

# A Predominant Narration: A Comparative Study of The Solitude Experience of Exile in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605) and Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* (1955)

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**ABSTRACT:** *William Shakespeare's King Lear (1605) is known for its projection of madness, similar to Toba Tek Singh (1955) penned by Sadat Hassan Manto. The paper aims to analyze the driving force behind this madness of characters of these two narratives. Both Shakespeare and Manto have presented it through the madness of characters and space, making exile a universal ideology. Thus, this study aims to research the concept of madness through journey via Edward W. Said's Exile – "as a discontinuous state of being" (139). The exile of Cordelia and King Lear from Shakespeare's play, King Lear will be demonstrated with a comparative study with the expatriate of Bishan Singh and other lunatics from Manto's Toba Tek Singh. The research focuses on "the compound misery of "undocumented" people" who are banished just because of their deviance displayed in King Lear and Toba Tek Singh (Said 141).*

**Key Words:** Discontinuous State, Exile, King Lear, Madness, Toba Tek Singh.

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## **Introduction:**

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605-06) is a five acts tragedy, the play revolves around the story of an

aging King Lear [who] decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, allotting each a portion in proportion to the eloquence of her declaration of love. The hypocritical Goneril and Regan make grand pronouncements and are rewarded; Cordelia, the youngest daughter, who truly loves Lear, refuses to make an insincere speech to prove her love and is disinherited. (Bevington 1)

Later, Lear is continuously ridiculed by her elder two daughters. They also revoke their promise to take care of and support him but instead he is left to wander and face madness. (Bevington 1). When he realizes the true worth of his youngest daughter, Cordelia, he is later united with her. Thus, both exiled father and daughter are killed at the end when they try to fight against Edmund, Goneril, and Regan's false ideas.

*Toba Tek Singh* (1955) by Sadat Hassan Manto is a satirical Urdu short story on the relationship between India and Pakistan. "The story revolves around the character of Bishan Singh and some other lunatics residing in the mental asylum. The story is set in the initial years of post-partition (Malyakkal 1). The protagonist, Bishan Singh came to this asylum almost fifteen years ago, where his family members came to visit him, but when the riots occur they stopped coming. On the day of exchange, all lunatics are taken to the border of Wagha. The task itself was very difficult for the officers, as some of the lunatics were crying, laughing, screaming, running here and there, thus creating chaos. When Bishan Singh's turn came he asked, "where is Toba Tek Singh" (Manto 17).

When he learns from the officer that his homeland is in Pakistan, he is refused to budge. Many officers tried to move him but failed, so they left him for a little while to attend to others. After a few seconds, all heard a sudden scream from Bishan Singh, who was lying flat face forward onto the ground. And the piece of land where he fell belonged neither to India nor Pakistan. (Malyakkal 1)

Thus, Bishan Singh never reached his homeland and dies amid a place that belongs to no one. Which is home to no one.

Edward W. Said in his essay, *Reflections on Exile* says exile seems fascinating to think about but awful to experience. Exile is a painful separation between a person and its native land also known as a parting between the self and home, a feeling hardly to overcome with (137). For Said, the concept of exile is “a predominant narration”. Both King Lear and Cordelia were banished from their home. Similarly, Bishan Singh and other lunatics were exiled in the name of madness. Both Shakespeare and Manto have presented it through the madness of characters and space, making exile a universal ideology. Thus, Said’s concept of exile as a predominant narration is superior in all times whether it is seventeenth or the twentieth century.

### **Literature Review:**

Madness in *King Lear* is depicted through raging weather or via unknown journeys. Ann L. McLaughlin in her article, *The Journeys in King Lear* defines “madness as a new concept of twentieth century which Shakespeare understood even in 17<sup>th</sup> century (384). She contrasts this madness with other plays where she clarifies “madness as a static disease”, and further explains Lear’s madness as, “in *King Lear*, madness becomes a journey and a vehicle by which Shakespeare can ask such ultimate questions as what is a man and what is life” (McLaughlin 384). Similarly, Smita Das in her research, questions the journey, the madness of partition as,

The horrific images of violence, craziness, and death that haunt Manto's stories invoke an overwhelming fear of illogical violence, and at the same time, question what is at the root of that violence. What could cause Hindu and Muslim friends and neighbors to castrate each other? What kind of lunacy would mobilize people across the border? And how could these same people across the border return warm corpses to grieving families and to a broken nation that was once their homeland? (202)

Thus, this study aims to research the concept of madness through journey via Edward W. Said’s *Exile* – “as a discontinuous state of being” (139). The exile of Cordelia and King Lear from Shakespeare’s play, *King Lear* will be demonstrated with a comparative study with the expatriate of Bishan Singh and other lunatics from Manto’s *Toba Tek Singh*.

Exile seems a vibrant theme of *King Lear*. This exile through madness serves as an awakening for Lear himself. In his article, Joyce Carol Oates explains this arising as,

THE MOMENT of Lear's awakening is one of the most moving scenes in our literature, coming as it does after so much grotesque and senseless horror; it marks not simply the reconciliation of King and mistreated, exiled daughter, the reconciliation of the tyrannical, aggressive Lear and his loving, all-forgiving Cordelia, but the mysterious moment of "awakening" of the soul itself for Cordelia, with her unearned kiss, symbolizes that moment of grace that forces the tragic action to a temporary halt and allows a magical synthesis of the bliss of eternity and the tragedy of time that is so powerful in Shakespeare because it is so rare. (19)

This study focuses on this awakening which was not realized unless Lear himself faced this exile himself, and thus makes it a "transcendental homelessness" (Said 144). Oates, later in his article questions the "tragic vision" of Shakespeare by elucidating the importance of certain characters to validate his tragedies (21). He says,

Not that Desdemona, Cordelia, Edmund, Hotspur, Falstaff, and others who cannot be contained within the established society are defeated-but that they have been imagined into being at all, that their voices, their imprudence, and vitality, have been given any expression whatsoever-this does represent a triumph of the artist's personality, and we have only to remove the troublesome rebels from these works to see how pointless, how nakedly propagandistic, the "tragic vision" would have been. (20-21)

Similarly, Manto, albeit of his characterization in *Toba Tek Singh*, selects those people of society who are unrepresentable. He too has a "tragic vision" who "required the "artwork of pessimism" to evolve into a higher consciousness (Oates 21). Hence, the research will also look into the "tragic vision" of both of the works, but will seek it through Said's notion of exile, that how this deviation is considered treachry (Said 141). Cordelia's minute disagreement with Lear, Lear's slenderest request to Goneril and Regan will be analyzed in this paper. Furthermore, what made Bishan Singh and other lunatics leave their homes will also be discussed with the same notion.

Tahir Jokinen and Shershah Assadullah in their research, Saadat Hasan Manto, Partition, and Mental Illness through the Lens of Toba Tek Singh, explores the mental illness of Manto himself and also sees the

madness as madness of the outside world.” (Jokinen 1). They have researched that the major cause of this mental illness is not inward but the outside world is to blame. They say,

As the story progresses, the reader comes to realize that the asylum inmates are much saner than the politicians controlling their destiny. The main character, Bishan Singh, in his painful struggle for identity, is symbolic of the displacement suffered by millions of partition refugees (Jokinen 2).

In contrast to this idea, this study aims to look at the madness of *Toba Tek Singh*'s character concerning insanity portrayed in Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a mental illness triggered by their respective exiles.

**Significance of the Study:**

This study is up till now a novel study, as a comparative study of a seventeenth-century Shakespearean play, *King Lear* with a twentieth-century Manto's short story, *Toba Tek Singh* is not being done in the literary field. The research stands out as it provides a psychoanalytic perspective to analyze the mad voices of Cordelia, King Lear, and Bishan Singh through Edward Said's theory of exile. This study has only focused on “the compound misery of “undocumented” people” who are banished just because of their minor negation of built up archetypes is a disloyalty and displayed in *King Lear* and *Toba Tek Singh* (Said 141). New dimensions are open for further research. Furthermore, a postmodern comparative study of Shakespearean plays with South Asian writers can be investigated in the future.

**Research Questions:**

1. How the madness of *King Lear* and *Toba Tek Singh* is triggered through exile?
2. What kind of experience do Cordelia, King Lear, Bishan Singh, and other lunatics have in the state of exile? Does their deviation is the reason for their “discontinuous state of being” (Said 141)?

**Research Methodology:**

Referring back to Edward Said's concept of exile being a fascination to think about but awful to experience. It is a statement of a painful separation between a person and its native land also known as a parting

between the self and home, a feeling hardly to overcome (137). Edward W. Said in his essay, *Reflections on Exile* says, "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is an unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (137). He gives a comparison of Nationalism with that of exile, and refer it as a "compound misery of "undocumented" people (Said 139). Thus, this qualitative study will discuss this complex misery of *King Lear*, Cordelia, Bishan Singh, and other lunatics with the help of hermeneutics approach.

Both *King Lear* and Cordelia were banish from their home. Similarly, Bishan Singh and other lunatics were exile in the name of madness. Both Shakespeare and Manto have presented it through the madness of characters and space, making exile a universal ideology. The research focuses on "the compound misery of "undocumented" people" who are banished just because of their small disagreement on a notion built up by the society "slightest deviation from the accepted group line [is considered a] treachery and disloyalty" displayed in *King Lear* and *Toba Tek Singh* (Said 141). This paper will question the "predominant narration" of exile, how it triggered the madness of *King Lear* and the lunatics mentioned in Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, for that the paper has used multiple research journals to authenticate the contention along with reviews, blogs and the primary texts (Wadi 1).

### **Data Analysis:**

William Shakespeare's writings have been often categorized with their theme of universality. Similarly, *King Lear* is yet another drama that highlights certain universal concepts, including madness. Saadat Hasan Manto's short story, *Toba Tek Singh* also revolves around a similar theme, insanity. Albeit being a satire on the partition of India and Pakistan, this story strongly portrays madness as a character itself. However, what triggered this madness is not discussed in the drama or the short story. Both Shakespeare and Manto, but what charged it inwardly was exile draw the outward reasons. Edward W. Said, in his essay, *Reflections on Exile* tells that exile "is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being" (140). *King Lear* too faced this primary feature of brokenness. When his daughters, Goneril and Regan disagree to serve him, he was banished from his kingdom. A king, the power in no time becomes powerless, and foreshadows "Or e'er I'll weep-I shall go

mad” (Shakespeare 65). Exile is just not a “cut off from roots, their land, and their past. [It is also a loss from] armies or states” and as Said quotes, “they are often in search of them”, King Lear felt alienated towards this thought (Said 140). Losing his kingdom, the power, states, and army were more painful for King Lear than to lose his daughters as he asks for patience only by questioning “Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear’st...you heavens give me that patience, patience I need! You see me here, you gods, a poor old man, as full of grief as age; wretched in both!” (Shakespeare 64). With this heavy heart, he is then seen roaming from one place to another just to reconstruct his shattering identity. Similarly, lunatics in *Toba Tek Singh* were too in continuous search of a home. Being mad, they were already at the loss of losing one home, and when they considered the asylum as one they were again being exchanged on the name of the partition. Bishan Singh was numb as he blabbered these words only, “*Uper the gur gur the anexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of the laltain*” until he was told about the real locale of Toba Tek Singh (Manto 14), but the rest of them were “in search of [their] ... roots, their land, [and] their past” (Said 140). Thus, this continuous search for a home in a “discontinuous state” triggered the madness of King Lear, and the double madness of Bishan Singh, which resulted in his death (Said 140).

The nothingness in knowing that “*nothing* is secure” was the root cause of Cordelia’s exile (Said 141). Her disagreement is not explaining her love for her father, King Lear in sugarcoated words made her lose her status of being a princess, and a daughter. Said says, “Exile is a jealous state” (Said 141). Cordelia was facing this jealousy not just because she lost her share of the state but her father banished her from his affection as she expresses her feelings as, “I cannot heave my heart into my mouth: I love your majesty according to my bond; nor more nor less” (Shakespeare 6). She knew that by being powerless she could not regain her father’s love back and his position from her sisters. That is why she married the King of France, regained her position as a queen, and then returned to her native land. Said says, “what you achieve is precisely what you have no wish to share” similarly, Cordelia achieved the rank of being a queen which she was not supposed to share with any of her sisters, and was back to help her father (141). It was her “drawing of lines ... [from which] the least attractive aspects of being exile emerged”, power meant nothing to

her, but she knew only some sort of status could help her to fight for King Lear, and thus, she became a queen (Said 141).

“The compound misery of “undocumented” people” who are banished just because of their “slightest deviation from the accepted group line [is considered a] treachery and disloyalty”, and thus, becomes a reason of exile sometimes (Said 141). Likewise, Cordelia's one “nothing[ness]” ended up in her banish as King Lear himself warned her, “nothing will come of nothing” (Shakespeare 5). King Lear's impulsive nature was his tragic flaw, which caused him his exile. Cordelia's slight divergence of expressing her love for King Lear “according to [her] bond; nor more nor less” made her a nobody towards him (Shakespeare 6). Similarly, the lunatics of asylum from *Toba Tek Singh* were turned into asylum just because they strayed from certain norms they were supposed to unfollow. For example, the “young Hindu lawyer from Lahore” whose beloved turned him down because of the typical code of conduct turned him into an insane person (Manto 13). He was thus, exiled and angry

When told that Amritsar was to become the part of India, he went into depression because his beloved lived in Amritsar, something he had not forgotten even in his madness. That day he abused every major and minor Muslim and Hindu leader who had cut India into two (Manto 13).

Thus, moving from one asylum into another made him double exiled when the exchange of lunatics was occurring. Those lunatics were already “undocumented” people”, but they too were being documented on the name of finding their papered home, the asylum either in Pakistan or India (Said 141).

Said reflects, exile is identical to a person who looks at another non-exiled person with anger. Non-exiles fit into their surroundings, but an exile is always out of the place, thus, leading to jealousy (143). “Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. They belong in their surroundings, you feel, whereas an exile is always out of place” (143) and this non-belongingness causes a maddening jealousy, an *exile jealousy* (145). The state is evident from Cordelia, King Lear to Manto's lunatics at the asylum who having lost their claim to a place depict a resistance to stability and logic. Cordelia's resentment to her non-exiles sisters, claiming, “I know you what you are, and like a sister am most loath to call” (Shakespeare 13) becomes apparatus of her unstableness during banishment from the land



as well as the position she belongs. Her stubbornness to remain elusive despite the efforts to be understood show a resistance to the existential place that her sisters and father hold which Said explains as, “the exile jealousy insists on ... [her] right to refuse to belong” (145).

Cordelia’s refusal rises from an existential place of difference while Manto’s lunatics suffer from displacement and non-belongingness to a land. Manto writes about a “young hindu lawyer from Lahore” (13) whose madness was triggered by the news of Pak India separation and Amritsar, hometown of his beloved, being included in India. When other lunatics congratulate him on his exchange to India, he refuses to leave Lahore and his exile jealousy overcomes his longing to meet his beloved. Similar to the young lawyer who conceals his exile jealousy in the excuse for better law practice, King Lear exercises his “right to refuse” (Said 145) by taking along the tokens of his lost sovereign, “a hundred knights and squires, men so disordered, so debauched and bold” (Shakespeare 32, 33). He, for his daughter, exhibits sign of old age madness while he is in conflict between acceptance of the new land and refusal of the exile.

According to Said, “nationalisms are about groups” while “exile is a solitude experienced outside the group” (140), the seclusion that is visible in the exiles of the asylum as well as the banished daughter and the displaced king. Bishan Singh depicts such solitude where he stands alone with swollen legs and longs for his return to hometown. He refuses to get associated with any sikhs, Muslim league, anglicized groups of the lunatics, and only asks about where Toba Tek Singh is? His madness over a land that is now in Pakistan whereas he is about to be exchanged to India makes no sense to the people who are restored by an ideology. His death on the land between Pakistan and India is the exhibition of his lonely experience of the exile. Similarly, this solitude outside the group raises identity crisis in King Lear so much, so that he leaves towards the forest alone to match his inward position to the outset, and calls “does any here know me? This is not Lear... Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (Shakespeare 32) in hope for some relative association. Thus, “a discontinuous state of being” (Said 140) is a primary reason for disbanded state of mind. However, Cordelia as an exile exhibits what Said explains as the “need to reconstitute their broken lives” by associating themselves with “triumphant ideology” or “restored people” (141). She leaves as a forcefully exiled girl but returns to claim her patriarch, the solidarity

group of her father only after becoming the queen of France and part of the restored group.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude ,it is found out that “the compound misery of “undocumented” people” who are banished just because of their “slightest deviation from the accepted group line [is considered a] treachery and disloyalty”, and thus, becomes a reason of exile sometimes, the madness of King Lear, and death of Bishan Singh was solely triggered by exile (Said 141). Both Nationalism and exile are two different concepts, where exile is a “solitude experience...fundamentally [built] on a discontinuous state of being” (Said 139-140). King Lear, Cordelia, Bishan Singh, and other lunatics faced this dilemma because they strayed from certain norms of their respective societies. Thus, exile does not see any status but just occurs to a person. As Said says, “Because *nothing* is secure. Exile becomes a jealous state”, it was this jealousy that made Lear mad, Cordelia regained her status to fight against her sisters to help her father and Bishan Singh's madness was doubled, thus resulting in a sudden death (Said 141).

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