

ISSN: 0976-8165

# *The Criterion*

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

*5th Year of Open Access*

Vol. 5, Issue-6 December 2014

Editor-In-Chief- Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor- Mrs. Madhuri Bite



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>

## **Secret Taj**

**Sayantana Pal Chowdhury**

When they boarded the Lucknow-Mathura train from Kanpur station, the huge clock at Ghantaghar stroke 1 am. The queues in front of the ticket counters were growing larger even at this time of night. Here and there passengers were lying resting their backs against their luggage on the dirty platform. The beginning of the journey was not very smooth. They started from their rest-house near the Bengali Colony at about 11 at night on a hired auto. Mr. Chatterji warned them from the very first not to make huge number of bags and baggage. It would make their journey stressful if they had more number of luggages. They planned a two-days-tour to Agra from Kanpur. Mrs. Chatterji was very nervous and excited about the tour as their would-be son-in-law Avijit and his family were joining them. Their daughter Sonia was not so eager about their tour. She remained silent in their whole trip from Kolkata.

In total they were seven members including Sonia's younger brother Somnath in their trip. Avijit and Somnath stood in two different queues so that any one of them could get the tickets at first. But unfortunately the server from Delhi was out of order that stopped issuing tickets to the passengers. They became hopeless. It was as if bad luck accompanied them. When they started from their rest-house, midway their reserved auto got its tire puncture. The auto driver was a very gentle man. He hired another car for the Chatterjis and the Boses. He also helped them in uploading their luggage in the car. They were making haste. They almost lost their nerves as they were being late. Sonia was still silent as ever. As much Avijit was seeing her, he was feeling more interested in her. Also a kind of insecurity occurred in him. Was she ready to accept him as her life partner? Did she like him? She had to leave her job for their marriage. Whatever it might be, now the reality was that, they were getting married within a month. But from their first meeting till now Sonia remained unknown to him. Neither she asked him anything about his past, nor did she tell anything about herself.

The car started speedily towards the station. Avijit sat beside the driver, Mr. Chatterji, Mr. Bose, Sonia and Somnath in the middle row and Mrs. Chatterji and Mrs. Bose in the last seat. The windows were opened. A cool air was coming in. All the passengers were silent except the two women on the last seat who were chatting among themselves and chewing betel leaves. When the car reached the station it was almost twelve. Downloading piling up their bags on the platform Avijit and Somnath rushed towards the ticket counter. The lines were not so short. They stood in two different queues separately finding the respectively shorter ones. In this topsy-turvy situation the server from Delhi got disconnected. They were feeling restless now. Though there was another train an hour after the Lucknow-Mathura passenger, still they did not want to take risk. When the server reconnected, it was Somnath who first got the chance to get tickets. "Seven for Agra", he shouted from the glass hole of the counter inserting the fare amount through another hole of the counter. Grabbing the tickets he rushed towards his parents shouting, "Hurry up! It's not ten minutes left for the departure. We are already late. It is platform two. Oh mom, you have to close the betel leaves box now at least." They ran towards the platform two. The train was not so full with passengers. One or two passengers who had already boarded the train were making their sleeping places taking a

whole seat. They could manage huge room for themselves. Sonia took the window side as she had no intention of sleeping in the train. Somnath climbed up the upper seat and lay down there resting his head on one of the bags.

When the train moved on, Sonia was beside a window watching the play of light and darkness of the night outside. The train was not crowded. Other members of her connection accommodated themselves on the wooden benches separately. Only the other member who was awake was Avijit. He was standing beside an open door of the compartment. It seemed that sleep kept these two creatures on earth untouched. Two passengers alighted on a platform. Avijit made their space for their safe departure. They might not meet once again on this earth. It seemed very peculiar to Avijit. He always thinks about it. This idea tortures him more than anything else when he remains alone and ponders over his loneliness. He shut the door and came inside. While crossing the berths, he saw Sonia sitting alone by the window. He silently went to her and sat in front of her on the lower berth where his father was sleeping.

“You will not sleep Sonia?” he asked.

Combing her dishevelled hair Sonia replied with a smile, “I think I should not Avi. Look at the moon in the sky. Look at the lights here and there in the far away villages of unknown cities. Those people could never know that we are travelling in their places. We are crossing the people to whom we will remain unknown forever. Isn’t it amazing? Can you imagine sleep could come in such a night?”

“Hmm..” Avijit smiled in darkness when he found similarity in their thoughts, “You are right Ma’m. But if you don’t take rest now you’ll surely find yourself restless tomorrow. It may be a hectic schedule and you’ll not get a chance to sleep.”

“I can spend nights after nights awake if such a romantic atmosphere surrounds me Avi. Better you have a sleep now.”

Both of them remained silent for a few minutes. Cool air passed them. The train stopped in stations for a few minutes. Somewhere one or two passengers boarded the train. They accommodated themselves in various compartments. Only the sound of the running of the train could be heard. Avijit tried to close his eyes for some time. Sonia noticed it. “Why don’t you find your berth?” she asked. Avi looked at her, sat straight and with an air of seriousness he asked, “Are you feeling safe with me?” Sonia was not prepared for this abrupt question. She looked at him vaguely but remained silent. “Answer me Sonia. Your answer is valuable to me. We are going to start a new life within a few days. We must know one another fairly enough. I don’t want any sort of hesitation on your part or mine. Are you ready to accept me?”

“Why are you asking this Avi? We are enjoying the tour. Is it not enough for this time?” Sonia avoided the question and looked outside.

Avijit sighed, “You don’t know Sonia, I feel restless in my mind as much I observe you. You are like an oasis to me. We have been engaged, but for a single moment you are never seen happy. As much I think about you, I am feeling guilty.”

“Guilty!”

“Yes, guilty.”

“But why? I have never told you anything.”

“Everything doesn’t need a word expression darling. You are being more and more morose and reticent day by day. Still you pretend to be happy? I am feeling guilty for disturbing you.”

“You have disturbed me? Who told you so?”

“You told me, your silent presence told me. I have disturbed you by trespassing in your personal ground, in your life.”

“Not at all, Avi. I am happy.”

When the train reached Agra station, it was about 6 in the morning. All the passengers were awake. With haste they alighted on the platform. They counted their luggage. From the outer platform they hired a Safari car. Uploading their luggage they got in the car and started for the hotel they had already booked over telephone.

Someone in the train informed them to visit the Taj in the early morning. As the day grows it seems unbearable to look at the dazzling whiteness of the monument. They booked two rooms in the hotel. Though Mr. Chatterji insisted on booking another room for his family, Sonia requested her father to stay in a single room together with her parents and her brother. Though they had to pay extra charge for an extra person, Mr. Chatterji agreed with her. They got ready with half an hour, took tea and some snacks.

The same car was waiting in the portico of the hotel. They started for the Taj. Everyone was very excited for the first look of one of the Seven Wonders of the World. When they got off the car, it was about 8.30 am. A mild breeze was blowing in the garden in front of the Taj. Everywhere was a picturesque beauty of red and green. Sometimes it seemed that the Taj Mahal has changed its colour to red and green. Two or three horse carts were standing in the garden. Some people were walking in the freshness of beauty. On the lawn many people were practising yoga, inhaling breath from one nostril and exhaling from the other. Everywhere in nature was a sense of beauty and happiness that can easily wipe out the darkness of the unknown self.

From the counter they drew seven tickets. Only the women were carrying their hand bags with them. When they entered the green lawn inside the walls surrounded the lawn were made of red bricks. The walls have been carrying history in every brick from the very past. The ground which once was an unknown place, now has become a complete chapter of history of a nation and. The huge monstrous walls surround the history very gently and

secretly. The red and green colours surround the monument as an obedient soldier keeps his master away from all the attacks from outside. No one can know from the very outer fringe of the garden that the white and dazzling monument is lying inside. As much we step in, slowly and very slowly and at last abruptly we discover the wonder. Like an onion it removes its clothes to everyone.

Their excitement reached at its zenith when they reached the lawn. Crowds gathered here and there in the lawn. They reached the main gate. It was obviously congested as usual. In front of them was standing the token of love, the Taj Mahal. For a moment every one of them remained awestruck. They gasped and stopped. They followed the straight way to the main building. People from other countries mixed with the visitors from India. Every time when the building opens its pages, people from different areas irrespective of their nationality or race or caste or creed, gather to go through its words. Every time it is turned but still remains unknown. Under the red surface of petals lies the white blossom of a man-made wonder. Its secrecy hides the unknown and unturned facts like an iceberg, disclosing only the surface, only a part from a thousand parts of historical secrecy. Here and there lie scattered hidden truths.

They reached the main building. Removing the shoes and collecting them in a place they took a token from the preserver of those pairs. On the front door of the building was a crowd of people came from Japan might be for a tour to India, a storehouse of history. Their identical folded hand fan attracted many people who were more interested in that Japanese group than the Taj. When they saw a Bengali group, Mrs. Bose could not resist herself from talking to them. Being a homesick, she was overwhelmed to see people from her own land. That group came from Nadia. "I guessed you people are exactly from my motherland", exclaimed Mrs. Bose. Leaving them behind they went straight to the inner sanctum of the monument where Mumtaz and Shah Jahan were still lying. Someone exclaimed in the crowd that these were only the replicas. The main dead bodies were under the building where entrance had been restricted. A crowd gathered the floor from where they could see the graves under the building. Some guides informed the parties who hired them to quench their thirst for knowledge that once the visitors were allowed to go under to visit the graves of the two lovers. When Somnath and Avijit tried to look under, it was only darkness revealed. Though with everyone it was the same, but no one admitted it lest they could lose their pride of observing the traces of the historical lovers.

They entered through the main door in a vase room where the two replicas were surrounded with another marble wall. The dome-like ceiling echoed the sounds made by the guides and then by the visitors amusingly. Looking at the apparently small grave Sonia was thinking about lady lying inside and being the subject of the visual zeal of the visitors coming everyday in thousands in numbers from different parts of the planet. Beside the smaller one was lying the bigger grave of Shah Jahan. The longer one even after their deaths of hundreds and hundreds of years was protecting his lady-love from any harm. Rounding the room her family members went outside in the light.

“Amazing! Isn’t it, Sonia? A token of love,” someone whispered over her shoulder. She turned her head and discovered Avijit standing for her. She nodded her head and sighed. “Where is everyone?” she wanted to know suppressing a deep breath inside. “They have gone to visit the museum”, Avijit replied making path for others to visit the graves they came to a corner of the huge room. “Look at the ceiling. It can just be with an emperor. He was truly an emperor in his riches and in his heart. Did he ask Mumtaj if she was happy? What do you think dear?”

Sonia stared at him, puzzled. A deep cry wanted to burst out but she suppressed anyhow. Avijit held her by her shoulder with his hand and pulled her close. She resigned to his chest. Holding one another they rounded the room beside the graves lying silently, he said, “Look dear, I want to know you. Don’t remain like the actual graves under this floor and untouchable to me at least. If you have any previous commitments, you can tell me. Like a true companion I’ll support you. I’ll be with you in your every step. But please make yourself clear. I want to know your mind.” They came to the door through which light was coming in and falling on the graves.

“Can anyone know his or her true self? I don’t know, I don’t know”, tears rolled down her cheeks. “I want to go to that chair Avi. Will you?”

“Yes, sure.” They crossed the prohibited area where the two graves were underlying the marbled floor, and silently they went towards the chair under the shade of a tree at a corner in the garden.