

Toba Tek Singh
A Critique of the 1947 Partition
P.G. Sem IV
EC II
Unit III

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Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" is widely considered one of the most powerful critiques of the 1947 Partition. Rather than focusing on the high-level politics of Mountbatten or Jinnah, Manto uses the "madness" of asylum inmates to mirror the "sanity" of a world tearing itself apart.

Manto's views on Partition through the lens of this short story:

1. The Absurdity of Political Borders

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Manto's primary view is that Partition was an act of geographical and psychological absurdity. The Premise: The governments of India and Pakistan decide to exchange "lunatics"—Muslims to Pakistan, Hindus and Sikhs to India.

Manto's Critique: By applying a religious binary to people who have lost their grip on reality, Manto suggests that the politicians themselves were the truly "mad" ones. If a person doesn't know where they stand, how can a line in the dirt define their identity?

2. Identity is Rooted in Land, Not Religion

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The protagonist, Bishan Singh (Toba Tek Singh), becomes a symbol for the displaced millions. The Question: Throughout the story, Bishan Singh asks one question: "Where is Toba Tek Singh [his hometown]?"

The Conflict: He is told it is in Pakistan, but he is being sent to India because he is a Sikh.

The View: Manto argues that a person's identity is tied to their ancestral soil, not a national flag. To Bishan Singh, "home" is a physical place with his family and his land, making the concept of "India" or "Pakistan" irrelevant and incomprehensible.

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