



## **Trauma and Violence in Saadat Hasan Manto's Stories Open It and Toba Tek Singh**

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### **Abstract**

Saadat Hasan particularly in the aftermath of India's 1947 Partition, Manto's short stories serve as unwavering testaments to human suffering. By analysing trauma and violence in two of Manto's foundational works, *Open It* and *Toba Tek Singh*, this work investigates the moral, social, and psychological effects of Partition. Manto depicts the agony of everyday lives destroyed by the catastrophic upheaval with rich characterisation, potent imagery, and unwavering reality. His stories exposed both personal suffering and group confusion, exposing the deep wounds caused by social conflict. In the end, this study shows how Manto's writings highlight the lasting effects of violence and the human cost of political upheaval, establishing his body of work as a crucial lens for comprehending trauma in South Asian literature.

**Key Words:** Partition, trauma, identity, psychological, devastation etc.

### **Introduction**

Saadat Hasan Manto, a writer shaped in the furnace of Partition, not only witnessed its horrors but also understood the deep psychological destruction it caused. Millions of people were traumatized by the 1947 partition, which caused them to lose their identity, be uprooted from their ancestral homes, and live in a state of uncertainty and exile. Manto's famous short story *Toba Tek Singh* is set against the dramatic upheavals of Partition, which were characterized by mass displacement, sectarian violence, and the sudden reconfiguration of geographical and cultural borders. *Toba Tek Singh*, one of Manto's most well-known works, captures the confusion of a divided subcontinent. Manto challenges the idea of splitting human beings along arbitrary geographical boundaries as well as the catastrophic impact of Partition on society via harsh reality and sharp sarcasm. The narrative depicts how the subcontinent's society, culture, and literature were drastically altered by the devastating rupture of 1947, shattering countless ordinary lives.

Bishan Singh, a Sikh prisoner at an asylum in Lahore, is at the center of the story. Bishan Singh transforms from a single character into an allegorical figure whose "madness" highlights the absurdity of governmental organizations trying to categorize and remove individuals in accordance with hastily constructed national borders. The asylum itself serves as a microcosm of the subcontinent: a place where boundaries between chaos and order, sanity and insanity, and displacement and identity dissolve into instability. When Bishan



Singh and other prisoners are brought to the border for exchange between India and Pakistan, it is a crucial occasion. Here, he encounters an ambiguous, transitional area—a no-man's-land strip that embodies the precarious ontological state of people whose sense of identity has been shattered by the new mapping order. This borderland, which is neither entirely Indian nor Pakistani, represents how political borders are insufficient to encompass the lived human experience. Bishan Singh's unwillingness to enter either country turns into an act of resistance that affirms his emotional connection to Toba Tek Singh, his home, and rejects the logic of Partition. As M. Asaduddin observes, "Bishen Singh, the 'mad' protagonist of the story contemptuously rejects the verdict of the politicians to be divided between India and Pakistan and prefers to die on the strip of land that belongs to neither. This is Manto's symbolic rejection of the vivisection of the country, and his considered comment on the stupidity of the entire exercise" (Asaduddin 33).

His death on this disputed territory crystallizes the story's main irony—that the human cost of nation-making cannot be reconciled within inflexible geographical frameworks. Manto highlights the emotional devastation of Partition through this sad climax, showing how national identities established at the price of individual and collective memory are still unworkable. Thus, in a world shattered by political violence, Bishan Singh's destiny represents the greater agony of relocation, alienation, and the impossibility of belonging. Manto combines the asylum into allegory, crazy into metaphor, and no-man's-land into a platform for existential resistance in *Toba Tek Singh*. The narrative forces readers to face the folly of Partition and its catastrophic effects on human identity, serving as a reminder that the wounds from 1947 are not just historical but also profoundly psychological, deeply ingrained in South Asian consciousness.

Bishan Singh's act of perplexity and resistance beautifully captures the larger sensations of dislocation and alienation that many people went through during the Partition. Through him, Manto criticizes the arbitrary and ridiculous political processes that displaced millions of people and left them stranded in a state of transition where it was hard for them to fit in. *Toba Tek Singh*'s dual identity—both a man and a place—emerges as a potent metaphor for the psychological turmoil caused by Partition and the fight of identity. The gradual blending of Bishan Singh's identity with the ground he lives on highlights the deep impacts of political turmoil on both individual and group identity, showing how individuals are frequently rendered indistinguishable from the places they are pulled away from.

Manto's storytelling technique forces readers to see Partition as a profound upheaval in the social and psychological fabric of the subcontinent rather than just as a period of physical bloodshed and forced migration by purposefully blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction. The borderland's symbolic renaming as "Toba Tek Singh" emphasizes the blending of identity and geography, showing how official classifications and nationalist goals are intertwined with individual histories. By turning a single individual into a site of communal trauma, Manto illustrates how the dislocations of Partition go far beyond material loss and penetrate the very foundations of human identity. The story begins with a satirical depiction of Partition, ridiculing prominent figures on both sides and highlighting the identity uncertainty



that characterized the time. Readers are forced to confront the harsh facts of a divided country and the terrible human cost of political choices as Bishan Singh's narrative progresses. Manto's portrayal of Bishan's resistance and his terrible end is replete with themes of loss, displacement, and the need to belong across arbitrary national boundaries. "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" he asked in agony. The agony of those caught in the crossfire of uncontrolled historical forces is captured in the question, "In India or Pakistan?" The harsh reality of the partition stood mountain-like before him. The India of his imagination, the united India, solid and whole, lay shattered before his eyes. Even in his wildest imagination he could not have thought of such countrywide butchery, arson and loot in the name of religion. Lahore, with which he was once so familiar now looked alien to him and its atmosphere foreign (Waadhawan 28).

Toba Tek Singh ultimately serves as evidence of Manto's capacity to depict the complexity of the human experience in the midst of political turmoil. Manto emphasizes the long-lasting psychological and emotional wounds of Partition by combining the figure of Bishan Singh with the symbolic landscape of Toba Tek Singh. The story highlights the uncertainty and liminality imposed on persons displaced by violence, highlighting the connections between individual histories and national dislocations. By doing this, Manto provides a profound reflection on trauma, identity, and resistance in addition to a tale of lunacy. A couple of years after the Partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistan asylum should be sent to India. (11)

Manto's essays shed light on how vulnerable and resilient people may be in the face of societal change. Through meticulous attention to character development, narrative structure, and recurrent thematic elements, his stories portray many facets of pain. According to Khushwant Singh, the crucial event that separated Indian literature into pre-Partition and post-Partition eras was partition. The majority of academics agree that 1947 represents a significant turning point in literary discourses about identity, belonging, and nationhood as well as in the histories of India and Pakistan. Ordinary people were forced to reevaluate their sense of self, their connections to the community, and the fundamentals of existence due to the magnitude of this disruption. One lunatic also declares in a fit of anger, "I want to live in neither Hindustan nor Pakistan ... I'd rather live on this tree" (214). In this context, it has been appropriately pointed out by Dr. Sabiha Shaheen that "Toba Tek Singh is a scathing comment on the absurdity of the decision and the policy of the two postcolonial states to split up the inmates of the mental asylum according to their religious affiliation. Manto effectively depicts this situation of collective pain in Toba Tek Singh. The narrative illustrates how Partition broke ties to one another and the land, turning what would have seemed like an impersonal political barrier into a profound human sorrow. Manto portrays the miserable condition of thousands of people who faced severe consequences and were butchered on the basis of their religious identity. As Alok Bhalla rightly notes, Manto's short stories about the partition are more realistic and more shocking records of those predatory times (than those of



his contemporaries). They are written by a man who knows that after such ruination there can neither be any forgiveness nor any forgetting. (Bhalla xvii).

Open It (Khol Do) addresses the unsettling reality of gender-based violence and the profound sense of betrayal that accompanied the turmoil of Partition riots, while Toba Tek Singh emphasizes the craziness of boundaries and the displacement of identity. Sakina is the protagonist of the tale, and her destiny serves as a metaphor for the fragility of women in this era. Manto forces readers to face the intimate brutality that preceded national separation by exposing the structural flaws and inequities that fuelled communal upheaval through her character. The story, which takes place in post-Partition Lahore, centres on Sirajuddin, a father haunted by memories of his family, especially his wife and daughter, who have endured unimaginable suffering because to the bloodshed. His terrifying revelation that Sakina is lying half-conscious in a hospital in a relief camp, her body and soul damaged by trauma, is the result of his frantic quest for her. In this setting, the title line "Open It " takes on a terrifying resonance. Sakina's mechanical, passive compliance with the doctor's orders represents a dissociative condition and the psychological damage caused by sexual assault. But her acquiescence and quiet also represent a subdued kind of resistance—a declaration of survival against systems that aimed to destroy her autonomy. Manto highlights the gendered aspects of Partition's violence via Sakina, showing how women were unreasonably affected. Her narrative serves as a prism through which readers view the breakdown of protective systems, the betrayal of social ties, and the long-lasting effects of trauma. Sakina's stillness in Open It highlights the complex character of suffering during Partition—madness and muteness, resistance and resignation, all intertwined within the human fight to endure—in contrast to Bishan Singh's insanity in Toba Tek Singh.

Manto depicts the terrible confluence of violence, pain, and survival during Partition in his eerie short tale Open It (Khol Do). In the midst of Lahore's pandemonium, Sirajuddin, a father overcome with grief and desperation, desperately looks for his daughter Sakina. His search results in a terrifying discovery: Sakina is found half-conscious in a hospital in a relief camp, her body covered with wounds from abuse and her spirit shattered by tragedy. In these circumstances, the title phrase, Open It, gains significant psychological relevance. Sakina exhibits a dissociative condition in which she looks detached from her emotional and physical self, as seen by her mechanical, passive compliance with the doctor's order to untie her waist tie without hesitation. The long-lasting psychological impacts of sexual assault are symbolized by this robotic acquiescence, which shows how trauma undermines individual agency and turns the body into a place of mute testimony.

The story dramatizes the dynamics of power and resistance from a Foucauldian perspective. Sakina's quiet and passive acquiescence paradoxically represent a subdued sort of resistance, despite the fact that she has been imprinted with power via acts of violence and exploitation. Sakina claims agency by living despite her limitations; her perseverance becomes an act of rebellion against systems that want to destroy her individuality. She demonstrates resiliency in the face of institutionalized cruelty by bearing testimony to tyranny by her presence rather than her words. Thus, Manto's depiction of Sakina highlights the gendered aspects of the



brutality of Partition. Its most susceptible victims were women, who were raped, kidnapped, and silenced in startling numbers since they were frequently converted to symbols of social honour. By revealing the betrayal of familial ties, the breakdown of protecting institutions, and the profound wounds inflicted upon female subjectivity, Sakina's narrative compels readers to face this truth. Her quiet serves as a potent reminder of how tragedy alters identity, memory, and agency rather than being a sign of emptiness.

Manto highlights the duality of Partition's human cost by contrasting Sakina's subdued resistance with Sirajuddin's agonizing search: the resiliency of those who faced unimaginable brutality and the sadness of those who lost loved ones. *Open It* transforms from a story of personal pain into a biting critique of the political and societal systems that made such crimes possible. The narrative moment when Sirajuddin says, "*I... sir, I...I am her father*", and the doctor instructs, "*Open it!*" underscores the intersection of authority, vulnerability, and resistance (Manto 76). Manto uses Sakina to highlight the widespread human cost of Partition, especially to women, and to show how trauma alters identity and agency. The term "*Open It*" come to represent not only the brutality she endured but also her tenacity and subdued resistance to the repressive social and political systems that surrounded her. The deadliest victims of division were women. Thousands upon thousands of people were raped, murdered, or kidnapped. Nobody was spared, not even the elderly or children. The entire town was set on fire, and the convicts were hunted and killed with homemade weapons while screaming. No one has been able to make sense of that madness (mental condition). It is clear that not only individuals but entire communities can go insane." (Page xii-xiii, Hasan)

The harsh reality of Partition loomed in front of him like an impassable mountain. The India he had always imagined, a united, powerful, and coherent country, lay in ashes. The extent of the destruction was unfathomable: rampant butchering, burning, and looting carried out in the name of religion ripped apart the nation's social structure. He had liked and valued Lahore, but all of a sudden, the city's streets and atmosphere seemed foreign to him, turning into a place of alienation. Saadat Hasan Manto's work and vision were significantly influenced by this alienation, both individual and societal. Manto's short stories serve as complex analyses of pain and violence, providing readers with a prism through which to view the human cost of divide. This work aims to enhance our comprehension of the ongoing effects of Partition on South Asian literature and history. Manto's stories offer a biting examination of pain, violence, and insanity within the framework of India's Partition. The horrible realities of human suffering and the profound psychological scars caused by historical turmoil are shown by his unwavering realism, striking characterization, and evocative imagery. Manto forces readers to face the frailty of human existence during difficult times through his writings. He describes how the 1947 breakup not only claimed lives but also upended identities, broke up communities, and redefined belonging. His characters, such as Sakina in *Open It* and Bishan Singh in *Toba Tek Singh*, represent the suffering of common people caught in exceptional turbulence and become symbols of resistance and collective pain.





Manto's lasting impact serves as a reminder of the importance of empathy, compassion, and understanding when faced with adversity. His books are still incredibly relevant today, providing timeless insights into the human condition. Manto's writing challenges readers to confront injustice, recognize suffering, and develop a stronger sense of social responsibility by highlighting the complexity of sorrow and violence beyond everyday living. In the end, Manto's tales are eternal reflections on mankind itself rather than just memoirs of Partition. They maintain that in order to prevent memory from fading into silence, writing must give witness to sorrow. By doing this, Manto ensures that the voices of the uprooted, the violated, and the forgotten continue to reverberate throughout history by turning the atrocities of the past into tales of resiliency. *Open It* and *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hasan Manto are still two of the most potent literary accounts of the pain and carnage caused by India's 1947 Partition. When taken as a whole, these tales shed light on the complex psychological, social, and existential anguish that common people went through during political unrest. Manto offers readers a profound reflection on the human cost of nation-making by transforming individual experiences into communal emblems of displacement, lunacy, and perseverance via stark realism, allegorical depth, and unwavering narrative.

Bishan Singh, the protagonist of *Toba Tek Singh*, represents the confusion of millions displaced by arbitrary geographical divides. His "madness" is a metaphor for the absurdity of governmental institutions that attempted to categorize and move people along hastily defined national borders, rather than just a psychological ailment. As a microcosm of the subcontinent, the institution dramatizes the dissolution of boundaries between identification and displacement, order and disorder, and sanity and insanity. The fundamental irony of Partition—that the human yearning for belonging cannot be satisfied within strict geographical frameworks—is embodied by Bishan Singh's unwillingness to enter either India or Pakistan and his death in no-man's land. His demise highlights the psychological harm caused by Partition and shows how national identities were imposed at the price of personal and communal memory remain untenable.

*Open It*, on the other hand, emphasizes the gendered aspects of Partition's brutality. Sakina's mechanical, passive compliance with the doctor's order—untying her waistband tie without question—becomes a terrifying representation of trauma. Her quiet paradoxically represents a subdued kind of resistance, while her detachment indicates the catastrophic psychological ramifications of sexual assault. Sakina demonstrates persistence despite her limitations by enduring repressive systems that attempted to destroy her agency. Through her narrative, Manto reveals the severe wounds inflicted on women during Partition, the breakdown of protective institutions, and the betrayal of familial ties. Her quiet serves as a potent reminder of how tragedy alters identity, memory, and agency rather than being a sign of emptiness.

These two tales show the depth of Manto's literary vision when combined. While *Open It* addresses the personal brutality perpetrated upon women's bodies and minds, *Toba Tek Singh* questions the ridiculousness of boundaries and the displacement of identity. In Manto's investigation of human frailty and resiliency, madness and muteness, resistance and resignation, death and survival—all become entwined. His stories force readers to face the



magnitude of Partition as a fundamental rupture of identity, belonging, and humanity itself, rather than just as a historical occurrence. Manto's legacy is ultimately defined by his reluctance to sanitize or romanticize misery. His tales emphasize that in order to prevent memory from fading into quiet, writing must bear witness to pain. Manto pushes us to confront injustice, recognize pain, and develop empathy by revealing the unhealed scars of Partition. His words are still extremely important today because they serve as a reminder that the effects of violence are not limited to the past but rather continue to influence the present. Manto ensures that the voices of the dispossessed, the violated, and the forgotten continue to reverberate throughout generations by transforming historical traumas into eternal reflections on the human condition in *Open It* and *Toba Tek Singh*.

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