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**Mahatma Gandhi**  
**Antarrashtriya**  
**Hindi Vishwavidyalaya**

**hINDI**

L A N G U A G E  
D I S C O U R S E  
W R I T I N G

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**Mamta Kalia**



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# हिन्दि

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D I S C O U R S E  
W R I T I N G

January-March 2013

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## Editor's Note

*The year 2013 has begun with a number of festival of letters where Hindi has played a vital role at the levels of concern and conference. Close on the heels of Jaipur Literary Festival we had the fourth Chandigarh Festival of letters along with the twelfth International MELOW Conference. Melow stands for 'The Society for the study of the Multi-ethnic literatures of the World.' These occasions had the presence and participation of writers from various corners of the world. The conference was inaugurated with the keynote address of Prof. Cheryl Johnson from Miami University, Ohio and the festival set in pace with the address of Chandigarh Union territory administrator Mr. K.K. Sharma and Dr. Arun Grover, V.C. Punjab University.*

*Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidhyalay organized a five day conference 'Hindi ka doosra Samay' at Wardha. Hundreds of writers were invited to participate in this 'mahakumbh' of ideas and ideology. In his inaugural address Dr. Namwar Singh traced the development of Hindi literature from past one thousand years to its present times. Dr. Nirmala Jain said that Hindi language has to become the language for one and all. The Vice Chancellor, Vibhuti Narain Rai, in his presidential address pointed out the need for finding out a new tradition for Hindi.*

*In our current issue we have Acharya Shivpujan Sahay in Heritage column. We present his classic short story 'The Fugitive.' Acharya Shivpujan Sahay had the rare genius of commanding many intellectual powers. He wrote short stories, essays, memoirs and biographies along with his constant involvement with literary journalism. Short stories by Aabid Surti, Sanjeev, Mridula Garg and Harjendra Chaudhari open up new recesses of social conflict and contemporary reality. Let us hope they have been adequately translated.*

*This brings us to another important topic in our column 'Language'. We have*

*Raji Narsimhan's thesis on Neelabh's translation of Arundhati Roy's novel 'The God of Small Things'. Raji feels that Neelabh chose a wrong book to translate because she finds Arundhati's text at best a purely English text. She thinks a translator should be not simply bilingual but bitonal as well to essay transition from one language to the other. We invite reader's opinions on this issue.*

*We remember having read some very poor translations of Tagore, Chekhov and Tolstoy during our student days. Even then the richness of content kept us focused on the authors. Over the years, the quality of translation improved with more and more people learning various languages. Regarding translation work of other Indian languages it is to be noted that Hindi has become like a common platform for these. Their translators often look to Hindi instead of English to go to a manuscript for translation. Such is the broad spectrum of Hindi.*

*Mamta Kulkarni*

*Read Hindi on internet : [www.hindivishwa.org](http://www.hindivishwa.org)*

## The Fugitive

Shivapujan Sahay

*Translated by*  
Mangal Murty

*[ Shivapujan Sahay (1893-1963) is one of the front rank writers in Hindi literature, a contemporary and close companion of Premchand, Nirala and Prasad'. His literary career spans nearly a half century devoted to creative writing and literary journalism. His complete writings, SAMAGRA, (edited by Dr. Mangal Murty) have been published in 10 volumes. He was awarded Padmabhushan, in 1960 with the Bengali poet Nazrul Islam. He is famous for his novel Dehati Duniya (1926) which was published a decade before Premchand's Godan (1936).*

*Shivapujan Sahay wrote this Hindi story in 1923. It is among a group of only 16 stories that he wrote which were first published in 1935 in a collection named Vibhuti. It also belongs to an interconnected group of four stories based on historical accounts available in James Tod's celebrated Annals & Antiquities of Rajasthan. The time of these stories falls during the decades in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century when there were frequent battles between the Mughal rulers in Delhi and the smaller Kingdoms in Rajputana. The plot of this particular story relates to the battle between the Mughal Emperor Allauddin Khilji and Hammir Dev, the King of Chittorgarh in Rajasthan, about 500 miles south-west of Delhi. The romantic love-story that forms the core of the plot seems to have been based on some folk tale as narrated by Tod in his Annals.]*

The great Pathan King Allauddin had a passion for hunting. He was so ardent a huntsman that large expanses of forests were left abandoned in his kingdom specially for this purpose. In his passionate pursuit of hunting he would camp in these forests with his harem of begums for months together.

In India, the Vindhya are a famous mountain range, sprawling over a wide area, skirting as it were the charming waist of the land mass, with dense natural forests of incomparable beauty. Stretches of sleepy green tranquility lie crisscrossed with dark, fierce swathes of perilous forests. Herds of nimble deer would prance around bower-kissed pools of pristine water, as also there would be lairs of wild lions spattered with the gushing blood of their newly killed prey. There would be numberless trees filled with the music of myriad-coloured birds, as also hissing pythons curling round them.

Royal tents dotted one sequestered grove beneath a hill, some of them decorated with gorgeous Kashmiri shawls, tied with multi-coloured tent-pins and silken strings. Ornate bedsteads with starry canopies lay languorously around in these royal tenements. In their centre lay a large circular velvet *shamiana* surrounded by a flowery garden.

The golden sun was about to hide its face behind the hills. Allauddin had been out on a hunt. The begums were amusing themselves with chess and card games in the central *shamiana*. Sometime it would be a nine of Hearts seeming to score, and

soon a Jack would try to get the better of a Queen. At another game of Chess at one time a pawn by its devious moves would become the Queen, or the King himself would get cornered into a Checkmate. Lifting laughters would then ring all round the flower-filled gardens. Amidst all those dulcet gigglings, often a soft serene radiant smile would suddenly light up on a pair of lissome lips which had enough tipsiness to make the King sozzled.

The begums decided to go for a swim in a nearby pool, and soon rushed there with their maids. Armed guards readily surrounded the vacant royal harem tents for security. A train of maids followed the queens with their royal clothes, but were soon sent back. The absence of the King had brought a sense of boundless freedom and *joie de vivre*. Clad only in their loosely worn saris, with their arms round their shoulders, the bevy of beauties walked on their nimble feet into the copse. To savour their unbounded freedom they had not brought even a single *bandi* with them.

They went chatting, giggling, sprinting ahead, jesting and nudging each other impishly. They would smilingly chide a while the thorny bushes in which often their *anchals* would get entangled. One or two would mimic the koels in their cooings, some others would try to chase the fluttering butterflies flying around, looking like flashes of lightning in the darkening evening scene.

Once at the pool they took off their



*saris* and piled them in a lovely heap nearby. The pristine pool of the forest was fragrant with the aroma of lotus flowers, open-petalled or half-opened, and all radiant on the tranquil waters of the pool, teased by the black-bees, as the water fowl cooed around.

Overjoyed, the begums looked at each other, breaking into mischief-mixed smiles. In no time, their happiness and abandon became euphoric and gay. Very soon the nature-nurtured lotuses bowed their blushing heads, petals closed, before those golden lotuses that always lolled in the Pathan King's pool of consciousness.

Dark clouds filled the horizon. A heavy downpour seemed imminent. But the next moment the clouds disappeared and the sky broke into a glow. Suddenly there was some commotion in a nearby bush as if two venomous snakes were fighting each other. Terror-struck, the begums stopped their water-frolics and gigglings, their ears trained towards the hissing joust in the bush. Mortally afraid, they slowly came out of the pool one by one. The commotion was getting fiercer. The nearby bushes shook and swayed. They started running, but a storm had arisen. They couldn't even see their way ahead. The wicked storm soon blew their *saris* into the bushes. Helter-skelter, the begums, oblivious of their lost *saris*, ran for their lives where they could. Velvety skins were rudely pricked and scratched by thorns, but the fear of the King made them heedless of their pain.

Seeing their unclad mistresses trembling in panic and fear, the *bandis* tried hard to hide their smiles. The price for leaving them behind had been well-paid! But the *bandi* of the favourite begum was very flustered not to find her darling mistress among the frightened begums. A sudden hush fell all around. All blood froze. Horsemen were quickly dispatched into all directions in the dense forest. But there was no trace anywhere of the new begum. The horsemen came back with their heads bowed in shame. The other begums had their hearts beating dreadfully. The watchmen began tearing their hair. The favourite queen's *bandi* pulled out a dagger to plunge into her heart. But the senior begum caught her raised hand – “Stop! The horsemen have returned, but their *Sardar* hasn't come back yet. That might augur well!”

The *Sardar* was still circling around the pool, prying closely into every thicket, every shrub and bush, yet to no avail. Suddenly a strange fragrance filled his nostrils. He was struck with alacrity, focusing all his senses there. All at once he looked askance as his eyebrows lowered in shame, and throwing his silken turban, eyes still lowered, he asked the lissome beauty to wrap it around her nudity. The begum was shivering in cold, her black tresses loosely strewn around her glowing nude body, like snakes curled round a sandal wood sapling in a forest. Languidly she had wrapped the soldier's turban like

a sari around herself. But it had a distinct masculine odour in it which made the begum restive.

“I am shivering with cold. Can't you do something to bring me comfort?” – wailed the begum.

“Should I light up some fire here?” said the Sardar.

“And what about the fire that burns in my heart?”

“Order me, and I would do as you say”.

“Hold me in your arms to love me.”

The shocked Sardar said, “I would be playing with my life then.”

“Anyway, you are now caught in the snare of certain death.”

“But your royal honour is dearer to me than my life”.

“But you seem to love my honour more than me.”

“That to me is still more precious. Otherwise I wouldn't have dared so far.”

“Then forget the fear for my life. I can take care of that with a twinkle of my eye. But you are needlessly endangering your own life now by opting for a poison chalice and refusing to kiss this cup of nectar hung around your lips. Don't you know how I can make the King dance to my tunes?”

“My gracious lady, I know everything. But the offence is extremely grievous. My proven integrity, and my diffident soul forbid me to exceed my limits.”

“And you have no care for the turbulence in my heart. No more of

hesitancy now. Your promotion to the highest position is assured.”

“But I would rather shun such an act of disloyalty. Please forgive me.”

“You have already hurt a she-snake. Don't retreat now.”

“Great lady, there is a limit even to the wildest daring.”

“Yeah, then let me start the game myself.”

The Sardar was gripped by his qualms. But the begum lost herself in her passionate frenzy. The soft bed of the silence-filled cove soon overflowed with the wild intermingling of two streams of unrestrained desire. A lion emerged from a nearby thicket as the begum reached fulfillment. The Sardar then strung his bow with a smile and killed the animal with a single arrow. The animal was dead and alongside the begum, too, lay supine. Passion was requited into satiety. All nimbleness lapsed into lassitude. All scratches and nicks seemed like the living alphabets of a lifelong bond of union. And all, all was finally enveloped in an enduring embrace, firmly sealed with a passionate kiss.

The begum rode back on the horse to the royal harem. And the Sardar took the string of precious pearls as a gift of love, touched it to his heart, and kissed it smilingly. He only wondered how luck, like a wild storm, had blown his way, bringing him such a rich bounty.

On a moonlit night, Allauddin was on

a merry boat-trip with his new begum in the Jamuna river facing his royal palace. The royal boat was surrounded at appropriate distances by other boats of beautiful female singers. On the dark tranquil waters of the deep river the rays of the moon seemed to play a game of diamond dices. It was as if the luminous night-sky was pouring out the milk of a radiant moonlight.

Softly pressing the delicate chin of his favourite begum, Allauddin said—“You, breath of my dear life, seeing your resplendent face, even the moon goes hiding in shame. Look how it is soon about to drown itself into the river out of sheer shame. The begum bent her neck like one of a wine-jar to look that way and smiled. Her eyes reflected the glow of her beauty. The face gleamed with radiance, as her cheeks suddenly flushed rosy.

Allauddin was by now in a stupor of delight. The wine had already roused his dalliance, as the passion-filled begum was totally possessed by fervid desire and the royal boat-ride swayed with the rhythms of love. She was lying embraced in the sinewy arms of the King who was lost in those luscious kisses of his lovely partner.

Suddenly two river-beasts seemed to grapple with each other just there. There was a loud splash as if the river itself had been shuddered awake. The boat shook violently for some moments. The embrace got loosened. The kiss lay broken. And the begum couldn't help a titter.

“What made you laugh so loud, my love”, asked the King.

“Nothing, my lord; for no particular reason. Believe me”.

“That can't be, and you must tell me. I am sure you are lying this time, and it may not be good for you”, said the exasperated King.

“Howsoever be it, but there was no reason behind it.”

The King tensed as he took it as a jibe against his manhood. Feeling chagrined and skimpy, he fell into deep annoyance. Nothing would hurt a man more than the derision of his manliness by so beautiful a lover.

“Tell me the truth, or be ready to die by hanging tomorrow.”

“How regrettable my lord that you should be so peeved by such a trifle.”

“Enough of your impertinence now. Go ahead, if you still value your life, and tell me what it's all about.”

“If my lord can spare my life, I will tell you...”

“I give you my word. If you tell me the truth, here and now, I will hold you in my arms again and love you till the dawn.”

“If your lordship spares one more life... I will tell you all.”

“Granted, but go ahead at once.”

To cut the long story short, the begum spoke so excitedly about the chivalrous Sardar's manliness and prowess that Allauddin's face flushed red. He would only

grind his teeth, wring his hands and beat his head in extreme rage. The begum then realized the folly of revealing her deepest secret so naively to the King.

The very next morning, both the begum and the Sardar were thrown into prison. Condemned to hunger and thirst, the day of their execution was fixed. Luckily, the Sardar's brother was the chief of the jail guards and the brother of the begum was the police chief. By their daring collusion they helped the condemned duo to escape from the prison. When the King came to see, he only found a string of tied clothes hanging across the outer prison wall.

The fugitive duo went round asking for shelter and protection from the various powerful kings in the country, but most of the kings and chieftains even in Rajputana refused to provide refuge to them. Desperate for their safety, they approached King Hammir in his Court. The Sardar begged in a plaintive voice for security. Hammir was deeply stirred by the beseeching prayer of the fugitive couple, his forehead aglow with pride and gallantry. Descending from his throne, he came to the Sardar, and embracing him, said – “No power on earth can harm you now. So long as this Rajput King Hammir is alive you shall have all protection here, in the safe refuge of Rajasthan. Shed all fears henceforth and live with total security within the precincts of my fort. Whoever seeks refuge here shall have full protection

under these arms of mine. Now be fearless and give me your full account.”

The astonishing tale of the Sardar cast a spell on the entire Court of King Hammir, and a thousand swords came unsheathed when it ended. The Sardar now became fully assured of his security as he lived within the lofty walls of the royal fort. The begum also was deeply touched by the grace and beneficence of the Rajput ladies of the palace as she lived under full security among them.

Allauddin's spies carried all this news to their King who sent a clear threat of total annihilation to the Rajput King. But Hammir declared from the highest tower of his fort – “I don't care a fig for such hollow threats from a coward King.” And the surrounding hills resonated with the Rajput King's solemn averment. Even the high walls of the fort echoed back the Rajput's proclamation – “Each here shall lay down his life for the honour-bound protection promised to our shelter-seeker.”

In no time, the raging winds carried this grand illoquent message to the ramparts of the Delhi fort. For a moment, Allauddin's heart shuddered in dread. But the Prime Minister was immediately summoned and an instant proclamation was issued for a devastating attack on Chittorgarh. An army of the elite 50,000 soldiers immediately marched towards Chittorgarh.

On this side, Hammir invested the Sardar with the rank of his Army Chief

by tying the designated turban on his head with his own hands. Many of his Rajput courtiers tried to dissuade their King from doing so, but Hammir reposed full faith in the daring and gallantry of a war-hardened fighter.

Fully arrayed in battle dress when Hammir went to seek his mother's blessings, she kissed his forehead saying – "Victory in the battle may honour you, my son. I am sure you will prove worthy of my milk and the ideals of Rajput valour with which you were brought up." But she was startled when Hammir, for a moment, put aside the bow and arrows and his mighty sword and stood rather pensive before her.

"Why this untimely sorrow, my son?"

Hammir then said that this was a special day when he wouldn't be satisfied merely with the traditional blessing; he would rather have a blessing filling him with the invincible ferocity of a lion.

"Today, dear Mother," said he, "I need your special blessing which will enable me to annihilate the enemy totally or sacrifice my proud head at the feet of goddess Durga in the battle."

"So be it, my son!", said the proud Rajput queen Mother, as her breasts seeped with milk oozing out of a mother's love.

The battle went on for weeks. The Rajput army showed its gallantry in ample measure. Allauddin was totally flabbergasted by the valour of his enemy forces. All his arrogance was totally shattered.

In the battle Hammir always kept himself around the Sardar to ensure him full protection. But when the final day arrived, the Sardar found himself completely surrounded in one corner of the battlefield by the Pathan army. He amazed the Pathans by his fierce fighting, killing scores among his enemies, but couldn't emerge out of the siege. Rushing like a storm Hammir arrived there, leaving the crucial bloody battle that was taking place at the fort's main entrance. He cut through the enemy siege with his lightning sword and freed the besieged Sardar from the deadly orbit.

But soon both the fugitive and his protector were overwhelmed by a fresh rushing squad of the Pathan army. The battlefield appeared to be flooded by streams of blood. Death itself stood before the two brave heroes to welcome them. It was the Sardar first who seemed to implore Death to take him into its fold before it welcomed his protector. But Hammir himself appeared insistent for Death to take him first into its lap so that the valiant Sardar could follow him into the gates of Heaven. Both the heroes seemed to vie with each other as they prepared for their last journey, but Hammir was able to win precedence. Meanwhile, the Sardar had already brutally slain Hammir's attacker.

Finally both the Sardar and his protector King lay gasping in the lap of Death who laughingly said to them – "O

Maharana, and O Muslim Sardar! Both of you are truly blessed! If both Hindus and Muslims learn from your noble example to live together in harmony and good faith, then this great land which belongs to you both, shall be free from all hatred and violence, bringing some respite to me as

well. I feel truly blessed today to have both of you in my lap – one a chivalrous and daring Muslim Sardar, and the other a lion-hearted protector of his shelter-seeker. I don't know when again I shall have such a good fortune when the likes of you shall adorn this lap of mine.”

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**Acharya Shivapujan Sahay** (1893-1963) was a close associate of Premchand, Jayashankar Prasad and Nirala, and is highly regarded as one of the foremost writers of modern Hindi prose. He is well known for his novel 'Dehati Duniya', a pioneer work in Hindi regional fiction, and as one of the greatest editors after Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi. He edited several famous Hindi journals like 'Matwala', 'Madhuri', 'Jagaran' and 'Himalaya' as well as Premchand's 'Rangbhumi', 'Dwivedi Abhinandan Granth' and Dr. Rajendra Prasad's 'Atmakatha'. His complete works 'Shivapujan Sahay Sahitya-Samagra' in 10 volumes, edited by Dr. Mangal Murty, have been published recently. He was awarded Padmabhushan in 1960. He passed away in Patna in 1963.

**Dr. Mangal Murty**, born 1937 is a retired professor of English and Linguistics, who served in universities in Bihar and Yemen for more than four decades, and has written and edited several books in Hindi and some in English. He has recently edited and published the collected works of Shivapujan Sahay (his late father) and is presently doing translations of Selected Writings of Shivapujan Sahay. He now lives in Lucknow and is working on an English biography of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Email: bsmmurty@gmail.com

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## The Journalist

Aabid Surti

Translated by  
Anil Sud

D. M. Pande was a journalist. A past master at his profession, he was honest and straight forward. To top it all, he had high ideals. In fact, his ideals were sky high. It is these lofty virtues that posed hurdles at every step of his life.

Journalist D. M. Pande had been unemployed for the last seven months. He had applied to quite a few journals for a job but with no result. He was sure he would get one sooner or later. Hanging on to this thread of hope he had kept himself busy doing odd jobs. His family dragged behind. Times were hard.

As if this was not enough, he was hit by a bolt from the blue. A hurricane had swept over Gujarat's Kandla port. He had seen on TV for three days the havoc wreaked by it. He had also followed the newspaper coverage for a week. Every pore of his body screamed in agony.

*Journalist D. M. Pande's story in D. M. Pande's words : The ocean had swallowed hundreds of people and here I am, dying a hundred deaths to find a cure for the pain in my old mother's joints. Thousands had been rendered homeless and I feel tormented by the gloomy faces of my wife and children. What could be more shameful than this selfishness?*

I have resolved that I will express the suffering of these distressed people. I will write a story, my pen literally dipped in my blood, which will send tremors all over. The story of those starving, ill

clad people will touch the reader's heart deeply.

"What difference will it make, Pandeji?" asked a friend when I told him about my intentions.

I was surprised, "What do you mean?"

"You journalists only know how to wield your pen," was his answer. "Like the blabbering of politicians, you have let your pen loose over hundreds of pages but all that ink and paper never gave a starving man a loaf of bread or a piece of cloth to cover his body. Fifty years of independence and millions are still homeless; in fact the list of the deprived has swelled by millions."

My friend's criticism was valid. When had speeches and stories done any good to anyone? Have they put out the raging fire in anyone's belly? How could a single story of mine help thousands of homeless in Kandla?

I changed my resolve. Those helpless, homeless women... the starving children howling for a piece of *chapatti*...I decided to do my utmost for these poor by raising as much funds as I could.

I did not have to think much. I was standing at Hutatma Chowk. Right in front of me was a building which housed the sleek offices of an international corporation. Its owner had recently visited France with a business delegation. I had got him a great deal of publicity by getting his photograph with a flattering writeup published on page three. Then he had said with a smile, "Please give us a chance to reciprocate, Mr. Pande." The time was ripe to cash in on his promise.

Slowly the lift was going up. I was doing some mental arithmetic. By evening I will visit at least ten industrialists, collect a thousand rupees cash from each of them. With ten thousand rupees a thousand mouths will get a meal and this humble soul will get a little solace.

For a moment ten hungry faces of my family appeared before my eyes and the lift stopped on the tenth floor. I came out and turned right. I was shown into a large, imposing office. "Hello Pandeji," getting up from his revolving chair, Seth Rustomji Workingboxwalla welcomed me graciously, "please...have a seat. Today, after ages, how come you thought of me?"

I flashed a big smile and sat down on the chair opposite him. Between us there was a table with an array of three telephones; red, ivory and green. He resumed his seat on the revolving chair. Till now I was quiet, trying to formulate the right words to put forward my idea.

"Is there anything in particular?" He asked impatiently.

"Yes...yes sir," blurting out instantaneously I came to the point, "I have decided to raise funds for the homeless of Kandla disaster."

"Hmm..."

"For a propitious beginning I am starting with you."

"Hmm...", leaning back in the revolving chair he lit a cigar and asked.

"How much do you expect?"

"As much as you can give."

Tilting his face upwards, he began blowing smoke rings. These small rings slowly travelled upwards and scattered



when they hit the ceiling. After a while he looked at me again and mumbled, "Our reputation dictates that I should write out a cheque for ten thousand at least."

My eyes widened. I had hoped to collect a total of ten thousand rupees by the evening. How could I guess in my wildest dream that my first attempt would reap ten thousand?

"Ten thousand and one would be an auspicious beginning." I replied, tongue in cheek.

"If it was in my hands, I would offer you fifty grand." As he said it, his voice became a little muted, the smoke rings a little smaller. "But there is a problem. I will have to take the consent of my partner."

*That means the original amount of ten thousand in doubt!*

"Can't you take his consent on phone?" My enthusiasm was flagging.

"He has just left for home." He took a big puff and kept the cigar on the ash tray. "Listen, you go straight to his house."

"Then?"

"Appeal to him on my behalf. Hopefully, your work will be done."

There was no point in wasting anymore time here. I took the address from Seth Workingboxwalla with thanks and reached the Marine Drive flat of Seth Talkingboxwalla. I took a seat on a plush settee in an opulently furnished living room of a grand eight bedroom apartment.

A few minutes later, Seth Talkingboxwalla appeared with a pensive expression on his face. I introduced myself

briefly and explained the reason for my visit, equally briefly. His face turned more serious. He deliberated for quite some time. Then he said, "I do not like to see anyone leaving this house disheartened."

"I will give you a recommendation letter," he thought for a while and added, "If you go to the address and knock I am sure you will get at least fifty thousand rupees if not more."

Seth Talkingboxwalla scribbled a few words on a piece of paper, folded it neatly, slipped it in an envelope and gave it to me. I was thrilled. The letter was addressed to Miss Sanaya Sehgal, none other than the reigning superstar of Hindi cinema. (Last year, she had a straight run of five silver jubilee hits.) She was a dream girl for countless fans. Young college girls proudly emulated her coquettish mannerisms.

"Tell Madam Sanaya," Seth Talkingboxwalla, the partner of Seth Workingboxwalla declared generously as he escorted me to the door, "whatever amount she donates, I will top it up with one rupee more."

When I came to the main entrance of her Pali Hill residence, two Gorkha gunmen stopped me. I showed the envelope and presented my I-card also. The main gate opened for me to enter. I marched ahead. Between me and the palacious bungalow lay a lush green lawn, as big as a cricket field, bordered by beds of tiny flowers of myriad colours. There was a swimming pool in the middle of the lawn.

Miss Sanaya, wearing a bikini and dark

glasses, sat by the pool side on a cane chair under a rainbow coloured garden umbrella. She had a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice in her hand. Next to her the secretary stood with a diary and a pen. The muffled conversation was perhaps about shuffling her shooting dates.

Standing respectfully before them I handed over the letter. As she removed her dark glasses, I briefly explained my mission. Now I wanted not just food for the poor, life saving drugs for the sick and ailing too.

Miss Sanaya Sehgal kept shifting her big blue eyes from me to the letter and back. The secretary stood in silence. Under my feet was a soft green carpet of grass. I was tempted to roll on it, but I could not muster enough courage to do it.

“Pandeji,” she said at last, “I can see your intentions are noble, but such an enormous calamity cannot be tackled by the effort of just a couple of individuals.”

“Then?”

“I have a suggestion...” she emptied the glass of juice and keeping it on the table, continued, “and if you follow it, you will succeed in collecting more than a crore rupees.”

“Really?”

“Next month we will organise a cocktail party.”

“For what?”

“For the homeless.”

“But Madam,” I interrupted her like a fool, “what will the homeless do with cocktails?”

*Idiot!* She must have thought. Then explained, “The who’s who, the rich and

famous of the city will attend the cocktail. There will be business magnates and superstars, horse owners and builders, civil servants and political leaders. I will personally appeal to all of them with folded hands. I will make each one of them shell out one lakh rupees. Now tell me Pandeji, what do you think of it?”

“Amazing! Awesome!” was all I could say. My imaginary bag of ten thousand was getting heavier. The amount was going to cross the one crore mark. My face was flushed with a gloss that you see on the face of someone who has just hit the jackpot.

Miss Sanaya Sehgal was young, slim, sexy and had an uncanny gift of the gab. She had inherited from her mother the art of enticing men and delve deep into their pockets. She was going to stand there in person to collect funds and coax the men in her inviting voice. Could anyone refuse her compelling charm?

There was a significant role for me to play on this grand occasion. Miss Sanaya Sehgal had entrusted the publicity and promotion of this event to me. From the next day itself, I got down to the job and launched a blistering publicity campaign.

Almost all the newspapers of Mumbai-big and small- carried the news of this mega event. In film-magazines Madam’s photos were splashed in colour along with sizzling write ups. TV channels too pitched in and lent their full support.

The nervous wait for the cocktail party was finally over. I reached her bungalow a little before sunset. Madam looked pleased as did her secretary. He had

presented an album to her with the cuttings of all the published photographs and stories. She thanked me profusely for spearheading the entire campaign.

The sun had set long ago. The pool side looked like a bride decorated in all her finery. Tiny, multicoloured bulbs enhanced the beauty of the trees and plants. The guests began flowing in. Some millionaires, who had come before me and had started drinking in Madam's living room, came out to the poolside and continued with more drinks. There was soft music in the background. The waiters in starched white liveries were ensuring that wine flowed abundantly.

One waiter appeared before me with a tray of empty glasses and a bottle of whiskey. Another waiter trailed him with a tray of chicken tikka and mutton *samosa*. As I reached out for the *tikka* plate, I was reminded of my army of starving children, back home. The sunken cheeked face of my mother was floating before my eyes. They must have all gone to sleep after a frugal meal of tea with a loaf of bread.

I did not touch anything and the waiters moved away. The night was progressing steadily. The collective murmurings were becoming loud. One section of the crowd was singing lustily-

**Sanaya, Oh my darling Sanaya...**

**Which God has moulded this Maya?**

But so far not a word about the plight of the Kandla disaster had been uttered.

Just as my patience was running out, Madam Sanaya Sahgal opened her mouth. The noise subsided. She was speaking. Her dark eyes were speaking. Her

sleeveless *choli* was speaking. The strings of glittering pearls around her neck were speaking. The silver threads woven in her priceless sari were speaking. The glass of wine, held with panache in her hands was speaking.

“At this hour thousands of homeless children are crying plaintively. Hundreds of starving babies must have lost the battle of life already. Cholera and typhoid must have taken its heavy toll, too. They were all human beings and had a right to live like all of us here...”

The environment exploded with a thunderous applause. The speech was really heart rending. Whichever dialogue writer had penned it had done an impressive job. To top it, her dramatic delivery of words created an instant impact. Every word seemed to come from the innermost layers of her heart. It touched my heart also deeply. A pity though that besides the bus fare back home, I did not have a single paisa to contribute to the cause.

When the applause subsided, she came to the point. She announced a personal donation of fifty thousand and one rupees. Sitting close to her, a Marwari gentleman offered loudly-*one lac*. A figure of one and a half lakh was heard from another direction. It looked as if they were competing with each other to make bids at an auction.

I was adding the sum mentally. The last of the crowd, who was a film producer, topped the list with a figure of fifteen lacs! The grand total had surpassed one crore!

Somewhere a clock struck two a. m. I saw men and women, inebriated, jostling

with one another. Some were laughing raucously, and some had stumbled under table. I wondered how and when I would get a hold of the promised cheques.

I went to Miss Sanaya's residence the next morning. She had left for her shooting. When I went the third day, late in the evening, I was told that she had gone out for a week for outdoor shooting. I made similar rounds for a month, and finally on a Sunday, was able to catch her.

"You?"

"Yes, madam."

Getting over her momentary fix, she inquired, "have you collected all the cheques?"

"That I thought was your secretary's job?"

She grimaced once again.

"Pandeji," she retorted, "I am sorry to say, but you really are naive."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I spent fifty thousand rupees to organize that party," her melodious voice, like the sweet ring tone of a new telephone, turned harsh. "After making a massive effort to collect all the highly influential people of this city, do you expect us to knock at their doors also? Was it not your duty

to go and collect the cheques the very next day?"

"But I did not have their addresses."

"You could have asked my secretary."

"Never mind," keeping my cool I said, "It is still not too late. I will start my collection drive from tomorrow itself."

I collected the addresses from the secretary and went the following day to call on the first name, the Marwari gentleman who had announced a cheque of a lakh of rupees just after Madam. The moment he saw me, he knew instantly that my visit was to extract money from him.

"You are Pandeji..." he said politely before I could explain the delay, "am I right?"

I nodded my assent.

"Perhaps you may not know," looking at my tattered and deprived exterior he continued, "I am the proprietor of the evening called Super Fast, where you have applied for a job."

"Yes, of course," my lips parted in pleasant surprise.

"You are joining from tomorrow."

"Yes, of course." And my lips were sealed also.

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**Aabid Surti** : born 1935 is an author, painter, cartoonist, journalist and playwright; has won a national award for his short story collection Teesri Ankh; has also written for children. In all he has penned 80 books. Creator of the famous cartoon strip 'dhabboji', he lives in Mumbai.

**Anil Sud** : MA, Economics, St. Stephens College, Delhi University with 40 years of experience in civil and private sector services. Interested in music, arts and literature. Has translated several important authors. Lives in Gurgaon.

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## Seven Little Rooms

Mridula Garg

Translated by the author

Tourists look at reality differently. They look upon sightseeing as they do upon fiction: part truth, part fantasy. Proper tourists are quick to forget the picturesque places they visit, as they move on with their itinerary. But they also accept the tales told by the guides about them without question.

A few annoying exceptions are always there. People with no faith, fond of saying “so what?” to everything they are told. Tell them, the first raindrop falls like a tear on the grave of *Mumtaz Mahal* in *Taj Mahal* at Agra, and they will shrug: so what, that’s what marble roofs do—absorb moisture and leak. If everyone turned non-touristy, what would happen to poor guides? Go swell the unemployed horde, that’s what. But a lot of thrill and romance of travel would be lost.

Bet you saw *Devanand’s* film, *Guide*. When I first saw it in my youth, I refused to believe a guide like that could exist in real life. But when I saw it again in my old age—you may call me elderly, but I have no objection to being called old—I thought it could well happen. We grow more romantic with age, fatalistic too. And then, would you believe it, I found my remarkable guide in *Mandu*, Madhya Pradesh.

*Mandu* did not boast of many tourists. I could look far into space without the crowd butting in. Despite a profusion of gnarled trees of *peepal*, banyan and *khurasani* tamarind, the hilly landscape looked almost empty. Most of the ostentatious man-made buildings

were in ruins. The lesser ones had survived and merged in the natural surroundings. Nature is one hell of a dame sans mercy, not satisfied with less than total surrender. But she is not impatient, quite willing to wait for the right moment and opportunity. I felt at peace in *Mandu*, surrendering to the natural order, rid of ego and angst. But for how long?

I reached *Jahaz Mahal* to find a host of guides, mostly children, chasing a small number of tourists. Child labor! See, there was no escape. Wherever I was, the sorry state of society managed to unsettle me. Enough of sights and fables, I told myself, time to return to reality.

I turned round to find a boy of fourteen asking me, "Want to see *Saat Kothree*?"

I waved him away, but did not expect to escape the sales spies. But he did not say a word; gave an arrogant stare, shrugged and walked off. His nonchalance shouted loud and clear: stop me!

"What's to see there?" I called.

"How'll you know if you don't see," he said.

My-my, so guides could be non-touristy too!

"Surely you know its story. How far is it?"

"Far enough to need a car. Have one?"

"We'll hire one."

"Let me know," he said moving away.

"Are you a guide?" I called again.

"What else?"

"Don't you go to school?"

"Why not? Its two now, isn't it? The

school closes at two, doesn't it?"

Great! A mini edition of *Devanand*. Why did I always end up with mini editions!

We reached *Saat Kothree*, the Seven Little Rooms. Not bad as the view went. Hills and valleys merging and emerging from each other for quite a distance, making the expanse look, well... expansive. We left the car and climbed a fair distance to reach a high flat rock. A few roughly hewn steps, about thirty, led the way down to the other side. Going down, I was surprised to see small puddles of water here and there. Strange! There had been no rain. I recalled someone telling me, 'Had a drought not hit us again this year, the hills would have been bubbling with waterfalls.'

We managed to negotiate the slushy, uneven steps without slipping to reach a middle sized pond. The size of a small room with knee deep water; more like a square bathtub with a stone skirting. No, mustn't say that. Hadn't I seen a small alcove as we entered, complete with a priest and his quota of implements, *lota*, *kamandal*, flowers, dhoop sticks, incense, *charanamrit*, *aarti* plate and coins? Ergo, it was a temple! There was nothing ornamental about it though. What was there was just there. Still to call a temple a bathtub could invoke a curse. From whom, the nondescript priest? What a ludicrous thought! I had barely time to smile when the ground fell away from under my feet. The water climbed to my chest. The guide hung on to me, otherwise I would have

gone under. *Mahadev-Mahadev*, forgive me, I never said it was a bathtub! The mind, you know, is one hell of a jester; who knew what oddity it would conjure?

Taking small careful steps, we reached the far end of the stone skirting. I realized it was the end when my knees hit a stone boundary. I climbed over it and found myself in yet another pond. Chest deep hot water encircled me. The sudden onslaught of heat on my chilled body made a drowsy languor steal over it. I was reminded of a health club seen on the small screen.

‘Stop this nonsense this instant,’ I admonished myself! ‘Focus on the water above chest level, the slimy stones below; one false step and you’ll fall bang on Lord *Mahadev* himself.’ There he was ensconced on a flat stone platform protruding above the water. Not the bust, only the *lingam*. I had to climb over yet another skirting to reach it. The ground below must have gained height, because the water level fell to my waist. But it was much hotter now, like a sauna bath! Damn! Things I had never seen, felt or touched were jostling my mind via the idiot box. As if I was incapable of thinking for myself.

The quick change from cold to heat made my nose itch. I tried to stifle the impending sneeze, but despite my sincere effort, a mini sneeze burst forth as I put my bowed head and folded hands on the *lingam*. Fortunately no one but Lord *Mahadev* heard it. When I raised my head, I found I could see much better. I saw two small rooms branching off from

*Mahadev’s* pedestal. Both had stone images inside, one of *Ganpati*, the other of *Nandi*. I bowed to them from afar. As I turned back, I realized one room was missing. One, two, three, in a straight row, I counted, two on the side; that made five. Take the priest’s alcove for another small room; altogether six. Where was the seventh room? And why was there no image of *Parvati*, the consort of *Mahadev* with or without him?

We circled back to the priest. The *aarti* plate was offered, purse lightened, *prasad* received, and we were back at the door. I peered around the priest: right, left, over his head, but did not see any other room. Where was the seventh room? Outside ... perhaps?

We came out. As I sat on the top step to squeeze my wet *salwar*, I saw the priest come out, tying the offering of coins in his towel. He shut the door and turned the lock. Astounded, I could not help exclaim, “Why are you locking the ponds?”

He stared at me, “What if someone pollutes the water,” he said.

What was left to pollute? Hadn’t we all splashed in it with dirty feet? But before I could say so, he had run down the steps and disappeared.

“Shall we go? We have to see one more place before sunset,” the guide was saying.

“We don’t have to see each and everything,” I grumbled, shaking out my wet *kurta*, but followed him.

Back on the upland, we were greeted by an incredible scene. A woman sat on a small ledge jutting out of the uppermost

ridge, wringing her hands. At arm's length lay a hundred-foot deep ravine. Suicide! The fear of startling her made me suppress my scream, though I realized an instant later that she was too far away to hear me.

"What is that woman doing?" I whispered to my guide.

"Washing clothes, what else," he shrugged his shoulders.

But of course! I now saw the thin stream of water falling out of a tiny fissure in the rib of the ridge. The woman sat on the small ledge underneath, washing clothes. One false move and she would fall in the ravine, shattered to smithereens. That tiny trickle was the only thing resembling a waterfall we had seen that day. It was, after all, yet another year of drought.

There was so much water there in the natural tubs at *Saat Kothree*, hot and cold. One had to mix a little detergent, and the clothes of the entire village could be washed at one go. Better than a washing machine. But the water lay behind locked doors; not to be polluted.

My guide was running down the hills, agile as a goat. I kept turning back and looking at the woman as I dragged my feet after him. But as the hilly terrain grew rougher, I was forced to keep my eyes glued on the path and lost sight of the woman.

We came to rest atop a large plateau. Open blue sky branched far into the horizon on both sides. A deep valley full of centuries-old gigantic trees looked up at the sky. But neither they nor the mountain peaks dared reach it. In other words, everything needed for a sketch of

a traditional sunset was present. Collective memory is one bitchy mistress. Despite my skepticism, it forced me to pause and gaze at the sun playing the game of death on the horizon.

"What's to see here?" I asked the guide.

"We sit here," he said, and sat down cross-legged on a flat rock facing the setting sun. I sat where I was, on another rock. The sun began to set slowly. As it did everyday. It set, it rose. What was there to see in it? There was no sense of loss in losing it. One knew it'd return even as it left. It did convey a sense of momentary death, though, otherwise found only in orgasm or meditation. A quiet stillness enveloped everything including me. I was determined not to surrender to romanticism, so decided to tell the guide, I didn't want to sit there. But one glance at him made me hold my peace.

The setting sun suffused his motionless form with a crimson glow, turning it into a fountainhead of incandescent light. Golden rays emanated from his broad forehead.

"Evening star!" I mumbled spellbound.

Just then, the sun dived into the horizon and darkness fell. As it does every single living day.

He got up on cue, came to me and said, "Let's go."

I scrambled up, saying, "It grew dark so suddenly. Do you think the woman would have left the ledge earlier?"

"Who knows?"

"She could lose her foothold in the dark."



“Sure could.”

“Then...”

“She’d crash into the ravine, what else? Shall we go?”

How could a child talk of death so nonchalantly!

“She is used to the terrain,” I begged for reassurance, “Surely she’d climb down safely?”

“Did you like the sunset?” he asked.

“Damn the sunset! Answer me.”

“You are a no-good tourist,” he said.

“Why?”

“All this that *Master Saab* calls nature—mountains, forest, waterfalls—tourists call a place to picnic. But you...you ask too many questions.”

“Nature is no picnic. It’s a strict *Master Saab*. Two and two are always four; it offers no concession. Every single day, the sun sets; darkness falls, the next day...”

“Yes,” he broke in, “One whistle and the game over. How quickly the sun set! *Phut!*”

Dense darkness covered everything, the upland with the seven rooms, the hills and the valleys. I would not have seen the woman on the ledge, even if she was there.

“Why don’t people break the lock? There’s so much water at *Saat Kothree*.”

“What if the water got polluted?”

“Who’ll pollute it?”

“She who washes clothes on the ledge, who else?”

Was he a child or a mini edition of an old man?

We started back for Mandu. On the way, we passed through a dense jungle.

“Stop the car,” he said, “I live here.”

He got down and started to walk away as soon as the car came to a stop.

“Stop-stop,” I had to call out, “You forgot your fee.”

He refused the money I held out, saying, “What fee? I didn’t do anything.”

“You showed me *Saat Kothree*, didn’t you?”

“I showed you only six rooms.”

“True.”

“If you had asked, I’d have told you why six, not seven, wouldn’t I? I could have taken the fee then, couldn’t I?”

“You are right. I am a no-good tourist.”

He shrugged.

“Why don’t you tell me the story now, please-please!” I begged.

He nodded and began to narrate the story, standing by the side of the car.

As I sat still inside, listening to him, I traveled a long way back in time.

“A long time ago, more than a hundred years, there lived in this village seven virgin sisters. Each of the seven virgins declared she was *Sati*, the true consort of Lord *Mahadev*. Each of them, adorned like a bride about to enter her nuptials, propitiated Lord *Mahadev* with due worship and supplication. None was ready to enter into marriage with a mortal man. The village folk laughed, saying, poor Lord *Mahadev*, fancy him not finding any other female for a consort! They duly tried to arrange earthly marriages for them. Unfortunately the father was too poor to give a dowry seven times over, so not one got married.

“Then it came to pass that the village found itself in the grip of a severe drought for the third year running. A few ponds and waterfalls, which had escaped running dry in the past two years, dried up now. The village was submerged in grief. The elders declared that the drought was a punishment for the sin of seven unwed females gallivanting round the village. A woman’s dharma enjoined that she marry and run a household. These women were not virgins or *satis* but immoral women desecrating the village. If the father could not arrange proper dowries to get young grooms, let him marry them to widowers, but marry they must. Soon as the verdict was in, all the doddering old men of the village came forward asking for this or that girl’s hand in marriage. ‘We’ll soon see them all yoked,’ the village exulted.

“But alas, not one became a bride. A few days went by when they heard a herald proclaim throughout the village. ‘Come one, come all on the next moonless night to the house of the seven sisters. After ceremonial worship of Lord *Mahadev*, they will, one by one, throw themselves into the hundred foot deep ravine below. With each leap, water will spring forth from mother earth. Seven virgins: seven springs! Come one, come all, see the miracle with your own eyes.’

“As the twilight of the moonless night slunk by, it saw the entire village gathered by the side of the deep gorge. On the other side of the gorge, stood the seven sisters! Henna on the palms, crimson paint on the feet, vermillion in the hair parting and

brilliant red dots on the foreheads! They wore no jewels, but each held in her hand a gleaming *aarti* plate with a lighted earthen lamp. That was enough adornment. The village stood bedazzled as its eyes feasted on seven beauteous beings. The young men heaved a collective sigh, what a waste not to have made them theirs! How paltry seemed a dowry, before their radiant beauty!

“The eldest sister touched the *aarti* plate to her head, chimed a silvery cry of *har-har Mahadev* and leapt into the deep ravine. The village held its breath and waited but no water sprang forth. Then the second sister chanted *har-har Mahadev* and jumped into the gorge. Nothing! The third, the fourth, the fifth sister followed. All around them, the hills and the valleys reverberated with the chant, *har-har Mahadev* but not a single drop of water spouted anywhere. The villagers turned into stone. No one could move or speak. The seventh sister stepped forward with her head bowed over the glowing *aarti* plate. She came to the edge of the ravine, peered into it and stepped back. Again she came forward, peered and stepped back. This happened thrice. Some villagers wanted to cry, “jump”, others “don’t jump”, but too petrified to give tongue to their thoughts, no one uttered a word. The twilight faded and the impenetrable darkness of the night, not host to the moon, took charge. The evening star alone twinkled bravely in the dark. The villagers could no longer see the girl on the other side of the ravine. Some of them began to clamber over the hills

to reach where she stood hesitating. Before they could, they heard her give a tumultuous cry, “*Mahadev-Mahadev-Mahadev!*” Their blood ran cold. They stood transfixed where they were. All of them clearly saw a divine being come running and take her by the hand. Hand in hand they ran at a furious speed, away from the village, crossing hillock after hillock. Water sprang up wherever their feet touched the earth; cold from the footmarks of the virgin *sati* and hot from the footmarks of *Mahadev*.

“Early next morning, the villagers built a stone skirting to hold the water within ponds. Seven ponds thus came into being. Some had cold water, some hot. The *lingam* was installed in the last pond in the name of Lord *Mahadev*. The whole complex came to be known as *Saat Kothree* or Seven Rooms of the virgin *satis*. But before the next full moon was due, a murmur began in the village, growing louder and uglier by the day. First the young men whispered that Mahadev happened to be the name of the second son of the lowly shepherd Bhimdev and that he was missing from the village. Then it was rumored that he had gone missing on the very night when the six sisters threw themselves into the ravine. Finally it transpired that it was no divine being whose name the seventh sister had called, but that rogue Mahadev, and it was he who took her away. The vixen had eloped with her paramour under cover of darkness before their very eyes! The villagers looked hard and long for them but failed to find the sinful woman or her lover.

“The respectable folk of the village grew worried; what if the vixen returned and polluted the water sanctified by the six *satis*? What if the tale of her immoral behavior corrupted the young girls of the village? What if the penance of the six *satis* turned ineffective and the sins of the seventh sister spelt doom for the village? The elders convened a village council and decided that to have the seventh pond filled with bricks and leveled, the other six joined together and the whole complex barricaded by a locked door. Five elders were chosen to oversee the locking and unlocking of the door daily and the conduct of the worship. The complex was renamed, *Chhah Kothree* or Six Small Rooms. But the name did not stick. People continued to call it *Saat Kothree*. A hundred years have gone by. All eyewitnesses of the incident are dead and gone but the name lives on, *Saat Kothree*.”

The guide fell silent. The story was done. Darkness engulfed us.

“But,” I protested, “The water sprang from the footmarks of the seventh sister, when she took *Mahadev’s* hand, did it not?”

“They say the water did not spout until the degenerate woman had left the village. The piety of the six sisters took effect only after the seventh was over the mountains. Water has sprung from the spots where the six *satis* had fallen. Cold water because the six were pure, and hot because the seventh sister had made them shed bitter tears.”

“No,” I said, “that can’t be true.”

“They say it is.”

“And you? What do you say?”

“What’s to say? All seven sisters called Mahadev, did they not? He came only for the seventh, did he not?”

He fell silent. So did I. There came a time when one of us had to break the silence of that dark doom-night.

“Why isn’t the moon out?” I muttered.

“It is *Amavasya*, the moonless night,” he said. He then brought his face close

to mine through the open glass of the car and whispered, “Every *Amavasya* the seventh sister comes to wash *Mahadev’s* clothes, at the edge of the ravine.”

Clammy with fright, I gasped, “Is that so?”

All I got for an answer was a receding laugh in the dense darkness as he disappeared from view.

The car crawled back to Mandu.

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#### Glossary:

Jahaaz Mahal: Palace shaped like a boat.

Aarti plate: plate used in offering worship lit with oil lamp.

lota, kamandal; implements used in worship.

Charanamrit: a mix of milk, curd, basil leaf, butter oil and Ganges water.

Prasad: Sweets blessed by the Lord.

Salwar-Kurta: Dress similar to pants and tunic.

Master Saab: Teacher.

Har har Mahadev: Invocation to Lord Mahadev or Shiva.

Amavasya: Moonless night.

Sati: Virgin or virtuous woman.

**Mridula Garg**, born 1938, contemporary Hindi writer. She is the recipient of a number of prestigious awards, including the Vyas Samman for her novel *Kathgulab* in 2004; the Sahityakar Samman awarded by the Hindi Akademi; and M.P. Sahitya Parishad’s awards for her novel *Uske Hise ki Dhoop* and her play *Jadoo ka Kaleen*. She lives in New Delhi.

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## The Sacred Earth

Sanjeev

Translated by  
Jai Ratan

Durga Puja was only twenty-seven days away and as in other years, the old *jagirdar* Shridhar Rai's preoccupations had greatly increased. Even a child in the village knew that the old *jagirdar's* glory had corroded. Having lean times, he was no longer in a position to celebrate Puja with the same *eclat* as of old. But even so he kept up appearances and organised that Puja with the same show of enthusiasm. He would have a word with the decorator, send for the workers who were to put up the Puja *pandal* and give necessary instructions to the drumbeaters. He would also discuss matters with a stray villager or two who cared to evince interest in the goings-on. If nobody came forward, he would take out the list of the paraphernalia required for worshipping the goddess and sit there brooding over it. The people of the village would laugh at his idiosyncrasies. "How would he cope with it if he wants to organise it on the same grand scale as of yore?" they would mockingly ask. But that did not deter Shridhar Babu. "Come what may I must celebrate the Puja in the same way," he would say. "I am not going to do it all my life. As soon as Shikha is married I will entrust this responsibility to her and her husband and then retire to Kashi to spend the remaining days of my life in that holy place." He would feel consoled as if these thoughts were acting as a silken sop to his sombre mood.

Oh, how hard he had tried to find a groom for his daughter, Shikha, all the negotiations in the end coming to nothing. Every time he felt that the girl would meet with the boy's approval. But ultimately the negotiations would fall through on the question of dowry or they would find some fault with the girl. It would end up in the half-eaten sweets in the plates, unfinished tea in the cups and the nicely-groomed Shikha broken within. In his declining years Rai Babu began to feel that his life was aimlessly wandering in a burning desert or holding his daughter's finger he was chasing a mirage in an arid waste. He would keep wallowing in his own loneliness and suffering the pangs of old memories.

In life even a small slip can be a serious set-back-shackled by their own imaginary sense of guilt, both father and daughter had gradually become strangers to each other. At times they had some mutual misunderstanding; but the very next day they would rail into their daily routine as if nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened.

After preparing the morning meal, Shikha goes out to work as a Receptionist in The Imperial Company. She takes her tiffin with her and keeps her father's food properly covered in the food box. Rai Babu's eyes chase his daughter's receding figure till she disappears from sight round the bend. Then he looks around, taking the crumbling ruins, the wild shrubs and the sighing trees, a bizzare mix-up, in a sweeping glance. After his bath and his

meal, as he lies down to rest, every moment of the afternoon passes drearily, giving him a sense of suffocation. In the evening when the ruins are filled with the sound of the chirping of birds, the silence of his inner being becomes still more oppressive. To turn his mind away from these sounds, he spends his time tidying up the house and lighting up the charcoal brazier. As soon as the brazier stops emitting smoke he puts the kettle on to boil the water for tea and starts gazing at the path leading from the bus-stop over which a column of smoke is still hanging. May be she will again be late from office. A job is a job. But generally she comes in time and enters the house wordlessly, looking listless and tired, her shadow figure becoming one with the stillness of the atmosphere. By the time she has washed, Rai Babu is ready with the tea, which they drink in silence without exchanging any remarks. At last Rai Babu clears his throat and says, "*Beti*, I am going to the village for a short while." She suddenly looks up and finds that the fog has deepened and it has begun to snow. She knows that Baba's visiting the village is just an excuse. He will not even go beyond the road-crossing. He will just keep walking along the field abutments.

He returns by the time Shikha is ready with the evening meal. Sitting under the ominous lantern light, they eat together, racing each other and then straightaway go to their respective cots lying on either side of the threshold—father and daughter. Shikha reads in the dim light of the lantern hanging from the door knob and at last

falls asleep, the book still resting on her bosom. But Rai Babu's mind keeps reeling in a strange state, hovering between somnolence and wakefulness. Sometimes he hears the fluttering of bats and owls and that drives away his sleep for the night. In the morning, when Rai Babu sits there glancing through the Puja list Shikha realises that Baba had again not slept last night. Without making any comment, she packs her tiffin in her bag, covers Baba's food and goes out to work. Rai Babu keeps watching her through his thick glasses till his vision gets blurred ... How long would it continue like this? How long?

This year too the Puja is upon him and his daughter is still unmarried. Will she waste away her whole life working like this. No he fears lest one morning she may leave for her office never to return. It was such a mind-boggling thought. No, no, her age of adolescence is long since past and she has become mature in her thinking. Such a thing could not happen now. It was possible only when she was on the threshold of youth and had eloped with Jaideep, a scion of the Majumdar family. Since then he had been keeping an eye on all the youths of the village. He had already spurned some offers in the hope of getting better ones. But why repent over it now? He had done it in good faith as behoved a well-meaning father. How could he foresee that one day the *jagirdar* of Ballabhpur would fall on evil times and his only daughter would go a-begging for a suitable matrimonial offer? When invited, even the sons of the families who had

basked under his patronage would turn down the offer saying, "We are not interested in the rubble of your estate." The erstwhile great *jagirdar* would smile bitterly when these people left, and remark, except for Shikha what is left to my hard lot if not rubble!"

His faded eyes searched for those stables where horses neighed, and for the guest houses and the place set apart for merry-making, all of which were now reduced to ruins. And all those people with whom he was so chummy were now lost in the caverns of the past. Only their shadows faintly glimmered in his watery eyes. Shikha who was beautiful like a fairy seemed to be jinxed. Perhaps that was why she had taken birth in his family when his estate was gone out of his hands and her mother had died when she was of tender age, leaving the burden of bringing her up on his male shoulders.

Wiping his rheumy eyes with the end of his soiled dhoti, Rai Babu wiped his glasses and fixed them over his nose. Once again his eyes ran over the list which he had already studied umpteen times—prashad (votive offering), *mandap* (marque), drums, paraphernalia for worship. He scrutinized each item anew, lest people should think that Rai Babu was found wanting. As a safeguard, he would earmark a sum of hundred rupees towards miscellaneous and unforeseen expenses. Good, that he could himself act as a priest. Otherwise fifty rupees would be clean gone in engaging a priest to conduct the worship. He would require at least thirty rupees to consign the deity to the holy waters.

And then, there was the idol of the goddess Durga. Like a poor man slowly savouring his food, he lingered over the idea of the goddess ... Well, he should have no worry on that score so long as Pradeep Pal was there. Pradeep Pal had told him that he would cast the exact replica of *Mahishasur* modelled on the photograph of the lion he had taken at the Alipore Zoo after provoking the beast. It would go well with the idol of the goddess and strike awe in the hearts of the onlookers. A consummate artist, trained at Santiniketan with Rai Babu's monetary help in his hey day, he now charged four thousand rupees for each idol of Durga. But he would make the idol for Rai Babu gratis—not charging even a single paisa from him. It would save Rai Babu, not twenty, fifty, or a hundred, but full one thousand rupees. A sunset glow appeared on Rai Babu's crow-marked face. For a moment he felt that all his problems were resolved. Tongues may wag. But what did he care? He would look the people straight in the eye and remind them that though his estate was gone, his prestige was intact. As the saying went, even a dead elephant was worth a lac of rupees.

Folding his list Rai Babu was about to get up when his eyes landed on Pradeep Pal's nephew, Ashok, who had been waiting for him for a long time.

"Grandfather, please add ten rupees for the sacred earth\* also," Ashok said.

Shridhar Babu looked intently at Ashok. No, he was not joking.

"But nobody has ever demanded money for the sacred earth," he said. "Even

this time Gangadhar contractor and the Youth Club got the sacred earth without making any payment. It seems you did not tell them that the earth is for Jagirdar Shridhar," Rai Babu said. On such occasions when things were not working out to his satisfaction, Rai Babu would lean on the crutches of his past prestige as a *jagirdar*.

"I told them but they refused to listen," Ashok said. "They said that they would not give the earth gratis ..."

If it had been only a question of ten rupees it would not have mattered much. But it seemed that by resorting to this subterfuge they were posing a challenge to his ego. He was going to take out ten rupees from his pocket when it occurred to him that it would be an admission of defeat. "Let's go," he said.

This jolt to his confidence had shaken his equanimity. Now that he was no longer a man of means, even those who used to kow-tow to him passed by him giving him scornful looks. He had lost his estate, now who would care to hold him in esteem? If Pradeep Pal was nice to him, it was out of pity and not out of respect. Even in Shikha's behaviour he discerned a touch of cold disdain mixed with pity. To think that he was living on his daughter's earnings! What did they mean by this? He felt angry like smoke billowing in a dark, closed, room. He was no better than a senile toothless lion.

*\*Sacred Earth (Punya Mati) as a symbolic gesture some earth dug from outside a prostitute's door is also added to the clay used for making the idol of Durga.*



Ashok stopped in front of the verandah of a house in the red light district. From among the luridly painted and flamboyantly dressed prostitutes, a fat, flabby and imposing Madame, her flesh spilling out at the seams, stood up. "Come, come, venerable master, come," she greeted Rai Babu.

"I had sent this lad to get some sacred earth from your door, but you turned him away empty-handed," Rai Babu said.

"Yes, I did. We don't give the earth free of cost."

"You mean ten rupees for two lumps of earth?"

"Who asks you to spend ten rupees for this earth? You may pick up two lumps from any other place. It would serve your purpose just as well."

"If I had my lands you wouldn't have dared to speak to me so insolently." Rai Babu was beside himself with rage.

"We know of the times when the *jagirdars* of Ballabhpur could buy anything with impunity—sin and virtue, justice and morality, someone's honour even. Surely you don't lack the means to buy even two lumps of the sacred earth. You must be hoarding all your wealth including your ancestors'. And why shouldn't you, when your daughter earns for you? But where will you keep all this wealth?"

"That's the reason why he does not marry off his daughter," another prostitute remarked. Her voice was drowned in peals of laughter. Rai Babu felt like sinking fast into a filthy morass.

"Fallen women! Scum of the earth! You,

who are out to sell your honour for a few coins!" Rai Babu had lost his head, so incensed was he.

There was more laughter, followed by all sorts of innuendos and vulgar insinuations.

"O, *salis*, keep your mouths shut!" the Madame rebuked the prostitutes and then she turned to Rai Babu. "I've put the earth in a packet," she said. "Why don't you come in and take it? Please step in."

Rai Babu hesitated. But then to wriggle out of a nasty situation, he acted on the Madame's advice and walked in, leaving Ashok standing outside.

"May I know, old master?" the Madame said coyly, closing the door behind her and planting her thick body against it ... May I know what does your daughter, Shikha, do?"

"Have you called me inside just to know that? We may be poor but we do not sell our honour," Shridhar Rai *fulminated*.

"Huh! What honour? What's a woman's honour in the eyes of men? Over here we keep track of everything. We know what honourable means everyone adopts to earn a living. Don't you know that under the guise of a receptionist your daughter has to keep the Company's rich clients happy? If you don't believe me, ask the peon of her office and if you want to, we can help you to make enquiries yourself."

Rai Babu felt as if someone had hit him hard on his head. He stood transfixed before the Madame.

"If she had not been submitting herself

to all this, she would have been shown the door the very next day." With a diabolical laugh, the Madame went to the other room and came back holding a packet in her hand. There was a savage glitter in her eyes. "Old master, why talk of ten rupees? I won't charge a single paisa for the sacred earth. Just repeat the words which you have used for us. Brand your daughter with the same seal with which you have branded us."

Shridhar sat down on the ground. He had not realized that the honour he had tried to safeguard even by wearing patched clothes had become so rotten from within. A terrible darkness swam before his eyes like a raging sea, swallowing up his past, the present and the times to come. He rose to his feet like an automation and walked out of the room.

"Please take the sacred earth with you," the Madame's voice did not have the

sharpness of a taunt but had the softness of an entreaty. But it was lost on Shridhar Babu. Tearing through that group of prostitutes he proceeded towards Ballabhpur, completely unaware of all the sights and sounds of the world around him. Ashok followed him as if in a dream.

Shridhar Rai stopped outside his door and looking around he took a spade from a worker and dug up the earth with it from near his door.

"Pick it up!" he said turning to Ashok.

Ashok stood before him astounded. "What are you doing?" he cried,

"The sacred earth!" Rai Babu raised his head towards the sky. Tears flowed down his cheeks and disappeared into his gray beard.

As Ashok bent down and filled his palms with the sacred earth he felt it had become damp and soft.]

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Sanjeev, born 1947 is a well known Hindi author of fiction with a dozen collections of short stories and about eight novels. He has also written travelogues and plays. He has received several national awards including Pahal samman, Indu Sharma Katha samman, and Katha Kram samman. At present he is a writer in residence at Mahatma Gandhi Antarashtiya Hindi Vishwavidyalay Wardha.

Jai Ratan (1917-2012), scholar of Hindi and English who devoted a life time to translation. He worked as P.R.O. in a prominent business firm in Kolkata and was founder member of Writers' Workshop. Hindi owes him a tribute for numerous prestigious English translations including Premchand's Godan way back in 1955. He recently passed away in Gurgaon.

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## Pigeons

Harjendra Chaudhary

Translated by  
Ranjana Kaul

‘Indian doctor on deputation in Warsaw’s Wilanowaska hospital caught giving shelter to illegal immigrants’. ...This sensational headline was constantly hammering away at my brain and yet I continued to listen to his tale of woe. This was the first time in my life that I was extending this strange kind of hospitality to anyone. A needy, helpless fellow Indian had burst into tears as he narrated his story sitting in front of me in my flat and I was worrying that the police might make its appearance at any moment. It would be terribly mortifying if it really happened.

The sturdy, young, twentyone-twentytwo years old man named Amrik Singh was sobbing sitting in front of me and I was gradually being overwhelmed by the fear that he might just be arousing my sympathy in order to ask for some big favour. I was preparing myself to counter his clever tactics.

I have been in Poland for only eight months and am supposed to stay on for another four. But it is possible that I might have to rush back to Delhi before that because I am entertaining this illegal guest. This hospitality could cost me dear... He has just been released from prison two days ago. He was in jail for three months, where he was, apparently, quite contented. He was well fed and warm. Now, outside...This shroud like white freeze at the end of March stings and pierces the bones. Even during the day the temperature hovers around minus eight or ten degrees.

Amrik Singh is merely a human being. This cold has even killed the pigeon, though I am also responsible for that death to a certain extent. I had robbed it of its shelter. It used to live on the balcony of my flat—all alone. Regardless of how much snowfall there was, it was always there. Sometimes one could hear the echo of the cooing sounds it used to make. At other times it could be seen bobbing its head rhythmically as it ate the freshly fallen snow in the balcony. I was amazed that it had not yet succumbed to the cold and hunger. Did it survive on snow or did it go and eat something somewhere else and come back?

I had 'discovered' this pigeon in September. I must have seen it earlier, but I only registered its presence when it became necessary for me to feed an animal while performing the Shradh (the annual reminiscence) ceremony for my grandparents. I wanted to enjoy the pleasure of feeding someone. But leave alone wandering cows, one did not even see stray dogs in European cities. Sometimes one encountered cats which roamed about freely, but never at such moments. It was inevitable, therefore, that in such a situation, I would think of the pigeon on my balcony. But the pigeon not only denied me the happiness of feeding someone, but also hurt the souls of my ancestors by refusing to accept the 'Shradh'-meal of toast and cottage cheese...Still, I forgave him.

Looking back at the various attempts I have made at cooking, I have no

hesitation in accepting that I am the worst cook on this earth. Sometimes the food is undercooked, at other times it is overdone. At times I put the water on to boil on the hot plate to make tea or coffee and forget to switch it on. Frequently, it seems less of a bother to just pick up food from outside. When I have hospital-duty late in the evening, I prefer to eat in the canteen before coming back home. After staying in Europe I have now started feeling that I should accept my mother's advice and get married. I really have become an 'old man' of thirty years!

I phoned my mother to ask her how to prepare halva, noted it down on a piece of paper. It was the festival of Diwali. I tried to make some halva. The hot plate was too warm. I forgot to stir while adding the sugar syrup. The halva became lumpy and bitter. I couldn't eat it. I put it on a plate in the balcony. When I checked after two days, it was lying there, untouched... This is a strange pigeon! It doesn't eat grain, it doesn't eat cheese, it doesn't eat sweets. Does it eat crumbs of gold and diamonds!..I was angry with the pigeon. I thought of chasing it away but it wasn't intimidated by my anger. It just ignored me and carried on cooing. I felt a sense of pity—'Let the 'mast malang' remain where it is enjoying its carefree existence..."

There was a lot of snowfall in November. One holiday, feeling lonely, I suddenly thought of the carefree bird. I peeped through the glass panes of the balcony door. There was no snow where

the pigeon was sitting. An umbrella –like antenna acted as a ‘roof’ over its home. I watched it for a while. It greeted me, moving its pupils around and lightened the burden of my loneliness... somewhat.

There was a lot of snow in February and one day the temperature in the afternoon even fell to minus twenty two degrees celcius. For some reason the reception of my television became unclear. I called the mechanic. He went into the balcony and the pigeon rose flapping its wings and disappeared behind the building in front. The mechanic adjusted the antenna so that it hung perpendicular like a wall instead of slanting like a sloping roof. I was so overjoyed at the improvement in the reception of the T.V. that I did not give any thought to the fact that the pigeon had now become homeless. The growing materialism of man is making him similarly unsympathetic.

The pigeon isn't there any more. There is a lonely silence on the balcony. I don't know when it died. One morning in March I picked up its lifeless body and threw it in the trash can. I couldn't sleep properly for two or three nights. As soon as I fell asleep I would hear the fluttering of wings. I felt that I had become a pigeon with clipped wings and was falling into a deep well. Perhaps it was my loneliness which was disturbing the depths of my consciousness. I was not really aware of the pigeon while it was alive but after it died, I realized the extent to which it had shared my loneliness.

Perhaps pigeons are also like human

beings. But can human beings become like pigeons? Not the ones which carry letters, but the ones which eat crumbs of gold and diamonds! These pigeons keep flying about the skies all over the world and land in any continent where they see shining, sparkling crumbs and grains...flocks and flocks of pigeons!

After those two or three uneasy nights, spent fluttering around the deep well of sleep, life resumed its normal routine and I started getting used to the pigeon's absence...This process of getting accustomed was rudely disturbed by the arrival of Amrik Singh. He came to me alone but he hadn't been alone when he flew out of Delhi . There were five of them. All of them were graduates, unemployed and ambitious. It wasn't as if they were poor or starving. They were the sons of reasonably well-to-do farmers. Their villages were in the Ludhiana and Jullandhar districts of Punjab. Their fields were irrigated by the waters of the Satluj river. The crops were plentiful. Life was comfortable so long as one was content and not too ambitious. No backbreaking work was needed as there was enough cheap Bihari labour available. There were lots of cultivators, harvestors and tractors.

Over the past few years many people started migrating abroad from these villages and earning a lot of money. Whenever these N.R. Is. (Non-Resident Indians) visited their villages, the hearts of the villagers were flooded with a mixture of emotions including praise, envy and pride. This flood deeply disturbed and wiped out

the daily routine of life. Ambitious young men spent sleepless nights overwhelmed by restless, stormy waves of ambition. Dreams of becoming rich abroad snatched away their sleep. Just as people from Bihar come to Punjab-Haryana in search of a better life, similarly the Punjabis rush to Europe, America and Canada in the hope of earning big money. One must have more than what one has— this logic and psychology often makes human beings fly from one place to another.

Almost every city, big or small, is full of travel agents who guarantee that they can help their clients 'settle' in foreign countries. They are called Kabootarbaaz ('pigeon fanciers') in Punjab. They hand over a dream, an unending movie reel or a C.D. to you, in exchange for lakhs of rupees and you take the iron resolve of going abroad at any cost, by any means, to earn amazing amounts of money. It is just a matter of a few years and then there will be money, money and more money...Nor is it necessary to cut off ties with one's village, people or roots. Once one is well established in a foreign country, one can strengthen one's relationship to one's roots and country by funding schools, dispensaries, temples, gurudwaras, resting places for pilgrims, or by helping to build basic infrastructure in one's ancestral area. It is just a question of a few years, after that all will be well and there will be nothing lacking in life...

So many delighted and slightly confused young men, with hearts full of hopes and suitcases stuffed with dreams,

take flight day after day from international airports all over India. Like a flock of pigeons, their claws decorated with colourful tassels, flying away.

Amrik Singh had also flown away from Delhi along with four companions. All of them had sold their ancestral property to pay for this long flight. Amrik Singh's father had sold his seven acres of agricultural land to Jagtar Singh Sandhu. Jagtar's younger brother had settled in Canada, so there was no shortage of money. Jagtar had bought many fields on both banks of the Satluj river. All thanks to dollars! Though Jagtar had lost this time, it was definite that he would win the next election and become an M.L.A.

If one could believe Amrik Singh's version, he had come to Moscow on a tourist visa and spent a few months there selling C.Ds. Then some Indian or foreign agent had attempted to fulfil his guarantee of helping them cross the border by pushing him and his four companions on to the slippery surface of a frozen river saying –“Go, run across. There is Poland right ahead. It will be easy for you to cross from Poland into Germany. O.K...All the best...Go...”

Carrying their knapsacks, all five of them started across, their hearts full of enthusiasm and their eyes full of dreams...eyes which gazed far beyond the horizon. All around them were little hillocks of snow rising a few feet above the ground...We just have to cross this hill and then there will be gold and diamond mines, vaults filled with dollars,

pounds and euros to which we will have the keys... We will say... open sesame and all the untold wealth of the world will be at our feet. We will hold the world in the palm of our hands, we will have control over everyone, everything on this earth... The exhaustion of twenty hours of unending travel in a van was obliterated by the wings of the hopeful flight of their dreams. It wasn't clear whether they had been pushed in from Belarus or Ukraine. But they had clearly been told that Poland lay before them. They were running with their packs on their backs. Their young unaccustomed bodies were shivering in the freezing cold. The night was quite advanced though the morning was still far away. There was no hint of the redness of dawn in the sky; just a thin, yellowish luminescence which was illuminating the snowscape.

Having said, "All the best... March ahead!" the referees retreated. And then there was just nature and a few human beings. There were no spectators to watch the game. It was an empty arena, not an overflowing stadium. In that open, empty arena on the one hand, nature was launching its attack and on the other, destiny was waiting to play its hand. There was the loud sound of heavy boots crunching their way across the frozen river... crunch... crunch... crunch.

In India rivers are addressed as mothers. They may not give birth to humans but they do nurture them. Sometimes, of course rivers go on a rampage. They devour crops, homes, humans, animals –everything

that comes in their way. In Ludhiana, or Jullandhar, or Delhi, or Moscow or at some other place, the young men had been warned never to try and cross a border by walking across the frozen river before the fifteenth of December. November was dangerous any way and it was always better to wait till mid- December. But the pigeon- fanciers were in a hurry- "It is very cold this year, the ice has already frozen solid. There is no danger. Go, pigeons , go. Go and grab some gold..."

Eyes brightened. Hearts were flooded with enthusiasm. Lets go, brothers, lets go! The horizon is ahead! Just beyond it, there are mines of gold and diamonds, vaults full of dollars, pounds and euros! We will be the owners of all this wealth...

The frozen surface of the river was echoing with the discordant sounds... crunch...crunch...crunch.

Suddenly there was a loud cracking sound. Then the noise of the surface slipping under the waterglub...glub...glub. Navtej was perhaps the first one who disappeared into the maws of the river as he dashed across its frozen surface.

No one called out to anyone else as they ran across the icy surface of the river. One of them screamed a prayer –'O God! Have pity on us!' The rest kept on running. Running so that they would be safe.

"Navtej, Navtej!"-In a small village in Ludhiana district an elderly sardar, frightened by his early morning dream, woke up calling out the name of his son who had gone abroad. It was five thirty in the morning in India. His heart was

beating like a pair of bellows. It had been a strange dream –as though Navtej had drowned in the village pond in front of his eyes. A prayer emerged from the depths of his racing heart–“Oh God! Grant my son a long life! Have pity on me my guru!”

Sometimes prayers uttered by people who are pure of heart seem to get lost somewhere. Where do these prayers go after they have issued forth from the heart? Do they all disappear into the depths of rivers? How does a river with so many icy mouths devour so many heartrending prayers without even chewing on them? All these prayers, hopes lie submerged in the depths of the cruel river for centuries and no one knows what happens to them.

After a while and after running for quite a distance Amrik paused to get a grip on himself, but there was no one behind him...So where were, all his four companions? He burst into tears – what have you done, oh God, what have you done! Why should I stay alive now? “I felt as though I was the only person left alive on the face of the earth. I don’t know whether my companions went to heaven or not, but I felt as though I was only destined to go to hell...Save me from this hell Doctor Sahib, save me...” Amrik Singh burst into tears after completing his story. I got up and patted his shoulder.

After reassuring him wordlessly, I said –“Let me make some coffee.” I walked into the kitchen and switching on the hot plate got busy pottering around. When I re-entered the drawing room holding two cups of coffee, he had calmed down and gathered himself together.

I said, “Here, have some coffee” and started talking –“People have become very greedy for money in India. There is a lot of struggle and tension.”

Taking a sip of the coffee he said, “It isn’t only India, the entire world has become like this. But there is one thing which I can’t understand; if borders across the world are being opened to allow the passage of goods and raw materials, then why are there so many restrictions on the movement of workers and labourers? Can someone ask these rich countries what harm the people from the poorer nations have ever done them? They are keeping an eye on the public of the whole world –‘Oh god, so many consumers! Such a huge market!’ They can’t handle China but the rascals want to take over India . Everyone speaks of globalization, but the rich countries only want as much globalization as will help them and allow them to maintain their dominance. If restrictions are being removed, then why not get rid of all of them ! Goods are being allowed free passage, but there are strict legal controls over the movement of people, workers and those looking for employment. What sort of justice is this?...Human beings are much more valuable and important than things and that is the way it should be. But nowadays the opposite holds true. It seems as though goods are not made for people but people are made for goods . Anyone who can’t buy goods or be of any use to them is considered to be a useless human being.”— His face was flushed. He became silent and looked at me after taking one or two sips of coffee.



–“ I think if all countries open their borders then there will be chaos. The whole of Africa and Asia will rush over to Europe and America. Some legal restrictions are necessary.”–I voiced my opinion.

“But all countries do not follow their own rules strictly. Rich countries are quite happy to get cheap labour from poorer nations, but they also call them ‘illegal’ so that they can throw them out whenever they feel like. Use them for cheap labour and deny them any rights! This is real harassment. They own the skies as well as the guns and radars on the ground. At times they deliberately ignore the flight of the pigeons and at others they shoot them down with their guns. This is real injustice! The real story is that if all employment and resources were distributed evenly amongst all the nations of the world the differences between the rich and the poor would disappear. But the rich nations will never allow that to happen”–his voice was full of a deep restlessness and there was a helpless anger on his face.

The coffee was finished. I picked up both the empty cups, went to the kitchen and started washing up. I wanted to create a situation where he would himself get up and take his leave. I lingered over the washing up. Finally, when I returned to the drawing room he said –“Doctor sahib, I need some help from you.”

I was already worried that he might ask whether he could stay in my flat with me... Then the police would arrive...I had already thought of my answer–“Look Amrik Singh, I am here on deputation and I want to spend the remaining four months

of my stay without any hassles. I can't help you. I fed you, gave you coffee and listened to your woes. This is quite enough in a foreign country. Now, brother, you should leave.”–I completed my answer with determination. I felt as though something was sawing me up inside and everything was turning into sawdust. I had never found myself so helpless and so cruel.

He tried once again – “Doctor sahib, for God's sake just listen to one request of mine. Can I have my letters sent on your address?”

I kept my voice cool with effort–“O.K. you can give my address. But how will I get the letters to you?”

“You don't have to worry about that. I will come by and pick them up”–he seemed to be overwhelmed by the obligation. I reached into my pocket for my visiting card, but then put it back saying why don't you write down my address on a piece of paper, I have just a few of these cards left. Actually I hadn't given him the card because I was apprehensive about it being found on him. I was here on deputation and he was an ‘illegal immigrant’, I didn't want to get into any trouble.

I gave him a pen and paper to note down my address. He was ready to leave. Where, I didn't know. I wanted to do something for him but I also wanted to avoid any unnecessary difficulties.

I pulled out an overcoat and a woollen pair of pyjamas from the closet in my single bedroom. I gave them to him saying, “Take these, they will be useful.” He quietly accepted the clothes and as he took them

his eyes were moist and his lips were trembling –“Thank you, Veer ji.”

I escorted him down in the lift. He wore my overcoat on top of his own and wrapped the pyjama around his neck like a muffler. As I said goodbye to him at the gate I gave in to some unidentifiable emotion within me and pressed a hundred dollar note into his hands, “ Here take these. They are dollars, you can go and exchange them for Polish zlotys. You might need them sometime.”

He just mumbled, “Brother...” The ‘thank you’ seemed to be stuck in his throat. He shook hands and went out of the gate. The main gate of the building shut behind him. The cold sweeping in from outside was blocked. The heating system maintained the temperature inside the building at twenty three degrees. Outside it must have been around minus ten.

This was my only meeting with Amrik Singh. He never returned. Not even to collect his letter. Visiting someone in their dreams doesn’t count, does it? Even the dead visit us in our dreams. I even dream of the dead pigeon sometimes.

I visited Paris and Berlin in May and June. When I returned a letter had arrived for Amrik Singh. I ultimately opened the letter since no one came to collect it. It was written in the Devanagri script—half in Punjabi and half in Hindi.

“Dear son Amrik Singh, I received your letter. I was very happy to know that you are happy in Poland along with the rest of your companions. It doesn’t matter if you haven’t found any satisfactory work yet.

God is kind, all will be well. When all of you reach Germany send us your address... Navtej’s father came over last week. He worries a lot. I tried to explain to him that there is no need to worry about young people. He is also very concerned about his land. I told him not to be anxious. ‘The boys will earn lakhs –crores of rupees. You have sold five acres of land, later you can buy a hundred and five acres. The more our boys go abroad and earn, the more prosperous our villages will become.’

Amrik, my son, your boys must all stick together. Be careful about food and your health. Take care of one another and don’t ever fight over money. Money comes and goes. It is just dirt of your palm. One shouldn’t lose one’s humanity because of money.

How many Indians are there in Poland? Be kind and considerate towards everyone. Don’t ever deny help to any fellow Indian who is in need.

My eyesight is even worse than before. I visited the nursing home of Doctor Shamsher Singh Gill in Ludhiana. He says an operation is urgently required, but I don’t think there is any real hurry. It would be better to wait and have the operation at the P.G.I. in Chandigarh once you are well settled in your job.

Two boys from your maternal uncle’s village are in Germany. I will send you their addresses in the next letter. Meet them when you go to Germany.

Your mother is very happy nowadays. She says we will also go and visit Germany once Amrik is well settled. A lady from

your mama's village went to Germany to visit her son. She told your mother that Germany was a very nice country. I tell your mother, why just once, you will get the opportunity to go again and again if God is kind.

Tell Navtej Singh to write to his father. The sardar worries a lot. He says he gets very bad dreams. He often dreams that Navtej is drowning in the pond. Once some strangers picked Navtej up and took him away in the dream... I tell him not to worry so much. 'You are a Jatt and still you are so scared, this is wrong. Be brave and have faith in God.'

Son, Jagtar Singh Sandhu sowed Basmati rice and wheat in the fields which I sold to pay for your passport-visa-ticket and ancillary expenses. He had a bumper crop. The land is producing gold. It is all one's destiny.

May God give everyone happiness! Our blessings on you and your companions! Tell Navtej he must write home. You must also write. We will install a telephone at home when you send some money but right now

we have to depend on letters. May God keep you happy! Lots of love."

What do I do with this letter? My stuff has to be packed tomorrow. My air ticket has arrived. My deputation will be over on the thirty first of July and I will return to India next week...I don't know the whereabouts of Amrik Singh. He had said that besides our poverty and aspirations, the policies of rich countries were also responsible for illegal migrations. The string or lead which allowed pigeons to fly high or throttled them was in the hands of these rich countries...I don't know how that string has been manipulated in Amrik Singh's life. Is he languishing in prison in some other country or has he actually reached Germany and found employment? Was he forced to go back to India or is he still fluttering around like a pigeon – searching for crumbs of gold and diamonds or in the eye of the radars and guns of some country?... This letter has been lying here for the last two or two and a half months – where should I deliver it?

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**Dr. Ranjana Kaul**, born on 5 August, 1954 in Srinagar is an Associate Prof and teaches English Literature in the College of Vocational Studies, Delhi University. She has translated numerous short stories from Hindi and Kashmiri to English. Her translations include, this Metropolis' a collection of award winning short stories by H.K. Kaul for the Sahitya Akademi and 'Paper Bastions and other stories' by Meera Kant. She is also a regular contributor to academic journals.

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*[This review of Jainendra Kumar's book by veteran journalist Shamlal was published in the Times of India on April 3, 1964. We are carrying it to reveal that constant interaction between languages has always been there-editor.]*

## In a Maze of Words : Jainendra Kumar

Sham Lal

In a play I saw some years ago the hero says, "Those who hunt for me will find me hiding in the thickets of the law." Jainendra Kumar is far more clever. He prefers to hide himself most of the time in a maze of words where it is hard to track him down. His friend is also part author of his book of wisdom, Samaya Aur Hum. Jainendra sits with him face to face answering questions on every topic under the sun. But in none of his replies does he give himself away. We never see him; we only hear his voice which sounds like that of an oracle-impersonal, remote and somber. There is no hint of emotion or so much as a flicker of doubt in what he says. It is the kind of voice which invites questions from an expectant mother, 'Will it be a boy or a girl?'

Jainendra will protest, saying : "Isn't all wisdom impersonal? There is no trace of emotion on Yajnavalkya's face as he answers Gargi's questions." He has a point there, we concede. But Yajnavalkya at least betrays his fear of words. He knows that words are like curbs or brakes and that wisdom cannot keep its figure if it indulges in too much talk. Jainendra talks of God, creation, self, sex, Marx and Freud, Gandhi and Nehru, the Congress and the Communist Party. At times it almost looks as if the oracle is holding a press conference.

He has a flair for Upanishadic lore. He chews the cud of transcendental ideas with a certain sense of style. He delves into the mysteries of being and becoming though the sages tell us that ideas, however true, are by themselves of no use, that to gain a

true insight into the nature of things or into his own nature the individual has to first give up the conceit of the I. The conceit of the I is but another label for what Jainendra calls aham. He rightly extends its meaning to nations and classes and other collective entities of the day. But many others have done it before. We know nations nurse their egos as diligently as individuals. The question is how to make them less self-centred. Jainendra only begs the question. There are times perhaps when even an oracle can do no more.

As a people we have our own way of nursing our ego. We have suffered far too many indignities at the hands of others in the course of our none-too-happy history. And it is only natural that we should look for something which will compensate us for this sense of humiliation. We find this in our so-called spirit of tolerance. Which other people can claim to have allowed such free play to religious ideas? There is a sanctimonious edge to this question which even Jainendra cannot resist the temptation to ask. It is true that we have often tolerated all sorts of creeds in our midst without doing injury to persons upholding any of these. Nonetheless this religious tolerance has often gone hand in hand with most blatant forms of social discrimination institutionalized in a caste hierarchy with its cursed notion of the defiling touch. So long as we have untouchables in our midst there is no reason for us to foster the myth that we are a tolerant people, and so long as there are communal riots we have no

reason to delude ourselves into believing that we are non-violent. There is no vanity which is more destructive of reason than spiritual pride and we seem to have a surfeit of it. Jainendra ought not to pump more air into the balloon of our national ego.

We quite understand his devotion to the idea of ahimsa though here, too, he does no more than embroider on what others have said. He forgets that ahimsa is not an abstract notion but a practical idea whose efficacy can be judged only by the clarity with which it goes into action. Perhaps there are saints who do not think ill of anyone and who have rid their minds of the last trace of violence. But the question is not whether we can all turn into sages but whether we can do something to reduce the incidence of violence in social life.

Jainendra says present-day civilisation which is based on violence will explode one day. Few will be surprised if it does. Yet, if this happens it will not be because we have in some way become more degenerate in the course of the centuries and more prone to violence. Even the great Asoka, we must remember, had a qualm of conscience only after he had seen a hundred thousands or more dead in the battlefields of Kalinga. If our age looks more violent than those that have gone before it is because we have infinitely more efficient means of violence. If anything saves peace in our day perhaps it will be the very enormity of the destructive power of the new weapons. There is no cause which can justify the risk of laying waste

half the cities of the world.

Before he condemns present-day civilisation for its violence he would do well to have a closer look at the more advanced industrial societies. In many ways they are far more non-violent than ours in managing their domestic affairs. It is not because they have access to a new spiritual knowledge or can lay claim to some special virtue, but because in doing away with hunger and poverty and in providing new opportunities for education and for recreation, they have done away with the mass discontent which in poor countries so often erupt into violence. It is only spiritual pride which makes him believe that the hope for the future lies in the poor countries of the East. As it happens all of them are feverishly trying to rebuild themselves in the image of their richer neighbours. Not one of them has paid any heed to Kabir's advice : "Eat in peace thy dry crust of bread : do not covet the buttered bread of the other man."

While talking of *ahimsa* it is pertinent to remember that those who adopted it as a creed have not thought over the problems posed by legislation. They know that even a law which is passed by a majority in a popularly elected legislature has to have the sanction of force behind it. Those who swear by *ahimsa* should at least be keen to see that such sanction is not used in fields where a reform can be best carried out by persuasion. Ironically, while some of them have been lukewarm in their support of measures of redistributive justice, almost all of them

have supported prohibition laws. What kind of non-violent society do they want to build if they think it is right to prevent a man from having a glass of beer by punitive action while legislation to ensure gender equality or a fairer deal to landless labourers can wait? This is merely one more instance of the dark shadow that falls so often between what we say and what we do.

Jainendra is a brave man. For even when he is on unfamiliar ground he goes about his work with complete non-chalance. For every question—whether it is on metaphysics or ethics, psychoanalysis, biology, sociology or history—he has a ready answer. The result is a hold-all of a book. He indeed speaks at times in riddles. But that is the only way to evade awkward questions. Where he errs is in mistaking a collection of views on a wild variety of topics for a philosophy.

It is gratifying to see that at least in his judgment about literature he is not swayed by his obsession with the idea that the East is the harbinger of a saner future. He is frank enough to admit that in day-to-day life the problems of existence are *arthic* (economic) and that the perpetual nagging by petty worries leaves most people in the poor countries no time to attend to spiritual problems which matter most. And he is entirely right to regard the new note of despair in Western literature as evidence not of decadence but of a desperate search for meaning.

A man with a toothache thinks that all he needs to be happy is to get rid of

his pain. It is only when the pain is gone that the other problems crowd upon him. It is the same with the hungry man. He thinks all he needs to be happy is to be assured of his daily bread. It is only when he does not have to worry about his basic needs that he becomes aware of his inner emptiness. It is no surprise that it is only in his affluence that the Western man has come to feel that he is at the end of his tether. This is the secret of the popularity of a writer like Samuel Beckett. His characters who have nothing to look forward to are not a caricature of the Western man. They are poignant symbols of the feeling of the void within him. The catch in this glib conclusion is that this

feeling is confined only to a few sensitive spirits even in conditions of general affluence. Even so, this is no reason for the writer in a country like ours to feel smug. He has not even reached the point where he has begun to see the spiritual wasteland in which he lives. He is still preoccupied with the problems of bare existence.

So we return to the balloon of the national ego. Jainendra should not pump more air into it. It is already overinflated. The need is to take some air out. With the fears and anxieties that assail Indian society on every side it is indeed a surprise that its ego is not yet completely deflated.

*'Courtesy : Manoj Mohan'*

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Shamlal (1912-2007) : was a prominent critic, intellectual and a journalist who rose to the status of editor-in-chief of the newspaper 'The Times of India Delhi'. His editorial columns and comments commanded much respect. Very often he was the first to read a book and opine about it. He spent most of his earnings on purchasing books. His writings are collected and published in the book 'Indian Realities in Bits and Pieces.' His colleague and fellow journalist Premshankar Jha's comment about this book is 'In Shamlal's India we see the voyage of his mind that becomes virtually the voyage of India'. He passed away in Delhi in the year 2007.

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## Ramvilas Sharma : A Realist Critic

Subhash Sharma

After Ramchandra Shukla and Hazariprasad Dwivedi, Dr. Ramvilas Sharma (10 October, 1912 – 30 May, 2000) is the third prominent Hindi critic. However, the canvass of writings of Ramvilas Sharma was much larger than that of Ramchandra Shukla and Hazariprasad Dwivedi as he covered vast arenas of Hindi language and literature, viz. literary historian thinker, literary and cultural critic, multilinguist, translator, poet, editor and proactive anti colonialist writer. He has been known as an original and extra-ordinary critic both in range and depth. His birth anniversary was being celebrated in 2012 by various public and private institutions, literary magazines and individual authors/critics. For his critical appreciation it would be more apt to discuss his major contributions to Hindi language and literature. He wrote dozens of books but his collected works are still unpublished.

To begin with biographical profile, he was born in Unchgaon Sani village, Baiswara (western area of Awadh) in U.P. on 10 October, 1912 in a middle class Brahmin family. But he went to Shivpuri at the age of three years to live with his father who worked there. His elder brother Bhagwandin Sharma was studying there. At the age of seven years, Ramvilas Sharma went to Jhansi to study in a school. (Saraswati Pathshala). His grandfather was serving in military, as was the popular trend in his region, but he left it. His grandfather taught him Hindi language, counting and tables. He used to tell him stories and recited poems. During freedom struggle he too threw the official medal (distributed by the British administration)



and burnt his cap. Saraswati Pathshala was closed subsequently due to economic crisis and most of the teachers and students (including Ramvilas Sharma) joined Mcdonal High School there. He has written in his autobiography 'Apni Dharati, Apne Log' that he used to note down many patriotic songs and read many political books beyond the curriculum – e.g. history of revolutions and even a book on the revolt of 1857 written by Savarkar. He used to argue with his teachers about the negative role of the British Govt. and did not concede to its progressive role : Since his mother's health was not sound, he had to marry early at the age of thirteen years. He passed M.A. and Ph.D. from Lucknow University. He started teaching English there in 1939. He was awarded Ph.D. degree after a positive report of three examiners in England. Subsequently he migrated to Agra in July 1943 and taught in Rajput College for several years. He joined K.M. Munshi Vidyapeeth (in Agra) in 1971. Some members of governing body opposed his joining there on the ground that he did not hold M.A. degree in Hindi. His wife died in 1983 and thereafter he resided in Delhi. He travelled a lot in the country but could not go to the foreign countries due to family problems or lack of passport in time – he could not go to USSR to receive Soviet Land Award as his wife was unwell. He travelled in South India alongwith Amritlal Nagar and Rajendra Yadav.

He rose to the top of criticism during his life time and, therefore, Ravi Bhushan

brands him as ' the Himalaya of Hindi Criticism' and ' the great original thinker of Hindi Enlightenment' (Vagarth, No. 195, October 2011). Regarding Hindi enlightenment, he proposed many hypotheses : he talked of 'Hindi Jati' in the sense of sub-nationality wherein all Hindi-speaking States would become a mega State and this sub-nationality would not be opposed to nationality. In his own words, "As the existence of internationality is not possible without the nationality so nationality is not possible without subnationality whether the nation is one racial or multi-racial." This greater Hindi Pradesh will ensure more respect to Hindi and Hindi speaking populace as well as Hindi writers, as Hindi would be more entitled to the status of a link language, This conception of 'Hindi Jati' includes both Hindus and Muslims and he believed that the British rulers weakened the resistance power of Hindi Jati in different ways, especially since 1857 revolt when they made a divisive policy Urdu as a language of Hindus, through Fort William College. According to him, Hindi became a language of sub-nationality in 12<sup>th</sup> Century, because trade and market then developed in India vigorously. He believed that language was the main symbol of sub-nationality, not the script. Moreover Hindi sub-nationality will enhance and strengthen India's unity and integrity. Thus he was against division of States into smaller States and did not see any administrative problem as the Gram Panchayats and Zila Panchayats may be delegated more powers

including the right to self-determination. Ramvilas Sharma used to write extensively about the 'Hindi Jati' and Hindi as a link language in Communist Party of India's papers and periodicals (like 'Janshakti'). He often criticized the language policy of Communist parties because he rightly felt that new and relevant socio-economic or political ideas can not be made accessible to the labour class in English language – rather as factory workers in different cities regularly interact in Hindi language, hence communist parties should work in Hindi language. It is unfortunate that communist parties in India did not pay heed to his suggestion. Later Shambhunath and Karmendu Shishir extended his idea of Hindi enlightenment.

Further Ramvilas Sharma emphasised more on the evolution of Hindi from indigenous dialects and local-regional languages like Braj, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Bundelkhandi, Maithili, Chhatisgarhi, Rajasthani, Haryanavi, Magahi, Angika etc., rather than the unilinear evolution path of Sanskrit→Prakrit→Apbhransh→Hindi. That is, Hindi has regional roots too in its local dialects/regional languages and its grammar structure has different identity, Hence history of Hindi literature, dissimilar to Sanskrit, would be different. On the other hand, he was against independent status of such dialects/local languages of Hindi because this will lead to division and finally weaken the position of Hindi language. He negated the very theory of Indo – European language family; rather he was of the view that India's Aryan

and non- Aryan languages also contributed to the evolution of European languages. Further he emphasized the need for highlighting the mutual relationship between Aryan and Dravidian language families. Then without reacting sharply Nirala asked him to re-read that novel. Ramvilas Sharma opined that all language families are evolutionary and evolve in interaction with one another. Further the basic elements of language families are not restricted to only one tribe but spread to many tribes.

He was the first major critic to highlight the greatness of S.K. Tripathi Nirala's poetry through his essays and the book 'Nirala Ki Sahitya Sadhna' (3Volumes), Once Ramvilas Sharma bought Nirala's collection of poems – 'Parimal' and suddenly Nirala reached there and asked whether he liked his free verses, Ramvilas Sharma replied in affirmative; then Nirala asked its reason. Ramvilas Sharma replied that even an ordinary poet might compose the lyrical poems but the skill of a genuine poet was tested in a free verse as even without the fixed norm to sustain rythm was a task of a genius. He further added that in his poems there is 'wit', not merely emotion. This befitting reply was quite significant because at that time Nirala's many opponents were ridiculing his free verses. But Ramvilas Sharma was fair and neutral in his critical appreciation of Nirala's writings because on that occasion itself he told Nirala that he did not like his novel 'Apsara' which appeared as a writing of a

novice author. Further Nirala also liked the translation of Vivekanand's writings in Hindi by Ramvilas Sharma.

Ramvilas Sharma, too, composed poems in the beginning of his literary career. He was one of 'Tar Saptak' poets (edited by Agyeya). His poems were published under the title 'Roop Tarang', 'Sadiyon Ke Soye Jag Uthe'; and 'Pratinidhi Kavitayen'. However due to his proactive engagement with Progressive Writers Association and interface with contemporary burning issues of Hindi language and literature, he concentrated more on literary criticism as well as historical issues of revolution of 1857 and implications of British rule in India. He wrote '1857 Ki Rajya Kranti', 'Bharat Mein Angreji Raj aur Marxvad (2-vols)', 'Bhartiya Sahitya Ke Itihas Ki Samasyayen', 'Bhartiya Samskriti aur Hindi Pradesh', 'Bharat Ki Bhasha Samasya', 'Bhasha aur Samaj', 'Bharat Ke Prachin Bhasha Parivar aur Hindi (3-vols)', Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi aur Hindi Navjagaran', 'Parampara Ka Mulyankan', 'Bhartendu Harishchandra', 'Itihas Darshan' (2-vols), 'Swadhinta aur Rashtriya Sahitya', 'Marxvad aur Pragatisheel Sahitya', 'Marx aur Pichhade Hue Samaj', 'Acharya Ramchandra Shukla aur Hindi Alochan'. 'Tulsidas aur Bhartiya Saundaryashastra' and others. He took Marxist perspective and inter-disciplinary approach in Indian context where he emphasized on socio-economic and political conditions and tried to establish writers' association with the contemporary time and society. He wrote in his book

**'Pragati aur Parampara'** : "There is no direct reflection of economic base on literature or art. The basis of development of politics, philosophy, religion, art etc. is certainly economic base but there is also their effect on one another and on economic base. It is correct that for understanding of an epoch, the knowledge of economic relations is necessary but literature or art is not merely shadow of these relations. Art influences these relations". Accordingly to him a scientific analysis of literary activities should be attempted without being tied to any political party or dogma as literature is a lively activity. He sees literature as a form of people's life –collective experiences and struggles in everyday life. He sees the revolutionary role of an artist or litterateur who shows revolt against exploitation, going beyond emotions and sympathy. That is why he critically evaluated the progressive traditions in Indian society because for epoch-making changes it is necessary to break the negative and backward-looking customs, prejudices and presumptions. He found Marxism helpful in correct evaluation of ancient literature's content and artistic aesthetics with a historical-dialectical perspective. So he traced the progressive tradition in Hindi literature in writings of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, Tulsidas, Kabir, Surdas, Premchand, Nirala, Bhartendu and so on. He openly declared that Bhartendu Harishchandra, was an anti-imperialist, not a British loyalist. He applied Marxist perspective also in the evaluation of Bhakti

period in Hindi literature by tracing the religious façade over class struggle and brands both 'saguna (with form) and 'nirguna' (formless) types of devotee poets 'sant' (saint) poets of whom Kabir was the first and foremost poet who questioned all the religious rituals and preachings, condemned both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists, especially their religious heads, 'mullas' and 'pandits'. Thus Kabir equipped the masses with a new social consciousness by discarding social – religious customs and attaining salvation directly without taking the help of middle men (priests). Second, Ramvilas Sharma called Malik Muhammad Jayasi 'the poet of people's culture'. Third, he addressed Surdas, Meera, Raskhan and Rahim as the 'poets of love' who championed the cause of unity in diversity. However, the common thread of the literature of all saint poets of Bhakti period was secular character, according to him. When he declared Tulsidas as the great poet of Hindi literature, some secular intellectuals and Hindi litterateurs questioned his view because in their view Tulsidas was the supporter of feudal traditions and values and they cited these couplets :

“Dhol ganwar shudra Pashu nari ?  
Ye Sab Tadan Ke Adhikari ??” (1)  
“Pujiy Vipra seel gun heena ?  
Shudra na gun gan gyan praveena ??”  
(2)

Ramvilas Sharma proved that the above couplets were interpolations and not the original thoughts of Tulsidas. It is notable that a character 'Samudra' is saying so, not

the poet Tulsidas. Further, even if it is accepted that these are Tulsi's original couplets, then one should also remember that while describing 'Kalikal' Tulsidas criticises the Brahmins too : 'Pandit soi jo gal bajawa' and 'vipra nirakshar lolup kami/nirachar shath vishali swami ? Thus he established the progressive view of Tulsi regarding social strata.

Further many fundamentalist Hindu priests were not happy with Tulsidas who was tortured by them because of his clear saintly secular vision:

‘Dhoot Kahau, Awdhoot Kahau Rajput  
Kahau, Julaha Kahau kou ?

Kahu ki beti se beta na byahab, na kahu  
ki jati bigarab sou

Mangi Ke Khaibo masit mein soibo,  
lebe Ko ek na debo ko dou' ??

Second, Tulsidas very broadly defined religion as a work for other's goodness : 'parhit saris dharm nahi bhai/par peeda sam nahi adhmai??' . Third, Tulsids wrote against caste : “log kahai pochu, so na sochu na sankochu, more byah na barekhi, jati –panti na chahat haun.” Fourth, when Rama returns to Ayodhya, Nishad was welcomed there and when Nishad goes back, Rama emotionally utters : ‘ Tum mam sakha Bharat sam bhrata/sada rahehu ghar awat – jata.’ Thus Rama calls him friend as well as brother like Bharat – this shows egalitarian view of Rama (of Tulsi) towards Nishad who belongs to a lower stratum. That is why the famous socialist leader Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia too appreciated Tulsi's Ramcharit Manas for such progressive reference to Nishad.

Finally, nowadays there is predominance of gender discourse in Hindi literature and other disciplines. But Tulsidas long back condemned the secondary and dependent status of women four hundred years ago : ‘ Kat vidhi sriji Nari jag mahin, paradhin sapanehu sukh nahin’. Thus it is quite clear that when the saint poet Tulsidas criticizes the secondary status of women, how can he equate women with animals, fool, drum and shudra ? Further the same poet Tulsidas shows great respect for women as uttered by Ram : ‘Anuj Vadhu bhagini sut nari/ sun sath Kanya sam echari/Inhahi Kudrishti vilokahi joi/tahi badhe kachhu pap na hoi.’ Tulsidas also uses words ‘nar-nari’ together in Ramcharit Manas several times. Further Tulsidas takes the side of the subjects in their struggle against the rulers, as Tulsidas says : ‘Jasu raj priy praja dukhari, so nrip awasi narak adhikari’. Thus Ramvilas Sharma proves Tulsidas a progressive poet, much ahead of his times.

Ramvilas Sharma puts across the new conception of ‘Hindi’ Navjagaran’ (enlightenment) beginning with the revolt of 1857. He calls Bhartendu and his era as second nav-jagaran; Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi and his era as third, and Chhayavad era (including Nirala literature) as fourth one. One may agree or disagree with such categorization but he thinks that when there is a change in the social system, it is a ‘navjagaran’. But I think such categorisation is a loose one. At the national level he categorizes four navjagarans : pre-Rigvedic era, upnishadic period’s navjagaran, bhakti period’s navjagaran and

navjagaran of 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1857 revolt). Needless to say that Ramvilas Sharma regarded the revolution of 1857 as both anti-feudal and anti-imperialist – as masses and elites, Hindus and Muslims, upper and lower castes, from different corners of the country, participated in that uprising. Later he condemned American imperialism too. He also wrote against the globalization, liberalization and privatization because through these three processes India is being made a slave of United States of America.

He was open to the modern ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, though he was a Marxist scholar. He liked Gandhi’s Swadeshi movement and active ‘satyagrah’ in South Africa. He recommended Hindi authors and general public to read Gandhi’s collected works, especially his speeches in South Africa. Similarly he appreciated Dayanand Saraswati’s ideas, which he found closer to communism. But he did not like the obscene depiction by writers like Yashpal or narrow racist writings of Rangeya Raghav and Rahul who wanted independent status of Hindi dialects (as today there is a demand for declaring Bhojpuri as an independent language under schedule Nine) and they thought that Aryans came from outside. But it is also true that he ignored Muktibodh as a poet (on the ground of being existentialist) though he got a lot of recognition for his long and classical poems like ‘Andhere Mein’ and ‘Brahma Rakshas’. Similarly he also ignored S.H. Vatsyayan ‘Agyeya’ on the ground of his rightist ideology and being pro – US (being associated with

Congress for Cultural Freedom) but Agyeya emerged as the greatest Hindi poet in post independence India and has been accepted so by most of the leftist critics too including Prof. Namvar Singh, though belatedly. He also ignored Jainendra Kumar's stories and novels but he was able to carve out an independent space of his own in Hindi literature, especially fiction. He also ignored the fiction – writings of Renu but Nalin Vilochan Sharma highlighted the sensitive and sensible depiction of emerging development projects in rural Bihar's eastern part (Purnia) in the novel 'Maila Anchal'. Such ignoring proved the ideological limits of Ramvilas Sharma in the arena of criticism. However, he talked of 'democracy of perspectives', that is, diversity of views. In his later years he was not happy with the pollution, crowd and noise in Delhi and used to say that Delhi

was not a place to live in, especially for writers. The entire Hindi belt remembers the dedication of Dr. Ramvilas Sharma whose every book is more than a Ph.D. thesis with full seriousness and quality of research. He received many awards but returned their money for spreading of education for the masses. He contributed most to the Hindi language and literature than any Hindi scholar in Hindi criticism and literary history. Obviously he condemned the poetry of Reetikal as courtiers' poetry with feudal mentality and regression. Now the real homage to Dr. Ramvilas Sharma would be to carry out his unfinished serious tasks in Hindi language and literature. He desired not to be remembered as the formal tradition exists in Hindi belt, rather his works need to be extended in both range and depth.

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## Ek Kahani Yah Bhi : A Critique

Garima Srivastava

It is seen that in the recent Hindi autobiographies written by women writers many sensitive women are searching their own space in society. Among these is an autobiography Ek kahani yah bhi” which is not declared an autobiography by its author but we can consider it to be one. Premchand points out the importance of the absence of imagination in autobiography. “Literature includes both the imagination and self-experience, where there is more self-experience, that literature is everlasting. Autobiography should include only self-experience and not a bit of imagination.” Mannu Bhandari writes in the preface that she hasn’t taken any help of imagination at all” while writing my own story I had to keep my imagination aside, because I was the medium and the target as well. This is purely my story and it had to remain mine only. so I did not feel any requirement to improve or to change, no cutting or altering. Here I had to describe only those situations that came as they were which I suffered. In other words I must say that whatever I saw, knew, felt...I wanted to transcript my own story in words, so my story is word to word transcription of what I saw, knew and felt”. So does it mean that, autobiography is only the description of self-experiences. If that is the case why would a reader take interest? Every life contains many small and big, sweet and bitter memories and it keeps flowing. There could always remain many things that are untold, unlearned and inexperienced and the life ultimately ends.

Then what is the use of publishing the description of somebody else's life. Autobiography works as the catharsis for the writer, and it also describes the ups and downs of the society and its circumstances, in which the writer lives and grows. The autobiography is responsible for creating the environment for the writer, provided the writer maintains the honesty and integrity. Its call is comparable to clarion call for truth. But if an autobiographer always tells the truth then will he be able to maintain his stainless and perfect image in society? It's doubtful, and it seems more complicated when we talk about women writers the issue is even more complex. Woman is dominated and crushed for centuries and if given a chance to express she could be extra vocal. Since nobody has heard her so far she can unfold many conspiracies and reveal truths which may prove to be uncomfortable for the patriarchal society. The prominent Hindi critic Manu Pandey depicts the reason behind the absence of autobiographical writings in Hindi "in our social structure women are not allowed to tell the truth and men have the freedom but they are not at all habituated to truth"

Mannu Bhandari is a well known and well reputed author whose autobiography presents the masculine aspect of women's conscience. This can play an important role in understanding the contradictions of feminist discourse. This discourse is created as an outcome of the crisis of the woman writer, her ambitions, her contradictions in society and the domination of patriarchy,

as well as fear of social insecurity, and all this still in an initial stage where the woman tries to change the patriarchal mentality, ruins and even ends her own life. Although Mannu is economically independent and enjoys a strong recognition in society as an author but still she can't make any relations with male counterparts on her own terms and conditions. She herself faced gender discrimination and got conditioned with this. Not only carrying but justifying also, sometimes for the sake of her child and sometimes for the sake of her so called love. Still in mature age she is unable to think an independent life, parallel to men. Even if the husband is ill-mannered, sick, old, characterless she has to continue with him only and while doing all this, on one side she is complaining to friends but feels that it's for her own good. She cannot think about any extra marital relation.

In one way when we read her autobiography one can see that her last 35 years of marital life have been punished due to her sensitiveness. She rebelled against her own father, society and married a creative writer and talented critic just with the hope "...Everybody thinks and so do I that same profession, same tastes, same field really would make life easy. I shall get a golden path to write and get published. It's true that living with somebody who is in the same profession brings together many facilities, but brings along a pile of problems as well. I experienced it first hand" (page No. 48) where there are different work places there is limitation for interference, Mannu



Bhandari attained the literary environment for which she craved, but could she get the opportunity also to explore the facilities of that environment? No, not at all. She kept playing the role of host and nanny and kept working all alone in order to complete the household chores. This was the point where her expectations and dreams got ruined. Getting along with an author, critic–Rajendra Yadav was not only romantic but there was a hidden desire – to read and discuss literature, write and to get name and fame as a big author. That’s-why she did not adhere to the admonition by Mohan Rakesh who chided her just before her marriage to Rajendra Yadav, rather sermonized her. Mannu writes–“Rakeshji kept sermonizing me, tried to make me understand against this marriage, kept telling lots of things ultimately reaching to same conclusion that–‘Mannu you should drop the idea of marrying a writer. You will never be satisfied with totally uncertain, unstable life style, but all his preaching were like challenge for me, which were making me more stubborn. I replied that I have already crossed the age of romantic 16 and took this decision standing on real mother earth because whatever I expect from my life only an author could provide me.”

The whole autobiography rotates around Mannu Bhadari’s married life, and describes her childhood very briefly. Dissatisfaction with her creativity can be smelled in each of her descriptions “I had to perform all the duties of a house wife, my job which was very much needed to

run the house, my daughter...everything. In between these duties I had to steal out the space for writing whatever I wrote, just in between my responsibilities but not at the cost of my daughter and my home. Earlier at every stage I used to face crisis, my life was full of sufferings but my creative writing was not discontinued...but now most of the problems are solved but my writing also has come to an end. Does it mean that a life full of crisis is necessary for a creative writer?”(page 13)

Critical and problematic life, facing loneliness during sickness, depression, tensions provoke Mannu to write, they inspire the “creative writer” in her and give strength to flow against the current and explore new horizons and then she writes not only novels and stories but scripts for films, dramas, serials for the television etc. It means variety of creative works she enjoys and finds an unparallel broad spectrum for herself, and of course on her own. She searches the space for writing during her occupied schedule. Sometimes she goes and stays in girls hostel for a month and sometimes when she is unable to find time or space of her own she feels emptiness and gets irritated and this sense of dissatisfaction makes her writing more sharp and penetrating. Ek Kahani Yah Bhi can be seen from a different angle also that how a woman tries, fights and struggles to save her creativity in a male-dominant social mindset.

There are many incidents in history where women are punished for competence by men. Whenever a woman tries to

compete intellectually with man, she has to pay a high price, take any example whether it is the historical incident of Gargi and Yagyavalkya or Varahmihir and Ravna. Ravna—the daughter of Bhaskaracharya, could solve the puzzle which her husband could not. The king felicitated Ravna in his Court—which was crowded with intellectuals but back home, inside the boundries Varahmihir slaughtered her tongue. Ravna paid a high price for showing her wisdom and potential. Time has changed as well as situations. Now woman comes into existence with more power and independence which made her more free, she can earn her own money and spend it according to her own preferences then also she is expected to pat male scattered ego, always has to show herself subordinated and less worthy than man, just in order to maintain peace in the family. She has to ignore her husband's extramarital relations in the name of 'writer's freedom and only then the institution of marriage can sustain. Mannu Bhandari might have done this—this can be supported by many examples from her autobiography. We can ask her, even as critic Nirmala Jain asked her once that why she felt incapacitated that she, being an economically independent writer —could not break the marriage? This question remains unanswered in the autobiography. This could be one of her contradictions, like most of the women, which says – 'Instead of guilt conscience, I just could not take any bold step like this. Once upon a time I used to react and fight for social

causes, even fought but now. Was it love for Rajendra that just after two years of friendship I deeply got attached to him, it hampered me to take a bold decision and rejecting him would somehow mean to reject myself ? Since I married against my father's wish, I somehow did not want to prove this marriage unsuccessful...not at any cost.”(page 52)

*Sixhouse stresses on expression.* She says that woman should now change her role, she should speak, not only listen. Woman has to seek the courage to speak up in order to express. It seems that Mannu Bhandari might have shared her sufferings of life into pieces with her friends and well wishers but she made enough delay in expressing truth, speaking on her own life that even when she gets her own space and enough time in Ujjain it turns into alienation and she became unable to utilize that space for meaningful creative expression.

Mannu refers to the different incidents of her life along her creative journey. Sometimes the reader gets illusion that it's only about her literary creative journey and rest is unimportant. But peeping inside one can see how a woman surpasses the hermaphrodite arguments through writings and deconstructs our own existing social system and social conditioning. Thus she explores a new language, an appearance of new culture. Mannu Bhandari, as she repeats the incidents, breaks the intensive effect of a creative piece. Even after these many years she is unable to forget the incident of 1961

regarding hijacking her plot of Novel 'Ek Inch Muskan' by Rajendra Yadav, time and again her self-belief suffers with lots of ups and downs. Readers' appraisal and appreciation boosts her selfconfidence. She never forgets betrayal in love, just like a common woman. She has her mental conditioning of patriarchal society. Can't think of a life without husband. Sometimes she is worried for her daughter, sometimes about the social security—and moreover what the society will think if I break the marriage? She is just scared with herself, who cries, sings the song of helplessness but again comes back to square one. Blames her husband who failed to understand her requirements, never cared about the family, always behaved in selfish manner, so she could not devote her time and talent to literature. She got occupied with family responsibilities that she couldn't explore herself fully. This is what she says but one can understand underlined patriarchal mental conditioning of a traditional woman within her.

She suffered in thirty five years of bad marriage but couldn't come out, she is obsessed with traditional Indian values. She was neglected by husband, she cried but could not break the chains of her prison. Her talent, her existence, her emotions got ruined but somehow she was helpless. Her vision towards life, voice of traditional conscience and sensitivity can be seen as well as her selfpity. Mannu always suffered with inferiority complex due to her dark complexion. She admits that and reading and writing provides her a different

identity. It was sort of thrill for her to get married against her father's wish, who was very dominating. Later the thrill of this romance prevented her to visualize the real picture of life in practical and neutral way; still later she got influenced by a sense of insecurity, since she did not listen to father and got stuck up in bad marriage, and then something happens...? some but very few times when husband welcomes her wholeheartedly she feels that still there is some scope of reform in their marital relation. She knows, even if she is honest to her husband even if "she is truthful she will get defeated and he who betrays will lie and win" Elen Showalter suggests that while reading women's literature one should see the social concern in that, along with this how the self-conscience of a woman writer gets converted into different literary forms, this could be seen also as to how does this process takes place in a particular place and time, how does it change the 'self' of a woman, how does it develop and what are the aspects it has.

The post independent generation of women Hindi writers have already crossed 70 years-Krishna Sobti, Usha Priyamvada, Raji Seth, Mridula Garg. Mannu Bhandari's autobiography should be seen in the context of these women's writings. These writers belong to the second stage of Indian feminist discourse. They are more concerned and alert towards their creativity, existence and expression and presentation in the society. The next generation of women writers is making and maintaining relations with society on it's own terms

and conditions. It is so interesting to see how many intellectual concerns flow together in society. And beside that how many literary forms are being used to express the social and intellectual concern. These women's creative writings are filled with the examples of creative vision, especially in their autobiographical statements. In this context it is expected that more and more women writers should express their thoughts, in their writings and explore themselves for readers, So that we could get the validated literary proof of changing social, economical and political scenario.

This is also very important to notice that only creative writing provides the true meaning to her life, novels like *Apka Bunty*, *Ek Inch Muskan*, political novel like *Mahabhoj*, drama and film scripts, representation of Premchand's stories, social work and writing of short stories are the illustrations of her continuous creativity. It's true that she felt neglected by her husband but daughter Tinku, son in law Dinesh, friends like Nirmala Jain, Mohan Rakesh, Jainendra Kumar—they all love and

supported her. She keeps referring to all of them in her autobiography. One day she sees her gardener, in order to rejuvenate a plant deals with it in the way she describes—"...and he removed the plant from the pot, took out the bunch of roots...heartlessly. There were many entangled threads together, rotten ones, that had slowed down the life-strength of the plant. He removed them all ruthlessly, just chose very few healthy threads of roots, now the new plant extract the juice of life and bloom—he was fully assured...So do I also have to do the same for regaining my creativity—to attain my creative life again? who knows..."

The desire of rebirth only keeps her creativity lying inside her. During these many years of writing, her creativity expands to the riot victims of 1984 of Delhi. It keeps extending to the the rest of the world. This autobiography unfolds the ups and downs, happiness, sorrows of her journey of life and reveals the nature of relations in socio-cultural situations and literary world as well.

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## Manto's fight with Colonialism

Kusumlata Malik

Translated by  
Mangal Murty

*Literature is either genuflection or waywardness. This is an age of new anguish, new aches. People are writing, but literature today is not in the same language; the style has undergone a change.*

Who was this Manto, the writer? What did he write? Why was he always given the cold shoulder? Why did he face so many court cases? Why did his contemporaries turn their back on him? As we face these questions vis-à-vis Manto's writings, we find several perspectives in contemporary writing opening out. We encounter not only his multi-dimensional *oeuvre*, but also the various factors of the disregard to which he was subjected. The anguish of the new age also creates new aches. What gives way to waywardness in literature, and why is literature no longer merely literature – such questions peel off the dead skin from our sensibility to reveal, as if on a screen, myriad feelings and expressions on the human face in historical contexts.

Manto's time was the time when colonialism was at its zenith; it was the time of world wars. Imperialism was wreaking havoc with all its might, with savagery overwhelming the world in all its hideous forms. The worst sufferer was humanity itself – completely debilitated, oppressed and tyrannized. It was in such a time that Manto was born and grew up, started his writings and went on

with them; and in course of his writings went on suffering chastisements for wrongs he had never committed, and fighting against the perilous phoneiness of neo-colonialism. And it was thus, after spending forty two years, eight months and seven days, that he departed from our midst. Among many of the sins of Manto was also his choice of a life as a writer, a life of recklessness verging on intrepidity, a life of no compromise with capitalism or authority. It was a life in which he tried to cleanse the face of humanity begrimed with the dirt of vile reality, and cleanse it he would with the utmost sense of responsibility, and with all integrity, equanimity and love. All such honest work of his should have been truly acclaimed, but who would countenance a lion in a herd of jackals; he would only get insults, indignities and contempt. His literary writings were seen, after all, less as true literature than sheer waywardness.

Much has been written on Manto's stories already. But he wrote so much more besides his stories that an entirely new reader approach is needed to cope with it. He wrote stories for films when the film industry was just coming up. For the Akashvani, when it was just taking shape, he wrote numerous dramas, radio plays and articles. Similarly, he wrote several hundred letters of different kinds which also include his imaginary letters containing the hardest truth that lies beneath reality. Manto had spoken of the new anguish and the new aches of the modern times. That same anguish and those same aches are reflected

in his letters to Uncle Sam.

These letters contain all the abrasiveness that his writing quintessentially exhibits. In one of these letters Manto writes,

*The British government considered me as an obscene writer, and so does even my own government. But whereas the former had left me alone, my own government seems unwilling to do so.*

And it shouldn't be difficult to answer the question –But why so? Because Manto was doing all his writing with full awareness of the existing global situation. He knew very well that both the political and economic policies in Pakistan were strictly controlled by America, and hence how could he oppose Capitalism or America itself for that matter. As he again writes, *Pakistan, my own country, is not negligent about showing respect towards its men of arts and letters. But the real problem is that the list of those more worthy of that respect than I is much longer. In fact, my government recently fixed a life-long pension of rupees five hundred for 'Khan Bahadur Mohammad Abdur-Rahman Chughtai' who is a big propertied landlord. And hence a worthier candidate for such financial help. My government definitely bears a clean conscience. Dear Uncle! It only takes into cognizance your services, never your status or influence. The days of my life are counted, and though my saying so might hurt you, you yourself are responsible for this state of affairs.*

Here Manto seems clearly to point to his own literary sensibility as reflected in his writings as a whole. The finest quality marking his writings lies in this de-

colonization or deconstruction and demystification of all statusquoism. And it is this ever-vigilant creativity which makes him such a great writer. His greatest contribution to the twentieth century lies in this anti-colonial stance of his writings. It is this colonial dispensation with a global spread that has created the divides between the 'common' and the 'special' man, between the 'small' and the 'big' people or the 'have-nots' and the 'haves', between the utterly poor and the rich consumer. Colonialism did not have such an expansive, global spread in Manto's time, of course, but still he could envisage how things were getting uglier, more monstrous and hazardous by the all-round American intervention. He well realized the sinister implications of the American protectionism. In another of his letters he writes,

*Dear Sam Uncle! Tell me, after all, what wrong have I done that you are giving me such harsh punishment. Even the peons in your Lahore office would not talk to me with a straight face, and I don't know what special feathers you have stuck in the caps of the two or three junior officers there, who are my own Pakistani brothers, that they start abusing me the moment they hear my name. But what's my fault, after all?*

Why, the fault is well-known in the wide world; to be among the poorest of the poor – isn't it a big fault? An independent nation's dependence on America does make a small man smaller; it does render a common man more miserable. If this yawning chasm between

the 'common' and the 'special' man is connected internally with social realities, then externally neo-colonialism has only widened and deepened it. Manto could very well see through the masquerade of this neo-colonialism. As he writes again, *It's a different matter that in order to digest the wheat sent by you we had to adapt our digestive tract to being pro-America. I fail to understand why you are giving millions of dollars of foreign aid to India and such massive military aid to Pakistan.*

And expressing it more brusquely and confrontationally, he writes with greater audacity.

*In keeping both India and Pakistan happy you seem to have only one aim: wherever you find the flame of the lamp of freedom and democracy failing, you do not extinguish it by blowing it out but try to drown out the very lamp with an excess of oil so that it never complains of thirst.*

But there is a contrary relationship between the thirst for freedom or the thirst for creativity and the oil of capitalism. The oil of capitalism would rather drown the lamp of freedom and democracy than keep it burning. Thus even sixty years after Manto we are now face to face with the dangers of neo-capitalism. How the techniques of neo-capitalism are swallowing up freedom of existence and breeding world-wide subjugation was never more obvious than it is today. It may not have attained its present diabolical form in Manto's time, but he must have realized from its very beginning, how horrific its end would be. If India occupies the 84<sup>th</sup>

position among the most corrupt countries in the world, Pakistan also is down at the 149<sup>th</sup> place.

Manto saw how the American civilization was becoming the code of conduct for the newly independent countries; how the centuries-old liberal folk cultures were dying out and the pythonic 'pseudo-culture' tightening its coils all over. He could envision the whole scenario: the smell in his story 'Boo' (Smell) is not merely physical, but also spiritual. The irony in his story 'Khol Do' (Open) is not limited to the opening of a window or the loosening of the string of a *salwar* (woman's pyjama), it is also a knock on the closed doors of consciousness – doors which have been latched shut with parochialisms. Manto writes in a letter.

*Sam Uncle! I swear by you star-spangled lofty hat. Days are passing miserably, so miserably indeed that I have forgotten even to ask for benediction. Believe me, the time for covering myself with rags is here, because proper clothes have become so expensive that the poor can't even get shrouds when they die, and those that live are covered in mere tatters. In fact, in my desperation I have decided to start a 'Nudes Club', though then what will these nudes eat – their own nudities? But that too will be so hideous that they would rather drop their morsels sooner.* Manto did feel that our society and culture as yet have not grown as insensitive as the American civilization, and it can still be revived to better health.

*I can tell you that the upper crust of our society can bear with any degree of*

*humiliation, because its eyes have already been washed clean in your laundries, but the lower and the lower middle class of our society is still averse to any such degradation.*

Manto's sense of dignity and solemnity about women is well-known. A woman in our society is generally treated with respect, but in a capitalist society she is more or less a show-piece, or a mere 'product'. See, what Manto has to say.

*For you, everything is naked. You would peel off everything and put it in a shop-window – be it a fruit or a female body, a machine or an animal, a book or a calendar. Yes, indeed you are the veritable emperor of nakedness!*

This naked empire of the capitalist civilization has overspread the entire globe which we feel proud to call a globalized world. Manto had sensed the dangers of capitalism during the Second World War itself. After seeing the film 'Bathing Beauty' he had realized that there was nothing outside the stranglehold of capitalism, and if we have to escape from that stranglehold, we must save everything, all our human relationships from getting so facilely perverted. We must view the relationship between man and woman not as one of consumer and product but as of true collaborators in life's journey. As Manto writes:

*Uncle Sam! Women at your end are fabulously beautiful – women with long, slim, silken white legs. But please don't expose those sexy legs in Pakistan. We here only see the legs of our wives; we consider seeing legs of other women as sinful.*



The revolution in information technology had not yet happened in Manto's time; hence, forums like Internet, Facebook and Twitter were not available then. But Manto had his prescient instincts to perceive the technological face of capitalism which had turned human beings into puppets – all dressed up puppets with no sensitivity left in them. In Manto's time we did not even have women's liberation movements which could possibly have influenced him, but he was extremely conscious of the tussle between truth and the establishment, and also how truth was being coerced by the establishment. And yet he was never ready to compromise truth with the establishment. It is only when we read him that we understand what truth and integrity mean to a creative writer. In another of his letters he writes:

*Women here also have come out of their veils, but when we see them without their veils we feel they had better stayed behind their veils. Your Maxfactor has made them look so repulsive... You give us wheat and your literature, and even weapons for free; but why don't you send one or two hundred of your original American girls here?*

Manto was well aware of the all-round assaults on humanity, and was trying to counter them steadfastly, but he only had his pen and his writing as his weapon which he would just not surrender to capitalism. He quite understood the rigmarole of the advertising world of capitalism. As he writes about it in one of these imaginary letters: *I will have genuine American smile delivered here by air and stick it on my lips, and that*

*smile will have a thousand connotations. For instance –you are an outright jackass; you are the most brilliant person; I felt greatly annoyed to meet you; I felt extremely delighted to meet you; you are an American bush-shirt; you are a Pakistani matchbox; you are an elixir; you are Coca Cola, and so on and so forth.*

Who does not know how fast this advertising culture has dulled our sensitivities? We are all stung by the poisonous snake of this alien culture. Not only humanity but the environment itself which gives it life is being callously destroyed and it is as much a matter of serious concern as of dedicated action. Pointing towards such crises, Manto writes here sarcastically (punning on the phrase 'chal-dhal'):

*I like immensely your American manners ('chal') and style ('dhal'), because the manners ('chal') serve as style ('dhal'), and the style ('dhal') equally serves as manners ('chal').*

We have certainly seen enough of these American 'manners' and 'style', not only in Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, etc. but in the entire world.

*The truth, Uncle Sam, is that only Americans deserve to live on the terrains of this earth. All others here, by God (Khuda), are only wasting themselves away. Yes, Uncle Sam, the truth is that we know neither how to live nor how to die.*

All these questions by Manto may have been raised about imaginary relationships under imaginary situations, but the entire contemporary global scenario is reflected in them; all the reverberations of the power

equations, all the dangers of capitalism are subsumed in them. We must acclaim Manto's sagacity – the fearless, unrelenting, and seemingly unabashed Manto; how gentle, innocuous and committed he emerges in his letters. In a letter to Pandit Nehru, he writes:

*Radcliffe had made two slices from the loaf of India that were regrettably yet to be toasted, one of which you have been toasting on your side, and the other one, we have been toasting on our side, though the fire in both our stoves comes from outside.*

All of Manto's literature of letters embodies life's reality soaked in tears of blood. But it is we who have become shameless and totally insensitive to that reality. All our lives and surroundings have become incredibly drab and insipid. No event or even accident makes any difference to us now, but it did to Manto, of course. Today we seem to have lost both our natural traits of laughing and weeping, but it wasn't so in Manto's time; they were very much there. In his letter to Pandit Nehru he writes:

*Being a Kashmiri signifies beauty. And beauty means that which I haven't seen anywhere as yet.*

This was Manto who received no eulogies from critics in either India or Pakistan. The Manto we have known through his stories is an incomplete Manto.

For knowing the complete Manto it is essential to know Manto's social and political commitments, to explore the humanist underpinnings of his writings, to understand the gravity of his revolutionary ideas, to study his literature of letters, his critical writings and his writings for the radio and films – only then can we discover the complete Manto. The Manto that is applauded or denigrated today is only an incomplete Manto. To discover and understand Manto in his totality we must delve into his anti-colonial vision.

In this context it is important to consider Manto's writings alongside the writings of his contemporaries. We must also study the writings of Rajendra Singh Bedi, Krishna Chander, Krishna Baldev Vaid, Ismat Chughtai, Premchand, Upendra Nath Ashk and see how these contemporaries of Manto were writing; how Manto's sensibility was different from these writers who were his contemporaries. Also, what was the nature of the influence of Manto's writings on many of his contemporaries. All these questions must also be considered when we are studying Manto. Only then we can understand Manto fully. And to be fair to Manto, language should not be a barrier in the proper evaluation of his writings.

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## Renaissance, In Contemporary Context

Karmendu Shishir

Translated by  
**Ramjay Pratap**

In the history of a nation the chapter of renaissance happens to be a living testimony in its favour, i.e. a regular source of inspiration, and in every difficult situation it turns over its pages and ponders afresh, over the modes of entanglements of the period. It is, probably, a major irony of free India, it never articulated its sources with its own renaissance and its sources wherever get articulated, also the knowledge of the very place has no longer been a secret. How a major censure it is, we never stopped, for a while, to see ourselves being partial to the time. Sometimes, to curtain our shame we, at best, remembered it in a formal manner, but unfortunately, also imported the perceptions of modernism. Did we also fail to prove ourselves to be capable of thinking after independence? Churchill used to say, Indian minds are full of husks and today, the master class of the country is busy with proving the same to be true and it goes to be more than the excess. We have a possibility of self-praised ego in spite of the dependence to this extent, as no positive relation was developed ever in between the conducting authority of our country and the intellectual resources. Neither a self-glory of the country nor a person having such vision is seen, and no one can lead the country without it.

It is a fact that we can neither remain impartial to the world, nor be ignorant of the modern world by putting ourselves in a

closed autonomous circle. But the world to be sure, we can not view with the eyes of other persons. For the existence and betterment of ourselves, we have to understand the world and for ourselves we require to know it. It is we who can necessarily do the work of having acquaintance for ourselves. The determination of self-dependence can not be maintained only by the thoughtfulness, as for this, there must be a perception and dedication of activity and about the reality of the whole world we must have a knowledge in detail., but our view should always be based on the interest of our nation and society. In this light, we shall be acquainted with the world and also for us, this is a desired one. The master-class intellectuals, not seeing the whole world with this point of view, create a gentleman-hypocrisy of neutrality, sovereignty and total thinking and today, it happens to be more necessary to identify and unmask them and in the end to dethrone them. because they have long occupied the commanding seats of the system. Can you give the name of a country that disowns its own interest in the interest of the world?

In independent India we have, by now, repeated much the grammar of ideologies and acquired today, also the ability to make a very high and deep explication of each and every aspect but failed to have the intention to introduce a change in ourselves and the society in accordance with it as the mentality of ours was never constituted of the fibers that had formed our ideologies. No inducing flame re-

mained inside us, no perplexity and agony remained there. It is never surprising, if such nation or society goes astray in a tunnel and fails to determine a certain path. Why not the national dignities of ours as earned, during the course of the freedom-struggle, could be in the end, a part of our civil lives? Our main character happened to be hypocrisy and its several other aristocratic expressions. A sharp dissatisfaction that presently underlies every conscious and wise citizen will certainly get increased thereby, and it can not be restrained anyway from being exploded. Its appearances are clearly seen that can neither be overlooked, nor brushed aside, nor made an intransitive expectation of renaissance to stop for a while. The present hour warrants us to turn out from our own disguise and be free from our hypocrisy. Now we ought to begin moving through the looplevelines of reality, not through the heights of ideals.

Our woes are, of course, deep enough but only a boldness has to be shown to admit the realities, as the recurrence may, at least, get stopped, if the feeling happens to be a deep one. Today, the world has, undoubtedly, changed enough. If we look behind, a wonderful and decisive change we observe in the world of today as being introduced since the period of the second world war. Now the world is not identical to the world it was a hundred years ago, but we never show any interest in developing ideologies with a changed dynamism of the world. Ideals, for the advocacy of which, we have been struggling till date,

have turned valuable today, but in the same faces it can never be carried on, nor has our goal to be made easy by that way because the world and time in which we acquired those ideals, aims and paths, have changed in too and our challenges have turned to be more critical and difficult. Of the whole world we will have to make a new analysis in a new perspective, as it needs to be perceived afresh. We neither believe in the end of thoughts, nor do we imagine a society or civilization without a thought but the thoughts adhered to senselessness, will never enable us to arrive at a conclusion.

May it be a socialist system or a capitalist in the whole world, for the people, a democracy has turned to be the most desirable. Democracy has, of course, its own interpretations, limits and defects. The way the religious fanaticism and terrorism spread on large scale and the nationality of caste-elevation got generated, it tarnished the effects of all ideals of our civilization, and the presumption of the world-government of ours turned to be an armour behind the screen of which the vicious economical imperialism was gently tied up and the forces that were contractors of world-peace, played impudently a game of narrow selfishness. The truth remains that even today the national interest is the only ground in view of which every country makes a balance of its co-ordination or contact with other countries. The ideal of world-fraternity India raised up to the limit of enthusiasm, has lost its significance and the economy and mili-

tary- strength have become the deciding forces. It gets almost substantiated that a country, weak and in-debt, can never maintain the ideal of world-fraternity.

In our country, there is a difficult pause at the level of thinking but this pause too, fails to compel us to make a critical self-criticism, India too, has been one of the founder-countries of the World Bank that we never tire to say is the giant of dependence, does not directly compel us for a loan, It is we who are compelled to knock at its door, We could not pay our attention to the loan and the use of loan with the same intensity as we paid to the other financing institutions. The licentiousness and anarchies of the master-class are being fostered at the cost of the whole country-record achievements include the booty and extravagance In the end the loan and loan-financier are where in it? We are not restlessly expecting any renaissance standing in the corridors of time-in this competition we are struggling for a personal existence, and have no such imagination of the national future for which a collective struggle is going on. An expectation of renaissance can neither be personal nor intransitive. If we have to invite a renaissance indeed, the nearest past will have to be seriously over-hauled. We can neither import modernism, nor can revive tradition, nor can determine an immediate practicality by restraining both. We can *not* select the excellence of the past without understanding the world of today. In a country where the source of unity is grounded in its cultural vanity, nothing can

be resolved there in haste only by sustaining a mental strain as the cultural vanity too, is not a stable unit. Every moment creates its grammar itself and in this process, the past as well as the modernism happen to play a useful role. It is wrong to say that the people of only one country can carry out a total thinking about the betterment of human beings, as such no abstention we maintain, from the import but a selection and negation have always to be made by self which never happens to be an easy task because our nearest renaissance and its all goods and chattels, ail issues, perceptions and thoughts would never entirely belong to the Indians, rather they had been imported from the west and other countries, but all, in the context of national movement.

Which of the traditions are associated with the renaissance in India and when they took birth and spread over, I am, presently, not interested in rinsing their history-sheets. In the past too, much inequalities have been there in political prosperity or cultural levels. The access of the period from the vedic to Bodh, Maurya to Gupta, had no equal access to all spheres as during this period there has been a difference in cultural, social, economical and political exaltations. Our cultural excess was at an inimitable height so far as the Bhaktikal or modern age is concerned, but we were salve at political level and also socially unequal. Today we are politically independent but culturally disabled, hence a hypothesis of a thing like a total renaissance, never happens to be possible in

reality. For instance, let us take the aspect of religion. A strong allegation of religiousness is levelled against the renaissance. The persons raising such allegation, have an international source of thinking and idea of renaissance in Europe. The renaissance of the modern Europe that exports modernism all over the world, had emerged from a womb, blood-bathed in religious movements and anarchic slaughters. Whatever name may it be, we can, infer the religion thereby to the extent. It is not easy to say. How shall the modernism overweening to deviate the whole human society from the religion. be transplanted. If the communication, perception, observation and favour as made with regard to the religion in renaissance, are-examined seriously. we will find a change was also there, a consciousness was there, and also a modernism, if we could say, was there. Mahatma Gandhi was a modern religious person who did not fail. The strongest voice of renaissance included a strong blow on religious customs and hypocrisies. I want to put up this matter not in a tune of favour, rather as an alternative that is worth considering. By now, we could not have made a comparative discussion on the tradition that remained during the period from RamKrishna, Swami Dayanand and Swami Ramtirth of Swami Vivekanand and the tradition of modern saints. *As long as the religion is adhered to the man and society, we can not imagine a society, may it be better or modern, by overlooking it, as the spirituality has been a total hunger of the man and he will like it to be supplied*

in any form as such. I am of this view that we ought to reconsider it.

The form of democracy and its conducting forces along with the master-class are as seen today in our country, the imagination and pride of renaissance is worthless for them? Why do they like it? today, power means more than a single party or ideology, as many forces share the power, and wealth, strength and wisdom have become the factors to determine the political power. The forces maintain no abstention from a religion, caste, language, province or regionally and they have their own conduct because only wealth and strength are their object and intent. The political culture, as a matter of fact, never affected the cultures in the manner as is affecting today. Now the violence has turned to be decisive and anarchy to be in a stable state, hence we will have to go to the extent to bring about a change. A violent culture of loot has developed within the whole social civilization- what does it mean to live in such a modern society? In a society where a man fails to get the form of his own life, what concern does he have with the modernism and democracy of the very society? A form of life does not matter only with the economical soundness, as the wealth is never the sole ground of the soundness of life, but it has changed the measuring scale and also this presumption the modernism took in its grip. The moment a presumption of wealth happens to be in the center, it also becomes the central greed of the society. In what form should we

take this difference of presumption? No doubt, only the political and economical analysis makes us capable of having a knowledge about the society. But, we can not arrive at the right conclusions only by virtue of them, for this we shall have to concentrate on the life-virtue and cultural exaltations of the society. Overlooking its renaissance, no society can be acquainted with the acting elements of those life-values and cultural exaltations. In the end, the roots of a society underlie its own past, as such the past requires to be uncovered from time-to-time.

Renaissance is not only a matter of intellectual thinking but of perception and feeling also. It is also a matter of concern and conduct as emerged from its thinking. The concern of the political Marxists, Gandhians or socialists is how far it is met by the traditions of Marxist, Gandhian or socialist thoughts? Introducing one's own prudence who proceeded to establish a comprehensive relation with the society and nation. Had it been so, the communal power would not have been so strong. Moral values were not prohibited anyway in any ism and we ought not to forget it, the modes of solving the problems of this country can not be imported because they have to be made up or evolved. Those thoughts have to be expressed by the conduct, and the usefulness of renaissance turns to be important for transplanting those values in whole society. Renaissance is not only a formality to be maintained by recollecting it, but its necessity warrants the usefulness of society.

In every linguistic society, nationality, comes a period of renaissance that leaves out such necessary ideals with the help of which it, whenever needed, invites again the renaissance for itself. Our society is as if hesitated or deviated, meaning thereby a restlessness is also there in it for a change. The sprout of renaissance can emerge from the womb of that very restlessness, and a foresightedness lies there only in hearing and feeling its sounds. A cultural activist does nothing but deepens this feeling and converts it into a faith. Similar were the roles the Jan-Nayaks (peoples' hero) of renaissance played. If one distinguished the mind acting behind their thoughts, he shall

feel their values lack the foundation of our character. To memorize them in absence of this feeling, can not be easy. It is not a fact that the warmth of renaissance was confined to a single language, caste, society or mode. The fact remains, the warmth of renaissance was equally present in Jagdish Chandra Basu to Meghnath Saha and contemporary Indian English and also in dialect like Bhojpuri. Now, a number of things have turned appears to be evident in its beginning to pervade the society and place but it pervaded the whole of Indian society. A true search that we require to make has to be made as to perception, recognition and treatment of the problem.

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## Jhootha-Sach: Yashpal's Masterpiece

Braj Kishor Jha

*Jhootha-Sach* is one of the greatest political novels of the world and the greatest literary fiction book written in Hindi. *Jhootha Sach* i.e., 'False Truth' or 'The baseless Truth', is not just for the people reading for entertainment but also for the people who are interested in knowing the things leading to what happened after the era-changing event of India's partition in 1947.

Almost fifty years ago, when Yashpal's *Jhootha Sach* was serialised by the then most popular Hindi magazine "Dharmyug", it made the readers anxiously wait for the next issue. Much of the Hindi reading populace of the country had for the first time read an authentic and humane narration of life in Lahore and the trauma of the exodus that had struck Punjab. The author, till then better known as a revolutionary and a writer, instantly carved a niche for him among literary giants. The book is a real account of *grim tale of human suffering* of that historical period because the author, Yashpal himself was a member of Hindustan Socialist Republican Association led and operated by Chandra Shekhar Azad and had been a close associate of Bhagat Singh. Yashpal grew up at a time of ferment and agitation for Indian independence. In his school days he was drawn at first to Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, but later felt that such movements were unresponsive to the needs of the poor and that non-cooperation with the British was ineffective. He joined National College, Lahore, a hotbed of nationalist sentiment, which was founded by Lala Lajpat Rai, the venerable leader of pre-partition Punjab. There he met Bhagat Singh who was hanged for his role in the assassination of policeman J.P.

Saunders in Lahore (1928), and for exploding a bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly in New Delhi (1929).

Yashpai wrote in his reminiscences. *Sinhavalokan*, "One day I and Bhagat Singh got chance to practise rowing in the Ravi River. Just two of us, no one else was there. I don't remember how the subject came up, but in that solitude I said to Bhagat Singh, trusting him implicitly: Let us pledge our lives to our country.

"Bhagat Singh's face turned very serious, and extending his hand to me he said: I do pledge."

At first Yashpal took part in the activities of Naujawan Bharat Sabha organized by Bhagat Singh, but after the Lahore Bomb Factory was unearthed in 1929, he too went underground and never looked back. As an active member of the *Hindustan Socialist Republican Army*, he came into contact with another well-known revolutionary, Chandra Shekhar Azad, who shot himself (1931) in a shootout with police in Allahabad. After the death of Azad he was chosen as a chief of the *Hindustan Socialist Republican Army*.

During the next two years, Yashpal made explosives at several secret factories, blew up the train carrying Viceroy Lord Irwin in 1929, took part in an attempt to free Bhagat Singh from Borstal Jail in Lahore, shot and grievously wounded two police constables in Kanpur when they tried to block an attempt by his group to escape. He also met his future wife, 17-year old *Prakashvati* who had left home to join the revolutionary party.

Yashpal was arrested in Allahabad in 1932 when his bullets ran out after an armed encounter with the police. He was one of the main accused in the concluded Lahore and Delhi conspiracy cases, but after a lengthy trial the government decided not to reopen these cases in view of the expenses involved. Some other charges against him could not be proven for lack of witnesses. In the end, he was given a life sentence.

In prison Yashpal taught himself enough French, Russian and Italian to read original works in those languages. He also wrote and re-wrote short stories that were later published as *Pinjare ki Uran* (Flights of a Caged Mind). In this life of discipline and contemplation came a surprise in the form of a petition by Prakashvati to the jail authorities that she wanted to marry Yashpal, the prisoner serving a life sentence.

Since the jail manual did not forbid a prisoner from getting married, the British superintendent gave his consent. The police did not want the notorious revolutionary to go to the civil court without handcuffs and leg irons, and Yashpal refused to get married tied up like a criminal. A compromise was reached when the Deputy Commissioner agreed to perform the marriage inside the prison. After the ceremony, Yashpal was returned to his cell to serve his life sentence, and Prakashvati went back to Karachi to finish her studies to become a dental surgeon which she had begun after her own arrest and subsequent release by the police.

Their's might be the only marriage ever

to take place inside a prison in India. When the news of the marriage leaked outside, the newspapers seized upon the novel idea, provoking the government to add a section to the Indian Jail Manual forbidding a sentence-serving prisoner to be married in the prison in future.

India moved toward self-government in 1938. As part of the election campaign, the Congress Party promised to release all political prisoners. Workers of Gandhi's movement were released immediately, but assurances were sought from the revolutionaries that they no longer believed in violence. Yashpal refused on the ground that it would appear that he had bargained with the government for his release. He was the last to be set free, on the condition that he would not be permitted to go back to Punjab. He then decided to make Lucknow, the capital of United Provinces (UP) where he was serving his sentence, his home.

*Viplava* was a milestone in Hindi and Urdu political journalism by Yashpal. Besides being immensely popular, it was also a forum where staunch Gandhians and avowed believers in non-violence and *satyagraha* (civil disobedience) debated social and political issues with equally staunch Marxists and hardcore revolutionaries. When Yashpal was put in prison for seditious writing, Prakashvati filled in as editor.

Yashpal never hid his preference for Marxist ideals, and the inefficacy of the movement led by the Congress Party and Mahatma Gandhi. His *Gandhiwad ki Shav-*

*pariksha* (Post-mortem on Gandhism), written in 1941 when Gandhi was alive, continues to be among his best-selling works. Although some of his early works showed the Communist Party as the saviour of Indian people, he himself never joined the party; in fact, the Communists later turned against him for his criticism of comrades who sacrificed free will and independent judgment to the Party's dictates.

The work showed Yashpal's deep knowledge of Indian classics and his command of Sanskrit., His political novel *Jhootha Sach* (1958 & 1960) is similar in scope and breadth to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and has been compared to the works of Balzac and Victor Hugo. Probably the only work of its kind in any language and often acclaimed as the definitive novel on India's partition, it chronicles the ups and downs in the lives of two families (a brother and sister, and his girlfriend/wife) in pre- and post-partition India. Critics praised the novel for its balanced depiction of both Hindus and Muslims, and readers loved its merciless portrayal of the Congress Party leaders in the making in British-free India.

That portrayal was so merciless that Yashpal was blatantly passed over for the Sahitya Academy Award given by the government. The issue of Congress Party criticism, and of Jawaharlal Nehru, resurfaced a decade later when his name was on the national honours list. Indira Gandhi, then prime minister, reportedly read the 'objectionable' pages of *Jhootha Sach* and found nothing objectionable.

Yashpal, the born anti-establishment rebel, was finally bestowed Padma Bhushan in 1970. The Sahitya Akademy tried to make amends by giving him the denied award in 1976 for his last novel *Meri Teri Usaki Baat*. It's not known if he'd have accepted it; he was too unwell to say either yes or no.

*Jhootha Sach* is the best known work of Yashpal, an epic novel written in two volumes - I. Watan Aur Desh (the motherland and the nation), II. Desh Ka Bhavishya (future of the nation). While the first one gives an account of the things taken place between 1943 to 15th August 1947 with the backdrop of Lahore, the second one accounts for the events starting from 15th August 1947 to January 1957 when the results of the second general elections of India came out, i.e., depicts the political events of the period covering the early forties to the late fifties. It gives an insight into the people's thought patterns and psyche in the pre-partition as well as the post-partition days and very naturally describes how the so-called idealists and nationalists of dependent India became the men not able to look beyond their vested interests after the country's political independence.

The story starts when one of the lead characters, Jaidev Puri, the elder son of a lower middle class family of a school teacher in Lahore, gets released from jail along with several other prisoners detained in the wake of the Quit India Movement. The very first scene which is of the death of his grandmother lends momentum to

the story and then there is no looking back either for the author or for the reader. The other protagonist of the novel is his sister Tara who is a woman of principles. At the start of the story, she is a nineteen years old teenager who is proud of her brother who is a freedom-fighter. Things move politically and socially in India, leading to newer and newer developments for the brother-sister duo. Tara falls in love with her classmate Asad who is a Muslim whereas Jaidev Puri succumbs to the charm of his student, Kanak whom he gives tuitions for English and who belongs to a well-off and reputed family of a known and respected political figure of Lahore. Tara gets married to a loafer, Somraj against her will and then only she realises that her so-called patriot brother is, in fact, a hypocrite who maintains double standards and is scared to do anything worthwhile for anybody else or for the cause of any principle or ideals. The house of Tara's in-laws is attacked by the Muslim rioters on her wedding night itself and while fleeing for her life, she has to undergo much trauma before she is rescued from a brothel and carried to Amritsar as a refugee. Puri gets stuck in a rioter attack on a train and circumstances take him to Jalandhar where he happens to meet his political senior in jail. Sood Ji. Thus the brother-sister duo loses its Watan (motherland) which is Lahore but now they are in their Desh (nation) which cannot be Lahore, for it is a part of Pakistan now. Here ends the first part.

The second part shows the

transformation of the Indians from the all sacrificing patriots to the people interested in and taking care of their vested interests only. Here comes the change in the principles and ideals of the brother who was, in fact, a pseudo-nationalist and now moves like a fan with the direction of the wind. He proves himself a hypocrite in the eyes of not only his parents but also his sweetheart Kanak also who is his wife now. He becomes a corrupt publisher cum businessman working in association with Sood Ji who is now encashing his so-called sacrifices made for the country prior to its independence.

The sister Tara, on the other hand proves that her principles and ideals were not just for the fair weather. She has to bear and foster them for her entire life. Firstly her parental family gets the news that she got burnt when the rioters set her in-laws' house to flames but later on her escape and the fact that she is alive, is known to all including Puri. She faces all odds and comes across all kinds of people but with her determination, courage and perseverance, she is able to carve a niche for herself in the cruel and the selfish world. She becomes a civil servant by clearing the Indian Civil Services Exam. Having seen a lot of things in her life, she is not ready to marry just anybody. Then Dr. Praan Naath who is now the economic adviser to the Govt. of India and who was her tutor in her Lahore days comes as a pleasant surprise in her life. Despite the age difference, they decide to get married but Puri manages his sister to

be charged for bigamy which is a punishable crime for a govt. servant. In the final scene, the marrying couple gets exonerated in the enquiry whereas Puri's mentor Sood Ji loses his seat in the general elections in January 1957.

The story has several sub-plots and several characters. The historical events as well as the historical characters have been woven in the fictional plot with finesse by the legendary author who has used his own freedom-fighting experience skilfully in authoring the book. The book spells out the riots and the Hindu-Muslim psyche in detail, yet it is nowhere biased. Neither the bashing of any community, nor the undue support to any community's prejudices towards the other. All the characters whether the lead ones or the supporting ones, are completely human. The novel shows that a human-being is a product of the circumstances prevailing at the particular moment or in a particular time. It describes crowd behaviour, the socio-political understanding of the educated Indian masses and the prejudices and stereotypes deep-seated in the psyche of the people of both the religious faiths with utmost sincerity and truthfulness.

In *Jhutha Sach* some of the Marxist intellectuals attack the communist party and its policies because they believe that, "the Communist party was not a national organisation; it was only a part of the international Communist movement. Its policies were formed to suite the strategies of international Communism rather than in response to the national needs."

(Yashpal *Jhutha Sach*, p.337.) Actually through a positive hero. Yashpal has asked “*what is wrong with it?*” i.e. an end of the system of imperialism in any country is helpful to democracy, it promotes democracy. How can a progressive policy hurt our national interest? Is it not true that even the Congress party seeks foreign assistance to solve the country’s food problem? Don’t we want international support on the issue of Kashmir? Are we not receiving aid and assistance from Great Britain, the U.S. and Soviet Union? If the party tries to formulate its policies in

accordance with the trend in the international progressive movement. *what is wrong with it?*

It is also their belief that the greatness of the Soviet Union lies in its efforts to build the independence of underdeveloped countries. Whereas the capitalist countries extend economic aid to the new nation to undermine their freedom, the Soviet Union helps them to become economically independent. It can be said thus, the positive hero is not swayed by narrow nationalistic loyalties.

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## Suraiya : Accursed Beauty of Krishna Mahal

By Kanan Jhingan

Translated by  
Anil Sud

Her mother had named her Suraiya, which means a cluster or chandelier of light or the third planet Kritika. ( Pleiades ). In her film journey during the 40s and 50s, she lived up to both the meanings of her name. Her big almond eyes, a sharp nose, a thin, delicate forehead cast an inimitable beauty on her dusky complexion, specially when she would laugh suddenly and with unrestrained abandon. Her personal life remained shrouded in an unraveled mystery. Acting in a variety of roles in films, and singing in her melodious voice, she swayed like a puppet whose strings were pulled by her grandmother. Through her entire life, she longed for her own love. Krishna Mahal should have resonated with festive, uninhibited love but it became a jail instead. She was destined to lead a cursed life in that prison. Like the Lady of Shallot (in the poem of the English poet Lord Alfred Tennyson), who lived in a cottage on the island of Shallot, on the river, alone. She was forbidden by a curse to see the outside world. She would look, in her mirror, at the passing girls and boys dressed in colourful dresses and weave those scenes together in her melodic voice. The village folk regarded her as a fairy and she knew if she looked outside directly, it would be the end for her. Years later, she saw, in her mirror, Lord Lancelot, a handsome, spiffy dandy on horseback.

Spellbound, she forgot all about the curse, the mirror, the web, the whole lot. She emerged in the open, sat in the boat and flowed along with the waves. The mesh was gone with the wind, the mirror broken. Her lifeless body reached Camelot. Lancelot looked at the body wistfully and sighed “God had created this beautiful woman with his unbounded grace.”

The lonely existence of the fated ‘Lady of Shallot’ mirrors the life and times of Suraiya.

Born in Gujranwala (now a part of Pakistan), Suraiya had her upbringing in Bombay. She had her schooling in the J. B. New Girls’ High School. A study of Persian literature and Quran were the building blocks of her personality.

Her entry into films was a mere coincidence. During her school vacation, she accompanied her ‘villain’ uncle Zahoor Saheb to see him shoot at the Mohan Film Studio. Nanubhai Vakil, the producer of Prakash Pictures looked at the 12 years old girl. He was looking for an artist to play the role of Mumtaz Mahal in her childhood days. That is how Suraiya became a child artist, acting in films like Taj Mahal. She also started singing in the children’s programme of All India Radio, encouraged by childhood friend Raj Kapoor and neighbour Madan Mohan. Music Director Naushad also heard her sing and gave her an opportunity to sing in Kardar’s film ‘Sharda’. Suraiya was the play back singer for Mehtab, a much older artiste. The 13 years old child singing star had to stand on a stool to reach the mike.

At the time of Suraiya’s entry into the film world, the reigning queens of the silver screen were Shanta Apte, Leela Chitnis, Shobhana Samarth, Kanan Bala and Devika Bose. A string of popular stars followed Suraiya – Nargis, Madhubala, Kamini Kaushal, Geeta Bali, Waheeda Rehman and Nutan. Suraiya remained the link between the traditional and the modern. She had to contend with the virtuosity of Nurjahan and Khurshid. The partition of the country saw both stars opting for and migrating to Pakistan. Now the sky was the limit for Suraiya and she soared, higher and higher.

In 1944 Suraiya got supporting roles in K. Asif’s film ‘Phool’, Mehboob Khan’s ‘Anmol Ghadi’ and ‘Dard’. In the love triangle of ‘Anmol Ghadi’, Suraiya, daughter of a rich man, is in love with Surendra but he loves Noorjahan. Noorjahan sang four songs, all of which became very popular, specially ‘Awaaz de kahan hai’. Suraiya sang only one song, ‘Socha tha kya, kya ho gaya’. The intensity with which she brought out the sadness of the protagonist, with her acting and her voice, was such that she was not too far behind Noorjahan in her performance. Her co-star Nadira’s father would come to the hall again and again, just to see Suraiya sing this song. He would leave as soon as the song sequence was over.

In 1945, she got a break in the leading role in ‘Tadbir’. The renowned actor-singer, Kundan Lal Sehgal had heard her sing in a rehearsal and on his recommendation, she got roles in two films ‘Omar Khayyam’



in 1946 and 'Parwana' in 1947.

Suraiya's link with director Kardar lasted a long time. The period 1944 to 1952, saw a unique blend of acting and singing in Sharda, Kanoon, Sanyog, Dard, Dillagi, Daastan and Deewana. Her songs in 'Pyar ki Jeet' in 1948 and 'Badi Behen' in 1949, under the music direction of Husnalal Bhagatram were very popular hits. 'Wo paas rahen ya door rahen' and 'Door jaane wale' were on the lips of all her fans. It was in 'Badi Behen' that Lata Mangeshkar sang 'Chhup chhup khade ho zaroor koi baat hai, pehli mulakaat hai'. The critics described the voice of the same Lata as too shrill and high pitched while comparing her with Suraiya and Shamshad Begum, though she was to pose a challenge to these singers in the times to come. At this very time, Naushad got Suraiya to sing 'Murali wale murali baja' and she sang 'Man mor hua matwala yeh kaisa jadoo daalare' in Afsar, composed by Sachin Dev Burman, which were widely acclaimed.

During this popular phase of Suraiya, Nargis and Kamini Kaushal had carved out a niche for themselves in films but since they were not singers, Suraiya remained on her pedestal. She was the highest paid artist of the time. She was a rage amongst her crazy fans when she rode in her American Buick car. It had become almost impossible for her to jostle through the crowds at the premiere shows of her films. Her admirers would be prepared to cross any limit to touch her or just to have a glimpse of her. Dharmendra reminisces till today how he used to walk miles to see

Dillagi. And he did this forty times.

Suraiya tasted success in Daastan with Raj Kapoor, her childhood friend. She was cast as an orphan in this film. She wins the heart of the hero but his sister hates her. Later, Raj Kapoor went his own way and paired up with Nargis.

Suraiya had a halo around her. All the employees and directors would give her a standing ovation when she would come to the sets for shooting. She was followed by her grandmother. Alongside was her uncle, a cigarette dangling on his fingers. Holding a box of the most expensive cigarettes in one hand and two thermos flasks in the other. The finest tea in one and fresh fruit juice in the other. Which one 'Baby' would need when, was hard to say. Even her maid and her make up man considered themselves to be a class apart.

She did not need rehearsals on the sets. Shooting would commence as soon as she came aboard. As soon as the scene was okayed, she would go and sit in the chair, between her grandmother and her uncle. The make up man would come running to her and the maid handed out from the bag whatever she needed. That's how the preparation for the second shot went.

Suraiya was cast with all of these stars – Surendra, Dev Anand, Rehman, Shyam, Bharat Bhushan, Singer Talat Mahmood (Waris), and Mukesh (Maashuka). But working together in Vidya (1948), Jeet (1949), Shair, Afsar (1950), Do Sitare (1951), brought Suraiya and Dev Anand close to each other. Their films were not box office hits but their love for each other

became an open book for the world. Suraiya's grandmother was now stalking her like a shadow, saying 'Baby, Baby' all the time. She was shackled with restrictions lest this attachment would grow deeper. She got an award for her performance in Sohrab Modi's film 'Mirza Ghalib', made in 1954. Her portrayal of Ghalib's beloved was nothing but a repeat of her real life in reel life. 'Dil-e-nadaan tujhe hua kya hai, aakhir is dard ki dawa kya hai' and 'Yeh na thi hamaari kismet ke visale yaar hota', sung by her under Ghulam Mohammad's direction brought out the beloved's yearning for Ghalib and at the same time, a lucid expression of tentativeness on her face, tempered by the social constraints of her real life. Pandit Nehru, while presenting the gold medallion to Suraiya said "you have enlivened the soul of Ghalib". The film was a milestone for Suraiya. In 1963 after 'Rustam Sohrab' she brought the curtain down on her film career and was thereafter lost into oblivion.

There is no way of knowing what Suraiya went through, away from the film world, confined to the four walls of her home. No friends, no one to share her secrets with. Years later, Dev Anand, her soulmate, wrote his autobiography, 'Romancing with Life'. It revealed a few pointers to the ache in their lives. These indications provide the only dim glimpses into the love and anguish of Suraiya and Dev Anand.

When Dev Anand got the role of a hero with Suraiya in the film Ziddi, their career graphs were poles apart. Suraiya was

at the pinnacle of popularity and Dev Anand was only on the starting blocks. Dev Anand was nervous, naturally and understandably. The first day, when Suraiya arrived on the set, Dev Anand was introduced to her. Before the Director could say anything, Dev Anand spoke up, "They call me Dev. What would you like to call me?" She laughed and said, "Dev, of course". It just took one scene for Dev Anand to be enamoured of Suraiya's eyes and her overall personality. The second shot called for Suraiya to come from behind and put her arms around Dev playing the piano. The very thought of the country's dream girl, the heart throb of everyone, being so close to him, sent waves of ecstasy in Dev. As the second shot was coming to a close, it was apparent that Suraiya too felt drawn towards Dev. Instead of sitting in the chair next to her grandmother, as always, she kept chatting with Dev. The inherent tentativeness of the first meeting had melted away. When Dev compared her eyes with a diamond, she was eager to hear more. And when Dev told her, "your nose is comely but a bit too long" she did not mind it. When he told her that he had a nick name for every girl he knew, she was impatient to know what hers would be. "I will call you Nosey" and from then on, he always called her by that name.

Suraiya's favourite hero was Gregory Peck. She saw his likeness in Dev Anand. But Dev desired a bigger niche in Suraiya's heart. So he was nicknamed "Steve". Nosey and Steve had become friends. They did not need any rehearsals for their romantic

scenes. On the sets also, they were not enacting the love scenes. They were living life with a new dimension of love. They were turning the romantic fantasies of youth into virtual reality. One scene required a flower to be put in Suraiya's hair while she was standing next to a flower bed. Dev Anand, ignoring the script, came quietly from behind, plucked a flower, chucked it in the air and caught it between his teeth. Suraiya pulled it and kissed it. The entire unit burst out into an applause. They were becoming intimate friends on their way to becoming lovers. The film journals had started the gossip trail also. Rumours were taking off. Their love tales were the topic of conversation all over the country.

Dev Anand, along with his brother, Chetan Anand, started his own company, Navketan Productions. There could only be one heroine for the unit. They met every day during the shooting of 'Afsar'. Visiting Suraiya at her home every evening was taken for granted. If he missed out a day, a reprimand was indicated. They would find a private corner of a full house for their dalliances, deliriously unaware of every moment of their love serial being watched and monitored. Their "you -are- the- only-one" looks for each other, in and out of the house, were obvious enough for people to jump to conclusions.

The numerous suitors for Suraiya's hand in marriage, were getting particularly restive. Every evening efforts were afoot to win her over. They would poison her family's mind with a flurry of stories against

Dev Anand, giving them a communal tinge. There would be appeals for 'Save Our Religion'. A Muslim girl to marry a Hindu... blasphemous! And a crime!

The grandmother was the custodian of morality, religion and money in the household. Her own opposition was taking a jihadi form. Suraiya's mother harboured a deep affection for Dev. But hers was a lonely voice in wilderness, muffled by outpourings of slander emanating from envy, day in and day out. Dev was no longer a welcome visitor in that house. It was the meeting point of all film folk, old and up coming directors, prospectives and hopefuls, running Dev down. No one noticed when he came and when he departed. Suraiya would watch all this with a heavy heart, but stood by helpless.

Grandmother's opposition to Dev came out in the open on the sets of film Afsar. She gave them no opportunity to speak to each other beyond the dialogues of the film. Proximity was forbidden in any film scene.

In an intimate scene, Dev was briefed on how he was to kiss Suraiya's big, closed eyes, lightly. But grandmother raised a storm. Shooting was held up for a long time. It had come to a standstill. Then a stratagem was used. An old acquaintance, an employee of the unit, manoeuvred grandmother out of the studio for a while and the shot was completed with finesse and without any hindrance.

Dev Anand had understood by now that the grandmother was the master of Suraiya's life and destiny. However,

increasing restraints on them by the grandmother only whetted their desire to be united. Meetings were possible only on the sets during shooting, under stringent, watchful eyes, and the vigil of cameras and dazzling lights. It was as if Suraiya's family would come armed and well equipped to rescue Suraiya from a carnivorous monster. But Dev did not give up. Divecha, the cameraman of 'Jeet' was very close to the family. Dev gave him a letter which was slipped into Suraiya's purse. She replied, "Your letter made me cry profusely. I too am dying to meet you. Call me tomorrow at seven. I will be near the phone." It was an endless wait; the clock had stopped. Finally, it was seven and the phone rang and Suraiya's 'Hello' tingled every nerve of Dev, wave after wave. Just then a voice, like the crack of a whip, was heard, "who is it?" Suraiya's shrieks shattered all plans of Dev. Still, he called several times and each time it would be cut off followed by a threat, "Next time you will be talking to the police." Is this life worth anything, now? Dev mused. He called again after an hour. This time it was her mother in a muted tone "This is Mummy here. I can't put you through to Suraiya. She can't stop crying. My mother is also here. Call after an hour." When he called, there was a message for him, "Tomorrow night Suraiya will be on the terrace at 11-30 pm. Go straight up." Dev was apprehensive. Was it a trap being laid for him? But if I do not trust Suraiya's mother, who else can I count on? It may be perilous but one has to face it even though I may land up in jail.

For this daring rendezvous, he took along with him a police inspector Tara who was a friend. They reached the venue much before time and sat on the parapet wall on the seafront. It had a vantage view of the movements on the terrace of Krishna Mahal. Tara gave a small flashlight to Dev to be used as a signal in case of any danger. At 11-30 Dev went up to the terrace. She was sitting near the water tank. The moment she saw Dev, she spread out her arms and ran towards him. They remained locked in each other's arms for a long, long time." Will you marry me?, Dev asked. "I love you, dearly, very, very dearly", was the reply as the embrace tightened.

The next day a pricey diamond ring, probably the most expensive in the market, was purchased. Dev sent it to Suraiya through Divecha. When he returned he looked very happy. Suraiya had reaffirmed her intense love for Dev. Thus a 'proxy engagement' took place but there seemed to be no way of meeting her. Their films had been completed. Signing new ones together was out of question. Days turned into weeks. When Divecha was assigned to make an attempt to visit her house, the doors were slammed shut in his face. The house was out of bounds for everyone. After a lot of enquiries it was learnt that Suraiya was crying the whole day, consoled by her mother and none else. It was commonly conjectured that if Suraiya did not back out, either she would be liquidated or her grandmother would commit suicide. Suraiya wept and sobbed all the time, beseeching mercy. Eventually,

she gave up and surrendered. On oath she was now to banish Dev from her life, a thorn pulled out of her body. She went to the seashore, looked at the diamond ring one last time and then chucked it in the sea for the undulating waves to lend a rhythm to their love ballads.

After this closing episode, Dev poured out his heart on the shoulders of his brother, seeking solace. Closing this

chapter, Dev set out on a new journey, seeking new destinations and new companions.

Suraiya was never seen thereafter in any social gathering. She put on a cloak of loneliness and though alive, was enveloped by a deathly stillness. Even after her grandmother's death, she remained chained and imprecated. On 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2004, she breathed her last.

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**Kanan Jhingan** : born 1938, Karachi (undivided India), educated and worked at Delhi. Kanan was reader in Hindi at Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi from 1961 to 2003. Author of seven books, she specialises in writing on films and philosophy. She has translated Amitav Ghosh's novel 'The Glass Palace' for Penguin India. Kanan lives in Delhi.

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# Poetry

## Six Poems

Vishwanath

[1]

Who is he  
within me  
who does not let me be

Whatever I do  
Whatever I say  
Whatever I think  
Whatever I believe  
He questions all these  
He would not  
let me be in peace

He is indeed  
an integral part of me  
Even if I wish  
he would not go  
I wonder  
Whether he is a friend or foe.

[2]

Today the sea is in a rage  
Like the roaring lion in a cage  
Mighty, menacing waves  
Are surging forward  
Raising ten-feet high  
Moving walls of water  
Sweeping aside, tearing asunder  
Whatever comes their way

But, even the mightiest  
Meet their nemesis  
As the waves reach by the shore  
They recede meekishly  
Leaving behind  
A trail of froth and foam.

[3]

I am scared  
of the mirror  
Whenever I look into it  
A weird face stares back at me  
  
At times it wears a sinister smile  
And mocks at me  
Flaunting a certain intimacy with me  
  
I believe it is not me  
I cannot make out  
Who is he.

[4]

If I do not move fast  
I will be left behind  
  
I cannot move fast  
I cannot push myself in the race  
beyond my placid pace

If I look ahead  
I am the last in the line  
But, if I look backwards  
the first place in the row is mine.

[5]

Let me live  
the winter of my life  
with as much warmth  
as the summer of my youth

If youth was  
Life's golden phase  
Let my Sunset Years  
be full of love and grace.

[6]

Autumn leaves  
of different hues  
pale yellow, copper brown  
rust and red  
fluttering down  
in a gentle waltz  
to lay a carpet  
of dried leaves.

Dry, crips autumn leaves  
Trampled and mingled with dust  
whisper the ultimate secret of life

Dust thou art  
and unto dust shall thou return.

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**Vishwanath** : is a seasoned poet, fluent and expressive in many languages, including Hindi, English, Urdu, Sanskrit and Punjabi. He is Vice President of D.A.V. Organisation and has a publishing house. He lives in Delhi.

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# Poetry

## FIVE POEMS

Rituraj

Translated by :  
Nishi Tiwari

### THE UNPOETIC MISERY

Mother Earth, so luxuriantly cropped, abundantly verdant  
Seething with prosperity,  
Perhaps that's why, the grimy cloth carelessly thrown over  
Jeevan Baiga's shoulders  
Remains unseen.

Sahbji! Don't sit on the bare floor  
Please take...do take this cloth,  
Let me spread it for you.  
Oh no! how awfully it smells, the stench of sweat and dirt  
I'll spread my shirt instead.

And inside,  
Nothing...absolutely nothing, except for the  
Empty vessels (spelling hunger)  
And the extinguished hearth.  
While, his child, cried continually...perpetually...endlessly.

Sahbji, let him cry and whimper,  
Don't give him anything, bread, biscuit...nothing

Nothing at all.  
He must learn to fight hunger.  
It is not just a question of one day,  
Sir, you will go away, but we...remain here  
Doomed to live our lives thus,  
In misery, famished...ever.

The evening was fast descending, and the dark night  
Desperately waiting on the threshold,  
Like, an expectant beggar.  
Mother Earth having come back empty handed  
To sleep...a starved sleep  
And  
The child lay silent...still, shackled in hunger.

## THE LAST CRY

Before the waters engulf the landscape,  
And houses lie entombed in their watery graves;  
Before floating carcasses appear bobbing,  
For five days,  
Struggling for survival on khejri leaves.  
The last word agonizingly uttered will be...  
Save me!

Encircled by water lies everything,  
Every inch of a tiny world is to be entombed  
Harsood...Harsood everywhere Harsood.

All arrangements are, no doubt, up to the mark...  
No shortfalls.  
Still the last word agonizingly uttered will be...  
Save me!

Those for whom life is full of ease,

Their names will be immortalized in books ancient  
In language sublime.

Only he whose last agonized cry had been  
Save me!  
He and only he will have drowned,  
Entombed in the watery grave.

## HER TOUCH

She, after academic completion, tied in wedlock  
With the chosen one.  
Till then, embracing a different world, lost in a watery den I lay  
Unaware of her desires  
And her union  
remembered, or perhaps, forgotten to a great extent.

No propelling memory will recall my name  
Or kindle the cinders, at her marriage anniversary jubilations.  
Nor will anyone remind her of my death commemorative ceremony.  
Maybe, in conversations, I'll surface up thus...  
In glimpses and flashes... ever evanescent  
"Papa was nice but had become irritable towards the end...  
Stationed at the doorway of death"

Her daughter will try to salvage, her grandfather's photograph,  
From her junk of broken toys.  
But who will tell her that many aspects of her *nana's* life  
Remained unrecorded.  
A long desolate journey over a difficult terrain,  
And he, drenching in sweat  
No bend in sight,  
No friendly face,  
No friend, wrapped in an anguish of loneliness  
Who will say that it took him only forty-eight years  
To dispel the darkness, to regain himself.

Diligently trying to convince her man,  
Recounting, illumining the dark treasure trove.  
*Father was no fool, so what if he wrote poetry  
Some beings are truly great, even after having failed,  
And some scarcely audible words more valuable,  
more potent than a great epic.*

Sometimes while flicking dust off books and things,  
her hands may chance to touch, some long forgotten book  
unread.

## STRUGGLE

While others are sweeping...cleaning  
Will you keep sitting contentedly in sweet repose  
Behind clean enclosures...leisurely basking in others' toil?

While others are lighting fires with smoke and heat  
Invading every pore, will you keep fattening yourself  
On other's toil?  
Sinking into sloth?

Why hesitate...why not accept  
It is others' toil that lends your face a healthy glow  
But, those grimy faces smudged with soot  
Will not let you repose in peace  
Lifelong.

Don't cease to be...awaken, fashion yourself anew  
Pick the broom  
Come clean...sweep and clean,  
Blow through the smoke and heat, light the fire  
For this, is the only cure.

Fight...overcome...grab your individuality  
Remain glued to the wheel of motion.

## MUKTIBODH

We wanted to preserve him, shielding him  
From a violent gale, that disrupts a bird's flight.

His solemn dignity and majestic aura  
Shimmering crystal clear  
on his tilted face...scarred and bruised.

Him, whom we wanted to preserve,  
As a unique legacy of, a once magnificent culture  
Now, tottering desolate...was fatigued  
To the core.  
But even then, the glow emanating from his face  
Was crystal clear, exuding ripples of aura.  
A zigzag of knotted veins, standing out prominent on his hands  
Symbolizing, skeins of memories, aspirations woven  
Inextricably into the brilliant tapestry of his intellect.

There his language did not like a butterfly  
Flit from flower to flower, ever searching nectar and fragrance.  
But, like the miner's premeditated dynamite explosion  
Full of fragmented fireworks, violently impacting  
Multi-directional.  
Small words and phrases full of restless energy and  
Stupendous friction,  
Grating on human consciousness.

Like a submarine under-water, peeling off layer after layer  
Of scum, gathered over the years on the steps  
Immersed in water.  
The lone traveller...robust, strong, under whose footprints,  
The past vapourized...receding out of sight,  
Followed by a serpentine procession, enthralled.  
In each face mirrored his own  
Every face, entire culture, revealing the brilliant secrets of salvation

Hidden within, the threatening thunder clouds of grief,  
Ready to explode.

For ages swathed in frayed garment  
Sitting on his haunches on dilapidated steps and,  
The innumerable galaxies splashed across the firmament  
Kept his wife enchanted, lost in the sweet dreams of her children.

His hands, bruised and wounded with the burden of domestic drudgery  
But, deep within, scintillated brilliantly,  
A burst of prismatic hues,  
Meandering,

Navigating through a maze of words, he kept hurling,  
Dazzling torches from the magic spell of his solitude  
Beyond infinity,

Beyond eternity...dispelling the darkness.  
And a blazing glorious sun up rose  
Clawing its way out, surmounting literary barriers  
From putrefying greeny layers of mouldy literature.

Those who often have demolished barriers  
Damp walls under peeling plasters they too, stood amazed,  
they too hear, the poet's approaching footfall  
plodding and splashing through the cold, sticky, swishy swamp.  
Insignificant aluminium vessels flashing and glinting through dry hay  
As if

Flinging challenges headlong.  
Deep beneath the thick lifeless layers of man's being  
Lie tremendous energies, locked and stowed away  
Simmering within.

The poet's deep insight incredibly piercing darts through  
The murky indolence.

rising from a deep abyss he clutches and drags you below

and then...ripping apart impervious complacencies  
dead layers of lifeless stupor.....layers of nothing  
he ascends once again, magically extricating you  
ever climbing towards the heavens ever like a brilliant sun  
suffused with exhilaration  
amazingly emerging from layers of scum...a vista glorious to behold

Serenity pervasive, just like the fading out  
Of the poem's loud rhythm.

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**Rituraj** : born 1940 in Rajasthan is a prominent poet. He taught English until his voluntary retirement and later worked as a language expert in Radio China International. He has been honoured with many literary awards including Pahal, Bihari and Subramanya Bharti awards. Has a number of published works including, Ek Marandharma, Pul par pani, Kitna Thoda Waqt etc.

**Nishi Tiwari** : a post graduate in English from Benaras Hindu University, has taught English literature in various colleges on ad-hoc basis. She has also worked as Extension Officer in the government of Bihar and has been teaching English literature for several years. She lives in Ranchi.

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# Poetry

## Five Poems

Divik Ramesh

Translated by

Sunita Jain, Anamika, Vishwa Mohan Tiwari

### GRAIN IN HOUSE

Though bought with borrowed money  
there is grain in the house  
tonight.

The lady of the house is happy  
she has mud-coated the courtyard  
Joyously.

The rolling pin and bread board  
are flapping their wings;  
the lady is happy.

There are no vegetables to  
go with bread,  
but the lady is happy.

She will grind salt and pepper together  
and garnish it with a pinch of coriander  
the stone-slab and mill-stone are thrilled.



Grain, though bought with borrowed money,  
the man and his lady are happy.

The walls too are happy  
there will be respite now  
from the daily household bickering.

The children have wiped their noses clean,  
the broom smiles like the woman next door.

The house it seems is vibrating,  
the wife is happy, and happy her man;  
there is finally some grain  
in the house tonight.

## THE SURPLUS EGG

We are four.  
And the eggs are five.  
If there comes a decent guest  
We can very well  
Treat him to the surplus egg,  
    Yes, we can.  
But who cares to come?  
Shilpa's Papa;  
    Never!  
We alone keep visiting them  
We alone keep visiting folks  
    All the time.

And I wonder  
If ever  
Will someone note  
That we also lay  
Breakfast on the table at times  
At times we do

Luxuriate in eggs  
And at times we do not have  
To fight shy of what we eat.  
Oh. if ever Shilpa's father visits us,  
We, of course, will  
Treat him to eggs.

### LITTLE OPEN ARMS

And the sky, how large is it ?  
Very large!  
Very very large!  
Answered the child  
Spreading his arms  
Stretching them with all the power  
At his command  
As if the blue sky entire  
He had encompassed.  
And water in the ocean, how much is it?  
So much, so much!  
He waved his arms  
As if straddling the ocean.  
And the mountain, how high is it?  
That much, that much!  
Extending his arms up above  
Standing on his toes,  
He looked at me  
And the earth?  
This much, this much!  
And he ran  
And embraced his mother  
In his little arms  
And how weary was I  
Sizing and gauging the sky.  
Fathoming the ocean  
Scaling the invisible summit.

Piecing together the fragmented earth  
How exhausted had I become  
Struggling and wrestling with  
These simple questions ?  
Indeed, I had forgotten  
The sky is he,  
The ocean is he,  
The mountain is he  
The earth is he  
Truly is, the whole creation  
In his little open arms!

## GHOSTS

In this village of mine, 'KIRARI'  
Apart from this pond, 'MANGOTHAR'  
And this tomb of sufi saint  
Ficus religiosa, the peepal tree  
Is the only survivor now  
That is worth talking about.

Now surrounded by  
Grass rough and tall  
Is a large abandoned well  
Just by the side of the peepal  
Nobody knows whether  
The mighty peepal sprouted first  
Or the well was dug first.

Since my childhood  
Often I have heard  
Sobs, shrieks and laughter  
In the dead of many a night  
Gushing from the mighty peepal

Hoary persons swear

Naag and nagin, the cobra pair,  
The residents of this ancient well  
Indeed are spirits.  
And the mighty peepal  
Is the abode of ghosts, male and female.

I cannot recollect any night  
When I could pass the peepal  
Without a numbing fright.

Villagers walk past the mighty peepal  
On nights only when they must  
But their hands they fold  
As in prayer  
And chant names of Gods in holy fear

They listen  
With rapt attention  
Fascinating tales by the cowherds told  
Of male and female ghosts  
These are cowherds only who are blessed  
With ghosts' affection  
Dining with ghosts  
Gossiping with them  
Making them the guards for their animals  
Incidents mysterious  
Are all commonplace  
In the world of cowherds

By the side of peepal  
On this road, this year  
The traffic has increased  
Yet many oil lamps are lit  
On the platform under the mighty peepal  
Though some have voiced their discontent  
Many still shiver with fear  
Of the residents of the mighty peepal

## Part-2

I have heard it said  
The gentle wife of Choudhary  
Committed suicide  
When so much tortured  
By the younger wife in rivalry  
She is the only one from the wealthy  
Who has become a ghost.

There are male ghosts, only two,  
One simple brahmin  
The second Raam Singh Kahaar  
The water carrier and menial too.  
both had jumped in this large well  
The brahmin  
Due to his life of poverty  
And Raam Singh Kahaar  
Due to rape of his wife Imartee.  
Raam Singh Kahaar then  
Was only eighteen.  
It is said that  
The Cobra couple  
Residents of the well  
Are no other then Raam Singh and Imartee  
Bigger oil-lamps are lit  
Specially for these two ghosts  
But people are frightened  
Of Raam Singh most.

Raam Singh Kahaar attacks only foul and wanton  
And can be exorcised  
Only after painstaking difficulties  
Whom nobody wanted to know  
Who could be beaten and paraded  
Same Raam Singh Kahaar  
Is now dreaded  
In villages far and near

But nobody dare call him names  
And say people wizened  
Nobody had ever heard  
Of a ghost  
So cruel and intractable  
As Raam Singh Kahaar, the menial

It took a long time for people to believe  
It is Raam Singh Kahaar  
Who has become so shameless  
After turning into a ghost  
His innocence he has lost

Raam Singh Kahaar, the menial  
Attacks only women immoral  
And to get him exorcised  
Is an expensive ordeal.  
Raam Singh never attacks women  
From families poor and simple  
He only, if at all, warns them  
Often, she-ghosts attack women sinful  
At the instance of Raam Singh Kahaar,  
No More menial

The simple brahmin  
Comes out, if ever, hardly,  
A shy ghost is he  
Who is satisfied easily  
It is very amazing  
In this world of ghosts  
There is no division  
Of class or damn castes.  
She ghost, wife of Choudhary even  
Respects fully Kahaar Raam Singh.

### Part-3

Often in the dark nights  
Drivers and conductors  
Returning from their jobs  
Have seen the Kahaar  
In deep mournful sobs. It is heard,  
All the ghosts cry and mourn  
Loudly with the Kahaar

But Raam Singh has never  
Said as much as a word  
To the drivers and conductors,  
Yes, he has shared  
Jokes and tales with them  
On occasions rare.  
But nobody is so daring  
As to look at Raam Singh  
All of them return  
With a dread in their hearts  
Cowherds only have dined with them  
And have, at times, for their cows  
Made them act as guards.

It is really strange  
All the she-ghosts residing  
On the mighty peepal  
Belonged to this village.  
Jumped have they all  
Into this large well  
Cloistered by rough elephant grass.

Nobody sympathises with these  
Women of poor families.  
Yet to safeguard themselves  
They all get nails  
Driven into door frames.  
Causes unknown of suicides

Of many female ghosts  
Each one has exposed  
By 'possessing' a woman  
Of decadent abode.  
But nobody sympathises  
With the victims who have died  
Although they are all terrified  
Of the female ghosts.

It is a wonder  
Women of poor families  
Are slaving still under threat  
But powerful and fearless  
She-ghosts of poor families  
Get worshipped, again, under threat.

## UP AGAINST BEASTS

(The Statement may sound deranged /But not issued by a  
man crazed)

Yes, here !  
just here were they seen  
on this very track  
we all tread time and again  
each day.

They were paws  
with each claw  
throbbing loud  
the lusty blood  
of those bloody beasts on the prowl.

Just here  
printed on this sand  
were those paws !



What horror  
clawing the bare chest  
right to its ribbed core !

I came  
simply  
to speak the horror out  
muffling each footfall.  
The witches that lurk in these trees  
must have rubbed them away  
danced them into flat sand now.

Look !  
now too  
its swoons,  
so inert  
so still it lies  
if only  
you care to see with care.

Oh,  
can no one  
really  
carry it to the town hospital  
quick !

Those bloody beasts  
will  
yet erupt again.  
I know too well by now

that they wander  
yet on the prowl.

No,  
'twas no delusion of mine,  
let it not be  
just tossed aside.

Will you still doubt me when I say  
that under some charm  
I witnessed  
the huge proportions of those beasts  
emanate  
enormous  
from  
the sharp printed  
paws

I came simply  
to speak the horror out  
muffling each footfall.

However could I know  
that in such  
clear, broad daylight  
the witches that lurk in these trees  
would dance them flat again !

O, how can I even tell  
what paws they were !

But wait !  
wait hushed in hiding with me,  
we'll pounce upon them  
just as they appear again—  
those bloody beasts !

Ha, ha, ha,... No ?

Right  
We'll do yet another trick,  
let's print the sand  
with our own bare feet,  
and who knows  
that reading those prints  
I may decode them to get

those same bloody paws once printed on this sand ?

Ha, ha, ha, ha,...

What !  
you sulk away already ?  
But how shall I ever fight  
those beasts alone !

They will yet erupt again  
the minute you're lost to view  
I'm sure they wander yet on the prowl.

The witches will throttle the track.  
The pounding beasts  
will claw the chest—  
riding  
ripping it to the core !

How then, all alone  
can I come to its rescue ?

Not even when I'm martyred  
will it ever be redeemed.

Just wait !  
do not fear  
for am I not here too ?

Just look for a moment  
into its eyes  
we tread it each day  
and very often so.

Can we look on in dumb silence  
and watch it at its last painful gasp?

Do you think

it happens to be  
my rustic mother of our village,  
who  
in the clear, board daylight  
was stoned to death—  
then consumed by flames  
and no rascal was ruffled  
no stir was ever caused ?

Now this track  
is one  
unbroken, entire track  
having lost which  
whatever shall we tread !

Come, don't doubt me still  
I can place those beats for sure  
but never can I rout them all alone !

It's certain they'll erupt again—  
As they wander yet on the prow.

I sure did see them  
what perilous paws they were  
printed on this very sand !

---

**Divik Ramesh** : born 1946 is a prolific, prominent poet and academician; has been professor and principal of a college in Delhi University and on visiting faculty at Hankuk Univ. Seoul, Korea, has several collections of poems and is honoured with Hindi Academy's and N.C.E.R.T. awards. He lives in Noida.

**Sunita Jain** : born 1940, is a well known Hindi poet and short story writer; has many published works including books in English. She has received several national awards and a Padmashri honour in 2004. She lives in New Delhi.

**Anamika** : born 1961, is also an eminent poet of Hindi who teaches English at a College of Delhi University. She often translates from Hindi to English. She writes fiction and is a noticeable voice in feminist discourse. She lives in New Delhi.

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# Poetry

## Five Poems

Madan Kashyap

Translaed by  
Shobha Narain

### THE WAIT

It is that critical hour  
When the koel has stopped  
In its singing track  
And the cock hasn't as yet  
Heralded the break of day.  
The noisy cricket  
Languorous, is hushed to silence  
and stars  
Return to their hiding place.

At this hour  
All around it is  
Darkness deep  
Calm and peaceful  
This treachery infested  
Earth appears,  
This is the time  
When even dogs and jackals  
Fall asleep.

This is the time  
When anger  
Losing its fangs  
Suckles innocently  
This is the time  
When hatred  
Loses its sting.

Silence sounds  
Like the live music  
As if,

an old woman  
The solitary mother  
Is singing  
To the rhythm  
Of her tear soaked stifled wait  
A song of farewell.  
Slowly,  
The dark night  
Is slipping past  
On its angular slope.

## AT LEAST

At least,  
There is still air on this earth  
And air is free.

At least,  
At some places  
Water dispensers  
Dole out water free,  
And at some place  
A sundry soul  
Serves water

Free of charge.  
At least  
Roads do not expect to be paid;  
As you walk on them;  
At least there is no tax  
On sunlight  
Though it hardly  
Reaches the urban homes.

At least,  
You can visit  
Many a park free;  
You can touch the sea  
Without payment,  
You can have glimpses  
Of the rising and the setting sun,  
All for free.

Lucky at least  
That there is this  
'at least'.

## MOTHER'S SONGS

What else did mother have  
A dusky face or big eyes  
That lovingly nurtured hopes  
And countless songs.

Spring of laughter  
Would spurt  
From sorrows rock  
When my infant head  
Rested in her lap.

Mother did not own a palace

but she had songs  
of mansions and attics big,  
She had songs of golden plates  
With a vast sumptuous spread  
Of dishes fifty six.  
And songs of silken robes.

In those songs  
I would sail  
Across the river  
In displeasure,  
But father in his silver boat  
Would come  
To coax me back.

I would have a crown of gold on my head,  
I would write pearl like syllables,  
On a sandal slate.  
Never in those songs  
Barefoot was I.

In those songs  
The entire earth was mine  
So was the starry sky  
Millions of stars shone bright  
In my milk way.

I owned the ocean  
Where countless waves  
Marched their routes  
To a melodious tune.

All my castles  
Had open gates  
All my temples  
Had chiming bells  
In those songs  
I wasn't weak in the knees



Even if threatened I might be.  
In these songs  
Killing the demon  
I would marry the princess  
Treasures immense would I bring  
From Rangoon.

In life however,  
Triumphant is the tyrant  
But in those songs  
Never would he win.

For festivals and ceremonies  
Countless were the songs  
Songs of sweat  
And sweet smell of grounded wheat  
Mixed in them.

It was an ocean  
Of melodies  
In mother's eyes,  
That she could sing  
Even of melancholy

Her life hanged  
On most of ceremonies  
Like a tight canopy.

For a single rite  
She had several songs  
Or for several rites  
A single song would do  
Mother's collection of songs  
Was wondrous indeed!

## MOTHER'S PHOTOGRAPH

There was a photograph of mother,  
That I saw somewhere when I was a child,

Ma was in the centre.  
On both her sides were two women,  
Perhaps her friends or some distant relatives.  
I could not recognize them

That was the only photograph of mother;  
Perhaps these women who were in the photo  
Might have a copy  
But I do not know.  
When Ma died  
I, her eldest son  
Was just eight years old.  
She was operated in the city of Patna  
I want to see the doctor's operating knife

But I do not know  
Even his name.

When slightly older,  
I asked, father  
About that doctor, about that photograph  
Father could not tell anything.  
Father's ultimate weapon is his silence.  
Father mostly does not reply to a question,

If he is forced to speak  
He utters such bitter words  
That render me speechless.

I tried on my own  
To find that photograph  
But it could not be found  
When father did not take care of mother

Could he be expected to take care of mother's photo?

In mother's box there were  
Some issues of 'Kalyan'  
Along with grand mother's letters.  
In father's box were found  
Some film magazines  
Of the years forty-eight, forty-nine,  
Some priceless postage stamps  
Of the second world war,  
And some documents  
Of possession of land  
And its division.  
But mother's photograph...  
It wasn't there.

Gradually these were lost  
Ma's reminders.  
There were some sarees of mother  
Given away to sister  
For her wedding,  
The box was made of tin  
It broke as it rusted.  
Some ornaments were there too,  
About them also  
Father does not say a word.

Only a pair of earrings remained.  
And a white sheet  
Which mother was embroidering  
With skeins of green.  
It remained unfinished.  
I have preserved this  
Along with her memories.

There is nothing anywhere,  
But in my heart  
I still have

Some blurred images of mother  
As my eyelids snap shut,  
Mother's shadowy pictures  
Caressingly descend  
Before me.

---

1. Kalyan—A Hindi journal of Hindu mythology and values.

## MY DAUGHTER'S RITE OF PASSAGE

Last 'Phagun'  
She had lusterless eyes  
Last 'Sawan'  
Her songs were without pain.  
But suddenly she has grown  
Like the silk-cotton tree  
Without my realization  
My daughter  
In front of my eyes  
Has grown by leaps and bounds.

When she was born  
The well and the pond.  
Would be full to the brim,  
The river would be  
Over flowing its banks.  
In the month of 'Bhadoon'  
It would rain in torrents.  
It was a rainy night when  
She was born,  
When the rain drops  
Continued to slither  
In a watery string.  
Not stopping even for a moment.

Now she is grown up  
And the ponds have dried,  
The water in the well  
Has receded to its bottom  
The river seems to have changed too,

No more the same river  
In the forests of reeds and tall grass,  
It appears  
As a narrow line in motion.

My daughter is growing  
So does her loneliness,  
But  
She still loves to chatter with birds  
Pick up a fist-fight with flowers  
Or lean restingly against the trees,  
But  
Everything is changed  
I guess.  
Birds don't warble as sweetly as before

Stinging to the eye  
Are the colours of gaudy flowers  
Fearful are the shadows  
Of the darkened trees.

My daughter is growing  
The wolves and the jackals are growing too!  
Mother's love is deluged by anxiety,  
Father's rock like strength has fissures appearing,  
That break it,  
Because the daughter is growing.

Baba, baba  
Hang me like the sheaf of corn  
On a cross beam

Hide me like the red-rice grains  
In the granary.  
The corn cob is protected by its covering.  
Rice by its husk  
The 'dholna' by its box  
Who would save you

My dear daughter?  
Lower your eyelids  
My dear daughter  
Shorten your sleep  
Don't let your eyes shimmer with happiness,  
Don't let your laughter spill out of the corner of your lips.  
Let your pain remain hidden in your heart.  
Let your thoughts be buried  
Let your hunger be controlled.  
And learn  
To let your 'self'  
Be entombed.

---

1. **Dholna**—A necklace that married women wear. It is not only a symbol of their marital status but is held as a very precious piece of ornament.

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**Madan Kashyap** : born 1954 Bihar, is a poet and essayist. His major books are *Lekin udas hai Prithvi*, *Kavi ne Kaha*, *Neem Roshni mein*. His essays are in three collections. He has been honoured with *Shamsher Samman*. He is also into journalism. He lives in Ghaziabad.

**Shobha Narain** : is a poet and short story writer. She teaches English in a College of Delhi University. She lives in New Delhi.

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# Poetry

## Four Poems

V.K. Jain

Translated by the poet

### GOVERNANCE OF TIME

Time benign  
Thy force is Thee  
A force universal  
Not touched, nor seen  
No sound, no smell  
Neither heard, nor felt

Time eternal  
No beginning, no end  
No birth, no death  
No limit my Thee  
A force on move  
Ever going ahead  
No break, no rest  
Not turning behind

Time universal  
And is equal to all  
No favour, no revenge  
No love, no hate  
Opportunity of devotion  
Is offered to all

To reform their destiny  
Depicted on Thee

Present of the universe  
Is present in Thee  
Past of the universe  
Is in books of Thee  
Time gone beyond  
Is the past of all  
Time to come  
Is an enigma for all

My past is gone  
With time beyond  
My present is being  
Coded on Thee  
A point of time  
Is coded in billions  
All events in universe  
Are coded on Thee

Inceptions, intentions  
Thinking and working  
Billions of events  
Are coded on Thee  
Thou destiny of all  
Is depicted on Thee

I live my life  
In cycles of Thee  
Moving ahead  
With time my Thee  
My life is flowing  
With time my Thee

Events of my life  
Are coded on Thee  
My destiny is designed



On time by 'Thee.'  
My end is depicted  
On time by 'Thee

In a span of my life  
On time my 'Thee  
Force of my life  
Is to keep me alive  
Living with forces  
In universe around  
Bound with time  
And forces celestial

Time will bring  
My destiny depicted  
My journey is limited  
By time my 'Thee  
Bound with time  
My destiny with 'Thee  
I drift with time  
In cycles of 'Thee  
My beginning and end  
Is depicted on 'Thee

Events to bring  
Changes in universe  
Evolution in universe  
Is designed by 'Thee  
Events created  
Are coded on 'Thee  
Destiny depicted  
On time my 'Thee!

Evolution of a cell  
And of all in universe  
Depend on forces  
Governed by 'Thee  
All forces in universe

Are working ahead  
Having place on time  
And bound with Thee

Events are created  
By forces in universe  
Evolutions are brought  
By time my Thee  
Segregation, division  
And changes created  
By working of all  
Thy forces, in universe

Events of creation  
And destruction O! Thee  
By action reaction  
Of forces in universe  
Process of changes  
To develop in demand  
Keeping the universe  
In balance by Thee

Creation by events  
Is gain some where  
Destruction by events  
Is relief some where  
Losses and gains,  
Agony and relief  
Destiny of all  
Was designed by Thee

Balancing of universe  
Is an art of Thee!  
Some where Thy need  
To pull a string  
Some where Thy need  
To loosen the string  
All thy forces

Are working in unison  
So strange and unique  
Is thy art, O Thee!

Forces of all  
The living and the dead  
Air and water  
Material and fire  
Earth and the planets  
Celestial and Thee  
All forces are working  
Alone and together  
Riding on time  
Creating some events  
Circumstances created  
By events on Thee

Forces are working  
In universe around  
With forces celestial  
And time my Thee  
All forces to bring  
The changes in universe  
I learn to live  
With changing events

Force of my life  
With forces around  
Made me live  
With affairs in the world  
Evolved and grew  
With affairs around  
Bound with time  
And forces in universe

My inherent nature  
Is to work to live  
To know the mechanism

Of working in universe  
Actions, reactions  
Of forces in universe  
Develop a process of  
Reaction in me

My intense desire  
Is to learn and work  
Events in universe  
Make me to learn  
Circumstances created  
Compel me to work

Conception in me  
By reactive forces  
For actions reactions  
My thinking and working  
My intentions and judgments  
Are coded on Thee  
Thus! Karmas design  
My destiny on Thee

## LIFE IN A BODY SHELL

Two cells united  
To make me, Thee  
Material of universe  
Made me, Thee  
Decided by time  
Thy force is Thee  
A force of life!  
Entered in me

Time is to tell  
For the birth of a cell  
Destiny of cell

Is depicted on Thee  
Time decided  
With forces around  
Growth and shape  
And living on earth

A place was created  
For me to come  
To balance the universe  
Some where by Thee

Time is to judge  
With forces celestial  
Where and how  
To place me on earth

I am a product  
Of time my Thee!  
I am a part of the  
Universe O! Thee  
I came on earth  
As a part of an event  
Circumstances were created  
For me to come

I was born with  
A shape unique  
At a place unknown  
Decided by Thee  
My parents were chosen  
By Thou O! Thee  
My life is bound  
With time my Thee

My birth on earth by  
Thy virtue O! Thee  
Virtue designed  
My life on earth

Thy virtue made me  
A different creed  
My shape my thinking  
My working unique

Billions of creatures  
Are living in universe  
Similar their birth  
And desire to grow  
Their thinking and  
Working not the same  
A harmonious living  
In diversities designed

Thy art of differences  
In similarities of all  
Similarities in differences  
Of all in universe  
Disparities in all the  
Living beings in world  
Their inception, perception  
And reactions unique

Disparities and differences  
In all my Thee!  
Made thy universe  
A wonderful place  
All forces are working  
With forces celestial  
Balancing thy forces  
To work in unison

Soul of all the  
Living beings in world  
Life independent  
Their nature unique  
Inception, perception  
And judgment unique

Living with unique  
Desire and greed

Instinct and desire  
My perceptions unique  
My actions, reactions  
Conception unique  
My thinking and working  
My shape unique  
My heart, my mind  
And prayer unique

Attraction, repulsion  
By love and hate  
By source of wave  
Some where alike  
A wave generated  
From the core of heart  
Is a reaction to perception  
Of a force alike

My intuitive force  
Is a wave unique  
Perception to my heart  
Thy wave unique  
Conception in me  
Of a percipient force  
By reactive forces  
Of wave alike

A wave unique  
Is perceived by me  
Touched my heart  
In my conscious self  
Instinct and desire  
To unite and love  
By virtue Thy nature  
To love one

And all in the universe  
Are not the same  
The wave generated by thee  
Is not the same.

## LIVING AND LEARNING

I was born  
A virgin soul!  
No love, no hate  
No desire in me  
To begin my life  
On earth my Thee  
Force of my life  
Thou soul in me  
Encaged in my body  
To keep me alive  
Entity of mine  
Not known to me

I grew as matter  
In universe my Thee  
I knew nothing  
Of affairs in the world  
Not aware of forces  
Working around  
Not knowing mechanism  
To live in the world  
My mind was empty  
And heart was pure

Time evolved  
My mind and shape  
Perceptions generate  
In the core of my heart  
Instigate my mind  
And senses in me



Force of my life  
Made me learn  
By working of forces  
Around in world  
Perception to senses  
Developed in me  
By action, reaction,  
Of forces around

Action reaction  
Of forces around  
Inducing inception  
And perception in me  
Animate my mind  
By changing events  
Beginning the process  
Of reaction in me

My learning began  
With events to know  
My reaction to events  
By perception in me  
Force of my life  
Is to know and to grow  
Intellect in me,  
Is to think and to judge

Force of my life  
Has instinct to grow  
By body material  
And learning to know  
Learning with events  
Of changes around  
Trying to know  
Alien things abound

Force of my life  
Made me to live  
With material in universe

And forces around  
Develop my senses  
For my thoughtful acts  
Define my perceptions  
And judgment to act

Living in world  
With my parents and kin  
In society and friends  
I learn from them  
They influence me  
To learn and work to live  
I enjoy my living  
With affairs around

My inherent nature  
To live and grow  
Instinct and desire  
To learn and work  
Creative sense  
With ambition to grow  
My nature is influenced  
By yang in me

My ambitious yang  
Has to work for a living  
My working to live  
And growing to gain  
Also to protect  
My protective yin

And to protect  
My conscious self

Inherent desire of my  
Learning and working  
Governed by destiny  
And forces celestial Forces in universe  
And my destiny on Thee Shape up my living

And working on earth

Mechanism of working  
In universe around  
By forces in universe  
And time my Thee  
Events created for  
Changes in universe  
Circumstances created  
For me to work

Events are changing  
With time my Thee  
Changing perceptions  
And reactions in me  
Perceptions to me  
Of changes around  
Reactive forces  
Arise in mind

My thinking is changed  
To work for my living  
My intention for action  
On events created  
Define the process  
Of reactions in me  
My conscious self  
Is to know my Thee!

By instinctive force  
Inherent in me  
Made me to know  
And to think about  
The right and wrong  
By judgment in me

A force unique  
In my conscious self  
Trying to synchronize

My living world  
Working to grow  
And learning to know  
The mechanism of life  
To live in universe

Events created  
By forces in universe  
Bringing the changes  
Little or large  
Perception to changes  
By events created  
My reactive forces  
Provoke me to act

My growth my learning  
With time my Thee  
Depends on circumstances  
And changes around  
My thinking and working  
Tends to change  
For my need to live  
And desire to grow

My life and living  
With forces around  
To live with the events  
Of changes in universe

My growth, my learning  
And senses in me  
My perception, reaction  
To forces around  
My living, my thinking  
And judgment to act  
Is depiction of life  
Thy force in me

My senses depicting

Perception in me  
Make me to see,  
To smell and to listen  
Warmth perceived  
By physical touch  
All physical pleasure  
By senses perceived

Perception of pleasure  
And agonies or woes  
Thy perception is felt  
In my conscious self  
I act on my judgment  
For good or bad  
My intentions, reactions  
Are coded on Thee

## INEBRIATED LIFE

By seeing the glamour  
Around the world  
Developed a greed  
And desire in me  
My learning and working  
In society around  
Develop a passion  
For glamorous world

The glamour is seen  
In material world  
Display of wealth  
In different modes  
My ambitious ego  
To work for gain  
Changed the process  
Of thinking in me

Impact on my mind

Of glamour around  
A desire generated  
To live in world  
My passion to live  
With desire strong  
For greed to gain  
To rule thy world

Reactive forces  
Arouse my senses  
Perception of pleasure  
And pain to me  
Instigate my mind  
To live in pleasure  
Make me to work  
To achieve my game

Drifting my life  
For material gains  
For living in pleasure  
To enjoy myself  
My inception is changed  
For conception in me  
I am lured to lurk  
By passion in me

Perception of pleasure  
In touch and smell  
In taste and sound  
To soothe my heart  
Pleasure perceived  
In material gains  
A destructive mode  
In glamorous world

Inception changes  
Conception in me  
Shape up my living  
And working to live

The pleasure enjoyed  
In glamorous world  
By seeing the beauty  
And wonders in world

Pleasure is felt  
In possession of wealth  
To boost my ego  
To command the world

Pleasure is a perception  
My senses enjoy  
I crave to remain  
In illusion for ever  
My obsession to live  
For ever in world  
Hankering my mind  
For vivacious greed

Glamour in world  
And affairs around  
Influence the inertia  
Of my conscious heart  
My conscious norms  
Tend to change  
For material gains  
In glamorous world

Influenced by forces  
Working around  
Enjoying the glamour  
Around in world  
Changing perception  
And conception in me  
Induce me to work  
For a pleasure in me

Learn and grow  
With affairs around

I tend to achieve  
The heights in world  
Force of my life  
With a desire strong  
My yang empowered  
My conscientious yin

My instinct and desire  
For gaining more  
My life is devoted  
To material gains  
My working is implied  
To atrocious acts  
Shadowing Thy force  
Of my conscious self

Obsession, possession  
To boost my ego  
Lust for power  
By preceptive force  
My life is merged  
In material world  
To achieve a higher  
Place on earth

To show myself  
And power in me  
believe in ego  
As power supreme  
Obsessed with my  
Material gains  
Induce me to command  
And to rule the world

Living together  
With love and hate  
Working together  
To win the game  
Trying to empower



My relations and friends  
Influenced by  
Villainous force in me

Ambitions have changed  
Conception in me  
involved completely  
In material world  
My learning, working  
Earning and acts  
My thinking, desire  
And ambition to grow  
Enhance my greed  
For increasing demands

Obsession to live  
With a passion in me  
Possession or wealth  
Is the need for me  
Obsession to possess  
Enormous wealth  
An illusion to live  
For ever in world.

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## 'The God Of Small Things' *A Wrong Book to Translate*

Raji Narasimhan

The language of 'The God of Small Things' is overpowering. For the translator this strong, fore-grounded presence of the parent language creates problems. Its language, however, is not the exclusive factor for the power and impact of the novel, it should be mentioned. The deeper bearing on Neelabh's translation of this near but not exclusive sway of language in the original will become clearer -I hope!-as the analysis goes on.

The immediate effect on the translator of this thrust of language is that it thwarts him, from sufficiently distancing himself from it, and focusing on the thought/thoughts behind it. Such distancing is a necessary step in all translation exercises. The aural incursion of the source text has to somehow get toned down sufficiently, to enable the translator to go past it and make contact with the cerebral-cum-psychic propellers behind the cascade of voice and tone.

Roy's spell-binding text complicates this necessary and instinctive move of the translator, equipped as he is, with the counter weapon of his own rendering language, and duty-bound, so to speak, to demonstrate its equal virtuosity. For most of its narrative stretch Neelabh's rendering responds and reacts more to the verbal magnetism of Roy's text. He does do this with gusto, it must be said, does it with what seems a devotee's adulation of her prose.

Take this, passage, for instance: "He didn't know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And that personal despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal turmoil

stopped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible public turmoil of a nation. That Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. Then Small God (cosy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity. Inured by the confirmation of his own inconsequence, he became resilient and truly indifferent. Nothing mattered much. Nothing much mattered. And the less it mattered, the less it mattered. It was never important enough. Because Worse things had happened. In the country that she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse things kept happening."

Before taking up Neelabh's translation of that para, it might be helpful to consider the special features of the original, and thereby, the variations deriving from it.

First, that whole passage is an encoded and anguished statement of political import. It rises from an involuntary expression of un-bridged, unbridgeable differences between not only different cultures, but more importantly, more urgently, between segments of the same culture, the same country - that of Rahel's, the girl proxying for the narrator. It sways between the two extremes of the 'Small God' of this country and culture signifying the impertinent growth of personal ordeals, and its 'Big God', signifying the immanence and rooted strength of the body politic, of land and country. With taut, sybilline utterances the narrative voice details the tragic-comic yet grim, deadlock that results

when the Small God tries to dislodge the Big God. No David and Goliath story results from the bout, the narrating voice says. The Small God remains small, a, defeated and defiant loner, homing in into people's eyes and freizing there as an inscrutable look. "He climbed into people's eyes and became an exasperating expression", is how the Small God is described in the next para.

Secondly, we can divide that passage into three clear, segments. There are, first, the two classic segments of Thesis and Anti-thesis that comprise a proposition. There is, first, the Thesis of the Big God - immanent, invincible, supreme. The Small God, the god of personal despair crossing sword with the Big God, is the Anti-Thesis. The third segment, comprising the classic summation of a proposition, Synthesis, is signified in that passage by the near-total subsuming of the Small God by the Big God. Near total, not, total. The passage transcends -- or breaks out of-the formal pattern set for a syllogism by the rules of formal logic. The two segments -major premise and minor premise, to use the terms of formal logic -- or Thesis and anti-Thesis, symbolized by the Big and Small Gods stay apart in their respective spheres in uneasy proximity, liable to come to blows, tethered to their tethers. The passage, in effect, leaves behind semantics for the natural poetry of free expression.

The question now is, do we get this sense of a beauteous construct of semantics and poetic fervour from the Hindi translation?

At first, the Hindi phonetics trip you up in the leap that you as a reader -and perhaps a potential translator -need to make to get to the lull behind the words, to get to the word-quietened, evocative essence of the prose, in order to grasp its underlying statement.

You tend to read the Hindi simultaneously with the English, letting yourself into a scramble of languages. The irony here doesn't escape you. For, scrambling up the language is a prominent feature of Roy's prose style and form. But the scramble you come up with, alas, is devoid of the method gone into Roy's creative scramble!

Anyway, you persist, and persistence pays, as always. The English intrusions die out, leave the field clear for the native genius and tonal dynamics of the target language to wash into your ear. Made receptive, objective, you register the adequacy of the translation. You wake to the close, analytical attention paid by the translator to the choice of words in the original, and his painstaking, disciplined search for words of matching import and impact. Take, in that passage, the long, high-decibel, adjective-ridden concluding phrase: "vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation". The English ends with 'public turmoil of a nation'. The translation takes this end as the opening parts of its rendering. "Rashtra kee vishaal. prachand, chakkar khaatee..." it runs. Other displacements also occur. The opening phrase of the English, "That something happened..." comes at the end

of the Hindi rendering. In the English the two phrases 'That something happened' and 'when personal turmoil' are joined, made consecutive. 'Dropped by at the wayside shrine of ..' immediately follows this conjoined phrase. The three parts then unite and brace to meet the barrage of adjectives that breaks out immediately after: '...vast...insane...unfeasible...'. And this swinging, swaying complex of mutually sustaining phrases allied with high-spirited adjectives is halted by the slow, measured gait of the concluding phrase, 'public turmoil of a nation'.

The Hindi, as said, changes the order of the sentence, almost inverts it. 'That something happened', followed by 'when personal turmoil' is broken into two separate phrases, placed at the beginning and end in reverse order. The full sentence reads, 'ki jab nijee uththal-puththal ek rashtra kee vishaal, prachand, chakkar khaatee, ayed lagaatee, haasyaaspad, unmathth, asangat, saarvajanik uththal-puththal kee sadak kinaarey banee samadhee par pahunchtee to kuchch ghatit hota'.

The re-ordering doesn't bother you though you do wish for and work out alterations, in a kind of word game. How about, e.g, 'kee kuchch ghatit hota jab nijee uththal-puththal rashtra kee vishaal, prachand, chakkar khaatee, ayed lagaatee, haasyaaspad, sadak-kinarey banee samaadhee par pahunchtee?' Don't the six concluding words in this order highlight better the dramatic impact of the act of stopping by at a wayside shrine - you wonder, speculate.

But the speculations fade: speculations can be endless. Solid workmanship is unmistakable in that line. To revert to the English for purposes of comparison: we find that each adjective in the English has a point of convergence for its vowel compound. The voice is expelled with force from this point into new vowel shapes that give the adjective a solid, noun-like feel. In 'violent', for example, the speech stress first homes in on the 'i'-o' vowel compound, and then springs out on the weaves and turns of the succeeding vowel, 'e': you feel the violence of the 'violent'. The same principle of inward and outward motions of sound-fall is discernible in the Hindi words. In 'prachand', (for 'violent') the voice gathers in and bounces out on the tracks of the successive 'a' sounds of the word. More. The consonant 'pra' preceding the first 'a' sound, and the consonant 'nd' that succeeds the second 'a' sound exert their own pressures of sound and evocation on the vowel, giving the word a special feel of solidity. 'Prachand' - 'violent'- expands as 'prachanda-ta' - 'violence' ; adjective becomes noun. A special, inner assonance of articulation caused by some ground rules of speech articulation brings the two languages on a fraternal level. Add to this the diligence you cannot help but notice in the translator's choice of words: you re-read the passage as writing in its own right. (Para 1. page 32, Maamoole Cheezon Ka Devta. Neelabh. Rajkamal Prakashan 2004).

The English subsides in your field of attention. The Hindi appropriates sound

and sense, gains ascendancy. The prose carries you along. The line of thought, reasoning and argument engages you. The imagery comes as novel, bold, paring the language to re-contour it, re-code and re-constitute its silences. At the end of the exercise you sit back, a-wash with the contentment that a well-proportioned, well-rounded product of literary effort arouses in a reader.

But a sense of incompleteness persists. The context beyond the context created by words and meaning, does not break into the reader's awareness with the unambiguous, clarity of the English original. The three elements, one, the immediate context, two, the context beyond, and three, the words, stay in a working coalition, each distinct from the other, brought together under the pressure of the narrative voice. In the English, the feel of a nation sprawling, tempestuous, a mastiff unchainable -the Big God: and of the hardened, veteran survivor of life-long strife and privation, the Small God, - unfurls genie-like from the pulse of the prose-narrative. The image, shadowy yet firm of feet and solid, anchors the rush of thought in that passage. The dead serious political statement that is contained in the characterization and alignment of the two gods, Big and Small, with Rahel the Indian girl of Larry McCaslin the American with Rahel, the Indian, rings out from the inner construct of the passage.

This audibility of the unsaid, this immediacy and life-like presence of a reality presented not frontally but in silhouette, is not a feature of the Hindi. A translation

which compels attention from its sheer reproductive élan, a translation which carries the reader along on the momentum of this élan, a translation of this calibre fails this litmus test set by the English original.

Why? One cannot help wondering. Is it something to do with the shaping agents that have gone into the physique of the language?

It may well be so, one cannot help feeling. Let us take some key phrases and sentences from the English original of that passage. Country and nation emerge as vivid, ineffaceable realities from them. "...in some places, like the country that Rahel came from various kinds of despair competed for primacy". The italicized phrase (italics mine) acted upon and spotlighted by the preceding and succeeding phrases '...in some places' and 'various kinds of despair', simply condenses into the country meant. The term 'India' flashes on like a neon sign in the corridors of the reader's mind, and stays lit. The whole sentence mutates and metamorphoses into one particular place, like a leaf turning to flower.

One looks for this kind of transformative energy from the Hindi equivalents of those phrases. 'Kuchh jagahon mein, maslan rahel jis desh se aye ththee, hatasha kee alag-alag kismen avval rahney ke hod mein shareek rahteen ththee'.

Now, to repeat what has been said before, the Hindi of course has to be read with the mind purged of the spell of the English. It has to be read as a text in its own right, even though its reproductive

verve is what gives it its stature. But at this point in our analysis re-productivity is not the issue: the issue is the realm beyond.

"...Rahel jis desh sey aayee thee" is alerting. You connect 'Rahel' with 'jis desh sey aayee thee' and sense the phrase contracting to its hard, implicit essential. But the qualifying phrase 'hataashaa kee alag-alag kismen avval rahney kee hod mey shareek rahtee thee', does not merge with the initiating phrase in the metaphorising and metamorphosing way it does in the English. It does not condense, does not essentialise the sentence into the emotive one-word, India. Once again, why? The words are apt and faithful to the nuances of the original. But the magic synthesis of the original does not take place amidst all this verbal proficiency. Why? Forget the sprawly and over-loaded feel of the phrase. The English is taut and quick-footed. It is verb-based, action-based - 'various kinds of despair competed for primacy' - it goes. The Hindi, almost double the word-load of the English, from 'hataashaa' to shareek rahteen thee' sags under the strain of grappling with the pithy, quick-off-the-tongue quiver of the English. Compare the two. 'Hataashaa', the operative word, takes quite a while to connect and fuse with 'alag-alag kismen', denoting variedness. In the English the connection is instantaneous, no sooner said than there. 'Various kinds', 'alag-alag kismen'. 'Alag'alag' is the main culprit here. Say it fast: say it slow, for the significance of 'alag-alag' to register: say it anyhow. But 'various' releases into the mind its sense and sound with the utterance. And

then there is the phrase 'avval rahney kee hod men shareekh rahten ththeen.', for the three- word English phrase 'competed for primacy'. The English is lighter, lither, fleet-footed, discharging into the mind the sense and import of the words with the sound. Forget all this. They are secondary. Overlookble. Forget also the possibility that the inversion in the placing of 'despair' and 'various kinds' in the Hindi could be part of the reason for its ineffectiveness. What if it had been 'alag-alag kismon kee hataasha: wouldn't it have compressed the phrase into the required tautness? Wouldn't it have absorbed better the eight-headed monster, 'avval rahne kee hod men shareekh rahten thee' for 'competed for primacy'? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Perhaps yes. Perhaps, perhaps....

It is not verbal re-casting that is the issue here. It is something bigger, more basic. The synthesis does not take place because the nuances of the original, its suggestions and semi-suggestions, issue from a full-fledged image-compound present in the first writer's mind. Because this image-compound itself has been thrown up in the first writer's mind from the slow churning of concepts formed in her mind much before the writing. Because the resonances, the metaphysical and allusive vein, the undertones and overtones of this vein that combine to give the language its strong personality and distinct orientation, are effects of a cerebral-emotional exercise undergone by the writer before she commenced writing the novel.

The translator, of course, cannot be

expected to undergo or to have undergone the same inner dialoguing. But he is expected to connect with the wavelengths of the first writer's thoughts and feelings. Either through self suggestion or auto suggestion or what you will, he has to vibrate with the author. On this score, that of vibrating, Neelabh, as we have seen, gives no ground for, complaint -far from it. This brings us back to the question being considered here: why, even a most sensitively wrought verbal similitude like Neelaabh's, fails to match the power of signification that Roy's novel has.

One reason could be that the signifying powers of languages differ in quality: that no two languages signify similar objects or similarly.

Let us take again, one last time, even at the risk of rousing boredom, the sentence we have been considering: 'In the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy'. You see smoky, surrealist outlines, while the word 'India' tattoos faintly in the voice-box of your understanding. Alongside, the word 'despair' sets off a jumble of images, sprung from anterior images of poverty and disease. 'Despair, you read and hear the word: watch a mad jig of cholera, hunger, penury. The word 'India' tolls again from this montage, superimposes upon it as a steady, cognizable presence of face and form.

This drama of signifying is much less dramatic in the Hindi compared to the English. Here's the translation again, to repeat it here for quick and easy reference: 'Rahel jis desh se aayee thee, hataashaa kee

alag alag kismen avval rahney kee hod mey shareek rahaatee thee'. Except for the word 'desh', individual words do not fold in and unfold into a major reality. 'Hataashaa' does not have the hard, well-defined feel of 'despair'. It sounds fluid, evokes a state of generalize, unfocussed unhappiness. The phrase 'various kinds of despair' and 'hataashaa kee alag-alag kismen' do not evoke the same sensation. The clipped, compact and staccato quality of the English is very different from the vowel-centric, sprawly phonetics of the Hindi. This sense of an uncondensed centre to the words continues, is carried over to the succeeding words, till the whole sentence gets a swinging quality of perpetual motion. Motion and motility are held in leash in the English. Words harden, centralize, mutate and transform into deeper, metaphysical implications.

Why does the Hindi fall short of this final turn? Why doesn't a direct and taut link, a current of instantaneous, mutual recognition get established between the narrating voice and its narrative? One reason could be the rather obvious one, that the parent narrating voice is umbilically connected with the well-springs of its narrative, rises from the underbelly of its rationale and semantics. In a translation this organic connection of the narrator with his narrative, is of course, not possible, as pointed out before. But the interlock this connection denotes remains the test for the successes and failures of a translation. The failure of Neelabh's commendable translation to bare the unverballed yet

unmistakable vibrant presence of the statements behind the words, thus, can only be attributed to the chanciness, to the hit-or-miss element inherent in the translator's craft: inherent in the translator's deliberate, necessary act of fitting the original writer's nerve cords of feeling to his own mode and range of cognition.

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Let us turn now to those instances in Neelabh's rendering where chance works in his favour: where his professional endeavour of chiming with the original writer has paid off. We see it in his rendering of a nursery rhyme. Here is the English:

'There's a sad sort of clanging/ From the clock in the Hall/ And the bells in the stee/ple too/And up in the nursery/An absurd/ Litt-tle Bird/Is popping out to say-'

Neelabh's rendering is:

'Galiarey mey khadee ghadee kee ghantee bole tan-tan/door charch kaa ghantaa baajaa/madhdham sur me ghanghan/ khidkee par aakar chidiya ne/ ooncheetaan lagayee/ baith ghadi ke bheetar koyal...'

Some material differences between the two catch the attention immediately. There's only one bird in the English: there seem two in the Hindi: the 'chidiya' (bird) in the 'khidkee' (window), and the koyal 'ghadi ke bheetar' (within the clock) seem two different birds. And there's nothing like a bird on a high note in the English- ('chidiya ne oonchee taan lagaayee'): there's no window, no 'khidkee', nothing like a bird coming to the window. In the English the



'clock in the Hall' goes up in a 'sad sort of clanging'. In the Hindi the clock comes out with just 'tan-tan'. The onomatopoea does not evoke sadness. And nowhere in the English do the church bells peal in a 'madhdham sur' meaning medium scale. But another reading of 'madhdham sur' is possible, you realize. 'Madhdham sur' could be meant to convey the idea of plaintiveness present in 'sad sort of clanging'. It denotes a mood couched in the terminology of music. But even granting this, a distinct difference is perceptible in the two versions. The English has a languid, lingering tone of the blues, become catchy with the lilt of a children's jingle. The Hindi is just sleepy-eyed. No undertones of a sad strain quiver behind the words.

And yet, despite its a-tonality, its lack of an inner dimension, the Hindi rendering captures the reader's attention in a sweeping, disarming way. It gives a spell of sheer aural pleasure, inlaid with the primal fancies of a childhood re-awakened.

More. It makes you sway back to the context in which the nursery rhyme is being sung. Makes you visualize the scene, visualize the characters and circumstances that make for this incursion of a nursery rhyme in their midst. It makes you, in short, re-read, re-consider the two texts, takes you deeper into the cross-currents of translation. For those few, trance-like seconds that come from the reading of good writing, you hear, feel and live the beingness of the characters: you rock with their bickerings and squabbles, their face-offs. And most importantly, you feel the throb of their turbulent, inherent bi-lingualism.

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Bi-lingualism is more than knowing two languages. It is an intimacy with the speech sounds of two languages, giving the bi-lingual a manoeuvring capacity between them. The bi-tonal quality that this kind of flesh and bones bi-lingualism can lead to, is vivid in Roy's text. It is basically an English text. The non-English, Malayalam inflexions injected are into this English body. Take this passage, for example. "Nothing specifically as such", 'Comrade Pillai said. 'But see, Comrade, any benefits that you give him, naturally others are resenting it. They see it as a partiality. After all, whatever job he does, carpenter or electrician or whateveritis, for them he is just a Paravan. It is a conditioning they have from birth. This I myself have told them is wrong. But frankly speaking, Comrade, Change is one thing. Acceptance is another. You should be cautious. Better for him you send him off...'. 'For you what is nonsense, for Masses it is something different'.

If a Hindi translation evokes the bi-tonality of an English framework it would be no mean achievement. For the most part Neelabh's translation does not achieve it. The right linguistic field or balance is not available to him. His rendering of the passage quoted above is bereft of the comedy in the English original produced by the juggling with two speech idioms, and the parodying of the variant form. Here it is:

'Naheen, aisi koi khaas cheez nahin', comrade pillai boley. 'lekin dekho, kaamraid, job hi suvidhaaen tum usey

deyter ho kudrati taur par doosrey uska bura maantey hain. Vey isey ek tarafdaaree kee taur par dekhtey hain. Aakhirkaar, kaam voh jo bhee karta ho, badhaigiri ya bijli giri ya jo kuchch bhee, unkey liye voh sirf ek paravan hai. Yeh sanskaar unmeey janm sey hoten hain. Yeh mein khud unhey bata chukka hoon ki ghalat hai. Magar saaaf-saaf kahen to, kaamraid, parivartan ek cheez hai. Usey sveekaar karnaa doosri cheez. Tumhey hoshiaar rahanaa chaahiyey. Usee ke liye behtaar hai ki tum usey kaheen ravanaa kar do...' 'tumhaarey vastey jo ek bakvaas hai, janta ke liye voh ek alag cheez hai'.

All the comedy, all of Roy's tongue-in-cheek show-casing of a mutant idiom, have been wiped out of the rendering, leaving it flat. 'Others are resenting it'; 'a partiality' (italics mine); 'I myself have told them'; 'Better for him you send him off' - are typical-ities of a certain idiom of spoken English grown amongst us. Such dramatizing of a group idiom is among the reasons for the exceptionally strong aural dimension of Roy's novel. And then there is the jammed up word 'whateveritis'. This word compound, constructed from the particular tone-fall of Comrade Pillai's way of speaking, sets his voice and vocal inflections ringing in the ears. It evokes the ethno-culture of Comrade K.N.M Pillai.

In addition to these absences of speech variations evoking ethnicity, the absence of capitalized letters -not possible in Hindi - affects it further. Words like 'Change' and 'Masses' acquire an intended comic/heroic twist from the capitalising of their first

letters carried, out in the English. Roy's prose style has a visual feel, a visual presence, as well as an aural, let's not forget!

But in the verse sections that Neelabh tackles and which abound in the book, these innate non-presences are not felt at all. A harmony of voice and word gets formed -a harmony of narrative voice and narrated words - in a kind of sporting contest, a sparring, with the English. This rejuvenation is felt, to begin with, as a change in the timbre of the narrative voice, a sudden heightening of it. At first, the objects and events figuring in the verses seem alien, unconnected to the translating language, and you balk at this alien-ness. The cuckoo clock, for instance, in the verse we dealt with a little earlier, or the church bells chiming in the distance, are not features of the Indian milieu-scape. Take this verse, for example:

'O Esthappaappechen Peter Mon/  
Where, oh where, have you gon? We seek  
him here, we seek him there/Those  
Frenchies seek him everywhere/ Is he in  
heaven? Is he in hell?/That demmedel-usive  
Estha-Pen?'

The Hindi is;

'O esthaappappechen kutappan peter  
maan/Kahaan haan kahaan gaye tum jaan/  
ham dhoonden yaheen ham dhoonden/  
vahaan/ franceeseedhoonden yahaan  
vahaan/voh nabh main hai ya gaya paataal/  
voh mahachchali estheppen lal?'

We note, to begin with, the absence of capital letters in the Hindi as we did in Comrade Pillai's speech. And we feel again that the words have been reduced or

truncated in some way. The whole text has a sunken, curtailed look. (We see Roy's text too, don't forget!) About 'maan' and 'jaan', and about the whole of the succeeding line - about the whole versifying, in fact - you feel something forced about the rhyming and the rhythm. In the second stanza 'ham dhoonden...dhoonden', that veers away to the 'Frenchies' and evokes the lore of the Scarlet Pimpernel this sense of laboured craftsmanship deepens. For the slang 'Frenchies' no matching Hindi slang has been sought or attempted since none exists. But the gains that the Hindi registers despite these lacks are not dismissible. The whole of the first line, even in its undifferentiating, un-capitalisable nagari script does look and sound like the nonsense words of a children's jingle in Hindi. Yes! The Hindi text too does acquire a visual quality, over and above its alphabet and letter formation. This is one of those inexplicable, alchemizing processes by which words read gain an aural materiality, and this aural mass re-connects with the sense of the words, giving the words a kaleidoscopic animation. The overall rhythm stays firm, and the words 'dhoonden yahhan, dhoonden vahaan...' rise newly minted from its beat. Their brevity, tailored to the beat and in tandem with it, immunises the sanskritic strain in the rendering, 'nabh' (sky), 'paataal' (the nether world), 'mahachchali' (the great trickster), from charges of pedantry. This friendly, approachable Sanskrit conflates with the uncolloquialized word 'franceese', (for 'Frenchies') and creates a piquant 'firang'

ambience that evokes the multi-cultural, multi-limbed body of the novel.

A similar evocation of the multi-lingual, multi-cultural essence of the novel through a kind of occidentalism occurs in the translation of another form of versifying prevalent in it. Here, the last letter or syllable of a word links up with the first letter or syllable of the next word, in a faithful, well observed parody of speech habits. Here is an example in the English and the Hindi. 'O young lochin varhas scum out of the vest/Through wall the wide Border his steed was the best/Tand savis good broad sod heweapon sadnun'. In normal English it would be 'O young Lochinvar has come out of the west/ Through all the wide Border his steed was the best/ And save his good broadsword he weapons had none'

The Hindi is no less of a hilarious garble. Here it is: 'lo, yuva lokin vaahnika paschim se ho kar/saasee maaprant me us kaashva ththaama nohar/ rar khada chchodus kepaas nahinththaha thiyaaar/aurchala woh nishastr akelaghode parsavaar. In ungarbled Hindi it would be: /lo, yuva lokinvaar nikla paschim se hokar/ saare seemaprant mey uska ashva ththa manohar/ aur khadag chchod uskey paas naheen ththaa hathiyaar/ aur chala voh nishastr akeley ghodey par savaar'.

And here again - as with the translation of the rhyme about the clanging of clocks and church bells noted earlier, and thus testifying to the success of the translation - the reader's attention winds away from the crafted, arresting senselessness of the garble, to the essentials of the novel, in a

recapitulative consideration of the why and whence of the creation of the garble.

Another small and utterly delightful euphonic translation: this one is un-versed. The context is of Rahel and Estha pleading with Velutha's brother, Kuttappen, to repair their boat. Here's their dialogue:

"First we'll have to find the leaks', Kuttappen said. 'Then we'll have to plug them'

'Then sandpaper', Estha said. 'Then polish'

'Then oars'. Rahel sid.

'Then oars', Estha agreed.

'Then offity off', Rahel said.

Here's the Hindi:

'pahely hamey chched dhoondnen honge', kutappan ney kaha.

'phir regmaar', estha ney kaha. 'phir paalish'

'phir chappoo', rahel ney kaha.

'phir chappoo'. Estha ney razamandi kee.

'phir chalchalchalchal', rahel bole.

'Chalchalaachalchal' - 'Offity Off'. The Hindi with its very different phonetics produces the same mood of a skipping, fragile joy as the English: a fragile joy miniaturizing the evanescent high spirits of the Small God that pervades the novel.

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But are these occasional sweeps into the inner signifiers of the novel enough to create a translation equalling its mass and weight? We raised this question in the beginning and answered it in the negative.

Let us see, taking the following passage as an example, if we have to retain the negative or withdraw it.

"The candlelight accentuated her rouged cheeks and painted mouth.. Her mascara was smudged. Her jewelry gleamed'.

Here's the Hindi:

"mombataaee kee roshnee uskey surkhee lagey gaalon aur rangey huey honton ko aur bhee numayan banaa rahy ththey".

The difference from the English gets very well illustrated here. There's no intimacy, no direct link, no bond, between the character and the description of her by the narrative voice. The use of the word 'uska' or 'uske' for 'her'-however correct linguistically-- has an inexplicable, distancing and impersonalizing effect. Baby Kochamma, the character figuring in that para seems a figure seen from a distance, seen from the outside, by the describing voice. She becomes a third person presence, which she does not in the English, despite the third person terms in which she is described. The English is verb-centred. And it has adjectivised nouns, 'rouge-ed', 'painted', which make quick connections with the pronoun 'her'. This halts and reverses the distancing capacity of the third person pronoun.

Perhaps the pronouns 'uska', 'uske', could have been avoided altogether. 'Mombattee kee roshni surkhee lagey gaalon aur rangey huey honton ko aur bhee numayan bana rahieen ththee. Kajal phail gaya ththaa. Gahney chamak rahey ththey'.

Even assuming that these deletions echo the original they still are only minor changes, minor verbal adjustments. The problem with Neelabh's work is bigger: that

even when linguistic faults cannot be cited - and for the most, part, as we have maintained, they cannot be-it yet misses making contact with the life-giving lungs of the words. And it is this shortfall that this analysis has been attempting to explore and fathom.

Let us consider this para describing the path leading to Velutha's hut. Velutha, let us keep in mind, is the god of small things.

'The path, which ran parallel to the river, led to a little grassy clearing that was hemmed in by huddled trees: coconut, cashew, mango, bilimbi. On the edge of the clearing, with its back to the river, a low hut with walls of orange laterite plastered with mud and a thatched roof nestled close to the ground, as though it was listening to a whispered subterranean secret. The low walls of the hut were the same colour as the earth they stood on, and seemed to have germinated from a house-seed planted in the ground, from which right-angled ribs of earth had risen and enclosed space. Three untidy banana trees grew in the little front yard that had been fenced off with panels of woven palm leaves'.

The line that springs out from that passage, and hoists the reader's attention over its full range back and forth, is, 'The low walls of the hut were the same colour as the earth they stood on, and seemed to have germinated from a house -seed planted in the ground, from which right-angled ribs of earth had risen and enclosed space'. The imagery of walls sprouting from the earth and coated the same colour as their

parent, walls nestling close to her, angled like her inner shape and architecture, invokes the subsistence-level life of the inhabitants of the place. They are the sons of the soil, the gods of the small things, the trees and vegetable life that grow from the same belly from which they themselves have grown.

The unassuming yet seething, rumbling energy of these gods, perennially fed by the saps of the earth goddess, is a standing statement in the polemics of the novel. And the sense of a close, unbreakable physical union between these gods and the earth mother that this statement and the imagery suggest, finds re-iteration in the preceding line about the roof of the hut 'nestled close to the ground as though it was listening to a whispered, subterranean secret'. The first and last line of the para, foregrounding the growth of trees and the chancy supplies of food they make, completes the statement of the precarious and explosive living conditions faced by the inhabitants - the Paravans, or the Untouchables-that the novel makes.

The Hindi twins the original. Neelabh hears the words he translates. He is dedicatd in his endeavour to gather into his rendering all the tremors or meaning and association in the English. In the passage being, considered here, the Hindi words are not only equivalents, thy also replicate the stress-tones of the original: 'Raastaa, jo nadi ke samaanaanatar chalta atha thaaa, ghaas ke ek chchotey, khuley ahaatey tak gaya ththaa, jo sataa kar lagaayee gayeen pedon ke jhurmut se ghira thaa'.

The stress words and phrases in that sentence, 'smaanaanatar', 'jo sataa kar lagaayee gayii pedon ke jhurmut sey ghira ththaa', diligently echo the risen, descriptive tone of voice we register in the English at these points. The whole para is animate with these spells, of sharpened narrative voice. The sharpened quality is present unflinchingly in the key sentence we discussed above in our analysis of that passage in English, '...lagtaa thaa ki veh dharatee me boey gaye kisi ghar ke beej se ankurit huey ththey, jisse dharti ki samkon pasliyon ne phootkar jagah ko gher liya hai'.

Now there is, admittedly, something freakish about this yoking of an imagery that sounds remote to the language -- Hindi. They don't seem to be in harness, don't seem to be in any engagement with each other. Nonetheless, the imagery attracts the attention. Its strangeness compels, and drawn by it you settle down to the comparative study of the words. You don't come out fully satisfied with the exercise. 'Ghar ke beej' for 'house-seed' is misleading. It seems to mean 'seeds belonging to the house', not 'seeds of the house'-like the seeds of the peepal tree or the banyan--which is the sense in which the words are used in the English. 'Jissey dhartee ki samkon pasliyon ne phootkar jagah gher liya hai' takes a while to settle down and disclose the picture the words hold. The English equivalents nudge you. 'Ankurit'; 'Germinated'. 'Germinated': 'Ankurit'. 'Samkon pasliyon ne phootkar jagah gher liya hai': 'right angled ribs of earth had risen and enclosed space'. 'Right angled

ribs of earth had risen and enclosed space': 'samkon pasliyon ne phootkar jagah gher liya hai' - back and forth you say the words in a babel of English and Hindi, Hindi and English. 'Samkon pasliyaan' for 'right-angled ribs' don't quite interlock. 'Samkon' used for 'right-angled' has a smooth, rounded feel to it, made, you feel, by the 'm', 'n' nasals. 'Right-angled' is hard, crackling of tone, with its 't' and 'ngle' sounds making it solid, throaty.

But you don't give up. You can't. Neelabh's translating élan can't be set aside easily. Eventually, the linguistic din and disunity quiet: the Hindi words stay poised over their store of imagery, legitimised.

Yet a sense of the disconnectedness persists. Word and image do not seem organically connected, the one does not unfurl on the dot to disclose the other within itself.

But it is not words that can close this gap, you realise, even as you register and acknowledge again the hand-picked, thought out quality of the words. The sentence and its imagery do not radiate and floodlight the entire para above and below, as its English precedent text does. It does not conflate with the sister image in the preceding sentence that delineates the low roof of Velutha's hut, so low that it seems to have its ear glued to a secret message from the earth. And it does not drive home, with sphinx-like, mock-smiling seriousness, as the English does, a founding statement of the novel - that it is, always has been, a dog's life for the paravans, and perhaps always will be despite the communists' drumbeating.

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This lack of recapitulative, retrospective vigour in that passage remains a feature of the translation all through. It cannot be ascribed to the language, as we said. The language mirrors the original with devotion and verve. But it does not spring from the passionate concern for the underdogs of society, from the passionate rage at discriminations over and above those bred by caste, that vibrate in the narrative voice of the English. The Hindi's inspiration is from the English text. Its narrative energy is text-derived, not idea-generated and imagination-driven as the English is.

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And so, eventually, this under-muscled, un-veined idiom moves up to tackle the scenes of Ammu and Velutha's lovemaking. The small gods, touchable Ammu, and untouchable Velutha, rise against the Big God of History in a desperate supreme act of defiance. History is braved by its own offspring. Where can the lovers hide? History is immanent. It is of rarer substance than the earth on which it is made. This earth, colonized by history, cannot give the lovers asylum. They are the cast offs of history and earth both. Water holds out hope. Velutha swims or rows across the river Minachal to reach Ammu on the other bank. But water is transparent. It cannot keep secrets. Boat, oarsman, swimmer, tryst-on-the-bank - all soon to become public, each object outlined and thrown into relief by the undulating action of the water.

The censoring eye of the public, and the freezing gaze of history -the big god-

are looming absent presences all through the thirteen nights of Ammu's and Velutha's tryst. The lovers expand within, as their bodies converge and root into sensations never known. Simultaneously the spaces, outside them contract, become menacing with the hot, panting breaths of history and its minions closing in. The simultaneous projection of opposites, which is the main narrative strategy of the novel, reaches its peak in these sections. The fleecy, spring-time symphony of the lover's union is shot through with the heavy, approaching roll of enemy drums.

'Biology designed dance. Terror timed it. Dictated the rhythm with which their bodies answered each other. As though they knew already that for each tremor of pleasure they would pay with an equal measure of pain. As though they knew that how far they went would be measured against how far they would be taken'.

Does the Hindi project the binaries of pleasure-pain, terror-anti terror, distance-nearness that form the brickwork of that passage in English? Does it secondly, move on from the binarian method to consolidating the binaries and bringing back into attention the parent proposition - the bear hug of history on human beings?

'Shareer ke vigyaan ney nritya ki roop-rekha banaayee. Aatanak ney taal nirdhaarit kee. Us laya ko nirdeshit kiya jissey unkey jimson ney ek-dooosrey ko uttar diya. Maano unhey maaloom thaa ki sukh key har spandan ke liye unhe usee maatra mein peeda sah kar keemat chukaanee hogee. Mano unhey maaloom thaa ki jitnee dur

veh jayengey yeh us par nirbhar karega ke unhe kitnee dur tak ley jaayaa jaaney vaalaa thaa.'

Once again, the careful, crafted word-conscious quality of the prose catches the attention. Deferring to its claims we turn a deaf ear to the speed-breaking circularity and multi-voweled phonology of the Hindi. We reach out, instead, to discern in the marrow and after tones of the words, the founding statements on history that the novel makes and sustains.

We do not get it except in faint echoes. Disturbed by the lacuna we revert to the English and try to imbue fullness into the Hindi: we try to draw fullness from the translation by re-reading into it the image of retribution biding its time, of a menacing immanence, thrown up by the English.

Why doesn't the Hindi, word-perfect as it is, have the retrospective sweep of the English? The question nags us again. And in its wake other limitations of this word-perfect translation come bristling in. Why do Ammu and Velutha seem distant from the narrative voice? Why don't they seem like the close kin of the narrator they do in the English? Why is there no sense of a blood tie between them? Why does the

narrator seem an outsider, not the participating insider as in the English?

Strictly speaking, this lack of intimacy between the narrator and the narrative ought not to be considered in absolute terms. The writer of the original, and the translator, are two different people, separate, however much the translator assumes the original writer's mien. And readers do make allowances for this separateness.

But from 'The God of Small Things', the translator cannot get this indulgence. The book's very being springs from what seems an umbilical, connection between the narrator and the narrative. Call it autobiographical, if you like. Call it anything. But all its characters - Estha, Rahel, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma - seem like intimates of the narrator, genetically connected to her. All its events seem like tests of fire gone through by the narrator. Its searing quality comes from this knife-edge closeness.

A closeness paralleling this cannot be established by the translator, however conscientious his pursuit of the word.

Neelabh just chose the wrong book for his skills.

*Courtesy: Sage Publications, India.*

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**Raji Narasimhan** : Migrating from journalism to creative writing in the seventies, Raji Narasimhan, writing in English, has produced to date five novels, two short story collections, two books in literary criticism, and three translations from Hindi to English. Her novel, 'Forever Free' published by Hind Pocket Books in 1979, was short listed for the Sahitya Akadami Award, and was on the English literature syllabus of the IIT, Delhi. 'Sensibility Under Stress: Aspects of Indo-English Writing' was short listed for the Sahitya Akadami Award, and was recommended reading for students in a number of universities. A second book of criticism, dealing with translation processes, is due to appear later in the year. She lives in New Delhi.

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## Academic Activism of Archana Verma

Deepak Sharma

Archana Verma in her book. **A Discourse on the female Identity and Voice** [Asmita-Vimarsh Ka Stree-Swar] describes and assesses certain key ideas and theories of feminism, language and literature with a double purpose: at once tracing their global history while also viewing them from the perspective of Indian woman with an Indian emphasis. She settles upon a codification that indicates the making, the shaping and the fashioning of a chain of judgements moving towards a seminal pattern.

The first section called 'A few concepts' carries five essays, namely. The Woman Question; The Role of Language and Envisaging a Change; Selfhood: Meaning and Concept; Only a Fabrication: Womanhood; and The Impending Reality of the Previous Century's Dream.

The six essays of the second section named 'The Principles of Literature' bear the following headings: A Discourse on Woman: Fiction, Reality and Language; The Female Character of Hindi Short Story; A Discourse on Woman by a Man: Jainendra and his Women; Mahadevi: Expanding the bounded Area towards the Boundless; Real politic in the domestic idiom and a Discourse on Women and the Principles of Literature.

The last and the third section titled 'Relevant Contexts' offers six chapters again; Strengths of the so-called Weak Women; The Minimal and the Maximum; The Limitations of Law. Domestic

Violence; Love—No Moonlight and Roses; A Liberated Woman; and women's Liberation : The Politics of Economics of body and how the literary critics of Hindi perceive It.

Her essays relating to feminism bring together our social, economic and literary issues in larger contexts and examine the borders along which our women and women writers define themselves.

They spring from her implicit belief that the capitulation forced upon a woman by the hegemonic mindset for fear of social stigma and exclusion from the mainstream will end only when she focuses on her self creation. Again, the bitter struggle between man and woman can cease only if the organisation of both family and society changes from the roots.

She also suggests that problems relating to domestic violence can be resolved if women equip themselves with economic independence and a higher level of consciousness and self-awareness. The categories our Indian women fall into are four sets based on these characteristics :

(1) Those who are self dependent, self-supporting and possess a high degree of self-awareness.

(2) Those who are self-supporting but are devoid of self-awareness.

(3) Those who are economically dependent but possess self-awareness.

(4) Those who are both economically dependent and devoid of self-awareness.

She also appeals to our sense of duty towards all those women who are denuded of an honorable and just existence.

In her treatise on language, Archana Verma asserts that the acquaintance with the theories of deconstruction, structuralism, post-structuralism and post-modernism, reaching us during the years 1975-80 changed and broadened our spectrums of language.

She also draws our attention to the fact that Ferdinand De Saussure, being the Sanskrit scholar and teacher that he was, shared some basic precepts of language with Sanskrit grammarians, both believing that :

(a) language is arbitrary with an independent entity;

(b) Language holds the subject-matter of our consciousness and that the two cannot be separated from each other;

(c) Language defines the world for us and our knowledge of the world is proportionate to our knowledge of language;

(d) Language is essentially a nomenclature and every society has its own language and lexicon, which undergo changes through time and space.

Archana Verma also talks about the feminist theory of language. Among the polyphony of feminist voices she mentions l'écriture feminine of France which can boast of its august members like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous who gave a new intellectual dimension to the 'women's sentence'. She also acknowledges the influence of Freud and Lacan who had changed the whole orientation of psychoanalysis. If Freud, in the 1920s, had defined the ego in relation to the two other terms the id or reservoir of effective energy and the super-ego the ego-

ideal or the representative of external reality and ego as an agency attempting to distinguish itself from the other two with a capacity for complete self-awareness then Lacan, in the 1950s, had contended that the ego was of primary importance in understanding human behaviour. Lacan had also linked language and the unconscious by saying 'The unconscious is structured like a language.

Archana Verma illuminates Indian women writing with this 'rethinking' of assumptions, especially when she discusses its short story writers in Hindi.

Hunting them down from the year, 1922, when the publication of 'Chaand and 'Madhuri' started, she puts on record Shiv Rani, Usha Devi Mitra, Satyawati Malik, Kamla Choudhary and Sumitra Kumari Sinha among the earlier writers. Soma Veera, Shivaani, Shashi Prabha

Shastri, Vijay Chauhan, Krishna Sobti, Usha Priyamvda and Mannu Bhandari constitute the group who got prominence between 1950 and 1970.

She calls attention to Mrinal Pandey and Nasira Sharma for their meaningful and satirical portrayals of our society. Rajee Seth, Jyotsna Milan, Geetanjali shri and Maitreyi Pushpa are also mentioned with respect for their original themes and moulds of unprecedented women.

Among the new 'voices' she mentions Anamika, Gagan Gill and Alka Saravagi whose veritable explorations of female psychology and its symbolic realizations make themes stand apart.

Propulsive in tone, elegant in phraseology and spectacular in academic work, Archana Verma's book **A Discourse on the Female Identity and Voice** commends itself for a good read.

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The Book Reviewed: Asmita : Vimarsh Ka Stree-Swar

Published by : Medha Books, Delhi

Price : Rs. 250/-

Deepak Sharma : born 1946 published fifteen collections of short stories in Hindi including Hinsabhas (1993) Ghoda ek Pair (2009) and Uncheeta (2012). She has been professor of English at Christian P.G. College Lucknow. She lives in Lucknow.

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## Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh

Rajkumar Saini

Translated by  
**Anil Sud**

In Prem Chand Sahajwala's book ( 118 pages) on the martyrdom of Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh and his revolutionary companions an all out effort has been made by the author to add a few more pages to the history of the independence movement. Where and when did the restlessness for the independence struggle start? Seeking to answer this question, the author avers that though it would be fair to tag 10th May, 1857 as the first chapter of India's struggle for independence, which marks the founding of the Indian National Congress on 28th December, 1885 in Gokuldas Sanskrit College in Mumbai by a group of 72 delegates and the emergence of a band of intellectual leaders. Later, the Tilak-Gokhale duel surfaced in the Congress where it was turned into a Gandhi-Tilak confrontation. Tilak was arrested on March 10, 1892. The Congress was beginning to show signs of being divided into two groups, the soft (non-violent) and the hard (violent). Within and outside the Congress, the youth were of the view that without an armed struggle, independence was not attainable. From Pune's Chapekar brothers to Bhagat Singh, they dreamt of an armed struggle to liquidate the British empire. The elderly intellectual leaders and the youth were possessed by an intense desire to fight. This well researched book is an attempt to underline this consciousness which reflected

the desire to overthrow the yoke of slavery. However, most of the narrations centre around the adroit activities of Bhagat Singh. The author's research reveals that the gazal titled 'Sarfaroshi ki tamanna' which the immortal martyr Ram Prasad Bismil used to sing with ardent fervour was actually penned by another poet, Bismil Azimabadi. To substantiate this fact, the author has cited the writings of political analyst A.G. Noorani (The Trial of Bhagat Singh- Politics of Justice, pages 12,13 and 16) and the renowned poet Ali Sardar Jafri. Prem Chand Sahajwala, while introducing the painful episode of Jalianwala Bagh says that this unfortunate incident affected Mahatma Gandhi so deeply that he decided to adopt the path of non-cooperation with the British. In this context, the author comments that path of non-cooperation with the British was no bed of roses. It was in consonance with the principle of non- violence, but not easy or simple; it was tough and arduous.

This episode affected a twelve years old child also and that child was Bhagat Singh. Just after the Jalianwala Bagh firing took place, Bhagat Singh, a child then, had moved to Jalianwala Bagh with his father. He collected the bloodstained soil of Jalianwala Bagh in a small bottle and took a vow not to rest till the British were expelled from India. His father and uncle were active revolutionaries and from that day itself, Bhagat Singh also became one. He resolved that if he was asked what his

religion was, his reply would be 'Patriotism'.

The author depicts Bhagat Singh as a mature youth evolving as a young intellectual. He illustrates his contention by saying that not only was Bhagat Singh a revolutionary but a sharp intellectual, deeply influenced by the great leader of the Russian revolution. He was in a way a replica of Lenin. If he had not become a martyr at a very young age he would surely have become Lenin of India.

In this context, the author comments : It is another matter that the leftist thinking and philosophy got a beating later. Why another matter, the author does not elucidate. This subjective anti-thesis of author deserves attention, because the lost cause of today can be risen from the ashes and be the rallying platform of tomorrow. The interesting point to note is that Bhagat Singh had the same equation with Gandhiji as Lenin had with Tolstoy.

While examining the religious beliefs of Bhagat Singh, the author says that like Karl Marx. Bhagat Singh also thought that 'religion was the opium of the masses'. There was only one difference between them, which Bhagat Singh acknowledged towards the end of his life. Coincidentally, I am reminded of David Shub's book 'Lenin'.

Lenin's elder brother, Alexander and four of his revolutionary comrades were sentenced to be hanged on charges of plotting the assassination of the Czar. Lenin resolves to avenge this act but in a different

way. He believed in carrying on an armed revolution. Similarly, Bhagat Singh had also reached the same conclusion. 'He was reading Lenin' biography minutes before being hanged. Before that Bhagat Singh and his comrades came to the prison court on 'Lenin Day', wearing red scarfs. (January, 1930). Bhagat Singh placed before the magistrate a telegram to the organizers of the third International Festival to mark the Lenin Day Celebrations with the request that it may be sent to Moscow. The telegram carried this message from Bhagat Singh : On this auspicious occasion of the celebration of Lenin Day, we offer our heartfelt congratulations to mark the success of the great experiment of Comrade Lenin. We are eager to link our names with this revolutionary movement." (P. 63).

Bhagat Singh and his comrades used to shout slogans in the court, 'Inquilab Zindabad' (Long Live the Revolution) and 'Down with Imperialism'. Bhagat Singh was fearless and knowledgeable but very humble at the same time. His averment that he was not a terrorist deserved to be taken note of. "I am not a terrorist. I am a revolutionary with a definite, well thought out long term plan of action. I summon all my innermost strength, declare emphatically that I am not a terrorist". (Page 36).

The author, while mentioning the armed struggle for India's independence launched by Subhash Chandra Bose, states

that when Subhash Chandra Bose sought Hitler's help in attaining India's independence, Hitler's response was that there was no way in which India could get independence for another 150 years at least. And even added : I am not keen to see the British leave India because if they do, their place would in all likelihood, be taken by Russia. (Page 38).

The author refers to a meeting between Pandit Nehru and the immortal martyr Chandrashekhar Azad which showed how disillusioned he was with terrorist methodology. Nevertheless, Chandrashekhar was not convinced that independence could be attained through non-violent means.

Dr. Vishwamitra in his comprehensive account of India's struggle for independence comes to the seemingly logical conclusion, that India's independence was the result of a collective effort, violent and non-violent, in and outside the country. Therefore, it would be unfair to negate any endeavour or to devalue its contribution. Independence is the sum total and an outcome of all endeavours, violent or non-violent. Any appraisal of the history of our struggle for independence should acknowledge the contribution of all efforts and struggles. I would even go to the extent of saluting the visionaries who had dreamt of independence even before we actually got it. In this arduous journey, we must acknowledge the foremost contribution of these people through their

sacrifice and martyrdom.

Bhagat Singh was one of the immortal martyrs whose sacrifice for the country can never be forgotten. So much has been written about him in the past and so much will be in future. Prem Chand Sahajwala's

book is also a link in the chain of the same tradition. How authentic it is can only be assessed by historians but one can certainly say that the book, written in a simple, easy and absorbing style, deserves to be read by Hindi readers.

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The Book Reviewed : Bhagat Singh : Itihas Ke Kuchh aur Panne

Author : Premchand Sahajwala

Published by : Ayan Prakashan Delhi

Price : Rs. 150/-

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