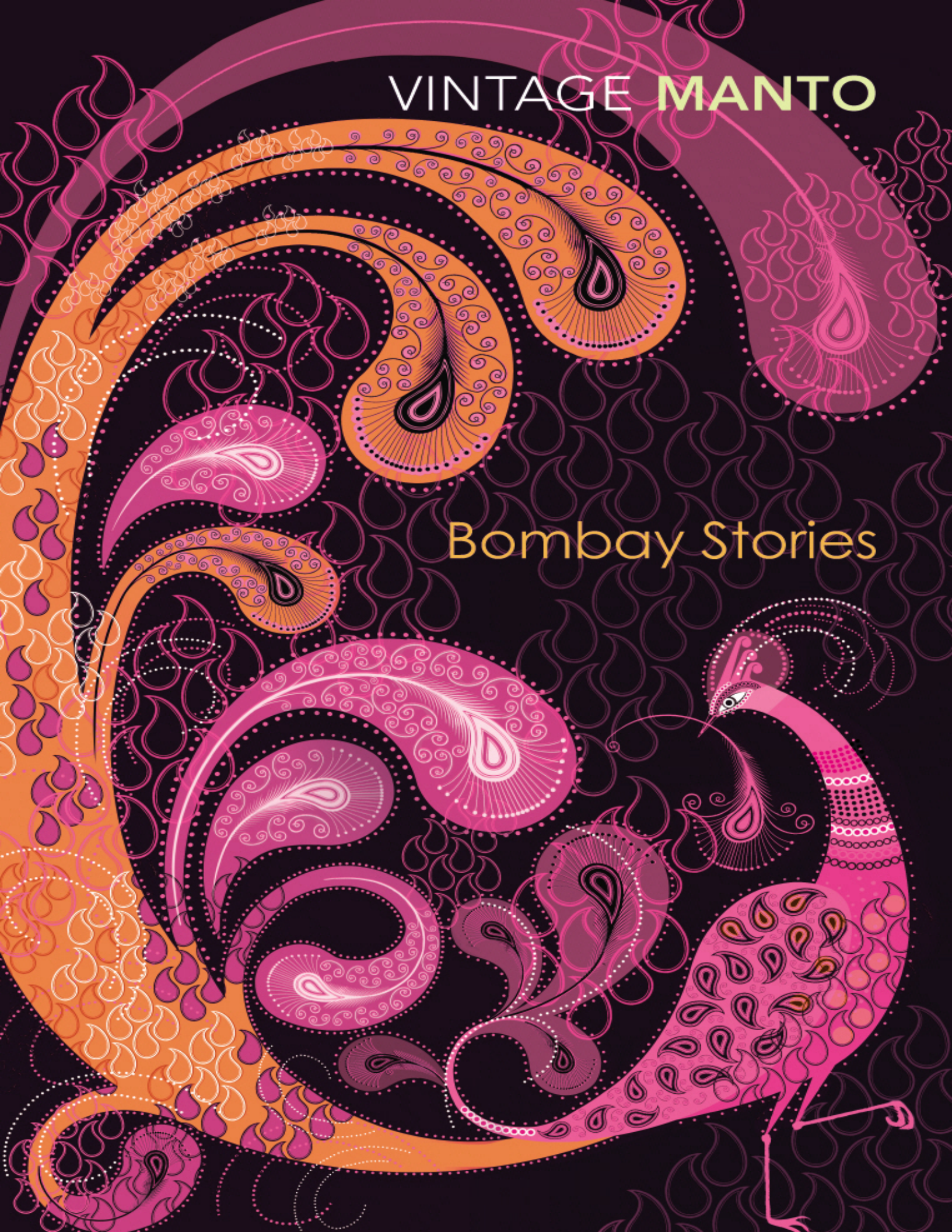


VINTAGE MANTO

Bombay Stories



Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Saadat Hasan Manto

Title Page

Foreword

Introduction

Khushiya

Ten Rupees

Barren

The Insult

Smell

Babu Gopi Nath

Janaki

Peerun

Rude

Hamid's Baby

Mummy

Siraj

Mozelle

Mammad Bhai

Glossary

Acknowledgements

Appendix—

Why I Don't Go to the Movies

Women and the Film World

Lecture at Jogeshwari College, Bombay

Bibliography

The History of Vintage

Copyright

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the 1930s and 40s, Bombay was the cosmopolitan capital of the subcontinent - an exhilarating hub of license and liberty, bursting with both creative energy and helpless degradation. It was also muse to the celebrated short story writer of India and Pakistan, Saadat Hasan Manto. His hard-edged, moving stories remain, a hundred years after his birth, startling and provocative. In searching out those forgotten by humanity - prostitutes, conmen and crooks - Manto wrote about what it means to be human.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Saadat Hasan Manto has been called the greatest short story writer of the Indian subcontinent. He was born in 1912 in Punjab and went on to become a radio and film-script writer, journalist, and short story writer. His stories were highly controversial and he was tried for obscenity six times during his career. After Partition, Manto settled in Lahore where he lived with his wife and three daughters until his death in 1955.

ALSO BY SAADAT HASAN MANTO

Kingdom's End: Selected Stories

Mottled Dawn

Bitter Fruit: The Very Best of Saadat Hasan Manto

Stars From Another Sky

SAADAT HASAN MANTO

Bombay Stories

TRANSLATED FROM THE URDU BY
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Matt Reeck

WITH A FOREWORD BY
Mohammed Hanif

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

FOREWORD

Saadat Hasan Manto is known for writing some of the most shocking short fiction about the Partition of the subcontinent. It's often forgotten that Manto had a life before the Partition. And this life was lived at its fullest in Bombay, where this anthology is set. Here you can see Manto learning his craft, honing it, finding his writer's voice, hanging out with lowlifes and learning to drink with movie stars. He loves Bombay for the reason most immigrants from smaller cities and towns love big cities: anonymity. He wasn't known in Bombay because of his clan or caste - he could be anybody here. And for a while he was. He was a working writer whoring himself to the studios, becoming competitive, even bitchy. He was editing film magazines and, not content with being a sideshow, trying to get into scriptwriting. But, like any true writer, he sought his affirmation not in literary circles but amongst non-writers, even non-readers. He inserts Manto the writer into some of his most satisfying pieces. He tells a suicidally depressed man on Juhu beach the price of his short stories - seven or eight rupees per story.

In the eponymous story, local hoodlum Mammad Bhai, who is not likely to read anything - not even the court warrants against him - knows that Manto is an important writer. When he appears in the midst of Mammad's epic struggle with his moustache, Manto is alone, his only identity that of a writer, and he has a high fever. Writing most of these stories long after he left Bombay, Manto takes pleasure in reminding us that a street hoodlum, a sad

man on the beach and an ageing madam of a salon all knew that Manto was a writer.

In the only Bombay story, set just outside the city, Mummy has surrounded herself with recklessly ambitious men and even more recklessly sensible girls. Manto and his fellow writer-friend tell their wives that they are going to pitch a script to the producer, when they are actually going to Mummy's party. In the background hangs the death of Manto's young child. The party seems to disguise his depression like Mummy's cheap make-up, which disgusts Manto at first glance. This shabby glamour hides characters' small needs, like a bit of cash, a kiss, a music composer craving a break in the film industry. The pleasure and loss of this life are as fleeting as a smashed bottle of whisky at a party.

Sometimes Manto's fascination and disgust with female anatomy and appearance are those of a small-town, chronically monogamous man, who can only see women as whores, divas or when they become - as in the tale of the Jewish seductress Mozel - martyrs.

The constant clinking of the coin provides background music to these stories. Money is mentioned casually, but it seems Manto cannot write a character without counting the coins in his or her pocket. Friends are always borrowing money from each other; a fabulous job offer is casually made and accepted; unpaid loans at tea and at cigarette shops make people change their paths; doctors quote, but dare not accept, fees from a patient who is broke. Manto himself gets seven or eight rupees for a story, almost as much as Saughandi gets after the pimp's deduction in 'The Insult'.

A working girl desperate for ten rupees can fling ten rupees in your face; another innocent, homely working girl can bankrupt a hard-working man within a week. Life in Bombay seems like a ride in one of those rickety taxis; existence itself is metered here, the clicking of the taxi

meter debiting a bit of your life; and this calibrated clink of money forms the very heartbeat of the city.

Although at the centre of most stories there is a woman protagonist, Manto's Bombay is very much a gallery of hopelessly broken male rogues, whose ideas of women, money and masculinity doom them. In the very first story there is Khushiya the pimp, watching his merchandise - Kanta - naked, and feeling slighted that she renders him a non-man by saying that it's okay to be naked in front of him because he is only Khushiya, her pimp. The collection ends with Mammad Bhai having shaved off his legendary moustache to avoid murder charges - a murder about which he regrets only that he didn't knife his victim as neatly as he had knifed his earlier victims, and the loss of his moustache as he is forced into exile from Bombay with 'tears looking strange on his newly clean shaven face'.

Again and again we see how desperate men are, how they chase girls, how they buy love, then want to believe in the love for which they have just paid.

We'll never know why Manto left Bombay, for he himself struggled with the question after arriving in the desolation that was post-Partition Lahore. Was it because of the insult that he felt at being passed over as a scriptwriter? Was it because of the promise of more money, more fame in a new country? Was he done with Bombay's slums and sour-faced pimps and wanted new material for his stories? Or maybe it was because of an incident in a Bombay alley where he was stopped by a rioting Muslim mob; he was accompanied by a friend, a famous movie star who happened to be Hindu, and for a few moments Manto believed that both of them would be lynched. Maybe in that moment Manto realised that Bombay wasn't as bighearted as he had always believed, and the man who was always absolutely fearless on the page got the fright of his life and left Bombay quite abruptly.

But it's also possible that, like some of the characters in these stories, he had reached the end of the road - like Mummy, like Mammad Bhai, who were simply asked by the authorities to leave the city because they saw through the cheap make-up, through the fearsome moustache, and found out that these people were a threat to the city's moral order; that their ruthless compassion was more dangerous than their way with a knife and the ability to organise a party at very short notice.

Later, in Lahore, the Bombay that so fascinated and later scared Manto would become a glittering memory. In Lahore's divvy bars, in court case after court case, between bouts of chronic alcoholism, he would remember that there was a time and place where life was an adventure. In post-Partition Lahore, from which most Hindus had fled, he would dream of a Bombay street where Chinese, Arabs, Jewish and Burmese lived together; where you could get a job by mentioning a film idea to a producer over a drink; where famous actors and singers took casual pride in cultivating you. Here, in Lahore, when he wasn't scrounging money for his evening's drink, he was going from one court to another pleading that writing about a brutal rape and murder wasn't vulgar or sensational - it was a writer's job.

In this desolation he had things to hang on to: his Bombay, his memories, the money he had made, all the films he had almost made.

In these stories Bombay is not just a city of dreams, it's a feverish state of mind where in the same evening you can get drunk, mourn the death of a young child and hear about the travails of a pimp with high moral standards.

There were probably days when, confined to a mental institution in Lahore, Manto waited for Mammad Bhai to appear with a doctor, or for Mummy to throw one last party.

Mohammed Hanif, 2013

INTRODUCTION

SAADAT HASAN MANTO—HIS LIFE

Saadat Hasan Manto was born on May 11, 1912 in the small town of Samrala near Ludhiana, a major industrial city in the current-day Indian state of the Punjab.¹ He claimed allegiance not only to his native Punjab but also to his ancestors' home in Kashmir.² While raised speaking Punjabi,³ he was also proud of the remnants of Kashmiri culture that his family maintained—food customs, as well as intermarriage with families of Kashmiri origin—and throughout his life he assigned special importance to others who had Kashmiri roots.⁴ In a tongue-in-cheek letter addressed to Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, he went so far as to suggest that being beautiful was the second meaning of being Kashmiri.⁵

Manto's father, Maulvi Ghulam Hasan, was a lawyer from a family of lawyers.⁶ He married twice, and Manto was the last of twelve siblings and the only son from his father's second marriage.⁷ Hasan transferred to Amritsar some time after Manto's birth, and Manto grew up there in Lawyers' Lane, the area of town where lawyers resided.⁸ He was a strict disciplinarian with whom the teenage Manto had a somewhat contentious relationship. Manto liked to portray his parents as opposites, with his father's coldness offset by his mother's warmth,⁹ and while Manto never wrote much about his father, he did recount in the sketch 'Two Encounters with Agha Hashr' an incident in which his father swooped down upon the informal drama

club that several high school friends and he had put together, broke the harmonium and tabla the boys had been using for musical accompaniment, and made it absolutely clear that he considered such activities an utter waste of time.¹⁰

While Manto's three elder half-brothers followed in the family tradition and became lawyers,¹¹ Manto didn't have the temperament to become a lawyer, and his school career as such was marked more by failure than success. In the Indian educational system, students must pass a final high school examination to be eligible for college, which Manto failed in his first two attempts because of poor scores in, of all subjects, Urdu.¹² After barely passing in his third effort, he entered the Hindu Sabha College in Amritsar in 1931.¹³ At the end of his first year, he failed the annual year-end tests, and after failing again the subsequent year, he dropped out.¹⁴ To complicate matters further, his father died on February 25, 1932.¹⁵

During these years, Manto did have the good fortune to meet Abdul Bari Alig, an editor of the Amritsar newspaper *Equality*.¹⁶ Bari Sahib served as a writing mentor for the young Manto. Under Bari Sahib's tutelage, Manto translated Victor Hugo's novella *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*,¹⁷ and the resulting book was published in Lahore in 1933.¹⁸ This first translation was followed by three more projects. With the help of Bari Sahib,¹⁹ he and his friend Hasan Abbas translated Oscar Wilde's play *Vera, or the Nihilists*,²⁰ a melodrama about the despotism of the Russian monarchy and the efforts of a group of revolutionaries to overthrow the old order. After that he would go on to publish two collections of translated Russian short stories—*Russian Short Stories* and *Gorky's Stories*, a collection of Maxim Gorky's short fiction.²¹ These earliest literary efforts showed Manto's ideological fervour and passion for social justice. They also revealed his

tendency toward iconoclasm. Bari Sahib also introduced Manto to Communism. Manto later admitted that when Bari Sahib wrote an essay 'From Hegel to Karl Marx' for his short-lived journal *Creation*,²² he hadn't even heard the name Hegel and knew Marx only as someone Bari Sahib talked about as a friend of the working classes.²³ Yet Manto took it upon himself to learn more about the Communist cause, and later he put his learning to use when he wrote a thumbnail historical essay on the Bolshevik Revolution,²⁴ as well as his short story 'Rude', included in this volume. Manto's debt to Bari Sahib was immense. He gave him what every young writer needs, both good writing advice and publication,²⁵ and Manto noted sardonically that if he had not met Bari Sahib, he might have become not a writer but perhaps a criminal.²⁶

Manto's second attempt at university began in July 1934.²⁷ This time he travelled far from home to enter the prestigious Aligarh Muslim University. His career there did not last long, although this time it was not due to poor study habits. After nine months, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis.²⁸ This diagnosis, which later turned out to be incorrect, was a heavy blow to his scholastic ambitions since tuberculosis was then a deadly disease.²⁹ He left the university, borrowed money from his elder sister, and retreated into the mountains, spending three months in a sanitarium in the small northern town of Batot.³⁰ Whatever the original cause of the chest pains he had been suffering in Aligarh had been, his health improved somewhat in the high altitude of the mountains. He returned to Amritsar in late 1935 and faced yet another set of challenges; his mother was without money and he realized he would have to start earning his own living. The next year his life would change considerably when he accepted the offer of Nazir Ludhianvi to go to Bombay to edit his weekly film newspaper *The Painter*.³¹

Thus began the second era of Manto's young life. When he arrived in Bombay, he was twenty-four years old. Manto would live in Bombay twice: from 1936 to 1941; and then after a hiatus of one and a half years, from 1942 until his final move to Lahore in 1948. In hindsight, he would recognize that these Bombay years were the best and most enjoyable of his life; and yet while Manto lived there his frequent bouts of ill health³² coupled with his temperamental personality meant that his time in Bombay was not at all free of disappointments, sadness, or angst.

Shortly after Manto went to Bombay, his mother moved there as well. She went to live with his only full sibling, his elder sister Iqbal, in the suburb of Mahim.³³ His mother was eager to see him married, and in 1938 Manto became engaged to his future wife, Safiya, the daughter of a Lahore family of Kashmiri descent.³⁴ Their wedding did not take place until April 26, 1939 since Manto continually procrastinated because of his inability to support her financially and the uncertainty he had about his ability to be a good husband.³⁵ But to his own surprise, Manto took to being a husband. In May 1940 Safiya gave birth to a son, Arif, and Manto's life as a father began, though this would be bitterly truncated when the toddler died the following April.³⁶

Manto worked at the Clare Road offices of *The Painter*. Upon his arrival he slept in the office of the newspaper and continued to do so until he had enough money to rent a room in a squalid building nearby—a two-storey building with holes in its roof, forty narrow rooms, and only two bathrooms, neither of which had a door.³⁷ He lived in these conditions—which caused his mother to cry when she first came to his room—until ten days before Safiya was to move in with him, at which point he hurriedly rented a room nearby.³⁸ In August 1940 Nazir Ludhianvi suddenly fired Manto from the newspaper,³⁹ and Manto then took up the

editorship of Babu Rao Patel's film magazine *Caravan*. Not even seven months had passed, though, when he grew dissatisfied with that job and accepted a position at All India Radio in Delhi.

During these years, Manto not only worked at editing jobs but also wrote stories and radio plays.⁴⁰ He published his first full collection of short stories, *Sparks*, as well as *Short Stories*.⁴¹ Just as importantly, Nazir Ludhianvi introduced him to the film world where Manto soon began to work as a scriptwriter.

Manto's first job in the film industry came at the Imperial Film Company, and his first film credits appeared in the 1937 film *Village Girl* whose script and dialogue he wrote.⁴² As this was India's first colour feature-length film, the Imperial Film Company had spent a considerable sum of money buying the required colour-processing equipment. When the film failed to make an impact at the box office, the company's future fell into doubt. Nazir Ludhianvi intervened once again on Manto's behalf and got him a job at Film City, where his pay jumped from forty to one hundred rupees a month.⁴³ Yet when Seth Ardeshir Irani, the owner of the Imperial Film Company, learned that Manto had joined another studio, a tug of war developed. He wanted Manto back, and at twice his original salary Manto rejoined the Imperial Film Company.⁴⁴ This reunion didn't last long, though, because almost as soon as Manto returned, the company became insolvent. Manto's work there ended with his having collected only eight months' worth of his year's pay.⁴⁵ Manto then joined Saroj Movietone in June 1938, and yet this company's finances were so thin that it also immediately threatened to go out of business. Seth Nanu Bhai Desai, the owner of the studio, secured new financial backing, and the studio was relaunched as Hindustan Movietone. Despite disputes with Seth Nanu Bhai over unpaid back wages, Manto would stay

there until his abrupt departure for Delhi three years later.⁴⁶ During his tenure there, Manto wrote the story for his second film *Mud*, a film that was later wisely renamed *My Hometown*.

Manto left Bombay for Delhi in 1941, and we might ascribe his departure to general malaise. His firing from *The Painter*, his dissatisfaction with his job at *Caravan*, the memory of the sudden death in June 1940 of his mother,⁴⁷ his uncertain health, and the stresses of living in a big city without ever earning a stable income all combined to make the job at All India Radio sound appealing.

While in Delhi, Manto's life as a writer improved. All India Radio was emerging as an outstanding literary venue, and Manto came into contact with many leading Urdu writers of the time. His job at the station was to produce radio plays, and he did this with great diligence, churning out plays in impressive numbers, and in his short time in Delhi he saw several collections of his radio plays published.⁴⁸ Other aspects of his writing life flourished as well. Along with a volume of essays, he published a short story collection called *Smoke*.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, Manto's expectation that his health would improve in Delhi was not borne out, and his contentious and often oversensitive reactions to his colleagues eventually tired everyone involved.⁵⁰ A series of events unfolded in his second summer in Delhi that would lead him back to Bombay: Nazir Ludhianvi once again offered Manto a position at *The Painter*, and Manto's good friend Krishan Chander, who had originally offered him the job at All India Radio, left the station. When Upendranath Ashk—another noted Urdu writer with whom Manto shared an especially acrimonious relationship—took over Chander's job, Manto couldn't reconcile himself to the fact that Ashk would be editing his work. While the station readied to broadcast a version of

Manto's play 'The Wanderer' that was edited by Ashk, Manto unceremoniously quit.⁵¹

Manto returned to Bombay. He resumed editing *The Painter*; and upon the intercession of Shahid Latif, an old friend from Aligarh and husband of the influential Urdu short story and film writer Ismat Chughtai, he began to work for Filmistan, a film company where over the next six years he would meet many of the most famous actors, actresses, directors, and personalities of the film world. The next significant event in his life—and in the lives of all those in the subcontinent—came at the stroke of midnight, August 15, 1947, when India and Pakistan came into being. Safiya and the couple's eldest daughter, Nighat, left for Lahore,⁵² but Manto stayed, joining Shahid Latif and the famous film actor Ashok Kumar in their attempt to revive one of the first great Indian film companies, Bombay Talkies.⁵³ But trouble turned up there as well, when Kumar passed over Manto's work, deciding instead to adapt an Ismat Chughtai short story into a film.⁵⁴ Manto had a hard time accepting this decision. The perceived affront, coupled with increasing Hindu-Muslim communal tensions, made it difficult for Manto to see a future for himself in the changing political climate of Bombay, so he set out for Pakistan. He travelled by boat to Karachi and arrived in Lahore on January 8, 1948.

Thus began the last and the hardest era of Manto's short life. The seven years he lived in Pakistan were characterized by indigence, severe alcoholism, and nostalgic reminiscences about the life he had known in Bombay. He never adjusted to his new environment. He wrote in the introduction to his volume of short stories *Cold Meat* (1950) about his sense of dislocation upon arriving at his new home:

For three months I was confused. I couldn't figure out where I was. Was I in Bombay, at my friend Hasan Abbas's place in Karachi, or in Lahore, where the Qaid-e-Azam Fund was being built up through proceeds from dance and music concerts being put on in a handful of restaurants?

For three months I couldn't make up my mind about anything. It seemed as if three movies were playing simultaneously on one screen. Sometimes I saw Bombay's shopping districts and alleyways, sometimes I saw the small trams of Karachi rushing past donkey-drawn carriages, and sometimes I saw Lahore's noisy restaurants. I couldn't figure out where I was. I would sit lost in thought all day.⁵⁵

In Pakistan he drifted through his days without steady employment, trying to maintain his dedication to being a serious writer but encumbered by poverty and a debilitating drinking habit. He adopted the habit of writing a story a day and going immediately to a magazine's office to demand payment, only to spend this money on alcohol.⁵⁶ He entered a mental institution in April 1952 in a belated attempt to cure his alcoholism, but this had no lasting results.⁵⁷ Wracked by his disease, depressed about the uncertain status of his reputation, and distressed by his failure to provide for his family, he died on January 18, 1955.

MANTO'S BOMBAY

Bombay was where the motion picture made its first appearance on the subcontinent when the French Lumière brothers' Cinématographe was shown on July 7, 1896 at the upscale Watson's Hotel.⁵⁸ The honour of having made the first Indian film goes to Hari Bhatvadekar whose two short

films—one of a choreographed wrestling bout and another of a man training a monkey—were shown in late 1899.⁵⁹ Bombayites would have to wait more than thirteen years for the first feature-length Indian motion picture to be released, when D.G. Phalke unveiled the mythological film *Raja Harishchandra* in May 1913.⁶⁰ In order to complete his film, Phalke mortgaged his life insurance policy to afford travelling to London to buy equipment,⁶¹ converted his kitchen into a makeshift laboratory,⁶² and, according to Manto, even sold off his wife’s jewellery.⁶³ He also faced the difficulty of finding a woman to play the role of King Harishchandra’s wife, as all the women he asked refused due to the impropriety they felt that acting involved, and Phalke was forced to give the role to a man.⁶⁴ Phalke would go on to make twenty mythological films and ninety short films,⁶⁵ becoming the undisputed champion of the silent era and the consensus ‘father’ of Indian cinema.

The next landmark in the history of the Indian film industry came in 1931 when *Light of the World* became the country’s first feature-length sound film.⁶⁶ The Imperial Film Studio—the first studio at which Manto worked after coming to Bombay—claimed credit for this film, and their 1937 film *Village Girl* was the first feature-length colour film in the subcontinent.⁶⁷ The 1930s saw the first studio competition arise. Not only did the Imperial Film Company figure prominently on the scene, but the Prabhat Film Company and Bombay Talkies also made names for themselves.⁶⁸ Prabhat was established in 1929 in Kolhapur though the studio was moved four years later to nearby Pune. Set up by V. Shantaram, K.R. Dhaiber, S.B. Kulkarni, and S. Fatehlal, the studio had several hits in the thirties, including *The Churning of the Oceans* (1934) and *The Immortal Flame* (1936).⁶⁹ In addition to the progressive social content of their films, the studio was known for the technical qualities of its products. The four founding

members, as Manto notes, 'all had the same desire, and that was to outstrip everyone else in matters of art and technique.'⁷⁰ Bombay Talkies came into being five years after Prabhat and featured the husband-wife pair of Himanshu Rai and the beautiful Devika Rani, the former working as producer/director and the latter starring in films,⁷¹ including the popular *Untouchable Girl*.⁷² Furthermore, their studio is noteworthy from a historical perspective, as it employed three men who would later come to rank among the forefront of actors in the entire history of Indian cinema: Ashok Kumar (then a laboratory assistant), Dilip Kumar (then and afterwards an actor), and Raj Kapoor (then a clapper).⁷³

The burgeoning film industry aside, Manto's Bombay was a city of economic opportunity, attracting people from all over India and indeed from around the world. The census of 1921 revealed that an amazing eighty-four per cent of its work force came from outside the city.⁷⁴ These workers were men from villages and towns, thinking they would come to the city for a while to earn money to send back home. Often, they decided to stay for good, sending for their families and other relatives to join them. These immigrants developed their own lifestyle, which has now long since become a part of the Bombay myth. The tightly confined chawls constructed by the textile mills to house their employees were their environs, and it was here that two of the typical characters of Bombay, the gangster and the prostitute, came about.

A chawl can best be described as tenement housing. The rooms were tiny and without running water. Common lavatories and washrooms were located at the end of corridors, or as in 'Ten Rupees', the buildings were entirely without such facilities. Access to the water taps was a serious issue, especially in the summer when the water

supply often failed. Getting water was the cause of much worrying and worse, and the communal water taps brought people together who would have been better kept apart. Sarita, a teenage prostitute, is the main character in 'Ten Rupees'. Manto writes about the tense encounters that could take place around the taps: 'But when Tukaram harassed Sarita by the water spigot one early morning, Sarita's mother started screeching at Tukaram's wife, "Why can't you keep track of that dirty rat? I pray to God he goes blind for eyeing my little girl like that."'

People jammed into the chawls' rooms. The 1930s saw the textile mills begin multiple shifts, and workers often rotated in and out of the chawls' rooms just as they replaced each other at the factory. The men returned to the chawls to collapse upon their mats, their peers sleeping right next to them; when these men returned to the factory, others came to sleep in the spaces just vacated. In 1931 a full three quarters of Bombayites lived in such one-room accommodations.⁷⁵ But sharing such tight quarters didn't bring about a sense of solidarity within the ranks of the workers. Instead, indifference manifested itself, as Manto writes in 'Ten Rupees':

Sarita's mother was always telling this story [of the death of her husband], but no one knew whether it was true. No one in the building felt any sympathy for her, perhaps because their lives were so difficult that they had no time to think about others. No one had any friends. Most of the men slept during the day and worked nights in the nearby factory. Everyone lived right on top of one another, and yet no one took any interest in anyone else.

The chawls' overcrowding made maintaining order difficult. The police by themselves could not—or chose not to—serve as the main law enforcers, and so a new figure emerged,

the 'dada', the Bombay hoodlum cum agent of the peace. A dada was at once a benevolent figure and one to be feared. Manto gives us two portraits of dadas, the extended one of Mammad Bhai in 'Mammad Bhai' and a briefer look at Dada Karim in 'Hamid's Baby'. The dada would help those living in the area where he ruled, even if it meant committing a crime to exact revenge and re-establish order. He had a reputation for violence, and his persona was built up through anecdotes, real and mythic, which exemplified his physical prowess, cunning, and keen eye for justice. He knew everything about his people, and he was expected to protect them. Mammad Bhai is feared for his ability in martial arts and his habit of wearing a razor-sharp knife beneath his waistband. But he is also a benefactor, making sure the sick get cured and the poor don't get cheated, and protecting the women of the neighbourhood.

Bombay's working world was a male one. In 1864 there were about 600 women for 1,000 men, and by 1930 the proportion of women had declined even further.⁷⁶ If women worked, it was because their family was so poor that they needed the income, however slight. In 1931, only thirteen per cent of women claimed employment, even though around two-thirds were of working age.⁷⁷ Prostitution developed out of these conditions and did so on a scale unlike anywhere else in India, as the migration of unaccompanied males to the city met with destitute women forced to earn money by any means possible. In 1921 there were an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 prostitutes in the city.⁷⁸ (Contemporary figures estimate there are now about 450,000 prostitutes, and yet these numbers are approximate and conceivably on the low side.⁷⁹) Manto saw how the unique social conditions of the city bred prostitution, and the figure of the prostitute became of considerable interest to him. In *Bombay Stories*, prostitutes

of one type or another are featured in just about every story.

Another striking feature of Bombay was its ethnic diversity. One gauge of this would be Manto's enumerations of the ethnicities represented by prostitutes: in 'Mammad Bhai' he claims that there were prostitutes 'of every sort—Jewish, Punjabi, Marathi, Kashmiri, Gujarati, Anglo-Indian, French, Chinese, Japanese.' In the same story Manto mentions Arab pearl merchants and Chinese restaurateurs.⁸⁰ Otherwise, in several stories there are Punjabis and Kashmiris; in 'Khushiya' the prostitute Kanta Kumari is from Mangalore, Karnataka. 'Smell' and 'Mummy' feature Anglo-Indians; 'The Insult' and 'Rude' mention people from south India. 'Ten Rupees' and 'Mummy' involve characters from Andhra Pradesh; Pathans from the Hindu Kush Mountains are mentioned in 'Janaki.' Mammad Bhai is from Rampur, Uttar Pradesh; and Sen, the murdered musician in 'Mummy', is Bengali.

Not only did people come from everywhere to live in Bombay, but people of all religions lived there together in relative harmony—from the Parsi descendants of Zoroastrian immigrants from Iran to Jews, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Muslims; and this history of tolerance has a surprisingly long history. Christian history in Bombay began almost 500 years ago. The Portuguese were the first to come, and they worked up and down the western coast, with the Jesuits and the Franciscans competing for souls to convert. While the Jesuits were said to have won out in Dadar and Parel, the Franciscans fared better among the native fisher-folk in Mahim and Bombay.⁸¹ The architectural patrimony of Christianity in Bombay is old as well, as St Michael's in Mahim, the oldest surviving church in the city, was built in 1534, the year the Portuguese acquired land from the Sultan of Gujarat.⁸² By the time the British took over, there were already

Christians in the native population, and in 1674 the East India Company asked the British government to send over some good unmarried Anglican girls since the Company's workers were breaking religious etiquette by marrying native Indian Catholics.⁸³

The history of the Parsi community is deep as well⁸⁴ for they came as soon as the British, and their contributions—first as cloth merchants, then as shipwrights,⁸⁵ and yet later as industrial barons and intellectuals—greatly aided the city on its rise to prominence. A Jewish community also existed in the city:⁸⁶ the 1941 census showed more than 10,000 Jews living there, and the vast majority of these were the Bene Israel.⁸⁷ Mozelle from the eponymous story in *Bombay Stories* is Jewish. Manto provides us with certain Indian Jewish stereotypes—namely, Mozelle's traditional dress and wooden Sandals—but her licentiousness is clearly a fictional detail. Among the other communities, the Muslims ruled the area before the Western colonial intrusions, and Hindus of diverse types have lived in the area since perhaps time immemorial.

In only the last twenty years, Mumbai has increasingly become associated with communal violence, chiefly after the 1993 bombings and riots that seared the city and left 1,400 dead in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.⁸⁸ The first notable example of such violence came during an eight-day stretch in 1893 when riots broke out in reaction to Hindu-Muslim communal fighting in Saurashtra, Gujarat. Eighty people died (thirty-three Hindus, forty-six Muslims, and one Jew), and 700 people were wounded.⁸⁹

Riots erupted again in 1929, and yet these riots were not set off by religious acrimony; they began as a clash between striking workers of General Motors and a group of Pathan musclemen.⁹⁰ Pathans were an intimidating physical lot—tall, broad-shouldered men wearing turbans

and flowing gowns, their kurtas so long they nearly touched the ground. From the wild mountainous regions of the borderland between Afghanistan and Pakistan, they had well, deserved reputations for violence. In addition to working as henchmen for corporate powers, they also worked as small-time moneylenders. They arrived on payday at the factory gates to demand repayment on loans and were said to go so far as to demand sex from women who could not pay up.⁹¹ (Pathans figure in *Bombay Stories* several times. In 'Mummy', there is mention of a 'bloodthirsty Pathan' pressuring Chaddah to pay back a loan, and in 'Why I Don't Go to the Movies', Manto mentions the 'intimidating Pathan guard.')

A group of forty such Pathans were called in to break the workers' strike. They descended upon the offices of the Girni Kamgar Union, the leading Communist labour union, but the violence soon got out of hand and turned along communal lines. In the clashes, 106 people died and over 600 were wounded,⁹² and in time these riots became known as the Pathan Riots.

Manto claims that he was twice witness to Hindu-Muslim violence during his first stint in Bombay (1936-41),⁹³ and there is no reason to doubt him, as the years before independence saw increased violence of all sorts, including labour strikes in connection with the Quit India Movement. And yet it wasn't until the communal violence of 1946-47 that Muslims thought to live separately for their safety.⁹⁴ Manto left the city due in part to the growing tension that divided the city on religious lines, and yet even then the growing unease he felt was more a premonition for what the future would hold than it was a part of the city he knew and loved.

LITERARY CONTEXT

Salman Rushdie has described Manto as a writer of 'lowlife' fictions,⁹⁵ and this phrase helps explain why Manto had problems with government censorship and, to an extent, with many of his fellow writers. Rushdie's comment points not only to the low social status of many—in fact the overwhelming majority—of Manto's characters, but it also suggests the uncertain morals that many of these characters display. It was due to this second point that Manto found himself in conflict with the leading literary movement of India and Pakistan of the twentieth century, the Progressive Writers' Movement.

The Progressive Writers' Movement began in 1933 with the publication of the collection of short stories *Burning Coals*,⁹⁶ as four young writers critical of the shape Indian literature was taking came together to argue for a new way of writing that was politically minded and sceptical of religion. The movement took its official identity the next year when two writers living in London, Sajjad Zahir and Mulk Raj Anand, founded the Progressive Writers' Association,⁹⁷ and when the All India Progressive Writers' Association was established in 1936.⁹⁸ Urdu writers joined the revolutionary spirit by initiating their own Urdu Progressive Writers' Association, along with starting up the journal *New Literature*⁹⁹ that would be the effective mouthpiece for their efforts. The UPWA's first manifesto announced their intention that 'we want the new literature of India to make its subject the fundamental problems of our life. These are the problems of hunger, poverty, social backwardness and slavery.' In April 1939 in the first issue of *New Literature*, they again stated their position: 'In our opinion, progressive literature is literature that trains its eye upon the realities of life, reflects them, investigates them and leads the way toward a new and better life.'¹⁰⁰

Manto is considered a peripheral member of this movement. He did focus on the lower strata of South Asian

society, and he was friends with many writers of the movement, most notably Krishan Chander and Ismat Chughtai. Nonetheless, the elite of the movement, both in India and later in Pakistan, often disapproved of Manto's writing and sought to distance themselves from him. In the All India Urdu Congress in Hyderabad in 1944, Sajjad Zahir criticized Manto's story 'Smell' for being obscene and for not having the reformatory intent that modern fiction should have.¹⁰¹ Literature was meant to be a vehicle for social uplift, and Manto's stories often fell short of the ideals of the more doctrinaire: he portrayed society's sordid aspects as they were and remained free from any ideological programme. Manto was too individualistic (and perhaps too egotistical) to belong to any movement that demanded absolute allegiance from its members; he was too interested in his own viewpoint to sacrifice anything for the good of any group. Manto made his own views known on the Progressive Writers' Movement, and he wrote about them with bitter irony and sarcasm. Two examples include his story 'Progressives',¹⁰² a trenchant criticism of the movement's pertinacity, and his satirical essay 'A Progressive Cemetery'¹⁰³ that makes fun of the label 'progressive' by placing it in the context of the supposed advancements taking place in a Bombay cemetery.

Indeed, perhaps the most consistent reaction to Manto's writing during his lifetime was censure. Manto stood accused of writing obscenities on five separate occasions. His first four trials took place in Lahore and the last in Karachi, and in each instance he was eventually acquitted. His first trial took place shortly after the story 'The Black Shalwar' was published in 1941.¹⁰⁴ His second such experience took place after he had resettled in Bombay. A CID agent arrived from Lahore to arrest Manto at ten at night in his apartment on January 8, 1945, again in connection with 'The Black Shalwar' but also for his story

'Smoke'.¹⁰⁵ Manto was subsequently released on bail and ordered to stand trial in Lahore.¹⁰⁶

Manto stood trial for the third time for his story 'Smell' and his essay 'Modern Literature'.¹⁰⁷ In the manner typical of his trials, he was convicted in the lower court but then acquitted in the sessions court.¹⁰⁸ On May 3, 1945 Special Sessions' Judge M.R. Bhatiya wrote in his judgment that in '[the story] there was nothing to incite lustful feelings, and moreover in the testimony of the expert literary witnesses the story is progressive ... and will have no harmful effect on people's morals.'¹⁰⁹ Manto's difficulties with censorship continued after Partition as well. After the Lahore literary journal *Portraits*¹¹⁰ published his canonical story 'Open Up', the Pakistani government stepped in to close down the journal's printing operations for six months.¹¹¹ Manto's story 'Cold Meat' then became the focus of a series of trials. Manto, along with Nasir Anwar, the owner and editor of *Eternity*,¹¹² the magazine that printed the story, faced an arduous course that lasted over a year. Manto faced a prison term of three months' heavy labour and a fine of 300 rupees (along with three weeks' additional heavy labour if he couldn't come up with the money to pay the fine),¹¹³ but in the end Sessions Court Judge Inayatullah Khan came to the reasonable conclusion that 'Cold Meat' was 'not obscene nor overly objectionable.'¹¹⁴ Manto would stand trial one last time in Karachi for his story 'Above, Below, and in Between', with the result this time being a small fine that Nasir Anwar willingly paid.¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, Manto's troubles with the Pakistani government have continued into the present, and on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, he was still banned on Pakistani television and radio.¹¹⁶

Other than the government censors and Manto's fellow writers, it's not clear how many read his work. His stories were published in the leading Urdu literary magazines of his time, but these presumably had small subscriptions as