

**Trauma and Literature**  
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**Lecture - 03**  
**Manto's Toba Tek Singh - Part 2**

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how was it that the place where they lived had until recently been known as India?

One lunatic got so involved in this India/Pakistan question that he became even crazier. One day he climbed a tree and sat on one of its branches for two hours, lecturing without pause on the complex issues of Partition. When the guards told him to come down, he climbed higher. When they tried to frighten him with threats, he replied: "I will live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I'll live in this tree right here!" With much difficulty, they eventually coaxed him down. When he reached the ground he wept and embraced his Hindu and Sikh friends, distraught at the idea that they would leave him and go to India.

One man held an M.S. degree and had been a radio engineer. He kept apart from the other inmates, and spent all his time walking silently up and down a particular footpath in the garden. After hearing about the exchange, however, he turned in his clothes and ran naked all over the grounds.

There was one fat Muslim lunatic from Chinot who had been an enthusiastic Muslim League activist. He used to wash fifteen or sixteen times a day, but abandoned the habit overnight. His name was Mohammed Ali. One day he announced that he was the Qaid-e-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Seeing this, a Sikh lunatic declared himself to be



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22/4/2020 Toba Tek Singh - Words Without Borders

Master Tara Singh. Blood would have flowed, except that both were reclassified as dangerous lunatics and confined to separate quarters.

There was also a young Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had gone mad over an unhappy love affair. He was distressed to hear that Amritsar was now in India, because his beloved was a Hindu girl from that city. Although she had rejected



Hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Trauma and Literature where we are looking at Saadat Hasan Manto's short story *Toba Tek Singh*. We already had a lecture on this particular story and we will go on from where we left in the last lecture. We talked about how the madness in this story is an example of a bio-political condition because it is biological and it is medical.

However, at the same time, it has got the political quality as well, in the sense that there are these political parameters, these political events, especially the partition, which inform the whole experience of madness quite significantly. It affects madness in a way, which makes it even more confusing. The cognitive confusion around the entire scenario, the entire spectacle over here is largely due to the political partition.

There is this absurdity, there is that irrationality about partition which is quite pervasive, which is quite visible. Most importantly, we saw in the last lecture that no one seems to have any clear idea about what the whole idea of India Pakistan is.

Is there any need to have another country and more importantly, what will these two countries do now - whether they would completely declassify or take away all the earlier identities or older identities of the village, town, small places, and they will just disappear becomes an important factor for us to understand as well.

Among other things, the idea of partition can also be perceived as an experience of an event that unsettles identities, destabilizes identities and obviously, informs and accentuates the whole idea of madness, the whole experience of madness, which is the overarching narrative in this particular story.

The lunatic asylum in Lahore becomes a very symbolic site because that is the site where madness gets depicted and played. That is also a site for some very fundamental questions about partition asked in terms of what is the need to have another country? Where is India? Where is Pakistan?

The more important questions will come later where people will start asking where are their own villages, their old villages, their old towns. They were certain that the entire grand narrative of what two nations would do is that it would completely do away with the local narratives, and the local identity.

Again, what we see over here is increasing loss of agency and increasing loss of identity where the local narratives, local identities disappear and are consumed essentially by the grand narratives of nation formation. Now we come to this point, this should be on the screen.

"One lunatic got so involved in this India Pakistan question that he became even crazier. One day he climbed a tree and sat on one of the branches for two hours, lecturing without pause on the complex issues of partition. When the guards told him to come down, he climbed higher. When they tried to frighten him with threats he replied, "I will live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I will live in this tree right here." With much difficulty, they eventually coaxed him down.

When he reached the ground, he wept and embraced the Hindu and Sikh friends, distraught at the idea that they would have to leave him and go to India."

Now as funny as this particular act may appear, it was also very human, very tragic in many degrees. You have this madman who does not want to go to India or Pakistan, and he climbs a tree and he climbs higher when people threaten him.

Obviously, that act of climbing the tree becomes in a way an act of asserting his agency in a very absurdist way. It is the only method left to assert your agency, to act madly, to act in a way that is crazy, which is insane. Now when he is brought down from the tree, when he's coaxed and he comes down from the tree; he comes and hugs his Hindu and Sikh friends in the asylum and weeps at the thought that he would never see them again because he will be sent to India.

Now what this does in a very fundamental way is that obviously, it talks about the emotional quality of partition. How people who grew up together, people who stayed together, people who had villages together, had neighbours together, were suddenly told that on one fine day that they have to be sent to a different country depending on their religious identities.

As I mentioned in my earlier lecture, religious identity becomes the grand narrative of identity. All the other identities, the linguistic identity, the food identity, the gastronomic identity, the cultural identity becomes secondary. Religious identity will become the primary identity over here. That becomes interestingly the grand narrative of identity information, unfortunately, at the time of partition.

"One man held an MS degree, Master of Science degree and had been a radio engineer. He kept apart from the other inmates and spent all his time walking silently up and down on a particular footpath in the garden. After hearing about the exchange however he turned in his clothes and ran naked all over the grounds." We are given different kinds of descriptions of how the mad people are taking or responding to the idea of partition.

Some of those are funny, some of those are tragic, but there is also the very human quality and also very emotional quality about his responses, and we can see how the madmen over here can be seen as a microcosm of the population who have no idea or no access to the decision-making devices, decision-making officers where things are just decided for them in terms of what should happen, where people should go, etc.

This becomes a very sad situation. So sadness or tragedy of the story is quite palpable despite the ostentatiously or superficially funny setting. "There was one fat Muslim lunatic from Chiniot, who had been an enthusiastic Muslim League activist. He used to wash 15 or 16 times a day but abandoned the habit overnight. His name was Muhammad Ali. One day he announced that he was Qaid-e-Azam or Mohammed Ali Jinnah."

Again, we can see how during a time of madness like this, during times of political unrest, all kinds of misappropriations take place. People associate themselves with certain other identities. We have a Muslim lunatic over here who was clearly mad because he was washing himself 16 times a day, but he abandoned the habit overnight.

Then suddenly his name is Muhammad Ali and when he gets to know that Mohammed Ali Jinnah is also the name of the person who would become the leader of Pakistan, he claimed that he was that same person. Thus, "One day he announced that he was the Qaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Seeing this, a Sikh lunatic declared himself to be Master Tara Singh" who was a Sikh leader during the time of partition during the time of national independence.

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and making every up and down a particular subject in the garden, with hearing about the exchange, however, he turned in his clothes and ran naked all over the grounds.

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There was also a young Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had gone mad over an unhappy love affair. He was distressed to hear that Amritsar was now in India, because his beloved was a Hindu girl from that city. Although she had rejected him, he had not forgotten her after losing his mind. For this reason he cursed the Muslim leaders who had split India into two parts, so that his beloved remained Indian while he became Pakistani.

When news of the exchange reached the madhouse, several lunatics tried to comfort the lawyer by telling him that he would be sent to India, where his beloved lived. But he didn't want to leave Lahore, fearing that his practice would not thrive in Amritsar.

In the European Ward there were two Anglo-Indian lunatics. They were very worried to hear that the English had left after granting independence to India. In hushed tones, they spent hours discussing how this would affect their situation in the madhouse. Would the European Ward remain, or would it disappear? Would they be served English breakfasts? What, would they be forced to eat poisonous bloody Indian chapattis instead of bread?



"Blood would have flowed except that both were reclassified as dangerous lunatics and confined to separate quarters." Obviously, it became very hostile when the Muslim lunatic declares himself to be Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Sikh declared himself to be Master Tara Singh. We find that people are trying to appropriate different kinds of identities. The Muslim lunatic wants to be Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

A Sikh lunatic declares himself to be Master Tara Singh and becomes very hostile very quickly, and they are separated and declassified and reclassified as dangerous lunatics. We have different kinds of very strange responses to partition as we can see. The asylum over here becomes a very symbolic site. It becomes an effective site as it were by different kinds of effect play against each other.

Now we come to see another example of someone becoming melancholic or sad because of partition. "There was also a young Hindu lawyer from Lahore, who had gone mad with an unhappy love affair. He was distressed to hear that Amritsar was now in India because his beloved was a Hindu girl from that city. Although she had rejected him, he had not forgotten her after losing his mind. For this reason, he cursed the Muslim leaders who had split India into two parts so that his beloved remained Indian while he became a Pakistani."

We have a Hindu lawyer over here who was from Lahore, and whose beloved is now in Amritsar and he gets to know Amritsar is now in India. Thus he is becoming very very sad because he thinks he would not be able to see her again because now she is in a different country.

So he is cursing the Muslim leaders who are calling this partition because his beloved remain an Indian while he becomes Pakistani. "Now, when news of the exchange reached the madhouse, several lunatics tried to comfort the lawyer by telling him that he will be sent to India where his beloved lived. But he did not want to leave Lahore fearing that his practice would not thrive in Amritsar."

Look at the way in which different local and effective attachments are made over here. He was a practicing lawyer based in Lahore and when he is told that because he is Hindu he will now be sent to India, he very quickly announces he does not want to go to India, because he can lose his practice that is thriving in Lahore. Thus, he wants to stay in Lahore for that reason.

Again look at the very local banal immediate reasons that people have to stay in a particular place. These are immediate identities, local identities, that the religious identities are taking away. As I mentioned, the whole idea of religion becomes the grand narrative over here and that takes away all the other kinds of narratives, all the other kinds of practices, all the other kinds of associations.

The only association we are allowed to have over here is the religious association. Apart from that all of these associations are becoming redundant, and secondary. When news of the exchange reached the madhouse, to comfort the lawyer, many told him that he will be sent to India because he is an Indian but he wants to stay back in Lahore because his practice thrives in Lahore.

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In the European Ward there were two Anglo-Indian lunatics. They were very worried to hear that the English had left after granting independence to India. In hushed tones, they spent hours discussing how this would affect their situation in the madhouse. Would the European Ward remain, or would it disappear? Would they be served English breakfasts? What, would they be forced to eat poisonous bloody Indian chapattis instead of bread?

One Sikh had been an inmate for fifteen years. He spoke a strange language of his own, constantly repeating this nonsensical phrase: "Upri gur gur di annex di be-dhiyan o mung di daal di di laiteen."<sup>2</sup> He never slept. According to the guards, he hadn't slept a wink in fifteen years. Occasionally, however, he would rest by propping himself against a wall.

His feet and ankles had become swollen from standing all the time, but in spite of these physical problems he refused to lie down and rest. He would listen with great concentration whenever there was discussion of India, Pakistan and



“In the European ward, there were two Anglo-Indians, Anglo-Indian lunatics. They were very worried to hear that the English had left after granting independence to India. In hush tones, they spent hours discussing how this will affect the situation in the madhouse. Would the European ward remain or would it disappear? Would they be served English breakfast? What, would they be forced to eat poisonous bloody Indian chapattis instead of bread?”

Again, the local concerns become important, the funny concerns where people are saying, there are two Anglo-Indians over here in the ward as well. They are worried because now they get to know that India has become a free country and there are two different countries now.

They wanted to know what's going to happen to them. What was their status as identities? Would they continue to get bread, or will they have to survive and suffer Indian chapattis. In other words, the chapati-bread thing over here becomes a signifying standard. Would it stand to fall or will they continue to have a privileged position in this asylum?

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His feet and ankles had become swollen from standing all the time, but in spite of these physical problems he refused to lie down and rest. He would listen with great concentration whenever there was discussion of India, Pakistan and the forthcoming lunatic exchange. Asked for his opinion, he would reply with great seriousness: "Upri gur gur di annexe di be-dhiyana di mung di daal of di Pakistan gornament."<sup>3</sup>

Later he replaced "of di Pakistan gornament" with "of di Toba Tek Singh gornament." He also started asking the other inmates where Toba Tek Singh was, and to which country it belonged. But nobody knew whether it was in Pakistan or India. When they argued the question they only became more confused. After all, Sialkot had once been in India, but was apparently now in Pakistan. Who knew whether Lahore, which was now in Pakistan, might not go over to India



Now, this is the point in the story where we get to know the character, the protagonist, who is Toba Tek Singh, or Bishan Singh. The person becomes the symbolic reaction to partition. So one Sikh had been an inmate for 15 years. He spoke a strange language of his own, constantly repeating this nonsensical phrase, "Upri gur gur di annexe di be-dhiyan o mung di daal of di lalteen."

Now, this particular phrase will keep getting repeated. It roughly translates into that the quality of moong daal is getting worse and worse by the day. However, the Gods up there have no time to notice, the Gods up there can hardly be bothered by the quality of the moong dal which is getting worse, and this is something that concerns him.

Obviously, it is a very absurd phrase, but if you sort of unpack it, what it also means is that the moong ki daal is a very local thing, a very normal thing eaten by normal people. Thus, the complete detachment of the Gods, the higher Gods, the powerful Gods, from the concerns of the low people, from the concerns of normal people - that becomes a similar detachment.

Because it also reflects the detachment the governments have, the higher offices of governments have compared to the normal people who have no access to the government who have no agency



apropos the government. The complete lack of agency, the complete lack of access is what has been suggested over here.

The quality of moong dal eaten by the common man becomes the metaphor of common life, becomes the metaphor of common existence, which is deteriorating by the day. However, the Gods up there have no concern for that. That becomes a recursive refrain in the story. "He never slept. According to the guards, he had not slept a wink in 15 years.

Occasionally, however, he would rest by propping himself against the wall." He stood all the time and never sat down, and never slept. Sometimes he would rest by leaning against the wall, and this happened in the last 15 years. "His feet and ankles have become swollen from standing all the time. But in spite of his physical problems, he refused to lie down and rest."

Again, the body of this man becomes interesting. The feet and ankles have become swollen. It is almost like a symbolic swelling of time. A lot of time has gone into him and as a result, his anatomy is changing, his embodiment is changing. "He would listen with great concentration, whenever there was discussion of India and Pakistan and the forthcoming lunatic exchange.

Asked for his opinion, he would reply with greater seriousness, "Upri gur gur di annexe di be-dhiyan di mung di daal of India Pakistan government." Now again, alternatively, he would sometimes blame the Pakistan government and the Indian government for the deterioration of the quality of the moong ki daal, which becomes a metaphor for the sustenance of the common man.

The common man would sustain themselves by eating moong ki daal. He would just respond whenever someone told him about the India Pakistan partition. Whenever someone mentioned anything about the ensuing violence and the confusion about it, he would just mention his response would just refrain that the moong ki daal is deteriorating by the day, is worsening by the day.

The governments had no care or concern for that. This madman's response in a way becomes a very symbolic response because that is reflective of the government's callousness to the concerns of the common man. Again, this brings us to the basic theme of the story, the inaccessibility of the common man to the higher governments or the complete lack of agency the common man has with the big, strong government officers who take decisions for them.

"Later he replaced "of di Pakistan government" with "di Toba Tek Singh government."

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This Sikh lunatic's hair was unkempt and thin. Because he washed so rarely, his hair and beard had matted together, giving him a frightening appearance. But he was a harmless fellow. In fifteen years, he had never fought with anyone.

The attendants knew only that he owned land in Toba Tek Singh district. Having been a prosperous landlord, he suddenly lost his mind. So his relatives bound him with heavy chains and sent him off to the madhouse.

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Now Toba Tek Singh at this point becomes interesting because that is a village where he is from. He now gets to know the word government. It is a new word for him. Initially, he says Indian government, Pakistan government and very quickly replaces that with the Toba Tek Singh government. That became an important phrase for him.

He also started asking the other inmates what Toba Tek Singh was and which country it belonged to. Nobody knew whether it was in Pakistan or India. This becomes the geopolitical/existential confusion in the story. This is what the geopolitics and existential issues meet and converge in the story. No one seems to know what Toba Tek Singh is. No one knows how it has been reclassified.

It is just a small village and no one really cares whether it is in India or Pakistan. It is not really a part of the grand cartography, which has been formed by the partition. This is a small village. Thus, he keeps asking everyone where Toba Tek Singh is. And no one can give a satisfactory response to it. So no one knew.

"When they argued the question then they only became more confused. After all, Sialkot had once been in India but was now apparently in Pakistan. Who knew that Lahore, which is now in Pakistan might not go over to India tomorrow, whether all of India might become Pakistan. And was there any guarantee that both Pakistan and India would not one day vanish altogether?

All kinds of absurd reactions, all kinds of speculations are being spread and consumed. What is important for us to understand here is to see that these questions are actually no more absurd than the fundamental premise of partition, which is to break people on religious grounds. That becomes the most absurd thing in the first place. Now the madman's responses are micro questions of absurdity, micro-narratives of absurdity.

However, these micro-narratives of absurdity are meant to be a response to the macro narrative of absurdity. Like, why was the need to break India and Pakistan into two different countries? Now people ask you all kinds of questions, where is Toba Tek Singh? How come Sialkot, which was in India, is now in Pakistan? How come Lahore you know which is now in Pakistan might now go to India.

Whether there is any guarantee the whole of India might become Pakistan? The last speculation is about the possibility that both countries will just be dissolved into something else. What this means is that it is the formative phase of nation formation. Thus, the nation at this point in time in people's imagination is very much a construct.

It is not something that is always already there. It is something that has been formed, it was a very formative phase of nation formation. This formative phase is important for us to understand

because what it means is, people over here are acutely aware of the constructed quality of nation formation. They are acutely aware that this is being constructed, this is being engineered.

Now when something has been engineered, then that obviously does not become very sacred or solemn or holy because you can see it happening in front of you. It is a material process of becoming. Now when that happens obviously people are asking, what about the other land masters? What about the cities? Would there be a permutation combination going on with the cities as well? We would see Sialkot become India.

Would Amritsar become Pakistan? Would Lahore, which is now in Pakistan, will become India at some point? How is the possibility of the whole of India becoming Pakistan, and who is to say if India and Pakistan together will not dissolve into something else? That is also perfectly possible. All these mass speculations mean that this also becomes the voice of the common man.

The madmen over here become the voices of the common man in terms of the agency that exhibit because of their madness. They can get to ask these questions because they are madmen. So that medicalization to identity is in a way also a sort of protection. It also protects them in a certain sense.

With this particular person, the protagonist, Toba Tek Singh or Bishan Singh, we find out that he is always worried about his own village Toba Tek Singh. And the only thing he wants to know, the only thing he is interested in knowing is to ask where Toba Tek Singh is? What happened to Toba Tek Singh? Where is that going to go?

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This Sikh lunatic's hair was unkempt and thin. Because he washed so rarely, his hair and beard had matted together, giving him a frightening appearance. But he was a harmless fellow. In fifteen years, he had never fought with anyone.

The attendants knew only that he owned land in Toba Tek Singh district. Having been a prosperous landlord, he suddenly lost his mind. So his relatives bound him with heavy chains and sent him off to the madhouse.

His family used to visit him once a month. After making sure that he was in good health, they would go away again. These family visits continued for many years, but they stopped when the India/Pakistan troubles began.

This lunatic's name was Bashan Singh, but everyone called him Toba Tek Singh. Although he had very little sense of time, he seemed to know when his relatives were coming to visit. He would tell the officer in charge that his visit was impending. On the day itself he would wash his body thoroughly and comb and oil his hair. Then he would put on his best clothes and go to meet his relatives.

If they asked him any question he would either remain silent or say: "Upri gur di annexe di be-dhiyana di mung di daal of di laalain."

Bashan Singh had a fifteen-year-old daughter who grew by a finger's height every month. He didn't recognize her when she came to visit him. As a small child, she used to cry whenever she saw her father. She continued to cry now that she was older.



"This Sikh lunatic's hair was unkempt and thin because he washed so rarely. His hair and beard had matted together, giving him a frightening appearance. But he was a harmless fellow. In fifteen years, he had never fought with anyone." So he was a harmless madman. "The attendants knew only that he owned land in Toba Tek Singh district. Having been a prosperous landlord, he suddenly lost his mind. So his relatives bound him with heavy chains and sent him to the madhouse."

He comes from a feudal background. He was a landlord once upon a time, and he has suddenly become mad. Now his relatives just chained him up and brought him into this asylum. "His family used to visit him once a month. After making sure that he was in good health they would go away again. These family visits continued for many years, but they stopped when the India and Pakistan troubles began."

You can look at the way in which the partition trouble also affected or interrupted all kinds of normal human movements. The family would come to see him once in a while, but they would also stop coming because of the partition because it was unsafe for people to go out in the streets randomly because they can always be able to be just mobbed.

There can always be communal violence and the safety of people especially women and children would be at stake. We have these normal daily domestic activities being interrupted, sometimes irreparably by the partition. We are told that they stopped visiting him because ever since India Pakistan troubles began.

"This lunatic's name was Bishan Singh but everyone called him Toba Tek Singh although he had very little sense of time, he seemed to know whether his relatives were coming to visit. He would tell the officer in charge that his visit was impending. One day on that day, he would wash his body thoroughly and comb and oil his hair. He will put on his best clothes and go to meet his relatives."

Again, we see this interesting example of common sense, the sixth sense over here. His rational mind has been destroyed completely by madness, he has no sense of reality. However, for some reason, he had a sixth sense, a gut feeling, that he would always know when his relatives would visit him.

He would prepare accordingly, he would sit and comb his hair and wash his clothes and put on his best clothes, take a bath and wait for his visitors to come and will tell the guards that the family is going to come to visit him on that day. "If they ask him any question, he would either remain silent or say the same thing, "Upri gur gur di annexe di be-dhiyan di mung di daal of laaltein."

So he would continue to comment on the quality of moong ki daal which again becomes, a sort of a sustenance figure.

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Bashan Singh had a fifteen-year-old daughter who grew by a finger's height every month. He didn't recognize her when she came to visit him. As a small child, she used to cry whenever she saw her father. She continued to cry now that she was older.

When the Partition problems began, Bashan Singh started asking the other lunatics about Toba Tek Singh. Since he never got a satisfactory answer, his concern deepened day by day.

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2/24/2020 Toba Tek Singh - Words Without Borders  
Then his relatives stopped visiting him. Formerly he could predict their arrival, but now it was as though the voice



"Bishan Singh had a fifteen-year-old daughter, who grew by the finger's height every month. He did not recognize her when she first came to visit him. As a small child, she used to cry whenever she saw her father. She continued to cry now that she was older. When the partition problems began Bishan Singh started asking the other lunatics about Toba Tek Singh. Since he never got a satisfactory answer his concern deepened day by day."

We are also told that he had a daughter who would come and visit him every month, but the daughter also stopped visiting when the partition troubles began. Now we are told that the daughter's visit is something very special to him and as a small child, she used to cry whenever she saw her father.

She continued to cry even when she grew older. Then, of course, the question about Toba Tek Singh became more and more recursive. He never got a satisfactory answer. No one seemed to know what the geopolitical location of Toba Tek Singh and his concern deepened day by day.

We will stop at this point today. We find that how the partition as I mentioned has begun to affect, or how deeply affected normal daily activities, just visiting family eating normal food, asking fundamental questions. Even at a very micro level, at a very domestic intimate level, the partition had been big violence, a big act of violence, enacted violence at the level of knowledge.

Your knowledge of reality changes, your knowledge of your realization of reality changes, your knowledge of your surroundings change, without knowledge, without change in knowledge. What also happened, obviously was you know your sense of self also changed. That is one of the fundamental concerns, one of the fundamental effects of trauma. Your sense of self changes because of something medical, but also because of other external reasons, emotional reasons.

We see this is a very classic story about how madness can be seen as bio-political violence on the human self. It is medical violence of course because the mind changes. Also, it is political violence because of partition, your sense of identity changes, your awareness of identity changes. Without awareness, your realization of reality changes.

The reality that once you knew once upon a time, would no longer be valid under the current circumstances. Everything around the older coordinates changes. Your family changes, your family values change, your children change. The whole idea of partition obviously becomes a major event, which brings to a halt or interrupts in a big way. All sorts of identity, all sorts of embodiment.

We use the word embodiment in a very loaded way. The embodiment can be seen as a neural category, as a cerebral category, as a medical category, but also as a discursive category, as something which is external. There is this embedded quality of embodiment. It is also an extended quality of embodiment. Both get interrupted in different measures with the advent of partition.

We will stop at this point today. We will continue with this and hopefully finish the story in another couple of hour's lecture. Thank you for your attention.



