

# Memories of Partition

## Revisiting Saadat Hasan Manto

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2012 was the birth centenary of Saadat Hasan Manto and was celebrated in Lahore, Karachi, New York, and his own “muse” Bombay (now Mumbai). This is an attempt to remember Partition by revisiting Manto’s memories of the event documented in his Partition stories. These stories are valuable documents, indispensable for historians studying the human dimensions of that event. Such studies on the historical appraisal of literary works, based on memories and survivors’ accounts, can provide important breakthroughs for a better understanding of the aftermath of the division of the country and can prove to be history’s “alternate archive”. A study of such literary writings needs to be included in the reference list for the study of Partition.

### Introduction

The partition of India was one of the most important historical events of the 20th century. In the ferocious massacres that followed at least one million Hindus and Muslims lost their lives. Hundreds of thousands of children were lost and abandoned; between 75,000 and 1,00,000 women were raped and abducted apart from the families that were torn apart. Poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz captured the pain in his *Subh-e-Azadi*: “*Yeh daghdar ujala yeh shab gazida sahr; woh intizar tha jiska woh yeh sahr to nahin*” (This stain-covered day-break, this night-bitten dawn. This dawn is not that dawn we craved for – S A I Tirmizi, *The Paradoxes of Partition 1937-47*). A body of literature was thus born that gave voice to the traumatic realities of Partition, the disillusionment and the psychological trauma. These writers not only reject religion as the cause of the separation; they also highlight the composite culture of united India and invoke the symbols of unity and humanism observed by the masses even during times of such horrific violence. They do not only “celebrate” the village kinships in undivided India but also “mourn” the loss of it in August 1947. The literary reaction that Partition received, from Saadat Hasan Manto to Bapsi Sidhwa, from Rahi Masoom Reza to Kamleshwar, and from Khushwant Singh to Shashi Tharoor during regular intervals in the last millennium, in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, makes it not merely a political upheaval, but a social and psychological one too.<sup>1</sup> They uncover the complicated ways in which the politics of Partition entered into people’s consciousness; how the Pakistan movement split families on ideological lines and created fears and uncertainties. These narratives are dominated by nostalgia and feelings of exile felt on both sides of the border; they effectively narrate the Partition-induced issues of refugees and the displacement and anguish of the women abducted and/or raped.

Therefore, a close study of such literature becomes important to (de)construct the communal history along with the cultural and literary history of the subcontinent. It also becomes imperative to study this rich Partition corpus to (re)write the history of Partition from the gender and/or subaltern perspective.<sup>2</sup> Academic history, till almost the 1980s, concentrated on the “high politics” of the division, rather than on the “human dimension” of its impact. However, the post-1980s writings have seen major shifts. The “voices” and “experiences” are more important now than the “causal patterns”. The question of the relationship between memory and history was raised in a way that recalled certain European lines of questioning around the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup>

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Recent writings by historians like Mushirul Hasan, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Gyanendra Pandey and Ranbir Samaddar have focused more on the memories of Partition, on the creative literature that recaptures this traumatic experience and the visual representations of its tragedy.<sup>4</sup>

Novelists, unlike historians, have fully addressed the human agonies which accompanied Partition. A majority of these writers have been “witnesses” to the event, for instance Manto, Khushwant Singh or even Bhisham Sahni. Mushirul Hasan has often emphasised the centrality of literary narratives and the role of memory in a historian’s attempts to write Partition’s history from the margins. To quote him, the literary writings on Partition “...form a cultural archive of first-hand information, experiences and vivid impressions” (1995, vol 1: 1).

S H Manto’s short stories on Partition scathingly highlight the physical and psychological impact of violence, abduction, migration and resettlement and most openly narrate the issues of masculinity and vulnerability of sexuality during the phases of “man”-made violence. He does not seem to judge the event or the behaviour of the mob/a particular individual. What will follow in the succeeding sections is a modest effort to provide Manto’s Partition-based short-stories, their rightful place in Partition Studies.

### Manto’s Partition Writings (1948-55)

The Partition of the country and the changes that followed left feelings of revolt in me...when I sat down to write I found my thoughts scattered. Though I tried hard I could not separate India from Pakistan and Pakistan from India...my mind could not resolve the question: what country did we belong to now, India or Pakistan?

—Manto 1950 (quoted in Mahey 2001: 153).

Manto was born in a Kashmiri Muslim family on 11 May 1912, in Samrala in Ludhiana district of Punjab. He received his early education at Muslim High School in Amritsar and joined the Hindu Sabha College for Intermediate Arts in 1931. Manto was a witness to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 when he was seven years old. Bhagat Singh and the revolutionary movement in Punjab had deeply influenced him. In 1933, he met Abdul Bari Alig, a scholar-cum-journalist, who encouraged him to read Russian and French authors like Oscar Wilde and Victor Hugo. Volumes of Victor Hugo, Lord Lytton, Gorki, Chekov, Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Gogol Andriev, Oscar Wilde and Maupassant’s works adorned his bookshelves. He translated Victor Hugo’s *The Last Days of a Condemned Man* into Urdu and also published a collection of the Urdu translation of Russian stories under the title *Russi Afsane*.

Manto subsequently spent some time at the Aligarh Muslim University but had to leave before graduating. However, he contributed to the Progressive Writers Association. After a brief spell with All India Radio (AIR), he went to Bombay in 1937 where he joined the film industry as a writer. By this time he had already made his mark as a short story writer with the publication of *Aatish Paray* (“Fragments of Fire”, 1936). He also published his collection *Baghair Unwan Ke* (“Without a Title”, 1940) and *Teen Auraten* (“Three Women”, 1942). He

married Safiyah on 26 April 1939. He produced about 50 short stories in Bombay between 1937 and 1941 but insecurity forced him to leave Bombay for Delhi in 1941 and his drinking habits ensured that he remained ill all through 1941. Unhappy with his AIR job, he came back to Bombay in 1942 and lived and wrote there until 1948.

### Leaving India for Pakistan

After Partition, Manto felt deeply disturbed by the intolerance and distrust that he found in the city, even in the areligious world of cinema.<sup>5</sup> “He could not accept the fact that suddenly some people saw him not as Saadat Hasan but as a Muslim”. He was disillusioned when he learnt that Ashok Kumar, with whom he worked at Bombay Talkies, had been receiving hate-mail accusing him of being responsible for the induction of Muslims into the company. His desire to flee increased. Finally, a conversation with friend-cum-actor Shyam made him feel guilty, disillusioned and offended, and “...without further ado I (Manto) quickly took the side lane to Pakistan” (quoted in Alvi 2000: 22). Once, Shyam and Manto heard some Sikh refugees from Pakistan narrating their experiences of dreadful violence in Pakistan. After hearing that, Manto asked him, “Look, I’m a Muslim, don’t you feel like murdering me?” “Not now”, Shyam replied. “But at that time when I was listening to the story of Muslim’s cruel deeds, I could have easily done you to death.” Manto wrote,

Shyam’s words gave me a jolt...when I pondered over the matter I felt a world of difference between this world and that. It helped me to understand the psychological background of the gory events in which daily hundreds of innocent Hindus and Muslims were being done to death (quoted in *ibid*: 23).

Manto was never comfortable with his migration to Lahore and always suffered due to this sense of “dual belonging”. In 1953 he had to be admitted to an asylum following hallucinations about his life in Bombay. He was not tied to the city for historical, cultural or intellectual reasons, but deeply attached to it because it “had asked me no questions. It had taken me to its generous bosom, me, a man rejected by his family, a gypsy by temperament”. “I was in love with Bombay. I still am” (quoted in Hasan 1997: 123). Manto has graphically narrated his migration to Pakistan in his story *Sahay*.

He lived in Lahore until his death in January 1955. This period of seven years in Manto’s life was one of great suffering, turmoil and poverty. From 1948 to 1955, Manto wrote speedily. With the prolific writing, his excessive drinking increased too. During these seven years, he wrote 127 stories and had to face five court cases due to some of them. He won almost all these cases and continued to write in the same bold vein. Meanwhile, his health deteriorated due to the excessive drinking and he was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver. However, he continued drinking alcohol against the advice of his doctors and ultimately suffered from hallucinations. He would see visions, talk incoherently with imaginary people and hear sounds. In 1953, he had to be taken to a mental hospital. He died of liver haemorrhage in the early morning of 18 January 1955, at the age of 43.<sup>6</sup> Many films produced in India and

Pakistan were based on his stories. He even acted in a film: the role was that of a madman!

### The Partition Narratives

*Siyah Hashiye* ("Black Margins"), Manto's first anthology of Partition stories, is a collection of anecdotes, some as short as two lines.<sup>7</sup>

The riots and the thoughtless violence had left a deep mark on Manto's mind. "Whose blood is it that is being shed so wantonly? Where will their bones be burnt or buried from which the flesh, symbolising religion has been picked by kites and vultures laying bare the bones" (quoted in Alvi 2000: 23). Manto's black humour flowing from Partition violence and compiled in *Siyah Hashiye* was published in Lahore in October 1948. Manto described this collection as "an attempt to retrieve pearls of a rare hue from a man-made sea of blood" and dedicated the book to "the man who, when recounting his many bloody deeds, said, 'But when I killed that old woman I suddenly felt as if I had committed a murder'" (Manto 1991). As Jalal wrote:

With faith in that kind of humanity, Manto wrote fascinating short stories about the human tragedy of 1947 that are internationally acknowledged for representing the plight of displaced and terrorised humanity with exemplary impartiality and empathy (Jalal 2012).

In the first sketch, *Sa'at-i-Shireen* ("Sweet Moment"), Manto, in the form of a news item of one sentence, informs us how Mahatma Gandhi's death was celebrated in Amritsar, Gwalior and Bombay by distributing sweets. Though regarded as the Father of the Nation, many rightists held Gandhi responsible for India's Partition. *Mazdoori* ("Wages") opens with the sentence "Looting and plundering was rampant. A Kashmiri labourer too picks up a sack of rice but is chased by the police and shot in the leg. After he fails to persuade the police to let him keep it, he pleads 'Exalted Sirs, you keep the rice, all poor me asks is my wages for carrying the bag, just four annas'". In *Ta'awun* ("Co-operation"), rioters attack a home and are about to loot it when a mysterious man comes and unlocks the door, and conducts the organised looting of the house till all its valuables are looted by the people. Manto shocks readers by revealing in the end that the mysterious man was none other than the owner of the house. In *Taqseem* ("Division"), two men decide to share whatever is there in a large wooden box. When they open the box, a man comes out with a sword in his hand and cuts them into four pieces. In *Karamat* ("Miracle Man"), a man who had stolen two sacks of sugar, falls into a well while trying to hide it from the police raid and dies. The following morning, the residents of the locality find that the water of the well now tastes sweet. The "thief" is immediately declared a saint. In *Ishdirakyat* ("Socialism"), some people are not ready to believe a man who has loaded his own belongings in a truck and is on his way out of the town; they get ready to loot him.

At one point Manto said,

I was depressed by the greed and avarice with which people were enriching themselves through allotments of evacuated and abandoned non-Muslim properties after the Partition of the country... It did not seem to occur to anyone that after such a revolution, things would never remain what they were (1991: xiv).

G D Khosla has recorded that in the disturbances in Sind, the goonda element predominated. Large number of persons belonging to the middle classes also participated in such lootings. Even government officials took part in the plunder (Khosla 1949: 254).

*Munasib Karawai* ("For Necessary Action")<sup>8</sup> depicts a couple, frustrated with the game of life and death in hiding, and ask people to kill them. However, all the people they approach tell them that killing is a sin in their religion.<sup>9</sup> And, instead of saving them, they hand over the couple to the people of another mohalla for "appropriate action". The reader is left wondering whether those people really practised their religion when they handed over the couple to be killed. *Dawat-i-Amal* ("Invitation to Action") exposes the irony of the situation in which a hoarding on a shop that escaped the communal fire reads "All building and construction materials sold here" (for being destroyed again by the hooligans in the name of religion and nationalism?). *Kasre-Nafsi* ("Modesty") shows how rioters kill the passengers belonging to the "other" religion; and as if nothing had happened, they treat the remaining passengers to *halwa* (a sweet), fruits and milk and also apologise for their inability to entertain them more lavishly as the news of the arrival of the train reached them too late to make better preparations. In *Nigrani Me* ("Due Supervision"), Manto is found making fun of the military, the police and the administration that is not able to, or rather does not want to, prevent communal riots. *Pesh-Bandi* ("Precautionary Arrangement") addresses the same delay in action on the part of the police. *Aaram Ki Zaroorat* ("Resting Time") depicts two murderers; one of them is so exhausted that he does not have energy left to kill his prey.

In those days much blood flowed in the streets and in the story "Jelly" Manto shows how an innocent child assumes that the ice-selling man's solidified blood on the road is "jelly". In *Safai-Pasandi* ("Tidiness"), Manto mocks perpetrators of violence who are so "hygiene-conscious" that they do not kill the victim in the train compartment as it will make the carriage "dirty". In *Ulhana* ("Doublecross"), Manto sees a rioter complaining of being double-crossed by a petrol seller who sells him petrol at black market prices, though it could not set on fire a single shop! *Ghate ka Sauda* ("Losing Proposition") and *Riyayat* ("Out of Consideration") portray women as victims of Partition-violence and how their sexuality was (ab)used during Partition. Signs and markers of personal identity and religious symbols such as circumcision and the Sikh turban became crucial determinants of one's being. While women's bodies were often mutilated beyond recognition, the sexual violence was not limited to women but also brought men into its orbit. The men were either castrated or forcibly circumcised in many cases. Sudhir Kakkar suggests that, "Cutting off breasts or the male castration incorporates the more or less conscious wish to wipe the hated enemy off the face of earth by eliminating the means of its reproduction and the nurturing of its infants" (quoted in Hansen 2002: 163). Manto's sketches *Islaah* ("Mistake Removed"), *Istaqlah* ("Determination"), and *Sorry* ("Mistake") revolve around this theme of violation of man's masculinity. *Islaah* starts with an interrogation amidst the cry of *Har Har Mahadeo*.

The man being interrogated over his religion says it is the same as that of his interrogators. They are not satisfied and remove his trousers to examine if he has been circumcised which he turns out to be. He pleads with them saying that due to the fear of the enemy community he was forced to be circumcised. This is the only “mistake” and the rest of him is fine. In the next moment, the “mistake” is chopped off and so is the man. *Istaqlah* is a one-line sketch, wherein we read of a man refusing to convert to Sikhism and asking the perpetrators to return him his razor (so that he, if he is saved can circumcise “others” or “chop off” their mistakes?). In *Sorry*, the murderer, after killing his victims, realises, when he cuts the pyjama cord, that “chi, chi, chi, I’ve made a mistake”!

Manto’s *Haiwaniyat* (“Bestiality”), *Khaad* (“The Fool”), *Qismat* (“Luck”) and *Aankhon Par Charbi* (“Ungrateful Lot”) depicts how religious symbols and their usage change during political and social upheavals. The cow, the most sacred animal in Hinduism becomes a “beast” to a Hindu couple hiding from rioters when it starts mooing. *Qismat* and *Aankhon Par Charbi* both mention how pork and beef were widely used to taint the other’s religion and encourage riots.

*Bekhabri Ka Faida* (“The Benefits of Ignorance”) and *Halal aur Jhatka* (“Ritualistic Difference”) depicts how people love violence and in the process train each other in methods of killing and murdering. In *Bekhabri Ka Faida*, a man takes aim at a child through a window. His horrified companion is reassured that though the gun is without any bullets, “what does a child know?” In *Halal aur Jhatka*, a friend describes how much he loved the method he used in murdering his victims. His friend scolds him for his “wrong way” and demonstrates a better method to chop off the head cutting his friend’s neck in the process! The title of this sketch also turns on the reader’s understanding of the difference between *halal* (ritual slaughter of meat for Muslims) and *jhatka* (prescribed slaughter of meat for Sikhs).

*Khabardar* (“Warning”), *Juta* (“The Garland”), *Hamesha ki Chutti* (“Permanent Vacation”), *Sadqe Uske* (“God is Great”), and *Pathanistan* are the remaining sketches relevant for Partition studies. *Khabardar* shows people who amidst so much violence and threat to their lives care more for their money and property. In *Hamesha Ki Chutti*, Manto take a humorous swipe at “vacationing (during Partition)” as he shows a man pleading with the rioters to leave him as he is going home on “vacation”. What those affected most wished for was the return of normalcy as Ustadji does in *Sadqe Uske*. Finally, *Pathanistan* is Manto’s humorous comment on the then existing demand for Pathanistan separately from Pakistan. Historical records tell us that there was a demand for a separate nation for Pathans in Pakistan (this raises questions over the validity of the two-nation theory based on religion). According to the 3 June Plan, it was decided to hold a referendum in the Frontier on joining the Indian or the Pakistani Constituent Assembly. The Pathan movement had gained “sufficient ground” and the masses were wedded to it. We see a small glimpse of it in Manto’s sketch *Pathanistan*. The Pathan in the sketch stops a person and asks him whether he is a Hindu or Musalmaan. When told he is a Musalmaan, the Pathan asks another question: who is your

Prophet? The reply is “Mohammad Khan”<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added). Pleased with the answer, the Pathan lets the person go.

### More Concrete and Realistic Accounts

Manto’s later stories, written after *Siyah Hashiye*, deal more concretely with Partition and are a more realistic description of the times. *Gurumukh Singh ki Wasiyat* (“The Assignment”), *Mozel* (“Mozail”), *Ramkhelawan* (not translated by Khalid Hasan), and *Sahai* (“A Tale of 1947”), all present the slaughter of human beings and still as in *Sahai*, maintain Manto’s belief in the goodness of the human heart.

*Gurumukhsingh ki Wasiyat* uses the perspective of the victims, a family of two children and an ailing father, to convey the mood of anxiety, of “paralysed” terror. It is such texts that tell us that there were people who were quite optimistic about the gradual withdrawal of such violence. They did shift to other places for safety, merely locking the doors of their houses, “to come back again”. “The general view in Amritsar was that the riots could not last long... Two weeks or so of unrest and then business as usual (Manto 1997: 15).”<sup>11</sup> The protagonist of the story, Mian Abdul Hai, in fact sets a deadline – the forthcoming Eid – for the return of peace. During the carnage, he is visited on the eve of Eid by Santokh, the son of Gurumukh Singh, a recently deceased Sikh, who he had helped get justice and win a tricky case. Santokh brings *sevaiyyan* (sweet noodles) to deliver to Mian Abdul Hai, as his father had told him to keep up this annual practice after he is gone. After delivering the sweet noodles, as he is about to leave the locality he is stopped by a mob and the leader asks him if they can now proceed with their “assignment” with the family. Though, Santokh dares to fulfil his father’s last will even in such disturbing times, he is unable to fight the fear and thoughtlessness.

However, in *Mozel*, *Ramkhelawan* and *Sahai*, Manto reiterates his faith in man’s (woman’s in Mozail’s case) humanity and belief in universal fraternity. *Mozel* is set against the Bombay riots of 1947. Mozel, a Jewish/Bohemian girl fights against all the odds and sacrifices her life too, in the process of saving Tirlochan’s fiancée.<sup>12</sup> Through *Mozel*, Manto has also made fun of religious rituals and symbols; of Tirlochan’s obsession with the turban and long hair. When Tirlochan removes his turban to cover Mozel’s naked body she says contemptuously, “Take away this rag of your religion. I don’t need it.” *Ramkhelawan* depicts how a common washerman is encouraged by “his” people to attack the protagonist of the story, the author himself, as he belongs to the “enemy” community. Manto also informs the reader how the rich “seths” distribute wine among the poor for free to encourage them to kill the Muslims of the area. The story again reiterates Manto’s belief in the goodness of the human heart as Ramkhelawan apologises for his behaviour the next morning.

*Sahai* depicts courage and sacrifice by some individuals who are role models. Also, one can easily make out that the Mumtaz in the story is Manto himself as it portrays how Mumtaz who is living in Bombay with his Hindu friends, after a comment by his friend Jugal that, “If Hindu-Muslim killings start here.... Maybe I’ll kill you”, decides to leave India for Karachi. Manto’s

decision to leave India was also based on his friend Shyam's similar comment (discussed above).<sup>13</sup> The story starts with Mumtaz's speech on the futility of religious frenzy and slaughter of man by man to destroy the "enemy" religion. He says it is futile to take revenge by killing someone in Bombay for a murder done in Lahore or vice versa (161). Mumtaz narrates the story of Sahai, a Hindu pimp he meets in the streets and who has been fatally stabbed. Sahai gives him a packet containing Sultana's (a Muslim) ornaments and money (Rs 1,200) and asks that they be returned to her. Sahai was on his way to do so when he is stabbed. Before dying, Sahai utters a few words, which show the "undying humanity" in him, "these are bad times you know... Tell her she should leave for a safe place... but...please...look after yourself first!" (164). Unlike Santokh Singh who succumbs to fear and pressure from his community; Mozel, Ramkhelawan and Sahai portray the heights human beings can reach even during a period of slaughter, giving hope to mankind by their sacrifice and courage to stand up against religious chauvinism.

### Women's 'Bruised' Sexuality

Manto wrote *Anjam Bekhair* ("A Girl from Delhi"), *Sharifan* ("Bitter Harvest"), *Khol Do* ("The Return"), and *Khuda Ki Kasam* ("The Dutiful Daughter") to illustrate the point that it is women who are always at the receiving end during any kind of violent social or political upheaval. It is they who stand to lose the most. *Khol Do* and *Khuda Ki Kasam* powerfully depict the horror and psychological trauma experienced by women during Partition. Tens of thousands of girls and women were seized from refugee camps (like Sakina of *Khol Do*), crowded trains and isolated villages in the most large-scale kidnapping of modern times.

*Anjam Bekhair* is the story of Nasim Akhtar who escapes with the help of her dancing master Ustad Achhan Khan and successfully reaches Lahore. How the common people were brainwashed by the Muslim League propaganda comes out very clearly in Nasim's words: "It is going to be Hindu Raj; they don't want any Muslims around... the Quaid-i-Azam, Jinnah Sahib, has worked so hard and got us our own country, Pakistan, and that's where we should go and live" (123-24). Mando the musician says, "I am prepared to go to Pakistan this very minute. If I die there and my bones are placed in its earth, my soul will rest in eternal peace" (124).<sup>14</sup> However, as it happened with hundreds of thousands of people, the migration does not change Nasim's destiny and she gets cheated by her own husband who sells her off to some old courtesans to again live a life she never wanted to. Pakistan did not fulfil her dreams of "living like a normal woman, married and raising a family".

*Sharifan* brings to light "a war on each other's women" during Partition. If not raped or abducted, the women were killed simply to take revenge, perhaps to prevent "the future generation of the enemy community" from taking birth. As Qasim rushes home he finds that his wife is lying dead and his daughter is lying close by naked. He rushes out in an unconscious state holding an axe in his hand. He knocks a door, a girl opens the door and when asked answers that she is a Hindu. "Qasim threw

away the axe and pounced on her like a wild beast, throwing her to the ground. Then he began to tear at her clothes and for half-an-hour he ravaged her like an animal gone berserk. There was no resistance, she had fainted." Later when Qasim looks at the naked body of the girl he is reminded of his daughter Sharifan and drapes a blanket over the girl he has violated. Just then a man enters the house; he recognises Qasim and shouts, "What are you doing in my house?" Qasim points towards the blanket. "The other man pulled off the blanket. The sword fell from his hand; then he staggered out of the house wailing, 'Bimla! Bimla!'" (146). The reader can guess what happens: a circle, an unending one of violence and vengeance.

*Khol Do* depicts a psychologically traumatised and comatose girl. Women were so brutally raped that they lost the sense of language itself. The narrative is crowded with incidents – the Partition, rioting, caravans of refugees, refugee camps in turmoil, the orgies of the *razakars* and so on. Sirajuddin's daughter Sakina disappears from a train carrying Muslim refugees from India to Pakistan. After much "searching and risking" their lives, the *razakars* find Sakina, but instead of returning her safely to Sirajuddin, they rape her repeatedly until she becomes unconscious. Manto shows how, during Partition, men pretended to act out of a sense of honour and piety but were reduced to bestiality and violence and at times co-religionists themselves turned out to be the perpetrators of crime. Sakina is brought to the doctor's chamber in the camp in a semi-conscious state. When the doctor walks in, he sees the room in darkness, points to the window and asks the ward boy to "open it", "*khol do*". Sakina's hands mechanically go to the drawstring on her *shalwar* (loose pants), to undo the knot, "surrendering herself to be raped".<sup>15</sup> "She has become so brutalised and her relationship with language becomes so distorted that henceforth *Khol Do* (open it), carries just one meaning for her to the exclusion of all others" (Asaduddin 2002: 322). The story highlights,

...how language was fractured and bruised during Partition; how language, the sign of normality, had created new charms in the world. It offers a critique of the cultural insistence on the 'purity' of women by offering the image of a father less concerned with his daughter's chastity than with her survival. Finally, it offers Partition as a psychic space that gave play to all of these cultural tropes and repressions (Kamra 2003: 136).

When the worst phase of the violence was over by December 1947, the question of the recovery of *our* women and the restoration of *theirs* became an urgent one. At the initiative of a number of women social workers, supported by some of India's most important political leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, a programme for the recovery of abducted women was drawn up. It was decided by common agreement that the kidnapped women had to be returned to their community of origin, even if they preferred to remain with their family of adoption and had converted to the religion of their kidnappers. "Hundreds of volunteers had been assigned the task of recovering abducted women and children and restoring them to their families. They would go in groups to India from Pakistan and from Pakistan to India to make their recoveries", (Manto 1997: 96). Overall, 30,000 women

were recovered; 22,000 Muslim women in India and 3,000 Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan. The break-up of families through abduction and abandonment is a major aspect of the Partition experience. As one participant puts it:

The Jats of Bharatpur reacted to the Muslim League and what was happening to Hindus in Punjab... This was a time of communal frenzy and passion when people forgot humanism (*insaniyat*). We took away women. That was the system. Women do not have any religion [ye to system tha hi, auraton ka to koi dharma hi nahi hota] (quoted in Mayaram 2007: 380-1).<sup>16</sup>

Read against this background, *Khuda Ki Kasam* provides sensitive insights into the impact of abduction on ordinary people which has surprisingly been ignored by historians. The narrator is a liaison officer from Pakistan involved in the recovery of abducted women. He encounters an old Muslim woman who is searching for her daughter and refuses to return to Pakistan with him without her daughter. One day, they see a young and handsome Sikh walk by them accompanied by a veiled woman. The Sikh whispers to the woman, “your mother”. The young woman looks for a moment, then averts her eyes and walks away. The old Muslim woman recognises her daughter and shouts after the liaison officer, “Bhagbari, Bhagbari”...I have seen her ... I have seen her” (101). He firmly replies, fully aware of what is happening, “I swear on God your daughter is dead”. The old woman collapses to the ground. Manto’s ending reveals perhaps better than anything else that Partition involved the death of family ties as well as of individuals. The sorrows and occasional futility of the exercise of rehabilitation are laid bare as the abducted Muslim woman refuses to recognise her own mother. It is true that many women did find a new life after being abducted. Happily married to a Sikh youth, Bhagbari does not wish to risk her happiness by remembering this naked, insane woman as her mother. The story gives us some useful “journalistic” information, too, emphasising the futility of the exercise of rehabilitation:

...in Saharanpur, two abducted Muslim girls had refused to return to their parents who were in Pakistan. Then there was this Muslim girl in Jullandar who was given a touching farewell by the abductor’s family as if she was a daughter-in-law leaving on a long journey. Some girls had committed suicide on the way, afraid of facing their parents. Some had lost their mental balance as a result of their traumatic experiences. Others had become alcoholics and used abusive and vulgar language when spoken to (97).<sup>17</sup>

### Stories on Psychological Trauma

Manto’s *Thanda Gosht* (“Colder Than Ice”)<sup>18</sup> and *Toba Tek Singh* are strong testimonies to the kind of psychological trauma people lived through during the Partition. *Thanda Gosht*, first published in March 1949, depicts the effects of six days of continuous looting and murder on the usually passionate and hot-blooded Ishar Singh. Unable to make love to his mistress, Kulwant Kaur, he confesses attempting to rape a young woman after murdering six members of her family. About to enter her, he discovers that she is dead, is “cold meat”, “colder than ice”, which he himself becomes at the end of the story. He loses his potency. Ishar Singh, through losing his potency, reveals that he still has within him a glimmer of

humanity and sensitivity.<sup>19</sup> The story powerfully represents the impact of violence on its perpetrators, too. Ishar Singh’s impotence following the rape provides a compelling symbol of the loss of human sensibilities during August 1947. Priyamvada Gopal’s essay, “Bodies Inflicting Pain”, offers a compelling reminder that “Manto’s stories of the trauma of Partition focused not only on the victimhood of women but on crises of masculinity, especially as that masculinity was rearranged in the theatre of sexualised mass violence” (2001).

The metaphor of madness and the theme of identity-crisis recurs often in the discourse on Partition, whether conventional historiography or fictional representation. The nationalist leaders were often heard saying, “our people have gone mad”. Gandhiji appealed to the people not to “meet madness with madness”. The newspaper editors said so, and so did ordinary men and women. Partition not only created a “mad” atmosphere but also made its victims “mad”, “insane”, losing their mental balances due to traumatic experiences. People in both the territories were confused about their identities, about their geographical and political identities, and about their citizenship as well. Manto merges these two themes and creates *Toba Tek Singh*.<sup>20</sup> Toba Tek Singh has become a symbol of the confused and torn identities arising from separation from one’s ancestral home. He wins over those who “claim to be sane” and who want to fix his identity, as his death takes place in no-man’s-land, where the writ of neither nation prevails.

The story opens with a series of vignettes, establishing an image of the Partition and ridiculing political leaders on both sides and reflecting the confusion of identity. For example an inmate named Muhammad Ali, who fancies himself to be Jinnah, argues with a Sikh who thinks himself to be Tara Singh, while other inmates “...were unable to decide whether they were now in India or Pakistan. If they were in India, where on earth was Pakistan? And if they were in Pakistan, then how come that until only the other day it was India?” (Manto 1997: 2-3). The story takes us to an asylum, “taking the notion of victimhood to its extreme” and gradually focuses on one old Sikh inmate named Bishan Singh, but who is called Toba Tek Singh because he had been a wealthy landowner in a village of that name. Although unable to speak except in nonsense syllables,<sup>21</sup> upon hearing of the intended transfer, he tries to find out whether Toba Tek Singh is in India or Pakistan. He cannot understand why he is being uprooted from his home. That was the question over two million people asked their governments during Partition. At the border, Bishan Singh learns from a liaison officer that Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan, and he refuses to cross. When all persuasion fails, he is left standing by himself between the two border stations. Finally,

Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh, the man who had stood on his legs for fifteen years, screamed and as officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed to the ground. There behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh (9-10).<sup>22</sup>

The phrase, “lay Toba Tek Singh”, refers both to the man stretched out on the ground and to the piece of ground itself,

which has become for him “the homeland” Toba Tek Singh, where he most wants to be.<sup>23</sup> Toba Tek Singh is Manto’s symbolic rejection of the division of the country and his considered comment on the mindlessness of it.<sup>24</sup> To quote Gilmartin,

The desperate attempt to maintain the linking of place, ancestry, sanctity, and moral order was cast against the backdrop of a fixed Partition of territory that symbolically torn these linkages asunder. No work of literature encapsulates this more dramatically than Saadat Hasan Manto’s Urdu short story, “Toba Tek Singh”.... (1998: 1084).

### Miscellany

Manto wrote a few other short stories on Partition and its consequences. *Aakhri Salute* (“The Last Salute”)<sup>25</sup>, *Titwal Ka Kutta* (“The Dog of Titwal”), and *Yazeed* (“The Great Divide”) revolve around the Indo-Pak War of 1948 and very aptly comment on the divided loyalties of soldiers and those living close to the Indo-Pak border region. The war further widened the gulf between the two states. Manto’s insight was confirmed, even as effects of the Partition continued to echo through the years, resulting in several wars, the Kargil conflict, the nuclear confrontation, and the latest “killings” and “counter-killings” of jail inmate/s on both sides of the borders. *Pandit Manto’s Letter to Pandit Nehru* illustrates Manto’s ironic vision, and his mixed response to the question of national allegiance.<sup>26</sup> *Titwal Ka Kutta*, more sarcastic in tone, is a sad tale of a dog caught in a mountain valley between Indian and Pakistani troops.<sup>27</sup> According to Flemming,

...through the obvious symbol in the dog of all those caught in the crossfire of conflicting loyalties, the story makes a chilling assertion about the fate of those unable to commit themselves to one side or the other: those already committed will eventually kill them (1985: 85-86).

In *Yazeed*, a culture-specific anger bares itself in the ending to the story when Karimdad names his newborn son *Yazid* (a tyrant), who would undo the tyranny of the enemy.

In *Savere Jo Kal Aankh Meri Khuli*,<sup>28</sup> Manto demonstrates the suddenness with which the symbols of a new nation were inscribed on the body of the city. The signboards of the shops across the bazaar were rewritten, the old names giving way to new ones, starting with “Pakistan” “Pakistan *Zindabad!*”, “Jinnah”, “*Qaid-e-Azam*”, etc. “There is a sense of an over-enthusiastic attempt to write history anew at Pakistan’s ‘moment of arrival.’ What gives Manto’s irony its edge is the disjunction posed between the familiar and the unfamiliar, for the geographical spaces remained the same” (Ravikant and Saint 2001: xiv). *Sau Candle Power Ka Bulb* (“The Room with the Bright Light”), *Darling* (“The Woman in the Red Raincoat”) and *Shahidsaaz* (“Doing God’s Work”) do not belong immediately to Partition, and are secondary to the ones discussed above. *Sau Candle Power Ka Bulb* and *Darling* starts with few paragraphs describing the change in the locality and the communal riots ravaging east and west Punjab after the riots. *Shahidsaaz* revolves around a refugee in Pakistan, who migrates from Gujarat Kathiawar<sup>29</sup> in India. He becomes rich and then for “spiritual satisfaction” starts a business “of doing God’s work” by assigning the status of “martyr” to religious-minded people. It is a satire on how one can use people’s religiosity for

petty purposes and how misconceptions about religious symbols can lead only to death in vain.

### Significance of Manto’s Partition Narratives

Manto’s stories on Partition voice the agonies of the marginalised sections of the society who suffered the most during Partition: women, children, outcaste, poor people, etc.<sup>30</sup> These short stories can be very aptly taken as case studies to understand terror-like situations, how violence affects language, the medium through which human beings express agony and ecstasy. They can be applied universally. To quote Das and Nandy,

It was the genius of...Manto to have created the form through which the deafening silence accompanying the trauma of being simultaneously the subject, object, and instrument of violence could be represented. We hope scholars will be stimulated into examining this kind of literature for understanding the theoretical constructions within which violence may be located in human societies (1986: 194).

Moving from the black humour of stories like that of the dog who belongs to neither Muslims nor Hindus and the madman who belonged to one country and now belongs to another, to the tragic story of the girl who is unconscious after repeated rapes, Manto gives the starkest and bleakest pictures of Partition. His *Siyah Hashiye* remains the very first major literary response from any writer in the subcontinent. Ishar Singh and Toba Tek Singh effectively capture the traumatic and establish Partition as a “psychological” phenomenon too and raise questions over the very basis of the division, the very definition of “homeland”, the state, and citizenship and identity. As Ayesha Jalal confessed,

Long before I made the ‘error’ of looking at the first document stored in official archives, the searing experience of the Partition had been conveyed to me through Manto’s stories.... The pain of these stories of rapes, abductions and murders persuaded me of the need to understand the causes of Partition and its horrors and not simply echo in historical non-fiction what had been so graphically portrayed by the more sensitive creative writers and artists (1996: 93-104).

Manto’s Partition stories must not be overlooked by social scientists including historians attempting to appreciate and analyse the event, especially those working on the emotions it unleashed, the memories it evokes, and the human dimension of the whole event. Manto believed:

...literature gives news about the nation, the community to which it belongs, its health, its illness. Stretch your hand and pick up any dust-laden book from an old shelf – the pulse of a bygone era will begin to beat under your finger-tips (quoted in Narang 1997: 72).<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusions

Partition was the turning point in the history of the subcontinent post-1947. It gave rise to sectarianism and large-scale disbelief in the “Other” in both India and Pakistan. However, the literary responses to the event do celebrate the memories of the commonly shared heritage, and the cultural and geographical space between Hindus-Sikhs and Muslims before August 1947. The Partition corpus strengthens the composite culture and the plurality of the subcontinent and the belief of the litterateurs in the ever-present humanism, not only in the

victims but in the perpetrators too, as in the case of Manto's Ishar Singh. These writers did not believe that religion was a divisive force and blamed the hunger for power and the political indecisiveness of a handful of leaders which robbed people of their homes and hearths, of their memories and of the sheer belief in humanism. Such writings establish Partition as a human tragedy rather than a political one, an aspect most cherished by the "historical" discourses on the event.

A study of such literary writings needs to be included in the reference lists on the study of Partition of India. They are important as they direct us to an alternative reading of

the "master narrative", though one is certainly free to establish the credentials of the author/s of such texts and then include them in his/her research. Such studies having literature at the centre can promote comparative literature and historical cultural studies and with an emphasis on literary cultures of a society can reconstruct history in a new manner. It will be a fitting tribute to Manto if his stories and ideas are able to find their rightful place in the writing of the history of Partition of the subcontinent by scholars especially among the ones sponsored by the individual nation states of India and Pakistan.

## NOTES

- For more on India's literary response to Partition, one can read Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memoirs in the Aftermath of the Partition"; Alok Rai, "The Trauma of Independence: Some Aspects of Progressive Hindi Literature 1945-47"; and Jason Francisco, "In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly"; all three articles in Hasan (2000). Also, articles by various authors in Settar and Baptista Gupta, Vol 2, 2002 will be useful readings.
- I Submitted an MPhil dissertation, titled "History, Memory and Literature: Partition Narratives of S H Manto, Khushwant Singh and Bisham Sahni", to University of Mumbai in 2009. This article is a summarised and updated version of chapters one and three of the same.
- Hayden White has addressed this issue in some of his writings; read Moses (2005) for a critical appraisal of White's "...vision of historiography...appropriated for the "public use of history" in many ethnic and nationalist conflicts today...".
- Urvashi Butalia (1993): "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 24 April, 28 (17), 12-24; Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1993): "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition", *ibid*, 2-11; Hasan (1995) (the preface to the volume one by Hasan gives a glimpse of importance of literary material, memoirs, testimonies, etc, as an alternate archive to the Partition studies); Hasan (1997); Hasan (2000); Samad-dar, Ranabir (ed.) *Reflections of Partition in the East*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997; Pandey (2001); Talbot, Ian, "Literature and the Human Drama of the 1947 Partition" in D A Low and Howard Brasted (ed.), *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence*, Sage Publications, Delhi, 1998, pp 39-55; Menon and Bhasin (1998); Butalia, Urvashi (1998): *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, Penguin, New Delhi; Butalia, Urvashi, "An Archive with a difference: Partition Letters" in Kaul, Suvir (ed.), *The Partition of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2001.
- Shiv Vishwanathan wrote in his article "TV-Kshetra", "Years before, when partition was occurring, Saadat Hasan Manto suggested that *Bombay Talkies* was the answers to partition. Its tone, its amalgam of creative forms, its hospitality, even its *bachchanalia* was the true answer to the puritanism and tragedy of partition.... Manto is as relevant today for his sociology of *Bombay Talkies*." Viewed on 5 September 2012 (<http://www.bangaloremirror.com/index.aspx?page=article&sectid=26&contentid=2012094201209042032241368b09659f>). 2013 marks the centenary of the Indian Cinema.
- English readers interested to know more about Manto's life and career can refer to Flemming (1985). Manto's collected works are available in five volumes in Devnagari script (without translating them in Hindi in the process) in Menra and Dutt, ed. (1993).
- This article studies in all 18 stories by Manto, including *Siyah-Hashiyeh*. Eleven stories will be mentioned in more detail and other seven only briefly. These stories have been read from the following texts: Menra and Dutt 1993: Vols. 1, 2, and 4; Mohan 1992; Manto 1997; Flemming 1985; and Manto, "Black Margins", translated from Urdu by Mushirul Hasan, in Hasan, ed. (2000): 287-99.
- English translation of the titles and quoted sentences as well are taken from Khalid Hasan's translations of Manto's stories and sketches, mainly the ones published in 1997. All translated titles/sentences refer to him.
- Manto, in his sketch has not mentioned what religion they belonged to. However, both Mushirul Hasan and Khalid Hasan do add a sentence in their respective translations of the sketch mentioning that - "They were Jains" or "They belonged to the Jain..." religion.
- Khan is a surname adopted by all Pathans. And Prophet Muhammad was a Saiyyid Muslim and not actually a Pathan!
- All the translations and page numbers, unless specified, refer to this edition.
- Keki N Daruwalla says, "It could be said that Mozel was Manto's answer to the general denigration of and the onslaught on the Jews. But this would be farfetched" in Bhalla, ed. (1997): 61. Margit Koves' (1997) article looks at the short stories of Manto in Urdu about the Partition and of Orkeny, a Hungarian Jewish writer about the Holocaust and finds that both the writers "...enabled the reader to deal with and go beyond the paralyzing effects of such traumatic experiences".
- Ayesha Jalal, introducing her forthcoming book on Manto at the Karachi Literature Festival 2012, says, "The story effaces the distinction between fictional and historical narratives", and comes to a sort of conclusion that "...his fiction is nothing if it does not approximate the factual", viewed on 17 September 2012 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7nObBA-ZEw&feature=related>).
- Partition clearly destroyed bonds based on locality and personal connections, replacing them with religion, community and territory. One refugee, on reaching Pakistan from Jullundur after seeing her entire family murdered could still exclaim, "At last, somehow or other, after crossing the sea of fire and blood, we stopped on the lovely land of Pakistan.... the happiness I found when I saw the Pakistan flag flying at the Pakistan border, is still living in every cell in my body" in Misra 2007: 253.
- Khol Do* was one of the many stories which brought Manto to the courts in Pakistan on the charge of 'obscenity'. Read Hanif (2012) for a sarcastic take on the "shallowness" of all such court cases against Manto. Hanif recounts in the article, "A person no less than Justice Javed Iqbal, son of your fellow Kashmiri poet Sir Allama Mohammed Iqbal (the alleged dreamer of the dream we all live in), wrote that if people read *Khol Do*, they might be tempted to become rapists too. Now you get the point? You might have written a story about the trauma and tribulations of a woman. Some of us read it as a rape manual. We, sir, have become a rape-positive republic."
- An MA dissertation was submitted on the theme of women during Partition in the UC San Diego in 2009 titled "Beeran ki kai jaat...?: the figure of the woman in Partition discourse", by Rashné Marzban Limki. It is available on <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5z3111xj>, viewed on 1 November 2012.
- Read Satish Gujral, "Lahore Goes Up in Flames" in Ahmad, ed. (2001: 81-96), for a similar real life story of abduction and abandonment, where Jaswant Kaur was abandoned by her own mother and teenaged brother when they find that she is carrying a Muslim's child who gave her shelter and married her to save her honour and life. Manto writes in *Khuda Ki Kasam*: "When I thought about these abducted girls, I only saw their protruding bellies. What was going to happen to them and what they contained? Who would claim the end result? Pakistan or India? And who would pay the women the wages for carrying those children in their wombs for nine months? Pakistan or India?" (1997: 97). During Partition, the "modus operandi" included gang rapes, stripping, parading naked women through the town, branding the breasts and genitalia with slogans like "Pakistan Zindabad" or "Hindustan Zindabad", amputating the breasts, knifing open the womb and killing the foetuses. The recurring feature in these attacks was the emphasis on the symbols of sexuality and reproduction (refer Hansen 2002). We had a confirmation of this nearer home in Gujarat in February-March 2002. In the post-Godhra violence in February 2002, Muslim women were deliberately targeted in these "pogroms" and incidents of "ethnic cleansing". Read Tanika Sarkar (2002): "Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtira", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 37 (28), 13-19 July.
- Some translators have translated *Thanda Gosht* as "Cold Meat" which is more appropriate than Khalid Hasan's "Colder Than Ice". For a critical assessment of Khalid Hasan's English translations of Manto's stories, refer M Asaduddin (1997): "Manto in English: An Assessment of Khalid Hasan's Translations" in Bhalla, ed. (1997): 159-71; and Alok Bhalla, "The Politics of



- Translation: Manto's Partition Stories and Khalid Hasan's English version" in Settar and Baptista, ed. (2002), Vol II: 241-59.
- 19 In his defence of the story against charges of obscenity, Manto himself stressed this theme: "...even at the last limits of cruelty and violence of barbarity and bestiality, he [Ishar Singh] does not lose his humanity. If Ishar Singh had completely lost his humanity, the touch of the dead woman, would not have affected him so violently as to strip him of his manhood." Manto defended himself of charges of obscenity against the story: "What can I do if this story is obscene? The event on which it is based was itself obscene." Manto, as quoted by Ashok Vohra, "Manto's Philosophy: An Explication" in Bhalla, ed. (1997): 129-40.
  - 20 Watch two very good video versions of the story on Youtube. 1. "Toba Tek Singh – Sadat Hasan Manto", viewed on 14 September 2012 ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f\\_nU6iZXtTA&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_nU6iZXtTA&feature=related)); and 2. "Manto, Saadat Hasan-Toba Tek Singh (Afsana) مرغن و رعش جافری Archives", viewed on 17 September 2012 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kE4OYy5qHvA>). Bollywood lyricist Gulzar once wrote these lines in a tribute to the story: "mu-jhe wagah pe toba tek singh wale 'bishan' se ja ke milna ha[1]..." The entire poem could be read in Vij (2012).
  - 21 He could only say these:
 

*'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the Government of Pakistan.'*; *'Uper the gur gur the annexe the mung the dal of Guruji da Khalsa and Guruji ki fatch [sic]... jo boley so nihāl sat sri akal.'*; *'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and Hindustan dur fit-tety munh.'*; and before dying he uttered – *'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhyana mung the dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.'* Slogans like 'Pakistan', 'Guru ji da khalsa, guruji di fateh', 'jo bole so nihaal', 'Hindustan', 'Toba Tek Singh', were all used by leaders to deceive people and merge their religious and national identities leading to the "madness" called Partition.
  - 22 Someone recently remarked to have been reminded of this story while the subcontinent was engulfed into the Sarabjit Singh discourse.
  - 23 Tagore once said, "The country is not territorial (*mrinmaya*); it is ideational (*chinmaya*)", (Tagore, *Rabindra-Rachanabali*, Vol 1, p 1, quoted in Nandy 1994: viii). Toba Tek Singh emphatically brings this idea of nation and nationhood to the fore.
  - 24 The metaphor of madness occurs very often in Manto's short stories; refer Alter 1994 and Gilmartin 1998.
  - 25 Read Riyaz 1997.
  - 26 Refer Manto, "Pandit Manto's First Letter to Pandit Nehru", trans. M Asaduddin in Ravikant and Tarun K Saint, ed. (2001): 87-91.
  - 27 Read "*The Dog of Tetwal*" in Context: The Nation and Its Victims" in Ravikant and Saint 2001.
  - 28 No translation found. This story was read from Menra and Dutt ed. (1993) Vol 4, and Mohan, ed. (1992).
  - 29 Mohammad Ali Jinnah was a Kathiawari, too!
  - 30 Refer Memon 2012.
  - 31 If I can have the freedom to paraphrase the same and say: "Stretch your hand and pick up any of the Manto's Partition stories from an old shelf – the pulse of the Partition era will begin to beat under your finger-tips."

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