he was always secure in the knowledge that he was a great writer:

Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto. With him lie
buried all the arts and mysteries of short story
writing. Under tons of earth he lies, wondering if
he is a greater short story writer than God.

Khalid Hasan
Vienna, 30 April 1987

A couple of years after the Partition of the country, it
occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakis-
tan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should
also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be
transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in
Pakistani asylums should be sent to India.

Whether this was a reasonable or an unreasonable idea is
difficult to say. One thing, however, is clear. It took many
conferences of important officials from the two sides to
come to this decision. Final details, like the date of actual
exchange, were carefully worked out. Muslim lunatics
whose families were still residing in India were to be left
undisturbed, the rest moved to the border for the exchange.
The situation in Pakistan was slightly different, since almost
the entire population of Hindus and Sikhs had already
migrated to India. The question of keeping non-Muslim
lunatics in Pakistan did not, therefore, arise.

While it is not known what the reaction in India was,
when the news reached the Lahore lunatic asylum, it
immediately became the subject of heated discussion. One
Muslim lunatic, a regular reader of the fire-eating daily
newspaper Zamindar, when asked what Pakistan was,
replied after deep reflection: ‘The name of a place in India
where cut-throat razors are manufactured.’

This profound observation was received with visible satis-
faction.
A Sikh lunatic asked another Sikh: 'Sardarji, why are we being sent to India? We don't even know the language they speak in that country.'

The man smiled: 'I know the language of the Hindostoras. These devils always strut about as if they were the lords of the earth.'

One day a Muslim lunatic, while taking his bath, raised the slogan 'Pakistan Zindabad' with such enthusiasm that he lost his footing and was later found lying on the floor unconscious.

Not all inmates were mad. Some were perfectly normal, except that they were murderers. To spare them the hangman's noose, their families had managed to get them committed after bribing officials down the line. They probably had a vague idea why India was being divided and what Pakistan was, but, as for the present situation, they were equally clueless.

Newspapers were no help either, and the asylum guards were ignorant, if not illiterate. Nor was there anything to be learnt by eavesdropping on their conversations. Some said there was this man by the name Mohamed Ali Jinnah, or the Quaid-e-Azam, who had set up a separate country for Muslims, called Pakistan.

As to where Pakistan was located, the inmates knew nothing. That was why both the mad and the partially mad were unable to decide whether they were now in India or in Pakistan. If they were in India, where on earth was Pakistan? And if they were in Pakistan, then how come that until only the other day it was India?

One inmate had got so badly caught up in this India-Pakistan-Pakistan-India rigmarole that one day, while sweeping the floor, he dropped everything, climbed the nearest tree and installed himself on a branch, from which vantage point he spoke for two hours on the delicate problem of India and Pakistan. The guards asked him to get down; instead he went a branch higher, and when threatened with punishment, declared: 'I wish to live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live in this tree.'

When he was finally persuaded to come down, he began embracing his Sikh and Hindu friends, tears running down his cheeks, fully convinced that they were about to leave him and go to India.

A Muslim radio engineer, who had an M.Sc. degree, and never mixed with anyone, given as he was to taking long walks by himself all day, was so affected by the current debate that one day he took all his clothes off, gave the bundle to one of the attendants and ran into the garden stark naked.

A Muslim lunatic from Chaniot, who used to be one of the most devoted workers of the All India Muslim League, and obsessed with bathing himself fifteen or sixteen times a day, had suddenly stopped doing that and announced — his name was Mohamed Ali — that he was Quaid-e-Azam Mohamed Ali Jinnah. This had led a Sikh inmate to declare himself Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Sikhs. Apprehending serious communal trouble, the authorities declared them dangerous, and shut them up in separate cells.

There was a young Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had gone off his head after an unhappy love affair. When told that Amritsar was to become a part of India, he went into a depression because his beloved lived in Amritsar, something he had not forgotten even in his madness. That day he abused every major and minor Hindu and Muslim leader who had cut India into two, turning his beloved into an Indian and him into a Pakistani.

When news of the exchange reached the asylum, his friends offered him congratulations, because he was now to be sent to India, the country of his beloved. However, he declared that he had no intention of leaving Lahore, because his practice would not flourish in Amritsar.

There were two Anglo-Indian lunatics in the European ward. When told that the British had decided to go home
after granting independence to India, they went into a state of deep shock and were seen conferring with each other in whispers the entire afternoon. They were worried about their changed status after independence. Would there be a European ward or would it be abolished? Would breakfast continue to be served or would they have to subsist on bloody Indian chapati?

There was another inmate, a Sikh, who had been confined for the last fifteen years. Whenever he spoke, it was the same mysterious gibberish: 'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain.' Guards said he had not slept a wink in fifteen years. Occasionally, he could be observed leaning against a wall, but the rest of the time, he was always to be found standing. Because of this, his legs were permanently swollen, something that did not appear to bother him. Recently, he had started to listen carefully to discussions about the forthcoming exchange of Indian and Pakistani lunatics. When asked his opinion, he observed solemnly: 'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the Government of Pakistan.'

Of late, however, the Government of Pakistan had been replaced by the Government of Toba Tek Singh, a small town in the Punjab which was his home. He had also begun enquiring where Toba Tek Singh was to go. However, nobody was quite sure whether it was in India or Pakistan.

Those who had tried to solve this mystery had become utterly confused when told that Sialkot, which used to be in India, was now in Pakistan. It was anybody's guess what was going to happen to Lahore, which was currently in Pakistan, but could slide into India any moment. It was also possible that the entire subcontinent of India might become Pakistan. And who could say if both India and Pakistan might not entirely vanish from the map of the world one day?

The old man's hair was almost gone and what little was left had become a part of the beard, giving him a strange, even frightening, appearance. However, he was a harmless fellow and had never been known to get into fights. Older attendants at the asylum said that he was a fairly prosperous landlord from Toba Tek Singh, who had quite suddenly gone mad. His family had brought him in, bound and fettered. That was fifteen years ago.

Once a month, he used to have visitors, but since the start of communal troubles in the Punjab, they had stopped coming. His real name was Bishan Singh, but everybody called him Toba Tek Singh. He lived in a kind of limbo, having no idea what day of the week it was, or month, or how many years had passed since his confinement. However, he had developed a sixth sense about the day of the visit, when he used to bathe himself, soap his body, oil and comb his hair and put on clean clothes. He never said a word during these meetings, except occasional outbursts of 'Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain.'

When he was first confined, he had left an infant daughter behind, now a pretty young girl of fifteen. She would come occasionally, and sit in front of him with tears rolling down her cheeks. In the strange world that he inhabited, hers was just another face.

Since the start of this India—Pakistan caboodle, he had got into the habit of asking fellow inmates where exactly Toba Tek Singh was, without receiving a satisfactory answer, because nobody knew. The visits had also suddenly stopped. He was increasingly restless, but, more than that, curious. The sixth sense, which used to alert him to the day of the visit, had also atrophied.

He missed his family, the gifts they used to bring and the concern with which they used to speak to him. He was sure they would have told him whether Toba Tek Singh was in India or Pakistan. He also had a feeling that they came from Toba Tek Singh, where he used to have his home.

One of the inmates had declared himself God. Bishan
Singh asked him one day if Toba Tek Singh was in India or Pakistan. The man chuckled: 'Neither in India nor in Pakistan, because, so far, we have issued no orders in this respect.'

Bishan Singh begged 'God' to issue the necessary orders, so that his problem could be solved, but he was disappointed, as 'God' appeared to be preoccupied with more pressing matters. Finally, he told him angrily: 'Uper the gur gur the annexe the mung the dal of Gurujia da Khalsa and Gurujia ki fateh ... jo boley so nihal sat sri akal.'

What he wanted to say was: 'You don't answer my prayers because you are a Muslim God. Had you been a Sikh God, you would have been more of a sport.'

A few days before the exchange was to take place, one of Bishan Singh's Muslim friends from Toba Tek Singh came to see him — the first time in fifteen years. Bishan Singh looked at him once and turned away, until a guard said to him: 'This is your old friend Fazal Din. He has come all the way to meet you.'

Bishan Singh looked at Fazal Din and began to mumble something. Fazal Din placed his hand on his friend's shoulder and said: 'I have been meaning to come for some time to bring you news. All your family is well and has gone to India safely. I did what I could to help. Your daughter Roop Kaur ...' — he hesitated — 'She is safe too ... in India.'

Bishan Singh kept quiet. Fazal Din continued: 'Your family wanted me to make sure you were well. Soon you will be moving to India. What can I say, except that you should remember me to bhai Balbir Singh, bhai Vadhawa Singh and bahain Amrit Kaur. Tell bhai Bibi Singh that Fazal Din is well by the grace of God. The two brown buffaloes he left behind are well too. Both of them gave birth to calves, but, unfortunately, one of them died after six days. Say I think of them often and to write to me if there is anything I can do.'

Then he added: 'Here, I brought you some rice crispies from home.'

Bishan Singh took the gift and handed it to one of the guards. 'Where is Toba Tek Singh?' he asked.

'Where? Why, it is where it has always been.'

'In India or in Pakistan?'

'In India ... no, in Pakistan.'

Without saying another word, Bishan Singh walked away, murmuring: 'Uper the gur gur the annexe the be dhyana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and Hindustan dur fittey mou.'

Meanwhile, exchange arrangements were rapidly getting finalized. Lists of lunatics from the two sides had been exchanged between the governments, and the date of transfer fixed.

On a cold winter evening, buses full of Hindu and Sikh lunatics, accompanied by armed police and officials, began moving out of the Lahore asylum towards Wagha, the dividing line between India and Pakistan. Senior officials from the two sides in charge of exchange arrangements met, signed documents and the transfer got under way.

It was quite a job getting the men out of the buses and handing them over to officials. Some just refused to leave. Those who were persuaded to do so began to run pell-mell in every direction. Some were stark naked. All efforts to get them to cover themselves had failed because they couldn't be kept from tearing off their garments. Some were shouting abuse or singing. Others were weeping bitterly. Many fights broke out.

In short, complete confusion prevailed. Female lunatics were also being exchanged and they were even noisier. It was bitterly cold.

Most of the inmates appeared to be dead set against the entire operation. They simply could not understand why they were being forcibly removed, thrown into buses and driven to this strange place. There were slogans of 'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Pakistan Murdabad', followed by fights.
When Bishan Singh was brought out and asked to give his name so that it could be recorded in a register, he asked the official behind the desk: ‘Where is Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?’

‘Pakistan,’ he answered with a vulgar laugh.

Bishan Singh tried to run, but was overpowered by the Pakistani guards who tried to push him across the dividing line towards India. However, he wouldn’t move. ‘This is Toba Tek Singh,’ he announced. ‘Uper the gur gur the annexe the be dhyana mung the dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.’

Many efforts were made to explain to him that Toba Tek Singh had already been moved to India, or would be moved immediately, but it had no effect on Bishan Singh. The guards even tried force, but soon gave up.

There he stood in no man’s land on his swollen legs like a colossus.

Since he was a harmless old man, no further attempt was made to push him into India. He was allowed to stand where he wanted, while the exchange continued. The night wore on.

Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh, the man who had stood on his legs for fifteen years, screamed and as officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed to the ground.

There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.

The soldiers had been entrenched in their positions for several weeks, but there was little, if any, fighting, except for the dozen rounds they ritually exchanged every day. The weather was extremely pleasant. The air was heavy with the scent of wild flowers and nature seemed to be following its course, quite unmindful of the soldiers hiding behind rocks and camouflaged by mountain shrubbery. The birds sang as they always had and the flowers were in bloom. Bees buzzed about lazily.

Only when a shot rang out, the birds got startled and took flight, as if a musician had struck a jarring note on his instrument. It was almost the end of September, neither hot nor cold. It seemed as if summer and winter had made their peace. In the blue skies, cotton clouds floated all day like barges on a lake.

The soldiers seemed to be getting tired of this indecisive war where nothing much ever happened. Their positions were quite impregnable. The two hills on which they were placed faced each other and were about the same height, so no one side had an advantage. Down below in the valley, a stream zigzagged furiously on its stony bed like a snake.

The air force was not involved in the combat and neither of the adversaries had heavy guns or mortars. At night, they would light huge fires and hear each others’ voices echoing through the hills.
The last round of tea had just been taken. The fire had gone cold. The sky was clear and there was a chill in the air and a sharp, though not unpleasant, smell of pine cones. Most of the soldiers were already asleep, except Jamadar Harnam Singh, who was on night watch. At two o'clock, he woke up Ganda Singh to take over. Then he lay down, but sleep was as far away from his eyes as the stars in the sky. He began to hum a Punjabi folk song:

Buy me a pair of shoes, my lover
A pair of shoes with stars on them
Sell your buffalo, if you have to
But buy me a pair of shoes
With stars on them

It made him feel good and a bit sentimental. He woke up the others one by one. Banta Singh, the youngest of the soldiers, who had a sweet voice, began to sing a lovelorn verse from *Heer Ranjha*, that timeless Punjabi epic of love and tragedy. A deep sadness fell over them. Even the grey hills seemed to have been affected by the melancholy of the song.

This mood was shattered by the barking of a dog. Jamadar Harnam Singh said, ‘Where has this son of a bitch materialized from?’

The dog barked again. He sounded closer. There was a rustle in the bushes. Banta Singh got up to investigate and came back with an ordinary mongrel in tow. He was wagging his tail. ‘I found him behind the bushes and he told me his name was Jhun Jhun,’ Banta Singh announced. Everybody burst out laughing.

The dog went to Harnam Singh who produced a cracker from his kitbag and threw it on the ground. The dog sniffed at it and was about to eat it, when Harnam Singh snatched it away. ‘... Wait, you could be a Pakistani dog.’

They laughed. Banta Singh patted the animal and said to Harnam Singh, ‘Jamadar sahib, Jhun Jhun is an Indian dog.’

‘Prove your identity,’ Harnam Singh ordered the dog, who began to wag his tail.

‘This is no proof of identity. All dogs can wag their tails,’ Harnam Singh said.

‘He is only a poor refugee,’ Banta Singh said, playing with his tail.

Harnam Singh threw the dog a cracker which he caught in midair. ‘Even dogs will now have to decide if they are Indian or Pakistani,’ one of the soldiers observed.

Harnam Singh produced another cracker from his kitbag. ‘And all Pakistanis, including dogs, will be shot.’

A soldier shouted, ‘India Zindabad!’

The dog, who was about to munch his cracker, stopped dead in his tracks, put his tail between his legs and looked scared. Harnam Singh laughed. ‘Why are you afraid of your own country? Here, Jhun Jhun, have another cracker.’

The morning broke very suddenly, as if someone had switched on a light in a dark room. It spread across the hills and valleys of Titwal, which is what the area was called.

The war had been going on for months, but nobody could be quite sure who was winning it.

Jamadar Harnam Singh surveyed the area with his binoculars. He could see smoke rising from the opposite hill, which meant that, like them, the enemy was busy preparing breakfast.

Subedar Himmat Khan of the Pakistan army gave his huge moustache a twirl and began to study the map of the Titwal sector. Next to him sat his wireless operator who was trying to establish contact with the platoon commander to obtain instructions. A few feet away, the soldier Bashir sat on the ground, his back against a rock and his rifle in front of him. He was humming:

Where did you spend the night, my love, my moon?
Where did you spend the night?
Enjoying himself, he began to sing more loudly, savouring the words. Suddenly, he heard Subedar Himmat Khan scream, 'Where did you spend the night?'

But this was not addressed to Bashir. It was a dog he was shouting at. He had come to them from nowhere a few days ago, stayed in the camp quite happily and then suddenly disappeared last night. However, he had now returned like a bad coin.

Bashir smiled and began to sing to the dog. 'Where did you spend the night, where did you spend the night?' But he only wagged his tail. Subedar Himmat Khan threw a pebble at him. 'All he can do is wag his tail, the idiot.'

'What has he got around his neck?' Bashir asked. One of the soldiers grabbed the dog and undid his makeshift rope collar. There was a small piece of cardboard tied to it. 'What does it say?' the soldier, who could not read, asked.

Bashir stepped forward and with some difficulty was able to decipher the writing. 'It says Jhun Jhun.'

Subedar Himmat Khan gave his famous moustache another mighty twirl and said, 'Perhaps it is a code. Does it say anything else, Bashirey?'

'Yes sir, it says it is an Indian dog.'

'What does that mean?' Subedar Himmat Khan asked.

'Perhaps it is a secret,' Bashir answered seriously.

'If there is a secret, it is in that word Jhun Jhun,' another soldier ventured in a wise guess.

'You may have something there,' Subedar Himmat Khan observed.

Dutifully, Bashir read the whole thing again. 'Jhun Jhun. This is an Indian dog.'

Subedar Himmat Khan picked up the wireless set and spoke to his platoon commander, providing him with a detailed account of the dog's sudden appearance in their position, his equally sudden disappearance the night before and his return that morning. 'What are you talking about?' the platoon commander asked.

Subedar Himmat Khan studied the map again. Then he tore up a packet of cigarettes, cut a small piece from it and gave it to Bashir. 'Now write on it in Gurmukhi, the language of those Sikhs . . .

'What should I write?'

'Well . . .'

Bashir had an inspiration. 'Shun Shun, yes, that's right. We counter Jhun Jhun with Shun Shun.'

'Good,' Subedar Himmat Khan said approvingly. 'And add: This is a Pakistani dog.'

Subedar Himmat Khan personally threaded the piece of paper through the dog's collar and said, 'Now go join your family.'

He gave him something to eat and then said, 'Look here, my friend, no treachery. The punishment for treachery is death.'

The dog kept eating his food and wagging his tail. Then Subedar Himmat Khan turned him round to face the Indian position and said, 'Go and take this message to the enemy, but come back. These are the orders of your commander.'

The dog wagged his tail and moved down the winding hilly track that led into the valley dividing the two hills. Subedar Himmat Khan picked up his rifle and fired in the air.

The Indians were a bit puzzled, as it was somewhat early in the day for that sort of thing. Jamadar Harnam Singh, who in any case was feeling bored, shouted, 'Let's give it to them.'

The two sides exchanged fire for half an hour, which, of course, was a complete waste of time. Finally, Jamadar Harnam Singh ordered that enough was enough. He combed his long hair, looked at himself in the mirror and asked Banta Singh, 'Where has that dog Jhun Jhun gone?'

'Dogs can never digest butter, goes the famous saying,' Banta Singh observed philosophically.

Suddenly, the soldier on lookout duty shouted, 'There he comes.'
‘Who?’ Jamadar Harnam Singh asked.
‘What was his name? Jhun Jhun,’ the soldier answered.
‘What is he doing?’ Harnam Singh asked.
‘Just coming our way,’ the soldier replied, peering through his binoculars.
Subedar Harnam Singh snatched them from him.
‘That’s him all right and there’s something round his neck. But, wait, that’s the Pakistani hill he’s coming from, the motherfucker.’
He picked up his rifle, aimed and fired. The bullet hit some rocks close to where the dog was. He stopped.

Subedar Himmat Khan heard the report and looked through his binoculars. The dog had turned round and was running back. ‘The brave never run away from battle. Go forward and complete your mission,’ he shouted at the dog. To scare him, he fired in his general direction. Harnam Singh fired at the same time. The bullet passed within inches of the dog, who leapt in the air, flapping his ears. Subedar Himmat Khan fired again, hitting some stones.

It soon became a game between the two soldiers, with the dog running round in circles in a state of great terror. Both Himmat Khan and Harnam Singh were laughing boisterously. The dog began to run towards Harnam Singh, who abused him loudly and fired. The bullet caught him in the leg. He yelped, turned around and began to run towards Himmat Khan, only to meet more fire, which was only meant to scare him. ‘Be a brave boy. If you are injured, don’t let that stand between you and your duty. Go, go, go,’ the Pakistani shouted.

The dog turned. One of his legs was now quite useless. He began to drag himself towards Harnam Singh, who picked up his rifle, aimed carefully and shot him dead.

Subedar Himmat Khan sighed, ‘The poor bugger has been martyred.’

Jamadar Himmat Singh ran his hand over the still-hot barrel of his rifle and muttered, ‘He died a dog’s death.’

This Kashmir war was a very odd affair. Subedar Rab Nawaz often felt as if his brain had turned into a rifle with a faulty safety catch.

He had fought with distinction on many major fronts in the Second World War. He was respected by both his seniors and juniors because of his intelligence and valour. He was always given the most difficult and dangerous assignments and he had never failed the trust placed in him.

But he had never been in a war like this one. He had come to it full of enthusiasm and with the itch to fight and liquidate the enemy. However, the first encounter had shown that the men arrayed against them on the other side were mostly old friends and comrades with whom he had fought in the old British Indian army against the Germans and the Italians. The friends of yesterday had been transformed into the enemies of today.

At times, the whole thing felt like a dream to Subedar Rab Nawaz. He could remember the day the Second World War was declared. He had enlisted immediately. They had been given some basic training and then packed off to the front. He had been moved from one theatre of war to another and, one day, the war had ended. Then had come Pakistan and the new war he was now fighting. So much had happened in these last few years at such breakneck
speed. Often it made no sense at all. Those who had planned and executed these great events had perhaps deliberately maintained a dizzying pace so that the participants should get no time to think. How else could one explain one revolution followed by another and then another?

One thing Subedar Rab Nawaz could understand. They were fighting this war to win Kashmir. Why did they want to win Kashmir? Because it was crucial to Pakistan's security and survival. However, sometimes when he sat behind a gun emplacement and caught sight of a familiar face on the other side, for a moment he forgot why they were fighting. He forgot why he was carrying a gun and killing people. At such times, he would remind himself that he was not fighting to win medals or earn a salary, but to secure the survival of his country.

This was his country before the establishment of Pakistan and it was his country now. This was his land. But now he was fighting against men who were his countrymen until only the other day. Men who had grown up in the same village, whose families had been known to his family for generations. These men had now been turned into citizens of a country to which they were complete strangers. They had been told: we are placing a gun in your hands so that you can go and fight for a country which you have yet to know, where you do not even have a roof over your head, where even the air and water are strange to you. Go and fight for it against Pakistan, the land where you were born and grew up.

Rab Nawaz would think of those Muslim soldiers who had moved to Pakistan, leaving their ancestral homes behind, and come to this new country with empty hands. They had been given nothing, except the guns that had been put in their hands. The same guns they had always used, the same make, the same bore, guns to fight their new enemy with.

Before the partition of the country, they used to fight one common enemy who was not really their enemy perhaps but whom they had accepted as their enemy for the sake of employment and rewards and medals. Formerly, all of them were Indian soldiers, but now some were Indian and others were Pakistani soldiers. Rab Nawaz could not unravel this puzzle. And when he thought about Kashmir, he became even more confused. Were the Pakistani soldiers fighting for Kashmir or for the Muslims of Kashmir? If they were being asked to fight in defence of the Muslims of Kashmir, why had they not been asked to fight for the Muslims of the princely states of Junagarh and Hyderabad? And if this was an Islamic war, then why were other Muslim countries of the world not fighting shoulder to shoulder with them?

Rab Nawaz had finally come to the conclusion that such intricate and subtle matters were beyond the comprehension of a simple soldier. A soldier should be thick in the head. Only the thick-headed made good soldiers, but despite this resolution, he couldn't help wondering sometimes about the war he was now in.

The fighting in what was called the Titwal sector was spread across the Kishan Ganga river and along the road which led from Muzaffarabad to Kiran. It was a strange war. Often at night, instead of gunfire, one heard abuse being exchanged in loud voices.

One late evening, while Subedar Rab Nawaz was preparing his platoon for a foray into enemy territory, he heard loud voices from across the hill the enemy was supposed to be on. He could not believe his ears. There was loud laughter followed by abuse. 'Pig's trotters,' he murmured, 'what on earth is going on?'

One of his men returned the abuse in as loud a voice as he could muster, then complained to him, 'Subedar sahib, they are abusing us again, the motherfuckers.'

Rab Nawaz's first instinct was to join the slanging match,
but he thought better of it. The men fell silent also, following his example. However, after a while, the torrent of abuse from the other side became so intolerable that his men lost control and began to match abuse with abuse. He ordered them a couple of times to keep quiet, but did not insist because, frankly, it was difficult for a human being not to react violently.

They couldn’t, of course, see the enemy at night, and hardly did so during the day because of the hilly country which provided perfect cover. All they heard was abuse which echoed across the hills and valleys and then evaporated in the air.

Some of the hills were barren, while others were covered with tall pine trees. It was very difficult terrain. Subedar Rab Nawaz’s platoon was on a bare, treeless hill which provided no cover. His men were itching to go into attack to avenge the abuse which had been hurled at them without respite for several weeks. An attack was planned and executed with success, though they lost two men and suffered four injuries. The enemy lost three and abandoned the position, leaving behind food and provisions.

Subedar Rab Nawaz and his men were sorry they had not been able to capture an enemy soldier. They could then have avenged the abuse face to face. However, they had captured an important and difficult feature. Rab Nawaz relayed the news of the victory to his commander, Major Aslam, and was commended for gallantry.

On top of most of the hills, one found ponds. There was a large one on the hill they had captured. The water was clear and sweet, and although it was cold, they took off their clothes and jumped in. Suddenly, they heard firing. They jumped out of the pond and hit the ground — naked. Subedar Rab Nawaz crawled towards his binoculars, picked them up and surveyed the area carefully. He could see no one. There was more firing. This time he was able to determine its origin. It was coming from a small hill, lying a few hundred feet below their perch. He ordered his men to open up.

The enemy troops did not have very good cover and Rab Nawaz was confident they could not stay there much longer. The moment they decided to move, they would come in direct range of their guns. Sporadic firing kept getting exchanged. Finally, Rab Nawaz ordered that no more ammunition should be wasted. They should just wait for the enemy to break cover. Then he looked at his still naked body and murmured, ‘Pig’s trotters. Man does look silly without clothes.’

For two whole days, this game continued. Occasional fire was exchanged, but the enemy had obviously decided to lie low. Then suddenly the temperature dropped several degrees. To keep his men warm, Subedar Rab Nawaz ordered that the tea-kettle should be kept on the boil all the time. It was like an unending tea party.

On the third day — it was unbearably cold — the soldier on the lookout reported that some movement could be detected around the enemy position. Subedar Rab Nawaz looked through his binoculars. Yes, something was going on. Rab Nawaz raised his rifle and fired. Someone called his name, or so he thought. It echoed through the valley.

‘Pig’s trotters,’ Rab Nawaz shouted, ‘what do you want?’

The distance that separated their two positions was not great, the voice came back, ‘Don’t hurl abuse, brother.’

Rab Nawaz looked at his men. The word brother seemed to hang in the air. He raised his hands to his mouth and shouted, ‘Brother! There are no brothers here, only your mother’s lovers.’

‘Rab Nawaz,’ the voice shouted.

He trembled. The words reverberated around the hills and then faded into the atmosphere.

‘Pig’s trotters,’ he whispered, ‘who was that?’

He knew that the troops in the Titwal sector were mostly from the old 6/9 Jat Regiment, his own regiment. But who
was this joker shouting his name? He had many friends in
the Regiment, and some enemies too. But who was this
man who had called him brother?
Rab Nawaz looked through his binoculars again, but
could see nothing. He shouted, 'Who was that? This is
Rab Nawaz. Rab Nawaz.'
'It is me . . . Ram Singh,' the same voice answered.
Rab Nawaz nearly jumped. 'Ram Singh, oh Ram
Singha, Ram Singha, you pig's trotters.'
'Shut your trap, you potter's ass,' came the reply.
Rab Nawaz looked at his men, who appeared startled at
this strange exchange in the middle of battle. 'He's talking
rot, pig's trotters.' Then he shouted, 'You slaughtered
swine, watch your tongue.'
Ram Singh began to laugh. Rab Nawaz could not
contain himself either. His men watched him in silence.
'Look, my friend, we want to drink tea,' Ram Singh said.
'Go ahead then. Have a good time,' Rab Nawaz replied.
'We can't. The tea things are lying elsewhere.'
'Where's elsewhere?'
'Let me put it this way. If we tried to get them, you could
blow us to bits. We'd have to break cover.'
'So what do you want, pig's trotters?' Rab Nawaz
laughed.
'What do you hold your fire until we get our things.'
'Go ahead,' Rab Nawaz said.
'You will blow us up, you potter's ass,' Ram Singh
shouted.
'Shut your mouth, you crawly Sikh tortoise,' Rab Nawaz
said.
'Take an oath on something that you won't open fire.'
'On what?'
'Anything you like.'
Rab Nawaz laughed, 'You have my word. Now go get
your things.'

Nothing happened for a few minutes. One of the men
was watching the small hill through his binoculars. He
pointed at his gun and asked Rab Nawaz in gestures if he
should open fire. 'No, no, no shooting,' Rab Nawaz said.

Suddenly, a man darted forward, running low towards
some bushes. A few minutes later he ran back, carrying an
armful of things. Then he disappeared. Rab Nawaz picked
up his rifle and fired. 'Thank you,' Ram Singh's voice
came.

'No mention,' Rab Nawaz answered. 'OK, boys, let's give
the buggers one round.'

More by way of entertainment than war, this exchange of
fire continued for some time. Rab Nawaz could see smoke
going up in a thin blue spiral where the enemy was. 'Is your
tea ready, Ram Singha?' he shouted.

'Not yet, you potter's ass.'
Rab Nawaz was a potter by caste and any reference to his
origins always enraged him. Ram Singh was the one person
who could get away with calling him a potter's ass. They
had grown up together in the same village in the Punjab.
They were the same age, had gone to the same primary
school, and their fathers had been childhood friends. They
had joined the army the same day. In the last war, they had
fought together on the same fronts.

'Pig's trotters,' Rab Nawaz said to his men, 'he never
gives up, that one. Shut up, lice-infested donkey Ram
Singha,' he shouted.

He saw a man stand up. Rab Nawaz raised his rifle and
fired in his direction. He heard a scream. He looked
through his binoculars. It was Ram Singh. He was doubled
up, holding his stomach. Then he fell to the ground.

Rab Nawaz shouted, 'Ram Singh' and stood up. There
was rapid gunfire from the other side. One bullet brushed
past his left arm. He fell to the ground. Some enemy
soldiers, taking advantage of this confusion, began to run
across open ground to secure positions. Rab Nawaz
ordered his platoon to attack the hill. Three were killed, but
the others managed to capture the position with Rab Nawaz in the lead.

He found Ram Singh lying on the bare ground. He had been shot in the stomach. His eyes lit up when he saw Rab Nawaz. 'You potter's ass, whatever did you do that for?' he asked.

Rab Nawaz felt as if it was he who had been shot. But he smiled, bent over Ram Singh and began to undo his belt. 'Pig's trotters, who told you to stand up?'

'I was only trying to show myself to you, but you shot me,' Ram Singh said with difficulty. Rab Nawaz unfastened his belt. It was a very bad wound and bleeding profusely.

Rab Nawaz's voice choked, 'I swear upon God, I only fired out of fun. How could I know it was you? You were always an ass, Ram Singh.'

Ram Singh was rapidly losing blood. Rab Nawaz was surprised he was still alive. He did not want to move him. He spoke to his platoon commander Major Aslam on the wireless, requesting urgent medical help.

He was sure it would take a long time to arrive. He had a feeling Ram Singh wouldn't last that long. But he laughed. 'Don't you worry. The doctor is on his way.'

Ram Singh said in a weak voice, 'I am not worried, but tell me, how many of my men did you kill?'

'Just one,' Rab Nawaz said.

'And how many did you lose?'

'Six,' Rab Nawaz lied.

'Six,' Ram Singh said. 'When I fell, they were disheartened, but I told them to fight on, give it everything they'd got. Six, yes.' Then his mind began to wander.

He began to talk of their village, their childhood, stories from school, the 6/9 Jat Regiment, its commanding officers, affairs with strange women in strange cities. He was in excruciating pain, but he carried on. 'Do you remember that madam, you pig?'

'Which one?' Rab Nawaz asked.

'That one in Italy. You remember what we used to call her? Man-eater.'

Rab Nawaz remembered her. 'Yes, yes. She was called Madam Minitafanto or some such thing. And she used to say: no money, no action. But she had a soft spot for you, that daughter of Mussolini.'

Ram Singh laughed loudly, causing blood to gush out of his wound. Rab Nawaz dressed it with a makeshift bandage. 'Now keep quiet,' he admonished him gently.

Ram Singh's body was burning. He did not have the strength to speak, but he was talking nineteen to the dozen. At times, he would stop, as if to see how much petrol was still left in his tank.

After some time, he went into a sort of delirium. Briefly, he would come out of it, only to sink again. During one brief moment of clarity, he said to Rab Nawaz, 'Tell me truthfully, do you people really want Kashmir?'

'Yes, Ram Singha,' Rab Nawaz said passionately.

'I don't believe that. You have been misled,' Ram Singh said.

'No, you have been misled, I swear by the Holy Prophet and his family,' Rab Nawaz said.

'Don't take that oath ... you must be right.' But there was a strange look on his face, as if he didn't really believe Rab Nawaz.

A little before sunset, Major Aslam arrived with some soldiers. There was no doctor. Ram Singh was hovering between consciousness and delirium. He was muttering, but his voice was so weak that it was difficult to follow him.

Major Aslam was an old 6/9 Jat Regiment officer. Ram Singh had served under him for years. He bent over the dying soldier and called his name, 'Ram Singh, Ram Singh.'

Ram Singh opened his eyes and stiffened his body as if he was coming to attention. With one great effort, he raised his arm and saluted. A strange look of incomprehension
Then it came to him in a flash — the dead body of his wife, her stomach ripped open. It was an image that wouldn’t go away.

Sakina’s mother was dead. That much was certain. She had died in front of his eyes. He could hear her voice: ‘Leave me where I am. Take the girl away.’

The two of them had begun to run. Sakina’s dupatta had slipped to the ground and he had stopped to pick it up and she had said: ‘Father, leave it.’

He could feel a bulge in his pocket. It was a length of cloth. Yes, he recognized it. It was Sakina’s dupatta, but where was she?

Other details were missing. Had he brought her as far as the railway station? Had she got into the carriage with him? When the rioters had stopped the train, had they taken her with them?

All questions. There were no answers. He wished he could weep, but tears would not come. He knew then that he needed help.

A few days later, he had a break. There were eight of them, young men armed with guns. They also had a truck. They said they brought back women and children left behind on the other side.

He gave them a description of his daughter. ‘She is fair, very pretty. No, she doesn’t look like me, but her mother. About seventeen. Big eyes, black hair, a mole on the left cheek. Find my daughter. May God bless you.’

The young men had said to Sirajuddin: ‘If your daughter is alive, we will find her.’

And they had tried. At the risk of their lives, they had driven to Amritsar, recovered many women and children and brought them back to the camp, but they had not found Sakina.

On their next trip out, they had found a girl on the roadside. They seemed to have scared her and she had started running. They had stopped the truck, jumped out and run after her. Finally, they had caught up with her in a field. She was very pretty and she had a mole on her left cheek.

One of the men had said to her: ‘Don’t be frightened. Is your name Sakina?’ Her face had gone pale, but when they had told her who they were, she had confessed that she was Sakina, daughter of Sirajuddin.

The young men were very kind to her. They had fed her, given her milk to drink and put her in their truck. One of them had given her his jacket so that she could cover herself. It was obvious that she was ill-at-ease without her dupatta, trying nervously to cover her breasts with her arms.

Many days had gone by and Sirajuddin had still not had any news of his daughter. All his time was spent running from camp to camp, looking for her. At night, he would pray for the success of the young men who were looking for his daughter. Their words would ring in his ears: ‘If your daughter is alive, we will find her.’

Then one day he saw them in the camp. They were about to drive away. ‘Son,’ he shouted after one of them, ‘have you found Sakina, my daughter?’

‘We will, we will,’ they replied all together.

The old man again prayed for them. It made him feel better.

That evening there was sudden activity in the camp. He saw four men carrying the body of a young girl found unconscious near the railway tracks. They were taking her to the camp hospital. He began to follow them.

He stood outside the hospital for some time, then went in. In one of the rooms, he found a stretcher with someone lying on it.

A light was switched on. It was a young woman with a mole on her left cheek. ‘Sakina,’ Sirajuddin screamed.

The doctor, who had switched on the light, stared at Sirajuddin.
suddenly suffused his face. His arm fell limply to his side and he murmured, ‘Ram Singha, you ass, you forgot this was a war, a war …’ He could not complete the sentence. With half-open eyes, he looked at Rab Nawaz, took one last breath and died.

The Return

The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon, arriving at Mughalpura, Lahore, eight hours later. Many had been killed on the way, a lot more injured and countless lost.

It was at 10 o’clock the next morning that Sirajuddin regained consciousness. He was lying on bare ground, surrounded by screaming men, women and children. It did not make sense.

He lay very still, gazing at the dusty sky. He appeared not to notice the confusion or the noise. To a stranger, he might have looked like an old man in deep thought, though this was not the case. He was in shock, suspended, as it were, over a bottomless pit.

Then his eyes moved and, suddenly, caught the sun. The shock brought him back to the world of living men and women. A succession of images raced through his mind. Attack … fire … escape … railway station … night … Sakina. He rose abruptly and began searching through the milling crowd in the refugee camp.

He spent hours looking, all the time shouting his daughter’s name … Sakina, Sakina … but she was nowhere to be found.

Total confusion prevailed, with people looking for lost sons, daughters, mothers, wives. In the end Sirajuddin gave up. He sat down, away from the crowd, and tried to think clearly. Where did he part from Sakina and her mother?
"I am her father," he stammered.

The doctor looked at the prostrate body and felt for the pulse. Then he said to the old man: 'Open the window.'

The young woman on the stretcher moved slightly. Her hands groped for the cord which kept her shalwar tied round her waist. With painful slowness, she unfastened it, pulled the garment down and opened her thighs.

'She is alive. My daughter is alive,' Sirajuddin shouted with joy.

The doctor broke into a cold sweat.

I come from Gujarat Kathiawar in the west of India, and am a bania by caste, trader by tradition. Last year, when the world went topsy-turvy following the Partition of the country, I was temporarily out of work, except for the odd buck I made through my cocaine deals.

Thousands of refugees had begun moving from here to there, or there to here, so one day I also decided to migrate to Pakistan. There would always be something to do, I said to myself. If not in cocaine, then something else. So I set out. It took me some time to get there, but in the end I managed, even making a little cash as I went along.

Since I had moved to Pakistan to start a business, I began to study the situation carefully. The going thing seemed to be allotment of property left behind by the Hindus. Since I have the gift of the gab and can get round people, I was able to make friends easily in the right quarters and soon a house was allotted in my name. I sold it promptly, making a nice packet in the process. This looked promising and I began to move from city to city, getting property allotted and disposing of as soon as I had the documents.

All work takes effort. Nothing in life is easy. Well, I could not hope to be an exception. It was a constant struggle. Sometimes flattery would get the necessary done, other times a bribe or a dinner invitation, even a 'good time' in the evening. What I do know is that I was constantly on my