

# *The Stone Raft: Search for Portuguese Identity and Culture*

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The novel *Stone Raft* concentrates on the raft of the Iberian Peninsula of the European continent. The raft means a flat structure made of pieces wood tied together and used as a boat. The stone raft sails towards the Atlantic ocean but the God knows where exactly it goes? Iberian Peninsula wants to separate from the European continent. It means it creates 'new and strange', which has been thoroughly refused for centuries together. Indeed, this was not the most evident way of inventing a new world where people do not know each other but meet by a supernatural experience. It reconstructs the Portuguese history, traditions and culture. The text which focuses the history is called 'historio-graphical meta-fiction' because it reconstructs with dominant ideology of the present.<sup>1</sup> Jose Saramago is of the opinion that history takes place once, is the record of past events but it is interpreted in the different ways by the different historians. It does not say anything but historian manipulates it; because they want to compel their opinions, their version through historical discourse. 'the traces of the past, whether written or archaeological, do not actually tell us anything; rather they are the silent pieces of data that the historian manipulates in order to tell his own versions of events'.<sup>2</sup>

*The Stone Raft* is the voice of Peninsula as we read in the novel. Jose Saramago wants to see Portuguese and Spain together for the betterment of its people. His Peninsula is ideal and stands without any clashes, like the ideal state of Plate. Jose Saramago longs for national pride and national identity of Portugal. 'Iberianism has been defined as the desire for Portuguese unification with Spain.'<sup>3</sup> Jose Saramago thinks that he is the first writer to talk on unification of, first of all he is Portuguese later on Iberian and European. As Indian feel first of all Indian later on Asian, when we are out of country. That's why he writes maximum texts in Portuguese language, later on they are translated into many languages. 'He encompasses the Iberian Peninsula'.<sup>4</sup>

Magic plays important role in literature, film and fiction. *The Stone Raft* began with Joana Carda, a woman who traces a ridge in the dirt that seems to magically reform every time. It is wiped away when she scratches the ground with the elm branch of the tree. All the animals specially, dogs of Cerbere began to bark which is unusual event for the inhabitations and surroundings. It is said that animals know the catastrophe, which is going to be happen. The dog that guards the gates of hell, known as Cerberus and it has three heads. When the Iberian Peninsula breaks up the dogs start barking which is unusual in any province. The collective rise, barking of dogs is remarkable and used as a metaphor which is noticed at regular intervals in novel and which could be related to the recovery of the long-lost barking of the dogs of special province in the opening of *The Stone Raft*. Joana Carda has no idea of the consequences of her act which seemed meaningless. Five people and a dog, all of which have experienced bizarre incidents that may be connected with the Peninsula, meet and began a journey together.

The mayor of Paris sends two qualified and experienced Veterinary doctors to investigate the unusual phenomenon of barking dog, mischievous behaviors of other animals. The secret examinations are carried out on vocal cords which are the cause of barking, but to their surprise the vocal cards were missing, because people should not became aware of the thing that 'the bough, the dog, the birds, the boat, and the wise woman who unifies all – are these mere isolated symbols'.<sup>5</sup> When Joaquim Sassa throws the stone into the sea of Portugal; at the same time in Spain, Pedro Orce rose from his chair as he feels the slight vibration caused inside the earth. The strange thing is that pharmacist is able to feel the vibration of the earth. The vibration is confirmed by Seismograph. The human beings cross the uncultivated plain and pastures. A flock of starlings followed him. The birds and animals don't possess reasons but show instincts often vague and involuntary. Meanwhile a woman called Maria brings with her one suitcase and an elm branch. Jose Anaico and Joana Carda continue their conversation about current happening. They finally accept that the mistake is theirs. Joana tells that the elm stick that she brings with her has some magical power. This elm stick is the cause of separation of the Peninsula. She says when she has drawn the line, the crack appears and whatever happens now is because of this line.

Jose Saramago uses the invisible pen i.e. *ex nihilo* on paper to separate from European continent and create something unique. The characters react to each other on unification of Spain and Portugal. They separate from Europe and unite Portugal and Spain. Jose Saramago thinks that unification of Spain and Portugal is inevitable. So *The Stone Raft* becomes the Iberian discourse. This physical separation has co-related with socio-political and cultural implications. As the characters discuss this imaginary separation, so the readers from Spain, Portugal and Europe have to contemplate on it. Jose Saramago doesn't use only historic references but also fable and myth for an understanding of the readers. The first crack appears in these mountains of Alberes at the eastern end of the Pyrenees is pure imaginary. The dog calls Ardent has extremely sharp ear who is the first to approach the stone raft. As the dog approaches to the crack; the crack grows bigger and deeper and begins to spread creating a room to put a hand inside the crack. Irati, is originated in France and flows in the Spain and finally meets the Mediterranean Sea. The town, Orbaiceta becomes the important centre of Europe. The ministers, politicians, civil and military authorities, geologist, journalist and mineralogist were coming to Orbaiceta, but suddenly water of Irati river retreats from the shore and vanishes leaving the river bed exposed. So Gabriela says that, 'At 86 year's age, Portuguese author and Nobel Prize winner Jose Saramago has become the voice of contemporary Iberianism'.<sup>6</sup>

Three technicians and experts regarding earthquake set off to investigate this abnormal development. They examine different possible hypotheses of this event. The first hypothesis is the landslide on the mountain might have diverted the rivers course. The second hypothesis is that it might be the work of the French, and the third hypothesis is that the source, the spring has dried up. Examinations and expeditions realize that the river Irati has dried up. Through a crack that could not have been moved more than three meters wide, the water rushed into the earth roaring like a tiny Niagara. The French and Spaniards have rounds of talks but it is neither wide ranging nor profitable. In order to make some progress both the parties set up tents and raised their flags, with the intention of examining the tourist potential of a Natural Phenomenon. At the last minute, one factor arose to upset the relative consensus and that is the establishment of permanent commission for setting disputes of boundary. The king Dom Joao gives a nobleman an imaginary island. So like that nobleman that Pedro Orce, Jose Anaico and Joaquim Sassa have to find out the separate island for them. 'Dom Joao made a certain nobleman a gift of an imaginary island, now tell me, do you know of any other nation where such a thing could happen, And the nobleman, what did the nobleman do, he set out to look for it, now what I'd like to know is how you can find an imaginary island'.<sup>7</sup>

The investigation of the stone raft is complete. The concrete mixtures and machineries along with large amounts of rough stones and fast setting cement are brought to joint both the land slides. Large dumps of steel are put into the ground. The footing and filling operation is in progress continued for long time. The crack swallows up the torrents of stones and grey sludge and raw material, even though deep echoes could be heard inside the earth. Many tons of concrete is poured in the depth of seventeen meters and slowly the battle is won. The technicians, laborers, engineers and policemen embrace themselves, flags are waved on both sides, and television announcers give latest news-bulletins paraphrasing the titanic struggle. When the gap has been filled finally; and there start celebrations like New Years Eve with firework and the bull fight of Sao Silvestre. The cameras click many a times. The crack no longer exist, and the concrete surface which is still moist and began to move and descend slowly. The crack has not widened but is much deeper and no one knew how much. The world could now see the altered expressions. This event is discussed in the news, opinion polls, commentators, debates, discussions and conferences.

Jose Saramago comments on artificial way of footing where natural crack appeared. When the specific part of the land goes away; man-made efforts cannot stop it. Man-made efforts cannot be replaced with natural power. It has geographical implications on the province of Iberian Peninsula. The Iberian Peninsula wants to create something new associated with geography, socio-political implications and it continues to nourish its own identity and culture. It needs the courage and Portugal possesses it. 'we accompany the most daring voyage of all, for in this fanciful novel filled with geopolitical, socio-psychological, and philosophical implications, the entire Iberian Peninsula breaks loose from Europe and floats out to sea, with all Portuguese and Spaniards aboard!'<sup>8</sup>

In this way, Jose Saramago attracts the attention of the readers, involve deeply with his thought process. It happens automatically. It might be possible that readers start thinking which is not shared by the writer. 'Jose Saramago is one of the writers who mostly require the constant participative action of his reader'.<sup>9</sup>

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