

Story: “The Dog of Tithwal”
by Saadat Hasan Manto

(Student: Melanie Tanielian)

Melanie uses the modified journal format introduced in Chapter Three to focus on just one major topic from Manto’s story that brings into sharp focus the tragic conflict between the nuclear powers India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir. In spite of its apparently political content, the story’s real theme is about the fate of innocence in a violent world – well-captured by the title that Melanie chose for her essay: “The Innocent Must Suffer.” She has added a section, in which she draws parallels between this story and Deepa Mehta’s film “Earth” to show the plight of Kashmir’s people. This is an interesting and effective way to connect works from different genres that share the same theme. The text of the story is in Chapter Five of the textbook.

DISCUSSION OF THE STORY

The Innocent Must Suffer

by Melanie Tanielian

The beautiful mountainous land between Pakistan and India is the setting of “The Dog of Tithwal” written by Saadat Hasan Manto. His description of nature leads the reader into the peaceful hills of this disputed area of Kashmir. This seemingly peaceful part of the world became the home of two armies. The war, mostly in the form of border skirmishes, has been going on for many years, and the fact that neither army has a clear advantage establishes a daily routine: harmless fighting during the day and bonfires with folk tales at night.

A dog suddenly appears in the Indian camp and is a welcome distraction from their daily rituals. An Indian soldier, Jamadar Harnam Singh, declares that even a dog will have to decide whether he is Indian or Pakistani and baptizes the visitor “Jhun Jhun,” attaching a name tag to his collar saying, “This is an Indian dog.”

The smell of a breakfast prepared in the opposing camp leads Jhun Jhun to trot over to the Pakistani hill where Pakistani soldiers who know him greet him with equal excitement. They immediately see the tag and counter the name “Jhun Jhun,” what they think to be a secret message, with the words: “Shun Shun, this is a Pakistani dog.” Then Subedar Himmat Khan, a Pakistani soldier, sends the dog on its way to deliver their message to the Indian camp. As the opposing soldier sees the dog coming down from the Pakistani hill, he decides to fire on him. Himmat Khan starts firing at the dog too, not wanting the dog to abandon his mission. Both soldiers are shooting at the dog: one

outraged by the treachery and the other forcing the dog to show bravery. The dog dies “a dog’s death” as a “martyr.”

The story of Jhun Jhun is not a humorous story of an indecisive dog but is the story of the Kashmiri people who are suffering under the occupation of two nations. Struck by the absurdity of human greed for conquest and possession, the author wants to convey the irrationality of conflict and violence by displaying the unnecessary suffering of the innocent dog, Jhun Jhun/Shun Shun.

The conflict between the nuclear powers of India and Pakistan has been a concern for the world for over fifty years. Border disputes, especially in the region of Kashmir are ongoing. In the story, the war is depicted as boring and stagnant; the first two paragraphs of the story suggest the interminable of this conflict. War has become so much a part of the environment that separating it from the elements of nature has become almost impossible. The air is described as “quite unmindful of the soldiers hiding behind the rocks and camouflaged by mountain shrubbery. The birds sang as they always had and the flowers were in bloom. Bees buzzed about lazily.” Not only is Manto suggesting that the war has become part of the Kashmir environment, but also that it is not questioned anymore; as we would not question the existence of the mountains and rivers. Saadat Hasan Manto, a native of Kashmir uses the dog, Jhun Jhun as a lighthearted means to describe the role of the Kashmiri people within this tragic conflict. Torn between the two camps and wanting to belong to both, the dog has no voice and becomes the possession of the one that names him, just as the Kashmiris are not asked whether they want to become part of India or Pakistan or become neutral and live in peace.

The Pakistani soldier trusts Jhun Jhun to deliver a message to the opposing camp; however, he does not neglect to threaten the dog to prevent any kind of treachery: “Look here my friend, no treachery. The punishment for treachery is death.” In the story, the dog is more connected to the Pakistanis, having been within their camp a few days more, just as the Kashmiris are more bound to Pakistan, the majority of the population being Muslim. The Pakistani soldier looks at the dog as a useful tool and does not doubt his faithfulness. However, the Indian soldier, however, seeing the dog coming from the opposing camp, immediately labels him a traitor and kills him. The story is critical of both sides. The Indian soldier states that there should be a strict separation between the two sides, and that “even dogs will have to decide if they are Indian or Pakistani.” Moreover, even though the two sides’ intent of firing at the dog is different, the outcome is the same. The Indian soldier shoots to kill Jhun Jhun because the dog has been unfaithful; the Pakistani soldiers shoot at the dog in order to make him go forward to fulfill his mission. Just like the dog, the Kashmiris are caught in a crossfire. The two countries of India and Pakistan are using the innocent, voiceless people of the disputed region as puppets to fight their war. One side is saying that the innocents suffer for the cause, and the other is suggesting that they deserve to die because they are traitors. No matter which side we look at, we are struck with the irrationality of the conflict: The innocent die for a cause that is not theirs, and die because of treachery to a country that is not their own and all along poor Jhun Jhun was just “wagging his tail”.

The most obvious cultural insight we get from Hasan Manto’s story is the deeply rooted conflict between Pakistanis and Indians. The hatred that they feel towards each other, triggered by religious differences, is reflected in the story. The differences and the

similarities between Hindus and Muslims are depicted through two absolutely different motivations with the same outcome: a dead dog. Islam and Hinduism have the same lofty goal of advocating an ethically sound and peaceful life in the quest for unity with a Supreme Being. Their adherents, however, seem to forget this fundamental commonality in large matters, choosing instead to remain entangled in violence over small differences. The story also shows the importance of song and folk tales in both traditions. In both camps, singing is part of the daily routine.

There are connections between this short story and Deepa Mahta's movie *Earth*. Both deal with the irrationality of war and the innocent suffering under the decisions made by their leaders. The slaughter of a trainful of Muslim women and children in *Earth* is hardly anything to compare with the death of a dog, but both works try to depict unreasonable deaths. The dog was a friend to both sides until the day he would get between the lines and become a target, just as the maid Shanta in the movie is everyone's friend until one day she becomes an easy target for revenge. She is wrongly captured to be punished for the heinous crimes of those who slaughtered a trainful of innocent Muslim women and children. Shanta just happens to be of the same religion as the mass murderers, but, in her peace-loving nature, she is totally unlike them. Tragically, she still becomes a target of hate and revenge. Even the narrator of the story, a young Parsi girl, is caught in the crossfire. She becomes a heroine for the Muslims by giving up her Hindu maid, but the Hindus see her as treacherous. She is innocent just like Jhun Jhun because she has no concept of the consequences of her being friends with both sides of the war camp. Her mother said that Parsis are like sugar in water; invisible, but sweet to the taste. Here the sugar has turned into a bitter essence, and the Parsis' dilemma is to decide

which side to serve in order to be saved, not unlike the Kashmiri people trapped between India and Pakistan. The Kashmiris have no voice and no means to prevent themselves from falling into the stream “zigzagging furiously on its stony bed like a snake” between the two sides.