



# Understanding The Trauma of 1947 India-Pakistan Partition – An Account of Toba Tek Singh

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**Abstract**— The year 1947 saw the birth of India's freedom and the death of its people's joy, leaving behind slaves of religious chauvinism, communal barbarity and inhumane cruelty. The partition of 1947 was a gruesome and landmark incident in the history of both the nations. The 'bloody' line of partition that was drawn by Cyril Radcliffe has not stopped bleeding since 1947. This line, drawn by a man who never visited the nation before, had marked the fate of millions, causing an unceasing chaos which ever since has been the reason behind tension between the two nations today. The two nations that were one community; a community which lived in peace and harmony once. The high spirits of the nation after its victory in the struggle for freedom was suppressed by the pain of partition. Author Moni Mohsin, in her literature piece, throws light on the way India won this freedom at the cost of happiness and lives of millions. In her words – "The creation of India and Pakistan in 1947 led to horrific sectarian violence and made millions refugees overnight" (Mohsin). The partition of India was nothing less than a heart cut into two pieces and though wounds will heal, memories will fade but the pain will always reside in the hearts of the families that were destroyed. This grotesque event led by greed for political powers had caused one of the largest massacres and migrations in the history of mankind. Although the partition was a landmark incident in the geopolitical history of India, "Toba Tek Singh" by Sadat Hassan

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Manto, portrays the way this traumatizing event flipped the lives of many people overnight. There were thousand others like Bishan Singh waiting for a visit from their daughter; the families that got displaced lived through the terror of partition, spent sleepless nights, doubting whether their home, their land and their community was now in India or Pakistan. Doshi and Mehendi in their composition, talk about the state of horror of the partition which haunted the families who were displaced. "Trains carrying refugees between the two new nations arrived full of corpses; their passengers had been killed by mobs en route," (Doshi and Mehdi) as the author narrates this, he makes his readers feel the pain through real time instances of the family members who were a part of this horrifying state of affairs. Where some of these family members wept for the loved ones they lost, the others wept for their dear ones who went missing overnight. In one of the instances

in Toba Tek Singh, Manto very well depicts the grief of losing a family through Bishan Singh. As cited in the reading by Manto- "He missed his family the gifts he used to bring and the concern with which they used to speak to him." (Manto, 6). This is where Manto also points out the impact of this tragedy on Bishan Singh's life. Due to the communal disharmony and political unrest, Bishan Singh no longer received the monthly visits which really affected him. Bishan Singh might have failed to express the pain he was suffering due to loss of his family and his home but the scars of the wound stayed in his heart till he was alive. The partition of this subcontinent did not result in a successful emergence of two nations but a heartbreaking carnage of millions of innocent.

Neighbours were murdering neighbours and childhood friends turned into sworn enemies. Lovers were now drifted apart with a wall of two nations standing between them due to political greed of some. The Sikhs and Muslim communities coexisted in peace and harmony until one night; the night of partition. This night not only divided a piece of land, but millions of families and relationships too. As it can be traced from Manto's story, the advocate from Lahore lost his mind due to separation from his lover. As stated in the story- "that day he abused every major and minor Hindu and Muslim leader who had cut India into two, turning his beloved into an Indian and him into a Pakistani." (Manto, 4) This ugly night had turned them into citizens of two different nations. Hopes were shattered and the only thing which prevailed in the air was bloodshed and chaos. Muslim families living in Delhi for hundreds of years were compelled to leave for Pakistan, apprehending communal violence while on the other side, Hindu families living in Pakistan for decades became refugees in India in merely a day. Author Khushwant Singh talks about the families and relationships that were broken, leaving millions lamenting over their situation in his book – *Memories of Madness*. As cited in his book - "The tragic legacy of Partition haunts the subcontinent even today" (Singh), because the 1947 partition was no less than the holocaust for people of both the nations.

Toba Tek Singh very well portrays that partition not only destroyed families but also gave created a sense of identity crisis among millions. A nation is not only a piece of land but a person's identity too. The 1947 partition had compelled these people to abandon and leave their land, depriving them of their very own identity. The fight here is not with anyone else but with oneself; a fight for one's own identity and a fight for acceptance of reality. Although the people of India were liberated from British rule but they were still fighting to preserve their age-old identity. Manto's story on partition discussed that the people who were forcefully displaced did not get a new identity but lived as outsiders, in a state of confusion and chaos all their life. As it can be traced from the story, on hearing about the India-Pakistan partition, one of the inmates declares that: "I wish to live neither in India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live in this tree." (Manto, 3). This lunatic inmate, on learning about the violence that was being perpetrated on both the sides of the line dividing the land, climbs a tree out of insanity. Further he refuses to come down from the tree, as he would be compelled to move to one of the either separated lands that subsequently would deprive him of his actual identity. With identity lies a great sense of belongingness one has among the people of a particular community.

The forceful displacement of people between the two nations and terming them "refugees" shattered the sense of belongingness among the people. Reflecting upon the literature piece of Leela Dhar, it can be inferred that the 'identity' of an individual is shaped both by the society and community it lives in. Further, as narrated by the author in her work, "a cataclysmic event like the partition of India left many people confused about their identity in relation to religion, community and so on." (Dhar, 96) However, being disowned by their very own society did not only result in the loss of their ancestral homes but even their identity. The very own community these people belonged to snatched away their identity by tagging them as 'outsiders'. The stigma of losing their identity and being tagged as 'outsiders' on their motherland by their own community was a traumatizing wound in the lives of these people, which stayed with them forever even after decades. Further, as observed the work of Alter, Manto confuses and mixes the names of Bishan Singh with the name of his native place (Toba Tek Singh) in his story. As stated by the author, "By mixing up the name of the character and place, the individual and the land, Manto emphasizes the relationship between a person's home and his identity." (Alter, 97) The polarization of people on the basis of their religion did not only cripple both the nations but gave rise to a grave identity crisis among the people who were separated from their homes. Even after seventy years of partition, the families who lived through the pain and trauma of this separation are still struggling to find their identity.

The madness of partition had taken over the insanity of the lunatics like Bishan Singh. Sadat Hasan Manto draws a parallel between the insanity inside as well as outside the lunatic asylum in his story, Toba Tek Singh. The partition left both the nations crippled; it not only affected the sane but also had a severe impact on the lunatics who were uprooted from their community and homeland. Reflecting on Manto's work, in his story, the lunatic asylum in Lahore symbolizes nothing less than a community and subcontinent in itself wherein lunatics from different religious communities lived together in peace, free from all sorts of religious dogmatism. However, the aftermath of partition was so grave that even these lunatics, people who are said to have an abnormal pattern of mental behavior, were disturbed of being uprooted from their homeland. According to Nanzie Raj, Manto's story clearly illustrates that the lunatics are much saner than those making the decision for their displacement. As narrated by the author, "the madness of Partition was far greater than the insanity of all the inmates put together." (Raj, 104). The irony here is, while the inmates of the lunatic asylum assume the roles of the people outside; the people outside the walls of the asylum,

drawing the 'bloody' line of partition, took the role of the inmates in the asylum, behaving in the most ruthless, barbaric and irrational way. These lunatics were already fighting their own battle in their lives; however, the partition's consequences were so severe, that their battle just got tougher.

The grotesque incident of the 1947 partition had turned these madmen from prisoners of a mental asylum to prisoners of confusion, chaos and trauma. The grave impact of partition was quite evident on the lunatics through the instances stated in *Toba Tek Singh* by Manto. In one of the instances from the story, "one day a Muslim lunatic, while taking his bath, raised the slogan 'Pakistan Zindabad' with such enthusiasm that he lost his balance and was later found lying on the floor unconscious." (Manto, 2). Such was the condition of the other inmates too, on hearing that they will be parted from their community. The severity of the impact of the 1947 partition on these lunatics has also been well focused in Mahnaz Isaphani's article – "Sadat Hasan Manto". As stated by him in his literature piece, "on the night of the exchange the madmen and madwomen resisted their expulsion from the asylum. Brought to the border, they began to tear off their clothes; they screamed, sang, chanted, wept and fought in the icy darkness." (Isaphani). These insane individuals, lacking the normal behavior of their thought process were also so gravely affected that even they were resisting and protesting in order to avoid being uprooted from their homeland. Furthermore, Bishan Singh's insanity was a medium for Manto to advocate the sense of identity crisis, dislocation and separation that had taken over the minds of the lunatics as well.

"As the clock struck midnight on August 15, 1947, celebratory shouts of freedom from colonial rule were drowned out by the cries of millions frantically making their way through the corpse-littered landscape of nascent India and Pakistan." (Perkins) The arbitrary line, which the British had drawn, to carve up India had scarred the subcontinent forever. This line had uprooted millions of innocent from their homes making them a victim of partition; partition of communities and families. With their homes and families, people lost a large part of themselves. Though partition had made India and Pakistan two free nations, it left behind thousands of slaves and victims of trauma. Further, Sadat Hasan Manto's story of *Toba Tek Singh* undoubtedly proves it as one of the most terrible mass population migration and carnage in the history of mankind. Two hundred fifty years have passed by since the British have left the country, but the only memory of independence, which the Indians look back to is the horrific scenario of partition and division of their country, the massacres and kidnapping, the vendettas and

the never-ending violence which the British instigated between the Hindu and Muslim communities.

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