**Toba Tek Singh**  
**Saadat Hassan Manto**  
**Translated by Frances W. Pritchett**

Two or three years after Partition, it occurred to the governments of Pakistan and Hindustan that like criminal offenders, lunatics too ought to be exchanged: that is, those Muslim lunatics who were in Hindustan’s insane asylums should be sent to Pakistan, and those Hindus and Sikhs who were in Pakistan’s insane asylums should be confided to the care of Hindustan.

There’s no telling whether this idea was wise or unwise; in any case, according to the decision of the learned, high-level conferences took place here and there, and finally a day was fixed for the exchange of lunatics. Thorough investigation was made. Those Muslim lunatics whose relatives were all in Hindustan were allowed to remain there. As for the rest, they were sent off to the border. Here in Pakistan, since almost all the Hindus and Sikhs had already left, the question of keeping anyone didn’t even arise. As many Hindu and Sikh lunatics as there were, all of them were conveyed, under police protection, to the border.

No telling what was going on that side. But here in the Lahore insane asylum, when word of this exchange arrived, major discussions began to take place. One Muslim lunatic, who every day for twelve years had regularly read the “Zamindar,” was asked by a friend, “Molvi Sa’b, what’s this ‘Pakistan’?”; after much thought and reflection he answered, “It’s a kind of place in Hindustan where razors are made.”

Having heard this answer, his friend was satisfied.

In the same way, a second Sikh lunatic asked another Sikh lunatic, “Sardarji, why are we being sent to Hindustan? –We don’t know the language of that place.”

The other smiled: “I know the language of those Hindustaggers– those Hindustanis go strutting around like the devil!”

One day, while bathing, a Muslim lunatic raised the cry of “Long live Pakistan!” with such force that he slipped on the floor and fell, and knocked himself out.

There were also a number of lunatics who were not lunatics. The majority of them were murderers whose relatives had bribed the officers to get them sent to the lunatic asylum, to save them from the coils of the hangman’s noose. These understood something of why Hindustan had been partitioned and what Pakistan was. But they too were ignorant of the actual events. Nothing could be learned from the newspapers. The guards were illiterate and crude; nothing could be picked up from their conversation either. They knew only this much: that there’s a man, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whom people call the “Qa’id-e Azam.” He has made a separate country for the Muslims, the name of which is Pakistan. Where it is, what its location is– about this they knew nothing. This is the reason that in the insane asylum, all the lunatics whose minds were not completely gone were trapped in the dilemma of whether they were in Pakistan or Hindustan. If they were in Hindustan, then where was Pakistan? If they were in Pakistan, then how could this be, since a while ago, while staying right here, they had been in Hindustan?

One lunatic became so caught up in the circle of Pakistan and Hindustan, and Hindustan and Pakistan, that he became even more lunatic. One day he had been sweeping– and then climbed a tree, seated himself on a branch, and gave an unbroken two-hour speech about the subtle problem of Pakistan and Hindustan. When the guards told him to come down, he climbed even higher. When he was warned and threatened, he said, “I don’t want to live in either Hindustan or Pakistan. I’ll live right here in this tree.”

When after great difficulty his ardor was cooled, he came down and began to embrace his Hindu and Sikh friends and weep. His heart overflowed at the thought that they would leave him and go off to Hindustan.

In an M.Sc.-qualified radio engineer, who was Muslim, who used to stroll all day in silence on a special path in the garden entirely apart from the other lunatics, the change that manifested itself was that he removed all his clothing, confided it to the care of a warden, and began to wander all around the garden entirely naked.

A stout Muslim lunatic from Chiniot who had been an enthusiastic worker for the Muslim League, and who bathed fifteen or sixteen times a day, suddenly abandoned this habit. His name was Muhammad Ali. Accordingly, one day in his madness he announced that he was the Qa’id-e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In imitation of him, a Sikh lunatic became Master Tara Singh. In this madness it almost came to bloodshed, but both were declared ‘dangerous lunatics’ and shut up in separate rooms.

There was a young Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had been rejected in love and had turned lunatic. When he heard that Amritsar had gone away into India, then he was very sad. He had fallen in love with a Hindu girl from that very city. Although she had rejected the lawyer, even in his madness he hadn’t forgotten her. Thus he abused all those Hindu and Muslim leaders who had connived together and made Hindustan into two fragments– his beloved had become Hindustani, and he Pakistani.

When talk of the exchange began, then some of the lunatics comforted the lawyer, saying that he shouldn’t mind about it, that he would be sent to Hindustan– the Hindustan where his beloved lived. But he didn’t want to leave Lahore, because he thought that in Amritsar his practice wouldn’t flourish.

In the European ward there were two Anglo-Indian lunatics. When they learned that the English had freed Hindustan and gone away, they were very much shocked. And for hours they privately conferred about the important question of what their status in the lunatic asylum would be now. Would the European Ward remain, or be abolished? Would breakfast be available, or not? Instead of proper bread, would they have to choke down those bloody Indian chapattis?

There was one Sikh who had been in the insane asylum for fifteen years. Strange and remarkable words were always be heard on his lips: “*Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di daal of the lantern*.” He slept neither by day nor by night. The guards said that in the long duration of fifteen years he hadn’t slept even for a moment. He didn’t even lie down. Although indeed, he sometimes leaned against a wall.

Because he constantly remained standing, his feet swelled up. His ankles were swollen too. But despite this bodily discomfort, he didn’t lie down and rest. When in the insane asylum there was talk about Hindustan-Pakistan and the exchange of lunatics, he listened attentively. If someone asked him what his opinion was, he answered with great seriousness, “*Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di daal of the Pakistan Government*.”

But later, “of the Pakistan Government” was replaced by “of the Toba Tek Singh Government,” and he began to ask the other lunatics where Toba Tek Singh was, where he had his home. But no one at all knew whether it was in Pakistan or Hindustan. If they tried to tell him, they themselves were caught up in the perplexity that Sialkot used to be in Hindustan, but now it was said to be in Pakistan. Who knew whether Lahore, which now is in Pakistan, tomorrow might go off to Hindustan? Or all of Hindustan itself might become Pakistan? And who could place his hand on his breast and say whether Hindustan and Pakistan might not both someday vanish entirely?

This Sikh lunatic’s hair had grown very thin and sparse. Because he rarely bathed, the hair of his beard and head had clumped together, which gave him a very frightening appearance. But the man was harmless. In fifteen years he’d never quarreled with anybody. The longtime custodians in the insane asylum knew only this much about him: that he had some lands in Toba Tek Singh. He was a prosperous landlord, when suddenly his mind gave way. His relatives bound him in heavy iron chains, brought him to the insane asylum, got him admitted, and left.

These people came once a month to see him; after checking on his welfare, they left. For a long time these visits took place regularly. But when the confusion over Pakistan-Hindustan began, the visits stopped.

His name was Bishan Singh, but everyone called him “Toba Tek Singh.” He had absolutely no idea what day it was, what month it was, or how many years had passed. But every month when his near and dear ones came to visit him, then he himself used to be aware of it. Thus he used to tell the custodian that his visitors were coming. That day he bathed very well, scrubbed his body thoroughly with soap, and put oil on his hair and combed it. He had them bring out clothes that he never wore, and put them on, and in such a state of adornment he went to meet his visitors. If they asked him anything, then he remained silent, or from time to time said, “*Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di dal of the lantern*.”

He had one daughter who, growing a finger-width taller every month, in fifteen years had become a young girl. Bishan Singh didn’t even recognize her. When she was a child, she wept when she saw her father; when she’d grown up, tears still flowed from her eyes.

When the story of Pakistan and Hindustan began, he started asking the other lunatics where Toba Tek Singh was. When no reassuring answer was forthcoming, day by day his agitation increased. Now even his visitors didn’t come. Formerly, he himself used to be aware that his visitors were coming. But now it was as if even the voice of his heart, which used to tell him of their arrival, had fallen silent.

His great desire was that those people would come who showed sympathy toward him, and brought him fruit, sweets, and clothing. If he asked them where Toba Tek Singh was, they would certainly tell him whether it was in Pakistan or Hindustan. Because his idea was that they came from Toba Tek Singh itself, where his lands were.

In the insane asylum there was also a lunatic who called himself God. When one day Bisham Singh asked him whether Toba Tek Singh was in Pakistan or Hindustan, he burst out laughing, as was his habit, and said, “It’s neither in Pakistan nor in Hindustan– because we haven’t given the order yet.”

A number of times Bishan Singh asked this God, with much pleading and cajoling, to give the order, so that the perplexity would be ended; but he was very busy, because he had countless orders to give. One day, growing irritated, Bishan Singh burst out at him, “*Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di dal of hail to the Guruji and the Khalsa, and victory to the Guruji! Who says this will thrive– the true God is ever alive!*”

Perhaps the meaning of this was, “You’re the God of the Muslims! If you were the God of the Sikhs, you’d surely have listened to me!”

Some days before the exchange, a Muslim from Toba Tek Singh who was his friend came to visit him. He had never come before. When Bishan Singh saw him, he moved off to one side and turned to go back, but the guards stopped him.

“He’s come to visit you. He’s your friend Fazal Din.”

Bishan Singh took one look at Fazal Din, and began to mutter something. Fazal Din came forward and put a hand on his shoulder. “I’ve been thinking for a long time that I’d come see you, but I just didn’t get a chance… All your family are well; they’ve gone off to Hindustan…. I helped as much as I could…. Your daughter Rup Kaur…”

He stopped in the midst of what he was saying. Bishan Singh began to remember something. “Daughter Rup Kaur.”

Fazl Din said haltingly, “Yes… she… she too is fine…. She too went off with them.”

Bishan Singh remained silent. Fazal Din began saying, “They told me to check on your welfare from time to time…. Now I’ve heard that you’re going to Hindustan…. Give my greetings to brother Balbesar Singh and brother Vadhava Singh…. And sister Amrit Kaur too…. Tell brother Balbesar that those brown water buffaloes that he left behind, one of them had a male calf…. The other had a female calf, but when it was six days old it died…. And… and if there’s anything I can do for you, tell me; I’m at your service…. And I’ve brought you a little puffed-rice candy.”

Bishan Singh confided the bundle of puffed-rice candy to the guard standing nearby, and asked Fazal Din, “Where is Toba Tek Singh?”

Fazal Din said with some astonishment, “Where is it? Right there where it was!”

Bishan Singh asked, “In Pakistan, or in Hindustan?”

“In Hindustan — no, no, in Pakistan.” Fazal Din was thrown into confusion.

Bishan Singh went off muttering, “*Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di dal of the Pakistan and Hindustan of the get out, loudmouth!*”

Preparations for the exchange had been completed. Lists of the lunatics coming from here to there, and from there to here, had arrived, and the day of the exchange had also been fixed.

It was extremely cold when the lorries full of Hindu and Sikh lunatics from the Lahore insane asylum set out, with a police guard. The escorting wardens were with them as well. At the Wagah border the two parties’ superintendents met each other; and after the initial procedures had been completed, the exchange began, and went on all night.

To extricate the lunatics from the lorries, and confide them to the care of the other wardens, was a very difficult task. Some refused to emerge at all. Those who were willing to come out became difficult to manage, because they suddenly ran here and there. If clothes were put on the naked ones, they tore them off their bodies and flung them away. Someone was babbling abuse, someone was singing. They were fighting among themselves, weeping, muttering. People couldn’t make themselves heard at all– and the female lunatics’ noise and clamor was something else. And the cold was so fierce that everybody’s teeth were chattering.

The majority of the lunatics were not in favor of this exchange. Because they couldn’t understand why they were being uprooted from their place and thrown away like this. Those few who were capable of a glimmer of understanding were raising the cries, “Long live Pakistan!” and “Death to Pakistan!” Two or three times a fight was narrowly averted, because a number of Muslims and Sikhs, hearing these slogans, flew into a passion.

When Bishan Singh’s turn came, and on that side of the Wagah border the accompanying officer began to enter his name in the register, he asked, “Where is Toba Tek Singh? In Pakistan, or in Hindustan?”

The accompanying officer laughed: “In Pakistan.”

On hearing this Bishan Singh leaped up, dodged to one side, and ran to rejoin his remaining companions. The Pakistani guards seized him and began to pull him in the other direction, but he refused to move. “Toba Tek Singh is here!” — and he began to shriek with great force, “*Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan!*”

They tried hard to persuade him: “Look, now Toba Tek Singh has gone off to Hindustan! And if it hasn’t gone, then it will be sent there at once.” But he didn’t believe them. When they tried to drag him to the other side by force, he stopped in the middle and stood there on his swollen legs as if now no power could move him from that place.

Since the man was harmless, no further force was used on him. He was allowed to remain standing there, and the rest of the work of the exchange went on.

In the pre-dawn peace and quiet, from Bishan Singh’s throat there came a shriek that pierced the sky…. From here and there a number of officers came running, and they saw that the man who for fifteen years, day and night, had constantly stayed on his feet, lay prostrate. There, behind barbed wire, was Hindustan. Here, behind the same kind of wire, was Pakistan. In between, on that piece of ground that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.