

Literary Radicalism in India

Gender, nation and the transition to independence

Priyamvada Gopal

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Literary Radicalism in India

While most readers of contemporary Indian literature in English and in translation are familiar with the idea of ‘freedom at midnight’, much less is known about the turbulent period of artistic and cultural transformation that characterised the years leading up to and following Independence in 1947. This study examines one of the most influential – and yet relatively unexamined – literary movements in the twentieth century on the Indian subcontinent. Focusing on writers who were affiliated to the Progressive Writers Association during India’s transition from colony to nation, *Literary Radicalism in India* examines in detail some of the most important and controversial works of Indian literature.

Featuring historicised readings of the fiction, essays and films of such prominent figures as Rashid Jahan, Sajjad Zaheer, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, the book examines the connections between aesthetics and politics in the context of nation-formation in India and Pakistan. It argues that gender, in this context, was not reducible to questions of ‘representing women’ but that it was a constitutive point of *contestation* in the struggle to define ‘India’.

This thoroughly researched study is a must for all those interested in the impact of nationalism, feminism and social movements on literature, and provides a timely intervention into current debates about Marxism, nationalism and modernity.

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to independence

Priyamvada Gopal

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For my family and for Benita

In Memoriam

**S. Thiruvengkatachari
Bernard Soysa**

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possible in some cases. Any omissions in this regard that are brought to the notice of the publisher will be rectified in future printings of this book.

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Priyamvada Gopal
Cambridge, July 2004

Note on translations

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. In the main, I have used editions that have been transliterated from the Nastaliq (Urdu) script into the Devanagri, checking against the original where necessary.

Introduction

... my uncle's house was a popular place. On card-evenings, it would burst at the seams with jazzmen gossiping about quarrels and reviews in American magazines and singers who carried throat-sprays in their handbags and members of the Uday Shankar dance troupe, which was trying to form a new style of dance by fusing Western ballet with Bharat-natyam ...; there were painters who argued violently amongst each other. The air was thick with political, and other, chatter.

(Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*)

And apart from Sen there was the group of distinguished writers who gathered for a time under Aurora's wing, Premchand and Saadat Hasan Manto and Mulk Raj Anand and Ismat Chughtai, committed realists all; but even in their work there were elements of the fabulous ...

(Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*)

This is a book about literature and radical politics in the Indian subcontinent during the decades immediately preceding and following the attainment of formal independence in 1947. The fabled midnight of 15 August 1947, which was preceded by the bloody partition of the region into the independent nation states of Pakistan and India, has been mythologised by writers as different as Jawaharlal Nehru and Salman Rushdie in terms of its transformative potential. In an epochal sense, this transitional period was, in fact, a remarkable one and widely perceived as teeming with political, social and cultural possibilities. The consequences for literary and cultural production were decisive. The years from about 1936 to 1954 were the heyday of a hugely influential radical cultural movement that spanned several regions and languages across India (as well as the region that became Pakistan). Represented by, though not restricted to, the formation of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) in 1936 (and its partner organisation, the Indian People's Theatre Association or IPTA, which was established in 1942), this movement was closely linked to debates over decolonisation and the nature of the post-colonial nation state that was to come into being. Founded by a diverse group

2 *Introduction*

of writers, both established and upcoming, who shared the conviction that art, literature and film could help shape and transform the nascent nation state in progressive directions, the PWA reinvigorated cultural production and debates in various media, including dance and film. Certainly, as even the predictably satirical epigrams from Rushdie seem to suggest, almost no contemporaneous Indian writer in any language, including English, would remain unaffected by its reach.

Although the diversity of texts and authors that emerged out of the radicalising influence of the PWA deserves exhaustive study in its own right (a comparative project across several languages that will require the combined efforts of several scholars), this book will examine specific questions of literary subjectivity, political consciousness and representation in the context of nation formation that occupied some of the most prominent writers associated with the movement. These are questions of continuing relevance to postcolonial studies in its own engagement with the problem of representation in relation to political practice. The ways in which all writers and intellectuals ‘represent something to their audiences and in so doing represent themselves to themselves’ is of particular significance in relation to writers who saw their work as both profoundly literary and inescapably committed to social transformation and nation building (Said 1994: xv). Aesthetics and politics were to be articulated together in unprecedented ways even as the precise modalities of that partnership were to remain open to debate from the 1930s into the late 1950s. Although social issues, especially those relating to women’s education, the treatment of widows and caste reform, were already an integral part of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature in various Indian languages, tied to the rise of the realist novel in particular, the historical conjuncture of the transitional period brought a fresh sense of interventionary urgency to the writer. As I show in Chapter 1, the ideological field of the nation had exploded into a ‘terrain of struggle’ for several social and political forces that were organising around issues ranging from gender, caste and religion to labour, language and region. These struggles took place on the ground of nation, but they were inflected by phenomena of global dimensions: the struggle against imperialism in Asia and Africa, and the rise of fascism and resistance to it in Europe. Indeed, the formation of the PWA was itself inspired by the emergence of anti-fascist and left-wing cultural fronts in Europe and the USA. Enormous disquiet co-existed with a profoundly optimistic sense that something had to and could be done – and that writers had a role to play in it all.

Thus, in this context in which, as the PWA inaugural manifesto put it, ‘radical changes are taking place’, the writer was to emerge with a brief not unlike that which Edward Said gives the modern intellectual, as ‘an energy, a stubborn force engaging as a committed and recognizable voice in language and in society with a whole slew of issues, all of them having to do with a combination of enlightenment and emancipation or freedom’ (Coppola 1974: 1; Said 1994: 73).¹ Inasmuch as the field that has come to be known

as postcolonial studies exists 'in a relationship of supplementarity to that of critical theory in its postmodernist and/or poststructuralist incarnations', its most dominant voices have long since dispensed with 'totalising' notions such as 'freedom' or 'liberation' (Lazarus 1999: 9). The *privileged* texts and reading protocols of postcolonial studies tend to be anti-humanist and hostile to systemic analysis.² Although it is not the case that their work is only amenable to poststructuralist or anti-realist readings, the canonisation of a handful of authors, most prominently Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in the work of influential theorists has allowed for a talismanic reiteration of privileged conceptual categories such as 'hybridity' and 'ambivalence'. Even when an unambiguously liberationist and realist author such as Mahasweta Devi is brought to metropolitan academic attention by a distinguished theorist such as Gayatri Spivak (making for a salutary consideration of non-Anglophone texts), she must first be made fit for refined theoretical company. Her text must be '[reconstellated] to draw out its use', a process that entails undoing the distinction between history and fiction (Spivak 1987: 244).

In turning to authors as diverse as Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, this book undertakes several related tasks that speak to new directions in postcolonial literary studies. The first is to bring to wider critical attention a few of those many texts and authors – by no means minor or marginal in terms of their cultural impact during the era of decolonisation in South Asia – that have thus far remained outside the purview of the field. Postcolonial studies must necessarily become a comparative field of study and can no longer restrict itself to studying texts written in metropolitan languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese). It must also necessarily interrogate the cross-cultural validity of models of literary study that privilege (generally monolingual) 'national' literatures. The authors whose work I examine here were at the very least bilingual and produced some of their work in English (Abbas continued to write in it for most of his life), even though their preferred medium was, ultimately, the language of their natal community, Urdu. As Aijaz Ahmad points out, this kind of bilingualism and 'polyglot ease in communication' was fairly typical for the intelligentsia of the late colonial period in India; it was often reflected in their literary practice (Ahmad 1992: 76). The point here is not to replace English-language texts with those written in Urdu or other indigenous languages, but to allow a different set of texts to reconstellate key concerns within the field of postcolonial studies and to throw up new questions. (Indeed, even more conventional studies of English literature itself have hardly been undertaken without due attention to affiliated languages and literatures, whether Latin, French or German.) Inasmuch as writers in Urdu and English were particularly active in the movement from its early days, many of its foundational concerns and shaping debates are reflected in their work. Each of these writers did see themselves as operating – albeit with a critical consciousness – within a national and international frame. As such, questions of nation formation and national culture frame this study although

the aim is obviously not to 'slot very diverse kinds of public aspirations under the unitary insignia of nationalism' (Ahmad 1992: 243). While Aijaz Ahmad is right to point to the general dangers of designating 'nationalism as the determinate and epochal ideology for cultural production in non-Western societies', it will also not do to understate the conceptual importance of 'nation' – precisely as a terrain of struggle rather than a unitary given – for politically aware writers, especially in the transitional period (ibid. 243). In their engagement with issues ranging from intercommunity romance and female sexuality to masculinity, morality and class mobility, each of these writers was concerned with the nation as an imaginative possibility and as a ground on which to stake a claim.

The shared, yet differently articulated, commitment of these writers to emancipatory politics and socialism broadly conceived is another important concern in this study. The dismissal of the Progressive legacy in some influential quarters resonates with a wider disavowal of Marxism within literary theory and postcolonial studies as 'economistic' or 'deterministic'.³ Even as elegant and scholarly a monograph as Geeta Patel's study of the great Urdu poet, Miraji, swiftly loses nuance when describing the PWA, dwindling into unsubstantiated accusations of conservatism, political orthodoxy and aesthetic tyranny aimed at a generic and undifferentiated category, 'the Progressives'. While Patel's study begins by pointing out, quite correctly, that literary groupings such as the PWA and Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq (Circle of the Men of Taste) were, for a good while, loose coalitions with overlapping memberships, a partisan tone emerges quite early on with Patel on the side of the aesthetically sensitive and victimised modernists against the Progressives who were apparently undertaking routine 'trials and pogroms' of those who refused to be political in the right way (Patel 2002). Rather than resurrect the hackneyed and frankly unilluminating battle of the 'political' versus 'the men of taste' (or overstating the case for what were, ultimately, literary quarrels rather than life-threatening conflicts), this study examines each writer as an individual artist and thinker whose work can be located in relation to the issues and debates generated by the PWA, but which is not, therefore, reducible to those issues or to a party line – however much a few in the PWA might have liked to see just such a line emerge. As with all organisations, leftist or otherwise, the history of the PWA is a history of struggle and contestation and not of the unilateral triumph of authoritarianism.

At the same time, *Literary Radicalism in India* is not a study of working-class literature, proletarian fiction or even socialist realism as such. The writers examined here, as well as many others in the PWA, came from relatively privileged (middle- and upper-class) backgrounds. Grappling with the question of how the disenfranchised could be represented in literature and thinking about the processes that led to that disenfranchisement, they increasingly found it necessary to think reflexively about their own subjectivities and subject positions. Certainly in the case of a Rashid Jahan, an Ismat

Chughtai or a Saadat Hasan Manto, there was an evolving understanding that representation is not so much a given as a problematic to be engaged with. An attentive and open-minded reading of the *trajectory* of their work (as opposed to isolated pieces) precludes easy claims such as those Patel makes: ‘the “people” became an other. . . [The Progressives assumed] that the life of these others, whose oppression served as literary material, could be easily, transparently rendered’ (ibid. 125). Such careless condemnations in fact tell us more about hostile critical preconceptions that prevail with regard to forms of realism, materialism and Marxism than about the actual complexities of these texts themselves.

Gender plays a particularly instructive role with regard to questions of representation and reflexivity. Even as it is the reformist thematic of ‘the woman question’ that informs the early work of a Rashid Jahan, a Chughtai or a Manto, over time, each of these writers would come to think about gender in relation to their own complex subjectivities as writers, political thinkers and social beings. Out of this emerged a body of fiction where gender came to have *constitutive* rather than merely thematic importance. By this, I mean that themes with a more familiar connection to the ‘woman question’ – education, domesticity and familial politics – came to intersect with questions of citizenship, political responsibility, labour, sexuality, class, caste, religion and ethics.

In Rashid Jahan’s short fiction, for instance, the homogeneity of the generic category ‘woman’ itself is interrogated by class and sexuality while Ismat Chughtai’s autobiographical novel, *The Crooked Line*, illuminates the ways in which lived experience of modernity is profoundly gendered. The work of both Chughtai and Rashid Jahan presages, in different ways, the insights of contemporary materialist feminism, in particular the understanding that questions of gender cannot be studied in isolation from other issues (and conversely). Although many of his stories do deploy the familiar reformist trope of the female prostitute to represent exploitation and degradation, it is masculinity as social identity and as experience that forms the core of Manto’s best work. His post-Partition short fiction is an agonised exploration of maleness in relation to the violence of nation formation; the connections he made between masculinity, community and violence resulted in a furor over several of his stories. K. A. Abbas’ cinematic collaborations with Raj Kapoor, in particular the famous and wildly popular ‘Vagrant’ films, *Awara* and *Shri 420*, tell us something about the ways in which certain preoccupations of Progressive writing – gender equality, social justice and the agency of ordinary people in bringing about social transformation – are translated into gendered post-Independence discourses of the ‘popular’. We see how the figure of the new citizen subject subsumes and elides knotty questions as agency shifts from the revolutionary to the consumer. In that sense, this book is as much about the failures of Progressive literary and cinematic production as it is about the importance of the utopian impulse in literature.

The writer in opposition

If there is one 'position' that accommodates the work of all these figures, it may be that described by Said in relation to the oppositional intellectual, of 'writing from eccentric angles of vision' and not being 'at home' in either community or nation. But this body of work is not, however, a literature of 'exile' in any sense (Said 1994: 59). More apropos are the oxymoronic tropes of unsettled habitation that proliferate in Ismat Chughtai's remarkable 1942 novel, *The Crooked Line*. The distinction between this kind of co-existence of 'irony and commitment' in relation to the national project (to use Terry Eagleton's phrase) and Said's privileging of perpetual exile as the actual or metaphorical condition of the engaged intellectual is important (Eagleton 1990: 23). For even as they offered persistent and often excoriating critiques of the national project as it unfolded, a Chughtai or a Manto remained obstinately insistent on their locatedness – of inhabiting, however restlessly, the imaginative and geographical terrain of nation. To repudiate or transcend the nation as it came into being out of the anti-colonial struggles was simply not an option; what was possible and necessary, however, was to lay claim to it even as it was being spoken for by sectarian economic and cultural interests. This 'laying claim to' dovetails with Said's assertion that

national languages are themselves not merely out there, but must be appropriated for use . . . This does not mean opposition for opposition's sake. But it does mean asking questions, making distinctions, restoring to memory all those things that tend to be overlooked or walked past in the rush to collective judgment and action. With regard to the consensus on group or national identity it is the intellectual's task to show how the group is not a natural or god-given entity but is a constructed, manufactured, even in some cases invented object, with a history of struggle and conquest behind it, that it is sometimes important to represent.

(Said 1994: 33)

Unlike Rabindranath Tagore whom Said praises for not hesitating to criticise nationalism even as he remained a nationalist, the writers discussed in this book remained profoundly engaged with the everyday turmoil of living in society. Dislocation and exile had to be reckoned with, most poignantly by Manto in the wake of Partition, but it was not an option to be voluntarily embraced or celebrated. The nation and the forces occupying its centre are not to be conceded the power to exile or marginalise – even as the processes that lead to marginalisation must be powerfully represented.

The study of writers such as Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas enables us, then, to interrogate and rethink influential templates for the 'postcolonial intellectual'. In Bhabha's delineation, the intellectual is not only necessarily an 'exile' but is also the 'hybrid location of cultural value – the transnational as translational' (Bhabha 1992:

47–8). Despite the aspiration to generalisability, the migrant who emerges in Bhabha's account is stubbornly specific to a particular historical conjuncture: 'Gatherings of exiles and *émigrés* and refugees; gathering on the edge of "foreign" cultures, gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language, gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines . . .' (Bhabha 1994: 139). The 'indentured' and the 'interned', less glamorous figures, but the invocation of whose (aestheticised) presence is necessitated by liberal good conscience, make a quick appearance in the following sentence: 'Also the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned' (ibid. 139, my emphasis). In Bhabha's binary and, despite itself, surprisingly literalist discourse, it is only those outside the inside of nation who 'will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of modern nation' (ibid. 164). Made unimaginable by this account that paradoxically relies on national borders to enable any interrogation of the nation is the possibility of complicated and resistant *habitations* of the space of nation. Within Bhabha's framework, irony cannot co-exist with commitment, or location with dislocation; the radical possibility (articulated most famously by Theodor Adorno) of not always being at home at home is elided altogether so that the nation emerges as a curiously monolithic object that can only be disrupted by the 'outsider'.⁴ The historical and existential actuality of the 'internal' migrations, dislocations, indenture, exiles and wanderings – as well as forced immobility – that always already underwrite national communities is written out of this easy valorisation of the figure of the transnational migrant.

In contrast, the exigencies of the historical conjuncture of the transitional period (discussed in Chapter 1), in combination with their own subject positions, impelled many writers affiliated to the PWA to come up with cultural interventions that attempted to articulate anti-colonial nationalism with internationalism; pluralism of religious or cultural identity with shared values; and a commitment to modernity with a sharply vigilant critique of its exclusions and excesses. In the case of the four writers studied here in some detail, this complexity was connected, in part, to their own backgrounds as North Indian Muslims from Urdu-speaking middle- and upper-class families. They were English-educated, fluently bilingual colonial subjects strongly committed to anti-colonialism; members of relatively elite social groupings invested in a variety of Marxist and socialist projects; *littérateurs* who were devoted to the literary craft while urgently concerned with social and political transformation; and, last but not least, Muslims who were engaged in a critique of Islamist orthodoxy even as Hindu majoritarianism threatened to exclude Muslim communities from the life of the Indian nation. Even as all these writers attempted to take on projects of representation (in both the aesthetic and the political senses of the term), they did so in a diversity of

ways: there was no simple ‘condition’ or textual form that would encapsulate what it meant to emerge as a ‘postcolonial’ intellectual or writer.

A few words on my own cautious use of the term ‘postcolonial’ is warranted here. I share Aijaz Ahmad’s disquiet with the reduction of a diverse historical and geopolitical field comprising a range of texts and authors to a singular category that reinforces a fixation on the experience of colonialism.⁵ In as much as the suffix ‘ism’ generally implies a discernible, even if heterogeneous, body of ideas and practices, it is not clear that the term ‘postcolonialism’ makes sense in quite the same way as, say, ‘feminism’, ‘Buddhism’ or even ‘Modernism’. However, like others who share some of Ahmad’s reservations, I use the term ‘postcolonial’ as a convention, as shorthand to signal reading and writing protocols that are concerned – though not exclusively so – with imperialism, its aftermath and its ongoing depredations. As Crystal Bartolovich argues, ‘if it is indispensable to retrieve Marxism from its contemporary disavowal (not least in postcolonial studies), it is arguably also important not to commit oneself to an undifferentiating (Marxist) disavowal of postcolonial studies’ (Bartolovich 2002: 10). Neither Marxist/materialist criticism nor postcolonial studies are constitutively incapable of drawing on insights and knowledge produced by the other. If Marxism serves as a constant reminder that questions of labour, systemic inequality and capitalism must remain fundamental to postcolonial studies, the latter enjoins attention to ethnocentrism, race, patriarchy and difference in unanswerable terms. What is necessitated is an intersectional mode of analysis that allows for the specificity of texts and cultural phenomena to emerge without getting mired in singularity. The body of texts studied in this book does offer an exemplary instance of work that remains irreducibly resistant to the term ‘postcolonial’ even as the fact of colonialism and its aftermath inflects their concerns. Yet, inasmuch as the terrain of the postcolonial nation state was at stake (along with other forms of collectivity and sociality, as Ahmad has pointed out), the condition of postcoloniality is a formal and thematic concern (Ahmad 1992: 118).

What is the role of the writer and intellectual as a colonial regime officially lowers its flag and the independent nation state comes into being? How will social transformation take place as decolonisation gets under way? How is consciousness radicalised? These are the related questions that haunt the work of a Rashid Jahan, an Abbas, a Manto and a Chughtai in different ways and that resonate with Frantz Fanon’s famous considerations on ‘the pitfalls of national consciousness’ (Fanon 1963). Those who have the intellectual resources ‘snatched when going through colonial universities’, Fanon tells his fellow African intellectuals, must not disappear complacently ‘into the shocking ways – shocking because anti-national – of a traditional bourgeoisie’ (ibid. 180). The nation, absolutely vital to the struggle against colonialism, will swiftly degenerate into another oppressive entity without ‘an authentic movement of nationalisation’, which entails redistribution of wealth, new social relations and ‘the concrete betterment’ of the people’s

existence (ibid. 157; 187). This is no paternalistic project of representation, however; Fanon is abundantly clear that the intellectual must participate in a dialectical process, not one of 'haranguing' the people through 'political teaching' (ibid. 197). It is, rather, a process of creating the conditions for agency, of facilitating an awareness that 'the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people' (ibid. 197). Teaching without leading and educating without didacticism is obviously a fraught process, a tall order rife with potential contradictions. The challenges and pitfalls of such a project become apparent in Rashid Jahan's narratives of middle-class feminist consciousness complicated by cross-class encounters; in Ismat Chughtai's protagonist's vacillations between empathy with and anger towards her fellow citizens; in Manto's stories of would-be reformers who are stymied by the objects of their sympathy; and K. A. Abbas' unsettled, eccentric vagrant heroes who are transformed into emblematic citizen subjects. As with Fanon's reflections on the role of the bourgeoisie, the dynamics of modernity are integral to the work of Indian leftists writing in the crucible of transition to nationhood. Like the nation, modernity is a historical actuality that must be engaged with, and the writer's task is to 'think *with* modernity *against* modernity' (Lazarus 1999: 6).

This is not a task that is simply mimetic or derivative. In Fanon's case, underlying what seems to be an oddly celebratory attitude towards the European bourgeoisie is, in fact, a critique of mimicry and derivativeness. The postcolonial national bourgeoisie is problematic precisely to the extent that it blindly identifies with and emulates its Western counterpart, 'has totally assimilated colonialist thought' and fails to display inventiveness, fearlessness and 'the will to succeed of youth' (Fanon 1963: 153). It becomes an intermediary rather than an agent, so that 'its mission has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism' (ibid. 152). In contrast, the task of the radical intellectual is to facilitate a resistance to the derivative, to spark a keen awareness of new possibilities and to participate in total transformation: 'To educate the masses politically is to make the totality of the nation a reality to each citizen' (ibid. 200). This project is, above all, a radically humanist one of (drawing on Aime Césaire) 'inventing souls' and *making* human beings rather than taking human nature as unchanging essence (ibid. 197). A similar sense of human possibility underwrites the work of the writers studied here. In Abbas' 'Vagrant' films, for instance, 'insaaniyat' ('humanity' or 'humanism') emerges as both the bedrock and utopian horizon of aspirations to social transformation in the context of national modernity. Even when this modernity becomes something of an imaginative blind spot for these writers, the idea of the human serves reflexively to open up possibilities beyond the temporal and historical limits of modernity. Insofar as it ascribes humanism as such to a single cultural formation and historical contexts ('the Enlightenment'), the distrust that postmodern varieties of postcolonial theory evince

towards it suggests a singular lack of imagination.⁶ As Rashid's Jahan's story 'Will the Accused Please Stand' suggests, the problem is not humanism or universal values in themselves but a selective application of them, which sees some as truly human and others as less so.

As the readings that follow show, even the best writers to emerge in the wake of the PWA produced an uneven body of work. This is work that must be read as part of a broader cultural project, a range of experiments in literary radicalism born of the conviction that writers needed to participate in the project of constructing and radicalising postcolonial national communities. At the same time, this study should go some way towards showing that writers on the Indian left during the transitional period were engaged with questions of self, self-consciousness, affect and interiority in ways that undermine prevalent stereotypes. Whatever their individual failings as writers might have been, there is little about Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto and K. A. Abbas that fits the image of bloodless bureaucratic party functionaries churning out Zhdanovist tomes. Questioning 'individualism' rather than the idea of the 'individual', as Mulk Raj Anand put it, these writers explored the production of selves in their literary and cinematic fiction.

The PWA itself was, of course, a forum with a nationwide reach, with each linguistic region establishing its own chapters and groupings. At the same time, many founder members and some of the most influential affiliates of the movement were secular Muslim writers from North India whose literary credentials had been or were to be established in Hindustani and Urdu.⁷ The stringent critique they offered of their own communities was to provide an inspirational framework for the critical interrogation of the ground of nation undertaken by many writers associated with the PWA. *Literary Radicalism in India* focuses on four of these figures, all of whose works are significant and shaping contributions to cultural debates on nation, gender and the question of social transformation. Two of them – Rashid Jahan and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas – were founder members of the PWA, while Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto were both influential associates and provocative dissenters. Chughtai and her mentor, Rashid Jahan, were certainly the most well-known feminists to emerge from the movement; indeed, they are among India's most well-known twentieth-century feminist authors. The trajectory of literary radicalism in India from Rashid Jahan's early contributions to *Angarey* to Abbas' cinematic *Awara* trilogy tells us something about the ways in which the subject of radicalism, both literary and social, evolved in response to historical exigencies. 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 a par with that of the writers discussed here – even though he remains one of the most interesting critics and essayists of the time.

The chapters that follow offer an overview of the issues that occupied these writers, and the PWA more generally, in conjunction with detailed readings of key texts. Chapter 1, 'The critical spirit: decolonisation and the Progressive Writers Association', argues that the transition from colony to nations

constituted a ‘conjunctural terrain’ that engendered powerful political and cultural possibilities. This chapter also discusses the controversial anthology of short stories, *Angarey* [Live Coals] that came out in 1932 and was banned shortly thereafter. By identifying a self-reflexive ‘us’ and ‘our’ as the subjects of critique, *Angarey* pioneered one of the key features of the literary radicalism that was to follow. Additionally, I argue that the controversy surrounding the publication of *Angarey* and the subsequent ban on it is instructive with regard to the role of gender in the construction of radical cultural discourses in transitional India. The interest shown by later writers such as Manto in masculinity and the figure of the male reformer is presaged by stories such as ‘Dulari’ and ‘Gallantry’ in this collection. In Chapter 2, ‘Gender, modernity and the politics of space: Rashid Jahan, “Angareywali”’, I show how this socialist doctor and writer’s fiction moves from a relatively simplistic naturalist depiction of the female body to a more nuanced understanding of female bodies and subjectivities in dynamic engagement with colonial, modern and national institutions. The work of this pioneering feminist doctor enables us to think through a contentious and urgent question for contemporary feminism: how can anti-colonial feminists make use of and generate emancipatory thinking, including scientific enquiry, without legitimising patriarchal and colonial authority?

Chapter 3, ‘Habitations of womanhood’, examines the ways in which the renowned feminist writer Ismat Chughtai extends the work of her mentor, Rashid Jahan, by developing a literary engagement with the female body that reconfigures the distinctions between realist and experimental, and critical and imaginative. Chughtai’s often whimsical work tries to think through the potential of the imaginative, the ironic and the performative in the practice of radical politics. This chapter focuses on her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Crooked Line*, the story of a young Muslim woman’s coming to an understanding of self and society in the context of changing institutional and familial structures. Chughtai is concerned with the development of a gendered modern *habitus*: the ways in which the subject’s body, mind and emotions *shape and are shaped* by intersecting social fields. The workings of the *habitus* suggest how the relationship between the premodern and the modern, and the colonial and the postcolonial, were dynamic rather than ruptural. Chapter 4, ‘Dangerous bodies: masculinity, morality and social transformation in Manto’, engages the work of Saadat Hasan Manto who, like the *Angarey* collective and Ismat Chughtai before him, was obliged to defend his works from obscenity charges. Reading several of his famous short stories as well as accounts of the various legal trials they were subject to, I examine how the politics of bodies and sexuality plays out in his writing, which also became the focus of dissent among radical *littérateurs* over what constituted Progressive writing. Hailed by Salman Rushdie as ‘the only Indian writer in translation whom I would place on a par with the Indo-Anglian’, Manto is described by the former as a ‘writer of low-life fictions whom conservative critics sometimes scorn for his choice of characters and milieus’ (Rushdie

1997: 52). In fact, the controversies generated by his stories had nothing or little to do with his choice of characters and milieus. Instead, I argue, many of Manto's post-Partition stories put pressure on radical discourse (including his own previous work) by forcing an unusual engagement with *male* bodies and sexualities. Reading (in)famous stories such as 'Smoke' and 'Cold Meat' along with some less controversial ones, I show how, like Rashid Jahan and his great 'friend and enemy', Ismat Chughtai, Manto too faced the challenge of developing an aesthetic and a politics that could articulate the contradictions of the time. Where Ismat Chughtai developed to its fullest an engagement with a gendered modern habitus for a certain class of Muslim women in the transitional context, Manto was to explore the experience of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' masculinity, most powerfully in the context of the violence that marked nation constitution.

Chapter 5, 'Straight talk or spicy masala? Citizenship, humanism and affect in the cinematic work of K. A. Abbas', looks at how the transformative possibilities of the transitional period and the Progressives' response to them played out in the increasingly influential Hindi film industry, which offered many of these writers, including Chughtai and Manto, their livelihoods. A prominent member of the PWA as well as the IPTA, K. A. Abbas wrote several novels in English and Hindi during the course of a flourishing journalistic career, but his greatest contributions were the several films he scripted or directed, many of them landmark successes in the long history of Indian cinema. His collaboration with superstar and director Raj Kapoor is as legendary as is the immense popularity of their movies in the Soviet Union. This chapter examines Abbas' translations of Progressive ideologies, aesthetics and narratives of social transformation into the idiom of the cinematic popular, and the role of Abbas' work in constructing a notion of the 'popular' itself.

The book concludes with a reflection on the legacy of Progressive writing and its relevance for postcolonial Indian literature. I suggest that this literature merits as much consideration in terms of the projects it undertook as with regard to its actual achievements (and failings). The historical imperatives out of which the radicalism of the transitional period emerged enable us to think about narratives of progress and transformation in our time. It is important to stress that my project in this book is a modest one. Progressive writing produced a vast and heterogeneous body of literature whose afterlife is as interesting as the moment that inspired it. My attempt has been to open up a few windows for future investigations as the subcontinent continues to struggle with the legacy of the 'stained dawn' that brought into being the two neighbouring nation states that remain locked in a deadly intimacy.

1 The critical spirit

Decolonisation and the Progressive Writers Association

On August 14, 1947, a few hours before India attained formal independence from British rule at midnight, Jawaharlal Nehru addressed the constituent assembly of India in a now famous speech:

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

(Nehru 1965: 336)

To present-day readers, after many such midnight ceremonies, inaugural trysts and speeches across decolonising regions of Asia and Africa, the metaphors and gestures of Nehru's speech are familiar ones: an awakening from slumber, the dawn of a new era, the assertive, unitary *vox populi* and the rebirth of a nation. Several such scenes in which the motif of national emergence on to the world stage would recur were also played across Africa from 1957 onwards: 'With the passing of the world-historical era of colonialism a new world-historical era would dawn. In this new era, the slumbering giant of Africa would awaken and leave the imprint of its decisive action upon the world' (Lazarus 1990: 2–3). As Neil Lazarus has pointed out, these ceremonies were all imbued with a 'special aura of timelessness' testifying to 'the headiness of initial expectations of independence' (ibid. 3).

Some ten years before Nehru gave his fabled speech, a group of young Indian writers issued a manifesto that also spoke of transition:

Radical changes are taking place in Indian society. ... We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our

existence to-day [sic] – the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness, and political subjection. All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and un-reason we reject as re-actionary [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.

(Anand 1979: 20–1)

The differences between the two calls to national action are marked even as both draw on an epochal sense of transition and on similar vocabularies of transformation. If Nehru is cautious about the extent to which India's 'pledge' can be redeemed as her ineluctable destiny unfolds, his words nevertheless speak to an inevitable renaissance, a national self-actualisation that is now unstoppable. The 1936 manifesto drafted by Mulk Raj Anand and others to commemorate the inauguration of the All-India Progressive Writers Association (PWA) is also optimistic in its epochal vision but emphatic about the self-critique and work that postcolonial *reconstruction* (as opposed to *rebirth*) will take. Despite its own schematic and teleological undertones, this document conveys a sense of the challenges involved in such a project.¹ The new, if it is to be brought into being, requires the development of a critical awareness of all that needs to be changed or reworked and of the labours that such transformations will require. The new is not the opposite of the old; instead, the latter is to be examined 'in the light of reason' and reworked into the future. Where Nehru's speech is replete with references to a singular national history to which national self-'discovery' is integral, the PWA manifesto speaks of a dynamic process of recognising problems and working through them. The structure of the former is teleological; the latter is driven by utopian impulse but not a sense of manifest destiny.

The distinction between these two inaugural gestures is not unlike one that Lazarus, drawing on Anouar Abdel-Malek, maps between 'nationalists' and 'nationalitarians' in anti-colonial struggles in Africa. Nationalitarians (Frantz Fanon is one example) criticise 'nationalists for conflating independence with freedom' and for not undertaking the radical social and economic restructuring that would mean real freedom (Lazarus 1990: 11). Nationalitarians, such as the founders of the PWA, do see the moment of independence as one with revolutionary potential; the postcolonial era must bring with it 'a wholesale reconstruction of society' (ibid. 5). If Nehru's words have come to represent a certain kind of nationalism emblematic of the newborn Indian state itself, for the writers who came together to found the PWA, the nascent nation state in 1936 was 'a terrain of struggle' (Ahmad 1993: 48). Rather than take the 'long-suppressed soul' of the nation for granted, a fundamental and urgent question here is how to democratically *build* an all-India character. If for Nehru, despite cautionary disclaimers, 'the past is over and it is the future that beckons us now', the PWA manifesto eyes the future with a radical sense of the present and its challenges. Certainly, both

sides share the urgent sense that the day must be seized in the interests of bringing utopian visions to fruition.

For Nehru, this vision is troped as a quest, the discovery of an idyll that is always already part of India's historical being. Change has already occurred ('we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow') and what follows in its wake are the labours of ensuring its fruits: 'The future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving . . . the ending of poverty, and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity' (Nehru 1965: 336). The PWA manifesto, in contrast, interprets the moment as one that demands active intervention in the interests of broadening the meanings and scope of 'freedom'. Even as it highlights oppression, the manifesto is a call to agency. The task of the radical writer is not the benevolent one of 'wiping tears from eyes', but one of active self-transformation (Nehru 1965: 336). Where Nehru uses the relatively benign phrase with a missing agent of action – 'inequality of opportunity' – to indicate the challenges at hand, the manifesto speaks more forcefully of 'political subjection' as a problem. In the final instance, its polemical target is not all that 'we've endured' but all that enables 'us' to be passive, reactionary and inactive.

Without overemphasising the distinctions between these Progressive writers and mainstream nationalists (for there were also significant overlaps between the two groups), it is clear that the motley crowd who came to constitute the PWA were concerned with a diversity of issues beyond nationalism that they saw as integral to the transitional period of decolonisation. Though deeply invested in anti-colonial activity, they spoke of an 'institutional change' that was to take place at several different levels. The writer's primary task in this context of the 'radical changes' already under way was to counter backlash, or 'reactionary and revivalist tendencies on questions like family, religion, sex, war and society' (Anand 1979: 20). The 'struggle' itself was framed not as a dyadic one of coloniser against colonised, but as a war to be waged against a range of social and political forces. Much of the output in this newly radicalised literary climate mandated that 'a critique of others (anti-colonialism) be conducted in the perspective of an even more comprehensive, multifaceted critique of ourselves: our class structures, our familial ideologies, our management of our bodies and sexualities, our idealisms, our silences' (Ahmad 1992: 118). In contrast to the axioms underlying Nehru's discourse of freedom at midnight, the initial work of many writers associated with the PWA does militate against any kind of 'sustained, powerful myth of a primal innocence' when it comes to the colonial encounter (ibid. 118).

The formation of the All-India Progressive Writers Association in 1936 points to a crystallisation of radicalising trends begun in the years before.² Many critics and writers, including founder members of the PWA, trace the literary radicalism of this period back to the publication in 1932 of a controversial anthology of short stories, *Angarey* [Live Coals]. This anthology contained some ten short stories contributed by four authors who would then go on to be involved with the PWA: Sajjad Zaheer, who edited it, Ahmed Ali,

Mahmuduzzafar and Rashid Jahan, the lone woman in this group. Both its many detractors and its enthusiastic supporters saw *Angarey* as the result of cultural and intellectual contact with Europe: 'It would be hard to say', writes critic and translator, Shakeel Siddiqui, 'whether the vision for *Angarey* or an anthology like *Angarey* was conceived in Lucknow or London' (Siddiqui 1990: 12). Siddiqui observes that both Zaheer and Ahmad Ali had been studying in England at the time; both were drawn to the radical and avant-garde literary movements that were gaining momentum in the Europe of the 1930s.³ All four contributors were, however, members of the upper strata of the Muslim community in Lucknow. The publication of the stories, all of which thematise the morals and mores of this community, drew upon the authors the charge that they were 'intoxicated' by English education and brainwashed into attacking Islam and its tenets. Some religious leaders denounced the collection and even an official 'anti-*Angarey*' campaign was inaugurated; Ahmed Ali writes that he and his fellow authors 'were lampooned and satirised, censured editorially and in pamphlets and, were even threatened with death' (Ali 1974: 35). This campaign was ultimately successful in getting the British government to ban the collection and confiscate remaining copies almost six months after its publication.

The question of location is an important one with regard to this collection and the radical literary production that followed in the next two decades. Given the status of north Indian Muslims as a minority community and the overdetermined nature of any emancipatory project in colonial polities – where it inevitably overlaps with civilising missions – the charges against the collection bear some reflection. What are the valences of self-criticism within minority communities in such a context? The answer that the authors gave through Mahmuduzzafar's letter to the editor in *The Leader*, dated 5 April, 1933, was simple:

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.

(Alvi 1995: 102)

This idea that a self-critical literature or, more precisely, writing that critically identified an 'us' and an 'our' in the interests of reconstruction needed to be developed was one of the defining features of this emergent radical tradition. If the *Angarey* writers had chosen their natal religious community and class as the target of critique, in the radical literature that was to follow, such acts of identification and self-criticism would take place along other axes, including gender and caste. Critical identification, a radical reappropriation of the communal 'we' and 'us', was a particularly difficult and yet especially necessary task in contexts where homogenised 'selves' defined

themselves against equally homogeneous ‘others’ – coloniser and colonised, Hindus and Muslims, minority and majority. *Angarey* was to inspire a body of literature that, by interrogating the ‘we’ of both communal and national collective identities, attempted to break away from dyadic models of conflict and oppression. As Aijaz Ahmad has suggested, this literature – especially in the bloody wake of Partition – did not ‘construct fixed boundaries between the criminalities of the colonialist and the brutalities of all those indigenous people who have had power in our own society . . . No quarter was given to the colonialist; but there was none for ourselves either’ (Ahmad 1992: 118).

Some four years after the publication of the *Angarey* collection, the All-India Progressive Writers Association was formally inaugurated in April, 1936 at a large conference in Lucknow. The primary goal was to consolidate the gains of the last few years – to open up institutional spaces where diverse issues pertinent to regenerating nation and national culture could be discussed and to create support networks for writers concerned with social and cultural change. While it is certainly true that the PWA had links to the Communist Party of India (CPI) (through influential founder members such as Zaheer), it is incorrect to reduce the organisation’s mandate, as Aijaz Ahmad does, to that of a cultural front *for* or *of* the CPI. Many leading figures at that first conference, even those deeply sympathetic to communism, were not affiliated to the party and certainly did not see the organisation as a front for the party. In fact, founder members such as Mulk Raj Anand often went to great lengths to point out the respect for political heterogeneity that the organisation would maintain.

[T]he title of ‘Progressive Writers’ Association’ has led to some confusion by suggesting some kind of regimentation of writers or at least by giving the appearance of a clique . . . actually we were a collection of readers and writers groping together, in spite of our different individualities, towards the realisation of certain facts.

(Anand 1979: 2)

Anand also pointed out that, unfortunately, ‘the naiveté of our catch penny formalists’ and ‘vulgar sociologists’ allowed reactionary forces to dismiss Progressive and Marxian thought; he urged Progressive writers to ‘be strongly on our guard against cheap simplifications and sensationalism’ (ibid. 8–9). Meanwhile, writers such as Chughtai and Manto had deeply contentious relationships with the party and often distanced themselves from it, even as they retained a commitment to radical politics. In a famous essay entitled ‘Progressives Don’t Think’, Manto wrote bitterly about the dismissive treatment he had received from more orthodox socialist and communist writers. Ismat Chughtai – who unhesitatingly described lifelong party member, Rashid Jahan, as her mentor – was also emphatic about her own independence: ‘no association could dictate to me what I could or could not write’ (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 128).

In ascribing the development of what he terms ‘critical realism’ primarily to the party’s influence, Ahmad weakens his own salutary insights about the importance of leftist and Progressive writing during this period in two ways. His claim that ‘critical realism’ became a ‘fundamental form of narrativity’ in response to the CPI’s ‘United Front’ strategy seems suspiciously close to an endorsement of party-line aesthetics (Ahmad 1992: 118). This delineation also militates against the attempts of many in the PWA not to be regimented in this way, either aesthetically or ideologically. Although Ahmad’s claim honours the role of organised communism and the CPI in forging cultural resistances and alliances (a necessary gesture in a contemporary critical climate that is marked by a sweeping and undifferentiated hostility towards communism), so schematic a causal linkage fails to provide us with a historicised account of why such a diversity of writers and intellectuals were prompted to come together at this particular historical conjuncture. Michael Denning has pointed to a similar blindness in readings of Popular Front public culture in the USA; he argues that the politics of anti-fascist solidarity with Soviet socialism has erroneously ‘led many historians to see the Popular Front, not as a social movement, but simply as a strategy of the Communist Party, a political line dictated by the Moscow-controlled Communist International’ (Denning 1997: 11). While the PWA and its more mass-based sister organisation, the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA, established in 1942), were not social movements in the strict sense of the term, they certainly had broader roots and a more heterogeneous membership in their heyday than a singular emphasis on the CPI’s role would indicate. As David Roediger has noted, again in the context of the Popular Front in the USA, a cultural moment with striking affinities to the moment of the PWA and IPTA: ‘A fixation on the Party . . . has left enormous gaps in our knowledge of the radical past’ (cited in Denning 1997: 5). The task of the radical critic and historian is to reconstruct this past without undermining either the role of organised party politics or the enormous efforts of those who were not affiliated to the party or who worked in a kind of contentious solidarity with it.⁴

‘Radical changes are taking place’: the historical conjuncture of transition

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to reconstruct in full the historical conjuncture that gave rise to the cultural radicalism of the PWA and IPTA, I will try to show here how it was that this conjuncture came to be seen as a transitional one that needed to be seized in the interests of social transformation. The ‘terrain of the conjunctural’, as Gramsci defines it, is one where incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves (reached maturity), and that, despite this, the political forces that are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them (Gramsci 1971: 178).

This is 'the terrain [upon which] the forces of opposition organize' (ibid. 178). In the context of India's transition from colony to nations, the Gramscian dyad of 'existing' versus 'oppositional' forces was marked by a certain fluidity of position. If, for instance, Gandhian nationalism functioned as an oppositional force in relation to the colonial government, it is also true that the same force could and did take a reactionary role with regard to, for instance, peasant militancy. Despite this fluidity – or perhaps as a consequence of it – the decades just prior to formal independence were marked by a proliferation of oppositional forces and social movements. Additionally, in 1935, the India Act gave a certain limited autonomy to provincial governments run by Indians and increased the electoral franchise from 6.5 to 30 million. The new constitutional structure, historian Sumit Sarkar has suggested, provided a frame around which a major confrontation between left and right within the national movement could play itself out (Sarkar 1983: 336). The India Act consolidated the terrain of 'nation' within which various struggles would now be enacted.

In his influential work on the discursive contours of Indian nationalism, Partha Chatterjee has argued that the Gramscian concept of 'passive revolution' best describes the general form of the transition from colonial to post-colonial states in the twentieth century' (Chatterjee 1986: 50). Because of its inherently contradictory nature – drawing on a modular Western form while attempting to assert a unique, oppositional cultural essence – non-Western nationalism adopts passive revolution as 'the historical path by which a "national" development of capital can occur without resolving or surmounting those contradictions' (Chatterjee 1986: 43).⁵ Accordingly, dominant nationalism (in this instance, Gandhism) attempts a 'molecular transformation' of the state, neutralising opponents, converting sections of the former ruling classes into allies in a partially reorganised system of government, undertaking economic reforms on a limited scale so as to appropriate the support of the popular masses but keeping them out of any form of direct participation in the processes of governance (ibid. 45).

Unlike a more frontal attack on the state, this process of manoeuvring in a 'war of position' prevents contradictions from coming to a head.⁶ Although the general arc of his argument seems convincing, Chatterjee's analysis of the trajectory of nationalism and the transition to postcolonial statehood in India fails to give sufficient importance to the complexities of each historical conjuncture ('moment') that he analyses. Attempting to delineate a seamless trajectory from the moment of 'departure' to the moments of 'manoeuvre' and 'arrival' in Indian nationalism, Chatterjee alludes to, but does not sufficiently elaborate on, the contestatory nature of the struggle for nationhood. For while the story of the establishment of the nation state is certainly one of manoeuvre, co-optation and eventual domination by an alliance of the rural and urban bourgeoisie, it is also the history of opposition, counter-manoeuvres, appropriation from below and alternative 'imaginings' of community. If it is true that 'the unique achievement of Gandhism' was to

open up the possibility for 'the political appropriation of the subaltern classes by a bourgeoisie aspiring for hegemony in the new nation state', it is also the case that the subaltern classes often undertook appropriations of their own (Chatterjee 1986: 100). In his brilliant case study of the ways in which Gandhi 'registered in peasant consciousness', for instance, Shahid Amin has shown how peasants often contravened orders from above to take militant action in their own interests, but in the name of the Mahatma (Amin 1988: 289). 'While such action sought to justify itself by reference to the Mahatma, the Gandhi of its rustic protagonists was not as he really was, but as they thought him up. Though deriving legitimacy from the supposed orders of Gandhi, peasant actions in such cases were framed in terms of what was popularly regarded to be just, fair and possible' (ibid. 305).

The conjunctural terrain of Indian nation formation in the decades just prior to independence in 1947 is marked by the gathering of various forces of opposition. Their activities ranged from trade union activism to peasant agitation, and from the secularisation of state institutions to the proliferation of diverse women's organisations. Though inflected by the struggle between British imperialism and Indian nationalism, the activities undertaken by these various forces suggest that a multiplicity of projects were to be undertaken as the transition from colony to nation took place. Gramsci's contention that oppositional forces on the terrain of the conjunctural 'seek to demonstrate that the necessary and sufficient conditions already exist to make possible, and hence imperative, the accomplishment of certain historical tasks' is borne out at this historical conjuncture (Gramsci 1971: 178). Even as the tide of Indian accumulation swelled and the Indian bourgeoisie were on their way to becoming captains of industry, labour activism was on the rise after a long quiescence. Sumit Sarkar points out that, in 1934, the number of strikes began rising as 'British and Indian cotton mill-owners alike tried to pass through the burden of Depression on to the workers through retrenchment, rationalization and wage cuts' (Sarkar 1983: 335). As pressures applied by big business resulted in the formation of a nationalist right wing in the Congress party and Gandhism manoeuvred itself into a position of ideological dominance, the Indian left was also consolidating itself. With the disappointing Gandhian retrenchment of civil disobedience, the world crisis of overproduction, which stimulated the growth of fascism, and an as yet untarnished Soviet experiment with socialism, Sarkar suggests, many within the nationalist movement were drawn to communism, socialism and Marxian thought (ibid. 331). Importantly, this left itself was a diversified one, ranging from radical nationalists to Marxian scientific socialists and communists.

In the face of superficial and minimal agrarian reforms, the period witnessed the growth of agrarian radicalism in the form of the emerging Kisan Sabha movement, which made radical and un-Gandhian demands such as the abolition of landlordism (zamindari). Sarkar points out that the umbrella left organisation, the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), was instrumental in 'stimulating thinking . . . on questions like radical agrarian reform, problems

of industrial labour, and non-Gandhian methods of mass mobilization and struggle' (ibid. 333). Along with labour activism, peasant militancy rose in the years 1933–4. Although the Communist Party was officially banned in 1934, the paradoxical result was a strengthening of the left through a United Front strategy, 'with communists progressively developing contacts with Left-nationalist elements by work within the CSP and the Congress' (Sarkar 1983: 335).⁷ While these elements pressed for more radical changes in property laws, land ownership and labour regulations, the Congress itself officially maintained a Gandhian policy of 'helplessness' and 'non-interference', choosing simply to express the hope that princes, landlords and capitalists could act as 'trustees' for property and wealth which theoretically belonged to all (ibid. 341). Eventually, communists led peasant militancy in the case of landless labourers and sharecroppers who were effectively excluded even from the more radical Kisan Sabha. With the Quit India movement launched by Gandhi in 1942, nationalism became an increasingly polysemic concept with a proliferation of the meanings of 'swaraj' or self-rule. One rumour that spread is symptomatic of the radical potential with which independence was invested: 'under a Swaraj government no taxes would be paid and the paddy of the rich would be available to the poor' (Sarkar 1983: 401).

By the 1930s, women (largely from the middle and upper classes) too had entered the political and public sphere in unprecedented numbers; their presence was noticeable not just within nationalist organisations but also in trade unions and educational institutions.⁸ Issues around women's rights and gender relations became linked to ideological diversity within the emergent national public sphere and to women's own increasingly varied political allegiances and activities. As Hajrah Begum's account of her years with the All-India Women's Congress (AIWC) suggests and as scholar Geraldine Forbes has shown more recently, '[by] the mid-1940s, the all-India women's organizations had lost their hegemony'; their claim to speak for all Indian women had been openly undermined (Forbes 1996: 189). Not only was their mandate considered too Hindu and too urban middle class, but even members of their existing constituency had become active in a variety of social and political movements. Many women were questioning Gandhian ideologies of women's nature and place even as they credited him with the entry of women into public life. Some, such as Hajrah Begum, Razia Sajjad Zaheer and Rashid Jahan, joined Marxist, communist and socialist groups, and still others (such as Preetilata Wadedar and Kalpana Datta) become involved with violent revolutionary organisations (Kumar 1993: 74–95; Forbes 1996: 190). Some Muslim women, led by Begum Shah Nawaz, reacted against Hindu dominance in the AIWC by organising the All-India Moslem Women's League (Forbes 1996: 197). Both 'domestic and worldwide events demanded a new idealism and pragmatism from politically active women' (ibid. 191). This involvement in a range of activities 'helped shatter the essentialist construction of the "Indian woman" that helped some women but hindered others in their quest for equality' (ibid. 191).

My point here is that the history of nationalism and nation constitution in colonial India was one of contestation and mutually shaping pressures between different political and social forces. Even as a certain kind of bourgeois nationalism was eventually to triumph in its manoeuvres, the birth of the Indian and Pakistani nation states was a far more contestatory process than accounts such as Chatterjee's would indicate. I am not just making the obvious point that all hegemonies are consolidated through a process of construction and articulation. The argument is, rather, that the historical conjuncture from the early 1930s to the years immediately after independence made possible a range of historical tasks or, at the very least, a *perception* that it would be possible – and necessary – to undertake certain kinds of radical endeavours. It is these tasks – and the project of raising awareness about them – that the cultural front constituted by the PWA and IPTA placed at the centre of their agenda. As Gramsci has suggested, the demonstration that conditions for accomplishing such tasks exist is developed in the immediate 'in a series of ideological, religious, philosophical, political, and juridical polemics, whose concreteness can be estimated by the extent to which they are convincing, and shift the previously existing disposition of social forces' (Gramsci 1971: 178). The PWA/IPTA combine can be seen as polemics that attempted to take seriously the role of culture in shifting these previously existing dispositions.

In his analysis of intellectuals and writers working in Africa in a similar position of contentious solidarity with the national project in their respective countries, Neil Lazarus has suggested that even those who were critical of the conflation of independence and liberation were susceptible to 'a preliminary overestimation of the emancipatory potential of independence' (Lazarus 1990: 23). This is because radical intellectuals, with few exceptions, themselves belonged to the bourgeoisie, the class that had most reason to believe in the good things that independence would bring.

To the extent that they identified with the aspiration of the peasant and working classes as articulated in the rhetoric of anti-colonialism, they may *theoretically* have appreciated that the mere acquisition of political independence was not to be confused with national liberation. But, in practice, they also experienced their class's sensation of being set free.

(ibid. 11, original emphasis)

These intellectuals are 'guilty of an unwarranted conflation . . . of independence with *revolution*' (ibid. 11–12, original emphasis). Lazarus' observations about the classed nature of the nationalitarian position are pertinent to discussions of radical writing in contexts such as India where literacy itself marked a relatively high-class position. Most writers associated with the PWA were from middle-class, upper-class and/or upper-caste backgrounds.⁹ Ralph Russell has rightly observed that many Indian communists and fellow-travellers 'were able to take advantage . . . of the remarkable class solidarity

of the Indian privileged classes to which most of them belonged', although his delineation of their literary activities as the 'gentlemanly practice' of revolutionary beliefs verges on caricature (Russell 1999: 73). Sajjad Zaheer was even to comment, with disarming frankness, that the PWA came into being as a collection of folks who did not know what to do other than write: 'We were incapable of manual labour. We had not learnt any craft and our minds revolted against serving the imperialist government. What other field was left . . . ?' (Zaheer 1979a: 36–7) Both Russell and Lazarus are right to caution against any overestimation of the radical scope of nationalitarian or Progressive endeavours in the context of the transition to independence. It would seem necessary, however, to make a distinction between transformative *projects* undertaken as independence approached and the actual events that took place during the transition and after. Lazarus asks whether 'if the kind of revolutionary consciousness to which Fanon alludes had actually existed in the era of decolonization, [it could] have been so rapidly or so easily unravelled in the first years of independence' (Lazarus 1990: 15). In the case of India, it is possible to argue that there was a range of radical *possibilities* that were thrown up by the very nature of the anti-colonial struggle and the process of decolonisation; what happens after independence does not negate these possibilities even as it may eliminate, co-opt or reshape them.

Culture, community and nation

But why *organise* in the interests of culture? Beyond the *Angarey* phenomenon, the genesis of the PWA can be traced back to two curiously disparate influences outside India as well – the Bloomsbury circle, with whom both Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand had developed a personal acquaintance, and the European group, 'International Writers for the Defense of Culture', whose 1935 Congress in Paris they attended. In his memoirs, *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, which consists of vignettes of meetings with luminaries ranging from the Woolfs, to E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, Clive Bell and Lytton Strachey, Anand writes of being attracted to the stimulating intellectual atmosphere of Bloomsbury (while working part-time as a proof corrector at the Hogarth Press) but feeling 'nervous and on edge about the undeclared ban on political talk' (Anand 1995: ix). Though drawn to the literary brilliance of the European modernists whom he meets and eager to share his work with them, Anand also found himself dismayed by what he saw as a general acceptance, even endorsement, of British imperialism in India; these vignettes are replete with painful and illuminating glimpses of genteel ethnocentrism and racism. He writes of wanting to learn from the writers and critics he meets, but also 'out of my own disillusionment with Europe, to show the concave mirror to Western intellectuals, however eminent they may be' (ibid. 169). Out of these encounters grew a desire to create a stimulating literary circle that would reproduce the excitement of Bloomsbury, but one that would also be political and definitively anti-imperialist in its provenance. There was a

sense that, as subjects of a colonial regime, Indian writers necessarily had a political and activist role to play for they had seen 'the ugly face of Fascism in our country earlier than the writers of the European country' (Anand 1979: 17). For these writers, situated at the intersection of an encroaching fascism and an entrenched colonialism, each of these political ideologies cast light upon the workings of the other and made culture visible as a zone of conflict and subjugation; as such, it was also a zone of intervention. It would not be enough, however, simply to posit an originary national culture in response to fascism and colonialism for, on these native grounds, 'narrow nationalists' and 'revivalists' waged their own war against the people at large (ibid. 18). The most meaningful strategy in this minefield of contradictions and ambiguities would be to create spaces and institutions that would enable writers to 'popularise' culture.

The idea of 'popularising culture' through organising was, of course, one that had gained currency in the France of the Popular Front in the 1930s; influential cultural fronts – including one for African-Americans – were also being formed in the USA in the post-Depression era of the Works Progress Administration.¹⁰ The term 'cultural front' was increasingly used by those on the left to 'connote their insistence on culture as one arm, or front, of a widening campaign for social, political, and racial inequality' (Mullen 1999: 2).¹¹ In France, the Communist Party played a pivotal role in this process, sponsoring the formation of the Association of Revolutionary Artists and Writers (AEAR) in 1932 'with the aim of gathering together, under the vague aegis of the party, all intellectuals opposed to fascism' (Jackson 1988: 119). Like the manifesto that Zaheer and Anand would circulate to Indian writers in 1936, the AEAR's 1933 manifesto against German fascism was signed by a range of well-known non-party writers including the two Andres, Gide and Malraux, Romain Rolland and Louis Aragon, whom Zaheer consulted about the formation of the PWA. In keeping with the shift from valorising proletarian literature to forging broad cultural coalitions, the 1935 Congress of 'The International Writers for the Defense of Culture' laid out relatively pragmatic goals: 'The guarding of our civil liberties, the organization of writers to safeguard their own economic interests and to render help to the writers exiled by fascism' (Anand 1979: 13). A range of European literary luminaries attended this Congress, including E. M. Forster, Julien Benda, Aldous Huxley, Heinrich Mann, Elya Ehrenburg, Isaac Babel, Boris Pasternak, Christina Stead and Michael Gold (Coppola 1974: 14). Mulk Raj Anand writes that there was also a general sense at the 1935 Congress that it was important to gain 'the support of the labouring classes' and to join the United Front against fascism (Anand 1979: 13). This broad conception of a progressive cultural front resonated with the prevalent coalitional thinking among these London-based Indian intellectuals whose political views ranged from 'the radical socialist nationalism of which Nehru was the most representative, to the communism of Sajjad Zahir [sic]' and the Gandhian utopianism to which Anand was attracted (Russell 1999: 70). Indian communists such as

Zaheer had already accepted that the Indian National Congress and Gandhi, in particular, dominated the anti-imperialist struggle and 'that the radicals, the revolutionaries also should, therefore, work through this movement, radicalise it if they liked' (Zaheer 1979a: 43)

And so, as the Indian expatriates 'emerged from the slough of despond of the cafes and garrets of Bloomsbury and formed the nucleus of the London-based Indian Progressive Writer's Association', which met to read and discuss members' work, they confronted the question of their own location (Anand 1979: 1). Although aware of 'the advantages of forming the association in London', they felt that a 'few exiled Indians could do little more than draw up plans among themselves and produce an orphanlike [sic] literature under the influence of European culture' (Zaheer 1979a: 39). At best, they could 'represent Indian literature in the West and . . . interpret for India, the thoughts of Western writers and the social problems which were profoundly influencing Western literature' (ibid. 40). The more urgent task at hand was to reinterpret India for Indians themselves. The past, writes Mulk Raj Anand, has to be rescued 'from the maligning of Imperialist archaeology on the one side and from its misuse by reactionary elements in our society, whether they be the narrow nationalist revivalists, the priestcraft, or orthodoxy' (Anand 1979: 18). As with the Popular Front in France, there was an attempt here not merely to inspire avant-gardism but to reclaim Indian culture *tout court*; the PWA nominated themselves 'to be the inheritors of the best traditions of Indian civilization' (Anand 1979: 21).

For the intellectuals who met in 1935 at the Nanking Restaurant in London to set up what was initially called the Progressive Writers' Group, the question of location was, obviously not one of authenticity, but that of the most effective site for cultural work and intervention. Invested as they were in anti-imperialism, it was the emergent Indian nation that would provide this site. This necessitated physical proximity; exile was not perceived as the most useful vantage point. At this early point, the primary aim does seem to have been to create a climate for discussion and debate: 'We knew, of course, that good literature could not be produced to "order". But we aimed at creating those conditions for our writers that would help them in their work . . . [through] mutual criticism and just appreciation' (Zaheer 1979b: 49). These conditions would be fostered in institutional contexts in the form of cultural institutes, workshops, translation projects, advocacy groups for freedom of expression, seminars, conferences and sponsored publications such as periodicals, books and pamphlets. The idea, eventually put into practice, was to proliferate a number of local PWAs to correspond to various linguistic regions and to make Hindustani a common language written in the Roman script (which did not happen, of course). English came to be the predominant language of business and general critical discussion, while it was in the Urdu- and Hindi-speaking regions that the PWA became enormously influential among writers (Russell 1999: 79).¹² Other PWA goals included bringing literature into close contact with the people; this took place to a certain

limited extent in the form of poetry and story recitals, which included the participation of peasant and worker poets in some regions (ibid. 82). Written texts necessarily had a limited and class-circumscribed readership in a context where illiteracy was high. As Ralph Russell has pointed out, there was, in fact, fairly widespread support for the inauguration of the PWA from across the intelligentsia and literati. The support of literary luminaries such as Munshi Premchand and Rabindranath Tagore added enormously to the nationwide cachet of the organisation. The relatively free and supportive atmosphere in which many PWA associates worked was, however, to change with independence and the emergence of anti-Communism in Nehruvian circles, on the one hand, and the hardening of Communist Party control of the organisation, on the other.

The early manifestoes and essays do indicate some tension between the more programmatically inclined members of the group, such as Zaheer, and those such as Anand who were anxious to retain heterogeneity.¹³ Even Zaheer, however, would concede that it was a '*consciousness*, in many cases vague and undefined' of the need for change that led to the formation of the PWA (Zaheer 1979a: 48, my emphasis). Mahmuduzzafar argued that it was 'futile to search for all-embracing definitions' while Ahmad Ali understood the word 'progressive' not to mean 'revolutionary' but 'the consciousness of what we are, what we were, what we should or can be. It is dynamic in essence' (Ali 1979: 78–9; Mahmuduzzafar 1979: 87). As such, 'Progressive writing' (or 'Progressivism' as some termed it) itself became the subject of productive discussion and debate. In the chapters that follow, I map the ways in which some of the most interesting writers who worked in this radicalised environment evolved their own perspectives on what constituted the 'progressive' – and how they conceptualised the role of the writer in relation to projects of social transformation. As a broad imperative (perhaps because the organisation was always already heterogeneous – filling its ranks with both established writers and newer ones), the 'progressive' emerged not so much prefabricated content as a general critical spirit. Even Zaheer insisted that the definition of 'progressive' would be 'neither narrow nor sectarian' (Zaheer 1979b: 51). Instead, its meaning itself would emerge from discussions and debates that happened within broad parameters such as combating 'literary trends reflecting communalism, racial antagonism, and exploitation of man by man' (ibid. 51). Nevertheless, essay after essay returns to one common 'purpose', i.e. to make literature a revitalising force of 'social regeneration' both at the level of the individual psyche and that of society at large (Russell 1999: 72). In his famous inaugural address at the 1936 Conference, for instance, literary *éminence grise*, Premchand, invoked the need for literature to 'arouse in us a critical spirit' and to be "force-giving" and dynamic' (Premchand 1979: 53). Literature's function would be to awaken a certain moral capacity in its constituency; not through 'fear and cajolery, reward and retribution' like religious morality, but by arousing our 'sense of beauty' (ibid. 53).

Premchand's address invokes the two concepts whose pairing best de-

scribes the 'critical realism' of the PWA that Aijaz Ahmad alludes to without defining. (The term does not, however, appear in the literature itself.)¹⁴ For Premchand, if, on the one hand, literature must engage our 'inherent sense of beauty', on the other, it must 'make us face the grim realities of life in a spirit of determination' (Premchand 1979: 53). Realism, within this framework, 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. Beauty – our sense of the aesthetic and the affective – has to be recuperated from orthodoxy and redefined. As I show in the chapters that follow, the literary perspectives developed by writers as diverse as Rashid Jahan and Saadat Hasan Manto attempt to combine the *cognitive*, or what Roy Bhaskar calls 'explanatory critiques' of existing conditions, and the *affective* – discourses 'of place, body, inheritance, sensuous need' (Bhaskar 1993: 2; Eagleton 1990: 34). In an insightful essay in which he discusses what he sees as the Western left's 'fatal surrender' of aesthetics to the right, Terry Eagleton points to the dilemmas of the left *vis-à-vis* discourses of the particular such as nationalism: 'The political left is then doubly disabled: if it seeks to evolve its own discourse of place, body, inheritance, sensuous need, it will find itself *miming the cultural forms of its opponents*; if it does not do so it will appear bereft of a body, marooned with a purely rationalist politics that has cut loose from the intimate affective depths of the poetic' (Eagleton 1990: 34, my emphasis). In some ways, it is this challenging project of bringing together the rational (systemic analysis of self and society, universal values) and the affective (cultural identity, particularity and desire) in a context in which the nationalist centre and religious communal right had appropriated the latter that marked the attempts – not always successful – of different writers in this radicalised climate to develop a literature that would think through questions of individual and social transformation.¹⁵

Any oppressed group, Eagleton suggests, also needs 'to generate a positive particular culture without which political emancipation is probably impossible. Nobody can live in perpetual deferment of their sense of selfhood, or free themselves from bondage without a strongly affirmative sense of who they are' (Eagleton 1990: 37). It is this recognition that alienation's true triumph 'would be not to know that one was alienated at all' that marks the importance accorded to the anti-colonial national within the Progressive movement: 'They attack the national character of our literature by preaching that all culture is cosmopolitan, that it has no national characteristic and form' (Eagleton 1990: 37; Sharma 1979: 135). This nation, unlike Nehru's, was defined less in terms of its content than as an enabling structure, a space where freedom must be defended so that 'we can discuss, criticise, and remould our varying ideals and develop our national culture' (Anand 1979: 12). This attitude to the national was also marked by an awareness of all that was problematic about nationalism as it was being articulated in the present, combined with a sense of its liberationist and revolutionary potential. Imperialism, capitalism, feudalism, fascism and communalism came to be seen

within this analytic as interconnected phenomena that needed to be part of the same sustained critique.

Gender in the crucible of transition

Where, though, have all the women gone? If one examines the manifestoes, early essays and speeches or minutes of conferences, very little is said either about women or gender relations, apart from the occasional reference to the liberation of women from feudal ideologies. Other than one report by IPTA General Secretary, Anil D'Silva, women writers and intellectuals have no presence in these documents, a fact that is all the more remarkable given their relatively high profile in Progressive literature and the salience of gender as a thematic in this body of work.¹⁶ More disturbingly, several of these critical writings draw on symbolic resources from deeply patriarchal traditions. The revitalised nation, for instance, is imagined in constitutively masculinist ways: Ahmad Ali calls for a 'more virile' national literature, 'pulsating with fresh blood and throbbing with new life' (Ali 1979: 83), and Zaheer casts his utopia in terms of 'a young man's world, full of love' and 'the charm of a well-formed body and eyes which captivate' (1979a: 36).¹⁷ The deployment of a rhetoric of heterosexual masculinity in relation to the radical literature of the time is not unusual. Paula Rabinowitz has shown how Popular Front literature in the US was often figured as a 'virile poetics' in opposition to 'effete' modernism or bourgeois literature (Rabinowitz 1991: 22).¹⁸ Patriarchal ideologies were not restricted to tropes, of course, and invariably structured institutional practice. Sudhi Pradhan's introduction to the compendious three-volume collection of documents relating to the PWA and IPTA, *Marxist Cultural Movement in India*, for instance, discusses Anil D' Silva, the first Secretary General of the IPTA, solely in terms of the 'self-willed spontaneous behaviour of this Ceylonese girl' and her supposed proclivities for having affairs 'with the big guns of the Party' (Pradhan 1979a: xx–xxi).¹⁹ This is all we are told about a woman whom we know was 'one of the spirited ideologues and organizers of the movement in its initial stages'; nothing is included in the collection from her speeches or work (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 79)

The organisational story of the PWA is, to some extent, that of a male-dominated institution that was gradually 'infiltrated' by women such as Rashid Jahan, Hajrah Begum and Anil D'Silva, who then brought their own personalities to bear upon its collective character. In an interview in which she recollects her role in organising the 1936 conference, Hajrah Begum, a Communist Party member, speaks about the role to which she and Rashid Jahan were relegated:

... then both I and Dr Rashid Jahan were asked by Sajjad Zaheer to help organize this conference here in Lucknow. We did all the work which nobody else liked to do, like putting on stamps, writing addresses and

so on and we ran around. . . in fact, so much so that [Premchand] asked Zaheer, 'What is this, Banne [Zaheer's nickname], you are using these two girls.

(Begum 1990: 89–90)

Hajrah's role in the conference was of a piece with her earlier work for the party, which she describes in terms of carrying out instructions from male leaders without always knowing what the larger project was and generally undertaking the odd jobs that male intellectuals such as Zaheer were not wont to do.²⁰ What is compelling about her account, and instructive for feminist history, however, are her descriptions of how she, Rashid Jahan and other women in the movement grew with their experiences and developed as political activists and thinkers. In jail, for instance, they learn how their own subjectivities are structured by middle-class domestic spaces and familial relations. Deprived of familial support or even contact, they must now necessarily engage with new ways of being and relating to others. Finding themselves jailed alongside women workers from tanneries and textile mills, they come to understand how gender is invariably inflected by class. What she perceives as the 'toughness' of these labouring women gives Hajrah a sense of how her own gender identity is classed in specific ways. This sense of intersecting identities then enables her to develop a sophisticated critique of both women's groups and other political organisations. If the mainstream women's organisations were exclusivist in their middle-class focus on the single issue of gender, the Communist Party leadership saw the idea of having a separate women's organisation within the party as 'bourgeois' and harmful for the Party's growth (Begum 1990: 142). Arguing that gender was an issue in its own right, Hajrah and others pressed for the formation of a left women's organisation that would include women from different classes, despite the reluctance of male party leaders to sanction the establishment of a separate organisation. Hajrah astutely notes that, while men in the party feared that a separate organisation would divert the attention of women from other political issues, they themselves made no investment in women's issues: 'men never feel that they are responsible for the women's movement' (ibid. 164).

In a brief glance at the PWA's history in their introduction to the second volume of *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have suggested that class analysis within the PWA found 'little place within the terms of its strict analytic history to acknowledge the histories through which religion, class, caste, gender, and even secularism took shape in India' (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 81). Basing their analysis of an entire movement on a single play by K. A. Abbas, Tharu and Lalita opine that 'socialist ideology' itself cannot engage with broader social questions; gender, for instance, was relegated to 'the woman question', which was seen as 'a social problem that would be resolved with the overthrow of capitalism' (ibid. 81). Issues such as purdah, they claim, are 'reduced to an attitude, a habit, a prejudice, social or personal, that will dissolve when more primary questions are posed and more

radical commitments made' (ibid. 81). Despite its laudatory efforts to force open 'the upper-caste resolutions of nationalism with the question of exploitation', literature associated with the PWA is deemed *constitutively* incapable of anything other than class analysis.

The history of leftist cultural endeavours, both in India and elsewhere, is also the history of exclusions and failures (a comment undoubtedly applicable to any major literary tradition). As I have suggested above, issues of gender are conspicuous by their absence in the documents and manifestoes pertaining to the PWA's history (except as a problematic trope), and women participants in the movement were often subject to crassest sexism. It is, therefore, now something of a feminist critical commonplace to assert that leftist political and literary traditions inevitably subordinate gender to class. This assumption, as Rabinowitz points out, results in the complete elision of certain types of women's writing, such as that inspired by the American Popular Front in the 1930s, from feminist literary histories such as the *Norton Anthology of Women's Literature*: 'If 1930s Marxist-feminism subordinated gender to class, most American feminists failed to register class differences amongst women at all' (Rabinowitz 1991: 6). For contemporary feminist studies, one of the more deleterious results of the assumption that Marxist thought is *constitutively* incapable of engaging gender or sexuality has been a narrowing of what is considered political and feminist. The result is a feminist conclusion that oddly echoes a certain patriarchal division of space: 'Women's literature, like woman's place is viewed as private and extra-historical, providing a particularistic vision in contrast to the universalised stance of masculine discourse' (Rabinowitz 1991: 7). As Rabinowitz suggests, we 'need to understand how women's lives, however private, nevertheless construct political history and how women's writings engage in debates that extend into the so-called public arena' (ibid. 7).

Despite her insights into the feminist elision of other women's voices within radical traditions, however, Rabinowitz ends up establishing some rather dubious dichotomies of her own. Radical fiction by men, she suggests, deals with body, labour and history, whereas radical women writers engage desire and language. Rabinowitz's own feminist critical project with regard to histories of literary radicalism is not to dismiss them as constitutively incapable of engaging gender but to 'write a regendered history of literary radicalism', which will examine the ways in which women's revolutionary fiction 'inscribes desire into history' (ibid. 35; 64). In itself, this is a laudable and necessary project, but in danger of being weakened by the reverse crudity of associating desire, language and sexuality with women, while conceding the terrain of labour, history and class to male writers. While it pays necessary attention to the specificities of women's writing, such a dichotomy is also in danger of reinscribing the very absences that it critiques. A 'regendered' history of Indian literary radicalism in the transitional period should open a window on to not only the ways in which women writers engaged issues of gender, sexuality and domesticity, but also how they dealt with the multifaceted challenges of

being professionals, social activists, writers and intellectuals. Such a history also needs to look at the ways in which male writers dealt with questions of gender, not only in their treatment of such things as ‘the woman question’, but in relation to their own subjectivity as men in a patriarchal context; this is a task I undertake below and in Chapters 4 and 5.

Tharu’s and Lalita’s claims – such as that PWA-inspired work relegated gender issues to attitudes that would be resolved after the overthrow of capitalism – are not only caricatures, verifiably inadequate in relation to the work of several different writers, but also forestall considerations of more important issues in this body of work. In the chapters that follow, I work with some questions that a strong feminist and materialist approach might pose. Was the climate of enquiry and debate that the PWA attempted to foster in fact able to stimulate creative work that engaged with the complexities of human lives and gendered subjectivities, both individual and collective? What gaps and fissures do we see in these attempts to understand subjectivity and identity in intersectional ways? And, not least, how did these men and women engage with their own gendered and classed subjectivities as intellectuals and activists? Even a cursory glance at the prodigious body of PWA-related work in Urdu alone, ranging from the publication of *Angarey* in 1932 to the texts produced over the next two decades by authors such as Rashid Jahan, Rajinder Singh Bedi, K. A. Abbas, Mulk Raj Anand, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto, Razia Sajjad Zaheer and Krishan Chander, indicates that gender and gender relations remained a central concern for these literary radicals. Women’s oppression and men’s role in that oppression was a recurrent theme in a great deal of fiction produced during this period. Women’s lives and labours, as well as relationships between men and women, came to constitute the thematic heart of many stories and novels. This is not to suggest that gender, either as theme or as trope, is necessarily and always deployed in radical ways. The tendency to thematise issues such as prostitution or widowhood through stock characters and scenarios, thereby precluding fresh, more disruptive analytical perspectives, weakened the work of even as sophisticated a writer as Manto and certainly that of less skilled authors such as Abbas.

‘That *Angarey* woman’: gender, community and controversy

On March 15, 1933, the following circular was issued by the Police Department of the United Provinces:

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 con-

tains matter the publication of which is punishable under section 295A of the Indian Penal Code.²¹

Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code punished whoever put representations in the public domain 'with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of His Majesty's subjects'.²² *Angarey* had been out for about five months at the time that it was banned. Among the many perceived causes for grievance among those who claimed that 'religion' had been 'insulted' was the portrayal of sex and sexuality, the prize specimen being 'Jannat ki Basharat' (A Vision of Paradise), a story by Zaheer which portrays a sanctimonious cleric fondling a copy of the Koran in his sleep as he dreams of nubile houris in heaven. Translator and editor Shakeel Siddiqui has commented that the collection seemed particularly focused on the 'deplorable condition of women' (Siddiqui 1990: 12).

The person who became the prime symbol and target of the campaign against *Angarey* was Dr Rashid Jahan. The religious zealots were unable to stomach the fact that it was a Muslim woman who was rebelling against them and writing about the woman's body and the oppression she had to endure. Rashid Jahan was threatened with having her 'nose cut off' and 'acid thrown on her face'. Even her name became 'Angareywali [The *Angarey* Woman] Rashid Jahan' (ibid. 12).

In her memoirs, *Kagazi hai Pairahan* [Attired in Paper], Ismat Chughtai describes how the publication of *Angarey* sent ripples through the girls' college where she was studying at the time. A zealous cleric, Shahid Ahrarvi, descended upon the college and demanded that the 'whorehouse' be shut down; he also displayed hostile cartoons depicting Rashid Jahan and her fellow writers (Chughtai 1998: 145–6). For the young Chughtai, who was then inspired to write an essay in the *Aligarh Gazette* defending women's education, *Angarey* raised questions about what constituted obscenity – a debate her own work would be implicated in a few years down the line. What is clear, however, is that Rashid 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 about modernity, science, progress, ethics and epistemology.

But there is another important dimension to the treatment of gender and sexuality in some of the *Angarey* stories, one that has received surprisingly little critical attention – and this is their engagement with masculinity and male subjectivity. It is my contention that, beyond the 'woman's body' issue, the collection's encroachment upon this unmarked terrain contributed something to the uproar over its alleged 'obscenity'. However incomplete or tentative these forays into questions of masculinity may seem, they certainly make nonsense of claims that the *Angarey* writers were uncritical votaries of colonial institutions, 'not self-reflexive' or that their critique was only 'outwardly directed at the institutions, norms, and practices of their community' (Patel 2002: 101). As is clear from Zaheer's and Ali's response to the attacks on *Angarey*, these writers saw themselves as part of the community they were

attacking and, as such, implicated in its traditions as well as the colonial institutions to which this community would, ironically, appeal under a perceived threat from 'Westernised' intellectuals. As such, some of these stories are excoriating critiques, not only of traditional sexual and social mores but of the figure of the would-be moderniser himself. Stories such as Zaheer's 'Dulari' and Mahmuduzzafar's 'Jawanmardi' foreshadow the emergence within Progressive discourse of a tradition of self-reflexivity with regard to the figure of the intellectual, the reformer and the moderniser – the very category to which many of these writers would have understood themselves to belong. It would eventually be in Saadat Hasan Manto's post-Partition work that the incipient attention given here to masculinity would be taken forward most spectacularly.

In Sajjad Zaheer's story, 'Dulari', a young woman, Dulari ('darling'), is raised – fed and clothed – by a family that also makes abundant use of her labour. Even the other servants in the household come to feel that, as wage servants, they are fortunate compared with her, a 'chattel'. Dulari remains uncomplaining even though, after puberty, she starts to feel a vague dissatisfaction with life; she is neither able to discern its cause nor get rid of it. She is then seduced by the eldest son of the family who sees himself as something of a social reformer and is thus at constant odds with other family members. A passionate affair ensues. A year passes; when this son gets married and brings home his bride, Dulari disappears. Several months later, another servant spots her in the prostitute quarters of the town. He persuades her to return 'home' where she is received with a scolding from the matriarch who, nevertheless, is relieved to have her back because 'ever since Dulari had run away, the household chores weren't being carried out as well' (Zaheer 1990: 48). As Dulari sits there with her head bowed, her former lover enters the room with his bride and, while he ignores her, tells his mother to leave 'this unfortunate creature' alone. At this, Dulari raises her head at last and proffers the assembled crowds a look that makes them all 'back away, one by one' (ibid. 48). Looking like a monument to 'womanly self-respect', that night she disappears once again.

Zaheer's story, like most of the other stories in the collection, was admired for its confrontational attitude to feudal values, but did not find critical acclaim as a literary achievement. It is, however, a valuable index of themes, ideas, characters and concerns that were to be taken up in different ways by radical writers in the decades that followed the publication of *Angarey*.²³ Of course, Zaheer himself was drawing on the existing literature of social reform; it was in the work of its most celebrated exponent, Munshi Premchand, that woman as victim of a patriarchal and feudal order – the Hindu widow, the prostitute and the peasant – had already achieved iconic literary status.²⁴ Progressive fiction and drama in the next two decades were thickly populated by characters such as the female servant whose labour as well and sexuality are vulnerable to exploitation; upper-class women who are either willingly exploitative (as is the mother in 'Dulari') or naïvely benevolent (the daughter of the house); the paterfamilias for whom domestic matters are

too small to be of concern; and the young man whose reformist ambitions are most honoured by caddish breaches of trust. Dulari herself stands at the head of a long line of fictional domestic servants, peasant women and prostitutes subject to the most extreme forms of gendered exploitation and yet whose subjectivities emerge insistently to disrupt the narratives that seem to determine their lives.²⁵ This story, as indeed the entire collection, evinces a preoccupation with what one historian has termed 'the stranglehold of feudalism' (Sarkar 1983: 341). Progressive writing was to remain concerned with the persistence of this stranglehold even as leftist scholars such as D. D. Kosambi opined that feudalism *per se* was no longer a concern for the left in India (Kosambi 1957: 20–3).

Arguably, it was the sphere of the domestic that bore the most visible traces of this stranglehold, even as familial structures were also responding to the penetration of capitalism. The presence of wage labourers in this fictional household in the form of the servants who taunt Dulari ('At least I'm not a slave like you') suggests that older modes of extracting labour are already being eroded (Zaheer 1990: 44). The contractual nature of the work that these women do, as opposed to Dulari's liege labour, allows them to 'at the slightest grievance, quarrel and leave' (*ibid.* 44). For all its reliance on familiar tropes and stock characters, however, Zaheer's story also heralds an attempt to move from a reformist tradition to a more radicalised Progressive literature (even as the relationship between the two was to remain both fraught and intimate). If the literature of social reform brought scrutiny to bear upon the domestic sphere in its own right, stories such as 'Dulari' interrogate these naturalised spatial divisions themselves. It is because she knows no other life and means of sustenance that the chattel does not complain: 'her whole world was this house' (*ibid.* 44). Even as 'Dulari' ends with the familiar scenario of the turn to prostitution, it is able to posit as a *problem* the naturalising of domestic work as familial obligation rather than visible and waged labour. As Geraldine Forbes has suggested, even female servants were rarely seen as workers, partly because 'the distinction between dependent relative and domestic servant was often slight' (Forbes 1996: 180).

'Dulari' also begins to explore the connections between the affective and the cognitive that would later preoccupy writers such as Manto for whom the sexual and the epistemological would become inseparable. In Dulari herself, the stirrings of adolescent desire are congruent with the emergence of a different kind of awareness that initially takes the form of an inchoate dissatisfaction with her condition: 'she often found herself gloomy. But this was an internal state of affairs and she did not know its cause or its cure' (Zaheer 1990: 45). It is at this moment that she comes in contact with a professed social malcontent, the young master – the would-be moderniser, Kazim, who 'was always fed up with his family and thought them narrow-minded and uncivilized' (*ibid.* 45). The story's treatment of their inevitable encounter is simultaneously perfunctory and bathetic: 'Two bodies, in whose mental lives there was the difference of heaven and earth, suddenly sensed that the

edges of their desires were converging. They were like two straws drifting in a sea of dark forces' (ibid. 46). Within this framework, both Kazim's eventual betrayal and Dulari's turn to prostitution (presented with schematic abruptness) are proffered as part of a familiar narrative trajectory. But it is after this point that the story begins to subvert the 'rescue and reform' narratives of earlier literature.²⁶ Even as Dulari sits on the ground draped in a white sheet, a monument to ruin and repentance, there is something recalcitrant about her – and in the final instance, she refuses to be rescued. For the most part, however, 'Dulari' remains content with demystifying the feudal familial order's claims to benevolence. At the same time, however, this order's self-professed antagonist, the male reformer, is also the focus of criticism, and Dulari's final act of defiance is directed at him. As her former lover walks into the room where Dulari sits, refusing to look at her, he refers to her in the third person as he chastises his mother. It is this paternalistic and didactic voice that 'the girl could not find the composure to listen to' (ibid. 48). The gaze that she returns, to the surprise and mild fear of her interlocutors, is directed at the reformer's discourse, which differs little from that of the order that is responsible for her condition in the first place. The moment of resistance is necessarily fleeting, 'the last attempt of a bird whose wings were wounded, to fly. That very night she disappeared again' (ibid. 48).

Whether satirised in early efforts like 'Dulari', lampooned in Ismat Chughtai's fiction or treated with a measure of critical empathy in some of Saadat Hasan Manto's stories, the figure of this self-appointed gatekeeper to social modernity – the (male) reformer – recurs in radical fiction from *Angarey* onwards. The feminist, Ismat Chughtai, wielding irony as her weapon of choice in her semi-autobiographical novel, *Terhi Lakir* (translated as *The Crooked Line*), would not only satirise the whims and vagaries of male family members with regard to women's emancipation, but also the comradely sexism of leftist men who saw themselves as several stages ahead of mere reformers. Attention to the figure of the reformer also allowed some male writers associated with the PWA to distance themselves from prior discourses of female emancipation. The frequency with which the topic was approached suggests that, even as early as *Angarey*, there was an awareness that masculinity and male sexuality underwrote emancipatory projects and needed, therefore, to be subjected to scrutiny. The last story in the collection (perhaps strategically positioned this way) is structured as a confession from a man who sees himself as a progressive, but who comes to accept responsibility for his wife's death because of his complicity with patriarchal discourses of masculinity.

The 'Evil that Men do'

Mahmuduzzafar's 'Jawanmardi' [Gallantry] is an account of a man who sees on his dying wife's face not the smile that other people suggest she wears, but 'alienation and hatred' for him (1990: 84).²⁷ 'I was', the narrator remarks

lugubriously, 'fully deserving of this'. Where 'Dulari' is shot through with heavy-handed sarcasm, 'Jawanmardi' – narrated in the first person – is full of self-flagellating melodrama. The opening passage contains a vivid still: a newborn's head stuck between his mother's thighs as she lies there in the throes of death. The narrator then holds forth on the failings of his sex: 'I was the cause of her death, I alone had brought her pain and unhappiness. There is no limit to men's depravity and stupidity' (ibid. 84). Indeed, the title of the story itself, the Urdu word, 'Jawanmardi', translates literally to 'young manhood', although the term is generally used to denote qualities such as courage, gallantry and bravery. But even as the story draws on conventional wisdom about the evils of masculine behaviour, it also interrogates the determinism of these very notions: 'But it is not correct to say that I was the victim of this depravity and stupidity. No, that would be absolutely incorrect. In fact, I had been caught in the talons of my own pride' (ibid. 84).

Mahmuduzzafar, who later married Rashid Jahan, was to make only a brief foray into fiction with his contribution to *Angarey*. Like his protagonist, he too had spent time in the West (studying at Oxford); he later joined the Communist party, wrote political pieces for journals such as *Chingari* and *Congress Socialist* and read papers on literary and cultural issues at various PWA conferences. Mahmuduzzafar, who became a nationalist while still at Oxford, himself came from a reformist family. Though 'Jawanmardi' appears, at one level, to belong to what might be characterised as the 'evil that men do' reformist genre in which invariably rapacious men victimise silently suffering females, the story also attempts to examine how gender identities are shaped by social institutions as well as the ways in which the gendered subject engages with those institutions. Although the narrator points out that he and his wife were married at a young age at which they could not possibly develop a mutual understanding, he also admits: 'But the events that presented themselves later and their consequences, those I will *not* blame on fate or on conditions over which I had no control' (ibid. 84, my emphasis). As he struggles to understand both the death of his wife and their alienation from each other while she was alive, the narrator begins with a familiar explanatory trope: 'I had never fallen in love with my wife and how would I have? We were travelling in two different spheres of life, my wife in the narrow and dark alleys of an older era and I in the *clean and broad roads of the new times*' (ibid. 8, my emphasis). In keeping with these gendered spatial divisions where 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. Here, the homesick narrator frequently indulges in the artifices of nostalgia: 'She was in her small old fort while I, tiring of the pointless and gratuitous sensual affairs of a hectic life, would occasionally find myself dreaming about this pure and trusting woman' (ibid. 85). One day, when a letter from his wife throws him into a state of extreme sentimentality and longing, the narrator decides to make the 6000-mile journey back home. She has written to him, gently complaining about the brevity of his communications to her and describing her days spent on a sickbed, languishing from a mysterious illness.

These are not really love-letters, as the narrator himself suggests. If he is acutely aware that his own feelings for the wife he hardly knows are displaced nostalgia for the inner spaces of 'home', inscribed in the idiom of romance, it is also evident that her letters encode a longing for the unfamiliar outer spaces of the 'world': 'Ever since I've been sick, I do nothing but think of you and those novel things and new people whom you must be encountering there' (ibid. 84). The wife's unnamed sickness, which renders her unable to walk and confines her to bed, becomes metonymic for her own sense of containment. The reactions of those around her, as she perceives it, are also symptomatic of the ways in which her own subjectivity is constantly under erasure: 'When people discuss my illness and express their sympathy, it irritates me. They don't understand what is wrong with me. They feel sorry for me only to the extent that it soothes their own hearts' (ibid. 85). Even as she expresses her sense of misery, she is quick to assure her husband that none of this is intended to be a complaint or to put obstructions in his way. His own return home is prompted by her plaintive claim that she thinks of him as the one who preserves and completes her life: 'When I read this letter, a wave of love and desire ran over me' (ibid. 86). Interpellated as ideal man and husband, he responds by trying to perform these roles.

But it is not long before his 'sentiments started to change' and 'verities' begin to emerge, first as those matters of practicality – how to earn a living, how to spend his leisure time, how to deal with his in-laws – which invariably intrude on sentiment. But the narrator's return home also undermines his 'heart's fantasies about the old times, which [he] had kept like a snapshot in [his] soul' (ibid. 87). Interestingly, it is not the feminised domestic sphere that seems to close in on him but the world of men: 'I saw myself closed into a narrow and dark, dirty, tyranny- and depravity-laden space. Of the people who came to receive me at the station, most were frivolous, rascally, petty, narrow-minded, bad men' (ibid. 87). He is swept into their company, with the 'same crude, obscene jokes and bad-mouthing of other people'. What is at stake in this fervid denunciation of the company of men? There is, on the one hand, the acknowledgement that the space of 'the home' is just as structured by the ideologies and practices of masculinity as is that of 'the world'. Equally, the 'outer world' of official masculine space can be just as narrow and dark as those inner spaces. The logorrhoea of (self-)condemnation, however, also precludes a more clear-sighted analysis for the narrator. Paradoxically, his return home turns into another self-regarding journey in which the narrator focuses on how *he* is being affected by the narrowness of all round him; he cannot attend to his wife's pleas to imaginatively take her away from the home: 'Here there is no difference between night and day. But why are you silent? You must have had new experiences. Learned new lessons from new matters. Talk to me about those' (ibid. 88).

Despite the narrator's self-deprecating but wilful slide away from his wife into the world of 'dirty and useless' manly pleasures – cards, booze, mistresses, boasting about sexual conquests – he cannot keep the two spaces sutured. The masculine 'outside' is not only inseparable from the feminised

'inside', but each sphere structures the workings of the other. In fact, it is the friends who boast about their various gallant and amorous acts who help bring domestic matters to a violent crisis. 'Finally, people started to cast doubts about my masculinity and to spread all kinds of rumours. I was in an awkward dilemma and decided that something definitely needed to be done' (ibid. 89). He takes his wife away from her sickbed to the mountains, where she improves. The narrator feels pride as his friends and relatives now observe them together, but feels that 'there was still some doubt in their hearts . . . For full proof, they were waiting for something else' (ibid. 90). Within weeks, the wife's belly is growing with child: 'My condition was like that of a gardener who sees his flower-beds blooming and cannot contain himself for pride'. His wife's silence is finally broken by her racking screams during labour, 'all of which was evidence of my gallantry' (ibid. 90). The silence that falls again after this episode haunts him as does the memory of her screams but, he says, 'after her death, when people came to tell me that there was a smile on her lips as she died, my heart found some solace in that' (ibid. 90).

These last lines of the story directly contradict the opening words which read: 'My wife was going. There was *no hint of that smile on her lips* which people who wanted to comfort me were remarking on' (ibid. 85, my emphasis). The story is framed, thus, by a moment of insight and a moment of blindness respectively. By ending with the latter rather than the former (and thereby inverting the teleology of standard reform narratives), 'Gallantry' delineates the power of an entrenched masculinism to obscure individual moments of insight. For all its didacticism, the story's power derives from its understanding that reformist discourses are themselves inflected by dominant ideologies and patriarchal power. This is the power, as in the narrator's case, to traverse gendered divisions of space, to determine what takes place within these spaces and to influence the lives of the less franchised others who inhabit the domestic sphere. It is often difficult, however, to distinguish the text's awareness of contradiction in the ideologies it examines from its own contradictory participation in them. Is the final silencing of the woman through death a subversive condemnation of the force of patriarchy or is it evidence of the story's participation in discourses of woman-as-victim that re-enact that victimisation? Or both? If, on the one hand, stories such as 'Dulari' and 'Jawanmardi' attempt to make visible naturalised forms of exploitation and alienation, it is also true that, in the process, the subjects of their study are in danger of becoming reduced to aesthetic and political signifiers. In the chapters that follow, I examine the ways in which this problem was negotiated, with varying degrees of success, by the literature that followed *Angarey* as writers such as Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas traversed terrain marked by the intersecting challenges of gender, class, community, religion, sexuality and nation.

2 Gender, modernity and the politics of space

Rashid Jahan, 'Angareywali'

Immediately preceding Mahmuduzzafar's story in *Angarey* is a one-act play that reads more like a short story, written by Dr Rashid Jahan, who had just completed her training from Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi. 'Behind the Veil' (Parde ke Peeche) dramatises a conversation between two women: to her visitor, Aftab Begum, Mohammadi Begum expresses a wish to consume poison and end her miserable existence. When Aftab remonstrates, Mohammadi launches into her tale of woe: a child every year since she was married at seventeen, poor health, a husband who insists on sexual intercourse even when she is unwell, a sickly brood who were never able to drink mother's milk as her husband wanted her to himself after their birth, infidelity on his part, divorce threats, the fear of pregnancy and anxiety about losing her looks and, consequently, the husband who gives her so much grief. The pairing of the stories in this manner seems deliberate: if 'Gallantry' is an account of one man's relationship with his wife and the spatial geography of traditional conjugality, Rashid Jahan's 'Behind the Veil' is a bitter rant by a married woman who lives her life in seclusion. 'Gallantry' examines what it sees as the depredations of a predatory masculinism while 'Behind the Veil' is an account of a victim's experience of oppressive domesticity. Together, the two texts attempt to chart, from different gendered perspectives, what Anthony Giddens has termed 'the transformation of intimacy' within modernising familial structures and changing gender relations (Giddens 1992).

It is the central trope of the veil in this story play that is most significant in terms of the *Angarey* collection's endeavours as well as Rashid Jahan's later work. The text is, at one level, an attempt to lay bare – to 'unveil' – the workings of a sphere that, as Giddens suggests, tends to be less visible than the public sphere with regard to processes of modernisation and democratisation (Jahan 1988a: 184). The stage directions are detailed invocations of the domestic, feminine and quotidian atmosphere of the zenana or women's quarters from which the curtain is being lifted. Here the two women sit, one of whom 'looks sad and tired' while the other is seated across from her 'cutting her calluses' (ibid. 196). The room is full of domestic furniture such as 'shelves and cupboards containing utensils and household decorations', a

couch, cushions, a bed, a pitcher of water covered with a cup and a ceiling fan from which a sprinkler sprays rose water. The 'veil' of the title refers, then, not only to the stage curtains behind which this tableau vivant is set, but also to the discursive and material barriers that attempt to demarcate private from public. Democratisation is not so much the topic of the play as the condition of enunciation that underlies its emancipatory impulse. The text is conceptualised as a speech act, a subversive litany of the wrongs that men do and women endure. Acts of naming catalogue the hitherto unnameable in upper-class Muslim homes: reproductive systems, fetuses, breast-feeding, sexual practices, sexual abuse, and contraception.

If to name the body is to make it available to understanding, then the eponymous 'veil' refers also to the mystique and silence that enshrouds the female body. Some of the most interesting (and dramatically engaging) moments in the text surface in Mohammadi's recollection of her interaction with her female doctor, a new entrant to the scene even in a household where 'doctors stand at the ready, day or night' (ibid. 200). Mohammadi is ordinarily treated by a male doctor who sits on the other side of a screen (another veil) and diagnoses without actually seeing or touching her. (Recall the famous hole-in-the-curtain romance at the beginning of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.) It is only when it finally becomes necessary for her to be examined from 'within' that a woman doctor is summoned. The story is as much about this new, 'unveiled' doctor-patient relationship between two women as it is about gender relations in the domestic sphere. The woman doctor is able to examine Mohammadi directly, face-to-face and 'inside', a privileged diagnostic location. But the opportunity is also enabling for the patient, inasmuch as it allows her to articulate a reflexive sense of her own physical, mental and emotional state. The body is no longer under erasure, an object of sexual use in sickness and in health, but integral to the woman's subjectivity. In choosing to have the patient, rather than her physician, narrate the encounter, Rashid Jahan offers an account, not of unidirectional diagnosis and treatment, but of a mutually instructive experience for both women. If the doctor has a vantage point as she looks 'inside' the patient and detects yet another two-month-old foetus, she is limited in her reading of other symptoms. Noticing the medical professional's puzzlement at the discrepancy between her patient's stated age and withered looks, it is the latter who has to explain that premature ageing is the result of endless pregnancies and ill-health. The doctor does not comprehend how her patient could have become pregnant during an illness and, yet again, Mohammadi must explain that sickness and health have no meaning for her husband: 'I said, ehay, Miss Sahiba, it is you who are simple. You earn, you eat, you sleep the sleep of enjoyment. Here the corpse could be in heaven or hell, but his concern is with his plate of sweetmeats . . . She heard me and fell silent' (ibid. 76).

Rashid Jahan had just finished medical school when she wrote this story, which would seem intended to be, surely, as much an object lesson to herself and her fellow women doctors as it was a dramatic 'documentary' ex-

posé of the evils of feudal patriarchy. Rashid Jahan or Rashida (as she was known) had trained as a doctor (with a specialisation in gynaecology) at Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi, which had been established in 1916 with the express purpose of educating native women in Western medical practice. Though European women who faced discrimination within the patriarchal medical establishment in their own countries came eastward to practise medicine on Indian women, the colonial administration determined that only the training of native women doctors would make its health care mission for its women subjects a successful initiative. As part of a conspicuously gendered minority involved in the institutionalising of modern European medicine in India, itself a highly contentious issue, Rashid Jahan necessarily found herself thinking about the relationship between the breed of 'new women' to whom she belonged and the constituency in whose name she had been created.¹ As David Arnold has remarked, the training of Indian women in colonial medical institutions itself came about as a result of the 'fervent politicisation' of their bodies (Arnold 1993: 265). Rashid Jahan, 'lady doctor', wrestled specifically with issues of scientific and secular thought in relation to the female body. The kinds of questions she investigated remain relevant to contemporary feminist engagements with science, technology and culture. What is the relationship of the body to the ideologies and institutions that seek to shape it? How does this relationship affect the way we seek to liberate the body from suffering? How might we recuperate scientific and medical knowledge from the power relations in which they are imbricated while understanding that knowledge is never politically unmarked?

The woman doctor has access to the woman behind the curtain as well as to her 'inside'. 'Behind the Veil' does not distinguish clearly between the different uses of the word 'andar' or 'inside', which could refer to the inner (female) quarters of the home and/or to the inner recesses of the female body. But this vantage point is not enough, even when combined with professional scientific and medical knowledge; 'access' does not necessarily entail 'understanding'. If the body is available to scientific enquiry, it is also situated in a social context that the professional healer must engage with. In this scheme of things, the doctor needs to be as much social critic as one who diagnoses physical ailments. This pioneering sense of the doctor as politicising – and politicised – subject inflected both Rashid Jahan's literary imagination and her own life as a doctor. If her contact with women patients across classes shaped her thinking as a feminist, her experiences as a doctor underwrote her social analysis: 'She was quite aware early in life of social injustice and the sickness of society. As a practical person, the diagnosis was not enough for her; she wanted a treatment, a cure' (Saiduzzafar 1987: 162). As Roger Jeffreys has pointed out, medical professionals in the pre-Independence era generally saw themselves as tending to a sphere of civil society and not as political actors (in sharp contrast to the preponderance of lawyers in mainstream nationalist organisations) (Jeffreys 1988: 160). But Rashid Jahan's female doctor in 'Behind the Veil' finds that it is not enough to go 'behind

the veil' to the domain of the domestic as a monadic agent of modernity with the eradication of physiological disease as her sole aim. She must herself become the subject of education and transformation. One of the arguments made against having European women doctors in favour of training native women was that the former had no knowledge of 'the languages, customs, and habits' of their patient constituency (Arnold 1993: 265). Rashid Jahan's work, incipiently in 'Behind the Veil' and more explicitly in later stories such as 'That One', would problematise the assumption that native women professionals had an uncomplicated epistemic privilege.

The *Angarey* collective's entire project was itself, of course, troped as an unveiling of hypocrisy and hidden oppression, and it is this effect of brave exposé that Rashid Jahan draws on in her animated tableau of domestic misery in 'Behind the Veil'. Needless to say, exposé was a fraught act in a context where 'vitiating by the lie of the colonial situation', as Fanon puts it, it becomes difficult 'for the colonized society and the colonizing society to agree to pay tribute, at the same time and in the same place, to a single value' (Fanon 1965a: 126). If it is true that women became a point of contestation in the struggle for cultural and political legitimacy, it is also the case that, for some traditionalists and nationalists, 'Western' (allopathic) medicine could not 'be meaningfully abstracted from the broader character of the colonial order' (Arnold 1993: 8). Rashid Jahan – as a woman and a doctor – writing about gender, medicine and the politics of space, became an icon of the literary radicalism of *Angarey* itself, decried by some and celebrated by others: 'In progressive families she became a symbol of the emancipated woman; in conservative homes an example of all the worst that can occur if a woman is educated, not kept in purdah, and allowed to pursue a career' (Zubair and Coppola 1987: 170). It is from this perilous subject position that Rashid Jahan, who came to be known as 'Angareywali' [the *Angarey* woman], would find herself thinking about articulating a critique of colonialism without conceding ground to patriarchy and traditionalists within her community. It is no accident then that Rashid Jahan's oeuvre evinces a recurrent concern with the figure of the female reformer and the shifting complexities of being in her position.

Rashid Jahan herself belonged to the second generation of reformers in her family and community. Her father, Shaikh Abdullah, was a well-known educationist who was secretary of the Female Education section of the All-India Mohammedan Conference; a year before Rashida was born, he had founded the widely circulated Urdu journal for women, *Khatun* [Woman], to which her mother, Wahid Jahan Begum, was a frequent contributor.² The journal was preoccupied with 'themes of spiritual and social uplift in light of western educational ideals, modernity achieved with hard work, and the call for far-reaching improvements in all quarters of society, especially for women' (Zubair and Coppola 1987: 167). Rashida also studied in a school for girls established by her father, and here she was introduced to the work of nationalist writers such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore

and Gandhi, along with English literary exports such as Jane Austen (whom she admired greatly) and the Brontës. It is not surprising, then, that Rashid Jahan's own writings reflect both an investment in and a critical interrogation of these competing traditions. Over time, she was also to bring this critical scrutiny to bear on the figure of the female reformer, women like herself, who had inherited a legacy of 'education and uplift' from their fathers and brothers. These were the pioneering generation of male reformers who came out of the Aligarh Movement, an attempt to reconcile English education with Islamic values and traditions of science and enquiry.³ Not least because the movement was also implicated in an attempt to foster a productive alliance between upper-class Muslims in North India and the colonial government, Rashid Jahan's and the *Angarey* group's generation of intellectuals and activists was faced with the challenge of evolving out of reform into a radicalism that would also be more explicitly anti-colonial. In Rashid Jahan's own work, we can track the uneven emergence of just such a trajectory; over time, her stories would attempt – not always successfully – to go beyond a simple 'expose and teach' model towards a more developed understanding of how social and political relations might be radically transformed.

The 'realism' that 'Behind the Veil' attempts to develop does not, as I have suggested, go beyond a rough-and-ready, somewhat stylised naturalism. The story relies on a simple notion of 'exposure'; the unmediated truth becomes accessible when the curtain of ignorance is drawn aside. 'Behind the Veil', like the other stories in *Angarey*, also accepts a certain operative understanding of public and private as sutured and separate spheres, an assumption that several of Rashid Jahan's later stories were to interrogate. In point of fact, the accounts that emerge from domestic spaces can now be heard precisely because of the historical emergence of a mediating, travelling figure – the woman doctor, in this instance – who can go back and forth between the two spheres. The presence of the female professional is an enabling condition of enunciation for this story even though her role is relatively muted; indeed, her response to her patient's story is, at one point, to 'fall silent'. In later stories, such as 'Voh' [That One], Rashid Jahan would bring greater critical scrutiny to bear upon the politics of knowledge and representation, of speaking for the 'other' or even *about* the 'other'. 'That One' was published in the only collection of stories to appear during her lifetime, *Aurat aur Digar Afsane va Drame* (Woman and other Stories and Plays), although many of them had also been published in journals with limited circulation. The story, remarkably short and sparse, concerns the chance encounter of the narrator, who is a teacher in a girls' school, with a grotesquely disfigured woman at a clinic. After an exchange of 'smiles' with this literally faceless woman, the narrator finds out from the pharmacist that the woman, only referred to as 'That One', is a prostitute suffering from a venereal disease. Later, she is visited by this woman during her lunch hour at the school where she works. To the discomfiture of the narrator and her colleagues, the visits continue on a daily basis, until a woman worker at the school, a sweeper, picks a fight with the unappealing visitor and beats her out of the premises.

'I first met her at the hospital. She had come there for treatment and so had I' (Jahan 1993: 119). The opening lines of the story lay out the new spatial and institutional configurations that enable this encounter between two women whose paths, only a few years previously, might not have crossed so easily. The narrator belongs to the emergent class of middle-class female professionals who work outside the home; her interlocutor is a working-class woman, the public exploitation of whose labour and sexuality has long been institutionalised. At first, it is only in terms of her own being that this encounter has significance for the narrator – as a kind of inverted romance with her own emotional existence at the centre:

I was working at a girls' school. I was still fresh from college. The future was a garden where no flower fell short of a rose or a jasmine blossom and the world lay stretched out at my feet. Life was a stream in a moonlit night, rippling gently here, cascading into a waterfall there. I was happy. I had no idea what the wrench of pain might be.

(Jahan 1993: 119)

There is only a hint of irony here as the narrative draws on the high sentimental rhetoric of the 'afsana' or romantic short story that was especially popular with a female readership. The narrative takes this rhetoric seriously, using it to set up a contrast between what it sees as the privileged world of the narrator and the wretchedness of *That One*. Indeed, in describing her own coming to political consciousness through Rashid Jahan's influence, Ismat Chughtai would use a similar distinction: 'The handsome heroes and pretty heroines of my stories, the candle-like fingers, the lime blossoms and crimson outfits all vanished into thin air. The earthy Rasheed Jahan simply shattered all my ivory idols to pieces. . . Life, stark naked, stood before me' (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 118).

At first, the emphasis in 'That One' seems to be on the narrator's unlearning of her own privilege. Accordingly, her initiation into the 'real world' is one where her sheltered senses must encounter the shock of the other:

I felt repulsed too, but somehow managed to look straight at her and smile. She smiled back, or at least I thought she tried to – *it was difficult to tell*. She had no nose. Two raw, gaping holes stood in its place. She had also lost one of her eyes. To see with the other she had to turn her whole neck around.

(Jahan 1993: 119, my emphasis)

The physical otherness of this woman is crucial to the narrative of encounter and (failed) attempts at empathy and solidarity. If the claims of professional feminist organisations such as the All-India Women's Congress (AIWC) to speak for all women were based on an unexamined premise of shared biology as sufficient common cause, it is a premise that is all too easily disrupted

by this decaying and grotesque physique that not only evades conventional modes of communication but also makes 'knowing' difficult. At the same time, the refusal of common humanity by the pharmacist is represented as problematic: 'That one is a scoundrel, a filthy whore. She's been rotting to death, that one, bit by bit. And now she thinks of treatment'. For the pharmacist, it is outrageous that the clinic treats this woman as a body that is deserving of treatment like any other: 'The doctor has no sense either. Just hands a prescription over. Ought to be thrown out, she ought, that slut!' (ibid. 119). As histories of hospitals and European medicine in colonial India suggest, these institutions themselves were initially associated with the lower echelons of society; efforts were later made to court the patronage of the higher castes and classes, and especially their 'respectable' women (Arnold 1983: 258). Given this context, 'That One' is an account, not only of the emergence of middle- and upper-class women into these public institutional spaces, but also of how these spaces and their denizens are altered and affected by the entry of the former. If the narrator sees That One as the embodiment of a reality she has been sheltered from hitherto, it is also true that the narrator's presence is part of a transformation of That One's reality, in ways that are not unconditionally emancipatory.

As the bamboo curtain of the school's staff room rises day after day to admit That One, her forays into the narrator's 'respectable' space become a journey in the reverse direction with the proverbial curtain now raised by the 'other'. Not surprisingly, this unexpected move brings the apparently modern and egalitarian foundations of institutions such as the girls' school and the hospital to crisis: 'The principal was annoyed too. . . "Must you invite her into the school? I'm sure our parents will take exception to a loose woman like her entering our premises"' (Jahan 1993: 120). As That One seemingly takes silent charge of their encounters, the narrator herself feels a deep sense of passivity, even helplessness: 'Every day I would decide to put a stop to it all. . . All the same when she came the next day I would offer a chair and mutter, "Please sit down"'. This unexpected loss of agency – and the return of her own romanticising gaze – forces the narrator to move the focus from herself, her emotions and her encounters with another reality to That One: 'There she sat, just gazing at me with that crooked eye and that ghastly nose-less face. Sometimes I thought I saw her eye fill. What was passing through her mind? I wondered' (ibid. 120). The educated woman here has information, but not insight. A stray moment of identification raises the possibility, although not acceptance, of a shared humanity: 'What was she staring at? What was she thinking about? Had she once been like me? I shivered at the thought'.

As it turns out, it is That One's belief that the narrator, Safia, 'knew nothing about her' that has sustained this curious romance with its daily offering of a jasmine flower from the former to the latter. After being attacked by the sweeper, Naseeban, who calls her a whore, a devastated That One weeps, not for the blood trickling down her temple but because '[n]ow you know

everything' (ibid. 122). Her dramatic last words suggest that her only stake in this relationship was the hope that the narrator was ignorant about her past, allowing her to live in a make-believe world of purity and romance. But it is not implausible to imagine that a woman used to being the object of curiosity, revulsion, pity or fear feels empowered as a subject and agent in a relationship in which none of these attitudes seems to be overtly at work. For one who has also been an object of sexual exploitation, this relationship of apparent mutual respect with another woman may also be an opportunity to imagine and experience reciprocity. The romantic overtures that That One makes towards Safia invert the objectifying gaze directed at the prostitute in reform discourse; it is deflected away from the margin back to the centre: 'I was being made into an object of ridicule in the school. Still, whenever she placed a flower before me, I would tuck it into my hair and her face would once again crease into that horrifying smile' (ibid. 121).

The liberal – and Gandhian – fiction of reciprocity and mutual understanding across class boundaries within the emergent nation is one that the narrative participates in even as it recognises its impossibility under the circumstances. It is noteworthy that the decisive act of repudiation comes neither from the doubtful narrator nor her sneering colleagues but from another working-class woman. When That One blows her nose and wipes her fingers on the wall, the old sweeper, Naseeban, apparently forgetting 'all the good breeding culled from twenty years of working in the school' hits her hard in the back (ibid. 121). By placing the actual burden of rejection on Naseeban's 'old back-alley self', the narrative absolves the narrator and her colleagues from any direct participation in class antagonism. Yet, we know that Naseeban only articulates their own suppressed instincts, Safia's included: 'Nobody would sit in the chair she used. I don't blame them. It wasn't their fault. She looked so revolting. I couldn't bring myself to touch the chair either' (ibid. 120). Indeed, the 'othering' of That One is so complete that an older teacher does not regard her as a female at all: 'Tut, tut. You ought to observe purdah before that one'. The veil, in this instance, is advocated as a way of reinforcing gendered class distinctions to the point where only upper-class, ostensibly 'inviolable', females can be regarded as 'women'. Once again, the narrative subjects the concept of shared womanhood to scrutiny, suggesting that gender is inflected by other co-ordinates, most saliently class and community. 'That One' problematises the universalising assumptions of the category 'woman' without, however, dissolving biological specificity or human commonalities into the purely discursive.

The narrator's conflicting feelings towards That One are instructive: on the one hand, she shares the revulsion of those around her; on the other, she finds herself responding to That One's overtures of friendship. Part of her insists on a profound moral difference between them that is also a rejection of the other's claims to a shared humanity: 'Doesn't she have a mirror? Doesn't she know she's reaping the fruit of a sinful life? Why doesn't anyone tell her. . . Does she really believe that I consider her only *another sick person*?'

(ibid. 121, my emphasis). But, at the same time, Safia cannot help wanting to know more, to go beyond the apparent and plumb the depths of this stranger: 'Does she have a family? Where does she live? Where does she come from?'. This bifurcation in the narrator's consciousness, the veil as it were, between her impulse not to recognise That One as another human being and her need to know more is integral to the kind of social critique that the story attempts to evolve. A will to ignorance, to refuse to probe reality, is problematic even though coming to knowledge is never a simple process. In this regard, That One's sad parting remark is important – for it too is preceded by a momentary act of veiling: 'She hid her face in her hands and a moment later said: "Now you know everything," and left' (ibid. 122). It is certainly plausible to read this moment in terms of the subaltern's fundamental desire to remain inscrutable to reading. Her actions would then indicate a deliberate veiling that speaks to her need to evade appropriation as the subject of understanding or knowledge. To respect inscrutability is, presumably, a way to avoid epistemic violence.

But there would be something lacking in such a reading even as it cautions us against a naïve humanism that enjoins us to 'only connect', to invoke E. M. Forster's famous phrase. To emphasise repeatedly the ineluctability of subaltern consciousness and the intractability of the subaltern's subjectivity to understanding is, paradoxically, to refuse her the agency she seeks to assert. The narrator asks at least one important question: 'Why does she come here?'. What motivates her repeatedly to seek out the company of the woman she has made eye contact with just once, if what she wishes is to remain ineffable? On the face of it, the narrative itself offers no real insights as the only explicit suggestion it makes is that That One seeks to enact the fantasy of living a different, more 'pure' and romantic existence. But is it really only the loss of that make-believe persona that That One laments in her parting words? It is also possible that her comment is a reference to what she sees as a lost struggle to solicit an understanding from the narrator that will not partake of the conventional 'knowledge' that typically determines readings of her diseased body. In other words, hers could also be a quest for a more genuine, reciprocal understanding that would enable her to develop new kinds of relationships, as opposed to the lack of knowledge that equates disease with moral decay and grotesque bodies with inhumanity. 'What does she feel when she comes to the school', the narrator wonders. One possibility is that 'she' sees this space, so crucial to the emancipation of one class of women, as one that will also enable her to resist the degradation and determinism that she is subject to elsewhere. Naseeban's hostile words insist that this will not be possible: 'You bastard, you whore, who do you think you are? Yesterday you were loitering at the street corner, and today as your flesh falls apart rotting, you parade here like a lady' (ibid. 121). Vicious as they are, the sweeper's words may actually serve as an honest insight into the egalitarian pretensions of the place where she herself has worked in a menial capacity and which has, in fact, brought little emancipation or transformation to her own life.

In the introduction to the second volume of their pioneering anthology, *Women Writing in India*, which includes 'That One', Tharu and Lalita raise an important question for feminist scholarship: 'What are the dimensions in which the working-class woman is imagined in stories such as Rasheed Jahan's . . .?' (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 82). Their own reading is categorical: 'It is the nameless middle-class woman, the story implies, who must lift the veil of her consciousness and find the resources to look this figure from the real world straight in the eye'. The 'other woman' in a story like this, 'the prostitute, the working-class woman is a figure cut to the measure of this middle-class woman's requirement that is also, we must not forget, the requirement of the nation' (ibid. 83). This cautionary claim is one that must be taken seriously. It is often the case that stories about those at the margins, including histories of the subaltern, are, at one level, 'stories of the center, told by the center' (ibid. 83). In the case of written texts, literacy and access to the means of intellectual and literary production themselves make this hierarchy inevitable. Even as we keep this caveat in mind, however, it seems necessary to read a story such as 'That One' more carefully, as much for what it does not state explicitly as for its narrative claims. Tharu's and Lalita's reading overlooks, for instance, the way in which the veil also becomes That One's means of shaping her identity. By literally crossing bamboo-curtained borders to claim institutional space for herself, That One attempts to draw a curtain over the history of her interpellation as 'whore'. To say that this is a subaltern imagined by the centre is indisputable at the most literal level of authorial biography; but to use this fact to flatten the range of possible understandings and insist on an inevitable ideological 'pandering' is of dubious critical use.

Moreover, given how contested a category the 'nation' itself was at this point, it is unclear what it would mean simply to 'pander' to its requirements. While the account that 'That One' offers is made possible by the institutional spaces of the modern nation-in-making, what actually takes place in these spaces is determined by more than a set of 'requirements'. In fact, Rashid Jahan's story raises the possibility that interactions within these spaces might exceed, subvert or even simply evade the expectations that precede them. As such, 'That One' is also an account of the meanings of nation and national modernity – as defined by institutions and the spaces they create – for those outside the centre. Sociologist Kalpana Ram has suggested that:

While it is important to register the kinds of conceptual/social exclusions that may be at work in the hegemonic intellectual paradigm, it would be a mistake to assume from this that the hegemonic paradigm has not also exercised considerable influence over marginalised social groups, or that very sense of exclusion has not been operative as a point of mobilisation for them.

(Ram 1996: 315).

My argument is less that hegemonic paradigms and institutions exercise influence over the margins than that we need to pay attention to how those margins approached, appropriated and consequently altered those hegemonies themselves. This work – which need not entail romanticising subaltern capabilities or ignoring the power dynamics that make ‘appropriation’ difficult – is especially important given the contemporary theoretical emphasis on problematising ‘modernity’ and ‘reason’ in the name of this very subaltern.⁴

In some ways, Rashid Jahan’s concerns with regard to modernity and tradition were similar to and can be amplified by those of another famous doctor intellectual working in a colonial context. In an essay entitled ‘Medicine and Colonialism’, Frantz Fanon wrote:

Introduced into Algeria at the same time as racialism and humiliation, Western medical science, being part of the oppressive system, has always provoked in the native an ambivalent attitude. . . [T]he colonial situation is precisely such that it drives the colonised to appraise all the coloniser’s contributions in a pejorative and absolute way.

(Fanon 1965a: 121)

Unlike primary colonisation (‘military conquest and the police system’), technological and scientific advances can offer objectively identifiable benefits but, in a colonial situation, they are either perceived as intrinsically linked to other acts of violence or actually put to bad use by those in power. The wheat becomes inseparable from the chaff in a situation that is ‘vitiated by the lie of the colonial situation’ (ibid. 121). For Fanon, this state of affairs is intrinsically tragic for, although he empathises deeply with the suspicion of the coloniser’s apparatuses and intentions, he also identifies with a pull, felt by the native himself, to act ‘from a strictly rational point of view, in a positive way’ (ibid. 126). (He offers a medical example here: ‘my son has meningitis and it really has to be treated as a meningitis ought to be treated’ [ibid. 126]):

The dominant group arrives with its values and imposes them with such violence that the very life of the colonised can manifest itself only defensively, in a more or less clandestine way. Under these conditions, colonial domination distorts the very relations that the colonised maintains with his own culture. In a great number of cases, the practice of tradition is a disturbed practice.

(ibid. 130).

In emphasising that the practice of tradition is ‘disturbed’, Fanon is less invested in debunking ‘tradition’ than in suggesting that the logic of culture is never simply about conserving or consolidating notions of the ‘self’. On the contrary, under normal circumstances, cultural processes are inherently reflexive and transformational. The practice of tradition is ‘disturbed’ in

as much as it can entail a refusal to engage, reflect, learn and strategically appropriate the unfamiliar; this kind of ossification, in certain situations, requires the psychic violence of going against one's better judgement.

Rashid Jahan's work also speaks to a more complex understanding of cultural dynamics in colonial situations. Writers like her had come to see themselves and their cultures as capable of radical change through self-critique in ways that would neither simply accede to nor blindly react against the coloniser. For the questions raised by a story such as 'That One' are not only: 'What do I think of That One?' but also: 'How is she imagining herself?' 'What is her relation to these new spaces' (hospital and school) and, equally important, 'How is she imagining *me* (the narrator, the educated middle-class woman)?'. Despite the ostensibly revelatory nature of its closing lines, the story is less invested in claiming access to the subaltern's consciousness than in suggesting that her relation to the institutions and ideologies of the modern must figure in our histories and programmes. What does it mean, for instance, that the sick woman does insistently, in the contemptuous words of the pharmacist, 'think about treatment'? Or that she feels empowered to come to the school to gain a new sense of self? In her investigation of the gendering of the flâneur in European modernism, Susan Buck-Morss has pointed out that there is a 'close connection between the debasement of women sexually and their presence in public space' (Buck-Morss 1986: 118). The insistent, 'offensive' presence of That One, so 'awkward' and 'humiliating' for the narrator, cannot but be subversive in a very similar context which associated the sexual debasement of women with their entry into public spaces. (It is the narrator, interestingly enough, who experiences a sense of debasement which That One refuses to feel.) In that sense, the story poses compelling questions: beyond 'uplift' and 'progress', which we do well to problematise, what do colonial/postcolonial modernity and its institutions mean to the gendered subaltern? And how might a knowledge of her responses and her engagements affect not only the way we think about modernity or progress, but the very setting into place of new communities and institutions?

It seems entirely reductive, then, to claim that a story such as 'That One' is not really different from those more conservative ones that 'raise few threats to a patriarchal order', and that it 'manages the shift into the modern while maintaining the authority of the old order' (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 83). This is a critical observation that is limited by the assumption that any and all indigenous attempts at social change and reform are ineluctably subsumed within the colonialist and nationalist projects. The trajectory of Rashid Jahan's work, shaped by her experiences as a doctor and, later, as a communist activist (she joined the CPI in the late 1930s), suggests that she came to see social transformation as a dynamic and dialectical process that grew out of encounters, both personal and cultural. These encounters are at the heart of some of her best stories, which are also explorations of the social geography of modernity in the emergent nation. Early stories such as 'A Tour of Delhi' and later ones such as 'On a Journey' examine the ways in

which women's relationships to their bodies, to others and to space shift in response to historical and social exigencies. It is as these shifts take place that possibilities for a more radical transformation of interpersonal and social relations emerge.

The 'Agitated Veil': Coming Out stories

Rashid Jahan's other story in *Angarey*, 'Dilli ki Sair', has been translated as 'A Visit to Delhi', although something of Rashid Jahan's intended irony would be retained by 'A Tour of Delhi'. This brief, almost anecdotal story (it runs to a few short paragraphs) is about a woman who is taken by her husband for a promised tour of the Indian capital. This story, like 'Behind the Veil', is also offered in the form of a reminiscence, an experience recounted to friends who are dying to get the scoop from Mallika Begum, she having been 'the first to have sat in a train. And that too all the way from Faridabad to Delhi!' (Jahan 1990: 70). First-person reminiscences are often the preferred narrative form for many of Rashid Jahan's stories because their structure allows for both a detailed account of personal experience and a reflexive processing of that experience in time. The summary Mallika gives her friends is deceptively spare: when the train reaches Delhi, Mallika's husband, referred to only as 'he', leaves her with their luggage to go and greet a friend of his. Wrapped in her burqa, she sits atop the pile of luggage and watches the world of Delhi Railway Station go by. When her husband returns, she tells him she's had her fill of Delhi and, much to his annoyance, asks to take the return train back to Faridabad immediately.

The inclusion of this spare story in a collection of fiction attempting to undertake fiery social criticism seems somewhat odd. It has either been described, along with other stories in *Angarey*, as 'adolescent' or somewhat reductively praised as 'poignant in its message about men's complete lack of concern for women's feelings' (Saiduzzafar 1987: 161; Zubair and Coppola, 1987: 170). Yet, in all its cryptic brevity, 'A Tour of Delhi' is, in fact, a telling commentary on the much-vaunted reform project of 'bringing' women out of strict seclusion into the gendered public spaces structured by colonial and national modernity. Mallika's trip is made possible by the benevolent graces of a husband who offers to 'show her the sights' in Delhi. Once they reach the station at Delhi, 'he met up with some wretched station-master. Leaving me near the luggage, he took off somewhere and I sat on the luggage, wrapped in my burqa' (Jahan 1990: 70). As she sits ensconced in this state of portable seclusion, she finds herself inhabiting a strangely liminal space where the domestic and the public collide against each other. It is a juxtaposition that also seems to translate into the familiar division between feminine and masculine, and both are experienced as oppressive: 'On the one hand, this damned burqa and on the other, these wretched men'. Almost immediately, Mallika becomes the object of varying degrees of harassment as the men around her try to attract her attention. The story, recounted by

Mallika in a casually acerbic tone, does not, however, simply develop into a predictable lament about the sexual perils that threaten women entering public spaces. For, despite her discomfort, these spaces hold a real erotic fascination for Mallika as well. She remarks on 'the black-black men who live in the engine. ... They wear dark blue clothes, some are bearded and others clean shaven. Holding on with one arm, they swing from the moving engine. *The onlooker's heart starts to beat*' (ibid. 70, my emphasis). Mallika then tells her wide-eyed friends of the hawkers who vend cigarettes and toys while the coolies shout at the top of their voices, and of the crowds who jostle her as she sits on top of her luggage. Finally, the husband, who has disappeared for two hours with his station-master friend, comes back and expansively offers to buy her lunch, having himself eaten at a nearby hotel. At this point, she tells him that she has seen all she needs to of Delhi.

'A Tour of Delhi' is a quietly polemical account of what the reconfiguration of spatial divisions and the initiatives to 'allow' women new kinds of mobility meant for those who experienced it, in the first instance, as a benevolent and paternalist project. As its protagonist experiences a range of shifting emotions from fear to desire, and from humour to anger, the narrative charts some of the ambiguities of 'coming out' of seclusion when the process is initiated on terms that are not one's own. Mallika Begum's wilful abbreviation of her 'tour' of Delhi is plausibly read then as an assertion of resistance. Women such as Mallika experienced the spaces outside the home into which they were 'brought' as fundamentally hostile, even uninhabitable. And so, in the middle of Delhi's railway station, it is her burqa that Mallika continues to inhabit, as she sits atop her domestic possessions in the midst of a crowd, itself Walter Benjamin's 'agitated veil'.⁵ An incipient flâneuse, such as Baudelaire's famous city walker, she too '[sets] up house in the middle of the multitude' (Baudelaire 1964: 9).⁶ Significantly, she too reads all spaces in terms of habitation. The railway workers are, in her mind, men who 'live' in the engines while the station itself is figured as a large fortification: 'Delhi station, aunt – even a fort is not as big. For as far as you can see, there is only the station, railway tracks, engines and goods containers' (Jahan 1990: 70). The space of the railway station is always already masculinised, sexualised and commodified; it cannot be reclaimed without a struggle, one that Mallika refuses to undertake. Of course, this is also a colonised space. The railway station itself is emblematic of the imperial presence and its technologies of power. There is something deliberate about this choice of setting: if the railways spread across a geographical expanse and made possible the imagining of nation, they also materially enabled the kind of mobility that allowed for a novel experience of geographical and cultural diversity. The women's awe at Mallika's journey is premised on this: 'Such enjoyable matters were not to be heard about in Faridabad. Women came from everywhere to listen to Mallika's stories'. The railway station is the literal and symbolic intersection of the colonial and national, traditional and modern, urban and rural. The station is also a place of encounter for differently gendered and

raced subjects. As Mallika Begum sits behind the burqa, she notes also the sexualised presence of British men and women, holding hands and chattering. Aware of male attention as she watches these couples, she, in turn, is drawn to the 'blackened' men in the engines. Class, race and gender meet here in an erotic cocktail, which produces alienation but also desire.

In reform narratives (which Progressive writing is indistinct from, according to Tharu and Lalita), bringing women out of seclusion into the public is figured as a charitable act that focuses on the object being moved rather than on a dialogic reconstitution of spaces and spatial divisions themselves. In contrast, 'A Tour of Delhi', like 'That One', suggests that women's subjectivities and desires must necessarily shape their emergence into new spaces, if this move is to be truly emancipatory. Mallika's refusal to unveil may be a statement of discomfort and estrangement, but it is also resistance to an initiative that is benevolently patriarchal and reformist in the most limited way. 'Bringing women out' of seclusion into the public becomes an act of noblesse that focuses on the object being moved rather than on a dialogic reconstitution of spaces and spatial divisions themselves. As the work of Hannah Papanek (and also Fanon in 'Algeria Unveiled') suggests, orders to unveil and come out of seclusion often came from men who felt pressured by their colonial bosses to emulate a European model of socialising in couples; these were orders strenuously resisted sometimes by the wife in question (Fanon 1965b; Papanek 1988). Reforms such as the raising of the marriage age in 1929 and the easing of purdah restrictions in this period were measures that 'reflected the habitus of middle-class nationalist reformers, habitus being defined as habitual bodily practices of decorum, dress, hygiene, sexuality and taste that inform gender and class identities' (Whitehead 1996: 188). The question underlying a story such as 'A Tour of Delhi' is that of how women might also come to develop a habitus that would genuinely bring them out of seclusion, enabling them to be full participants in the remaking of the world around them.

Like the Mahmuduzzafar story 'Gallantry', discussed in Chapter 1, 'A Tour of Delhi' also suggests that there are more similarities between domestic and public spaces in terms of the masculinism that structures them than is commonly assumed. The domain of the public is *not in and of itself* a subversion of or improvement on the sphere of the domestic. Thus, Rashid Jahan's story is as much an account of gendered domestic disharmony and alienation as it is of the sexual politics of public spaces. Observe Mallika's sardonic description of her husband's return from his jaunt: 'Some two hours later, he appeared twisting his mustache. And with such indifference asks me, "If you're hungry, shall I bring you some pooris or the such-like? Do you want to eat? I myself have eaten in that hotel over there"' (Jahan 1988 71). When she expresses her desire just to go back home, he says sourly, irritated that his benevolence has been rejected, 'Even taking you to heaven would be impossible' (ibid. 71). For Mallika, there are continuities between her husband's indifferent benevolence and casual machismo and the more open harassment of the

strange men who seem to own these public spaces. Her response is one of passive resistance, a refusal to inhabit the new and an insistence on returning to the old. Stories like 'On a Journey' would, however, attempt to explore the question of how women can, in fact, come to inhabit these spaces – and their own bodies – in new and more radical ways.

Travel diaries: 'On a Journey'

In his account of veiling and unveiling in the context of the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria, Frantz Fanon also speaks of women's relationship with their bodies and with spaces. Like Rashid Jahan's, his work is also concerned, in part, with the question of habitus, specifically a revolutionary habitus:

The absence of the veil distorts the Algerian woman's corporal pattern. She has quickly to invent new dimensions for her body, new means of muscular control. She has to create for herself an attitude of unveiled woman outside. She must overcome all timidity, all awkwardness (for she must pass for a European) . . . The Algerian woman who walks stark naked into the European city relearns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion.

(Fanon 1965b: 59)

Fanon appropriates this process of bodily 'relearning' as a revolutionary narrative in which the reconstitution of women's bodily being maps unproblematically on to the aims and achievements of the national revolution itself. Rashid Jahan's work, in contrast, although also invested in the anti-colonial and revolutionary, tracks the contradictions and fissures that mark the process of reworking habitus. In a story such as 'Mera ek Safar' [On a Journey], the woman does not re-establish her relationship with space solely as a response to subversive initiatives from outside. The re-establishment of her body is figured as part of a political process that demands that women engage with historical conditions as thinking and acting political subjects.

'On a Journey' (1937) appears to draw out some of the more cryptic aspects of 'A Tour of Delhi'. Written as a letter (again, a reminiscence) to a friend, Shakuntala, the story opens with the image of a woman, the narrator herself, running to catch a train.⁷ She arrives at the station and, seeing the train start to pull out, hikes her sari up high and begins to sprint. The first several lines describe the heads turning and watching her in astonishment as she races down the stairs of the bridge taking two or three steps at a time. Her hair is flying wildly behind her, her hair-clip falls off, locks of hair fall on to her face, her sari is trailing behind her, and she is breathing 'like an ironsmith's bellows' (Jahan 1988b: 75). When she attempts to jump the last few stairs, she falls flat on her face. All the while, she is conscious of people smiling at this odd sight; when she falls down, they hasten to help her but she scrambles up: 'Taking my red face out of my hair, I shrieked, "The train!"'

(ibid. 75). The grinning guard holds the train up for her, and she rushes into the very first carriage, which turns out to be a compartment full of men. There, like Mallika Begum, she is subjected to leering and laughter, and so she stares steadfastly out of the window until the train pulls to its first stop. Here, she gets down, buys a ticket and goes to sit in the women's section.

This opening scenario is lengthy. Running into several short paragraphs, it dwells in some detail on the narrator's relationship with her body: her sense of how others are perceiving her, her awareness of herself in motion; and in relation to the urbanised and mechanised space around her, which includes the platform, the bridge, the staircase, the train. Where Mallika Begum in her 'Tour of Delhi' sits immobile on the platform, withdrawing into her burqa, wondering how to negotiate the space around her, this narrator, who we later find out is called Zubeida, hikes up her sari sportingly and makes a run for her train. This re-establishment of the narrator's gendered body in public space is given some emphasis in the story's opening paragraphs. Where Mallika Begum resents the stares of those around her, the narrator in this story decides to ignore the men watching her. This process of undomesticating herself has begun earlier for the narrator who already has a reputation for non-conformity. As she tells her friend: 'My hair was flying – you will say that this is nothing new, it always does fly all over the place. But yesterday, it really was in pretty bad shape' (ibid. 75). Like Mallika, this narrator initially finds herself in a 'mardana', literally, the men's quarters, on the train. Where Mallika chooses to remain in purdah, this woman at first tolerates male derision and hostility, and then moves herself to another form of portable seclusion – the zenana or the women's compartment on the train.

In the women's compartment, she is subjected to a different kind of scrutiny and interrogation:

'You are a student?'

'Yes'.

'Are you married?'

'No'.

... 'What caste are you?' Another woman asked.

'Chamar'. I answered, laughing loudly.⁸

Within seconds of getting in to the crowded women's compartment, the narrator notices two groups of women, Hindus and Muslims, sitting on opposite benches. A member of the former group, noticing the bindi (a beauty mark generally associated with Hindus) on the narrator's forehead, assumes that she is 'one of them' and offers her a portion of 'their' bench. Our narrator is glad that she wore the bindi despite her grandmother's disapproval (from which we infer that her own background must be Muslim). But Zubeida's tongue-in-cheek replies to the questions put to her are perceived by her interlocutors to be deeply offensive while the narrator finds herself wanting to irritate and provoke them further. Her comment about her caste affilia-

tion is, of course, what upsets them most: the implication that they are so stupid that they would believe that she is of low caste (and, moreover, that such a woman would even dare get on the train, let alone sit next to them). In part, they are outraged because they believe that she is pulling rank on them, making fun of their illiteracy, because she is obviously an educated woman. Zubeida then notices that the Muslim women sitting on the adjacent benches seem to be of one family. The Hindu women look to be upper caste, but then, she observes to herself sardonically, modern-day travel dissolves group affiliations and entails a literal social mobility: 'In any case, in travel everyone becomes a brahmin and I certainly haven't seen a traveler below the rank of a Thakur' (ibid. 77).⁹

The small zenana carriage is a pressure cooker where differences of class, educational level, gender, religious community and caste come to a boil: 'The third class carriage was chock full. A small compartment, with women, children, luggage all together so that there was no place for one to stand comfortably' (ibid. 76). Without subjecting the story to a purely allegorical interpretation, it is plausible to read this space as symbolic of the public spaces of nation and its brand of pluralism, one that was, paradoxically, underwritten by the consolidation of cultural identities and differences. Both the probing questions asked of the narrator by her fellow travellers and her own observations on who they are point to the operative salience of identity and difference in these spaces. Meanwhile, the narrator's own remarks are not without a class bias: 'When the compartment is third-class and full like this, the kinds of smells that came my way are not things you travellers in first- and second-class have any notion of. I stood there with a handkerchief to my nose. . . .' (ibid. 77). This classed perspective is not only something that the narrative does not problematise, but it is, to a great extent, one that determines the events that follow. Initially, the narrator adopts the cynical, detached and observing gaze of a feminist flâneuse, a 'passionate spectator' (Baudelaire 1964: 9). Looking at a fellow Muslim sitting nearby, laden with silver jewellery and a huge nose pendant, she observes with amused, middle-class feminist smugness: 'The nose pendant was more like a curtain hanging over her mouth. . . . And women too are such fools that they make a custom out of things like that. No wonder every religion teaches that women diminish the intelligence' (Jahan 1988b: 77–8).

The irony is there, but it does little to distance the narrator from her own classed and internalised misogyny. This combination of condescension and irony marks, at first, her manner of observing the events that take place before her and, later, her engagement with these events. When the Muslim woman with the nose pendant rises to go to the restroom, the edge of her long scarf touches one of the Hindus sitting on a piece of luggage. At once, a fight erupts between the two groups of women. At stake is the ownership and management of space. There then erupts an explosive turf battle that is resonant with echoes of other kinds of conflicts. The metaphors and imagery of argument are drawn from established discourses of power and possession:

'Does your father own the railways?'; 'Are you the only one who bought a ticket?'; 'Are you the ticket collector that you will have me put in jail?'; 'Do you know who I am? I can have you all offloaded here'; 'Listen to her carefully. There sits the Viceroy's wife' (ibid. 79). Very soon, the language of religious and communal identifications – 'we Hindus'/'we Muslims' – enters the fray (ibid. 79). The narrator, in keeping with her impassive role as *flâneuse*, 'sat down carefully and started to listen keenly' (ibid. 79). But almost immediately, physical violence breaks out as the original (Muslim) perpetrator returns from the lavatory and, once again, walks back to her seat in such a way that her scarf hits the (Hindu) woman sitting on luggage. Soon, hair is being pulled, earrings and nose-rings are being tugged at, slaps are dealt out freely and persons are even being bitten. The narrator sits with eyes downcast, hoping that a station will come soon and distract their attention. The sounds of cursing and swearing fill the air.

How does the narrator-as-*flâneuse* read the scene? As a 'field of battle' that is fuelled by nationalist sentiments: 'The woman who was sitting next to me wanted to reach the field of battle but couldn't find space. She was going *mad with patriotic zeal*' (ibid. 80, my emphasis). One by one, even those who are on the sidelines enter the war zone, jostling to get a piece of the action: 'Even those who had only been taking verbal part in the fight finally lost control and infiltrated the *enemy's territory*' (ibid. my emphasis). Perhaps in as much irritation with the classed aloofness the narrator displays as in presumed communal solidarity, one Hindu woman berates the narrator for staying out: 'Sister, what are you just sitting there and watching for? Come, are you going to get beaten by these outcastes?'. Meanwhile, children sit and watch this scene silently while one or two start crying as they too get hit: 'But the mothers had forgotten them in their patriotic zeal' (ibid. 81). As the conflict spreads, the narrator sits tight and keeps watching: 'If anything was missing, it would be cries of "Allah-ho-Akbar" and "Har Har Mahadev"' (ibid. 81). As beef flies in the direction of the Hindus and the possessions of the Muslims are thrown out of the windows, one woman is pushed and falls on the narrator, while another's hand descends on her short hair. She gets up and leaps towards the emergency stop chain: 'Ah my dear Shakuntala, if only you could have heard me. You would hear that Zubeida too can lecture'. Surveying the bloody scene in front of her, she 'thunders': 'Just look at yourselves!... are you women or animals?' (ibid. 81)

The proliferation of metaphors of war, nationalism, patriotism and 'leadery' in the narrator's critical observations suggest that Rashid Jahan, unlike Fanon, sees the manner of women's emergence into (and behaviour in) colonial public spaces as problematically influenced by patriarchal and masculinist discourses, in particular by religious or 'communal' chauvinism. The narrator's initial passivity is transformed into an intervention that is simultaneously problematic and fantastical. Zubeida threatens to hand all the fighting women over to the police at the next station, a threat that strikes immediate fear and subservience into her listeners. She asks them to exam-

ine their own condition – clothes torn, some of them half-naked now, others with their ears red from being pulled. Shouting at the top of her voice, she berates the Hindu women for hypocritically practising ‘untouchability’ while wearing Gandhian clothes, and the Muslims for waging jihad: ‘If your heart is into leadery, go do it in the marketplace’ (the English-derived term ‘leader-y’ translates contextually to ‘rabble-rousing’). Asserting that it is really those women who cannot put their moral authority to good ends who are useless to society, Zubeida addresses the oldest Muslim woman: ‘Had you scolded them in the first place, why would this situation have even come about?’ (ibid. 84). As a final act of punishment, she asks the fellow travellers to ask forgiveness of each other. If they don’t, she will turn them all into the authorities when the train comes to a halt.

As she oscillates between persuasion and intimidation, Zubeida is all the time conscious of the situation as spectacle and of herself as involved in a didactic performance. As she repeatedly tells her reader friend, ‘It was a *scene* worth seeing’ (ibid. 83, my emphasis). The repeated use of the English terms ‘lecture’ and ‘scene’, drawn from educational and cinematic vocabulary respectively, indicate that the flâneuse-turned-activist is aware of both the didactic and the performative dimensions of her actions. This sense of distance as she watches herself perform is the only truly reflexive moment in the text. In that sense, even though ‘On a Journey’ is a more sustained engagement with women as political and civic subjects than the stories discussed earlier, it is also a surprisingly less self-aware text than even an early story such as ‘Behind the Veil’, and certainly ‘That One’ (which appeared in the same collection in 1937). The narrator is confident of her own moral and intellectual superiority. To one of the women who challenges her authority with the question – ‘Why? Are you the government?’ – Zubeida’s telling reply is ‘I wish I was’ (ibid. 85). Her account is an uncompromising fantasy of disciplining and punishing – and reforming – the less intelligent, less cultured and, crucially, the rural woman steeped in false consciousness. As she makes them ask forgiveness of each other and actually marvels at her own powers in getting them to do so, she tells herself: ‘Half the women were village-dwellers. They had never in all their lives even heard of forgiveness’ (ibid. 83).

What do we with this problematic and, yet, somehow engaging tale? We could, as Tharu and Lalita might, relegate it to the dustbin of middle-class women’s reformist fantasies. But we may also want to read the text for what it tells us about women in public spaces in the context of colonial, technological and political modernity, and for its insistence on women as political subjects and actors who bear civic and social responsibilities with regard to emancipation and democratisation. New spaces need to be defamiliarising in a way that allows for a radical unlearning of old social habits. This entails a rejection of cultural determinism: is it indelibly etched in their minds, Zubeida asks her fellow-travellers, that they have to attack a member of the other community when they see one? Early on, she is cognisant of the fact that the women are unleashing emotions they cannot otherwise give vent to,

not having the run of the streets. But public spaces – even the market she asks them to take their ‘leadery’ to – cannot be inhabited in the same old ways with the business of identity and difference conducted with the usual quotidian violence. These spaces must be reconfigured in productive ways by their new denizens. If the narrator can no longer be flâneuse and must participate in the politics of what goes on around her, neither is it sufficient for these women to be ‘granted’ access, however limited, to erstwhile masculine spaces. They will have to learn to be accountable political actors in relation to each other, as also in relation to the larger politics of nation, state and religion. The disorientation produced by new spaces can also be productive of radically transformed sensibilities and social relations.

There is one moment in this story of encounter that exceeds the paradigms set out by the narrator herself. Initially, the women sullenly apologise to each other under duress. But within minutes, the tension gives way to emotion, and the two central provocateurs – the Muslim woman with the big nose ring and the Hindu woman who has objected to being touched – fall into each other’s arms and start crying. The startled narrator observes: ‘I had not expected that such a thing could possibly happen . . . What creatures woman are! One minute this and the other minute that’ (ibid. 86). In a final symbolic act, as their destination approaches, the women gather the scattered belongings together as a collective act of repair. Zubeida’s observation that women are capricious in their emotions echoes a familiar patriarchal saw, but it also indicates (in contrast to the rest of the story) that these women do, ultimately, have moral bearings of their own that enable them to acknowledge their mistakes and seek a connection with each other. Herein, the story suggests, lies the potential for change. Feminist scholar, Elizabeth Wilson, has pointed out that, in the European context, the fragmentariness of urban life in distinction to rural life means that ‘we observe bits of the “stories” men and women carry with them, but never learn their conclusions’ (Wilson 1992: 107). Rashid Jahan suggests that the ‘brushings against strangers’ are also the stuff of which stories are *made* and relationships *forged*; the happy endings can be worked out, at least in the realm of imaginative possibilities.

In an essay on feminist readings of the modernist flâneur in Europe, Wilson is rightly critical of the tendency to read both the gaze and the flâneur, one who practises the art of seeing in the midst of urban multitudes, as quintessentially male.¹⁰ The question of how women experienced nineteenth-century European city spaces cannot be answered by resorting to dichotomies in which women had no meaningful access to outer spaces while the male gaze roamed at will.¹¹ Wilson points out usefully that ‘we cannot automatically accept the nineteenth-century ideological division between private and public spheres on its own terms’ (ibid. 98). The work of Rashid Jahan on women’s experience of space in colonial, urban contexts also works to challenge such assumptions. Apart from the fact that such spaces were never sutured and separate [as Partha Chatterjee’s account of the nationalist ‘resolution’ of the women question would seem to suggest (1993: 116–34)], the domestic was

often a male-dominated sphere. Beyond that, when women did emerge into the spaces of the public and the national, they brought with them their own habitus, one that would necessarily affect these spaces and, in turn, would be transformed by them. For Rashid Jahan, this encounter is invested with great potential and must be used to socially transformative ends. 'On a Journey', for instance, sharply critiques the re-enactment of religious sectarian ('communal') hostilities between two groups of women sharing an all-female space. As in 'That One', gender here becomes an insufficient marker of commonality as various other co-ordinates of identity – caste and religion in particular – emerge to generate animosities. Rather than write it out of the equation, the story suggests that gender – the 'woman question' – itself must be redefined as a critical political force that will also interrogate the ways in which other identities operate. There is an insistence in Rashid Jahan's work on seeing women as political subjects and actors who bear civic and social responsibilities with regard to emancipation and democratisation. Fanon's famous narrative of the unveiling of Algerian women, the reconstitution of women's being-in-space gets unproblematically mapped on to the aims and achievements of the national revolution itself (Fanon 1965b: 121–46). For Rashid Jahan, however, this relearning, re-establishing and distorting of 'corporal patterns' must be a reflexive process in which women learn to be accountable political actors who must critique and refashion the ways in which national spaces are constituted (Fanon 1965b: 59). Rashid Jahan's insistence on women's political agency warns against reducing the scope of women's actions by reading them only as signs or objects of reform.

Rethinking modernity

As such, Rashid Jahan's work brings to crisis certain canonical readings of gendered modernity in the colonial context. The most well-known cartography of cultural modernity in colonial India has been undertaken by Partha Chatterjee, whose insightful work maps a spatial dichotomy of home and world that apparently 'resolved' the paradoxes of Indian nationalism. Anti-colonial advocates of Indian sovereignty who found themselves drawn to the very Western and modern idea of the nation state realised that to adopt this framework wholesale would be to concede superiority to the coloniser. Yet, argues Chatterjee, the nation was a powerful and attractive framework for self-assertion. The 'resolution' of this paradox came in the form of a separation of private and public, inner and outer, spiritual and material which then mapped on to the division between the spheres of the national and the familial:

The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. . . [The world] is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain

unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representative.

(Chatterjee 1993: 120)

If the West had superiority in the sphere of the world and had succeeded in subjugating non-European peoples on these grounds, for the nationalist intellectuals that Chatterjee writes about, 'it had failed to colonise the inner, essential, identity of the East', which resided in the feminised sphere of the home.

Chatterjee's account has a certain intuitive resonance for students of both nationalism and women's history as its attempts to offer a historicised account of the paradoxes of modernity and nation formation in (post)colonial contexts. Yet, there are serious limitations to this account, the most significant of which is the slippage whereby what purports to be an analysis of 'the Women Question' devolves into an account, principally, of male nationalist anxieties around cultural identity and colonial subjection. Chatterjee's characterisation of the home–world dichotomy is that it is the answer to the problem of how to retain 'the self-identity of national culture' (Chatterjee 1993: 120). That it then becomes the 'ideological framework within which nationalism answered the women's question' seems incidental (*ibid.* 121). Chatterjee's picture of *how* the nationalist 'resolution' entailed a gendered division of space does not really explain *why* this solution was gendered in this way. While he concedes that his conclusion looks little different from 'the typical conception of gender roles in traditional patriarchy', Chatterjee insists that the rationale at this point in history is intimately bound up with specific nationalist crises of identity (*ibid.* 120).

Ironically, in the process of elaborating the *symbolic* role played by gender in nationalist crises of modernity and self-identity, Chatterjee winds up giving short shrift to the 'Women Question' itself. As Wilson has suggested in the context of criticism on European modernism, the study of "woman as sign" too often ends with *reduction* of woman to sign' (Wilson 1992: 104, original emphasis). The symbolic gendering of space was to have obvious material consequences in women's lives, but Chatterjee does not actually expand on the nature of the 'Women Question' (as opposed to the tradition–modernity or West–East questions). Why did the 'resolution' of these questions play itself out on the bodies of women? There is also something limiting about the assumption that 'the nationalist mind' was always already male and that the issue of national 'self-identity' was fundamentally a crisis of masculinity. This limitation stems partly from the attempt to generalise about nationalism from the written works of a few select male writers and to theorise about practice from the standpoint of intellectual history alone. But beyond that, Chatterjee also seems unwilling to read women's relationship to cultural processes as anything other than reactive. As she emerges in his account, the Bengali middle-class 'New woman' writes about her relationship to the dichotomies that structure nationalist thought, and perhaps her occasional

subversions and appropriations, but never finds herself in a dynamic and dialectical and *lived* relationship with cultural processes. Even when he makes a self-conscious move from discussing discourse *about* women to emphasising women's speech in his later work, Chatterjee is unable to conceptualise such a dialogism. Instead, he claims, women's 'autonomous subjectivity' is to be found in the domestic archives of home rather than 'the external domain of political conflict' (Chatterjee 1993: 137).

Rashid Jahan's stories complicate this picture. She writes in a historical period that directly follows the nineteenth-century context that Chatterjee discusses, but her treatment of similar spatial divisions (in the upper-class Muslim households of North India) is strikingly different. Modernity cannot be successfully sutured and contained in the 'world' and, even so, women do not necessarily adhere to the divisions. They cross boundaries, not as assertions of 'autonomous subjectivity' but as participants in a dialogic process. In 'Journey', the narrator cannot remain a flâneuse, the female counterpart of Benjamin's (and Baudelaire's) solitary urban protagonist, nor even the shopper of Western cityscapes signifying 'the expansion of consumerism' that allowed the further blurring of public-private distinctions (Felski 1995: 19). She is not the keeper of the 'home' nor even torn between home and world.¹² Neither prostitute nor consumer, she is a member of that small but increasingly visible group of professionals produced by higher education for women. It is from college that Zubeida comes to catch her train; she is immediately identified by the groups of woman sitting beside her as literate and, as such, different from them. The city is not the scene for the sale of this narrator's body nor is it where she comes to buy modern consumer pleasures. She does not, therefore, belong to the dyad of sexual exploitation and consumerist agency-through-pleasure set up by several feminist discussions of Western modernity.¹³ Her subject position bespeaks a measure of class power deriving from a command of certain privileged forms of knowledge. At the same time, as a female in this landscape still dominated by men, though not exclusive to them, she is vulnerable to ridicule and harassment.¹⁴

Of course, the very existence of 'male' and 'female' areas within larger public spaces makes visible the efforts to control the gendering of public spaces, precisely to avoid both an imagined sexual chaos and the very real possibilities of sexual violence. The attempts to replicate the spatial divisions of middle- and upper-class homes in public spaces would seem to buttress Chatterjee's argument that women and tradition were both contained through seclusion but, clearly, such replication and suturing is, in reality, impossible. Portable seclusion can only be a moment within a larger, ongoing movement of encounter and spatial reconfiguration. Moreover, the seclusion of women in spaces such as the 'ladies' compartment' in trains raises an unexpected challenge: gender may function as a lowest common denominator of identity, but it is thrown into crisis at precisely the moment in which it is deployed in public spaces. In the all-female spaces of the women's clinic, the girls' college and the ladies' compartment, the category 'woman' seems

entirely inadequate to the task of containing or expressing identity: class, religion, community, marital status and educational level all inflect gender to produce a range of gendered identities. A feminist understanding of the 'personal as political' must necessarily, therefore, be broadened to include the challenge of transforming relations between women in the context of the (re)constitution of civic spaces and institutions.

What is at stake, then, in the work of an early twentieth-century Indian feminist and social activist such as Rashid Jahan, in the writings of an anti-colonial radical such as Frantz Fanon and in the scholarship of contemporary theorists such as Partha Chatterjee is the nature and status of modernity as a cultural and political process.¹⁵ 'Modernity' can be broadly defined in this instance in terms of a 'constellation of socio-economic phenomena' that includes 'scientific and technological innovation, the industrialization of production, rapid urbanisation, an ever expanding capitalist market, the development of the nation-state' as well as the foregrounding of emancipatory ideologies, including democratisation (Felski 1995: 13). As Giddens has suggested, these are processes that affect the domestic sphere and emotional life even if in less visible ways than they do the public domain (Giddens 1991: 2–3). Where Chatterjee argues that modernity is a fundamentally Western discourse that tries to 'obliterate the fuzziness of communities' in postcolonial contexts, Rashid Jahan and Fanon embrace – cautiously and critically – a certain dynamism of everyday life in the modern world (Chatterjee 1993: 227). This dynamism is one, Fanon suggests, that is arrested under conditions of colonisation where 'colonial domination distorts the very relations that the colonised maintains with his own culture' (Fanon 1965a: 130). Under such conditions, what gets entrenched is 'an attitude of counter-assimilation, of the maintenance of a cultural, hence national, originality' (Fanon 1965b: 42). For both Fanon and Rashid Jahan, this tendency to counter-assimilation, while understandable, cannot be allowed to destroy a culture's capacity 'to re-evaluate its deepest values, its most stable models' (Fanon 1965b: 42). For Rashid Jahan, modernity in the colonial context cannot simply be reduced to a pedagogical project that inflicted violence on a colonial subject. On the contrary, as some of her stories, such as 'Mujrim Kaun?' [Will the Defendant Please Stand?] suggest, the violence and racism of the colonial project is often predicated *not* on a ruthless universalism, but on an inequitable relativism that justifies racial and geopolitical hierarchies.

In the final instance, what emerges in Rashid Jahan's work, are reflections on the possibility of an anti-colonial, feminist and socially engaged habitus that might actively engage the challenges and contradictions of the transitional period. Such a habitus would not necessarily develop through the somewhat mechanistic (and voluntaristic) 'processes of ideological selection' that, according to Chatterjee, were deployed by male nationalist reformers (Chatterjee 1993: 121). Rather, it was to be negotiated and developed through the exigencies of daily existence at the intersections of the colonial, the modern, the feudal, the industrial, the familial, the public, the tradi-

tional, the private, the communitarian and the national. This framework of dynamic and engaged transformation, in which the gendered subject engages critically with historical circumstances, even as she is shaped by them, opens up possibilities outside the restrictive dyad of determinism and voluntarism. Feminists in postcolonial contexts have to deal, for instance, with situations in which their critique of their own communities and indigenous patriarchies is seen as a betrayal and sometimes appears, even to their own watchful eyes, uncomfortably close to racist perceptions of these communities. For us – as there was for Rashid Jahan – there is a continued urgency to the project of developing a viable understanding of how to negotiate cultural difference, and critique epistemic and material violence, without giving up on the possibility of self-critique and social transformation altogether. In the next chapter, we see how the younger writer, Ismat Chughtai, in a semi-autobiographical novel, engages more explicitly than Rashid Jahan with the psychic and affective dimensions of participating in just such a project.

3 Habitations of womanhood

Ismat Chughtai's secret history of modernity

A few years after the *Angarey* fracas and the furore over Rashid Jahan's gendered insubordination, another literary scandal broke out. Scores of angry letters were sent to the editor of the Urdu literary journal, *Adab-i-Latif*, protesting about the publication of Ismat Chughtai's short story, 'Lihaf' (The Quilt) in 1942. As it had done with *Angarey*, the Crown promptly stepped in to charge Ismat Chughtai with obscenity, a charge that she chose to contest in court despite being advised to apologise and avoid a fine. The controversy hinged on what the narrator, a young girl sent to stay with an aunt, saw and heard:

Sometime in the night I suddenly woke up, feeling a strange kind of dread. The room was in total darkness, and in the darkness Begum Jan's lihaf was rocking as though an elephant were caught in it.

'Begum Jan', I called out timidly.

The elephant stopped moving. The lihaf subsided.

... When I awoke on the second night ... I only heard Rabbu's convulsive sobs, then noises like those of a cat licking a plate, lap, lap. I was so frightened that I went back to sleep.

(Chughtai 1993: 133)

Unlike *Angarey*, which was to remain banned for several decades following its publication, 'Lihaf' won its case in the Lahore high court. Chughtai's lawyer threw the prosecution witnesses into disarray by asking them to point to specifically obscene words in the text, which they were unable to do. When they resorted to the argument that respectable women did not write about 'such things', the presiding judge acquitted Chughtai, noting that the censurable did not amount to the illegal.

The lawyer's argument worked because 'Lihaf', in fact, makes no *explicit* reference either to sexual activity or, indeed, to lesbian relationships. Yet the story contains some of the most suggestive and sensual representations of homoeroticism in modern Indian fiction. We witness the incident in the story through the eyes of the pubescent protagonist who sleeps in her aunt's

room and who wakes up one night to find the quilt covering the aunt and her female companion throwing moving shadows on the wall. What the child sees as she tentatively lifts the corner of the *lihaf* in the closing image of the story is, however, left to the imagination: 'Allah! I dived for my bed' (Chughtai 1993: 138). Chughtai juxtaposes the child's keen, but uncomprehending gaze with the sardonic tone of the adult narrator in whose memory the *lihaf* is preserved 'like a scar from a red-hot iron'. It is, however, left to the reader to surmise what exactly had been taking place; 'the rocking shadow of a *lihaf* on the wall' becomes the site of an interpretive contest in which the reader must also participate and through which she must become accountable (*ibid.* 129).

Now widely anthologised, 'Lihaf' has become one of Chughtai's landmark works, heralding the emergence of her distinctive literary style with its attention to the sensual minutiae of everyday life.¹ Though Saadat Hasan Manto (whose story 'Bu' [Odour] was also under trial in the same courtroom) praised the story as one of her best, Chughtai herself was less enthusiastic about it and professed to be taken aback by both the controversy and the praise. 'Lihaf' is neither a call to feminist arms nor a celebration of lesbian relationships; indeed, the story lends itself quite easily to a homophobic reading especially in the context of remarks Chughtai was to make later about such relationships as 'vices'.² She simply noted at the time, somewhat disingenuously, that her mind was 'an ordinary camera that records reality as it is'; if such relationships between women existed, then she had to write about them (Chughtai 2001a: 249). The significance of the story lies in its attention to the intricately layered sexual politics of the domestic sphere and the complicated emotional lives of its denizens. Neglected by an aristocratic husband who prefers to spend his time with beautiful young men, a young bride is 'installed . . . in the house with the rest of his furniture' and 'tethered to her canopied bed' (Chughtai 1993: 130). Eventually, the cocooned wife finds physical and emotional fulfilment in the bed she ends up sharing with her maid. The quilt functions as a trope in various competing narratives – romance, childhood nightmare, sexual fantasy and coming-of-age story. But it is also the site and symbol of a reworking of the wife's oppressive condition, first into survival and then fulfilment, as 'her dried up body began to fill' and '[t]he massage of a mysterious oil brought the flush of life to her' (*ibid.* 130). Like the quilt, the female body in this story is both substance and interpretation; it is acted upon by historical and social structures, but it also engages with and shapes those structures. The story dwells at great length on the body of Begum Jan: lying inert and desolate under the quilt, eating, drinking and keeping warm; blooming with fulfilment as it is touched and massaged, its skin 'without a blemish' but suffering from 'a permanent itch'; its hands 'cold as ice but so soft', embracing the adolescent narrator ('the warmth of her body drove me to distraction'); convulsing, at times, with anger and frustration; and, finally, merging with the *lihaf* 'to take on such strange, outlandish shapes' like 'an elephant on the rampage' (*ibid.* 137).

'Lihaf' was also important inasmuch as it signalled yet another moment of arrival for the generation of Muslim women that Gail Minault terms 'the daughters of reform' (Minault 1998). These were middle- and upper-class Muslim women in North India, many of whom were born to mothers with some education and who themselves 'grew up going to school, reading women's magazines, and coping with accelerated social change brought on by the growth of nationalism, the Great War, and the equally Great Depression' (Minault 1998: 267).³ As these women continued to make forays into the increasingly high-profile literary public sphere of cities such as Aligarh and Lucknow, they were putting pressure on prevalent assumptions about who could write, about what and how. (Oddly enough, the editor of *Adab-i-Latif* withheld the letters of complaint about 'Lihaf' from Chughtai herself until she was married later that year – on the presumption that only then could she be privy to such a frank debate about sexual matters!) As Rashid Jahan had done in *Angarey*, Chughtai was claiming for herself the right to write about the female body, but she was also going further by recognising its claims to pleasure and fulfilment. While the imperatives of modernising within the Muslim middle class accounted for the emergence of these women writers, their work also, unsurprisingly, engaged reflexively with modernity as an ongoing project in their own lives and in the lives of community and nation. At the centre of this exploration is the gendered and classed subject of the transition to national modernity, the daughter of reform whose filial allegiances are now also demanded by the emergent nation state. The middle-class background of several of these women is crucial to an understanding of their experiences and interpretation of modernity. In an important study of the emergence of the 'middle class' as a category in colonial North India, Sanjay Joshi had argued that this group played 'a crucial role in defining what it meant to be modern' through cultural entrepreneurship and public sphere politics. The study of Indian modernity, Joshi rightly points out, is too often reduced to claims about 'derivative discourse', as simply and inevitably modelled on Western precedents. In actuality, the middle-class construction of modernity in India *as elsewhere* was a *fractured* process, i.e. it 'drew on older resources of power and privilege as well as new ideas about the organization of social and political resources' (Joshi 2001: 3). Or, as Gail Minault has suggested, 'it is necessary to look at indigenous sources of and motivation for intellectual change and social reform. The processes of interaction between the colonial and indigenous, then, created change' (Minault 1998: 3).

Middle-class women, of various communities, of course had a complicated relationship with the project of modernisation. While it is widely acknowledged that gender was a key site of contestation in the construction of both nationalism and modernity in India, much less attention has been paid to the ways in which women themselves not only negotiated a 'fractured modernity' but also *participated* in its construction, in both the public and the domestic spheres. Joshi himself offers a compelling account of the 'discursive structures' that constrained a critique of patriarchy, but does not engage substan-

tively with the question of how women experienced and engaged with the process of modernist self-fashioning. The work of Progressive writers such as Rashid Jahan and Ismat Chughtai, and others such as Razia Sajjad Zaheer and Khadija Mastur, is inflected by the question of what it meant to 'become modern', not only as women, but as professionals, as middle class, as Muslim, as Indians and, particularly, as intellectuals with an investment in social change. Rashid Jahan's work, as we have already seen, evolved from taking a didactic approach to female emancipation into undertaking a reflexive scrutiny of the figure of the emancipated middle-class woman and her aspirations to radicalism. Ismat Chughtai's investment in the politics of social change is combined with a keen-eyed interest in everyday life to produce a literary oeuvre that sought to illuminate the often fraught interstices between modernity as large-scale historical project and as lived experience.

Ismat Chughtai (1915–1992) is now regarded as one of the subcontinent's foremost feminist writers as well as a pioneer in twentieth-century Urdu prose.⁴ Like Shaman, the protagonist of her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Crooked Line*, she grew up in a reasonably well-off North Indian Muslim home that was gradually making the transition to modernised familial and class structures. (Her father was a judicial magistrate who was once known as the 'Smallpox Judge' because of his zeal for inoculating people against the disease!)⁵ Always aware of a gendered double standard even in a liberal family where assertive females were not as appreciated as were argumentative men, Chughtai had to argue with her parents to let her finish schooling in a hostel away from home. She refused an arranged marriage and then went on to study for a Bachelor's degree in English and the Arts at Isabella Thoburn College, where she was stimulated by everything she read, from the Bible to Darwin, Freud and the great European novels of the nineteenth century. Claiming that scepticism was her weapon of choice, Chughtai recalls a special affinity with the Shavian temperament but also struggled to find her own voice away from Shaw's influence, which shows clearly in her first play, *Fasadi* [The Rioters]. Chughtai then lobbied successfully for admission to Aligarh Muslim University to train as a teacher (women had not been admitted up to that point), after which she worked as a headmistress in a girls' school. She later married film-maker Shahid Latif, a partner of her own choice, and they moved to Bombay where they set up a film production company, Filmina. Chughtai wrote scripts for films that Latif directed; she also worked as a freelance writer for other Hindi films.⁶ The young Ismat, who had already read the *Angarey* collection at school, idolised Rashid Jahan whom she subsequently met and who became her role model and 'guru': 'We looked in vain for evidence of vulgarity and obscenity, but no one had the courage to say that *Angarey* was not dirty' (Chughtai 1998: 41). When a local cleric denounced women's schools as whorehouses that were responsible for producing abominations such as Rashid Jahan, Ismat, still a schoolgirl, wrote an essay in the *Aligarh Gazette* calling on progressive teachers and male students in the university to support the school and the cause of women's

education. Her appeal was heard, and the mullah's office was duly vandalised by angry students.⁷

Chughtai, whom Rashid Jahan took under her wing, attended the first Progressive Writers Conference in 1936 and started writing shortly afterwards. Early stories such as 'Gainda' (1938) also clearly show the influence of the *Angarey* collection; like Zaheer's 'Dulari', it is also a somewhat sentimentalised attack on the sexual exploitation of young female servants by their masters' sons (Chughtai 2001a: 1–12). Although she came to be considered a leading light of the PWA and remained sympathetic to communism all her life, Chughtai would have no truck with official literary ideologies of any sort:

For instance, when the policy of the Party rigidly concluded that Progressive literature is only that which is written about the peasant and the labourer, I disagreed. I cannot know and empathize with the peasant class as closely as I can feel the pain of the middle and lower class. And I have never written on hearsay, never according to any set rules, and never have I followed the orders of any party or the Anjuman [Association]. Independent thinking has always been my nature and still is.

(Chughtai 2000: 131)⁸

Along with Saadat Hasan Manto, Chughtai was sometimes lambasted by critics, including some on the left, for what was seen as her preoccupation with sexuality, a charge that she shrugged off as untrue and irrelevant. Rather than write sententious stories about heroic subalterns, she insisted, the times called for honesty about 'one's own experience and observation' (ibid. 68).

Chughtai's famous and justly celebrated novel, *The Crooked Line*, provides a remarkably incisive exploration of the politics of gender, family, sex, education and class in transitional India. Written from the point of view of a middle-class female subject, *The Crooked Line* provides an extended account of her lived experience of modernity in the context of nation formation. Tracking conflicts and continuities between public and domestic spheres in the production of both modernity and nation, *The Crooked Line* also explores 'lived social relations within the family and with people who served it in the capacity of servants' on which, as Sanjay Joshi observes, there is a paucity of archival sources (Joshi 2001: 17). The novel is the story of a young woman, Shaman, who, like Chughtai, comes of age between 1920 and 1943, as the Indian nation state is deemed into existence during the last decades of British colonial rule. The text charts Shaman's transition from gendered colonial subject to gendered national citizen, as she comes to an understanding of self and structure while trying to inhabit the role of the 'new' middle-class Indian woman.⁹ Opening with Shaman's wild child infancy, *The Crooked Line* progresses to her adolescence in a mission girls' school, subsequent university education (with the earliest batches of Muslim women to receive one), career as a schoolteacher and, finally, a fraught and short-lived marriage to

an Irish captain in the British Indian army during the last days of the British Raj. Like many of Rashid Jahan's stories, *The Crooked Line* also documents the shift from 'home' to 'world', inasmuch as the protagonist's biography itself is shaped by middle-class women's participation in the making of a new gendered national public sphere. In addition to participating in this often hostile public sphere, this was a woman who also had to engage with left radicalism and its sometimes contradictory gender politics and negotiate an intricate web of personal and sexual relations during a period of transformation in familial and social structures. Shaman is a dissonant subject who engages jaggedly with this process of the 'worlding' of the 'new' Indian woman, underscoring – through her own eccentricities, achievements and traumas – its unevenness, triumphs and failures. As it reflexively delineates the protagonist's experience, the novel moves beyond a static home–world dichotomy to map the dynamic interactions between bodies, selves, families, communities, institutions, nations and global orders. This is a mapping that is reflected in an outward-moving narrative structure that self-consciously marks the 'stages' of the subject's growth. As she moves into different spaces, it also tracks the mutually transforming pressures that subjects and spaces put on each other. The novel elaborates what Rita Felski terms 'the shifting complexities of the modern in relation to gender politics' and, in the context of narrating transition, is concerned with questions of what we can know in the face of flux and how that knowledge can enable change (Chughtai 1995: 18).

'Her birth itself was inopportune' (Chughtai 1995: 11). These inauspicious first lines take the reader into a domestic space where small but significant changes are starting to take place. Breaking with convention, the pregnant mother has expressed a desire to bring in a 'mem', a midwife trained in Western medicine, for this delivery. She is foiled by the baby who arrives too early. The household's slowly disintegrating ties to a receding temporal and social order are signalled by the narrator's observation that this is the tenth child in a family populated by endless pregnancies. The mother is not allowed to breastfeed (and thereby prevent conception) while care of the infant is duly outsourced to a wet-nurse from Agra. While the novel as a whole is remarkable for its careful and evocative attention to bodily detail, the first few pages chronicling Shaman's infancy are especially striking for the heavy 'embodiedness' of perspective and the proliferation of tactile images. This embodied language provides a necessary prologue to the novel's endeavours to understand 'human biology in its intersection with the project of culture', in this case, the evolving culture of middle-class modernity (Spillers 1987: 66). In this first stage (the novel is divided into three such stages), it is the biological that is foregrounded as the narrative delineates something akin to 'the civilizing process' famously described by Norbert Elias, to which the disciplining of the body is integral. This is a process, Elias suggests, most evident in modern times through a 'profound discrepancy' between adult and child behaviour where the former stands for the cultural/civilisational and

the latter for the biological/instinctual (Elias 1978: 140).¹⁰ Accordingly, *The Crooked Line* licenses itself to evoke the smells, sounds and sights of childhood in exuberant and scatological detail. The thematic concern here is the way in which the instinctual is subjected to the social, but it is by no means clear where the former ends and the latter takes over. Take for instance, the scene in which the infant comes upon the lovemaking of the wet-nurse and her lover:

She started looking for [Anna] by sniffing all over like a greedy dog. She found her. . . .Cooing, she started to burrow into her. Her lips started to move and the veins in her throat started to throb. As though mouthfuls of milk were making their way past her throat into her stomach. Suddenly she gagged. As she tried to hold on to something with her fat hands, a powerful force pushed her away and grabbing Anna, pushed her to the ground. She opened her throat and screamed as though she'd been bitten by a snake. Her innocent eyes were transfixed by the gross scene in front of her.

(Chughtai 1995: 12)

When adults are alerted by the child's angry cries to this scene of sexual discovery, the nurse is duly relieved of her duties. As a result, the infant feels orphaned, and life for her and her wandering hands becomes one long search for breasts and warm female bodies (ibid. 13).

Despite the best efforts of the adults around her to keep her clean, the young Shaman comes to 'resemble a mad dog who had come out of a muddy trough' with her frock smelling 'like a rotting rat's skin' (ibid. 14). A classed patriarchal order that demarcates female sexuality itself as 'impure' and, as such, resonant of the gross physicality of the lower castes and classes, puts in place a taboo that simply fuels the child's desire for dirt and bodies. Despite punishment and a consequent promise to civilise herself through disembodiment like 'an unworldly ascetic who repudiates his own body', Shaman returns compulsively to 'the same wretched condition. . .like an intoxicated drunkard' (ibid. 15). It is difficult – perhaps deliberately so – to distinguish here between the child's natural proclivities for playing in the dirt and the joy she may consciously derive from resisting classed and gendered norms. It is not surprising that it is with her highly 'unsuitable' best friend, the sweeper's daughter Pinia, that she savours the joys of eating mud and rolling around in the dirt. Soon, the two of them start to look like pregnant women with little swollen bellies. While Shaman is defaecating one day, 'the son she had been carrying' (identified later by the doctor as roundworms) makes an appearance. Shaman now fearfully imagines thousands of snakes 'slithering inside her belly. Bunch after bunch of snakes, as though emerging from a charmer's basket' (ibid. 16). The next time the child gazes longingly at dirt, the snake in her stomach begins to move in warning and initiates a frenzy of quasi-sexual agitation: 'The sinews of her body would arch like a scythe and

she would be consumed by a desire to squeeze herself into the bosom of the earth' (ibid. 17).

A few short chapters encapsulate the infancy and early days of the protagonist as the text begins to explore the question of how subjects are produced. The form this part of the narrative takes as a tale of desire, consumption and punishment, complete with bestial and sexual imagery, does not seem coincidental. We cannot fix desire's origins – it is instinctive, but it is also shaped, in this case, by the material and repeated loss of caregivers: the mother herself, the wet-nurse and the older sister who gets married and leaves home. The infant's hunger for touch and nourishment takes all kinds of 'dangerous' forms such as staring at a bathing sister 'so oddly that Manjho felt embarrassed', displaying an open interest in bodily functions and wandering off to play peculiar games by herself (ibid. 14, 23). As her cognitive understanding of hierarchical power relations within the family develops gradually, desire takes on specific new resonances for Shaman. Thus, the older sister who grooms and disciplines her becomes the object of a mildly violent fantasy of role-reversal: 'Some people dream of getting married but Shaman, for a few days now, had been nursing an ambition to hit someone. . . She too would like, one day, to give Manjho a sound blow on her strong back. After giving her two slaps on the cheek, she would take her clothes off and give her a bath' (ibid. 17–18). After she displaces this desire by mutilating a pliant doll, Shaman does feel guilty; her understanding of moral norms is now advanced enough for her to worry that she might have actually murdered someone. In these feminised domestic spaces where even certain articles of clothing are invested with moral meaning, the girl child is overcome with the desire to try on forbidden adult female clothing: 'Amma used to hide and go put hers on in the bathroom like it was a bad word' (ibid. 22). We are reminded here of Elias' suggestion that the civilising process involves the subjecting of instinctual life to advanced levels of 'shame, revulsion and knowledge' (Elias 1978: 140). In this context, it is the gendered female subject who is the paradigmatic site of the self-civilising undertaken by the emergent Muslim middle class.

Shaman's general deviancy becomes the source of resigned disavowal for her family, expressed, not surprisingly, in the language of class and caste difference: 'Shaman is the sweeper's daughter, Nani bought her from the *bhangan* for two paises' (Chughtai 1995: 29). The gendered naturalisation of class and caste differences is integral to the process of (middle-)class consolidation. Shaman's intractability threatens this tenuous state, thus incurring the intense familial disapproval that is to last well into her adulthood. As she grows into a more conscious awareness of class and gender norms, the violence and unruliness that characterised her infant days are transformed into more thoughtful and deliberate acts of resistance. Shaman seeks revenge for neglect by 'rubbing fistfuls of dirt into her hair and massaging her neck and face with mud' (ibid. 30–1). The child has arrived at some cognitive understanding of the importance of her body in producing her as a classed and

gendered subject; she now *consciously* grasps the fact that it is also, therefore, the logical weapon for resistance. As she persists with her disruptive projects, Shaman soon becomes the family cautionary tale of 'what will happen to you' if you do not bathe/study/tell the truth/obey orders or cannot recite lists of English nouns (ibid. 38). In her intractability, the permanently bedraggled girl-child inhabits the border between the success and failure of the civilising process at the heart of Indian modernity.

Unique and personable though Shaman is as a fictional character, the dissonance she both experiences and produces is not reducible to a tale of individual rebellion. The novel seems to suggest that the historical moment of transition to national modernity for the middle-class family and the female subject was itself a confusing and necessarily ambivalent one. Education, particularly English education, was, for instance, an ambiguous tool of modernisation, part of a catalogue of genteel feminine talents but also, inasmuch as it was tied to Christian schools, seen as potentially deracinating (as Shaman's struggle to be allowed to stay on at the missionary college suggests).¹¹ The counterfoil to Shaman is her widowed and much older sister, Bari Apa, who figures in the narrative as the prototypical subject of 'tradition', both victimised and victimiser, holding her family to emotional ransom as she stays single and 'kills off her own womanliness for the sake of her father's honour' (ibid. 41). Shaman, who feels no gratitude for her sister's sexual martyrdom, swiftly develops a critical consciousness towards familial structures and ideologies of sexual propriety and decides that 'it would not bother her at all if [Bari Apa] took herself off to a brothel' (ibid. 41). This critical edge, so conspicuously lacking in her much older siblings, is generated by virtue of Shaman's unique historical position as a transitional subject who is able to travel between older and newer spaces. Even as the contours of these spaces – 'tradition' and 'modernity', 'home' and 'world' – and the lines between them seem to be shifting, Shaman is able to both inhabit and abstract herself from them. Unlike Bari Apa and her other sisters, and despite the ambivalence of her family towards modernisation, Shaman will be formally educated at home and in public institutions. She will thus forge links beyond the family to the public sphere and the nation state. If she herself is aware that her body is an instrument of rebellion, modernity for her family is marked by a measure of uncertainty as to how that very body is to be shaped and moulded in this changing context. And so, surprisingly, except for the occasional whacking and scrubbing, the young Shaman is left to wander around doing what she likes. For all its deprecation of her intractability, her family would seem to be peculiarly uncertain about what to do with her.

The gendered modern habitus

In a perceptive analysis of narratives of self-identity in late modernity, Anthony Giddens discusses the development of frameworks 'of ontological security' and their reliance on emotional and behavioural formulae that are part

of everyday behaviour and thought (Giddens 1991: 44).¹² Because the self is embodied, such security is also sustained by an awareness of the contours and the properties of the body. Shaman's move away from the family home, not quite into the 'world', but into the halfway house of the all-female boarding school with its limited, yet novel, freedoms is marked by the growth of radical uncertainty and profound distrust: 'When she set foot into the school, the first thing she did was to assess from which direction there was a danger of being attacked' (Chughtai 2000: 50). If in her infancy and early childhood, Shaman's body was an instrument of both exploration and an unconscious refusal of regulation, now it is the site of cognitive dissonance and anxieties about loss of control. Although the omniscient narrator observes somewhat mawkishly that Shaman is an always already distrustful subject, 'shrinking from love', what happens to Shaman here has less to do with emotional predisposition than with the range of new experiences she now undergoes (ibid. 50).¹³ In the space of the familial home, the transition to modernity was marked by uncertainty about normative practice and subjectivity. Here, it is defined by a multiplicity of intersecting, often conflicting, frameworks and narratives: a modernising educational system that both works against and defers to 'tradition' and its gendered values; public spaces that simultaneously elide and emphasise difference; secular institutions that foreground religious identity; and, finally, social fictions that both construct and regulate sexual desire.

These dissonances are, once again, registered by Shaman's body, which repeatedly teeters on the verge of breakdown. In homoerotic desire, treated here with greater authorial sympathy than in 'Lihaf', Shaman seems to find both a comforting safety and an unnerving rupture. If her love for her teacher, Miss Charan, brings fulfilment, it is also frightening in its intensity and unfamiliarity. Shaman's dislocation from her family generates joys, uncertainties and fear that take somatic shape in an amalgam of fantasy and hysteria:

She is sleeping, Miss Charan is patting her. She is thirsty, her throat is parched and Miss Charan is squeezing cold and fragrant juices into her mouth. Her hand is on Shaman's forehead . . . She sees herself wandering in the darkness, crying. Lying on the cold grass, shivering. Miss Charan is laying her down on her own feathered and flowery pillow.
 . . . Thoughts of Miss Charan possessed her like an illness.

(ibid. 53)

Chughtai, whose own childhood was plagued by nightmares, uses Shaman's experience of dislocation to suggest that bodies are 'permeated by, and contain within them, their own historical experience of social relations' (Chughtai 1998: 175; Mellor and Shilling 1997: 20). Now it is forging interpersonal relations with strangers – itself an experience uniquely 'modern' for women from relatively privileged backgrounds – that makes for uncertainty in the form of unfamiliar rules of engagement. As bodily and emotional needs take

shape in changing institutional and ideological contexts, they are manifested through both physical and psychological symptoms. The familiar boundaries between fantasy and experience, and between body and mind, are blurred in the subject's lived experience of estrangement. When Miss Charan is finally dismissed following a sleepwalking episode in which Shaman ends up in her room late at night, Shaman decides that '[t]he fault lay somewhere within her and she was ready to accept that fact now' (Chughtai 2000: 52). What she cannot cognitively grasp, yet, is the extent to which the 'within' and the 'without' are dynamically engaged in her experience of the world around her.

By this point in the narrative, close to what the text terms 'The Second Stage', Chughtai's interest in the mutual engagement of body and psyche expands into a concern with the dynamics of what might be called a *gendered modern habitus*. Although the concept of the 'habitus' has been deployed variously by scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias, it can be broadly taken to indicate the organisation of the senses and cognitive capabilities into different ways of being, knowing and acting.¹⁴ As is the case with Chughtai's account of the vicissitudes of Shaman's transition from familial to public space, the body, 'both shaping and being shaped by the structure of social fields', is central to the development of habitus (Shilling 1993: 149, fn. 2). The gendered modern habitus, as it emerges in *The Crooked Line*, is one that engages physical and mental capabilities, indigenous and foreign influences, individual proclivities and historical processes. It evolves from a dynamic and dialogic process in which subject and social field (in this case, modern educational institutions for young women) exist in a relationship that is at once agonistic and collaborative. If, on the one hand, Shaman's body is subject to a mechanistic new institutional regime, 'standing up with the other girls, sitting down with them, coming in and out with them', on the other, her body refuses to succumb to the possessive control of the individual subject as agent:

Different parts of her body were growing at different speeds. At first it was as if her legs had taken a dislike to the rest of her and were getting indiscriminately longer. At night she could feel them growing. Undulating like long lines, they would flow away from the bed towards some unknown destination. If she raised herself up on her elbows to watch them, they would swiftly recoil like tapeworms. As if she had just caught them before they ran away altogether . . . Other parts of her body were also becoming alien to her. Her nose quarrelled with her face and went on its own way.

(Chughtai 2000: 58)

Modernity in this context is indeed 'fractured', bringing with it radical doubt as well as unusual certainty. It offers Shaman the opportunity to develop a

sense of self outside the parental home while overwhelming her with a sense of infinite possibility.

The adolescent body, which Shaman feels both dissociated from and oppressed by, reflects – but also resists – this coming-of-age. Shaman's experience of her changing body is clearly overlain by the ideologies of shame and disgust that govern the female subject's relation to her body and its sexed processes. To overcome this split, she must attempt to gain what Hortense Spillers terms 'insurgent ground as female social subject', by asserting 'the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to "name")' (Spillers 1987: 80). Appropriating the power to name – to understand, to classify, to take control – requires, in turn, working towards knowledge of the biological body in relation to its social field. Significantly, Shaman experiences her 'illness' in terrified isolation; she is never able to name what she is going through, either physically or psychically. Indeed, she fears naming it: 'once before, when she had talked about these kinds of matters, a sister had scolded her for being quite shameless' (Chughtai 2000: 58). As if to underscore the silence that marks Shaman's experience, the narrative also does not give her illness a name. It is left to the reader to surmise, from the very secrecy and shame surrounding this episode, that some of Shaman's problems are gynaecological. If modernity in this instance is characterised by 'the means to exert an unprecedented degree of control over our bodies', it is also marked by radical doubt about 'our knowledge of bodies and how we should control them' (Shilling 1993: 3). The struggle to come to know the body, in Shaman's case, is complicated by a host of ideological constraints. Modern medicine seems as opaque as the conventions of her familial home, and more invasive. As rumours fly through the school about Shaman's purported delivery of a baby, she wonders if she had indeed had one, and if so, 'who the baby looked like' and how she would raise him (Chughtai 2000: 59). Despite the absurdity of this moment, the narrative is grim about the rhetorics of shame, secrecy and ignorance and their consequences for the gendered subject. Tellingly, it is after she finds out certain biological facts (we are not told what they are) that Shaman's mental state improves and she feels herself 'gradually coming out of the twilight into brightness' (ibid. 60). But knowledge is acquired within institutional frameworks and these must be reckoned with. Frightened later by her roommate's obsession with her, Shaman does not dare to talk about it or complain to matron: 'What would she tell her? Just last month some girls from the lower classes had been punished for playing inappropriate games. Hiding under quilts they were delivering each others' babies' (ibid. 61).

The Crooked Line narrates a secret history of modernity from the conflicted perspective of those women who were nominated to showcase its transformative power. In lived experience, its contradictions were nowhere more apparent than in the realm of desire and sexuality, which reveal themselves to be profoundly shaped by social imperatives. Thus, homoeroticism seems normative in an institutional context where worshipful cliques form around attractive and powerful women, so that it is heterosexuality into which schooling

is necessitated. Shaman's new friend Bilquis explains to her that she too once had a passion for the woman whom Shaman has a crush on, 'but Apa Bi told me girls should have passions for boys [because we]. . . can marry them and live with them forever' (ibid. 82). Shaman is initially shocked at the unnatural thought of feeling desire for males but is then introduced by Bilquis to the world of youthful heterosexual romance, the 'ailment' where everyone must have 'a registered lover' (ibid. 84). That modern romance is underwritten, however, by material resources is made clear with the arrival of two rich aristocratic girls who bring with them modern accoutrements such as powder and lipstick even as 'the poorer girls rubbed their faces with red ink and four-anna powder for pimples when they couldn't find anything else' (ibid. 98). Conversing in English on radical subjects adds a frisson of subversion to the proceedings: 'All those young men in the college who were enlightened, revolutionary and spirited came there to discuss social and political matters and ways in which forthcoming generations could be radicalized . . . Love flourished in full view of everyone, not in secret corners' (ibid. 84). The narrative voice remains sceptical about the transformative potential of these public displays of radicalism.

'Becoming modern' in transitional times entails a constant and difficult negotiation of contradictory imperatives for the young Indian Muslim woman in Shaman's class position. If her family gives in to her desire to pursue higher education, it is a move outside the familial home that is permitted with the implicit understanding that she will remain within the bounds of its sexual norms. Arriving at the missionary college, Shaman is, however, exposed to a daunting new set of social norms where co-educational contact is not only encouraged but expected. Informed by teasing seniors that kissing men is 'compulsory', Shaman is anxious about the consequences of these new sexual mores for herself, given that she has had to battle her own uncertain family to be allowed to educate herself further away from home. The lived experience of modernity as the nation state makes its entry on to the world stage entails engaging with a multiplicity of ideologies not reducible to the dyad of the colonial and the national. The banquet, arranged at the college to introduce young men and women to each other, functions here as the microcosmic institutional setting for the emergence of the 'New Woman' of the transitional period, a woman who, much like her contemporary descendant, 'is Indian as well as new' (Sunder Rajan 1993: 132). '[T]his subject is 'Indian' in the sense of possessing a pan-Indian identity that escapes regional, communal or linguistic specificities, but does not thereby become "westernized"' (ibid. 130). Represented here by the sari and the spot of kumkum on the forehead that Shaman's friend compels her to wear, the 'pan-Indian' is, in fact, constitutively Hinduised. (As Gail Minault points out, many young Muslim women in this time period adopted the Hindu-identified sari in the face of disapproval from family elders.¹⁵) Feeling physically oppressed by this enforced and calculated syncretism of the 'Indian' and the 'Western', Shaman sits dressed for the first time in high heels, sari and kumkum dot on

her forehead, talking to her nervous suit-clad date talking in stilted English: 'Suddenly Shaman felt as if someone had filled her throat with smelly sewage from a drain. She felt like throwing up violently but managed to contract her throat and swallow a large mouthful of tea' (ibid. 130). Bodily and psychic management in the new spaces of the national modern is a project much like learning to eat 'tinned fish'; it 'needed practice' and 'was best accomplished in the bathroom after vomiting several times. . . (ibid. 130). The gendered modern habitus threatens perpetual disintegration like the sari that she fears 'will slip off her body, leaving her naked' and the kumkum dot which 'was lodged on her forehead like a bullet and with any pressure, would explode like a pomegranate seed and drip down her face' (ibid. 129–30).

This constant sense of impending dissolution and even annihilation accounts for Shaman's renewed desire, after the banquet, for wholeness and stability. It takes the symptomatic form of a crush on Rai Sahib, her best friend's father, indicating her longing to merge seamlessly with the dominant Hindu imaginary that he represents to her. As she secretly applies red kumkum, the insignia of Hindu femininity, on her forehead, she experiences a libidinal charge as 'this tiny drop of blood engendered a thousand colours' (ibid. 137). She reads the Hindu epics and imagines herself their heroine. In her memoirs, Chughtai recalls her own 'romantic interest in the Hindu religion' after a staple diet of Islamic teachings, even extending to a desire to become Hindu (Chughtai 1998: 115). A lovelorn Shaman also turns to nineteenth-century English romance, weeping for Hardy's Tess and for Jane Eyre who 'returns to her blind master', while the poetry of Byron and Shelley sends 'shivers through her veins' (ibid. 139). The rhetoric of English India and of Hindu nation merge to bring her to a final fatal declaration of love for this unlikely Rochester in her life for whom she offers to convert to Hinduism. Cast off by him and her friends, reeling from his unexpected death a few days later and overcome by shame, Shaman finally encounters the shattering breakdown into fragments that she has always anticipated and feared. Convinced that she is nothing, Shaman, in an eerie repetition of the traumas of her adolescence, experiences somatic episodes of nightmares and hysteria, until she returns home where 'for three months, typhoid lay relentless siege to her body' (ibid. 148).

This melting down of all that is solid – romance narratives, family, dreams of marriage, a secure sense of cultural identity – is a simultaneously regenerative and alienating experience for Shaman. If the process of 'becoming modern' has been experienced thus far in terms of a loss of control, Shaman's initial steps towards recuperating agency entail a break with family. It is liberating, but not unambiguously so: 'Who were all these people to her? It was true that all these brothers and sisters had sprung from the same mother's womb, but so what? Thousands of tenants come to a building, live there for a while and then leave. Who are they to each other?' (ibid. 149). The language of commercial contract denaturalises filial relations even as the description of the spatial economy of the family home marks it as other

than modern. Shaman's sickbed is near the veranda where grain is winnowed and spices are ground while children play there; only a few yards away, people quarrel during a game of cards while others are served their meals. But the modernised national public space of the university, to which Shaman returns with relief, proffers its own complicated spatial politics. As men and women wrangle over questions such as the 'cure for Hindustan's endless bondage and poverty' and play games that encourage bodily contact, predictable problems lurk beneath the façade of political equality (ibid. 162).¹⁶ Armed with a scepticism towards both, Shaman is now able to compare the sexual politics of home and world. If the traditions of the former hinge on romantic stories about marriage and family, then equally suspect narratives of enlightenment and progress are available to those negotiating the terrains of the modern. If the romance of the wedding can be punctured by the thought that very soon the 'bride' will dwindle into a 'wife' with 'dozens of children clinging to her young body and thousands of worries sucking her blood like leeches', then Shaman's radical colleague, Iftikhar's, bohemian arguments against marriage are equally dubious (ibid. 173). Although comrade Iftikhar advocates free love, Shaman sees him as mired in patriarchal privilege and blind to the conditions of inequality in which such unions would take place. Narratives of free love are as attractive as the romance of the family but, in the absence of material and institutional change, they will not necessarily be emancipatory. While acknowledging that the imagination is 'a wonderful thing' that enables both personal adjustment (in the case of Noori's marriage) and social transformation (in Iftikhar's utopian vision), Chughtai refuses to concede that it is, in and of itself, liberatory (ibid. 172). 'I cannot change the state of the nation with a snap of my fingers', she recalls telling a friend who chides her for not being bolder in her personal life as a young headmistress. 'It will take an epoch' (Chughtai 1998: 206).

Compelling though it is as a textured study of how the gendered modern habitus evolves, *The Crooked Line* offers an even more provocative 'psychobiography' of the making of that quintessentially modernist figure, the progressive, feminist and intellectual activist whose sphere of operation is the nation itself. As her protagonist becomes more politicised in the company of radical students and poets, Chughtai undertakes a thoughtful – and often characteristically irreverent – meditation on the nature of radical politics itself. Shaman herself experiences the process as though she were a split person:

The more she understood the enigma the more difficult and convoluted it seemed to become. It felt as though the new Shaman was playing hide and seek with her. As soon as she came close to touching her, she would dissolve in the wind. Sometimes she would feel like she had caught her. But before she could identify her features, she would let go of her hand and duck away. The she would run after her with redoubled effort.

(ibid. 189)

The oxymoronic and modernist image of the elusive core encapsulates the kind of critical humanism that the third stage of the narrative will elaborate as a bringing together of commitment to knowledge and openness to change. Like the *habitus*, this 'core' is neither essence nor performance but a constantly evolving dialectic of self and structure. For the subject herself, embracing this process can be traumatic, for there are no new 'homes' of any kind that will substitute for the one that she has cast off. Both nationalist and radical organisations have resources that she can draw on, but both have also to be held at a critical distance. Of the former she notes wryly that the nationalist girls at college spoke English at home, dressed in Western clothes and came from wealthy indigenous capitalist families whose every stake is in keeping their textile business away from colonial control: 'the gospel of homespun clothes fattened their businesses, but the workers remained hungry and deprived as always' (ibid. 191).

But it is when subjecting Shaman's 'progressive' comrades to scrutiny that Chughtai – who joined the PWA at its inaugural conference in 1936 and remained a (not uncritical) supporter all her life – is at her satirical best: 'Progressive newspapers, progressive associations, progressive essayists and progressive poets were born, and the revolution took place in full force' (ibid. 262). Ironically, for an author who herself was repeatedly charged with obscenity and a preoccupation with sexuality, Chughtai's satirical target is the erotic drive of self-styled progressive poetry and the various poets who sublimate their desires in intimations of revolution. She is scathing, for instance, about the poet who predicts to the object of his affections: 'The revolution will come – all restraints will be broken, society will be destroyed. . . the workers will rule [after which he would] undo her musky tresses in the silence of the night and let them perfume the air with their fragrance' (ibid. 192). Chughtai also has little patience with nativist appeals to 'traditions' of erotica, demanding whether even diseases need be carefully preserved (ibid. 264). While she is undoubtedly reductive and somewhat lacking in nuance when dismissing all of Shaman's progressive male comrades as sex obsessed, Chughtai is justly critical of the unexamined sexual politics of a great deal of radical poetry – as exemplified by an obsession with and aestheticisation of prostitution. The question of 'obscenity' versus 'legitimate' depictions of sexuality was, of course, a persistent point of contestation in debates within the PWA. In one of her own literary essays, Chughtai asks: '... why are you so scared of eroticism in literature? And don't you see that the writer himself is trembling fearfully and is terrified of the world's obscenity? All he's doing is converting events that are taking place in the world into words' (Chughtai 2001b: 19). What Chughtai really critiques in Progressive discourse is the celebration of mere eccentricity or avant-gardism for its own sake to the detriment of wider analysis and action: 'Old ties were broken. New paths and new angles were drawn up. Messy hair, passionate eyes, dirty or unusual clothes, a briefcase containing heaving poems, fiery short stories, glowing essays and exquisite photographs: any such person was deemed a progressive' (Chughtai 2000: 262).

The limits of the ideational when it comes to social and ideological transformation become most apparent when Shaman takes a job as the headmistress of a girls' school. Now she must battle with mismanagement, lack of resources, poorly paid teachers, mindless bureaucracy, the theft of school lunches by starving workers and the unhappiness of the impoverished women on her staff. Personal goodwill and generosity cannot mitigate the situation: 'Razia Begum observed a policy of stern defiance. Even after efforts to persuade her, she would not teach the girls anything' (ibid. 218). While Shaman understands the reasons for this subaltern obduracy, she rejects passive resistance as a solution to systemic problems, embarking instead on a project of (re)construction. There is much to be discouraged by, and she finds herself wondering whether it wouldn't be better to 'go back. Go home, get married and increase the population of the naked and the hungry, this is her national legacy' (ibid. 227). The preponderance of architectural metaphors and symbolic acts of construction here is striking. In contrast to her home where everyone drags the 'broken cart' of life without making any effort to fix it, Shaman vigorously undertakes repairs of the girls' school building which, symbolically, had originally been built by a wealthy man for his favourite courtesan (ibid. 200–1).

Modernity in this text is figured as a critical project that draws upon the dynamic of culture itself, a dynamic that engages constantly with old and new, inside and outside, to create regenerative cultural and institutional forms. Both historical memory, in the form of cultural traditions of justice and progress, and utopian vision, which includes learning from other contexts, are integral to the architectural project of reconstruction.¹⁷ As its very title suggests, the text is preoccupied with the idea of mapping and reconstructing real and imagined spaces. Shaman's repeated attempts to recast herself and her existence into a 'straight' (rational, controlled, ordered) rather than crooked (chaotic and unpredictable) line are emblematic of her relationship to the project of becoming modern. She will eventually have to come to terms with lived modernity as a dialectic of older and newer modes of existence within which neither pure agency nor unalloyed oppression are viable models of subjectivity. It is an insight that gathers strength even as Shaman begins insistently to perceive links and resemblances between her own life and that of the nation: 'The pitiful state of her own home reminded her of the general state of affairs in Hindustan. . . . If only some disaster would sweep up the inhabitants of these ruins and fling them into a barren desert where free of the dark protection of this house, they would be forced to build new shelters for themselves' (ibid. 259). The nation cannot be built on the family unit as it stands; both need radical transformation and reconstruction.

Modernity is rife with failures and betrayals at both the personal and the political levels. Where radical men turn out to be old-style sexual swindlers, European nations make false claims to being the champions of democracy and freedom. Struggling with cynicism and the overwhelming urge to dwindle into indifference, Shaman embarks on yet another train journey, not

knowing where exactly she is headed, and even pondering lying down on the tracks: 'What is the need for a destination? When the point is to get away, why look to tread on a line that is already drawn?' (ibid. 233). This aimless journey is, nevertheless, a liberatory moment of experimentation against the teleological and the rigidly normative, even as Shaman's depression will later expand into a cynical relativism that brings her to the point of breakdown. As in Rashid Jahan's story, 'On a Journey', Shaman's travels in a third-class carriage afford her further lessons on the state of the nation and its denizens: 'Sick, broken, clumsy human beings – wearing dirty and foul-smelling rags; who knows where they were going and why. Perhaps they do not know what their destination is either' (ibid. 233). The world itself can be mapped on the crowded platform; a lone Englishman sits in the first-class waiting-room, while the others are crowded together like cattle: 'The platform is a kind of government where apart from a few persons in first-class, the rest are a disposable bundle of rags' (ibid. 234). Another train journey undertaken after yet another failure to find roots (this time by adopting some of her siblings' numerous children) also works to map the contours of the nation as she travels from city to city. She dreams of untangling the cords of her heart into neat separate compartments, but like Old and New Delhi, neither is a feasible alternative: 'Everything seemed unhealthy and unattractive. Dilapidated buildings stood cursing those who had built them . . . And her step-sister, New Delhi? Clean, desolate and eerily isolated. It feels as though only bats or ghosts live here. Exactly like a modern Taj Mahal' (ibid. 302).

Oscillation between wholeness and fragmentation marks Shaman's experience of modernity. The third stage of the novel finds her constantly vacillating between finding a 'home' to inhabit and travelling aimlessly: 'What's wrong with floating on like this? Without rudders, sails or a guide?' (ibid. 301). [In contrast to Chughtai's decision as a young woman to become the 'master of my own boat' (Chughtai 1998: 108)], Shaman will eventually have to find a way of inhabiting the world that will be neither rooted nor rudderless but, until then, she finds herself experimenting with a range of possibilities from commitment to relativism. Particularly striking are her experiments with motherhood as a way to find stability and 'wholeness' through filial bonds. During her own frequent frightening crises of fragmentation, Shaman longs to curl up in her mother's lap and discover the contentment of childhood, even as she is aware that her relationship with her largely absent mother was far from satisfactory. Her experiments with adopting some of her siblings' numerous children, however, end in failure. Even as she embarks on the project of recovering familial ties for herself, she sees the nation itself reflected in her family and remains unconvinced that originary or biological bonds are integral to either entity:

If, like Germany, Hindustan decides it too needs pure blood, how much native stock would be left over? About as much as the white on a sesame seed, perhaps not even that much. A share from the Aryans, a share from

the Iranians, and then Afghan, Mongol and Arab blood. Then this fresh British blood which was coming filled in red canisters along with other war supplies. Hindustani soil absorbs them all.

By the third stage, the narrative weaves together an intricately patterned fabric in which the lives of its protagonist, that of the nation and the contours of the global historical are intertwined. A sinister vignette reminds us that this is the period of expansionist fascist aggression when 'two greedy children divided Poland as though it were a sweetmeat and ate it up' (ibid. 230). Wondering how 'the delicate bodies of Europe which wither at a sharp glance' will endure the kind of tyranny that they themselves have inflicted on their colonial subjects, Shaman finds herself apprehending events on a global scale through the same complex lens through which she now views events in her own life (ibid. 230). It is a complexity that is necessary if the ironies embodied by the colonial narrative of 'good colonialists versus bad fascists', the nationalist narrative of 'we are one' and 'better than all the world', and the insidious patriarchal tendencies of radical thought are to be identified for what they are. Through a series of shocking images of 'human skeletons, black and crooked', Chughtai telegraphically reminds us of the state of the 'nation' at this historical juncture. This is the period of the horrific 1943 Bengal famine, an event that fired the imagination and anger of several radical writers and film-makers, a holocaust of over three million deaths caused by the diversion of food to Allied troops. The famine brought to crisis the British colonial administration's argument that the war was for the good of the entire Empire, as well as nationalism's claim to fraternity between all Indians. For Shaman herself, these reflections are both abstract and terribly immediate: 'Black, yellow, crooked and withered legs, some half-dead legs wrapped in torn, dirty dhoties, weak legs covered with dirt and slush and, sometimes, disfigured legs bent under the weight of a huge paunch – all these used to pass under her window' (ibid. 230–1).

Shaman's attempt to understand causal connections results in fits of self-directed rage at the role of the colonised in upholding colonialism: 'We'll go to bed hungry but your granaries must stay full. Just confer upon us the privilege of being your orderlies and your ayahs so that our blackness can bow before your whiteness' (ibid. 231). But almost immediately, the text attempts to undermine its own pessimistic observation with a somewhat vainglorious claim: 'The wealth and the wealthy of Hindustan can be vanquished. But its sobbing beggars and silently expectant hearts cannot be won over' (ibid. 245). Pointing to colonial hypocrisy in advocating the values of freedom to mobilise its colonial subjects against fascism, Chughtai suggests that, for those whose bodily suffering and mental anguish is already extreme, it could be harder to make fine semantic distinctions between British imperialism and German aggression (ibid. 260).¹⁸ Colonialism and fascism must be understood as related and fought together; where the moral 'othering' of fascism by imperialism must be seen for the deception that it is. As historian Sumit Sarkar has

pointed out, in the context of a struggle for national liberation, 'the Allied propaganda that the conflict was one between democracy and the principle of self-determination of nations against tyranny and aggression was bound to seem extremely hollow' (Sarkar 1983: 375).

Shaman's experiments with relativism occur as a defence against breakdown, when she discovers that the 'revolutionary', Iftikhar, to whom she had devoted much of her emotional energies, is a married man with a history of cultivating susceptible young women. It is an event that reifies her long-held mistrust of male radicals and propels her across the thin line between critique and cynicism. An event of global significance, the German invasion of Russia in 1941, strengthens her sense of radical contingency in love and war: until now, 'Russia and Germany were in an embrace, cuddling each other, and today this battering had started' (Chughtai 2000: 278). As she wonders 'how to gather up all fragments that were scattered everywhere' and put herself back together, both the home and the world from which she feels alienated seem to hold out a paradoxical promise of succour. She thinks of her mother's lap or of running into the crowd and saying to it: 'Absorb me, hide me. . . surround me from all four sides and chase away this frightening loneliness' (ibid. 275). Despite her earlier distrust of instant change, she decides to command herself into wholeness: 'The backbone, which was accustomed to bending along special curves, now lay on the straight floor. No . . . every curve would now be erased. This crookedness would have to be straightened' (ibid. 277). This 'straightening' takes the form of *enacting* wholeness without feeling the pressures of commitment. So, as the swastika 'spun like a top in ever-expanding circles', Shaman goes shopping and romancing with reckless abandon. The same agency that eluded her as a sexual subject will, she believes, accrue to her as a consumer. As if to make amends to herself for being objectified unwittingly in the past, she now *demand*s objectification in the form of gallantry and verse. 'Performing' her own objecthood, she decides, she can give herself the power of (self-)control she did not have before. Commitment is a waste of time: 'Why should my heart be in it? For whom?' (ibid. 286).

The narratives of body, family, nation and world merge towards both crisis and resolution with Shaman's unexpected romance with and marriage to Rufy Taylor, an Irish captain in the British Indian Army.¹⁹ The inter-racial relationship in a situation of dramatic political inequality and cultural difference is reminiscent of Aziz's and Fielding's abortive friendship in Forster's *A Passage to India* ['no, not yet. . . no, not there' (1979: 316)]. This last section of the novel works as an experiment in the possibility of cross-cultural humanism in a world that is still defined by the colonial project. Shaman and Taylor are aware of the political valences of their relationship, first in stimulating ways and, later, haunted by the morbid inevitability of its decay even as they are determined not to let history stand between them. Their first weeks of being together are happy ones, as two people from different cultures who 'had had the same sort of childhood and youth. The same small pranks and punishments, the same innocent interests and games' (Chughtai 2000: 337).

Something like a postcolonial humanism seems eminently realisable in the sphere of affective relations: 'human beings are the fruit of the same seed. What's with all this big and small, black and white?' (ibid. 332). There are no essential cultural barriers that account for the decay that finally undermines this relationship, but in this colonial context the historical refuses to be ignored or simply transcended. As Taylor remarks bitterly: 'My countrymen look at me with hateful compassion. As though you were some disease I've foolishly brought upon myself while your fellow Indians think that sitting next to you is not a human being but a huge insult aimed at their whole nation' (ibid. 334). For Shaman, the very fact that her equality has to be asserted rather than assumed within (Taylor's) Eurocentric humanism points to the paradox whereby one group retains the power to define the parameters of the human. Political debates that were once stimulating turn into vitriolic and destructive fights, which now stress irreconcilable differences. Where then is the possibility of humanism to be found? Certainly not in the vacuous declarations of 'generous' friends:

One of our uncles married a Red Indian. She was very loyal and good. She would sing us songs in her own language and tell us scary stories about the jungle . . . He used to tell us: 'The only way to foster a friendship with Hindustan is to erase the distinction between black and white'.

(ibid. 358)

Not to be arrived at through voluntarism or idealism, humanism cannot simply be asserted in a context defined by profound inequality. But, for all the despair that marks the last few pages of the novel, the project of humanism itself is never consigned to the dustbin of history, even as it is recognised that: 'This mildew that had set in over the centuries could not be scraped off with ease' (ibid. 350).

Reconciliation takes place briefly when the couple receive a loving letter from Rufy's mother. Feeling the distant embrace of the old Irish woman, Shaman's deep-rooted hatred of white women dissolves into a humble admission that she has not really had a chance to get to know them in their own context, away from imperialism's tainting influence. But it is hard not to conflate the institutional structures of imperialism and those who seem to represent it: '...these scars of imperialism! If only an unseen hand would pick up this rubbish and throw it into the ocean and along with that, wash away the white stains that have erupted from sores exposed to heat and darkness' (ibid. 350). The declarations of human commonality that she and Taylor cling to to save their marriage are limited ones for here, too, the parochial masquerades as the universal. While Shaman quietly, even unwittingly, integrates herself into a European lifestyle, Taylor operates with an insidious system of equivalences where Europe is the yardstick: everything must be measured in European terms. As Russia joins the allies, she is reminded of the same paradox in global terms: 'All charlatans. Setting out to be the true

defenders of humanity. What if they devour what little is left of humanity?' (ibid. 353). As their marriage finally dissolves, Shaman eventually goes off to work for famine victims and Taylor leaves to fight on the front. Having 'chewed off every tie with poisonous teeth' (ibid. 369), Shaman will now wait for the young life in her to emerge into the world. Alluding thus to the cutting of an umbilical bond, the novel ends on a wistful, ambiguous and yet deeply hopeful note: the unmothered child will now be a mother herself in an unconventional family unit. Motherhood encapsulates the interface between the cultural and the natural, and between 'irony and commitment': it is debunked constantly, but is also the source of solace and strength (Eagleton 1990). It is a role that women can reclaim in transformative ways, as is clear through Alma's initial rejection of and ultimate reconciliation with her 'illegitimate' son. Although Shaman appeals to the biological, to 'natural' maternal love in order to persuade Alma to overcome her sense of shame, this is a reclamation of motherhood that ultimately rejects conventional ideologies of both body and family. Now it is Shaman's turn to be a mother in a non-traditional domestic unit. There are no clarion calls for closing lines, and we are not clear how Shaman's future will turn out, but there is cause to be hopeful as, at last, she realises that she must live in constant engagement with contradiction: 'Never before had she felt so weak and yet so brave, so anxious . . . and yet so confident' (Chughtai 2000: 368). The closing lines of the narrative bring together fragmentation and wholeness:

The mother sitting in America and knitting warm clothes, Rufy . . . flying towards the open mouth of death . . . she herself . . . and . . . a life closer to her than her own self . . . It is true that they were all very far from each other. A journey of thousands of miles separated them. But at this time she felt as though the whole world had gathered itself into her own being.

(ibid. 368)

The contradiction contained, even celebrated, within these closing lines adumbrates Chughtai's own sense of what modernity had come to mean to her and her fellow-travellers. 'Contradiction marks existence', she writes, recalling her attempts to balance her bohemian inclinations with a sense of responsibility as a young teacher. 'Countless questions are wrestling with each other in my mind. Resolving them, disrupting them and then resolving them again, this is life' (Chughtai 1998: 207). This understanding of modernity is strikingly similar to Marshall Berman's famous account of the phenomenon as 'a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish' (Berman 1982: 15). Berman contends that this experience is world historical, spanning five centuries and cutting across boundaries of geography, religion, class and nationality even as it generates 'a plenitude of traditions of its own' (ibid. 16). Chughtai's literary foray into the

gendered experience of modernity in transitional India combines an awareness of its world-historical dimensions with a finely honed sense of cultural and historical specificity. Indeed, the Shaman–Taylor romance, arguably the least autobiographical section of the novel, seems specifically intended to ask to what extent historical conditions such as those produced by modernity can be ‘shared’ experiences. Colonialism – a reality that only nips at the edges of the rest of the narrative – becomes curiously salient in the last few chapters, pointing to that which is obvious enough but can easily be forgotten in the rush to reconcile differences. As a world-historical phenomenon, modernity produced savagely unequal economic and socio-political conditions that make for markedly different relations to and experiences of it. The cultures of colonialist (and capitalist) modernity are legion, but are connected precisely by its world-historical sweep.

Profoundly aware though they are of themselves as products of modernity in transitional India and of the several contradictions of being in their classed and gendered positions, Progressive women writers such as Chughtai clearly came to a more complicated understanding of their situation than theories of ‘derivative discourse’ might indicate. Indeed, *The Crooked Line* is a deliberate act of self-reflection in relation to colonial and national modernity, indicated as much by Chughtai’s choice of the long novel form (although her speciality remained the short story) as by its obviously biographical moorings. Where Chughtai’s most celebrated short fiction typically tells stories of women who lived lives that were somewhat different from hers – young servants, impoverished widows, unfulfilled aristocrats, runaway brides, lonely single women – *The Crooked Line* is preoccupied with the evolution of its protagonist into a gendered modern citizen and subject, but one whose consciousness will remain sharply critical in relation to the conditions in which it was produced. The commodious yet disciplined structure of the bildungsroman allows this novel its close focus on the self even as it proffers a panoramic sense of society and nation. The novel form also allows Chughtai to do what her closing image so powerfully does : draw together, without collapsing them, the universal and the particular, self and society, and existence and imagination. This sense of connectedness in the face of contradiction encapsulates the novel’s conclusions as well as its author’s understanding of her own historical circumstances. The novel is unyielding about colonialism and yet clear that the life of its protagonist(s) and the nation cannot be reduced to its derivations. Modernity in India is connected to colonialism, but it also connects with other phenomena and structures to produce also that which is irreconcilable with and resists the colonial. The depredations of modernity – fascism, war, famine, poverty, new forms of marginalisation and exploitation – must be identified and fought, but there is no desire to return to an imagined prelapsarian moment of communitarian non-modernity. Patriarchy persists in new modern dress even among the self-appointed radicals of the day; but, for a woman in Shaman/Chughtai’s position, there is nothing in the least bit compelling about what appeared to pre-exist the modern.

This sense of connection is also apparent in Chughtai's insistence on the inseparability of thought, politics and imagination in literary practice. In an exasperated and forceful critique of the Progressive literary critic, Ebadat Bareilvi, Chughtai questions his separation of 'action' and 'imagination' (or aesthetics and politics). She professes bewilderment at his claim that 'literary' socialism would be different from political or 'worker' socialism and at his attempts to exalt 'humanism' as the proper provenance of Progressive writing. In a critique that prefigures some of her attacks on modernism, she writes:

He equates action with falling from the heights and lauds texts that have been written in a vacuum. . . . But how will [the writer] observe life? How will he manage to discharge all the duties related to 'humanism' and populist reform from so far away? I hope that the respected gentleman is not under the impression that the writer is a minor prophet to whom all the secrets of the universe will be revealed through prophecy?

(Chughtai 2001b: 58)

This is a critique that is also directed at armchair Progressives who romanticise the working classes using their 'imagination' alone: 'The working class has been used in much the same way as the prostitute is used. You see the same old *pari* of *Indersabha* [mythological nymphs] in the guise of the female labourer' (ibid. 59). Progressive writing is also in danger of creating abstract and ideational figures such as the 'working class' or 'woman.' In contrast, Chughtai's own interpretation of realism in literature necessitates engaging critically with the complexity of the real using a combination of imagination, sense experience and intellectual work. To become subjects rather than objects of one's historical moment, it is necessary to engage fully with it and to participate in shaping its contours. There is no looking back nostalgically nor any wondering 'whether a revolution will come along in a leisurely manner and clear the path' (Naqvi 1995: 61). In the following chapter, we see how Saadat Hasan Manto, a friend and comrade-in-arms of Chughtai's, also wrestled with the problematic of making connections and becoming an accountable subject. For Manto, it was to be the nightmare of Partition in 1947 that catalysed his ongoing efforts to bring together otherwise bifurcated elements in his work: self and society, cognition and sense experience. Where Chughtai and Rashid Jahan focused on the self-fashioning of women in the context of national modernity, Manto was to take further the efforts of Mahmuduzzafar and Sajjad Zaheer to engage with the question of masculinities, so often the absent presence in meditations on social transformation.

4 Dangerous bodies

Masculinity, morality and social transformation in Manto

The knife had already sliced through the abdomen all the way up to the nose. The pajama cord was cut. From the mouth of the knife-wielder came prompt words of regret, ‘tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk! A *mistake* has happened!’.

(Manto 1996d)

Accounts of violence. . . are vulnerable to taking on a prurient form. How does an anthropologist write an ethnography – or to borrow a more apt term from Jean Paul Dumont – an anthropology of violence without its becoming a pornography of violence?

(Daniel 1996)

If *this* isn’t an insult, what is it? A girl appears naked before a man and says ‘what’s the harm. . . It’s only Khushia . . .’ Khushia? . . . he couldn’t be a man, but a tom cat, like the one that is always yawning on Kanta’s bed . . . yes, what else?

(Manto 1996g: 60, my emphasis).

In Saadat Hasan Manto’s eponymous story, the pimp Khushia sits brooding on a deserted platform that serves by day as a car repair station. He is thinking about his call that morning on Kanta, one of the girls in his ‘circuit’. After identifying her caller, Kanta had opened the door to let him in, wearing nothing but a small towel. Khushia finds himself petrified; he quickly averts his gaze from her semi-nude form. When he tells her reprovingly that she shouldn’t have opened the door in that state, her reply is mortifying: ‘I thought what’s the harm . . . It’s only Khushia; I’ll let him in (ibid. 58). Beating a hasty retreat, he spends the evening on the deserted platform pondering the implications of what has just taken place. He can only come to one conclusion: had Kanta thought of him as a man rather than ‘only’ her pimp, she would never have allowed herself to appear ‘unceremoniously naked’ as she opens the door to let him in: ‘She was a prostitute, of course, but even they didn’t behave like this’ (ibid. 59). Chewing paan with tobacco, he swirls the accumulated spittle around his mouth and, as though enacting his sudden sense of sexual inadequacy, finds himself unable to spit out the liquid.

Narratives of sexual encounter and ensuing crises of male self and sexuality are central to the prodigious body of work produced by Indo-Pakistani writer, Saadat Hasan Manto, during his short life (1912–1955). Aside from defending himself from lawsuits over the alleged obscenity of five of his short stories, Manto enjoyed (and assiduously cultivated) the reputation of an intellectual maverick who habitually generated controversy. In his essays and memoirs, he represents himself as a lone rebel, unfettered by ideological constraints or threats, whether from the right or the left. Hailing him ‘as the only Indian writer in translation whom I would place on a par with the Indo-Anglian’, Salman Rushdie describes Manto as a ‘writer of low-life fictions whom conservative critics sometimes scorn for his choice of characters and milieus’ (Rushdie 1997: 52). Leaving aside the dubious and patronising compliment to Manto, Rushdie’s comments are problematic in more than one way: they reduce an uneven and diverse body of work to the anodyne category ‘low-life fictions’ and do little to illuminate the nature of the controversies over Manto’s writings. These famous and very public controversies, generated by stories such as ‘Cold Meat’, ‘Smoke’, ‘Black Salwar’ and ‘Open It’, had little to do with his choice of characters and milieus; after all, established literary greats such as Premchand had already taken up issues such as poverty, prostitution and sexual exploitation. I would argue, instead, that it was Manto’s forays into the relatively uncharted and unmarked terrain of masculinity – as lived experience and as social category – that accounted for the furore generated by some of his most well-known stories in both Progressive and less radical circles.

Saadat Hasan Manto was born in 1912 in Punjab to a Muslim family of Kashmiri descent. A notably poor and undisciplined scholar, he stumbled his way through school and college and finally had to quit Aligarh Muslim University after being wrongly diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1935. Under the intellectual tutelage of a journalist called Abdul Bari Alig, however, Manto had come to know and love the classics of nineteenth-century European literature, the works of Wilde, Maupassant, Chekhov and Hugo in particular. His first literary achievement was, accordingly, an Urdu translation of Hugo’s play, *The Last Days of a Condemned*; he later undertook to translate Wilde’s *Vera*.¹ Like many other writers of the time, Manto moved to Bombay to begin a career in journalism; from 1941 to 1942, he also worked for All-India Radio in Delhi as a staff dramatist. On returning to Bombay, like Ismat Chughtai and K. A. Abbas, Manto joined the film industry as a story writer, first for Imperial Film Company and later for Saroj Movietone, Filmistan Studios and Bombay Talkies. It was here that he came in contact with Progressive writers such as Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi and, of course, Chughtai herself. Although much influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of the PWA both in Aligarh and in Bombay, Manto was to have a contentious relationship with the organisation all his life.² After Partition, when Manto finally joined his family in Pakistan in 1948, he suffered a depressive episode that made him even more dependent on alcohol, already a big part of his life. When

he died of alcohol-related illness in 1955, he was not quite forty-three years old. In twenty-two years, he had produced over 250 short stories, in addition to scores of essays and sketches. Five of his stories were to be indicted for their allegedly obscene content, although only two of them – ‘Thanda Ghosht’ [Cold Meat] and ‘Upar, neeche aur darmiyan’ [Above, below and in between] – were actually found to be in contravention of existing legal codes on obscenity.

Reading some of these stories alongside less controversial ones in the pages that follow, I shall attempt to show how, like Rashid Jahan and his great ‘friend and enemy’, Ismat Chughtai, Manto too faced the challenge of developing an aesthetic and a politics that could engage powerfully with the complexities and contradictions of his time, an epoch marked both by buoyant hope and by gut-wrenching disillusionment.³ In that sense, both his much-vaunted ‘individuality’ and his so-called ‘perversions’ and ‘obscenities’ are best understood in terms of his struggle, over time, to craft a literary position that would articulate these contradictions while imaginatively exploring possibilities for social transformation. Manto’s early fiction illustrates the very binary between the affective and the cognitive that he would find himself having to undo after the shock of the blood-soaked Partition that came as collateral damage with Independence in 1947. There are, on the one hand, the stories of male sensual experience such as ‘Dhuan’ [Smoke] and ‘Bu’ [Odour], which evoke a precognitive, purely experiential mode of male being-in-the-world. On the other, are the more explicitly political stories of exploitation and oppression, which typically have a female figure at their centre. ‘Woman’ in these latter functions as a kind of shorthand for the gritty ‘real’ in ways familiar to us from the work of reform writers such as Premchand. It was to be the cataclysmic experience of Partition in 1947 – and the extended reverberations of the communal hatred and bloodshed that followed it – that would finally push Manto to bring together psychobiography and historical analysis, probing the wounded recesses where individual and community colluded in doing violence to themselves and to others in the cause of self-assertion. Where Ismat Chughtai engaged with the making of the modern Indian woman, Manto was to explore the experience of masculinity, most powerfully in the context of the violence that marked nation constitution. If Rashid Jahan and Chughtai focused on the reconstitution of female bodies and psyches in space, it was Manto who took up most visibly and forcefully the project initiated by stories such as ‘Dulari’ and ‘Jawanmardi’ in the *Angarey* collection: the reformation of male bodies and psyches.

It is this interest in masculinity as experience and social relation that is signalled in a story such as ‘Khushia’ (1940).⁴ In the opening lines of the narrative, Khushia is seen brooding on a platform that by day is used for a paradigmatically modern, masculinised activity – car repair. The platform is ‘littered with motor-tires and other spare parts’ as Khushia reflects on his standing in the twin spheres of labour and desire (Manto 1996g: 57). Sitting alone, surrounded by the paraphernalia of modern masculinity, commerce

and technology, Khushia tries to come to terms with the fact that his identity as an agent of sexual transaction and as a man have come into conflict. If his encounter with a naked, unperturbed Kanta makes him feel the absence of a *recognisable and recognised* gendered sexuality (male and heterosexual), then here too he is an anachronism of sorts, a spare part in a modern world that is dominated by skilled and mechanised activity. Manto's discursive mapping of space in the story suggests that Khushia's crisis is, in fact, generated by his awkwardly liminal position in relation to sex and labour. If gender marks and is marked by distinctions between public and private, labour and desire, then the pimp is one subject who does not fit into either space. He traverses the spaces of (public) labour and (private) desire, literally negotiating transactions between them; in the process, he disrupts their boundaries. It is he who transacts a conventionally private act into a commercial exchange; he works by night, when all other commerce is conventionally suspended. For Khushia, this disruption ricochets on to his own embodied self, and he himself becomes an ambiguity – illegible for gender and sexuality.

Significantly, Khushia has turned up at Kanta's expecting to find a woman in the process of feminising herself: 'She would be in bed with her hair fixed in curlers, or cleaning her armpits with that depilatory powder, the smell of which almost turned Khushia's stomach' (ibid. 60). Instead, what takes place is a scrutiny in reverse of the fixings and trappings of his own masculinity. Kanta's nonchalance brings Khushia to an 'interpretation . . . so evident and yet so obscure that he could come to no definite conclusion' (ibid. 58). What happens when the male gaze is rendered neutral by the refusal of the female figure to recognise it as such?

Damn it, there was a man standing before her . . . a full grown man, whose eyes could penetrate even the clothes of a woman . . . But, no, she hadn't turned a hair. And her eyes? They seemed to have come fresh from the laundry, without a speck of shame or modesty in them. She ought to have felt a little disturbed, a light blush ought to have tinted her eyes.

(ibid. 59)

Manto presents us with a familiar insight here: masculine identity relies on the recognition not only of sexual difference, but of the power of the male gaze and body to penetrate the gendered other. Refused this recognition, the gaze is returned to sender and finds itself resting on its owner. The imagery is explicitly phallic here: 'Khushia felt as if a peeled banana had slipped out of his hand and stood before him in the shape of Kanta. *No, he felt as if he himself had become naked.*' (ibid. 60, my emphasis).

The crisis of gender and sexuality, interestingly, also turns into a crisis of class and space – and as such, into an ethical one. This is manifested in Khushia's brief and unexpected awareness of the prostitute's sexuality and humanity: 'Her body was beautiful. For the first time, Khushia realised that even those who hired out their bodies could retain attractive figures. He was

surprised at this' (ibid. 59). Ironically, his own attitude to the prostitute has mirrored hers to him: members of the same profession, they regard each other as instruments of transaction rather than as gendered or sexual subjects. For Manto, as we shall see, to deny sexuality was to deny humanity and, in his firmly heterosexual universe, marked gender distinctions are essential. By the end of the story, Khushia has moved from the platform covered with car parts to control of the vehicle itself: 'The taxi under Khushia's command, passed through several streets, glittering with bright lights' (ibid. 62). As he arranges the kidnapping of a surprised Kanta and drives her off to an unknown destination to an unknown fate, all we are told is that 'Khushia was never again seen on the wooden platform of the automobile spare parts shop' (ibid. 63). We can only infer that Khushia has made the move from pimp to customer or, perhaps, husband or lover – from spare part to owner of the vehicle. And that thus, as Kanta's words are 'drowned in the metallic roar of the engine', the ambiguity that precipitates Khushia's crisis finds resolution.⁵

'Khushia' juxtaposes concerns that were, by and large, to remain bifurcated in the rest of Manto's early, pre-Partition work: male sexuality and masculinity, on the one hand, and patriarchy and the exploitation of women on the other. Where early stories with female protagonists are often polemics against sexual exploitation, in stories with male protagonists, male sexuality seems to have no apparent representational function; it neither provides metaphors for social exploitation nor functions as the point of departure for social critique. Through his renderings of young boys' sexual awakenings in stories such as 'Smoke' and 'Blouse', and a young man's yearning for his 'earthy' tribal lover in 'Odour', Manto develops a self-consciously lyrical aesthetic that brings together nature and male desire, emphasising the sensuousness of 'things' ranging from the air and rain to the smells of cooking and the texture of goat flesh. In sharp contrast to his stories about the degradation of prostitute life, the emphasis here is on pleasure and innocence; sexuality is the thing-in-itself rather than the means through which social criticism is effected. Unlike the prostitute stories, which are set in visibly urban contexts, and where architecture and machines have a conspicuously figurative presence, Manto strives in these early accounts of male sexuality to create an aura of timelessness.

In 'Smoke' (1941), for instance, there are very few indicators of time and place; the accent, instead, is on natural phenomena and on the consciousness of the protagonists as they come together and translate each other.⁶ In place of the gas lamps, trains, warehouses and cars of the prostitute stories are rain, breezes, the touch of flesh, the warmth of cooking and the slipperiness of wet mud. Heavy-handed symbolism is replaced by an emphasis on an organic connectedness:

On his way to school he saw a butcher who was carrying a huge basket on his head. In that basket there were two freshly slaughtered goats.

They had been skinned and from their naked flesh, smoke was rising. In various parts of the basket, the flesh – upon seeing which Masud could feel waves of warmth running along his cold cheeks – was twitching, just as his eyes would twitch sometimes.

(Manto 1991d: 70)

As if to emphasise this sense of connection, the landscape is painted in soft brushstrokes, dissolving the lines separating the animate and the inanimate. As Masud watches the steam that comes out of people's mouths in the cold air, he senses a benevolent dimness in the morning, one that 'toned down the sharpness of objects in his line of vision' (ibid. 70). Sight, which separates subject and object, is replaced by touch as Masud walks by the butcher's stand again and gently fingers one of the two still quivering carcasses: 'The flesh was warm . . . Masud's cold finger found this warmth very nice' (ibid. 71).

This intense sense of connection is a prelude to the awakening of sexual feelings that Masud will experience later in the day. Food, death and, incipiently, sex have no cognitive dimensions for him; there is, in other words, no separation between the subject and the object of knowledge. Watching his mother cook spinach later that morning, he sees the steam rise from the pot and remembers that the 'smoke' rising from the two goat carcasses was like the steam from his own mouth in the cold morning. Remembering the funeral of his grandfather, Masud recalls only the rain, the slush and almost falling into the grave himself; he wonders if it will rain on the funeral that his father is attending this morning and if people will find themselves slipping in the wet mud. Massaging his sister's aching back by treading on it, he once again thinks of the pulsating flesh of the slaughtered goats:

Kulsum's hips were filled with flesh. When Masud's feet touched that part, he began to feel as though he were pressing that goat's flesh, the one which he had pressed with his fingers at the butcher's stall. For a few seconds, this sensation brought the kind of thoughts into his mind and body that seemed to have neither head nor feet. He didn't understand their meaning, and how could he, when no thought was complete?

(Manto 1991d: 74)

The young boy's sexuality, although already part of a narrative that weaves together his various sensations, is figured as precognitive. Experiences merge into each other, translate each other, but as yet have no meaning beyond that. Just as the young girl in 'The Quilt' can describe what is going on between her aunt and her maid without understanding its meaning, Masud (who is also about eleven or twelve years old) experiences sensual pleasure without grasping its significance in terms of his own development.

Like the child in Ismat Chughtai's 'Lihaf', the young protagonist of 'Smoke' also cannot place his experience within a cognitive framework; once

again, the interpretive burden is upon the reader. As Masud feels his sister's flesh starting to become warm under his touch, just like the goat's carcass, he finds himself getting pleasure out of a task that he had begun with indifference. Below his massaging feet, 'Kulsum was moaning softly. These soft sounds, in tune with the rising warmth of Masud's feet, were adding to his mysterious pleasure' (ibid. 74). In the face of his cognitive incomprehension, Masud can only think of parallel sensations: that of fish flailing around gasping for air or of the acrobat he had watched walking a tightrope. Even so, he has a faint sense of the possible immorality of his sensations: 'Once or twice he wondered: if Kulsum were slaughtered and skinned, would smoke rise from her flesh too? But he felt himself a sinner at such unholy thoughts and wiped them away from his mind just as he would take a sponge to a slate' (ibid. 75).

Writing about the story in the wake of legal action in an essay called 'The Pleasures of the Senses,' Manto insisted that, while the story took sex seriously, it had no erotic charge whatsoever. Making a distinction between the physical and the erotic, he argues that the former is a natural phenomenon ('that which exists') and the latter is socially constructed. Manto suggests that what Masud enjoys is precognitive and ontological, 'an unnamed pleasure', while the erotic is inescapably ideological, embroiled in a specific kind of knowledge of the sexual (Manto 1991e: 80). In theorising 'Smoke', however, Manto is oddly conflicted about whether the story has a critical or moral edge to it: 'I have offered no moral in this story, I have given no speeches on morality because I don't consider myself a so-called reformer or a philosopher of character' (ibid. 80). He goes on, however, to offer an oddly moralistic explanation for his endeavours, which is to show that '[h]uman beings are not born with any bad inside them' (ibid. 80). If Masud eventually becomes perverted, it will be through the secrecy and mystification that the outside world imposes on sensual feeling. He himself writes for those, argues Manto, who are not caught up in the binds of mystification, people 'who see a woman's breasts as breasts and don't go any further, who do not look askance upon relations between men and women' (ibid. 82).

Manto's critical essays on his own work give us a sense of some of the ambiguities that structured his creative endeavours. If he argues, on the one hand, that his brand of realism does not have the power to incite emotions and passions, on the other, he suggests that this realism *is* itself an influential speech act inasmuch as it will change prevalent sensibilities by boldly making reference to the actually existing. The advocacy of realism also constitutes his defence against charges of obscenity from his detractors: leave alone references to a woman's body, he writes, 'for some people, the very existence of woman is obscene, so what cure can there be for that!' (ibid. 81). In his anxiety to distinguish the physical from the erotic, and the literal from the metaphorical, Manto underestimates his story. 'Smoke', in fact, derives much of its aesthetic power from conveying *without* naming the delicate texture

of Masud's unfolding erotic awareness, which the reader experiences along with him.

'My' women: the prostitute stories

Manto makes the case for his brand of realism as one that boldly refers to the female body in all its physical actuality rather than mystifying it through metaphor. But, in his several stories dealing with the lives of women, Manto's understanding of his role shifts from that of poet of sensuous experience to representative of the marginalised, a move that is signified precisely by a gap between woman as subject and woman as metaphor. In stories ranging from 'Babu Gopinath', 'Sharda' and 'Mummy' to 'Kali Shalwar' [The Black Salwar] and 'Hatak' [The Insult], all of which engage with the lives of prostitutes, the female body comes to represent social stratification and exploitation. Where stories of male sensual experience such as 'Smoke' and 'Odour' purport to avoid analysis by stressing sense experience, Manto's stories of prostitute life are marked by polemic and critique, even an excess of intellection. In these latter stories, Manto's voice assumes the moral authority of the social critic, a role he had explicitly refused in his essay on 'Smoke'. Reality, which is now the object of criticism, is equated with and represented by the experiences of his female protagonists. Interestingly, one of his most famous stories in this genre, 'The Black Salwar' (1942) was in the same collection as 'Smoke' and was the target of legal action at around the same time. The stylistic and thematic contrast between the two stories is remarkable. Where the narrative of male sexual awakening in 'Smoke' is redolent with lyrical metonymy, the story of female sexual labour in 'The Black Salwar' is laden with metaphor and heavy symbolism.

The following passage, one which Manto himself proudly cites in an essay defending the story, is illustrative. Here, the prostitute Sultana is sitting on her balcony and reflecting on her loneliness:

On the other side of the road, there was a warehouse which sprawled from one corner to the other. Under the iron roof on the left hand side, huge sacks lay on the ground and all kinds of goods were piled up there. On the right hand side, there was a large open ground on which innumerable railway tracks were spread out. When the tracks gleamed in the sunlight, Sultana would look at her own hands on which blue veins, just like those tracks, were standing out. On that long and open ground, all kinds of engines and trains would keep going through. Sometimes here, sometimes there. The huffing and puffing of these engines could be heard all the time. When she would get up in the morning, a strange sight would meet her eyes. In the dim light, the engines would be spewing thick smoke which looked like fat and heavy men trying to lift themselves skyward . . . Then sometimes, when she would see a lone carriage moving by itself on the tracks after being shunted there by an engine, she would

think of herself. She would think that she too had been left on the tracks of life after being shunted there by someone and she too was moving along all by herself. Other people were changing directions all the time but she was going on, who knows where! Then that day would come when the force of the shunting would slowly decrease and she would come to a standstill.

(Manto 1991b: 32–3).

The cityscape here is central to the representational project of the narrative and, unlike the misty streets of 'Smoke', is marked for time and place – colonial New Delhi. Warehouses, tracks and engines symbolise the prostitute's lot as the terrain of patriarchal traffic and situate her sexual bodily labour in relation to the mechanised world around her. Sultana is, thus, both *of* the city, embodying spatial and ideological divisions that regulate human traffic, and *like* the city, which becomes metaphor for her own condition and that of other women. 'The Delhi municipality, when they set aside a special space for Delhi's prostitutes, did not know', writes Manto in an essay citing the passage above, 'that the goods warehouse would become an accurate symbol of their lives' (Manto 1991c: 44). It is, he claims, his visionary insight as a writer that allows him to make and describe the connections between these material and symbolic realities. In contrast to the young boy and his experiences in 'Smoke', both Sultana and her way of life are historically situated. A prosperous prostitute who used to work in the Ambala army cantonment where her clientele was primarily British soldiers, she falls victim to her poor judgement in following her lover to Delhi where business is slow. 'This life very bad', she tells her new neighbour drawing on the small store of English she has picked up from her former customers (Manto 1991b: 28). The indoor plumbing with which Sultana is unfamiliar when she first arrives in the city symbolises her place within urban social architecture: 'In this flat there was a toilet where if you pulled the chain, all the filth would be washed away below the surface by a huge rush of water which made a lot of noise' (ibid. 29). The prostitutes' quarters, instituted by the city to prevent them 'making little enclaves everywhere', are all alike, and Sultana cannot distinguish her own flat from the others. The shop signs that help her find her way around are heavily symbolic: 'Soiled clothes laundered here', 'Coal sold here' and 'Meals for travellers here' (ibid. 31).

It is this symbolic ordering of space that enables Sultana to arrive at a more critical consciousness of her own alienated condition:

In Ambala cantonment, her house had been very close to the station, but she had never looked at these things the way she did now. Now, at times, it would come to her mind that these railway tracks spread out like a web in front of her, with steam and smoke rising in places, was just one big brothel.

(Manto 1991b: 31)

Although it is heavy-handed in places, the skill with which Manto's prose conveys Sultana's profound loneliness constitutes a powerful affective basis for the story's critique of exploitative regimes of urban social hygiene. Sultana's quest for the eponymous 'Black Salwar', an item of clothing she can no longer afford as her earnings are frittered away by her lover, Khudabakhsh, represents her desire also to find heterosexual love outside the framework of a commercial transaction. This is precisely what will elude her, Manto suggests, because gender identities are always already underwritten by the logic of commerce. 'If [Sultana] had been a married woman', he writes in his essay on the story, she would have received all these things for free, 'but married she is not' and so, 'she must labour' (Manto 1991c: 42). The real prostitute in this story, in turns out, is not a woman but Shankar, the man who promises to bring Sultana the coveted black salwar in exchange for sexual favours, but ends up swindling her and her friend, Mukhtari. In the final analysis, it is masculinity that is shown to be debased; deprived of its mythical status and reduced to a contractual commercial exchange, it ends up casting doubt upon its own sustainability.

Another story 'Hatak' [1940, *The Insult*], a personal favourite of its author, provides an instructive comparison to 'The Black Salwar'.⁷ Here, Manto stays with the theme of the good-hearted prostitute who is exploited both materially and emotionally by the men in her life. Sugandhi is a prostitute who, like Sultana, craves love and approbation from men for being a good person. Consequently, she too spends her earnings on her lover, Madho, who, while benefiting fully from it, is given to sanctimonious and husbandly speeches on how she needs to give up her trade. The narrative unfolds around a single incident that takes place when Sugandhi's pimp, Ramlal, wakes her up in the middle of the night to take her to a customer waiting in a motor car. When she reaches the car, the customer shines a flashlight in her face, makes a dissatisfied grunt and drives off. The pimp tells her that she has failed to make the grade with this gentleman. The insult which Sugandhi experiences from this rejection precipitates a crisis that has been simmering inside her for a while. In the hours that follow, she experiences a breakdown of sorts and, in the process, finally breaks free of her own oppressive need for approbation. Her life-defining final act in the story is to get rid of Madho once and for all.

That 'The Insult' was never actually targeted for legal action suggests that it was, in fact, those of Manto's stories that specifically foregrounded male sexuality and sexual behaviour that found themselves in the dock of the law. While 'The Insult' is at least as sexually explicit as those stories that did find themselves in legal trouble – and certainly more so than 'Black Salwar' – its focus is really on the body and psyche of the prostitute. Her experience of her own body is delineated in painstaking detail: the pain in her bruised muscles after a night of hard work; the coins nestling next to her breasts, 'as if the silver were melting slowly and dripping into her heart's blood' and the frequently shaved right armpit, blue 'like a piece of skin from a plucked hen' (Manto 1996a: 85). The following lines are typical: 'Of all the parts of her

body, Sugandhi loved her breasts the best. Once Jamuna had told her: “You should restrain these spherical bombs in something. If you wear a brassiere, then they will stay firm” (ibid. 93). The comment that Sugandhi makes as she stares at herself in the mirror then becomes Manto’s justification for writing ‘her’ story: ‘Sugandhi, the times have not treated you well’ (ibid. 95). As the prospective customer’s grunt of rejection reverberates in her mind, Sugandhi begins to comprehend the distinction between objecthood and subjectivity. She then tells herself that the customer’s rejection should not turn into self-rejection. Nevertheless, her continued anger at this man brings her to the point of violence as she replays the moment in her head, fantasising about tearing his face apart with her nails as he shines the torch on her.

She knew that she was not a bad person, but good; *but she needed someone else to validate that*. Someone – someone – if only someone at this moment were to put his hands on her shoulder and say, ‘Sugandhi, who says you are a bad person. He who says that about you is himself a bad sort’. No, there was no particular need to say even that. It would be enough if they said, ‘Sugandhi, you are very good’.

(ibid. 102–3, my emphasis)

The role of that ‘someone’ – necessarily male, in Manto’s conception – is taken up by the writer himself. His task is defined as a putting-to-rights, of working against the grain, not only of the pimp’s, the customer’s and the parasitic lover’s account of the woman, but also Sugandhi’s own insecure sense of herself. It is the writer who combines in himself the roles of critic and defender, who must succeed where other men fail; in doing so, he will establish himself as the new consciousness of the times that, thus far, have treated her badly.

Like ‘Black Salwar’, ‘The Insult’ occupies the liminal space between psychobiography and social critique without quite bringing the two together. The connections it makes between the evil that individual men do and systemic exploitation are tenuous, coming together most obviously in Sugandhi’s anger and sense of personal hurt at being rejected in a commercial transaction. Even this connection is distilled into a single image: her renewed fury at being dragged out of the privacy of her home into the public space of the market, only to be slapped in the face by the glare of the flashlight (Manto 1996a: 104). She can feel the man’s scrutiny pressing on her muscles, like someone examining a lamb or goat ‘to see if there is only hair there or actually some meat too’ (ibid. 104). What the narrative does evoke powerfully, however, is the way in which the incident effects enough of a cognitive shift in Sugandhi to goad her into transforming some aspects of her life. This transformation will neither take the form of the petty vigilante revenge that she fantasises about nor result in a revolutionary overthrow of her circumstances. What ensues in the minutes that follow is the beginning of Sugandhi’s determined rewriting of, if not her circumstances, then at least what she makes of them

and those around her. In a frenzy of destruction, she starts to pull off and smash pictures of the various 'regulars' in her life, including Madho, that hang on her room wall. Returning scrutiny and judgement, she now laughs at the posturings of these men and their pretensions to desirability. After this ritual act of desecrating those she has hitherto looked up to, she finally turns on a pained and surprised Madho.

'If you start up this trade of yours again, then you and I will be finished. If you let any man stay over here again, then I'll catch you by your hair and throw you out of here. I will send you this month's expenses via money-order as soon as I reach Poona – yes, what's the rent for this place?'

(ibid. 107)

This familiar litany is not delivered by Madho this time, but in Sugandhi's mocking voice. After a shocked and scared Madho finally makes his exit, Sugandhi sits down and feels a growing void within and without – 'all around her there was a frightening silence – a silence that she had never felt experienced before' (ibid. 108). It is with this void that the story leaves her, 'a zero that she tried to fill, but in vain', and her brain a sieve through which thoughts enter and leave. In the closing simile, Sugandhi, like Sultana in 'Black Salwar', likens herself to a 'a train filled with passengers that, after off-loading them, now stands alone in an iron shed' (ibid. 108). This ambiguity remains with us at the end: is the story a critique of *patriarchy* or only of individual *men* who treat women badly? Is the solution a rediscovery of an inner self, an interiority that transcends the body, one that, as Sugandhi tells herself, 'neither you nor your father can buy', or a restructuring of the conditions that allow bodies to be bought and sold in the first place? On this, the story remains unclear.

From man to human

Manto has often been lauded for a fierce individualism of a sort that apparently distinguishes him from the other Progressives who 'were busy trying to connect men and women's social and economic status to their characters' lives and to provide systemic solutions to their problems' (Joshi 1997: 155). This much-repeated assessment of the author is, however, one that flattens the historical range of Manto's output into a mindless iconoclasm. Manto was undoubtedly a self-appointed maverick, but his relationship to other Progressive writers (themselves hardly a homogeneous lot) was never one of simple alienation, as even polemical essays such as 'Taraqqi-Pasand Socha Nahin Karte' [Progressives Don't Think] suggest. In actuality, Manto's work ranges from complex psychobiographical vignettes to stories that are just as simplistic and 'vulgar' as some of those written by the 'social engineers . . . turned litterateurs' that some critics find so appalling (Joshi 1997: 155). As even the more developed stories of prostitute life such as 'Black Salwar' and 'The

Insult' suggest, Manto was frequently susceptible to deploying stock characters and narratives drawn from the literature of 'social engineering' as well as 'human drama'. More instructive than either celebratory or denunciatory approaches to both Manto's 'individualism' and his 'social commitment' is an understanding of how his work changes in response to historical exigencies.

Historicising Manto's work is particularly important with regard to those of his many well-known stories occasioned by the Partition of India in 1947. Typically read as 'documents of barbarism' (to use Walter Benjamin's formulation), many of Manto's best Partition stories, including the aphoristic sketches in 'Black Marginalia', are powerful evocations of the violence and trauma out of which emerged the sovereign nation states of India and Pakistan. Partition and the ensuing bloodshed were to have a profound effect not only on Manto's conception of himself as a writer, but would also compel him to confront the way in which that self-conception was gendered. It would no longer be tenable to keep separate the poetic accounts of male sensual experience and the project of representing the gendered subaltern. The cataclysmic and self-devouring violence of Partition would jolt Manto – and the male characters he created – out of their comfort zones into a difficult engagement with maleness as lived experience and as social relation. As almost a million people were suddenly dislocated and forced to move to new national homelands determined on the basis of religious affiliation, grieving and enraged communities – Sikh, Hindu and Muslim – consolidated their identities and visited unspeakable violence upon each other. Hundreds of thousands were brutally killed while many thousands more became the victims of rape, kidnapping and arson. Two facts became inescapable: the first, that ordinary, otherwise humane, people had turned into brutal perpetrators of violence, which could not itself be blamed in any direct way upon the colonial state or on political leaders and, secondly, that this violence was constitutively gendered and sexualised. As Menon and Bhasin have pointed out, a 'preoccupation with women's sexuality formed part of the contract of war between the three communities'; at the same time, the violence men visited upon each other (identifying and marking genitalia, castration, ritual humiliation) was also profoundly gendered (Menon and Bhasin 1998: 44). For the Progressives, the utopian impulse that had driven them in the years leading up to independence seemed to have been perverted beyond recognition in the name of national and cultural identity.

But Manto, after a depressive breakdown of his own following his relocation to Lahore in 1948, was to return to writing with renewed fervour (not least because it was now his main livelihood in a Pakistan where the film industry was miniscule compared with that in Bombay). But the subject of scrutiny and transformation had now shifted in significant ways. In those of Manto's stories that emerge out of the violence of Partition, the traumatic moment of the loss of masculine identity that we first saw in 'Khushia' now also signals a moment of cognition and self-realisation out of which transformation *might* occur. This is most vividly illustrated by the controversial story, 'Thanda

Ghosht' [Cold Meat], which, after its publication in 1949, became the focus of a year-long court battle. The *mise-en-scène* is a rendezvous between two Sikh lovers, Isvar Singh and Kulwant Kaur. In the world outside, looting and arson are rife, and Isvar has participated in them fully, periodically bringing the spoils home to Kulwant. The air between the two lovers in the hotel room is tense. Kulwant has sensed that things between them have not been the same for some weeks now. Suspicious that he has been seeing another woman, she badgers him aggressively about his whereabouts. He manages to pacify her by initiating a bout of lovemaking. However, when the foreplay reaches fever pitch and Kulwant is like a 'pot ready to boil over', Isvar is unable to 'play the trump card' and bring their sexual play to completion (Manto 1991f: 90–1). Now hysterical with rage (for this has happened the previous week as well), Kulwant confronts him about the 'other woman', to whose existence Isvar Singh finally confesses. At this, she grabs his dagger and stabs him in the neck, still demanding details. With blood spurting from his veins, Isvar Singh tells her: 'In the house that I . . . looted . . . there were seven . . . seven men there. Six . . . I . . . murdered . . . with this very dagger, with which you . . . never mind . . . listen. . . . There was a girl, very beautiful, who I picked up and took with me . . . ' (ibid. 93). He had taken the girl to a road where there are bushes behind which he intends to 'taste this delicacy'. As he finally 'plays his trump', a terrible realisation dawns on him.

' . . . but . . . but . . .

His voice became faint.

Kulwant asked again, 'Then what happened?'

Isvar Singh opened his closed eyes and looked at Kulwant Kaur's body, every part of which was heaving, 'She . . . she was a dead body, a corpse . . . Absolutely cold meat . . . my love, give me your hand'.

Kulwant Kaur placed her hand on Isvar Singh's hand which was now colder than ice.

(ibid. 97)

The story was rejected even by sympathetic publishers of progressive Pakistani journals as too dangerous before it was finally published in the journal *Javed*. Within a month, it became the subject of protracted litigation. Read together with accounts of the trials and the various judgements handed down on the charge, 'Cold Meat' provides valuable insights not only into Manto's own evolving literary politics, but also into the gendered politics of cultural identity in the context of Partition.

'Cold Meat' is a strikingly explicit account of an encounter, dwelling as it does on the physical attributes of both characters and their relationship as ideal (hetero)sexual partners. At the same time, gender roles themselves are depicted as fluid, shifting between the two lovers until there is a complete reversal at the end of the story. Kulwant Kaur is introduced as extremely womanly with a hint of the masculine. She is 'large of limb . . . with big hips,

full with quivering flesh. Breasts lifted high, flashing eyes, a faint shadow on her upper lips. From the set of her jaw it is clear that she is a woman who fears nothing' (ibid. 88). Isvar Singh's masculinity, on the other hand, is emphasised at the precise moment that it starts to be undone. The reader first encounters him in a state of nervous tension, 'his turban coming undone, holding a dagger in hands that are trembling slightly' (ibid. 88). Isvar's masculinity is indistinguishable at this point from his heterosexuality, his physical fitness to bed a woman such as Kulwant. As Isvar unties and reties his long hair, the competing forces of suffering and desire vie inside him for dominance. Similarly, the narrative rhythms oscillate between strained tension and sexual energy. First, Isvar's silences are punctuated by Kulwant's aggressive questions about his whereabouts; then her comment, 'You are not who you were eight days ago', is met by a burst of physical assertion on his part:

Isvar took Kulwant's upper lips with his teeth and started to nibble them. Kulwant melted completely. Isvar pulled off his own kurta and said 'Let the card game begin' . . . With both hands, he took the folds of her tunic and just as one might skin a goat, pulled it off and put it to one side. Leering at her naked body, he gave her a hard slap on her side and said: 'Kulwant, in the name of the Great Gurus! You are one solid woman!'
(ibid. 90–1)

Masculinity is recuperated, unsurprisingly, through sexual aggression and Isvar's playful reappropriation of the role of the 'tyrant'.

Why, then, does the discovery of cold flesh and the brush with necrophilia have such a debilitating effect on a man who, we are told, has shown neither mercy nor humanity as he participates in the killing frenzy of the riots? Even the lovemaking of Isvar, playing the tyrant, is filled with violent machismo, contrasting sharply with the impotence of the would-be rapist:

Having said that, he decided to punish her some more. He bit her upper lips, her earlobes, grabbed her heaving breasts, slapped her buttocks, filled his mouth with her cheeks to kiss them, and sucking her breasts, he slathered them with saliva. Like a pot on high heat, Kulwant was starting to boil over. But for all this frenetic activity he was unable to stir any desire in himself. He tried all the tricks and moves he could remember, he tried them out like a losing wrestler might, but to no avail.

(Manto 1991f: 91)

In the face of his lover's impatience and sexual assertiveness, it is now Isvar who turns into 'cold meat' like his erstwhile victim. To Kulwant's angry questions about the identity of 'the slut . . . who has sucked you dry', Isvar's answer that there is 'no one' has an ironic ring of truth to it. Just as his violent acts in the name of cultural identity have reduced his victims to 'no

one', his punishment 'from Nature' is that he too will lose his identity as a heterosexual male. As anthropologist Valentine Daniel has pointed out, violence in the pursuit of cultural assertion leads to a paradox whereby 'what the "victorious" group . . . has gained is the recognition of a corpse, which is no recognition at all' (Daniel 1996: 69). The moment of necrophilic rape becomes the moment when Isvar Singh is forced to confront the possibility of his own annihilation, for the coldness of the corpse circumvents and refuses the 'heat' that defines him as a man and a sexual being. Sexuality is central to his story, argues Manto, not because he wishes to eroticise the text but in order that the force of the contrast between life and death may emerge: '– if Isvar Singh himself had been a cold man then the effect of this incident related to a forced sexual act would not have been so strong' (Manto 1991h: 114). Stalled by the death of his victim, Isvar must now reckon with the implications of what he has been doing all along in taking life with such reckless abandon. This is a reckoning not only brought about by the humanity that finally makes its presence felt within Isvar, but one that results in a renewed allegiance to this humanity.

Reading accounts of the three trials that the story withstood, it becomes apparent that that the story's explicitly sexual content only partially accounts for the furore over it. The state's interest was less, it would seem, with the text's engagement with sex and sexuality in themselves than with its critique of the role of masculinity and male identity in relation to violence. The charge of 'obscurity' functioned, in fact, as a point of condensation and displacement for a host of other concerns related to gender, cultural identity and moral authority. For, even as it drew on existing narratives of women as victims, the story finally placed the burden of scrutiny on men in relation not only to female bodies but to their own bodies and the ways in which those bodies occupied and shaped spaces. The story's contention that humane values can be developed by working through contradictions and personal trauma emphasises the cognitive abilities of the subject and, as such, came into conflict with the received idea – reflected in the arguments made by prosecution and the two judges sympathetic to them – that moral norms were best determined by a cultural elite who alone knew the difference between right and wrong. Manto was specifically urging his fellow men to confront the question of 'what it is to be violent; and what that violence means for our existence as men' (Bradbury 1992: 156). As Peter Bradbury has argued, the more familiar rhetoric of female emancipation in left discourse has allowed men 'to distance [themselves] through professionalism or exclamations of horror, and to evade the crucial issue which women cannot confront for us', namely, what it means to be a male in the context of patriarchal violence (ibid. 156).

That the story's interest is in the experience of sexual violence for the male perpetrator rather than the female victim is powerfully emphasised by a key shift in reference. In the end, it is Isvar who is transformed into 'cold meat': it is 'Isvar Singh [who] becomes the victim of a shock related to forced sexual relations' (Manto 1991h: 113). Without absolving Isvar Singh of his

culpability in this encounter, Manto suggests that, under certain conditions, the perpetrator of violence undergoes a trauma of his own, one that might clear the ground for reformations of the self. In this instance, the would-be rapist is forcibly made aware of the fragility of his power and subject position: Isvar Singh's own masculinity is denaturalised and destabilised by the death of the gendered other who cannot perform the cognitive act of acknowledging Isvar's power and difference. By dying, by literally becoming 'not woman' and 'not human', the potential rape victim disallows the enactment of gendered power relations, and so the burden of cognition becomes Isvar's own. As with Khushia, whose gaze returns to himself and his own destabilised masculinity, the scrutiny at the end of this violent encounter returns to Isvar Singh.

Manto, one should be clear, has no interest in deconstructing the entire apparatus of masculinity. But the events of Partition would seem to have driven him towards the conclusion that masculinity itself had to be radically reconstituted if there was to be any meaningful societal transformation and, certainly, if the horrors of 1947–8 were not to repeat themselves. This would entail not just a simple reformation of behaviour or attitudes but a more far-reaching transformation wrought from an engagement with contradictions within the self. Isvar Singh is a compelling character because his emotions and his behaviour are at war with each other until he makes some kind of peace between them and with himself (although this peace is accompanied by death). When we first encounter him, holding his dagger and standing in a corner of the room, he is 'unravelling the threads of his troubled thoughts', ashen-faced, head cast down and speaking in a trembling pain-filled voice (Manto 1991f: 88). His sexual failures, as we have already seen, are intimately related to his ethical transgressions and his rediscovery of his own human capabilities. Towards the end, it is as Isvar Singh dies tasting his own blood that the potential in him for a regenerative transformation into a decent human being becomes evident. It is a moment, as Manto says, 'where he comes to a realization, or let's say, *becomes capable of realizing* that the dagger which just slit my throat is one that I used to kill six people' (Manto 1991i: 130, my emphasis). This awareness of those six other people in a metonymic tasting of human blood is a moment that Daniel, drawing on Piotr Hoffman's work on violence, might describe as the 'transcendence of narcissistic particularity' (Daniel 1996: 68). Because this transcendence entails 'the emergence of a universal/communal being, [it] is the mark of becoming truly human' (ibid. 68).

In *Manto Adaalat ke Katghare Mein* [Manto in the Dock of the Law], a compilation of testimony, reports and judgements on the five court cases that were fought over his work, there is a prefatory essay by Manto on 'Cold Meat'. It opens with a long meditation on his move to Pakistan in 1945. The rambling observations on shifting locations, writer's block, literature and nation seem to have no immediate or apparent connection to the account that then follows of how he came to write 'Cold Meat', the difficulties he had in getting it published and the awful predictability with which it was impounded:

For three months, my mind was in an odd state. I couldn't tell if I was in Karachi, in my friend Hassan Abbas' house or sitting in a restaurant in Lahore where there were frequent soirees to benefit the Prime Minister's fund . . . For three months, my mind couldn't decide anything. It felt as though on the screen, several movies were running simultaneously. Clashing with each other. Sometimes Bombay and its bazaars and streets. Sometimes Karachi with its small, swift trams and donkey carts and sometimes the noisy restaurants of Lahore – I couldn't figure where I was. I would sit all day long on a chair, lost in thought.

(Manto 1991g: 95).

The dislocation and disorientation produce for him a series of questions on what to write, how to write, indeed, the very nature of writing and literature in this changing context:

Will Pakistan's literature be different? If so, then in what way? Who will be the owner of all that was once written in undivided Hindustan? Will this be divided too? Are not the basic realities and problems that Pakistanis and Hindustanis face one and the same?

(ibid. 95)

As Manto ponders the fate of the Urdu language itself (he was prescient in believing that its fortunes would change in each of the new nations) and worries about living in a potentially theocratic state, it becomes clear that, from this point on, his writing would inevitably be inflected by these philosophical and political questions. Manto describes the pervasive dissatisfaction he can sense around him as two streams flow together, that of life and death. Life becomes a constant mingling of opposites such that it is hard to distinguish between them: hunger and gluttony, sadness and joy, expressions of happiness and cries of pain. Even slogans cheering the new nation and its new prime minister have a ring of sadness to them, pointing to the contradictions out of which the new state is born (ibid. 95).

It is out of this disorientation, stasis and writer's block, as his 'pen ambles around in the general twilight, looking for a path', that 'Cold Meat' is finally born (ibid. 96). This tightly crafted story about a rioter who confronts his humanity through crisis is, if not exactly allegorical, certainly deeply connected to Manto's concerns about the shape of national culture and the form that the new nation state will take beyond its surreal and violent beginnings. What can be rescued out of the debris and bloodshed of a death-dealing birth? Can the literature of mourning transform itself into a literature of willed regeneration? The story of the death of Isvar Singh, the man, and the birth of Isvar, the human being, signals an imaginative act of faith on Manto's part, one in which the reconstitution of masculinity and the rediscovery of humanity become preconditions for each other. Indeed, it is the experience of violence – of being, at one and the same time, violator and violated – that brings Isvar

Singh to moral understanding. Mind and body, reason and emotion, are all integral to this process.

Inasmuch as it brings culture and moral understanding into the ambit of the people at large, such psychic reconstruction has disruptive implications for the nexus of state, nation and culture. As Edward Said has pointed out, a Victorian intellectual such as Matthew Arnold understood that 'to be able to set a force or a system of ideas called "culture" over society is to have understood that the stakes played for are an identification of society with culture, and consequently the acquisition of a very formidable power' (Said 1991: 10). Manto's suggestion that moral practice entails working through one's own contradictions – in contrast to the imposed legislation and acceptance of moral codes from above – was constitutively subversive of a nationalist teleology that also identified 'a triumphant culture with the State' (Said 1991: 10). It is important to point out here that Manto was not an anti-statist in any simple way: indeed, he feels impelled to claim that he will remain 'loyal to the state under any circumstances' but asks at the same time: 'will we be given the leave to criticise its rule?' (Manto 1991g: 96). It is precisely his sense that the state can and must be part of a radically *democratised* culture and moral vision that enables him to make connections between individual psychic transformation and social reconstruction. As such, it is not surprising that the legal debates around the story come to focus on various inflections of the term 'character': the character of the author (pornographer or conscientious *littérateur*?); the character of the story's protagonist (sexually depraved or noble savage?); the character of the reader (impressionable or critical? Is he likely to be aroused or disgusted by what happens in the story?); and, by implication, the character of the state (the keeper of unitary national culture or framework for pluralism? Democratic organ of newly won freedom or authoritarian replacement for colonial rule?).⁸ Given the political uncertainties at the heart of the fledgling nation state (reflected in what Ian Talbot describes as 'interminable constitutional wrangling') which was to head rapidly towards the failure of democracy in 1958, it is not implausible to read the 'Cold Meat' controversies as part of a struggle to define the new polity.⁹ At stake was the locus of moral authority: whether it was to be the state itself or a democratic base that had so far failed to materialise for the leading political players.

What is remarkable about the entire discussion, in comparison to other discussions of national culture in the same period, is the complete absence of any reference to women. The burden of scrutiny is, for once, on the character of the state and its male citizens. If moral practice is forged out of the heterogeneous and contentious arena of daily life, then 'Cold Meat' attempts to explain how moral understanding might develop, as a cognitive and emotional process, out of working through the contradictions that structure everyday existence. This emphasis on individual and collective cognitive understanding threatens the *moralism* of the nationalist state whose own authority might come under scrutiny should its subjects develop critical and

reflexive moral faculties. Manto's defence against the state's charge that his work was obscene was to argue that he had merely been faithful to life and the demands of authenticity. This is why the portrait of Isvar Singh is necessarily that of an unrefined man:

The question is why not present things just as they are? Why make jute into silk? Why make a heap of garbage into a heap of perfume? Will turning our faces from reality help us become better people? Absolutely not – so why take umbrage at the character of Isvar Singh and his way of talking?

(Manto 1991h: 115)

Isvar Singh's crudeness and unrefined language are that much more effective in highlighting the humanity that he is capable of after all:

[D]o we not see a glimpse of the humanity in Isvar Singh's dark heart which causes him to negate his own desires – and it is a healthy thing that the writer of the story has not lost faith in human beings and humanity. If the writer had not made sensuousness integral to Isvar Singh's way of feeling and thinking, then truly 'Cold Meat' would be a very base thing.

(*ibid.* 115)

As he goes on to argue that what happens to Isvar Singh can happen to anyone, Manto veers between exceptionalising this character and his experience for literary purposes and generalising both in order to gesture towards the possibility of collective transformation. Sexual desire thus becomes both an index of Isvar Singh's classed existence and a marker of that which is common to all human beings.

In an essay entitled, 'The Story Writer and the Matter of Sex', Manto suggests that sex epitomises the contradictions of modernity itself where 'woman is both near and far . . . sometimes appearing naked, sometimes clothed' (Manto 1996f: 352). But if sex is a metonym for the ambiguities and tensions that mark modern gender relations, it is also that which (with implacable heterocentrism) withstands history and politics: 'Two lands can be separated from each other by a law but no administration, no decree, no law can keep man and woman apart from each other' (*ibid.* 352).¹⁰ Similarly, although sex has a pivotal aesthetic and political function in 'Cold Meat', that of eliciting from the reader an empathetic emotional response that will have epistemological consequences, Manto's own interpretation of his story can be startlingly contradictory. In his written testimony, for instance, he downplays the complexity of the sexual in his story in favour of according it a simple instrumental role. Insisting that the story has no erotic charge and that only a pervert would gain any sexual thrill from it, Manto writes: 'Of abnormal people, I can say nothing, for there are people who would find

it possible to have sex with a corpse' (Manto 1991i: 129). Normal people, he insists, would have only the reaction that one of his own defence witnesses claimed to have had: the story would render them 'cold meat', i.e. impotent. Although such a claim clearly has a tactical use in fending off the charge that Manto was a pornographic writer, it also contradicts his prior claim that, in order for the story to have the effect that it does, the cold, the dead and the inhuman(e) must necessarily be contrasted with the warm, the vital and the sensual. The reader, he suggests earlier, must *feel* this contrast in order to understand the ways in which the humane and the inhumane can co-exist in their own heart. For Manto, this paradox structured not only individuals, but also the patriarchal nation states that had emerged out of Partition; his challenge as a writer, from this point on, would be to unravel it.

Father, state and holy war

In a recent book on women's experiences of Partition, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin make a familiar feminist observation about women in relation to the construction of nation and community:

The range of sexual violation . . . stripping; parading naked; mutilating and disfiguring; tattooing or branding the breasts and genitalia with triumphal slogans; amputating breasts; knifing open the womb; raping, of course; killing foetuses – is shocking not only for its savagery, but for what it tells us about women as objects in male constructions of their own honour. Women's sexuality symbolises 'manhood'; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that *it has to be avenged*.

(Menon and Bhasin 1998: 43, original emphasis)

If 'woman' represents patriarchal honour in nationalist and communal discourse, in much Progressive writing, the figures of the prostitute, the widow and the victim of rape came to stand in for patriarchal depredations. Represented with benevolent, if earnest, paternalism, women once again became symbols of male honour, social progress and cultural redemption. In his earlier writings, Manto, as we have already seen, drew liberally on these existing resources. But the experience of Partition would impel him to interrogate prior assumptions and familiar discourses of emancipation. His chillingly terse story 'Open it' inverts the paternalism of 'rescue' narratives to suggest that a very thin line separates patriarchal violence from patriarchal protectionism.

Set in a refugee camp on the Pakistan side of the newly drawn border with India, the story tells of a father's search for his daughter, Sakina, who has been separated from him as they flee the violence in their home town. Rescue efforts for lost persons, especially abducted women, are in full swing, as both communities and states commit their honour to the recovery of 'their' women. As Menon and Bhasin have pointed out, both the abductions and the

rescues came to have immense 'material, symbolic and political significance', and the two new nations, in the midst of all the hostilities, came together in 1947 to sign an Inter-Dominion Agreement to facilitate the recovery of 'their' lost women (Menon and Bhasin 1998: 43). Manto's story opens with the figure of the father, Sirajuddin, lying on the cold ground of the refugee camp trying to come out of his own haze of disorientation to figure out the whereabouts of his daughter. The prose here is quiet and slow, but also thick with feeling; its rhythms manage to convey both the frenetic madness and the desolation of the moment:

At ten in the morning, when his eyes opened on the cold ground of the camp and he saw a surging sea of men, women and children in all four directions, his powers of thinking became even more atrophied . . . His whole being was suspended in nothingness . . . Several images were running through his head – looting, arson, running-fleeing, station, bullets, the night and Sakina. . . Sirajuddin stood up at once and like a mad man started looking into the sea of people around him.

(Manto 1991j: 148)

The tragic figure of the paterfamilias is at the heart of this story, as he wanders Lear-like around the camp calling out for Sakina. His family unit has unravelled around him, and he doesn't know how and why: Sakina's mother is dead, murdered, with her entrails strewn around her, and his daughter is nowhere to be found. Sirajuddin cannot even remember where he last saw her. He can only recall naked feet running, the long scarf or dupatta that modestly covered her bosom falling on the ground and himself stopping to pick it up even as she screams to him to leave it be.

The incident with the scarf is small but telling. It is to the father that his daughter's modesty, her honour bound up in the scarf that covers her breasts, is of such literally life-threatening importance. The scarf was there, in his pocket, but 'where was Sakina?' (ibid. 149). That it is at the very moment he stops to recover the scarf that he loses its wearer cannot be coincidental; although the story leaves us to make what we will of this incident, there is a hint that Sirajuddin has unwittingly traded Sakina, the woman, for the scarf that stands in for her 'modesty'.¹¹

Sirajuddin racked his brain, but could not arrive at any conclusion. Had he brought Sakina with him to the station? – Did she get into the train with him? – When the train has stopped on the way and rioters had gotten on, was he unconscious when they took Sakina away?

(ibid. 149)

The realisation of the loss, not only of his daughter, but of his senses and capacities (he has no answers, only questions), now defines his being: 'He needed solace, but so did all the people who were trapped around him'. The

refugees are infantilised and cathect the function of dependent children under the protection of the guardian state. Helpless as a lost child, Sirajuddin meets the aides of the state who will offer him help, 'eight young men, who had sticks and guns' (ibid. 149). These are the 'volunteers' who man the rescue programmes; they assure Sirajuddin that they will locate Sakina, if she is alive. Within days, as they are driving along in their lorry, they see a young woman on the road to Amritsar. She matches Sirajuddin's description of his daughter: beautiful, with a mole on her right cheek. The woman runs from them, but they give chase and catch up with her. Reluctantly, she acknowledges that she is Sakina, daughter of Sirajuddin. They take Sakina with them, and all eight do their best to look after her as they would a child: 'They fed her, gave her milk to drink and sat her in the lorry' (ibid. 150). As the crowning act of kindness, one of them, noticing that she is covering her breasts with her hands because she has no dupatta, gives her his coat to cover herself with. The act that Sirajuddin had so tragically failed to complete is now undertaken by her new protectors.

When Sirajuddin next runs into his young friends with the lorry and asks them if they have news of Sakina, they assure him that they will soon know. At this point, the reader, like Sirajuddin, has no idea what has happened. The scene then shifts to a moment, a few days later, when Sirajuddin hears that a young woman has been found unconscious by the railway tracks and has been brought to the camp. Slowly, Sirajuddin makes his way to the camp hospital where, in a darkened room, he sees a body lying on a stretcher. As the light suddenly comes on, he realises that it is Sakina. The ending of the story must be quoted in detail:

The doctor, who had just come in and turned on the light, asked Sirajuddin, 'Yes, what is it?'

Sirajuddin could only utter the following words, 'Sir, I . . . Sir, I . . . I am her father'.

The doctor put his fingers on the pulse of the body lying on the stretcher and said to Sirajuddin, 'That window, *open it*'.

Sakina's lifeless body suddenly stirred. With lifeless hands she opened the waistband of her salwar and lowered it all the way down. With great joy, Sirajuddin screamed, 'She's alive – My daughter is alive' . . . From head to foot, the doctor was soaked in sweat.

(ibid. 150, my emphasis)

The shock ending of the story, the twist in the tale that speaks eloquently of human depravity, is, of course, vintage Manto. The lifeless woman, bestialised in her conditioned response, reminds us of the unresponsive corpse of 'Cold Meat'. Some critics have found the ending of 'Open It' implausible: Leslie Flemming in her pioneering study of Manto's life and works, for instance, suggests that it takes the focus away from Sirajuddin by emphasising instead, 'the depths of inhumanity to which even supposedly well-motivated

people can descend'. For Flemming, this emphasis weakens the story, for 'the primary intention is to shock the reader, rather than to generate sympathy for Sirajuddin' (Flemming 1985: 80).

Flemming's comments about the story's shock ending and apparent failure to be 'realistic' point to a common misreading of 'Open It'. To foreground 'sympathy' for the father who witnesses the sexual degradation of his daughter would be to participate in the general hysteria about the loss of patriarchal honour through the violation of one's women. Manto attempts, instead, to show how the paternalism of a communal ideology can turn in on itself and lay bare the violence that is constitutive of it. This is a violence that does not and, in fact, cannot restrict itself to 'defence' against or 'revenge' on the depredations of the communal Other (whether Hindu or Muslim), but will eventually and inevitably return to prey on itself. Both Sakina and Sirajuddin, man and woman, father and daughter, will fall victim to it. As Menon and Bhasin have indicated, the communal violence of Partition was of the sort where, for women, 'it was not only miscreants, outsiders or marauding mobs that they needed to fear – husbands, fathers, brothers and even sons could turn killers' (Menon and Bhasin 1998: 255). In such instances, the line between 'protection' and 'attack' is rendered tenuous. Given the sharpness of its attack on the patriarchal underpinnings of the 'recovery' project, 'Open It' was, quite predictably, the target of Pakistani state action. The journal, *Naqush*, in which it was published, was banned for six months for 'disturbing the peace' (Manto 1991j: 147). Of course, it is the nature of such a 'peace' itself that the story questions, for gender is only the most visible of cleavages that show up in critical relief against the apparently unified surface of national community. By highlighting the collusion between masculinity, patriarchy and national identity, 'Open It' attacks and exposes the weakness of certain claims to national community. Benedict Anderson has famously suggested that 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1983: 7). Anderson claims that it is this comradeship that enables people not so much to kill, as to die, for nation. How might one then fit the willingness to prey on one's own body politic into fraternal sentiments about comradeship, community and nation?

Manto further problematises abduction-and-rescue narratives in 'In the Name of God', a story that interrogates the idea of the 'abducted' or 'lost' woman itself.

I often wondered why these women were called abducted women – when were they abducted? Abduction is a very romantic job in which both men and women participate. The veins in both their beings must be afire before they can cross a gulf of this kind. But what is this act where you catch a defenceless woman and then imprison her in your house?

(Manto 1996c: 152)

Both the primary narrator of the story and his informant, whose account constitutes the core narrative, are administrators in charge of recovery projects. Both eventually come to realise that the subjectivity of women must necessarily impinge on the work that they are doing, on the very definitions of 'abduction' and 'recovery'. As in 'Open It', the story told to and by the narrator focuses on the figure of an old parent, this time, a woman who descends progressively into madness as she wanders various towns searching for her lost daughter. The liaison officer, the narrator's informant whose account this is, tries to tell her several times that her daughter is dead, killed in the riots. The old woman refuses to believe him: 'She is beautiful – so very beautiful that no one could kill her – they couldn't even slap her' (ibid. 154). The officer encounters the woman several times; each time, she has descended further into mental and physical ruin. He is inclined to take her back with him to Pakistan and commit her to an asylum, but finds that he is troubled by the implications of doing so: 'I didn't want to take her from a vast mental asylum where journeying for miles would quench the thirst of her wandering feet and, instead, imprison her in a small confined space between four walls' (ibid. 154). One day, as he is sitting at a tea-stall with his sister, discussing the case of another missing woman, he notices a couple walking by. The woman is veiled and the man with her, a strong and handsome Sikh, suddenly stops and, pulling her by the hand, whispers to her, 'Your mother' (ibid. 155). The woman raises her short veil and, glancing in the direction of the old woman who is wandering the street, quickly lowers it again and tells the young man, 'Let's get out of here'. But it is too late, for the old woman has seen her. As the couple hasten away, the old woman screams out for her daughter. When she tells the officer that she has just seen her daughter, he tells her once again that her daughter is dead. In fact, he can swear 'in the name of God' that she is dead (ibid. 155). The old woman collapses in a heap on the street.

The liaison officer's perjury speaks to more than a desire to save the old woman further trouble. For a man who represents the benevolence of the patriarchal-protectionist state, it is also an acknowledgement that he cannot take for granted the subjectivity of the women he is 'recovering'. If these women are not always and simply victims, then his conception of his own role in this project and that of the institution he represents must necessarily change. The situation of the young woman in this story was not an uncommon one: as Menon and Bhasin have indicated, young women were known to have made use of the social chaos ensuing from Partition to run away and marry men of their own choice from other communities, acts that would have been impossible under normal circumstances.¹² In other instances, women often adjusted to situations such as abduction or forced marriage to settle down to fairly happy lives. Often, when they were asked to leave those situations or to 'return', they resisted.

It is by no means our intention to suggest that the predicament these women found themselves in was not traumatic or fraught with anxiety and uncertainty; merely that it would be false to presume that their lot was uniformly grim, their 'abductors' without exception, 'bestial' or unreliable and craven, and to assert as Mridula Sarabhai did, that recovery was 'an effort to remove from the lives of thousands of innocent women the misery that is their lot today, and to restore them to their legitimate environment where they can spend the rest of their lives with *izzat* (honour)'.

(Menon and Bhasin 1998: 91)

Manto's story also recounts the 'strange tales' that the narrator has been hearing – of the two girls who refused to join their parents in Pakistan; the young woman whose 'abductor' family gathered to bid her farewell as they would have a daughter-in-law undertaking a long journey; the girls who committed suicide rather than rejoin their natal families; and the 'recovered' girls who, unable to endure their psychic wounds, had gone mad and taken to drink. What is remarkable about the story, however, is that it is able to convey complexity without reducing the situation to complete indeterminacy. Although he suggests that 'abduction' and 'recovery' are multivalent and that, accordingly, the role of the rescuer state is not self-evident, Manto does not suggest that any and all attempts at helping displaced persons are misplaced. What he does, instead, is to lay out and question the singularity of the assumptions underlying institutional and communitarian action.

What, in other words, are the *motivations* behind the whole project of men 'involved in erasing the ill-effects of evils committed by man?' (Manto 1996c: 151). Wondering why women who had already been 'defiled' were now being 'saved' from further looting, Manto's prose moves now into a satirical vein:

So that their breasts would not be marked with further stains? So that they might quickly lick their blood-stained fingers and sit with men of their own kind to eat? – So that they might take the needle and thread of humanity and mend their chastity, while decent people look the other way?

(ibid. 151)

Manto does not rule out a genuinely humane impulse to right wrongs and, indeed, acknowledges that there is something inspiring, even 'pleasantly surprising', about the energy with which hundreds of men and women are engaged in the task of recovery and restoration (ibid. 151). But there is also a way in which the communal project of recovery, ungrounded in any kind of self-criticism, attempts to 'erase' and thereby consign to silence a history of inhumanity and violence that it too is implicated in. The rescuer himself can become the 'abductor' and rapist, not only of the 'Other's' women, but also his 'own'; bestiality cannot be contained by (af)iliative ties. In this haste

to restore the semblance of order, *whose* honour is at stake, Manto seems to wonder. The woman who quickly cleans her bloodied fingers and sews herself together into an apparent wholeness once again becomes the stake, the object, in the making whole of masculine honour.

Benevolent interventions: the prostitute and her patron

Manto's own work too, as we have seen, had been inflected by 'rescue and reform' narratives, in particular those stories of prostitute life in which he drew liberally on cherished reformist stereotypes: the promiscuous woman with the heart of gold ('Mozail'); the prostitute who craves love, domesticity and male protection ('Black Salwar', 'Sharda'); and the benevolent john with his protégé's best interests at heart ('Babu Gopinath'). Manto, with a notorious penchant for self-aggrandisement, often participated in the construction of himself as a whistleblower who unveiled those sleazy truths that no one else dared to address. In a satirical sketch lampooning those who denounced his writing as pornographic, Manto sets up a conversation between two of his critics:

'The government is considering building a settlement near the Raavi for courtesans and whores. Move the city's dirt far out. Why not send these poets, storytellers and litterateurs there too?'

'... But that wretch [Manto], instead of entertaining himself, will write about them. He'll present us with more Sugandhis and Sultanas'.

'More Khushias and Dhondus'.

'Don't know what pleasure that wretch derives from uplifting these fallen beings'.

'The rest of the world considers them disgusting and worthless, but he embraces them. Gives them love'.

(Manto 1991a: 23)

Manto's self-representation in this piece, written late in his career in 1952, is of a man who prefers the bitter to the sweet, the dirty to the clean, the naked to the veiled, who 'won't even look at housewives [but will] mingle with prostitutes' (ibid. 23). He is the lone champion of the truth, while the rest 'continue to pull the blinds around each other's misdeeds' (ibid. 23).

Again, it is Partition and the insights that Manto derived from witnessing violence that seem to have brought him to a greater degree of awareness about the problematic assumptions of his own brothel-district stories. In 'Sau Kaindal Power ka Bulb' [A 100 Candle-Power Bulb], written some time between 1948 and 1954, the protagonist is a man who becomes acquainted with a pimp and a prostitute and who finds his neutral attitude soon turning into outrage on the prostitute's behalf. He is anxious to channel his feelings into constructive action but, as the ending of the story shows, that is not to be. Like Manto himself, the protagonist is a man with a tendency to philosophise

on all matters, including sex, and is wryly aware of this tendency: 'Man needs this thing at all times', he tells the pimp, 'this thing which you can offer him – on those gallows – on a burning funeral pyre' (Manto 1996b: 138). As he waits on a stairway in a broken-down building, more the curious *flâneur* than the eager customer, he hears the pimp waking the prostitute. The woman pleads to be allowed to sleep some more, for she hasn't slept in weeks: 'I won't get up – won't get up – won't get up!' (ibid. 139). The customer moves closer to the room and sees that it is a tiny space, lit by a very bright bulb. As the pimp keeps prodding her, the prostitute leaps up shrieking like a 'rat shown fire' and gets ready to go out. At that point, it is not so much pity for this woman that fills the narrator's heart as a sudden and deep existential fear: 'He thought he'd run away – just leave this city. Leave this world – but where to?'. As he waits, he can only think about the blinding brightness in which the woman tries to sleep, and wonders why the bulb needs to be so bright. When handing over an advance to the pimp, he feels the desire to take a big stone and kill him. It is a thought that crosses his mind again as he leaves with the woman on a rickshaw; she is a 'wreck – with swollen eyelids', half-shut eyes and a sunken frame (ibid. 141).

If stories such as 'Black Salwar' and 'The Insult' are premised on the prostitute's presumed desire to be understood, here the half-comatose woman will have no truck with the protagonist's attempts to communicate with her. In the hotel room where he tries to establish a relationship with her and asks her to talk, she remains obstinately silent, with reddened eyes, 'which looked like someone had thrown chilli powder into them'.

'Your name?'

'Don't have one'. Her tone was pungent, like acid.

'Where are you from?'

'Wherever you want me to be from'.

'Why do you talk so brusquely?'

Now the woman was awake and looking at him with reddened eyes, she said, 'You finish your job, I have to go' (ibid. 141).

This woman who, significantly, remains unnamed is not of the group of prostitutes to whom Manto fondly refers in his essays as 'my Sugandhi' or 'my Sultana'. When the protagonist, hurt by her behaviour, tells her that he does 'sympathize with her', she screams in annoyance: 'I don't want your sympathy . . . You do your job and let me go' (ibid. 141). With great deliberation, Manto pushes this scene to its limits: the man comes over to the woman and tenderly brushes her forehead. She pushes him away; when she tells him that she hasn't slept in days and to stop troubling her like this, 'from top to toe, he became sympathy itself'. He invites her to sleep right there in the hotel room, to which she tells him that she can't for this is not her house. When he asks her where her house is, she tells him not to be ridiculous – she doesn't have one (ibid. 142). 'Sympathy' under such circumstances reveals itself to

be a pointless emotion. The gaps in knowledge that the woman truculently refuses to fill (indeed, she sees the endeavour to get to 'know' her as 'nonsensical') also speak to a social distance that the man cannot simply transcend as he would like to. For him, the very endeavour to 'sympathize', to be on her side, is born of an earnest desire to distance himself from the very institution that he feels himself to be complicitous with. The unnamed prostitute will not facilitate this running away.

For a writer so deeply invested precisely in this kind of sympathy and solidarity with the 'fallen', and in declaring himself a renegade from the society that facilitates their exploitation, Manto now shows a remarkable reflexivity with regard to the problems with such endeavours. As with the other post-Partition stories we have looked at, here too the burden of scrutiny has shifted to the male participant observer, a position that Manto himself often occupied. The day after his encounter with this woman, the protagonist tells a friend about his heavy heart and recalls his desire to take a brick and smash the pimp's head in. The friend who 'melts in pity' agrees that to kill the pimp would indeed be a 'virtuous deed' (Manto 1996b: 142). Intrigued by the story, this friend now takes on the role of *flâneur* and makes his way to the slum to see what he will encounter. When he doesn't find the pimp at his usual place, he makes his way to the building that the protagonist had described to him. Climbing the dark broken-down staircase, he finds himself in the blinding glare of a light-bulb from a room. Looking into the room with his hands shading his eyes, he sees a woman lying on the bed: '— she was sleeping — her scarf covered her mouth. Her chest was rising and falling with her breath . . .' (ibid. 143). When he sees what else lies there on the naked floor, he stifles a shriek: a few yards from the woman is a man, his head smashed to pieces. Nearby lies a bloodied brick. The woman has, in the final instance, usurped the role that her would-be protector fantasised about; she has taken care of the problem herself.

Is this story a requiem, then, for Manto's other prostitute stories, his much-vaunted endeavours to 'embrace' and 'love' those whom society rejects? It is significant, certainly, that it comes so late in his career as a writer. In contrast to stories such as 'Cold Meat' and 'Open It', this story does not actually focus on a reformation of the body or habitus, but on the consciousness of the middle-class male intellectual. It sets up a distinction between the cognitive presence of this figure and the physical presence of the prostitute to whose consciousness the former has very limited access. The 100 candle-power bulb of the title may be a reference to the 'light' that the writer, in self-aggrandising mode, aspires to shine on the sleazy and the ugly (recall also the scrutinising flashlight that so upsets Sugandhi in 'The Insult'). It is a light that now blinds the writer's investigating and transcendent eye but, remarkably, has no effect on the woman whose needs appear to be entirely different. When the writer does finally look past his symbolically blinding light into the room, what he sees may not be what he expected to see. The

'truth' that he hopes to unveil becomes, instead, as the last lines suggest, the stuff of nightmares that wake him all through the night.

It would seem reasonable then to read the story as the critique to end all critiques: a farewell to literary arms and the writerly aspirations to a realism that would let the light of day upon the filth and grime that the rest of society refuses to see. That was obviously not to be the case, certainly in terms of Manto's career and continued output. But the argument can certainly be made that the experience of Partition and the devastation that followed chastened the writer and made him aware of the relative modesty of his own and other literary endeavours. It appears, in this instance, to have occasioned an acknowledgement of the limits of what he could, in fact, explain and effect in relation to social transformation. Significantly, the first half of '100 Candle-Power Bulb' dwells extensively on the riot-torn urban wilderness and desolation in which the protagonist finds himself:

In amazement, he wondered where the colours had gone – where had that vermilion flown to? Where too were those musical tones he had seen and heard – it wasn't that long ago, just yesterday (is two years any time at all?) he had been here . . .

Such a great revolution in just two years!

. . . some storm, that it could suck the life out of buildings even. Human beings killed human beings, women were dishonoured and even the bricks and stones of buildings were subjected to the same treatment.

(Manto 1996b: 136–7)

The bitter irony of the 'revolution' that should not have been, for a self-styled revolutionary writer, makes for a seamlessness between the desolation of the urban wilderness and the consciousness of his protagonist. (We recall here the joyously organic connection that young boys like Masud felt with their environment.) This is a situation in which narratives of emancipation and revolution are interrupted and force a rethinking that may not otherwise have taken place. How does change happen? Where are solidarity, compassion, empathy, sympathy and all those other human(e) values? The force of a violence that can rob even buildings of their colour is clearly one that defies even the angry pen of a revolutionary writer; calm reflection is all but impossible.

Framed by desolation and nightmare and culminating in a single act of violence, '100 Power' provides a contrast to stories such as 'Cold Meat' in which the humanist impulse emerges as a redemptive counterpoint to violence. In fact, Manto dedicated 'Cold Meat' to its protagonist, Isvar Singh, 'who in becoming a beast still did not lose his humanity'. '100 Candle-Power', on the other hand, deals with two kinds of violence: the senseless bestiality of the riots and the murderous violence of the unnamed woman, a violence that is frightening in part *because* it makes a perverse sense. Ending as it does in the tortured nightmares of the observer, the story interrogates the

intellectual's non-violent but untested humanism. Inasmuch as it challenges Manto's own previous delineation of the prostitute as the *object* of the writer's affection, curiosity, philosophy and art, '100 Candle-Power', like 'Cold Meat', is a text that returns questions of psyche and affect to radical thought. This fusion of affect and analysis can be contrasted with Manto's pre-Partition work which, as we have already seen, tended to dichotomise emotion and intellect, or metonymy and metaphor.

In that sense, this story puts pressure upon Manto's own theories of realism and social change – explicated typically through the connection between urban decay and sexual exploitation. In earlier essays, for instance, he writes of his brand of realism as one that moves from the genteel neighbourhoods of the city to the places where the city channels its excreta:

Who doesn't know the women of the brothels? There is a brothel in every city – who doesn't know of sewers and drains? There are sewers and drains in every city which take the city's dirt out. If we can speak of our marble toilets – if we can refer to soap and lavender, then why can't we speak of these sewers and drains, after returning from which man can make the rounds of temples and mosques?

(Manto 1991c: 42)

Resting on a distinction between the clean and the dirty, and a privileging of the latter, realism is defined now as an anti-aesthetic. To validate his claim to uniqueness and utility, the writer moves his gaze from the gentrified/veiled/prettified to the lower class/exposed/ugly. There is something facile about this, a too easy rendition of urban landscapes into moral and ethical terrain. The writer's act of assertion is the very act of naming the existence of that which others will not speak about. The prostitute, like the city, is the referential object and not much more. In Manto's deliberately overwrought metaphor, she is, quite tellingly, a corpse:

The house of the prostitute is a bier which society carries on its shoulders. Until it is buried, it will remain a topic of discussion. This corpse is rotten, yes; foul-smelling, yes; disgusting, yes; frightening, yes; abhorrent, yes, but what's the harm in looking at it? Does she mean nothing to us, are we not her loved ones? Every now and then, I will open the coffin to look at her face and show it to others.

(Manto 1991c: 43–4)

She must be spoken for.

Ambivalence and agency

If Partition made Manto more uneasy about the project of representing the subaltern, what happens to his understanding of how transformation does

or does not happen? We see the protagonist in '100 Candle-Power' wondering what kind of agency someone like him could possibly have with regard to effecting social change, if entire cityscapes can be transformed at such a frighteningly 'revolutionary' pace. The encounter that follows suggests that it is not only cities and buildings, but human beings and human relations, that are resistant to reformist interventions. The unnamed prostitute, unlike Sugandhi or Sultana, is not available either for ethnographic enquiry or for sponsored rehabilitation. The killing rage of the prostitute in this story is both distinct from and related to the murderous violence of the rioting mobs that destroyed the city: the corpse that lies in the room has been killed by a brick from that very heap 'of broken-down bricks, leaking taps and garbage piles' where she lives (Manto 1996b: 138). What sorts of adjudications are possible here? Clearly, the rage of a woman who has been tortured to her limits must be distinguished from the hysteria of a mob whipped into hatred and bestiality. But rather than herald this act as the dawn of a new vigilante age, the story chooses to leave us in the liminal zone of nightmares. The naked bulb shining brightly over the sleeping woman, the corpse and the bloodied brick shed no light on what has taken place and what can be done. It is not a metaphor like the warehouses and railway tracks of 'Black Salwar' nor even the scrutinising flashlight of 'The Insult'; what happens here cannot be fully explained or contained by the symbolic resources of language.

But it would be wrong to read Manto as having arrived at the conclusion, so familiar to our own times, that an acknowledgement of complexity must also entail the impossibility of explanation and transformation. For it is in his post-Partition work that Manto moves from a descriptive interest in something like 'the human condition' to discussing the psychic and political potential of *humanism*. The somewhat formulaic approach to the former in his early stories is now reworked into a sense that neither the human nor the social can be captured by formula. At the same time, however, his perception of the need for individual and systemic transformation loses none of its urgency. If that which must be overcome is captured in Partition violence with its perverse combination of mindless hysteria and twisted rationality (recall the epigram at the top of this chapter drawn from Manto's 'Syah Hashiye' [Black Marginalia], where a killer acknowledges a 'mistake' with polite regret after seeing the genitals of his victim), then transformation will also require a bringing together of emotion and reason.¹³

In his lyrical and incisive account of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka, Valentine Daniel has provided some insights into the difficulty of writing about violence that Manto himself seems to have finally confronted in '100 Power'. Daniel's 'chapters in an anthropography of violence' speak of the difficulties of 'understanding' violence because any theory of violence must 'conspicuously "stand apart" from it as a gesture of open admission to its inadequacy to measure up to the task' (Daniel 1996: 6). At the end of his account, itself a collection of 'horror stories' and 'abominations that stagger belief' (not unlike 'Black Marginalia') as well as hesitant scholarly observations, Dan-

iel's conclusions bear some resemblance to Manto's own resignation in '100 Power':

Violence is an event in which there is a certain excess: an excess of passion, an excess of evil. The very attempt to label this excess (as indeed I have done) is condemned to fail . . . Everything can be narrated, but what is narrated is no longer what happened.

(*ibid.* 208–9)

If, for Manto, the aftermath of Partition entailed a breaking down of the barrier between seer and seen, subject and object, Daniel sees his own attempts in the late twentieth century to interpret and understand culture and violence as inevitably limited by a 'blind spot'. Citing George Bataille's characterisation of the blind spot as one that is not lost in knowledge but one where knowledge loses itself, Daniel points to a 'darkness and silence' where there is 'neither ontology nor epistemology, hermeneutics nor semiotic, materialism nor idealism, and most important, neither culture nor Culture' (*ibid.* 210). Both Manto and Daniel respond, of course, not only to the actual violence they witness but to the intellectual currents around them. Daniel, who writes with a heightened consciousness of a deconstructive academic climate (to which he frequently alludes), points out almost plaintively that 'the will to understand persists' (*ibid.* 211). His text evinces, accordingly, a schizoid movement between attempts to interpret acts of violence in all their multivalent complexity and a retreat into a genealogical 'Nietzschean picture' of the 'short run'. Although he acknowledges that the 'long run' will require different practices of enquiry with a commitment to 'truth' as a concept, he himself will remain 'agnostic about the "long run"' (*ibid.* 131). Manto, meanwhile, was also responding to what he perceived as the increasing ossification of Progressive writing into formulaic and 'sterile' work based on manifestoes and statements inspired by 'external political diktat' (cited in Hasan 1991: xiii). But, despite his disillusionment with official 'Red' writing and his hurt at the condemnatory hostility of some of its votaries towards his 'Black Marginalia', Manto does not respond with a retreat into the anti-representational, the purely local or the apolitical, even as he mulls over the problems of representation.¹⁴ The 'shining sun' that inspired the writer earlier is now a 'terrible sun whose truth is best seen not in its heart but in its corona, around its edges' (Manto 1991g; Rai 2000: 368). The 'anguished failure to understand, to stare unblinking into the glowing inferno, itself becomes a negative way of representing that which is truly horrific' (Rai 2000: 368).

Of 'Black Marginalia' and his post-Partition work in general, Manto has written:

For a long time I refused to accept the consequences of the revolution which was set off by the partition of the country. I still feel the same

way; but I suppose in the end I came to accept this nightmarish reality without self-pity or despair. In the process, I tried to retrieve from this man-made sea of blood, pearls of a rare hue, by writing about the single minded dedication with which men had killed men, about the remorse felt by some of them, about the tears shed by murderers who could not understand why they still had some human feelings left.

(cited in Hasan 1991: xii)

The 'Black Marginalia', like the Partition stories discussed above, are essays in a critical humanism, which takes both affect and reason, individual and collective, seriously. Each irony-laden sketch in 'Black Marginalia' is a play on traditional values such as 'politeness', 'propriety', 'decency', 'consideration', 'equity', 'fairness', 'honesty' and 'neatness'. In observing the perversions of these values, Manto simultaneously attacks the twisted emptiness of conventional etiquette and yet seems to hint at some possibility of ethical reconstruction out of them. Take, for instance, 'The Complaint', a one-line 'episode' from the *Marginalia*:

Look my friend, you charged me black market prices and still gave me such low-grade petrol that I wasn't able to burn even one shop.

(Manto 1996d: 280)

The best of Manto's post-Partition work, despite its birth out of 'nightmare', still attempts to resurrect and deepen what he once described as the explanatory importance of writing. Talking of his stories and sketches on the life of the prostitute, Manto asserts that he attempts to go through her wounded body into her heart, and 'for a while, become this wretched creature' (Manto 1996f: 352). While he may have come to doubt the possibility of such insight and identification after Partition, he seems to have held on to the second part of his comment: '. . . I will not offer only a picture of this incident but will also attempt to show *why* it comes to pass' (ibid. 352, my emphasis).

Like Paul Celan, accused by Adorno of 'writing a poem after Auschwitz', Manto was also condemned by some of his former comrades for making a literary career out of suffering.¹⁵ Manto, like Celan, might not only have replied that '[o]nly faithless am I true', but also that it was in trying to understand, and in not always succeeding, that he remained true (cited in Daniel 1996: 211). It is in this way that he is able to offer us some insight into the cadences, wounds and violence of human life in times that often elude comprehension. The vast and uneven corpus of this writer, whose explicit wishes that he not be deified after his death continue to be disregarded by those who write about him, requires of us a critical apparatus that evades both the celebratory and the condemnatory. From 'Khushia' to 'Black Marginalia', we glean evolving insights rather than fixed conclusions, as we, like Manto, continue to think about and work towards 'the ongoing process of becoming human or at least renewing one's humanity' (Daniel 1996: 69).

5 **Straight talk or spicy masala?**

Citizenship, humanism and affect in the cinematic work of K. A. Abbas

From its inception, the PWA struggled with a substantial gap between the radical aspirations laid out in its inaugural manifesto and the actuality of bringing literary radicalism closer to the 'people'. Unlike the Popular Front in France during its brief glory days, the PWA's cultural agenda was not linked to a wider social or institutional programme. In France, the new 40-hour working week and paid holidays enabled the 'organisation of leisure' to be addressed as an institutional and policy question. The PWA, however, did not have a mass base or the means to create one, leading Sajjad Zaheer to report critically in 1943 that there was no functioning 'central organisation . . . which would give direction on an all-India scale . . . and formulate tasks keeping in view the changing conditions in the country' (Zaheer 1979c: 308). Zaheer's report, written in his capacity as General Secretary of the AIPWA, reflects, of course, his own allegiances to the Communist Party of India and a desire to give the obstinately heterogeneous, even unwieldy, movement a centralised structure of command akin to that of the party. But the question of how radical cultural production was to be popularised on a national scale remained insistently on the table for other writers and intellectuals associated with the PWA as well. In a country that had a literacy level of 10% in 1947, readership was an always already circumscribed category. To some extent, the PWA addressed this gap between the written word and a non-literate audience through highly successful poetry and story recitals, which often involved the participation of worker and kisan [agricultural labourer] performers. In various regions, indigenous performance genres such as the Urdu 'masnavi' (long story poem), the Telugu 'burrakatha' and the Marathi 'pawada' were appropriated and reworked with great effect to accommodate radical themes.¹ The primary means of disseminating Progressive writing more widely was through books and literary magazines, several of which were launched and circulated through PWA office libraries. Beyond this, there were no mechanisms that would allow for the creation of a mass audience or readership and, in an era in which the technologies of radio and the cinema had become rapidly entrenched in the national public sphere, the challenge had to be faced up to.

The recognition that it was in the sphere of the performing arts (rather than the strictly literary) that Progressive cultural work was meeting with success was one of the factors, along with the perceived urgency of raising popular consciousness about the dangers of fascism, that led to the formation of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in 1942. Noting the 'spontaneous' growth of 'a movement of songs, recitation and dances rousing people to action', the first conference of the All-India People's Theatre Association gave the organisation its mandate 'as a means of revitalising the stage and the traditional arts and making them at once the organiser and expression of our people's struggle for freedom, cultural progress and economic justice' (All India People's Theatre Conference 1979: 130–2). The IPTA would go on to become one of post-independence India's most successful and enduring cultural movements with a truly *national* provenance, imbuing local theatrical genres, such as the 'nautanki' and 'jatra', with topical political content. Proscenium theatre was abandoned in favour of street plays that were often collectively improvised in response to current events.² Although many early IPTA efforts, as Rustom Bharucha points out, were 'predominantly urban in perspective' and offered 'appallingly abstract exposures of fascism and imperialism', the IPTA eventually produced successful political drama and 'was responsible for changing the very structure and conception of theatre in various parts of India' (Bharucha 1983: 41). It did so by making 'theater more available to those sections of society who had previously ignored it, or had been prevented from seeing it' (ibid. 42). There is no doubt that much of IPTA's success with politicising theatre had as much to do with popular enthusiasm and hope over impending Independence as with the deep-rooted anger over widespread hunger (of which the Bengal famine was the most terrible manifestation) and state repression.³

The establishment of the IPTA brought into focus the knotty question of how literary radicalism could be 'popularised' and woven into the fabric of national culture itself. Where the evolution of radical fiction had often entailed a shift of emphasis from the object of reform to the subjectivity of the reformer herself, the project of 'making popular' once again returned attention to that nebulous entity, the 'mind of the masses', about which the founding resolution of the IPTA made its own assumptions: 'it is also essential that our productions should be simple and direct so that the masses can easily appreciate and understand and also participate in the creation and production of these' (Pradhan 1997b: 131). Implicit in this formulation and in the general project of making the arts 'at once the expression and organiser' of 'the people's' struggles is a degree of confusion about what constitutes the 'popular' ('of the people') itself. If the people are conceptualised in Brechtian terms as 'a fighting people', necessitating 'an aggressive concept of what is *popular*', there is also a markedly vanguardist role for the writer as teacher and guide, one who will appropriate the idioms of the masses to disseminate his own analysis of what the situation of the people is and how

it is to be transformed. Brecht's own heterogeneous formulation leaves open more dialectical possibilities:

Popular means: intelligible to the broad masses, adopting and enriching their forms of expression/assuming their standpoint, confirming and correcting it/representing the most progressive section of the people so that it can assume leadership, and therefore intelligible to other sections of the people as well/relating to traditions and developing them/communicating to that portion of the people which strives for leadership the achievements of the section that at present rules the nation.

(Brecht 1977: 81)

For a variety of reasons, including the participation of highly politicised groups of workers and peasants, in particular during the Bengal famine, the IPTA was successful in the project of reviving and reworking what it called 'folk' forms of expression. This success also spoke to the existing vibrancy of theatrical traditions in various regions (despite gloomy claims about the moribund nature of Indian drama in IPTA documents) and the adaptability of theatre itself as a medium.

What was true of theatre, however, would not hold true of other media in any straightforward way. As we know, many writers associated with the PWA, including Chughtai and Manto, earned their livelihoods in the Bombay film industry as screenplay and dialogue writers. At the same time, there were close links between the Bombay chapter of IPTA and established film industry figures such as Prithviraj Kapoor. Progressive poets such as Sahir Ludhianvi and Shailendra met with great success as lyricists for film songs, to the point of dominating the genre for several decades. These links and the work of Progressive writers (in particular the poets) within the film industry is deserving of separate study. My interest in this chapter is, however, specific to the questions of individual and collective transformation that preoccupied Progressive writers. Both short and long fiction was clearly conducive to explorations of how individuals and societies change in response to historical exigencies; at their best, the work of a Rashid Jahan, a Chughtai or a Manto was also able to raise unique and hopeful imaginative possibilities in relation to such transformation. What happens when these concerns are transferred to the medium of narrative cinema where the Progressive 'auteur' faces new narrative conventions and different aesthetic imperatives? Of course, within an institutional framework of collaboration, 'authorship' itself would acquire a new meaning as a range of perspectives and styles came together to shape the cinematic text. By and large, writers such as Manto and Chughtai would, in their capacity as screenplay and dialogue writers, work within received parameters, reserving their experimental and radical writerly personas, it would seem, for their own fiction. We must turn to the work of another well-known Progressive, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, for a substantive understanding of attempts to 'translate' the themes, narratives and analyses of radical

literature into the medium of popular (and commercial) cinema in the decades immediately following Independence in 1947. This chapter examines, in particular, what I call the 'Vagrant trilogy' – a series of films centred on a Chaplinesque 'little man' figure of a tramp named Raj or Raju – and its reconfiguration of radical literary discourses of subjectivity, agency and social transformation. Two of these films (on which Abbas collaborated with actor Raj Kapoor), *Awara* and *Shri 420*, were landmark successes in the history of Indian cinema and instrumental in giving this cinema an international profile in the postwar era.

Inasmuch as cinema, and Hindi cinema in particular, can be seen as 'an institution that is part of the continuing struggles within India over the form of the state', attempts to construct a popular idiom of radicalism in the 1950s and 1960s were bound up with the making of a reconfigured subject of social and political transformation: the male citizen subject of the newly independent nation state (Prasad 1998a: 9). This reconfiguration speaks to a more fundamental shift in the relationship between oppositional cultural discourses and the (now postcolonial) state. During the period of transition to the nation state in India, art historian Geeta Kapur has argued, the demobilising national movement 'hands over the task of cultural transformation to the state, enjoining artists to co-operate with its new institutional structure' (Kapur 2002: 201). Without suggesting a complete or seamless co-optation, it would be reasonable to suggest, along with Madhava Prasad, who argues for a collusive relationship between state and film industry, that this call to political alliance would have resonated particularly strongly in the Hindi cinema. It clearly inflects Abbas' cherished project of articulating the radical and the popular or, as Abbas and Kapoor saw it, 'education' and 'entertainment'. The three 'Vagrant' films they made together are shaped, on the one hand, by an immense sense of national possibility and, on the other, by an anxiety about obstacles to the realisation of that community.

Abbas' journey towards the popular cinematic successes that were *Awara* and *Shri 420*, the first two films in the Vagrant trilogy, was one shaped by an object lesson in failure: the making of the IPTA film, *Dharti ke Lal* [Children of the Earth]. In 1943, in the wake of the success of Abbas' play, *Zubeida*, which had attracted a diverse audience of 10,000, including hundreds of women (who, it was claimed, had never seen a play before), the IPTA applied for and was granted one of three available wartime licences to produce a film. It was the height of the Bengal famine, which had already resulted in the death of millions. *Dharti ke Lal* – which combined the successful IPTA play, *Nabanna*, and the Progressive writer Krishan Chander's novella, *Anna Daata* – would become an important milestone in the histories of both the Indian cinema and the Progressive movement in literature and the performing arts. The film, which, according to its opening credits, stars 'The People of India' was produced and directed by Abbas in conjunction with three associate directors. The credits acknowledge the Dhulia District Kisan Sabha (Farmers' Union) as well as other labour groups that provided support and personnel.

Dharti ke Lal was arguably, India's first 'arthouse' film, 'the first Indian film to be made outside the conventional business framework, as a cooperative venture, with commercial viability as only one of a number of considerations affecting production' (McDonald 1993: 109). The basic storyline is a familiar one to those acquainted with the literature of the Bengal famine and more famous later films such as *Do Bigha Zamin* and *Mother India*. A poor farming family in Bengal is forced by need to sell its rice crop cheaply to the local moneylender; later, when the food shortage becomes worse, they have to buy back the rice at extortionate prices. When it looks as though they might have to sell their land too, they, like many others, join the mass exodus to Calcutta in hope of work and relief. When they get there, of course, there is nothing to be found but death by starvation or prostitution. Eventually, the older son gets involved with a farmers' union and is convinced that the only solution to this manmade crisis is co-operative farming. He persuades his family and other villagers to return to their land where they will undertake this project; the film ends on a utopian note of hope and regeneration.

Dharti ke Lal was undoubtedly a bold departure from the prevailing cinematic norm and does, in many ways, prefigure the more sophisticated realist cinema of a later era (such as Ray's acclaimed Apu trilogy). But the double imperative – deriving from the IPTA project itself – of raising consciousness while working with popular and folk idioms leads to predictable impasses. Particularly striking is the generous deployment of gendered clichés that are less reflective of rural life in Bengal than of the urban, middle-class directors' assumptions about peasant consciousness. Stock characters, contrived song sequences, folksy music and stylised dialogue both betrayed the film's theatrical origins and failed to work in the cinematic medium. The film was a flop even as it was showcased in film festivals abroad. While some critics celebrated *Dharti ke Lal* as a radically innovative moment in Indian cinema, others panned it as a 'poor amateurish effort' with a 'tiresomely familiar' story whose 'theme proves entirely boring!' (*Dharti ke Lal* 1946: 65). Abbas himself blamed the poor showings on riots that had broken out on the day of the film's release; he claimed later that, when he asked people in his own home town why they had left the theatre after the first few reels and demanded their money back, they pointed to the fact that 'the people in the film were poor, dressed in rags, starving and unromantic. . . these people were like themselves and they saw no reason to pay money to see themselves' (cited in McDonald 1993: 115). While he never gave up on his passion for making what he saw as 'realistic' films, he had clearly picked up on the need, as he was to put it in a 1955 seminar on Indian film, to engage a wider audience: 'I think our responsibility is to stop making pictures that do not entertain' (cited in Ray 1956: 84). By 1946, Indian cinema was already several decades old; it had created its own idioms, narratives and audience expectations. Simply transferring the themes and techniques of public theatre on to screen was clearly not going to work; Progressive writers would have to engage cinema on its own terms.⁴ It was Abbas who would make the most sustained attempts to

do so even as he continued to valorise experimental work that would depart from the populist and popular norms of Hindi cinema as he knew it. Not long after the release of *Dharti ke Lal*, Abbas got together with a young, upcoming actor, Raj Kapoor, and undertook to write the script for a film that Kapoor would direct and star in. After its release in 1951, *Awara* [The Vagrant] would go on to become a blockbuster both in India and outside, most notably in Turkey and the Soviet Union where it was dubbed into Russian as *Brodagya*. In addition to making films of his own over the next three decades, Abbas would go on to write several more scripts for Kapoor, of which two others – *Shri 420* (1955) and *Bobby* (1973) – were also to become landmark successes in the history of popular Hindi cinema.

Abbas, a self-proclaimed ‘fellow-traveller’ who was involved with the PWA and was a founding member of the IPTA, himself occupies an interesting and influential position in the cultural map of transitional and post-Independence India.⁵ His work ranges across not only the fields of fiction, journalism, biography, criticism and drama, but also the three languages that were central to debates about national culture in post-independence India: Hindi, Urdu and English. While his fiction in English is stylistically flawed and dogged by inelegant and didactic political diatribes, Abbas’ trenchant film criticism and political journalism make for lively reading. To the end of his life, Abbas remained unrepentant about mixing politics with aesthetics and proudly referred to his own directorial ventures as the work of a ‘film pamphleteer’. Abbas occupies the curious niche of an ‘auteur’ whose own enterprises as a director were reviled for their overstated preachy political positions and unappealing content, but whose efforts as a scriptwriter for Kapoor resulted in popular classics that are part of the bedrock of Hindi cinema. In some ways, he was the quintessential translator, translating his work and the work of other authors into English or Hindi, turning his own fiction and that of others into films, making English novels out of his Hindi screenplays, turning historical events into prose and screenplays, and interpreting films for the general public in his capacity as a film critic for *The Bombay Chronicle* and other newspapers. From his work on films such *Dharti ke Lal*, *Dr Kotnis ki Amar Kahani* (translated into English as *And One did not Come Back*) and the Vagrant trilogy to his licensed ‘borrowing’ of work from friends such as the writer Krishan Chander to his partnership with V. P. Sathe on several scripts and with journalist R. K. Karanjia on a biography of Indira Gandhi, Abbas worked in situations that (sometimes to his dismay) demanded exchange and compromise. He recalls being told that there was no authorial autonomy in the making of films: ‘You will soon learn that writing is one thing, but only the director knows how it should be presented (Abbas 1977: 224). Significantly, even the best of Abbas’ own directorial ventures were only modest successes; it is the collaboration with himself as writer and Raj Kapoor as director that gives Abbas his place in the history of popular Hindi cinema. Kapoor’s own sense of himself was, of course, as a showman with a mandate to reach the masses: ‘The medium of Cinema is not a drawing room conversation. It must

reach the farthest, the remotest corners of the country. It must entertain' (cited in Bhatt 1985: 174). This collaboration between a self-confessed leftist writer and an ambitious actor-director who had already achieved a measure of mainstream success in the film industry was to result in some of the most compelling cinema to emerge from the transitional period.

Awara [1951, *The Vagrant*], the first of the trilogy that Abbas and Kapoor produced, is an excursus into questions of reproduction, both social and biological. The film poses, and attempts to answer, a series of questions about subject formation in the utopian crucible of the new nation state: how are its citizen subjects to be created and reproduced? What is the force of narratives in this process? How is critique to be articulated effectively and by whom? The labyrinthine narrative runs something like this: Judge Raghunath is a man of reformist spirit who has defied the feudal establishment of his small town by marrying a widow. At the same time, he is known as a stern officer of the law who adheres rigidly to the belief that 'the children of criminals become criminals while the children of the respectable ('shareef') become respectable'. Acting on this prejudice, he has convicted Jagga, the son of a dacoit, who is trying to reform himself and who has been falsely accused of rape. Jagga is forced back into a life of crime and, as revenge, he abducts Leela, Raghunath's wife, only to release her on religious and compassionate grounds when he learns that she is pregnant. Raghunath and Leela are joyfully reunited, but Raghunath is beset by doubts about the paternity of his unborn child. Unable to cope with these anxieties and the disapproval of his conservative family, he throws Leela out into the streets even as she goes into labour. A self-sacrificing Leela then moves to Bombay where she struggles to raise and educate Raj, the son who is born to her. Jagga, who has decided to disprove Raghunath's dictum by turning the judge's son into a criminal (and who has also moved to Bombay!), entices the young Raj into a life of crime after the boy is thrown out of school for not paying fees on time. By the time he grows up, Raj has become something of a jailbird and works for Jagga's gang while his mother believes he is employed in the 'import-export' business, engagingly defined by Raj as a process whereby 'stuff from here is moved there while stuff from there is moved here'. Raj is now the eponymous 'awara', a merry vagabond who roams the streets and steals for a living, and it seems that Raghunath's dictum has, indeed, been disproved, for the son of a judge has become a criminal. One day, Raj encounters Rita, a childhood sweetheart who is now an orphan, a lawyer and also Judge Raghunath's ward. For love of Rita, Raj tries to clean up his act, an attempt that is foiled by a social order that does not give ex-cons a second chance. After a series of complicated events, Raj lands up in jail for the murder of Jagga and the attempted murder of Raghunath. Rita, who decides to represent him, makes a plea for Raj by offering his life story – and the social milieu in which he was raised – as extenuating circumstances in themselves.

The ostensible theme of *Awara* is the explanatory superiority of 'environment' over 'heredity' in accounting for character. This relatively simple

binary, however, indexes a larger political and philosophical concern with subject formation in the context of the transition to national sovereignty. As the postcolonial Nehruvian state came into being, it was invested with the emancipatory promise of independence itself. The personal charisma of Nehru with his own vaunted commitments to socialism and his enthusiasm for progressive cultural initiatives inspired left intellectuals such as Abbas to reposition themselves and their work in line with the developmental goals of the state itself. In the wake of independence, Geeta Kapur suggests, Indian modernism – unlike its Western counterpart, developed without an avant-garde; the ‘very liberalism of the state absolve[d] the left of confrontational initiatives on the cultural front’ (2002: 202). While neither Abbas nor other Progressives were to retreat into quietude, films such as *Awara* were clearly attempts to rethink the meaning of radicalism and oppositional subjectivity in relation to the emancipatory promise of the newborn state. Abbas, for instance, was to remain a lifelong admirer of Nehru and a votary of Nehruvian socialism; his self-conception was that of an adviser and sympathetic critic to the statesman. In his newspaper column, ‘The Last Page’, he often presented himself as the first Prime Minister’s socialist conscience, decrying Nehru’s anti-communist and pro-Commonwealth attitudes at times and praising his anti-imperialism and internationalism at others.⁶ However, although they end up broadly endorsing the Nehruvian interpretation of nation and socialism, films such as *Awara* and *Shri 420* do more than just include ‘progressive messages while conforming to the popular format’ (Prasad 1998b: 128). They participate, rather, in the project of reworking literary and political radicalism for a popular medium; in the process, they both draw on existing cinematic idioms and narratives *and* create new ones. At the centre of this process, as the anti-colonial is transformed into the national, is the liminal figure of the vagrant who must negotiate the transition from oppositional to normative subjectivity.

This transition is also a gendered process and entails the reconfiguring of patriarchy out of a feudal paradigm into one that is more in line with the modern nation state’s liberalising ambitions. It is Judge Raghunath’s susceptibility to what is figured as an outmoded patriarchal logic that undermines his subject position as a bourgeois democrat with vested interests in the postcolonial state. Unable to rid himself of the belief that the subject is produced through biological rather than social reproduction, his own contradictions come to crisis when he reluctantly but decisively repudiates his pregnant wife. Raghunath undermines his membership in the new ruling order by his reluctance to partake of the foundational fiction through which the bourgeois democracy of the nation state legitimises itself: that subjects are constructed and can be reproduced through social engineering (and the apparently democratic marketplace of opportunity that it creates). *Awara* is offered as an experiment with a constitutively modern(ising) hypothesis (environment over heredity), one that is necessarily conducted in the paradigmatically modernist laboratory of the postcolonial metropolis. For, as Sudipta

Kaviraj points out: 'Democracy in the decades after independence was not merely a political principle; it had a clearly marked space of residence. It was universally known to live in the city' (Kaviraj 1998: 149). As the narrative jumps forward to the young Raj's childhood, the ornate pillars of the isolated feudal mansion and cobbled streets of the small town where Leela lies in the gutter give way to shots of high-rise buildings and Bombay's BEST buses. For a brief moment, visuals of both spaces are held in montage along with a shot of the courtroom where the transition gone awry will be put to rights.

The only boy in the slum who is made to attend school regularly, Raj is ridiculed by the neighbourhood boys as a 'chokri' or 'girl'. The gendered insult marks latent class difference; through a proper (English-medium) education, Raj will be (re)produced as a different kind of subject from the delinquents ('awara') who live on his street. According to his mother, the 'awara' are persons who 'wander around streets and bazaars and who gamble instead of reading and writing'; they have no respect for property rights and 'think of other people's goods as theirs . . .' Raj's trajectory, as elaborated by Leela, is to be a different and decisively bourgeois one: 'first a lawyer, then a magistrate, then a judge . . . *just like your father*' (my emphasis). 'Reading-writing' ('parhai-likhai') is, for Leela, the talismanic mechanism of social reproduction. Although intended to replicate him, social reproduction does not rely on the father and, as such, generates deep patriarchal anxiety. In a scene where the young Raj encounters Judge Raghunath at his friend's birthday party (neither knows yet that they are related), the older man expresses hostility towards the child who does not 'know his own father's name'. When berated by his more liberal friend for adhering stubbornly to outmoded beliefs, Raghunath replies: 'He reminds me of the boy who despite being my wife's son is not mine. He too must be going around saying "I am *only* my mother's son"'. It is Jagga who offers himself as a fiendish substitute father, the Fagin-like progenitor of a young criminal: 'From now on you will go everywhere with me, do everything with me'. Theft – outright appropriation of a share of the surplus – and not reading-writing ('parhai-likhai') is his chosen means of social reproduction.

Abbas' efforts to translate literary radicalism into the language of popular cinema is marked most conspicuously by a shift of discursive emphasis from the analytical to the affective, a process that takes place within each of the narratives in the Vagrant trilogy and across the trilogy as a whole. In *Awara*, questions of structural inequality and injustice are gradually transformed into *moral* options before the individual rather than economic or political challenges with a wider social provenance. The figure of the New Woman, Rita, is central to this reconfiguration. Her gaze is given the power to interpellate the protagonist, to transform him from criminal to citizen subject through an affective process. Accordingly, as Ravi Vasudevan points out, the photograph of the young Rita that hangs on Raj's wall 'represents a frozen moment of the past which, ironically, also represents a future state of grace for the protagonist' (Vasudevan 2000: 113). This state of grace is, of course,

bourgeois citizenship. Imagining that Rita's innocent gaze is reproaching him for turning to crime, Raj turns the photograph so that it faces the wall, away from him and the spectator.⁷ The distinctively gendered options before him are now presented in moral rather than political terms: the world can be ravished for the asking (as the vamp in the seedy gangster joint suggests invitingly) or a place in it can be earned through some bootstrap-tugging and the love of a good woman (as Rita repeatedly asserts). Transformation itself, therefore, now becomes an individual rather than a social project. The famous and climactic 'dream sequence', which marks Raj's rite of passage back to 'good' citizenship is the film's tribute to the power of the affective as the realm of emancipation. A triumph of theatrical kitsch, the sequence is complete with ornate pillars and winding staircases, a sinuous catwalk glittering with footlights, billowing fog, dancing flames, operatic orchestral music, giant statues of Hindu gods and demons and undulating chorus lines of female dancers in gauzy costumes. The camera angles generally maintain a proscenium view of the performance, which takes place on a large stage, emphasising its status as a theatrical rite of passage. The synecdochic sequence enacts a struggle between the feminine forces of good (Rita as an embodiment of celestial beauty) and brute patriarchal evil (a fiendish knife-wielding Jagga) for Raj's soul, while the accompanying song thematises the operative opposition between the soft life-giving world of women and the harsh world of death-dealing father figures: 'I am burning alive on the funeral pyre of life . . . I don't want this hell; I want flowers, songs, love; I want spring . . .' Unlike many other staple 'dream sequences' in Hindi cinema that enact the utopian fulfilment of fantasy, here the protagonist, Raj, remains literally suspended in limbo at the end. (This is the only point where the sequence departs from proscenium mode: Raj is tracked by the camera as he falls off the stairway to heaven into a bottomless abyss.)

Redemption – and release from degradation – in real life is, however, a more complicated matter, and the film acknowledges this even as it strains towards an ending where love conquers all. Raj's goal of 'sharafat' or 'respectability' is not easily achieved in a world that poses both material and institutional constraints to subjects who would remake themselves in a different mould. For one thing, the Father cannot be repudiated as easily as he repudiates. On the grounds that he has a criminal past, Raj is fired by the owner of the mill where he undertakes manual labour in order to make a fresh start while Jagga literally controls the purse strings for the seed money that must be invested in the production of a new citizen subject: 'To become a respectable man ("shareef"), rupees are needed', he says tauntingly. Raj's vow to 'die of hunger but not steal' becomes increasingly difficult for him to honour, but Rita persists with her own brand of voluntarism: if he tries hard and improves himself, she assures him, 'society' (which now unambiguously refers to the rich and the powerful) will forget his past and include him in its embrace. Despite the emphasis on the affective – the romantic moonlit beach that has provided the *mise-en-scène* for previous trysts and soft sitar

music in the background – Rita's assertion that Raj is wilfully choosing to live in his hell and that he should change his life triggers the most serious argument between the couple, perhaps the last moment in the film when something like social analysis is allowed to interrogate the increasing emphasis on an inchoate humanism of the heart. On what material basis can he build his life again, Raj demands: can Rita give him his childhood back? Can she give him the education he lost out on? And the father, the name, the respectability that society keeps demanding of him? These questions anger him to the point of violence as he puts them to her; but as he suddenly sinks to his knees before Rita in abjection, the triumph of the affective is sealed with a triumphal benediction from her: 'Mother and I are with you. This is a transaction of the heart which cannot be weighed by the scales of the law'.

'Law' in this context refers, of course, both to the judicial state apparatus and to the rationalising law of the father that governs social norms. *Awara* enacts a powerful and agonistic struggle between the 'law' and the 'heart' for control of Raj's fate. In a repeat of an earlier encounter between them, Raghunath – both representative of the judiciary and paradigmatic patriarch – reiterates his dictum to Raj: without a patronymic and patrimony ('aamdhani'/'jaydaat'), Raj has no identity; patriarchal law will not recognise him as a citizen subject. For Raj, Raghunath's denial of his petition to marry Rita constitutes a denial of his fundamental right to 'life, love and humanity' ('zindagi, mohabbat aur insaaniyat'). This abuse of patriarchal power will culminate, in Raj's mind, in his mother's accidental death under the wheels of Raghunath's car, an incident that goads him to take revenge by attempting to murder Raghunath. (In yet another symbolic act, Raj has already killed the other patriarch, Jagga.) It is Rita who now opposes the *law* of the father ('qanoon') with the *heart* of woman ('dil'); chided for allowing her emotions to influence her judgement as a lawyer, she asserts: 'But, Judge Sahib, the heart does not accept the law'. *Awara* enacts, ultimately, a contest over the meaning and scope of public institutions and their power to interpellate and define the citizen subject. The law – embodied by Raghunath and his peers – is not so much repudiated as *reconfigured* in the form of the woman lawyer, Rita, who disrupts the courtroom by arriving unannounced to defend Raj, accused of the attempted murder of Raghunath. Simultaneously lawyer and witness, daughter and fiancée, she is invested with the power to resolve contradictions and to integrate within herself both the public and the private. As though to underscore this point, the tone of Rita's courtroom voice alternates dramatically between soft and pleading, on the one hand, and harsh and stentorian, on the other. For a film whose claims to being progressive rest upon its emphasis on 'environment' as explanation, Rita's own clinching argument as she argues Raj's case rests on an odd combination of 'heart' and heredity: 'No proof in the world will convince you if your heart is not prepared to accept Raj as your son. Judge Raghunath, if there is any proof, it is in your mind and in Raj's eyes. Look at him: eyes just like yours, a broad forehead just like yours. He speaks like you, and he is obstinate just like you. Is your heart still

not prepared to accept him as your son?' To the presiding judge's reminder that the law does not take the heart into consideration, Rita offers her closing lines: 'And, your Honour, the heart also doesn't accept the law. That's it, I have nothing more to say'.

As 'heart' and 'law' finally enter into an elective and triumphal partnership, it is only with Raj's own final speech to the courtroom that something of the initial emphasis on social conditions and causality returns:

The vermin of wrongdoing were not given to me through the blood of my father and mother. They came from that dirty gutter which flows past our dirty chawl. That gutter is still flowing there and even now the vermin of wrongdoing are being bred there. And thousands of poor children who live in the nearby chawl are daily prey for those insects. Don't worry about me. Worry about those children, worry about your own children . . . Let it not be that one day your, and your, and your, child ends up standing here in this dock like me, saying repeatedly: "The blood of a respectable father flows in my veins!"

For a split second, the story shifts from one individual to encompass the social as the camera pans the packed courtroom in response to Raj's pointing finger. But the resolution enacted by *Awara* is, in the final instance, one that subsumes the analytical and the social to the affective and individual. While there is an undoubtedly sharp critique of regnant patriarchies – both feudal and colonial – what is enacted is less a repudiation of patriarchy as such than a modal shift towards one better fitted to the modernity of the new nation. Modernity is conceptualised here precisely as 'law with heart', a move away from the monolithic rule of the patriarch to that of the companionate couple who will reproduce the units that will constitute a kinder, gentler social order.⁸ 'Woman' is integral to this transitional process – which Raghunath disrupts by throwing his pregnant wife out of the house – not only as the bearer of future generations but also as the symbol of and conduit for the affective. Significantly, woman no longer indexes the domain of the unchanging private; her provenance is public and her agenda is one of enabling the male subject's transition to citizen subjectivity. In *Awara*, the woman lawyer literally becomes Raj's voice when he refuses to represent himself before the law; in the process, ideological analysis is transformed into an affective redemption narrative. As such, *Awara* can be read as a kind of fairytale for the normative male subject of national modernity: Raj will release himself from real social constraints through a brief period of expiation and then marriage to Rita. Repatriation – into family and society – will take place through the affective agency of woman. What is finally elided in this transaction is the dimension of the collective: the individual 'awara' will transcend his situation through romance while the original emphasis on the social conditions that produced him dwindles into a rhetorical flourish.

Shri 420: the city, the crowd and the joker

Even as *Awara* shares with *Dharti ke Lal* a utopian belief in the possibility of social transformation, the most significant difference between the two filmic narratives is the former's emphasis on the *individual's* struggle to become the citizen subject of an emancipatory state. The 'awara' as popular hero is necessarily atypical and, in the final analysis, it is his singularity rather than his common humanity that makes his story worth telling. The 'folk' in *Awara* is reduced to a chorus: it is heard and glimpsed; it offers warnings, wisdom and song but is limited to the margins of the play. It is a static entity that cannot become part of the story of transformation, occupying as it does the domain between the feudal (whose oppression it critiques) and the modern (to which it cannot move). In Abbas' next venture with Kapoor, the equally successful *Shri 420* [Mr 420], which also features a tramp-like character named Raj, a collective dimension returns to the narrative of transformation, but in a symptomatically qualified manner. Although figured as the subject of social transformation, the benignly comic crowd in *Shri 420* cannot represent itself, and it is the Raj character, his muted singularity now transformed into confident eccentricity, who will undertake this task in the capacity of an organic intellectual. The city, once again Bombay, is not just the site of human degradation that it is in *Awara*; it is a zone of contestation and personified as an active agent in determining the fates of those who reside within its boundaries: 'Everyone comes to Bombay thinking they will buy her. But it is Bombay who buys everyone; she takes what she needs and then throws them into a corner of some pawnbroker's shop'. Raj is now more a symbol than an index: he will represent the crowd of the poor and disenfranchised in this contest but, as an educated man who has fallen on hard times, he is not really of them, and his residence in their midst is destined to be temporary.

Shri 420 (the number, commonly used to denote commoners, refers to Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code) tells the story of another Raj, an educated but unemployed young man who leaves his small town existence in search of a job in the big city. In the city, he discovers the heartlessness of urban existence where his education, honesty and willingness to work hard count for nothing. Determined to make a living for himself, he takes a job as a worker in a commercial laundry where he is exposed to wage exploitation and the miserliness of the rich. In the meantime, he also meets and falls in love with Vidya, an impoverished schoolteacher who lives with her disabled father in a poor locality. Blackmailed by a wealthy customer into becoming a cardsharp, Raj enters a dazzling world of wealth, opulence and fraud. He is initially thrilled by his newfound riches but is then rejected by a dismayed Vidya who accuses him of selling himself. He winds up working for a rich merchant or 'seth' and running various scams for this man. It is only when the seth comes up with a scheme for defrauding homeless people of their meagre savings by promising them housing that Raj finally rebels and outwits him, thus saving the day for the poor. He is then reunited with Vidya and becomes a hero to

the masses whom he exhorts to unite and make their demands heard by the government.

It is no coincidence that the Raj persona here is more confident and stylised than in *Awara*, eventually assuming a messianic role in relation to 'the People' ('janta'); this in turn allows the crowd a greater visual and verbal presence in the film. *Awara* had proved to be a hugely successful cinematic experiment, and the tramp-like Raj character, singing 'Awara hoon' ('I'm a vagrant...') was firmly established in the popular imagination. But the emergence of a house style is also symptomatic of a trend that had begun in the 1930s, the 'elevation of stars to the status of independent values, capable of a sort of self-valorization' (Prasad 1998a: 39). Madhava Prasad has argued that this shift was a significant factor in undoing the dominance of the studio system in the production of Hindi films; the increasing star status of Raj Kapoor clearly impacted on the textual form of the Abbas–Kapoor collaborations as well, culminating in the ghastly self-absorption of the Raju character in the last of the 'Vagrant' films, *Mera Naam Joker* [My Name is Joker]. In *Shri 420*, the Raj character performs with a certain practiced ease, and his stylised actions – from the imitation Chaplin walk and repetitive doffing of his hat to the jaunty song-and-dance routines – are presented as signature traits. Unlike in *Awara*, where we watch the transformation of the mama's boy into an insouciant gangster, in *Shri 420*, the tramp character emerges *ab nihilo* on to a dusty open road, complete with bundle at the end of a stick, hat, cropped trousers and torn shoes, to the tune of a now anthemic song: 'My shoes are Japani/My pantaloons are Inglistani/This hat on my head is Russi/And yet my heart is Hindustani!'⁹ The 'heart' – which is the subject of contestation in *Awara* – now unequivocally belongs to the nation. From the outset, the Raj character performs himself as a kind of canny Indian Everyman *playing* a Chaplinesque tramp walking along national highways (some, significantly, still under construction) and singing merrily as he takes stock of what he sees: 'Up and down, down and up, the waves of life go on; only the naïf sits on the bank and asks for the way to his native land'. This performative dimension is emphasised in the opening credits where two quasi-*commedia dell'arte* masks are displayed in the foreground as names appear and disappear on the screen.

If the trajectory of *Awara* was towards abstracting the accidental vagrant from his adoptive milieu and returning him to his rightful place in the emergent bourgeois social order, in *Shri 420*, the emphasis is on his transformation into a representative of the disenfranchised masses. The Raj of *Shri 420* is a deemed organic intellectual whose exceptionality, however, is never in doubt. During his first encounter with the 'footpath-dwellers' (whose hospitality he relies on as he finds his way around the city), he is hailed as harbinger and agent of change. 'Did I not say that one day the Raj of the hungry and naked would come', exults a member of the anonymous crowd. Here, the term, 'raj' or 'reign' allows for a useful slippage from collective to individual; Raj, the man, is anointed as the champion of those who cannot represent themselves

within this narrative framework, those whom the city has condemned to live on its precarious margins. The city itself is now personified as a hostile opponent in the masses' struggle for enfranchisement, and Raj is pitted against its allure and machinations. As in *Awara*, the crowd here performs a choric function but is also figured as an infantile subject awaiting guidance in the ways of the new nation state. Although Raj is schooled – literally, as he is a university graduate – in the official discourses of nation and state, his affinities with the homeless have less to do with this and his temporary lack of shelter than his being a 'man of the heart'. In a famous song sequence that draws on the carnivalesque folk performance genre of 'tamasha', Raj narrates a cannily humorous story about being caught by a policeman because he has a face like a thief but being released when recognised as the station chief's brother-in-law; everything in this world works on appearance. The brilliantly rhythmic and evocative song lyrics (which defy poetic translation) interpellate both singer and listeners as persons with heart ('dilwala'): 'This is straight-talk, not mirch-masala/Only one with a heart understands the state of mine'.

Like Rita in *Awara*, the Raj of *Shri 420* is figured as a desirable combination of heart and mind. If, in the former, the emphasis was on the creation of a masculine citizen subject who had to be schooled – through romance – to bring the analytical under the regime of the affective, in *Shri 420*, this already canny but sensitive man with a heart has to learn to become a leader who will domesticate and channel the *disaffections* of the masses in the right direction. The combat zone of the city also provides a higher education in statesmanship, the next step for the citizen subject who already identifies with the nation state and its modernity. His task is to rescue a benevolent national modernity from those who would corrupt it with unbridled individualism and progress defined as self-advancement. In order to fulfil this mission, however, he must undergo a kind of Citizen's Progress through the thickets of temptation, corruption and greed before he emerges cleansed and ready to harness the energies of the crowd. The social forces that he contends with emerge from the self-serving coalition of feudal and capitalist interests that seek to keep control of the national economy. Satirised in the form of persons such as Seth Sonachand Dharmanand, the venal 'cotton and bullion king', and Maya, the vampish and Westernised society lady, these forces attempt to render the contractual relationship between nation and citizen subject opaque. In the hands of this crass ruling elite, the 'New Life' ('nai zindagi') promised by the national compact degenerates into a rental commodity like the dinner jacket Maya makes Raj wear when she exploits his card-playing skills. Enraged when he requests an equal share of their ill-gotten gains, she demands: 'Who are you? What is your status? . . . I loan you a new life for a few hours and now you consider yourself equal to us?'

The transformed narrative function of 'woman' announces the most pronounced discursive shift from *Awara* to *Shri 420*. If, in the former, she is the agent of the 'heart', enabling the analytical to be subsumed by the affective,

in *Shri 420*, her function is simultaneously more attenuated and multifarious. Where Rita of *Awara* is a composite character, able to embody both moral force and sexual agency, the women in *Shri 420* are depicted through a now familiar schism in the idiom of popular Hindi film – that between the sexually rapacious ‘vamp’ and the morally inspiring wife goddess. As Maya (‘illusion’), she indexes desire and debauchery while, as Vidya (‘knowledge’), she is a catalyst for moral improvement. In either case, unlike the more complicated figure of Rita who has agency in both the public and the private spheres, woman is now a symbol rather than a subject. If the world is a marketplace of identities, woman represents both that which circulates as a commodity and that which resists the market altogether. Accordingly, Raj must choose between his own prostitution (and consequent feminisation) at the hands of the wealthy, and life as a possibly impoverished but morally upright citizen subject, husband and father. The affective choices for Raj are not complicated – it is either worship for the ‘devi’, a term he uses with explicit reference to Vidya or revulsion for the shimmying and voluptuous Maya whose liberal use of English and revealing dress mark her as irredeemably ‘Westernised’. [Rita, we recall, was able to switch languages and dress with little impact on her moral credibility; indeed, in the love scene on the beach in *Awara*, the actress Nargis, who plays Rita, was famously clad in a (for the time, daring) swimsuit and is shown changing out of it behind a fluttering and transparent cloth.] If Maya is problematically Westernised, with her tight shimmering dresses, cigarette-holder, dangling earrings, dark lipstick and painted talons, then Vidya is a visual icon of the good Hindu woman – modest sari, bindi, high-cut blouse, with her shoulders and head covered in key dramatic scenes. She is, as Raj says, an object of visual reverence or ‘darsana’ – the logical culmination of her role as the bearer of moral meaning.¹⁰

The citizen as human

In *Dharti ke Lal*, the last word is left to Radhika, the ‘fallen’ wife, who voluntarily excises herself from the newly established community of co-operative rural promise. As she and Ramu turn around and walk back down the road they had come on, Radhika’s sombre comment is in odd contrast to the scene of pastoral festivity they have just witnessed: the country will continue to burn, she declares, until the time of *insaaniyat* arrives. ‘Insaaniyat’, deriving from the word ‘insaan’ or ‘human being’, broadly and variously refers to the state of being human, feelings of humanity or humane values. Radhika’s alienation is linked to her sense of having been irrevocably dehumanised, and it introduces a significant note of dissent into an otherwise schematically utopian ending. Insaaniyat in *Dharti ke Lal* remains an abstract and notional category, invoked as a desirable future state, but one that cannot be realised even within the utopian community of the co-operative farm. In the Vagrant trilogy, on the other hand, a version of *insaaniyat* becomes the dominant conceptual filter through which the vagrant is transformed into citizen sub-

ject. While *Awara* proffers a nationalitarian critique of the material obstacles to achieving *insaaniyat* (which does, however, get conflated eventually with 'sharafat' or 'respectability'), in *Shri 420*, the bifurcation in the role of 'woman' also maps on to a radical redefinition of *insaaniyat* as a purely moral state and, as such, separable from the material dimensions of existence. Raj's plaintive assertion that *insaaniyat* requires means – he and Vidya will need money to fulfil their ordinary dream of a home and children who will go to school and college – is countered by Vidya's moral outrage at his apparent materialism. An important shift has taken place: where the analytical is *subordinated* to the affective in *Awara*, in *Shri 420*, it is *elided* in favour of moral abstractions. In response to Raj's claim that money is necessary to even draw a breath in this world, Rita offers not an argument but a moral judgement: 'Oh Raj, what have you done. . . . For this false pride and glitter, you've lost everything! Go to the Rajmahal hotel and sell your *insaaniyat* there. Then buy yourself some love as well!'. Commodification and objectification are to be countered by an ineffable morality that also stands in for the affective as such; domesticity will triumph over 'duniya' or world. Unlike Rita, who insists on bringing the force of private emotions to bear on public action, Vidya advocates a retreat into domesticity away from the corrupting influence of the world. Despite Raj's astute observations on the topic, the economic requirements of domesticity remain deliberately and necessarily obscure.¹¹ The choice between lucre and love that is laid before him is so sternly cast as to subsume not only the analytical, but also the affective realm of desire and passion to the moral. Raj's drunkenly insightful protestations strike a lone reflexive note: 'Sermons on honesty are always preached to the poor man: "Labour hard, do your work, eat the dry bread of honesty and give thanks to God and the rich man!"'.

This ideational alchemy whereby critique and analysis are converted into a fuzzy and simplified *insaaniyat* marks the trajectory of the filmic narrative as a whole. The conversion of complexity and contradiction into fuzzily affective entities also marks the narrative's engagement with the concept of 'the people' ('janta'). As suggested earlier, *Shri 420* includes the crowd as an actor in ways that initially seem promising; the scurrying bodies on the city streets constitute a complex subject, both comprising the city and acted upon by it. As the choreographed and stylised pageant of folk in the opening song sequence gives way to the rudely jostling crowds, bicycles, cars and automobiles of the city, the opening conversation between Raj and an old beggar is instructive:

Raj: 'Say, brother, do only deaf people live in your Bombay city?'

Beggar: 'Deaf. And blind. Their ears hear nothing but the jingling of coins. This is Bombay, my brother, *Bombay*! Here the buildings are made of cement and the hearts of people are made of stone. Stone! Only one god is worshipped here and that is money'.

The crowds in this Bombay are neither the gentle folk chorus nor the lumpen and marginalised hooligans of *Awara*; from the outset, we see them in all their full involvement and identification with the city itself. The ideologies that Bombay propagates – acquisition, ownership and vicious competition – have a powerful reach and interpellate even disenfranchised homeless ‘footpath wallahs’ as entrepreneurs. When Raj tries to sit down on the pavement to rest, its ‘landlord’ demands one and a half rupees as rent, and a scuffle ensues around the question of ‘whose father’ the pavement belongs to. It is only when Ganga-mai, a Mother India prototype, intervenes that order is restored: ‘This footpath is neither your father’s nor his. It belongs to our mai-baap [mother–father] government’. This magical invocation of a benign and parental state immediately changes the tone from the satirical to the sentimental; the rest of the film oscillates between these two modes until the latter wins out in the end.

In the satirical mode, *Shri 420*, like *Awara*, elaborates a brilliant national-alitarian critique of those who have hijacked the project of nation. This critique is explicitly directed not at the state itself – which is figured as vaguely benevolent and potentially responsive – but at the coalition of feudal and capitalist interests that would withhold the benefits of nationhood from the people at large. In a marvellously comic scene that pokes fun at the familiar figure of the businessman-turned-politician, Raj and Seth Sonachand Dharmanand vie with each other to retain the interest of the crowd as they make speeches on Chowpatty Beach. As the Seth points to his ‘Swadeshi’ (indigenously made) clothing and his patriotic values, Raj manages to upstage him by asserting that, while *his* clothes may come from everywhere, his *heart* is Hindustani. In response to the Seth’s deprecation of the crisis of spiritual values, Raj suggests that the real problem before humankind is a material one, that of bread; there can be no ‘peace of mind’ or ‘life of the soul’ without food. As the excited crowd rushes to Raj and cheers him on, the Seth is left extolling ‘the Call of Time’ and ‘the Invitation of History’ and denouncing the ‘new and poisonous religion of “bread”’ to an empty enclosure. But this crowd is not a passive recipient of Raj’s antics either; when he tries to sell them fake toothpaste for healthier teeth to eat their bread with, he is soundly beaten and sent home to his friends on the footpath. It is this same cheering crowd that sends shivers up Sonachand Dharmanand’s spine much later, when he and Raj are working on a scheme to extort money from them by promising cheap housing to the homeless: ‘Seeing so much passion among the people, I sometimes feel afraid’.

Nevertheless, the power of the crowd and the people (‘janta’) remains largely notional and containable within the narrative framework of the film and, except in a handful of memorable scenes, it emerges as something of an easily domesticated creature. It is loving and affectionate despite a prickly exterior and quiescent until taught how it may correctly emancipate itself. The penultimate scene of the film, in which Raj exhorts it to become a unified collective, is a case in point:

Now take a look at yourselves as well. Who says you are poor and without recourse or home? Today each of you has 1.5 crore rupees. This is the same money I had collected from you after making you dream of the Janta Ghar ['Homes for All']. I wasn't trying to cheat you. I wanted to unify you. If you like, you can each take your 100 rupees back. But if you want my opinion, don't waste your wealth like this. Don't vitiate your strength. 100 rupees never built a house, but with 1.5 crores, lakhs of houses can be built. Go to your government and say 'here is 1.5 crore rupees and the strength and labour of lakhs of men. Give us land and we will make our own houses!'

In the same speech, Raj holds himself up as an example of the road that should not have been taken. His mistake, as he sees it, was to have confused his quest to become a citizen subject with becoming a 'big man'; to that end, he had squandered his real assets – honesty and education – to take up greed and deception. As the crowd stands before and below him in neat, silent rows, Raj exhorts them to learn, as he did, from Vidya's teachings: 'The cure for poverty and unemployment is not char-sau-beesi [becoming a 420]. The cure is courage, hard work: the cure is the progress of the whole nation and the unity of the people'. The problem, then, is not a structural one – as the Raj of *Awara* sees it in his final speech – but of attitudes and intentions. The eponymous *Shri 420s* are not structurally integral to the nation state as it has come into being, but warts on an otherwise healthy body politic; these are the bad capitalists and politicians who undertake white-collar crime, float bogus companies, trade on the black market and run insurance scams. By the end of *Shri 420*, *insaaniyat* has been transformed from a question of rights and the conditions of existence to one of subjective attitudes and personality; like morality, it is a personal attribute rather than a social goal. The once fractious crowd is now exhorted to become a right-minded *consumer* with purchasing power rather than an agent with contestatory demands and fighting power. The transition from urban wretchedness to urban utopia can be seamless, it is suggested, once the bad guys are in jail and communication is restored between morally upright citizen and morally responsive state.

The shift in emphasis from the analytical to the affective that marks the narratives of both *Awara* and *Shri 420* also marks the general trajectory of the Abbas–Kapoor experiment with articulating the progressive and the popular, culminating in *Mera Naam Joker*, a film that serves as an uninspired but telling finale to the Vagrant trilogy. If the clown or 'maskhara' figures of the two earlier films were intended to both represent and stand out from the crowds out of which they emerge, the Raju of *Joker* is, from the outset, deeply solipsistic, revelling in his own perceived *emotional* alienation from the world around him. Society exists at the expense of the individual, and the gap between them cannot be redressed, the filmic narrative suggests; there is no attempt, however, to understand or analyse this chasm in terms outside the purely affective rhetoric of private hurt. If the heart or 'dil' has to be

brought into conjunction with the mind in *Awara* and is the source of moral guidance in *Shri 420*, in *Joker*, the heart, quite literally, takes on a life of its own in the shape of a large piece of inflatable red plastic. Out of this circus prop, Raju, the joker, emerges during one of the film's opening scenes. To the doctor clown's query as to whether he is a man or a heart, Raju replies: 'Man is the heart, doctor sahib. Man is in the heart and the heart is in the man'. This 'heart', it seems, can encompass the whole world, and Raju's problem is that his 'heart is too big and the world is too small'. This keynote establishes Raju's emotional life as the centre of the film's narrative; it is never clear what is meant by 'the world', why it is 'too small' or how Raju's relationship to it came to be this way. The attempts made by *Awara* and even *Shri 420* to think about the protagonist's subjectivity in relation to his social context are completely abandoned in favour of a focus on Raju's self-pitying and mawkish persona. The affective itself is redefined in purely individual terms as one man's emotional existence. The narrative itself is episodic with no particular distinguishing plot: Raju, a poor boy, decides to become a clown or 'joker' just like his late father. He will make people laugh and forget their sadness, a God-like profession in his mind. His life is a series of betrayals and loss: first, his school teacher on whom he has an unrequited crush; then, the Russian trapeze artist, Marina, with whom he falls in love and, finally, Meena, the ingénue whom he helps on her way to a celebrity career in films. Nevertheless, he soldiers on, laughing and forgiving and, as the words stamped on the screen at the end of the film tell us, even his impending death is 'Positively Not the End!'. A Christian undertone – with a suffering rather than a revolutionary messiah – is established explicitly at the beginning of the film where the young Raju claims to be inspired by Christ, the martyr, who tried to relieve the burdens of mankind.

Joker was released in 1970, some 15 years after the success of *Shri 420*. By now, Kapoor was a superstar, both as an actor and a director, and firmly enconced in the firmament of popular cinema. While some of his blockbuster successes as a director were still to come, all of which would claim to have a socially purposive agenda, *Joker* was a watershed film in several ways, signalling a sharp discursive shift away from the kind of social democratic concerns that had marked his and Abbas' earlier successes. The 'insaan' or human, although always gendered, has now explicitly become an 'aadmi' [man], while women represent not moral and social possibilities but thwarted male desires. Indeed, the affective itself is reduced now to male heterosexual desire. *Joker* was the first Kapoor film to explicitly deploy the kind of female nudity that the showman was to become notorious for in later films such as *Bobby* (also scripted by Abbas) and *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*. The camera is a willing accomplice to voyeurism in *Joker*, offering point-of-view shots from the schoolboy peering at his teacher changing behind the bushes, the clown who bumbles into the women's dressing room and the man who watches Meena change into a sari. The several shots of the actress, Padmini, in a clinging transparent sari are among the first images to make Kapoor's name synony-

mous over the years with the soft pornography of 'wet sari' scenes. There are several related ideological moves: the absent father is now a figure of reverence and emulation rather than critique, and the upwardly mobile desires of the mother are to be thwarted in favour of patrilineal heredity, 'my father's blood which is in my veins'. The crowd is reduced to a choreographed circus parade, while poverty itself is figured as a state of mind: 'One with a heart so large can never be called poor'. 'Insaaniyat' does not involve an existential or material struggle: it, too, is a state of being signified by an intense absorption with one's emotions. *Joker's* allegorical aspirations are repeatedly suffocated by the quagmire of narcissism into which its explorations devolve.

The trajectory from the *Dharti ke Lal's* tonelessly abstract invocations (certainly lacking in 'aesthetic force') to the affective excesses of *Mera Naam Joker* tells us something about how 'insaaniyat' was deployed and refashioned by Abbas (and Kapoor) as an ideology of civic humanism. The construction of the citizen as 'insaan' allows for the apparent resolution of potential contradictions between personal and political, domestic and public and, at an overarching level, between education and entertainment (between the subject of emancipatory pedagogy and the subject of fantasy). The 'insaan' as exemplified by Raj is at once the ideal citizen subject of the protosocialist state and the controlled model consumer in the 'mixed economy' of the Nehruvian nation. This mythic citizen subject, notable for the simplicity of his emotions and thoughts, is also the consumer of the cinematic text. Raj Kapoor describes his own affinity with this consumer thus:

Thank God, I have not studied too much . . . Thank God I am not bookish, thank God I am not literate, thank God I am a fool or a buffoon. I am just simple and down to earth so that I can identify and feel for the other one. I can smile with him; I can share his pain and I can share his joy – both, sitting on the footpath.

(Kapoor 2002: 148)

The relentless pursuit of this chimerical 'mass mind' (which, to Raj Kapoor's great bewilderment, rejected the buffoonery and tears of the *Joker*) was to shape the evolution of Raj Kapoor's cinema including his next famous collaboration with Abbas, the blockbuster melodrama, *Bobby*. It is no small irony that schematic socialist realism (which Abbas was critical of despite his lifelong commitment to realist work) as well as the cinema for the masses that Kapoor valorises (and which Abbas was never wholly reconciled to) invoke and address the same fictive spectator, one who is presumed to be capable of processing only one attenuated thought or emotion at a time.

In his famous essay on Chaplin, 'The Poor and the Proletariat', Roland Barthes argues that the Poor Man essayed by the legendary comedian is successful precisely because this character 'is always just below political awareness. . . still outside the Revolution'. Although 'fascinated by the problem of bread winning', Chaplin-man is 'as yet unable to reach a knowledge of politi-

cal causes and an insistence on collective strategy' (Barthes 1973: 43–4). A film such as *Modern Times* is powerful because it foregrounds the humanity of its worker protagonist: 'Other works, in showing the worker already engaged in a conscious fight, subsumed under the Cause and the Party, give an account of a political reality which is necessary, but lacks aesthetic force' (ibid. 44). In other words, it is the visible space between the aesthetic and the analytical that makes a work truly revolutionary in the sense of being 'politically open to discussion' (ibid. 44). Abbas was to make a similar argument about the phenomenal popularity of *Awara* in the Soviet Union. The timing had been right: 'the Stalin Era had just ended with its Boy-Loves-Tractor, Girl-Loves-Tractor' type of stereotyped ideological films without entertainment' (Abbas 1982: 33). Despite his own respect for the masterpieces of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, Abbas writes, he came to understand that *Awara's* Soviet audiences were 'registering a protest against the dullness and over-purposefulness [sic] of the fare served to [them] for so many years' (Abbas 1977: 381). He claims to have been told by the Russians he met: 'Instead of war we want to see love on the screen, we want to see carefree happiness, we want someone to make us laugh. That's why we are crazy about *Awara*' (ibid. 380). The thoughtful case made by Barthes (drawing on Brecht) for the importance of leaving space for reflection in the text, a gap between the Man and the Proletarian that will allow for the growth of political awareness through the viewer's own agency, may well approximate what Abbas, with Kapoor, might have been trying to do as he made the shift from the didactic stodginess of *Dharti ke Lal* to the 'attractively packaged' Vagrant trilogy (ibid. 380).¹² If it is 'the broadly human force of his representations' combined with political ambiguity that makes Chaplin's work powerful, as also the fact that Chaplin-man 'never invests in man anything but man himself', for Abbas, it was to be 'insaaniyat' that became the locus of aesthetic and analytical experimentation.

But if the investments in and elaboration of 'insaaniyat' enable the films to exercise a certain aesthetic force and affective power lacking in works such as *Dharti ke Lal*, it also results in the closing-off of certain political possibilities. While the first two Vagrant films do raise questions of subjectivity and affect that do not emerge out of the strict political schematic of *Dharti ke Lal*, their attempts to articulate the analytical and the affective are, ultimately, fragmented. The affective itself is, finally, reduced to heterosexual romance and the family unit it generates, while critical consciousness – and, certainly, revolutionary consciousness of the kind that Barthes celebrates in the Chaplin films – is repeatedly undermined by the extent to which the films' version of insaaniyat overlaps with statist ideologies of citizenship and rights.¹³ It is far from the case, as has been argued recently, that the films thematise 'the liberatory potential of socialism' or that they enact an 'epic struggle between socialism and capitalism' (Varma 2004). On the contrary, socialism is domesticated and transformed into a desirable *moral* attribute of good capitalism rather than an alternative in and of itself (pointing to some of the paradoxes of the 'mixed economy' of the Nehruvian state itself). State

paternalism is tweaked and then endorsed rather than challenged; indeed, the restoration of reworked affective and filial bonds constitutes the central concern of the trilogy. The citizen subject who emerges from these texts is the model consumer in a controlled market (which cannot, obviously, be conflated with socialism); rights and desires can be both modulated and fulfilled through the planned economy.

Is this a pessimistic account, then, of the definitive erosion of the radical agenda of Progressive literature and theatre in the postcolonial era? Does the triumph of the affective signal the constitutively flawed nature of the attempt to articulate the affective and the critical, to come up with a dialectical cultural form that would synthesise universal (utopian) and particular (sensual)? While there is no doubt that the trajectory of the Vagrant trilogy itself points to a dismaying 'resolution', a radical redefinition of 'insaaniyat' in terms of individual desire and fulfilment, away from an edgier politics of collective and community, it would be unduly defeatist not to note the achievements of the Abbas–Kapoor collaboration – however attenuated they were in the final instance. For it remains the case that what the Vagrant trilogy put on the agenda of Hindi film was to remain, in one form or the other, central to some of the best cinema of the postcolonial period and that is the insistent imperative of finding ways to give cultural radicalism a wide audience. The pioneering attempt to bring together the subject of political emancipation and the subject of fantasy was to give rise to many further experiments that achieved varying degrees of success. Rather than read the trilogy as pointing to the impossibility of articulating radical aspirations with affect, it may be more productive to allow these cinematic works to leave us with the continually urgent question of how popular culture can also be the locus of radical experimentation. Trying to bridge the divide between avant-garde and popular may continue to generate as many failures as successes, if not more, but these too will be instructive. In the final analysis, this may be the legacy, not only of Abbas' films, but the Progressive movement in art and literature as a whole.

Afterword

‘Sustaining Faith’ and the legacy of Progressive writing

‘Do you think that the Progressive Literary Movement (sic) has had a lasting impact on Indian literature?’ asked the journal *Indian Literature* in a questionnaire entitled ‘From the Progressive to the Postmodern’, which was distributed to several contemporary writers (From the Progressive to the Postmodern: Questions 1992: 151). Both the questions and the range of answers they elicited are telling. If, on the one hand, the questionnaire rehearses the same anxieties that dogged the early debates of the PWA, on the other, it is marked by concerns particular to our own historical moment:

[H]ave the issues raised by the early progressive writers turned stale and obsolete? . . . Several young writers, especially postmodernist ones feel that the old ideal of purely political commitment is quite inadequate to meet the challenges thrown up by our times. For them commitment means a broader concern for the whole species and even nature and includes the battle against the discrimination of race, gender and caste, ecological devastation, violence and war.

(From the Progressive to the Postmodern: Questions 1992: 151–2)

Suggesting that these ‘sceptical and even cynical’ impulses are related to ‘the break-down of the Soviet model of statist socialism’, the journal poses the important question of where the writer might now turn to for ‘sustaining faith’: ‘to religion? The State? Micro-movements? The ultimate invincibility of the human spirit? Themselves?’ (From the Progressive to the Postmodern: Questions 1992: 152).

These somewhat leading questions elicited a range of symptomatic responses that speak to the two dominant strains of thinking about the legacy of the PWA and IPTA. Hostility to that legacy emerges in claims that writers affiliated with it were ‘sentimental and propagandistic’, enslaved by a commitment to an ‘outside agency’ (Karanth 1992: 152). In battling against protofascist literature, claims another writer respondent somewhat hyperbolically, they ‘brought about another form of fascist literature and even a

more dangerous, fascist way of looking at literature and allied human activities' (Ashokamitran 1992: 154); and they were 'more concerned with . . . pre-ordained ideological certitudes' than with multifaceted human activity (Komal 1992: 159). For defenders of the PWA, its lasting impact is evident in a legacy of 'social orientation' in literature; moreover, 'the propagation of ideas or ideologies is not such a heinous crime as it is sometimes made out to be' and can be undertaken without necessarily devolving into dogma (Sahni 1992: 157). For Bhisham Sahni, a veteran of stage and screen, ideology can be both a vitalising force and a stultifying one, when 'the writer begins to lose his own insight into things and becomes a passive conformist' (ibid. 157). Mulk Raj Anand, the last surviving founder member of the PWA, defends the spontaneity of the movement and the importance of its departures from 'the feudal heritage' in literature, but blames party functionaries such as Sajjad Zaheer for what he calls keeping 'the movement under a shadow of segregation from the Right' (Anand 1993: 181–2). Regardless of the specific positions of respondents, including that of writers such as Komal who insist that neither the PWA nor any other movement can have a lasting impact on literature, the very nature of the impassioned responses suggest that contemporary writing in India inevitably reckons with the legacy of Progressive cultural production.

My aim in this study has been to delineate some of the ideological and historical contours that shaped the literary radicalism of the transitional period and to argue that the work of writers as diverse as Rashid Jahan and Khwaja Ahmad Abbas articulated transformative moral and political visions that are germane to radical literary and political projects in the present day. *Literary Radicalism in India* suggests that the question of what constituted the progressive was, for these important and influential writers, less an issue of either 'external directives' or 'internal conscience' than the focus of literary and critical enquiry. As such, this literature merits as much consideration in terms of the *projects* it undertook as with regard to its actual *achievements* – or lack thereof – as some critics might have it (to borrow Neil Lazarus' useful distinction: Lazarus 1990: 222). To understand the historical imperatives that engendered the radicalism of the transitional period is to open up space for more grounded investigations of our own narratives of progress and transformation. Rather than pit 'postmodern' ideas against somewhat reductive understandings of an 'old ideal of purely political commitment', as do the questions posed by *Indian Literature's* editors, it may be more productive to examine the ways in which the PWA itself engendered a diverse body of texts deriving from shared literary and political concerns (From the Progressive to the Postmodern: Questions 1992: 152). If these texts found themselves defining transformation and moral vision with regard to the exigencies of their times, what do our times call upon us to do as critics, writers and intellectuals? How do we understand our own historical moment and what are the ways in which that understanding should shape our commitments?

It is with these questions in mind that *Literary Radicalism in India* fore-

grounds the *gendering* of narratives of social transformation. From the questions formulated by *Indian Literature* to innumerable inaugural gestures in contemporary feminist scholarship, it is assumed that the fundamental difference between an older left politics and contemporary poststructuralist and post-Marxist theories of change is the constitutive inability of the former to engage dimensions of identity other than class.¹ *Indian Literature's* questionnaire suggests, for instance, that postmodern writers are disenchanted with the PWA and what it stood for because for them: 'commitment means a broader concern for the whole species and even nature and includes the battle against the discrimination of race, gender and caste, ecological devastation, violence and war' (From the Progressive to the Postmodern: Questions 1992: 153). As this study has tried to demonstrate, whatever the individual failings of different writers associated with the PWA, it was certainly not the case that issues other than class were neglected in this literature. Violence and war are recurrent thematic concerns in many texts, most visibly in Manto's Partition stories, but also in Rashid Jahan's and Chughtai's fiction. Gender relations and sexual politics, far from being absent, are approached in a variety of compelling and, at times, self-reflexive ways, going beyond the 'woman question' to include questions of masculinity and male identity. This is not to suggest, obviously, that any of these texts offers us templates of transformation that are above feminist critique. As my readings of Abbas' films and Manto's work suggest, gender was an issue that literary radicals necessarily struggled with in the face of the patriarchal and paternalist underpinnings of much of their own work. If Rashid Jahan's oeuvre, especially in stories such as 'One of My Journeys', is dogged by middle-class feminist vanguardism, Ismat Chughtai's fiction is not without undercurrents of homophobia and an internalised, classed misogyny.

It is my contention that further work on the literary production of the period – from Premchand's agrarian novels to Krishan Chander's and Rajinder Singh Bedi's social fiction, and from Razia Sajjad Zaheer's and Siddiqua Begum Sevharvi's feminist short stories to K. A. Abbas' and Mulk Raj Anand's Anglophone novels – will yield an even greater understanding of the richness of diverse endeavours to define and formulate progressive and socially transformative projects, endeavours that were simultaneously flawed and visionary. What might we learn, for instance, from Anand's convoluted attempts to weave Gandhian thought into his brand of socialism in an anti-caste novel such as *The Untouchable* which, by his own admission, was revised to conform to a Gandhian 'Talisman'? This commandment, directly from Gandhi, enjoined Anand to overcome despair by thinking 'of the poorest man you can help and go[ing] to him' (Anand 1993: 179). The same Anand who helped to draft the first PWA manifesto in London was also permitted to observe the Bloomsbury crowd from close quarters. How did his mixed reactions to them – a certain unmistakable respect for their literary talents combined with a profound distrust of their 'undeclared ban on political talk' – shape his own

attempts at forging a specifically Indian realism in the Anglophone novel? (Anand 1995: ix)

A study of the moment of the PWA and the IPTA makes it possible to think about what goes into the making of socially transformative visions and to understand, without relativising, the historical imperatives that shape them. Thus, the question of 'sustaining faith' raised by the *Indian Literature* questionnaire can be answered not by pointing to quasi-metaphysical generalisations such as the 'ultimate invincibility of the human spirit . . . [and the] elusive and shimmering realms of the individual consciousness', as one well-known critic of the PWA would prefer, but to a self-reflexive and critical humanism (Memon 1994: vi²). Humanism – as it emerges variously in the work of Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto and K. A. Abbas – does not consist of 'probing into what lay beyond the immediate socioeconomic reality' (Memon's imperative for good writing) any more than it reduces human life to that reality. It is, rather, to be developed through an understanding of how human life is inflected by the material and the discursive, the psychic and the social. Without being simplistically Manichean, this humanism (best exemplified, in some ways, by Manto's Partition narratives) is undergirded by the belief that human beings are capable of both terrible evil and real good. The guiding question then becomes: how might one recuperate the latter in the interests of social transformation?

The literature of the moment of the PWA is, ultimately, a literature of *reconstruction* in the wake of colonialism and nation formation, proffering ethical insights without being reducible to ahistorical morality tales. The presence of history and society inflects each author's forays into developing a 'sustaining faith', at times gesturing towards historical possibilities and, at others, marking fissures and constraints. Rashid Jahan's investigations of bodies in relation to modern institutions, for instance, are made possible by the historical fact of upper-class female education and colonial institutions such as the Dufferin fund, even as they make the case for emancipatory truths and values that must be wrested back from the 'lie' of the colonial situation. The gendered modern habitus that emerges so vividly in Ismat Chughtai's work is a profoundly historical one and grounds Shaman's tortured attempts to find her 'core' – to articulate commitment to knowledge with an openness to change. *The Crooked Line* finds its own sustaining faith in imagining and crafting relationships that will undo the violence of traditional family structures and social imperatives. Reimagining community and nation is also at the heart of Manto's work, underwritten by what he sees as the fundamental human capacity for psychic regeneration.

Such profoundly moral visions, for all their tentativeness and internal tensions, are, of course, vulnerable to the charge of 'messianism', the assumption that in 'the decolonizing years. . . it would have been possible for the nation as a whole to be systematically transformed or revolutionized' (Lazarus 1990: 186). In his critique of Fanon on national consciousness, Neil Lazarus points out that Fanon's brand of messianism 'is the product of a utopian conceptu-

alization of the national liberation struggle' where the latter is cast 'as *already* revolutionary in character, in correspondence with the revolutionary theory – *its* theory that claimed to represent it' (ibid. 12–13, original emphasis). Fanon further compounds this utopianism by endorsing the formation of 'a revolutionary party of intellectuals' who would mobilise and organise revolutionary activity. What is germane to the case of the PWA, as a group of intellectuals who also saw the moment of decolonisation as one with revolutionary transformative potential, is the question that Lazarus posits:

For if the kind of revolutionary consciousness to which Fanon alludes had actually existed in the era of decolonisation, could it have been so rapidly or so easily unraveled in the first years of independence? Would not revolutionary unity be made of sterner stuff? . . . the historical fact that the 'upward thrust of the people' was not maintained in the postcolonial era, points to the conclusion that it was never really present as a revolutionary force in the first place.

(ibid. 15)

Like Fanon, they too can be charged with an 'intellectualist bias' that, while it represented a moral theory of anti-colonialism and revolution, 'never represented this anticolonialism in its actuality' (ibid. 15).

Lazarus' contentions, which refer specifically to anti-colonialism rather than to a broader, perhaps more uneven, range of transformative impulses such as those described in Chapter 1, are, nevertheless, relevant to the moment of the PWA as well. Like Fanon and Armah in Africa, most writers and intellectuals associated with the PWA belonged to the middle (or upper middle) classes. These were the classes for whom national liberation would entail the kind of freedom to prosper, the expectation of which underlay their utopianism. Beyond this, Lazarus argues, the 'overriding problem with Fanon's messianic formulation is that it makes the setbacks of the postcolonial era seem incomprehensible' (ibid. 17). One of the main arguments in this study has been, however, that the writers under consideration here were concerned less with coming up with utopian templates than with exploring how consciousness – individual and collective – might be radicalised. At its best, this kind of literary and cultural production produces texts that explore the need (and the historical potential) for radical social transformation and examine how that transformation might take place. This would be as true of the women's compartment in 'One of my Journeys' as of the scene of potential rape and necrophilia in 'Cold Meat'. If writers such as Rashid Jahan and Manto appear to have misjudged the transformative potential of the moment, it is not a misjudgement that can be determined on the basis of the events and processes that followed the transitional era. The history – literary, political and social – of this period merits separate consideration. Such a history would try to document and account for the shifts that so conspicuously took place in the postcolonial era; shifts that perhaps have less to do with a failed messianism than with the complicated politics of this later period.³

All such projects, this one included, are relevant not only as literary histories *per se*, but to the important question of how we might think about contemporary literature in relation to that earlier, formative moment. At the same time, understanding the work of the *Angarey* group and writers such as Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto and K. A. Abbas belongs to the larger project of historicising literary production in decolonising parts of the globe. As such, this study is offered as one intervention among others that will help to reconstitute some of the reigning schematics in the field of postcolonial studies, primarily those that rely on oppositions between colonial discourse and postcolonial literature, Anglophone and vernacular, national and cosmopolitan, and even literary and political. This reconstitution is related to shifts taking place in the field of feminist scholarship: I have attempted to bring together analytics that are generally kept distinct: the female body as site or object of violence; the female body as symbol, icon or allegory; female bodies and persons as participants in resistance and reconstruction; and the female body as the subject of knowledge. This book also participates in the necessary move within contemporary feminist scholarship and activism towards intersectional work rather than an exclusive focus on gender.

The bulk of this study was researched during the much-vaunted fiftieth anniversary celebration of independence for the subcontinent in 1997. As I have been writing its concluding pages, the legacy of partition continues to resound in our ears as India and Pakistan become nuclear states, as intermittent hostilities take place on the border which Manto wrote about so eloquently, as thousands of Muslims were killed in pogroms in the state of Gujarat in 2002 – and many more made into refugees in their own country. We cannot look to an earlier era to make our visions for us; nor can we imagine that our challenges and problems mirror those of an earlier period in any simple way. Yet, the legacy is there to be engaged and drawn on. An album of popular songs written by well-known film music composer, A. R. Rahman, to commemorate this very fiftieth anniversary invokes this same bringing together of cultural affect and critical, reconstructive consciousness that was attempted by the writers of the earlier moment. In a song where Rahman and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, an Indian and a Pakistani national respectively, both sing (in Hindustani) about people and borders, a simple refrain (in English) is taken up by a chorus of children:

What are you waiting for, another day, another call?
Some day we have to find a new way to be.

(Rahman 1997)

It is perhaps in occasional cultural moments like this that we most visibly see traces of that project of ‘reinventing souls’ that Aimé Césaire described eloquently and note the ways in which they might speak to our own times. Much is undoubtedly lost in translation; much may no longer be germane in

the same way. But, in an era marked by conflicts of its own kind, derived from earlier conflicts and compounded by new ones, perhaps all that can be said for a 'sustaining faith' is that there lies before us, as it did for those earlier writers and activists, the task of finding new ways to be.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 For an interesting comparison of the London version of the Manifesto, published in *Left Review*, and the Hindi version, published in the magazine *Hans*, see Coppola 1974.
- 2 See, for instance, Bhabha 1994 and Spivak 1987, especially the essay, 'Deconstructing Historiography'.
- 3 See Bartolovich 2002 for a fuller account.
- 4 See Adorno 1978.
- 5 See Ahmad 1992: 101.
- 6 See Lazarus 1999 for a nuanced critique of these anti-humanist positions.
- 7 See Ansari 1990 for an excellent account of the development of socialist thought among North Indian Muslims.

1 The critical spirit: decolonisation and the Progressive Writers Association

- 1 At least two published versions of this manifesto exist: the first was published in *Left Review* (1935); later, an amended version translated into Hindi was published in the literary journal *Hans*. For an interesting comparison of the two versions, see Coppola 1974.
- 2 Khizar Humayun Ansari suggests that there were other precursors to such literary organisations, such as the Tahzib al-Akhlaq and the Anjuman-i-Panjab. The latter 'aimed to advance "popular knowledge" through the vernaculars and through discussions of social, literary, scientific and political interest' and expand the purview of poetry and poetry recitals to include new subjects and styles. The Anjuman-i-Taraqqi Urdu was founded in 1903, inspired by English liberalism, and was instrumental in encouraging Marxist approaches to literature and literary criticism (Ansari 1990: 157).
- 3 Ansari points out that, by the end of the 1920s, several Urdu-speaking Indian Muslim students, including Sajjad Zaheer and Hajrah Begum, were involved with the Oxford and Cambridge Majlises and were instrumental in taking those organisations leftwards; topics of debate they introduced included 'Imperialism', 'Communalism' and 'The Language Problem'. Some of them gathered into a Marxist study circle in London.
- 4 Gramsci's words are salutary when it comes to determining causal relations in the case of movements such as the PWA – and go some way towards explaining Ahmad's stance: 'A common error in historico-political analysis consists of an

- inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural. This leads to presenting causes as immediately operative which in fact only operate indirectly, or to asserting that the immediate causes are the only effective ones. In the first case there is an excess of “economism” or doctrinaire pedantry; in the second, an excess of “ideologism”. . . One’s own baser and more immediate desires and passions are the cause of error, in that they take the place of an objective and impartial analysis – and this happens not as a conscious “means” to stimulate to action, but as self-deception’ (Gramsci 1971: 179).
- 5 Chatterjee bases his argument on the contradiction between the ‘thematic’ and the ‘problematic’ that structures nationalist thought. The former is ‘an epistemological as well as ethical system which provides a framework of elements and rules for establishing relations between elements’. The thematic of anti-colonial nationalism mirrors the structures of colonial power. But the problematic posits an essential difference from the coloniser. The problematic is defined as ‘concrete statements about possibilities justified by reference to the thematic’ (Chatterjee 1986: 38).
 - 6 As mathematician and occasional historian D. D. Kosambi observed in the mid-1950s, ‘the big Indian bourgeoisie owes its present position to two war periods of heavy profit making. World War I gave Indian capital its first great impetus and initiated the process of Indianising the bureaucracy. World War II vastly expanded the army and Indianised the officer corps; further, it swelled the tide of Indian accumulation and enabled the capitalists, by rallying the masses behind the Congress Party, to complete the process of pushing the British out of the country’ (Kosambi 1957: 25).
 - 7 Khizar Ansari points out, correctly, that the collaboration with the Congress while it had gone underground allowed communist members of the PWA such as Sajjad Zaheer to develop closer relationships with their fellows in mainstream nationalist politics. This ‘assured the Progressive Movement of a warm reception in larger sections of the Indian intellectual community’ (Ansari 1990: 167). As Ralph Russell has also pointed out, the PWA’s closeness to Nehru and other nationalist figures did allow the organisation a degree of mainstream acceptance.
 - 8 See Kumar 1993, especially Chapters 4 and 5, for an extensive account of women’s ‘doings’ in the political sphere during this period.
 - 9 See Ansari 1990, especially Chapter IV, ‘The social background of Muslim socialists of the 1930s and 40s’. Ansari makes a useful observation about the ‘qasbah’ background of many leading PWA figures, with its emphasis on Islamic culture and learning.
 - 10 For detailed accounts of Popular Front culture in the United States, see Denning 1997 and Mullen 1999; and in France, Jackson 1988.
 - 11 Mullen argues that ‘the 1936 opening of Chicago’s black “cultural front” represented both a culmination and a new beginning for African-American engagement of and revision within the US Left’ (Mullen 1999: 6)
 - 12 For a succinct account of debates among Hindi writers affiliated to the PWA, see Rai 2000.
 - 13 Although there were to be common interests among its constituent members, at no point in the first constitution adopted at the 1936 PWA Conference or in any early manifestoes do we see anything even as programmatic as the committed guidelines suggested for the John Reed Clubs in the USA that had been established some years before. Where the latter had some interest in making ‘industrial correspondents’ of its affiliated writers, the manifesto adopted at the PWA conference simply states that it is the object of the Association.
 - 14 Ahmad does not appear to be using Lukacs’ definition of critical realism either. Lukacs saw critical realism as a mainly bourgeois aesthetic, which had a pro-

- gressive stance in contrast to bourgeois modernism. Its subject matter was the 'social and ideological crisis of bourgeois society' (Lukacs 1962: 60). In contrast to modernism, which exalts 'life's very baseness and emptiness', critical realism 'transforms the positive and negative elements of bourgeois life into 'typical' situations' (ibid. 68). While critical realism was not hostile to socialism, it did not include a socialist perspective, which was fundamental to the more radical 'socialist realism'. My own use of the term with regard to the PWA is closer to Roy Bhaskar's 'dialectical critical realism', which combines anti-positivist 'explanatory critique' and emancipatory/transformational axiology (Bhaskar 1993: 2).
- 15 In the context of the Indian left, this argument has particular resonance. The left has, indeed, been conventionally associated, as even the PWA manifesto seems to suggest, with 'a rational and scientific basis for social change' (Panikkar 1990: 9), while the communal right has been more successful in deploying the rhetoric of sensuous particularity and cultural identity. Recent debates within the broad spectrum of the Indian left have returned repeatedly to the idea that the left needs to recuperate the ground of the aesthetic, the cultural and even the religious ecumenical. While Panikkar problematises the recuperation of religion within secular traditions, Aijaz Ahmad has suggested that an 'ideological struggle against Hindutva fascism must recoup, as a significant element, those traditions of humanism, ecumenism, agnosticism and anti-casteist world-view which we have inherited from our medieval anti-Brahminical movements' (Ahmad 1993: 65). These were debates that were familiar to those associated with the PWA and IPTA.
 - 16 Well-known women writers in Urdu and English with links to the PWA include Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Razia Sajjad Zaheer, Jeelani Bano, Attia Hossain, Quratulain Haider, Hajra Masrur and Khadija Mastur.
 - 17 Ahmad Ali has more to say on the role of the arts: 'The dance and song are the medii [sic] through which the primitive man expresses his joy and sorrow, anger as well as fear. It is through them that he woos the woman; they express his sexual ecstasy. . .' (Ali 1979: 77).
 - 18 'One author, praising Gold's literary criticism, put it this way: "The stale Bohemian writer, recognizing the vigor of the new proletarian literature, sadly contemplates his own wilted phallus, and howls that the Goddess of Pure Art is being raped by the barbarians." Gold's choice of metaphors ultimately set the tone for the homophobic and antifeminine rhetoric of literary radicalism . . .' (Rabinowitz 1991: 23).
 - 19 D'Silva was removed from the post in 1946, 'apparently on charges of sexual misconduct' (Tharu and Lalita 1993: 79).
 - 20 She describes with pride her decision to visit the Soviet Union for herself and the surprise of her male comrades when she returns and voices her opinions about what she has seen there. In contrast to their utopian notions, she informs them 'No it is not like that, these people are still struggling and it is that struggle which is most important and very interesting for us in India' (Hajrah Begum 1990: 67).
 - 21 From the *United Provinces Gazette*, 1933. India Office Records. V/11/1511. Reprinted in Alvi 1995: 103.
 - 22 Alvi 1995: 103.
 - 23 The economics and sexual politics of domestic servitude were themes taken up in stories such as Premchand's 'Penalty', Rashid Jahan's 'Iftari' [The Breaking of the Fast], Razia Sajjad Zaheer's 'Neech' [The Lowborn One], Ismat Chughtai's 'Dil ki Duniya' [The Heart Breaks Free] and Manto's 'Ji Aya Saab' [Coming, Sir]. The economic pressures that result in the turn to prostitution had already been

- thematized in works such as Premchand's novel, *Bazaar-e-Husn* [Marketplace of Beauty] and was later taken up in Manto's many prostitute stories, including 'Licence' [Licence] and 'Sharda' [Sharda].
- 24 See, in particular, Premchand's *Nari Jeevan ki Kahaniyan* and an English translation of some of his woman-centred stories, *Widows, Wives and Heroines*.
 - 25 Naseeban and That One in Rashid Jahan's 'Iftari' and 'That One' respectively; Manto's Sugandhi in 'The Insult' and the unnamed prostitute in '100 Candle-Power Bulb' are well-known examples.
 - 26 There are many examples of 'rescue and reform' narratives to be found in both women's and men's writing in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literatures of the subcontinent. Some relevant examples of influential texts are Premchand's *Sevasadan* and *Gaban* written in the 1920s, Kazi Abdul Ghaffar's *Laila ke Khatut* (1932) and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Devdas* (1917).
 - 27 It has been suggested plausibly that 'Gallantry' was first written in English and then translated into Urdu by Sajjad Zaheer. Mahmuduzzafar had been educated exclusively in English and is unlikely to have been able to write in Urdu with proficiency. See Zubair and Coppola 1987: 182, fn. 10.

2 Gender, modernity and the politics of space: Rashid Jahan, 'Angarewali'

- 1 The Dufferin Fund or the National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India was established in 1885. The purpose was to provide 'financial assistance to women willing to be trained as doctors, hospital assistants, nurses, and midwives'; to aid 'in establishing medical training programs for women' as well as 'the construction of hospitals and dispensaries' (Forbes 1996: 161).
- 2 The character of 'Ammi' in Mukul Kesavan's novel, *Looking Through Glass*, seems to be loosely based on the figure of Wahid Jahan Begum.
- 3 Well-known Urdu writers associated with reformist literature of the period include Altaf Husain Hali, Muhammad Husain Azad, Mir Hadi Ruswa and Maulvi Nazir Ahmad.
- 4 While this trend crosses cultural and scholarly contexts, I refer here primarily to the recent work of scholars affiliated to the Subaltern Studies collective including, most prominently, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Sudipta Kaviraj and Partha Chatterjee. For a trenchant critique of the disappearance of the subaltern from this project, see Sarkar 1997.
- 5 Elsewhere, Benjamin writes of Baudelaire's flâneur that 'The mass was the agitated veil, through it Baudelaire saw Paris' (Benjamin 1968: 168).
- 6 On the flâneur, Baudelaire has this to say: 'The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense job to set up house in the middle of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite' (Baudelaire 1964: 9). Where Mallika Begum is a reluctant flâneuse, Rashid Jahan's relatives remember her as one who 'loved crowds and loved to mingle with people and get the "feel" of crowds' (Saiduzzafar 1987: 163).
- 7 There is another story, 'Sarak' [The Street], in the same collection, which is in the form of a letter from Shakuntala to Zubeida.
- 8 The chamar caste were associated with leather workers and cobblers – considered to be impure because they handled dead flesh.
- 9 A land-owning caste.

- 10 For his most well-known discussion of the figure of the flâneur, see Benjamin 1973. See also Jenks 1995.
- 11 Feminist critics such as Janet Wolff have appropriated Benjamin's *flâneur* model of the individual's relationship to urban spaces in the West and argued that the flâneur is inevitably male; women could only experience modernity 'ec-centrally as whores, as women of the streets' (Ledger 1997: 151). Others such as Rita Felski and Sally Ledger have suggested that there are, in fact, *flâneuse* figures who challenged gendered divisions of sexual space such that the modern cityscape was not inevitably masculine. In fact, the entry of women into the nineteenth-century European cityscape prompted a crisis of masculinity and a consequent demonisation of the 'monstrous regiment of women' that invaded cities such as London (ibid. 151).
- 12 See Tagore 1985 [1919].
- 13 See 'The Erotics and Aesthetics of Consumption', in Felski 1995 for a thorough mapping of feminist readings of the modernist woman-as-consumer.
- 14 For an interesting comparative analysis of similar issues in early US culture, see Cline-Cohen 1992. She writes: 'Public transport constitutes a potential breach of the public/private dichotomy . . . wherein a manifestly public activity was undertaken by both sexes' (ibid. 110). More importantly, she points out that no pre-existing etiquette existed for such situations and, as such, such a study offers a glimpse of a dynamic social construction of gendered roles. Rashid Jahan's story, I suggest, visualises a salutary breaking down of rather than a carry over of both gender roles and communal identity politics.
- 15 While the meaning of 'modern' bears extensive study, especially in colonial contexts, I share Rita Felski's general characterisation of modernity as 'an overarching periodizing term' that contains any combination of these features as well as a 'general philosophical distinction between traditional societies . . . and a modern secularized universe . . .' (Felski 1995: 13).

3 Habitations of womanhood: Ismat Chughtai's secret history of modernity

- 1 There is wide critical consensus that Chughtai's use of language and imagery made for a distinctive literary style. She was the first to bring the 'begumati zuban' or the unique gendered sociolect spoken by Muslim women of her class background into literary use. She combined this with a remarkably evocative attention to sensory detail. Manto reflects on this aspect of her work in his essay, 'On Ismat' (Manto 2000).
- 2 For a detailed reminiscence of this trial, see Chughtai's essay 'Un Byahtaon ke Naam' [In the name of those married women] in Chughtai 1998. The title of this essay is taken from a poem by Faiz Ahmad Faiz that pays tribute to wives whose bodies are 'atrophied on loveless, deceitful beds'. An account of the 'Lihaf' trial, this essay expresses Chughtai's tongue-in-cheek view that she had not known that 'such things . . . disease . . . or vice etc.' (Chughtai 1998: 32). An English translation can be found in Chughtai 2001.
- 3 See Chughtai 1998 for her account of the struggle for women's education in her family, especially the essays 'Tasadum' [Accidents] and 'Adhuri Aurat' [Incomplete woman].
- 4 For a succinct biography, see Sukrita Paul Kumar's introduction to *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (Paul Kumar and Sadique 2000: 9–17). The book as a whole offers a useful panoply of both personal and critical glimpses into Ismat's life and context. It also contains first-time English translations of select chapters from her autobiography, *Kagazi hai Pairahan* [Attired in Paper].

- 5 See Chughtai 1998: 114.
- 6 Her filmography includes *Ziddi* [The Obstinate, 1948], *Aarzoo* [Desire, 1950], *Faraib* [Deceptions, 1953], *Society* [1955] and *Sone ki Chidiya* [The Golden Bird, 1958].
- 7 Chughtai discusses this episode in the section of her autobiography entitled 'Ali-garh' (Chughtai 1998, 144–7).
- 8 In an essay entitled 'Progressive Literature and I', Chughtai writes: 'I have never taken it to be my mission to reform society and eliminate the problems of humanity; but I was greatly influenced by the slogans of the Communist Party as they matched my own independent, unbridled, and revolutionary style of thinking' (Paul Kumar and Sadique 2000: 127).
- 9 For a succinct account of the contemporary 'New Woman' in India, see Sunder Rajan 1993: 130–3. The figure of the New Woman in India changes through the twentieth century, but is consistently figured as being able to combine in herself, modernity and tradition.
- 10 See Hortense Spillers' essay 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book'. Demonstrating the historicised nature of gender and kinship relations in the context of the 'bitter Americanisation' of persons brought to the United States under the violent aegis of slavery, Spillers invokes what she calls the 'The Great Long National Shame', the history of anti-human violence that continues to contour symbolic orders in the present day. This involves talking about bodies and the violence done to them (bodies that are neither inert matter nor bloodless ideation); bodies in their relationship to event and history, to economic institution and social structure. Histories of consciousness can only be written as a comprehensive account of the nexus of all these spheres. Spillers makes a distinction between 'body' and 'flesh' where the latter, although it does not escape discursive concealment, can be seen as a 'primary narrative'; abduction and slavery constitute irreparable 'high crimes against the flesh' (Spillers 1987: 66).
- 11 Chughtai's own arguments with her parents to be allowed to study at a mission school are charmingly recounted in the chapter 'Lohe ke Channe' [Chewing on Iron] in Chughtai 1998.
- 12 Giddens also argues that ontological security is tied up with trust, with finding 'answers' to fundamental existential questions.
- 13 Chughtai herself recalls her hostel days with affection, recalling that, although freedoms were circumscribed, she blossomed away from home, taking part in all events and activities and making several new friends (Chughtai 1998: 131).
- 14 See Bourdieu 1977 and Elias 1978.
- 15 See Minault 1998: 270.
- 16 A measure of sexual openness functions in this period as a double-edged sickle: the freedom is exciting even as it is institutionally regulated, but it also poses the greatest danger to the woman professional. Historically, sexual harassment was a problem, especially for unmarried professional women, and they found very little social sympathy. At the trial for the actual sexual assault of a woman doctor by her male superior in the early 1930s, the judge ruled: 'If women engaged in professional work come out into the open they must adopt the standards of ordinary men and women of the world. They cannot expect to retain the hypersensitive notions of modesty which their ancestors in purda may have possessed' (cited in Forbes 1996: 166).
- 17 I draw on a talk by David Harvey for this insight. Harvey points out that architecture as a social and aesthetic form can usefully draw on both historical memory and the utopian impulse (Keynote Address, Conference on 'AfterImages of the City', Cornell University, 17 October, 1998).
- 18 Three million people perished in the Bengal famine of 1943, engendered by the

callousness of British administrative policy and the economic impact of the Second World War, which included inflation, 'gross mismanagement and profiteering'. Sarkar writes: 'even (Viceroy) Wavell complained bitterly in private of London's indifference toward Indian food problems, and spoke of a "very different attitude toward feeding a starving population when the starvation is in Europe". In the terrible summer and autumn of 1943, lakhs trekked to Calcutta to starve to death on its streets, begging no longer for rice, but just for the water in which it had been cooked'. The profiteering meant great wealth for some members of the Indian bourgeoisie (Sarkar 1983: 406).

- 19 Naqvi's English translation of the novel, *The Crooked Line*, gives Taylor's first name as 'Ronnie', a plausible interpretation given the graphic similarity of 'n' and 'f' in Urdu calligraphy. I have, however, stuck with the original as given in both the Devnagari and the Nastaliq versions of the novel.

4 Dangerous bodies: masculinity, morality and social transformation in Manto

- 1 Translated as *Sarguzasht-e-Asir* (A Prisoner's Story).
- 2 Leslie Flemming writes that 'he was never formally a member [of the PWA] in Bombay, although he frequently attended their meetings and was actively friendly with such Progressive writers as Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Ahmad Nadim Qasmi' (Flemming 1985: 10). She claims that he severed his ties in 1944. However, although his relationship with some leading figures became increasingly contentious and bitter, it is not clear that Manto 'severed' his friendships with all his Progressive friends, and he certainly continued to be invested in the issues that PWA-affiliated writers were engaging with. After Partition and the decimation of the Pakistani left, he engaged with 'jadidiyat' or 'Modernism', propagated by the Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq, but was never a member of that circle in any formal sense either.
- 3 Both Manto and Chughtai wrote reminiscences about each other recalling their fondly cantankerous relationship. Chughtai's was called 'Mera dost, mera dushman' [My friend, my enemy].
- 4 Originally published in *Manto ke Afsane* [Stories by Manto, 1940], although it was probably written in the late 1930s.
- 5 Hortense Spillers raises the possibility that Khushia might, in fact, have taken Kanta away to be married. Although the text does not suggest such a move in any explicit way, it would be in keeping with the trajectory of the narrative in general. Marriage would rescue Khushia from his anxieties about his gender and sexuality, by turning pimp into husband, a normatively masculine role. Regardless, we are given to understand that whatever he does is by way of setting gendered relations 'right', either by becoming husband or, perhaps, paying customer (H. Spillers, personal communication).
- 6 'Dhuan' was first published in the journal *Saqi* in 1941, and then provided the title for another collection of Manto's stories which came out in 1942.
- 7 First published in *Manto ke Afsane* (1940).
- 8 See the accounts of the controversy over 'Cold Meat' by Manto and others in Issar 1991 (Manto 1991f-i). Pointedly, Manto asks: 'Having just won our freedom, will our condition be any different from the way it was under foreign rule?' (Manto 1991g: 95).
- 9 One of the defining political moves in this struggle was the crackdown, in the early 1950s, on the Communist Party of Pakistan, trade unions and prominent writers such as Faiz Ahmad Faiz. See Talbot 1998: 138.

- 10 'Cold Meat' is 'a story whose background may be the recent riots, but its foundation is, in fact, man's sensual desires' (Manto 1991h: 113).
- 11 Menon and Bhasin have compiled several accounts of women being asked by men in their family to commit suicide in order to prevent rape or kidnapping by men from other communities. One particularly chilling example is of a woman's husband who uses her scarf or dupatta to strangle her to death (Menon and Bhasin 1998: 51).
- 12 'Resistance to being recovered came not only from their "abductors" but also from women themselves. A common plea was that their liaisons had been made freely and under no compulsion; and indeed, many had taken advantage of the social turmoil to marry men of their choice from outside their community, something that would almost certainly have been disallowed in more normal times' (Menon and Bhasin 1998: 118).
- 13 Amitav Ghosh's observations are relevant here: 'The stories of those riots are always the same: tales that grow out of an explosive barrier of symbols – of cities going up in flames because of a cow found dead in a temple or a pig in a mosque; of people killed for wearing a lungi or a dhoti, depending on where they find themselves; of women disembowelled for wearing veils or vermilion, of men dismembered for the state of their foreskins' (Ghosh 1992: 210).
- 14 Manto writes of *Syah Hashiye*: 'And, believe me, it caused me great pain when some of my literary friends made cruel fun of my book, denouncing me as an irresponsible hack, a jokester, a nuisance, a cynic and a reactionary. One of them, a close friend, accused me of having robbed the dead of their possessions to build a personal collection' (Hasan 1991: xix).
- 15 See Daniel 1996: 211.

5 Straight talk or spicy masala? Citizenship, humanism and affect in the cinematic work of K. A. Abbas

- 1 See Bharucha 1998: 42–3.
- 2 See Sahni 1981.
- 3 For a further discussion of the Bengal famine in relation to fiction and drama of the period, see Bharucha 1983 and Gopal 2001.
- 4 This engagement would now take place variously, not through a formal cinematic project, but the increasing presence of Progressive writers and poets who found employment in the film industry as screenwriters and lyricists. Manto, Chughtai, Krishan Chander, Sahir Ludhianvi, Kaifi Azmi, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Ali Sardar Jafri all earned their daily bread penning screenplays and songs for commercial films, some of which were great successes and others, more or less forgettable.
- 5 Abbas writes in his memoirs that he was expelled by the increasingly CPI-dominated PWA for writing a preface to Ramanand Sagar's novel on partition, *Aur Insaan Mar Gaya* [And Humanity Died], which blamed all political parties, including the communists, for not having prevented the massacres that took place during the period (Abbas 1977: 329–37).
- 6 'Nehru needs no other source for anti-imperialist inspiration but himself – his OLD self – which he seemed to have forsaken in recent times. Dutch aggression, however, has jolted him out of the Commonwealth groove' (Abbas 1982: 25).
- 7 For an account of spectation in the context of Hindi film, see Prasad 1998b. He points out that to be dropped from the 'nazar' or gaze of the morally/socially superior person is 'the equivalent of symbolic death' (ibid. 139, fn. 19). For an extended discussion of the photograph and the moral gaze in *Awara*, see Vasudevan 2000.

- 8 Vasudevan points out that the family is the 'remarkable symbolic, if not literal, locus of the narrative's organization of both conflict and resolution' and that this formation 'emerges under the benign agency of the law. It would seem, however, that the law has to be made benign – through the agency of the affective such that the relationship between familial and institutional is reconfigured in gendered ways (Vasudevan 2000: 111).
- 9 The Hindustani lyrics (by Shailendra) are as follow: 'Mera jootha hai Japani/Yeh patloon Inglistani/Sar pe lal topi Russi/Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani'.
- 10 Given these visual markers and their prominence, it seems odd to claim that 'The film... avoids drawing overt attention to difference, other than class difference' (Varma 2004). On the contrary, in *Shri 420*, both Bombay and India are produced as always already Hindu spaces, with the margins generously left open for the affable, domesticated Other – such as the nameless 'Raddiwala Kaka' – to inhabit.
- 11 The distinction between Rita and Vidya is also made starkly clear in a scene that approximates the dream sequence of *Awara* where Rita entreats Raj to leave the life of crime behind him by offering him love. As the Raj of *Shri 420* staggers away drunk into the night, determined to make easy money, Vidya stands ramrod straight with her hands by her sides, fists clenched, to prevent herself from going after him. An imaginary double clad in a filmy white dress emerges on to the screen representing Vidya's inward anguish and desire to cajole Raj back; but the real Vidya who stands firm in a black sari will not give in to her own weakness and feelings for the wayward Raj.
- 12 Abbas claimed that *Awara* intervened in the predominant socialist realist mode of Soviet cinema and forced 'discussions on art and aesthetics that shook the entire cultural world of the Soviet Union' (Abbas 1977: 380).
- 13 Barthes argues that Chaplin's refusal of a collective politics is 'the most efficient form of revolution in the realm of art' because 'politically open to discussion' (Barthes 1973: 44).

Afterword: 'Sustaining Faith' and the legacy of progressive writing

- 1 Well-known instances include Tharu and Lalita 1993. See also Scott 1988 and Barrett 1992.
- 2 See also Memon 1994 and Joshi 1997.
- 3 Historians of the PWA and IPTA, such as Sudhi Pradhan, speak of a clear decline for the cultural movements that becomes evident in the mid-1950s (Pradhan 1979c: iii). For Pradhan, this decline is connected to a crisis within the Communist Party leadership with regard to various issues, including casteism, communalism, peasant organising, trade union movements and the question of constitutional politics. While Pradhan's overview of crises within the CPI and their relation to the decline of the progressive cultural front constituted by the PWA and the IPTA is suggestive, it is inadequate (as I have suggested in Chapter 1) to study such a heterogeneous front and its histories purely from the perspective of party politics and leadership, as the initial scope of the movement extended well beyond the purview of the party. It would, of course, be useful to examine to what extent pressures from a party in crisis, in fact, resulted in a narrowing of the scope of the movement and a subsequent implosion of its energies. Even if a case could be made for the destructive influence of proto-Zhdanovist elements within the CPI (soon to split) of the late 1950s, such factors would only partially account for the eventual decline of the front. A more comprehensive history of the decline of the literary radicalism of the transitional period would, among other

things, necessarily have to look at the impact of state formation and the setting into place of legitimising cultural apparatuses such as the Sahitya Akademi (Academy of Letters). The harnessing of the energies of the progressive writer into projects such as 'national integration' would also have played a role in the changes that took place in the postcolonial era.

Appendix

Select biographical and bibliographical information

Rashid Jahan

- 1905 Born on 25 August, in Aligarh, to Sheikh Abdullah and Wahid Jahan Begum
- 1921 Joins Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow. First short story, 'Salma', written in English, is published in *Chandbagh Chronicle*, the college magazine
- 1924–9 Completes medical training from Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi, with a specialisation in obstetrics and gynaecology
- 1931 Takes up a post in the Lady Dufferin Hospital, Lucknow
- 1932 Publishes 'Parde ke Peeche' and 'Dilli ki Sair' in *Angarey*. Becomes the object of conservative ire and diatribes against the education of women
- 1933–6 Marries Mahmuduzzafar. Moves to Amritsar where she meets left-leaning Urdu poets such as Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Helps organise First All-India Progressive Writers Conference in 1936
- 1937 Publishes *Aurat aur Digar Afsane wa Drame* [Woman and other Stories and Plays]. Moves to Dehradun with her husband where they get involved with the PWA. Also edits a political journal called *Chingari*
- 1938–42 Writes several short stories and plays, including radio dramas produced for All-India Radio
- 1949 Arrested along with other communists for participation in a railway strike; jailed for three months from March to May
- 1950 Undergoes surgery for cancer; an earlier operation in 1942 had removed a benign growth
- 1952 Passes away in July after failed treatment for advanced cancer in Moscow. Her epitaph reads 'Rashid Jahan: Communist Doctor and Writer'
- 1974 Posthumous publication of thirteen stories under the title *Shola-e-Jwala* (Hot Coals and Flames)
- 1988 Posthumous publication of *Vah aur Dusre Afsane Wa Drame* (That One and other stories and plays) in Hindi and Urdu scripts

Saadat Hasan Manto

- 1912 Born in Samrala in Punjab, on 11 May, to Moulvi Ghulam Hasan and his wife
- 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre and ensuing political ferment make a strong impression on the young Manto
- 1934 Joins Aligarh Muslim University, a highly charged political and intellectual milieu during the 1930s. Is diagnosed with tuberculosis after less than nine months and has to leave. Takes up journalism to support himself
- 1936 Moves to Bombay to become editor of *Musawwir*, a film magazine
- 1940 Joins All-India Radio where Progressive writer, Krishan Chander, is in charge and moves to Delhi. *Manto ke Afsane* [Stories by Manto] is published from Lahore
- 1941 *Dhuan* [Smoke], a second collection of stories, is published
- 1942 *Manto ke Mazamun* [Essays by Manto] is published by the Urdu Academy, Lahore
- 1943 After returning to Bombay, joins Filmistan, a film production house, as a staff story writer
- 1946 Travels to Lahore, along with Ismat Chughtai, for the trials involving obscenity charges against her 'Lihaf' and his 'Bu'. Both are acquitted though a fine is levied against Manto
- 1947 Independence and Partition of India
- 1948 Emigrates to Pakistan
- 1955 Dies on 18 January of alcohol-related illness after fighting both depression and alcoholism. His epitaph, written by him, famously reads: 'Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto. In his breast are buried all the secrets and nuances of the art of short story writing. Even now, weighted down by earth, he is wondering if he is the great story writer or God' (cited in Flemming 1985: 21)

Ismat Chughtai

- 1911 Born in Badaun on 21 August to Nusrat Khanam and Mirza Qaseem Beg Chaghtai
- 1932 Matriculates with a second division
- 1935 Fails her BA examination
- 1936 Graduates after taking the examination as a private candidate. Attends the inaugural conference of the PWA
- 1937 Commences her career as a school principal
- 1938 Publishes her first short-story, 'Gainda', in the well-known Urdu magazine *Saqi*
- 1939 Commences study towards a teaching degree at Aligarh Muslim University. Writes her first novella, '*Ziddi*', which has been translated as 'Wild at Heart'

- 1941 Her first collection of short stories, *Kaliyan* [Buds], is published by Saqi Book Depot, Delhi
- 1942 Marries filmmaker Shahid Lateef against her family's wishes. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas is one of the witnesses for the ceremony
- 1945 Her first daughter, Seema, is born
- 1946 Goes to Lahore to stand trial on obscenity charges against her short story, 'Lihaf'; she is accompanied by her husband and the Mantos. Later that year, she begins to spend time with other Progressives such as Mulk Raj Anand, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Jan Nisar Akhtar at the Silver Fish Restaurant in Bombay. They come to be known as the Bombay Group of Writers
- 1947 Writes *Dhani Banken*, a drama on Partition
- 1948 *Ziddi* is made into a film. She also begins to write dialogues and scripts for films produced by Filmina, a company run by Lateef. Barring *Sone ki Chidiya* (The Golden Bird, 1958), most of these films are flops
- 1952 A collection of stories and non-fiction, *Chooi-Mooi* [Touch-Me-Not], is published from Bombay. Her second daughter, Sabrina, is born in this year
- 1953 'Nanhi ki Nani,' translated later as Tiny's Granny, is published by the magazine *Naqoosh*
- 1961 Another famous story, 'Chauthi ka Jora', is published
- 1962 A novella, *Dil ki Duniya*, and a novel, *Masooma*, are published
- 1973 Writes the story for M. S. Sathyu's film on Partition, *Garam Hawa* [Hot Wind], and wins the President's Award for Best Film Story
- 1989 Receives the Padmashri, one of India's highest civilian honours
- 1988 Is diagnosed as suffering from Alzheimer's disease
- 1991 Passes away on 24 October and, in accordance with her wishes, is cremated rather than buried

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas

- 1914 Born in Panipat on 7 June to Khwaja Ghulamul Sabtain Ansari and Masroora Khatun
- 1929 Joins Aligarh Muslim University. Helps launch *Aligarh Opinion*, an independent and nationalist student weekly
- 1935 Graduates from Aligarh Muslim University with a degree in law. Begins work as a film critic for *The Bombay Chronicle*
- 1943 Goes on a 'world tour' with a cheap steamer ticket. Meets Upton Sinclair in Los Angeles
- 1944 Marries Mujtabai Khattoon (Mujji). Publishes *Tomorrow is Ours* and *And One did not Come Back! The Story of the Congress Medical Mission to China* (which is made into V. Shantaram's film, *Dr Kotnis ki Amar Kahani*) and writes the IPTA play, *Zubeida*
- 1946 *Dharti ke Lal* is released

- 1948 Publishes *Inquilab*. Controversy is generated by his story ‘Sardarji’ and his preface to Ramanand Sagar’s *Aur Insaan Mar Gaya*. His relations with the increasingly CPI-dominated PWA are strained
- 1949 Meets Raj Kapoor and begins work on *Awara*
- 1951 *Awara* is released. Begins work on another film, *Anhonee*, which he produces and directs with Raj Kapoor and Nargis. Sets up his own film company, Naya Sansar
- 1954 Directs *Rahi*, based on Mulk Raj Anand’s English novel, *Four Leaves and a Bud*
- 1955 Travels to the Soviet Union, where *Awara* has met with great success. Directs *Munna*, one of the first no-songs Indian films. *Shri 420* is released
- 1956 Directs Indo-Soviet production, *Pardesi*
- 1957 Directs *Shaher aur Sapna*, which meets with Censor Board’s disapproval but wins awards
- 1969 Directs *Saat Hindustani*, which launches Amitabh Bacchan’s film career
- 1970 Writes script for *Mera Naam Joker*, which is also published as a novel in English
- 1973 Writes script for *Bobby*, which is released this year
- 1981 Directs *The Naxalites*, which had been published as an English novel in 1979
- 1985 Co-writes (with V. P. Sathe) the screenplay for *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*, a titillating blockbuster directed by Raj Kapoor
- 1987 Passes away

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