

Partition by W .H Auden

W. H. Auden's poem "Partition" describes a British civil servant who must decide how to divide land, in the Indian subcontinent, between Muslims and Hindus who hate each other. To prevent further conflict between the two groups, the British government (which once included the subcontinent as part of its vast empire) has appointed this unnamed functionary to decide which lands will belong to which group. He is not a native of the region; he knows relatively little about its history; his maps are outdated; and, although he has two Hindu and two Muslim judges with whom he can consult, the final decisions about how to carve up the territories are ultimately his. His mission is dangerous, because neither group is likely to be entirely happy with the choices he makes. He even runs the risk of being assassinated. Once he has done his job, however, he goes back to Britain – never to return to the countries whose boundaries he has decided. To do so would be too risky: people might kill him because they disagree with his decisions.

Auden's poem alludes to the period in the late 1940s when the people of India finally won independence from Britain. However, severe tensions between Hindus and Muslims led to the formation of two separate countries: India (a Hindu state) and Pakistan (a Muslim nation). At least half a million people lost their lives in the conflicts leading up to the creation of these two countries. However, although Auden's poem obviously deals primarily with this particular situation, the poem is also relevant to many other recent territorial disputes between conflicting religious or ethnic groups. The most obvious (and perhaps most dangerous) of such conflicts is the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians in the middle east. Thus, although Auden's poem is set in the 1940s and specifies a particular example of partitioning, the poem remains eerily relevant in the present day.

The poem "Partition" is written by W.H Auden. It is a political and historic poem. It is about partition of Indian subcontinent. It is criticism on the method of partition. Cyril Radcliffe parted the subcontinent on the idea of outdated maps and incorrect census inside a brief interval of seven weeks. The tone of the poem is sarcastic and critical. One can discover assonance, consonance, alliteration, enjambment, understatement, parallelism and simile in poem. Auden presents theme of unjust partition and colonizers perspective in the direction of colonized on this poem.

Summary

Radcliffe is unbiased when he arrives in subcontinent for the very first time. He is known for the partition between two nations, Hindus and Muslims, although he had never been to India before. He is briefed in England to divide the nation into two parts with out rational debate and mutual reconciliation, for time is just too short. Viceroy writes him a letter that he doesn't need to meet him and we will give you two assistants two Hindus and two Muslims for consultation however the remaining choice rests in your hand. Radcliffe shuts himself in a mansion to keep away from assassination. In this mansion, he continues to work to resolve destiny of millions. The

maps at his disposal are out dates and census incorrect however within seven weeks he divides the nation into two parts for good or worse. He sails back to England.

Stanza by Stanza Analysis of "Partition"

Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission,

Having never set eyes on this land he was called to partition

Between two peoples fanatically at odds,

With their different diets and incompatible gods.

Radcliffe was unbiased when he arrived in India. The phrase "atleast" means that he was biased after his arrival. One can interpret it in two ways, Hindus can interpret it as a prove that he favors Muslims and Muslims can interpret it as a prove that he favors Hindus. Auden criticizes the method of partition, a person who had by no means been to India is called for partition between two nations, who're socially,culturally and religiously totally different from one another."Time," they had briefed him in London, "is short. It's too late For mutual reconciliation or rational debate:The only solution now lies in separation.

He was briefed in London by authorities that there isn't a time for mutual reconciliation and rational debate, go and divide the subcontinent into two parts. And the one answer is partition.

The Viceroy thinks, as you will see from his letter,

That the less you are seen in his company the better,

So we've arranged to provide you with other accommodation

We can give you four judges,two Moslem and two Hindu

To consult with, but the final decision must rest with you.

Auden must have read the letter written to Radcliffe by Lord Mountbatten that is why he's referring to that letter on this poem. Auden says that it's evident from Mountbatten's letter that he doesn't need to see Radcliffe. It means that he has given all authority to Radcliffe and separates himself from the choices relating to partition. Here Auden provides edge to English authorities that they'd nothing to do with partition of subcontinent. Mountbatten's writes Radcliffe that we've organized to give you different accommodation.We may give you two judges to Hindus and two Muslims to seek the advice of with however the remaining choice rest with you.

Shut in a lonely mansion, with police night and day

Patrolling the gardens to keep assassins away,

He got down to work to the task of settling the fate

Of millions.

Radcliffe shuts himself in a lonely mansion, which is guarded by police. In this mansion he works to resolve the destiny of millions. Auden describes that destiny of millions rest on the line drawn by him. It decides who's going to migrate or keep in one's nation. Because of this line subcontinent has witnessed bloody massacre, hundreds of women have been raped and kidnapped and migration of millions.

Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date

And the Census Returns almost certainly incorrect,

But there was no time to check them, no time to inspect

Contested areas

Auden criticizes the method of partition and describes that there was no time the maps and census at Radcliffe's disposal had been incorrect and he didn't even have time to verify and examine contested areas. How one can trust his choice on partition of subcontinent.

The weather was frightfully hot

And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot.

But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,

A continent for better or worse divided.

Auden presents subcontinent climate in a derogatory method by exaggerating the hot climate of subcontinent using "frightfully hot". After WWII, Britain was affected by financial disaster. Britain couldn't run subcontinent subsequently they divided the subcontinent hasty within seven weeks. They don't care what good or will come out of their choice of unjust strategy of partition of subcontinent.

The next day he sailed for England, where he quickly forgot

The case, as a good lawyer must. Return he would not,

Afraid, as he told his club, that he might get shot.

Radcliffe goes back to England and forgets what he has finished in India like a great lawyer forgets his case and move on.

Themes in the poem Partition

Colonizers perspective in the direction of colonized:

Auden presents subcontinent climate in a derogatory manner. He exaggerated the hot climate of subcontinent "frightfully hot".

The weather was frightfully hot

Britain suffers monetary disaster after WW2. Britain couldn't proceed it's rule on subcontinent that is why it parted subcontinent within seven weeks with out giving a second thought to it's consequences. Colonizers would not care about colonized they do what they need.

But in seven weeks it was done, frontiers decided

A continent for better or worse divided.

Rhyme scheme

The length of stanzas vary. The first stanza follows the rhyme scheme, "aabbccaddaee" and the rhyme scheme of second stanza is aabbccddeefff.

Metaphor

Between two peoples fanatically at odds

People is a metaphor for nation

Imagery

a lonely mansion, with police night time and day Patrolling the gardens to keep assassins away.

Parallelism:

It is when phrases in sentences have related or the same grammatical construction. It serves to provide pattern and rhythm in addition to clarity.

no time to check them, no time to inspect

Simile:

It is comparison between two unlike things using words such as "like" and "as" It is to simplify ideas.

The next day he sailed for England, where he quickly forgot The case, as a good lawyer must

As a good lawyer is a simile.

Here Auden compares Radcliffe with good lawyers

Conclusion

Poem "Partition" is about unjust partition of subcontinent. In this poem, Auden describes and criticizes the method of partition of subcontinent, which relies on outdated maps, incorrect census and finished by a person who had never been to subcontinent. He presents theme of unjust partition and colonial perspective in the direction of colonized. One can discover literary devices on this poem like enjambment, understatement, parallelism, simile and so on.

