**Additional English**

**CIA-I**

**Topic: Riot by Bimal Choudhury**

**(translated by Subhrajyoti Bhattacharya)**

**About the Author :**

Bimal Choudhury is a renowned author in Bengali Literature. His stories are lucid and easy to understand. He belonged to the era of the East Bengal Partition and his stories depict the struggles of the refugees and rampages and riots of that phase.

**Introduction to text:**

**R**iot written by Bimal Choudhury and translated by Subhrajyoti Bhattacharya is a story about Makbul, a Muslim boy who is longing for his Amma’s embrace. The story is set during the Partition of Bengal which was a part of the Independence of India and Pakistan. During this period, there was immense communal riots and rampage in that area. It focuses on the dismal situation of the people living there and the risk on Makbul’s life when he strays onto a Hindu lane filled with people enraged and determined for cold-blooded revenge. As Makbul prays to Allah for his survival, he lands himself in a situation of life and death. We later see how his one decision changes his destiny.

**Summary :**

**T**he story opens with the description of the landscape in Naryangunj station. Makbul, a Muslim boy, travelling to Dhaka to meet his Amma, manages to catch the train leaving the platform, with great difficulty. As he seats himself in an almost empty train his mind wanders from his dreaded fear of not seeing his Amma if he had missed the train to tipping the boatman who helped him to make it just in time in the rough weather. He is elated at the thought of seeing his parents after two years.

He dozes off imagining himself being embraced in his Amma’s arms only to be woken up by a co-passenger asking for a box of matchbox. The simpleton of a villager tried striking a conversation with Makbul only to be snapped at by him. Makbul got down at Ganderia and started walking on a stranded street to Narinda, where his parents stayed, on foot. He was terrorized and struck with fear as he found himself in a predominantly Hindu locality, defenseless. As he hid himself behind the shaggy undergrowths of aquatic plants, neck-deep in water, he cursed his fate and was agonized as he heard the Hindu localities enraged and hell bent on slaughtering any Muslim in sight.

Just then, a young boy came running towards Maina Da, the head of the troop to inform him about the sight of a Muslim boy on those streets. Maina, filled with the idea of revenge sent search parties who stormed to locate Makbul.

Makbul prepared himself for his death. He sobbed and prayed at the thought that he would never be able to meet his Amma again. He reminisces of his childhood when his mother was always there for him at the time of slightest trouble. Out of nowhere, he spotted a young toddler, eyes filled with joy at the sight of an aquatic flower. The sight frightened Makbul as he saw the toddler wobbling dangerously close towards the edge of the water.

Unmindful of the situation, Makbul screamed at the top of his lungs for help for the little guy. Blood raced through his veins as he saw the search party sent for his murder, approaching his direction.

To get out of the pond then would mean embracing his death and putting a fullstop at the dream of ever seeing his mother but irrespective, Makbul held the drowning child and carried him up the slippery bank. As the mother came running, crying hysterically at the sight of his almost drowned son, Makbul reassured her with a calm voice that her child was just fine and affectionately caressed the child before handing him over to the mother filled with gratitude.

At the very moment, Maina approached Makbul recognizing him to be his victim. Makbul looked straight in the eye of his murderer with nervousness.

The story takes a turn as Maina flung the dagger into the water and locks Makbul in a warm embrace. Makbul’s one gesture/ act of kindness towards a young toddler irrespective of his religion gained him respect and his life back from his communal enemies.

**Critical Analysis of the text**

**B**imal Choudhury’s Riot despite ending on a heartwarming note is a horrifying and an unapologetically truthful narration of an event that was commonplace during the British Raj. Fueled by the Britishers, the Hindus and the Muslims took part in acts of violence against each other. These communal riots that strengthened the British rule over India seeded the distrust and hatred between these communities which is visible even today.

The atmosphere of the text lends its hand in helping increase the tension. The rain and the difficulty with which Makbul tries to get to the railway station on time and his thoughts about not getting to see his mother serves as a wonderful backdrop to the text. The unrelenting weather serves as an imagery that can be related to the unrelenting social situation where even the unwilling were forced to raise their arms against people of the other religion regardless of their innocence.

The claustrophobic situation faced by Makbul multiplies in intensity when he seeks refuge in a cross between a swamp and a pond. The fact that he can’t swim puts him in an even more difficult position. The author’s intention to multiply Makbul’s hardships in the face of his desire to see his mother makes us realize how petty and illogical the communal riots are.

While one son wishes for his mother’s protective embrace, the other sneaked out of his mother’s protective eye. The contrast is telling and Makbul saving the child’s life by risking his own is testament to the humanity that prevails in all of us. The author seems to be reminding us that there are matters far more important than fighting over petty issues such as religion and communal preferences.

No one has ever managed to succeed through the use of violence and Makbul’s sacrifice bears similarity to a great leader from our history who proved that through sacrifice and non-violence you could unite two strongly opposing forces- the leader being none other than Gandhiji. Even the strongest put their arms down at the sight of a valiant, non-violent gesture and that is proved true when Maina threw away his dagger when the reader expected him to shove into Makbul’s heart.