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Embodying Gender, Class, and Religion in 20th Century India: An Analysis of Rashid Jahan's "Merā ek Safar" or "One of my Journeys"

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Abstract. This paper takes Rashid Jahan's "Merā ek Safar" (One of my Journeys) as a case study into the Progressive writers' literary commentaries on 20th century India. These writers distinguished themselves based on the following themes: contesting colonial stereotypes of South Asian identity, the South Asian subject as the antithesis to the archetypal modern man, communal strife as it emerged in the years surrounding partition, and the quotidian experiences of the underprivileged in India. Rashid Jahan engages with all these themes by emphasizing the interactions between women of different religious affiliations. The short story is about a young college student witnessing a catfight during an inter-city train journey. The fight ensues after a Muslim woman's dupatta (scarf) touches a Hindu passenger, escalating into a violent interaction between the Hindu and Muslim passengers. The story pokes at the multiplicity of identity in South Asia, dismantling the single-dimensional stereotypes erected by the colonial regime. This paper is an attempt at both a literary analysis of the story, and a retrospective commentary on communal strife rampant in 20th century India. It analyses Jahan's approach towards the representation of womanhood, caste, and religious identity in the story. And it brings the story's emphasis on the common Indian subject in conversation with the post-colonial approach forged by Subaltern Studies. Since satire is the author's genre of choice, it equips the texts with the agency to offer political commentary on these crucial questions. In this tendency the short story shares an intimate relation with the leading themes of *Angarey*.

Keywords. Communal strife, National identity, Postcolonialism, Subaltern subjecthood, Modernity, Primitivism.

Introduction

Rashid Jahan (1905 – 1952) was the only female contributor of *Angarey*,

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and also the one to receive the most severe criticism after its publication in 1932. Jahan was an English-educated doctor who served the Indian people both as a women's doctor and a political activist. Growing up she had the privilege of belonging to an upper-class family that was at the forefront of the intellectual and educational reformist movement amongst the Muslim communities of India. (Cappola and Zubair 167). These experiences influenced her writing choices in significant ways. Throughout her career as a writer, she frequently triggered her political contemporaries with her audacious portrayals of social themes. Based on these Coppola and Zubair qualified Jahan as Urdu literature's "first angry young woman" (Cappola and Zubair 166). While Jahan wasn't the first woman to contribute to Urdu literature, she soon distinguished herself with her brave portrayals of women's issues. "Merā ek Safar" (One of My Journeys) is a story that was published in a larger anthology *Aurat aur Digar Afsāne* (Woman and other stories;1937). The story is written as a letter in which the narrator is addressing her college friend to update her on a recent train journey she took across cities. The letter offers a first-person account of an encounter between a group of Hindu and Muslim women during the journey. The encounter escalates unexpectedly, resulting in a violent catfight. And the conflict is eventually resolved by the intervention of the narrator who champions the voice of reason in the midst of pandemonium. In doing so, the story becomes a vehicle for highlighting the real-world relevance of multiple crucial themes – colonial politics of differentiation, post-colonial notions of progress and modernity, and politically strained social relations. Jahan's story identifies these social tensions as caused by an urgent avoidance of the multiplicity of identity; since postcolonial nationalism was premised on religious identity, Hindu and Muslim social groups viewed one another as different and therefore incompatible. There was a sudden need to avoid heterogeneity and categorize oneself based on religion and nationality. These are the ideas the story beings center-stage, commenting on the sharpening of religious identity in post-colonial South Asia.

This paper attempts to pronounce the bearing of all these themes on the lives of those occupying the margins of society. It premises this discussion on the story's distinction between the upper-middle-class narrator and the lower-class women passengers on the train. In the story all the characters remain unnamed except the narrator and her friend to whom she addresses the letter. In addition to this, the passengers are further anonymized as each one becomes one among the many participating in the "enflamed communal frenzy" (Jalil 161). Considering this, the unnamed passenger-women emerge as the subaltern. The primary argument of this paper is that Jahan's story is another example of the socially privileged being

able to *visit* alternative experiences when no similar opportunity exists that qualifies the subaltern to see and participate in the lives of the rich. It claims that the narrator's privilege as an upper-middle-class, educated Muslim woman allows her to traverse alternative settings of experience with a certain nonchalance that is not available to the subaltern. The paper evaluates the scope of emancipatory politics by acknowledging the limitations of such literary representations of subalternity. Considering that Jahan's work is continuously relegated to the confines of the subcontinental past, and its relevance in the global literary field is unfairly diminished in the contemporary moment, this paper attempts to restore the significance of Jahan's work in informing the negotiation of identity in the subcontinent even today.

'One of my Journeys' and the All-India Progressive Writers Movement

Undeniably, Progressive writing in 20th century India had a clear utilitarian intent behind it and Rashid Jahan was a torchbearer in its production. Progressive writing emerged in a social milieu wherein the Soviet Union's advocacy of socialism began gaining currency around the globe. And the Indian Progressive Writers participated in an "Indo-Soviet collaboration" that explains their appreciative reception of socialist ideals (Khanna 2). Ann Lowry details the features of Soviet socialist realism that the Indian Progressive writers borrowed when importing Progressivism to India. Jahan's "Merā ek Safar" is an overt manifestation of this borrowing. According to Lowry a stereotypical feature of socialist realist writing was the portrayal of a "positive hero" who served as "the peak of humanity from whose height the future can be seen" (Weir, 135). Jahan narrates her story in a first-person narration of a female protagonist who initially plays the role of a participant observer in the conflict between the Muslim and Hindu women. She overlooks the fight, distancing herself from the "illiterate" and "uneducated" "squabbling women" (Jalil 163); and following the climax of the scuffle, attempts to make the women to feel ashamed of their conduct: "Just look at yourselves! Look, you are practically naked……. Your kurta is torn to shreds. Tell me…are you women animals" (Jalil 163). This eventually results in a dilution of the angry sentiment in the compartment, leading to a Hindu and a Muslim woman embracing one another. Here the narrator of Jahan's story unmistakably becomes the positive hero, deterring the passengers from a future where communal strife becomes a typical feature of society. Additionally, the story has a happy ending where the women are driven to a reconciliation at the positive hero's intervention. This too was a feature of socialist realist writing wherein "tragedy and ambiguity cannot exist for there is no question about whether

the hero (and indeed his whole society) will achieve the ultimate social goal" (Weir 135). This evidence proves that Jahan's writing was very self-consciously Progressive, socialist.

Another idea highlighted in *Anthems of Resistance* is the notion of a *manzil* (destination) in Indian progressive writing (Mir & Mir 60). In most cases the destination was used as a metaphor for a preferred or social order. Or, contrastingly, crafted as a social consequence the reader must be cautioned against. Set in a moving train, "One of my Journeys" also implies an anticipated destination which is eventually defined by the protagonist-narrator as a society that is free of communal strife and religious disharmony. Once the conflict begins the protagonist looks out the window hoping an approaching station will help distract the women from hurling insults at one another. Since that does not happen the fight continues. This may be read as Jahan's commentary on the need to reflect on the nature of religious antagonism in colonial India. From this emerges the realization of the desired *manzil* – a transformation of Indian society to one where religious difference are eradicated and people co-exist harmoniously. Again, Jahan's story follows suit with the Progressive Writers Association's "complete dissociation from, rejection of, and opposition to religion in all its forms" (Ahmed 122). Considering this, Rashid Jahan's writing was purposeful aiming to bring about radical change in her society, as inspired by the progressivism in 20th century Urdu writing.

Before moving ahead, I wish to explain why it was necessary to establish the place of Rashid Jahan's writing in the context of the Progressive Writers Movement. It cannot be denied that India's progressive writers set out to achieve a purpose with the literature they produced. This purpose has often been understood as ushering society towards reform. It is this intentionality behind progressive literature that merits the following question: Did the Progressives achieve their purpose, or did Progressive literature make a dent? Since Jahan's "Merā ek Safar" also intended to achieve the utilitarian purpose of inspiring concern for women's illiteracy, and pointing at religious disharmony in India, the story merits the same question. This is to assert that Jahan becomes responsible for her portrayals of the Indian people in her capacity as a progressive writer. Because she identified as a relatively privileged individual claiming to write representative literature, her writing can be held accountable for slipping into elitism, adopting a tone of superiority over the subjects of her writing, and consequently furthering harmful stereotypes about the Indian people. Rashid Jahan was an English-educated doctor who had a front-row seat in the political negotiations for independent India. Her access to the English language granted her a privilege denied to the masses. Despite her advocacy

for women's education in the 20th century she may be considered complicit in the assumption that the illiterate required elite leadership to be helped out of their uncivilized backwardness. "One of my Journeys" pokes at this problem of the elite's complicity in their attitude towards the socially and economically marginalized. In the story Zubeida encounters a group of lower-class, illiterate women whom she subjects to her elitist gaze. However, here one must remain wary of separating the author from the narrator. The paper will attempt to resolve this split in a later section. Essentially, this critique was to show that because Rashid Jahan's story finds itself in the fold of Progressive Writing it may be scrutinized for slight departures from the essence of progressivism. The agenda of the Progressivism was to make room for the multiple subjectivities of the Indian people, no matter how vastly different from one's own. Jahan's short story reveals a hierarchy between the educated college student and the illiterate passengers portraying the student as the emblem of colonial modernity in the company of the rustic sensibilities of the others. A later section of the paper analyses the short story for the author's potential complicity in a reassertion of this hierarchy.

Rashid Jahan's intentions with "Merā ek Safar" aren't ambiguous. The story highlights three main issues as they appeared in 20th century Indian society. Firstly, a large part of India's female population was illiterate. Jahan was a notable advocate of women's education and this fact is apparent in the story: "The Muslim women who were sitting on their benches and chomping paan after paan, seemed just as illiterate…. The Hindu women, though uneducated, looked as though they belonged to different castes…" (Jalil 156). These lines indicate clearly that women's illiteracy is an issue up-taken in the short-story. Secondly, the story acknowledges the lack of women's participation in political negotiations. It explains the catfight between the Hindus and Muslims as caused by how "seldom" these women "got a chance to fight on the streets" (Jalil 158) By explaining the catfight as a cathartic consequence of the women's otherwise concealed political expression Jahan highlights that the women weren't passive recipients of the political events of 20th century India. Since they weren't entirely withdrawn from the advancements in nationalist politics, they expressed their loyalties wherever and however they could – in this case by insulting the oppositional religious group in the train compartment. And thirdly, the story highlights the nature of the Hindu-Muslim antagonism in pre-partition India – the tendency of both the Hindus and the Muslims to view the other in violent opposition to themselves. Jahan portrays the conflict as a "battle between Hindus and Muslims ranging inside this compartment" which asserts the claim that communal strife is a crucial theme in "Merā ek

Safar" (Jalil 158). As pointed out by Ann Lowry, "caste and communal differences are repudiated by the positive hero" (Weir 1992). In the short story Zubeida plays the role of the positive (s)hero ushering the women passengers towards a reflection of their rivalry with one another. Upon confrontation she says to them: "Do you think this is a wrestling pit that you must display your tricks and throws? …. Quiet! If you have an ounce of shame, you should drown in it!" (Jalil 163). By casting Zubeida in an almost maternal role here the story portrays religious strife as characteristic of willful Indians, lacking education and therefore, the judgement to recognize the shallowness of fights caused by communal differences. Priyamvada Gopal claimed that "Jahan came to see social transformation as a dynamic and dialectic process that grew out of encounters both personal and cultural" (Gopal, 50). Thus, the purpose behind "Merā ek Safar" becomes rather clear – bringing attention to the many issues plaguing 20th century Indian society. And the antagonistic interactions between uneducated Hindu and Muslim women become the most fitting site for an exploration into these issues.

Jahan's story replicates many of the features of Progressive Writing in the 20th century. The most prominent feature of the short story is that the protagonist is a female instead of a male. Additionally, the primary setting in the short story is an all-female one. The story takes place in a third-class women's train compartment which is "packed with children and luggage" (Jalil 154). This is also a distinctive feature since it was rare for literature to not have a single male character. "Merā ek Safar is an example of those few stories where, as the storyline reaches its climax men are momentarily forgotten. By center-staging women Jahan draws attention to their lack of participation in public negotiations of political power. She portrays an all-female space as capable of becoming the site of the same contestations as all-male spaces. And in doing so, women are asserted as stakeholders in the play of political power. There is also another way in which Jahan spearheads an intervention. *Anthems of Resistance* explains that a crucial intervention of the Progressive Writers Movement was the "framing of the anticolonial struggle along the binaries of the exploiter and exploited" (Mir & Mir 51). Jahan intervenes further because when subaltern women become the primary subjects of her writing the layers of domination they are subjected to extend beyond the reductive binary of exploiter and exploited. "One of My Journeys" takes a break from an overt criticism of British colonialism, instead zooming in onto local hierarchies and structures of domination. In this context, local patriarchy, caste distinctions, and class disparities become targets of criticism. It points to the fact that women are doubly disadvantaged. First, through the colonial apparatus that furthers the divide

between the literate rich and the illiterate poor. And second, through local patriarchy that relegates females to the lowest rungs of society.

Women and Jahan's "Merā ek Safar"

As discussed earlier, Rashid Jahan's short story centers around female characters. Jahan's portrayal of women can be situated in an existing literary milieu where women writers were attempting to produce female characters that critiqued patriarchy either by resisting against it or by emphasizing the pathos of their circumstance by surrendering to it. Women writers sought to produce writing that was conscious of rebuking patriarchal stereotypes that existed in literature. In *Anthems of Resistance* Ali Hussain Mir and Raza Mir introduce all the major angles that were adopted by female poets to produce female protagonists. It is suggested that women were represented as either potential rebels, weak victims of oppressive structures, objects of the male protagonist's gaze, as dependents on men, or as agents with an active role in the public sphere (Mir & Mir 183). Jahan's preferred portrayal in "Merā ek Safar" may be identified using this framework. The short story is intriguing in that it simultaneously derides women's folly and highlights the necessity of their involvement in public negotiations of political power. It is rather blunt in its mockery of the behavior of the passengers travelling in the "third class compartment exclusively for women" (Jalil 154). The narrator adopts a moralizing tone when subjecting these women to her gaze, subscribing to the patriarchal stereotype that women are inherently more prone to pettiness. While narrating the sights of the scuffle Zubeida says: "A poor woman's sari had come undone in the melee, but she was supremely unaware of it as she grappled with the mob" (Jalil 162). The implication of this line is that women's folly drags them to lengths beyond self-awareness. As in this instance, the woman is unable to be cognizant of her nakedness because of the extent of her involvement in the scuffle instigated by two women who were probably strangers to her. Yet, the story does not conclude that this instance should be used as a justification for barring women from participation in politics. In the story Zubeida is compelled to remind the women of their responsibility towards society. While addressing one of the elderly women in the compartment, she says "Badi bi, if you were not old enough to be my mother, I would have throttled you with my own hands…What did you mean by flinging the meat around like that? Is it the festival of Holi that you are throwing colours around?" (Jalil 163). This is an instance of Jahan urging her readership to reflect upon the consequences of depriving women of both an education and a chance to formulate sensible judgements about socio-political and communal rivalries in India. Since the story was published in 1937, its proximity to the realities of Hindu-Muslim communal rivalries in pre-

partition India is obvious. Conclusively, in "Merā ek Safar" Jahan heightens concern for the future of India if such antagonisms go un-curtailed.

Essentially, Jahan portrays women as active participants in the communal rivalries across India, and paradoxically, also as agents of possible reconciliations. The story concludes:

> Women are strange creatures! One moment they are something, and the next moment something else! A short while ago they were fighting because the dupatta of one had touched the other; now they were clinging to one another and weeping (Jalil 167).

"Merā ek Safar" is interesting in that it portrays the fluctuation between conflict and reconciliation as typical of women. These lines seem to imply that it is womenkind who are predisposed to rapidly switching between fighting and then suspending all differences. Jahan makes a crucial statement by choosing communal strife as the site of this fluctuation. Neetu Khanna suggests:

> Jahan's astute use of the gender-segregated train compartment as the theater of communal violence highlights the way in which the women come to subject each other to an aggressive gaze usually reserved for men. (Khanna, 6)

She also offers an acknowledgement of the fact that in this story, Jahan situates her women in the "theatre of communal violence" usually reserved for men (Khanna, 6). However, the claims of such a portrayal may be extended further.

What does the short story do by portraying the rapid shift from conflict to reconciliation as typical of women? This paper claims that Jahan makes two suggestions here. Firstly, since the short story comments extensively on "uneducated" women's lack of good sense, it may be claimed that by pairing religion-based conflict with this folly the story dishonors Hindu-Muslim antagonisms. By exposing its female characters to criticism "Merā Ek Safar" seems to be arguing that fights spurred by religious difference appear as such – signs of illiteracy and foolishness. This is hence a commentary on the macrocosmic moment in 20th century Indian politics. And additionally, the story also insinuates that communal rivalries are socially constructed. Since the women are able to reconcile their differences upon intervention from the narrator, the story asserts that people may similarly be motivated to engage in the violent scuffle. The embrace between the Hindu and Muslim woman near the story's resolve is testament to the claim that religious strife is a social construct that may be mediated by certain interventions.

There is another instance in the short story that points at similar issues. While subjecting her fellow passengers to her gaze, Zubeida is thinking deeply:

> I am sure that, once upon a time, some man, fed up with a talkative woman, must have invented the nose ring so that a woman's voice would remain trapped in her mouth. And women are such silly creatures that they turned this invention into tradition. No wonder then that every religion teaches that women have feeble minds. (Jalil, 156).

It is well-established that Progressive Writers strongly disapproved of the overwhelming dominance of religion in pre-partition Indian society. This fact is reasserted in these lines where the story offers a subtle critique of the deployment of religion by patriarchy. But additionally, these lines also corroborate the claim that societal features such as traditions of accessorizing, are often socially constructed by a complex web of collaboration between patriarchy, religion, and nationalist politics. In this particular instance, the narrator is pondering over the Muslim woman's nose-ring "worn as it was on her septum" (Jalil, 156). In the context of the story the accessory becomes an essentializing feature that distinguishes the Muslim woman from her Hindu counterparts. This is a further reassertion of the same idea – religious differences are often solidified by social constructions such as the association between a particular kind of jewelry and religious identity. Hence, it may be claimed that according to Jahan, religiously motivated antagonisms in India were socially constructed and must be done away with.

Drawing upon the same piece of evidence, another crucial theme of "Merā ek Safar" must be highlighted. In the story, the narrator is repeatedly seen distancing her identity from the rest of the female passengers. The extensive detailing of these women's clothing and jewelry is an indication of the idea that Zubeida takes advantage of being the spectator/onlooker instead of being the subject of the gaze herself. Following this, she also distinguishes herself from the rest of the passengers along the lines of class and caste. Upon entering the women's compartment Zubeida observes: "Those of you who only travel first or second class cannot imagine the sort of smells that assailed me from my vantage point near the toilet" (Jalil, 155). The narrator's prejudice (isn't she being sarcastic or even sarcastic?) in this instance is unmistakable. The portrayal of unpleasant odors as a typical feature of the third-class compartment is an example of the narrator simultaneously associating herself with the upper classes and distancing herself from the lower classes. And soon after when her Hindu neighbor asks her about her caste she says "Chamar!"[1] and laughs out loud (Jalil, 155).

Zubeida's ability to laugh away such an interrogation is a rather brusque reminder of her privilege. It is her privilege that allows her such nonchalance towards the implications of caste differences.

A primary argument of this paper is that the privileged are able to traverse alternative experiences with little to no consequence, unlike the subaltern. The suggestion here is that the socially privileged rarely need to shift or modify their identities when moving between different spaces, and that often, even the ability to modify it is an allowance of the privilege. As in "Merā ek Safar" the narrator reveals different aspects of her identity in different moments. First, she finds a seat in the men's coupe, then is able to buy a ticket to the third-class women's compartment, and later upon her interactions with the other women is shown to be Muslim: "No doubt I had been asked to sit near the Hindu women because of the red bindi I sported on my forehead. I thanked the bindi for coming to my rescue, the red dot that so offended my grandmother and made her angry" (Jalil, 155). These thought processes reveal two main ideas.

First, the prevalent essentialization of identity in 20th century India. And secondly, the casualness?? with which Zubeida is able to sport an alternative identity. Though the lower-class Hindu women are able to tell that Zubeida is no Chamar, they do not retort more than – "You are chamar? Just because you are educated, do you think the rest are fools?" (Jalil, 156). Here the narrator laughingly modifies her identity for it buys her a seat next to the Hindu women in the excessively crowded compartment. It is this paper's assertion that the narrator in "Merā ek Safar" was able to move between the various spaces as she did, only due to the possibilities afforded to her by her positionality. Within the story, as the fight between the Hindu and Muslim camps thickens, Zubeida narrates "I quickly averted my gaze and began to look out of the window to convince her that I had no desire to be a party of this slaughter and mayhem" (Jalil, 161). This is another example of Zubeida's ability to distance herself from the escalating scuffle. And it is evidence for the claim that the tussle of identity is not relevant to someone belonging to her background in the same way as it is to the others.

The Progressive Writers' Movement has frequently been subjected to the criticism that its contributors were mostly the educated elite who wrote more frequently for those who had access to their writings rather than for the actual masses. In the 20th century, not many people could read and write – an opportunity only made available to those few that shared adjacency with the colonial apparatus. As Talat Ahmed has also stated: "It could be argued that rather than writing for the masses their audience was a like-minded social milieu" (Ahmed, 15). The same critique may be applied

to Jahan's "One of My Journeys". The story is framed as a letter that Zubeida is writing to her friend Shakuntala with whom she attends college. The letter is essentially a conversation that takes places between two women belonging from the same socio-economic background. This may be used to explain the explain the prejudice often apparent in the narrator's tone... Zubeida reveals her perceptions of the other women's appearances, her discomfort at having to sit in the third-class compartment, and her astonishment at the other women's behavior in the letter – and all with a particular lightheartedness. Given this, it may be inferred that these friends' worldview, and by extension their supposed prejudices, are constructed within a singular plane of their own experience. Since the letter is addressed to someone who relates to Zubeida's lifestyle, her assumed superiority over "these women from poor households" is publicized with ease (Jalil, 158). This idea emerges most clearly when Zubeida narrates the way in which she brought the women to feel ashamed of their behavior: "Shakuntala, how I wish you had been there! You would have seen how Zubeida too can speak (Jalil, 162)!" Here the narrator seems to be assuming a role where she becomes responsible for restoring harmony between the "foul minded, quarrelsome" women (Jalil, 165). This is where "Merā ek Safar" conforms with a major belief of many Progressive writers articulated by Ahmed Ali that "The West is ascendant because of a more modern outlook, rationalism, and technological advancement, scientific inquiry rather than spiritual acquiescence" (Ali and Rashed, 96). By claiming to restore reason, Zubeida aligns herself with the notion of Western supremacy due to its unwavering commitment to the voice of reason, and when she evokes the threat of the police, she further affiliates with the colonial apparatus which was popular for its coercive/corrective practices. Hence, in the short story the narrator may be charged for complicity with the Imperialist in assuming a moral and rational superiority over the subaltern masses. Yet, one question remains unanswered. In "One of My Journeys" can the author be separated from the narrator? Since the narrator's prejudice against the passengers in is question, Jahan's Progressive intentions with this work must be considered more pointedly: Is Zubeida's character Jahan's medium of criticism against the elitism in 20th century India?

Commentary or Complicity?

Jahan's writing may be charged for complicity with the Imperialist, given the many aspects of the story discussed earlier in the paper. She may be participating in what Talat Ahmed describes as follows: "notions of Western superiority were at the heart of the PWA agenda … yet many Western mores and values were taken as synonymous with progress" (Ahmed, 123). By mocking the uneducated lower-class women's tendency

for such "kicking-scratching-biting-punching furies" Jahan participates in the assumption that the western educated individuals were the more admirable in comparison to the subaltern poor (Jalil, 160). As discussed extensively above, "Merā ek Safar" recreates the binary of the literate modern person and the "primitive uncivilized" person. However, by framing the story as a letter instead of a narrative, story Jahan intelligently distances herself from the narrator. And this fact introduces an exciting complication in answering the question 'Can Jahan be separated from Zubeida's complicity?'

This paper seeks argues that by framing the short story as a letter Jahan critiques the insulated world of the privileged. By crafting Zubeida as a character in the story instead of claiming her narration of the incident as her own, Jahan is able to critique Zubeida too. As a result, the narrator emerges as the elite protagonist whose spectatorship of the subaltern may be problematized. As recognized by Priyamvada Gopal, "Jahan sees the manner of women's emergence into colonial public spaces as problematically influenced by patriarchal and masculinist discourses" (Gopal, 57). Gopal corroborates the claim that colonial public spaces adopted a discriminatory attitude towards the illiterate lower classes. And this is heavily asserted throughout "Merā ek Safar." But Gopal's second claim also requires attention. In "Merā ek Safar" Jahan overtly critiques indigenous patriarchy by emphasizing both the consequences of restricting women from expressing their political opinions, and the need for women's education. In doing so she defends herself against the charge of complicity. She uses the short story to firstly, warn 20th century India against the violence that is caused by Hindu-Muslim antagonisms. And secondly, to champion the advocacy for women's education.

Conclusion

"Merā ek Safar" urges the Indian populace to both re-evaluate its nationalist politics and understand the importance of women's responsible participation in public reason. It achieves this purpose by closing the story on a reconciliation between the Hindu and Muslim camps. Near the resolve of the conflict the Muslim woman extends her hand to the Hindu woman saying "If my dupatta is untouchable, you are not likely to touch my hand. Anyhow, please forgive me. It was my fault" (Jalil, 167). The apology serves to reassert some crucial features of the social circumstance in 20th century India – the significance of caste relations and the politics of (un)touchability in determining the consequences of interactions between people. Moreover, the occasional overlap between inter-caste and inter-religion relations; rules regarding untouchability manifested as frequently in exchanges between people of different religious affiliations as in inter-caste

interactions. In the given instance in the short story, the Muslim woman apologizes to the Hindu woman for breaching this code by extending her hand to remedy the unpleasantness caused by their participation in the catfight. However, Jahan's literary work is also distinguishable in its attempt at articulating the social reality in 20th century India alongside the Progressives' aspirations for Indian society. With the Muslim woman's extension of an apology, while caste related tensions continue to remain relevant, there is yet an attempt at the erasure of the stringency of differentiated identities. And in doing so, Jahan comments on society and conceptualizes an aspiration simultaneously. In consequence, Jahan's story is able to instruct 20th century Indians to reflect on the baselessness of the Hindu-Muslim strife.

Yet, even more importantly, "Merā ek Safar" becomes a case study of all the primary notions introduced by subaltern scholars. In the story the women passengers are shown to be doubly disadvantaged. First, by the colonial apparatus that discriminates against all that are unable to make themselves translatable to the colonial powers due to their lack of access to western education. And second, by the local patriarchs who become one of the major reasons for why women remain restricted to the domestic. Thus, as claimed by Gayatri Spivak, "the woman is doubly in shadow" (Spivak, 84). Zubeida may be seen as siding with the colonial apparatus, catalyzing the colonizer's power by embodying the function of the local patriarch – furthering the colonial perception of the subcontinental subaltern subject. This claim rests on the attention the story brings to the ways in which "the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" ends up in a catfight in a third-class train compartment (page?). In Jahan's story Zubeida uses her notions of modernization to insult the other passengers' continuous surrendering to the hold of tradition. She presents tradition as one of the reasons for the women's eventual involvement in the catfight. Zubeida encourages the reductive binary of modernity-tradition, casting the train passengers as distanced from modernity due to their subscription to certain stereotypical features of subcontinental tradition. Clothing, jewelry, language, and dialect all become markers of what continues to be packaged as tradition. Hence, "Merā ek Safar" heightens Spivak's assertions about the subaltern woman whose voice is silenced in the tussle between tradition (led by the nationalist elite) and modernization (led by the colonial elite).

It is the combination of all these factors that must contribute to raising the status of Jahan's writing. Despite the fact that the story was written to address the Indian population in 20th century India, the story's themes continue to be relevant to the contemporary moment. Even with the re-purposing of the Progressive Writers' Movement – excessive glorification

of its role in the sub-continent's past – the service that it can continue to offer in the present moment remains ignored. Hence, my primary intention with this paper was to highlight all the features of Jahan's "Merā ek Safar" that can remind us that the subcontinent hasn't completely freed itself from the shackles of the colonial import of modernization. Also, that progressive writing was perhaps more reconciliatory than motivated by separatist intentions.

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