SAʿADAT HASAN MANTO

The Fifth Trial*

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The magistrate who appears in the second part of this piece was Mehdi Ali Siddiqi. In a social meeting, which took place in a coffeehouse the day after the trial, Manto asked him why he had fined him if he admired him and considered him a great writer, to which Mr. Siddiqi replied, "I'll give you my answer after a year." He did give his answer in a piece, "Manṭō aur Maiñ" (Manto and I), which appeared a few months after the writer's death. At the time, Mr. Siddiqi did not know that Manto had already written the second part of "The Fifth Trial" as it did not appear in print until two years after the publication of his own piece. The two accounts of their meeting are somewhat, perhaps even significantly different and vividly portray some aspects of Manto's personality.]

One

I HAVE BEEN DRAGGED INTO COURT FOUR TIMES concerning my short stories and now, recently, a fifth time. I want to talk about what transpired during this last trial.

My first four stories to be tried were as follows: "Kālī Shalvār" (Black Shalwar), "Dẖuvāñ" (Smoke), "Bū" (Smell), and "Ṭẖanḍā Gōsht" (Cold Meat). The fifth one was "Ūpar, Nīčē, aur Darmiyān" (Above, Below, and Middle).

I was acquitted on the first three stories. I had to travel two or three times to Lahore from Delhi to be present at the hearing for "Kālī Shalvār." However, "Dẖuvāñ" and "Bū" turned out to be a real pain because I had to come all the way from Bombay.

But it was the court case on "Ṭẖanḍā Gōsht" that proved to be the most vexing. It really left me totally exhausted.

Although the proceedings of the case took place right here in Pakistan, they involved such convolutions that a person with my sensitive disposition could hardly withstand it. Here, you're subjected to every kind of indignity and humiliation. May you never have to go to the weird place called "court," the likes of which I've never seen anywhere.

---

*"Pāñčvāñ Muqaddama," from *Dastāvēz* (June 1982), 174–84.

I hate the police, for they've always accorded me the treatment reserved only for the meanest criminals.

Recently, when the Karachi periodical *Payām-e Mashriq* reprinted without permission my short story "Ūpar, Nīčē, aur Darmiyān" from the Lahore-based newspaper *Eḥsān*, the Karachi administration lost no time in issuing a warrant for my arrest.

Two sub-inspectors of police, along with four constables, came to my house and surrounded it. I was not at home. My wife told them so; however, if they wanted, she could send for me. But they insisted that I was hiding inside and she was flat out lying.

Actually, at the time I was at Chaudhry Nazir Ahmad's publishing establishment Naya Idarah, which also doubled as the office of the literary journal *Savērā*, writing a short story. I had barely written a dozen lines or so when Chaudhry Nazir Ahmad's brother Chaudhry Rashid Ahmad, the owner of the Maktaba-e Jadīd publishing house, walked in. After a few minutes silence he asked, "What are you writing?"

"A short story … a rather long one."

"I've come to give you some very bad news," he said in a terribly anxious tone.

You can well imagine how I would have reacted to that. What could the bad news be? I wondered for a few moments. Many possibilities came to mind. I wavered among them but couldn't figure it out. Finally I asked Chaudhry Rashid, "Brother, what's the matter?"

"The police have surrounded your house. They're adamant that you're hiding inside and they're trying to break in."

Hearing this, Ahmad Rahi and Hameed Akhtar, who were sitting right near me, became very upset. They decided to accompany me. We hopped into a tonga and headed for my home. When we got there, we saw the police standing outside the door of my flat. My sister's son (Hamid Jalal) and my brother-in-law (Zaheeruddin) were standing by their cars busily talking to the policemen. "You're welcome to search the house if you want, but believe us, Manto is not inside."

Just then Ahmad Rahi, Hameed Akhtar and I arrived. We had already instructed Chaudhry Rashid Sahib to phone the newspapers so that they would publish an account of whatever happened to me in the next day's issue.

We also saw Abdullah Malik engrossed in talking to the police officers outside the door. Abdullah Malik is a Communist and whatever he writes is unabashedly and quite overtly "red," but, strangely, I've never spotted a trace of true "redness" in him.

So there he was, talking to the sub-inspectors and the constables, who

had threatened my wife that if she didn't let them in to search the house they would attempt to force their way in.

I'm sure my arrival and my meeting them outside in the compound must have caused them sufficient embarrassment. I invited them politely to step inside the house, which they *graciously* accepted. They were a pair of pretty rude and headstrong police officers. I asked them the purpose of their visit. They said they had come from Karachi and had a warrant to search my house. I was hugely surprised. I am not someone who deals secretly in contrabands, or sells opium or illegal wines and liquors, not even a pinch of cocaine. Why did they want to search my house? In any case, the first question they asked me was: where is your library?

What could I have told them? Here in Pakistan my entire "library" consisted of a few books, of which three were dictionaries. So I said, "Whatever books I owned were left behind in Bombay. If you're looking for a particular magazine or piece of paper, I'm afraid you'll have to go to Bombay. Here is the address."

They failed to appreciate my witty response, so bereft were they of any sense of humor, and started rummaging through my house. My house is not some bar or tavern, though I did have half a dozen empty bottles of beer which they didn't bother to glance at. There were a few porcelain bowls in a cupboard and some papers in a small box on the tea table. They went through the box methodically and looked at every single scrap. They found some newspaper clippings, which they promptly confiscated.

I politely asked them to show me the search warrant they had brought from the capitol Karachi but they refused. The one who had it in his hand simply waved it at me from a distance saying, "This, here."

"What is it?" I asked.

"The thing that has brought us here."

When I made it plain that I was not about to let them continue without seeing the warrant, one of them, holding on to it firmly, spread it out between his hands and said, "Here, you can read it."

On reading it I discovered that the warrant wasn't only for a house search but also for my arrest.

So now there was the question of bail. The officers were so headstrong that they wouldn't accept it from anyone, not even my nephew or my brother-in-law who are both gazetted officers. The police officers told them: "But you're government employees, what if you were let go from your jobs tomorrow?"

In short, I twice wrote to the Karachi court to be excused from being present at the hearing on account of illness and attached the relevant medical certificates with my request. But, of course, that was only a temporary

solution. I couldn't hope to be lucky all the time. Eventually, I had to go to Karachi.

An interesting joke: There was no one in the house to arrange for bail when finally the warrant arrived for my arrest. I went looking for friends but, as luck would have it, found none. Finally, I went to see Muhammad Tufail Sahib. He is a very decent man. He went with me willy-nilly, or maybe willy-willy, and posted the bail. How? Well, he runs a literary establishment (he is both the editor and the owner of the journal *Nuqūsh*) and the balance of the books in his shop is guarantee enough that he can put up a bail for five thousand rupees.

Well, here is another joke. Listen. Tufail Sahib did post the bail, but now he feared that I might not show up on the date of the hearing.

As God is my witness, I was absolutely penniless. I didn't even have money to buy a drop of poison, as the saying goes. Tufail Sahib materialized at my door at five in the morning, with two second-class train tickets in his pocket. He also gave me the fare for the tonga, accompanied me to the station and hung around with me until the train started moving. He had asked one of my friends, Naseer Anwar, to go with me, perhaps to forestall any possibility of my not reaching Karachi and jumping bail.

What I went through in Karachi I'll tell you some other time. Right now, I'm too terribly ill to continue.

Two

I had started writing an article entitled "The Fifth Trial" in one of the issues of *Nuqūsh* (nos. 29–30; Feb.–Mar. 1953) but was unable to finish it on account of my severe illness. I'm still ill, and it seems I will remain ill forever. "Your illness," some friends quip, "is all you've got." By "all" they perhaps mean my short story and nonfiction writing.

Tufail Sahib, the editor and owner of the *Nuqūsh* literary magazine, has also written an article about me, entitled "Manto Sahib." Brother Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi, who has, unfortunately, been appointed the stand-in editor of *Imrōz*, has penned the following review of this article under the name of "Critic":

> Muhammad Tufail's article "Manto Sahib" is personal and, to a large extent, overly intimate. In our opinion he should have kept those secret matters bearing on his and Manto's mutual relationship a secret. Were the relations of publisher/editor and writer to be let out in the open so unabashedly, there would be no place left for either of them to hide. Who doesn't have flaws and weaknesses, but to expose them in print like this! At least in our opinion,

> it is overstepping the bounds of moderation. It is true that unveiling the little flaws of writers and artists does help to bring out their personalities more fully, but such unveiling that it disgraces! However, the article does leave the impression that Tufail Sahib means well. He seems to have been carried away by emotion and said certain things that it would have been better not to have said, or at least not in the way he has said them.

I had already sent the following letter to Tufail Sahib before Qasimi Sahib's review appeared in print:

> My brother, *as-salāmu ʿalikum*!
>
> Last night Safia [Manto's wife] told me that you have written an article about me in *Nuqūsh*. I couldn't read it properly at the time as I'd had too much to drink. Since Safia liked it, I asked her to read it to me. She read some random parts, which I absolutely didn't like; I even cursed you up and down. Then I fell asleep.
>
> Reading it myself the next morning, I liked it a lot. I don't disagree at all with whatever you have chosen to say about me. Regardless of my flaws, I'm very happy that your account of my flaws is blissfully free of any trace of hesitation. Whatever I am, it is there in your article, and in abundance. It mentions certain things about me that I had in me all along; it's just that I was not aware of them.
>
> Humbly, Saadat Hasan Manto

I don't wish to say anything more about that article. I'd be the last person to stand in the way of truth. If I drink, why should I deny it? Equally, if I have borrowed money from someone, I shouldn't deny that either. If the world wants to put me down for this reason, let it. If I worried about what the world says, I wouldn't have written in excess of one hundred short stories. Mr. Critic (Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi) comments: "It is true that unveiling the little flaws of writers and artists does help to bring out their personalities more fully, but such an unveiling that it disgraces!" I don't know whether I've been disgraced since Tufail Sahib's article. Time will decide.

I do want to say one thing, though, about that article. If what really moved Tufail Sahib to put off his brother's medical treatment and come to my aid was on account of his sudden recollection of his elders' saying: "one should never provide a guarantee on behalf of someone," then I truly regret it. Had I only known of his weakness, I'd never have appeared in the court. He would have been arrested and would have looked for someone to bail him out. I would then have said to him: Mister, time to remember the advice of your elders which you threw overboard out of politeness. Forget about the bail, and come with me to the slammer …

*

As you've probably read in the first part of this article, it is an account of my fifth trial.

So my friend Naseer Anwar and I arrived at the railway station. Tufail Sahib had already bought our tickets. Our problem now was how to find room in a carriage. Then again, we had carried a supply of beer bottles, and there was no room to be found for them either. Suddenly I remembered that one of my classmates, Yaqub Taufeeq, was assistant stationmaster at the Lahore Station. By chance, he was on duty at the time. I talked to him and he quickly arranged for our seats. And so we set out for Karachi.

A Maulvi Sahib was also traveling in the same carriage. He was rolling his prayer beads on his fingers. Darn it, what a fiasco! I said to myself. Then I thought of a way. "Come on, open a bottle," I said to Naseer Anwar. He quickly pulled out a beer from under our seats, uncapped it, and handed it to me. The Maulvi Sahib exited the carriage at the next station, his fingers still rolling the beads.

I remember another amusing anecdote. A man entered our carriage at Lahore with his wife in tow. We could have put up with the man somehow, but his wife, that was impossible—well, actually, it was she who could not have put up with us. So when the couple got in, I told the man plainly, "Look, sir, we're both hard drinkers and we're carrying some fifteen bottles of beer. When we're drunk, we have no control over what comes out of our mouths. You're a respectable gentleman and traveling, perhaps, with your wife. It would be better if you found room in some other carriage."

As I'm writing this piece, Tufail Sahib tells me that this man who was with his burqa-clad wife went straight to the stationmaster and complained that two rogues are ensconced in such and such carriage in which they were given seats. The stationmaster showed great surprise and said, "Oh, but it's Saʿadat Hasan Manto, a thorough gentleman, who's traveling in that carriage." The man wouldn't buy it and insisted, "No, he himself told me that he's one hell of a drunkard."

Anyway, they were finally off our backs. They were assigned seats in a different carriage and we felt relieved.

The trip to Karachi was absolutely ghastly. Even the second-class carriage was miserably full of dust. But, thanks to the beer, we somehow overcame the discomfort of the journey. At Karachi I wanted to stay in a hotel but couldn't afford it. Finally I decided to stay at Khwaja Naseeruddin's, if only because my wife had insisted, "Look, you must stay with my brother …" One can ignore the rest of the world, not the brother of his wife—no, sir. So I flung the rest of the world to the wind and went to stay with my brother-in-law, who is a thorough gentleman. He has a good job,

makes a decent salary, and lives in a spacious flat. He showed us great hospitality. By chance, the flat next to his was unoccupied. He got it for us. I felt no desire to prolong my stay in Karachi. The city failed to excite me, a bummer, especially after my fifteen years in Bombay.

The next day we appeared before the Additional Magistrate Sahib. He had his office in a small room in a very unexceptional building. As I had been through several lawsuits at Lahore, I was quite familiar with the manners of its court; familiar, that is, with a place that was singularly devoid of manners. I stood before the Magistrate Sahib, transmogrified into a perfect image of submission. He looked at me and asked, "What do you want?" The polite tone of his voice took me by surprise. I submitted, "Sir, my name is Sa'adat Hasan Manto. You've summoned me under Section 292 of the Obscenity Law concerning my piece "Ūpar, Nīčē, aur Darmiyān." He looked at me closely and then said, "Please sit down."

I thought he was asking someone else to sit down as such courtesy was alien to the Lahore courts with which I was familiar. So I remained standing.

Finding me still standing, he said again, "Please sit down, Manto Sahib."

I sat down on the bench close to his desk. After some time he turned to me, "Why did you take so long to come?"

"Sir, I was ill."

"You should have sent a medical certificate."

"I was too ill to even think about sending it," I flatly lied.

He heard my lie, remained silent, and then said, "What do you want?"

What do I want? I began to wonder. I only wanted to be out of this mess, and I wanted to be out of it pretty damn quick. Tufail Sahib's thought repeatedly drifted into my mind. He had bailed me out and, being well acquainted with my devil-may-care nature, had later even come to my home early in the morning with two second-class tickets. I thought for a while and said to the Magistrate Sahib, "Please wrap up my case; I want to return home as soon as possible."

"Not so fast. I'm afraid it will take some time. I still haven't read your story. God willing, I'll read it today and give my decision tomorrow."

Both Naseer Anwar and I said good-bye to him, piled into an auto-rickshaw and went looking for some bar to drink a few beers. I found this thing called an auto-rickshaw quite fascinating in Karachi. It speeds along making *phut-phut* sounds, traversing long distances in a matter of minutes, and doesn't cost much to ride.

The next day we showed up at the court. The Magistrate Sahib returned my salaam and asked me to sit down. I did. He pulled out a small piece of paper and said, "I've written out my judgment." He then looked at the Reader and asked, "What's the date today?" The man promptly replied, "The twenty-fifth."

I'm a bit hard of hearing. It's been some time that my ears don't hear well. I thought he had fined me twenty-five rupees. "Sir, a fine of twenty-five rupees?" I asked.

A twenty-five rupee fine foreclosed any possibility of appeal, and my sentence would have remained. The Magistrate had probably decided on a fine of 500 rupees, but when he heard me say twenty-five, he smiled, picked up his pen, struck out the original amount and changed it to twenty-five.

Naseer Anwar quickly took twenty-five rupees from his pocket and paid the fine, saying to me, "You got out of it with a negligible fine. You didn't want to get into the headache of appeals and constant knocking about the courts, did you? Don't you remember what all happened during the trial for "Ṭẖanḍā Gōsht"?

I remembered it and shuddered.

I thanked God for getting me out of this mess so quickly.

I was about to say good-bye to the Magistrate and leave when he asked me, "When are you going back to Lahore?"

"Yet today, if I can."

"Please don't go today. I want to have a chat with you."

I was hugely surprised. Why did he want to meet me? I wondered. "Okay," I said, "I'll put it off until tomorrow."

"Where can I see you tomorrow at four in the afternoon?"

I rattled off to him all the bars I had been to for beer. He was a pious man. So we finally settled on a coffee house.

We had decided to meet at four o'clock but we arrived fifteen minutes late. He was already there. After we talked formally for a while, he said, "Manto Sahib, I consider you a great short-story writer of our time. The reason I wanted to get together with you was that I didn't wish you to go back thinking that I am not an admirer."

I was flabbergasted. "If you're an admirer, sir, then why did you fine me?"

He smiled, "Why? I'll give you my answer after a year."

Several months have gone by. Only a few remain. Let's see what kind of rabbit the Magistrate Sahib, who looks like someone who keeps his word, pulls out of his sleeve. ❑

7 June 1953

—Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon