

**Twentieth-Century Fiction**  
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**Lecture – 53**  
**Toba Tek Singh – Part 5**

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10/22/2019 Toba Tek Singh by Sadat Hasan Manto

said, "It's neither in India nor in Pakistan. In fact, it is nowhere because till now I have not taken any decision about its location."

Bishan begged the man who called himself God to pass the necessary orders and solve the problem. But 'God' seemed to be very busy with other matters. At last Bishan Singh's patience ran out and he cried out: "*Uper the gur gur the annexe the mung the dal of Gurji da Khalsa and Gurji ki fateh Ojo boley so nihal sat sri akal.*"

What he wanted to say was: "You don't answer my prayers because you a Muslim God. Had you been a Sikh God, you would have surely helped me out."

A few days before the exchange was due to take place, a Muslim from Toba Tek Singh who happened to be a friend of Bishan Singh came to meet him. He had never visited him before. On seeing him, Bishan Singh tried to slink away, but the warder barred his way. "Don't you recognize your friend Fazal Din?" he said. "He has come to meet you." Bishan Singh looked furtively at Fazal Din, then started to mumble something. Fazal Din placed his hand on Bishan Singh's shoulder. "I have been thinking of visiting you for a long time," he said. "But I couldn't get the time. Your family is well and has gone to India safely. I did what I could to help. As for 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'll be moving to India. Please give my salaam to bhai Balbir Singh and bhai Ragbir Singh and bhai Amrit Kaur. Tell Balbir that Fazal Din is well. The two brown buffaloes he left behind are well too. Both of them gave birth to calves, but, unfortunately, one of them died. Say I think of them often and to write to me if there is anything I can do."

Then he added "Here, I've brought some plums for you."

Bishan Singh took the gift from Fazal Din and handed it to the guard. "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" he asked.

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



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at Sadat Hasan Manto's short story Toba Tek Singh, which I am hoping to conclude in this lecture today.

So, we have seen how this short story covers many aspects, the chief among which is a trauma and the entire the disturbance and unsettling of partition which takes away all human agency and how we have seen the madhouse in Lahore which is the setting in a story – how that becomes paradoxically the only possible site of agency, the only possible site of resistance which is obviously, you know inverting the entire rational mad you know binary. So, we find that a madman over here they end up acting more rational, they end up acting asking more rational questions compared to the bigger spectacle of madness which is partition in the first place.

So, the point at which we stopped in the last lecture is a point where someone called Fazal Din who is a Muslim who comes from Toba Tek Singh and he comes to visit you know Bishan Singh who is a protagonist in the story. And, we find that how that little

episode, little conversation, little exchanged they have Fazal Din and Bishan Singh. It is full of human empathy, it is full of very intimate conversations about little things like a buffalo giving birth to two calves, one of which has died etcetera.

So, very local, very intimate knowledge which is sort of delivered to Bishan Singh and, we find that how this intimacy of knowledge is completely consumed completely obliterated and completely taken over by the bigger knowledge narratives in the moment which is about India and Pakistan, which is about the formation of states of India and Pakistan.

So, among other things as I mentioned in my last lecture, I may have mentioned that what partition did was it brought about an entire violence, an entire idea of violence, an order of violence at a level of the epistemic knowledge, epistemic narratives. So, your awareness of reality, your knowledge of reality, your navigation of reality that gets truncated that gets interrupted that gets you know terribly unsettled by the violence of partition.

So, your knowledge of your of your address of your birth place of your location of your experience around you, all that gets you know very unsettled with the partition coming in. So, the partition was obviously, a massive spectacle of physical violence, but also and equally it was a big violence on the mental health of people on you know it brought out trauma obviously, the trauma lingered on for generations and that is something which Toba Tek Singh also points at.

Now, we find that despite the intimacy in the in the conversation of Fazal Din has with Bishan Singh, there is one little episode in that conversation where things get a bit cryptic and there is a sinister quality about that little bit as well. When he is reporting to Bishan Singh that all your family members are fine you know your brother is fine, your wife is fine and when he comes to his daughter he says well she too and there is a moment of hesitation and she says she too is safe in India.

And, you know the hesitation obviously, holds the key to the ambivalence over here, it could mean many things. It could mean that she may have been murdered or you know taken away or you know something terrible happened to him happened to her sexually, maybe she became a victim of abuse we do not quite know, but the hesitation is a pointer to all kinds of possibilities which are never spelt out in this short story.

So, again this is a very classical trope of all great short stories, the things are never really spelled out things are suggested, hinted, insinuated. And, we as readers need to unpack the insinuations, we as readers need to unpack the hints and suggestions the entire economy of suggestions which are there in the short story. And, then of course, this little episode about the brown buffalos giving birth to calves one of them dying etcetera.

And, you know just come back to this point and this should be on your screen where he is telling Bishan Singh – Say I think of them often. So, when you meet your family you should convey my best wishes to them – Say I think of them often and to write to me if there is anything I can do. So, again we can see how these human beings are separated by this completely brainless or mindless activity of partition. They suddenly just decided to demarcate people on the basis of religion and as a result of which people who have been neighbours, for years, for generations they suddenly find themselves across you know each other in two different parts of the world, two different nations.

There is suddenly a border has been created between the houses suddenly you know, a boundary has been created between the houses and obviously, these borders and boundaries are not just physical sites they also become mental you know situations where there is always this border you have to cross to talk to someone to trust someone. So, among other things what partition did historically was it was the violence not just on human body not just on the corporeal human self, but also the mental human self. It was a violence on trust; it was a violence on you know relationships. So, so everything became you know suspicious after the partition, people started mistrusting the neighbors, etcetera.

So, again the question of trust becomes very important, the question of empathy becomes very important here. So, you know and this conversation continues and I come back and this should be on your screen – Then he added, Here, I've brought some plums for you. So, he is bringing some fruits again as a token of intimacy, a token of human kindness and care and concern that he has sort of come all the way to meet Bishan Singh from Toba Tek Singh and he is delivering him the news about his family, he is delivering him local news about buffalos giving birth to calves and then of course, at the end he gives him to very simple, but very humanely loaded and rich gifts.

Bishan Singh took the gift from Fazal Din and handed it on the guard handed it to the guard. Where is Toba Tek Singh? He asked. That is the key questions. So, again look at the way in which the intimate narratives about buffalos, about family members all these little things in the villages those get subsumed completely under this big grand question, the meta question where is Toba Tek Singh? Is Toba is Toba Tek Singh in India or in Pakistan, that is the big thing that is the big question, that is the big narrative of knowledge that everyone's wanting to know where is my location, now where is my address and which country does it belong to.

So, again coming back to the point I have already spoken about, is that how intimacy goes away, how trust goes away, how little narratives local narratives go away completely we have instead is a big grand narrative about the nation formation that becomes the whole narrative that becomes the only narrative that people are interested in.

So, where is Toba Tek Singh? Where? Why it is where it has always been. So, again look at the dramatic irony of it - they do not seem to understand each other you know immediately because when Fazal Din is asked where is Toba Tek Singh he thinks of it as a physical location he say well, it is not changed. It is where it is always been, it is the same place.

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Then he added "Here, I've brought some plums for you."

Bishan Singh took the gift from Fazal Din and handed it to the guard. "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" he asked.

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

"In India or Pakistan?"

"In India? No, in Pakistan."

Without saying another word, Bishan Singh walked away, muttering "*Upur the gur gur the annex the boy diyana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and India dur fitey moon.*"

At long last the arrangements for the exchange were complete. The lists of lunatics who were to be sent over from either side were exchanged and the date fixed.

On a cold winter evening truckloads of Hindu and Sikh lunatics from the Lahore asylum were moved out to the Indian border under police escort. Senior officials went with them to ensure a smooth exchange. The two sides met at the Wagah border check-post, signed documents and the transfer got underway.

Getting the lunatics out of the trucks and handing them over to the opposite side proved to be a tough job. Some refused to get down from the trucks. Those who could be persuaded to do so began to run in all directions. Some were stark naked. As soon as they were dressed they tore off their clothes again. They swore, they sang, they fought with each other. Others wept. Female lunatics, who were also being exchanged, were even noisier. It was pure bedlam. Their teeth chattered in the bitter 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 to a strange place. Slogans of "*Pakistan Zindabad*" and "*Pakistan Murdabad*" were raised, and only timely intervention prevented serious

[www.sacred.net/partition/tobateksingh.html](http://www.sacred.net/partition/tobateksingh.html)



In India or in Pakistan? In India o no, in Pakistan. So, again the ambivalence here is interesting, the confusion over here is interesting. He first says in India and then he said it is Pakistan. So, the confusion in the response, the confused response over here holds the key to the existential dilemma in this people's mind. So, they do not quite know where the place of birth is, it is just some random decision taken for them and some random ritual with which the whole mapping has happened.

So, he first says India and then he says Pakistan seemingly unsure. So, again he is trying to probably he is trying to comfort Bishan Singh to sudden exchanges like he had tried to comfort him with the news of his daughter. He did not want to tell him perhaps the gruesome bad thing which has probably happened to her we do not quite know, but he had hesitated for a moment before telling him that you know she too is safe in India. Likewise, when he is asked you know question about Toba Tek Singh o, yes in Indian then he says o, maybe it is in Pakistan.

So, again the confusion over here is cognitive, it's political, it's existential, it's emotional and all that comes together all that coalesces together into form this big massive confusion about your identity, about your location, about your existential situation as a human subject. Without saying another word, Bishan Singh walked away murmuring. Again, the seemingly nonsensical thing that he says uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and India dur fittey moun.

So, again the crux of this nonsense lyric is well we do not quite know what is in India what is in Pakistan and the gods up above do not care just like they never cared about the quality of dal deteriorating. So, again the deteriorating dal becomes a very symbolic thing, a very symbolic object over here because that is the reflective of the greater deterioration and greater rot that is happening all around. Rot at the level of human knowledge; rot at the level of political knowledge, rot at the level of human location, about human conditions etcetera.

So, the mung ki dal which is deteriorating in Toba Tek Singh is again it is a bit like you know if you read Eugène Ionesco's play Rhinoceros or you know any of the plays by Ionesco, there is always a deteriorating, a rotting thing. It is a dead body which is rotting and growing nails with this rhinoceros which are bellowing away and in very rotten

metropolis. So, there is a similar absurd quality, I mean Ionesco obviously, belongs to the school of absurd theatre.

There is a similar absurd quality about Toba Tek Singh, but like Ionesco's play. The absurdity of this particular story is what makes it so profoundly political in quality. So, the absurdity is not an irrational absurdity, it is not an escape from rationality rather it is a reflection of rationality, rather it is a reflection of the rot of rationality that what we consider and consume to be rational is actually becomes rotten to the core that you know the consumption of rationality itself has become pathological in quality.

So, rationality is rotting away and so absurdity since it is the only way in which we can engage with rational questions because rationality the way it is operative now is a rotting mechanism is at its core are very rotting structure. So, absurdity over here becomes not an escape from rationality, but a deeper engagement with rationality and that is the ironical message in Toba Tek Singh there and when you have a moment like partition when you have a traumatic moment, a traumatic experience and event like partition, then absurdity paradoxically becomes the only possible engagement with rationality because rationality itself becomes so rotten to the core.

So, and then we come we cut back into the present time where you know the big day of exchange has been decided, has been settled and the you know lunatics have been transported to the bazaar, to the to the border in a van you know and again there is something very absurd about the whole setting. All lunatics are dressed up in uniforms presumably and two vans are going to come from across India and Pakistan and they are going to meet across the border and they will release the lunatics you know chain presumably.

So, it is quite spectacular and there is also a darkly comic quality about it which is also making it very political in quality because what has been done over here essentially is that two sets of madmen, quote unquote madmen across the borders would be swapped across each other because that seems to be the politically correct thing to do right under the given circumstances where partition has wrought the you know such destruction in so many people's lives. In order to make it mathematically complete, in order to give a closure to this whole politics of division even the madmen will be swapped across the borders just like the lunatics had been, we are told at the beginning of the story.

So, we now know that this is again part of the text which should be on your screen – At long last the arrangements with exchange were complete. The lists of lunatics who were to be sent over from either side were exchanged and the date fixed. So, each party, each country sent a list of lunatics to the other country and they would just tally and match the lists in terms of getting the lunatics from the other side. Again, there is something very bizarrely bureaucratic about the whole movement which makes it very absurd. So, again this came back to the same thing - absurdity becomes a deeper engagement with rationality whereas, rational bureaucracy becomes a true absurdity in this situation.

So, on a cold winter evening truck loads of Hindu and Sikh lunatics from the Lahore asylum were moved out to the Indian border under police escort. So, again there is a you know it is very cinematic everything about it. A truck loads of excuse me, Hindu and Sikh lunatics were being transported from the asylum excuse me, from the Lahore asylum and they are taken towards the border the Wagah border presumably where you know India and Pakistan states would exchange their mad men.

Senior officials went with them to ensure a smooth exchange. So, again the bureaucrats are going to ensure there is there is a smooth exchange that all the boxes are ticked, the tally is kept you know the names of madmen are matched against each other, there is a list etcetera. The two sides met at the Wagah border check-post, signed documents and the transfer got underway.

Now, if we take a look at this sentence over here the two sides met, signed documents and the transfer got underway. There is something automatic, something perversely automatic and perversely non-human about this movement over here. So, it is almost as if two switches are switched on and the swapping mechanism begins to happen like a vending machine; you press a switch the function happens. So, trucks are gone, trucks go to the border you know, documents are signed and the prisoners are released and they began swapping each other.

So, you find that this that the stillness, the clinical quality about this whole exchange is what makes it so perverse in quality. Now, against this perverse stillness, against this perverse automatic quality of exchange what we have is an act of resistance by madmen. So, the lunatic movements, lunatic limb movements, motor movements, emotional swings, the mood swings of the madmen they become the only available human

resistance against its clinical bureaucratic exchange. So, we find in this description given right away where the madmen's you know movements of resistance that are described to us.

And, obviously, it is very tragic, very sad and also it seems funny and very superfluous kind of a way. They began to run away, they began to remonstrate, they began to protest, they do not want to go across the borders because you know no one obviously had consulted them, no one obviously had taken their consent in terms of agreeing to transfer them. But, then they carry on and they are forced to do it. It is a spectacle of coercion in that sense. So, all these madmen are coerced into crossing the borders according to their names and religious affiliations. So, the Hindus will come to India, the Muslims will go to Pakistan.

So, again it is very mathematical perversely rational kind of a swapping and that again obviously corroborates the point. The rationality becomes diseased over here, rationality becomes a true absurd phenomenon over here. We are told that the resistance of the madmen becomes quite palpable and quite spectacular in quality.

Getting the lunatics out of the trucks and handing them over to the opposite side proved to be a tough job. Some refused to get down from the trucks. Those who could be persuaded to do so began to run in all directions. So, again the running over here in different directions becomes the complete contrast of the linear sequential and automatic quality of the transfer movements that were done by the bureaucrats.

So, again the disarray of the madmen becomes in a way an act of resistance against this perverse sense of order, a perverse imposition of order that has been done or been executed with a neat exchange according to religious affiliations right. So, the madmen running away, the madmen becoming hysterical quote unquote, the all these become almost political in quality in the form of resistance given against this grand narrative of exchange.

So, some refused to get down from the trucks those who could be persuaded to do so began to run in all directions. Some were stark naked. So, again the nakedness becomes an act of subversion. You are taking off the clothes, you are running in all directions and that is obviously, undercutting and the very clean clinical manoeuvre which has been done with the bureaucrats over here – dress them out in a particular way, chain them up



in a particular way and then swap them across the borders and tick the boxes, tally the names against the people coming in very bureaucratic, very cool, very clinical, very automatic in quality. So, the heartlessness of it is something which is very palpable, the human, the nonhuman, inhuman quality of the whole thing becomes very palpable over here.

So, some were stark naked. As soon as they were dressed they tore-off their clothes again. So, again the tearing of the clothes becomes in a way an act of subversion, an act of rebellion. They swore, they sang, they fought with each other. So, again, we find this is completely undercutting or attempting to undercut the neat, clinical, closure that the two governments wanted to have now.

And, the fact that the madmen are swearing, running against each other, they are singing together, they are exhibiting all kinds of quote unquote hysterical reactions. And, the hysteria over here paradoxically becomes the only available agency that they can exact they can enact under the circumstances.

Others wept. Female lunatics, who were also being exchanged, were even noisier. It was pure bedlam. Their teeth chattering in the bitter cold. So, bedlam obviously, becomes you know it is nice it is an archetype, it is the original madhouse and it goes back to classical times; bedlam is medieval, is classical. So, you know this Lahore asylum madhouse is connected to an archetype of madness which is bedlam which has become synonymous to confusion, synonymous to turmoil, a complete topsy-turvy etcetera. But, originally it was on it was a big madhouse in classical times and also in medieval times bedlam. So, you know it was pure bedlam. So, this word becomes interesting in terms of its dialogue with a local and the mythical.

So, most of the inmates appeared to be dead set against the entire operation. So, this is where the agency-less-ness of the madmen comes into play. They do not want to be moved, they do not want to be swapped, they are absolutely against it. They are dead set against the entire operation. The word operation obviously, gives it a clinical, cold, detached, bureaucratic quality which is non-human.

So, the human consent is not taken. The human will is against this operation, but this operation has to be executed because that is what the governments have decided very Kafkaesque centres have decided this exchange. So, the human beings have to abide or

conform to it, otherwise there would be dissidence and obviously, madmen would be dealt with differently.

They simply could not understand why they were being forcibly removed to a strange place. So, the strangeness becomes important and obviously, strangeness over here bear some resemblance to the Freudian understanding of the uncanny right uncanny being strange, uncanny also being unhomely outside the home. So, they were actually been made to leave their home in some sense. So, Lahore being the home, their asylum was the home for a longest time. So, they were now asked to leave the home and to enter the uncanny.

So, India to these people despite their Hindu affiliation, despite the Sikh affiliation, India is a strange country. India in the sense that has been newly formed the state of, the new state of India is a strange country to them and they do not want to go there because they were born in Lahore. They were born in different parts of what is Pakistan and they want to be there because that is where they grew up and that is where that is the identity they have, the spatial extension of their identity.

Now, that spatial extension is being amputated over here and or terminated and now they are being sort of pushed into a different kind of spatial identity which is imposed upon them without their consent whatsoever. So, we are told that they simply could not understand – it is cognitive confusion to them as well why is this happening, where are we going, what are the political implications of these movements. So, these are questions to which no one can give any answer to them. So, they are completely confused, cognitively confused, politically confused etcetera.

They simply could not understand why they were being forcibly removed to a strange place. Slogans of Pakistan Zindabad and Pakistan Murdabad were raised. So, again long live Pakistan and death to Pakistan both were raised together, almost simultaneously by different people, and only timely intervention prevented serious clashes right.

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clashes.

When Bishan Singh's turn came to give his personal details to be recorded in the register, he asked the official "Where's Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?"

The officer laughed loudly, "In Pakistan, of course."

Hearing that Bishan Singh turned and ran back to join his companions. The Pakistani guards caught hold of him and tried to push him across the line to India. Bishan Singh wouldn't move. "This is Toba Tek Singh," he announced. *"Uper the gur gur the amere the be dyhana ming the dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan."*

It was explained to him over and over again that Toba Tek Singh was in India, or very soon would be, but all this persuasion had no effect.

They even tried to drag him to the other side, but it was no use. There he stood on his swollen legs as if no power on earth could dislodge him. Soon, since he was a harmless old man, the officials left him alone for the time being and proceeded with the rest of the exchange.

Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh let out a horrible scream. As everybody rushed towards him, the man who had stood erect on his legs for fifteen years, now pitched face-forward on to the ground. On one side, behind barbed wire, stood together the lunatics of India and on the other side, behind more barbed wire, stood the lunatics of Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.

[Partition of 1947 - India - Pakistan: Some scattered resources](#)



So, intervention by the police, intervention by the military, by the observing officials that that was the only way that any clashes could be stopped otherwise people were just coming to blows almost regularly. And, also this whole idea of Pakistan Zindabad, Pakistan Murdabad – long live Pakistan, death to Pakistan they all have been clamored almost together and that obviously, goes to show that you know that all these affiliations is very random in quality. So, what is to one person a death wish can also be, a life wish to this to some other person, the same event the same space can have a life wish and a death wish by two different people depending on which perspective you are choosing to take.

When Bishan Singh's turn came to give his personal details to be recorded in the register, he asked the official Where is Toba Tek Singh? In India or in Pakistan? So, again the only detail which matters to him, and this is the complete discrepancy in details because of the officials the more interesting detail is whether he is Hindu or Sikh or Muslim, a country which that in the movement will be done the movement will be determined depending on his religious affiliation. But, to him the only question is where is Toba Tek Singh. So, he does not really care about the Sikh affiliation over here, does not really care about this you know anti-Muslim affiliation over here. All he wants to know all he needs to know at this point is where is Toba Tek Singh in India or in Pakistan.

The officer laughed loudly. In Pakistan, of course. So, this was meant to be a joke perhaps in Pakistan of course, but what that does to Bishan Singh is that it gives an impression that he is being made to forced to leave and leave Pakistan and go to a strange country which is India right. So, he is concerned about Toba Tek Singh, the village from which he is from and does not really matter to him whether it is in India or Pakistan he just needs to know where it is. Now, someone you know half jokingly tells him that it is in Pakistan which gives an impression that he is about to be sent off from his own land and obviously, that is a very dramatic moment for him, that is a moment of epiphany for him that you know I am about to lose my home I am about to lose my place of birth.

Hearing that Bishan Singh turned and ran back to join his companions. So, he just refused to go because he was told he is in Pakistan and he realized he is about to leave Pakistan in a sense he is about to leave his home so he will never go back to his home that is what is you know playing in his mind. So, he runs back he turns back and ran back to his companions. The Pakistani guards caught him hold of him and tried to push him across the line of line to India. Bishan Singh wouldn't move. This is Toba Tek Singh, he announced. Uper the gur gur the annexe the be dhayana the mung the dal Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.

So again, the nonsense lyric about, the nonsense line about the quality of dal deteriorating and how Pakistan and Toba Tek Singh are the same thing, that has been uttered by him right. And, obviously, he refused to go because he is told that this is in Pakistan and you know this is being, this being Pakistan he realizes why would he go to India if going to India means losing Toba Tek Singh. So, again look at the way in which the spatial identity has prerogative in his mind over his religious identity. He could not really care so much about his religious identity, but what he does care about is his spatial identity, how the space becomes an extension of the self and that extension quality is important for us to understand ok.

It was it was explained to him over and over again that Toba Tek Singh was in India or very soon would be, but all this persuasion had no effect. So, again people are trying to just get rid of them. So, they are telling him that Toba Tek Singh is in India; if it is not in India now, it will be India in some point of time, but that had no effect.

Now, the point here is to understand that what are the two spatial parameters at play over here. So, to Bishan Singh the only spatial parameter which is meaningful is Toba Tek Singh, to this officials the two other grand meaningful parameters are India or Pakistan. So, Toba Tek Singh would be completely insignificant in their radar, in their cognitive radar. It does not really matter, it does not really feature in their cognitive radar at all. What does feature the only thing that features is whether this person is Hindu in which case he will go to India or if he is Muslim he will go to Pakistan.

So, two spaces that with matter only are India and Pakistan and it is almost like an emptying out of a space. Toba Tek Singh has been disappeared, has been made to disappear has been made to vanish from the face of India or Pakistan. So, you know now they are trying to persuade him into telling him that it is actually in India you are going in right direction and if it is not in India, it will be in India at some point of time. So, the obvious thing happening over is they are trying to cajole him into just going over to India, after which their job will be finished, their duty will be finished.

So, again look at the way in which a human being is mapped purely on the basis of his religious affiliation. It has got absolutely nothing to do with the spatial affiliation, it has got nothing to do with his cultural affiliation, but he just happens to be a Hindu or a Sikh. So, he has to go to India even if he wants it or does not want to, it has got no effect whatsoever, all this persuasion had no effect.

They even tried to drag him on the other side to the other side, but he it was no use. So, again they are trying to control him corporeally, they are trying to coerce him corporeally, they are trying to drag him his body down to the other side, but that too is useless. Why? There he stood on his swollen legs as if no power on earth could dislodge him. So, again the swollen legs become important that is almost is a close up to the swollen legs.

We are told that he had not slept or sat down no one has ever seen him non-standing for 15 years as a result of which his feet has swollen his feet have swollen. It is almost like as I mentioned an accumulation of time which is gone into his body. So, it is almost like a corporealization of time or a temporalization of body whichever way you want to look at it. So, all the time has got into his body and it sort of gives him some kind of a density which is producing stillness, which is producing immobility and he is just transfixed

there, he does not move at all. So, every effort to move him it does not work because he just stands there like Atlas, the statue because his feet have swollen over the years.

No power of earth could dislodge him. Soon, since he was a harmless old man, the officials left him alone for the time being and proceeded with the rest of the exchange. So, because he was a harmless old man, the officials left him alone and he just stood there forever while the rest of the exchange took place. Again, exchange over here being a very you know bureaucratic manoeuvre, a mindless manoeuvre where these boxes are ticked, the people are sent and pushed across the borders as per decisions taken by two big centers ok.

So, the proceeding goes on, the swapping goes on forever. Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh let out a horrible scream. As everybody rushed towards him, the man who had stood erect on his legs for fifteen years, now pitched face-forward on the ground. On the one side, behind barbed wire, stood together the lunatics of India and on the other side, behind more barbed wire, stood the lunatics of Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.

So, obviously, it is a very compelling conclusion it is very moving emotionally as well as politically we find that the barbed wires become important because the barbed wires here become the borders, the borders that force you from moving towards where you wanted to be. The barbed wires here become the symbol of human agency-less-ness of human imprisonment or the imprisonment of the agentic human self that's imprisoned within the barbed wires. So, the barbed wires in India, there are more barbed wires in Pakistan.

Now, what happens in the end is that there is a space in-between India and Pakistan, a non-classified space and that is where Bishan Singh lies, that is where Bishan Singh stops. So, he is in a way, he becomes a space. So, Bishan Singh becomes Toba Tek Singh so, Toba Tek Singh in no man's land between two territories. So, his, the final claim that Bishan Singh manages to do is that he manages to claim the third piece of land, the third piece of territory.

So, these two big acts of territorialization, India and Pakistan he rejects both and in the end very symbolic, very spectacularly he claims the third territory between India and Pakistan which had no name, the declassified territory. Just like Toba Tek Singh have been declassified there had been no classification of Toba Tek Singh in terms of where it

was situated, no one knew a neat answer to it in a similar way the land between the strip of land between India and Pakistan it had no name and that name becomes Toba Tek Singh.

So, this claiming over third territory becomes important because it is a rejection of the two territories given to him without his agency, without his will. The big territory of India and another big territory of Pakistan obviously, he never wanted to go to either of the territories. So, in some sense the conclusion of the story is a rejection of the two binaristic understanding of territory and it is a claiming of the third piece of land which becomes Toba Tek Singh.

So, the first the final scene in Toba Tek Singh, the short story is an act of claiming, is an act of agency, an agentic claim the only and like I mentioned before the only agency available over here is an agency through madness. Because the only reason why he was not shot when he did not want to go to Pakistan or to India is that because he was a madman. So, his madness in a way becomes a license through which you can claim the third territory, the license with which he is let go temporarily because you know people are thinking oh this is a harmless madman. So, let us deal with the other bureaucratic manoeuvres first and we can deal with him later.

So, in a paradoxical sense that act of madness, that identity of madness, that marker of madness saves him and enables him to claim the third territory which is Toba Tek Singh. So, as you can see this whole story is very moving, very compelling and it is one of the most complex and perhaps the most famous short story written on partition.

But, then it just blurs the border lines between madness and rationality, between insane and the sane and obviously, it really raises some very important questions on human's agency you know in a politically predetermined regime where things are politically predetermined, where decisions are taken for you, where does it leave you as an agentic human self. So, like I mentioned the only way you can attain agency, the only way you can acquire some agency is through madness right. So, madness becomes the only route to agency.

And, you know the fact that he is just lies in between two territories is also like I mentioned an act of claiming you know he claims the third piece of land, he claims a strip of land which becomes Toba Tek Singh. So, in a way Toba Tek Singh which had

disappeared from the map from between India and Pakistan, it reappears. So, the final act of you can almost call it suicide, the fact that he decides to stay there till he dies, decides to stand there till he dies and the final collapse that he has in that strip of land that becomes in a way the naming the land as well.

So, the claiming of the land and the name of the land happened together. So, the land becomes Toba Tek Singh, it is a and as Manto says, in between on a bit of earth which had no name lay Toba Tek Singh. So, the namelessness of Toba Tek Singh rings out as well, but at the same time he becomes a space of land, he becomes a space that it was presumed to have been lost, the declassified space right. So, the disappearance of Toba Tek Singh and the death of Bishan Singh are simultaneous acts in some sense.

And, also the disappearance of Toba Tek Singh is undercut by the deliberate suicide of Bishan Singh, the fact that he chooses to stay there till he dies in that in a way, to a certain extent helps him reclaim that identity in his refusal to go to either of the two identities conferred on him. So, we have a rejection of territorial identity or territorialized identity, identities which were already conferred on him without his consent that is rejected. And, on the other hand we have a claim to us some kind of a different identity a third identity which is not available to him.

So, he makes the unavailable available, so that no man's land where no laws work. It is a very symbolic space if you think about it. It is a symbolic strip of lawlessness. There is no legal law operative you know in that setting it is neither India, nor Pakistan, it is a liminal landscape and the liminality of the landscape becomes important because that is exactly what makes this particular move, this particular suicide, this particular collapse so political in quality right.

So, you know this is the entire story of Toba Tek Singh. It is about agency-less-ness, it is about madness, it is about what is appears to be rational to be the most mindless activity and in a way it is also about epistemic violence and that is something I keep telling because it is easier to decode, it is easier to spot the physical violence done, but also look at the way the hesitations in narratives become important, the ambivalence in narratives become important when Fazal Din comes for instance and tells, narrates to Bishan Singh the well-being of his family, when it comes to his daughter he hesitates.



So, that little brief interruption in the narratives becomes you know a pointer very poignant pointer towards an epistemic crisis to its crisis at the level of knowledge that you do not know what happens to the daughter. We as readers do not know, perhaps Fazal Din does not know, no one quite knows what happens to the daughter. So, we have to sort of dress it up with a lie to a little extent. And, then of course, again when Bishan Singh asked Fazal Din where is Toba Tek Singh, again the hesitation to say it is in India, o no, it is in Pakistan.

So, that too does not quite work you know because that too is a narrative interruption to a certain extent, right. And, so, these interruptions, this metalepsis, all these become very important in different degrees in this particular short story because you know what that does this network of interruptions is that it tells you it is reflective of the fractured reality of life, the fractured understanding of reality, to a large extent that is what is caused by partition.

So, among other things the partition of India and Pakistan it fractured the lives of many people, it fractured the bodies of many people, it mutilated the bodies of many people. But, also it fractured the identities of many people, the level of knowledge that you know your knowledge of reality became fractured and stayed fractured forever right. So, as we can see it is a profoundly political story, it is a deeply emotional story, it is a story which pitches or pits madness against totalitarianism.

So, madness becomes the only resistance towards totalitarianism in the story and by totalitarian I mean the bureaucratic manoeuvres through which the decisions made for people without any consent on them whatsoever, without any agency or any question of agency that is acquired from them at any level. So, as you can see this is a story which is very resonant to the political climates even today and it is something which will always be resonant in any political climate.

Because when it comes to taking consent when it comes to taking a decision about people, the collective consent of people, the individual consent of people, the micro consent is never important. What gets important is a macro consent, just like the micro space is never important. No one knows where Toba Tek Singh is, no one needs to know where Toba Tek Singh is.

What is more important is the macro space, the macro territories of India and Pakistan, the two big land masses, the two grand narratives, the two national narratives. So, the two big novels erupting out of this crisis, out of this abyss and in the abyss in between little things, little casualties like Toba Tek Singh become collateral damage, the Bishan Singh becomes a little collateral damage in that abyss between India and Pakistan.

So, with that I finish this short story. I hope you find this compelling and moving. It is a very rich piece of literature. It is one of the finest pieces of the short story short fiction in twentieth century which is why it deserves a very rich location on a course like this. So, with that we have finished Toba Tek Singh by Sadat Hasan Manto and we move on to the final text in this course which would be the chess players by Munshi Premchand or Shatranj ke Khiladi with which we will begin the next lecture.

Thank you for your attention.