

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

**16** YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

**VOL. 16 ISSUE-1, FEBRUARY 2025**

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**  
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**



[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

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

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

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

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

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

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



ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**

[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## Green, Yellow

Shaik Asad  
Andhra Pradesh.

Minutes past one o'clock in the morning, when the train arrived on platform number 2 of Tenali Junction, it was about an hour late. An hour late wasn't too late by Indian railway standards, but I was already quite sleepy and exhausted from the queasy, three-hour-long ride in the last bus of our village that'd churned along a series of bumpy, cratered roads skirted, for the most part, by irregular patches of paddy fields.

I slung my backpack—my only piece of luggage—on my shoulders and got on the train. Spreading out the white bedsheet on my Side Lower 3AC berth, I stretched out, snug and comfortable under the blanket. Within less than five minutes of its stoppage, the train let out a shrill whistle and resumed its journey up north.

One thing I liked about the train journey was the uninterrupted sleep I could get throughout. I had plans to lie asleep until 11 a.m. tomorrow, which was the scheduled time for Bhopal Jn, my destination.

But, as it turned out, I didn't get to sleep much longer: before even an hour passed, someone shook me off my slumber. My bleary eyes made out a short man's silhouette standing before me, but in the semi-darkness, it was hard to see the man's face. Irritated, I almost gave him a little piece of my mind.

'Hullo, *utho*,' the short man said in a gurgling voice.

I was sure I could smell liquor and gutka on his breath. He was rocking sideways to the gentle movements of the fast-moving train. I flicked on the light to see who the hell this man was, hell-bent on disturbing my peace in the middle of the night. His face was all bushy, his ears cartoonishly large.

'Get up,' he said again.

'Hmm?' I mumbled, rubbing my eyes, still a little dazed.

'*Arre utho!*'

I ignored his words and was about to lie back when he grabbed me by my arm. I tried shaking myself off his grip, but my arm was so tightly clasped in his powerful hand that any movement only twisted the skin around the gripped part of my arm. My temper flared up. I clenched my teeth hard and swallowed the rebellious impulse to punch him in the face with my free hand and watch the blood trickle out of his nostrils.

'*Arre*, who the hell are you? Don't disturb me,' I growled at him.

‘Just give me my seat,’ he said, ‘go sleep somewhere else.’

‘What do you mean, your seat, huh? This is my berth, do you understand? You must've been mistaken. Please check again.’

‘Show me your ticket,’ he demanded.

‘Show me your ticket,’ I retorted.

He turned violent at once. With cuss words flowing freely from his mouth, he tried pulling me off the berth by force. I somehow shook myself off his strong grip and gave him a little push. At this, he lost control of his drunken body and stumbled back, bumping against the door. This seemed to have angered him even more because his face instantly turned red. He gave an outrageous cry and launched into a series of threats.

‘Saale, you think I'm all alone on this train? Let the next station come, I'll show you who I am. There are twenty of us on this train, I'm telling you. Get off my seat at once or I'll break every bone in your body.’

Although I put up a brave front on the outside, to be honest, I was terrified out of my wits as I imagined myself being thrashed by that many people. There wouldn't be any chance to fight back if what he'd said was true.

Grabbing hold of my backpack, I stomped away as fast as I could, warning him I'd be back with the TTE.

‘I'll make sure that the TTE kicks your ass out of the running train, you asshole.’

As if the TTE on duty was my own brother-in-law!

Only when I was out of the coach did I breathe a sigh of relief. I stood near the toilets for about half an hour waiting for the TTE, cursing the stranger with all my heart. The TTE would sort this all out, I thought. Twenty people! Was the crook being honest about the number or was he just bluffing to scare me into giving in? Anyway, it wasn't wise to pick with the drunk. The intoxicated idiot didn't know what he was doing.

When there was no sign of the TTE coming, I thought it best to go ask around for the TTE's berth and fetch him from right there. By the way, was I sure I was on the right coach?

I pulled out my mobile and checked my e-ticket just to be doubly sure.

‘Oh shit,’ I cried, slapping my forehead.

Everything was crystal clear now. No doubt it was the same train, same coach, same berth, but, as it turned out, my booking date had been for yesterday.

#

Here's what happened: while booking my ticket about a couple of weeks ago, I decided to board the train on the night of 24th October. The train's timing at Tenali Jn, however, was two

minutes past midnight, which technically pushed the date of the journey to the next day by just two minutes. I had failed to reckon with this subtle change, as a result of which, instead of booking for 25th October, I'd gone blindly ahead and proceeded with 24th October.

This made me ticketless presently, which meant I was the one liable to be kicked out of the train by the TTE. After all, the short man's wild behaviour turned out justifiable. I wondered what I would've done in his place...

For a few moments, I even toyed with the idea of calling up my boss to beg for another couple of days of leave, but had to drop it immediately because, as it was, I'd already stayed back three days beyond my leave period without even notifying him. He must already be mad at me for not picking up his calls these last three days.

'So I guess I'll be travelling in the general compartment today,' I told myself despairingly. But even for that, one needed a ticket.

When the next station came, I got down and ran about this way and that, desperately looking for a ticket counter nearby, but I found none. A coolie was saying I had to go beyond that escalator visible on the right side when the train jerked into motion.

'Hell with the ticket,' I said to myself and quickly hung on to one of the general coaches, which was so stuffed with people that there was no chance of even getting in. The entranceway was choked with people standing, leaning against each other. Even in their standing position, they were nodding off. With one foot on the steps, I held on to the handle near the door for about an hour, waiting for the next station. Thankfully, the wind flapping against me wasn't too cold.

The next station came and went, then another, and another, but hardly anyone got down. My hands and legs began to ache from all the hanging. On top of that, my head was pulsing with drowsiness. A strong sense of hopelessness washed over me, sinking my spirits to a new low. Cursing my fate, I slapped myself hard for the sheer carelessness that had brought me to this state of despair.

Then I remembered a hack my father had once told me about, which, according to him, could prove helpful when things threatened to get out of control.

'Roll all your worries into a ball,' he had said, 'and set the ball next to the infiniteness of the universe. Watch how, in the grand scheme, the ball shrinks away into near-nothingness!'

Back then, I'd thought it to be quite an idealistic approach, but in the present circumstances, I saw no harm in giving it a try. I gazed up at the inky, star-studded sky overhead and tried to capture the whole expanse of the sky in my eyes.

As it turned out, the ball didn't shrink away into near-nothingness, as my father had claimed, but I thought I sensed a slight reduction in its size. Wasn't this enough?

With renewed vigour, I plunged myself into the human sea, shoving everyone out of my way, ignoring all the imprecations aimed at me for disturbing their sleep.

The only space not stuffed with people was the space between the toilets. I pushed my way there to realise why it was deserted. The doors of the toilet wouldn't close. Through the open doors, I could see the steel Indian-style commodes on either side. I think it's better not to describe the level of wretchedness they were in.

'Last cleaned in Baba Adam's zamana,' I heard someone say. I turned around almost at once but failed to figure out who said that.

Anyway, the stench was so overwhelming that I couldn't stand there much longer. Besides, idling around here on the edges of the coach wouldn't do if I were to aim for a comfortable seat.

Weaving my way through the sleeping human bodies sprawled on the aisle, I reached the middle of the coach, where I stood for some time, waiting for someone to vacate their space.

It was much less crowded here. And also, much airier. This made me wonder why everyone just wanted to hang about the entranceway, ignoring the free space inside of the coach.

After some time, an opportunity presented itself—an old woman vacated her space on the aisle, which I occupied with no second thoughts.

The fellow sitting next to me woke up from his sleep and smiled at me. I smiled back. He had a blue backpack in his lap, which he hugged. His hands were rough and greasy at the nails, his face sunburnt. I guessed him to be a motor mechanic.

'Where to?' I asked him.

'Ambala. You?'

'Bhopal.'

'Oh. Army?'

'No, no. I work at Ambika Plastic Company.'

He nodded but didn't pursue the subject further. Licking his dry lips, he kept gazing at my half-full water bottle resting in the side pockets of my backpack.

'You have some water?' he asked after a while.

I took a sip and gave him the bottle.

Tilting the bottle over the cupped palm stuck to his open mouth, he took a few gulps. Some of the water seeped through his fingers and dripped on his bag and onto the floor.

‘Thank you,’ he said, allowing himself another broad smile. ‘Ah, now I feel so good.’

He then rested his head on his backpack, and went back to sleep, swaying gently to the train's movement.

I rested my head on my backpack and tried dozing off for a while in the same fashion as him, but, despite my state of drowsiness, the fact that I was travelling ticketless kept nagging at me for some time. What if the TTE came on a round while I was asleep? I seriously doubted that the TTE would have the gall to venture this deep, but still, a slight fear of getting caught hung over me like a sword.

Anyway, I did manage to doze off, although, every once in a while, someone or another stirred me awake in their hurry to get to the door before the train left their station.

An hour or so passed this way. Then I saw my chance of hitting a jackpot!

The occupant of one of the two luggage racks overhanging either berth, a middle-aged man, woke up from his sleep and consulted his gold watch. Then he began packing his things in a hurry. His station was coming up soon.

I looked around myself. Everyone, including those who were standing, was nodding off. I was glad I had no competition. Nevertheless, I hung my backpack on my shoulders and was ready to pounce, waiting for the man to vacate the rack. No sooner had the man climbed down did I get to my feet and leapt onto it, stirring many dozers in the process.

It felt like heaven stretching myself out on the rack, even though it wasn't padded like the berths down below. It was basically a frame of steel bars and cross-bars welded together.

‘See? Things do get better,’ I told myself. ‘All you have to do is hang on and wait.’

Spreading my bed sheet over myself, I gave a huge yawn and went to sleep almost immediately.

I would've slept for about an hour and a half.

I woke up to find my lowers slashed multiple times around my pocket.

#

‘Oh God,’ I gasped. All my sleepiness was gone in that instant. Panic took over me as I frantically unzipped the pocket. Thankfully, Nothing was lost. My mobile and purse were still in there. The money in my purse was also untouched.

‘Thank God,’ I told myself. What if I'd remained sleeping for another hour?

I would've been penniless throughout the journey. A chill ran down my spine as I considered how I'd escaped the catastrophe by a hair's breadth. Cold sweat broke out all over my body.

It occurred to me all of a sudden that I hadn't recited the Safar Ki Dua after getting on the train.

Whipping out my mobile, which had a photo of the Arabic Dua, I recited it slowly, stumbling and drawling through the Telugu text.

My thigh was glaring at me through the multiple slits. Gulping down the anger pulsing through me at whoever had done it, I got down from the rack and picked my way over to the stinking toilet, where I changed into another pair of lowers, retching and gagging all the while.

I returned to find my rack occupied by someone else, and the gentleman was already snoring gently.

I took the vacant spot on the opposite berth below, most probably left by the fellow who'd taken my place.

My sleeping session was over anyway, I thought. I wasn't going to get any more sleep as long as I was on this bloody train. Why not let the poor guy sleep at least?

Of the six people dozing on the berth opposite me, one should be the thief.

For a long time, I pretended to be asleep, watching over the fellow sleeping in my place in the hope of catching the thief red-handed. By this time, my anger at the thief had all but sapped out now that I hadn't lost anything, but I was a little curious as to who it must've been. The idiot had been competent enough to ply a blade through the gaps in the luggage rack without waking me up but should've been quicker with the snatching...

One by one, everyone seated before me woke up from their sleep, stretching, yawning, and rubbing their eyes.

'Hmm. Let's see,' I told myself.

Those two on the edges couldn't have stood a chance because it was impossible to reach my pocket from where they sat. Among the other four, a fellow in a yellow shirt was wearing a waist pouch on his bulging ponch.

What's hiding in that waist pocket?

Could be a mobile, could be a knife or a blade.

'Oy oy,' I muttered to myself, 'don't be so judgemental, like you were last night...'

But then it was growing quite amusing. I felt like a detective on a confidential mission, like in the movies. The thief must be caught anyhow or something disastrous was bound to happen!

Brushing aside all my inhibitions for once, I rubbed my hands together and gladly went ahead with my secret 'investigation'.

There was another fellow, a skin-and-bones man sitting next to the Yellow Shirt with his feet perched up on the berth, hugging his knees. He occupied very little space. He was clothed in a green shirt a couple of sizes too big for him. His sad eyes kept flitting towards me every now and then, but they hardly took notice of me watching him.

I chose the two of them as the prime suspects. The Yellow Shirt, the Green Shirt.

Yellow Shirt pulled out a comb from his waist pouch and harrowed it backwards through his oiled, glistening, double-crowned hair. His hair was submissive, the comb's teeth forming parallel lines of hair along his scalp, reminding me of a freshly harrowed paddy field.

‘Oho... double crown!’ I thought excitedly. Well, was he, by any chance, a bigamist?

Green Shirt, on the other hand, hardly stirred. He looked like he was brooding over something that had been bothering him for years. For a long time, he looked out the barred window without registering the changing landscape outside. Then he plugged his earphones into his ears and began watching something on his mobile.

I wondered if he really was like this or intentionally being discreet.

Yellow Shirt was a lively sort of man. Nothing stirred in the train without him noticing. His beady eyes captured everyone passing the aisle until they disappeared from his sight.

As the morning rays filtered in through the windows, the train was gliding into a major junction. The whole coach came alive with the hustle and bustle of hawking food vendors, who hopped on even before the train stopped on the platform, one hand balancing the containers of their wares. I bought a packet of boiled groundnuts and a cup of tea. The groundnuts were good, but the tea tasted awful.

Having rested there for about ten minutes, the train gave out its shrill whistle and resumed its journey.

The next time I saw Green Shirt, he was leaning back and sleeping with his earphones still plugged in. Although unobtrusiveness was one of the most essential prerequisites of a thief, I found this man too boring. For that reason alone, I chose to eliminate him.

This makes the Yellow Shirt my finalist, who’d just bolted down a couple of samosas and was wiping his oily hands on the crumpled paper plate. After throwing the paper plate out of the window, he reached into his waist pouch, turning things over in search of something. I fixed my gaze at the pouch for something sharp to pop up, something convenient to slit any cloth, but nothing of that kind surfaced. Most likely, he’d pressed it to the bottom of the pouch, making sure it didn't slip out accidentally.



Finally, he did find the toffees he was looking for. He unwrapped one and popped it in his mouth. He had another one in his hand, which he offered to me. When I declined, it went to the old man sitting next to me, who accepted it without any qualms.

The toffee acted as a catalyst to a conversation.

‘Where to?’ the old man asked for a thank you.

‘Bhopal,’ Yellow Shirt replied. ‘That’s my home. I work in Tamil Nadu. You?’

‘K—.’

‘Good.’

‘Your *Vidhayak* is A— right?’ Yellow Shirt said.

‘No no. He’s lost the elections this time. By a great margin, that too! It’s this young man J— this time. Let’s see what this fellow will fare. Anyway, you can’t expect much from them, you know. They’re all the same, *saala*.’

This stirred a friendly debate. Another fellow begged to differ, quoting the example of an erstwhile Pradhan of his village who’d done many good things for the village.

This was promptly countered by another fellow, who had absolutely no faith in politicians. He asked, ‘If the Pradhan was so good, why has he lost? Why is he an “erstwhile”?’

Sensing the heat of disagreement building in the air, another one, a wise man if you ask me, changed the subject for a lighter mood. He shared a funny anecdote that steered everyone out of politics.

I must admit I was sucked into the conversation too. However, Yellow Shirt was the one who was all ears. His head flicked this way and that, based on who was doing the talking. If he agreed on something, he nodded slightly, pouting his dark lips. If he was against a statement, his eyebrows rose, forming deep furrows on his forehead.

When Bhopal was about fifteen minutes away, I got up, hung my backpack on my shoulders, and was on my way to the door when Yellow called out, ‘Your charger!’

‘Oh, no that’s not mine. Thank you!’ I said after examining it for a while, although I knew I hadn’t charged my mobile here on the train.

#

It was a real struggle getting off the train against those trying to push themselves in.

Once I was on the platform, I was walking over to the nearest stall to eat something, perhaps a fruit cake with tea, when, from a distance, I saw Yellow Shirt making his way towards the exit, a red-black neckband Bluetooth coiled around his neck, bobbing up and down with his gait. I thought they looked just like mine. I was pretty sure I hadn’t taken them out

throughout the journey, but I checked my bag anyway, as things hadn't been going in my favour lately.

'Oh shit,' I cried for the third time since last night, and raced towards the exit, looking for Yellow Shirt everywhere, cursing him heartily.

Yellow Shirt was nowhere to be seen.

For many days afterwards, I cursed myself for my exemplary display of carelessness, but in the end, I also felt a little proud of myself for having identified the thief.

If at all I choose to resign from this present job of mine, I can very well try my hand at being a private detective!