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➤ **Sanity vs insanity in *Toba Tek Singh*/ Theme of madness**

“In a mad world”, says Akira Kurosawa, “only the mad are sane.” The above remark proves itself to be true at its best in the hands of ‘greatest chronicler of the most turbulent episode’ of India’s history, Saadat Hasan Manto. In 1947 when India was celebrating the vibes of her independence, there were more than a million people who were hardly aware of their country. Manto took the convulsive backdrop of the partition of Bengal and presented the hypocrisy of the then leaders through his witty words. *Toba Tek Singh* is a seminal text in the bleak backdrop of partition to show a glimpse of many untold stories. The story centres round some lunatics of a lunatic asylum. Apparent it sketches the absurd activities of the lunatics but the madness of the inmates of the lunatic asylum work as a slap in the cheeks of the then so called rational and national leaders.

The story starts with a whimsical decision taken by Indian and Pakistani government after two to three years of partition. The government officials of each country decided to exchange the lunatics as per partition norms. The story takes a lunatics asylum of Punjab at its centre. When the news of exchange came to the inmates of the lunatic asylum, the inmates was in a confusion regarding the exact location of India or Pakistan. This confusion is discernible in the following lines—

“If they were in India, then where was Pakistan? If they were in Pakistan, how come that only a short while ago they were in India? How could they be in India a short while ago and now suddenly in Pakistan?”

The remarkable instance of lunacy stands in the fact of the exchange of lunatics. According to partition norms the Muslim lunatics had to be sent over to Pakistan or vice versa. This incident of the story reminds us the short story *The Last Lesson* by Alphonse Daudet. In *The Last Lesson* an order was sent from Berlin that made German and not French the official language of Alsace and Lorraine, after the Franco-Prussian War. Nobody could do anything but follow the instruction: irrespective of how silly it was to even try to curb a language that is the “key to their prison”. When the protagonist of that story Franz asks, “Will they make them speak in German, even the pigeons?”. It reveals the absurdity of such unthoughtful straight action. In case of the exchange of lunatics in the present short story *Toba Tek Singh* there is no difference. Even the lunatics were divided. The conversation of the lunatics among themselves attributes a ‘sane’ ambience to the turmoil situation of partition just like Franz’s statement about pigeons in the story of Daudet.

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There Franz says that birds won't be asked to choose a nation as they can fly across borders. While through the character of a child Daudet criticises the socially constructed binaries of adult /child and sane / insane, Manto deploys the lunatics to reproach the so-called great leaders of India and Pakistan.

The idea of sanity and insanity inverts through the activity of a certain lunatic in the asylum. One of the lunatics climbed up a tree and claimed himself to be of both India and Pakistan. Very interesting and ironically enough this division without the knowledge of same common mass. The leaders who were responsible for partition, were not among the millions of the homeless persons. Thus, the leaders' fascist decision was very much alike a mad person.

The insanity of the national leaders can be perceived through the activity of the lunatic lawyer in the story. Though he heard that he would be transferred to the country of his beloved, he was not willing to go there because he would not be able to flourish his business in an unknown land. Thus, this kind of idea from a lunatic person was like a whip in the back of so-called sane leaders.

Jinnah's 'Two Nation Theory' divided Bengal ruthlessly into two parts. Being provoked by the dried notion of nationalism, the people of both Hindu and Muslim community killed each other. But the lunatics in the asylum understood how absurd it was to divided the country and protested in their own way. Thus, though the so-called sane men killed each other, the lunatics were critiquing the notion of new nation through their innocent activity.

The camouflage of sanity was torn by literal insanity of the protagonist Bishan Singh in the short story *Toba Tek Singh*. Bishan Singh, as is portrayed, was an old man who was there in the asylum since last fifteen years. He was from a place named Toba Tek Singh. When he heard the news of partition, he often uttered a phrase consisting of Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi registers. Apparently, the phrase is nonsensical but it expresses the fact that Bishan Singh thought the idea of partition to be an absurd one.

The theme of sanity versus insanity comes to its zenith on the very day of exchange. The inmates were divided and sent to their respective countries in accordance with religion. When it was the turn of Bishan Singh, he refused to move. He announced that the land he was standing on was Toba Tek Singh. After that, "The man who stood erect on his legs for fifteen years, now pitched face-forward on to the ground." He was actually in both the lands, on one hand and also in no

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man's land at the same time. He claimed the land to be Toba Tek Singh. If he decided that the particular land in which he inhabited was Toba Tek Singh, and based on this we call him 'insane', then the hypocrite politicians who redrew borders thoughtlessly and gave new names of the provinces were equally or rather more insane. If the decision on the politicians can be taken for granted as 'sanity', why cannot the decision of claiming the unnamed land as his village by Bishan Singh be taken for granted? Thus, the story inverts the binary of sanity and insanity established by social norms.

In *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, Pecola believed at the end that she had blue eyes (Morrison), and nobody could falsify her belief. In her madness, she finally found what she was looking for just like Bishan Singh who found his Toba Tek Singh in an unnamed piece of land. And no sane person can take that absolute freedom away from the mad through logic and reason. What they feel about their body or, in Toba Tek Singh's case, the nation, can't be altered by the opinion of the 'sane', for in madness there is freedom; freedom from the tyranny of social, cultural and national norms and structures. In the movie *Mammo* (Jalal), it was evident how Mammo defied the rule of the state because it was meaningless to stay away from her family and homeland just because the government decided that she would have to be restricted to the nation they've 'made for her'. She was categorized 'sane' unlike Bishan, but both did the same thing, defied the orders of the state. Thus, *Toba Tek Singh*, a story of mad people, is more about sanity and logic inherent in the madness of the inmates. Throughout *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault insists that madness is not a natural, unchanging thing, but rather depends on the society in which it exists (Foucault). Indeed, the society valued the men, who took irrational decisions in their 'sane' state, and banished men who thought rationally in their 'insane' state. Even in *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a mad woman is shown to be obsessed with the wallpaper in her room (Gilman). Her pursuit of tearing down the wallpaper portrayed her want to break down patriarchy and is one of the most effective ways through which one could understand the pressure of patriarchy. This is similar to the absurdity of partition that is well understood by the stories of madmen in *Toba Tek Singh*. The ones who create definitions of madness and thus keep mad people away from society aren't acknowledging the fact that these people might think differently but being different doesn't always mean being inferior or unfit. Madness might even be a gift!

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To conclude, it can be said that the traditional idea and norms of sanity and insanity are made at stake in the short story *Toba Tek Singh*. The story insanity becomes an instrument of protest against the inhuman hypocrisy of the then national leaders in dividing Bengal into two parts. The madness of Bishan Singh might come to an end after his death, but the insanity of the then leaders in the guise of sanity would remain the unchanged. Thus, Anchal Malhotra rightly says, “Memory dilutes, but object remains unaltered.” (*Remnants of a Separation: A History of Partition through Material Memory*)

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