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Editor  
Mamta Kalia



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## LANGUAGE DISCOURSE WRITING

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## Editor's Note

*Literary journalism has had a rich heritage in Hindi. It acquired its relevance during the years of our struggle for independence. Every literary journal made Indian independence its supreme mission and strived towards this goal. Bhartendu Harishchandra started his magazine 'kavi vachan sudha' from varanasi in 1867 when he was only 17 years old. The magazine was of 22 pages and priced at 4 annas per copy. The first edition was of 250 copies. It was a monthly magazine that later on became a weekly.*

*Hindi Pradip was another monthly magazine that was brought out in 1877 from Allahabad under the editorship of Balkrishna Bhatt. It comprised of 16 pages. Hindi Pradip was banned by the British govt. for its revolutionary ideas and the ban lasted till 1910. The famous magazine 'Saraswati' was published from Allahabad in 1901. With scholarly editors like Shyam Sunder Das, Jagannath Das, Kishorilal and Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, it became the foremost manifesto of Hindi renaissance. As editor Dwivediji was the touchstone of grammatical perfection and content co-relation. Other magazines followed thereafter—Pratap, Karmvir and Janta.*

*'Chaand' was published in 1923 from Allahabad. It had Nand Gopal Singh Sehgal, Mahadevi Verma, Nandkishor Tiwari and Munshi Navjadiklal as editors. Mahadevi Verma took over Chaand in November 1935. The very first issue edited by her became historic since it played a pivotal role in voicing women's issues. This was the 'vidushi ank' that had only women contributors. The feminist discourse gained much momentum due to this special issue. Mahadevi Verma tried to bring about a renaissance by invoking women to come out of their submissive shell and assume a more constructive, cohesive and catalyist role in society. Her editorials crusaded for women's rights and lashed out against atrocities committed against women. These editorials were later published in a book form entitled 'shrinkhala ki kadian' in 1942. In fact Simone De Beauvoir's much acclaimed book 'the second sex' came out in 1949 whereas 'shrinkhala ki kadian' was published much earlier. Others who wrote about women's uplift were Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Shivrani Devi, Uma Nehru, Rameshwari Nehru and Swarup Kumari.*

*A curious fact was that most of these literary magazines were edited and published by writers themselves. They were not profitable investments to interest commercial publishers. A few business establishments maintained some magazines just to*

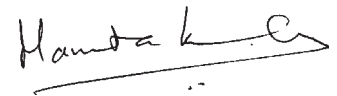
keep in touch with the intellectual class. Premchand wrote in magazines like Zamana, Maryada and Madhuri before he established 'Hans' in 1930 to express his progressive views. 'Kashi special number' of Hans was very well received by its readers. Other special issues were such as—'kahani ank, progati ank, shanti ank and Premchand smriti ank' published in 1938 after the writer's demise. His younger son Amrit Rai carried the torch by publishing it for some years. Hans was rejuvenated after a hiatus in 1986 by our senior contemporary writer Rajendra Yadav who preferred to call it 'jan chetna ka pragatisheel katha masik'.

Varanasi and Allahabad have been the pulsating points for the launch and lifeline of many literary magazines. But Badrivishal Pitti brought out 'kalpana' from Hyderabad and sustained it for a long time. At one time Calcutta patronised a number of literary magazines. 'Matwala' a weekly came out in 1923 and it had Nirala and Shivpujan Sahay on its editorial board. Our contributor Dr. Mangalmurty has given a detailed account of those years in Shivji's memoir 'Reminiscences of Nirala'.

It is not easy to enumerate all classic literary magazines in a short space. Hindi has flourished with every venture though at times the right and the left wing forces have been sharply polarised due to these publications. They have indulged in politics instead of polemics.

In this issue we have Muktibodh's famous essay on personal honesty of an artist. The prominent literary critic Dr. Nirmala Jain discusses problems that a literary critic faces while assessing a work of fiction. In focus there is Sahitya Akademi award winning poet Liladhar Jagudi with his poems. Another famous poet Manglesh Dabral casts a critical eye on his poetry.

Vimal Kumar and Umesh Chauhan's poems express different shades of contemporary experience in a complex existence whereas younger poet Vazda Khan brings out graphic details of feminine attitudes. Urdu Poet Javed Akhtar is very well known for depicting social reality without mincing his words. On our specific request Dr. Gopichand Narang has given us a detailed critique of Javed Akhtar's poetry. Dr. Nandkishor Naval is outspoken and straight-forward in his candid conversation. The given short stories are, as usual, interesting and insightful. Contributors are again requested to kindly send us their contributions on line at [editor.hindi@gmail.com](mailto:editor.hindi@gmail.com)



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## PERSONAL HONESTY OF AN ARTIST

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh

Translated by  
Ravindra Mishra

My diary attracts not much of debate. But yesterday was an exception. That Yashraj, who lives on that street, is not doing well in his profession as a lawyer but otherwise he is a proficient person. In spite of being B. Sc, B. Tech, L.L.B he is completely unemployed. Everyone in this city knows him, makes fun of him because he is unemployed. Saturn's shadow is always on his face.

Anyway I was very happy when I got the opportunity of reading my freshly written diary for 'Vasudha'. I thought what a great feat I have done! Yashraj was listening silently with his head down. When I finished reading he raised his head slowly. He started saying "this diary is totally fraud".

It seemed that I had been hit by some avalanche .Blood had dried from my veins. The pulse was very weak. Yashraj had distorted his face as if the taste of his mouth had become completely bitter.

I had written the diary with great effort. I had done so much of hard work after being inspired by paper-pistols of Parsai. But what was the consequence- dust! ash! sand!

I advised my mind a great deal. I patted it on the back even. But undoubtedly at that time my face had turned pale. Because I felt in those moments it appeared that squeezed from my face the blood is oozing

into my heart. When I looked at Yashraj I suspected he is laughing at me.

Collecting myself after a pause and gasping for words I said “call it fraud if you like but definitely there is personal honesty in it. This diary is a proof of my personal honesty”.

Yashraj suppressed his smile. This small movement of his lips-kind of wounded me. I tried that anger or blood should run in my eyes. But my body was bloodless. Secondly I could not have acted to swagger because that was against my parameters of intellectual culture.

Hitherto the history has been that I have been editing and correcting my heart with my mind. This process has been on since my childhood. Life is not a college or a university; it is like a primary school where one has to sit on a mat or wooden platform; one has to suffer all the sensation of a slap on cheeks over trivial issues. Yes! this life is like that. Fear, terror, unique apprehensions, strange complications, torn mats, old ink, coloured table, scary moustaches of the teacher and at home scolding of parents and the tender little body of the kid!

I had thought that I will grow fast—tall, robust and hefty; then life won't be at a primary level. But that was not to happen. With passage of time I grew frailer. I grew taller but sapped of vitality. Life became worse in primary school than before. Yes, I have to read the lessons all my life. Only

reading tables won't do. I will have to do newer arrangements of multiplication and division. Ink on fingers, blue spots on shirts, and blue colour on one corner of lips, this life is going to remain a primary school. The same old torn mats as if they were a line out of my poems.

Yashraj's case is different. He is a great man. He talks about Einstein. Planqui, La Place dance on his lips. I? Demolish this I! This is the message of Indian culture.

Yashraj's word-flow blew into my ears “what is the meaning of personal honesty? At the most that is honesty of expression, nothing more than this. You don't have even that.”

I don't know what all Yashraj kept saying. In my mind I was thinking that I have to edit my heart with the help of my wisdom. I have to add foot-notes, write introduction and at the end of it all I have to add a list of instructions. But will this editing and correction be ever complete? It is not possible. Only yesterday my old, very old father had said one has to keep learning till the last breath. One has to keep making amendments in oneself. One has to keep learning continuously and read newer lessons! It is like that!

I told Yashraj in the voice of self confession the meaning of “personal honesty' that it is stating ideas and feelings in the same quantity and ratio as they have arisen. It is the duty of the author to present feelings and ideas in their original



form.”

Yashraj continued in his persistent voice, “is his duty limited only to this? If it is limited to this it is neither personal honesty nor honesty of expression.”

I was not feeling like continuing discussion with Yashraj. I felt if some one offered a cup of tea the veins would warm up. Then perhaps I would regain interest in discussion. Still if I did not answer I would have appeared awkward. After all what is the matter! It is possible that Yashraj has something to say which can supplement me. I need to have patience.

I said, “how?”

Yashraj continued flying like a cartridge fired from a pistol. He said, it is not enough to present “feelings and ideas in the same quantity and ratio in which they occur. The thing that is important is whether the feeling or idea is in conformity with any objective reality or not. Those giving a slogan of personal honesty give importance to only subjective aspect of feelings and ideas and crown it with the title of emotional-truth and self-truth. But feelings and ideas have objective side as well. These days, subjective aspects are given importance and objective aspects are ignored. At the time of portrayal subjective side is given primacy, not the objective side. This attitude affects the technique.”

Yashraj’s eyes were worth looking at.

He was looking at me in a way as if sneering. But I started paying attention to his words, not his eyes.

Yashraj kept saying, “except for some important exceptions during the medieval period the description of objective side has been the dominant tendency. This tendency under emphasized the subjective aspect. The new Chhayavadi Yug gave prime importance to the subjective side and underemphasized the objective side. If Hindi poetry has to play an important role in the history of literature or for that matter in the history of culture it has to establish coordination between subjective side and objective aspect in the nature of poetry and its craft.

Yashraj looked at me with the eyes of a victor. Undoubtedly I had to be defeated. I nodded my heavy head in agreement with him. Then I realized that my mind is full of trivial things. They are not even worth cooking.

In spite of this I started listening more attentively. I realized, he has to say something that might be useful for me.

I said in the tone of a prayer, “See Yashraj I am not the spokesman of new poetry. Even if I accept your point it will continue to be a mystery as to how harmony is achieved between subjective and objective aspect?”

Yashraj interrupted and said “I was talking about your diary. From that context

I deviated to Nayi Kavita. At places you have talked of personal honesty which is quite foggy. What is the definition of personal honesty? I keep reading Nayi Kavita I don' find any big honesty in it".

Yashraj continued, "Nayi Kavita has also become stereotyped. That is also a pattern. Pattern can accommodate everything once one has mastery over its craft!"

Yashraj added saying "I hope you agree that feelings or ideas have an objective element. This means it is a mental reaction caused by an object. The element of truth would be born from this mental reaction when objective element has its origin from the object. At the same time it should include even this sense that the mental reaction which has occurred about the object is right or wrong, proper or improper, is in right proportion or wrong proportion. If it does not happen it would be a strange thing."

I said smilingly, "gentleman, the process of poetry is not an exercise in knowledge."

Yashraj answered, "Right. But the edifice of feelings is standing only on the basis of knowledge and understanding. If the foundation of knowledge and understanding is defective then even the building of feelings would be shapeless and useless. That would affect the poetic-craft as well."

After saying all this Yashraj kept quiet

for a moment as if to breathe. Then he continued "Personal honesty would be seen where a writer doing object related assessment of an object has honest mental response to the object. If he deviates from this, truth would be absent from his reaction."

I said, "if your definition is accepted there would be riot like situation in the field of poetry. The reality is that the object related truth you talk of is different from feeling related truth of poetry."

Yashraj started looking at me with wide eyes as if I were a strange creature like giraffe or kangaroo.

I also answered with great seriousness, "Even I have not succeeded in explaining my point."

Both of us changed our postures.

I started looking in space. I could see two things in the void. One was that according to Yashraj the depiction of that object is also very essential which causes mental reaction. The other was that for the emergence of truth it was essential that the poet expresses true mental reaction about the concerned object.

I commented on the views expressed by Yashraj like this. "What is the parameter to judge whether our mental reaction about any object is correct or not. To me a poet-author reacts to an object according to his view point. I agree that sensitivity is inherent in mental reaction but so is the

view or viewpoint. Both sensitivity and viewpoint constitute mental reaction. Yes, it is not necessary that the poet is fully conscious of his complete ideology which remains in the background of the view or viewpoint at the time the poet is mentally reacting. Everything can't be present in the focus of attention of man. But mind and attention are two different things. One has objective reality in mind while registering sensitive reaction to it but this reaction also has viewpoint of the poet either in conscious or half conscious form. It can't be said that this view or viewpoint is essentially intellectual. I can call his viewpoint a tendency or an attitude. The interesting thing is that at times while expressing mental reaction a tendency or view is present but mind is not a unit. Within this unit there is a duel. In such a situation there is a tendency within a mental reaction and there is also a vision which edits and amends the reaction. People on one side of the debate are of the view that editing and amending mental reaction is wrong, full of danger. There is scope of dishonesty here, it happens and is done deliberately. That is why what should actually happen is that individual mental reaction should be expressed in correct proportion and quantity as it appears.

This view held by them has a great content. Those who talk big in poetry, pretend and think of themselves as messiah,

present insignificant mental reaction in an exaggerated form which is in line with their vision. They are actors—. Although they absolutely lack the courage to indulge in real love yet they pretend so much that they can't live without their beloved. If we don't insist on presenting mental reaction as they appear in natural quantity and proportion the actor and pretender and those who exaggerate in poetry, would create fake literature. Such people edit and amend their mental reaction according to the nature of the duel in the unit of the mind. They hold the view that poetry is a cultural reaction not individual. That is why at the time of composing poetry they are at full liberty to act, pretend and indulge in hyperbole in their minds. They argue that poetry is a cultural institution not a personal space.

Please let go big words. Even I have been talking about editing and amending mental reaction. What is the real meaning of my view? What is the instructional importance of the fact when Yashraj talks of mental correctness of the mental reaction and emphasizes accurate mental reaction to an object? Does he mean to say that a poet should grow a realistic world view and that view should be inspiring his mental reaction? If in reality he holds this view there is not much of difference between our positions. All this I could think in a moment. The whole world of ideas became vibrant inside me. But the

flow of Yashraj's ideas was going in some other direction.

He kept saying, "personal honesty means when an author presents correct mental reaction about an object on the basis of objective assessment. If he deviates from this his reaction won't produce authenticity. Isn't it?"

I answered "If one accepts your definition there would be turbulence in the field of poetry. The truth of poetry is neither administrative nor scientific. Had it been so all literature born so far in the world would have followed your definition."

Yashraj interrupted "I was talking about personal honesty. I want to say that there are many poems in Hindi [and I can

talk of Hindi alone] that are absolutely fraud. There is not any less fraud in what you call Nayi Kavita."

Perhaps Yashraj had said this only to excite me but by the grace of God I did not lose my cool. I quietly launched an angular attack. I said, "Is not your criticism also a fraud?"

I wished to name a few critics but thinking of something I restrained. Even critics speak truth at random together with lies. Yes it happens in spite of their messia like ego.

Although I was quiet my excitement was mounting. Yashraj and I had indulged in many such brain storming sessions even earlier. So there was nothing disturbing about it.

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**Gajanan Madhav Mukibodh** (1917-1964) : one of the greater literary personalities of twentieth century is best known for his collection of poems 'chand ka munh tedha hai' and literary diary 'ek sahyik ki diary' He was a poet's poet. In prose he grappled with the fundamentals of literary criticism as they affect a writer's work and wisdom. Muktibodh lived in Madhyapradesh but passed away after prolonged and painful illness in Delhi.

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## DIFFICULTIES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

Nirmala Jain

Translated by  
Meenakshi Pawha

A long time ago, a teacher critic, writing in the context of literary formulae of Hindi literary criticism quoted Rene Welleck and Austin Warren that their quantity and quality both are very inferior from many points of view. To raise its standards, he had suggested that critiquing a literary work should be the prime objective of the critic. It would be futile to say that this suggestion grew out of an emulation of an emerging literary trend in English. With a purpose to indicate a lack of development in Hindi literary criticism, and by hinting at Rene Welleck, the writer simply affirms that despite expectations, literary criticism had a long way to go in English as well. But instead of bringing the problem of Hindi literary criticism centre-stage, this perspective created more confusion. The reason was that English was not bereft of 'new literary criticism'. Rather, it was being considered weak despite it. Instead of importing the problem and the solution, should we not look towards streamlining Hindi literary criticism? Once in a while, there are discussions pertaining to techniques of Hindi literary criticism. Hence in the present context we would like to focus our attention on the problems that beset criticism of the novels only.

Since a very long time, no matter how many techniques may have been adopted in the creation of the novel, in the realm of criticism, only one has been in practice.

The critic made a synopsis of a novel and then evaluated the

sociological, moral or psychological aspects as revealed by its chief protagonist.

This technique of literary criticism was adopted for critiquing 'Godan' 'Parakh' as well as *Banabhatta ki Aatmkatha*. The problem that arises is that by doing so, can one represent the complexity of life in its entirety? It is apparent that through this method, one can only cull out the skeleton of a vibrant novel, which, from the point of view of an appraisal, cannot by any stretch of imagination, be considered adequate. In this context, an example of English literary criticism can be illuminating. Percy Lubek, after gaining insight from the complex creative processes of Henry James, made a foray into literary criticism. At the very onset of *Craft of Fiction*, what he encountered was the difficulty of making a work fully autonomous. He had to concede that a refined interest and a sharpened focus are ineffective unless we visualize the critiqued work holistically in our mind. And the work is as elusive as a cloud which cannot be pinned down, and which perennially eludes us. While critiquing a lyric, one does not encounter difficulty in visualizing its image in totality. But it is a major encumbrance in the way of critiquing a narrative.

In re-creation of the analysed work this is the first step, then it is quite unnecessary to affirm that literary criticism, by nature is accursed. In resorting

to summarization of the narrative or centering on character analysis, it would be impossible to fully re-create its essence. With this practice, a lot is left out, and these residual remains, are usually, far more invaluable. The summary of any vibrant novel is similar to that thread in a garland which has been laid bare after all the flowers have been ripped apart from it. Hence, the foremost problem of literary criticism is to look for the necessary techniques to re-invigorate a novel. There is no doubt, that every technique of re-creation is, by nature afflicted by simplification. Consequently, our endeavour in this direction is to avoid, as far as possible, this temptation of over-simplification. Though in a painting, a simple sketch is also a mechanism which gets further enhanced at the hands of a proficient artist.

In the process of re-invigoration of the critiqued work, it is important for a critic to have some knowledge of the critical processes. For this, he is perforce dependent upon the clues hinted at by the writer himself/herself. Another reason for the weakness of Hindi literary criticism is that the novelists themselves have not taken a lead in this direction whereas their western counterparts have made available, plethora of material in the form of diaries and exhaustive notes. In Hindi, if the criticism in poetry is richer, then it is predominantly because the poets have

facilitated the availability of the material which chronicle their creative processes. But the most unfortunate part is, that despite some novelists having attempted to make such material readily available, Hindi criticism has failed to take advantage of it.

*Shekhar ek Jeevni* is a case in point. The author, in the preface to the book had indicated: 'Just as the colourful woof of the carpet is held by the hard strung warp of a single colour, similarly the three parts of the life history of my narrative are bound by a single skein, which, in turn is indivisible'. It is not important to enumerate, that the critical gaze has been on the chief protagonist Shekhar, who is akin to the tough hard spun thread in the carpet- but which part of the carpet does it lend its support to or bear its weight upon, has been completely ignored. What is worth mentioning is that Agyeya, in trying to articulate the matrix of his novel, resorted to the metaphor of a carpet which has an important aspect of the creative process of the novel embedded in it. For instance, Thomas Hardy in trying to exemplify his creative process had taken recourse to this analogy when he wrote: 'Just as when we look at the carpet and follow the trail of a single colour scheme, a particular kind of figure emerges, and if we follow another colour scheme, the figure morphs itself into a different form, similarly a seer should follow and narrate a form

which interests him. What Hardy said in the context of life, can be found useful in the context of the novel as well. A novel is similar to a carpet. A critic must have the resilience to be able to carefully and consistently follow the trajectories of the different colour schemes. Not only this, he must also endeavour to look at the flip side of the carpet as well. To say the least, the question here is –does Hindi literary criticism investigate in this manner or does it even contemplate the need to undertake such an exercise?

There can be an objection that the novel is not a carpet. Hence, to see it in that form is outside the realm of criticism. No doubt, like other metaphors, this too has its limitations and to carry it too far would indeed be an exercise in futility. But what is worth mentioning is that like criticism of other literary genres, one cannot insulate the vocabulary of literary criticism from metaphorical use. In English too, the vocabulary of literary criticism is indebted to many other art forms. To elucidate the making of a novel, E.M Forster depended on rhythm and expressed his debt to music. Correspondingly the narrative reflections of Henry James are intermittently imbued with painting, sculpture and architectural references. F.R. Leavis, in the fourth decade of the twentieth century turned from the poetic criticism towards the criticism of the novel. He was influenced by the new

achievements of literary criticism- he called Shakespeare's plays, a novel in dramatic poetry. It is evident that these kinds of techniques have been used in literary criticism. It was done to make use of the novel which has portrayed life in its varied dimensions and there is no doubt that literary criticism has been enriched to a very large extent in this manner. If Hindi, did not take recourse to these similarities, then the outcome of it was that though Hindi was able to maintain its traditional purity, it got relegated to it being synoptic criticism. Seeing the novel of today one can only call it an incomplete interface, rather a one-sided encounter.

The second problem of Hindi literary criticism: vast popularization and analysis of the novel—pertaining to its components, and to critique and evaluate the novel on each of its components. Usually, there are five or six components of a novel, in which plot, character, time and context are considered extremely important. A novel is analyzed on the basis of these components. The dead mechanical description analysis becomes all the more dangerous when one of these elements is made the basis of evaluation. For instance, to critique *Godan* on the criteria that in an attempt to include urban life, Premchand has weakened the plot or that there is disintegration in the plot of *Charu Chandralekh*. The limitations of such critiques is not that it expects a particular

kind of readymade plot, rather it is not clearly enunciated as to what is the designated role of a plot in the work that has been critiqued. Hence, there is a kind of criticism levelled against some novels that they are devoid of plot. Correspondingly, a narrator of a novel is considered its chief protagonist, and by some strange logic this is considered to be the weakness of the author's character! There is another tradition of Hindi literary criticism and that is the vibrancy of minor characters and weakness of major characters- which is considered a weakness of the novel itself. Similar magical evaluations are performed on time and space.

It is true that every novel has a plot. It is populated by some characters and there is a certain context as well. In the same way as you have nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions- which are integral in a sentence, it is unnecessary to affirm that the power of these components is not real, rather they are a kind of convenient imaginative concepts which have been used to describe a language. In order to understand the implied connotation of a sentence, one has to transcend the components of grammar and take recourse to the strength of the word. Similarly, there is a need to move beyond the grammar of a novel- but then for this it is imperative that the components of a novel be considered its



grammar.

Thus in this way, a novel's entire structure is constructed. All the novelists use plot, character, context, but every novelist uses his/her experiences from life and uses these elements in a very special way to fulfill his creative aspirations. As per requirements, he/she manipulates the plot accordingly- sometimes the plot is strong, sometimes it is disintegrated and at times even weak. Some characters may be active while some maybe lazy, while others may be detached while yet another, a philosopher. When Falubert said that 'I am Madame Bovary or when in *Parakh*, Jainendra said that 'this book has been created to reveal me', both the novelists forbade the readers not to look into those specific characters only but rather to view life in its entirety as reflected in that work from the beginning to the end. The question here is that have there been any attempts in Hindi literary criticism to transcend these practices?

Hindi literary criticism is besieged with yet another predicament-to ignore the creative role of language in a novel. There is no denying the fact that while doing an appraisal of a novel, one casually mentions the role of the importance of language contributing to the spontaneous conversation amidst characters and in the description of the scenes. But the strong contention beyond a shadow of doubt is that in a novel, language has a secondary

role. What is definitely incontestable is the role language plays in poetry-it is certainly not the same in a novel or a story. What is also true is that many novelists are extremely lackadaisical in the use of language-to the extent that some novelists have created great novels by a relatively poor use of language. But what is also true in conjunction with this fact is that along with a poetic work, a novel too, is after all a creation of the language. After completing a novel, we find that each character emerges in front of us, to witness the emergence of a cogent plot and the context comes alive, This entire edifice is only possible as every word and every sentence in a novel has a cumulative impact.

No matter how insignificant a language may appear in a novel, but it is veritably impossible to envisage its structure without it. It was on the basis of this trust that the analytical techniques employed in New English Literary Criticism were applied to the criticism of the novel. The cardinal creative contexts of the critiqued novel was brought forth most by its language analysis. In doing so, the beauty of the plot was highlighted. In this process, there is mention of imagery, symbolism and myths. Undoubtedly, a popular work of art such as a novel cannot simply be appraised purely on the basis of a language analysis of a few situations or contexts, because this technique is clearly inadequate. But with this technique, the critiqued work

reflects the sharpness and intensity of life experiences. But because of this practice, the sharpness of different life-experiences and their gravity are illumined, which otherwise get excluded in the method of critiquing characterization. The question here is, that knowing adequately the limitations of this practice, is it possible to make its role relevant in literary criticism, even if it is in a miniscule way ?

The importance of linguistic analysis arises in the context of those works where the re-creation depends on a specific language: For example *Banabhatta ki Aatmakatha* (The Autobiography of Banabhatta). for all practical purposes, *Banabhatta ki Aatmakatha* is a historical novel, but it is not a historical novel like *Jhansi ki Rani*. The critical evaluation of *Jhansi ki Rani* is possible even without a linguistic analysis, in fact, if one were to be overtly critical of its language, even then it would not do injustice to the novel. But the same principle cannot be applied to *Banabhatta ki Aatmakatha*. Language is not merely a trustworthy medium to create a trustworthy environment in *Banabhatta ki Aatmakatha*, rather the entire narrative is imbued in it. Through a very Sanskritised language, an attempt has been made to create an environment of trust for *Divya*. But from the point of view of a sensitive reader, the use of language in *Divya* does not rival the creative output

of the language in *Banabhatta ki Aatmakatha*. Similarly, novels such as *Tyagpatra* (Resignation Letter), *Nadi ke Dweep* (Islands of the River) and *Ve Din* (Those were the Days), in the use of language, expect to be evaluated at par with the precedence set by a poetic work.

In the narrative literature of the latter part of the twentieth century, a huge number of stories and novels have been written in which the authors have made judicious use of the language. In order to make its narrative effective, these authors have used language as a very successful instrument. There is a kind of playfulness towards the language which evinces a great strength of that work. To be able to gauge this creative output of the prolific writer, it is imperative to understand his/her use of the language. The main attraction of Manoharshyam Joshi's novel '*Kuru Kuru Swaha*' and his other stories was this treatment meted out to the language. Hence, apart from critiquing and embellishing conversation with it, it requires a close perusal of its language.

In the past, Vinod Kumar Shukla's *Deewar Mein Ek Khirki Rahti Thi* (There was a Window in the Wall) was extremely popular because of its unique use of the language and the use of fantasy. This novel critiques the culture of consumerism and envisages a vision. It plays a major role in trying to adapt the language of poetry to the novelistic

genre. The point is that such works cannot be wholly investigated on the basis of the plot, character, chronology, setting, nor can it be done on a sequential preference of these elements.

The objections were raised against the appropriation of New Criticism in English Literary criticism. If Hindi, in a knee-jerk fashion criticized the linguistic evaluation, then definitely literary criticism has been deprived of very serious critical endeavour. For the simple reason, that even in the field of poetic literary criticism there has not been an adequate linguistic appraisal so far.

Ostensibly, a major problem of Hindi literary criticism is to adopt the novel as a document of real life. Those who consider a novel as a work of art and go and stand on one end of the spectrum, then the realists take recourse to the novel as a document synonymous with real life. It is futile to point out that Hindi literary criticism is predominantly on the other end of the spectrum.

If the purists assess a novel only on the basis of its coherence then the so called realists' perspective is incessantly synonymous with the novel's correspondence to life. The point is that the novel is neither a piece of art like a painting nor is it a solid document of life. The position of the novel is unique between these two ends of the spectrum as some people consider it a creative

amalgamation. Hence in order to critique a novel, it is imperative that its complete autonomy be accepted and it be considered a unique art form rather than a real life document. If we have to construct an independent critical treatise for the novel, then we have to, perforce, assign it the status of a very special creative form.

Like a very distinctive work of creativity, a novel is like a microcosm of the macrocosm, which though complete in itself is still receptive to the real world. It is not necessary that every novel must acquaint us to our already prosaic realities. In an age, where the much agreed upon reality has become rather dubious it is unfair to expect realism in the novels and when failing to get it, it would rather be unfair on our part to accuse the novelist of not being relevant in his/her outlook.

If there is no manifestation of realism, then it is evident that the novel does not belong to the realistic mode but is also becoming a medium of creative expression of realism. Thus, the best novels of this century are an attempt by its writer at seeking the truth. Under these circumstances it is extremely dangerous to investigate the significance of sheer correspondence to life, which can deviate literary criticism from its designated path. With regard to realism, Hindi literary criticism, even today, is oblivious of these unique creative challenges, and hence most of the criticism that emerges in the name

of literary criticism is 'extrinsic'. In Hindi, one does not find serious attempts at critiquing novels written in the genre of 'fantasy'. One major reason for it is this misconception about the nature of the novel. Premchand's *Kayakalp (Metamorphosis)*, and Agyeya's *Apne-Apne Ajnabi (Our Own Stranger)*, Manoharshayam Joshi's *Haria Hercules ki Hairani (The Astonishment of Haria Hercules)* and many similar novels have apparently fallen prey to this notion.

One needs to ponder on this, that for a very long time Hindi literary criticism was devoid of its indigenous critical structure. The reason for this was that it was seen as an outcome of the western influences in the contemporary times. Using *Pariksha Guru* as a target text, Ramchandra Shukla in his first edition of History of Hindi Literature had said: 'The very first attempt based on the English novel, published in Hindi was Lala Srinivas Dass's *Pariksha Guru*'. What he analysed as an English style, was in relation to its language, on which there was no monopoly of English over it either then or now. In India, from the very beginning, one thing is evident for the evaluation of the novel, and that is the propensity to pay attention to the special features of the English novel was a natural outcome of this popular trend.

Without an exposition, later on Nirmal Verma, labeled the novels of Premchand

as those emulating the Victorian model. If his intention was to look for moral lessons—then it would not be out of context but rather appropriate to recall that India has an ancient tradition of 'moral fables.' In his essay entitled *Premchand ki Upasthheiti (The Presence of Premchand)*, categorically states thus: 'Most of Premchand's writings were drawn from the nineteenth century developed European models'. This structure of the narrative form like other modern worldwide apparatus, was a very convenient tool for every writer. Whenever the writer's regional experiences did not fit into this structure, the writer found it more convenient to forsake those experiences of his instead of abandoning those structures'. What is not clear in the aforementioned statement of Nirmal Verma is his insinuation towards —what kind of regional experiences was Premchand failing to fit into the so called structures—which compelled him to abandon these regional experiences? It is rather ironical that Nirmal Verma, who was known for his proficient experimentation with the various techniques of modernism and post modernism in his stories should be creating a hue and cry for Premchand resorting to western literary models and in doing so, abandoning his regional sensibilities. These remarks are indicative of the fact that constantly, our criticism of literary works is inadvertently looking westwards for inspiration. It is worth reiterating that this

propensity to consider the West as its 'Muse' for literary criticism has gone a long way in jeopardizing the Hindi regional sensibility in developing its own critical tools.

India has got the story from the West—those who have been perennially chanting this mantra have been adequately warned by Dr. Ramvilas Sharma, who has cited an already existing ancient tradition of story telling. The existence of this tradition has been talked about several times by others as well, but predominantly in the historical sense.

Whether this tradition found its fruition in indigenous and regional traditions, or in modern Indian literature, and if it did, then in what form and to what extent—the investigation that needed to be done lacked the vigour. What is being implied here is that though the Hindi novel was within the western mould, there lie certain indigenous and regional elements in it. The identification and delineation still needs to be done. The structures of the Hindi novels and stories are constantly breaking down and being constantly refabricated. The very first important structure was first produced by Premchand in his stories which dealt with societal issues. These were pitted against the fiercely individualistic subject matter of Jainendra's stories.

This change was not only of the subject matter, but of the entire structure—the

transformation of the realistic structure into a creative one. The question was the change being effected not only in the tenets of the creative process but in perspective as well. This change can be comprehended neither in a form of constant exchange of local and foreign structures nor in doing jugglery by simplifying it. Each has its own distinctive regional colour.

Despite their common individualistic approach, the works of Jainendra, Agyeya and Nirmal Verma's individualism cannot be hung on the same peg and explained.

The demand for modernism and postmodernism have subsequently proliferated. Despite their common individualistic approach, there is a distinctive difference in their perspectives, it is not necessary to state and need not be overemphasized at this juncture. What needed to be affirmed is that the impact of the western influences and its syncreticism on the writer is dependant on his/her personal value system and mental framework. The stamp of his/her writing should be made on this criteria.

It would not be out of context to recapitulate that there was a unique wave of western individualism which impacted the literatures of all regional languages of India and there were huge discussions pertaining to this influence. It cannot be denied that this impact to a large extent was perceptible on the literary works, style

and idioms. But the sense of being a stranger, feeling of alienation, an experience of being lonely in a crowd, and a sense of frustration, oppression, fear of death in *The Plague*, *Outsider*, *Nausea* *Metamorphosis*, can be juxtaposed and can be comprehended but to recognize these works as a contrast to their writings would be a far better proposition.

Another important question is raised pertaining to those novels which have been an outcome of an interface with deep cultural knowledge and the local milieu. It is obvious, that the literary works of Hazariprasad Dwivedi, Phanishwarnath 'Renu', and Manoharshyam Joshi or Surendra Verma, cannot be evaluated by

one single literary tool. How futile can this indiscriminate application of western literary critical parameters be, have been adequately proven by the postmodernists in their attempt entitled *Virachan*. Despite all the hullabaloo of name dropping, there seems to have been no gain in terms of better understanding of such works.

There are many other problems of literary criticism and there can be more, but there is only one way to untangle these problems. The Novel should be considered an intensely progressive creative form. One must take into account its diversity and critique and evaluate it accordingly. The possibilities of the development of literary criticism are inherent in these liberal perspectives.

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## JAVED AKHTAR'S POETRY : A CRITIQUE

Gopichand Narang

Translated by  
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“*Hogâ koî aisâ bhî ki Ghâlib ko na jâne/ Shâyir toh woh achhâ hai pai badnâm bahut hai*” –(Could there be anyone who does not know Ghalib? A good poet though he is, he has a very bad reputation.) It is here that Ghalib has made a distinction between his poetic persona and his poetry, although the highs and dips of personality and events of life do certainly get reflected in poetry. Poetry, however, is not just a mirror of the self. The canary has the mirror in front of it in all the directions. It looks in the mirror and displays its coquettish charms. In eastern traditions the poet is called a sweet -singing bird, but the bird imagines its own reflection to be it's 'other', and then starts talking with it. The words come from an invisible world, which means from behind the mirror. In other words, they come from the comings and goings of life. “*Âte hain ghaib se ye mazâmîn khayâl mein*”. That is why some scholars have described poetry not as an exact mirror image of personality, but something that transcends it. This means that poetry does not constitute an escape from life-situation, but the shape that life-situation takes on being transformed by the inner creative process. Before we turn to Javed Akhtar's poetry, we can also put it like this, that poetry undoubtedly grows from a situation that has occurred in life, but it is also engaged in a discourse with the eye of imagination and the invisible world and thus the poem that makes its appearance on the page of paper has its own individuality. It exists on a different axis of time, which is different from the mechanical rotation of day and

night or black and white, and is capable of discoursing with the future also.

Furthermore, Ghalib has put the world 'badnâm' (infamous) in the (above) verse at such a place that the 'achhâî' ('goodness') of the word 'achhâ' ('good') has become all the more apparent and 'badnâm' ('infamous') has become a term of praise, giving a sense of good repute and fame. Without making any comparison, it can be said that as everybody knows Javed Akhtar's fame travels several steps ahead of his poetry, though we are not concerned here with the Javed Akhtar whom people of the celluloid world know — and know him like not knowing him at all. This is because it is the world of the image whose glitter and glamour is nothing but simulacra, that is, the real is nowhere, only the master copy exists, which in itself is an image — something that is not but has been created, as though it were a vision of a mirage. Whereas, though language is manifest, but if the verse is written with lifeblood, and is an emanation of the inner flame, it is not only real but is acquainted with the secrets of the truth and meaning of life, as we shall see a little later.

There is another aspect of Javed Akhtar's personality and that too is not any less apparent. There will be hardly any poet of Urdu who is related to such excellent and historical personalities from paternal grandfather's and maternal grandfather's side, with literary and poetic

legacy passing on from father to son, generation to generation. Who does not know the name of Allama Fazlul Haq Khairabadi, he was extraordinarily intelligent and a great scholar of his times. Ghalib was a great admirer of his. It is said that his advice also had a hand in the selection of Ghalib's *Dewân* (collection of poems). He had put his signature to the decree of the Mutiny and was sentenced to imprisonment in Kâlâpânî (Andaman) jail on the charge of rebellion against the British. And before the orders for his release reached Andaman, he obtained freedom from both the prison of the foreigners and prison of the physical body. Even today his grave is a public place located on a high mound covered with green trees on the shore of the blue waters of Andaman's sea. The Maulana was his paternal grandfather's paternal grandfather. Javed Akhtar's paternal grandfather Muztar Khairabadi was a distinguished poet of his times. Javed Akhtar is the son of the progressive poet Jan Nisar Akhtar and Sophia Akhtar of 'Zer-e-lab', and the nephew of poet Majaz, who died young. He is related to Kaifi Azmi also; so as to say, "în hamkhânâ âftâb ast" ('the sun and I live in the same house'), and writing has been a hereditary inheritance. However, Jan Nisar Akhtar and Majaz have been so generous in giving it away and putting it to good use that when young Jadu reached Bombay after the tragic death of his destitute mother, he



got nothing but the unsheltered life of the footpath. Actually, he learnt to face the challenges of circumstances and calamities and adjust with the vicissitudes of time from the beginning. The struggle of life is the only key that opens closed doors. When the inner fire came out in the form of golden speech, it started getting moulded into powerful words. The bounties of ancestors and elders continued to benefit him, but drawing of lifeblood did not allow anything else to be dominant. Javed Akhtar's poetry is everywhere his own poetry, in which he has his own voice, his own tone and tenor, his own poignant style.

However, sometimes more than fathers and grandfathers, it is the unconscious relationship of the great-grandfathers that leaves its imprint in the blood. Courage and boldness, facing challenges and self-respect are archetypes which come from unconscious relationships. Let me give one hint and things will become clear.

An interesting event about his grandfather Maulana Fazl-ul-Haq is mentioned in the '*Tazkirah Gausiyā*' (Memoirs of the Saints). It is said that Maulana Fazl-ul-Haq was the son of Maulvi Imam Khairabadi and enjoyed a high status among scholars of logic. He also used to compose poetry in Arabic. He was so capable that he had achieved great fame at a young age. It so happened that one day he composed a *qasidā* (ode) in the

style of Amr-al-Qais and recited it before Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz (Shah Waliullah's elder son). Shah Sahib raised an objection at one place. In reply the Maulana quoted couplets from the ancient poets. Maulvi Fazl Imam (the elderly father) interrupted, and accused him of crossing the limit of pertinence! He retorted by saying that it was no science of interpretation of the *Hadis* (the sayings of the prophet Mohammad), it was poetry, so how did it amount to impertinence. On hearing this Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz Sahib, before whom nobody dared to utter a word, said, "You are right my son, I made a mistake".

Javed Akhtar's collection of poems *Tarkash* had appeared many years before and Quratul-ain-Haider had written a comment on it. Jadu's upbringing in his childhood years was an extremely painful reportage of the courage and spirit of a frail and thin lady which fills the mind with great sadness. Javed Akhtar has written *ghazals* as well as *nazms*, but he has worked his magic mostly in his *nazms*. Poems such as '*waqt*' (Time) "*Wo kamrā yād ātā hai* (I remember that room), '*Ek mohre kā safar*' (The journey of a pawn), '*Merī āwārgī*' (My wanderings), '*Bhūkh*' (Hunger), 'Mother Teresa' became so to say his trade mark. But these poems are quite different from the tradition of modern poetry which originated with N. M. Rashid, Miraji and Akhtar-ul-Iman or which formed the mode of expression of Majaz, Jan Nisar Akhtar,

Makhdoom, Ali Sardar Jafri and Kaifi Azmi. What was Javed Akhtar's own voice? What was his own thinking, his own discourse, his own poetic structure, his own form and style which were shaped by his poetry or which did not have anybody's imprint? No one has discussed this till now, though everybody has showered praise on him. This being the case, it is necessary to try to see what arrows he has in his quiver having the power to pierce. Poetry is a manner of saying things; it is not the name of amorous glances of beautiful women. Even otherwise analysis of the wonders of poetry is not so simple. Where there is lava there will be fire also, where there is fire there will be ashes, a thing that burns gets extinguished also, where something is given shape there will be tension as well—it is not as simple as that. Some sparks are cultivated ideas while some emanate from writing in the process that also operates here. Only criticism can try to find out.

Javed Akhtar's poems include all kinds of *nazms*, long as well as short. One thing about their weave and structure that draws our attention again and again is that they are products of Javed Akhtar's mental quest or his perception and reflection. That means his thinking is an effort to reach at the core of some problem, to untie the knots of some knotty or intractable tangle or to know the secrets of the universe or unravel the mysteries of man's inner life. '*Ye khel kyâ hai?*'

('What is this game?'), '*Kâyânât*' ('The Universe'), '*Ajîb qissâ hai*' ('A strange matter'), '*Bargad*' ('The banyan tree'), '*Bar vaqt ek aur khayâl*' (Another timely thought'), common to all these poems is his mental quest, his endeavour to know the secrets of life or find out its mystery. The second thing is that while composing his poems Javed Akhtar generally makes use of small lines. Not that he has not used longer metres at all—quite a few of his ghazals are composed in longer metres. But *nazms* he splits into smaller parts. Giving the subject a poetic shape sequence by sequence, he goes level by level into depth to build the poem. His third characteristic is that he raises one question after another. The fourth thing is that while pondering over the questions at different levels, he takes the reader along with him, and remaining in discourse with him raises questions verse by verse, and then moves ahead. The fifth and last thing is that in these poems there is space not only for enquiry but for understanding also.

I am thinking  
 What are these pawns  
 If I regard these pawns  
 Only as wooden toys  
 Then what is it to win or to lose?

The title of the poem is '*Ye khel kyâ hai?*' ('What is this game about?'). As the poem goes on, we find that it is not about chess, it is about life. The winning or losing

is connected with life. Chess is only a metaphor. The black and white pieces are days and nights. The whole activity, whole struggle, is concerned with life.

This is no game  
This is a war, which has to be won  
So I assume  
These pieces are real kings and queens  
Real pawns  
And in front of them  
Are the enemy's forces  
Who have every intention  
Every kind of plan  
To destroy me

Furthermore, the king and the queen represent destiny and power and the pawns are poor and helpless human beings who have no voice of their own. Here the metaphor of war assumes a double meaning. This is not a war just for personal defence, personal gain or welfare; it is a war to be fought for creating awareness about the exploitative clutches of social oppression and injustice and for deepening the desire to struggle against it.

Why is there such a rule in the game  
That the pawn that has left its house  
Should not be allowed to return to it?  
If this is what the rule is  
Then what a rule it is  
If this is what the game is  
Then what a game it is

I do not know for how long I have been involved with these questions

My opponent has made a move  
And is now waiting for my counter-move

The way the whole subject under discussion has been wound up and given a dramatic twist – that too is one of the delightful features of the poem that enhances its enjoyment.

The vastness of the horizon, its span from end to end, with no limit to its limit, this too is a knotty problem that we generally leave alone as routine, without being concerned about or being conscious of it. But sages, philosophers, mystics and saints have always confronted this problem. Einstein had said, "God does not play dice". Since then quantum physics is engaged in unravelling one mystery after another, yet it is not as though the mysteries have been unravelled. Like time, space too is a question that is imponderable. In Switzerland CERN is doing its work, but the euphoria that had been generated on the discovery of Higgs Boson is now uncertain. However much be the high stars scared of man, a creature created out of dust, the passageways of stars are enveloped in the mist of the galaxies. Where the poet's imaginative eye and ecstasy reach, those distances even hundreds of light years cannot fill up. As pointed out earlier, Javed Akhtar's inquisitive eye probes every scene,

ponders over it, raises questions and makes the reader participate in the process of understanding and explaining, wonder and delight.

For many centuries I have been gazing  
at

This universe and its vastness

All this is amazing

What a sight it is, what a spectacle!

What we think is the sky

In it thousands of suns are melting like  
fireflies

Gleaming meteors

Are shooting across it like arrows of  
fire

Galaxies are spread over

Millions of light years...

And in the end this paramount  
question,

Is there any world beyond it?

Any sky

If not

Then how far does this "not" stretch?

It is not as though the poet has any solution for these questions or any basic mantra to explain the mysteries of the universe. But firstly by leaving a spark of inquiry in the reader's mind, the poet shatters the facade of routine unconcern or one can say he awakens in him through reflection and understanding an awareness about complex questions. Secondly, the poet launches an attack on the way the monopolists of religion keep all the keys

with them or want to snatch away from the common man his ability to ask questions, which is the first lesson of fascism. Religion is for man's guidance and welfare, but difficulty arises when some people regard religion as their personal fiefdom and use it to bargain with simple-minded masses. The word 'wâiz' (preacher) has been used as a metaphor. It could be 'Brâhman' or 'Maulvî' also, or 'gabromajûsî' ('Parsi fire-worshipper') or 'pâdrî' ('priest') as well. In fact the poem ends on a note of double entendre. Perhaps nobody should have any doubt that like the poem 'Waqf', which belongs to the period of 'Tarkash' for its thoughtfulness and sense of inquiry, these poems also call for deep consideration and thought.

The same contemplative tone and sharp edge of thought can be found in the shorter poems also, though these poems deal with different problems and questions. But, as pointed out above, they display the same stance regarding thinking and curiosity, interestedness in pondering over or exploring something, and on the reader's participation in an enquiring discourse. For instance, 'Ajib qissâ hai' (It is a strange story), 'Bargad' (The banyan tree) 'Khudâ hâfiz' (Good bye), 'Ânsû' (Tears) and 'Zabân' (Language) are similar lively poems which compel us to think. 'Ajib qissâ hai' is as much about human relationship as about the problem that the excitement of achieving one's ideal or goal lies not so

much in success as in restlessness and search. Sometimes success and prosperity also boomerang on us, or else why does every revolution become the rust on its mirror after its success. 'Ānsū' tells a tale of woe, 'Bargad' is reminiscent of small town culture, it reminds us that everything is as it was, the turns of the road, the people, the lanes, but the shade of intimacy and coolness that were there are lost in the vicissitudes of time and cannot be brought back.

'Zabān' is a different kind of poem and it also forms the title of the exordium of the collection under review. Like time and space, language is also a great mystery, unknowing of beginning and end, self-dependent, self-aware and autonomous. The Upanishads say that the word is the Brahman. Modern thinker Heidegger says "being is language". Postmodernist Lacan, who is Freud's degenerate disciple and an admirer of Anandavardhana, argues that the human unconscious is like language and language is like human unconscious. If we consider why did Ghalib have to say this in the beginning of his youth:

"Hajūm sādāh lohī pan ba gosh-e-harifān hai

Digar na khwāb kī muzmir hain afsāne mein ta'bīren"

Like self or the universe, language too is an inexplicable phenomenon. In his natural manner Javed Akhtar raises this

question verse by verse and untangles it step by step:

I am thinking that  
This sound called *alif*  
Is a straight line  
But who was it after all  
Who had filled it with sound?  
Why did everybody agree to call  
this fruit on the table in front of me  
an apple  
The peculiar relationship  
That this sound has with this fruit  
How did it come to be established?

In the twentieth century, the bond that existed between the word and the meaning has been untied after the Sausserian revolution. Let us consider from Ibn Qatiba and old Ibn Jaffer to Ibn Khaldun and in the Indian traditions from Nagarjun and Bhartrihari to Shankaracharya why *shabd* was called *shabd* and *akshar* was called *akshar*. The poet, without getting into any theological discussion, unfolds the secrets of language and this infinite world of wonder and takes the poem to its climax on the question of questions:

All things  
All emotions  
All thoughts  
All sounds  
Slipshod lines  
Who is it who in order to give  
Their news  
Their message

Full coverage

Settling these sounds in their houses  
Keeping them under their protection  
Has established a family?

By the time it reaches here the poem goes into the depths of the problem and lays it open for further reflection. *Akshar* means stable, that which cannot be removed from its place, immovable, whereas the meaning is a rapid flow, it is as much present as it is absent. The mystery of mysteries is that this is why the text protects the meaning and interpretations change with the differences in reading. The fact is that to enjoy this poem one must read it repeatedly. From *Marâh-ul-khayâl* we quote an interesting event about Bedil that will unfold yet another dimension to the interpretation of this poem which connoisseurs will find out themselves. Bedil's famous couplet is as follows:

*Nashad âina kaifiat mâ zâhir ârâi/  
Nihân mânind yam chûn ma'anî bachand  
yîn lafz paidâi//*

(In spite of external decoration our inner state was never revealed. In spite of so many words we remained concealed like meaning.)

Sheikh Nasir Ali objected that the second line is against the convention, as meaning is dependent on the word. Bedil replied that the meaning you declare to be dependent on the word is in reality not more than a word. The thing that is really

called meaning cannot be contained in a word. For instance, in spite of all the explanations and details given in books, man's real essence has not been revealed at all. On hearing this reply, Nasir Ali became dumb founded. It hardly needs to be said that where a poet's intellect and imagination reach in the blinking of an eye, it takes philosophies centuries to reach there.

There are many more poems of this kind which we can talk about; for instance, '*Jhonpdî*', '*Ghar mein baithe kyâ likhte ho*', '*Melâ*' and '*Ped se liptî bel*'. There is a certain warmth of sincerity and touch of reflection in poems written for Shabana and Kaifi. In the poem '*Ghar mein baithe kyâ likhte ho*', poets have been urged to come out of their shells and survey the world. This poem is a must read for critics and self-styled intellectuals who give pricks in the form of words of patronage or pick up faults in the verse, and do not want to know that the whole human scenario has changed. In '*Jhonpdî*', we have a different world of its own kind – a world of love, desire, human relationship, armed mafia, drugs and crime. Has it been created by another God? Good deeds or bad, these destitute people are held responsible for everything. Those who make them do all this live in mansions themselves. The hidden hands are somewhere else. For these people separate settlements have been set up or they have been pushed into

the sewers. Has their God also been taken away from them? Or he keeps his eyes closed? 'Melâ' (Fair) also displays a tendency towards thoughtfulness and the capacity to understand subtleties. This life too is a fair in which there is an imaginary picture of a father and a son and a dialogue between them about how the cycle of life changes interpretation of ages and the same child who sleeps on the shoulder of his father, when he grows up and the father grows old the father himself needs the shoulder of the son to rest upon.

Javed Akhtar's *ghazals* are also equally thought provoking and pleasing. Every couplet of his *ghazals* is unique, but there is a flow also in some *ghazals*. In these too there is little sentimentality and more of a reflective and perceptive atmosphere as in the *nazms*.

Philosophical traditions have their own place in the suggestiveness of the *ghazal*, but here too Javed Akhtar has his own style. One often finds a consistent quality of enquiry and reflection in them, which has its own pleasure. For instance, consumerism has destroyed social values and ripped apart the map of social life today. In this context these verses appear to speak of a different kind of heartache. It is a state of mind that did not prevail twenty or thirty years back, it prevails today:

*Nigal gaye sab kî sab samandar zamîn  
bachî ab kahîn nahîn hai*

*Bachâte ham apnî jân jis mein voh  
kashî bhî ab kahîn nahîn hai*

*Bahut dinon ba'd pâyî fursat to main  
ne khud ko palat ke dekhâ*

*Magar main pahchântâ thâ jisko voh  
âdmî ab kahîn nahîn hai*

*Guzar gayâ waqt dil pe likh kar na  
jâne kaisî ajîb bâten*

*Waraq palatata hûn main jo dil ke to  
sâdagî ab kahîn nahîn hai*

*Tum apne qasbon mein jâ ke dekho  
wahân bhî ab shahrî base hain*

*Ki dhûndate ho jo zindagî tum voh  
zindagî ab kahîn nahîn hai*

[The seas have swallowed up the whole  
of earth; there is nothing of it left now

The boat in which we could save our  
life too has perished

Having found time after many days I  
looked back at myself

But nowhere is to be seen the man I  
used to recognize

Time has passed, writing strange  
things on my heart

When I turn over the pages of my  
heart, I do not find that simplicity  
anywhere

Go and look in your small towns

There too the city people have smugly  
ensconced themselves

The life that you are seeking is  
nowhere to be seen now.

Or when the chapter of struggle is closed then how enthusiasm becomes cold and how movements commit suicide with their own dagger:

*Woh zamânâ guzar gayâ kab kâ  
Thâ jo divânâ mar gayâ kab kâ  
Dhûndtâ thâ jo ik nayî duniyâ  
Laut ke apne ghar gayâ kab kâ  
Woh jo lâyâ thâ ham ko dariyâ tak  
Pâr akele utar gayâ kab kâ  
Khwâb dar khwâb jo thâ shîrâzâ  
Ab kahân hai bikhar gayâ kab kâ*

That time has passed long since  
The one who was crazy has died long since

He who was looking for a new world  
Has returned to his home long since

He who had brought us to the  
riverside

Has crossed over alone to the other  
shore long since

That which was binding together dream  
after dream

Is nowhere now, it has been undone  
long since

Similarly the following verses are of  
the sort that their reflective meaningfulness  
and the pleasure one can derive from them  
have to be seen and experienced:

*Ahsâs kâ maskan hai un ufkâr se âge  
Jangal ye ajab âtâ hai bâzâr se âge*

The abode of feeling is beyond those  
thoughts

This strange forest lies beyond the  
marketplace

*Kisî kî ânkh mein mastî to âj bhî hai  
wahî*

*Magar kabhî jo hamein thâ khumâr  
jâtâ rahâ*

Someone has the same intoxicated  
looks even today

But the intoxication that we had once  
is no more there

*Âj woh bhî bichhad gayâ hamse  
Jaise yeh qissâ bhî tamâm huâ*

He too has now parted from me  
Seems this tale is also over now

*Kuchh bichhadne ke bhî tarîqe hain  
Khair jâne do jo huâ jaise*

There are ways of parting too

But then let it be, what happened has  
happened

*Shab kî dahlîz par shafaq hai lahû  
Phir huâ qatl âftâb kôî*

The threshold of the night is sunset-  
red with blood

A sun has been murdered yet again

*Kabhî jo talkh kalâmî thî woh bhî  
khatm huî*

*Kabhî gilâ thâ hamein unse ab gilâ bhî  
na rahâ*

At one time there was bitterness in our  
speech, now that too has ended



At one time I had a complaint against you, now there is nothing to complain about.

*Main kab se kitnâ hûn tanhâ tujhe patâ bhî nahîn*

*Terâ to koî khudâ hai merâ khudâ bhî nahîn*

How alone I am since long you know nothing about it

You may be having your God, I do not have God even

*Zindagî kî sharâb mângte ho*

*Ham ko dekho ki pî ke pyâse hain*

You ask for a the intoxicating wine of life

Look at me I am thirsty even after having a drink

*Na to dam letî hai to aur na havâ thamtî hai*

*Zindagî zulf sanwâre koî kaise terî*

You do not stop for a while to take rest, nor does the wind stop blowing

O Life, how will I your tresses adorn

*Pursakûn lagtî hai kitnî jhîl ke pânî pe batak*

*Pairon kî betâbiyân pânî ke andar dekhiye*

How peaceful does the duck look on the surface of the water of the lake

The restlessness of its feet can be seen only under the water

*Âj maine apnâ phir saudâ kiyâ*

*Aur phir mein dûr se dekhâ kiyâ*

Once again I bargained myself away today

And then looked at it from a distance

*Zindagî bhar mere kâm âye asûl*

*Ek ik karke unhen bechâ kiyâ*

All my life principles were of help to me

One by one I sold them all

*Na koî ishq hai bâqî na koî parcham hai*

*Log dîvâne bhalâ kis ke sabab ho jâyen*

There is no love left or its standard to bear

What is there for people to be crazy about?

*Hamâre jahan kî bastî mein âg aisi lagî*

*Ki jo thâ khâk huâ ik dukân bâqî hai*  
The habitat of my mind was engulfed by such a fire

That whatever I had turned to ashes, save a lone shop

*Dhulkî shânon se har yakîn kî baqâ*

*Zindagî le rahî hai angadâi*

From its shoulders rolled down immortality of every belief

Life is stretching its limbs

These are a few sparks from Javed

Akhtar's fire-altar. When molten lava solidifies, rocks and valleys emerge from it. We have seen only a glimpse of it. That other scenarios will not emerge from other readings, is just not possible. One single reading does not end the possibilities of any other reading. I count the last poem of this collection, 'Ped se lipti bel,' among the most sensitive poems of Javed Akhtar's poems. In this poem we see the same questioning, reflective, metaphorical mode, the same short lines, the same atmosphere of enquiry and understanding which has assumed the status of his creative signature. The creeper was an indigent thing clinging to a branch of the tree. The pleasing colour of the tree kept on permeating the creeper and it became a part of the tree's existence instead of its own. 'The tree had a hundred tales of its own to tell, but the creeper figured in none of them'. Why then is the creeper holding the tree in its arms and has become the support of its life?

The creeper is now holding the tree in its arms

Leaves are again sprouting from its wounded branches

Slowly

New roots have grown

And are going down deep in the earth

It looks as though flowers of a new smile

Have bloomed

On the creeper

This is a scenario of unkindness and hopelessness in life changing to hope. But what is this tree and who is this creeper, a metaphor standing for hope and glad tidings of growth. And it is clinging in a manner that it cannot be separated. Here it is necessary to indicate that in Javed Akhtar's poetry, there are no storms of sentimentality, no tempests of passion, courage and hope are there but restrained, lava is there and so is fire and sparks of curiosity-filled thought too, as we have been seeing, but not that one-dimensional romanticism, the passion for which had turned poetry of some well known poets into a quagmire of emotions. The glitter of steel is developed in poison-water. Here we have a sustained state of being immersed in thought, asking curiosity-filled questions, addressing concerns, and compelling the reader to think and reflect. Here a disturbed mind, reflecting on the vicissitudes and the nature and essence, problems and manifestations of life and seeking answers to questions comes to the fore. Ghalib had said:

*Rashk hai asâishe arbâb ghaflat par  
Assad*

*Iztarâb-i dil nasîb khâtire âgâh hai*

(I envy the smugness of the ignorant.  
Agitation of mind is the fate of the aware)

This agitation of mind and the awareness is the greatest boon for a sensitive person. In days of the sorrow and deprivations of childhood, patience

and resistance and the ability to withstand things on the part of the wounded inner man was the only way to soften the blow of the times. And thus it was that a creative mind was brought up. The sun has now crossed more than half the sky. The tree has now endured winds and storms. It is

the inner creeper of thought entwined around its every branch that is holding the tree in its arms. It has been growing and spreading with the tree at every stage. If it is in its splendour today, it bodes well not for the tree alone, but for everyone.

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**Gopichand Narang**, born 1931 at Dukki, Baluchistan, is a prominent scholar and critic of Urdu who has more than 56 published works to his credit. He has been honoured with Sahitya Akademi award. He has received honours from Italian, Canadian and Pakistan governments. Recipient of Padmshri and Padmabhushan, he has been vice chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia university and professor at Delhi, Wisconsin and Oslo Universities. He has been president of Sahitya Akademi and Vice President, National Council for promotion of Urdu. Some of his famous books are : Beeswin shatabdi ka Urdu sahitya, Urdu par khulta daricha, Manto : punravalokan ki bhumika, Urdu : hamari zuban. He lives in New Delhi.

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## LIFE OUT OF AN OVERLOADED SCHOOL BAG : JAGUDI

Manglesh Dabral

Translated by  
Om Gupta

The poetry of Liladhar Jagudi is like a wonderland. At times it surprises you, at another it confuses you. It is a complicated world. There is a lot of action, commuting ups and down, and ever changing visuals. Situations clash with feelings seriously and playfully in turn. It looks dramatic, the language seems to move in circles, it's rhythmic and blank verse in the same breath. The poet uses all devices and tools to fill his possible experiences in his poetry. It is a poetry of chaos. There is little silence, interlude and darkness. It doesn't take you to a mystery, an unknown or infinite. In fact it writes the story of the familiar and the known. It gives company to a disconnect, gives a shape to the shapeless, and finally it tries to find logic in the illogical. Everything in this world and even the whole life is sudden and unexpected but is a fully lived narrative. It has a peculiar amystery, a perennial worldliness. There is no straight road. There are many turns and twists. They are familiar but they appear to shock you. In one of his collections 'Bhay bhi shakti deta hai' (Fear also gives strength, 1991) in a poem Mod (The Turning) he has expressed all this with a touch of finality: Mod bina kuch door tak hi bhali lagti hai sapat sadak/ phir aana hi chahiye koi naya mod / bas aata hi hoga koi naya mod (A straight road doesn't excite you for long. One longs for a turn, for a twist. Hope it is around the corner).

In another poem 'Pahad par raaste' (The hilly tracks) the hills (or may be life also), Jagudi asks while describing the sudden appearance of the tracks: Saare raaste gharon tak aa gaye/Aadmi pair dhokar ghar ke andar jaane laga/ tab kya ghar pahunchate hi raaston ka ant ho gaya( All roads bring you back home/ the man washes his feet to enter his home/ Is that the end of all possibilities?) He gives the answer in the same poem. ....yeh raasta mere aage chalega/ jahan tak yeh pahle kisi ke peeche chala tha/ shesh raasta mujhe banana hai... ( I have to follow this track to the point where it has followed some one/ I have to make my way to cover the rest of it).

It is a cruel uneasiness. If we look at it, in the world around us, outside the realm of Jagudi's poetry we shall find its reasons and logic at every turn. Has Jagudi not created a chaotic world in his poetry that we find everywhere? Are the tracks not uneven and unexpected that surfaced when we are trying to avoid them? The first poem in 'Bhay bhi shakti deta hai' by the title 'Bure waqt ki kavita' ( poem of the bad times) fully defines his poetry. In ' Ek bure waqt men'one good poem has a study of the lower middle class, study through the relationship of the ideal and existing reality. Its backdrop is like the well known daily tragedies such as 'half won freedom in the world', in which one keeps on talking about the soaring price of potatoes,

headaches, calculations around the medicines and milk, family feuds, 500 rupees moneyorder meant for the dad, the night without a wink of sleep and 'the foul smell of some rotten stuff'. On the face of it, this stuff is meant for a poem of the bad times. The poet is a part of this scenario. He is absorbed by the shapeless and the disconnect so well that he can't reach to a good poem. But all the situations described in the poem take a decisive turn when he comes to know that: ....Achhi kavita tum men koi jhanjhat nahin jabki kharab kavita aur mujh men kai jhhagde hain/ kai baar hum ek doosre ko khatm kar dena chahte hain. (Good poetry, I have no problem with you but there are many conflicts between bad poetry and myself. We often feel like killing each other). Where a conflict moves away from bad life and good poetry and takes a position between bad poem and bad life, there we find that the poet wants to finish both.

To live life is also known as facing the world. And the world is in constant motion. Liladhar jagudi is a worldly poet at a deeper level, because he travels with this world in motion. But he doesn't let it go away from his sensibility. He makes an attempt to convert every action, movement and shuddering through the experience of his language. He follows the world for long.

Jagudi says: Phir bhi main hamesha hi/khud ko daudte hue dekhta hoon/, aur dekhta hoon ki dharti/ ek baste ki tarah meri peeth par ladi hui hai ( Still I always/

find myself running/ and see that the earth/  
is on my back like a loaded school bag).  
Riding on a mortal man, protected, mortal  
history being carried like the recent times  
tells us the thrilling and intimate  
relationship with the poet.

Oh, meri purani chidiya tum kabhi  
marti nahin ho/ jab bhi dekhta hoon tum  
koi roop le chuki hoti ho (old bird,  
whenever I see you, I find you in a different  
form).

'Oh meri purani chidiya' says the story  
of a sparrow that has been born millions  
of times. As if it is telling the quintessential  
tale of life in the universe. There is much  
restlessness in Jagudi's poetic world so  
that even if you don't do anything,  
something will still happen. Nothingness  
also spurts into a dark message and as the  
wind blows, you recall, what more is left  
to do. In another poem, soi hui saari  
srishti men/giri hui cheez (when the whole  
world sleeps, something suddenly drops).  
But this world is not full of a sparrow,  
school bag or a sleeping object. If that was  
so, writing a poem would have a simple  
act. The reader would have been a fellow  
traveler enjoying the whole experience,  
but life is like a market place. The times  
are bad and the moment is a vagabond.  
There are bad characters like Baldev Khatik  
and killer point like Mandir Lane., the  
water well is crowded and the traffic is  
jammed. A soul like a 50 paisa coin and  
a court made of soap, rivers flown into

pipes, the folk songs are dying in the slow  
and dull life. In this new civilization, an  
elephant rider becomes a conductor who  
gets crushed under his own wheels. Jagudi  
sees this reality in many shapes and forms.  
He searches its nooks and corners. At  
times we feel the need to look at it from  
his world view. It is not without a reason  
Jagudi calls his poetry the 'contemporary  
history'.

Perhaps in 1968, Jagudi published his  
first modern poem 'bilkul niji samvaddata  
dwara ( An exclusive news by the staff  
reporter). That informed us about his first  
anthology Shankhmukhi shikhron par  
(1964). I announced the hilly romanticism  
and exit from Baru Moh. Since then two  
main focus distinctly appear in Jagudi's  
poetry in different forms. These are nature  
and market. Their relation is dialectic and  
in conflict. In the final analysis Jagudi's  
concern is the moral values coming out of  
the clash between market and nature. He  
reaches that value judgement by an  
involved and curious search. It is not  
surprising that while recording these  
vibrations of nature, he takes a note of  
international market with equal intensity.  
We had heard this voice long back. It has  
been fashionable in Hindi poetry to see  
moonlight as chandan. And to expect  
moon as a coin without resonance. But  
Jagudi calls hunger a tree or a needle  
paining while on a record. By doing this he  
marks his presence by his shocked and

restive sensibility. When he got disillusioned from romanticism, his first collection was natak jaari hai (the play is on). It was meaningful but metaphorical. It could be called peaceful. It is frozen between motion and inertia. A violence and a hesitation. He uses a shloka of Kumarsambhav by Kalidas, Na yayo na tasyo. It couldn't have been described more aptly.

Jagudi was the most prolific poet of our times. He has dealt with 1975 emergency vividly after Raghuvir Sahay.

Jagudi portrays reality but his experience is also in the domain of

language. He has such a rich lexicon that he doesn't get conclusive. He extends those conclusions.

He is spontaneous in experience, fundamental in nature, using all forms and styles, representative of all voices, most dramatic in syntax, and religious in impact.

It may not be possible to write such poetry. But the dream remains. Jagudi constantly chases this world despite knowing that the world is also following him since earth or life is on his back, from which there is no escape because of the trial by fire at every turn.

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**Om Gupta**, is a media professional with wide experience in Hindi and English journalism. He is also into media academics. He has been a playwright for Akashwani and co-director of many serials; has completed his first novel chowk, chhajja aur chhat. He lives in New Delhi.

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## ACHARYA RAMCHANDRA SHUKLA AND THE RASA THEORY

M.S. Kushwaha

Acharya Ramchandra Shukla is the first Hindi scholar to offer an independent interpretation of Bharata's rasa theory. Though fully cognizant of Bharata's formulation, he nowhere talks of his rasa-sutra or its acknowledged interpretations. Instead, he offers his own definition of rasa. According to him, "the emancipated state of the heart (harday ki muktavastha) is called the state of rasa" (RM, 5) <sup>1</sup>. This 'emancipation' of the heart occurs when a person rises above his selfish interests (which bind his heart) and gets rid of the feeling of his separate entity. In other words, he forgets himself completely and remains just as pure feeling (RM, 5). As he observes at another place (CM-I. 147), the experience of rasa is marked by

(i) annihilation of the separate identity of the experiencer during the experience.

(ii) and sharing of that experience by all sahradayas (sensitive readers).

He does not believe that a mechanical application of Bharata's rasa-formula is enough to ensure the presence of rasa in a poetic composition. His comment is noteworthy:

"Since the poets began to aim at fulfilling the condition of rasa just by enumerating vibhava, anubhavas and vyabhichari-bhavas, it was almost forgotten that the foremost task of a poet is to present such



subjects as could become the object (alamban) of various emotions of the reader or listener. It was unfortunate to assume that the mere portrayal of a character expressing love, laughter, sorrow, anger, etc., is sufficient for the consummation of rasa as well as the full realization of rasa on the part of the reader. A reader or listener, too, has his heart. He does not read or listen to any poetic composition just to watch other people laughing, weeping, flaring up, etc. He reads it to find such subjects as would attract and absorb him and make him laugh, weep or fume". (RM, 110)

The full realization of rasa on the part of the reader, according to Acharya Shukla, is possible only when the alamban (object) of the ashraya's emotion becomes also the alamban of the same emotion of the reader (RM, III). And this depends on the depiction of the alamban of an emotion in such a manner that it becomes the alamban of the same emotion of all human beings (CM-I, 134). This is exactly what sadharanikarana implies.

For a poet, the depiction of bhavas (emotions) is not so important as the depiction of vibhava, specially alamban vibhava (object of emotion)<sup>2</sup>. Acharya Shukla stresses this point when he says :

"If a poet has drawn a word-picture of

any alamban or object of human emotions, he has virtually done his job. It is not mandatory for him to show as ashraya (experiencer of an emotion) experiencing those emotions — dancing in joy or weeping in sorrow. I consider the vivid description of the alamban alone as fully capable of generating rasa.,,experience (call it bhava-experience, if you like) in a listener" (RM, 101).

In this connection he asserts also that descriptions of nature are not only contributory but also independent alamban (object) of our emotions" (RM, 78).

Rasa, for him, is not a spiritual experience. He categorically states that, according to him, "there is no scope for the word 'spiritual' (adhyatm) anywhere in the realm of poetry and art" (RM, 55). Nor can the rasa-experience be described as alaukik (non-worldly), having no connection with this world (CM-I; 146). The word anand/(joy), too, does not express the true nature of rasa-experience. The epithets, lokottara (transcendental) and anirvachaniya (indescribable), neither save it from its meaninglessness nor atone for its employment (RM, 70). To him, rasa is not fundamentally different from bhava (emotion).

He makes it even more explicit when

he says that if is the emotion (bhava) of a character which is experienced by the reader or listener as rasa” (RM, 116). He states clearly that “the description of all objects that can become the alamban of our emotions is within the domain of rasa, for bhavas, too, are grasped as rasas” (RM, 101). Rasas are nothing but the bhavas (emotions) grasped in an emancipated state of the heart, But even in that state the bhavas do not lose their original character. Acharya Shukla quips :

“Do anger, sorrow, disgust, etc. enter the heart of the listener or reader in the shape of ‘anand’ (joy)? Do they cast off their original nature completely? Is nothing left over? Does the mere fact of becoming vibhava [i.e., being treated in a poetical composition] deprive them of their nature, and lend them a unitary character? Do the various kinds of sorrow appear to be the kinds of joy? Does the sight or hearing of Harishchandra demanding shroud from Shaivya, who was weeping for her dead child, elicit laughter rather than tears from us?” (RM, 71)

Similarly, the shedding of tears by spectators during the performance of a tragedy can hardly be explained by saying that ‘tears are also shed in joy’. The spectators in reality experience sorrow. But since this sorrow is experienced in an emancipated state of the heart, it takes on

the quality of rasa (CM-I, 148).

It is worth stressing that Acharya Shukla does not attach any spiritual or mystical connotation to the word ‘anand’. For him, anand, like the rasa-experience itself, is purely a mental phenomenon<sup>3</sup>. To him, the word ‘anand’ has rather hedonistic implications; he takes it to mean ‘vyaktigat sukh-bhog’ or self-centred enjoyment (CM-I, 148). It is this connotation of the word ‘anand’ which leads him to denounce it and declare that it has greatly reduced the importance of poetry and turned it into an instrument of entertainment (RM, 71). “If the ultimate aim of poetry”, says Acharya Shukla, “is to entertain the mind, to make it happy or joyful, it just becomes an object of indulgence” (RM, 20). Obviously Acharya Shukla does not subscribe to this view. According to him, “the ultimate aim of poetry is to vividly represent the poignant aspects of the world, and to establish a harmonious relationship of the human heart with them” (RM, 19). The rasa-experience helps in establishing this relationship by liberating the heart from selfish and immediate interests. “The repetition of such an experience”, observes Acharya Shukla, “purifies our emotions, and secures and maintains our emotional relationship with the rest of the world” (RM, 5). Rasa-experience thus serves a higher purpose than merely affording

anand. Acharya Shukla's own definition of rasa is perfectly in sync with his lofty notion of poetry.

Acharya Shukla's independence of mind is seen at its best in his extending the frontiers of rasa-experience. He is probably the only scholar to claim that rasa-experience is not confined to literature alone; it can also be had in real life. His essay 'Rasatmak-bodh ke Vividh Roop' (Various Forms of Rasa-perception)<sup>4</sup> is written to demonstrate the possibility of rasa-experience in actual life. Of course, these life-emotions, like literary emotions, will have to fulfil the conditions mentioned in the beginning. Not all raw emotions qualify for rasa-experience. This distinction is brought out clearly in Acharya Shukla's analysis of so-called sthayi-bhavas. To take an example, his analysis of krodh (anger) is adduced below:

"If we are angry with someone who has hurt us or our relatives, our anger will not have the quality of rasa. But if we are filled with anger when we see or hear about the cruel deeds of an oppressor, our anger will acquire the state of rasa" (CM-I, 148).

In the like manner, Acharya Shukla has shown, with sufficient illustrations, that all sthayi-bhavas are capable of attaining the state of rasa in real life situations. His examples are drawn from

the fields of both direct perception (pratyaksh) and memory (smriti). Acharya Shukla arrives at the conclusion that "rasa-experience is not radically different from experiences based on direct perceptions or memory; it is rather a refined form of those experiences (CM-I, 149). This, he adds, is also reinforced by the traditional view that emotions lying as impressions (vasana) are evoked in the form of rasa (CM-I, 149).

Acharya Shukla is not only sure of rasa-experience in actual life but also accords it great importance. He boldly declares :

"Those who cannot reach this state [of rasa in real life] do possess inferior and narrow hearts. Poetry is beyond their reach even though they are called poets. For the success of word-poetry, the study of world-poetry is absolutely necessary" (CM-I, 149):

Acharya Shukla does not accept the role of vyanjana or dhvani (suggestion) in rasa-realization. Vyanjana, according to him, aims at cognition (bodh) while rasa is a matter of feeling (anubhuti). Obviously these are two different kinds of experiences. To characterize the experience of an emotion (bhava) as vyangarth (suggested meaning) is not very appropriate. "Vyangarth is always a fact or

idea and expressed in the form of 'somebody is in love or somebody is angry', it cannot give the taste of love or anger" (CM-II, 130). Acharya Shukla feels that the word 'vyanjana' should not be used in connection with bhava or rasa (CM-II, 131).

The same idea is expressed when he says at another place (RM, 147) that the mere combination of vibhava, anubhava and sanchari bhavas cannot make a spectator or audience experience a bhava (emotion) just by dint of the power of suggestion (vyanjana). Such a combination may, for instance, suggest the bhava of lajja (shame/bashfulness) but this suggestion will produce in the reader's mind just an image of lajja; it cannot make him experience the emotion of lajja.

Acharya Shukla's independence of mind is displayed also in his analysis of emotions (bhavas) and their classifications. It is specially noticeable in his treatment of so-called sthayi-bhavas or permanent emotions (the word 'sthayi' literally means 'permanent'). Of Bharata's eight sthayi-bhavas Acharya Shukla accepts only rati as a true sthayi-bhava. He does not include utsah (one of the sthayi-bhavas enumerated by Bharata) even among the bhavas; it is considered an impulse and linked with sheel (character)<sup>5</sup>. Except rati and utsah, all sthayi-bhavas are taken to be primary

emotions. According to him, the corresponding sthayi (permanent) states of those bhavas are as follows:

bhavas (emotion)	sthayi dasha
	(permanent state)
Rag (attraction)	Rati (love)
Has (laughter)	X
Ashchary (wonder)	X
Shok (sorrow)	Santap
	(anguish, suffering)
Bhay (fear)	Ashanka
	(apprehension)
Krodh (anger)	Vair (enmity)
Jugupsa (disgust, aversion)	
	Virati (indifference)

It may be noted here that rag is Acharya Shukla's own coinage, and that in two cases there are no nameable corresponding sthayi (permanent) states.

The main difference between bhava and its sthayi-dasha is. that while bhava is addressed to one alamban on one occasion, sthayi-bhava is drawn to the same alamban on several occasions. Secondly, anubhavas are associated with bhavas (including sanchari bhavas), not with their permanent (sthayi) state. Thirdly, the experience of bhava (emotion) is characterized by, the absence of intellect (buddhi) while the

latter has a conspicuous presence at the permanent state (RM, 127).

There is also a higher state called 'sheel', when an emotion is naturalized and becomes a trait of one's character. A person in whom has is naturalized is characterized by cheerfulness and a sense of humour.

Acharya Shukla divides principal emotions (so-called sthayi-bhavas) into two groups: painful (dukhatmak) and pleasant (sukhatmak). The first includes shok, krodh, bhay, and jugupsa, and the second consists of rag, has, utsah and ashcharya. They retain their character even during the experience of rasa. As noted earlier, sorrowful emotions lose their sting simply because they are experienced in an emancipated state of the heart.

Sanchari bhavas, too, are divided into four categories: (I) painful (e.g., tras or fright); (II) pleasant (e.g., garv or pride); (III) both painful and pleasant (e.g., smriti or recollection); and (IV) indifferent (e.g., vitark or reasoning). Acharya Shukla provides a detailed and penetrating exposition of the nature and character of various sanchari bhavas, and at places, offers suggestions for change in the traditional view. He observes, for instance, that alasya (lethargy) should not be considered a sanchari of some dominant bhava (RM, 163). He further adds that sanchari bhavas may occur as independent

bhavas, and include other sanchari bhavas within them. He cites the examples of lajja (bashfulness) and asuya (envy) which may include avahittha (dissimulation) and 'amarsh or indignation, respectively (RM, 147).

The main difference between dominant bhavas (so-called sthayi-bhavas and sanchari bhavas lies in the fact that only those bhavas, whose alambans (objects of emotions) are of a generalized nature, are included among the dominant bhavas. The rest are counted among sanchari bhavas (RM, 148). The same idea is expressed again when he observes that dominant bhavas are those bhavas which, being expressed by some character, are equally shared by the audience (RM, 146). Sanchari bhavas, expressed by a character, need not be experienced in the same manner by the audience.

Acharya Shukla is of the view that a dominant bhava unaccompanied by a sanchari bhava or a sanchari bhava unaccompanied by a dominant bhava is capable of evoking some emotional experience in the reader. It may not have the full force of a rasa-experience but nevertheless it is grasped by the reader as rasa (RM, 173).

In his treatment of bhavas Acharya Shukla is undoubtedly influenced by his study of psychology, specially The

Foundations of Character by Alexander F. Shand (1914) but this influence is not allowed to override his discretion. As a matter of fact, it is his own perception which ultimately determines his judgement<sup>6</sup>,

On the whole, Acharya Shukla's approach to the rasa-theory is scientific and rational; it is based on his own aesthetic experience rather than authority. Without completely rejecting the traditional view, he offers a new version of the rasa-theory which is more realistic and sensible.

The main tenets of Acharya Shukla's version of the rasa-theory may be summed up as follows:

1. Rasa is defined as the emancipated state of the heart.
2. Rasa is neither alaukik (unworldly) nor it is characterized by anand (joy).
3. To conceive rasa as anand is not only to depreciate rasa but also to demean the purpose of poetry.
4. There is no basic difference between bhava (emotion) and rasa. An emotion experienced in an emancipated state of the heart is called rasa.
5. Dominant bhavas (so-called sthayi-bhavas) include both pleasant and painful bhavas. These bhavas retain their character

even during the rasa-experience.

6: The so-called sthayi-bhavas, except rati, are not truly sthayi or permanent. They are primary emotions, and differ from the real sthayi-bhavas.

7. Rasa is experiential, not vyangarth (suggested meaning). It is a kind of feeling rather than cognition.

8. Rasa-experience is not confined to literature; it can be had in real life.

9. The worldly-rasa is not qualitatively different from literary rasa. On the contrary, the experience of rasa in actual life is necessary for the success of portrayal of rasa in literature.

10. For rasa-realization, the depiction of vibhavas is more important than the depiction of bhavas.

11. Natural scenes need not be employed as uddipan vibhava; they can very well serve as alamban vibhava.

12. A mere combination of vibhava, anubhava and sanchari bhavas does not ensure the rasa-experience.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *The titles of Acharya Ramchandra Shukla's works cited in the text (in brackets) are given in an abbreviated form that are as follows:*

1. CM-I Chintamani, Vol. I. Allahabad: Lokbharati, 2002 Ed.

CM-II Chintamani, Vol. II, ed. Vishwanath Prasad Mishra. Varanasi: Nagri Pracharni Sabha, V.S. 2041.

RM Rasa-Mimamsa, ed. Vishwanath Prasad Mishra. Varanasi. Kashi Nagri Prachani Sabha, 5th Edition (V.S. 2039).

2. The following statements of Acharya Shukla are noteworthy:

“Vibhava is of paramount importance in poetry” (RM, 77)

“Alamban is of prime importance in poetry” (RM, 109)

3. Vishwanath Prasad Mishra in his

‘Introduction’ to Rasa-Mimamsa (p.3) rightly observes that Acharya Shukla was not in favour of extending the discussion of poetry beyond the mental level (manomaya kosha). He further adds that the tradition of treating rasa as alaukik (unworldly) has had its origin in philosopher- commentators.

4. The essay is included in Chintamani, Vol. I.

5. However, he justifies the inclusion of utsah in main bhavas from the view point of rasa-experience (RM, 131).

6. This view is reinforced by his full-length essays on utsah, lajja, glani, bhay, krodh and other bhavas (emotions), included in Chintamani, Vol. I.

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## REMINISCENCES OF NIRALA

Shivapujan Sahay

Translated by  
Mangal Murty

*Nirala is acknowledged as the greatest Hindi poet of the modern age. An excellent biography of the great poet written by Dr Ramvilas Sharma, in truth his Boswell, was published in 1969. Dr Sharma dedicated that biography to Shivapujan Sahay, one of the closest friends of Nirala, and acknowledged the valuable help he got from Shivji (as he was popularly known) through personal interviews and research in Shivji's correspondence with Nirala.*

*Shivji and Nirala came close to each other when they were living together in Calcutta wayback in the early 1920s. Shivji had resigned his government school teaching job at Ara (Bihar) in the wake of Gandhi's first non-cooperation movement in 1920, and come to Calcutta to seek a career in journalism. He began by editing a monthly journal 'Marwari Sudhar' which was being printed at the Balkrishna Press in Calcutta, owned by Mahadev Prasad Seth of Mirzapur in U.P. Later he was invited by Sethji to live with him in the same building where he came into intimate contact with Nirala who was already living in that building on an upper floor. Shivapujan Sahay reminisces in his memoirs about those early years of the turbulent twenties.*

The hurricane of the first Non-cooperation movement had risen only a couple of years after the end of the First World War. The nationalist fervor started countering the onslaught of state violence with great gusto. I was then a Hindi teacher in the Arrah Town School.



As an act of my non-cooperation, I left that school and joined a local national school. I had taken to writing in 1910 itself, but by 1921, I also became an editor of the monthly journal 'Marwari Sudhar'. Soon I bid farewell to the national school also and reached Calcutta. I stayed with Shri Durga Prasad Poddar who had his business in Calcutta and lived in Harrison Road. Pt Ishwari Prasad Sharma, my teacher and literary mentor, fixed up Balkrishna Press for the printing of 'Marwari Sudhar'. It was through him that I came to be introduced to Babu Mahadev Prasad Seth, the owner of the press, and his companion, Munshi Navajadiklal Shrivastava.

The day I took the edited press copy of my journal to the press, both Sethji and Munshiji spoke very encouragingly about my work. Though at first they found it hard to believe that the editing of the articles had been done by me, and Munshiji particularly thought it all to be done by Sharmaji, as I was his true disciple any way. He had specially blessed me by publishing my early articles in his favourite literary monthly 'Manoranjan' (1910-12). Even my handwriting closely resembled his, which strengthened the suspicion. Sethji requested me to live in his press, and Munshiji also gave some positive allurements, but Poddarji would have none of it. Ultimately, however, the duo prevailed over my friend Poddarji; though it

took me about three-four months to shift from Harrison Road to this press. Soon I got very close to these two gentlemen. And meanwhile I also had an opportunity of meeting Niralaji there.

Balkrishna press was located in an open space behind the Vidyasagar College at 23, Shankar Ghosh Lane. On the ground floor of the building was the press, and monks of Ram Krishna Mission lived on the upper floor, with whom the poet Niralaji lived.

*The learned monk Swami Madhavanandji of the Vivekanand Society in Calcutta had, with deep reverence, brought Niralaji as editor of the Society's monthly journal 'Samanvaya' on the special recommendation of Acharya Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi. It was thus that the serendipitous assemblage happened there of these four literary figures – Mahadev Prasad Seth, Navajadik Lal, Shivapujan Sahay and Nirala –which resulted in the publication of 'Matwala', a revolutionary weekly styled after the famous British weekly 'Punch'. The first number of 'Matwala' came out on 26 August, 1923, and soon the Balkrishna Press of 23, Shankar Ghosh Lane became the headquarters of 'Matwala-Mandal' and the main centre of a literary congregation in Calcutta.*

*It is said that Nirala assumed this pen-name in rhyme with 'Matwala' when he started publishing his earliest poems and his prose pieces in that weekly. Besides*

*publishing his poems he also wrote a satirical column 'Chabuk' (whip) or 'Matawale ka Chabuk' in which he commented on the articles published in the contemporary literary journals, particularly the linguistic solecisms in them.*

*Shivapujan Sahay and Nirala both left 'Matawala' after a year or so, but their close affinity went on deepening across the later decades as evidenced by their intimate correspondence which is now published in the 'Samagra' writings of Shivapujan Sahay. Shivji also wrote a series of memoir articles during the last couple of years in his life which present an extremely fascinating and sensitive portrayal of the great poet's personal human qualities. A selection of some glimpses of Nirala's overly humanistic and compassionate nature, as depicted in Shivji's memoirs, is presented in the following extracts.*

When the Vivekanand Society in Calcutta decided to bring out a Hindi monthly magazine 'Samanvaya', its learned monk, Swami Madhavanand, went straight to Acharya Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi looking for a good editor for its journal. It was Dwivediji who had selected Niralaji for the job.

It is said that Mahatma Gandhi had chosen a jewel like Nehru. Great men indeed have the ability to make such unmistakable historical choices. Dwivediji

also discovered this jewel for Hindi. Who would not just wonder at his perceptive choice? The Society had indeed found a rare gem in Nirala, and soon as the incomparable talent of Nirala unfurled before the Swami, he started taking all care of the priceless jewel that had fallen into his hands.

The Society was housed in the same building as the 'Matawala-Mandal'. I had myself seen how much care the Swamiji took of Niralaji's comforts, always being at the latter's beck and call. Sethji, the 'Matawala'-editor, was verily sold out to Niralaji ever since he met him. There has never been a greater devotee of Niralaji.

All the monks of the Society showed great respect to Niralaji. They were all Bengalis, and Niralaji spoke Bangla like his mother tongue. In the philosophical discussions with them, Niralaji had always an upper hand. Even in discussions on Bangla literature, Niralaji always proved weightier. Amazed at his analytical prowess, Swami Vireshwaranand had once exclaimed – *Eimen ki manaver medha* (Could this be human genius)? But Niralaji's analyticality never crossed the bounds of reasoning. His prodigious memory power and razor-sharp rationality always left others totally convinced.

*Shivapujan Sahay then sketches a portrait of the poet in those days, done as it were in pastel colours.*

God had been bounteous in his gifts to Nirala. An attractive, tall and well-built healthy body chiselled by regular exercise, astounding intellect, mellifluous voice, kind-hearted, contemplative mind, a prolific creativity – God had showered him generously with his boons. Big captivating eyes, brilliant, shining teeth, black curly tresses adorning his head, small mouth with thin lips, long, slender artistic fingers, broad heavy chest – the Creator had embellished his statuesque figure with great love and care...

Nirala was also a wrestler in his youth. Even at the 'Matawala' office he would smear his body with earth in the traditional way as he exercised. Munshiji would bring soft Ganga clay for him, from his native place near Balia in U.P, to rub on his body. Nirala had long black tresses and Sethji would bring expensive perfumed hair oils like *Jawakusum* and *Kesh Ranjan* for him. He would even polish his shoes every day. When he went out, Sethji would put money in his pocket. But he would always return empty-handed with nothing left in the pocket. The beggars were familiar with his habits. He would put whatever came out of his pocket on any begging palm spread before him and then nonchalantly move forward. It was impossible to fathom his strong wilfulness. Munshiji would often caution him to be frugal and save something for the future. But one who didn't care for the present, how would he bother for the

future? Instead, he would rather be quite exultant as he looked at his broad chest and strong biceps while exercising. Nirala was a poet of glorious manhood. Why would he worry about his old age? Both in his mind and body he was always full of the virility of manliness. When his first book of poems *Anamika* was published, and he started reciting its poems to us with his characteristic verve, he looked a perfect embodiment of manliness.

He was also gifted with excellent histrionic talent. The Raja of Mahishadal (Bengal) was so enamoured of his acting talent that he loved him like a prince. But Nirala was not to be tempted by such adoration. When he went from Gokul to Mathura, he would never look back to Gokul again. He fully enjoyed his luxurious life style. Like Bharatenduji, he would pour out perfumes on his palm and rub them all over his clothes. But often he would also go out bare-bodied or in dirty, shabby clothes, bare-footed, to the market, rubbing *surti* (tobacco) on his palms. He just didn't bother what someone - who may have seen him only the other day clothed in fashionable spotless *dhoti-kurta* - would say, seeing him in such shabby clothes today. Nirala never cared for what others would say of him....

A session of the All India Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was held in the Senate Hall of Calcutta University. The great poet 'Ratnakarji' was presiding. Nirala came out

of the hall and stood in the park nearby at Wellington Square, took off his *kurta*, expanded his chest and started flexing and displaying his muscles. His long tresses swung round his face. At once a small crowd of onlookers gathered there. That divine repository of physical strength and beauty was only Nirala, and none other than him.

*Shivji, in these memoirs, fondly recounts many stories of Nirala's incredible munificence. He says that these acts of Nirala's generosity were such daily occurrences that he could even have maintained a diary of them.*

There are countless stories of his generousities. A whole diary could be written about them. 'Matwala' was published every Saturday. Early morning every Saturday several Bengali young graduates would arrive with their bicycles. They would sell the magazine and collect their commission amount on a weekly basis. 'Matwala' was a hot-selling item, and poor students used to earn enough money through its sale. One day Niralaji started talking to a very poor, shabbily dressed young student and learnt that he used to sell the magazine on a bicycle which he took on rent. Nirala was so moved seeing his poor, dirty clothes that he not only bought him a bicycle worth 150 rupees, but also got a two-piece suit stitched for him. Then advised him always to be self-reliant, and never hesitate to ask him for

money for buying any books that he might need. When Sethji, the 'Matwala' editor, asked him where did he get that big amount of around 250 rupees for it, Nirala only dismissed it with a smile. Later it transpired that for this he had taken an advance amount from Shri Mahadev Prasad Jhunjunwala, a publisher of the Badtalla locality for writing a book.

There are other stories of his boundless munificence. The watchman of the 'Matwala' office was a handsome young lad who came from Gorakhpur area. He used to call Niralaji 'Guruji'. When his marriage was fixed, he requested Niralaji to attend the ceremony. But just on that occasion Niralaji's nephew fell ill. Even so he gave him, without anyone's knowledge, a silk sari with a velvet blouse, a pair of gold earrings, some cosmetics, plus ten rupees as his marriage gift. But Niralaji would never talk about his secret deeds of charity.

Nirala used to earn by writing books for publishers and also from writing for the magazines, but whatever he earned vanished into thin air in almost no time. The 'Matwala' editor, Mahadev Prasad Seth was always eager to cater to his smallest needs. When Sethji went out with him and bought sweets or fruits exclusively for him, Nirala on his way back would keep giving away to the beggars all that he carried in his own hands, and when he had finished with his own things, he would take the things from Sethji's hands and give all

that away, too. And Sethji adored him so much that he would never resist and just look endearingly at him. Often, a little upset, he would ask Nirala to carry everything himself if it was all only to be given away to the beggars. Munshiji who also invariably went with Sethji would often chide him for buying all those delicacies, if everything was only to be given away by Niralaji, and they had only to return empty-handed. But Sethji would do all this out of respect for Niralaji's sentiments. For him, his money had no value if it so pleased the poet. Munshiji would often say jokingly that Sethji was only being over-indulgent towards Niralaji. But even such comments had absolutely no effect on Nirala.

Nirala was – just as his pen-name signified – truly 'unique'. He would often give a bunch of grapes or a packet of Muscat dates to a beggar and smilingly ask him to taste them and then tell him how he liked them. When Munshiji would say – Niralaji, why don't you give him some money instead so that he could buy some cheap eatables to fill his tummy, he would just give the beggar, in addition, a couple of oranges of the finest Nagpur or Sylhet variety. One day he gave a red shining apple to a beggar saying – if you eat this, your face also would look as redolent. The grinning poor fellow replied - Sir, if I eat this apple today through your noble kindness, will that fill this shrunken body

of mine with enough blood! Hearing this, Nirala asked Sethji to give the beggar two rupees more so that he could buy more apples and Sethji dutifully complied. And when Munshiji said with a loud laugh that even those two rupees would not buy him enough apples to bring that much blood to his weak body, Nirala gave him another rupee. And when Sethji saw more beggars flocking towards them, he hastily pulled Nirala away from there.

Munshi Navajadik Lal, besides being an old friend of Mahadev Prasad Seth, was also the manager in a factory of cosmetic products, owned by Seth Kishorilal Chaudhary of Patna City. Once when Nirala went to that factory, Munshiji presented him its products as gift, but before he reached 'Matwala-Mandal' Niralaji had given away all the bottles, except one, of the famed 'Bhootnath' perfumed oil, and had distributed all the soap cakes among the beggars - who by now had known him too well - for washing their dirty clothes. He just stopped near the dirtiest of them and ask if he gave him a soap cake would he wash his dirty clothes with it? And who would not avail of this free gift? Several pairs of hands spread before Nirala and instantly each needy palm had a soap cake on it. And the next moment, each beggarly, licey crown would have expensive perfumed oil soaking it. Even the emptied bottle was given away to one of them. Had one such bottle not been safe in my pocket,

that also would have been sacrificed to his munificence. And just then a vendor selling *tilkuts* (square-shaped candies made of sesame) arrived on the scene and Nirala bought and freely distributed the candies among those beggars. When all the candies thus disappeared, he even promised the beggars that he would give them a similar feast of *pyaji pakoris* (fried onion veggies), thus earning evermore blessings from them.

*Such profound philanthropic trait was inherent in Nirala's character...*

In the Belur Math (Calcutta) of Paramhansa Shri Ramakrishna, there used to be formal mass feasts for the poor to mark the birth and death anniversaries of Paramahansaji and Swami Vivekanand. Niralaji, as the 'Samanvaya'-editor, would always go there on these occasions with the sanyasins of the Vivekanand Society which was a branch of the Mission. During the various programmes in those momentous events, Nirala would only busy himself in distributing the food items to the *daridranarayan* (the poor folk). His intense interest in feeding the beggars would earn the admiration of all. Generally on these occasions, only the Bengali *bhadralok* (gentry) would assemble there, and Nirala, who spoke Bangla as his mother tongue, would thus win the hearts of the assembled gentry. He would mix like sugar-in-milk with that crowd. Even the most learned of the Bengalis could not excel him

in his depth of knowledge in Bangla literature. His recitations of the songs of Rabindranath would fill even the most ardent of Bengalis with wonder and satiety.

*But Nirala's generosity were not limited to humans only. Even animals came well within his ambit of loving kindness...*

The 'Matwala' office was first located at 23, Shankar Ghosh Lane. Behind it lay the Vidyasagar College. Once we were going to attend a public meeting there. A dog lay whining in pain on the footpath of Cornwallis Street, just in front of the Arya Samaj Temple. There was a big suppurating wound on its back. Nirala suddenly sat there beside it. We were getting late for the public meeting, but he ran to the medicine shop across the street and came back with a tube of ointment, wiped the wound with his handkerchief and threw it off, then spread the entire contents of the tube on its wound. It was only after completing this task and washing his hands at the nearby public hydrant that he accompanied us to the meeting. While returning Munshiji jokingly said – 'Please also give the poor thing something to eat' – and Niralaji immediately bought some *pakoris* from the vendor there and put it before the beast in agony, and burst into laughter when the poor thing started gobbling the *pakoris* hurriedly.

*Nirala always lived in a world of deep*

*thought, entirely lost to the mundane world – in a kind of transcendental existence. Shivji recounts another incident of Nirala's utter non-materialistic behaviour...*

At a flower show one day Sethji bought and presented Nirala a beautiful flower bouquet for Rs five. But when we came back to our office, it was discovered that he had left it somewhere in the flower show itself. Immediately, Sethji went back there by tram with Niralaji, but the latter couldn't remember where exactly the bouquet had been left. When winter came, Sethji got an expensive light quilt made for him. He bought the finest Dhaka *mulmul* cloth for it, got it done in gaudy colours, even the inner cotton was coloured red and green - all then sprinkled with mica dust, and adorned with broad satin borders, and finally enveloped in a specially sewn cover. Nirala then wrapped it around himself and beamed a smile, but only a couple of weeks later gave it away to a beggar. It was bitter cold when that beggar in his bare body had appeared before him. At once Nirala took his quilt off and lovingly wrapped it around that poor being with his own hands. When by chance I saw this, I rushed to the press to call Sethji and Munshiji. But even before they could reach there, that crafty poseur had just vanished! Sethji ran to look for him but all in vain. And Niralaji burst into a loud laughter, saying – Why are you so bothered? Poor fellow will have a comfortable time in this

biting winter! Even Sethji then smiled and said – You are truly great, Niralaji!

*Nirala had very strong views about economic inequalities in society, almost verging on the communist ideology, very much in the air in those days...*

Often in the 'Matwala-Mandal' when discussions took place on the problem of poverty, or news or articles appeared on the subject in the newspapers, Nirala would forcefully present his arguments against it. While criticizing the rampant economic inequalities in the country he would seem to be an aggressive Communist. Although he lacked sympathy for able-bodied beggars, yet for the sad plight of the infirm or the disabled among them he would bitterly criticize society and the administration. Only the lame or the blind, or the totally deprived and the lepers among them would catch his attention, and then he would be totally oblivious of his own circumstances. In a big city like Calcutta he would always be looking for these most unfortunate beggars on the pavements; much of his time would be spent in the world of these wretched beings only. On these pavements in the nights, besides these beggars, many shelterless labourers and vendors also would be found sleeping. There was none else in that megapolis of the rich except Nirala who would buy and distribute *biris*, fried corn or gram or peanuts among them all. Numberless business magnates would pass

by these pavements in the night, and may be a few of them threw a coin or two among these beggars, but there would be none like Nirala to share their sorrow with heartfelt sympathy. Calcutta was the City of Joy, and Nirala had no dearth of money for enjoyment, but his sole source of entertainment was the succour he could provide to the poor.

Nirala was so detached from worldly affairs that he remained a recluse throughout his life. Never had he any trunk with lock and key in which to keep his things, nor any care for clothes or money. How many clothes were tailored for him or were sent to the washerman, he would never remember. He had absolute trust in his tailor or his washerman. Nor would he ever bother about the upkeep of his clothes. Always engrossed in his own self, he had no care for these mundane things. Any accounts of his expenses also, he would never keep. Hundred rupee notes would lie under his pillow, but no one knew how long would they stay there? It would be lucky for any currency note to stay with him for more than twentyfour hours! What came in the morning went by evening, and that which came in the evening would disappear before next morning. He had no bad habits, no indulgences of any kind. But his cronies would come to know about these cash arrivals, and he was ever ready to meet their demands.

Even when he left Calcutta and lived in Lucknow or Prayag (Allahabad), he continued to live like a monk or a recluse. Wherever he lived, he would shower his munificence on the shopkeepers catering to his needs with exorbitant payments. Even the *ekka-tongawllahs* (hackney-drivers) would bask in his indulgence, and would refuse other passengers in order to serve him. The beggars of the neighbourhood would start blessing him the moment they saw him around.

Nirala would generally give away his new clothes to the poor and use his old clothes instead. In the winters also he would give away his new quilt to the poor making do with his old blanket. People of such philanthropic nature were scarcely to be seen in his literary fraternity.

*In Shivji's memoirs of Nirala, there is also a very amusing anecdote of great literary interest, when Nirala was still in Calcutta with 'Matwala'...*

'Matwala' published Nirala's poems as well as his critical pieces, but Nirala wrote his critical notes on material published in other literary magazines under a pseudonym – 'Gargaj Singh Varma'. Once under this column he wrote a series of critical notes on articles published in *Saraswati*, the famous literary journal edited by Acharya Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi. But Dwivediji did not know that those critical notes were written by Nirala. When he could bear it no more, Dwivediji



edited all those issues of 'Matwala' in which the said critical notes were published and sent them back to 'Matwala' office by registered post. He had mercilessly edited all those issues from cover to cover with a red pen and written in his letter that those who try to find fault in others should first look into their own shoddy work. When Nirala got that packet of 'Matwala' issues with Dwiwediji's letter, his loud bursts of laughter would not cease till he went totally out of breath. After that day he stopped criticizing 'Saraswati' for good. He also requested that all the pages corrected by Dwiwediji's pencil should be published by 'Matwala' but Mahadev Prasad Seth, the 'Matwala'-editor, locked all those brutally edited issues of his magazine in his iron chest never to be seen by anyone. If those pages could be seen today, they would appear to be priceless literary material....

But Nirala was ever reverent towards his seniors, as he was conscious of his own self-respect. He would give all respect to a venerable person and yet would expect similar approbation from him. Once when he went to a literary meet in Calcutta, the president of the meet did not stand up to welcome him. Nirala went up the dias, but the very next moment descended from it. The president even then failed to take the hint. By the time, Mahadev Prasad Seth, the 'Matwala' editor, knowing Nirala's quick temper, went to stop him, he had already gone out and left on a taxi.

On another occasion, in a poet's meet, when the list of poets was being announced, his name came at the very end; perhaps, to make the audience stay till the last. But when Nirala did not hear his name at the top of the list he at once left the place. When we wanted to stop him, he said – 'I wouldn't mind reciting my poem at the end, but why was my name given last without even asking me?' And he just went away.

One day Niralaji went with Munshiji to meet Pandit Narayan Prasad 'Betab' [the famous dramatist of the Parsi theatre]. 'Betabji' later arranged a drama-meet at his residence and invited Niralaji also. But he did not agree to go there in spite of all our pleadings. He said – 'I was the first to go to his place to see him, but he did not come to my place any time thereafter. If he doesn't have the time for it, I, too, don't have the time today'.

There are innumerable such instances of Nirala's elevated sense of self-respect which touch the very summit of self-pride.

*One such anecdote of later years (1960) when Shivji had gone to see Nirala in his last days of ill-health is equally remarkable...*

I went to see Niralaji on 24th November, 1960. While bathing at the Triveni confluence, before meeting him, I saw a glittering bus carrying film starlets arrive there with the famous star Raj Kapoor. There was a great crowd

surrounding them. Some scenes for the film 'Ganga-Jamuna' ['Jis Desh Me Ganga Bahti Hai'] were to be shot. When I met Niralaji I started describing the scene to him. Then he said ruefully – 'Raj Kapoor's father Prithviraj, whenever he came to Prayag, would always come to see me, but Raj Kapoor hasn't come yet!' Niralaji was always very conscious about these things.

*Shivapujan Sahay had left 'Matwala' in 1924 and gone to Lucknow only to return a year later to Calcutta, but not to 'Matwala', doing odd editorial jobs elsewhere, though still contributing frequently to 'Matwala'. By 1926, he had finally moved to Kashi. Nirala, too, who had disassociated himself from 'Matwala' a couple of years later, had arrived in Kashi around this time...*

Niralaji had lived in Kashi for some time, when I, too, lived there. Literary sittings at 'Prasadji's' were a daily affair. Poetry recitations would also take place on boats in the mid-Ganga river. Once Nirala sang that bhajan by Tulsidas – 'Shri Ramchandra kripalu bhaj man' playing on a harmonium. Later 'Prasadji', in Nirala's absence, had lavished praise on him. He had been extremely impressed by his equal virtuosity in both literature and music. 'Prasadji' was a man free from feelings of envy or approbation. After weighing his talent, Prasadji had prophesied at that time that Nirala was God's gift to Hindi. On seeing Nirala's passionate rendering of his

poem 'Panchwati' Munshi Navjadik Lal would say that at such times Nirala reminded him of the brilliant actors of the Bengali stage. Those who had ever seen Nirala's dramatic talents on the stage could never forget his memorable histrionics.

*Nirala spent his last days at Daraganj, Prayag. On hearing of his ill-health Shivji went to see him in November, 1960...*

Last November (1960) I got a leaflet regarding his ill health from Prayag (Allahabad), and I went there on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to meet him. After putting my luggage at the house of Pandit Vachaspati Pathak, the manager of Bharati Bhandar in the Leader Press, I went straight to Niralaji's house in Daraganj. My eldest son, Anand Murty, and my five-year old grandson, Lallu, were also with me. When he saw me standing before him, he was overjoyed. After the usual exchange of greetings and solicitations about my welfare, he said – It's late evening, and after a long journey you must be tired. Please go and have rest and come early tomorrow so that we may have a full day's chit-chat; and please also have your lunch with me here. I noticed some swelling in his legs. His only son, Pandit Ramkrishna Tripathi, was there to nurse him. I was told that earlier the then C.M. of U.P., Dr Sampurnand, and the Education Minister, Pt Kamalapati Tripathi, had both come to see Niralaji and by a special order Ramkrishnaji had been transferred from Jhansi, where he was a

music teacher, to Prayag, to look after his ailing father, though the latter's family was still at Jhansi. He wanted to rent a house in Daraganj to bring his family there and help in nursing his father. But I was surprised to learn that Niralaji was absolutely reluctant about any change of place. He was not even ready to go to a hospital as the Ministers and the doctors had advised. I, too, implored him for it but he flatly said that he would not hurt the feelings of the inmates who had been serving him for years and give credit for nursing him to others in this last stage of his life. Even later he didn't agree to move to a hospital. But this was nothing new. What he would once decide, he would stick to it in spite of all persuasions. He wasn't stubborn by nature, but would only go by what his over-sensitive heart told him.

Next morning after a bath at the *triveni-sangam* (the holy confluence of three rivers at Prayag), I went again to Niralaji's place. I had wrapped myself with a double *andi* (warm shawl), but he insistently covered me with his own hands with a *lihaf* (quilt). Then he called the house-keeping lady to cook *moong-urad* lentils, rice and puris, green vegetables and fried *badis* (salted cakes) of *urad* and gram – indeed, he dictated to her a whole menu of rich dishes for me. He also invited Pandit Ganesh Pandey, the old wizened proprietor of Chhatra Hitkari Pustakmala, for the lunch. He always liked to eat in company, as he said. He took my grandson in his lap and

kept cuddling him. When a gentleman came to take a photograph, he made me sit on his bed by his side. We kept talking about the present and the past affairs till late in the afternoon. He even said that my visit has cured him of half his ailments. Encouraged by his statement, with folded hands, I implored him to take all necessary precautions about his delicate health, and put a restraint on his tendency to speak continuously. But, instead, he took up a copy of *Abhigyan Shakuntalam* and started reciting selected *shlokas* from it as also explicating the subtle nuances of their meaning. The more I avoided making him speak, the more he would go on speaking. He would sometimes start reading from Tagore's verses and then switch over to reciting lines from memory from Shelley's and Milton's poems. I couldn't even get up to leave. He then started asking about Munshiji's family. [Munshiji had died in 1939, leaving his widow and small children in very indigent circumstances.] He wanted to know about the sum of 2,100 rupees which he had received as a literary award and given away to be sent to Munshiji's family [through Mahadevi Varma]. He also talked about Professor Nand Dulare Vajpeyi, Dr Ram Vilas Sharma and Pandit Vinod Shankar Vyas. He kept on talking in spite of my keeping totally mum. All my pleadings to stop him went in vain. And no sooner had I returned to Leader Press after making further entreaties with him about proper care and rest for himself, he

came there on a rickshaw accompanied by the house lady. Vachaspati Pathak was sitting there, besides Pandit Vishwambhar Nath Jijja (Sub-editor, *Bharat*) and Shri Bhagawati Charan Varma. All of them expressed their deep anguish and surprise and said that he shouldn't have come like that, and he could get well only by following his doctor's advice. But possessing an intellect of the highest order and being a poet-philosopher with a highly self-willed temperament, he would listen to everybody, but do only what he willed. And it was this unbridled wilfulness that proved so perilous for his failing health. Who, indeed, could argue with him about the mortality of the physical body and the transience of life!

*Concluding his series of reminiscences*

*of Nirala, Shivji speaks of Nirala's deep anguish for Hindi which he shared with Shivji during their last meeting at Prayag in November, 1960...*

Nirala had expected that after independence the supremacy of Hindi as Rashrtabhasha will be established, but that hope was belied, which made him very sad. When Sanehiji, a fellow poet, went to see him, he said to him feelingly – Look, I want to die now, but people just wouldn't let me. For whom should I live now? Language and literature have become political weapons, and the humiliation that Hindi is being subjected to has now become unbearable. English has now become beloved of all – whether or not people understand anything of it.

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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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## SEVEN POEMS

Liladhar Jagudi

Translated by  
Premlata and Govind Prasad Bahuguna

### A DIALOGUE WITH LOVE

It may be very indecent  
    yet is essential  
may be very crude  
    but practical  
It may be fully worn out  
    but effective  
I got a little bit of love  
    at a place for sometime

It was my god fortune  
    that I got love  
I wanted to thank her  
    and feel obliged  
wanted to get her  
    everywhere, and all the time.

Love first whispered a bit  
    then started crying  
behaving normally a little later  
    said—I like you  
but have you chosen me for ever?

because you tend to choose and leave  
again you choose  
and again you leave.

Even after choosing me  
sometimes you select  
anger, hatred or ascetism  
from time to time you choose  
boredom or distance  
often you select mother; sometimes wife  
another time you choose  
ideals or country.

Where as I know  
none of your nights is an ethical night.

Because you love me  
that is why you want to get me  
so I also love you  
what all you have?  
apart from your entire life?

The thing which you call relationship  
I want that along with  
your eyes, ears, nose and tongue  
I want your heart, your courage and your emotions  
your love ideology  
in other words  
every thing that is yours

In the end, not only this much  
but I would also wish  
that when you die  
You die for me,  
even if it is for a small thing;  
and when you die in a big way

for which cause of mine  
will you die?

### **DISTRESSED WORDS**

One day the distressed words  
came and said—  
we have been cut from here and there  
been removed from sentences;  
either our substitutes have been found  
or they proceed without us.

Among them were  
Mr. Quiet, turncoat and the incarnator  
besides among them were  
the immortals of their times  
rich and wealthy  
all the words were there,  
some were rusted  
others were torn  
the rebellion was also there  
with a visibly disshevelled beard.

Right in front was  
the deprived virtuous,  
he was saying  
evil is spreading like weeds,  
The huge evil was standing astonished  
now no one is scared of me.

All around there were such words  
that had a past deeper than sea  
but they were not included  
in the ethics of a language,  
they were neither from morning

nor from evening  
and not from everyday life  
they were not clouds, bubbles  
or dewdrops  
they were perturbed words  
that were urging  
without forming a union  
'please save us'

Some of them were seasoned old loafers  
seeking refuge in women's bosom,  
some had worn out.  
others though whole  
but couldn't walk,  
some were bloodless  
others were soaked,  
they couldn't be understood  
no one was making sense.

Some neuter gender words were sitting  
next to Mr. Quiet;  
Ma'm purity was very dirty, sad and untouchable  
when I asked where is Mr. pure?  
she said, he has become a box'  
being sold with a seal and a stamp;  
now he is not as pure as before  
goes on changing his shades.  
Right in his presence  
I was raped a number of times,  
each one was trying  
to make me contemporary  
and I went on getting erased.

I noticed  
that rape was nowhere  
among the distressed words



then suddenly  
there was a shout  
    where is murder?  
she is busy and mobile  
    answered an innocent non criminal word,  
he didn't have hands or feet  
    in sound condition,  
his neck was also limp  
    she doesn't even come in language  
she hides behind the habituals  
    makes a murder out of any one  
now justice is also under her control,  
then he spoke about himself  
    I am affection  
tried a lot to make friends and friendships  
    but  
the world wore me like a veil  
    and layed me like gunpowder.  
I am broken now  
    no use taking me to a doctor  
get me one neck  
    hands and feet which can work  
I can still gather enough strength  
    to give a blow with my fist.

People who pushed me aside  
    were merely two-three words  
sitting side by side  
    one of them says he is dialogue  
another is message  
    and the third one is appeal  
Message has his own problems  
    whereas dialogue wants to get established  
and appeal has been rejected repeatedly.  
    No one could create some thing  
which could be called 'affection'.

I am totally confused  
in my thoughts, had a dialogue with my language  
first she stripped me  
with common words  
then in front of neighbours  
threw me out among vulgar words.  
They mocked at me  
and left deep marks of abuses  
on my soul.

My language  
domestic, neighbourly and  
coming filtered  
from various professions  
advised me if you want to become  
contemporary then take risks;  
The soul is to be grown  
like potatoes  
in the field of your body.

Why do you go to grave yards?  
why do you pickup.  
these dead bodies?  
Remain inactive  
like a gentleman  
otherwise  
you will be in difficulty  
you will get killed.  
you can't even live  
for your ownself  
and you are trying to infuse  
life in others?

Now a new character has come up  
who is very practical

where keeping quiet  
is also a clever strategy.  
The fickle is a leader  
don't trust him  
the incarnater is looking  
for his own possibilities.  
Don't look at dead characters  
look at those  
who have movement  
ones who impress at once  
but continue saying wait  
but don't tell who  
and don't even tell  
how much strength is needed  
to go on waiting,  
because waiting is meaningless unless  
the thing that is coming  
is also moving.

The turncoat does't tell  
that ability and wisdom  
should be combined with experience,  
and wait for some thing  
that is coming towards you.

People will live as per their ability  
in every time and age  
impotents are there in every generation.  
why the neutre-genders  
are so upset?  
they are walking enough,  
and tell purity  
not to behave like a prostitute  
how will she deal  
with so many suitors?  
here every one pretends to be pure.

You were screaming and screaming  
what happened to the faith  
that broke values?  
won't it be a rape?  
what else?  
after all  
rape also breaks a value  
and it is not murder  
but it is a confrontation  
which every one has to do.

### **POETRY IN BAD TIMES**

Good poetry I cannot reach you  
till day before yesterday  
I was perfectly alright  
worrying about nothing;  
yesterday I could think about you  
till noon there was taste on my tongue  
even the most useless  
and outspoken things  
had their own pleasing taste  
Nice poetry I cannot reach you.

Today I came tired and exhausted  
trying to reduce the price  
of a kilo of potatoes  
but failed, ever after a lot of haggling  
everytime potatoes are costlier  
by four 'annas'  
buying them is like buying  
half of the world's independence.

By then I heard four persons broke into  
and robbed even the last needle

from the next house;  
I had a deep sigh of relief  
hearing they broke into the next house  
pleasant poetry I can't reach you.

Good poetry whenever I fall ill  
I try to use my self confidence  
but by then come letters;  
Quarrels have increased at home  
father needs five hundred rupees  
and warm cloth  
for a set of kurta-pyjama  
winter has set in  
and he needs to go to Tehri  
for the court case.

Good poetry I get headache  
and feel giddy  
I see yellow and blue all around  
even the colour of blood  
doesn't look red  
The night keeps me  
away from sleep  
my family's necks  
look all slaughtered.

Nice poetry shall I say  
all this with an Aha!  
how easily dying has been arranged  
how can I make  
my being hunted out an artistic feat  
shall I kill art  
by saying something  
using a skill which is unartistic?  
how many times I need to destroy my  
entire life to say something properly.

Good poetry even in bad circumstances  
    can it be written nicely  
I can't write you like that,  
    that sort of completely polite and disciplined way,  
whose non-guilty craft  
    makes an enraged man desperate,  
where sad people  
    depicted artistically  
look lazy and stupid,  
    who knows sometimes  
bad poetry may look like good poetry  
    good poetry I am a very bad man  
my children's mother  
    is less bad than me  
I get angry and hate  
    feel piety and become merciful  
but she laughs  
    don't know at what she laughs  
on which later she cries.

Nice poetry which are the things  
    you really like;  
merely a few events or some sentences  
    or just words;  
I can't think much about you  
    I have to arrange  
to pay for the medicines  
    and have to calculate hard  
for buying milk.  
    Do you like lively, healthy  
and successful persons only  
    not the ill or the debt stricken ones  
who organise their words  
    even to tell bad dreams

Good poetry many of my acquaintances  
have been killed;  
without even moving my neck  
I can look into my old days  
where many adversities were endured  
They met their predictable end.

From a distance I can smell  
the decaying things  
along with the information  
that once they were beautiful.

Those who say  
such is good poetry  
which will not give you headache  
neither will you vomit  
It is not unclean like your stomach  
or absurd like your heart  
It is not confused facts of your mind  
there wouldn't be fear to die  
to deteriorate, to rot or to perspire  
no constipation, no urine obstruction  
good poetry there is no problem with you.

Where as, there are a number of problems  
between me and bad poetry  
several times we try to finish each other.

### **NOW AFTER SO MANY DAYS**

One is goodness  
another is evil  
Victory of goodness over evil  
is talked about repeatedly

yet sorrow goes on increasing  
similarly evil goes on spreading

we bewail a lot about  
ideas, virtues and values  
since thousands of years  
we have been saying something or the other.

Oh! how strong are evils  
and how weak are virtues  
we are given just one ideal  
'take the side of the weak'  
the ideal tells us—  
how weak is the side of the weak.

morality, chastity, kindness, caring and service  
patience, large-heartedness and faith  
since thousands of years  
insistence on these continue.  
After so much time  
why don't they come in our life  
suddenly, without effort?

### **I AM A BIRD WITHOUT NEST**

Birds in the valley invoked the evening  
Each ray of the sun made obeisance

A bough waved goodbye to the distant traveler  
Each branch shook off gloominess of the lonely sky  
Each post of horizon began to sip saffron wine.

The droning hymn of bees carrying nectar  
made the breeze heavy.

The blue flags of night hung on the mountain peaks.



Holding corners of sky at both ends  
Rain of tears poured down all night on the bosom of earth  
opening all secrets of the wounded heart  
A homeless bird as I am  
I could read each syllable of the hurt message.

## **INLAND LETTER**

Don't enclose anything in this letter  
Neither your ideas nor your memories  
No enclosures allowed in this letter.  
Neither any impression of your relations  
Nor the story of your troubles and grievances  
Neither promises to meet again nor any communicable  
disease.  
Neither your family lamentations nor your signatures even. Otherwise this letter may be  
censored.  
No enclosures allowed in this letter.  
Those without any shelter  
Are the most suspect and helpless lot  
On the face cover one side the name and address  
Of the recipient  
And on the other side the name of some sender must be there.  
The news demand care  
No enclosures allowed in this letter.  
The sender knows,  
What has not been written  
And the reader understands why it has not been written .  
He can read even the blank sheet  
even without a single alphabet in it.  
Therefore don't enclose anything in this letter.  
Do not insert anything in this letter.  
Neither any explosive phrase,  
Nor the news of your childbirth.

Neither news of a sudden demise  
Nor paper bomb  
Neither any reasonable argument  
Nor any New Year greeting or an intention of  
divorce  
No enclosures allowed in this letter.  
The total issue is the letter only.  
Which the bloodless face of the postman carries  
who will be castrated in the evening if returned  
without delivery.

### **NOSTALGIC MEMORIES OF UTTARKASHI**

The mountain ranges extending up to the far end of horizon  
Flags of white clouds fly high in the sky like cotton rolls  
Time cascading down the waterfalls like bellowing of conch  
shells  
The village seems to me an abode of Gods on earth  
The village- beauties stand in cohort of love mates on the  
fields  
The mountain ranges extending up to far end of horizon  
Many sad stories echo in the whistles of pine forest  
The footpaths are crouched on thighs of the mountain-  
slopes  
Lusty desire dances on the hints of jungle-trees  
The mountain ranges extending up to the far end of horizon  
The rows of rainbow bow down as if in mass prayer  
The rays of the morning sun begin to fill  
Deep gorges of the valley below.  
The whiff of harvesting corn travel in the air  
with the swish of innumerable arms of wind  
The mountain ranges extending up to far end of horizon  
On the shining slate-rooftops  
And the corners of the courtyard  
I feel your invitation every moment

your beckoning in all places  
Which rising bud doesn't hold imprint of sweet memories  
The mountain ranges extending up to the far end of the horizon.

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**Liladhar Jagudi**, born 1940 at Tehri Uttarakhand, is a sahitya akademi award winning prolific poet with other honours like Raghuvir Sahay samman and U.P. Sansthan samman. In 2004 he received Padmashri. He has a dozen collections of poems and is known for his sharp use of poetic metaphors. He lives in Dehradun.

**Dr. Premlata**, is senior reader in Maitreyi College of Delhi University. She lives in New Delhi.

**Govind Prasad Bahuguna**, born 1945 Uttarkashi is M.A. from Allahabad University and has been in academics and civil services. He has been an adviser to Uttarakhand govt. He has translated a great number of Jagudi's poems into English. At present he is living in Bangalore.

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## FIVE POEMS

Umesh Chauhan

Translated by  
The Poet

### The Dustbins

The dustbins placed all over in various localities of a city  
Do tell us in the very morning itself  
All the happenings and non-happenings of the homes of those localities,  
There is no better mirror as compared to these foul-smelling dustbins  
To have a glimpse of the real face of people's life.

For example, the dustbins do tell us  
In how many homes that day  
The skins of the fresh vegetables have virtually been peeled off,  
In how many homes that morning  
The fresh juice of fruits has actually been squeezed out,  
In how many homes people have lived on the packed food alone for  
the day  
And in how many homes that day  
The boxes of readymade clothes have virtually been opened up.

From only a glance at the dustbins of the slums  
One can easily get to realize

That in how many homes there  
Virtually nothing has been cut or opened the whole day,  
It may be another matter that  
The slums represent in themselves  
All the dustbins of the city collectively  
Since to the homes of the slums is carried  
The whole recyclable waste of all the dustbins of the City.

Dustbins themselves can easily tell us  
The way, in which people of a locality would have spent their nights,  
Quantum of foreign liquor, which would have been consumed by them  
And also the number of bottles of the country-made liquor  
The brands of Scotch and imported wines, which are consumed usually  
In the colonies of Government Officers,  
And the quantity of condoms, which are used at night in any locality.  
Occasionally, from some infamous locality's dustbin come out  
The cartridges of AK-47 and even bombs also some day,  
And some day even an ill-fated infant,  
Just born and discarded from the mother's lap.  
Oh! Economists!  
You don't have to send teams from door to door  
To collect the data of living standards of the people of a city,  
You can manage the task by just surveying the dustbins of the city,  
Because, the real living standard of a city  
Can always be best gauged from looking at its dustbins themselves.

### **The Undefeated Bird**

An obstinate bird is repeatedly trying to make her nest  
By entering into my drawing room

Over the hanger of its curtains,  
She brings dozens of pieces of straw daily  
From dawn to dusk  
Through the open window,  
Despite all the pieces so fixed daily by her  
Being brought down and removed next morning at the time of cleaning,  
The bird is not ready to accept defeat,  
She is hell bent upon making her nest in my drawing room only.

The bird is not afraid of any of the impending dangers,  
For example, while speedily entering the open window of my drawing room,  
On colliding with the moving ceiling fan,  
She has already got her wings hurt badly once,  
By laying over the eggs in her half built nest  
At the hanger of my curtains  
The bird has already got many of them fallen and broken,  
Facing the irony of not being able to enter the room  
Through the window remaining closed at night.  
The bird has to often spend  
Several nights of the winter, the summer and the rains  
Over the trees standing outside in the open.

Looking at the bird's heart being broken daily  
I often feel pity,  
I have also thought on many occasions  
About bringing and putting up a cage for her safety,  
But I have never been convinced about caging the bird like that,  
I have always been thinking that  
Perhaps she will understand the reality on some occasion  
And will stop entering my drawing room anymore.

She will prefer to make her nest on one of the trees outside,  
But the bird has not yet shown me any such sense,  
One doesn't know, whether she is obstinate or foolish,  
Or, may be, she is the one, compelled naturally to search  
An understandably safer place of living like this,  
Her attempt to infiltrate into my house is continuing as ever.

I see in this bird, the faces of the people,  
Who are living on the banks of the river Yamuna  
Or under the newly built huge flyovers of Delhi,  
Destined to settle in such slums and getting evicted from time to time,  
I see the same courage and somewhat similar dreams in their eyes too,  
At times the bird just appears to me as an encroacher like them,  
The bird looks untired even after losing all that, what she has,  
And just at the onset of every dawn,  
Holding a piece of dry straw in the beak,  
Quite eager to make her new nest to dwell upon and lay eggs,  
She is seen waiting at the branch of the tree outside  
For the opening of the window of my drawing room daily.

### **Sheela is Overwhelmed with Fear**

Sheela has come to Delhi from Jharkhand.  
There in a forest village of Palamu,  
She has a small thatched mud-house,  
Where live her parents and brothers and sisters,  
All over the walls of that house there are tribal paintings,  
Which she has made joining her mother during the last festive season,  
Outside, in the forest dwell her memories of childhood,  
Roaming freely all around,

There is a lot more, that she likes there,  
But clipped by the governmental regulations now,  
That forest does not provide them livelihood anymore,  
And, to discover a new future for her family,  
Though quite reluctantly, Sheela has come all over to Delhi from Jharkhand.

Sheela is not aware that  
Leaving her childhood behind in that forest village,  
Her tender adolescence, on coming to Delhi,  
How mercilessly that could be looted upon here,  
Even that clever agent of her village, who has brought her here,  
Giving repeated assurances to her parents for a good placement,  
Can not be depended upon at all on any count.

In the Jungle of Delhi  
Sheela is wandering alone now,  
Looking for a good house-lady,  
Serving whom by sweeping and cleaning,  
She can fulfill the expectations of her parents,  
And can get a safer shelter too,  
Usually difficult to be found in Delhi,  
Where she can keep her blossoming adolescence intact,  
Where she shall not have the fate of giving any such statement to the police  
About having been raped by some unscrupulous house-lord,  
Statements usually bear only the thumb impressions of illiterates like her  
And in reality, these are worded by others,  
Where she shall not be called upon to explain  
Any counter-allegations of theft leveled against her by such cornered rapists.  
Sheela is full of fear  
About going to those courts of Delhi,



Where police often takes other Jharkhandi victims of rape,  
Sheela is fearful about the piercing eyes of the court assistants and lawyers  
And most about the warden of that Women's Home,  
Where the court often sends  
These tortured and shelterless Jharkhandi girls  
To let them get rid of their feelings of agony,  
As, perhaps on facing a fresh agony,  
The human being tends to forget his previous pains.

Sheela also does not want that  
Her parents lose their faith in this city of hers  
And they come over to take her back to the village  
Like other victimized girls of Jharkhand around.

Sheela is overwhelmed with fear in this dense Delhi  
Because she does not want to fill her tummy and that of her family  
By putting her adolescence at stake  
Or by succumbing to the lust of any of the house-lords,  
But Sheela is not sure at all, up to how long  
She would remain safe amidst these beasts of Delhi.

### **The Co-passenger**

We are also the co-passengers of the same ship  
Boarding which you are sailing around the globe,  
When the time of sinking in the deep ocean comes,  
Will our experience of death be a different one?  
That too only, because, we are from a poor nation,  
So we do not eat as much, as you can,  
And you are from a well to do, rich nation,

Where every vegetable, fruit and flower and even human beings  
Can grow double the size of ours?

We have set on sailing together in this voyage  
To establish the new milestones of our friendship,  
But I don't know that, sitting on the top deck of the ship,  
Looking beyond the infinite spread of water in front  
And focusing my eyes at the horizon every morning and evening  
The kind of patch of this earth I am trying to discover,  
Whether you are also looking for a similar one or not,  
Or, otherwise, whether your aim is even today the same,  
That you still want to search a totally different world for yourself.

We have been destined to live in our habitat of millenniums old  
Coping up with the multifarious impact of history,  
And you have only recently set up  
This new habitat of yours across the Atlantic,  
Even then you have not bothered to look back even once to know  
That sitting far away on this earth itself  
Somewhere someone else is paying the cost of your luxurious living,  
And after the failure of the rounds of talks of Kyoto, Doha and Geneva,  
This is what we all feel ever so strongly.

For your gains in trade you have tightened well the limbs of people like us,  
Seems all you want is control over pockets of poor like us,  
But you are not ready to allow any poor to enter into your market at all,  
Having inflicted the wounds on the body of our earth,  
Now you also want to get the biopsies for grafting them up  
By chopping off the bodies of we the poor only,  
Therefore, how can we trust that during this long voyage

Giving up all that cut-throat competition we have seen till now,  
You will start thinking like us only about this earth,  
Unifying your mind with that of ours.

Friend (!)! I have earlier also been on many long sea-voyages  
With well to do friends of several other developed countries.  
While passing through the vast solitudes during all such journeys  
In the moments of serious trembling,  
Frightfully looking at the shaking ship,  
Sitting over the deck with those dear co-passengers,  
Putting our eyes into each others' eyes,  
We could always feel that  
Even if death really comes closer to us some day,  
Then also they would prove to be worthy co-passengers of that last journey,  
Struggling on to save each other till the very last moment,  
However, during the difficult times of this voyage of ours,  
Why it is, that we don't feel similarly assured about you,  
My dear co-passenger from Washington!

### **The Ants**

The movement of ants may be slow  
But with their dedication, they easily climb up  
The smooth and slippery walls of homes,  
Tall standing trees, high mounds and mountains,  
They can enter into the deep narrow holes, the tunnels,  
And creep in even into the caves,  
In their peculiar context, the ants look more laborious and courageous to me  
Than Hanuman, who could cross over the sea due to his strong willpower.

The movement of ants is in straight rows,  
Their diversions to go ahead towards the goal,  
By-passing the obstructions of any sort coming on the way,  
Their climbing up of the tallest targets all around,  
Their going across the immeasurable depths,  
While clasping the relatively heavier particles of food in their front pods  
Always surprises me a lot, as if they are capable of defeating  
Even the most well planned armies of the world.

I haven't seen till date any training centre for ants,  
They haven't organized ever any camp for their skill development,  
They have always learnt spontaneously  
All these curvaceous movements of life,  
And these practices of holistic management.

No matter how much we crush them under our feet  
They can't be finished from any scene,  
They were surely born on this earth prior to us  
And they are capable of surviving here even beyond our times.

The ants always enjoy a group-living,  
They gather in large numbers within moments on smelling the target  
They are suddenly seen moving in big herds from somewhere,  
The ants have not bound themselves  
Within the divisive walls of castes and religions,  
The ants are always keen to live, exhibiting togetherness,  
Keeping themselves away from the conflicts of the rich and the poor,  
They have filled up the essence of equity and equality in their society.

Ants are established in this world  
As a great example of social harmony,  
dedication, laboriousness and convictional firmness,  
Shouldn't we learn something?  
From the worth emulating lives of these ants!

---

**Umesh Chauhan**, born 1959 in village Dadupur of U.P., his complete name is Umesh Kumar Singh Chauhan. Writes poems in Hindi and translates from Malayalam into Hindi. He has translated prominent poets like G. Sankara Kurup, Akkitham and O.N.V. Kurup. He has five collections of Hindi poems from major publishers. Umesh Chauhan is in I.A.S. and is at present resident commissioner of Kerala govt. in New Delhi. He is one of the few Hindi authors who has mastered Malayalam like his mothertongue. He lives in New Delhi.

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# Poetry

## FIVE POEMS

Vimal Kumar

Translated by  
Mangal Murty

### **Loving my dead wife**

till now I never knew  
I had been loving my dead wife  
kissing her all these years  
in those embraces  
undressing her in darkness  
with all that tickling and giggling  
never realizing  
she had been dead all along  
much like my mother  
who had been dead  
as she lived

like a corpse  
with me my wife slept  
on our bed for years  
like a corpse  
kissing me  
her voice often choked  
on telephone  
I went with her in a wedding

to relatives at Begusarai  
and to friends' houses,  
once to Shimla  
and also once to Bhopal.  
She, all the while dead,  
changed into a skeleton  
though unknown to me  
a skeleton wrapped in flesh,  
eyes turned stone  
hands turned branches  
legs, lamp posts  
yet no one told me  
- your wife is dead -  
not even my children  
- mummy is dead, papa -  
even friends said  
- hey, is bhabhi not living?

one day even my wife said  
pulling me into her embrace  
- d'you know I have been  
dead all along  
living only for my kids  
and perhaps for you  
I asked her  
who after all killed you?  
and I have been looking  
ever since for the killer  
- there are many, said my wife  
you being one  
and here I am in my own home  
an accused in the docks

trying hard to know  
- I had always been loving her -  
how from a husband  
I turned into a killer  
when I never knew  
I had been loving  
a dead wife all along  
and what was her compulsion  
to love one who's her killer  
and live so long with him!  
like the wall in her house  
crumbling brick by brick  
and yet dying day after day!  
For me her husband  
and I too loving my dead wife  
trying to light up things a little  
as unwillingly I leave for office

.

### **Who made the tiger a tiger**

*(A response to Kedarnath Singh's poem 'Tiger')*

Do not kill the tiger  
He is afraid himself  
Of his death

Do not fear a tiger  
He is himself afraid  
Of time  
Like you are afraid



But civilization's basic question is  
Who made the tiger  
A tiger?  
The forest  
Time  
Or  
Human blood?

He became a tiger  
Because he never had love  
So do not kill the tiger

Kill him  
Who makes him a killer  
Wipes out the human being  
Lurking within him  
It must be he  
Who makes him a tiger

### **Which fish**

Which fish are you  
After all  
Flying in the air  
Falling from the sky in rain  
Or fluttering in agony  
On the sandbank  
Or making your home in the river  
Or confined like a prisoner  
In a drawing-room aquarium

I am looking for a fish

Which I won't eat  
Grilled on fire  
Nor take it out of water  
Only keep it with myself  
Near to my chest  
So as to live my life  
By its smell

That's why I ask  
Which fish are you  
Because each fish has a smell  
Separate from another  
And those who love a fish deeply  
They know its smell

Quite often  
Desire is mixed in the smell  
Often a human body  
Exists in its smell  
A particular memory  
Which makes the fish restless  
It wants to call near  
Near to its soul  
But often it cannot call  
Out of sheer shame

I want to spend an evening  
With a fish  
Sing a song for it  
That's why I ask  
Which fish you are

So that I have an evening  
And a song suitable  
A bath with you in the water  
But fish darling  
Always remember  
No excuses this time as of yore.

**How should I love**

Even till today  
I have never understood  
How should I love you  
Like a flower  
Always giving fragrance  
Or a mountain  
Ever solemn and pensive  
Or the sky  
Uncaring, formless  
Or the wind  
Filling lungs with power  
Or should I love you  
Like the wilful lusty waves!

How should I love you  
Like a flute whose music  
Is lost in the vale  
Or a sitar whose strings  
Strum deep within  
A human heart!

Should I love you  
Like the winter sunshine

Or love you like a tree  
Whose leaves fall one day  
In someone's remembrance  
Or like a bird whose feathers  
Fall on the sands of time

Never understood till today  
How should I love you  
Rising above my sheer emotions  
My overpowering sighs  
Or sinking in the swamp of life.

I should love you like my hunger and thirst  
Or like the dreams that never come true  
Love you with all my failings  
Or love you first battling  
With my passion and greed

I couldn't even ask you  
Whether I should love you  
Like fire or like water

Often have I thought of loving you  
Drowning in a river  
Or standing alone in silence  
On the riverbank  
Love you deep in self-conflict  
Or free from any whatsoever  
Midst the hazards of losing my job  
Or the closure of the concern

How after all to love you  
For all my keenness and frenzy!

Should I love you  
Like a burning candle in a dark forest  
Or like the moon waning in the night!

Can you tell me  
I should love you like a paper boat  
Or even like a flying kite  
Or like a building with a strong foundation  
Or like a piece of bread!

How should I love you  
So you feel no pain ever  
A smile glowing on your face.

How should I love you  
That you never lose your trust in me  
In the blizzard of globalization  
My friendship never turning  
Into hatred.

### **The fire that blazes**

How is that bird within you  
Does it still fly around in the sky  
Does it still keep singing as before?

Is the nest still safe  
Has it still not been caught  
In the net of time, the fowler?

How is the river within you  
Does it keep flowing as ever  
Or has it dried up?  
Do the waves touch the shores now  
People still wait there  
To quench their thirst  
The boats are still plying  
Or are they overturned?

How is the sky within you  
Spread into distances  
Blue as before

The moon still shining  
The stars aglitter  
Or are they all dead  
The moon doused out.

Is there a flower  
Still abloom within you  
Or is it withered  
In the summer's heat  
Is the fragrance still there  
Or is it lost in the wind?

You meet me after years.  
Hard to recognize you  
My teeth are all broken  
Your hair all grey too  
Like silver strings.

I am now a grandpa  
Are you not a grandma yet  
Tell me is your fire  
Still burning as before  
Or have all lamps gone out?

Something blazes within my chest  
When I see you  
Let me die  
But save this fire  
Till now I have lived  
Only with this fire  
In this faithless world.

---

**Vimal Kumar**, born 1960, is a poet who also occasionally writes prose. He has won the prestigious Bharat Bhushan Agrawal Puraskar. His published works are Chor Puran, Yeh Mukhota Kiska Hai and Sapne Mein Ek Aurat Se Batcheet. He works as a correspondent in U.N.I. and lives in Delhi.

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# Poetry

## FIVE POEMS

Vazda Khan

Translated by  
Nishi Tiwari

### THE WAY THE BODY DISSOLVES

Your smile,  
Brimming over with blissfulness  
Freezes on my alien lips  
With intangible restlessness.

Arrested is the quivering symphony  
In my corporal being  
And,  
Somewhere within my very essence  
At the extreme end  
Of the quivering cadence  
It is you, who often seem to stand.

With my entire being ,  
With fist clenched  
I strive to stop the quivering symphony  
Hidden behind an unseen canopy  
To invade my being  
And



Passionately do I labour to  
Dissociate myself, from all the mounds  
Created by  
The rainbow spectrum  
Splashed across the horizon  
Under the garb of intense longings.  
And strongly do I endeavour  
To cling to my moorings  
Within the innermost layer of my nakedness  
With the veil withdrawn.

Passionately do I toil  
To read the epitaphs  
Suspended across the sky  
With  
Sad eyes clouded by haziness.

Surely, hidden somewhere, are the embryos  
Which, continue nurturing, nourishing  
The deep sacred emotions  
All without the aid of  
Any  
Revitalizing essence  
And the harvest of deep agony  
Rippling in the eyes.

The essence that keeps alive  
My desire  
To go on living century after century  
Is woven inextricably into my very soul

Not having sprung up suddenly.

Century after century  
For hundreds of centuries  
Their phase goes on revolving continually  
May be,  
Sometimes interrupted by pauses  
But,  
So evanescent are they  
That,  
With a mere touch do they melt into  
The tide of time  
Just as  
My corporal being does so  
In our separation.

#### **WHEN NOTHING WILL BE LEFT**

The sulphurous fire tossing perpetually  
In  
A black cauldron....a fiery crimson sun.  
Perhaps!  
Tossing and raging since the day of chaos  
With  
Its ghastly band of hissing furies  
Let be..... let be.... Let it rage along.

Yet, I will snatch a moment of repose  
With  
My head, slumbering near your heart.  
Therein, will I weave little joys for myself

And

Save them from the sulphurous fire tossing perpetually

In

A black cauldron.

The blobs of fire raining continually

Over the earth.

And the earth

Sinking to ashes in the hissing fury.

One fine day, the crimson sun

Will engulf all....reducing everything

To

A giant mound of ashes.

The sulphurous fire tossing perpetually

In

A black cauldron

With which

Are burning out his golden beams

Along with

Its tears and murmurings

Tossing and raging constantly, the crimson deluge

Will scorch all.....

Salty tears.... hardened pride.

Till then, silent will be the black cauldron

No sound

No voice

No footfall.....hushed

But,

The sulphurous fire will go on

Tossing perpetually  
In  
The black cauldron.

A time will come  
When, the hissing fury will begin to melt  
The black cauldron  
With severe intensity will it smoulder  
And then, will the black cauldron explode apart  
With a thundering sound  
Thus, will the sun emerge out of the imprisoning cauldron  
Followed by  
Its hissing furies.  
Its fiery billows will engulf all....devour  
And burn to ashes all life forms  
You..... and even you  
Residue, remains....all.

### **WE JUST LIKE THAT**

Layer by layer do unfold fond memories  
Like, multilayered onion peels.  
The heart gropes with a hope  
That  
Love's scintillating sparkle must lie  
Enshrined somewhere.  
Surely sometimes your loving tenderness  
Must have suffused my very being.  
This being, was once your own

Oh yes, your very own!  
How heartless, how cruelly heartless, you continue to be  
That you fail to fathom my longing for you.

Your inspiration, succour.....filling me with fortitude  
Would have  
Launched me beyond the skies  
To the other end of the cosmos  
To great heights  
Where, with both hands could I gather  
My joys.....my future.

Your tender touch would have prevented the shattering of my soul  
Into a thousand pieces  
When smitten  
During stormy battles  
And  
Midst agonized moments, held me firmly  
Silent tears would not have soaked my  
Desolate soul  
When dreams lay hovering over closed eyelids  
On gloomy nights.

I wouldn't have become, a vagrant traveler....  
A mere shadow..... wandering aimlessly, directionless  
On  
Those points of life where ,  
Innumerable alleyways sprout like weeds  
On the pathways of life  
If only you had held my hand

And suffused my being with your glowing warmth  
But deeply egoistic, you cared naught  
Mindless of aught else  
You...and only you.....reigned in you.

And I( left to become) a living manifestation of truth.

### **ONLY A MASS OF FLESH**

I am neither a girl in your eyes  
Nor feelings...nor beauty  
Just...only just a mass of flesh  
A shadow on which all tread over and trespass .

A desire for selflessness  
When born  
Endless alleyways of desires  
Form thorny deltas  
On the glorious pathway  
The shadow runs astray  
Alienating itself  
From  
Its true identity  
And drop by drop trickle all things  
Into  
The desert land  
Where dwells.....thirst sublime  
Everlasting.....unquenched ever.

## **Silent eyes peering through the veil of darkness**

Silent eyes peering through the veil of darkness  
In which  
Lie hidden the despair and turbulence of centuries.

They ever keep gazing at the glorious spectrum of creation.  
Often on my way  
Do I come across these despairing dark phantoms  
Which  
Keep haunting my midnight hours  
Narrating  
Gory tales of evil deeds.

It is said that, engrained within black night and black pulses  
Are  
Dismal tidings,  
Deep despair  
Hidden within are wicked deeds, smelling of blood and lust  
Black draperies, the reins of which,  
Are mastered by the jihadies  
Who  
In the name of our savior, are waging a war against mankind  
(offering worship at a mistaken shrine).  
The dark drapery  
Is their unintended accomplice,  
And a means of their entertainment.  
Who deigns to hear, shrieks of agony and sinful fury  
Bursting forth  
From the chaotic darkness?

Who shares their agony of childbirth  
Year after year?

A woman's womb but a man's decision  
The irony of fate.....it's cruel play.

The truth is, the world over,  
In all walks of life  
In the busy bazaars  
In every community  
Creed, religion  
Oh woman!  
You are either an adored deity  
Or  
A slave transfixed  
A wretched prey to roving lust.

---

**Vazda Khan**, is poet and a painter with D. phil. in Painting and Fine Arts from Allahabad University. Her first collection of poems, from where these poems are taken—'jis tarah ghulti hai kaya'was published by Bharatiya Jnanpith in 2009. After several short stints in teaching, Vazda opted for being a full time artist at Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi. Shs lives in Noida.

**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 Delhi.

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## **KALANATH MISHRA IN CONVERSATION WITH NANDKISHOR NAVAL**

Translated by On Gupta

The noted Hindi critic Nandkishore Naval has been actively engaged in creative literary pursuit. Though he found his genre in poetics but he has chosen to review the art of criticism as well. His favourite authors have been Nirala, Muktibodh, Maithilisharan, Tulsi and the likes. Simplicity and compassion have been the strong benchmarks of his criticism. Naval started as a poet, rose to become a professor of Hindi literature at Patna University but soon graduated to critical appreciation. He has more than a dozen books on criticism to his credit including: Hindi Aalochana ka Vikas (Development of Hindi criticism), Premchand ka Saundrayashastra (Aesthetics of Premchand), Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi: Shabd Jahan Sakriya Hain (Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi: Where words are active players), I (Contextual Nostalgia), Nikash (Touchstone), Kavita ki Mukti (Liberation of Poetry), (Journey of Contemporary Poetry), Muktibodh: Gyan aur Samvedna (Muktibodh: Knowledge and Sympathy), Nirala aur Muktibodh: Char Lambi Kavitaen (Nirala and Muktibodh: Four long poems), Drishyalekh (Screenplay), Muktibodh ki Kavitaen: Bimb aur Pratibimb (Muktibodh's poems: Images and Reflections), Krambhang (Interruption), Uttar Chhayavaad aur Ramgopal Sharma Rudra ( Post-romanticism and Ramgopal Sharma 'Rudra'), Tulsidas, Hashiya (The Margin), Swatantrata Pukarti: Hindi ki Rashtriya Kavitaen ka Sankalan (Call of Freedom: An anthology of nationalist poetry) etc.

Born on 2nd September 1937 in a Bihar village Chandpura in Vaishali district, Naval was decorated with Ram Chandra Shukla award, Subramanyam Bharti award, Dinkar award and Rajendra Prasad Shikhar

Samman for his purposeful and powerful contribution to literary criticism. His writings have been inspired by his inner conscience. That is his books are not dull and dry analysis but logical and meaningful discourse. We present him in a conversation with the short story critic Kalanath Mishra.

Mishra, 'You have been actively engaged in creative pursuit for the last five decades. How do you feel after such a long literary journey?'

Naval, 'Please don't glorify my dabbling into criticism by calling it a creative pursuit. I am passionate about literature. Whatever I have written, it is to know and understand myself better. I describe criticism as a course correction. T.S.Eliot has said that longer the tradition of criticism in a language, better are the chances to explore the truth, meaning that the next critic takes a cue from his predecessor. I am applying this only to a critic. If he is not progressive he will keep on moving in a circle. Taking a close look at Hindi poetry of the last 500 years I can say that it has travelled from unrealism to reality. But it has given up the strength of imagination. Because you can't write without imagination.'

Its shape keeps on changing. For example Pant and Nirala used different kinds of imagery. The reason for this change is that the writer is placed between the object and its image. In this process, many

a time you can't recognize the original object. Poetry is generally lyrical. But competent poets bring the element of dialogue even in that. The language has been simplified though not flat. In fact it has become more complicated.'

Mishra, 'What kind of changes you find in the initial period of your creativity and later?'

Naval, 'The world of my literature has traveled from a village to the metropolis of Delhi. The literary scenario has undergone a drastic metamorphosis. Now the writers write less and seek recognition more. Publishing houses, magazines and newspapers, media, embassies, foreign junkets, awards and decorations have made the whole atmosphere a farce. Muktibodh had said that post-independence period has produced a flood of opportunists. Now that flood has become a tsunami.'

Mishra, 'You used to bring out a magazine Kasauti. It closed down after a while. What were the reasons for its closure?'

Naval, 'Kasauti, in fact was the magazine of an NGO called Punashcha. Shri Apoorvanand was the force behind it. Respecting my desire, he asked me to produce a quarterly on criticism. After retiring from the university, I accepted the offer but with a condition that it will have only 15 issues. It did close down ceremoniously after 15 issues. The swan

song was a special number. It later on came out in a book form and is still in great demand.'

Mishra, 'Rajkamal Prakashan has published your book on Tulsidas. What are your views on the contemporary relevance of Tulsidas?'

Naval, 'The word literary relevance has been made a currency by the Marxists, though it has no place in literature. A good piece of writing is one that becomes contemporary by changing its form in all times to come. If that was not so most of the writings like that of Balmiki's Ramayan, Mahabharat, Kalidas, Bhavbhooti, Vidyapati, Kabir, Soor, Tulsi and Bihari would have been deposited in a museum and nobody would have cared to read them. To give you one example as to how a piece written more than a century ago becomes relevant in modern times is Andher Nagri by Bhartendu Harishchandra. It was banned after it was broadcast by Patna radio during emergency of 1975. Tulsidas is a pioneer Hindi poet. He was a quintessential Hindu. Because of his certain views on Hindu scriptures, we can't reject his entire poetry. That would be like forfeiting our valuable treasure. Shakespeare, Milton, Tolstoy were all Christians but their views on Christianity don't obstruct us from enjoying their writings. Mir, Ghalib and Iqbal were Muslims but we take them as our own. Trilochan has rightly said Ghalib is unique.'

Mishra, 'So far you have been writing on modern poetry. You are a voracious reader and critic. But now you have chosen a poet of Bhakti Period. How did this change come about?'

Naval, 'Long ago, someone had asked me about my future plans. I shared my future plans with him. In that context I had also mentioned that I would sign off with Tulsidas. Because I like him the most as a poet. Why I chose to write on him has been amply explained in the preface of the book on him. I had nothing to write after that book. I was in a state of renunciation. Gyanpeeth's Alok Jain had offered me fellowship thrice to write the history of modern Hindi poetry but I politely turned it down. But one day, I felt charged about it and I accepted the offer. It was a second chance in life. And I was able to accomplish it without any hurdle. The book is there for anybody to read. I would like to mention here that there are nine chapters in this history and I took exactly nine months to dictate them. It was not difficult because I had collected the required material.'

Mishra, 'There was a magazine, Matwala from Calcutta. Some members of its editorial board used to write under a pseudonym. It is said even Nandkishor Naval wrote as Viveki Singh? Why did you feel the need to do this?'

Naval, 'I did write some reviews in Gopal Rai's Sameeksha. In Kasauti also I wrote some articles under this name

because it would not have been proper to lend one's name on more than one article in the same issue of a magazine. In Matwala, Nirala used to contribute poems under his own name. But his columns would appear under the pseudonyms Garjraj Singh Varma and Sahitya Shardool. Likewise, perhaps Shivpujan Sahai used to write a column under the signature as Chalti Chakki. It is a common phenomenon in magazine journalism and all editors are aware of it.'

Mishra, 'You were decorated with Ramchandra Shukla Award, Subramanyam Bharti award, Dinkar samman. How did you feel when you were awarded with Rajendra Prasad Shikhar Samman. What gave you maximum pleasure?'

Naval, 'Awards and decorations naturally make one happy. But I was never overwhelmed by them. Because I feel work is more important than anything else. One should concentrate on one's creation and shouldn't unduly bother about public appreciation through awards. There is a Sanskrit couplet that says: Glory is a maiden who couldn't get married because those whom she liked were not interested in her and those who wanted to marry, she was not keen about them. There is another saying that social respect is like crap. In such a situation why to hanker after awards. However Rajendra Prasad Shikhar Samman did make me happy because Prof Namvar Singh was a judge. And the award

money was fabulous.'

Mishra, 'Delhi has become the literary capital of India. There are obvious advantages to a writer who lives and works there. But you opted to stay back in Patna. Don't you think it affected your literary profile?'

Naval, 'I still miss that Delhi when Mathili Sharan Gupta, Balkrishan Sharma Naveen, Banarasi Das Chaturvedi, Jainendra Kumar, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar And Dr Nagendra lived here. Delhi of those days was totally literary. There was a fragrance of Hindi all around. These writers had established a parallel domain to Urdu literature. But Delhi grew as a city of publicity and promotion, comforts and perks and pleasures, it affected the literary honesty. Writers started chasing benefits out of the world of writing. Today, Delhi is caught in brinkmanship, bickering, leg-pulling and snatching fringe benefits. It appears Delhi has become totally non-creative. After Dr Namvar Singh's generation, there are neither many genuine writers nor readers. It is understandable why worthwhile literature is being produced in cities away from Delhi like Bhopal, Raipur, Benaras.'

Mishra, 'It is said that poetry lovers are declining. What is your opinion about it? '

Naval, 'I don't agree with this assessment. But it is true that poetry

anthologies have become costlier and most of what is being written in the name of poetry is meaningless. If the readers are ignoring them, they are justified. There are readers interested in poetry. Dhumi's Sansad se Sadak Tak (Down the road from parliament) is still being sold like a hot cake. You can count for yourself, how many editions have come out of that book. It applies to all those poets who are communicative. However, there have always been more readers of short stories when compared to poetry. During freedom struggle Dinkar and Maithilisharan Gupt found instant readers. Today, there are a few takers like those who are genuinely interested in poetry. Such initiated readers will always be there. This number will proportionately grow with quality writing.'

Mishra, 'Patna is presently commemorating 'Bihar Day'. How do you measure Bihar's contribution to glorify literature?'

Naval, 'One should take pride in celebrating what Bihar is all about through such events. But it is futile to spend millions of rupees. Glamour shouldn't be attached to such functions. That reduces them to promotion and publicity. I will count four people who stand out through their writings. They are Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, Nagarjun, Phanishwarnath Renu and Rajkamal Chaudhary.'

Mishra, 'There seems to be a mushroom growth of literary magazines these days.

But they lack standard. What is your opinion? How will you rank a few good ones?'

Naval, 'There was a period when little magazines had become a kind of movement. It was a statement against colourful magazines like Dharamyug. That magazine had come out from a big business house. Today such magazines like Dharamyug, Sarika, Saptahik Hindustan have fallen by the wayside. Little magazines have become larger in size and in number of pages. But they mostly contain rubbish. The editor's stamp is visible in the selection of authors and content. He doesn't bother about ordinary readers. He pretends to publish for them but cares two hoots for their existence. He perhaps is not familiar that a common reader has grown up reading from Valmiki, Vyas, Kalidas, Bhavbhuti to Premchand and Nirala. No wonder they don't take today's editors seriously. I can't recall a single magazine worth waiting for.'

Mishra, 'Many magazines are posted on Internet and blogs. Do you agree that they are adding up to the value and scope of Hindi literature?'

Naval, 'Internet is confined to a particular class generally referred to as aristocratic. This class places literature at third position in its priority list. How do you expect Hindi to benefit with such a mindset. Editors and publishers just want to appear modern by such gimmicks. As far as blogs are concerned, browsers prefer

to visit film star's blogs rather than Hindi writers. May be those who want to make a fast buck, use them.'

Mishra, 'Women's Studies and Dalit Studies have become quite popular indulgences among writers and critics these days. How do you view these engagements?'

Naval, 'The domain of literature is large enough to contain any kind of studies. But they can't be decisive factors. They have to follow the discipline. It is worth recalling that Acharya Shukla had placed poetry in a different category as a sentimental entity away from Karmyog and Jnanyog. It is true for the whole of literature. The bottom line of literature is feeling. The thought and knowledge are not the underlying factors for literature. Thoughts and knowledge don't expand their wings. They carry an excess baggage. Feelings or sentimentality have a flexible quality to expand, as they desire. Any borrowed idea can't last for long. Women's studies is a fall out of European feminism and Dalit movements has its roots in the black movement of the U.S. I want to say that instead of bickering over these studies, it will be a better idea if an important piece of literature on these subjects is made a part of the mainstream literature. But writers who are devoted to women's studies insist that only women can appreciate what women go through. Therefore, only they are competent to write on the issue. Likewise, Dalit writers

maintain that how can a non-Dalit express an authentic point of view. They don't know even their own traditions. Namvarji had referred to Tolstoy's story Man and Satan that it was not necessary to be a horse to write on one.'

Mishra, 'We find that female body has become the main concern of women's studies. Would you like to say something about it? How do you view the freedom of women?'

Naval, 'Simone de Beauvoir had talked of sexual freedom for women in her book The Second Sex. Germain Greer had taken it to the extreme. It may be recalled that Beauvoir started with sexual freedom and took it to human freedom. Wherever there was a fight for the colonial freedom, Beauvoir would rush there to express her solidarity. Towards the end she had stopped opposing the institution of family. She declared she was not opposed to the family. There should be an understanding between husband and wife. Both should be partners in raising a family, rear children and should respect each other's freedom. Back home in India writers of women's studies raise families and children, talk about sexual freedom for themselves but don't grant the same to their children. In the process they have appropriated the slogan of feminism asking women at large to break the seal imposed by men on them as their own.'

Mishra, 'You have been a critic of

poetry and of critiques. You chose Nirala, Muktibodh, Maithilisharan and now Tulsi. You also added Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi and Premchand to this list. In terms of numbers you have concentrated more on poetry and critique of poetry. Are you so fond of the criticism of poetry?’

Naval, ‘I am basically a poetry lover. Out of that, more of modern poetry. I don’t feel so comfortable with Braj poetry. Though I have tried to understand and appreciate from Dingle to Pingle. I am a dedicated student of my reverend teacher Prof Nalinvilochan Sharma. He used to emphasise on the intellectual analysis of poetry after grasping it. Naturally I also shifted in that direction. I had nothing better to do, so I got more and more involved in that. I am grateful to MA students that whichever poets I chose to teach them, I got fully engrossed in them.’

Mishra, ‘You are a critic but you are a poet also. Kahan Milegi Peeli Chidiya (Where will I find the yellow sparrow?) is your anthology of poems. What is your first love? Creative writing or criticism?’

Naval, ‘I entered literature through poetry. Earlier I used to compose songs. But the movement for new poetry changed every thing. I also took to writing that kind of poetry. ‘Kahan milegi peeli chidiya’ has a lot of freshness. I wrote them when I was a student. I am romantic by nature. Therefore love and nature fascinate me to the maximum. Even today whenever, I get

a good poem to read I get excited. That becomes an inexplicable day of my life. As far as criticism is concerned, I tend to agree with Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore that criticism is a remainder of art. In my literary life what has engaged me most is poetry. It may be mine or of someone else, that doesn’t make a difference. Let me add that the poetic tradition of Hindi is so rich that one lifetime is not sufficient to float in it.’

Mishra, ‘English is influencing Hindi in a big way. A word like Hinglish has been coined to describe the new situation. Would it affect Hindi adversely?’

Naval, ‘When a language comes in contact with another only then it grows e.g. the words and phrases of Arabic, Persian and Turkish have enriched Hindi. Whenever we borrow some thing from other languages we adopt it. For example we have borrowed a word gareeb (poor) as gareeb. But we didn’t accept its plural as gurba but we made it garibon. It applies to English as well. We have borrowed many English words but only after adopting them e.g. we converted hospital to aspatal. Likewise we changed college to kalege. But I don’t approve of this Hinglish business. It corrupts Hindi. I am of the opinion that the intrinsic force of Hindi will dump such aberrations and will move forward.’

Mishra, ‘What are your future plans?’

Naval, ‘I would like to quote Firaq Gorakhpuri in answer to this question-

Sab marhale hayat ke tay karke ab  
Firaq

Baitha hua hun maut men taakhir  
dekhkar’.

Mishra, ‘Would you like to give some  
piece of advice or message to the new  
writers?’

Naval, ‘Message and advice are

pompous words. To the new generation, I  
would only say that read literature in a  
systematic manner and try to learn and  
develop your writing style and content.  
Just remember that only a greater writer  
can be the teacher of a younger writer, not  
a humble critic or a teacher like me.’

*Coustesy : Nai Dhara, Patna*

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**Nandkishore Naval**, born 1937, is an important literary critic. He has been Professor of Hindi in Patna University. He has penned books on Nirala’s poetry and edited Nirala Rachnavali in eight volumes. He has also written on Dinkar and Muktibodh. ‘Hindi alochana ka vikas’ is another important book by Naval. He has edited six literary magazines, the last of which was kasauti. Naval has received U.P. Hindi Sansthan’s Subramanya Bharti Samman, Dinkar Puraskar and Ram Chandra Shukla Samman for his critical contribution. He lives in Patna.

**Kalanath Mishra**, born 1959 in Bihar is a Hindi author, He writes poems and short stories. He has written several critical books too. He has received Ramchandra Shukla samman and nai dhara award. He lives in Patna.

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## BEYOND LANGUAGE : SATYAPAL ANAND

Siyah Rehal

*With more than a dozen poetry books to his credit, Dr. Satyapal Anand abnegated ghazal from Urdu and rehabilitated nazm in the blank verse. In an exclusive interview with Can-India News, Dr. Anand reveals his journey to evolving as a revolutionary in the contemporary Urdu literature.*

Dr. Satyapal Anand may have trans-created 240 of his Urdu poems in English, but he is still as passionate about the language as he was half-a-century ago.

“My endeavour is to keep translating my poems as well as work of my contemporaries, both in India and Pakistan to build up a corpus of Urdu poetry in English”, Dr. Anand tells Can-India News. “We in the subcontinent are closely linked to English as a source of much that is modern (a misnomer, contemporary would be more akin to the sense of the world) in our life including the norms of dress, speech and food.”

The 81-year-old poet feels that it's important to abnegate ghazal from Urdu and rehabilitate nazm in the blank verse, the most common and influential form that English poetry has taken since the sixteenth century. “Comparisons are odious, it has been said, but what have we to offer to the Westerners? Is it Ghalib, Meer or Faiz? Except for fewer than a dozen Western scholars have imbibed Urdu. One would come across almost nothing about them in the world Encyclopedia of literature. One may come across the name of Tagore because he was a nobel laureate and also because his works have been translated into English.”

“Therefore, my idea was to create a sizeable corpus of translated Urdu nazams. Ghazal, as it is, is well nigh intranslatable. You can translate either verbatim or spread out the meaning in four or five lines and even then it would not suffice. The concept of the beloved as a male,

is an idea that is not understood and hence not enjoyed by the western readers include those of the *raaqeeb, zahid, naseh, sheikh, dost, rahzan, rahbar, and the oft-repeated similes and metaphors of gul-o-bulbul, ashiana, shama-Parwana, toofan aur kashti.*"

"Poets of the 19-20th centuries like Hali, Noon Meem Rashid, and Josh Malihabadi had also reached that conclusion. They avoided ghazal as far as they could. Critics like Kalimuddin Ahmed had termed ghazal as a semi primitive form of poetry (neem-wehshi sinf). When I wrote almost two dozen articles disengaging ghazal and promoting the cause of nazm, i.e. Azad nazm (blank verse poems) in the Western style, I was called a camp-follower of the West. But that didn't discourage me. I am happy to see that the tradition set by such established poets, has been kept alive by efforts of lesser poets like me."

Dr. Anand also noted that the ghazal genre of Urdu poetry should be categorized under the title orature (oral literature) rather than proper literature. "There is no tradition of 'sunaana' (to make someone hear your poem is the only translation in English of the word!). Thus ghazal is unsuitable for being read with your solitary self as your own companion unless you recite it aloud to yourself! Any experimentation in ghazal could thus be

confined only in mauzoo / mazmoon—and not in matan (text), or even asloob. It is for that reason why Rashid never wrote ghazals."

An Indian, Brit and American inhabitant Dr. Anand has witnessed, seen and felt the ramifications of both east and the west. Born in a nondescript village 'Kot Sarang' in Chakwal district of Pakistan in 1931, Dr. Anand was seventeen when the exigencies of partition took him to India. "The core personality of human being is incomplete before adolescence—and so was mine. Even today I consider myself, in terms of my culture, more as a Kot Sarang born Villager of Pakistani origin, than a Hindu born in India. The sweet smell of the soil of the countryside is still fresh in my mind—indeed it is a part of my being. All other influences, later in life, are but various layers of external paint: the core structure remains the same."

Dr. Anand now leads a retired life. Despite his frail health, he visits various universities in North America and Europe to help them with curricular planning and course designing in Comparative Literature. His trans-created poems in English can be found in the five volumes namely '*The Dream Weaver*', '*A Vagrant Mirror*', '*One Hundred Buddhas*', '*Sunset Strands*', '*If Winter Comes*', published by Trafford Publishing U.S.A.

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**Satypal Anand**, born 1931 in kot sarang has been professor of English in India and abroad. He has written widely in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English, transcreated his Urdu poetry into English. He now lives in the U.S.A. He has been honoured with shiromani sahitayakar award by Punjab govt.

**Siya Rehal** is a journalist with CanIndia newspapers Canada.

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## THE DARK SAAHEBS

Upendra Nath Ashk

Translated by  
Edith Irwin

Shrivastava came out of the District Magistrate's Office and glanced at his watch. It was eight o'clock and the office boy had told him that the District Magistrate would return at nine, which meant he had a whole hour to kill. So why shouldn't he go find Gajanan and deliver the good news of his arrival in Allahabad in person? "Two jobs on the same street," that was his motto, and if those two jobs happened to turn into four, he'd be sure to finish them all off along the way. It was because of this attitude that in just six or seven years he had moved up from a sixty-rupee-a-month journalist to the post of Deputy Collector. Not only that, but he was also such a sharp operator that once appointed to the post of Deputy Collector, he had managed to bypass assignment to some Godforsaken rural district and land this posh appointment to Allahabad. This was his first day in Allahabad and right away he had gone to his superior officer's place to pay his respects. But the District Magistrate happened to be out, paying his respects to some minister on tour from Lucknow. Shrivastava's boyhood friend, Gajanan, lived in Allenganj, a nearby locality and was a lecturer at the University. Since he was sure that his friend would be at home, Shrivastava decided to use his free hour for a visit.

Passing near the court, he stopped in the middle of the street. Someday I'll be the top man in this court. As the thought struck him, his pride lifted him a little off his heels. He fidgeted over his stiff collar and then straightened his bush-shirt, tugging it back and forth by the

hem a couple of times. Then in front of the pillared offices of the court, he noticed two rickshawwallas who seemed to be arguing about him as they headed his way.

“Rickishiyaw!” he called, pronouncing the word in a lordly tone, twisting it a little for effect.

“Yes, sir!” both rickshaw wallas shouted as they raced over and stood before him.

“Say, fellow, will you drive by the hour?”

“Where d’you want to go?” the first rickshawwalla asked.

“Where ever I may like,” Shrivastava snapped.

“So how much would I get for an hour?”

“The usual rate, whatever it is.”

“Sixteen annas.”

“Ten annas”

“Very well, sir, please come right this way, sir” interjected the second rickshaw walla speaking and gesturing with the exaggerated politeness common in Lucknow.

“Okay, okay, bring your rickshaw over.”

When the second rickshaw pulled up, Shrivastava hopped in and sat down, He fixed his shirt again and lifted his trouser legs a little so as not to mess up the crease. He didn’t dare sit back comfortably for fear of rumpling his bush-shirt. After all, he wanted to keep himself looking sharp until he met the District Magistrate. There

he sat in the rickshaw looking alert and upright as if he were sitting on a chair in the presence of his boss.

This rickshaw-walla was wearing a relatively clean khaki outfit. By appearance alone he wouldn’t have been mistaken for any common rickshaw walla. Village types predominate among the rickshaw pullers of Allahabad. During the slack season of the agricultural year, the men of neighboring villages would dress their lanky bodies in homespun jackets with a length of cloth tied at the waist. Then they’d set out for Allahabad with rough food for one meal tied up in a potli. They arrive in the evening and rent a rickshaw for the night. After collecting fares from passengers, they are able to buy barley flour sattu for the next meal. in addition to the usual paan preparations, crude biri cigarettes, and western-style cigarettes, many paan-sellers would cater to these village rickshaw wallas by keeping trays of barley flour decoratively arranged in pyramids with green chillies stuck in for a curiously festive effect. When these rickshaw wallas get a little time off from driving, they would buy a handful of the grain mash, knead it into a ball, and then with the help of some chillies, they’d manage to swallow the stuff and wash it down with a few gulps of water from a nearby faucet.

They say that when a jackal is about to die , he heads for the city. There is no significant difference between the proverbial jackal and these villagers. They drive

their rickshaw all day long every day and some times through the night too. Although they might earn enough to pay the year's rent, they blow their lungs out in the process.

There are other rickshaw wallas say, Allahabadis, who used to work as labourers in the city, but were laid off after the Second World War. They go on driving their rickshaw with their ribs sticking out and even with tuberculosis peering out of their eyes. In these expensive times they must go on driving just to fill the stomachs of their offsprings.

Being a native of Allahabad, Shrivastava was quite familiar with these two types of rickshaw-wallas, but this driver of his didn't fit into either category. It seemed that yet a third type was beginning to be seen here. Sporting thin, sword-like moustaches cut in the style of Ronald Colman, and wearing military shorts, or a bush-shirt, or only an army cap. These men who had been discharged from the army after the War were now beginning to drive rickshaws. The tilt of their heads, their rigid postures, and their way of pedalling with knees and toes turned out, make them immediately identifiable as ex-soldiers driving rickshaws. Clamping a biri in the right, or the left corner of the mouth, and dreaming of the Third World War, they drive their rickshaws jauntily, entertained by visions of Egypt, Iran, Italy, and Germany, and of the free atmosphere and beautiful fair women they would have there.

Independence has made them forget their ingratiating manners and has taught them to hold up their heads with self-esteem. However, the majority, being half-educated, are ignorant of the borderline between self-respect and arrogance. Why should they bargain over fares when they consider every passenger as a hostage seized from enemy territory?

In spite of the fact that this rickshawwalla wore military garb, he lacked the rigid posture of a soldier. What's more, his face had the elastic quality of kneaded dough and was decidedly different from the standard military mug which is about as pliable as coarse, dried flour.

Shrivastava had grown tired of sitting straight, so he relaxed a little and asked, "Tell me fellow, were you in the army?"

The rickshaw-walla went right on driving as he glanced back to answer, "No, Saahab, whatever would I do in the army?" His words were accompanied by an ironic and slightly contemptuous smile, beneath which Shrivastava detected a twinge of pain. It was a smile which seemed to ask, "Do you think I would sink to the menial work of an army lackey?"

"So you have your own small fleet of rickshaws?" Shrivastava asked.

The rickshaw-walla laughed, "Yes sure, Saahab, you bet. This rickshaw isn't even mine. I pay rent to drive it."

Sensing a certain degree of civility in the fellow's tone, Shrivastava felt sympathetic towards him. "So what makes you

do such backbraking work? Driving a rickshaw puts a terrible strain on the lungs, you know. Villagers who are used to driving a plow and swinging a mattock may be able to drive all day and all night, but such work is beyond the strength of city people like you.”

“Listen Saahab, d’you think I drive this thing for kicks? There’s my wife, several kids, my mother, and two widowed sisters, and it’s up to me to support them all.”

“Then why don’t you find yourself another job?”

“Because I don’t know how to do anything else, Saahab.”

“You mean you’ve driven a rickshaw all your life?”

“Oh no, Saahab, only since Independence.” Still steering with his left hand, he thumped his forehead with his right. “It’s only after the English left and the dark Saahabs took over that my fortune has exploded in my face. The native officers don’t understand my work, so of course they don’t know its value. I had no use for their business, nor they for mine. I didn’t know how to do anything else, so I asked if I could please be sent back to England with them. Naturally my request was ignored.”

“What was it, anyway—the work you used to do?”

“I worked at Commissioner Duck’s place. I got fifty rupees a month, two rooms to live in, and the clothes the Saahab gave me. It you’ll pardon me saying so...”

Then out of embarrassment he cut his words short.

“No, no, go ahead and say it,” Shrivastava urged as he sat up straight again.

“Take this bush-shirt you are wearing,” the rickshawwalla said, turning around and speaking very respectfully. “I used to wear one just like it when I worked at the Saahab’s place.”

Shrivastava slumped back in the seat again, not even noticing that his shirt was getting rumpled.

“Now where is the good life we knew under the British? On holidays there’d be a bonus; and not just for me. There’d be clothes made up for my wife and kids. Now tell me, these days where could I find all that? How am I supposed to keep up with the money my family spends? All I can do is drive a rickshaw even though the blood’s drying up in my veins, so one of these days I’ll just vanish into nothing.”

“Really now, what’s the problem? Why couldn’t you work for some native Saahab? We still have commissioners and collectors, just as in British days.”

“What native Saahab could afford my services?” And the same derisive smile spread across the rickshaw-walla’s lips.

“What were you at Commissioner Duck’s place?” Shrivastava asked with a mixture of annoyance and curiosity. “A cook?”

“No, I wouldn’t do cooking.”

“Well, were you a bearer, or what?”

“Yes, I was a bearer.”

Shrivastava sat up again. "So what's the problem? You could find another servant's position. I have a bearer at my place."

"Oh no, I wasn't that kind of bearer. I never did any of that food carrying business. I looked after the Saahab's clothes."

"Yes, of course. You took care of his clothes and cleaned his boots."

"No, Saahab, the sweeper did the boots., I had only to see to his clothes."

"You mean all day long all you ever did was look after his clothes?"

"What can I tell you, Saahab? You wouldn't understand," he said with a grin. "Those English had class. They'd wear a special suit for each occasion. A different one for night, for the office, for daytime lounging, for outings. Then there were dinner suits, golf suits, polo suits, dance suits, and hunting suits. It was my job to keep all these in order, give them to the washerman and get them back, and to dress the Saahab. Now how could any native Saahab understand or appreciate my work? Day and night, month in and month out, year after year they go on wearing this one suit right down to threads. See that red house we just passed? The Saahab who lives there is an important man, but sometimes he wears a suit which must have been salvaged from his college days. Where you'll find an office today, the English used to have a bathroom. And Saturday nights were so splendid. And that garden—you saw how they've let it go to

rot. Well, did you ever get to see how beautiful it was under the British? It's not just that garden either; the very mention of the British Saahabs sends the whole civil lines into tears. It's like having to look at the shaved head of a widow."

Shrivastava found this rickshaw-walla's contempt and disdain for the Indian way of life disturbing. He had a predilection for the good life himself, but at this point, each and every manifestation of British culture angered him. Thinking he might help this blind fellow to see the light, he said, "There's a big difference between their habits of dining, dressing, and high living when compared with ours. They don't see anything wrong with eating meat and fish or drinking liquor. They eat the meat of the cow and the pig, while in our houses it is a sin even to touch either one. Their women dance, while in our houses..."

"Not at all, Saahab," The rickshaw-walla interrupted, pedalling harder to emphasize his point. "Our country is a country of slaves. We have closed ourselves in like snails and have talked up poverty as though it was heaven. Even when we're rich, it's our habit to live as though we're poor. We put our money in banks and subsist on humble chapattis and dal. My saahab told me that in ancient times when India was free and the Aryans had just arrived, they too used to eat and drink well, dance and sing, and live gaily. They never used to veil their women or put restrictions on what people could eat and

drink. The Saahab used to say that money was only good for spending, not for putting in banks. Where money is spent, they bring money to craftsmen, laborers, and shopkeepers; and where it is not, unemployment rises. Every year my Saahab would have the furniture, doors, and windows refinished; and every six months he'd have the white-washing done. There were two gardeners, two bearers, a cook, and a sweeper, all kept as servants in his house. Because of him the breadman, the eggman, the cabinet-maker, and God knows how many others, all had regular wages."

A spark caught fire in Shrivastava's heart. He wanted to get up and give this foreigner's dog a good punch in the neck, but the rickshaw was going too fast. Instead he vented his anger on his former white officers.

"What about those bastards? They had a hell of a good time while they robbed the people blind."

"You mean to say our current masters rob the people any less?" the rickshaw-walla asked with a humble yet sarcastic grin. "All public servants, from the lowest to the highest, will steal from the people. But in those days, a distinguished officer could feel some shame, while now there's nothing but a welling-up of backbiting and selfish ambition. These officers know well enough how to take, but not how to give. Where you'd find an Englishman taking, you'd find that at the same time he was supporting ten men. These people here

hoard the money they steal. There's no need to speak of elegant living, it's not their style. They wear the same dhoti and kurta all the time, indoors and out. Every two or three weeks, no, more likely every month or two, they'll get themselves shaved. Now what do the barber, the washerman, the bearer, or the cook get out of these people?"

Shrivastava had begun to squirm inwardly, but he kept quiet so as not to be drawn into a row with such a low person.

"Why go so far afield?" The rickshaw-walla asked, continuing his stream of conversation. "Take the rickshaw and tongawallas. When a wealthy man hires a rickshaw, you can be sure that he'll haggle over the fare. There's an honorary magistrate here in Allenganj, an important man who also runs a printing press in Chowk. He's always waiting here at the stand, watching out for a chance to split the fare. If another passenger doesn't come along, he might go on standing for half an hour. Even an ordinary English soldier didn't haggle over the fare. If he had a rupee in his pocket, he'd give a rupee. If he had two rupees, he'd give two. One day my Saahab's car broke down, so he gave a rickshaw-walla a five rupee note to go from Allenganj to the court."

They arrived at Gajanan's house, and Shrivastava hopped out, only to find that his friend wasn't there. So he left his card, returned to the rickshaw, and told the driver to get going quickly. Just as they



arrived in front of the court, and Shrivastava was getting out, he glanced at his watch and saw that an hour and ten minutes had passed.

If it had been any other occasion, and the agreed rate had been ten annas an hour, he would not have given more than twelve annas. But he was hesitant to give this rickshaw-walla just twelve annas. As though to kick the graves of the British Saahabs, he said, "It's been a few minutes more than an hour. Even if it had been two hours the fare would only have come to one rupee and four annas. But here, take these two rupees. The fourteen annas extra you can keep as a tip from me."

The rickshaw-walla salaamed in his

modified military fashion. Shrivastava rose up on his toes and headed for the District Magistrate's office.

"So how much did you get?" the first rickshaw-walla called loudly from the stand where he was waiting.

"Two rupees!"

"Phew—two rupees!"

"Yup, two rupees. Have I ever gotten less from a native officer? Only I know how to handle these miserable dark saahabs."

Shrivastava overheard this last sentence. He sagged back down on his heels and even his strut was gone as he entered the District Megistrate's office walking just like an ordinary man.

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**Upendra Nath Ashk** (1910-1996), renowned author whose creative output like Premchand was first in Urdu and later in Hindi. He was born and educated at Jalandhar, Punjab and settled at Allahabad in 1948. Except for a few short term jobs in All India Radio and films, he was a whole timer in creative writing. He wrote plays, novels, short stories, poems, essays, memoirs and literary criticism besides editing the famous literary volume 'sanket'. He was a progressive writer who led an eternal struggle against reactionary forces. He wrote regularly from 1926 to 1995. Most of his works were published by his writer wife Kaushalya Ashk from their own publishing house Neelabh Prakashan, named after his illustrious son who is a major poet and an intellectual in his own right. Ashkji's major works are 'girti deewaren', 'pathharal pathhar', 'garm rakh', 'badi badi ankhen', 'ek nanhi kandil', 'bandho na nav is thanv (novels); 'anjo didi', 'tauliye', 'sookhi dali', 'lakshmi ka swagat', 'adhikar ka rakshak' etc. (collections of plays); 'akashchari', 'judai ki sham', 'kahani lekhika aur jhelum ke saat pul', 'chheente', 'ubaal', 'dachi', 'kale saheb', 'palang' etc. (short story collections); 'deep jalega', 'chandni raat aur ajar', 'bargad ki beti' (poetry collections); 'manto : mera dushman', 'chehre anek' (memoirs); 'hindi kahaniyan aur fashion (lit. criticism).

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## ANNAPURNA

Harjendra Chaudhary

Translated by  
Purabi Panwar

Having read the latest news on the internet and learning about the possible attack by America on another Asian country, I checked my e-mail. Six words and a comma that followed, seemed to drop a bomb on my mind..."Uncle, my mother died this afternoon"...the message had been sent a few hours back...it seemed that my nephew was standing in front of me, trying to keep back an ocean of tears..."Chachu, my mother is no more."

I did not quite believe it. Stunned and distracted, I kept on pressing the mouse, Yahoo mail closed, Hotmail closed. I left the computer halfdone.

Everything seemed like a bad dream. I tried to reassure myself, stroking my face with both my hands. I got up and looked out of the huge glass windows, Flakes of snow that looked like fluffy cotton were falling. The surrounding walls had become white. The sky had a yellow glow about it. Whenever it snows, the sky takes on this colour. It seems that it will snow the whole night.

I turned back to the computer from the window. The screen saver, a revolving globe, going round and round, jerking its way, getting bigger or smaller, balanced sometimes on its centre, sometimes on its circumference, seemed to groping its way around. When I could not stand this state of confusion the globe, the earth was in, I switched the computer off.

I walked towards the phone from the computer. After 0091, I dialed the code of Meerut and then my brother's number. I felt my fingers trembling as I was dialing the number. Then I heard Bhai Saheb's voice. Without any preamble, he said, "hello, so you came to know." Then, controlling the tremor in his voice fully, he said, "I don't know how she died. She was not even very ill. She used to have headaches. She used to have body aches too. As it is she was weak. She would cry because of the pain but do all the work in the house as well...for the last one or two days she had been feverish, had a sore throat, I had got her medicines... but today suddenly she had problems breathing... She died at ten minutes past two in the afternoon. At about four thirty , she was cremated..." There was the sound of a sob on the phone and then silence. "Be brave, Bhai Saheb" I broke the long silence. "I will call again." I put down the receiver.

Ten minutes past two in the afternoon Indian Standard Time...that is nine forty in the day or rather in the morning... the whole day passed and it was evening. It is night in India now. Now I know and have talked to Bhai Saheb about it. Have quick modes of communications really reduced distances between human beings? If so, why are people so disturbed all the time instead of being calm and composed?

I felt that I had kept a very valuable thing somewhere and forgotten about it...

Bhabhiji was not old enough to die. Last year when we had gone to India , she did seem somewhat weak and ill but as such there had been nothing serious. Still there were two full years left for Bhai Saheb's retirement, Bhabhiji was probably two or three years younger to him. Despite her poor health, she felt very happy looking at the way her sons had done well in life. All four of her sons had done very well for themselves. The eldest is a major in the army, the second an engineer in a computer Software Company in United States, the third was in the IRS and an Additional Deputy Commissioner in the Income Tax Department and the fourth had cleared the NET examination, was a lecturer and preparing for the Civil Services Examinations. He was in Delhi and the one who had e-mailed me. It does not take very long to go to Meerut from Delhi ; he would have been present at his mother's cremation. And Bhai Saheb? He would surely be feeling very sad and lonely now! He loves me more than I love my nephews.

When I was a child we lived in the village in a joint family. Our father had bought about seven hundred and fifty yards of land in Meerut . If anyone wanted to live in the city in future he could build a house on that plot of land. Bhai Sahib is the eldest of the three brothers. There is a difference of around eight or eight and half years between him and me. There are two sisters

older to me. I am the youngest. Being the eldest, the responsibility of building the house came to Bhai Saheb.

The land that my father and his younger brother had inherited in the village was large enough to be farmed by two tractors. That agricultural land between the rivers Yamuna and Ganga is really very fertile. We could be termed the 'creamy layer' of rural India . Our uncle started as a *sarpanch* and slowly graduated politically to being a loudmouth Member of the Vidhan Sabha in Lucknow . However, our aunt did not experience the joys she had anticipated, even after he became an MLA. Uncle sent both his sons to residential schools in Nainital and it was said that a woman teaching in a school in Lucknow started having an affair with him. Maybe it was the other way round...

The gossip that I used to hear in the village in those days seemed like part of a story now. I had heard someone in the village exclaim with great anger and envy, "Look at him! He goes around being an MLA and his poor wife has to work the whole day with the labourers in the fields." But Chachi seemed to have forgotten her own happiness, involved as she was with her home, family, land and all the delusion that went with it. Even when Chachaji got a second term as an MLA, she did not remember her own 'happiness'. Finally, troubled by an unwanted pregnancy, Chachi died during the delivery.

When Chachi died, I was around eleven or twelve years old. My mother and my eldest Bhabhi cried a lot at her death. Bhabhiji was newly married then. She was around sixteen or sixteen and a half year old then. For quite a few years after Chachi's death, she would start crying now and then. I still remember my mother and Bhabhi's crying. It would start with a loud cry and come down to sobs after which they would wipe their eyes and then start weeping bitterly all over again. Did they see their own deaths in Chachiji's untimely demise? Did they see the not quite born baby, stuck between Chachi's legs, as a nephew or someone like me? Do women all over the world suffer in the same way? Because of these experiences...I find women in villages, why only villages, the cities as well or rather the whole world, living images of grief... Break a thin skin-like layer of ice on the face, below which there was only water...

...Water...not water but ice...but ice is ultimately water. I feel the snow falling both outside and within me. It is like a sea coming in a gust from the sky and falling on to the earth in droplets. The snowfall has become heavy now. It is evening. A darkness that seems bright is overwhelming the mind all around. A white sea, made up small drops, tiny frothy flakes that are spreading all around. It is as white as a shroud. It is as black as death. I feel that the darkness is bright and the

brightness is absolutely dark. Was the sadness that had enveloped me for a few days without any reason a premonition of Bhabhiji's death or an outcome of it as well? Or is it that at the age of forty seven I can sense cremation grounds and graveyards advancing towards me?...

Trying to get rid of these frightening thoughts, I came out of my study. The aroma of a chicken cooking or already cooked came from the kitchen. Instead of flopping down on the sofa in the living room to watch TV on my own, I went straight to the kitchen. My wife was bustling around there. A warm smell pervaded. This was my external life, within me the news of the death was distressing me.

I was standing quietly at the door of the kitchen. My wife looked at me, smiled and remained busy in her work. She switched off the oven, placed the freshly cooked piping hot legs of the chicken on a plate, waiting for them to cool. Then she went to the sink, turned on the hot water and stood there.

"Will you have some?" She turned off the tap, picked up a plate and asked me. The freshly cooked legs of chicken were still steaming.

"You go ahead." I said in English instead of German. She picked up a piece and nibbled it on both sides. As she was eating, she smiled and her blue eyes seemed brighter. I too smiled.

"What has happened?" she asked me in

German. She could make out that my smile was put on. How could she make out that I was sad though I was smiling?

The sad news that was making me feel uncomfortable, burst out without any preamble: "Bhabhiji has passed away."

"Oh! How? When?" She stopped nibbling on the leg of the chicken and started firing questions at me. There were lines on her forehead. Her smile had disappeared. Her blue eyes had lost their brightness.

"She had started keeping unwell lately. Last year you must have noticed how weak she had become...I found her looking quite old... All her hair had become white, she had had a few teeth taken out because they hurt. There was no glow left on her face....This morning at nine forty... I mean ten minutes past two Indian time..." I could not go on, the tremor in my voice seemed caught in the gust of breeze for some time.

"Mein Gott!" she exclaimed in German. For a moment she remembered God and stood still with her eyes lowered.

"Oh, that untiring poor soul... may God bestow peace upon her..." she prayed for the untiring poor soul and crossed herself.

I was close to crying. It seemed very difficult at this moment to speak English, the language we spoke during our love-affair or German, my wife's mother tongue. I felt like talking to someone in Hindi, the

language I had blood relation with, the language I was instinctively bound to. I knew my wife was very innocent and emotional by nature, but still at this point of time I found her response very formal. Why did I feel that apart from my diary, pen, computer, fax machine and the telephone, there was no one in the whole of Europe to share my sorrow? Our son was far away from here, studying in London, our daughter was working in a company in the same city. Maybe she had started finding the subject she had studied at the Indo-Tibetian Department of Hamburg University, languages like Hindi and Sanskrit, of no use. She did not live with us, she had a room of her own. She wanted to be independent. Her personal freedom was very precious to her. She had told us in no uncertain terms that she would never marry...

I...poor Indian father...feel very helpless.

I had come to this country to study. I had an affair with a German girl, married her and settled down here. Twenty five years have passed. It seemed so nice here in the beginning. Why is it not like that any more? The German citizenship that I had craved so much did not give me any sense of joy any more. Why did I feel this sense of desolation again and again? Why did I feel like going to India, not just once a year but again and again? What was it that attracted me towards India again and

again? Why did I feel no excitement in the environment where I had settled down for the last two and a half decades? Does the long routine of daily life necessarily make any situation boring? Was this craving not for India in particular but for a change in general?

Had all these years of my life passed in vain? What about Bhabhiji's life? And my mother's life? My wife's life? Do all of them feel that they have not done anything with their lives? Boredom is something that women must be experiencing in the same way as men. Any woman whether she is from India or somewhere else...

My wife used to get along very well with my Bhabhiji. Despite the broken Hindi that my wife spoke, I don't know how they understood each other so very well. We have been visiting India almost every year-going to Meerut as well as to the village. We have travelled to other parts of India as tourists. My wife has been praising Indian women (she still does) in these words, "These poor women toil for others...for husbands, for sons, relatives, guests...for everyone except themselves...they are simply wonderful! They are really too much. Sometimes they seem to be unbelievable...their own hunger doesn't mean anything to them, they are happy in feeding others..." These words of my wife seem to be words from a book. She speaks in English and they automatically get translated into Hindi in my mind

without any conscious effort.

“Yes, Indian women are traditionally used to survive on food that remains after feeding others. Generally they take more interest in feeding others than having food themselves. They keep on serving food to their husbands, sons, guests, keep on feeding them. But those who have been served by them and have had their fill, never peep into their pots and pans to see if there is any food left for the living Annapurna , the goddess in human form. She never thinks of herself and those whom she takes care of so well, do not care for her either. The Indian woman is really a personification of the goddess Annapurna .” Saying this, I define Annapurna Devi in English and German and reduce her to a footnote. Having made an attempt to define her in some sort way, I finish by adding just this much- “The spirit of sacrifice in Indian women is responsible for keeping alive the tradition of hospitality. Women have paid a big price for centuries in order to keep this tradition alive.”

“But this spirit of sacrifice is a stupid idea. Everyone should eat together. Prepare everything and keep it on the dining table. Say ‘guten appetit’ and start eating together.” My wife gave her verdict. The situation that evokes praise from her also gives rise to a feeling of rebellion.

“Really?” I said to know what she really thought.

“Yes, of course.” The spirit of rebellion

asserted itself.

“But sometimes when we have guests, you also work hard in the kitchen so that they can have piping hot food.”

“It is different if it happens now and then. The second thing is that I never remain hungry even though I might eat later. If the food is not enough, I either cook again or get something from the supermarket and have it.” She smiled and said, “I always take care of my fat and figure...One should always look after oneself whether one is a man or woman.” Saying this, she passed her right hand over the graying hair over her right ear with great elegance and threw her head back. There was a gleam in her blue eyes.

“But sometimes I feel that European women also take great care of their husbands, children and guest and do not pay much attention to their own selves. I said and added, “This is perhaps the temperament of women all over the world, whether it is an Indian Annapurna or a European blue eyed beauty.”

“But we share and co-operate, Indian women are like self-made slaves.” My wife sounded rather wary and sharp today.

We have come and sat in the living room. We do not realise what all we talk about and how we have reached here. I agree with what my wife has said but do not want to. But I am not able to refute it... Is it really that the Indian woman is a self-created slave? But there is a great

difference between co-operating and being a slave. So, what is the basis of the notion we hold that the condition of women is not very much better in western countries... maybe slightly better but their condition is not ideal anywhere in the world... women are always busy everywhere though their labour is not given the respect and recognition due to it...

“Oh, our cats must be hungry!” My wife remembered suddenly. She got up and went towards the kitchen. I became more lonely.

Despite theoretical contemplation that condition of women all over the world is that of deprivation, I am not able to reduce the grief caused by the passing away of Bhabhiji. I did not feel such a sense of emptiness even when my mother passed away. I felt as if a mountain stream was gurgling within my breast. The sense of emptiness was spreading within, taking up more space. The throbbing of my heart seemed to come up right to my throat...

I had spent my adolescence in the protection of my Bhabhiji in Meerut . Bhai Saheb was working, I was studying. My eldest nephew had started going to school, the two younger ones would play pranks at home. I still remember the birth of the youngest one clearly. The midwife had told my mother while leaving, “Bahu has become very weak. Zamidaran, please see that she gets proper food. Of what use is all this land to you otherwise?” The words

seemed to convey advice, allegation and a note of warning, all in one.

“I am ready to do it, but she is the one who has to eat. We are both alike. We seem to be busy feeding others.” Mother was laughing and talking to the midwife at the same time. “But don’t worry. I have got twenty kilos of ghee from the village, I will make *gond-panjiri* for her next week.”

When the time came to prepare *gond panjiri* , Bhabhiji said to her, “Make just a little, I cannot eat enough of anything sweet or with a lot of ghee in it” But my mother had made a chulha of bricks, placed a kadahi on it and spent the whole day in preparing the *gond panjiri* that Bhabhiji was supposed to have after childbirth. The whole neighbourhood was full of the aroma of desi ghee.

It was supposed to be for Bhabhiji, but anyone from the village or a relative who came to see us, was served with a big bowl of this. It was very tasty, full of raisins, cashew nuts and almonds, and full of calories as well. I and my three nephews started putting on weight.

Even before the month was over, Bhabhiji started doing work in the house now and then. My two sisters, helped her for a few days, collected the clothes and jewellery that are traditionally given to them and went off to their in-laws. Bhabhiji could not rest when she saw my mother working. One day right in front of my mother, as bhabhiji massaged the baby



with oil in the winter-sun, breastfed him and got up to give him his bath, she felt dizzy. She managed not to fall by sitting down with the support of the wall.

I was the eldest male member in the house at that moment. When my mother took Bhabhiji to the lady doctor's clinic, I accompanied them. On follow-up visit after two days, the lady doctor looked at the reports and said in a soft voice, "Oh, she is anaemic." Then she told my mother, "Mataji, your Bahu needs to take more green vegetables, tomatoes, apples, spinach in large quantities. Give her a lot of milk too. Anaemia troubles women a lot after a certain age. It is necessary to take precautions from now."

"Mother repeated her usual words, "Doctorni ji, I would give her everything, but it is for her to eat. There is everything at home, by God's grace. But if she does not eat, what can I do?"

"Explain to her that later there might be complications. Many women die young because they did not eat properly." The lady doctor had sounded a little angry.

The lady doctor's words uttered repeatedly and with stress, seemed to have some effect on mother. She sent a buffalo which had just had a calf from the village to Meerut . Now Bhabhiji had an added responsibility. A lions share of the milk, curd and ghee that she should have had, was being given to Bhai Saheb, me, my nephews and people who visited us. On

one side of the big and open courtyard, a shed was built for the buffalo and in the remaining three or four hundred yards of land ,green fodder was grown instead of flowering plants and vegetables. Bhai Saheb was out most of the time because of his job, the nephews were too young, so I had the responsibility of helping her with the chores. But the only way in which I helped her was by going round the shed four or five times, whereas she took many rounds. In those days I felt sleepy all the time, and this was one of the ways in which I did not do my duties. Bhabhiji never put pressure on me for any kind of work.

Yes, there was something which I always rememebered to do. In the evening when Bhabhiji sat down to milk the buffalo, I would sit very close to her with open mouth. She would tilt the teats of the buffalo into my mouth spraying warm jets of milk into it. This remained a part of my daily routine for many years. This could be done only in the evenings because even when it was very cold, Bhabhiji would get up at four o'clock, get the fodder ready for the buffalo and milk it at five, when all of us were asleep.

Later when I went to Delhi to study, I would come to Meerut almost every weekend. As soon as I reached Bhabhiji, all the boredom of hostel food would disappear. As it is, I love milk, curd and ghee a lot. This arrangement of keeping the buffalo went on for a number of years. It

can be said that it showed on the health of all of us except Bhabhiji. All my four nephews are very sturdy. Though Bhai Saheb is older than Bhabhiji, he still looks younger than his age. I too am absolutely fit. Bhabhiji must have been blissfully responsible for all this.

...Bhabhiji is no more. Maybe it is not true. Maybe she is still busy doing something in that house in Meerut . She did not even have the time to die as they say. The nephews in the army and the USA would still be away even after hearing of their mother's death. Would they disbelieve the news of their mother's death the way I am doing? I am also far away, in Europe. What will I gain by going to India ? I will not be able to help anyone. I did not help when I could, what will I do now?

"Shall I set the table now? Or a little later?" My memories were disturbed by my wife's words.

"You have your food. I don't feel like eating." My distraction seemed scattered in the air all around.

"But you should eat something. I will not eat if you don't." She came very close

to me, touched my shoulder lightly and tried to persuade me...It seemed that I had become a young boy again and my mother or Bhabhiji was touching me on the shoulder.

"Have a drink." She spoke English instead of German and placed a teapoy next to my chair. She put a bottle of vodka and two small glasses on it. "Ahn" I sighed as if it did not matter whether I said yes or no.

I feel like crying, but I am not crying. I am having vodka.

All of a sudden my wife stood behind my chair and started stroking my hair. This is not an ordinary incident. My eyes have started closing. I am changing into a sentimental young boy.

The woman stroking my hair is either my mother or my Bhabhiji. Any woman can become like a mother to anyone any time. This primitive miracle is inherent in the nature of all women.

I have put the glass of vodka back on the teapoy and put my head on the back of the chair. I burst into tears...

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## MOTHER READS

S.R. Harnot

Translated by  
Manjari Tiwari & R.K. Shukla

I am back in my native village after an absence of many years. Mother stays here alone all by herself. Today the gate is unlatched. Normally she locks it early in the morning, before starting her morning chores. She spends her entire morning time in the cattle-shed, feeding the cattle, cleaning the shed, milking the cows, etc.

At this moment too she is not in the house. I am standing at the door of her room. The first rays of the morning sun have spread on the floor. But this morning the rays are not alone, I too am with them. I am very near the room, almost feeling its physicality on my skin but at the same time it seems to have drifted far away from me. Many things are lying on the floor, scattered all over the place as the rays of the morning sun. I look at the wooden ceiling and notice numerous cobwebs dangling from it with flies, unsuccessful to disentangle themselves, are trapped in them. The walls are no different. There are cracks all over and numerous dark patches of smoke have disfigured them. As for the floor it is littered with household items. Inside the room to the right of the door there lies the clay milk-pot, its mouth covered with a dirty piece of cloth. After heating the milk on the hearth mother removes the pot here. On the left side of the door there is the straw basket stuffed with unwoven wool. Over the unwoven wool there lie a few pieces of knitted woolen fabrics. Nearby lies the takali while in another corner of the room a bundle of dry khajoor leaves along side some leaf-mats. In yet another corner is a decrepit old table on which is mounted the

television set. There is also an old tin canister covered with a dirty piece of cloth on which is placed the telephone. The electric bulb is dusty and weather-beaten.

Towards the head-side of Amma's bed, there hangs the chahota (lamp-stand) on which she keeps her kerosene-lamp and the smoke spiraling from the lamp has made a deep dark line on the ceiling. Amma lights the lamp when the power supply snaps in the night. On the floor of the room bidi-stubs are lying all over and bidi smell fills the room. Apart from the bidi-stubs, the floor is also littered with half-burnt matchsticks, dry anar-grains on a khajoor-board, some anwalas and walnuts, corn-ears strung in a rope. The corn-ears seem to have been set apart to be offered to the gods for their grace when the new crop was harvested. There also lie different varieties of pulses in pouches and packets. All these items belong to mother, related intimately with her being, her companions as it were in her loneliness. Sitting in that room, and trying to make sense of the chaos around me, I felt myself to be an oddity, an intruder into a world that belonged exclusively to Amma and over which only Amma's writ prevailed. I couldn't link myself to that chaos which seemed so clearly a part of her existence, something without which she was probably incomplete or unrecognisable. I began to feel the items scattered all over the floor which were trying to recognise me, link me to themselves and to Amma to

make sense of me and my presence in their midst. They appeared to be mocking me and my presence in that room, over the house and other properties—the courtyard, doors, windows, grain-stores, lands, crops. In fact, whatever was Amma's was mine as well but was it really all that simple? Do they really belong to me and I to them, and if yes, then why had I drifted so far away from them as if there were no recognisable links between us?

While my mind is reeling under such dark thoughts, the sun has risen and reached above the house. The rays have moved away from the floor of the room and are spread all over the roof, leaving the room dark. It is still the morning time but the room has already slipped into darkness even though it is not the darkness that normally follows the setting of the sun. It is in fact the darkness that has soaked into my soul. I am in mother's room, crouching on her bed and drenched in her affection but the time away from her seems to be blocking this affection from completely enveloping me and saving me from my agony.

I have completely forgotten that I am holding a packet of books in my hand which I have brought as gifts for mother. These are books written by me, her son. Till today I haven't been able to send any of my books to her, haven't been able to invite her to the book-release functions organised by my publishers. Not that my

publishers ever scrutinise the list of invitees prepared by me. These functions are as a rule chaired either by the state governor or the chief minister even though neither of them knows the abc of literature nor has read my books. Exactly like those who preside over the garibi hatao (eradicate poverty) meetings know nothing about garibi or how to eradicate it. It is the same with us writers who wax eloquent in our books about the beauties of rural India and the simple life styles of the village folks without any personal connections with the village life and the hardships of the village people. What we lack in reality we try to make up with imagination or fading memories. The magic of our rhetoric works but becomes vacuous within no time.

It wasn't that I didn't want to invite mother on such occasions or that her memories didn't haunt me, but I was overpowered by fears of embarrassment as regards the way she would behave when she found herself in the midst of people so different from her. How she would talk to them, how she would react when I introduced my guests to her, whether she would be able to adjust to an entirely alien experience of meeting city-bred persons and so on.

The long bus journey from the village was itself a problem which never agreed with her system. As soon as the bus started her intestines would start churning and

she would start throwing up to the consternation of her co-passengers. For comfort she would take out a bidi from her pocket, light it and start smoking and it would further irritate the passengers. After a couple of puffs, she would start coughing so violently as if she was going to breathe her last.

Supposing she managed to reach the venue, she would be the centre of people's curiosity and they would be whispering about her. Her unkempt hair, her crumpled and dirty clothes, her dilapidated, dusty shoes, her wrinkled rough face would make people chuckle to each other. Then the foul bidi smell emitting from her mouth would make people close to her uneasy forcing them to move to other seats. Usually she keeps her head covered with her shawl but the grey locks of her loose hair with dry leaves and pieces of straw entangled in it would pop out of the shawl and be noticed by the invitees. And as soon as the people knew that she was my mother, they would surround her with their searching questions about my early life and background, pretending to congratulate her on her son's glory. Some would try to engage her in extended conversation thereby to make her blurt out saucy details about my past life, details which I have so carefully hidden from public life. She might tell them about our lowly status in the village. Apart from all this, her innocent rural ways of doing

things might amuse the gathering. She might take out a bidi from her pocket and start smoking while the food was being served or she might be overtaken by bouts of coughing while the guests were eating. When it came to eating she would put the spoons and forks aside and eat with her unclean-looking hands. People would not say anything before me or her but they would make stories about our backwardness and uncouth ways. As for me I would bear with all this but my children would feel bad and humiliated.

With such thoughts floating in my mind, I lie down on her bed. I am thrown back in time to my childhood days. I feel that I am lying in my mother's arms, that I am lying in the cradle and mother is rocking it. How much time has elapsed since those early days when I partook of my mother's affection! I don't want my reveries to end so that I could once again experience to my heart's content that warmth and affection of which I have been deprived for so long.

I'm surprised to reflect that even though my writings revolve round the village life of the region I come from, I'm so far from it in my personal life. The village landscape, the poor people inhabiting it and struggling for survival, my own mother's hard pressed life, her loneliness form the core of my stories but I myself have moved so far away from all these, wallowing in my newly found glory as a

writer. Lying on my mother's bed, I try to confront the writer in me but I don't succeed. That writer has many faces or has hidden his real face behind innumerable masks so as to keep his identity secure in that highly urbanised, elitist society that has conferred on him prestige and status so far removed from his lowly status and anonymity in a remote village. The writer in me and myself are so far apart from each other that they seem to belong to two space and time zones and the prestige and status acquired by the writer do not seem to touch my inner being. Suddenly I become aware of the books which I have brought for my mother, books written by me, her own son on whom she has showered all the warmth and affection, and for whose future she found no struggle too big. The sight of the books, their very presence in that room rouses the writer in me and he is a complete stranger to the person lying on the bed. He is so swollen with pride at the accolades showered on my books by the urban elite. What if mother was not there and I didn't invite here to the function! Isn't it not the twenty-first century and should I remain stuck in the outdated sentimentality? Village, trees, hills, cattle, crops look beautiful on paper, Such things invoke a romantic atmosphere but in reality they are signs of backwardness, life in a village is a complete hell. And moreover, I have come here to show my respect to my mother, to acknowledge her contribution in the making of my

writer. There are many writers, and great ones at that, who have left their background far, far behind for the sake of pursuing the dreams of their creativity and their aged parents are languishing in old-age homes. I have come here to place my books at my mother's feet and seek her blessings for my future as a writer. Then why should I regret or repent? She would be delighted and feel proud that her little one has risen to such glory, has become a well known celebrity. The books lying on the bed are feeding my pride and adding glamour to it.

While I am lost in such thoughts, my hands travel towards the head of the bed. Something hard strikes my fingers. Slowly my fingers explore beneath the pillow and I am taken aback and sit up and remove the pillow aside. There's a book out there. I lift the book in my hand and can't believe my eyes. I run my fingers over its cover page and feel as if I would swoon right there. My blood seems to gel. This is my latest book. I once again peer beneath the pillow and I find that all my books are there, books written by me, my mother's little one. There are other books about there and I can't believe my eyes when I find that all those books are mine, written by me. I try to recollect if I myself had not left these books there but no, my packet is lying right there where I am lying. I open the packet, all the books are there. The ones beneath my mother's pillow are old copies of my books.

I pick up one book, turn over its pages, notice pieces of straw and dry leaves between them. Probably when mother goes out to collect grass for the cattle, she takes the book along with her and in between cutting the grass she turns over the pages and in the process straw and dry leaves settle there. I experience the dry autumnal winds blowing around me.

I pick up another book, turn over its pages and find tiny sarson flowers between its pages, their fragrance still persisting as if the spring season with all its glory has for ever been imprisoned inside the book by mother for me. I guess that when mother went out for saag-picking in the fields, she must have taken these books with her and turned over their pages to fight her boredom and loneliness. I experience the joy of spring circulating in my veins, running a sort of intoxicating langour all over me.

Then I pick up another book, this time a copy of my novel, and lo! in between its pages is imprisoned the fragrance of jasmine. As soon as I open the book, the fragrance once released spreads in the whole room. My eyes travel across the courtyard where I notice a plant of jasmine. It has grown taller since I had seen it last. I am thrown back in time to those days when I was a small child and my mother would often sit here during sultry summer nights with me in her arms and she would tell stories of kings and queens,

of gods and demons and sing lullabies to make me sleep. Now I have grown past those days but the jasmine flowers remind me of those happy, carefree days. I guess that mother still sits under the jasmine tree during summer nights and turns over the pages of my novel.

The fourth book that I pick up emits a very different smell. It is the smell of flour and lassi. Small goblets of dough and grains of dried butter are noticeable on the pages. Some letters have become illegible and look like blots of dust. Probably mother turned over its pages while cooking or churning milk or skimming butter.

I pick yet another book but its pages smell of the dark and the bidi smoke which seem to have soaked through its pages. I turn over its pages and find my words to have evaporated and vanished. There are marks of bidi ash in between the pages where are also stuck a few dead insects. My guess is that mother must have opened the book while lying in the bed, pored over a few pages while puffing at her bidi and then dozed off.

I draw out one more book from under the pillow but by now am feeling a little unsettled and sad and a little irritated. I have started sweating. There are a few old photographs of father with me and mother. Probably in secret mother shares her pride in her son's glory with father.

I put down the books one by one and look for something else under the pillow.

But in the folds of the bed I see another book, the one which has been released just now at a grand function. I am astonished and stunned. The book was released hardly a week ago and how come it has reached mother! Some of its pages are already marked with cow-dung, suggesting that mother has browsed through its pages. It is possible that mother ran through its pages while feeding the cattle or cleaning the pen or in any case in the company of her favourites among the cows and goats.

I couldn't fight back my tears and they rolled down my cheeks in torrents. I don't remember any other occasion in my life when I was so deeply moved and cried so inconsolably. It seemed as if all that glory, all that self-esteem, all the pride in fact which had accrued to me due to my rising reputation as a famous writer had suddenly melted and flown out in the form of tears. I felt as if I was continuously sinking into the folds of my mother's bed, forgetting what or where I was. Surprise and shame seemed to have covered me from head to foot. But even in the intensity of misery I was feeling a strange joy and pride that did not permit me to feel defeated and remorseful. Lying alone in that room on my mother's bed I felt as if all her sacrifices, all her affection for me had taken a shape and a body of its own, showering blessings on me and assuring me that she has always been with me despite all the physical and emotional distances. This thought sustains me and



saves me from falling neck-deep into self-pity or sense of guilt. It helps me in getting out of that temporary stupor which had overtaken me at that moment and I come back to my own in time. Surprisingly my tears seem to have taken away my weariness and made me feel fresh. It's a feeling that throws me back to those childhood days when after whining over something and driving my mother to nerves, I would come to her, lie down in her arms, fall asleep and then wake up fresh and fine.

Someone knocks at the door and calls, "Dadi, oye dadi, here's the newspaper".

At the moment mother is cleaning the cow-pen and removing the night refuse of the animals. She hears the call, puts down the dung basket and rushes to take the newspaper from the hawker. I get up from the bed, watch what's going on outside. It was Amru, the village postman who had called mother. He lives at a short distance

from my house and is a regular visitor to my house.

Now things start opening up before me. Mother is peering at the newspaper and the postman is pointing to her at something inside it. Mother takes the newspaper, puts it in a corner of the pen and then begins her cleaning work as before.

I look at the books on mother's bed, arrange them and cover them with her pillow. I pick up the packet of books I had brought and get out of the room quietly. The load of guilt which had been pressing me down for so long is now gone. I know mother will come back to the room when her morning chores are over and then in a relaxed mood she will pick up one of the books, turn over its pages and try to make sense of the black marks on the white sheets. I do not want to interfere with her routine and silently slip out of the room.

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## THE CONSCIENCE

Subhash Sharma

Translated by  
the author

“Why did you kidnap Mohan Bind?”

The police officer-in-charge of the local police station began to speak in lathi-like language right away.

“I...I... didn't kidnap anybody.”

I protested but my voice lacked spirit. It sounded more like whining. It was not at all the determined, resolute voice of a social worker that I was. Several times I had vehemently opposed police excesses, but this time my resistance was much blunted and dispirited. My inner voice seemed to be reproaching.

“Tell me, where is he now? Otherwise I'll be forced to use third degree methods.” He glowered at me, and snatched away the piece of paper from my hands. Other policemen began to behave crudely and rudely with me. They were behaving nastily as if they had won an award like 'Indian Idol', not in any T.V. reality show of 'Laughter Challenge' or 'Dance India', but in a reality show of uttering maximum abuses in minimum time. Next, they also snatched the papers from the hands of Rakesh who was standing beside me. He loudly protested, “ I am a lawyer and Pushpesh is my client. This is outrageous... this bullying inside the court premises...?”

By this time many lawyers gathered there and they surrounded the daroga. They began to shout a slogan against him, “ Death to daroga.”

The temper of the daroga, till now flying high in the sky, was suddenly grounded with a thud. He was taken aback. Other policemen also lost their spirit. In fact, he had initially planned also to arrest Rakesh who was in plain clothes then but he was astonished to see a united group of lawyers who not only know law but who could also bring it into force. They missed him with a volley of questions of law, and he was stumped. But not for long, he was no clod. He changed his stance and, holding my right hand, announced, "I arrest you for the charge of kidnapping as a named accused." At the same time he said 'sorry' to my lawyer, and this softened the ego of the black coats. They began to scatter. They had gathered as the crows' flock together hearing the crowing of fellow ones but they did not bother to rescue me. I was left to fend for myself. I realized then that a lawyer belonged to a class different from the commoners. And also that a united group has a definite power. There were dozens of clients there. They had come for the trials of their cases but they were not a cohesive group. More number itself did not carry any weight, this I realized for the first time in my life.

The daroga, dispirited a moment ago, suddenly felt rejuvenated. In a moment he handcuffed me and pushed me in the rear portion of his jeep as if I were some lifeless luggage or a piece of iron or furniture. I couldn't speak. Despair had

choked my words. Suddenly it flashed in my mind that a ruling of the Supreme Court prohibited handcuffing of an accused. According to this ruling, the accused was to be told about the charges, and his family, friends or relatives were to be informed within twenty-four hours of his arrest. I already knew about all such legal provisions. As a social worker, I had participated in a number of campaigns regarding Right to Information Act. But all this knowledge seemed to have faded away from me then and there – the knowledge that I had used so effectively in generating mass awareness. My senses were paralysed, my whole consciousness seemed to have deserted me and had become the slave of daroga. Even the ghosts fly away, if beaten. What to say of me? In that agony, I suddenly remembered my wife's words: "Don't go in front of officers and back of a horse." Even now, there is no democracy in this country, it is only 'lathicracy.' In the pockets of the police uniform, there are legal provisions of various kinds which could be stretched like rubber toys played with in any manner that serves a purpose. Like a conjurer, the police can turn humans into animals and birds... make them vanish into the thin air, or charm them away into the underworld. That is why good people live at a safe distance from a police station or a liquor shop, I pondered.

I realized that I had paid dearly for the

mistake of ignoring the advice of my wife. I at least could have avoided the arrest but then my self-respect would have been hurt. In disgust, my head drooped. I was feeling very low spirited. On the other hand, the police party was in a mood of celebration. My arrest was like a trophy, a sort of victory of bringing someone so obstinate to his senses, of making him realise their importance and power. The withered face of the daroga blossomed like a rose in the sweet realization of this accomplishment, and his spirit once again soared high in the sky.

In a short while, I was brought down from the jeep and locked inside the police lockup where three dreaded criminals were already held. It was, however, difficult to say whether they had become criminals on their own or had been forced into crime by the society or administration. They stared at me, so did the walls and the iron bars and the ceiling and the floor. Then I felt cut off not only from others but also from my own self. I felt intense thirst. I cried for water but got no reply. Then one criminal blurted out. "They won't give you water as they don't have water. Ask me and I'll get my body's water out for you to drink." His mouth reeked of cheap country liquor. If my hands were free, I thought, I'd have taught him a befitting lesson.

When I became desperate for water, a constable showed a little pity. Without

opening the gate of the lockup!, he began to pour water from a 'lota' (a small pot) through the gap of the iron bars. I opened my mouth and somehow drank water. Water is not just water, it is life itself – this I realized then. Though my thirst got only half-quenched, it gave me great relief. Inside the lock-up it was worse than a pigsty-filth and stink made it unbearable. Worse still, mosquitoes had a free run as if running a parallel government, without bothering whether outside it was good governance or bad governance. They sometimes danced and then sang. They took my whole body as their realm where they did whatever they liked - they sat, sang and danced in a particular rhythm. My prayers to them to leave me alone went unheard. In this respect they were no less cruel than the daroga, after all, they also belonged to the same clan of bloodsuckers. The mosquitoes harassed me ceaselessly. Even the remotest corners and sides of my body were not safe from their invasions. Although I know that as per law I was to be provided some food, but I got nothing. My intestines were twitching with hunger and I felt they would come out of the body. At that moment even a simple diet of salt and boiled rice would have calmed me. However, I felt some comfort that the other three inmates were also without food and they also felt the same. The darkness of the night began to thicken and expand as if feeling tired. For the next hour my hunger seemed to

have spared me and I took a nap. When I woke up, I realized the truth of the proverbial saying – the sleep does not mind a broken cot and the hunger does not mind even the dried rice.

It so happened that one day the police, all of a sudden, raided my village, Mohanpur. Sohan, the son of Mohan Bind, had returned home a month ago, after working as labourer in Delhi. Four other labourers had also returned home with him after a year's stay in Delhi. He kept himself very busy and cared little for the folks of 'babuan tola' (segment of high caste). Some years ago, when he had refused to work as a 'banihar' (attached labourer) of Babu Bhola Singh, Babu sahib had implicated him in a false case of theft as he was much angered by this audacity. As Sohan went to Delhi and stayed there for quite sometime, the case was almost forgotten and not pursued. But when he returned, Babu sahib did not like his new way of living – wearing clean clothes and listening to the transistor. His dormant ire was aroused as he felt that Sohan was deliberately affronting the Babuan tola. He lost no time in making contact with the new officer-in-charge of the local police station and gave him some information. The officer-in-charge J.B. Singh was very fond of getting his pocket filled with notes. He began soon to flick through the pages of some old files wrapped in a red cloth. There he could see the shining silver coins

in tattered files. He took pride in tightening his moustaches in the style of a wrestler.

After a few days, the officer-in-charge, J.B. Singh, with his police party, raided the house of Mohan Bind of Mohanpur in broad daylight. Sohan Bind was present in the house. He was sitting cross-legged on a small stool wrapped in a 'lungi' after taking bath. He was waiting for the lunch to be served. In no time the whole 'tola' (segment) turned into a police camp. The policemen pushed Sohan's wife and father out of house. And then three shots were fired at him with a pistol at point blank range, although he had raised his hands up – his shoulders were in a gesture of surrender. Sohan fell down dead in a heap. Laid on a cot, his body was brought out by the policemen. Then they fabricated a story of encounter. Mohan Bind and Sohan's wife began to weep and wail bitterly. Tears rolled down their cheeks, but the daroga shouted angrily at them: "stop weeping now or I'll push the gun into your...." Fear suddenly dried their tears and their weeping shrank into sobbing. The village folks quickly assembled there. The police called some of them to sign as witnesses to the encounter story, but no one came forward. Then the policemen twitched their moustaches and the chowkidar (village watchman) produced two witnesses who seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. The two were ready to put their thumb impressions.

They had, in fact, sided with the opposition party during the panchayat elections. Even Mohan Bind witted under the threat of thrashing and put his thumb impression, swallowing his tears.

Afterwards, the officer-in-charge managed the government doctor for a 'suitable' post-mortem report. It seemed that the doctor had easily forgotten the hyppocretis oath of honesty and service to humanity. Probably, he had obtained his M.B.B.S degree through the nefarious network by mafia like Ranjit Don, who ran an admission and recruitment racket. This doctor did not bother for values like knowledge, honour and honesty. He kicked these values in the air, like a football as and when it suited him. Moreover, this doctor and the police officer regularly attended such pleasure parties where bottles of wine and beautiful women were available in plenty.

At that time I was away from the village. When I returned after a week and I came to know about this incident, I immediately went to Mohan Bind and expressed my deep sympathy. He burst into tears and told me that the daroga had forcibly taken his thumb impression on a sheet of blank paper which he could misuse. He also told in a muffled tone that he intended to file a criminal case against the daroga and other policemen in the court. I reassured him and promised to help. It was like holding up a small lamp

in the face of a big storm. I knew it was a daring decision, but still it was worth its while as it would save the honour of truth. If light loses credit, darkness prevails and then the society shrinks, and the frenzied dance of brute and unbridled power begins. Many such ideas kept coming to my mind. Finally, I decided I must help my village folks in times of crisis. So I set out for the court on my motorbike with Mohan on the pillion. I hoped to get justice in the court of law, which is said to be the backbone of democracy. A journey of twenty kilometers was completed in just half an hour. There in civil court campus I met one Rakesh Kumar, a young advocate known to me, who was always ready and willing to fight such cases, and that too without charging any fee. He quickly prepared a draft for filing the case in the court, and he read it out to us. Mohan heard it and put his thumb impression voluntarily on it, as he felt satisfied with its content.

The police, however, have dozens of ears – the front and the back, on the left and right, above and below and most of these are gullible. As soon as the officer-in-charge knew of our counter-move, he rushed to the court and all of a sudden snatched the papers from the lawyer's hand. When the lawyers protested, he went straight to the judicial magistrate. The inner part of this magistrate was as black as was his coat. The Judicial

Magistrate sent a message to the Secretary of the Bar Association to meet him in his chamber but the latter refused. The lawyers were agitated over snatching of papers from one lawyer by the officer-in-charge. In this confusion, the daroga took Mohan into custody. Mohan was terrified. First, he was threatened that he would be implicated in the trap of law. And then in an indirect way, he warned Mohan that if he did not lodge a case of abduction against me, he would meet the same fate as his son. Then he became desperate, he was ready to do anything to save his life. As the saying goes, even the ghosts are scared of the police! Afterwards it was not difficult to get Mohan adduce evidence regarding his alleged abduction by me under section 164 of Indian Penal Code. Mohan Bind was actually not produced before the Judicial Magistrate. Yet magistrate on the prompting of the officer—in-charge, signed as if recorded by him: - “Mohan Bind, S/o. Jhagru Bind, resident of Mohanpur, made this statement, on his own...” The daroga explained that a statement recorded under this section of the I.P.C. was binding on the complainant. That is, Mohan could not deny it later. Thus, according to him, I did kidnap him. The magistrate on his part, did not bother to cross-examine as to what motive there was behind the crime. Was there any criminal intention? Did I demand any ransom? Had I attempted to take revenge from him for an old malice? Did I want

to traffic him somewhere? Or, did I want to kill him?

The court was ominously silent on this point and so was the police administration. But this silence facilitated their complicity in that crime against humanity.

Hearing the news of my arrest, my whole family was exasperated and embarrassed. But my adolescent children began to doubt my integrity, though my parents had full faith in me. My wife was in an uncertain state of mind. She felt that in order to berate the officer-in-charge, I might have cajoled Mohan Bind to file a false case against him. After a long process, however, my family got me released on bail that was granted by the session judge who made a very adverse comment against the officer-in-charge. After release from jail, I wanted to meet Mohan Bind. My old-aged father also desired so for clarity and he took me to him. My father anxiously asked him to tell the truth. He began in a parrot-fashion, “ Pushpesh Babu is fighting a case against police-station over a plot of land. So, with a view to malign the officer-in-charge, he abducted me and got me to put my thumb impression on a blank paper. The officer-in-charge made a thorough search of Pushpesh Babu’s body and seized that paper from him. The intention of Pushpesh was not good. If officer-in-charge had not acted promptly, my life would have been in danger...” My father was stunned to

listen to this tale. My head drooped down and he could not see me eye to eye. My eyes were petrified and my ears went stone deaf. I felt myself falling into an abyss. I still have not got rid of that feeling. I keep on thinking; was it a mistake to confront a mountain for Mohan Bind? The event has left such a deep scar in my heart that I can never forget it. I often

think of it in retrospect. Mohan Bind had lost his only son in a fake encounter with the police, still he mortgaged his conscience. Did he care for his own life more than his son's life? Was he scared of the police officer who can easily and unfailingly convert a human being into a stone?

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**Subhash Sharma**, born 1959, educated in J.N.U., author of ten books including books in English 'why people protest, dialectics of agrarian development.' His main interests include culture, environment, education and development. He works in Ministry of Defence and lives in New Delhi.

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## THE SCREEN

Hari Bhatnagar

Translated by  
Shailendra Nath

We got a new sweeper for routine cleaning.

The earlier one was very erratic. He was always drunk and not regular for work. He would come one day and then disappear for days together; and always demanding money. I was fed up with him. I had to do the outside cleaning myself and had to carry the garbage also. The good thing was that he himself stopped coming.

The new sweeper seems to be okay. He does not appear to have any demerits, except chewing tobacco. Looks like he will work nicely.

When he came today morning for work, his wife was also with him. Although jet black, her features were sharp which attracted one. Washed and clean clothes and neatly done braids. In the long parting of hair, a small streak of vermilion on the forehead. A small red spangle and a bright nose stud. By her style, she did not look like a sweeper's wife.

While working, Raju sat on one side, squatting. He took out the tobacco pouch from the shirt pocket, put some lime on it and after rubbing and crushing it for long, pressed it between his front teeth. After savoring the juice of the tobacco and floating in its sweetish tipsiness for some time, he looked at the sky, as if he were in a mood to sing a film song. He even crooned its one or two refrains within himself, but thinking something else, he smiled. He looked at his wife.

His wife had firmly tucked her sari in her waist and was busy setting

the reeds of the stick broom which had loosened and were pricking against her hand.

After tightening the reeds she started sweeping. There was this small platform and a garden of almost the same size which had a few *Ashoka* trees and a huge bougainvillea which had spread out to the roof.

When Raju smiled, at that very moment his wife looked at him and asked him why he was smiling.

Raju did not tell the reason for smiling and again started humming the refrain of the film song within himself in which the beloved is dissuading her lover in a sad voice from going abroad.

Raju's wife also could not help herself and she also started crooning a verse from a new film song in which the lover beseeches his beloved never to keep him off her sight. Cleaning and sweeping was over in the process of singing. Raju's wife threw the broom and sat in a corner and started wiping the sweat with the edge of her sari. Raju got up, filled the garbage in the canister and looked at me as if making me realize how much dirt and filth was there! Everything has been cleaned up. People think that cleaning is an easy job, whereas it is a toiling work. One sweats and the face is disfigured. See my wife, when she had come, she was so neat and clean; now she is covered with dust.

I smiled. He remained stiff.

I took out a twenty rupee note. He started smiling and moved towards me almost rushing. Taking the note, he caressed his forehead with it and bent towards my feet. He wished for my prosperity.

Around eight in the morning was the fixed time for both to come. Both would come, and immediately thereafter, Raju would sit on a side, rub and crush the tobacco, put it in his mouth and overwhelmed by its savour, would repeatedly croon different sad songs and a few verses of some others to make the atmosphere somber.

His wife would stop in her sweeping, her throat would be choked and she would come almost to tears.

Days were passing like this when Raju got a job in a big complex. I was apprehensive of losing him. It was obvious – here a few houses, there an entire complex. But my fears proved baseless when he set his wife there and he started coming here alone.

For the first time, he did the work so neatly and diligently that I had not hoped. I was under the impression that this wretch who depended upon his wife won't work properly. But when he completed the work, I was amazed. He had left his wife far behind in the cleaning work.

That day, I gave Raju a tenner for tea

which he declined initially but ultimately took.

Raju is lean and thin, and feeble, as if he had TB. But, in fact, he did not have. His frame was like that only. He was around thirty but looked as if he was forty five or fifty. His hair were gray and badly knotted, as if they had never received a drop of water. His eyes were pale and reminded of a cat, and appeared to be protruding out. On his black shriveled face, thick beard and moustache looked like a tightly knit net. He was quite tall – around six feet – a bit bent forward. Because of this bend, one might think that he had some trouble in his waist. Because while working, he would put his left arm on his waist and feigned so much pain on his face as if he was about to groan. His arms were long like those of monkeys, full of black thick hairs.

For five or six months, he came at the fixed time without a break. And he did his work very properly. Then something happened and he started playing the disappearing act. He would come for one day and then disappear for two; would come for two days, then go missing for five. Furrows of worries would be formed on his face. The verses of the lyrics, which he used to hum deeply in the sad tone – were buried in his parched lips. Many times I tried to bring him around, but he did not respond. He just kept mum.

The state of cleanliness now was like it

was earlier - filth and garbage. And I used to grumble and get angry. I could not tell anything to anybody.

One day when I myself was doing the cleaning job, he came. I was livid with rage. Within myself, I started abusing him in the choicest words which would be too harsh for any gentleman to hear.

When he made as if to do the sweeping, I burst out 'Why don't you come daily? Where do you disappear?'

With the bent waist and the left hand on it, as if he were in pain, he said harshly 'Sahib, you have to increase my wages. I cannot do this work for fifty rupees.'

I did not like his tone. One can understand if a person works and then demand money. But when the performance itself is not satisfactory then why money? Still controlling myself, I said, 'I will increase the wages, but first be regular.'

He replied, 'I will come daily, provided you first raise the salary.'

'Sixty rupees are less, for so little work?' I hardened.

'If it is such a small work then why don't you do it yourself?' He retorted. But he collected himself immediately and started saying in an humble manner. 'Sahib, whether the work is big or small, I have to come. Then how can one manage within sixty seventy rupees these days. I earn around thousand through sewer work and

work in about ten houses, my wife also earns about this much. But we can't save anything. The entire money is spent. What to do, Sahib, I fail to understand.' Saying this, he started pulling at and scrubbing his beard.

'Two thousands are not sufficient for you, whereas electricity, water, house, everything is free!' When I said this, his reply was, 'Sir, my daughter is ill, whatever we earn is spent in her treatment.'

'What has happened to her?' I got softened, 'You never mentioned it.'

'Of what avail would it have been, sir?' He became silent. Then shaking his head, he said, 'It is beyond my understanding. Her both legs are numb. Now the whole body has started getting numb. She cannot even eat her meals.' Saying this, he burst into tears.

I started thinking, how many people are there, concealing their pain in their hearts! My voice choked with emotion. But I composed myself and said, 'Did you show her here at the Hamidia Hospital?'

He said crying, 'Sir I have got her checked up everywhere. Only the invocation of spirits was left; I am doing that also now. But there is no relief from any corner.'

Sighing deeply, I became silent.

Wiping his tears, blowing his nose and holding his waist, he kept on sweeping.

Then he staggered away.

After this, he might have come for a few days only. Then he disappeared altogether and resurfaced only after six months. During this period, his wife also was nowhere to be seen.

The other day when I was going to purchase vegetables, I found him sitting half squatted near the culvert. His entire countenance was like it used to be earlier except that his shirt had changed. In place of the torn and tattered shirt, he was donning a perfect shirt. His mouth was full with the betel leaf and he was going on spitting on the dusty ground like a long colour-water gun. He was pretty drunk, too. His eyes had become paler, and puffed.

On seeing him, I paused. I went close to him and asked, 'Why, Raju, you are not seen at all? Where are you these days?'

He was totally indifferent to whatever I was saying.

Suddenly, spitting the betel leaf spittle, and staggering, he said in a pointed voice, 'Sir, I have quit all the manual work. I don't do anything now!' Smiling, he continued, 'My wife also does not do anything!' He shook his head vigorously as if recalling some painful incident and said in an angry voice: 'Why should I work, Sir? Why? Hush! Hush!!' Getting excessively peeved, he started lamenting and, raising his face towards the sky, released a loud sound from his throat and fell silent.

I asked him, "Have you managed something from somewhere?"

Raising his hand, he denied. 'No, Sir, no manipulation, no maneuvering. We are just happy, very happy!!!'

'How is your daughter?'

'She passed away, sir. It was good for her; otherwise, how could that handicapped have survived! God heard her prayers.'

Wavering and staggering, he got up smiling, as if he were amidst the ripple of ecstasy, and said slowly, 'Sir, I had been thinking of coming to you, but I am lucky that I could find you.' Suddenly, he fell silent and cast his glance around as if nobody should hear him. Then he continued, 'Please accompany me to my hut, your mind will get fresh.'

Saying this, he held my wrist. His grasp was hard like pincers. I got my wrist freed forcibly and withdrew.

Wavering where he was sitting, he said in a nasal voice, 'Okay Sir, as you wish!' Saying this, he sat down. From a paper pack in the pocket, he took out many folded betel leaves and stuffed them in his mouth. While doing so, he fixed his pale puffed eyes towards me and asked, 'Sir, would you like to have some betel leaves? By your mercy, there is no dearth'.

I kept silent with my forehead furrowed, as if I were forswearing his betel leaves.

That day while marketing, I was wondering about the changed countenance of Raju; how he was saying he was very happy; he was even whispering and inviting me to his hut. Curiosity to get into the matter was pushing me towards his dwelling. Despite my wish, on the fourth day at the dusk, I made to go towards his hut, but came back from halfway. I thought why I should wade through this filth. Let that bugger go to hell; how does it concern me.

But the next day, I could not resist and found myself in front of his hut.

His hut was thatched with innumerable polythene sheets. It was no different from the neighboring shanties; rather, it was in a more decrepit condition. In the front was a platform plastered with cow-dung. The shed was very low. One had to enter inside bending quite a lot.

On the opposite side was a drain, stinking. It was stagnant, infested with flies and mosquitoes. A small boy was flinging a stick to kill the flies and the mosquitoes which were sitting on his ball. Three or four flexible bamboo poles had been tied and kept across the drain. It served the purpose of a small bridge to reach the hut.

When I stopped in front of the hut, I found Raju fully drunk, sitting by the bridge and abusing the mosquitoes. His mouth was stuffed with betel leaves, and eyes were puffed. Seeing me, he got startled. He

almost ran rocking towards me and bent towards my feet. Suddenly, he started talking in a loud voice, 'Sir, the entire colony is in a bad shape. All the sewer lines are broken. That son-of-a-bitch does not do anything even after gulping money. But you need not worry. I will see to it that everything is neat and clean, like a mirror.'

I noticed that Raju had started talking loudly on seeing a labour come out of the nearby hut so that the latter would take it that the matter related to the sewer and therefore the officer had come at the threshold.

But the moment that labour went inside his hut, Raju looked at me and winked his eyes, if he was saying how he made a fool of that labour.

When I made as if to leave, a secret smile spread on his face. His eyes twinkled as if they were gesturing how I could leave like that.

He cast his alert eyes on all the sides, looked at the hut of the labour who had gone inside, also looked at the two or three huts whose eyes and ears were constantly focused at his hut as if they were groping for something. When he did not see anybody, he started talking loudly again as if he wanted all to hear, 'Iron rods will have to be brought, and mason, a ladder will also have to be arranged for this work. I hope cement and sand will not be a problem.' All at once, he started whispering

in my ears – when you have come all the way to my door, then something...'

Before I could comprehend what he implied, he clasped my wrist in the same pincers like grasp. Wavering and staggering, he was now pulling me inside the hut.

I could not resist and when entered the hut bowing my head, I could not see anything due to stark darkness.

'Light the lamp, will you!' he said to someone in a sharp but low tone, almost grinding his teeth.

'That is what I am doing!' This was the voice of his wife.

There was the scratch of the stick on the match box and a pale dim light spread around. His wife was lighting the lamp, holding the burning stick. Her face was shining in the light, the bright stud in her nose, the small spangle, the vermilion, and her eyes – everything was shimmering.

Suddenly, Raju left me alone (mumbling something in an incoherent voice) going outside the hedge undulating; as if requesting me – 'Please sit here, I am just coming.'

The lamp was now lighted and everything was clear in its light.

A dirty, thick damp mat was spread right in the middle of the hut on which I was sitting awkwardly and scrutinizing the hut. On the one side of the hut were stacked kitchen vessels and next to it was

the sewer from where pungent smell of urine was wafting out. On the other side was an old rusted iron box on which were dumped tattered quilts and heaps of rags. The lamp was on a tin canister near the box which was drawn like the ornamental mark on the forehead, quite taut. The light smoke from the lamp was moving towards the ceiling. Nearby was a plastic bucket full of water on which was floating a mug.

At the one end of the mat, Raju's wife was sitting, supporting herself on her palm. There had been no change in her features; rather, she had blossomed prettier. Perhaps, the cosmetic items had made her face more attractive.

Smiling, she offered me a glass of water. I took the glass but did not drink it; I kept it in my hand – I was trying to avoid drinking the turbid water.

My objective was just to know the secret about Raju; there was nothing else in my mind. But here I had been captured in a different trap. I wanted to escape, but there was something which had overpowered me and, feeling helpless, I was yearning to do all that which I would have never accepted in a sane state of mind.

Suddenly, either because there was no oil or the wick had slid down, the lamp started being put out. ...

After a great tempest, I found myself like a boat thrown ashore.

At once, I came out of the hut. I threw a hundred rupee note towards Raju and rushed home. Inexplicable feeling of guilt was weighing me down and I wanted to speed up to home, as if I would get rid of this feeling once I reached my house.

The whole night that day and throughout the next evening, I was under deep remorse and guilt. But when the night set in, I don't know what happened to me, but I was absolutely free of such a feeling and was standing in front of Raju's hut.

And to tell you the truth, after that night, I started going to his hut daily in the darkness of night. I don't know what was there in Raju's wife which attracted me and I used to be uncontrollably drawn towards her, in a state of stupor.

Days were passing like this.

I used to come and, without the nod of Raju, remove the hedge unhesitatingly and enter the hut. Even Raju's fear of the initial days of the alert and scrutinizing eyes of the neighborhood had disappeared.

That day when milky moonlight was oozing out and a mild cold was spreading its magic in the air, I came out of my house and walking slowly, stood in front of Raju's hut. At that time, standing near her hedge, Raju's wife was talking to her neighbour. With his mouth fully stuffed with betel leaves and undulating under the influence of liquor, Raju was standing in front of his hedge and modulating the refrains of some

filmy song like the ticking sound of an eagle. I coughed.

I coughed so that Raju's wife should know that I had come and that she should not delay any more.

Finding no effect on Raju's wife, I coughed twice, thrice. Still, she remained indifferent; she was still busy chatting with that wretched neighbour. Now I could not stay outside any longer. I was filled with tremendous rage. Suddenly, I removed the hedge forcibly and entered the hut. Choicest abuses were overwhelming my mind for that wretched woman had not even looked at me, neither made me realize it. It would have smoothened my temper if at least she had shown some gestures. Then the delay would not have mattered.

But she did not do anything like that. This is the limit. ... While waiting, I was crushing her in my mind ...

The wait was not piercing as much as her deliberate ignorance of me. I was agonizing in this state of mind when she entered.

She was pretty angry with me and went on telling, 'You should not cough at least in front of others.' Suddenly she choked with tears, 'Only I know how much belittled I felt before that mean woman. She never said anything but her eyes were expressing and conveying everything.' Tears welled out from her eyes. 'Had you been a bit patient, I myself would have come, even without being sent for.'

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## A RUDE AWAKENING

Sneh Thakore

Translated by  
the author

Boom! A loud explosion erupted with hilltop debris dancing in the air before finally depositing itself on the ground. There was a time when their beautiful, glorious reflection in the river Ganges flowing at their foothill was a sight for sore eyes but now they have to make room for industries. What a price to pay for so-called progress!

Dhara's life shattered just like the hill across her house. It was a hot, humid day. A fragment of sunshine, perched on the handle of her chair, jumped on to the window grill and was getting ready to jump from there too.

Dhara was feeling dizzy. Walls were closing in and the ceiling placed a crushing pressure on her shoulders. Like that sunshine's fragment, she too wanted to jump from the window. Inside her, pain stretched from one end to the other, endless like the straight line on a heart monitor screen when the heart stops, reflecting no vital sign,.... just beep-beep-beep — monotone beeps, and straight line with no curves. The only difference is she must be alive as she is experiencing excruciating pain. If she were dead would she have felt this pain!

Dhara had learned a long time ago to close the doors on her hurtful memories. That was the only way she knew to live a relatively peaceful life. Then why this restlessness today? Why was Sheila's insensitiveness bothering her? Sheila didn't say anything, yet the language of her unspoken words said a lot. Sometimes you don't need the ladder of

words to reach the heart. Merely seeing the scratch on her arm made Sheila jump so far away, as if a huge poisonous snake had leapt at her.

Dhara hasn't recovered from the shock yet, since she has been diagnosed as HIV Positive. Beyond the physical pain, she was also enduring a barrage of emotions within herself. And now, this social rejection! Sheila wasn't the first person who made her feel like she was an untouchable.

Questions...questions...everywhere questions. They were penetrating her mind like a snake slithering into its hole. In search for answers she only found more questions. She feels suffocatingly surrounded by the immense wall of daunting questions all around her. The fog of thoughts flew over her like thick black clouds and the mist of loneliness was choking her.

The evening was getting ready to surrender in night's arms. Beyond the horizon a train passed with thunderous noise breaking Dhara's concentration. Lights from the compartment windows shimmered on the river's surface. Her deep sigh made the bird perched on the windowsill flutter her wings, but not seeing any sign of threat, the bird comfortably burrowed her head deep into her chest.

As Dhara got up and went to the bathroom, her footsteps echoed in the

quietness of the room. Dhara jerked her head. A stubborn tear was still hanging around on the bottom of her eyelashes. With the back of her hand she dragged that tear close to her ear, in the process wiping the very existence of it. She washed her face with determination so as to wash away all the sad thoughts. She muttered to herself, though her own voice sounded as if it was coming from a far distance belonging to somebody else. Words are just words until we pour our emotions into them, only then do they become meaningful.

By now Dhara was poised. The queasiness of her voice disappeared, words became meaningful and thoughts gathered strength. Why should I be upset or punished for the deeds I haven't done? Why should I behave like a criminal when I am not? Without any fault of mine, why was I put in the witness box? Why should I bow to those who are inhumane, insensitive, and ignorant and want to remain as such?

By the time Dhara reached Vasudha's house, her self-confidence started shaking, eventually crumbling like a house of sand. The hurtful memory got stuck on brain-cell like a leech. The beautiful Amaltas flowers in the front yard and colourful bunches of boganville entwined in the verandah's trellis lost their usual mesmerizing charm at this point.

Dhara thought, she shouldn't have

come. Yet every time she refused to come to these meetings due to the nature of her illness, Vasudha insisted that particularly given the nature of her illness and for the sake of her illness, Dhara must attend these meetings.

'Dhara, you are HIV Positive, you don't have AIDS. You know that there is a difference between the two. HIV-Positive person doesn't necessarily become Aids patient. HIV can remain in body for years. Though some people may show signs of Aids related illnesses, yet they may not be life threatening.'

'Having AIDS is life threatening but being HIV Positive is not. As you know Dhara, Aids means Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. HIV may become the reason for it. AIDS is a situation where the body's defense system declines so much that it's unable to fight the infection.'

A still depressed Dhara said, 'I could suffer AIDS at anytime.'

'Yes you may. Anything can happen anytime. Who can see or predict the future? Do you know what the next moment holds for you? Possibilities are endless; you may slip on a banana peel and die. You can't live on assumptions. Even if you have AIDS, you can't pass it on to anybody by being in gatherings, touching hands, shaking hands or embracing somebody. This virus can only be transmitted through blood transfusions, semen, and vaginal

fluids. Sweat, saliva and other bodily fluids don't have a strong enough concentration of the virus to be contagious to infect other people. On the other hand using an AIDS patient's needle is highly contagious. It is important to know high and low risk factors. Learning how to protect yourself and others from this illness is more important than drawing yourself in a cocoon. You have a right to live too.'

'If I had the right to live than why did God give me this AIDS...?' Dhara's voice was bitter.

'I told you, you don't have AIDS.' Vasudha interrupted her in mid-sentence.

'Vasudha, everybody is not like you. You know how people cut me off! One more category has been added to untouchables. People may not call us untouchable.....yet we are made to feel that way...'

'That's why I asked you to participate. I know you feel mental anguish, but people do this out of ignorance. You have to educate them. If not for yourself, do it for future generations. People think it is a serious illness, which it is till the cure is found. Yet on the other hand there is so much misunderstanding about how it spreads, we have to address this issue and clear the misunderstanding so that people can stop behaving inhumanly as they now do.'

Dhara cried, 'How can just two women

teach the whole society?’

‘A woman is not as powerless as you think. She is not a decorative toy. Whenever a woman has fought for justice, society has stood by her. Don’t consider yourself weak or lonely. Drain this sea of tears that is clouding your judgment. We have to stand up against the ignorance about AIDS and also prevent the spread of the virus. If we are not able to do this, are not able to educate the masses about it, HIV and AIDS sufferers will clam up within themselves when they see and suffer mistreatment and this inhuman criminal like behavior. They will hide the disease to protect themselves, which will be a calamity. We have to create the understanding and trust amongst ourselves. Open conversation and education is the only solution. We can’t hide our head in the sand like an ostrich, we have to face reality. AIDS has started ticking like a time bomb. We have to diffuse it collectively before it erupts into an epidemic.’

‘Dhara, do you remember an essay I read to you some time ago? My hats off to those people who are fighting this disease for years. Due to their mental awareness they are warding off AIDS until now. They have learned to live with this disease, not with ignorance but on the basis of their knowledge. This is not a death penalty for them, though no one knows the moment when death snatches the life from anyone of us! Only God knows the time of birth and

death.’

Dhara, somewhat pacified with the conversation, said, ‘Yes I do remember that. All right, from now on you are my guru. I will do whatever you propose.’

‘What an irony Vasudha! Whoever we considered our own family, in fact they were and in real genetic terms they are the family, became strangers and strangers whom we never met or heard of before became closest like family. Though years of relationship, yet the same, your own blood and flesh dump you like garbage. Betrayal by your own neither lets you live nor die in peace.’

‘I was brought up with so much love and care, like a delicate flower, yet now the same old me has been discarded like a rotten apple or as an useless furniture of the household. They still feed me, may be because they fear the wrath of society or a remnant of conscience, prick of their own consciousness, but they are not even slightly concerned about how much their behavior hurts me. The feelings, the insensitivity of my so-called loved ones burns me inside out. Life seems as if a thousand snakes are striking me over and over.’

‘Events happened fast. Before I blinked my eyes, my life was destroyed, just as a storm uproots trees, destroys flowers, fruits and deserts the land. Every day, a volcano erupts inside me yet outside I remain like an iceberg. My heart became

a cellar where I keep dumping everything. My life is a live grave. I wonder how long this life is going to go on like this!

Vasudha's throat swelled-up with emotions. She tried to console Dhara but words failed her. Sometimes even a single word refuses to come out from its vast collection of vocabulary, yet other times they come out with such a gush that they tangle among themselves so badly, they can't move at all and stand still like the cars in a big traffic jam. Words...what a strange commodity...powerful yet worthless. Vasudha's caring silence was louder than a million words.

The lava, which was gurgling inside Dhara for a long time, finally erupted. With a cold sweat on her forehead like morning dew, Dhara, breathing heavily yet composed, said, 'Vasudha, I have been running from everybody, even from myself, due to the fear of people. My life became an empty shell without a trace of hope. If ever I felt alive, it was for a moment or two like lightning in the sky. My eyes stopped dreaming, words died. I didn't know how to start my life again. I was like a woman who is knitting a sweater and half-way through who realized that the pattern she has knitted is not to her liking. Now what to do? Unravel it? Do I have time to start a new pattern in a new sweater? Or shall I carry on with this even though I don't like it? Do I knit another design on top of it? Would that look okay?'

Like a tap from a full vessel, Dhara kept on flowing, 'Vasudha, would the world change its attitude? Are these moments of pain and sadness enough to shatter this unreal tranquility? Are these ripples sufficient to create bigger ripples and eventually huge waves in this direction or will they just vanish unnoticed into thin air, leaving the sea's surface calm and tranquil? Will the silence of death prevail?'

Dhara sobbed uncontrollably. She became like a tree, standing at the edge of a bluff, looking for support as the earth kept slipping from its roots. Vasudha opened her arms and Dhara's head found shelter in the hollow of her chest. After a while she lifted Dhara's face and looked in her painful, sad, misty eyes. Two pairs of eyes looked at each other, trying to clear the vast jungle of questions and answers.

Vasudha's voice was full of assurance. 'Time never stands still. A clock ticks at its own pace oblivious to our feelings. Yet our emotions makes us feel differently at any given time. For some, time may not have moved at all, it just stood still, for others it soars in the sky. In fact, it is we who give the meaning to it at any given time with our emotions of happiness or tears of sorrow.'

'Dhara, you must understand one thing, comparing someone else's sadness with your own, does not cultivate the same intensity of pain. There are vast differences in feelings. Don't measure it with the same

yardstick. Keep on lighting awareness candles. Sitting still is fruitless. People relate HIV Positive with AIDS and that's why people don't come forward. We have to support each other. AIDS doesn't spare anybody, regardless of their age, gender, or nationality.'

'Society's ignorance is not only unbearable and dangerous for patients, it is equally damaging for the new generation. We have to tackle it socially, politically, and individually; otherwise it will romp around like a wild animal creating chaos and havoc indiscriminately. If we let it become an epidemic, this small pond will turn into an ocean of devastating grief.'

Vasudha, breathing heavily, carried on, 'Nobody deserves to be sick with this illness. It's wrong to say, due to certain deeds you asked for it. Nobody wants disease as a boon. How can one forget the large number of innocent people suffering from it...children from infected mothers who themselves were not aware of it, blood recipients and so on. Education is the first step.'

'You are right Vasudha. Fear breeds fear. In fact, fear is spreading faster than the virus. In small villages even health professionals are not properly educated. Anamika was shocked with their behavior when she was admitted. Their oath of helping patients evaporated like camphor. She understood the reasons, their ignorance about the disease, nevertheless

it hurts the same.

HIV carrying people can live at least 10-15 years of normal life if it's not robbed from them. Though health professionals are being trained in this direction, progress is slow.'

'That's why all of us have to pitch in. It is not a problem of any specific group. The key to dealing with it is the combination of research, learning from patient's experiences, and then incorporating this knowledge into the education system while changing society's attitude. In societies where discussions on sex, same sex, drugs, and AIDS are taboos, people form ill-conceived biased opinions.'

'Vasudha, your thoughts are a guiding light in my life's dark alley. You are absolutely right. I have to make people understand that I am just a regular face of a day-to-day crowd. I would not only want to live, I will like to extend my helping hand too.'

'When Revati got married, she had no idea that her husband had AIDS. By the time she found out, she was the mother of an HIV Positive girl. Why don't we have blood tests before marriage? Gajendra's parents arranged this marriage to stop his wandering steps. Little did they know that in this process they condemned two more lives!

Gentle, simple Rahul had no idea that the blood he received through a

transfusion was a death warrant for him. People not only isolated him, they isolated his parents and siblings too.

So many innocent lives are suffering from no fault of their own. Instead of dreams, their eyes are filled with desperation.'

On a softer note Dhara asked, 'Was Divya your relative?'

'I interviewed her as an AIDS patient. Later friendship blossomed. Unfortunately, we think these people are just a chart to be updated. We don't want to be connected with them in any form or shape. We have created this image in our minds that only prostitutes, same-sex people, drug abusers, bad people, gets AIDS. So we put them together in a pot and tighten the lid. We justify our reasons to wash our hands off them. From Divya, I learned that nobody deserves to die of AIDS. She made me

realize that this disease does not differentiate its preys; it just throws its net like a cruel hunter upon any of us. When we realize that any one of us can be a victim, perhaps then we will drop our blinded biasness.'

Vasudha's voice was filled with highly charged emotions which drenched Dhara from head to toe.

Dhara said with determination, 'Vasudha, I am with you. I have decided not to lose a moment. Even if I die, I will be useful for somebody else. When the seed buries itself in the ground, only then does the off-shoot opens its eyes above the ground. By destroying itself, the seed gives birth to trees, fruits and more seeds.'

Vasudha clenched Dhara's hand. A fist has been formed. Vasudha's and Dhara's fingers, though weak individually, were powerful, joined together.

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