

## An Exploration of the Cinematic Adaptation of Manto's Short Stories in the Light of Foucault's Discourse Theory

Pratima Purwar\*  
Research Scholar  
Dayanand Vedic College, Orai  
&  
Prof. Alka Rani Purwar  
Incharge, Department of English  
Dayanand Vedic College, Orai

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the cinematic adaptation 'Mantostaan', which is a compilation of the four short stories by Saadat Hasan Manto: 'The Last Salute', 'Open It', 'The Assignment', and 'Colder than Ice' in the light of Foucault's Discourse theory. These works are the English translations of Manto's Urdu works and are taken resort to for deeply observing the visual content of the film adaptation. For Foucault (1977), it is through discourse (through knowledge) that we are created; and that discourse joins power and knowledge, and its power follows from our casual acceptance of the "reality with which we are presented". The discourse theory is applied on the dialogues exchanged by the characters of the film in the background of the horror during the partition of India occurred in 1947. It also discovers how various kinds of situations, in the turmoil of communal riots, led the characters holding the power position and thus dominating the discourse. The characters of the film thus, driven by their knowledge, create or participate in the discourse. These discourses shape out the situations, consequences of which are faced by the people. Thus, the paper taking into account the partition fracas, focuses upon the situations created by the discourse throughout the time of communal animosity and upon its bewildering aftermaths affecting people's lives.*

**Keywords:** Power, Discourse, Knowledge, Partition, Adaptation

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Knowledge, according to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, is not about merely knowing facts, but about power to create dominant discourse in a social structure. It is this knowledge of something that enables a person to exercise power in his circle through discourse. Thus, according to him, knowledge and power are interconnected and cannot be separated from each other. In words of Foucault, "Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point of dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power." (Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings, 52) The knowledge of something decides the position of the knower either as a subject, who dominates the discourse or as an object, who bears the domination. Foucault believed that power structures were created and maintained

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\* Author: Pratima Purwar & Prof. Alka Rani Purwar

Email: [purwarpratima92@gmail.com](mailto:purwarpratima92@gmail.com)

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through the use of discourse. He believed people with power had more influence over what others deemed to be 'true' and language caters to the powerful in constructing knowledge and truths. These truths could then be used as a form of social control over the less-powerful.

Partition of India, in 1947, was a haste political decision made by the then and last Viceroy Louis Mountbatten and it created havoc beyond laymen's imagination. It emerged as a partition of communities that earlier used to be amiable with one another, but later left no stone unturned in availing the migration and displacement of the minors of respective countries. Even people belonging to the same community went beyond humanity for the sake of their lust of wealth, of carnal hunger, of communal power, and of bigotry. Everyone acted out of frenzy to assert his religious stand and turned bitterly hostile to other religion to the extent of mass genocide. As a historical event, partition can only present the statistics, but partition cinema, through its wide literature, presents the minute and pathetic description of the barbaric and formidable acts of the people driven by chaos of their compelled exodus.

There has been plenty of Partition adaptation: *Pinjar* (1950) by Amrita Pritam was adapted by Chandraprakash Dwivedi in 2003; Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) was adapted by Pamela Rooks in 1998; *Tamas* (1974) by Bhisam Sahni was adapted by Govind Nihlani in 1988; *Midnight Children* (1980) by Salman Rushdie was adapted by Deepa Mehta in 2012; Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988) was adapted by Deepa Mehta in 1998; and etcetera. *Mantostaan* (2017), an adaptation by Rahat Kazmi, is inspired from the short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto and is apt to be analysed in order to imbibe the miserable condition of people compelled to leave their own land for the sake of security of themselves and their families. 'Mantostaan' is a compiled adaptation of four short stories by Manto: 'Thanda Gosht' (1950) ('*Colder than Ice*'); 'Akhiri Salute' (1951) ('Last Salute'); 'Khol Do' (1948) ('Open It' / 'The Return'); 'Gurumukh Singh ki Wasiyat' (1988) ('Assignment').

Manto has used such a technique in his works that creates a vivid imagery of the horrified atmosphere of partition before his readers and has also invested in bringing forth the suffering of people from each strata of society, which makes the readers feel deeply the inner pangs of people belonging to that time. It is advocated that "Manto made the effects of communal violence on both: the victims and the perpetrators." (Flemming, L. *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 99) Although many partition adaptations exhibit the agony, disillusionment and fear of people, who were victimized during the communal riots to a greater inhumane level, 'Mantostaan' not only presents the agonized state of the victims, who lost their families, their land, their identity and their religious faith, but it also presents the dilemma of some of the

offenders, who exploited the situation under their brutish passions and later bewildered after realizing their barbarous acts.

Although Partition seems to be an event full of massacres and migration, when observed intensely, it also delineates circulation of power shaped out by various situations. As said by Michel Foucault, “‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure.” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, 63) Similarly, ‘Mantostaan’ depicts the circulation of power that leads the characters being sometimes objects and sometimes subjects of power. These positions of characters as subject and object are also well contributed by their position as a knower. This paper, through the film ‘Mantostaan’, focuses on the power position of characters deciding their position as subjects and as objects in the discourse, and also penetrates into the factors causing the power position of characters during partition.

All the four short stories, during adaptation, are portrayed parallel with one another. Some of the denouements are hinted earlier and resolved later by using flashback techniques and some of them are portrayed as the plot develops. The portion taken from the short story ‘Gurmukh Singh ki Wasiyat’ and ‘Khol Do’ are portrayed in appropriate order following the past actions; however ‘Akhiri Salute’ and ‘Thanda Gosht’ are presented using flashback technique. Whichever technique is used in this adaptation, it only creates a heart wrenching and awful picture of the cruel massacres, insanity and utter helplessness of the people titled as minorities in respective countries.

In the beginning of the film, Rabnawaz (a character from ‘Akhiri Salute’) is approaching towards wounded Ram Singh, who is gunshot by Rabnawaz by mistake. It is a story that brings into light the dispute of Kashmir between India and Pakistan and embodies the fragmentation of human existence. Both these characters used to be cronies, and before partition served in the same force, but after partition, they are opposite to each other on behalf of their respective countries in Pir Panjal Ranges in Jammu and Kashmir. Rabnawaz is not able to realize the true cause of his belongingness to Pakistan. This obscurity is witnessed in his conversation with one of his fellow soldiers, to whom he discusses that “Were Pakistanis fighting for Kashmir or for Kashmiri Muslims? if the latter, why not also fight for the Muslims of Hyderabad and Junagarh? And if this was purely a war for Islam, why weren’t other Muslim countries fighting alongside of them?” (Mantostaan 00:09:23-00:09:47)

Rabnawaz is facing identity crisis as he is uprooted from his native land and is given a new identity. He has to face on the frontier the people, whom he knows due to his early belongingness to India and now he is compelled to kill them. He conditioned himself as a stone

to prove his faithfulness to his own country 'Pakistan'. He proves his mettle in a number of difficult wars because of his tough demeanor, but he also oscillates between the rooted Indian spirits and newly thrust Pakistani nationality. According to Foucault, "However, discourses are produced by effects of power within a social order, and this power prescribes particular rules and categories which define the criteria for legitimating knowledge and truth within the discursive order. Through its reiteration in society, the rules of discourse fix the meaning of statements or text to be conducive to the political rationality that underlies its production." (M. Foucault, *Archaeology...* 126-134)

Here, the reiteration can be associated with the claim on the possession of Kashmir by India and Pakistan both. Kashmir has been an apple of discord between both countries since 1947, when raja Hari Singh decided to annex Kashmir neither with India nor with Pakistan. But it is also evident that the Instrument of Accession, a standard procedure under which other princely states had acceded to either India or Pakistan was later signed by the king in favor of India and it came off due to the unauthorized invasion in Kashmir when the king had to seek assistance from India. Later these militants were joined by the Pakistan military and usurped the area, which is today known as POK. (Indurthy, R. et al, *International Journal on World Peace* 9-44)  
 The Pir Panjal Ranges, where this episode of adaptation takes place, is found in this controversial area of Kashmir.

For Indian and Pakistani soldiers, killing soldiers of the adjacent country is a subject of celebration, but when on the border, Rabnawaz identifies Ramsingh, the hostility, for a while, converts into amiability, which is expressed by intermittent air fires from both sides. Here, the discourse is based on humanitarian ground as partition could not divide their integrity, which they developed in their early age. This power of discourse shifts to Rabnawaz, when Ramsingh is shot by him. Rabnawaz rushes to enquire the state of Ramsingh. Rabnawaz does not care about crossing the border for looking after wounded Ramsingh. Even in this mournful atmosphere, the discourse is filled with possession of Kashmir. Both of them consider Kashmir their possession and both participate equally in the discourse. This entitlement is shaped out by the power position of both countries: Pakistan shows its possession on the basis of its military power (as the chief General of Army possesses executive power) and India on the basis of Instrument of Accession, which advocates India's truth over Kashmir's possession. Each country governed by their power exhibits their entitlement and indulges in the war on the frontier. As Foucault said that through its reiteration in society, the rules of discourse fix the meaning of statements or text, hence, it can be inferred that repetition of the statement, in regard of Kashmir's possession, by the powerful agencies of Pakistan deeply established the notion

of Kashmir's belongingness to Pakistan irrespective of the fact that the instrument was signed with India. India shows its possession over Kashmir as the knowledge and truth of signing Instrument of Accession enables it to exercise power over Kashmir. Pakistan, in its religious context, aspires for the possession of Kashmir as it is a Muslim-majority state.

Foucault stated that "By fixing the meaning of text, and by pre-determining the categories of reason by which statements are accepted as knowledge, a discourse creates an epistemic reality and becomes a technique of control and discipline." ( M. Foucault, *Untying the Text*, 48-78) It truly reflects that the reason behind Pakistan's claim on Kashmir was pre determined by the political power of Pakistan and even in absence of any evidence regarding belongingness of Kashmir to Pakistan, it projected its claim worthy to be a reality and thus it controlled the mind of people. Rabnawaz and Ramsingh both, try to convince each other that the other is misguided in terms of possession and it happens so because both were governed by the projected reality framed by their respective political executives.

During one lucid moment, he asked Rub Nawaz, "Yaar, tell me honestly, do you people really want Kashmir?" Rub Nawaz replied in all earnestness, "Yes, Ram Singha, we do."

"No, no, I can't believe it. You've been taken for a ride."

"No, it's you who's been taken for a ride," Rub Nawaz said emphatically to convince him. "I swear by Panchtan Pak."

"No, yaar, don't swear." Ram Singh grabbed his hand as he said, "Maybe you're right." But it was evident from his tone that he didn't believe Rub Nawaz. (*trans. Memon., My Name is Radha: The Essential Manto*,45)

In words of Foucault, "That which does not conform to the enunciated truth of discourse is rendered deviant, that is, outside of discourse, and outside of society, sociality or the 'sociable'." (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*) Through this idea of Foucault, it is considerable that Pakistani soldiers were at no position to challenge the projected truth because by doing so they could be framed as deviant.

Next in the film, comes the story of 'Khol Do', where a person named Siraz-ud-Din is in rush with his wife and daughter Sakina in order to save their lives during the heavily instigated riots followed by slaughters and arsons in East Punjab(Amritsar). This story shows the existential apathy and religious extremism to the extent of exploiting the fearful and the weak. Sakina is lost during the chaos in Amritsar and his father Siraz-ud-din leaves no stone unturned in finding her after gaining his consciousness in the refugee camp. He had not got time to mourn the death of his wife and another trauma began to encompass him: the trauma originating from the thought of Sakina's security and from her separation. He appears to be vulnerable in all aspects

as he was displaced. He knew nothing about the whereabouts of his lost daughter and took help of a volunteer group that was on an expedition to help people finding their lost ones in Amritsar. Siraz-ud-din was assured by the group of the return of his daughter safely. Here, the volunteers hold the power position as they were dominating the discourse. When they succeed in finding Sakina, they choose to hide the fact from Siraz-ud-din and deny him about Sakina's finding. The volunteer group takes advantage of the situation and rapes Sakina continuously till she becomes a living dead. Here a father's credibility has been violated. Lack of the knowledge of the whereabouts of his daughter causes him to rely on others and that brings him nothing but ruin. As a knower he has not been in strong capacity of finding his daughter.

According to Foucault, "Power is not a discrete thing that someone can simply have, but is something which exists in fluidity in the relationship between things." (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 89) Power is something that is exercised not possessed, it exists only in exercise or in activity. (Descartes and Foucault: *A Constructive Introduction to Philosophy*, 145) This power stays with the hypocrite helpers, who dupe the helpless Siraz-ud-din first and later Sakina. Sakina was thoroughly objectified as she also was perplexed about her belongingness and that made her to believe upon the strangers, who made her to be entirely unconscious later. Sakina and her father's sense of belongingness, due to being ambiguous, brought them to the position of an object of discourse. Sakina, when discovered by the group, did not believe them and runs for her safety. She mistrusts the identity of the volunteers, "it was only after the men had reassured her then her terror left her, and she confessed she was Sirajuddin's daughter, Sakina." (Taseer, *Manto: Selected Short Stories*, 53) But once she is convinced, she is brutally raped again and again and that is more than enough to justify her position as an object of discourse. She was dominated to the extent that she unconsciously surrendered herself to the carnal desires of her predators. Her degree of unconsciousness can be witnessed from her only movement, which she makes in entire unconscious state, on doctor's request to Siraz-ud-din for opening the window: "...at the sound of the words, Sakina's corpse moved. Her dead hands undid her salwar and lowered it." (Manto.trans.Aatish Taseer, 54) The power lies with the volunteers, who were putting their lives in jeopardy in order to find their people in the riotous regions of Amritsar. Their spirit of taking risk of their lives put them in position of the subject of the discourse that enables them to hold the power of assuring people by their words. This power they avail as many of the opportunists of that time who did not mind violating the humanity by robbing, killing and raping people.

Ancestral relationship during partition, wherein the son of a Sikh, who indebted his life to judge sahib, deliberately puts judge's family into danger for the sake of his ostentatious Sikh pride

caused by the instigated communal hatred all around the nation in the story *The Assignment*. The story centers on two main characters: retired judge Mia Abdul Hai and his daughter Sughra. There is all pervading howling of fear in the house of the judge as the whole locality is burning in fire, the people are ready with swords in their hands all around to stab anyone belonging to other community, be it children, old ones or women. Sughra and her brother are terrified enough to plead and suggest Abdul Hai to leave Amritsar for Sharifpura (a muslim locality), but Hai remains hopeful about the subsequent changing situations. He said ‘you are imagining things. Everything is going to be normal very soon. (*Mantostaan*, 00:07:58-:00:08:01) Here, Sughra becomes an object of discourse as her statement is shown little credence despite the truth that communalism at that time was at its peak shattering all hopes of people and causing their migration.

The situation becomes worst when Judge Sahab gets paralyzed all of a sudden. His servant Akbar couldn’t make any effort for the betterment of his master due to the ongoing slaughters and arsons outside. Feeling helpless in this situation, Sughra spilled her frustration on Akbar chacha and accuses him of being of no use to his master:

“What good are you? Do you realize how ill Mian Sahib is? Perhaps you are too lazy to want to help, pretending that you are suffering from acute asthma. There was a time when servants used to sacrifice lives for their masters.” (*Mantostaan* 00:25:54-00:26:07)

Sughra dominates the discourse and thus holds the power position in the discourse with Akbar Chacha. Here, Akbar Chacha is morally misbehaved and his truth, of being frightened by the communal havoc, is not given the desired credence. Thus, Akbar chacha becomes an object of the dominance in the discourse. As the discourse of servitude has been created for long and thus it has created the truth of serving masters at the cost of servant’s lives. And when such actions do not appear to happen, the servants are judged on the basis of prevalent discourses. It is well advocated by Foucault that “Discourse is sometimes defined as a regulated practice, implying the unwritten rules, regulations, cultural and value structures that produce particular utterances and statements.” (Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge...*, 49) The expectation from servitude is developed on the basis of unwritten rules and social values of people belonging to the sound economic strata.

Akbar chacha is misinterpreted for not serving his master and this misinterpretation makes him unclear about his true sense of duty towards his master. Thus, he becomes an object of the long created and socially accepted discourse of servitude here. Sughra does not consider Akbar chacha fair with his servitude, nor does she shows required credence to his truth of being scared and thus, he experiences double accusation: first by sughra and second by himself. And driven

by this long standing discursive truth, he leaves the house considering himself the most unworthy servant. It is not made clear what further happened to him but it may be concluded that in such a tumultuous atmosphere of agitation, he certainly would have lost his life. By creating such a discourse, Sughra tries to regulate the anticipated idleness of Akbar chacha and she achieves it when her words force Akbar Chacha so much that he steps out of the house.

Another story, that is adapted parallel, is 'Thanda Gosht'. This story brings into light the implied sensitivity that was subconsciously alive even in the heart of a perpetrator. Kulwant Kaur and Isher Singh are the main characters of this portion of the film. They belong to Sikh community and are lovers, who passionately live with each other. Isher Singh is absent for seven days as he remains utterly perplexed by his own brutish action, which makes him being out of his sense for a long. It is not exhibited, but it can be guessed that Isher Singh is unable to realize the cause of his anxiety. He is utterly helpless to interpret what he is going through, however he had himself chosen to rape a fainted woman, who later turns to be dead. Isher Singh uses bio-power during the chaotic situation to plunder whatever he could and this haunts one of the female residents of the house, wherein Isher infiltrated with his sword killing the family members indiscriminately. The girl witnessing the slaughter of her family members suddenly faints. The fainted girl and Isher Singh do not get indulge in any discourse but the bio-power on Isher's part enables him to force his sexuality upon the girl, who later turns out to be a corpse. It can be evaluated that he feels bewildered due to his unnatural sexual impulses. His baffling trauma can be interpreted through the conversation between him and Kulwant:

Kulwant Kaur screamed. "Ishar Siyan!" She immediately swallowed her words. She got up from the bed and, as she approached him, asked, "Where have you been all these days? Ishar Singh ran his tongue over his parched lips. "I don't know." (Fair, C. Punch Magazine) (*Mantostaan* 00:36:55-00:37:21)

Unaware of his causing impulses, he has no answer to justify his stoic state to kulwant and hence, he tries his best to put himself in power position as a subject of discourse by advancing sexually towards Kulwant and saying "I swear to you, nothing happened." (Fair, C. Punch Magazine) He looks at Kulwant Kaur lustfully, and tells her "Get over here. It's time for round of 'cards'." (Fair, C. Punch Magazine) but eventually becomes object of it when Kulwant's sexual appetite was not satiated by him. It compels Kulwant to doubt Isher's fidelity and to inquire the fact aggressively. As stated by Olivia Leeker and Al Carlozzi, Infidelity can create a sense of relational betrayal, which may have detrimental effects on trust, affection, intimacy and emotional attachment. (Leeker& Carlozzi, journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 17-18) On part of Kulwant, she suffers the emotional trauma after anticipating Isher's betrayal, which



impels her to strangle Isher all of a sudden. Even in that numb state, Isher somewhere has a justified sense of his actions, due to which, in an injured state, he keeps on justifying his ways to Kulwant: “My love! You did it so quickly.” (Fair, Punch Mag.)

Kulwant too is exhibited as an object of the discourse, because after her exposure to the truth, she is helplessly unable to reach a conclusion whether she did justice to herself by attacking Isher or not? According to M. Rosie ShROUT and Daniel J. Weigel, In addition to the emotional processes that emerge, depressive anxiety symptoms or other psychosomatic reactions are often observed, highlighting the severity of the effects one may experience mentally. (ShROUT & Weigel, *Journal of social and Personal Relationships*, 16-20) It may be speculated that Kulwant’s attack on Isher was a consequence of her severe mental turmoil after feeling betrayed by Isher. It is noticeable that when Isher forces himself sexually upon the abducted woman, he holds the power position using his bio-power, but when he is exposed before Kulwant, he becomes an object as the power shifts to Kulwant, because she sniffed Isher’s infidelity and this enables her to hold power in the discourse due to which she keeps on inquiring the main cause of Isher’s sexual inactivity. The sexuality and mainly the sense of infidelity dominate the discourse throughout this part of the adaptation.

Thus, in this adaptation, various discourses take place. In words of Foucault, “Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it... a discourse can be an instrument and an effect of power as well, but can also be a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, 1998) In the whole adaptation, various discourses out of various reasons shape the whole plot and bring out the dimensions of power relationship.

Rabnawaz and Ram Singh’s discourse seems to be a hindrance in reconciliation as both exhibits their entitlement upon Kashmir and do not conform to each other’s opinion in the discourse. Consequently, nothing seems to be resolved. The volunteers take part in discourse with Siraz-ud-din as an effect of power, as Siraz was completely helpless and logically unconscious and this brought the volunteers in power position as they were actively searching for people left in Amritsar during the religious riots. Sughra’s discourse with Akbar chacha takes place as an initiation of opposing strategy as she spits her anger on inactivity of Akbar Chacha towards his paralyzed master. She opposed Akbar chacha’s lethargy at the time of his master’s urgent need of treatment. She opposed sluggishness of Akbar chacha on the basis of the discursive truth of servitude. Kulwant’s argument with Isher takes place out of an opposing objective, as Isher was constantly evading from explaining his truth. Kulwant predicts the truth of Isher’s

numbness on the basis of his queer behavior and his inability to sexually satiate her. And from that moment she starts inquiring dominantly and seeks the quick response from Isher.

According to Foucault (1978), power, including both disciplinary power (e.g., via school, religion) and bio-power (e.g., via the subjugated physical body), produce “discursive practices” or “discursive knowledge” in which individuals are expected to behave in certain ways bolstered by common sense truths. As a result, an individual is judged by how closely he/she fits into the expected norms. As in the ‘Last Salute’ (initial part of the film), the disciplinary power plays its role by controlling the behavior of soldiers on the basis of its discourse of religion. The soldiers from both side of the border were fighting for the sake of Kashmir without showing much interest in the root cause of the discord as they were concerned only about their religious solidarity. In ‘Colder than Ice’ (another part of the film), Isher uses bio-power to assert his sexuality before both the Muslim girl and his beloved Kulwant Kaur. In case of Kulwant, he tries his best to persuade her about his obscure sense of innocence using the discourse of sexuality (round of cards symbolizes the advancement for sexual indulgence) and bio-power as Kulwant appears sexually starved to Isher.

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