

Two or three years after the 1947 Partition, it occurred to the governments of India and Pakistan to exchange their lunatics in the same manner as they had exchanged their criminals. The Muslim lunatics in India were to be sent over to Pakistan and the Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums were to be handed over to India.

It was difficult to say whether the proposal made any sense or not. However, the decision had been taken at the topmost level on both sides. After high-level conferences were held a day was fixed for exchange of the lunatics. It was agreed that those Muslims who had families in India would be permitted to stay back while the rest would be escorted to the border. Since almost all the Hindus and Sikhs had migrated from Pakistan, the question of retaining non-Muslim lunatics in Pakistan did not arise. All of them were to be taken to India.

Nobody knew what transpired in India, but so far as Pakistan was concerned this news created quite a stir in the lunatic asylum at Lahore, leading to all sorts of funny developments. A Muslim lunatic, a regular reader of the fiery Urdu daily *Zamindar*, when asked what Pakistan was, reflected for a while and then replied, "Don't you know? A place in India known for manufacturing cut-throat razors." Apparently satisfied, the friend asked no more questions.

Likewise, a Sikh lunatic asked another Sikh, "Sardarji, why are we being deported to India? We don't even know their language." The Sikh gave a knowing smile. "But I know the language of *Hindostoras*" he replied. "These bloody Indians, the way they strut about!"

One day while taking his bath, a Muslim lunatic yelled, "*Pakistan Zindabad!*" with such force that he slipped, fell down on the floor and was knocked unconscious.

Not all the inmates were insane. Quite a few were murderers. To escape the gallows, their relatives had gotten them in by bribing the officials. They had only a vague idea about the division of India or what Pakistan was. They were utterly ignorant of the present situation. Newspapers hardly ever gave the true picture and the asylum warders were illiterates from whose conversation they could not glean anything. All that these inmates knew was that there was a man by the name of Quaid-e-Azam who had set up a separate state for Muslims, called Pakistan. But they had no idea where Pakistan was. That was why they were all at a loss whether they were now in India or in Pakistan. 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?

One of the lunatics got so bewildered with this India-Pakistan-Pakistan-India rigmarole that one day while sweeping the floor he climbed up a tree, and sitting on a branch, harangued the people below for two hours on end about the delicate problems of India and Pakistan. When the guards asked him to come down he climbed up still higher and said, "I don't want to live in India and Pakistan. I'm going to make my home right here on this tree."

All this hubbub affected a radio engineer with an MSc degree, a Muslim, a quiet man who took long walks by himself. One day he stripped off all his clothes, gave them to a guard and ran in the garden stark naked.

Another Muslim inmate from Chiniot, an erstwhile adherent of the Muslim League who bathed fifteen or sixteen times a day, suddenly gave up bathing. As his name was Mohammed Ali, he one day proclaimed that he was none other than Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Taking a cue from him a Sikh announced that he was Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Sikhs. This could have led to open violence. But before any harm could be done the two lunatics were declared dangerous and locked up in separate cells.

Among the inmates of the asylum was a Hindu lawyer from Lahore who had gone mad because of unrequited love. He was deeply pained when he learnt that Amritsar, where the girl lived, would form part of India. He roundly abused all the Hindu and Muslim leaders who had conspired to divide India into two, thus making his beloved an Indian and him a Pakistani. When the talks on the exchange were finalized his mad friends asked him to take heart since now he could go to India. But the young lawyer did not want to leave Lahore, for he feared for his legal practice in Amritsar.

There were two Anglo-Indians in the European ward. When informed the British were leaving, they spent hours together discussing the problems they would be faced with: Would the European ward be abolished? Would they get breakfast? Instead of bread, would they have to make do with measly Indian chapattis?

There was a Sikh who had been admitted into the asylum fifteen years ago. Whenever he spoke it was the same mysterious gibberish: "Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain." The guards said that he had not slept a wink in all this time. He would not even lie down to rest. His feet were swollen with constant standing and his calves had puffed out in the middle, but in spite of this agony he never cared to lie down. He listened with rapt attention to all discussions about the exchange of lunatics between India and Pakistan. If someone asked his views on the subject he would reply in a grave tone: "Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung

the dal of the Government of Pakistan." But later on he started substituting "the Government of Pakistan" with "Tobak Tek Singh," which was his home town. Now he begun asking where Toba Tek Singh was to go. But nobody seemed to know where it was. Those who tried to explain themselves got bogged down in another enigma: Sialkot, which used to be in India, now was in Pakistan. At this rate, it seemed as if Lahore, which was now in Pakistan, would slide over to India. Perhaps the whole of India might become Pakistan. It was all so confusing! And who could say if both India and Pakistan might not entirely disappear from the face of the earth one day?

The hair on the Sikh lunatic's head had thinned and his beard had matted, making him look wild and ferocious. But he was a harmless creature. In fifteen years he had not even once had a row with anyone. The older employees of the asylum knew that he had been a well-to-do fellow who had owned considerable land in Toba Tek Singh. Then he had suddenly gone mad. His family had brought him to the asylum in chains and left him there. They came to meet him once a month but ever since the communal riots had begun, his relatives had stopped visiting him.

His name was Bishan Singh but everybody called him Toba Tek Singh. He did not know what day it was, what month it was and how many years he had spent in the asylum. Yet as if by instinct he knew when his relatives were going to visit, and on that day he would take a long bath, scrub his body with soap, put oil in his hair, comb it and put on clean clothes. If his relatives asked him anything he would keep silent or burst out with *"Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain."*

When he had been brought to the asylum, he had left behind an infant daughter. She was now a comely and striking young girl of fifteen, who Bishan Singh failed to recognize. She would come to visit him, and not be able to hold back her tears.

When the India-Pakistan caboodle started Bishan Singh often asked the other inmates where Toba Tek Singh was. Nobody could tell him. Now even the visitors had stopped coming. Previously his sixth sense would tell him when the visitors were due to come. But not anymore. His inner voice seemed to have stilled. He missed his family, the gifts they used to bring and the concern with which they used to speak to him. He was sure they would have told him whether Toba Tek Singh was in India or Pakistan. He also had the feeling that they came from Toba Tek Singh, his old home.

One of the lunatics had declared himself God. One day Bishan Singh asked him where Toba Tek Singh was. As was his habit the man greeted Bishan Singh's question with a loud laugh and then said, "It's neither in India nor in Pakistan. In fact, it is nowhere because till now I have not taken any decision about its location."

Bishan begged the man who called himself God to pass the necessary orders and solve the problem. But 'God' seemed to be very busy with other matters. At last Bishan Singh's patience ran out and he cried out: "*Uper the gur gur the annexe the mung the dal of Guruji da Khalsa and Guruji ki fateh*" --he hesitated-- "*She is safe too*" in India."

What he wanted to say was: "You don't answer my prayers because you are a Muslim God. Had you been a Sikh God, you would have surely helped me out."

A few days before the exchange was due to take place, a Muslim from Toba Tek Singh who happened to be a friend of Bishan Singh came to meet him. He had never visited him before. On seeing him, Bishan Singh tried to slink away, but the warder barred his way. "Don't you recognize your friend Fazal Din?" he said. "He has come to meet you." Bishan Singh looked furtively at Fazal Din, then started to mumble something. Fazal Din placed his hand on Bishan Singh's shoulder. "I have been thinking of visiting you for a long time," he said. "But I couldn't get the time. Your family is well and has gone to India safely. I did what I could to help. As for your daughter, Roop Kaur" --he hesitated-- "She is safe too" in India."

Bishan Singh kept quiet. Fazal Din continued: "Your family wanted me to make sure you were well. Soon you'll be moving to India. Please give my salaam to bhai Balbir Singh and bhai Raghbir Singh and bahain Amrit Kaur. Tell Balbir that Fazal Din is well. The two brown buffaloes he left behind are well too. Both of them gave birth to calves, but, unfortunately, one of them died. Say I think of them often and to write to me if there is anything I can do."

Then he added "Here, I've brought some plums for you."

Bishan Singh took the gift from Fazal Din and handed it to the guard. "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" he asked.

"Where? Why, it is where it has always been."

"In India or Pakistan?"

"In India" --he hesitated-- "in Pakistan."

Without saying another word, Bishan Singh walked away, muttering "*Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhyana the mung the dal of the Pakistan and India dur fittey moun*."

At long last the arrangements for the exchange were complete. The lists of lunatics who were to be sent over from either side were exchanged and the date fixed.

On a cold winter evening truckloads of Hindu and Sikh lunatics from the Lahore asylum were moved out to the Indian border under police escort. Senior officials went with them to ensure a smooth exchange. The two sides met at the Wagah border check-post, signed documents and the transfer got underway.

Getting the lunatics out of the trucks and handing them over to the opposite side proved to be a tough job. Some refused to get down from the trucks. Those who could be persuaded to do so began to run in all directions. Some were stark naked. As soon as they were dressed they tore off their clothes again. They swore, they sang, they fought with each other. Others wept. Female lunatics, who were also being exchanged, were even noisier. It was pure bedlam. Their teeth chattered in the bitter cold.

Most of the inmates appeared to be dead set against the entire operation. They simply could not understand why they were being forcibly removed to a strange place. Slogans of '*Pakistan Zindabad*' and '*Pakistan Murdabad*' were raised, and only timely intervention prevented serious clashes.

When Bishan Singh's turn came to give his personal details to be recorded in the register, he asked the official "Where's Toba Tek Singh? In India or Pakistan?"

The officer laughed loudly, "In Pakistan, of course."

Hearing that Bishan Singh turned and ran back to join his companions. The Pakistani guards caught hold of him and tried to push him across the line to India. Bishan Singh wouldn't move. "This is Toba Tek Singh," he announced. "*Uper the gur gur the annexe the be dyhana mung the dal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan.*"

It was explained to him over and over again that Toba Tek Singh was in India, or very soon would be, but all this persuasion had no effect.

They even tried to drag him to the other side, but it was no use. There he stood on his swollen legs as if no power on earth could dislodge him. Soon, since he was a harmless old man, the officials left him alone for the time being and proceeded with the rest of the exchange.

Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh let out a horrible scream. As everybody rushed towards him, the man who had stood erect on his legs for fifteen years, now pitched

face-forward on to the ground. On one side, behind barbed wire, stood together the lunatics of India and on the other side, behind more barbed wire, stood the lunatics of Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.