

## Partition Ghazal

This may pass muster and yet may not pass:  
This past we are talking of is not the past.

Freedom was a lamp that was lit before our eyes.  
A forest of shadows that stood serried, massed

Suddenly broke rank and fled, we don't know where.  
How could freedom's flame spark off such a blast?

Yet flame and shadow live and die like lovers:  
Lip touching lip, the hands firmly clasped.

This may pass muster and yet may not pass.  
The past is heavy on our shoulders, good it is the past.

Gutted houses, de-gutted men (Is that a child's howl or a jackal's?)  
And the elongated caravan of creaking carts.

Sword and sickle pounce on the caravan's edge.  
Who has been abducted? Who saw that woman last?

Tenses curve and coil through the murk of time  
The past erupts except that it is not the past.

Beyond the linear and hence beyond the line  
The magic lantern images of memory flash past.

Gandhi's egg-shell head, round as a shrunken sun,  
Has it set forever into a black-hole past?

Not that Gandhi seemed the only anchorite.  
Jinnah looked ascetic too—how the years passed!

His classic suits replaced by bone-hugging achkans,  
Which made him look tall, though he was shrivelling fast.

Nehru's cap and rose, Patel's penumbral head—  
a line drawing's dream—where's my pencil, if I may ask?

Are they mere ghosts now, symbols, forgotten pennons  
fluttering atop a fog-bound, creaking mast?

Two ships in freedom's turbid waters turned to three.  
Lord! No splintering further into smaller shards!

And let's pray friends, our ships of state, some day,  
are not sold as scrap metal in American yards.

Then brick by brick three mossy domes went down—  
The world got a glimpse of *kar sewa* power.

Across the Wagah a hundred temples broke,  
icon noses slashed, stone goddesses deflowered.

This should pass muster, and yet may not pass.  
All tenses are tricky, especially the past.

The lesson for you, wine-bibbing Kaikhusroo—  
The past you talk of may not have been the past.

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