STUDENT PAPERS

Witnessing Violence: Perspectives on Sa‘adat Hasan Manto’s “Kʰol Do” and Rajinder Singh Bedi’s “Lajvanti”

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> *Mous, nous bâtissons des boîtes adoucissantes*[1]
> [We are building boxes which make us less voulnerable]

I

CONTRASTING VARIOUS ATTEMPTS in which especially Manto’s short stories have suffered the critique of literary categorization, and differing from recent applications of their summarized contents for the purpose of alternative history writing,[2] I here propose a different kind of approach in the reading of two particular texts: Sa‘adat Hasan Manto’s “Kʰōl Dō” and Rajinder Singh Bedi’s “Lājvantī.”[3] Both texts bring into focus the implications of a violent rupture, the Partition of India in 1947, and both have as a common feature the metaphoric recognition of the *violated body.*

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[1] Michel Serres, *Les cinq sens* (Paris, 1985), p. 154.

[2] See for example Leslie A. Flemming, *Another Lonely Voice. The Urdu Short Stories of Sa‘adat Hasan Manto* (Berkeley, 1979) and the contributions in “Sa‘adat Hasan Manto: Seminar Papers,” *AUS*, vol. 11, pp. 115–96; see Ian Talbot, *Freedom’s Cry* (Karachi, 1996) for a historical approach.

[3] Sa‘ādat Ḥasan Manṭō, “Kʰōl Dō” [Open It], in his *Nimrūd kī Khudā’ī* (Delhi: Saqi Book Depot, 1990 [1950]), pp. 5–11; Rajinder Singh Bedi, “Lajvanti,” in Mushirul Hasan (ed.) *India Partitioned. The Other Face of Freedom*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Roli Books, 1995), pp. 177–89.

Despite the particularities of their authors and the differences in narrative style, the two short stories can be recognized in their common potentiality for transforming the reader from a distant to at least a participant observer, if not for obscuring any notion of controlled observation. Without being able to fully discuss the theoretical grounding of the kind of participation that I would like to introduce, I must refer the reader to the crossroads where anthropological/ethnographical and philosophical notions of *witnessing* intersect.[4] Starting from Wittgenstein's last writings, in which the philosopher forcefully criticizes the sceptic attitude which is often held towards those who suffer not as an intellectual failure but as a failure of the soul,[5] one can find a replication of this critique in the ethnographical works of Jeanne Favret-Saada and Veena Das for instance. Both speak of a common body of witnessing that includes suffering subjects as well as ethnographers. Whereas Favret-Saada in her work on sorcery in contemporary France establishes a concept of "unbewitching as therapy" (according to which spoken words only reveal their meaning to the ethnographer at the moment she takes part in the violated zone that circumscribes the body of the bewitched),[6] Veena Das's fieldwork with Partition refugee women in Punjab, on the other hand, applies a metaphor drawn from Wittgenstein and Leder.[7] She introduces the notion of "forming one body" in witnessing the fine workings of the everyday in which these women invest their lives with new meaning. Taking the intersection of the different routes of these authors/fieldworkers as a distinct space, I would point out a slight movement from a theory (in respect to Wittgenstein it is full of silent irony and eruptions of madness) directed outwards to the domain of language, towards a social practice that opens itself to an aesthetics of the senses, to a zone in which sounds, smells, the touch of hands and sometimes bleak laughter shatter the belief in the domain of the visual. I want to argue that in terms of the author/reader relationship characteristic of the Urdu short stories I am focusing on here, it is possible to make out a similar movement as one wanders from Bedi's text to Manto's "Kʰōl Dō" and its rupturing end.

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[4] Recent articles in the volume on "Social Suffering" in *Daedalus* 125 (1), or in the journal *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* might give evidence for such a movement.

[5] Wittgenstein's thoughts on this subject (which are already formulated in his *Philosophical Investigations* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1953]) are developed further in his *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982) where the notion of the soul becomes central.

[6] Jeanne Favret-Saada, "About Participation," in *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 14 (2), pp. 189–200, and her *Les mots, la mort, les sorts. La sorcellerie dans le Bocage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977).

[7] Veena Das, *The Act of Witnessing and the Healing of Culture* (Delhi: Unpublished, 1995). Wittgenstein's metaphor of how to feel pain in another body, to be found in *The Blue Book* (Oxford, 1958), is of importance here, as well as Drew Leder's book, *The Absent Body* (Chicago, 1990).

The author/reader relationship I am concerned with takes the author, as Roland Barthes describes it, not as the father, nor does it take the reader as the consumer, of the text.[8] On the contrary, the text is seen as a zone uneasy with classification. Especially in contexts of violent transgression, it makes sense to regard the text in a very different way, for as both Bedi and Manto are concerned, the boundaries between writer, reader, and suffering subject are shifting constantly. Writing in/about violence then might be best described as a form of witnessing, although writing and reading texts differs from encounters in the field. The common body of witnesses in the context of literary discourse might be defined through the absence of those signs of violence which are inscribed on the skins of sufferers, i.e. through the impossibility of touching the topographic landscapes of violence. The question to be elaborated may then be formulated: In which way are the pages of Manto's and Bedi's short stories nevertheless likely to be seen as a sort of violated skin, which may be touched, its rugged topography making the reader's finger hurt? It seems that this elaboration may be accomplished on different levels, be it through a silent confusing irony, bodily metaphors of pain, or the use of slippery words. It is the author's attempt "to effect a loss in the reader that is neither fully lost (unrecognized) nor gained as profitable experience" what seems to be at issue here.[9] This characterization of Georges Bataille's fiction points toward a pain/lustful experience in participant reading, and toward the possibility of witnessing a violence in "Kʰōl Dō" and "Lājvantī" that generates more than intellectual statements about style and imagery.

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[8] Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in J.V. Harari, *Textual Strategies* (Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 73–81; Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973). It has to be said at this point that a similar important approach is outlined in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin/London, 1981).

[9] Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, "Sacrifice and Violence in Bataille's Erotic Fiction: Reflections from/upon the *Mise en Abîme*," in C.B. Gill, *Bataille. Writing the Sacred* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 91–104.

Before going into detail with this, I should now refer to the historical and social contexts the stories relate to: the large scale violent migration of 1946/47 and the bodies of women as the location of both masculine violence and the politics of the state.

II

Within the processes of constituting new national identities, especially shortly after the Partition of India in 1947, voices that called for the recovery of so called "abducted women" echoed public discourse and soon afterwards the topic came to the fore in the discourses of national politics and self-definition.[10] The category "abducted women" defined those women who, after being forced to migrate from one part of the country to another, lost their relations and were subject to rape, abduction by men, and other forms of violent disruption. Others were left back by their own family members and not seldom found shelter within the networks of the "other's" community, where they (re)marry soon after. Khosla figures the number of "abducted women" at about 200,000 or even more.[11] As Veena Das argues, these women have become objects of national honor and the whole issue has become an important factor for the self-definition of the newly created nation-states.[12] Already in November 1946, following the riots that took place in Calcutta and the Eastern parts of the Subcontinent, a resolution was formulated between India and Pakistan as a foundation for the "Inter-Dominion Agreement" of 1947. This agreement (which offers only an intermediate formulation until the "Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act" between India and Pakistan is passed in 1949), defines "abducted women" as possessions of the state, and the abduction itself as a violation of the religious sentiments of the community the women came from. In this way the bodies of women have to be regarded as signs operating in a masculine discourse in times of disorder. These bodies reveal a topography of violence, a territory on which the meaning of Partition is inscribed in two distinctive ways: On the one hand, through the infliction of masculine violence (in times of disorder), and on the other, through the politics of remembering and forgetting (in times of restoring normality).[13] Remarkably the voices of women are not to be heard in the discussions of the National Assembly. It is the social worker in her ambivalent position as agent of the state, as well as agent of women affairs, who is providing us with a kind of counter-memory and with voices that cannot easily be incorporated into the dominant referential frame provided by state and communities.[14] Documents of these social workers show a rather heterogeneous situation of *the* "abducted women" and allow us to recognize them as existential subjects. Many of them have settled into their new situation; some are even happily married to their former violaters. Forgetting a part of their personal past helps these women to survive and, even more, to bring into being new kinds of relationships.

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[10] Veena Das, "National Honour and Practical Kinship: Of Unwanted Women and Children," in her *Critical Events* (New Delhi: OUP, 1995), pp. 55–83.

[11] G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning* (New Delhi: OUP, [1943] 1989). For obvious reasons the figures provided by official sources are less than Khosla's.

[12] Das, "National Honour and Practical Kinship," p. 70.

This forgetting is not allowed by the state. As a consequence of restoration politics women *have to* remember the violent experience again, when they suddenly, years after their "abduction," face the authorities of the state (police and social workers) who force them to leave their new families—their new lives are referred to as "unlegal alliances."[15] The paradox of the situation is more obvious when we consider what happens to the women when being recovered. Again they have to suffer the assaults of sexual violence, which in their institutionalized forms are manifested in forced treatment called "medical check-up." It is sufficient to say here that the "unlegal outcomes" of "unlegal alliances" obviously posed serious categorizational problems for the officials and consequently had to be prevented. Many women had to remain in the established refugee camps for longer periods, because their former families did not welcome their return years later. Others were followed by their new husbands who plead with the authorities to return their wives to them.[16] Other women are in fact reincorporated into the networks of their former families. Beneath the silence prevailing the official speech in these families, marriage is arranged with the help of women's networks of the old communities and if necessary with manipulations of genealogical traces that would have identified women as formerly abducted.

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[13] *Ibid.,* p. 62. The argument is more complex if one takes into consideration the relationship of state and community. For a detailed discussion I can only refer to Das's excellent article. I am in no way able here to do justice to the importance of her argument.

[14] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition," and Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition"; both in *Economic and Political Weekly,* 28 (17), pp. WS2–24.

[15] Das, "National Honour and Practical Kinship," p. 72.

The dominant official discourses of state and communities, despite their different rhetorics, show a tendency to silence those voices that could be a danger to their legitimizing ideologies, which like to portray Indian history in uniform developments with causal interconnections. In this way, both the state as well as the communities avoid relating to the suffering of Partition in any way other than by speaking about a "short period marked by the ill-minded violence of a face-less mob" or by "an outburst of underlying conflicts between Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand, and Muslims on the other." There is simple silence concerning the violent transformations of the body in this kind of rhetoric. There is a black hole regarding the role of gender in this mode of creating memory. Michel Foucault has argued that it is exactly the discussion about the role of the body that marks the difference between dominant and genealogist (i.e. providing narratives that do not allow coherent visions) approaches to historical events like Partition: One marginalizes the body in favor of historical truth, the other sees the body as "totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body," providing much more fragmented truths.[17]

Manto's and Bedi's texts resist in their own ways dominant discourses and offer possibilities for approaching traumatic events without silencing the painful voices that emerge from the wounded time of Partition.

III

"Lājvantī" is one of Bedi's best known short stories, and critics agree that the narrative is excellently worked out, that it offers a dense psychological description of people's inner lives. The *leitmotif* of the story may be seen as the problem of acknowledging the pain of the other. Bedi develops this theme of failed recognition within one of his protagonists, Sunderlal, who speaks the modern language of tolerance against the conservative rhetoric which is constructing tradition as a kind of legitimation for the prevailing negative attitude towards the rehabilitation of "abducted women." Paradoxically this character is not able to address his own wife according to the principles of his own speech. This is the point the story relates to the context mentioned above. Sunderlal, who has missed his wife Lajo since the days of Partition, founds an organization which soon afterwards advocates the rehabilitation of "abducted women." He is shown successfully breaking the public silence in a moving speech and helping women to be restored to their families. Meanwhile other families refuse to recognize the returning women:

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[16] Menon and Bhasin, p. WS5.

[17] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, tr. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 148

> Why did they not die? Why did they not take poison to preserve their chastity? Why didn't they jump into the well to save their honour? They were cowards who basely and desperately clung to life! Why thousands of women had killed themselves before they could be forced to yield their honour and chastity?[18]

This is a reflection of the popular discourse one encounters in so many narratives about the period. Symbolically Bedi lets Sunderlal present a different interpretation of mythological themes: Was it Sita's fault that Ram rejected her? At a closer look the author operates with a silent and subtle kind of irony at this moment, when he elaborates that the vow that Sunderlal has given—a vow to build a shrine for his Lajo in the event she returns—neither helps to bridge wounded time nor to break the emotional wall standing between them. This becomes obvious in the light of Sunderlal's stunning reaction to the return of Lajo, when his image of *the* "abducted woman" is confronted with reality:

> Sunderlal felt a sense of shock. He saw that Lajo's complexion had become fresher and brighter, that she now looked healthier—she had almost become plump. Whatever Sunder Lal had thought about her had turned out to be wrong. He had imagined that her suffering and torture must have reduced Lajo to a mere skeleton and that she

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[18] Bedi, p. 181.

> would not even have the strength to utter a few words.[19]

Sunderlal's encounter with Lajo after her return is a turning point in the text, a shift from basically rhetorical questions to the concrete problems of how to witness suffering; it is a shift from intellectual knowledge about the brokenness of *the* "abducted women" to the failed recognition of a person that suffers. The possibility of acknowledging and sharing Lajo's pain is shattered because of Sunderlal's ideologically colored mind. It is the color of the modern middle class and of the propaganda the state has been enforcing. The way out of his dilemma is to address his wife as *devi* (goddess), exactly at the moment dialogue about the past event begins. Lajo's desire to speak to her husband is silenced by his rejection to listen:

> Then she wanted to reveal all that had happened to her but Sunder Lal said: 'Let the past be the past, since you are not to blame for what has happened.' So, all that was in Lajvanti's heart remained gagged, stifled. She curled up, sobbing in her helplessness and gazing at her body which had become the body of a devi and not her own—not Lajvanti's. She was happy, very happy, indeed, but it was a happiness that was struck by doubt and uncertainty.[20]

Lajo is described as happy and desperate at the same time. She feels alien in her own body, alien within the *image* Sunderlal has constructed for both of them. She even wishes to have back the "old" Sunderlal as a husband, who used to beat her, but who was at least able to apologize and to recognize her in her uniqueness of being. The therapeutic effect which lingers as a potential in the practice of remembering cannot take place because Sunderlal has closed himself off from a way to healing. The irony is that neither the public moral space Sunderlal was engaged in creating in order to make possible a return of the abducted women, nor his vow that should have revealed that the individual and the communal are mutually shaping one another, providing a path toward recognition of the other, has helped at all in his situation. Sunderlal's private speech seems diametrically opposed to his former politically inspired speech: he wants to forget, not to remember any more; he himself speaks of honor, despite rejecting the rhetorical use of this category in the traditionalist discourse as he espoused before. This has nothing in common with the situation women had to face in contexts of "abduction" when forgetting had been a conscious act in reconstructing the past. Perhaps it would be apt to use the psychoanalytic term "repression" in Sunderlal's case and to point to the absence of a moral space that would have provided a context for healing.

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[19] *Ibid.,* p. 188.

[20] *Ibid.*

To read Bedi's text in this way, i.e. to focus on the shift in perspectives mentioned earlier, may only be one possible approach. There are other links to Partition, other insights into the psychologies of the relationship between the sexes, of course. In the context of rape, abduction, and rehabilitation politics that marked women's bodies during Partition and afterwards, I want to stress the *intellectual failure in acknowledging suffering* that I found central in "Lājvantī," a failure that is grounded in a misleading philosophical notion of the incommunicability of pain. Like Wittgenstein, Bedi is pointing towards the limits of language and to zones of non-verbal understanding. Real consciousness and human knowledge of the tragedy—which is also a knowledge of the suffering body—seems only possible when a person is recognized in her uniqueness of being, and not when she is substituted by the traditionally informed category of "victim," which itself operates more or less as a rhetorical trope only. Bedi constructs the text as a space in which the significance of this difference may be experienced. The text is open to interpretation in the sense that it offers no solution, no final perspective.

I hope that with the following discussion of Manto's text, the argument I have begun to outline in this section will become clearer.

IV

Manto's protagonist, the old Siraj ud-Din, finds himself lying on the bare ground in a camp, his eyes fixed on a distant point while in his thoughts fragments of a film are playing: The scene "pictures" Siraj ud-Din as he finds himself, somewhere on the escape—we see how he experiences the violent death of his wife.

The place is crowded; it must be one of the refugee camps which have been built during Partition. There is only scant information about the setting of the story, and a literary critic might notice at this point Manto's "failure" to give a naturalistic or realistic description. I would argue nevertheless that it is the first instance in which the text offers its plurality. Looking at the very first sentence of "Kʰōl Dō" provides evidence: "The train left Amritsar at two o'clock in the afternoon and reached Mughalpur eight ours later."[21] As Veena Das and Ashish Nandy argue, the readership gets divided here, into "those who know what it could have meant for a train to take eight hours to cover an hour's distance in those days and those for whom it is a neutral statement of fact made in the simple past."[22]

Fully absorbed by his thoughts, Siraj ud-Din suddenly touches his daughter Sakina's *dupatta* with his hands and recognizes that she is missing. He starts asking people about her and finally some young men who call themselves "volunteers" promise to help the desperate father. In another scene these men are shown on their lorry with the missing young woman, she without her *dupatta,* covering her bosom with her hands. This is just before the final sequence of the story. In the camp Siraj ud-Din recognizes people carrying the body of a young woman to the hospital. He follows them and upon reaching the hospital he stops at the gate before entering the doctor's room where the body has been placed. Siraj ud-Din recognizes his daughter just at the moment the doctor enters the room:

> The doctor turned towards the body laying there, took the pulse and addressing Siraj ud-Din he said: Open the window! There was a movement in Sakina's dead body. Her lifeless hands opened the cord holding her salvar and pulled it down. Old Siraj ud-Din shouted with joy: She is alive … My daughter is alive. The doctor stood there breaking into a cold sweat.[23]

How to deal with this last passage of the short story? Stop here and let it speak for itself? Or let oneself go into an excess of interpretation? Leslie Flemming says that this scenario has a shocking effect only, whereas Shashi Joshi remarks that in the light of this final sequence, "the community of the trusted protectors is an illusion."[24] Indeed, we can go even further. One could focus first of all on the formal representation of Sakina's violation: A movement in her body represented as a *gesture* that transforms it into a sexually violated body. The violence itself is not described. If, then, the violation of Siraj ud-Din's daughter Sakina should be seen as the subject of the story, it is then the subject only insofar as *the reader* must delve into his imagination to find out what violence would mean in this context. A second instance in which the text offers its plurality: Since the violation is on the periphery of (the dialogues in) the story, and since the reader can surmise the atrocities against Sakina only in Siraj ud-Din's mad (mad?) reaction or in participating in the doctor's cold sweat, one could argue as well that it is the *non*-representation of the violent act that gives the story its quality.[25] Absences reveal their own meanings by calling for the presence of the reader. Note here also the subtle way Manto weaves the sensual as the crucial knots of the cloth of the text: tenderly touching the cloth of Sakina's *dupatta* at the beginning of Siraj-ud Din's actions, or the cold sweat covering the doctor's body in the face of the old man's utterance.

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[21] Manto, p. 5.

[22] Veena Das and Ashish Nandy, "Violence, Victimhood and the Language of Silence," in Veena Das, *The Word and the World. Fantasy, Symbol and Record* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 190.

[23] Manto, p. 11.

In another perspective, the father's reaction is not simply mad, but accounts for a transformation of the traditional role of *The Father* in Indian society. In the beginning of the story Siraj ud-Din is shown behaving within the categories of tradition—the moment he lost his daughter is the moment when he stopped to pick up her *dupatta*, the symbol of honor, which she lost—whereas at the end he is presented by Manto quiet differently:

> In giving a shout of joy and saying 'my daughter is alive', the father does not speak here in the personalized voice of tradition. In the societal context of this period, when ideas of purity and honour densely populated the literary narratives as well as family and political narratives so that fathers willed their daughters to die for family honour rather than live with bodies that had been violated by other men, *this father wills his daughter to live even as parts of her body can*

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[24] Flemming, p. 80; Shashi Joshi, "The World of Sa'adat Hasan Manto," *AUS*, vol. 11, p. 151.

[25] See Das and Nandy, p. 190.

> *do nothing else but proclaim her brutal violation.*[26]

Following Veena Das's reading of Manto, the latter has managed within an utterance to give witness to a moment of a subject's life in which the relationship between the perception and articulation of cultural concepts is reborn in a transgression of traditional cognitions. Writing, for Manto, is giving birth to images of a Kafkaesque kind that the reader must experience as something absolutely unexpected and new (or as something the reader has himself experienced?). Yes, Manto weaves painful texts inscribed by madness and disorder that seem to be unbearable in an environment where one is persistently confronted with the difficulties of how to relate to the violent experiences of Partition. What makes his text really shocking are neither his images nor the reader's, but that Manto's gestures, such as those in the examples above, constitute a kind of internal dialogue, that is underlying and at the same time woven into the workings of language, and reach the senses of the reader. Cold sweat covering hands and neck. Meaning, then, is somewhere *in between* author, reader and text. All signification is there, in the fluid, slippery words *and* in the rough silences of "Kʰōl Dō." Within Manto's use of words we discern gestures that are able to evoke a "loss in the reader that is not fully lost nor gained as profitable experience."[27]

"Kʰōl Dō" can also be read as a gesture that gives evidence to those moments in a life, in the midst of tragic events, that allow a person not only to survive but to find new ways of living, to start new relationships. Looking at women's biographies in which the Partition experience is inscribed, we see different ways in which they transgress culturally defined roles and take life into their own hands. It is the state's interference in their personal lives, via its construction of the category of the "abducted woman," which makes it difficult for them to make their own choices. The history of their lives and bodies provides us today with another perspective of looking at the collective trauma the Partition of India has meant.[28] In the light of this perspective, Manto's text is of crucial importance for generating an understanding of the significance of Partition violence, not in " 'explaining' a holocaust" as Shashi Joshi remarks,[29] but in touching its complex topography, in reading its silences.

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[26] Veena Das, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," *Daedalus*, vol. 125 (1) (Winter, 1996), p. 77; emphasis in the original.

[27] See Boldt-Irons, fn. 9 above.

[28] Das, "Language and Body," pp. 67–91.

[29] Joshi, p.146.

V

I started this essay with a concept of how to witness violence inspired by Wittgenstein's philosophical remarks, by Jeanne Favret-Saada, and more centrally by Veena Das's ethnographic writing in which she tries to "move away from the religious frames in which witnessing has been linked to acts of martyrdom, or the more commonly acknowledged judicial frames in which the visuality of truth would help to distinguish innocence from crime."[30] I argued that in both short stories, "Lājvantī" and "Kʰōl Dō," the narratives do not allow the reader to take refuge in a position of controlled observation: In reading these stories with an eye toward the kind of textuality that Barthes is concerned with, it is impossible to witness pain and violence in notions of martyrdom or justice. These are narratives that clearly resist the dominant reception of the Partition event and in this way resist any incorporation into ideologist discourse.

In his short story Rajinder Singh Bedi refuses any cooperation with such a reception, because he does not favor any of the rhetoric that constructs the category "abducted woman," as I outlined in my discussion of historical contexts. He leaves us with an ironic kind of happiness, a happiness on the surface overlaying bodies in which suffering remains enclosed. His silent irony is complex and in line with Wittgenstein's paragraphs concerning the communicability of pain. Like Wittgenstein, Bedi is able to show that those who believe that pain enters language games in form of *images* fail to recognize that pain already is there, not only in contextualized speech, but in cries, tears, the tenderness of Lajo's face, and on her tatooed skin. Sunderlal is the one who is building boxes (*boîtes*) and shrines—the analyst, the observer, the sceptic. How might there be any intimacy between the one living in a box and the one whose skin reveals a deceptive softness?

Sa'adat Hasan Manto on the other hand obscures the referential workings of language in such a way that the phonetic quality of language and its limits in pointing to the zones of unspeakability are made evident. The text is plural, it forces (Barthes would say it *longs for*) its reader to give meaning to the event. That is not an easy task. What to do with

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[30] Das, "The Act of Witnessing and the Healing of Culture," p. 1.

Siraj-ud Din's cry of joy and the cold sweat covering one's hands? It seems that an apt metaphor for approaching "Kʰōl Dō" (i.e. for reaching the *author*) would be *to listen* to the voices and to read the silences between the lines of the text. In fact silences are important for both the short stories. The loss of voice of those who suffer and the silencing methods of powerful political discourse are entangled in the stories. The author's silences are somewhere in between, located in a non-place. That is why all attempts to fix the author's voices in the texts finally must fail.

The perspective I have tried to uphold in this essay has been figured on the way the author's contributions in witnessing human suffering militate against the silencing mechanisms that pertain even to contemporary political and everyday discourses about the Partition of India. I discerned a movement from an ironic displacement concerning the potential for communicating pain, so my reading of "Lājvantī," to Manto's text "Kʰōl Dō," in which the phonetic aspects of language come to the foreground. Whereas Bedi starts to obstruct the notion of the eye-witness, Manto succeeds in reducing martyrdom to absurdity. Despite the loss the reader experiences in his or her attempts to categorize the consequences of a traumatic event, there are possibilities in reading the texts, that undo the seeming necessity of relying on the visual. As the experience of these stories is woven together in the presence of the reader, they offer possibilities to reopen wounded time and memory and to build bridges across the breakdown of human relationships. These fictions invite the reader to listen to voices of pain and touching landscapes of violent experience—to become a listener, and in this way a co-owner of traumatic events, to partially experience the violent transgression in oneself: Being present. ❐

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