

Subject	English
Course/ Paper Code & Title	ENGH-H-DSE-T-5/ Partition Literature (6 <sup>th</sup> Semester)
Title of the Module	'Toba Tek Singh' by Sadat Hasan Manto
Module Id	
Objective(s)	To introduce a literary analysis of the short story "Toba Tek Singh" written by Sadat Hasan Manto
Key Words	Partition, madness, displacement, identity, trauma
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"Toba Tek Singh" written by Sadat Hasan Manto in 1954, is considered one of the most powerful partition short stories in South Asian literature. It is a poignant portrayal of the tragic events that took place during the partition of India in 1947, which led to the displacement and violence against millions of people.

The story focuses on the experiences of the mental asylum inmates, who are representatives of the ordinary people caught up in the violence and chaos of partition. As the story progresses, the reader comes to realise that the asylum inmates are in fact much more sane than the politicians controlling their destiny. This story illustrates the human cost of the partition, as well as the traumatic experiences of those who were directly affected by it.

The main character, Bishan Singh, is a Sikh inmate who becomes confused and disoriented by the news that his hometown, Toba Tek Singh, will be divided by the border between India and Pakistan. He refuses to be transferred to either side, instead choosing to remain in no-man's land between the two countries. Through the character of Bishan Singh, Manto highlights the complexities of identity and belongingness that are disrupted by the partition. Bishan Singh's refusal to choose between India and Pakistan, and his decision to stay in no-man's land, represents the confusion and despair that large section of people felt during that time.

Mental illness is an important and enduring, perhaps even defining, theme in "Toba Tek Singh." Indeed the choice to write about partition through the lens of a mental asylum is itself highly significant. Manto's use of the patients to reflect the "madness" of what was

happening outside was poignant. The asylum in a sense represents the whole subcontinent, the madness of its inhabitants symbolising the madness of the partition violence. Bishan Singh's nonsense phrases, as Tarun K. Saint has explained, reflect the arbitrariness and opacity of the governmental machinery. Increasingly, it becomes clear that the "lunatics" in the asylum are more sane than the government figures making decisions about their exchange. The constant questioning and demands to know about his homeland are evocative of fractured identities and loss of sense of belonging. Perhaps his character is also a reflection of Manto's own suffering and confusion about identity in the wake of his move to Lahore. Manto wrote: 'I found my thoughts scattered. Though I tried hard, I could not separate India from Pakistan and Pakistan from India'. Elsewhere he added: 'I found it impossible to decide which of the two countries was now my homeland'. In this way, Bishan Singh's character can be read both as a mirror to the general displacement suffered by so many as well as a more specific portrayal of Manto's own personal experience. From both perspectives, the pain and emotional trauma of displacement is significant, often contributing to psychopathology whether implicitly or explicitly.

The story also portrays the sheer absurdity of partition, as people were forced to leave behind their homes, their families, and their way of life in the name of political and religious divisions. The madness and chaos of partition are reflected in the madness of the asylum inmates, who are ultimately the innocent victims of the larger political and social forces at play. Thus the mental asylum becomes a microcosm of the larger social and political upheaval taking place outside its walls.

Manto uses different literary devices and techniques to convey these themes and to create this poignant and unforgettable story. One of the key literary devices used by Manto is symbolism. The character of Bishan Singh, a Sikh inmate of the mental asylum, represents the confusion and disorientation felt by many people during the partition. Bishan Singh's refusal to choose between India and Pakistan, and his decision to stay in no-man's land, symbolizes the larger political and social divisions that tore apart communities and families during the partition. The fact that he dies in no-man's land reinforces the tragedy and absurdity of the partition, as well as the human cost of such divisions.

The author uses various events to describe the mental chaos caused by the pain of losing the identity. The intensity of desire of "being known" and "individuality" is portrayed by

different weird and unconscious happenings. For instance, one lunatic climbed the tree and installed himself on the branch, and spoke for two hours continuously on the topic of India and Pakistan. When asked by the guards to get down he went a branch higher and declared, 'I wish to live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live in this tree.' It is not a fit of mental imbalance neither his attitude is ignorant, but an unconscious effort to protect his identity. It is not merely the words uttered by a lunatic but his conscious effort to tell about his wish to live in the place which is known to him and where he is well known. India is as alien for him as is Pakistan or any other foreign land. The asylum is his home and he is well known to the inmates, he has an identity there, he can see his self-image through his fellow mates and his individuality is not hampered with the presence of other inmates. However, the day he will be transferred, he will lose everything. It will be in a new place and between new people, lunatic or not, but he will not have any identity among them.

In another incident, a Muslim lunatic who was a radio engineer and was so affected by the debate that he took off all his clothes, and ran into the garden stark naked. This is another unconscious effort to save his identity. He was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim when born, thus not liable for any transfer. Therefore, he ran stark naked, declaring in his way, that he belong to no country, that he is just a child who has not been clothed yet. Hence, he is eligible to be exempted from the transfer. He never had any identity when he was born hence no fear of losing it. He wish to hold on his identity by reversing the age and the best he could do was to remove all his clothes as a declaration that he do not belong to the world of adults which is prone to such conflicts and partitions.

In yet another incident there is a Hindu- Muslim fight and hatred at the time of Partition. A Muslim lunatic from Chaniot announces himself as Quaid-e- Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. As a reaction to this a Sikh lunatic has declared himself as Master Tara Singh. Apprehending serious communal trouble, the authorities declared them 'dangerous' and they were shut in separate cells. Manto, with his well crafty pen, satirize the political situation and political leaders. The harmless lunatics confined in the walls of the asylum were considered dangerous whereas the actual culprits of the partition were worshipped in their respective nations. The lunatics were just imitating their respective leaders, yet they were dangerous and were cautiously shifted to different cells. This would have been done actually to avoid serious and real communal violence. It is in this unique way that Manto gives his idea of solution to the problem of partition.

Manto through this unique portrayal of confusion and chaos of Partition highlights another common story of failure of love at the hands of hatred. He employs a character who is another lunatic, a young Hindu lawyer and a lover too. He keeps on abusing both the governments and leaders who cut India into two, turning his beloved into an Indian and him into a Pakistani. Later when this news of transfer reach Lahore asylum, he is congratulated by his fellow mates that now he will be transferred to the country of his beloved but he declares that he has no intention of leaving Lahore, as his practice would not flourish in Amritsar. This is again a psychological identity which makes him declare this and for safe guarding his individuality he is ready to sacrifice his love, for which he has lost his mental balance. The issue which was the matter of concern for him is immediately dwarfed and he starts looking at his identity as the matter of urgency. He is not willing to shift to the place of his beloved but want to be a part of the place where he is known already. Not only Indian inmates are shocked and horrified, similar feelings are also shared by two Anglo-Indians who are also equally affected by the decision but in quiet a different manner. They are more concerned about their breakfast which is of course different from Indian chapattis served to other inmates and about the existence of European Ward which now seems to be under question. The changed government and a fear of abolition of European ward are there in them because both mark their presence and give a separate identity to them. If abolished, then their separate status will be abolished too, hence snatching away their identity from them.

Manto also uses irony to highlight the irrationality and madness of the partition. The inmates of the mental asylum, who are already considered to be "mad," are used to represent the madness and chaos of the partition. The character of Toba Tek Singh, who is from the town of the same name that is divided by the border, is the epitome of this irony. He is unable to understand the political and religious divisions that have forced him to leave his home and his way of life, and his confusion is compounded by the fact that he is already considered "mad" by society.

The usage of language is also a key aspect of Manto's storytelling. He employs a stark and direct writing style that reflects the harsh realities of the partition. The language is often raw and unadorned, but it is also poetic and poignant in its simplicity. For example, the description of Bishan Singh's death is both heart-breaking and beautiful: "He fell to the ground and lay there as if he had merged into the earth, his limbs outstretched, his eyes fixed on the stars above."

Manto's writing style is known for its stark realism and frank portrayal of social issues. "Toba Tek Singh" is considered one of his most powerful works and has been adapted into films, plays, and other forms of art. Overall, it is a powerful and moving story that speaks to the trauma and tragedy of partition, as well as the enduring human spirit that perseveres even in the face of such adversity. Manto's frank and honest portrayal of the impact of partition on ordinary people makes this story an important contribution to South Asian literature and a powerful reminder of the human cost of such political and social upheaval.

Probable questions:

1. Discuss the question of Identity expressed in Toba Tek Singh.
2. Explain how the story 'Toba Tek Singh' is used as a metaphor for sanity.
3. Why does the author choose an asylum as the locus for the story?
4. What do we learn about Partition from this narrative?
5. Discuss some of the underlying aspects of the story.
6. Discuss the significance of the title of the story.

Suggested Readings

1. "Narrating Partition" by Sukrita P. Kumar. Delhi: Indialog, 2004.
2. *Partition: The Long Shadow* by Urvashi Butalia
3. *Translation & Marginalised Writer* by R. Ghosh. New Delhi: Akash Publications