

³ For political histories of the event of Partition, See Mushirul Hasan, *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy, and Mobilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴ Manto, ‘Jaib-e-Kafan [The Shroud’s Pocket]’, p. 223.

fictions that respond to this violence appear to have been ingested into a documentary realm of Partition historiography as a rich and intimate textual archive. This chapter, in fact, springs from the anxiety that the vernacular short story text, when subjected to a strong imperative to provide evidentiary girth to the needs of history, becomes prone to a form of reductive reading where its critical form as a literary text is neglected in favour of its representational content. When a text or a whole genre of texts (such as the ‘riot short story’ in Urdu) is read in lieu of a historical record or an archive, the critical approaches to them adopt a fealty to the discourse of history that might impose a set of constraints on their own forms of literariness, their own ‘states of mind’. Manto’s post-1947 corpus, which forms the bulk of this chapter, has been read overwhelmingly in lieu of history. Not only are such heavily anthologised texts as ‘Khol Do’ (Open it, 1951), ‘Toba Tek Singh’ (1955) and ‘Thanda Gosht’ (Cold Meat, 1951) frequently invoked by historians as mimetic testimonies to the gendered violence of the riots, even such ones as in the experimental collection *Siya Hashiye* (Black Margins, 1948) have served, rather often, as a series of ‘anecdotes’ to be etched around the margins of major historical narratives of the event.⁵ The short story form, of course, is particularly prone to be read in an anecdotal or a testimonial way due to its brevity and fragmentary nature. But such a reading, even though it may serve to subvert the major historical narrative, often fails to attend to literature’s complex entanglement with the ethics of narration itself, especially when it pertains to the ethics of narrating a genocide. In other words, what forms of imagination, aestheticization, even silencing, follow a writer in the work of representing the tortured body, the migrating caravans, the chaotic border-crossings, the refugee camps, and the methods of violence that constitute the landscape of Partition? What forms and modalities offer the ethical comfort from which a writer may attempt to delineate the subjectivities of the victims and perpetrators of this violence? These are some of the questions with which I engage in this chapter with respect to the Urdu *afsana*.

As is now well known, many of these ‘riot stories’ were tried for charges of obscenity by colonial and post-colonial governments, inciting a national debate over the role literature was to play in the

⁵ Notable anthologies in translations are Sa’adat Hasan Manto, *Mottled Dawn*, trans. by Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1997); Sa’adat Hasan Manto, *Kingdom’s End and Other Stories*, trans. by Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1989); Sa’adat Hasan Manto, *Partition: Sketches and Stories*, trans. by Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991).

new imaginaries of India and Pakistan, and the frameworks of value it was to be held against. Manto himself ended up in the dock five times, his trials, like his stories, instigating a series of questions on the ethics of writing fiction after witnessing the grim, self-devouring violence of Partition. While Manto's realistic fidelity to the event of partition is now generally commended, several of Manto's peers, burdened by these questions, decried his stories as vulgar, pornographic and distasteful. In 1953, Ahmad Nadim Qasmi, short story writer and editor of the controversial *Nuqoosh* (1945-73), despite having published Manto on previous occasions, compared him, at a meeting of progressive writers in Lahore, to a man 'searching the pockets of dead people for money and cigarettes'.⁶ The dead were of course a reference to those who were killed in the communal riots of the partition, so gravely etched in the memory of the continent that a return to its violence in literary or scholarly mode still continues to invite stigma and ignominy. Qasmi's comment was lamented by Manto as a betrayal of friendship and of the moral practice entailed by literature (enshrined in Urdu as *absan-e-adab*) as it was made in wake of a reading ban proposed on Manto's fictions by the All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association (APPWA)—the literary group that followed the hugely influential progressivist front in India.⁷ This was also the time when Manto's fifth collection *Siya Hashiye* (Black Margins, also translated as Black Marginalia) had resurfaced after going 'virtually unnoticed' at the time of its first appearance in 1948.⁸ It was a collection of short vignettes, some of them less than a paragraph in length, that inaugurated Manto's writings on Partition. The renewed public interest in the pocket-sized 1948 edition of *Siya Hashiye* was due to extensive litigation over two of Manto's other short stories, 'Khol Do' (Open It) and 'Thanda Gosht' (Cold Meat), both of which appeared in periodicals *Javed* and *Ibtida* in 1951. Although the trial did not succeed in indicting Manto for he 'did not use a single bad word' (Crown vs Minto, 1953), the journal *Javed* was issued a six-month ban for 'disturbing the peace'.

⁶ *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hassan Manto*, ed. by Leslie A Flemming, trans. by Tahira Naqvi (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1985), p. 14.

⁷ No substantial study of the APPWA exists, but useful sources for reading are: Coppola, I–III; Gopal, *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence*; Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu*.

⁸ Flemming, p. 14.

Manto's riot stories vary greatly in length, structure and form, even though they are somewhat approximate in terms of their themes and subjects, and all, at least outwardly, show a commitment to exposing the fallacies in the gendered logic of Partition's riot violence. While such later pieces as 'Khol Do', 'Thanda Gosht', 'Toba Tek Singh', 'Mozail' and 'Titwal ka Kutta' are longer texts which show a degree of plot complexity, *Siya Hashbiye* (Black Margins), written in the immediate aftermath of Partition riots, is a series of 32 plotless sketches, some of them less than a paragraph in length. When the book was first published in 1948, there was a furore over its violent content, and over the fact that Mohammad Hasan Askari, Urdu critic and short story writer who was prominent in his opposition to the AIPWA, had written the preface.⁹ In the midst of torrid debates on the relationship between literature (*adab*) and communal riots (*fasadat*), the subject of the book's experimentalist foray into violence and its textual representation was broached by Askari in this preface, which he titled '*Haashiya-aara'ai*', or Marginalia.¹⁰ Calling the stories 'casual testimonies' (*mukhtasa'ar bayaan*) of the violence of Partition, he distinguished Manto's writing from most other writing on the riots as 'a juxtaposition of the paradoxes that confer upon the Urdu *afsana* its ultimate meaningfulness'.¹¹ According to him, the sole purpose of the literature of the riots was not simply to document *zulm* (brutality) but 'to introduce the reader to the psychology (*nafisiyat*) of the perpetrator' which was, at once, of both a human and a beast, constituted by the presence of both humanity (*insaniyat*) and bestiality (*haiwaniyat*). Evaluation and review of the book in comparative critical practice often harks

⁹ Manto recalls in his *dibacha* (satirical preface) to the novelette *Behair Unwaon Ke* (1949) that Ali Sardar Jafri, the Chairperson of AIPWA and the editor of *Naya Adab* had written to him even before *Siya Hashbiye* was published, baffled that Askari was to write the preface. By 1949, Manto's relationship to the Progressives had grown extremely adversarial, and his own reactionary editorial project with Askari called *Urdu Adab* which lasted only few months before it incurred a ban under Pakistan's 1952 Amrit Dhara Act was blacklisted by the Progressivist elites on both sides of the border. See Sa'adat Hasan Manto, 'Baghair'unwan Ke', in *Baghair Ijdzat* (Lahore: Zafar Brothers), pp. 67–70.

¹⁰ Two essays in Urdu letters of the time that best capture this debate are Ismat Chughtai's 'Fasadat aur Adab' [Riots and Literature] and Askari's forceful response 'Fasadat aur Humara Adab' [Riots and Our Literature]. For a discussion see Mehr Farooqi, pp. 98–101, 245, 265–67.

¹¹ Mohammad Hasan Askari and Sa'adat Hasan Manto, 'Haashiya-Aara'ai [Marginalia]', in *Mantonama* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1991), p. 748. Alternative translation by Muhammad Umar Memon may be consulted in 'Margi-notions': Sa'adat Hasan Manto, *My Name Is Radha: The Essential Manto* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2015).

back to its ability to render the 'paradoxes of psyche' in the riot violence of Partition; indeed, one common allegory for the book is that it is a gritty peek into the interiorities of the 'human-beast' rioter caught in a spontaneous forfeiture of his ethical and moral conscience.

These critical allegories can be traced to a kind of testimonial reading which demands that the content of texts serves as a sort of affirmation for the historically contested reality of Partition's riot violence, therefore repeating and rehearsing its common appearance as bestial, spontaneous, and extraordinary. The 'spontaneity' of all mob violence, and the 'extraordinariness' of Partition's mob violence in particular, are recurring tropes in both public and political discourse. They serve to strengthen an all too familiar notion of mob violence within the nationalist imagination, which treats it, in the words of Gyanendra Pandey, as 'an aberration, an absence ... something removed from the general run of Indian history'.¹² Pandey, in his essay 'In Defense of the Fragment' (1992), urges the historiographical fraternity to adopt a 'fragmentary point of view' in order to rewrite the history of violence such that violence itself, whose 'contours and character are simply assumed' can be further investigated for its intrinsic form and unity (28). This fragmentary point of view would derive not only from minority cultures and their recordkeeping practices but also from the minority that is inherent to the literary narrative, especially to the short story which is already illustrious for its marginality and fragmentariness.

Due to its apparent distance from state power and its ideological functions, the literary narrative is thus to be treated as a historical fragment, a somewhat uncorrupted source of historical knowledge, a counterpoint to the official archive of the state which tends to the task of writing history 'in a context where the rhetoric of nationalism is of central importance' (28). At the same time, the employment of literary fragment, such as the fragments in *Siya Hashiye*, to serve in lieu of a historical record, even if it is to dehegemonise historical practice, brings with it the astringency with which historians tend to read literary texts. The allegories of spontaneity, discontinuity, and brutality of this violence, in fact, follow from an astringent form of reading that reduces even such experimental forays into violence and its representation as Manto's *Siya Hashiye* to its most common essence, its mimetic rudiments. My intention in this chapter is to problematise these allegories by situating the

¹² Pandey, p. 27.

texts within the critical frame I have so far followed, illustrating how the text (and its translational form) is not just an exposition of the commonplace appearance of riot violence, but a complex dialectical inquiry into its immanent and interior nature. While, on one hand, the plots, subjects or milieus that appear in these texts are often pressed into the service of a marginal historiographical viewpoint, it is the form of the text, which, on the other hand, resists the strict teleology of events, that is required by historical narrativity. Ayesha Jalal, the preeminent historian of India's Partition, not to mention also Manto's niece and administrator of his papers, has questioned the tenability of the very concept of a 'history' of violence, arguing that although the fragmentary and marginal narratives may bring richness and diversity to the historiography of Partition as a whole, 'Pandey is not likely to make any historiographical breakthrough so long as he clings to the undifferentiated and ahistorical category of violence'.¹³ But if not in the history of the event of violence, how else can we narrativize violence?

The Narrativity of Violence

The debate on the *narrativity* of violence, much like the ethics of its aestheticization, is a profound one. One of the defining realities of Partition's violence was that it was constitutively gendered and highly sexualised. Manto's stories were vilified by state and society because they dealt explicitly with the use of rape and related forms of sexualised violence on both male and female bodies during the riots. These forms of violence effected a cycle of revenge and humiliation that became integral to the logic of communalism, forming tight structures of dependencies between violence, representation, body, agency, nation, community, family, and sacrifice, complicating the task of the riot writer such that any assessment of Manto cannot be made without analysing which of these, and how they were, at stake. Several recent forays into the nature and method of this violence, such as by feminist historians and critics Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia, and Veena Das, are now taken to be principal elaborations upon the kinds of embodied nationalist expressions that fomented and

¹³ Ayesha Jalal, 'Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of "Communalism": Partition Historiography Revisited', *Modern Asian Studies*, 30.3 (1996), 681–89.

sustained Partition riots.¹⁴ In her seminal and profoundly moving work *Life and Words*, the task of understanding the forms, languages, and grammars of violence deployed against women during the partition, a subject central to almost all of Manto's riot stories, is taken up by Veena Das:

In the fantasy of men, the inscription of nationalist slogans on the bodies of women (Victory to India, Long live Pakistan), or proclaiming possession of their bodies (This thing, this loot—*ye maal*—is ours), would create a future memory by which men of the other community would never be able to forget that the women as territory had already been claimed and occupied by other men. The bodies of the women were the surfaces on which texts were to be written and read—icons of the new nations.¹⁵

Indeed, a substantial part of the discourse on sovereignty of India and Pakistan rested on the 'honour' of the female citizen-subject, her body expressed as an object to be protected by the masculinised nation-state at all costs. Following this ominous script, the abductions of women became one of the primary ways in which an injury to the new nation could be inflicted during the partition. Official accounts say that as many as 50,000 Muslim women were abducted in India and as many as 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women were abducted in Pakistan. These numbers are contentious, but they constitute a part in the spectrum of violence which is extensively reliant on the cast of nation as pure and masculine. Other acts of sexualised violence such as mutilations, naked parades, forced conversions, communal suicides, foeticides, forcible recoveries, and fratricides, also seized upon historical notions of purity, honour, and fertility in recasting the nation as a justified cause and effect for the

¹⁴ See Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (London: Hurst, 2000); Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Delhi, 1996).

¹⁵ Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, p. 85.

(re)enaction of violence.¹⁶ It was not just the rioters who participated in what Deepika Bahri rightfully calls the ‘gynocentric assault on the enemy’ but the two governments were deeply complicit in ‘an elaborate inscription of women as the patrimonial body of state and religion’.¹⁷ Several recovery operations, in fact, borrowed from the rhetoric that in order for the defiled and emasculated nation to be remade, the ‘abducted’ women had to be returned.¹⁸

As Jisha Menon notes, ‘the symbolic elevation of ‘woman’ as the embodiment of the sanctified, inner recesses of culture and tradition ironically positioned real women as targets of violent assertions of family, community and nation’.¹⁹ Such a symbolic elevation of woman to stand for the integrity of a nation is hardly a preserve of Indian culture, nor are violent expressions of warring slogans upon women’s bodies any particular to the events of Indian Partition.²⁰ While they may present their own narrative challenges in their differentiated contexts, this is still an important point to bear in mind

¹⁶ It is widely argued that gendered ideas of purity, honour, and fertility have been linked to martyrdom and sacrifice throughout the Indian history, in both literary and public discourse. A frequently cited example has been the figure of ‘Mother India’, which in effect, serves as a masculinist trope, as seen in vernacular tracts, pamphlets, and magazine covers during the freedom struggle. For further reading see Chatterjee; Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Discourse in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Deepti Misri, *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), p. 222.

¹⁸ The centrality of the discourse of masculine nation in the recovery project has also been examined by several historians and social scientists, using oral and testimonial accounts, as well as state records and archives leading up to the Inter Dominion Agreement (3 September 1947) and the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949. See ‘The Abducted Woman in the Imaginary of Masculine Nation’ (p.19) in Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. See also Gyanendra Pandey and others, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), VII, pp. 165, 174.

¹⁹ Jisha Menon, ‘Rehearsing the Partition: Gendered Violence in Aur Kitne Tukde’, *Feminist Review*, 84.1 (2006), 29–47 (p. 30).

²⁰ The practice of ‘inscriptional violence’ on gendered bodies is well documented in several conflicts around the world, including in humanitarian contexts. See Carol Harrington, *Politicization of Sexual Violence: From Abolitionism to Peacekeeping* (London: Routledge, 2016); Elizabeth F Defeis, ‘UN Peacekeepers and Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: An End to Impunity’, *Washington University Global Studies Law Review*, 7.2 (2008), 185–214.

so as to not slip into a misconstrual of this violence in service of colonial conceptions of India as a site of naturalised violence and ‘bestial’ passions.²¹ Although it cannot be denied that metaphors of the sexed body drew gravely on mythological and religious texts of India, it has to be also noted that colonial massacres and violent crackdowns (such as upon the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny) too relied on the trope of the ‘violated Englishwoman’ to establish the barbaric character of the revolting sepoys and a breach of colonial authority. Both Hindu epic texts such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the colonial rhetoric of returning the violence done to ‘the English lady’ as punishment to the entire tribe, were endlessly deployed by Hindu nationalist leaders and public figures to stoke patriarchal anger or sympathy for the abductions of Hindu women by Muslims, often calling for violent and indiscriminate forms of revenge.²² This is best encapsulated by the speech of an aggrieved member of the Constituent Assembly in the days immediately following the Partition:

‘Sir, try to remember how when one Ellis [reference to Mollie Ellis who was abducted by Afridi tribesmen in the Northwest frontier of the British Raj (now Afghanistan) sparking a widespread public furore and a militant rescue operation in 1923] was kidnapped by some of those Pathans the whole of Britain quaked with anger ... and we all know our own history, of what happened when Sita was abducted at the time of Shri Ram. Here, it is not about just one Sita, but thousands of Sitas are concerned. We cannot ignore this. We must not ignore this. We can ignore all the properties and the arson. This cannot be forgotten’.

The analogy with *Ramayana*, where the virginal goddess Sita was abducted by the evil god Ravana and later recovered by Lord Rama at the expense of an epic war, was constructed to frame the whole nation as ‘Sons of Rama’ and the communal strife as an *epic* battle. This was the kind of mythological excesses that formed a narrative strategy to establish the ‘truth’ of the Partition riots, not unlike, as

²¹ Indeed, the term ‘bestial passions’ frequently appeared in circulation in news reports and BBC radio broadcasts to report on the communal massacre of the Partition in August 1947. See Gopal Das Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 101.

²² Constituent Assembly Debates provide a crucial ethnographic and historical site to examine the gendered framings of partition violence. See *Proceedings of the Indian National Congress 1946-47* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1947), p. 553. As Quoted in Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, p. 27.

Jenny Sharpe has noted in her analysis, how excessive and often fictional descriptions of innocent white women being raped and children being cut into pieces by leering mutineers established the truth of the mutiny in 1857.²³ Das, taking on from Sharpe, further notes that:

‘Commissioners and magistrates entrusted with investigating the rumours could find no evidence of systematic rape, mutilation and torture at Cawnpore or anyplace else. The official reports, however, came too late, as the sensational stories had already done their work ... Barr [reference here to General John Barr] exhibits a predictable understanding of the Cawnpore massacre when he writes that there ‘one of the most revered of Victorian institutions, the English lady was slaughtered, defiled and brought low.’ When the massacre of women is reported as the destruction of an institution, we know that the sacred image of English womanhood has outlived the story of women’s lives’.²⁴

In other words, the event of violence is textually produced. What I mean by that is not so much that grievous violence can simply be ‘made’ out of literature, but that literature and its inherent textuality does more than just point towards the event. I have invoked here examples of these grand assertions and representations of violence because they provide an instance of thinking about how violence can be reified by its *excess* textual representation, and as a result, about the kinds of narrative challenges that stifle writers, particularly those who write short stories, who make the precarious attempt to represent it. This is the ‘chiasmus’ as Benjamin Noys calls it, between ‘representation of violence and violence of representation’ by which all literary and historical efforts to represent violence are ultimately afflicted.²⁵ On one hand, it is the nature of violence itself that it is always lurking, ready to erupt from its indictment, and ready to ignite from its representation. And on the other hand, the tracts of thinking, tropes of representation, and strategies of narration that are deployed by writers and historians to represent violence can derive from the same subjective clusters that enable violence

²³ Jenny Sharpe’s 1993 work is part of an array of scholarly work into the ideological constructions and deployments of English womanhood during the colonial era. Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

²⁴ Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, p. 53.

²⁵ Benjamin Noys, ‘The Violence of Representation and the Representation of Violence’, in *Violence and the Limits of Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 12–27 (p. 12).

to begin with. To study these clusters—by which I mean the metaphors and attitudes which had clustered around the gendered frame of the body, nation, and of violence itself—is then to take an interest in the *form* of the riot short story, reading it not only against the ethical burden that both encumbers and creates it, but also against some of the culturally and socially enforced absences in Partition's historical plot. A strategy of narration that I turn particularly to for examining Manto's short sketches is the narrative strategy of *rumour*. How is the trope and strategy of rumour used by a Partition writer to negotiate the ethics of representing violence? In the next section, I will study the role played by 'rumour'—a negotiation between reality and falsehood itself—to represent and reconstitute the contours of this violence.

A Role of Rumour

In this section, I will examine the deployment of the perlocutionary force of 'rumour' as a modal device in Manto's realist short story practice in *Siya Hashiye*, or Black Marginalia, published in 1948. In much Urdu criticism, *Siya Hashiye* is received as an innovative take on the Urdu short story, with Balraj Menra and Sharad Dutt referring to the form of the texts as an *afsananch*.²⁶ It is an intriguing portmanteau, deriving from the *afsana*, the short story in Urdu, and '*anch*', meaning a small part, but which, in colloquial Punjabi dialect, sounds similar to an 'inch' of length. As the most popular outlet for the short story was still the literary periodical, *afsananch* subtly elicits the idea of a short story that was written to be published within just one inch of a printed column. Its unusual form often draws comparisons to the networked short story cycles of the modernist period, many of which like Istvan Orkeny's *One Minute Sketches* (1952) and Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) are also experimental textual responses to different forms of mob violence. This unusual form is also intimately bound up with the perceived content of the book, whether it is the concurrent representation of the individual body and the rioting mob, or the modes through which the sense of vulnerability and agency (to both act in and against violence) transfers from the body to the mob in a textualized episode of mob violence. Each text in the book functions in this episodic way, lacking any sense of time, context or

²⁶ According to Menra and Dutt, Manto himself likened the form of the texts in *Siya Hashiye* to the 'afsananch' in 1952 at one of Lahore's famous Pak Tea House literary parlour meetings. For further reading see Vol II, *Manto: Dastavez* (Manto: Papers), 1993.

place, and often grossly exaggerated in its content and rhetoric. These exaggerations, I argue in this section, are what spill into the region of rumour, eliciting from the reader a highly specific affective response to the process of witnessing mob violence, whether physically or mentally, through the work of fiction. These exaggerations point to how the unbelievability of the riot is precisely what turns it into a form of believable truth.

Consider the sketch 'Mishtake' which appears as the eighth entry in the 1948 edition as 'Kalma-i-ta'asuf—

Ripping the belly cleanly, the knife moved in a straight line down the midriff, in the process slashing the cord that held the man's pyjamas in place. The one with the knife took one look and spoke regretfully, 'tut tut tut, Mishtake'. (164)

Perhaps the most cited text in the whole collection, this sketch, presented here in Khalid Hasan's contentious translation, deals with the symbolically complex subject of genital violence during the riots.²⁷ The text invites the reader-critic to examine the ethical and moral apparatus which sanctions this form of violence, and which produces, through its parallel discourse, the specious figures of the victim and the perpetrator. At one level, the book deals with these specious figures, their exchanges of dialogue, their dynamics of power, their violent energies and their repressive instincts. Deepthi Misri identifies *Siya Hashiye* as not only 'a rare representation of the riot that focuses on the male perpetrator' but also 'an unusual fictional exploration of the gendered vulnerability of *male* bodies in the communal riot'.²⁸ This is the level at which these figures occupy the vulnerable and gendered bodies that become, as a result of competing patriarchies in the subcontinent, a common currency for the exchange of power, and thus an exchange of violence. While the literature, including several of Manto's stories, has often leaned towards the violence meted out to women's bodies, a critical

²⁷ In a 35-page critique of Khalid Hasan's translations of Manto in *Mottled Dawn*, critic and translator Alok Bhalla takes particular provocation at the translator's re-titling of the story as 'Mishtake' instead of Manto's original title 'Sorry'; 'Hasan changes the title partly because he wants to snigger rather arrogantly at the lumpenisation of language, and partly because he thinks that Manto wants to point to the murderous propensities of the Punjabis in order to affirm ethnic stereotypes (the inability of many Punjabis to pronounce 's' has been the subject of endless jokes' (23). See Alok Bhalla, 'The Politics of Translation: Manto's Partition Stories and Khalid Hasan's English Version', *Social Scientist*, 2001, 19–38 (p. 23).

²⁸ Misri, p. 26.

understanding of the underpinnings of this violence is achieved only by studying how it were, in fact, both male and female bodies, that were, in Paulo Bacchetta's words, 'geo-politicised ... either ours or theirs ... sites of masculinist protection or desecration'.²⁹

During the riots, as sexualised parts of the body such as the penis or the breasts, or items of sartorial clothing or appearance such as the turban or the beard, became markers of communal difference, they also became somatic sites upon which political violence could be enacted. Mutilation of the penis, in particular, was a distinctly political form of violence, its feminising and emasculating logic disposed to injure the virile imaginary of the new masculine nation. In the excerpt above, the discovery of the (un)circumcised penis by the killer induces what is stylised by the translator as a 'mishtake'—presumably a fleeting (to not be dwelled upon) sense of regret at mistakenly stabbing a member of one's own community. It is noteworthy that the above excerpted translation appears alongside an assortment of Manto's Partition short fiction in a Manto anthology (a genre of its own today) called *Mottled Dawn* (Penguin, 2014) which is, according to Alok Bhalla, a 'deeply flawed' translation.³⁰ As I have argued, study of form in the Indian context is a fundamentally translational practice, so I turn to some of the differences between the form of the text in original and its form in translation to highlight the elements of rumour present in the sketch. Bhalla's criticism, for one, is that the translations in Hasan's *Mottled Dawn* dilute the secularist-critical elements of Manto's prose to 'recreate for us a Manto who is substantially compromised and damaged as a writer' (21). What is especially suspect in the translation is the neglect of the formal and subjective particularities of the sketch form, thereby concealing the phenomenological critique of communal riot violence which it presents in the original. Consider the original text, alongside a literal translation—

Churi (the knife)

paet chak karti hui (cutting through the abdomen)

naaf ke neeche tak chali gai (went past the belly-button)

jab izarband kat gaya (and as the trouser-cord was cut)

²⁹ Bacchetta and others, p. 571.

³⁰ Bhalla, 'The Politics of Translation: Manto's Partition Stories and Khalid Hasan's English Version', p.

Churi maarnevale ke (of the one who held the knife)

munh se da'fatan (from the mouth, suddenly)

kalma-e-ta'asuf nikla (came out with deep regret)

'*Chi Chi Chi... mishtake ho gaya*' ('... *mishtake* has happened')³¹

One way in which to rehistoricise the 'riot short story' is to look at its form in the original, just as it appeared in its ephemeral context, the 1948 *Siya Hasbiye*. Within this comparative critical mode, the most significant discrepancies between the original text and the translation will emerge, in fact, as matters of form and subjectivity. Firstly, the broken, verse-like lineation of the original text is rewritten in flowing prose, altering the textual form of the original; and secondly, the relocation of the agency of the 'knife' to that of the 'knife-holder' changes the way 'knife' is elevated as an object that commits the killing, turning it into an object that is merely instrumental in the act of killing. The hovering presence of the knife in the original text, with its slow-breathing and staccato rhythms, shifts the reader's gaze to the object such that it forms a deft phenomenological critique of violence; where Manto had wanted to stage violence as unwilling, spontaneous, and indoctrinated, the translation restages it as wilful, single-minded, and determinate; where Manto isolates the knife as a faithless object with an agency of its own, the translator focuses on the human figure of the knife-holder, a figure imbued with a communalist sensibility. In effect, the titular black inking (*siyabi*) on the grey margins of the Partition, is radically tempered by the form-agnostic translation, further diminishing the faith-agnostic critique of violence that is set forth by Manto. What I mean here by a form-agnostic translation or a faith-agnostic critique is that a certain tempering with form, which is inescapable to some degree for all translational work, tempers here with the text's original, highly uncertain relationship to fact. This is a relationship of agnosticism, of doubt, of *rumour*; the knife elevated as an agent of killing, as a protagonist (*haleef* in Urdu) itself.

Likewise, the word 'mishtake' that appears after the ambivalently rueful phrase '*chi chi chi*' offers an unusual site to understand the representational paradigms used throughout the whole collection. It has been variously interpreted as a stylisation meant to indicate one of either the rioter's non-

³¹ A note on normative Urdu gendering: *churi* (knife, feminine), *naaf* (bellybutton, masculine), *izarband* (trouser-cord, masculine), *munh* (mouth, masculine). *Kalma-e-Ta'asuf* is a compound phrase commonly uttered by someone upon realisation that they are on a path of sin.

English-speaking class status, Sikh ethnicity, or just a slurring of speech due to trauma. However, if read alongside several other sketches, what becomes visible here is an interest in exposing the orderliness, or what Hannah Arendt has called the ‘terrifying normality’ of violence.³² Is it possible then, that the word ‘mishtake’ is perhaps an infantilism, an attempt at the portrayal of violence as childishly trivial, banal, and guileless? I wish to examine this point further by very briefly invoking Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*, the 1988 novel which is today a mainstay in studying the representational ethics of Partition fiction.³³ The novel, which follows the experiences of a middle-class Parsi family and their household during the events of India’s Partition, is narrated through Lenny, a young Parsi girl who repeatedly finds herself in physical proximity of the gruesome violence of Partition. However, as neither Hindu, Muslim, nor Sikh, her proximity to violence does not extend in a communal sense. She is an amanuensis for the writer, a ‘sympathetic conduit’, according to Deepika Bahri, ‘giving shape and speech to the suffering that could all too easily lapse into prelinguistic stupor even if it were given permission to express’.³⁴ Sidhwa frequently switches between reacting to the violent scenes through Lenny’s startled expressions and through her own adult voice, but sometimes, her own narrative voice too adopts the tonality of the child narrator allowing her to reduce violence to what Das would call ‘a language of feud’.³⁵ In a telling scene from the novel, Lenny rediscovers her Ayah (carer of children) wearing bangles, *saree*, and heavy make-up, pimped and sold during the riots by Ayah’s admirer the Ice-Candy Man. Upon seeing this, she is quick to declare that Ayah’s

³² See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. Rev. and Enl. Ed* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

³³ Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man* was republished as *Cracking India* (1992) and Deepak Mehta’s 1999 period drama ‘Earth’ (2007) was based upon it. Actress Nandita Das who plays Shanta (maid) in the film went on to direct the biopic on the life of Sa’adat Hasan Manto’s called ‘Manto’ (2018). For a closer study of the novel, See Deepika Bahri, ‘Telling Tales: Women and the Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s Cracking India’, *Interventions*, 1.2 (1999), 217–34; Priya Kumar, ‘Testimonies of Loss and Memory: Partition and the Haunting of a Nation’, *Interventions*, 1.2 (1999), 201–15; Kamran Rastegar, ‘Trauma and Maturation in Women’s War Narratives: The Eye of the Mirror and Cracking India’, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, 2.3 (2006), 22–47.

³⁴ Bahri, ‘Telling Tales: Women and the Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s Cracking India’, p. 225.

³⁵ Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, pp. 257–58.

eyes were ‘vacant ... bigger than ever ... colder than the ice lurking behind the hazel in Ice-Candy Man’s beguiling eyes’.

One is immediately reminded of Manto’s sketch ‘Jelly’ in *Black Margins* where the child-narrator tugs at their mother to say how small lumps of coagulated blood on the street were candied fruits. Needless to say, this is a vastly exaggerated retelling, acquiring a cognitive affiliation with the truth in the short story only through the fact of its exaggeration. The naivete, the relentless seeing, the impulse to tell as it is, the childish tonality, as though, allows the writer to trim the sharp edges of reason and cognition that would make violence otherwise difficult to handle or confront, exposing through their objective slant the cracks and fissures of the reasoning which inheres in violence.³⁶ They numb the act of violence for the writer while retaining a sense of extremity for the reader, reducing the gruesome to just the grotesque, the scandalous to just the absurd, confining pain and suffering to those puerile margins of normalcy and forgettability where they could find some ‘shape and speech’.

It is both lamentable and inspiring to think that we do not have a standing language of pain, no specific words to delineate one kind of pain from another.³⁷ To find, then, as a writer, a conduit for this complex expression of pain in a young child is a provocative way to think about how violence is mastered, domesticated, and lived through, and how the capacity to effect violence, like the capacity to perceive, nurture, and narrate it, comes from the position of that ‘terrifying normality’ which is,

³⁶ In an interview in 2006, children’s writer John Boyne said that he finished the entire first draft of the novel *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* (2006) in just two days. Several critics have identified the relative comfort and heightened affect achieved through the role of child narrators in fictions of violence, for which there are many examples like Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*; Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*; Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* and *The Shadow Lines*; See Asha Sen, ‘Child Narrators in The Shadow Lines, Cracking India and Meatless Days’, *World Literature Written in English*, 37.1–2 (1998), 190–206.

³⁷ Elaine Scarry’s seminal work *The Body in Pain* (1985) is an eloquent history of bodily pain and its vocabularies, drawing upon a wide range of sources from medical documents to literary texts. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

in fact, a reality for children in times of conflict.³⁸ As Bahri argues, the child Lenny may be seen as a ‘flexible model (albeit a conflicted one) for the researcher, the literary critic, the reader distanced by time and history from the original event’.³⁹ If, for Sidhwa, the child presents a narrative conduit through which the ethical burden of retelling violence could be alleviated, Manto’s narrators too assume a child-like view to effect a sense of the way violence is tamed and normalised by adults but retains its dimensional absurdity for children. The hesitant retelling of the violent act of mutilation, the convergence of the gaze upon the knife rather than the holder, the creolisation of the word ‘mishtake’, altogether instil a sense in the reader that the act of violence is being seen and narrated by a child, or a child-like subject not yet implicated in the political rhetoric of violence. I argue here that a similar kind of representational comfort, if one may call it comfort at all, can be derived from mimicking the tonality of rumour. The use of this rumour-like tonality, which I will demonstrate to be a crucial element of Manto’s audacious realist practice, permits the metaphors of the sexualised body to function in a covert manner, making a false pact with a violence that is knowably unjust.

While talking about the performativity inherent in the short story form, Homi Bhabha has also alluded to the ‘indeterminacy of rumour’. It is a certain indeterminacy, which, according to Bhabha, ‘constitutes its importance as a social discourse’. In Manto’s textual treatment, the indeterminacy is always located between fact and fiction, a tussle with realism’s principal dictum of mimetic representation. Bhabha goes on to say of the rumour that ‘its intersubjective, communal adhesiveness lies in its enunciative aspect. Its performative power of circulation results in its contiguous spreading, an almost uncontrollable impulse to pass it onto another person’.⁴⁰ Within the social study of rumour, made eminent by the appearance of crowds and mobs in social scientific disciplines, the themes and

³⁸ Several studies within Child Psychology and Conflict Psychology have emphasized how children, when exposed to violent scenes in their development years, are able to internalise and normalise violence such that they can testify to it as if it were a part of normal life. This is widely recognised as a vulnerability of children that affects their ability to reintegrate and rehabilitate. For a study of several testimonies from children who have grown up during conflict, see James Garbarino, Kathleen Kostelny, and Nancy Dubrow, *No Place to Be a Child: Growing up in a War Zone*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Hall, 1998, 1991).

³⁹ Bahri, ‘Telling Tales: Women and the Trauma of Partition in Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*’, p. 225.

⁴⁰ Homi Bhabha, ‘By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in the Mid-Nineteenth Century’, in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 198–211 (p. 201). As quoted in Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, p. 117.

questions are around contagion, spread, embodiment, believability, order.⁴¹ Veena Das uses however a notion of *grammar* ('in a Wittgensteinian sense') to refer to 'rumour as spread'.⁴² I pursue here this grammatical sense, the knowledge that gets coded in the language and the modality of rumour, to examine how rumour functions within the ethical apparatus of Manto's riot short story. The short, paragraph-length form of the sketches in *Siya Hashiye*, as well as the capricious and flighty style of truth-telling that it adopts (*churi paet chak karti hui...*), is actually a resort to the language of rumour as a 'consensus of unthinking', to use Peter Lienhardt's interpretation of what rumour is.⁴³ By using this tactic in *Siya Hashiye* to tell the truth of the riots, Manto not only challenges the authority of truth, he also skirts the ethical challenges of retelling the truth by absolving himself of any authorial accountability. While the anonymity of rumour in its actual manifestation makes it a potent (and often lethal) weapon of building collective (mob) solidarity, it is also this anonymity, untraceability, and unpredictability, that in its literary reproduction, gives it its ethical distance from violence.

Consider how, when in the final sketch 'Who Knows' the fanatical adult rioter and the secular child figure ultimately face off, the reader is left upon that familiar cold terrain of violence where nobody really knows its object anymore. The sketch is organised in six passages to correspond with

⁴¹ Leading work in the field has been by historians of French Revolution and Slave Uprisings in Haiti, such as by Michel Rolph-Trouillot, George Rude, and Steven Moscovici. See 'Between Truth and Fiction' (6) in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995). See also David H Pinkney, 'The Crowd in the French Revolution of 1830', *The American Historical Review*, 70.1 (1964), 1-17; Serge Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd: A Historical Treatise on Mass Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). In India's case, the work of Ranajit Guha on peasant insurgency is often recalled to supply a discourse on rumours and crowds: Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) (gloss. 'rumour'). The work of Pradeep Jeganathan on mob rumours is also exemplary: Mala de Alwis and Pradeep Jeganathan, 'Talking about the Body in Rumours of Death', in *Matters of Violence: Reflections on Social and Political Violence in Sri Lanka*, ed. by Jayadeva Uyangoda (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2008), p. 33.

⁴² Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, p. 119.

⁴³ 'Rumours which produce integration without thought are the voice of a mob before the mob itself has gathered' (105) in Peter Lienhardt, 'The Interpretation of Rumor', in *Studies in Social Anthropology: Essays in Memory of EE Evans-Pritchard by His Former Colleagues*, ed. by J.H.M Beattie and R. Godfrey Lienhardt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 105-31 (p. 131).

the six slots for bullets in a pistol. In each passage, the pistol-wielding rioter takes aim at a human target, either killing, wounding or missing it. In the seventh passage, as the pistol is emptied, a child runs across the scene of carnage. The rioter still takes aim, terrorising the child, though when his companion asks why, he professes: 'I don't know, but the child doesn't know either'.⁴⁴ To not know 'why' was truly the mark and catalyst of Partition violence. It is the vacuity of this violence of communalism that Manto foregrounds in *Siya Hashiye*, utilising the brevity of the short story to create textual analogies with different elements of a mob (paragraphs for pistols, to take one example from 'Who Knows'). But seeing how reliant communal violence in India still is on the rhetoric of 1947 Partition, contemporary critiques of violence need to pay closer attention to the literary sites where the subjective complexities of 'why' get narrativized, including the gaps and slippages within those sites where these narratives stammer or fail. The violence of Partition continues to be evoked in contemporary renewals of Hindu-Muslim violence such as those following the two wars with Pakistan (1963 and 1971) as well as the 1991 demolition of Babri Mosque. In 2002 Gujarat Pogroms, Hindu-Muslim violence was eerily similar to the mob violence of 1947, and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots too relied on sexualised metaphors of nation and masculinity in enacting these gendered forms of violence.⁴⁵

Understandably, in the novel-centric realm of Partition literature, *Siya Hashiye* is often considered a fringe text, a testimony to the textual fallibility of any literary project that sets out to capture the essence of violence immediately after such violence has taken place—an inevitable failure of both form and critique. However, the critique of violence that it ushers in lies in its small and marginal form itself. Notice the brevity, sharpness, and fleeting irony in several other sketches in the collection, particularly the way they evoke a sense of 'routine' and 'order' within the violence they represent. In one of the sketches, 'Tidiness' (Safai), the killers enter a railway compartment to ask if there were any 'turkeys?' (165).⁴⁶ After some hesitation, one of the passengers hints at the lavatory. When the

⁴⁴ I have translated the sketch 'Usse Kya Pata' myself. For the original, see Devendra Issara, *Mantonaama [The Works of Manto]* (Delhi: Indraprastha Prakashan, 1996), pp. 58–59.

⁴⁵ For a study of how Partition violence continues to haunt contemporary transformations of communal violence in the Indian subcontinent, see Misri. See also Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ All page numbers refer to Hasan's translated anthology *Mottled Dawn*.

'turkey' is brought out to be slaughtered inside the train compartment, some passengers ask the mob to reconsider. The reason given here is that it would 'mess up the compartment ... take him outside' (165). Again, in 'For Necessary Action' a Muslim couple starved from hiding in the attic of an abandoned house decide to knock at a Hindu family's home, wishing for death. It turns out that the Hindu family were followers of the clean and orderly Jain sect, so after deliberating, they resort to handing over the couple to the neighbourhood 'for necessary action' (146). A rioter in 'Double Cross' thinks it is 'hardly fair' that he has been sold adulterated petrol for its full price, for not even one shop could be set to fire (153). The sense of 'order' foregrounded through these sketches, gives to violence its most terrifying quality: a clockwork appearance. It is shown as stately, methodical, and so accustomed to its own logic that it acquires a moral order of its own, however strange and frightening. A 'rumour' of violence, as a representational paradigm as well as an indicator of the irrationality of violence, is also something that works by acquiring its own moral order. A rumour does not spread, that is to say, by someone who begins by saying 'I am spreading the rumour that...' In the same way, Manto shows here, an act of violence too works through covert knowledge.

Mobilising the Mob

On one hand, as E. Valentine Daniel alerts us, there are significant pitfalls to staging violence in any form; the representational realm of violence is still haunted by voyeuristic, erotic, and spectacular possibilities, yielding easily to what he calls 'a pornography of violence'.⁴⁷ On the other hand, what is truly mystifying about violence is not its morbid spectacle, for which the novel and the film are frequently held to account, but an exposition of its underlying system of signs, symbols, metaphors. This is where the short story enables a unique form of critique. It is in asking how to textualise not the material but the immaterial, not the bodily but the semantic, that Manto's stories make visible a violence within violence—the invisible violence of the sign, of rumour, which animates, and then justifies, the violence of real life. They create, through their form, a false sense of order that startles the reader and exposes to them how violence is so tranquilised by the signs that produce it, that it can even seem accustomed and orderly—inviting the readers to participate here in 'a consensus of

⁴⁷ E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 229.

unthinking'. The primary critical concern of these texts, I would then argue, is not the violence which they purportedly fail to represent, and for which they are berated as a failure, but the 'order' within that violence and the signs that create that order. The critical and ethical possibilities offered here are quite different from those offered by realist-novelistic forms of representing violence, which, in their totality, are often so mimetic that they assume the signs that govern reality, rather than work to expose them. A recurrent feeling through the sketches is of this exposition; here, a perverse logic warps around the act of violence, but in retaining a congruous presence in itself, it exposes the signs that materialise violence. In finding it acceptable, for instance, that a man ought to be killed but retaining still a desire for tidiness, or in finding it morally unconscionable to kill as a Jain but still alright to abet that murder, exposes not just the indoctrination of communalist logic, but of violence itself. They expose violence *as* order, reared to the degree that this 'order' supersedes the political discourse from which violence finds its logic, presenting it not as a deviation, but as a culmination of the path upon which symbolic excesses and mythical or semantic dependencies between the body, nation, family, community, shame, and honour, are formed.

A great example of this is 'Mistake Removed', a sketch that appears right after 'Mishtake' with which I began this discussion. In the sketch, the rioters ask an unsuspecting passer-by his name, obviously to find out which community he belongs to. In response, he yells the Hindu chant 'Hara Hara Mahadev' to forcefully assert his Hindu identity. 'Mahadeva' is the destroyer of worlds, Lord Shiva, and the repetition of the word 'Hara' (which, like several Hindi words, carries a double meaning as verb and noun forms; *verb.* to rid; *noun.* everyone) militarises the prayer chant and transforms its meaning from 'rid me of the sins, Shiva' to 'rid every one of their sins, Shiva'.⁴⁸ The rioters reply by saying 'Har Har Mahadev' to acknowledge this deference to the mob's authority, but still ask for evidence of him being Hindu. The passer-by says that his name is Dharamchand, a common Hindu name. But neither this, nor the fact that he can 'recite all four Vedas by heart', can adduce enough

⁴⁸ Use of religious prayers, songs, and mantras during communal rioting has been well documented by journalists and anthropologists as a means to create masculine tension and *esprit de corps* that become significant in sustaining mob violence by recruitment of individuals, identifying targets and allies, and ascertaining authority. A prominent example is 'Vande Mataram'; See Julius Lipner, 'Vande Mataram: The Genesis and Power of a Song' (Unpublished paper presented at Political Hinduism: Conference at UCLA, 2005; quoted in Das 2007, 233).

evidence for his Hindu status, because the rioters ‘do not know anything about the Vedas’. Then, they cut to the chase—

‘Lower your trousers.’

When his trousers were lowered, there was a pandemonium. ‘Kill him, kill him’. ‘Wait, please wait ... I am your brother.’

‘Then what is this?’

‘The area through which I had to pass was controlled by enemies; therefore, I had to take this precaution ... just to save my life ... this is the only mistake, the rest is in order.’

‘Oh really? Boys! *remove* the mistake’.

Through the use of a heavily dialogue-laden form of the text, repetition of words, and the overperformance of religious identity, Manto recreates the space of a mob encounter, exposing within that space how a system of signs (circumcised penis, male fertility, religious identity, nation, community, truth, honour) lends to violence a governing order, superseding its political and discursive logic. It is abundantly clear that the rioters, though moved by the logic of religious identity in their acts of violence, do not care so much for the religion itself, for they say they don’t know anything about the Vedas. Nor is it enough for them that the victim has invoked the ‘Mahadeva’ to express a sense of solidarity with the mob, so as to spare him. It would seem here that the proof of religion still lies in the bodily marker that is picked up at the moment of birth—also the sign of purity, fertility, and capacity to bear offspring. Or, it would seem, that violence in the name of religion does not really care for its proof. In the reading of the sketch, Misri has argued for the latter, stating that what Manto critiques here is the false interpretation of violence which relies on proof, for it is the violence itself which destroys that proof, creating ‘the need for dexterous/traitorous bodies that can change between religious appearances’.⁴⁹

Given the ‘ideological work that [Manto’s] fictions are so frequently made to perform for the contemporary secular critique of communal violence’, sketches such as these are received as either a reproof of the communalist logic that bodily markers of communal identity have any evidentiary

⁴⁹ Misri, p. 42.

status in legitimating violence, or just a fragmentary anecdote of the absurdity of that violence.⁵⁰ But in an attempt to move beyond the fragment, to understand the cultural work of these signs, including how they spur the forces that animate the mob, we must excavate the repressed genealogies of meanings that attach to these signs and these acts of orderly violence. Manto packs an enormous breadth of meanings and metaphors into this short sketch. The mob, a notoriously difficult subject to study, much less to represent compellingly in a literary sketch, is at once presented as an agent, scribe, and a moral alibi for the violence that it enacts upon its victims. What Manto exposes in this *afsananch* is not the physical form of the mob, but the metonymical processes through which it is *mobilised*.

Consider the possibility that the use of the name ‘Dharamchand’ for the victim whose circumcised penis was mutilated is more than just a common Hindu name. Although, literally, the name means ‘an adherent of religion’, the word takes layers of complexities when looked up within the Punjabi-Urdu slang register; *Dharama* (Hindu religion) and *Chanda* (the Moon; to adhere to something like the moon adheres to the Earth) is sometimes an insult for the over-adhering, punctilious follower of the Hindu religion. Within the Punjabi colloquy, the irony of the word actually comes from a place of myth. Not many will have registered that Dharamchand is also the former name of a Rajpoot king who converted to Islam during the reign of Babar in the 16th century, becoming the first ever royal convert amongst the Chib Rajpoots—the Sufi Saint Sheikh Baba Shadi Shadeed who was given Babar’s daughter in return for his services as a doctor to the Mughal Emperor. The name ‘Dharamchand’ is therefore not just the slang for the over-adhering but often also an invective for one who has a weakness in his religious conviction.⁵¹ This is a critical metonym to grasp in order to

⁵⁰ Misri, p. 26.

⁵¹ In Manto’s ancestral land of Kashmir, the town of Bhimber is famous for the shrine of Sufi Saint Sheikh Baba Shadi Shadeed—or Dharamchand—by visiting which, it is believed, that childless couples may bear children. The history of the shrine (called Sur Shadi Shadeed) of the convert-Dharamchand is rather poorly known, nor can one say with confidence that Manto intended to invoke the myth in his choice given the commonality of this name, but it still helps to pose a question about the overlapping anxieties between ‘conversion to Islam’ and ‘male fertility’ that was circulating in public discourse at the time of Partition when sexualised forms of mob violence such as mutilation as depicted in this sketch was rampant. See ‘Ali Bahadur Khan of Saidpur, Raja’ in Roper Lethbridge, *The Golden Book of India: A Genealogical and Biographical Dictionary of the Ruling Princes, Chiefs, Nobles, and Other Personages, Titled Or Decorated of the Indian Empire; with an Appendix for Ceylon* (London: S.Low, Marston and Co., 1900), p. 17.

reproduce the sense of iffiness about both conversion and male fertility that would be strongly felt by an Urdu reader in the sketch, not least for the penultimate act of Dharmchand's mutilation.⁵²

Moreover, the story, in the original, is called 'Islah' which translates literally as 'reform', but as noted by Misri, also hints at the common ritual 'Islah banana' (to trim the hair or beard). There is a significant religious undertow in both connotations of the term. *Islah*, a form of 'reform' in Islamic thought alludes—though this remains a controversial debate—not to inherited forms and legacies of thinking, but to radical revisions of religious practice, often including religious pluralism.⁵³ The trimming of the beard is in itself a reformist perspective in Islamic thought, as orthodox readings of the *hadith*, or the sayings attributed to Muhammed, demand that adherents of religion keep the beard. In Qur'anic terminology, however, *Islah* invokes a determinedly secularist kind of reformism, which 'calls to restore oneself or to reconcile one another with people ... who follow peace, and are against wickedness, disorder, and anarchy'.⁵⁴

While Misri is not incorrect in her interpretation, it is important to obtain the meaning of the title from the period in which the sketch was written. In the particular context of the events leading up to the Partition, the term 'Islah' was regularly invoked to show a secular opposition to the Pakistan Movement for secession from India, and to stand as a signifier for the possibility of peace and co-

⁵² For a historical study of the overlapping anxieties of male fertility and religious conversion in the context of colonial India see Charu Gupta, 'Us' and "Them": Anxious Hindu Masculinity and the 'Other', in *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 222–67.

⁵³ For debates on reformist perspectives in Islamic thinking, especially the contentious vocabularies of change such as *islah* (reform), *tajdid* (renewal), *tazkiyah* (purification), *tarraq'i* (progress), *inqilab* (revolution) and *algher'i* (alterity, possibility) see Afsaneh Najmabadi and Kathryn Babayan, *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 52–56; Josef W Meri, *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 672; MA Muqtedar Khan, 'The Political Philosophy of Islamic Movements', in *Islam, the State, and Political Authority*, ed. by Asma Afsaruddin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 155–72..

⁵⁴ Meri, 675

existence within religious discourse.⁵⁵ In light of this, it would seem that Manto has ironically titled the sketch 'Islah' to locate, in the climactic act of mutilation, an immediate failure of those ideals of religious pluralism and secularism that had been touted as convoys to freedom. There is an unresolvable ambivalence about the victim in the end; is he mutilated for faking his religion, or is he mutilated for betraying his faith by circumcising his penis to save his life from the enemies? This ambivalence gestures at the fact that signs governing the mob in their orderly violence are no longer just religious signs—which can be counterfeited, exchanged, even destroyed—but the more complex, difficult to embrace signs of the body and its (sexualised) parts. It is in this sense that a mob gets *mobilised* in the text by a set of complex semantic and mythical processes.

In conclusion, it is never the case that the figure of the mob, even when deployed as an alibi for the critique of violence, is without its own violent ideology. Through these stories, Manto alerts us to the irreducibly political nature of even the most private forms of violence; the violence that is acted upon the body and its parts is highly metonymized, shaped by deeply historical forces, and emanates from a discursive space which contains the signs that enable violence, such as the symbolic and discursive abstractions which link the body and its parts to the mob and its political functions. Within these abstractions, as bodies are rendered as slates and agents of violence, any representation of the body risks lending itself to the forms of production, exchange, and ideological consumption that turn violence into a vicious, self-repeating cycle. These sketches, written with Manto's acerbic wit and concision, presage this very ethical problematic. They are marked in their refusal to be read or consumed, their circumvention of the spectacle of the riots, and their habituation of this violence into an *order* of things. They also hint at the rupture of sense-making paradigms in the context of Partition, their plotless anti-narrative form emphasizing the paradoxes that assert the irrationality,

⁵⁵ The Lahore-based anticolonial-intellectual Khaskar Movement started by Allama Mashriqi in 1931 to the aim of freeing India from British Rule and establishing a secular Hindu-Muslim government published the newspaper 'Al-Islah' from 1935 to 1947 which continues to serve as an archive of progressivist-secularist intellectualism which fought resolutely against the ideas upon which the secession of Pakistan from India occurred in 1947. Ian Talbot, noted historian of Partition, recalls the Khaskars as 'outspoken critics of the Pakistan scheme' (131) in Ian Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana, the Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), IX. See also Amalendu De, *History of the Khaksar Movement in India, 1931-1947* (Kolkata: Parul Prakashani, 2009), pp. 71-72.

abruptness and unknowability of mob violence through the mode of falsity and rumour, instead of giving into its instrumentalist explanations as lodged within a singular political event.

A Violence of Form

As I have discussed, the metonymic reconfigurations of the sexed body posed a direct challenge to the narration of bodily violence, a crisis of representation that has come to edify the aesthetic and political anxieties of the very form of the 'riot short story'. The crisis is manifold; first, the reduction, one might say ascent, of the 'body' to the level of 'rhetoric' transforms the way it may be described, gazed upon, or particularised in literal or figurative terms. As Judith Butler has argued in *The Psychic Life of Power*, there cannot be a subject, still less an embodied subject, without subjugation.⁵⁶ And when forms of subjugation are so reliant on historically gendered fabrications of the body and the nation, the forms of narration that deploy the body or the nation as subjects cannot be but deeply gendered. The critical task, then, is to assess whether the 'riot short story', immersed in representing the embodied violence of partition, *subjugates* the body in ways that exercise control or domination over it in specifically gendered ways, or betray these impulses by engendering new aesthetic norms? Allen Feldman, in his 1991 study on embodied mob violence in the Irish context, has furthered an understanding of the 'politicised body' as a somatic text, an artefact on which violent transcription takes place:

The body made into a political artifact by an embodied act of violence is no less a political agent than the author(s) of violence. The very act of violence invests the body with agency. The body, altered by violence, re-enacts other altered bodies dispersed in time and space; it also re-enacts political discourse and even the movement of history itself. Political violence is a mode of transcription; it circulates codes from one prescribed historiographic surface or agent to another. Transcription requires agency, both the communicative activity of the transcriber and the transcribed 'object.' Struggles will occur over competing transcriptions of

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

the same body and of different bodies. This contest over adversarial transcripts fractures the body as an 'organic,' 'natural' object and thus accelerates the body's subjectivation.⁵⁷

It is also critical to ask what forms of subjugation (and subjectification) constitute bodily violence? For violence is not merely an isolated phenomenon that is induced from disorder, from outside, but one that is demarcated and brought into existence by textual forms, modes of historical consciousness, and other discursive practices. This is not to deny the imperial, though always partial, reality of material violence, but to acknowledge, as I have done in the previous sections with the study of rumours and mob significations, that textual practices have played a central role in enabling violence by shifting the boundaries of what may, or may not, be condemned as violence in a given context. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin record several testimonies of survivors and witnesses of 'honour' killings, fratricides and mass-suicides during the Partition riots, and although these are issues at the centre of 'highly contentious debates about women's agency', what cannot be denied is that violence of this kind is enabled substantially by an erasure of a 'category' of condemnable violence, replacing it with deeply gendered notions of honour, shame, and sacrifice.⁵⁸ Menon and Bhasin in *Borders and Boundaries* record several testimonial accounts of fratricidal and suicidal violence during the riots of 1947. Perhaps most striking is that of Charanjit Singh Bhatia, a father of six daughters (all names in the book are pseudonyms). A conscientious Muslim neighbour had offered to have his sons marry the six daughters to ensure their safety in a Muslim neighbourhood when the riots broke out. After agreeing at first, Bhatia killed all six daughters the night before the wedding and screamed out from the funeral pyre, '*Baratan lao ao ab!*' (Bring your wedding processions now). In another recounting, a physician named Virsa Singh had 'claimed he had shot 50 women personally.' Just as he killed his wife, all women in the neighbourhood gathered around saying '*Viran, pehle mannu maar*' (Brother, kill me first).⁵⁹ Many critical questions as to the factual authenticity of the testimonial accounts are

⁵⁷ Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 7.

⁵⁸ Bacchetta and others, p. 675.

⁵⁹ See Menon and Bhasin, p. 14.

persistent in historiographical theory today, and I do not delve here into this rich area of debate.⁶⁰ What I am more interested in is how, paradoxically, language, still the only vessel beyond silence that can represent or reprehend violence in fictional or historical terms, can be steeped in the signs and signifiers that have historically nurtured these gendered notions that enable and rectify violence. In the examples of Virsa Singh and Charanjit Singh Bhatia above, what we see is a violence acting in a covert manner once again, oblivious to its own logic and presenting itself within a language of acceptable sacrifice and heroic rescue. I turn, therefore, to 'Khol Do' (Open It, 1951), a text which alongside 'Toba Tek Singh' (also by Manto) is perhaps the most heavily worked upon short story in all of Indian *bhasas*—fittingly as the last text to be examined in this thesis. I will examine how in critiquing a form of violence, the language of this text lapses itself into a form of violence. This is a violence of form, rather than a violence of content.

For a story like 'Khol Do', remarkably short and lacking in plot depth when compared to most of Manto's other riot stories, its wide use in the academy for scholarly work as 'the most anthologised partition story' is really interesting.⁶¹ Manto himself called it his greatest piece of work.⁶² The story follows Sirajuddin in his search for his daughter after they are separated during the riots. The 'special train' entering the platform in Lahore eight hours later than its scheduled arrival immediately situates the story in the queasy context of Partition violence when trains routinely arrived late at railway

⁶⁰ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's work in Trauma Studies may be consulted as a provocative starting point for this debate: Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and others, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991). See also Richard Crownshaw, 'A Natural History of Testimony?', in *The Future of Testimony: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witnessing*, ed. by Jane Kilby and Antony Rowland (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 160–77. A lot of the good work is being done in the context of South Africa and Latin America: Georg M Gugelberger, *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Annie E Coombes, 'Witnessing History/Embodying Testimony: Gender and Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17 (2011), 92–112.

⁶¹ George, *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature*, p. 142.

⁶² I state this with the disclaimer that Khalid Hasan does not actually give a source for this in the preface to *The Kingdom's End and Other Stories* (1989), nor have I been able to confirm this. A speculation is that this may have been a personal defence of the text when it was under litigation in Pakistan's courts in 1951.

stations, freighted with a load of corpses.⁶³ The detail is particularly eerie as the distance between Amritsar and Lahore across the newly drawn border was only a few miles and could have been covered in less than an hour. One of the major sites of communal violence, and certainly one that has endured in filmic and photographic reconstructions of Partition violence, was the massacre on the railways. 'Khol Do' may be read as a story which pertains loosely to this event in terms of its context and setting, but the massacre itself is absent from its narrative plot in any overt or depictive form, appearing as dotted fragments of memory, testament to some of the imposing limits of its representation. As Sirajuddin regains consciousness on a platform in Lahore, 'a succession of images races through this mind: Attack ... fire ... escape ... railway station ... night ... Sakina' (8).

Several other flashbacks aggregate a sense of narrative discontinuity in the story. The dead body of his wife comes to him 'in a flash' where he could even 'hear her voice: Leave me where I am but take the girl [Sakina] away'. It is only through the sensation of feeling 'a length of a cloth' in his pockets that he is able to revive the memory of how he last interacted with his daughter Sakina. They had been fleeing the riots when Sakina's *dupatta*, the scarf, had slipped to the ground and she said 'Father, leave it' as he stopped to pick it up. Soon, as Sirajuddin searches for his daughter amid the madness of the arrival camps, he comes across a group of young men, assumed to be Muslim, to whom he begs to find his daughter who is 'very pretty ... a mole on the left cheek' (9). The men assure him that if she is alive, they will find her. And thus, by risking their own lives by going to Amritsar (which was now in India) they find Sakina by a roadside, the mole on her cheek bearing the proof of identity. But, when Sirajuddin asks later if they had found his daughter, they only repeat the same words: 'if your daughter is alive, we will find her' (9).

Rosemary George notes how the '[reader is] now forced to go back and reread the few lines about the rescue' as the men lie to Sirajuddin about finding his daughter. This transmutes the length and form of the story, forcing the reader to notice those details that might have been missed in the first

⁶³ Massacre of railway passengers who were migrating between India and the newly formed Pakistan constituted a significant part of the killing, abduction and rape during the Partition in 1947. Several aspects of this particular kind of violence are well studied by anthropologists, historians and sociologists. The best historical overview is Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

reading of the rescue encounter, creating a kind of narrative circuitry and ambiguity that is typical of Manto's fiction. Sakina was 'ill at ease ... without her dupatta' and they had 'fed her' and 'given her milk to drink' (9). The narrator also notes that one of the men lends his own jacket to Sakina so she could cover herself, an act eliciting deeply mythical notions of patriarchal protectiveness. One is also reminded of how Sirajuddin, even as he was fleeing a riotous mob, had stopped to pick up the *dupatta*—an object that stands in for female decency and modesty. Finally, Sirajuddin notices four young men carrying the 'body of a young girl' into the hospital. When the light is switched on in the room, he recognises the body as his daughter. There is a doctor in the room, assumed to be male, who is examining Sakina for signs of life. He says to his assistant 'khol do' (open it) to open the window and let some fresh air. The semi-conscious Sakina, as Rosemary George notes, 'obeys the male command to 'open it' by slowly and painfully unknitting the drawstring to her shalwar (pants) and pulling them down'.⁶⁴ Manto ends the short story with two simultaneous reactions: Sirajuddin the father shouts loudly that his daughter is *alive*, but the doctor is 'drenched in sweat' (143).⁶⁵

These reactions demand an in-depth analysis, because they enact the gendered codes of violence that underscore the masculine logic of partition. Here, the ethical problematic of representation lies particularly in what may be considered as a literary process of 'enacting' a code of violence. What symbolic drawings, modes of address, narrative modalities, or representational strategies make up such an enaction? If we are to see the form of a literary text as 'rarefied' (to use Adorno's term) by the very content of the violence it is burdened to represent, as engendered by the experience of being a participant or witness to that violence, we cannot study the text as merely a representational object. In addition to, or even in place of representing, the text performs (to go back to Bhabha's notion of the enunciative and performative nature of the short story when compared to the novel) an act of

⁶⁴ Rosemary Marangoly George, '(Extra) Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33.1 (2007), 135–58 (p. 148).

⁶⁵ I note that Khalid Hasan translates the original phrase 'isse dekh kar Sirajuddin khamoshi se chillaya' as 'Sirajuddin shouted with joy' but this does not capture the paradoxical phrase 'khamoshi se chillaya' / 'صاح بصمت' that translates literally to 'screamed with silence' and has been translated variously as 'painfully screams' (Jalil 2005) and 'stammers' (Fleming 1995).

witnessing that violence, albeit with a degree of ethical difficulty.⁶⁶ This notion of text as a witness also affords to it a textual and formal quality that overcomes the blockages of language and speech imposed upon it by the burden of representing genocidal violence. At the same time, witnessing is a mode that is not merely textual, but also calls upon the relationship between the language and the experience of violence being witnessed, thereby offering it a chance to enact a social, rather than just a narrative process of that witnessing. Language offers an insight into what these social processes are—of witnessing, but also of mourning, of disturbance, of repulsion, of mortification, of shock, and even ambivalent eroticisms in the context of Partition’s sexualised riots. How does the language of the riot story participate in the conventions, in these ‘consensus of unthinking’? What determines a response to that violence in the reader? To answer these question would be to fold a kind of ethical thinking into the form and language of the text itself. I return with a closer attention to the original form of the *afsana* and the language (Punjabi-inflected Urdu) in which Sakina’s body is rendered as a corpse—a detail omitted in most translations of the text. As the male doctor says ‘khol do’ (open it), Manto, like his reader, *witnesses* that—

مردے مے کچھ جمبیش ہی

‘Murde me kuch jumbish hui’

This could be translated as ‘the corpse gestured’, but to preserve the grammatical and syntactical norms of the original Urdu, you would need to translate it as— ‘*in* the corpse, a gesture occurred’ emphasizing how the corpse, lying still on a hospital bed, is being witnessed as a subject. The words ‘murda’ and ‘jumbish’ are critical to the language in which the scene is being accessed, just like the socially altered connotations of their literal translations ‘corpse’ and ‘gesture’ is important in deconstructing the *gaze*, in Butler’s terms, through which the act of violence upon Sakina’s body occurs in the story. It is interesting that the word ‘*jumbish*’ is used to refer to an initial gestural motion in the corpse, rather than the literal alternative ‘*harkat*’ (movement), because while ‘*harkat*’ may be applied

⁶⁶ Several scholars have worked upon the intersections between art, literature, testimony and bearing witness in the context of major violent upheavals of the twenty-first century, but perhaps most importantly the Holocaust. For further reading see Saul Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

to all kinds of movement, *'jumbish'* is used exclusively for living things—there cannot be, for example, a *'jumbish'* in the rustling of leaves.⁶⁷ Likewise, *'murda'* cannot be any object in death—it may not be used for dead leaves, nor for dead animals; even as it clearly signifies the dead state of being, it bears a fleeting remnant of a necessarily human form of life. In the next line, over which the obscenity trials brooded obsessively, it is also only the *'bejaan haath'* (lifeless hands) of Sakina that slowly lift to unfasten her trousers, thereby exerting a language of vitality and death to expose the state of a violated female subject as a corpse. This is a form of language that is intricately wound up in a social code that can expatiate on the form of witnessing which the story participates in. It is my argument, at large, that Manto weaves, even if to expose, a social code of 'honour' in the text that ravel the definitions of life and death as merely embodied experiences, presenting them instead as culturally ordained states of being. To probe this further, it is important to think through an anthropological register of how new lines were being drawn around the heavy meanings of a corpse-like existence, of gesturing, witnessing, and of death itself, during the period in which Manto wrote the text. This is an attempt to historicise not just the text, but also the form of the riot story, *fasadat ka afsana*.

It is within the 'metaphorical body' of the abducted woman (female citizen-subject) that we find the most disturbing evidence of the entrenched masculinity of Partition violence, which is why literary figurations of the abducted woman, as in Manto's 'Khol Do', are inseparable from prevalent deployments of that figure in public discourse. Note how Sakina, the female victim identified apart from her name only by the 'mole on her left cheek', never appears in the story as anything but the female *body*. She is first found lying on the railway tracks, then fed milk by the rescuers, then handed a jacket to cover her breasts, and in the end, her body is carried into the hospital by four young men. Inside the camp hospital, it is only her 'prostrate body' (in Hasan's translation) that is being felt for for signs of life, brutally conditioned in its reactions to the male voice due to repeated sexual violence. All Sirajuddin is able to recall while fleeing a mob is how he stops to pick up his daughter's *dupatta* so she can cover herself—even the memory tends to patriarchal protectionism. A sense of patriarchal guilt and failure is firmly registered in the story when the reader realises that Sakina has gone missing. The choice of objects, manners of depictions, and shifting of narrative modes, thus, partake in

⁶⁷ The common phrase 'patton me kuch jumbish hui' (there was a gesture in the leaves) would be used only to refer to the presence of a living animal, such as a snake or a squirrel, behind the foliage.

generating a highly enunciated male gaze in the plotlines of the text. Therefore, in what follows, Sakina's sexual violation is witnessed by the reader as a 'male' death. When Charanjit Singh Bhatia murders her daughters instead of having them marry a Muslim man in the neighbourhood, he may be seen as running away from a male death, a death of a communal father. When Virsa Singh states that he killed 50 women, he is running away from his own male death. Though Sakina is alive in the story, it is Sirajuddin who actually dies. That is the violence which Manto reveals.

In conclusion, the bestialising descriptions of Sakina, vigorously defended by Manto in his court trials as a writer beholden to unconstrained realism, are nevertheless aimed at eliciting deep-seated masculine shame at her eventual violation by those who ought to be her rescuers. Manto affords no trace of interiority to Sakina's character, and the overuse of ethno-religious stigmas, such as the bare-breasted girl, as well as culturally weighted details, such as the *dupatta* and the virtuous 'mole on the left cheek', serve an instrumental function in the symbolic understudy of the text; it installs Sakina as a visceral, silent, and hapless metaphor for the nation largely following in what George calls a 'script ... of woman standing in for the nation as an object to be either violated or enshrined'.⁶⁸ In the culminating scene, just as Sakina is being watched over by the doctor and her father, the story tees off into an affective economy of shame and honour that gently cradles the masculine conception of national identity—what I call the violence of form. The final scene may have today become a mural for the impossibility of representing Partition violence, but even as it does not touch upon the graphic nature of that violence, it takes off in significant ways. Through the male gaze, deployed as a mode of witnessing the moment of Sakina's death, the hospital room gets reconstituted as an immanent space for national and political rehabilitation. On one side of the room, looking over the bed, you see the doctor, standing in for the masculine citizen-subject rebuilding his nation. He is chastened in speech and action as he gazes, like the reader does, upon the body of a violated female subject—a stand-in for his own violated nation. On the other hand, there is Sirajuddin, representing a 'half-citizen' who has recently arrived to stake a claim in the polity of the fledgling nation-state of Pakistan. He screams with 'silence' (*kbamoshi se chillaya*) that his daughter is *alive*. Only the reader knows that his daughter was violated by men who belonged to the same community as her, exposing

⁶⁸ George, '(Extra) Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction', p. 139.

how the bonds forged between the body and the nation, between masculine identity and communal belonging, are as fragile as they are virulent.

What also comes up here, as perhaps a fitting epilogue to this thesis, is how it was the short story more than the novel that supplied these ‘murals’ for the great impossibility of representing violence in the culminating moments of the late-colonial period. Flanked by violent Partitions and buoyant nationalisms, these texts gave the public memory enduring scenes, strained metaphors, and flashing critiques of the very conditions of national citizenship and religio-communal belonging that would foretell the ultimate failure of secular democracy and the concurrent rise of political authoritarianism in both India and Pakistan. This corpus of ‘riot stories’ shows that even though violence, with its simultaneous abstraction and concreteness, its defiance of language, and its repudiation of the ethical conventions through which it could be represented, sits at the very limit of representation, it is not *beyond* representation as such. Despite the many ambiguities of his political position as a progressive writer, or even for that matter a realist writer, Manto probed these limits by leveraging the specific qualities of the short story form.⁶⁹ In doing this, he critiqued violence, laying it bare, uncovering its absurdities, paradoxes, and rhetorical flaws.

⁶⁹ On the realism-modernism debate on Manto, see Jennifer Dubrow, ‘The Aesthetics of the Fragment: Progressivism and Literary Modernism in the Work of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55.5 (2019), 589–601.

Between the Canon and the Archive: Coda

THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT, on December 15, 2019, ordered the police to forcefully enter Jamia Millia Islamia University in an apparent crackdown against students protesting the new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the accompanying National Register of Citizens (NRC). Both laws, which have more than an eerie resemblance to the Nuremberg rulings of 1935, are part of a larger political agenda by the right-wing Hindu government to disenfranchise India's substantial Muslim minority population, and to make citizenship itself conditional for many who were born on Indian soil, their ancestors having lived upon it for centuries. Over the next few days, the images of the violent crackdown circulated across the internet. Students were being hauled across the paved street between what looked like the Premchand Archives and the statue of Ghalib in the gardens facing Gate No. 2. Camera footage showed the Police lathi-charge into the old reading room, vandalising walls and breaking bookshelves. Many jumped out of broken windows to escape the building under attack. A footage released by *The Quint* showed tear-gas combing through the library halls, setting like gloom over tables and chairs.¹

Over the past five years, the fundamental idea of Indian secular democracy, which once seemed so unimpeachable, has been tested. To many, the attack on Jamia Millia Islamia meant an attack on the only predominantly Muslim University in the capital Delhi. To others, it was an attack on the resilient spirit of Indian studentship. To me, in that moment, the attack also served as a reminder of how precariously balanced was the scholarly fate of the short story form—a literary institution

¹ 'New footage shows Police entered old reading hall', *The Quint*, <<https://www.thequint.com/news/india/jamia-violence-cctv-footage-delhi-police-entered-library-reading-hall-on-15-december>> Date Accessed: 28 November 2020

that is of constitutive significance to Indian literary history but one that has been betrayed by the norms, practices, and traditions of scholarship that still guide the study of Indian literatures.

The sixth floor of the Jamia Millia Islamia library holds over 300 journals from *Saqi* to *Alamgeer* to *Adab-i-Dunya* to *Naya Adab* to *Ismat*, which in turn contain over 5000 issues from the 1880s to 1990s, which in turn contain several of the last imprints of hundreds of short stories yet to be anthologised, translated, or republished. If a blaze swept across the sixth floor, at least a fifth of this material will be lost to a plane of history even more obscure than that sixth floor, where, as a janitor once told me, ‘we find only those who do not read Urdu’ (the joke being that the decrepit sixth-floor houses only Urdu *risab’al* collections and anyone there to read these collections is rather more likely to have lost their way). If a blaze swept away the floor at once, it may be difficult to find other copies of many of these journals, though, of course, such is the acumen for collecting rare books and issues of periodicals among comparative scholars that a lot may still find their way back into the light.²

But is it at all important that genres like the short story be preserved in their original ephemeral and material contexts? Wouldn’t some literatures have to be lost for others are to be apotheosized in our canons? To return to a comparison that I have steadfastly avoided in this thesis, a testament to the dominion of the canon still remains the novel. It is still the anti-thesis of the short story and the manifestation of everything it cannot be. When one says the word ‘novel’, the image conjured is of a printed book, a text that is bound in material, something with a spine that can be touched and stacked upon a shelf. But when one says the words ‘short story’, the image is of disembodied textual matter suspended in the air. There is no materiality, if we think of it like this, even to the psychic impression we have of the short story. Personally—though this may be down to interference from *The New Yorker*—all I see are poorly indented paragraphs scrolling down a page and searching for something tactile to rest on.

² The other archives of such significant historical value to the *bhasas* short story being Hyderabad’s Urdu Research Center, Delhi University Central Library’s Periodicals Collections, Mushfiq Khwaja Ali Library in Lahore, and Sharfabad Bedil Library in Karachi. As Rakhshanda Jalil once told me, those libraries found still to be in possession of these *risab’al* collections were just as likely too careless to unsubscribe to these twentieth-century journals than being committed to preserving them.

In his 1999 essay 'Who's In, Who's Out', David Greetham poses a similar question with respect to Shakespeare's plays: 'If Mona Lisa is in the Louvre, where is *The Hamlet*?'³ The distinction is presented as an ontological contest between 'spatial' and 'linear' texts using F.W. Bateson's 1959 terminology for bibliographical artefacts.⁴ As artefacts in the archive or items in the library, the text is either spatial, spread across space with no singularity; or linear, repeating in temporal cycles and renewing its source with every repetition. The short story is, in this sense, a spatial text, scattered in historical space-time in a way that is frequently more profuse than the novel, but lacking the crucial tendency of the novel to renew its source and preserve its textuality every time it is reprinted.

When the short story is picked up from the Archive—with a capital A—such as the vernacular Indian archive and brought into the World—with a capital W—it tends to make its own source obsolete. Of course, this is partly true for other short literary forms too, such as drama and poetry, but there are no publishing cultures within which short stories are treated as 'located' texts, existing inextricably within their social and political milieus. It is so rare to find the date and place of a short story's first appearance, and often even its original, untranslated textual content, that good scholarly practice today seems to be to cite from the *latest* impression of the text where possible. A practice that dehistoricizes the text altogether.

In her 1981 essay on the short story, Mary Louise Pratt calls genres 'human institutions'. If the material essence of the short story is artefactual—that is, it lies as an object in the Archive always at risk of obsolescence due to environmental and political pressures—its textual essence is that of a genre, a human institution. And human institutions are 'historical through and through'.⁵ Through close readings of short stories in this thesis, I have demonstrated the myriad ways in which short stories respond formally to historically specific pressures, finding (and even constituting) specific audiences, and engaging with the human tragedy of historical upheavals. It is the spatial nature and profusion of the short story in the public sphere that makes it a textual form into which meaning settles in its most multiform variety, allowing for a wide and productive range of interpretations. But

³ David Greetham, 'Who's in, Who's Out: The Cultural Poetics of Archival Exclusion', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 32.1 (1999), p. 5.

⁴ See Frederick Wilse Bateson, *Modern Bibliography and the Literary Artifact* (Bern, 1961).

⁵ Pratt, p. 176.

it is also this spatial nature that makes its material form so diffused that no singular textuality of the short story could be called upon for historical analyses in the conventional style of criticism and citation in the academy. I have found myself, at times, turning to conscious practices of renewal and republication like Anand and Shevalankar's 1946 *Indian Short Stories*, or Muhammad Hasan Askari's 1937 volume *Mere Behtareen Afsanein* (My Best Urdu Stories) or the many issues of *Adab-i-Dunya* from the 1940s that I scanned from Jamia's now-turbulent library in June 2018 just in order to be able to cite from 'authentic' sources. Consider, as another instance, that if it were not for a reproduction of 'Khol Do' in a legal paper looking into the 1951 obscenity trial 'The Crown vs Minto' [sic] I would have been limited to an English translation or forced to rely on a Hindi transliteration by Devendra Issara. The original Urdu, recompiled in Lahore's Sang-e-Meel publications' *Man-tonama* is far less likely to be found today in libraries from London to Lahore, whereas any of the dozen or so English translations of Manto's short stories can be found at every railway bookstore in India.

At other times, I have found myself clinging romantically to paratextual features found through secondary sources, such as a 1936 doctoral thesis by Suresh Akhtar Suhrawardy at SOAS. Indeed, all scholarship relies on such unlikely sources to complete their major argumentative arcs, but the point I make is that even though this thesis looks into short stories that can be considered 'canonical' by short story standards, they still present a unique problem of the scarcity of 'primary sources'. In order to suffer from this problem, a critic of the novel would need to turn the clock several centuries. This is not just down to poor archival and indexing ethos but also the inherent formal tendency of the short story to need more than merely a reproduction of its textual matter for a thorough critical appraisal. Since short stories are not singular entities published in a specific year by a specific press, but ephemeral and evanescent artefacts recreating their own print-histories as they meander in and out of journals, newspapers, anthologies, cycles, and pamphlets, the short story has no particular address, no 'shelf-mark' as such (to use here a term from bibliographical studies). Consequentially, within the canonical tradition that privileges fixed addresses and the 'singularity' of texts, the short story appears to exist, even in its most canonical iteration, as always outside the modes with which canonicity is established. The short story dawdles somewhere between the Canon and the Archive. What we begin to see through a lot of short story scholarship, as a result, is a regrettably inert view

of its textuality, for a short story existing as an 'artefact' in the Archive appears incapable of existing as 'text' prior to its discovery, and as anything but 'evidence' after it.

This is particularly true for the *bhasas* short story, twice-minoritized by the canon, lying both on the peripheries of the novel-centric European canon (with its imperial hierarchies of literary value) and that of the Indian canon (with its tendency to often recreate itself in the image of the European canon). These texts, therefore, must not only be revisited, but also re-historicised. They need to be urgently re-embedded within their own material contexts and print-cultures; within the languages from which they draw their narrative force. They need to be placed alongside the political currents and aesthetic repertoires established in the vernacular for the aim of representing the contradictions that inhere in the long and fraught processes of national and communal self-making. They need to be read, slowly and translationally, not with the totalising force of English as a colonial interpretive system, but as texts that exist within the pluralist culture of which English is just one among many parts. These texts need to be read for their political contents and rhetorical force, but they also need to be acknowledged for making contributions to the realm of *literariness*, to the ways in which they make radical investments in textual form, and its aesthetic, material, and ethical bureaux.

Even though postcolonial studies, with its strong emphasis on the agency and instrumentality of literature, had once rallied us all together to defend the disruptive power of literature in a context in which it needed to be defended, its critical legacies have today led to a neglectful attitude towards textual and aesthetic form and how that is shaped by language, context, and translation. The late-colonial Indian short story, in ways that I have shown in this thesis, offers the perfect (con)textual ground to disrupt these privileged legacies and forge new modes of reading.

In turning thus to form, to its radical potential, fragmentary moorings, and telling conjectures, it is my hope that we will take postcolonial studies, with its usual political affiliations and allegiances to text, beyond its accustomed pathways.

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