

## **REFUGEE, MIGRATION, DIASPORA**

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### **Lecture 10: Contextualizing Partition and Saadat Hasan Manto's Toba Tek Singh**

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Refugee Migration Diaspora. Today, we are going to talk about migration studies with respect to our understanding of the partition of India, Indian subcontinent's partition and we will understand the subcontinent partition through reading some literary works, right. So, partition of India symbolizes the division of British India into independent countries of India and Pakistan. According to the Indian Independence Act, which was passed by the British Parliament on 18th of July 1947.



So, the partition of India was said to take effect in on the 15th of August 1947 and this rapid partition had led to a population transfer of unprecedented magnitude accompanied by devastating communal violence, and history witnesses thousands of thousands going up to lakhs and crores of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims rushing to cross the hastily demarcated borders even before the partition would be a completed and kind of permanent process and the borders would be defined in a finalized manner, and the borders would be sealed; even before the borders were sealed and the demarcations we see lakhs and crores of Indians from Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities actually crossing the border to belong to the right side. Right side meaning that India became a Hindu majority secular nation whereas Pakistan declared itself as an Islamic state.

So, the estimated number of people who died during the partition ranged from 2 lakhs to 20 lakhs, according to the Britannica. According to C. Ryan Perkins, the partition of the undivided Indian subcontinent bore silent witness to trains that were laden with the dead, decapitated bodies, limbs that were strewn along the sides of roads and wanton rape and pillaging. There was nothing that could have prepared the approximately 14 million refugees for this nightmare. So if we go back and look at what was happening in the Indian subcontinent, Post 1940 or 1941-42, at the turn of the decade, in the early 1940s onwards, we see the violence on the rise.

We see that the informed population, who are usually... From the upper section of society—the socioeconomically more privileged section—they were informed about the nation's politics and the fact that India would eventually be broken up. And so, they were making their move already at the turn of the decade, even before that. Right. And we see that the elite section of South Asians—the elite sections of people from the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities—are resettling in a more organized manner.

They have the time to sell off their property, find alternative housing, and secure new business facilities. In the new land, the host land, the transition from the native land to the host land is comparatively smoother. So, having some money and cultural capital actually facilitates the process of immigration and resettlement. At the tail end of this entire process of population exchange, we find the subaltern, lower-class Dalit masses, who are actually pushed out of their homes—literally thrown out—and they already have no assets, leaving behind even the small resources they possess. So, this is the kind of situation that we see happening.

At the time of Partition. Now, the role of various state agencies in addressing the refugee problem has been painstakingly recorded in the 1948 government publication entitled *Millions on the Move*. So, *Millions on the Move* initiated the vision of a uniform refugee migration experience. This became associated with iconic images of the *kafilas*. So, *kafilas* refer to the Punjabi men, women, and children with their heavily laden bullock carts traveling across tracts of land.

And, you know, they are. Inundated by the monsoon rains, scorched by the sun, and then we also have the popular picture of trains with running boards and roofs that are packed with, overflowing with refugees. So, C. Ryan Perkins states that as the provinces of Punjab and Bengal were effectively split, approximately 7 million Hindus and Sikhs and


7 million Muslims found themselves on the wrong side, respectively. of the border or in the wrong country.

So, believing that they would return home, many of these families left their valuables behind before they emigrated with their essential belongings, and then they began their journey towards India or, if they were Muslim, they commenced their journey towards East or West Pakistan, right? And all the people had this hope that someday the violence, the turbulence, the social upheaval, and turmoil would calm down, and people would be able to come back and reclaim their homes. That never happened. They never made it. They could never, you know, go back and take possession of their homes, their land, and their property.

So, in *The Colors of Violence*, Sudhir Kakar asserts that partition violence is commonly agreed to have been the momentous event in the shaping of Hindu-Muslim relations in independent India. In the context of partition, Jennifer Yusin suggests, and I quote, 'One cannot talk about culture, politics, and identity in South Asia without drawing upon the partition, and one cannot talk about the partition without referencing the unprecedented scale of communal violence and migration that claimed approximately 1 million lives and displaced approximately 12 million people during the summer of 1947,' unquote. Acclaimed historian Ayesha Jalal has called partition the central historical event in 20th-century South Asia. According to Jalal, a defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, partition continues to influence how the people and states of post-colonial South Asia envisage their past, present, and future.

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- In the context of Partition, Jennifer Yusin (2009) suggests- "one cannot talk about culture, politics, and identity in South Asia without drawing upon the Partition, and one cannot talk about the Partition without referencing the unprecedented scale of communal violence and migration that claimed approximately one million lives and displaced approximately 12 million people during the summer of 1947" (453).
- The acclaimed historian Ayesha Jalal has called Partition "the central historical event in twentieth century South Asia." She writes, "A defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, partition continues to influence how the peoples and states of postcolonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future."



So it wouldn't be wrong to say that the legacy of partition that has been passed down the generations actually define the South Asian peoples, the South Asian denizen's identity, the violence, the stories of struggle, repatriating, resettling in a new land and struggling to

start afresh, all these narratives actually shape the person that we are today. So, partition, the ghost of partition keeps coming back to haunt South Asian politics time and again. It is never too far away.



In most of the cases, partition is imagined in a static packaged away manner without the jagged edges as Gyanendra Pandey would call it. So, it is seen as a historical event that took place 75 years back rather than an unfolding, evolving process. So, partition that has happened more than 75 years ago. We recently celebrated the 78th Independence Day. So, it is seen as...

watershed event in history which is parceled and frozen and kept away from the present and often it is seen as an upheaval, a social upheaval that defines the people's extreme emotions or that is reflective of an extreme situation. However, scholars like Gyanendra Pandey have argued that partition in terms of the South Asian people's mentality, in terms of our mindset, the language, the everyday, the common parlance that we use is not too far away at any point. Right. It is only in an emergency situation that people take each other's lives.

But on an everyday basis, we still have the communal mindset, which we hardly check or examine. So, it is only in the past few decades that oral history has emerged, moving beyond state narratives to explore the nuanced and varied ways in which the macro events of 1947 shaped and continue to shape the lives of countless Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis. Partition did not manifest in a homogeneous manner. Depending on one's geographical location, social class, gender, and caste position, among other variables of identity, the experience of Partition would differ from one person to another. So, there would be a number of experiences across the spectrum, depending on one's caste, class, gender, and economic position,

background, and so forth, such that post-Partition events have left a lasting mark on survivors and their families in different ways. So, we have different ways of remembering Partition, different aspects of Partition that each section of society remembers. The struggle is different for each section. The meaning of survival is different for each section.



So, the nature of Partition memory is very layered, nuanced, and multifaceted—and thereby complicated in nature. So, in the context of Partition, a refugee has been defined in a certain way. A refugee, according to the popular imagination, has been represented as helpless and homeless, in need of rehabilitation. So, the pictures and descriptions of famished people who have been displaced and who have gathered in railway stations reinforce this archetypal image of the refugee.

So, according to Ravinder Kaur, all previous identities and social distinctions were collapsed, neutralized, and made to be nullified in order to constitute the refugee. This becomes an archetype of the dislocated people who are in need of relocation within the post-colonial citizenry because of the decision made by the leaders to partition the subcontinent. From refugees, modern citizens were produced. Post-healing of their body and spirit. According to Kaur, the refugee body—for the purposes of policy-making—is a dispirited male body that can be successfully repaired.

Whereas, in this entire discourse or journey that the nation traces from refugee to citizenry, the female bodies are invariably absent. They are very conspicuously and apparently absent. So, from this entire discourse of the nation regarding the refugee's journey from refugeehood to citizenry, the female bodies remain mostly absent. They are almost conspicuously absent. From the discussion of the successful repairing of the

dispirited body, because this body of the refugee is essentially that of a male—a male who goes on to become the citizen visible on the nationscape.

And women are the dependents or family members of that refugee male. So, by the term 'refugee,' we are referring to a young, able-bodied male refugee. The female bodies are mostly absent, appearing only to signify the atrocities of sexual violence and abduction by the other community—the enemy community. Right. So, the female body becomes a center of discussion.

Symbolizing the male anxiety and the male obsession around her sexuality, how she can be protected, how she can be prevented from becoming a so-called fallen woman, and so forth. So, the obsession of the male citizens around the female body and yet invisibilizing it from the mainstream discourse or discussion about citizenship is something very glaring and something that many feminist scholars of partition studies question and problematize. So, discussions within the Constituent Assembly rapidly led to a broad-based consensus that Hindu and Sikh minorities fleeing violence in Pakistan belong to India. So, in 1950, the refugees' right to belong to India was enshrined in the constitution and

Article 5 allowed citizenship by registration to all those who had migrated to India from Pakistan, provided that they had arrived in India before the commencement of the constitution. However, in practice, at the ground-zero level, we see that the influx of refugees continued well beyond 1950 and informed the subsequent discussions on citizenship. So, the question of refugeehood and refugee belonging re-emerged as a dominant concern and a dominant discussion in 1955, molding the tenor and texture of the debate around citizenship. So, we see that Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who was a British lawyer and who lacked basic knowledge of India, was given only five weeks to redraw all the borders of South Asia and demarcate which part would be India and which part would go to Pakistan. His lack of knowledge about Indian culture and the basic internal dynamics within India was thought to be an asset



because, perpetually, such lack of knowledge would keep him unbiased while adjudicating, while arbitrating the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh issue. So, he would apparently not be biased either toward the Hindus or toward the Muslims. The randomness of partition by the British government is understood from the decision taken by the Bengal Boundary Commission to partition the Bengal province and tag the eastern half as East Pakistan, whereas we see that geographically, this East Pakistan as an entity—a geopolitical entity—was not abutting the West Punjab region, which went on to become West Pakistan. So, between East Pakistan and West Pakistan on the two flanks of India, there was this post-colonial nation of India.

So, between East Pakistan and West Pakistan was this post-colonial nation of India. Coming to Saadat Hasan Manto's short story, 'Toba Tek Singh'. 'Toba Tek Singh' is a short story written by Saadat Hasan Manto, and it was published in 1955. It follows the inmates in a Lahore asylum, some of whom are to be transferred to India following the 1947 partition of the subcontinent. This story is set two or three years after the 1947 partition, when the governments of India and Pakistan decided to exchange some Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu lunatics.

The narrative revolves around Bishan Singh, a Sikh inmate of an asylum in Lahore, who is from the town of Toba Tek Singh. The vital question posed by this short story by Manto is: who is mad? Is it the people in the asylum, or are the state actors making a completely insane decision? State actors who are deciding to exchange even the mentally infirm populace.

Who are the mad people? 'Toba Tek Singh,' as a partition text, is a classic gesture of denying and disavowing the dominant commonplaces in a hyper-territorial time. So, the



mental institution includes a refusal of the state-mandated principle of territorialism. To put it plainly, the asylum is a kind of hyper-territory.

So, the asylum emerges as a heterotopia. Where possibilities are more than we have in the rest of society at that point in time. People are getting a very diluted form of news from the nation's politics. The lunatics are receiving the news of politics, but in a very diluted form. In a very displaced fashion, and their understanding is doubly displaced.

So, they do not know what happens when partition takes place. Where does Toba Tek Singh go? And here, the interesting fact is that the reader conflates the identity of a person with that of a village. Where does Toba Tek Singh, the particular lunatic man, go? And where does this village called Toba Tek Singh go, right?



There is this conflation of identity, and within that madhouse, so many different interpretations can happen. Just like I said, it is like a hyper-territory; it is like a heterotopia. So, as part of the exchange, Bishan Singh is sent under police escort to India. So, this is the man whom the reader almost conflates with the identity of Toba Tek Singh, the village.

Bishan Singh himself is from Toba Tek Singh and he embodies Toba Tek Singh, right? People confuse between the person and the place. Upon being told that his hometown Toba Tek Singh is in Pakistan, Bishan Singh refuses to go. The story ends with this character Bishan Singh lying down in the no man's land between the two barbed wire fences.


To quote from the story, there behind barbed wire was Hindustan. Here behind the same kind of barbed wire was Pakistan. In between, on that piece of ground that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. In the story, whenever Bishan Singh gets irritated, he mutters a mix






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So, the government officials who claim to be sane people and who decide to exchange even the mad population from both sides of the border. So, the gibberish that Bishan Singh utters can be roughly translated into To something like this, the inattention of the annex of the rumbling upstairs of the Dal of the Pakistan and India of the go to bloody hell. It defies common sense. It defies grammar.

It defies logic. So, common citizens, these mad people could also be representative of the ignorant common citizens who were being made to cross the border, sometimes without any belongings, without any positions. The common citizens that were ignorant about the bigger decisions and who were speculating too many possibilities. They don't know where, which part would be Pakistan, where their own village would be located whether in India or in Pakistan.

This became the reality especially for many villages which were located in the border. So, what happens in reality is that the border villages are usually a mixed population, in a state of suspension for a long time. And this could have been represented. This is perhaps what Manto is trying to satirically represent through this gibberish uttered by Bishan Singh. A film based on a play adaptation of the story was made in 2005 by Afia Nathaniel.



Ketan Mehta also directed short film titled Toba Tek Singh, which was released in 2018 in India. So Nandita Das directed 2018 biographical film Manto, features the popular rant of the main protagonist in Toba Tek Singh. And this is one of the five short stories that Das features in her film. Regarding Toba Tek Singh, Shiva Raj Sanjel comments that it is an unflinching portrayal of structural violence. It reveals the impact of structural violence through catastrophic sufferings of the characters from political, social and economic dimensions.

It presents the horrors and human cost of the Partition. The loss of identity and sense of belonging is presented as the greatest impact of the absurdity that lies in drawing lines on the maps—drawing some absurd, random lines to separate a subcontinent into two, followed by three different countries. So, the story asserts that such absurdity results in catastrophic consequences in the form of immense suffering and displacement, and also the death of localized identities, such as this village called Toba Tek Singh, and also this man who almost embodies his village.

So, he is less known as Bishan Singh and more known as Toba Tek Singh. People know him less as Bishan Singh and more as Toba Tek Singh. He almost wears the identity of his village. After the Partition of India, this asylum, as an institution, lost its liberty and freedom.



The Partition creates a havoc impact on the lives of the asylum residents, who are already displaced from mainstream politics. This is something I have already stated—how the mainstream political news reaches the asylum in a very displaced, subverted, diluted manner, and further, the people, because they are mentally infirm, sometimes half-understand, sometimes misunderstand, sometimes misconstrue, and make their own interpretations out of this news. The central character, Bishan Singh, who is a Sikh, denies accepting his identity as Pakistani. So he wants to stay in between India and Pakistan, in a no man's land.

In this regard, Manto writes: I quote from the story once again. One day, as he was sweeping the floor, he suddenly climbed up a tree. Perched on a branch, he delivered a two-hour-long speech on the delicate Hindustan-Pakistan issue. When the guards asked him to come down, he climbed up even higher.

When they threatened him, he said, 'I want to live in neither Hindustan nor Pakistan.' 'I would rather live on this tree.' Bishan Singh resists the decision made by two partitioning nations and their diplomatic agreement to transfer the Hindu lunatics to India and the Muslim ones to Pakistan. Bishan Singh challenges the state's authority, defies the decision, and calls on them to define his nationality, which is neither Indian nor Pakistani, according to him—according to what he wants to declare.

Through Bishan Singh, Manto portrays the traumatic aftereffects of partition. The actual condition of Bishan Singh is clear from the following lines. So before the sun rose, a piercing cry arose from Bishan Singh, who had been quiet and still all this time. Several officers and the guards ran toward him. They saw that the man who had stood on his legs day and night for 15 years now lay prostrate on the ground.

Beyond a wired fence on one side of him was Hindustan, and beyond a wired fence on the other side was Pakistan. In the middle, on a stretch of land that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. So, this story brings out the complexities of the partition and the impacts on ordinary individuals restricted to living a peaceful social life. So, the localized syncretic culture of the village, where intercommunal harmony and faith subsisted and lived for a long time, was being destroyed by larger politics. The characters in the story find themselves caught in a whirlwind of tough situations, of disturbed times, which is beyond their control and yet deeply affecting their everyday lives.



A person who does not want to leave the asylum, who is very happy in the lunatic house, is forced into a bus or a truck and pushed to the other side of the border. There is certainly systemic violence in this entire process. Saadat Hasan Manto's stories capture the human dimensions of partition, therefore. So, rather than providing a factual history of partition that includes information on the political division of India and the establishment of new Indian and Pakistani governments, Manto portrays the ruptures, the dislocations, and the differences that were effected within families and within communities. And so his focus, the focal point, is the human cost of partition.

So, the textual ambiguity between Toba Tek Singh the man and Toba Tek Singh the place is part of what makes Manto's story particularly compelling and, one could also say, disturbing for a discussion about the traumatic impact of partition on a character. So, Bishan Singh's increasing disorientation, emerging from his inability to locate the place that he once called his home, is an important allegory for the profound confusion felt among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike—which side would these small villages go to? So, this was a situation where the syncretic culture of the village, the localized culture of the village, their intercommunal harmony, was being jeopardized by larger politics.

How Toba Tek Singh was being sacrificed, was being compromised. In other words, how the localized village culture or suburban culture in the border regions would be compromised once some very definitive, finalized lines were drawn between India and Pakistan. For a long time, these villages would not know whether they were part of India or part of Pakistan.



So, they were in the same situation as the lunatics in this madhouse. Quoting Scott, Jennifer Youssef suggests, I quote, 'In Toba Tek Singh, for example, the border clearly facilitates nationalist ideologies of divergence in which the Punjabi identity, which was regionally based, was superseded by Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu identities,' unquote. So, regarding the conceptualization of trauma, memory, and migration in Manto's Toba Tek Singh, Sudipta Datta comments, I quote Datta here, 'The character of Bishan Singh, aka Toba Tek Singh, is almost a mirror image of Manto's emotional roller-coaster ride during the Partition.' Manto himself was deeply affected by the Partition, from his own shift, his own displacement from Bombay, which was his dream city.

He could never accept leaving Bombay behind with so many memories, so many fond memories. So, coming back to Datta, I quote, 'Toba Tek Singh is Manto's supreme hero, the uprooted man, the man robbed of home, the victim of Partition, who wins a strip of land once' all his own, only in death,' unquote. So we see that this no man's land, which is neither part of India nor part of Pakistan, is Toba Tek Singh—something that cannot be defined. It is where the localized identity remained buried and dead.

So, the emotional aspects of rootlessness, belonging and unbelonging, trauma, and pain caused by the realization that the space upon which a memory is created would be out of reach and forever lost. All these factors come together in increasing the depth of the scar. So, with this, we come to the end of our lecture here today, and in our next class, we will

continue with our discussion on the partition of the Indian subcontinent. We will examine the repercussions of partition as reflected in literature through our reading of another literary work. Thank you.