

## Summary

Ghosh's poem "Rehabilitation" begins with a reference to the things the hapless speaker had. He can remember the things in a chain of flashing images like someone has started rolling an ending loop of indefinite images concerning places, things, or faces. In the first stanza, the poet says how all the speaker once had was lost like the sun in the western sky.

The next stanza depicts the things the speaker had after the partition. Being displaced from his own land, he found himself lost in the crowds. He was in the middle of nowhere, in a new city, caged inside the endless suffering.

The last stanza specifically deals with the reality of partition. Ghosh uses a number of images in order to hint at the effect of partition. In the last two lines, he ironically remarks that his speaker is now a beggar. He strikes flints of the past and present to ignite the gloomy memories of rehabilitation.

## Structure & Form

"Rehabilitation" is a free-verse poem that does not have a specific rhyme scheme or meter. It consists of three stanzas. The first, second, and third stanzas have a total of 17, 18, and 17 lines, respectively. The line count per stanza differs in the translated version. Most of the lines contain a word or a compound word. For example, in the first stanza, lines 2-4, lines 6-8, and lines 10-12 contain a single term or compound word. Such a structure makes one quickly read the lines. This scheme resonates with the mental state of the speaker. Apart from that, the sound scheme of the poem is dull and mechanical, aptly reflecting the theme of the text.

## Poetic Devices & Figurative Language

Ghosh uses the following literary devices in his poem "Rehabilitation":

- **Enjambment:** It occurs throughout the poem. Ghosh enjambes the lines in order to connect the ideas in succession.

- **Repetition:** In each stanza, the poet repeats the line bearing the idea thrice. For example, in the first stanza, the line "Whatever was around me" is repeated for the sake of emphasis.
- **Allusion:** This piece alludes to the Partition of India, a tragedy that shaped India's political and communal future. Besides, in the seventh line, Ghosh alludes to Vidyasagar's primer "Kothamala". In the translation, this line alludes to Bengali folklores.
- **Personification:** It occurs in the following lines: "The bones and the darkness within/ Surround them all", "The Howrah Bridge is holding up high/ The void/ Under my feet drifts Time." Here, inner "darkness", "bones", the "Howrah Bridge", and "Time" are personified.
- **Imagery:** Ghosh uses visual imagery throughout the text in order to depict several things that the speaker lost. He also uses tactile and organic imagery as well.
- Shankha Ghosh's poem "Rehabilitation" centers on a speaker who had lost everything during the partition. It is not clear whether the person is a Hindu or a Muslim, a male or a female. In this way, Ghosh depicts the pangs of all the people who were affected by the partition. What a sufferer unfolds, is not only his own pathetic story but of all. Millions of people lost everything in the turn of a night. What they had and what they got later are revealed in this poem.
- In the first stanza, Ghosh's speaker depicts what was around him. The person only utters names, nothing else. It gives a hint at the broken and suffering side of the speaker. A traumatic mind keeps rolling the scenes of the past in a broken manner. The speaker can visualize the grass and stones, reptiles crawling on the ground, and broken temples. What he saw was in his own land, currently on the other side of the barbed wires. Everything seems like watching the lonely sunset of one's life. The sun setting in the west is a symbol of death and pessimism.

Ghosh uses the symbols of "Arrows and spears" to signify destruction, killing, and bloodshed. The speaker becomes nostalgic while thinking about his own land. He says that everything trembled together and vanished leaving him in total darkness. His memory is like the refugees who set out for an arduous, long journey after partition. All he had was a broken box that was left beneath the mango tree. He did not know that everything was going to change at such a rapid pace.

In the second stanza, Ghosh talks about the things the speaker has with him in the present scenario. Now he can be found somewhere near the Sealdah Station

at high noon or beside the tattooed walls of some unknown alleyways of Kolkata. He leads a life of a destitute after losing the things he once cherished. Sometimes he can hear the political slogans that give him sudden starts. The tall monuments of the city reminded him of his smallness. Everything that is around him is nothing but an illusion of reality.

Furthermore, the speaker refers to his bed in order to hint at the streets where he sleeps now. He can be found lying under the lamp posts by the river Ganges. Ghosh uses these references to portray the fate of several homeless people who were forced to leave their own land.

The red color of the "Ganges" symbolizes the bloodshed that happened in Bengal after the partition. Ghosh can visualize the blood of several Hindus and Muslims dyeing the Ganges red. Here, the poet uses metonymy to hint at the cause by referring to its consequences.

The "darkness of the marrow"/"darkness within" is a metaphor for the dark and devilish instinct of those who killed their brothers in the name of religion. This darkness of brutality, hatred, and bitterness surrounds everything around the speaker.

Amidst this darkness, the waves of the river Ganges babble by, mourning the loss of several lives. Here, the poet uses pathetic fallacy and invests the river with the idea of mourning the tragedy of partition. Ghosh depicts the Howrah Bridge as a witness to the killings.

He personifies the bridge and thinks that it stands like a human being. Its top touched the sky. Beneath the speaker's feet, the river, metaphorically portrayed as "time," drifts by. In this way, the poet describes a picture of hopelessness and bleak absurdity.

In the third stanza, Ghosh describes the scene after the end of turbulence. Each line that is used in the form of a refrain contains a specific term to look into. For example, the first line contains the word "fountain," which hints at how the things around him fall and collapse into the ground.

The speaker can find the flying hair of those who were killed. Ghosh personifies the path beneath the speaker's feet. It is another witness to the sufferings of displaced people. He can visualize men storming with torches to find anyone who was left behind. If they could find one, they knew well how to get their job done.

In the following line, the speaker describes the scenes that are transparent in his mind. It includes the memories of dawn's soothing sound, his soaked body in rain, and an idol of Shiva. From the reference to "Shiva of the cremation ground," it can be inferred that the speaker is one of the Hindu migrants from West Pakistan. He took shelter in the streets of Kolkata after the partition.

All he can remember is the death of his own people. There was not a single day that passed without seeing lifeless, blood-drenched bodies. Each scene came together in the hands of his memory. Here, Ghosh personifies the abstract idea of "memory". It seems the speaker plays a puppet at the hands of memory.

The speaker has turned into a beggar. He sits on the dim-lit pavement of a street and strikes the stones of the past and present. Here, the memories prior to the partition and after the partition are compared to stones. These stone-like memories still hurt the speaker. He strikes the stones to throw light on the events occurring in his rehabilitated life. Through the last line, Ghosh ironically comments on how the refugees were rehabilitated after the partition.

## Historical Context

Shankha Ghosh's "Rehabilitation" alludes to the fates of millions of people who had to leave their own land after the Partition of Bengal in 1947. Following the partition of Bengal between the Hindu-majority West Bengal and the Muslim-majority East Bengal, there was a rapid influx of refugees from each side. Nearly 5 million Hindus left East Bengal and about 2 million Muslims left West Bengal immediately because of violence and rioting. In this poem, Ghosh describes how they lost the things they had and what they got afterward. By contrasting the before and after scenarios, he points to the irrevocable loss of refugees, irrespective of their religion.

This poem was originally published in Bangla as 'Punorbashon' in Shankha Ghosh's [Shreshtho Kobita](#) in 1970. It was translated by Sankha Ghosh and Debjani Sengupta and published in [Looking Back: The 1947 Partition of India, 70 Years On](#) in 2019.

## Questions & Answers

**What is the poem "Rehabilitation" by Shankha Ghosh about?**

Shankha Ghosh's poem "Rehabilitation" is about a refugee from East Bengal. Ghosh describes the things he lost during the partition and what he had with him after the tragedy. To be specific, instead of memories of the past, he had nothing left with him.

### **What is the meaning of the title "Rehabilitation"?**

The title of the poem refers to the action of restoring refugees to their former country after the partition. In this poem, Ghosh ironically comments on how they were rehabilitated after the partition.

### **Who is the speaker of the poem?**

The speaker of this poem is a Hindu refugee from East Bengal, previously part of unified Bengal. After the partition, he had to leave everything behind and settle down in the streets of Kolkata.

### **What type of poem is "Rehabilitation"?**

It is a free-verse lyric poem written from the first-person point of view. This piece is one of the partition poems that highlight the suffering of refugees during and after the partition.

### **What is the theme of the poem?**

This poem explores the themes of partition, memory, suffering, and loss. The main theme of this piece centers on the aftermath of partition, especially in Bengal