

A Journal of  
**Mahatma Gandhi**  
**Antarrashtriya**  
**Hindi Vishwavidyalaya**

**hINDI**

LANGU AGE  
DISCOURSE  
WRITING

Volume 6  
October-December 2011

Editor  
Mamta Kalia



ज्ञान शान्ति मैत्री

Published by  
Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

**Hindi : Language, Discourse, Writing**

A Quarterly Journal of Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya

Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

Volume 6 Number 4 October-December 2011

R.N.I. No. DELENG 11726/29/1/99-Tc

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Editor : **Mamta Kalia**

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**Cover Design** : Vazda Khan

**Editorial Office :**

A-73, Lajpat Nagar-I

New Delhi-110 024

Mob. : 9212741322

**Sales & Distribution Office :**

Publication Department,

Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya

Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

Gandhi Hills, Wardha - 442 005

**Subscription Rates :**

Single Issue : Rs. 100/-

Annual - Individual : Rs. 400/- Institutions : Rs. 600/-

Overseas : Seemail : Single Issue : \$ 20 Annual : \$ 60

Airmail : Single Issue : \$ 25 Annual : \$ 75

**Published By :**

Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha

Publication in charge : Dr. Birpal Singh Yadav, e-mail : bpsjnu@gmail.com,

Phone : 07152-232943/9272132803

Circulation in charge : Mr. Dan Singh Negi, e-mail : dansnegi@hindivishwa.org

Phone : 07152-232943/9665145282

All enquiries regarding subscription should be directed to the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha

**Printed at :**

Ruchika Printers, Shahdara, Delhi-110 032

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## LANGU AGE DISCOURSE WRITING

October-December 2011

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## Editor's Note

*In our previous issue of July-September 2011, we highlighted Rupert Snell's views on Shrilal Shukla's Rag Darbari. Little did we know that it was like bidding farewell to Shrilalji, the distinguished doyen of modern satire and irony in fiction. Rag Darbari holds a unique rank in Hindi by being a point of departure among modern classics. Shrilal Shukla passed away on October 28, 2011 leaving us a legacy of his creative genius.*

*A natural curiosity arises about a writer's art and craft of fiction. Yesteryears abound in tales of artless authors who wrote with the ease of a glider. They had the reader lapping up all they wrote like a hungry cat. Quite a few survived and an equal number were drowned in the ocean of oblivion. With the development of time and education, a greater awareness towards art and craft was created and practised. The author revealed an attitude to his tools of creativity. He became more conscious towards the logic of his narrative. He devoted better attention to his plot, theme, characters and environment. It was not sufficient to merely satisfy his reader's curiosity but also to evoke his visual imagination and appease his analytical mind. Thus long narratives were replaced with shorter descriptions and natural dialogues. The Hindi novel and short story have passed through many stages of development to come to their present form.*

*Bhuvaneshwar, Shrilal Shukla and Amarkant are milestones of their times, though very different from one another. Bhuvaneshwar is full of passion and fury and an abiding sense of the absurdity of life. Like Bernard shaw, his outbursts denote his personal chaos. We carry his short story 'The Wolves' that reveals that struggle for survival is the ultimate motive of life. He doesn't waste time in portraying parental emotion or filial relationship. Even then this short story conveys its own intensity.*

*Shrilalji was more successful as a novelist and his short stories lost to the fame of his first novel.*

*Our writer in focus is Amarkant, the Bhartiya Jnanpith awardee for the year 2009. He holds a unique place in Hindi literature by virtue of his steady sustenance*

in the field of creative writing. Amarkantji is one of the very few post-fifties' writers who has achieved greater creative effect through his constant focus on social reality and small-town incongruities. Amarkant does not waste time in depicting what he doesn't know. You will not find scenes of metropolitan life in his short stories and novels. He is the master of the lower middle class kasba culture. His style is simple yet lucid and his art is cautious yet invisible. The given short stories 'dopahar ka bhojan' and 'Deputy Collectory' are two of the many other masterpieces by him where small details draw up the devastating picture of scarcities and human concern. These short stories traverse their time and remain ever relevant to society.

Other short stories by Govind Mishra and Vandana Rag portray two different aspects of human experience coloured by time and trauma.

Memoirs make up an important part of Hindi writing and we have Ravindra Kalia's anecdote about the immortal progressive poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Ranjana Argare brings us another poet Shamsher Bahadur Singh's self-narrative in graphic detail.

Among poets we have Vishnu Nagar and Jitendra Srivastava whose poems cover a variety of locales and moments to suggest life lived in all its shades. The painter poet Kuber Dutt had sent us his discourse on Kailash Vajpeyi's long poem sometime back. The process of translation and revision took longer than usual time. We are carrying the article in this issue. Sorry Kuber Dutt, we were late while you were in a hurry to leave on October 2 this year.

*Manoj K. C.*

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## THE WOLVES

Bhuvaneshwar

Translated by  
Jai Ratan

“What do I care for a wolf?” Kharu Banjara (gypsy) said. “Just show me one. I can kill it with one blow of my *lathi* (stick).” I was inclined to believe him. He knew no fear though he was touching seventy and looked his age, being a bit faded and decrepit. He talked convincingly and I had to take him at his word.

Perhaps his real name was Iftkhar, or something akin to that. But he was popularly known as Kharu, as if this shortened name was glued to his body. His eyes were cold, almost frozen, and under his thick white moustache, his mouth was cruel like a mousetrap.

He had settled his score with life. Death seemed to have refused to own him. Even so, having spat on Time, he was lingering on. Without caring for whether one thought well or ill of him, he never told a lie. Even if the truth made the other person squirm. Perhaps, he just wanted to show how bitter the truth could be.

Kharu had told me this story. I can't tell it to you in the same unfeeling manner in which he had narrated it to me. But I can vouch for it being a true story, Every word of it.

“I don't stand in fear of anything except wolves,” Kharu said. “Not one wolf, not four wolves but a whole pack of them. They come out in lots of two hundred, or three hundred in winter nights.

Even all the things of the world in their full abundance are not enough to satisfy their hunger. Nothing on earth can face and annihilate the horde of these devils. People say a lone wolf is a coward. Far from it. A wolf is not a coward, even when alone. It is only wary. If you think that a fox is a crafty animal, you know nothing about wolves. Have you ever seen a wolf on the prowl? Out hunting an antelope? It does not play-act like a lion. It does not show-off like a bear. It just bounces once-only once like a ball and makes a deep cut in the antelope's thigh. Then it falls back and follows the antelope from its trail of blood till it reaches the place where the antelope has collapsed due to loss of blood. Or, adopting another strategy, it jumps and tears the abdomen of an animal even if it is three times its size and then it clings to its victim's abdomen. The wolf is a brave and clever animal. It never tires. Our pedigreed bullocks can race our gypsy carts at greater speed than horses. But when they smell a wolf they don't run away. They get so scared that they remain rooted to the place where they are. No four-legged beast can run faster than a wolf.

"Now listen. I was passing through Gwalior Raj territory on my way to Ieen. It was freezing cold and the wolves had come out in hordes. Our cart was overloaded and heavy. I, my father, the old man Giristi and three gypsy lasses, fifteen or

sixteen years old, were in the cart. We were taking the girls of Pachaha."

What for?" I asked.

"Do you think we were taking them for *mujra* (public dance)?"

"Stupid, it was to sell them off... Gwalior gypsy girls are short, soft and plump and in great demand by the people of Punjab. They fetch good prices there. These girls are no doubt saucy and smart but they are rather heavy of body. We had only one gypsy cart driven by three bullocks faster than horses.

"We had set out from our habitation early in the morning and wanted to catch up with the party that had gone ahead of us, before evening. For our protection, we had two bows and a muzzle loading gun. The bullocks were in good spirits and were going at a fast pace. We had already covered a distance of about ten miles.

"The old man turned round and said, "Khare, there are wolves."

"What do you mean, wolves," I said. "If there were wolves wouldn't have the bullocks become restive?"

"The old man shook his head. "Khare, I'm sure there are wolves. About ten miles behind us. Our bullocks are tired. We have yet another fifty miles to go. I know these wolves. Last year they had eaten up some prisoners. Only the prisoners' handcuffs and the soldiers' guns were all that were



left. Load your gun.”

“I tested my bow by stretching its string and clicked the gun.

Everything was in order.

“Inspect the gun powder keg also,” my father said.

“The powder looks old,” I said. “That’s all I have.”

“The old man started abusing me.

“I ferreted through the whole cart, turning everything upside down. The new gun powder keg was nowhere to be seen.

“My father also made a frantic search for it. ‘You must be telling a lie,’ he said. ‘I had given you a new powder keg. I clearly remember it.’ He dug his elbow into my back. ‘Let me once reach the city,’ he said in a threatening voice. ‘I’ll take you to task. I’ll flay you alive.’”

“The last word had hardly come out of my father’s mouth when the bullocks suddenly stopped. Then they panicked. Lifting their tails they broke into a run. I heard a sound coming from miles away. It was a faint sound like that of stormy wind passing through the ruins.

“The wind,” I said scared....

“They are wolves!” My father gave me a contemptuous look.

He tugged at the reins of the bullocks. They required no prodding or thrashing. They had smelt the wolves and were running

like mad. I saw a black speck in the far distance moving forward slowly. In a flat barren desert terrain one can see for miles around. I saw that the speck was slowly moving forward like a cloud. The old man said, “As soon as they draw closer shoot your arrows at them. Mind you, not a single arrow should go waste. Unless you want me to pull out your heart.” The three girls clung against each other and burst into tears. ‘Stop it!’ I warned them. “One more sound and I’ll throw you out.”

“The wolves were advancing fast and our cart was almost flying over the rugged stony ground. The wolves! The old man let go of the reins and taking up the gun put it on the ready. I picked up my bow. I was capable of shooting down flying ducks in the dark. And my father! Allah would forget to commiserate with the man at whom father took aim, such a sure shot was he. Bang! He shot down a wolf four hundred yards away which was running ahead of the pack. Then he made a somersault with the agility of an acrobat. And then one more, this one also like an acrobat. The bullocks were still running like mad in front of the cart. The foam from their mouths was falling on our faces like rain. And they kept bellowing, like gypsy women, aping buffaloes in heat. With every moment the wolves were gaining on us, devouring the fallen wolves in their flight or just leaping over them. My father who had taken the gun from the old man

had rested its barrel upon my shoulder. (I have still its burn marks on my neck). I also felled sixteen wolves with sixteen arrows. In turn, the old man had shot down ten wolves with the gun but the horde had kept advancing.

“Here, take the gun,” he said to me. “I must attend to the bullocks.” Perhaps he was under the impression that the bullocks could run still faster. But he was wrong. No bullocks could ever run faster than that.

“I was a good marksman and could handle a gun as expertly as a bow. But it was a rusty country-made gun. It took the girl, five minutes to load the gun. Anyway, she was a good girl. She would load the gun for me, I would take aim and fire and a wolf fell. In this way I shot down ten more wolves. I never missed. Bang, bang, bang! went the gun till the powder was finished at last. The wolves too seemed to have lost some of their ferocity by now.

“I said, ‘They are falling back’.

“The old man laughed. ‘Its a small matter for them,’ he said.

‘They can’t accept defeat so easily.’

“Even when I am dying I would proclaim to the world that there is no marksman even in seven Banjara countries to match Kharu” my father said.

“My father had become very jovial

in his old age. He was always full of laughter.

“So the wolves were falling back. Perhaps they had found something to eat.

“Srp! Srp! Srp! the whip fell on the bullocks’ backs, making them run faster and faster. But after a lapse of five minutes, we again found the wolves chasing us! Now there was only a distance of two hundred yards separating us.

“Suddenly the cart got a jolt, spun around and then coming back to the track started racing. This was considered to be the best cart among the Banjaras; holding the pride of place against other carts. With the luggage thrown overboard the cart had become light as a flower. For sometime we felt that we were outdistancing the wolves. But not for long. Soon they were again upon us.

The old man said, “Untether one bullock.”

“What?” I said astounded. “How can two bullocks pull our cart?”

“All right, in that case throw out a girl.”

“I pounced upon the fatter of the three girls and taking her in my arms, swung her out of the cart. She fell to the ground with a thud. Oh God, she was a gypsy girl from the Gwalior region. Given sharp teeth she could have fought with the wolves on equal terms. First she ran after the cart, cursing us loudly. But then realising that it was futile to run, she spun round

and caught an oncoming wolf by its legs. But it was no use. Suddenly she vanished from sight as if she had fallen into a well. Becoming still lighter the bullock cart raced on. The wolves had again started giving chase.

“Throw out the other one too,” the old man ordered. But I objected. “Are we out on a joy-ride that we should feel so harried? Why not get rid of a bullock instead?”

“I released a bullock... Lashing its back with its tail, it ran away bellowing. The pack of wolves changed its direction and chased the bullock.”

“My father’s eyes filled with tears. “It was a very docile bullock, a very docile bullock,” he kept mumbling.

“But we are saved,” I said in a conciliatory tone. But just then I heard the soft droning sound ...a...a...a...a. The pack of wolves had returned. “It looks like the Day of Judgement,” I remarked. I made the bullocks run faster and faster tightening my hold on the reins till blood oozed from my hands.

“But the wolves were coming up fast like onrushing water.

Our bullocks were on the verge of collapsing.

“Throw out the second girl also!” my father cried.

“Badi was the heavier of the two

remaining girls. She looked at me and I at her. After hesitating for a moment she proceeded to remove her silver earring with her trembling hands. Secretly I had taken a liking for her.

“I turned to the other girl. “Get out, you!” I said. She looked at me petrified as if she had a stroke of paralysis. I threw her out. She lay still on the ground as she fell. The cart had become still lighter and had started racing still faster. But the wolves again came on in a matter of another five minutes. The old man sighed deeply and beat his head. “What else could we do?” he said. “It’s in Banjara’s religion to beg for alms, in the bazaar. And we have had it. We wanted to get rich overnight.”

“I gave Badi a meaningful look. I said, “Will you jump out yourself or you want me to push you out?” She removed her silver ear-ring and handed it to me. Then she shielded her eyes with her arm and jumped out. The cart started flying in the air.

“Our bullocks were very tired and the next habitation was thirty miles away. I was prodding the bullocks with the butt of my gun... The wolves were back on the scene.

Perspiration was running in rills from father’s face. Let’s release the other bullock also,” he said.

“It amounts to going into the jaws

of death,” I said. “It will mean death for both of us. One of us must live-you or I.”

“You are right,” my father said. “I’m an old man, My life is coming to an end. I’m going to jump down.”

I said, “Don’t give yourself to despair. If I live I shall kill each and every wolf with my own hands.”

“You are truly my son,” my father said kissing my cheeks.”

“He took two big knives in his hands and tightly wrapped a piece of cloth round his neck.

“Wait!” he said. “I’m wearing new shoes. They would have been good for me for

the next ten years. But look, you must not wear them. One does not wear a dead man’s shoes. You sell them.”

“He pulled off his shoes and threw them in the cart. Then he jumped in the midst of the wolves. I did not look back. But I kept hearing him hollering for some time, “Here, have it! Here, have it! He did not live. But somehow I escaped with my life.”

Kharu looked at my frightened face. He laughed and then collecting his sputum in his mouth he spat it on the ground.

“The next year I killed sixty of those wolves,” he said with a laugh... But there was a hard, undefined glint in his eyes. Hungry and unclothed he stood up erect.

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**Bhuvaneshwar** (1910-1957) was a radical and non conformist short story writer and a playwright. Bhediye or The Wolves is his most famous short story. Premchand was much impressed by his genius but intrigued by his personality. Bhuvaneshwar had a streak of the absurd in his living and writing and he wrote thus much before the theatre of the absurd was born in the west. His death was as enigmatic as his life style and he left behind quite a few controversies. His plays have been collected under the title Karwan and his complete works are published by Rajkamal Prakashan. Posthumously he influenced a great number of writers. Recently Meerakant, an eminent playwright wrote a biographical drama ‘Bhuvaneshwar dar Bhuvaneshwar’ that was staged in several cities by Samanantar theatre troupe to much adulation.

**Jai Ratan** born December 6, 1917 Nairobi, veteran scholar of Hindi and English who has devoted a life time to translation. He worked as P.R.O. in a prominent business firm in Kolkata and was founder member of Writers’ Workshop. Hindi owes him a tribute for numerous prestigious English translations including Premchand’s Godan way back in 1955. He now lives in Gurgaon.

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## **DANDY AMONG FAKIRS :** **BHUVANESHWAR**

Bharat Yayavar

Translated by  
Ravi Nandan Sinha

Only the other day I was reading the special number of *Hans* on Premchand published in May 1937 and edited by Baburao Vishnu Paradkar. In that issue there are several articles reminiscing about Premchand but the one I found the most interesting— and which is also the longest— is an article by Jainendra Kumar. It is titled ‘Premchand: Maine Kya Jana aur Kya Paya’. In that article Jainendra ji writes, “Premchandji once told me a very interesting experience he had with a man. He described to me how a heartless young man deceived him and how easily he went on being deceived; this indeed is a very interesting story. At first I was surprised to hear the story and began to wonder how a man like Premchand who had such fine understanding of the subtlest shades of human character could be deceived so easily. But I also realized that what was tender in Premchandji was also his weakness. By touching that tender spot in him anyone could have manipulated him easily. And playing on that weakness in Premchandji that clever young man could easily take him for a ride. Although Premchandji himself led a very simple and parsimonious life, that young man used Premchand’s money to lead a life of such lavishness right in front of his eyes that when Premchandji woke up, he found it difficult to believe his own gullibility. He made Premchandji pay for his marriage, had ornaments made

for his bride with Premchandji's money and in his simplicity Premchandji went on doing all that. Premchandji would say to me, 'Bhai Jainendra, I still owe some money to the goldsmith. Even my wife does not know about the gold bangles that he got made for his bride and which I paid for. Now if I tell my wife about it, it will be like walking into trouble. But see, Jainendra, the fact is that he cheated me. That boy turned out to be a real cheat. Now, whenever I get some money for my stories, I have to pay back the loan of the goldsmith without telling anyone...The way that clever young man deceived Premchandji by manipulating his natural kindness would have made another man lose faith in humanity for ever, but even after being cheated, Premchandji's heart seemed to be capable of being deceived still more. There was so much of spontaneous faith in humanity in his heart.'

When I reached that point in Jainendra's reminiscences of Premchandji I paused, and for many days I kept thinking about the identity of that trickster of a young man whom Premchand gave so much affection and on whom he spent so much. Who was that young man who was so close to him? He was indeed a cheat, a swindler, and a petty actor—but how charming and how talented! Who was that young man? For many days this question kept haunting me, and I was disturbed. And suddenly, I remembered his name—Bhuvaneshwar Prasad!

This is what Premchand really was!

Today there are any number of writers who would stop talking to you or, sword in hand, would attack you in anger if they do not like something you say or do. Because he had an anarchical personality, most contemporary writers boycotted Bhuvaneshwar but still, there were some well-meaning writers also who were affectionate to him. Among such writers, Premchandji was the first man who gave Bhuvaneshwar a place in *Hans* and also wrote a long review of his book when it came out, on the strength of which Bhuvaneshwar could continue his journey of literary creativity. Premchand published Bhuvaneshwar's first one-act play titled 'Shyama: Ek Vaivahik Vidambana' in the December 1933 issue of *Hans*. Again, in the March 1934 issue of *Hans*, another one-act play of his named 'Ek Samyahin Samyavadi' appeared and in the same year came his next one-act play called 'Shaitan'. Premchand's decision to publish these three one-act plays in *Hans* was responsible for the acceptance that Bhuvaneshwar received in the literary world. He collected three other one-act plays— 'Pratibha ka Vivah', 'Rahasya Romanch' and 'Lottery'—in one volume called 'Karwan' and which came out in 1935. Bhuvaneshwar wrote an introduction to the volume on 30 March, 1935 when he was staying in Prayag. The book was published in the month of April and Bhuvaneshwar went to Kashi to present a copy to Premchand. Premchand wrote a very long review of the book which was published in the May 1935 issue of *Hans*. Bhuvaneshwar has written the

prologue and epilogue to 'Karwan' in an entirely new style, a style that expresses his remarkable concepts in an aphoristic form.

'Karwan' by Bhuvaneshwar is his only collection of one-act plays published in his lifetime; no other book by him was published either in his lifetime or after his death, though he continuously wrote one-act plays, stories, poems and essays, which remain scattered in various magazines. He was often talked about in the literary world and his place as a pioneer of one-act plays was assured in the history of Hindi literature.

Bhuvaneshwar was born in Shahjahanpur in 1910. He received his B.A. English Honours in that town itself. Even as a student he had acquired a considerable mastery over English and was practicing writing in Hindi and Urdu. He was well-versed in the plays of George Bernard Shaw. He has himself admitted that Shaw's influence can be seen on a scene in his one-act play 'Shaitan'. For some time, he was also influenced by Freud and D. H. Lawrence. Apart from these writers, the profoundest influence on him was that of Oscar Wilde. In 1933, he left Shahjahnpur and moved to Allahabad for higher studies. There he became a close friend of Sajjad Zahir, a young Urdu writer who was also a barrister. In November 1932, Sajjad Zahir brought out a volume in Urdu entitled 'Angaare' in which besides his own work, there were four stories by Rashidjahan, Ahmad Ali and Mahmud Zafar and a one-act play. The stories of 'Angaare'

exposed the stagnation, superstitions, rot, and stench in the Muslim society and marked the beginning of a new artistic perspective in Urdu literature. This is also the volume which is considered to be a source of inspiration to progressive writers in Urdu. This collection created a great deal of controversy and the government of the United Provinces banned it in March 1933. In those days Sajjad Zahir was staying at 38 Canning Road in Allahabad. Raghuvir Sahay Firaq, a professor in Allahabad University, and Ahmad Ali often had their sittings at his house. Bhuvaneshwar too would frequently be present at those meetings. He made two more friends in Allahabad — they were Shivdan Singh Chauhan and Shamsheer Bahadur Singh. These two were then doing their M.A. On 12 February 1936, Premchand had come to Allahabad to take part in a function of the 'Hindustani Academy'. On February 14, there was a meeting in the house of Sajjad Zahir in which the decision to form the Progressive Writers Association was taken. Fundamentally, the association was guided by the vision of the writers published in 'Angaare' and the primary inspiration behind it was Premchand. Only within a month or so, the association became an active platform for Hindi and Urdu writers in Allahabad and very shortly, its branches were opened in many cities. On April 10, the association organized a grand conference. As a young writer, Bhuvaneshwar too participated in it. Whoever met Bhuvaneshwar in that conference was more terrorized than

impressed by his talent. After the conference of the Progressive Writers Association was over, Bhuvaneshwar stayed on in Lucknow for many months. By then, he had become a friend of Ramvilas Sharma who also lived in Allahabad. Ramvilasji was doing research and was living alone. Bhuvaneshwar Prasad often went to see him.

Often Bhuvaneshwar had heated discussions with Ramvilas Sharma. Despite temperament that abhorred any kind of discipline, there were certain qualities in Bhuvaneshwar that made Ramvilasji hold him in great affection. Remembering those days, that is, the days in 1936, Ramvilas Sharma has written, "There was a young man named Bhuvaneshwar who was often seen with Premchand, Firaq and Sajjad Zahir. In height, he was shorter than even Premchand. He had a good knowledge of English and Urdu, and he was exceptionally proficient in impressing with his wit the students and professors in the university. For some time, he bragged about having been selected for the ICS but claimed that he did not join the service in order to serve the cause of literature. He would borrow books from his friends and then would sell them to a second-hand books' shop or to a shop buying old things. He was not ashamed of asking his acquaintances to lend him four annas or eight annas He remembered some dirty folk songs and sometimes, when he had the time, he would sit on a mat in my room and beating time with a little bell tied round his ankle he would sing those songs

to me and Narrotam Nagar. I would tell him—you are a neurotic; how can you be concerned with progressive writing? Bhuvaneshwar would reply—a neurotic is a progressive writer shot through with hope."

Such was the personality of Bhuvaneshwar! He had created for himself the image of a man without values, something that people often found difficult to digest. He wanted to live a life of scandal and notoriety. Bhuvaneshwar, who was a cheat, a deceiver and a drunkard, revered Premchand the most but he also considered it his duty to cheat even him. He wanted to become in Hindi literature what Oscar Wilde was in English literature. Because he had such exceptional literary talent, Premchand, a skilled story-teller capable of exploring the intricacies of the human character, was so impressed by him that he wrote in the beginning of his review of 'Karwan': " 'Karwan' marks the beginning of a new trend in Hindi literature, in which there is a beautiful blend of Shaw and Wilde. Till now our drama has been based on incidents, characters and stories. Though some problem plays were written portraying superstitions or new and old thoughts, everything had been presented in a raw manner in which action is at the centre but never before anyone has offered such a penetrating, philosophical and intellectual perspective on life and its various happenings, which is the basis of the new drama."

These sentences endorse the fact that Premchand was greatly impressed by



Bhuvaneshwar. Bhuvaneshwar wanted to be Shaw and Wilde at the same time. For Premchand, his being a Shaw was a good thing but he wanted him to give up some of those things for which Oscar Wilde is known. In conclusion he has written, "Bhuvaneshwar Prasad has talent, depth, pain, and the power to express something succinctly and he has the verbal skill to touch the heart. I wish he had used these qualities in his writings like 'Ek Samyaheen Samyavadi'. Can he not follow the good qualities of Oscar Wilde while eschewing Wilde's faults of character?" Premchand has not reviewed any other book with the kind of enthusiasm he has shown while reviewing 'Karawan'. He has not praised any other writer in the same manner as he has done Bhuvaneshwar. His words are brimming with his affection and love for Bhuvaneshwar. He only wanted Bhuvaneshwar to eschew the weaknesses of Wilde and move forward in his career. But that was not to be. Bhuvaneshwar had adopted the negative aspects of human behaviour in his life more than he had done in his writings and was moving in that direction. Leaving behind relationships and family he came forward to work for the cause of literature and was the creator of such wonderful, fresh and original works that have still not lost their sheen. Apart from the six one-act plays collected in 'Karwan' the following are his important one-act plays—'Mrityu', 'Hum Akele Nahin' and 'Sawa Aath Baje' published in 1936; 'Strike' published in 1938 in *Hans* in its special number on one-act plays and

has been mentioned by Ramchandra Shukla in his history of Hindi literature. In the same year in *Hans* itself in the fifth issue of 'Usar' and 'Rupabh' was published his play named 'Adamkhor'. In 1940 he published a one-act version of a play by Gogol under the title 'Inspector General'. In 1941, a magazine named 'Vishwawani' published his one-act play entitled 'Roshni aur Aag'. In 1942 his first one-act symbolist play called 'Kathputlian' was published. In 1945, he published his 'Photographer ke Samne' and in 1946 came his most discussed one-act play named 'Tambe ke Keere'. 'Itihas ki Kenchul' in 1948, 'Azadi ki Neev' 'Jerusalem' and 'Sikandar' in 1949 and 'Akbar', 'Changez Khan' and his last one-act play 'Seenkon ki Gadi' were published in 1950. These are the immortal one-act plays of Bhuvaneshwar which have often been anthologized in various text books and have been mentioned under the genre of the one-act play in different kinds of histories of Hindi literature. All historians are unanimous in acknowledging that Bhuvaneshwar is responsible for starting the trend of writing one-act plays in the new style. It is to be noted that the first collection of one-act plays in Hindi was by Jaishankar Prasad which appeared in 1929 under the title 'Ek Ghoont' and the second such collection was 'Karwan' published in 1935. Thus, it has been recorded in the history of Hindi literature in clear terms that Bhuvaneshwar has made a unique contribution to the genre of one-act play in Hindi.

In 1936, Bhuvaneshwar was living in

Lucknow. There he often met Nirala. It was in those days that Nirala had his photograph taken in which he wore nothing above his waist and that was the photograph that appears on the cover of the current edition of 'Nirala Rachnawali'. This photograph was published in the March, 1936 issue of 'Madhuri' with the first part of his long essay 'Mere Geet Aur Kala' (which was serialized in three issues of 'Madhuri'). Sitting in the library in Kaisarbag in Lucknow, Bhuvaneshwar read that essay by Nirala very carefully and found himself greatly impressed by Nirala's photograph. Bhuvaneshwar found that half-nude photograph of Nirala very interesting and thought that like him Nirala too was another unique, honest, and brilliant personality in Hindi who was tearing down the walls of genteelness, prejudices, and moral values, and was struggling to find a place in literature. In the beginning of the month of October Bhuvaneshwar went into the office of 'Madhuri' and told its editor Rupnarayan Pandey that he wanted to write an essay on Nirala but he wanted the payment immediately. Rupnarayan Pandey agreed to that. Sitting in the office of 'Madhuri' Bhuvaneshwar wrote a wonderful essay on Nirala at the outset of which he gave a snatch of conversation he had with Nirala and then put forward his very original ideas on him, "Nirala is a poet of the Bengali culture; the culture that was born out of the mannerisms of Tagore and which, in its final analysis, traces its roots to Kabir, Blake and others like them. Again and again, he has called

Pant a protégé of Tagore but the truth is that Nirala could never accept Tagore. He is a poet of mannerisms; he is poet of metaphor and simile and even when he is at his best he is only a skilled craftsman. Perhaps he is great also, but he is not a great poet. Nirala does not have the power of Tagore; in 'Juhi ki Kali', 'Tum aur Main' etc. the meaning lacks finesse. Nirala is hardworking, a man of self-respect and large hearted; there is hard work behind his poetry, there is study in it, artistry in it, tenderness in it, but he does not have that without which he is neither Browning nor Blake, he is merely Nirala. He can produce, but he cannot create. He cannot internalize life. As a story writer Nirala is not fit for serious discussion."

This essay was published in the November, 1936 issue of 'Madhuri'. It was widely discussed by Hindi writers. It was the first piece of criticism in Hindi that had been written in that kind of language. At that time, Nirala was living in Leader Press in Allahabad with Vachaspati Pathak. It was in those days that his 'Ram ki Shakti Puja' was published in the weekly 'Bharat'. Nirala felt very depressed and was really disturbed by Bhuvaneshwar's essay on him. Nirala felt that it was a violent attack on his creativity. In a letter written to Ramvilas Sharma Nirala asked him, "Have you seen that essay on me by Bhuvaneshwar published in 'Madhuri'?" Then on 8th November he informed Ramvilas Sharma that he was sending a reply to 'Madhuri'. He was also sending the reminiscences of Bhuvaneshwar by

two other people. Then on 9th November in a letter he wrote to him, "I have sent my reply to Shree Bhuvaneshwar Prasad. I have only written the introduction; I had to write it because he had written about me. My friend Pandit Vachaspati Pathak and Balbhadra Prasad Mishra M.A. (a research scholar in Allahabad University like you) have written about him. I have sent both those letters, which are very pointed. Read them when they are published there. They will prove to be very painful for him." In the end he offered a suggestion to Ramvilas Sharma, "I think it won't be wrong if you write a literary essay and also try to gain some knowledge of English and French from Bhuvaneshwar Prasad. I can say with certainty that he can discuss morbidity with you for a long time. In my reply to him, I have mentioned you saying that I wrote 'Kala ki Ruprekha' while staying with my scholar poet friend Ramvilas Sharma."

That angry essay of Nirala that threw Bhuvaneshwar out of the world of literature was published, along with the comments of Vachaspati Pathak and Balbhadra Prasad Mishra, in the December 1936 issue of 'Madhuri'. In that essay Bhuvaneshwar was described as a cheat, a liar and a braggart. Till that time, Bhuvaneshwar felt that he was occupying a lofty position because of his talent, his progressive views, his new literary sensibility and his rebellious temperament but for the first time 'Kala ki Ruprekha' diminished his stature considerably. He looked helpless and despondent. He replied to Nirala, which

was published in the January 1937 issue of 'Madhuri', "If this is Nirala's vindication, then it is in bad taste; and if it is his revenge, then it is very hard-hearted...I say it again that in this context, by and large, I have repeated his words only and at that time that issue about Burns had not been settled...Now about that thing about my not being an M.A. or an I.C.S., I plead guilty to that charge; many times earlier too I have done so. Circumstances beyond a man's control make him commit bigger sins than this; they have also made me commit sins. But it is cheap to use this fact against a writer in order to tarnish his character while debating a literary issue. Well! If I am made a taboo all my life because of this charge, what do I care?" In the end he wrote, "Now so far as I am concerned, this chapter is closed for me. If I am really dead, I would like to share this couplet of Ghalib with Niralaji, Mishraji, Pathakji and other gentlemen—

*Gar nahin hai mere marne se  
tasalli na sahi*

*Imtahan aur bhi baaki ho to yeh  
bhi na sahi.*

(If even my death does not bring satisfaction to him, let it be so.

If there are more tests left, then  
let even this pass.)

In his biography of Nirala, Ramvilas Sharma has described this incident in some detail. Whenever I read this incident, I am reminded of Phanishwarnath Renu's short story 'Aginkhor' in which Aginkhor

ji is a character created out of traits taken from two young rebel writers of Patna and which had created a somewhat similar controversy. In 1972, when that story was published in 'Saptahik Hindustan' those two young writers (Alok Dhanwa and Jugnu Shardeya) had had a heated discussion with Renu in Patna Coffee House and had accused him of writing a story based on their character.

Concluding his description of that incident, Ramvilas Sharma writes, "Bhuvaneshwar was truly an artist. When he found himself caught, he came out with the truth. He had little capital of his own. He could only polish with his wit material that he had borrowed from others. But he had more talent than many I.C.S. officers, promising M.A. degree holders and professors. That was the reason why he was able to deceive people of that class for such a long time, and when the reality came to be known, even then there were five or ten people still left who swore by his talent. The fact that Nirala was disturbed by his essay on him and had to bring in two more people with him to reply to Bhuvaneshwar was Bhuvaneshwar's success."

Strange stories continued to be narrated about Bhuvaneshwar, who was a vagabond, a deceiver, an undependable person, a cheat and a trickster. He would often be seen roaming about in the streets of Allahabad, Lucknow and Kashi by several writers and then he would disappear for a long time. When he somehow managed to have his needs taken care of, he would

be seen sitting in some library, reading and sometimes writing something. At times, he would be seen in some magazine's office. His writings continued to appear in magazines at irregular intervals. Indeed, there was so much talent in Bhuvaneshwar that he could have secured a job, could have got married; and leading a settled life he could have created a great deal of literature. But he led an indisciplined life by choice. When he died, there was no one to perform his last rites, nor was there anyone to take care of his writings. They remained scattered here and there in the same way as his life was broken down to pieces. When Rajendra Yadav's *Hans* reprinted his lost story "Bheriye", once again the attention of contemporary writers was drawn to the creativity of this talented writer; but after that once again there was an all pervading silence on him.

Bhuvaneshwar's talent earned him the respect of Ramvilas Sharma but the man who had a much greater respect for him was Shamsheer Bahadur Singh. In January 1958, when the news of Bhuvaneshwar's death was reported, Shamsheer was badly shaken and then he wrote a poem on Bhuvaneshwar which was published in 'Vasudha', a magazine edited by Harishankar Parsai. Later Shamsheer included that poem in his 'Kuchh aur Kavitaen' (1961) with some changes. But Ramvilas Sharma preferred the first version. When he wrote an essay entitled 'Shamsheer Bahadur Singh: Gahre Beehad Sanskaron wala Kavya-vyaktitva' on the poems of Shamsheer in

“Dharmayug’ (27 June 1965), he asserted that the version of the poem published in ‘Vasudha’ was the better one. This is indeed an immortal poem on Bhuvaneshwar offering a new perspective on his life and art.

Shamsher has presented a lively and realistic portrait of Bhuvaneshwar and at the same time he has also expressed his affection for him in a touching manner. In his final days, Bhuvaneshwar often lived among the foreign tourists in Banaras. Once in a while, when he came to Allahabad,

he stayed with Shamsher. Many of his unpublished works were lying in Shamsher’s house. After 1950, he lost the will to get his works published. In those days, Shamsher had got some of his works published in the magazines and newspapers of Allahabad. Bhuvaneshwar had written considerably in English too. Shamsher had published the Hindi translation of an English poem by Bhuvaneshwar in the joint third and fourth issues of ‘Nikash’, published in January 1957 and edited by Dharmavir Bharati and Lakshmikant Varma.

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**Bharat Yayavar** born 1954, is a well known critic and editor in Hindi. He has edited Mahavir Prasad Rachnavali and Renu Rachna Sanchayan. He has done extensive research work on Renu. Some of his famous published works are, alochna ke rachna purush Namwar Singh, Kavi Kedar Nath Singh, Renu Ka Jivan and Renu ke Sath. He has also written antariksh vigyan ki vikas yatra. His poetry collections are Main hun yahan hun, haal behaal and bechaini. He lives in Hazaribagh.

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## THE MIDDAY MEAL

Amarkant

Translated by  
Jai Ratan

The cooking done, Siddeshawari put out the fire and resting her head between her knees she abstractedly gazed at her toes and at the ants crawling on the floor. Suddenly she realized that she had been feeling thirsty for a long time. Getting up groggily, she poured out water from the pitcher and gulped it down in one draught. The water hit her empty stomach. 'Hai Ram!' she groaned and lay down on the bare floor.

She lay there for almost half an hour before she began to feel normal. Feeling a little revived, she sat up, rubbing her eyes and her gaze settled on her six year old son, Pramod who was sleeping naked on a broken string cot in the portico. He was so thin that his collar bones and ribs could be seen clearly. His limbs were withered and limp like stale cucumbers and his belly bloated like a pot. Flies swarmed around his open mouth.

She got up, covered the boy's face with a soiled old blouse of hers, and then went to the door and gazed into the lane listlessly. It was past noon. The sun blazed. But for a few passers-by now and then, rushing along firmly holding umbrellas, or wet towels loosely tied round their heads, the street was quite deserted.

She kept standing there for a long time till signs of impatience began to creep over her face. She looked anxiously at the burning sky and then craning her neck forward glanced up and down the

lane. There he was at last! Her eldest son, Ramchandra. He came shuffling along towards the house.

Galvanized into action, she fetched a pitcher of water and put it by the side of the wooden platform in the portico. Hurrying back into the kitchen she placed a low stool in the eating place which she had freshened up with a coat of earth. She had just turned round when Ramchandra stepped in.

He slumped down upon the platform and then, stretching himself on it, lay inert like a dead thing. His face was flushed, his hair dishevelled. His worn-put shoes were thickly coated with dust.

Siddheshwari did not dare go near him and watched him from a distance like a stricken deer. When he did not stir for ten minutes she got alarmed.

'Son! ...Son!' No reply. Fear-stricken she held her palm near his nose. He was breathing evenly. She touched his brow. Thank God, he had no fever. At the touch of her hand, Ramchandra opened his eyes and looked dully at his mother. Sitting up, he took off his shoes and went to wash his hands and feet. He came back walking like an automaton and sat down on the wooden seat.

'The meal is ready,' Siddheshwari mumbled uncertainly.

'Shall I serve it here?'

Ramchandra got up. 'Has Father eaten?'

'He should be here any moment,' Siddheshwari said, rushing into the kitchen.

Ramchandra sat down on the wooden seat. He was about twenty-one years old, tall, thin, of fair complexion, with big eyes and crinkled lips. He had passed his Intermediate Examination last year and was now apprenticed as a proof reader in a local daily.

Placing the plate before him, Siddheshwari sat down beside him and started fanning him. Ramchandra eyed his food without appetite : two chapatis, gruel-like thin daal, some fried gram.

Swallowing the first morsel, Ramchandra said, 'Where's Mohan? Oh, what terrible heat!'

Mohan was Siddheshwari's second son. He was eighteen, and was preparing privately to sit for his High School Certificate. He had been away from home a long time today and his mother did not have the foggiest idea where he was.

Siddheshwari did not feel like coming out with the truth. 'He has gone to a friend's house to study,' she lied. 'A bright lad, he is always at his studies and talks of nothing but books.'

Ramchandra did not say anything. He took another morsel, washed it down with a long draught of water and resumed eating. He broke his chapati into small bits and chewed them ruminatingly.

Siddheshwari gazed at him with anxiety and then said in a fumbling voice, 'Any news?'

Ramchandra turned his expressionless eyes towards his mother and then lowered his head. 'No, nothing,' he replied dryly. 'When the time comes, all will be well.'

Siddheshwari did not pursue that subject. The heat had increased. In the sky over the narrow courtyard two lonely clouds hung like the sails of a boat. In the street an ekka grated past, creaking. Inside, the sleeping child breathed wheezily.

'Has Pramod eaten?' Ramchandra asked.

Siddheshwari gave Pramod a sad look 'Yes, he has eaten,' she said.

'Did he cry?'

'No, he didn't cry today,' Siddheshwari lied again. 'A clever child. Today he wanted to go to your office. A boy like him...'

Her voice trailed off as if something had clogged her throat. Yesterday Pramod had demanded sweets and had kept on crying till he fell asleep, for more than an hour and a half.

Ramchandra gave his mother a surprised look and began eating a little faster.

Only a small bit of chapati was left in the plate. Siddheshwari made a pretence of getting up. 'I'll get you another chapati,' she said.

'No, no,' Ramchandra brushed away the suggestion with a gesture of his hand. 'I'm full,' he said. 'Even this is more than I can cope with, really.'

'Have half a chapati,' Siddheshwari persisted.

'Do you want me to get sick?' Ramchandra said, peeved. 'Must you always have your way. I would surely have taken another chapati if I were hungry.'

Leaving one morsel in his plate, he looked at the pitcher. 'Get me some water please,' he said.

His mother got up to fetch water. Ramchandra drummed the bowl with his fingers and then rested his hand in the plate. Picking up the last piece of chapati from the plate he eyed it for a second and put it into his mouth very gently as if it were a betel leaf.

The younger son, Mohan, suddenly appeared on the scene. He straightaway proceeded to wash his hands and feet and went directly to the wooden seat. Swarthy, narrow-eyed, he had a pock marked face. He too was thin like his brother but was not as tall, He looked grave and solemn beyond his years.

'Where have you been, son?' his mother asked him, placing the plate of food before him. 'Your brother was enquiring about you.'



‘I didn’t go anywhere. I was here all the time,’ Mohan answered gruffly, struggling with a big mouthful of food which he was finding hard to swallow.

Sitting some distance from him, Siddheshwari fanned him. ‘Your brother is full of praise for you,’ she said as if talking in a dream. ‘He says you are very intelligent and never get tired of books and devote all your time to studies.’ She looked at Mohan as if she had been caught in the act of stealing.

Mohan looked at his mother, gave a hollow laugh and kept eating. By now he had finished one chapati, three-fourths of the lentils and most of the fried gram.

Siddheshwari did not know what to do. She always felt uncomfortable in the presence of her grown-up sons. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She turned away her face.

Mohan had almost finished his meal.

‘Son, another chapati?’ she asked as if coming to herself. Mohan looked towards the kitchen as if it were a place full of mystery. ‘No, I think I’ve done with it,’ he said in a feeble voice.

‘No, son, just have one more chapati’, Siddheshwari almost pleaded. ‘Be a good boy. Your brother took an extra helping.’

Mohan looked at his mother closely. ‘I’ve finished,’ he said. Then he launched forth on an elaborate explanation,

deliberating over each word in the manner of a teacher explaining a complex problem to a pupil. ‘In the first place I’m not hungry,’ he said secondly, your *chapatis* are too coarse. I find them difficult to swallow. They taste like I don’t know what. But if you insist I’ll have a little more of the lentils. It tastes good.’

At a loss for words, Siddheshwari filled Mohan’s bowl with lentils.

Putting the bowl to his lips, Mohan was slurping its contents when Munshi Chandrika Prasad came in, his shoes dragging on the broken floor. With God’s name on his lips, he sat down on the wooden platform and crossed his legs. Siddheshwari pulled her sari over her forehead. Mohan gulped down his lentils and picking up the pitcher made a hurried exit.

Two chapatis, a bowlful of lentils and fried gram. Like an old cow chewing the cud, Munshi Chandrika Prasad lingered deliberately over each morsel. He was about forty-five but looked much older. His flesh hung flabbily over his body and his bald head shone like a mirror. His tattered vest was only a shade better than his dirty dhoti.

Raising the bowl to his lips he sucked noisily at the lentils ‘I don’t see the older one around,’ he said.

Siddheshwari was feeling out of sorts but didn’t know why. Something seemed

to be gnawing at her heart. 'He has just gone out after finishing his meal,' she said waving the fan more briskly. 'He said it would not be long before he started earning your name is constantly on his lips. You are like a god to him, he says.'

Munshiji's face lit up. 'Did he? That fool of a boy!' Looking embarrassed, he gave a thin smile.

His words acted like magic on Siddheshwari. 'Ramchandra is no fool' she began to mutter like a victim of hysteria: 'He is a clever boy. In his past life he must have been a Mahatma. Mohan holds him in high regard. Today he was telling me that his brother is highly respected in the city, especially among the learned. And as for himself, he dotes on his younger brothers. He can put up with any indignity in the world for the sake of his brothers, He cannot bear to see Pramod suffer in any manner.'

Munshiji was licking the lentils from his fingers. His gaze travelled to the alcove in the wall and he smiled. 'Yes, Ramchandra has a sharp mind,' he said, though as a child he was given to too much playing still in spite of that whatever lesson I set him, he did full justice to it. For that matter, all the boys are intelligent. Pramod, for instance...' He broke into a loud laugh.

After having finished one and a half chapatis, Munshiji was now trying to send down his throat a very dry morsel and finally succeeded in swallowing it with

a generous quantity of water. After a brief bout of coughing he resumed eating.

They fell silent. They could hear the intermittent hooting of a flour-mill drifting down from a distance, and from the acacia tree, the persisting cooing of a dove.

Munshiji seemed to have retired into his shell. It appeared as if he had taken a long vow of silence. Siddheshwari did not know how to deal with this situation. She wished to talk to him about many things, to ply him with questions and to take command of things as in the past with assertive boldness. But now her mind was filled with vague fears.

'The rains are late this year', she said at last to get over the oppressive silence. It may not rain at all.'

'The flies seem to have increased,' Munshiji remarked in a toneless voice, glancing around him.

'Any further news about Uncle?' Siddheshwari asked in an anxious voice. 'He was not too well.'

Munshiji sat gazing intently at the grains of fried gram as if he intended to talk to each one of them individually, and then he said, 'The marriage of Gangasaran's daughter has been arranged. The boy is an M.A.'

Again they fell silent. Munshiji was now at the end of his meal and was picking the last of the grains of gram, one by one, like a monkey.

‘Have another chapati,’ Siddheshwari coaxed him. ‘I implore you in the name of our first-born. There are plenty of chapatis left.’

Munshiji looked at his wife like a criminal in the dock and then furtively in the direction of the kitchen. ‘Chapati?’ he said like an adept at an old game. ‘Oh, no, I’ve already had my fill. Besides, it’s chapatis and salted things all the time. I’m fed up of them. But since you insist I won’t refuse you. I’ll take a chapati. Is there any *gur*?’

Siddheshwari told him that there was still some *gur* left in the pot.

‘Then prepare some cool syrup for me,’ Munshiji said enthusiastically. ‘It will take away the taste of the meal. And it’s good for the digestion too. The same food morning and evening...’ he laughed mirthlessly.

After Munshiji had finished eating, Siddheshwari took his used plate and sat down on the kitchen floor. She poured

lentils from the pot into her bowl, but the bowl did not fill up. A small quantity of fried gram was left in the frying pan. She drew the pan near her plate. There was only one chapati left: thick, coarse, half-burnt. She was going to take it when she suddenly remembered Pramod asleep outside. Her eyes rested for a while on the child and then she proceeded to divide the chapati into two equal parts, one of which she put aside. Filling her pitcher with water she started eating but she had hardly taken the first morsel when suddenly tears began to roll down her cheeks.

Flies buzzed in the room. A dirty patched-up sari hung on the clothes line in the courtyard. The two older boys were nowhere to be seen. In the outer room, Munshiji was lying prostate and snoring peacefully, as if he had not lost his clerk’s job in the Rent Controller’s office one and a half months ago and was not faced with the ordeal of going in search of a job that afternoon!

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**Amkant**, born 1925 is a very prominent, progressive author whose short stories and novels have influenced an entire generation of readers and writers. Very recently the prestigious Jnanpith Award for the year 2009 has been announced for him. Prior to this he has received Soviet Land Nehru Award, Sahitya Akademi Samman and Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan’s Samman. This short story ‘dopahar ka bhojan’ whose translation we are carrying is marked by a deep insight into the lower middle class struggle for survival. He lives in Allahabad and devotes all his time to reading and writing.

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## DEPUTY COLLECTORY

Amarkant

Translated by  
Jai Ratan

Sakaldeep Babu returned after one hour. As he entered the house he peeped into the outer room, opening into the vestibule. There was no client waiting for him. Even his court clerk was missing. He went in. Standing before his room he kept blinking like a monkey for a while and then looked in the direction of the kitchen. His wife, Jamna, was sitting grim-faced in the kitchen, lips pressed, cutting vegetables. Forcing a smile, he went in and watched his wife at her morning chore. Full of aplomb, he looked a picture of confidence which was not the case with him an hour ago.

That was how it had all started. In the morning, after finishing his bath, Sakaldeep Babu had just returned to his room when his wife placed two *jalebies* in a plate before him for his breakfast. He started eating without even acknowledging the presence of his wife in the room.

Jamna stood silent for a minute and then giving her husband a perfunctory glance said: "For the last three or four days I find that Babua is feeling very much out of sorts."

Sakaldeep Babu gave his wife a sharp look and his eyebrows shot up.

Jamna grimaced. "Yesterday he said that this year the number of recruitments to the Deputy Collector's posts is going to be larger than in other years. But he is afraid of asking you about it. The date for sending the examination fee will expire in four days."

Sakaldeep Babu's eldest son, Narain, was known as Babua in the house. About twenty-four years old, during the last three years he had sat for many selection examinations, knocked at the doors of MLAs and tried all sorts of strategies but had failed to get a job. Twice he had also sat for the competitive examination for the Deputy Collector's post, without success. Now he could avail of only one more chance, his last, which he did not want to miss. He was sure that this time there being more than the usual number of vacancies, he stood a very bright chance if he put in real hard work.

Sakaldeep Babu was a lawyer. But for sometime past his practice had alarmingly dwindled. Due to advancing years his body had lost its agility and his voice its old fire. Even his gait had become heavy and ponderous. So, not many clients knocked at his door. And out of those who came, many went away disillusioned. So Sakaldeep Babu would go to the court with God's name on his lips. He was lucky if he managed to pick up a case or two to enable him to keep the family going.

He flew off his handle when he realised the implication of Jamna's suggestion. His face became hideous with rage. "How am I concerned?" he barked at his wife. "Why can't you leave me alone? You people are determined to take away my life. Now listen. Let there be no mistake about it. I'm just not concerned about it."

Jamna kept silent. She knew her husband's ways. To get into tantrums had

become second nature with him.

Sakaldeep Babu sat silent for sometime. "Where's the guarantee that the Babu Saheb is going to make it this time?" then he said gesticulating wildly with his right hand. "He couldn't get an ordinary clerk's job in the Accountant General's office and now he has the cheek to aspire for a Deputy Collector's post. Ask him what special talent has suddenly descended upon him from heaven that he hopes to get into the civil service? A third class B.A. who smokes day and night and knocks about from place to place to amuse himself—I would like to know what is so very special about him that it would bring him success this time? These competitive exams. have swept thousands off their feet. And as for this fellow — he wouldn't even find his bearings. Besides, it's a question of fate. Some are just not cut out for such prize jobs. Tell me. if all the dogs are invited to a feast who would remain behind, to lick the pot?" Sakaldeep Babu curled up his lips.

"One shouldn't utter such evil words about one's own son," Jamna said in a soft voice. "Tell me, what's wrong with my son? He's one among thousands. And remember, perseverance has a hundred cutting edges. I've a hunch Babua is sure to make good this time. He's our first-born. If we don't help him; his heart would break." Her voice became strained. Turning away her face she tried to hold back her tears.

Seeing Jamna crying, Sakaldeep Babu lost his temper. "If you are so fond of

your son why don't you make him sit in your lap?" he cried and then made a face. "I say you're at the root of all trouble. You don't want to see me alive. The day I breathe my last your chest will swell with joy!" He started panting.

Jamna went away but Sakaldeep Babu kept sitting in the room, his face still tense with anger, his head bent to one side. Then he picked up an old newspaper from the floor and started reading it as if nothing had happened. After fifteen minutes he got up, brushed down his dhoti, put on his black coat, now shiny with age, and picking up his walking stick he went out of the house.

After an hour when he returned his wife was still in the kitchen, looking very sullen.

Sakaldeep Babu coughed. "Listen," he said. "Here, take these one hundred and fifty rupees. About a hundred will be gone on Babua's fees. Keep the remaining fifty safely. They may come in handy sometime."

Jamna stretched out her hand and took the money wordlessly.

"Give hundred rupees to Babua," Sakaldeep Babu said in a hearty voice. "Ask him to send the fees today. Yes, he's sure to succeed. Babua will become a Deputy Collector. There's no reason why he shouldn't. Ram! Ram! There's nothing to worry."

The next day, contrary to his habit, Sakaldeep Babu got out of bed earlier than usual. Rubbing his eyes he went and stood

in the vestibule. The others were still asleep and he could hear the sound of their breathing and the humming of the mosquitoes around their beds. It was still dark. There was a faint light emanating from the outer room. He tiptoed in the direction of the outer room and peeped in. A lantern stood on the table and Narain was studying with great concentration under its light. For sometime Sakaldeep Babu kept looking at his son, his eyes big with surprise as if he had chanced upon some great secret. Then he smiled and retracing his steps went into the courtyard and stood there cheerfully scanning the sky.

There were still stars in the sky and a fresh breeze blowing through the trees and passing over the tiled roof poured into the courtyard. Sakaldeep Babu felt exhilarated. Good that his son had sent the examination fee, he murmured to himself. He filled the buckets with water and went for his bath.

Sakaldeep Babu was a little over fifty. Short and lean, his face was covered with a web of thin lines and his flesh hung loosely from his neck and arms.

Although he had gone about his job very quietly yet his wife woke up and was surprised to see him standing in the courtyard, gazing at the sky.

"Why have you taken your bath so early?" she asked in an anxious voice. "You could have caught a chill."

"Sh! Sh! not so loud!" Sakaldeep Babu put his finger on his lips. "Babua is studying."

He returned to his room and lighting the lantern, started reading the Ramayana. When he got up after finishing his morning worship it had become quite bright. Jamna was in the storeroom, busy with pots and jars. Sakaldeep Babu knew what she was busy about. He stood in the door watching her scooping rice from a jar.

“Narain’s mother, don’t you say your prayers these days?” He smiled awkwardly.

Sakaldeep Babu had taken his religious initiation from a Sadhu Baba of holy Prayag and had hoped that his wife would also adopt the Baba as her guru. But as they say, women are an unpredictable lot. Influenced by a distant relative she had instead joined the Radhaswami sect. Sakaldeep Babu was furious and was never tired of picking holes in its followers. When he asked her the question she thought he was alluding to her religious waywardness.

“What have I got to do with puja and the prayers?” she said in a querulous voice. “We’re destined to be consigned straight into hell. Those who have to go to heaven should worry about praying.”

“Don’t be angry,” Sakaldeep Babu said in a soothing voice. “You must do puja every morning. I’m told that if one worships Radhaswami with a pure heart one’s wishes are granted.” Sakaldeep Babu’s lips trembled and he smiled. “From tomorrow, like me, you also must make it a point to get up at four.”

To avoid any controversy he beat a hasty retreat, but then as if he had suddenly

remembered something, he spun round.

“What are you giving Babua for breakfast?” he asked.

“Just what I give him every morning,” Jamna said in a toneless voice.

“It’s all right. But prepare some *halwa* also for him. Home made food is always good and wholesome. And get him some fruits.”

“I don’t have the ghee for *halwa*. And as you know *halwa* costs money.”

“But you’ve those fifty rupees, haven’t you? It’s food that sustains the body, if the boy doesn’t eat properly how will he prepare for his examination? Don’t worry about money. I’m still alive.” Sakaldeep Babu laughed out loud.

He made to go. “And look!” he said, suddenly turning round. “Tell the other boys not to make a noise in the outer room. It distracts one’s mind from studies. If they don’t listen I’m going to give them a good hiding.”

Sakaldeep Babu used to spend the morning hours in the outer room, waiting for his clients. That morning he put his table and chairs under the peepul tree in front of the house. The passers by were surprised to see him sitting in the open and he told them that he felt stifled in the room due to the oppressive heat. He made a face like a circus clown and then laughed as if he had made a big joke.

In the evening on returning from the court he placed four rupees in Jamna’s hand and also handed her two apples and

five packets of cigarettes.

“Cigarettes?” his wife looked at him in surprise. “What am I to do with these packets?”

“Smoke them!” Sakaldeep Babu laughed. “They are meant for you.” Then he suddenly became grave. “Give them to Babua,” he said. “Cigarettes, it is said, improve one’s concentration.”

Jamna was astounded. Her husband was very much against smoking and he had often taken Babua to task for smoking. She thought the old man had gone off his head.

After studying the whole day Narain had gone out for a walk. Sakaldeep Babu quickly changed into his house clothes and picking up the broom went into Babua’s room. He swept the floor, smoothed out the tablecloth, rearranged the hooks and was making his bed when Jamna looked in. “Have you nothing better to do?” she asked him amused.

“It’s no imposition,” Sakaldeep Babu said in a hearty voice. “I’m doing it of my own sweet will.” Then he looked away to hide his embarrassment.

On returning from the court in the evening it was Sakaldeep Babu’s habit to have a bite of something and then rest for a while. Often he dozed off and did not wake up before eight. Even if he did not sleep he would keep lying in bed. But today he had spent the evening cleaning Babua’s room.

“Your tea is waiting,” Jamna said and went away.

After cleaning the room Sakaldeep Babu came into the courtyard for a breather.

“One should attend to everything oneself,” He gave a hollow laugh, “One can’t rely on servants all the time.”

Slowly the days wore on. Narain was studying hard.

For the past few days Sakaldeep Babu had started visiting the Shiva temple in the evening. Situated about a mile from his house, it was a popular temple and was most of the time crowded with devotees. Returning from the court, Sakaldeep Babu would clean Narain’s room, have a bite and then make for the temple, where he spent most of the evening, returning home at ten. That evening when he sat down in the kitchen to eat, he suddenly stopped chewing and asked his wife: “Did you give the fruits to Babua?”

On his way back from the court he had bought a few oranges and had specifically asked his wife to give them to Narain. Though she had kept the oranges out of sight in a safe place, their twelve-year-old son, Tun Tun had spotted the oranges and made short work of them when no one was watching.

“What!” Sakaldeep Babu cried when Jamna told him about the mishap. His mouth fell open, showing particles of food resting on his tongue.

He got up in a huff without finishing his meal. “Eat, eat!” he cried. “You and your darling Tun Tun! Enjoy yourselves!” He barged out of the kitchen and withdrew



into his room.

Not satisfied with the rebuke he had administered to his wife, the next morning he sent for Tun Tun after doing his puja. Since the boy could not render a satisfactory explanation for the pilferage and stood before his father like a deaf-mute, Sakaldeep Babu gave him a few slaps and asked him to go.

The examination for the Deputy Collectorship was conducted by the Public Service Commission at Allahabad. The date of the examination was fast approaching. Narain had been working relentlessly for it, devoting eighteen hours to his studies every day. He wouldn't allow any distraction to stand in his way. He studied on and on, hour after hour. That was his only obsession now. They kept his room clean, made his bed, gave him good food to eat, made with pure ghee. To fortify his brain against mental strain he was served *halwa* and milk in the morning and fruits at night. They didn't even overlook his need for cigarettes and saw to it that his stock was replenished before he ran out of it.

The day Narain was scheduled to leave for Allahabad happened to be an off-day for the court. Sakaldeep Babu went out for a walk very early in the morning, spending sometime in the Company Garden. When a stroll in the garden failed to divert his mind he went to the riverside from where he made it to his friend, Kailash Behari's house and had a long gossip session with him. As the train time approached

he quickly returned to his house.

The train was to leave at nine. Narain ate a hasty breakfast and left for the station along with his father.

A few of Narain's friends had come to the station to see him off and were now standing on the platform chatting with him, awaiting the train's arrival. Sakaldeep Babu stood apart from them, looking unconcerned, as if he didn't even know Narain. When the train arrived he watched Narain's luggage being put into a compartment and then slipped away to the Wheeler's book-stall.

The owner of the bookstall knew Sakaldeep Babu. "Where're you going, Vakil Saheb?" he asked.

Sakaldeep Babu gave him a complacent smile. "My son is going to Allahabad," he said. "To sit for the Deputy Collector's exam. He'll reach there by the evening. He's got a seat in the compartment next to the inter class coach. His friends have come to see him off. I thought an old man like me would be an intruder among them. They must be talking of exams and such like things which are foreign to my mind. So I came here." He again smiled.

He lingered before the telegraph office, listening to the tick-tock of the messages being transmitted. Moving away from there he planted himself in front of a big wall time table and casually ran his eyes over the arrival and departure time of the various trains. But all the time he was keeping an eye on his son's compartment. When the bell announcing the departure of the

train clanged he rushed up and stood behind Narain's friends.

Narain quickly got down from his compartment and touched his father's feet.

"May God bless you son. May your wishes be granted," Sakaldeep Babu mumbled under his breath.

The train was about to start when Sakaldeep Babu's right hand suddenly went to his coat pocket. He took out something from the pocket, took a step forward and then suddenly stopped. His face flushed and he started looking sideways.

The engine whistled and the train started pulling out of the platform. Sakaldeep Babu looked nervously around and then firmly clutching the small packet in his fist ran forward to give it to Narain. Being short and lean, he could not run fast enough as he threw out his legs outlandishly, making a sharp, staccato sound on the platform. Luckily, the train had not yet gathered speed and he drew level with the compartment in which his son was travelling and who was now leaning out of the window anxiously watching his father's laughable antics.

"Son, eat it in good faith," Sakaldeep Babu said, thrusting the small packet in Narain's hand. "It's Lord Shankar's prasad."

The packet contained some sugar *batashas* of which he had made a votive offering to god Shiva and had forgotten to give them to his son.

The examinations over, Narain returned home. He was satisfied with his performance and assured his father that unless some-one relegated him into the background through back-door methods, he was sure to be called for an interview.

People were reluctant to believe him; he had said the same things on his two previous attempts. According to them, the candidates who made the grade bore a different stamp. However, Narain's prediction came true. He was asked to present himself for an interview before the Public Service Commission at Allahabad. The news spread in the whole town. It was after many years that a candidate from their town was being called for interview.

In the evening when Sakaldeep Babu returned from the court, he stood in the courtyard and laughed as if it was a part of some ritual. While hanging his coat on the peg he said to Jamna: "To be called for interview is no small matter. You can take it from me that he'll be in."

"We must wait for the result." Jamna gave a miserly smile.

"You doubt it even now?" Sakaldeep Babu laughed. "Babua is sure to get in this time. He must. If he doesn't I'll shave off my moustache. The senior lawyer, Ambika, Babu has already congratulated me about it. He said that being called for interview tantamounts to virtual acceptance. Well, he should know. People have

been making a beeline to me, so profuse are they with their congratulations. Now you're as good as the mother of a Deputy Collector."

He then took off his shoes and comfortably settled down on the charpoy.

"What have you and I to do with this rigmarole?" he said. "We shall retire to a corner and recite *Ram-nam*. But no, I'm still good for many years. I must continue my practice." He puffed out his cheeks and twirled his moustache.

"But Babua won't agree," Jamna said. "He felt sorry that you had to work beyond your capacity- specially considering your age. He said he could do nothing about it except watch helplessly."

"Did he say so?" Sakaldeep Babu asked in an eager voice and then started looking out of the door.

Fifteen days later Narain went to Allahabad to appear for the Interview. His interview, he thought, went off very well and he returned home full of hopes. He told his friends that while other candidates' interviews lasted only fifteen minutes or so he was grilled for full fifty minutes and had answered all their questions with confidence. His friends were convinced that this time he had hit it off.

In the evening when Sakaldeep Babu returned from the court, he saw Narain standing outside the door chatting with his friends. That he had been interviewed for fifty minutes, they considered a good augury.

Sakaldeep Babu went in and said to

his wife: "Did you mark it? Babua looks every inch an officer. Just now I saw him standing in the midst of his friends. He looks so different from them. His way of talking, his gestures — they are so dignified. These things are glaringly absent in his friends."

"This afternoon Babua said he would soon give me a ride in a car," Jamna said.

"Did he really say so?" Sakaldeep Babu asked. His eyes suddenly became dreamy.

The result was expected to be declared in about a week's time. Sakaldeep Babu remained busier than before. He did his puja as devoutly as before, but its duration had increased.

He visited his friends more regularly and spent a long time gossiping with them. He would veer round the discussion to a point where his friends were forced to accept the fact that Babua was as good as made. He would even force himself on Narain's friends when they came to his house and try to talk with them at their level. Narain would resent his father's intrusion and look away angrily.

"Narain's mother!" one morning he said dramatically to draw everybody's attention. "Last night I had a dream that Narain Babu had become a Deputy Collector!"

Jamna was sitting in the kitchen verandah picking the rice. Nirmala, Narain's wife was sitting by her side, her face covered with a veil.

"Did you have the dream in the morning hours?" Jamna asked, steadily fixing her

husband with her gaze.

“Of course, yes. I had the dream in the morning. Do you think I’m so foolish as to talk to you about an evening dream? I saw that the result was out and Narain Babu’s name was there. I don’t clearly remember at what position his name occurred. But it was quite high up on the list.”

“*Ammaji*, morning dreams generally come true don’t they?” Nirmala asked her mother-in-law in a low voice.

It seemed Sakaldeep Babu had heard Nirmala’s question for he turned round and asked: “Who’s speaking? Deputy Collector’s wife?” And he laughed good-humouredly.

The next morning Sakaldeep Babu again told his wife that he had had a similar dream in the early hours of the morning.

Jamna looked at the tip of her nose. “A morning dream always comes true,” she asserted. “When Nirmala was with child I dreamed in the morning hours that a goddess from heaven was descending in our courtyard, carrying a baby boy. I knew at once that it would be a son and a son it was.”

Taking a cue from his wife, Sakaldeep Babu said excitedly: “If the dream were baseless it wouldn’t have occurred twice — and both the times in the morning.”

As usual Sakaldeep Babu followed the daily routine: he did puja, attended the court, met people and whiled away a good deal of his time knocking about in the town. When he had nothing to do he would

make a demand for food. He had become quite a glutton and was hogging all the time. He would ask for *roti* and *gur* or baked potatoes. At other times he would demand rice and curry and then plain savouries. If nothing was readily available he would chuck a few pinchfuls of sugar into his mouth. Time would hang heavy on him.

Owing to indiscretion in food coupled with constant nervous tension he fell ill. He had fever accompanied with diarrhoea.

The people at home were worried. “Didn’t I warn you repeatedly not to exert yourself so much?” Jamna complained in a tearful voice. “But you never cared.”

But Sakaldeep Babu made light of her complaint. “It’s just a slight indisposition” he said. “I could have gone to the court, but gave up the idea, thinking that the day is not far off when I shall stop my law practice for good.”

“There will be time enough to think of those things,” Jamna said, peeved. “At present our worry is how to make both ends meet.”

“Oh, how you talk! Everybody falls sick one time or the other. I’m not a clod of earth that I’ll disintegrate. Had my illness been serious would you have found me like this?” A thin smile spread across Sakaldeep Babu’s face.

In the evening, his lawyer friend, Kailash Behari came to enquire after his health. While leaving he said that he had not seen Narain around.

“He must have gone out,” Sakaldeep

Babu said putting up a false facade of resentment. "You know his friends don't leave him alone."

"I knew from the beginning that this lad would make good in life," Kailash Behari said. "One can make it out from his bearing."

"Narain looks like a *rishi* of ancient times," Sakaldeep Babu corroborated his friend's statement by putting on a serious expression. "In the beginning, we had named him Pannalal. But one day a mahatma happened to visit our house in the course of his peregrinations and told me to change his name from Pannalal to Narain. The mahatma it seemed, had discerned some kingly qualities in the young boy. Of course, things were quite different in those days. But these days kingly qualities amount to holding executive powers. That way, a Deputy Collector is nothing short of a king." He tried to smile but instead started panting.

The day on which the result was scheduled to be announced happened to be a Sunday. Sakaldeep Babu recited the Ramayana, finished his breakfast and then went to the temple. Usually he spent the larger part of the morning at temple. That morning, he was at the temple at eight. The train which brought the newspaper in which the result was published arrived at ten.

For a long time Sakaldeep Babu kept sitting on the temple steps to rest. As he went up into the temple, Nandlal Pandey who was grinding sandal paste asked him about Narain. This was a signal for Sakaldeep Babu to launch forth on a graphic recital

of Narain's experiences as an examinee and his glorious prospects in the government's service. When he finished, the sun had risen quite high. He prostrated himself before the idol of Lord Shiva, made a circumambulation of the temple and rang the bell. He was just coming out of the temple when he ran into the school master, Jang Bahadur Singh who looked at him in surprise. "Vakil Saheb, aren't you going home?" he asked. "The result is out."

Sakaldeep Babu's heart missed a beat. "When?" His lips trembled. He gave a wan smile.

"By the ten o'clock train," the school master replied. "Narain Babu's name is there. But..." He suddenly fell silent.

Sakaldeep Babu's heart started pounding hard. He pursed his tongue over his dry lips. "Is there anything special?" he asked in a faint voice.

"No, there's nothing special. His name is there all right. But it's a little lower down. There are ten vacancies and his name is sixteenth or seventeenth on the list. But there's nothing to worry about. Some boys are selected for the Collector's cadre and there are some who fail to pass the medical test. Narain Babu may yet get in."

Sakaldeep Babu's face suddenly lost colour and he felt as if he was going to collapse on the ground. He stood there with bowed head like one taxing his mind to recall something. Then he started walking swiftly. After walking a few yards he accelerated his pace still further. But he

soon felt tired and stopping under a neem tree, tried to regain his breath.

Reaching home he fell on his charpoy. He could only utter, "Narain's mother!"

The house seemed to lay under a swoon, The smoke emanating from the kitchen had filled the whole house, as if causing further suffocation.

Suddenly Jamna appeared in the room as if from nowhere. "Are you all right?" she asked in an anxious voice.

"I'm all right," Sakaldeep Babu replied testily. "Where's Narain?"

With a toss of her head Jamna indicated towards the outer room.

Sakaldeep Babu gave a wan smile. "Everything will be all right," he said in a reassuring voice "Did you tell Babua about the loan of six hundred rupees? I had warned you not to breathe a word about it to him."

"I'm no fool," Jamna replied. "Once or twice he tried to probe but I parried his questions. He then asked me to stop buying fruits and extra milk for him and I told him not to worry his head over these small matters."

Sakaldeep Babu smiled and got up from his cot. His face looked worn. His eyes had sunk into their sockets and his moustache looked splayed like the fibres of an unserviceable broom. He proceeded towards the outer room on trembling legs.

Standing in the vestibule, he craned his neck to peer into the room which lay in semi-darkness, the door and the window opening onto the street being

closed. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw Narain's body outlined against the charpoy, his legs stretched out, his hands clasped over his chest.

Sakaldeep Babu walked into the room like a thief, his face unnaturally bright with excitement. He stood leaning over the table for a while, as if examining its contents and then suddenly squatting on his feet he slid forward towards Narain's charpoy. Reaching the charpoy he slowly rose on his feet and with bated breath surveyed Narain's prostrate body. His eyes closed, he lay perfectly still. Suddenly a fear gripped Sakaldeep Babu's heart. Alarmed, he took his left ear near Narain's mouth and listened. He beamed. Narain was breathing evenly.

As Sakaldeep Babu tiptoed away from the charpoy, he found Jamna standing in the door.

"What's the matter?" she asked, looking utterly confused. "Why are you behaving in this strange manner? You gave me the fright of my life."

With a gesture of his hand Sakaldeep Babu cautioned his wife not to make any noise and stepping out of the room he signed her to follow him into his room.

Back in his room, Jamna looked quizzically at her husband.

"Babua is sleeping!" Sakaldeep Babu said in a voice bursting with joy.

He couldn't speak any more. There were tears in his eyes. He started looking the other way.

## TEACHING HINDI AS A COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE : PERSPECTIVES AND INNOVATIONS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

G. Gopinathan

### 1. Introduction

Sanskrit has been the chief source language of Indian culture from ancient times. Pali had been popular in many parts of Asia from Buddhist times as the language of intellectual, scientific and religious discourses. Tamil is an important source language for understanding the synthesis of Aryan and Dravidian elements in Indian culture. From the medieval period, Hindi has been emerging as a vehicle of culture and a language for contact with people. In contemporary India, Hindi is a link language for the 22 or more major regional languages. As a vehicle of culture, it represents the dynamism of vibrant Indian culture. During the great socio-cultural movements like the Bhakti movement and the freedom movement, Hindi has been a vehicle of communication for the millions. Because of the perception of Hindi as a communication language of the masses, by Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar and other leaders, it was accepted in the Indian Constitution as the official language of the Indian Union. The Indian bureaucracy is still under the dominance of English, although it is only the co-official language. As far as the people are concerned, Hindi is a “great communication language”. By analysing the trends of teaching Hindi globally, we can observe that strategies are being

evolved to teach Hindi as a communication language.

## **2. HINDI: A contact language for Asia**

Hindi is a contact language for South and South-East Asians, especially in the ports, bazaars, tourist spots and pilgrimage centres. Hindustani, or the spoken form of Hindi and Urdu, is a common heritage of the people of India and Pakistan. Linguistically, it is an advantage for better communication between people in India and Pakistan. As a result of the long historical and geographical ties, this common spoken Hindi is very well used in Bangladesh, Burma, Malayasia, Thailand and Singapore. In the north-eastern regions of India and in Tibet, Nepal and the border areas of India and China, pilgrims, traveling traders, Buddhist monks and religious missionaries have always used Hindi as a contact language. Due to the socio-cultural and historical circumstances, the spoken form of Hindi, especially Dakshini Hindi became popular in South India. In the modern period, as an after effect of the Hindi Prachar movement launched by Gandhiji, Hindi became a second language in the whole of South India. Through trade, tourism and Buddhist travel, Hindi reached Sri Lanka and Maldives. Since the Sinhalese and Divehi languages have developed from Pali, they have wonderful affinity with Hindi. Similarly, Nepali and Hindi have developed from the same linguistic stock even though Nepali has been influenced

by the Tibeto-Burman. The people of the Tarai region of Nepal speak Maithili which is an important dialect of eastern Hindi. Hindi is a common communication language for Indians and Nepalis for their socio-cultural, literary and commercial contacts. In Afghanistan, many people are familiar with the spoken form of Hindi. Hindi is also spoken in the Gulf region along with Arabic, and is playing the role of a link language for Arabic-speaking people and Indians speaking various regional (Indian) languages. In most of the South East Asian countries, spoken Hindi is used in the ports and business and tourist centres like Hong Kong.

## **3. Hindi and Mass Media**

In the field of mass communication, Hindi is a popular language in the electronic media, especially on all TV channels. In Mumbai, the hub of Indian film industry, also known as “Bollywood”, people speaking the different languages of South Asia work together to create feature films in Hindi, which have been very popular the world over. Television programmes and serials in Hindi are popular in the whole of Asia and beyond. Hindustani music and Hindi film songs are very much loved globally, especially in Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and other parts of the former Soviet Union. India and Pakistan have always experienced their unity through film music, Hindi films. Ghazals and Sufi music. The communicative value of Hindi



language is also evident in the print media, since the largest number of newspapers is published in Hindi. In the changing socio-political scenario, Hindi can play an important role in the fields of tourism, business, mass communication and literary contact. Since the audio-visual media places importance on the spoken word, the spoken form of Hindi will become more popular and acceptable in many parts of Asia. (Gopinathan 2008: 23).

#### **4. Hindi and the Indian Diaspora**

Hindi has become a prominent international language because of the Indian Diaspora for whom it is a symbol of their cultural identity. Linguistically, the Indian Diaspora has proved to be a replica of Indian society. The people of different states in India use Hindi along with English for mutual contact. Likewise, the Diaspora also uses Hindi as a link language and this process is gaining momentum. In fact, the Diaspora carried this linguistic consciousness of a Pan-Indian Hindi language in their collective mind (Gambhir 2007: 5). The Indian people who left India took their languages along with the other symbols of their culture. The Ramayana of Tulsidas has helped the existence of Hindi language as a cultural symbol among the Indian Diaspora of countries like *Mauritius*, Fiji, Surinam, Trinidad, Guyana, etc. As a result of Indians living alongside other linguistic groups of the world for a long time, the contact between Hindi and the world

languages has also intensified. Typical examples of the effect of this contact can be found in the Dutch influence on the Surnamese Hindi of Surinam and Holland, the Kaibiti influence on Fijian Hindi and the influence of French Creole on Mauritian Hindi. Thus, the spoken forms of Hindi have acquired many linguistic diversities, worldwide. As a result of the propagation of Hindi by cultural organisations of the Indian Diaspora, such as Arya Samaj, Sana tan Dharma Sabha, Hindi Pracharini Sabhas, etc., not only the people of Indian origin, but also other foreigners who came into contact with them, have been learning Hindi because of their interest in the cultural programmes and Hindi cinema. This has resulted in increasing interest in Hindi in many countries like England, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and others. During colonial times, the speakers of colonial languages tried to suppress the Hindi language in different parts of the world where there was a strong presence of Indian Diaspora. However, because of the perseverance of the people, Hindi could survive in these countries.

In countries like Trinidad, Hindi has survived only in the spoken form, i.e. as a communication language in the broken form because of the domination of English and Creole. It is a fact that most of the people of Indian origin in Trinidad have no knowledge of the written form of Hindi... The World Hindi Conferences have created an awareness of Hindi among the people

of Indian origin and the Indian immigrants. This has stimulated the teaching and learning of Hindi among the Diaspora. People are also starting to understand the need for teaching Hindi, especially communicative Hindi, to the younger generation of the Indian Diaspora for whom language can be a bridge to the forgotten culture of their ancestors. The growing interest in the society and culture of India is another reason for learning Hindi worldwide.

### **5. Teaching Hindi as communication language**

Teaching Hindi as communication language is not only linked with the spoken aspect of the language, it is an attempt to find out the linkage between language and its use in the socio-cultural contexts. Many of the European and American scholars like McGregor (1970), Gumperz (1967) and Porizka (1972) have identified the importance of teaching the spoken form of Hindi and they prepared such teaching materials. These were certainly different from the grammatical theory-oriented materials on Hindi published by earlier scholars. Even theoretical grammatical works like *Hindin kielioppi* ('*Hindi Grammar*') by Bertil Tikkanen (1991) and *Vyavaharik Hindi Vyakaran* by Zalman Dymshits (1985) focus more on the communicative aspects of Hindi grammar. Present-day scholars are trying to link the learning of Hindi with popular cultural forms like Hindi film songs, Hindi television

serials, newspapers and other culturally important activities such as the presentation of drama, presentation of Bhajan singing and the traditional type of recital of Ramayana and other poetry forms, short story reading, etc. Tomio Mizokami of Japan had even formed a troupe of his students who presented Hindi dramas around the world. In a Warsaw Hindi Workshop, the present author also experimented with dramatisation with bilingual adaptation as an effective way of teaching communicative Hindi. Tomio Mizokami has brought out a collection of 301 popular Hindi film songs with Japanese translations (Mizokami 2006). In the introduction to this book, Mizokami states that taking this book to the audio-visual laboratory of the Osaka Foreign University, the student will be able to hear any song of his or her choice. In this way, the student becomes familiar not only with the linguistic aspects of Hindi like words, idioms, sayings, etc, but with the Indian attitude, mental make-up and social behaviour. By singing and playing the Hindi film songs, the students will immerse themselves in the joys of Indian life and Indian ethos. Anjana Sandhir of the USA has also brought out such a volume entitled *Learn Hindi and Hindi film songs* (Sandhir 2004). Susham Bedi in her article on the teaching of Hindi in America has mentioned that the audio-visual programmes plus grammar-translation methods of learning Hindi are more

effective (Bedi 2007: 12). Adopting the methods followed by the American Defense Language Institute, oral proficiency is given prime importance. The aim of such learning can be developing the ability of the student for social interaction through conversation in Hindi either with their grandparents in India or following the dialogues in any social context. Her teaching through selections from television films and improvisation, video recordings and computer work can equip the student with the use of the communication language. For this purpose, the American institutes are making lab work an inevitable part of such learning. Programmes for cyber learning of Hindi are organised in many countries such as Australia and the USA. The experiments of Dr. Richard Barz of the Australian National University and the experiments of Afroz Taj through his cyber programme “A door to Hindi”, funded by the United States Department of Education deserve special mention. Intensive workshops on communication skills in Hindi have proved to be most effective. The experiments in Warsaw and Leipzig have shown that the workshops comprising native-speakers, local teachers and students with involvement in multiphased cultural activities in the workshop can be most effective *for* teaching Hindi as a communication language. In countries like Mauritius, a remarkable thing with the MGM Institute is the creative writing programme as well as the translation

programmes with Hindi-French courses. In fact, translation is the best means *of* cultural communication. Hindi being a link language and a vehicle of link literature, any programme *for* teaching Hindi as a communication language should promote the teaching of translation from the local language to Hindi as well as from Hindi to the local language. This will certainly help to have a comparative approach in studying Hindi literature. Creative approaches can help to communicate the world culture and world literature through Hindi. Translation *from* Hindi into foreign languages can help the higher learning process. A typical example is the translation *of* Premchand’s stories and the novel *Godan* into world languages. Reading the Finnish translation *of* Premchand’s *Godan*, *Pyha Lehma* (Tikkanen & Karttunen 1989) with my students *of* Hindi at the University *of* Helsinki, I have found that reading and comparing such translations with the originals is a way *of* finding the unity and diversity *of* world languages and world culture (Gopinathan 1999: 267-70). The recently held workshop at Budapest on Teaching Hindi in Central and Eastern Europe has also recommended the use of language technology and multimedia in teaching Hindi language and literature (Gopinathan 2008: 87-92).

## 6. Conclusion

Hindi is emerging as a communication language on both the national and in-

ternational level. The teaching of Hindi as a communication language needs new strategies. The spoken form of Hindi and the linkage of language and culture should be the focal points in any such teaching programme. Many experiments with the help of mass media, have been done in this field by scholars at world universities and institutions where Hindi is being taught. The Diaspora is also evolving strategies to make Hindi popular among the younger generation. Gaining experience from international experiments and the ideas that emerged in the workshop at Budapest and the World Hindi Conferences, effective programmes may be organised for teaching Hindi as a communication language on a global level. International co-operation is needed for designing multimedia teaching materials with the application of language technology.

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## CODE-MIXING IN HINDI : A STUDY

L. Thillai Selvi

### 1. Introduction:

Language contact has pervaded human history so extensively and so intensively that languages that are not composite in structure are rare. Languages come close to each other through trade, conquest, or emigration. In the Indian context, through trade and conquest Arabic, Persian, Turkish and then English have exercised a very powerful influence on the structure of Hindi. While words can be borrowed by both languages in contact, a wholesale borrowing usually takes place from the language of the dominant group.

Hindi has borrowed hundreds of words from the Persio- Arabic source and from English for meeting fresh cultural and technical needs and also for the reasons of prestige. Speakers of these foreign languages were conquerors and rulers in India. Because of different social conditions in which the contact took place, different types of linguistic influences have been exercised. Lexical items have been borrowed from all of them. This has brought about a very intricate level of mixing between the two languages.

### 2. CODE-MIXING:

When two languages come in close contact with each other on a societal basis for an extended period of time, some type of linguistic

acculturation is produced. In such a situation, bilingual speakers become instrumental in carrying elements of their own language into the other and bringing in elements of the other language into their own.

Code-Mixing is different from borrowing. While mixing is a synchronic fact of a language, borrowing refers to a historical fact. The mixed code is one of the styles for the native speakers. It is prompted in appropriate contexts for objective reasons as well as for subjective reasons. The objective reasons include social and professional, and subjective reasons include prestige and formulation of linguistic habits.

Although influence of one language over the other can be facilitated or blocked by different factors, the most important factor is the presence or absence of the empathy factor. The lack of empathy factor can block all other causes of impact from outside. The empathy on the part of Hindi speakers is at its peak and they dauntlessly weave long stretches of English into their Hindi.

In this paper we can study about the nature and extent of English mixing in Hindi's different genres as follows.

(i) For various technical disciplines, there are a number of recently coined Hindi technical terms.

(ii) Hindi Journalism.

(iii) Hindi novels and short stories.

(iv) Letters in Hindi.

(v) Hindi movies.

(vi) In the informal and semi-formal speaking styles.

## 2.1 Technical terms:

For various technical disciplines there are a number of recently coined Hindi technical terms. Their use, however is generally restricted to written treatises. In the spoken mode, very few of the Hindi terms have gained currency, and instead their English counterparts are used more often. In spoken, the English terms are not only more popular but their use sounds more natural too. Because of the non-use of Hindi terms in the spoken mode, their use in books and articles does not always trigger for readers an instant flash of meaning. As a result, in written materials, these new Hindi terms are often used along with their English equivalents given within parenthesis in front of each word. With in the field of linguistics. we can see some of Hindi words and their English equivalents given side by side:

(a) sanrachnaa (structure)

(b) niruupak bhaashaa (meta language)

(c) praaruup (model)

(d) adhikram (hierarchy)

(e) maanakiikaraN (standardization)

(f) saaravabhaum vyaakaraN (Universal grammar)

Similarly, in the discipline of animal husbandry, we found words like

- (a) abhijanan (breeding)
- (b) abhijanak (breeder)
- (c) hridaya-paridhi (heart-girth)
- (d) panjiibandhan (registration)
- (e) kiNvikaraN (fermentation)

(f) praashan-pramaap (feeding standard).

English equivalents along with their Hindi forms seem to provide the meaning instantly.

## 2.2 Hindi Journalism:

Another genre is that of Hindi Journalism. I looked up several Hindi periodicals. Although a representative example should include study of several sources, in view of the limited scope of this paper I am limiting myself to an analysis of a few pages of "India Today", a typical Hindi weekly. Its use of Hindi language in general is elegant and lucid, and also, side by side. the editors and other writers' attitude can be seen reflected in the inclusion of hundreds of English words.

A sample of English words found in the pages of the Hindi weekly is analyzed

into following categories:

(a) Words like Dr., doctor, composing, phone, recording. board, championship, T.V., copyright. agency, telephone, company which were borrowed a long time ago to represent western ideas and western products are now fully diffused in all sections of the society.

(b) Words like computer, equipment, cartoon, clinic, holiday resort, interview, share, enterprises are important words which represent modern ideas and concepts and have no easily conceivable Hindi equivalents.

(c) Proper nouns, though originally English words, are now prevalent in the Indian community: kedar complex, unit trust of India. C.B.I., central building, kilburn engineering limited etc.

(d) Words like communist, pilot, manager, design, senior, Times of India Group Magazine, are frequently used despite the fact that there are good Hindi equivalents for them like saamyavaadii, viman chaalak, prabandhak sajjaa, varishTha, Times of India samuch kii patrikaaeye respectively. Theoretically, these are possible to spare but in practice, it seems. they are not.

(e) Words like news, circulation, publishers, finished goods, unfinished goods, leather, manufacturer, intelligence bureau are being employed despite the fact that they are not as commonly known

as their Hindi equivalents are: khabar, vitaraN, prakaashak, taiyaar maal, aadhaa taiyaar maal, camRaa, nirmaataa, guptacar-vibhaag.

(f) English initials for names written in Devanagari: A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, P. Chidambaram. V.P. Singh, M.K. Narayanan.

(g) Advertisement for consumer products project their English text prominently, e.g To Open. prickly Heat powder, 200 Grams Net. Godrej cinthol luxury toilet powder.

The use of English words in categories (c) to (g) seems to be triggered by no linguistic reasons but by reasons of social advantage accruable from the mere use of the English language, a notion that has its roots in the minds of its users.

### 1.3 Hindi novels and short stories:

A number of English words have also been inducted in present day Hindi novels and short stories.

Below are given some slightly adapted examples of mixing which have been randomly culled from different Hindi novels:

1. **Competition** bhii bahut hai is peshe me.
2. aapkii **practice** to khuub huii hai.
3. tumharii **gynecologist** kaunsii hai?
4. saaraa prosiijar to mujhe nahii

pataa.

5. kyaa tujhe yahaa karaani hai **delivery?**

6. kyaa yahaa **settle** hone kaa iradaa hai.

7. aapke kaam ko priority dii jaaegii.

8. Aap mind na kare to.

The first three sentences are not easy to express in Hindi without the help of English words. For others, however, it seems that one has to be in the 'Hindi frame of mind' to express them in Hindi. It is true that authors are a part of the society in which speaking and thinking in the mixed language is increasingly becoming the norm. when it comes to pen down real life on paper the mixed language suggests itself more naturally, economically, and readily. By using the mixed code, the author also mirrors the norms of the society where mixing rules the language.

### 1.4 Letters in Hindi:

This style of using two languages and two scripts is also emerging in personal letters in Hindi. There is not only a sprinkling of English words throughout but there is also a mixture of the two scripts. Some of the examples:

1. Flat change karne kii koshish me hai. Hamaaraa **flat** bikegaa tabhii change kar lege.



2. Sab ghar vallo ne mil kar **blood donate** kiyaa.
3. Unkaa bhii **ladies** kaa **group** hai
4. Shruti ab **10th class** me hai
5. **by air** hii gayaa aur **by air** hii vaapis aa gayaa.
6. Sab aae the lekin aapko **miss** kiyaa.
7. Unhone home bhii **invite** kiyaa thaa.

### 1.5 Hindi movies

Hindi movies are also becoming live examples of the mixed language. They are mixed more than the real life Hindi English mixing, and they approximate the informal written style reflected in Hindi novels and short stories. Generally Hindi movies seem to contain more English phrases and formulaic sentences than simple English lexical items mixed in Hindi sentences. Here are some examples from the Hindi movies:

Phrases: fantastic, my God, 'oh my God, no objection, shut up, understand?

### Formulaic sentences:

May I come in? you are under arrest, shoot him, you can get out from here now.

### Sentences for emphasis:

This is not your property, we must find him.

### Lexical infusion:

feel honaa, inform karnaa, electric shock, sensory area.

### 1.6 Informal and semi-formal speaking styles:

In the informal and semi-formal speaking styles, mixing between Hindi and English has reached hideous dimensions. It goes much beyond lexicon, phrases, and short formulaic sentences. Consider the following sentences from everyday spoken Hindi.

1) **I told you** na that vo nahii aane vaalaa

2) agar aap **mind** na kare, **if you don't mind**, to ek baat kahun, may I?

3) Uskaa bahnoii, **I mean his brother-in-law**;, **Bombay** se aa rahaa hai agle **week**.

These are examples from natural speech used by English knowing Hindi speakers. This type of language mix is jelling and increasingly becoming the most unmarked style to be spoken and heard in informal situations in Hindi areas of India.

### **Conclusion :**

In the conclusion I can say that these types of mixing illustrated above are motivated by the following four factors:

(1) Lack of precise context sensitive equivalents in Hindi.

(2) Hardening of speech habits of using the mixed language.

(3) Switching between Hindi and English due to insufficient control on either.

(4) Accruing social advantage from the use of English.

For Hindi speakers, mixing English with

Hindi at the discourse level severely restricts their proficiency development in English in informal domains and in Hindi in formal domains.

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## **SOCIOLOGY OF LANGUAGES : A PERSPECTIVE FROM HINDI**

Subhash Sharma

A language is a medium of communication orally or in written form as well as a system of signs expressing collective memories with shared meanings (though some words may not connote direct and immediate meaning independently like 'vani' used along with 'pani' (water) in Hindi as 'pani – vani' in a particular context of time and place). Broadly speaking, Sanskrit was the official language in ancient India, Persian was the official language in medieval India and English was the official language in British India. After Independence (in 1947) since 1949 Hindi has been declared as the official language of Union Govt of India with English as an associate language (which has grabbed almost the central position and thrown Hindi to the margin) and different states have adopted either Hindi (in North) or regional languages (in East, West and South) as the official state language. Some North Eastern states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya & Manipur have adopted English as the official language because there could not be a consensus on adopting one of the local languages as official language or the assimilative practices by Christian Missionaries under the hidden agenda or due to the pressure of modernisation through English language.

The Hindi critic Hazari Prasad Dwivedi believes that literary creations were pursued in Sanskrit language for six thousand years but, in due course of time, Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavir had challenged

the monopoly of Sanskrit by preaching in local dialects/regional languages like Pali and Prakrit respectively. Those who opted 'Buddhism, took three vows in Pali : Buddham sharnam gachchhami, Sangham sharanam gachchhami, Dhammam sharnam gachchhami'. The ancient emperor of India, Ashoka the Great, had taken all steps to popularise people's language like Pali for knowledge, religious preachings and administration. However, it is also a fact that in ancient India itself significant writings of two main branches of Buddhism – Hinyan and Mahayan – were done in Sanskrit and semi-Sanskrit languages. Actually the Chinese traveller Huentsang took 593 Buddhist books with him and many of these were written in Sanskrit. Thus though Pali language competed with Sanskrit in the beginning, observes H.P.Dwivedi, subsequently Sanskrit became victorious. Similarly latest Jain books were also written in Sanskrit. He is also of the view that even during the medieval period, though Persian became the official language covering the court and political system, Sanskrit remained the 'language of mind' (thoughts, ideas) and regional languages remained the 'languages of heart'. Once upon a time it was believed in ancient India that twelve years were necessary for one to be able to 'listen Sanskrit grammar' but nowadays language is secondary and idea is primary. On the one hand, Hindi enriched its vocabulary by adopting a lot of words from Sanskrit

but, on the other hand, it adopted day-to-day's practically used dialects in a big way. Kabir had rightly observed: ' Sanskirat hai Koopjal, bhakha bahta neer' (Sanskrit is like the static water of a well, while Hindi is like the ever-flowing water of a river, hence purer). Thus Hindi expanded and took along the masses in its journey of about two thousand years. Some Hindi critics and English writers have opined that Hindi is not the language of ideas. But this allegation is falsified with the publication of numerous quality books on different themes in Hindi every year. Our contention is that in India there is no monopoly of Sanskrit or English as a 'language of mind'. In the whole world most of original books are published often earlier in French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Russian etc. than in English. Russian scientists were the first to travel in the space and their teaching-learning process was facilitated purely in Russian language. Japan has developed through Japanese languages as the medium of education. Thus it is widely accepted now that language is a vehicle of expression of ideas and therefore the myth of original and great ideas associated with a particular language is falsified. Hindi is now the language of mind, heart and soul together. The popularity of Hindi cinema beyond India in almost all the continents, opening of Hindi Deptt in Western universities, and translation from and into Hindi are noteworthy.

Second misconception prevalent for quite a long time was that language is internally linked with a particular religion. For instance, Latin and English have been associated with Christianity, Sanskrit with Hinduism, Arabic and Persian with Islam, Pali with Buddhism, Prakrit with Jainism, Hebrew with Jews and so on. But this is not true because Latin language has been in vogue since much before the birth of Christianity. Further many Hindus even in ancient India could not read and write Sanskrit either due to illiteracy or due to prohibition to learn it or due to lack of will. In addition, many Muslims don't know Persian or Arabic, rather speak Urdu or other regional languages of India, or English. Moreover, many Buddhists (in Maharashtra, Srilanka, Nepal, Indonesia, Vietnam etc) do not know Pali language, rather they speak Chinese, Nepalese, Tibetan, Singhalese, Bhasha Indonesia, Vietnamese, Marathi, Hindi, Bhutanese, Burmese etc. Actually Sanskrit unites most of Indian languages through its vast vocabulary. Sanskrit word 'neer' becomes 'tannir' or even 'neer' is used in Tamil and 'neer' or 'vellam' in Malayalam, and remains 'neer' in Hindi. Deepam is common for both Sanskrit and Malayalam. For new areas of knowledge like computer, space, environment and earth sciences, Sanskrit proves easier for coining new terms and concepts to express innovative ideas. Two epics in Sanskrit, The Mahabharat and The Ramayana are great epics with high creative

ideals first and foremost and pious Hindu religious texts later because of three reasons:

(a) when these epics were composed, their authors did not talk of a particular Hindu religion – rather they talked of universal 'Dharma', referring to the moral duty for the entire humanity (Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam' – the entire earth as a family);

(b) they did not criticise other religions (Islam and Christianity were not in existence then but small religious faiths existed in ancient Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Greece, China and other civilizations);

(c) Hinduism is not an organised religion associated with a single pious book, a hierarchy of priests, and mono-god- e.g. Christianity has the bible as 'the' religious book & Christ as the God, and Islam has 'Kuran' as 'the' religious book and Allah as the God. Hinduism has many gods but recognises that Almighty is one. Mahatma Gandhi elaborated on it by saying 'Ishwar Allah tero nam, sabko sanmati de bhagwan' (God is one with different names who gives virtues to all). Sai Baba of Shirdi (Maharashtra) says, 'sabka malik ek hai' (Almighty for all is one).

Third misconception is that English is the richest language and indigenous languages like Hindi cannot compete with it. This myth was created by Lord Macaulay who thought that one almirah of books in any European library had more valued

knowledge than all the books in India and Arab. This is absolutely false on several grounds: first, actually the vocabulary of Hindi is much larger than English vocabulary; second, synonyms in Hindi are more than those in English; e.g. for water there is only one synonym in English (acqua) while in Hindi there are many synonyms like 'jal', 'pani', 'toy,' vari', 'neer', etc; third, single word preceding today in English is only one -yesterday- and single word following today is also only one - tomorrow - whereas in Hindi there are single words for four days preceding today - 'kal' (yesterday), 'parson' (day before yesterday), 'narson' (two days preceding yesterday) and 'tarson' (three days preceding yesterday) . Similarly for future four single words exist in Hindi : 'Kal' (tomorrow), 'Parson' (day after tomorrow), 'Narson' (two days after tomorrow) and 'Tarson' (three days after tomorrow). Thus Kal, Parson, Narson and Tarson are identical for past and future but the verb used along with these words indicates the difference between past and future. Similarly in Vanuatu, in Aneityum (that has only 600 speakers) language a word 'hovid' is used for both three days before today and three days after today ('inpin') and a word 'invid' is used for both two days before today and two days after today- their meaning is captured through contexts in past or future. In Vanuatu again in Sie language (that has 1200 speakers only) identical words with

an extra prefix are used for past and future to the span of nine days centred around today - 'wimpe' is used to denote 'four days from now' (future) while 'no - wimpe' is used to mean 'four days ago' (past). In the Huli language (in Papua New Guinea) there are single words for five days preceding and following today. Further in Kalam language (in Papua New Guinea) there are single words for six days preceding and following today. Obviously English language lags far behind Hindi (India), Yuki (California, US), East Kewa (Papua New Guinea), Sie (Vanuatu), Huli (Papua New Guinea), and Kalam (Papua New Guinea). But many English people and their missionaries still brag about richness of their language and have 'white' man's burden' to civilise the so-called savage. That is why Sie-speaking people (like English language) after contact with English missionaries, adopted a seven day week but they coined indigenous names for days - e.g. Saturday was 'bake day' and Sunday was 'rest day'. But unfortunately due to globalisation nowadays they are using English weekday names and forgetting indigenous Sie words (K.David Harrison). Finally, idioms in Hindi outnumber those in English., e.g., in Hindi two idioms are popular for not acting in time : ' Ka Varsha Jab Krishi sukhane', 'ab pachhtaye hot kya, jab chiriya chug gai khet'. But there is only one English idiom for these two: 'after death a doctor'.

However, Hindi is facing threats from

inside (Hindi dialects) as much as from outside (English). For instance, Hindi is the official language in many states like U.P, Bihar, Jharkhand, M.P., Chhattisgarh, (but recently Chhattisgarhi has replaced Hindi) Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh and more than forty dialects of these States have contributed to the evolution and sustenance of Hindi language over a long period, with specific local or sub-regional aesthetic flavours, smells and tastes. Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Rajasthani, Magahi, Brajbhasha, Bundelkhandi, Chhattisgarhi, Haryanavi, Pahari, etc often enhance the overall communication and have better effect on the receiver of messages. Unfortunately for the last few years there is a demand for placing Bhojpuri under Eighth schedule of Indian constitution; that is, it should be recognised as a distinct language of the Union as about eight crores of people, residing especially in Bihar, U.P. and Jharkhand, are said to speak Bhojpuri. Elsewhere, in foreign countries like Mauritius, Guyana, Fiji, Surinam etc, persons of Indian origin also speak Bhojpuri. Hence some Bhojpuri poets, politicians & public argue in a narrow way: 'Bhojpuri is like home and Hindi is like the nation' (Kedarnath Singh). But unfortunately Bhojpuri speakers have not created any magnum opus that can stand parallel to 'Ramcharit Manas' of TulsiDas or 'Padmawat' of Jayasi or 'Sursagar' of Surdas or 'Sakhi', 'Sabad' & 'Ramaini' of Kabir. 'Videsia' or 'Gabar

Ghichor' (drama) of Bhikhari Thakur, 'Loha Singh'(drama) of Rameshwar Singh Kashyap or 'Firangia' (poetry) of Manoranjan Prasad Singh undoubtedly deserve appreciation but not of as classic greatness as the creative writings of Tulsidas, Kabir, Surdas & Jayasi. Moreover these Bhojpuri creative writings got their due in the entire Hindi belt without political support. If Vidyapati, Sur, Kabir, Tulsi, Jayasi, Raskhan, Rahim, Maithilisharan Gupta, Dinkar, Bachchan, Nirala, Nagarjun, Muktibodh, Agyeya, Pant, Mahadevi Varma, Jaishankar Pd, Premchand, Yashpal, Renu, etc are removed, Bhojpuri will be without lustre and significance. Therefore a political movement for placing Bhojpuri in Eighth schedule of Indian constitution is more politicking than genuine concern for the progress of Bhojpuri language just like smaller states are favoured by many politicians and political parties for selfish interests. Obviously writers hailing from Bhojpuri regions will get prizes/awards from central Sahitya Akademi (as those in Rajasthani, Maithili, Santhali and Dogari are getting though there are very few quality literary creations in these languages annually), yet this is not the only way to recognise excellence from sub-regions of Hindi belt. Actually without placing Bhojpuri or any other dialect of Hindi in Eighth schedule of Indian constitution, more awards for Hindi writers may be easily earmarked in view of almost half of India's population being Hindi speakers/

knowers. Renowned Hindi poet and short story writer Uday Prakash had raised this point some years back but it was not paid any heed by those who matter in this regard nor Hindi writers were mobilised on this issue. The vocal elements for creating a separate space for Bhojpuri (or other dialects of Hindi) are doing great harm to Hindi because if some dialects like Bhojpuri, Brajbhasha, Awadhi or Magahi or Pahari are separated from Hindi lock, stock and barrel, Hindi's united strength will be badly weakened in terms of losing its distinctive identity due to its largest number of speakers. Then the opponents of Hindi, especially in Tamilnadu, will play the card of number game to their advantage and Hindi will lose its first and foremost claim of being official language of the Union. Further the proponents of dialects (for being placed in Eighth Schedule) also forget the fact that when there are a large number of persons in an intellectual or religious or festive or marriage gathering hailing from different sub-regions of Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Brajbhasha, Rajasthani, Pahari, Haryanavi, Magahi, Maithili etc, Hindi (Khariboli) becomes the lingua franca just like on other occasions involving workers from South India, Western India, Eastern India and North India working in a factory Hindi is the obvious and natural link language in everyday life and work. Unfortunately many govt and non-govt organisations meant for popularising Hindi like Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Nagari Pracharini Sabha etc

are not performing authentic tasks by publishing quality books in different arenas of knowledge because they have become narrow-minded, leaderless and visionless. Similarly Kendriya Hindi Directorate (Delhi), Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (Agra), Hindi departments in universities and degree colleges, Deptts. of official language (both at centre as well as in Hindi States) and Sahitya Akademi (both at the centre and in Hindi States) have not proved their worth for the real progress of Hindi language and literature. They have not promoted quality Hindi writings through translation, linking readers through libraries and book clubs, holding serious seminars/conferences and organising literary exchanges with full transparency and accountability. Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University (Wardha) is still in infancy and has to do a lot of great work with a clear vision and far sightedness, because language is not simply a medium of communication but also part and parcel of culture as well as it constitutes reality in varying degrees, as some post-modernists have correctly observed. However, unfortunately most of the state govts have introduced English language at lower primary stage itself (in govt. schools) though Mahatma Gandhi and Ram Manohar Lohia were vocal that primary education be imparted in one's mother tongue. One and all may study English from 6<sup>th</sup> standard onwards as a subject (not as a medium). Mushrooming growth of private English



medium schools in both urban and rural areas is visible in every part of India. Even govt. teachers nowadays are sending their wards in English medium private schools, though earlier they enrolled them in govt. schools. Ram Manohar Lohia used to say that the 'bhasha' (language), 'bhusha' (clothes), 'bhawan' (house) and 'bhojan' (food) should be indigenous (local, regional or national) to inculcate the desired cultural ethos in the people. Hence need of

the hour is to decolonise our minds by discarding the slavery-oriented dictum of 'west is the best' and by adopting our own progressive traditions in our own languages for the real prosperity of the nation so that without borrowing western left-overs, we may stand on our own feet. We must refuse to accept 'TINA' (There is no alternative) as human endeavours are full of potentials and innovative ideas, especially in indigenous languages.

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## WHEN FAIZ VISITED ALLAHABAD

Ravindra Kalia

Translated by  
Sanjeev Ranjan

Faiz Ahmed 'Faiz' came to Allahabad twice. First in 1958 and the last time in 1981. In 1958 I was away in Punjab. I had an intimate meeting with him in Allahabad in 1981. I also drank with him. I could have been in Allahabad in 1958 also but time did not favour my plan. My friend Amrik Singh Kalsi and I had decided to do MA from Allahabad University, but it was just not possible for me. My elder brother had gone to Canada to teach in a university and my mother was terribly upset with his absence, my going elsewhere therefore was out of the question, though this is besides the point that barely after two years I left home and I have been in exile since then. True exile happened to my friend Amrik Singh Kalsi because once he reached London he settled there and became its citizen. He did not come to India to even marry, he married an *English Mem* and started teaching at School of Oriental and African Studies. He had come to Allahabad in 1991. He procured my number somehow and called up. Before he could tell me who he was I instantly recognized his voice even after thirty five years and said, 'Kalsi de puttar kithon Bol Reyan?' We had become friends during our BA days. We had similar tastes. We used to bunk classes and come to the *dhaba* outside to smoke. The bug of literature had bitten him, too. He had gone to Pakistan also in this trip. He wrote a very interesting letter after coming back to Delhi:

*I met many new Urdu short story writers in Pakistan. I will*

*return to London on the 8<sup>th</sup>, till then I will be in Delhi only. You please come. I am putting up at my brother's place – his name is Harnam Singh Kalsi. Tomorrow I will find another place for myself somewhere near Connaught Place. My brother, who is 82 years old, drinks two large pegs every night. He gives me also, but only two. He neither drinks the third nor allows me to drink. This is a major problem. Also I cannot smoke here freely. I will keep writing to you from London also so that our restored contact does not break.*

Everything in this world is doomed to break one day. Perhaps this contact, too, was revived to break eventually. Kalsi must have gone back to London in 1991 only, but the revived contact broke once again. The blame lies with me also because I am extremely lazy in writing letters. Kalsi also did not take the trouble to write again. He forgot that we were fast friends during our college days. We invented and played many radical games together. Kalsi, Kapil Agnihotri and I had invented a unique game. It was called 'Urine Race'. There was a canal in the proximity of DAV College Jalandhar. We went there to urinate to our heart's content. The winner was the one whose urine reached the farthest. The loser had to buy beer for everyone. Kalsi was the shortest among us, so it was mostly he who had to pay the penalty. We encouraged him for the competition when we got the news that Kalsi has received

money order from home. At times we deliberately lost to him to keep the competition alive. In the last forty years I do not know how much water has flowed through the canal or whether the canal is there at all. I convinced myself that these things must have faded out from Kalsi's memory. Prayag Shukla is also Kalsi's age, but his memory is intact. I realized this when I recently met him by chance in Allahabad one day. For long we remained lost in the world of memories.

Prayag, Ganga Prasad Vimal, Humdam and I lived in the Sant Nagar area of Delhi in the early sixties. Our flat number was 5055. Those were the days of scarcity and freedom. Prayag and Humdam were freelancers, Vimal was lecturer in a Delhi College and I was with Central Hindi Directorate. We were kings when we had money in our pockets, otherwise we were sincere writers and intellectuals who lived in scarcity. But even in the days of scarcity we would squeeze out some money for a beer party. In the name of utensils we had a multipurpose bucket which came in handy for both taking bath and chilling beer bottles. Humdam did not drink beer, so there used to be Coca Cola for him. But he was the one who made arrangements for the party. Later while drinking beer in the small tea glasses of the *dhaba* we would feel:

*Waqt ki seedhion pae lete hain  
Is sadi ke Kabir hain ham log*

(Sprawled on the stairs of time  
We are the Kabirs of this century)

When Faiz came to Allahabad the second time in 1981 I had already become a denizen of Allahabad. Allahabad University had organized a function in his honour. The date was 25<sup>th</sup> April. I do not think there happened anything bigger than this in the university premises ever. A massive stage was erected on the lawns of Senate House. By evening the entire ground under the banyan tree was packed with students of the university. It seemed all the rickshaws, tongas, scooters, motorcycles and cars were moving in only one direction. There were many traffic jams. The entire city seemed to have turned out towards the university. Mamta and I, too, somehow reached the venue. When Faiz appeared on the stage the entire campus reverberated with the clamour of clappings. Mahadevi Verma presided over the function. Firaq Sahab was unwell so he was lifted and put onto the stage. Along with Faiz, Firaq and Mahadevi Verma there were Upendranath 'Ashq', Professor Aqil Rizvi and Dr. Muhammad Hasan who adorned the stage. Faiz dwelt upon the crucial link between literature and politics in his speech and said that his only message to the world is, 'fall in love'. Firaq Sahab was in total trance. He overwhelmed every one when he said:

Aane wali naslen tum par rashq karenge hamasaron!

Jab unko yah dhyan aayega tumne  
Firaq ko dekha hai.

(The coming generations will envy you

When it will occur to them you have seen Firaq)

Firaq Sahab seemed face to face with his impending death. His letter to Ali Sardar Jafari which he had written in extreme pain came rushing to my mind: '*Bhai Ali Sardar, bahut bimaar hoon (Dear Ali Sardar, I am terribly sick) – Firaq.*' Firaq died after some time on 3 March, 1982. Even today people quote what Dr. Muhammad Hasan had remarked from the stage that day:

Aane wali naslen tum par rashq karenge hamasaron!

Jab unko yah dhyan aayega

Firaq, Mahadevi, Faiz ko tumne,

Ek saath manch par dekha tha

(The coming generations will envy you

When it will occur to them

You saw Firaq, Mahadevi, Faiz,

Together on the same stage.)

Professor Aqil Rizvi has recounted a very interesting story in his memoir on Faiz: 'When we came out to take Faiz Sahab to Circuit House a girl started insisting that she would sit with Faiz Sahab. It was an unwelcome idea for Faiz Sahab's security. We did not know the girl. She was imploring Faiz Sahab, but Faiz Sahab

was silent. I strictly said 'no' to the girl. She then came and stood before the car and said I will not let the car go if you do not allow me to sit with Faiz Sahab. We became more suspicious that may be she is a terrorist. Faiz Sahib came out of the car and asked her to sit inside and before people could stop him he also sat in the car. The stupid girl revealed after sitting inside the car that she is a press reporter, and that from the last two days she has been trying to take Faiz Sahab's interview but she could never get the opportunity. We heaved a sigh of relief. The car started and she began her interview.'

Faiz had come to Allahabad on the invitation of Allahabad University. Prof. Udit Narayan Singh was the then Vice-Chancellor of the University. Though his subject was Mathematics he started taking tremendous interest in Urdu poetry when he befriended the newly recruited lecturer of Political Science Devi Prasad Tripathi (DPT) who had come from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). He could now recite extempore many of the ghazals of Faiz. When the proposal to invite Faiz to Allahabad was put before him he readily agreed.

A competition of sorts started among the judges, advocates, ministers, politicians and aristocrats of the city to invite Faiz for a banquet. We thought we would not be able to find space in this race. One

day when Devi Prasad Tripathi came to Rani Mandi I started exhorting him right away – 'Listen, DPT! The consequences would be bad if Hindi writers do not get to meet Faiz Sahab separately, perhaps your Vice Chancellor is making programmes considering status rather than eligibility.'

You can never find DPT alone, this is not possible for him. The person with him could be double his age or half his age. It is fine if the person introduces himself otherwise neither DPT nor I ever felt the need for introduction. DPT got a little startled with my rapid firing. Before I could say anything further it became inevitable for him to introduce the person with him – 'Oh, I forgot to introduce him, he is the Vice Chancellor of our University, Professor UN Singh.' Now you either bang your head or DPT's!

DPT is a thin supple man with extremely weak eye sight. He reads books by bringing them close to his eyes, and whatever he reads gets imprinted on his memory. He has read tremendous amount of native and foreign literature with his weak eyes. He is blessed with exceptional memory. Decades have passed since Firaq, Pant and Mahadevi passed away but if you ask DPT he will tell you their telephone numbers even today. After two, three pegs the urge to sing folk songs overtakes him. If there is no table in the proximity he would make match box the tabla and start singing in Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Punjabi,

Kashmiri, Sindhi, Telugu, Kannad, Malayalam, you name a language and he would shower you with folk songs of that language. He can sing Geet Govind, he can recite Sanskrit Shlokas, he can enumerate the verses of Quran.

DPT had been a famous student leader. A full police force had come to JNU campus to arrest him during Emergency. He was also the president of JNU students' union. He has exceptional ability to mesmerize people. But he never used this ability to impress girls. He rarely talked about girls. Perhaps this happens to all those who get married very early in their lives. Such people lose their appetite before they feel the pangs of hunger. DPT does not remember any complete woman from his JNU days. He remembers someone's long tresses, someone's eyes, someone's slender arms or someone's mere fragrance. If someone made a mention of long hair DPT would start quoting shloakas, geet, rubaiyat, sonnet, haiku one after another on long tresses. That evening it was decided that on 27 April 1981 Faiz Sahib will spend the evening with Hindi writers. Vibhuti Narain Rai, the then city superintendent of police, was chosen to be the host. Both he and DPT had been class fellows. They were close friends. No one could have been a better host than Vibhuti Narain Rai for the occasion.

That historic evening took place at Vibhuti's residence in the last days of

April of 1981. Writers, poets, playwrights, artists from both Urdu and Hindi had assembled there to soak in the atmosphere fragrant with the presence of Faiz. It seemed a long lost friend had come back after ages from across many seas and oceans. Every one wanted to hear and record his favourite ghazal from Faiz Sahab and he was obliging everyone. Here it seems necessary to mention that Faiz recited his poems most unimpressively, as if he recited his enemy's poems. I have not seen a poet who recited so plainly with such detachment. It was like, a monotonous piece of prose being read out by someone. When I said this to Doodhnath Singh who was sitting next to me, he spoke like a wise crow, "You are a fool Kalia! Perhaps you do not know that Ghalib recited his ghazals even worse. Always remember, inferior the poet, better the rendering!"

Faiz was overwhelmed by Allahabad, especially with the feeling that he was equally loved and admired among Hindi writers. If he ever stumbled in his rendering someone or the other would pop up the missing word, Faiz would pick from there and carry on.

Upendra Nath 'Ashq' started behaving like a young child who gets restless when his elder brother is given more attention. He started finishing his drinks rapidly whereas Faiz only occasionally brought the glass to his lips. Ashqji lost restraint and started reciting his own ghazals, but

people had come to listen to Faiz Sahab, no one showed any interest in him. Ashqji got disaapointed, he took Atia Nishat to a corner and kept reciting ghazals to her for a long time. We had two LP records of Faiz' ghazals. One of the records was playing slowly in the background. Suddenly someone increased the volume and the sharp, shrill, mellifluous voice of Noorjahan started floating in the atmosphere:

Laut jaati hai idhar ko bhi nazar kya  
kijey

Ab bhi dilkash hai tera husn magar  
kya kijey

Aur bhi gham hain zamane mein  
muhabbat ke siwa

rahatein aur bhi hain wasl ki rahat  
ke siwa

Mujh se pahali si muhabbat mere  
mehboob na maang

But the mood of the evening was just the opposite. Here woman's beauty was the central theme. There was no pain bigger than the pain of love, separation and infidelity. Every one in the party was beside himself - some with poetry, some with alcohol, and others with the sheer magic of the atmosphere.

After Ashqji, it was now DPT who lost restraint. He came holding his glass in one hand and sat at the feet of Faiz Sahab, he put his hand over his ear and began singing an Awadhi song with absolute indulgence. This amused Faiz greatly. He

also heaved a sigh of relief as he was continuously either reciting his ghazals or saying something or the other. He asked Mamata about an Awadhi word and became so happy with the meaning that he took both the LP covers from Mamta and wrote on them: 'For Mamta, with love – Faiz.'

These two LP covers are our prize possession. Faiz told us that when Begham Akhtar came to Pakistan he had requested her to sing a specific *thumri* many times:

Hamri ataria aao sajanwa

Dekha dekhi balam hoi jaey

When I told Faiz Sahab that this *thumri* was written by my friend Sudarshan Fakir he became very interested and asked me many things about him. He told us that he listened to the *thumri* in the light of India-Pakistan relationship. I immediately played Farida Khanam's famous ghazal in response:

Aaj jaane ki zid na karo

Yoon hi pahlu mein baithe raho

Aaj jaane ki zid na karo.

Eventually the evening came to an end. Everyone dined, group photographs were taken. The last drink for the road was raised, and people dispersed. DPT came staggering in his stupor and accompanied Faiz Sahab in the car. Faiz Sahab requested him to sing some more folk songs. DPT struck a note again and the car started.

We knew DPT's capacity, he could keep

singing folk songs for an eternity. He had given a spectacular performance only a few days back when Bhishma Sahani had come with his wife to stay with us for some days. DPT suddenly appeared from nowhere, like the omnipresent lover of literature and alcohol. He started citing verbatim the portions of Bhishma Sahani's famous story 'Chief Ki Daawat'. Both Bhishma Sahani and his wife were stunned by his memory, they could not believe that there could be a man who could memorise a story like a poem. DPT also has a special sense of smell. He smelt from the atmosphere the fragrance of alcohol and immediately asked for his share like a *fakir*. Those days living like a *fakir* was a fashion among intellectuals, otherwise a lecturer like DPT would not have come to the university on foot with his slippers slapping against his heels. When students saw *Guruji* walking the distance they got off their bicycles to follow him. There used to be a procession of students behind him when he reached the classroom. When Mamta came to know through one of the students of DPT about his *padyatra* she put some money in DPT's pocket and asked him to stop coming to the university like poets and politicians. The truth is, DPT is both. DPT brought the money close to his eyes, counted them and sent one of his students to bring a bottle of whisky as soon as Mamta left. He was so overwhelmed with Mamta's compassion that he turned the money into a bottle

in no time. Before Mamta could get angry, he assured her that from tomorrow he would obediently come to the university in rickshaw but for that she will have to give him some more money.

It was a memorable evening with Bhishma Sahani and his wife and DPT at his imaginative best. The Sahani couple sang some Punjabi *tappe* which fired DPT's passion for folk songs. Thereafter the evening was completely overtaken by the beauty and charm of the countryside – the open yards inside houses, the high rise spacious verandahs, pools and puddles, farms and barns, the thresholds that women do not cross in the presence of elders, the raised platforms where village meetings take place - DPT cast a spell of rustic innocence and simplicity. He presented such poignant pictures of scarcity and poverty, helplessness and hopelessness, pain and misery that he started crying himself. Amarkantji does not drink but he is the first who gets high in the party. When DPT requested him he recited his famous ghazal which Rajendra Yadav has mentioned in his memoir on Amarkantji:

Mujh se na pooch mera haal

Sun mera haal kuchh nahin

Mere liye jahaan mein

Maazi aur haal kuchh nahin

Those days the Pakistani singer Reshma was a craze among music lovers. Balwant Singh, the famous writer of Allahabad,



was the first to procure the cassette of Reshma. He had got the Pakistani cassette brought from Russia through Sheela Sandhu. He never lent the cassette to anyone, but one day he was pleased with me and allowed me to record it. That evening we enjoyed the entire collection. The night kept vibrating with the cocktail of Reshma and whisky. Along with the songs of Reshma the songs and ghazals of Sahani couple, DPT and Amarkantji also got recorded. This cassette also became popular like Reshma's and started getting borrowed and lent. One day like a clever woman it disappeared.

Next day Bhisimji had to preside over a function. The organizers came to my place to pick him up. DPT and I did not know when Mamta went to college, when children went to school. We had kept playing 'Damadam Mast Kalandar' again and again till very late. The children woke us in the afternoon when they came back from school. When I heard the sound of machines running I heaved a sigh of relief that the press is open and working. When Bhisimji came back from the function he found us in deep slumber. He must have been scandalised with our style of living.

My life style put my parents in deep anguish. The first things I had to do when information came that they were coming was to dispose off empty bottles from my house. It used to be very embarrassing when press workers came with a sack to

take the bottles away, they must have thought that I am splurging the money earned through their hard work. My parents could not scold me now because I was an adult, but they combined with Mamta and children to put my life under strict monitoring – early to bed, early to rise, bath and food at time precise. No punishment can be bigger for a lover of whisky who is forced to eat dinner as soon as the sun sets. I could never drink after dinner. I thought that would be like gunah balazzat.

My father was a teacher from olden days who believed in the dictum 'spare the rod and spoil the child.' He often thrashed me and nearly everyday I was made to hold my ears from under my legs like a cock facing the wall. But their experiments collapsed on me. The more they became strict with me the more stubborn and daring I became. I learnt my first lessons in disobedience those days only. My Father eventually got fed up and gave up on me, but mother kept scolding me till her last days.

DPT once had to endure my father's wrath because of his carelessness. I had warned him that my parents have come from Punjab and he must be careful, but he did not take notice. We drank and ate and went to sleep, next day I got up early but DPT remained asleep till very late. In the afternoon when the foreman of the press came to my room he informed

my father that there is someone sleeping in the room downstairs. The time was around twelve in the afternoon. My father grew suspicious if someone had committed suicide. He came up to my room and put his hand over DPT's nostrils to find out if he was alive. Nearly half a dozen of my friends in Jalandhar had died because of such attempts. Someone died because he remained outside in extreme winter, or someone consumed so many sleeping pills that he never woke up. My father came down seething in anger and asked the foreman to bring Devi Prasad down before him. When the foreman came to wake up DPT he asked for tea. He drank tea and came down caressing his beard to wash his face. In place of towel he had the pillow cover in his hand. Father asked him to sit down and started taking his class, 'Young man, perhaps you teach in the university.'

'Yes,' DPT said half yawning, 'I am a teacher in the university.'

'Today is holiday or what?'

'No, it is a working day.'

'You must be on leave then.'

'No, I am not on leave, but it is alright...'

'What alright?'

'Students love me, it does not affect their studies.'

'You are a very irresponsible teacher. You are playing with the lives of your

students.'

DPT did not say anything, but father kept speaking. 'When the teacher is such an example, how good the students can be. Have you ever thought that you are betraying your nation?' The foreman came to tell me that *Babuji* is very angry with Tripathiji. I thought it would be unwise to go down, I silently slipped into the bathroom for a prolonged bath. Father asked to bring a rickshaw to take Tripathi to university. Tripathi washed his face, became ready and silently rode on the rickshaw and left. In the evening he told me over telephone about the incident and said he can't gather courage to come to Rani Mandi as long as my parents are there, and he actually never came till he acquired credible information that they have gone back to Punjab.

DPT has an exceptionally strong Jupiter. It must be in the very centre of his *janmkundli* (horoscope). There might have been scarcity in his life elsewhere but *daru* was always in ample quantity around him. His salary made him a king in the first week of every month. His mobile bar moved with him. He drank in style and offered it like a king. He lived the famous *sher* of Ghalib in true spirit: "Har shab piya hi karte hain maey jis qadar miley (I inevitably drink no matter how I have to procure it)'. I often thought whisky is his call girl who comes on her own the moment he remembers her, and

when she does not come she sends invitation to him to come over. He thrills her with his ideas and language. He is a dream merchant. I often found him singing to himself:

Kabhi tera dar kabhi dar badar  
Kabhi arsh par kabhi farsh par

I have seen him riding the crest and I have seen him in the dumps. Rani Mandi was his dumps and Delhi is his crest. I think I have enjoyed every five star hotel in Delhi with DPT. All the waiters in five star hotels are familiar with his royal ways. He had his unique style of paying bills. He does not like counting money, he gives the complete bundle of notes and if something comes back he takes it with disinterest. Trains and buses do not figure in his life. He travels by air. When Nitish Kumar became Railway Minister he gifted him a card for AC First Class travel. He has his Nitish Kumar in every party. He was part of the country wide *padayatra* with Chandrashekhar. It was his residence where Rajiv Gandhi met Jyoti Basu for the first time. He had gone to attend Benazir Bhutto's marriage. He can have breakfast with Ramesh Bhandari in Delhi, lunch with Diggi Raja in Bhopal, and evening dinner with Lalu Yadav in Patna. He can take Sheela Dikshit to Dr. Ramvilas Sharma's house and organize a poetry recital of Fahmida Riyaz with Ashok Vajpeyi as compere. Everything is possible with DPT. He has transcended all ideas and ideologies,

he has breached every parochialism, he is a living example of Akbar Allahabadi's famous *sher*:

Mujhse mera imaan kya puchhti ho  
Munni

Shia ke saath Shia Sunni ke saath Sunni

Such a magician cannot remain restrained in the evening. Faiz came and went but DPT's desire to drink did not diminish. When Faiz was being felicitated in his farewell function which Mahadevi Verma presided, DPT invited Shubha Mudgal from the stage to sing a ghazal of Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Those days Shubha Mudgal was Shubha Gupta and she was a student of Allahabad University – slim,, delicate and very attractive. Till then Allahabad University did not know about her exceptional talent. There descended complete silence when she struck the note with her trained voice. Faiz himself started praising her:

Gulon mein rang bhare bada-e-naubahar  
chale

Chale bhi aao ki gulshan ka karobar  
chale

Very few among us know that Shubha Mudgal is granddaughter of the famous Hindi progressive critic Prakash Chandra Gupta. Shubha's father Skand Gupta was a famous cricket commentator and was attached with the English Department of Allahabad University. He was an ardent admirer of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. He had made

a film on the programmes of Faiz with his movie camera. It has all the discussions and discourses of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. I do not know who possesses that beautiful film now.

Today Shubha Mudgal is a special

celebrity. She has not looked back after creating the sensation 'Ali More Angana Daras Dikha.' Shubha Mudgal is a rage on the television. Now she sings Hindi Pop rather than Hindustani Classical Music. She rocked every channel with her song 'Abke Saawan Aise Barse.'

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**Ravindra Kalia**, born 1939, is a well known author and literary journalist with varied interests. Besides fiction, he has written some best-sellers in nonfiction. His book of memoirs 'Ghalib Chhuti Sharab' has run into a dozen editions and is translated into many languages. His other famous books are 'Khuda Sahi Salamat Hai', 'ABCD', '17 Ranade Road' (Novels); 'Nau Saal Chhoti Patni', 'Garibi hatao', 'Chakayya Neem', 'Zara si Roshni' etc. (short story collections). His writing has been honoured with Shiromani Puraskar, Lohia Samman, Premchand Samman and M.P. Govt. Award. He has participated in international conferences in U.S.A., U.K., Japan and Surinam. At present he is director, Bhartiya Jnanpith and editor of monthly journal 'Naya Gyanoday'. He lives in New Delhi.

**Sanjeev Ranjan**, born 1965, is creative director in a print media advertising agency and lives in New Delhi. He has picked up Ravindra Kalia's book 'Ghalib Chhuti Sharab' for translation and is midway into it. Mob. : 9811316838

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## **SELF-NARRATIVE : SHAMSHER BAHADUR SINGH**

Ranjana Argare

Translated by  
Meenakshi Pawha

I told Shamsheerji, 'Why don't you write your autobiography', so he started dictating it, but somehow it could not proceed further. I made many attempts but things did not work out, whatever he got dictated is being presented. It is for this reason it is being called a Self-Narrative – Ranjana Argare.

**24/6/1986**

Childhood in fact adolescence and sex arouse curiosity. For a child, erection and ejaculation both, have been things of wonder and astonishment as well as subject of fear. This astonishes the innocent child. The element of curiosity was probably far more during childhood. The researchers, in the field of academics and psychology are garnering some invaluable material on it. It is rather strange that childhood perceptions and rituals of worship influence each other and have been working in tandem and continue to do so.

Now, at the age of seventy three or seventy four, my imagination tries to link the inane with the profound and attempts some kind of a false connection between the two. For instance, there is a very nice pair of tablas lying quietly on my left, ostensibly meditating for some maestro. No matter how much I may wish that the tablas

should start resonating with a Tak-dhina-dhin, but they lie enshrouded in a film of dust. And their Tak-dhina-dhin, will lay captured in their sounds of silence. A railway carriage has always fascinated kids as a plaything. In order to fulfill their desire to play, kids do not depend on any one. If nothing else, a line of slippers and shoes simulate a chhuk-chhuk train. And if one were to observe very carefully, you will notice that all the kids impersonating as passengers create a world of their own. What is significant to note is that the young passengers are oblivious of the distinctions of caste or the false social hierarchy. You will also notice that children of the villagers living in the eastern India will be segregated from the rest or the environment will isolate and push them in a corner. Their haughtiness lasts for a short while. All the differences are sublimated in a while and all are equal. If on one hand these things pull the cords of compassion then on the other hand there are times when we feel a sense of remorse. This principle of division has further strengthened the divide in the society, and is etched rather firmly in our consciousness.

**25/6/86**

The distant attraction of childhood was surrounded by a jungle of memories which like the open sesame and close sesame of the Aladdin and the forty thieves seemed to visit us. Sometimes apparently so close

that I would scream and try to devise ways to escape these memories. There are times when children fear each other and our mind, in its wilderness, feels alone-sometimes not so alone. The whistle of the train, the near and distant glistening lamp poles with magical green, red lights were actually nothing but kerosene lamps.

Father was away to the office. My brother Tejbahadur and I would fight quite often. Very recently, Ma had made some jalebees and had packed them away in a box. This box had been kept away at the top most shelf of the cupboard. How could we get it and how could we bring it down? So what I did was, I got Tejbahadur to stand at the base of the cupboard while I climbed up on his shoulders, thus increasing my height. It was in this manner I could lay my hands on the box. My attention was focused on two things: (1) Jalebees should not be scattered while I bring them down. (2) There should not be any kind of sound that will result in Ma being awakened from her sleep, and she may just arrive at that juncture. At last we did manage to get the box down. I had to catch hold of the shelves very firmly, as well as keep the box tightly to my chest, so that it could be brought down without spilling its contents. Whenever I jog my memory about my mother, I recall only her beautiful face. Even on this occasion I faintly remember her angry self in front of my eyes, but I just cannot remember any traces of anger

on her face. That impression is indelibly etched in my mind – to see her surprised how could those tiny pair of hands have managed to get to the box of jalebees so carefully?

Sometimes, I along with my brother would sit on the terrace and watch the lamps that were clearly visible from there and waited patiently for the green, yellow lights to switch on or off. At that time we lived in some tehsil of Gorakhpur. My father, a sturdy young man, lived there. He wore a bandh-gala coat with pyjamas. I was very fond of my father, although I was mentally afraid of him. I was two and a half and my brother was a year and a half old – together we lived in our own world. These lamps with their red, yellow and green lights still continue to intermittently light up my reservoir of memories in a very tender way. I continue to seek from them, the answers to my questions. With the passage of time, the outline of these questions, their meanings, have become more lucid. I would not like to trace my later poetic inspiration to my early childhood. This ordinary incident is enough to surprise me.

My father was no less a lover of aesthetics. Gradually I began to read Hindi. I began to practice writing Urdu and improved considerably. Father knew the stories of Chandrakanta Santati and Bhootnath, virtually by heart. The clerks of those days would entertain themselves

by reading these books. I vividly recall that during the same time, in addition to Alif Laila, Chandrakanta series, we found several other novels scattered in the house. We had all the eighty volumes of Bhootnath series. Another kind of literary and critical works in our house (whether we brought them or his friends gave them) was Alhilal – Maulana Azad. Alhilal – Dooj ka Chand. This magazine used to attract me. I used to struggle to understand it as its standards were very high and it used to discuss serious issues. Maybe, some of its issues can still be found in old libraries. There were two other Urdu magazines that I found very interesting and which contributed to my knowledge. I am fully convinced now, that if books are written on serious issues with enthusiasm, then they are bound to be useful. Some students of class tenth standard, who while studying would enjoy the flavour of these books. 'Alhilal' can be one such research journal which is philosophical and political. Till 1918, I do not remember any magazine in Hindi which could rival it.

One magazine was unique to Urdu – 'Mastana Jogi'. This magazine dealt with issues like yoga meditation, as well as Unani medicines. It is in this magazine that I had read a formula for building stamina which I have not forgotten till now, just this - soak a fistful of Bengal grams in the evening and eat them the next morning, while chewing them properly along with it some jaggery with a log

of relish. Both the brothers had hot milk along with 'Amla Murabba' that Ma had prepared herself. After eating this, we would run off to school.

The readers would be aware that books in Urdu are printed in Litho. Litho is a white marble slab on which the scribe arranges the letters in reverse, which appear as normal print when printed in Litho. The use of Litho in publishing has decreased considerably. Still the various printing presses in India and Pakistan continue to keep it alive. For example, 'Al Hakim' was another magazine in Urdu that was brought home, which was completely devoted to Unani medicines. One of its issues that I can never forget was a special issue on snakes, which, as far as I can recollect had approximately 150 pictures of snakes and these pictures could have been published with such precision only in litho. Each picture was very clear and fulfilled its responsibility to the core - as litho provided to its ordinary reader all what the British / European magazines had to offer.

Both of us, my brother and I would often thumb through this. If father truly wanted, he could have encouraged our interest in Unani medicines. However, though our enthusiasm to read and write Urdu was certainly not enough, it was sufficient to create ground for us to do any work or to create anything new. There is one thing - beauty. It would be so

much nicer if we saw this beauty in writing as well, and attempted to comprehend it. You will gradually reach a point where a page written by a writer suddenly equates with a picture. You will try to seek and subsequently find out that one element which makes a picture great is balance. During my childhood and adolescence, there was a huge emphasis on handwriting as it had its importance!! The applications for job recruitments were asked for and insisted upon - 'applications in your own handwriting only.' It is for this reason that some poor writers would sit by the roadside or at the cross roads would often write in calligraphy, a person's name, his designation etc. which was then framed. It took them anything from half an hour to one and a half hour to write all these details and it thus became a source of livelihood for them. My friend Avinash Chandra Saxena told me that the calligraphy that we all went to have a look at in his drawing room, is still intact. It had his father's name Munshi Kalika Prasad Saxena, and his designation. Frankly, that calligraphy was worth admiring. During Eid and Bakrid, Muslims buy coloured printed paper others buy pictures of Jesus Christ or Virgin Mary and they frame them in a glass frame and hang them up on the walls of the room. No one values handwritten things today, as they used to in the earlier times, but the needy are able to fend for themselves — enough to subsist, albeit frugally.



During my childhood, I would often see middle aged or old people, making very tiny pellets of flour and throwing them in the Ganga, the Yamuna or the Gomti. This was their way of expressing the grace of Ram. Surprisingly, what has flashed in my mind right now, has never occurred to me earlier. Each of these pellets of flour, has a tiny piece of paper in them which has 'Ram' handwritten on them. For when we continually write the name of Ram with a pen or by hand, then the mind does steer itself towards Ram. If not too much, at least some miniscule part of it does concentrate on 'Ram'. Well, our mind is its own master. It is this mind which is befooling the fishes. Wherever one puts the pellets, they are being scattered, other fishes are coming to eat them. After all, their food is in these small fishes - where will this chain stop? It has left the devotee's bag and reached Ramji's, but what message will it bring back from there for the devotee?

What arrangements have been made for these poor little fishes? If we contemplate on this we are bound to confront this – are we not similar to the big and the small fishes? Do we not also try to ensnare other people in our entrapment, people who are utterly naive and simple, who can be made a fool of in no time. In Alice through the Looking Glass, we find that the beginnings of a society is with philanthropy. This

philanthropic scheme of things embraces all kinds of beings in its fold. What is wrong with this form of worship if the devotee makes 500-1000 pellets with his own hands, then it is a good spiritual utilisation of his time. In this form of worship, wittingly or unwillingly, we also get included in it. What we believe in and what we don't becomes integral to this whole issue. What difference does it make if we believe in Ramchandraji or Krishnaji?

But let us suppose, it is a Buddhist monk who has put these pellets, instead of a Ram or Krishna devotee. What were the thoughts of that monk when he made those pellets, what did he put in those pellets, with what determinations, what were his emotions when he was engaged in making those pellets - but ultimately it has all merged to make us all under the spell of Ram.

Now this has become part of this world. May Lord grant long life to the Devotee (I think he was probably making these pellets even at the time of his birth!!). We too are with Ramchandra's army. Say Ramchandra ki Jai, Pawan Sut Hanuman ki Jai.

During the Navratri, we used to watch Ramlila in the day time. Our maid used to accompany us. I cannot forget - even to this day, the huge Ramlila grounds in Gonda. Like the hero of Ramayana, the humongous crowds, were spread out

across the entire grounds. Ramlila used to be performed in a semi-circle. If there was no action scene, then the narrators of Ramayana would start reading some inspirational quatrains, while Ramchandra, as well as some of us idle students (I understand now, that nothing was useless) were trying to immortalize our great Hindu traditions. This task seems to be accomplished on its own, without any concerted effort from our end. That was the beauty of the whole thing. I deeply bless all the actors of Ramlila, its audiences, and its committee. Ramchandraji, stood in a corner, sometimes serious and sometimes playful in a childlike manner, flashing his magical smile on all the devotees of the world.

**26/6/86**

Jhanda Mohalla Lahangeji was the most central of all the localities surrounding it. The flag pole, which had a height of 100-125 feet was got from the jungle which was nearly ten-twelve miles away. Every three years, it was replaced by a new one. The flag, however was changed every year. The preparations for the celebrations of Guru Parv started before the commencement of the fair. The entire town used to surrender itself to the Sikh Guru, Ramrai. The flag of Guru Ramrai was placed exactly opposite on the left hand side of my maternal grandfather's house. Opposite to the flag of Guru Ramrai were permanent shops for groceries - flour,

lentils salt, tobacco etc. From the left hand side of the terrace, we could see the densely populated Mussoorie. Very tiny houses, large bungalows - houses and shops all glistened in the sun. At night, the entire view was very panoramic with illumined lights. In the days gone by, Mussoorie was sixteen miles from Dehradun, which means eight miles from Dehradun to Rajpur and subsequently another eight miles from Rajpur to Mussoorie. In those days, people mostly travelled on foot. The rest - women and children would travel by 'Jhappan' - a chair which was carried on the back of a coolie. The year I failed in my Intermediate examinations, I had gone to Mussoorie on foot. I must have reviewed those days over a hundred times in my mind.

Two years of High School, two years of Intermediate, and two years of B.A. - these four to six years are a huge challenge for students. These exams also test family values, sense of religiosity and scientific temper. Professor Amarnath used to stay in an unpretentious Guest House in Mussoorie. Till today, I vividly remember what he said. 'Poverty or being poor are not sins, but they are worse than sins'. This raises many questions and there are no easy answers to them. By the time I was in my first year of B.A., I had started dabbling in poetry. I had neglected my studies. Even in my second year of B.A., I spent my entire time on poetry, though those years should have been spent

in serious study of the English language. I should have engaged myself in the study of my course work in a disciplined manner and thus should have mastered the English language. This ought to have been my primary duty. On the contrary, I ignored this and started to write Hindi poems, ghazals in Urdu as well as poems in English. And I had no care in the world. I was leading a life of reckless abandon, and had not given a serious thought to my domestic problems and conditions. Harivansh Rai Bachchan had helped me a lot with my B.A. and M.A. course work, but my focus was not where he thought it should be.

Besides the emotional elements in poets one does find a lot of discipline in them - Bachchan himself is an example of this. Taking baby steps, to run to a certain extent and then to be serious and focused - Bachchan certainly, did not fail to look in these directions. Year 1937-38, were the years when I was doing my B.A. in Allahabad University. I was a weak student. Maybe there is an element of exaggeration in this statement, but one does find few important things here : Professors would be genuinely concerned for the students and would extend appropriate support without the knowledge of the student. The student had all the means to sharpen his focus, if he so desired. The faculty of the Department of English had a special affinity for poetry amongst the various genres of literature and painstakingly

nurtured it in the students and did not allow it to dwindle. They would ensure that all the bright students were provided with books. I think this is what a vigilant teacher would do to an earnest student. The practice of making the students take baby steps, has long been out of use since the last ten to twenty years. Industrious efforts must be made to achieve great heights in the field of education, and these achievements must reach others.

**27/06/86**

It is rather sad and surprising that the school and the classroom both, do not seem to inspire. When I look back, amongst all the teachers, I can only remember my English and History teacher. The students were not paying enough attention to his lectures. A muffled noise and whispering persisted. This had irritated and angered the teacher and he digressed from what he was saying to how things were regarding studies when he was a student. He started to share a lot about studies in those days. He indicated that he had read many books, concretizing the impression by pointing to the floor and then much above the table that was the stacks of books he had presumably read. I was deeply impressed with his reading skills. But to me, this person looked like a tragic hero, apart from everything else. Waiting to move ahead, yet unable to fulfill his responsibilities did give him a tragic demeanor. Yet on the other hand

he was trying his best to steer his intelligence towards its desired destination. The picture which I have just sketched a moment ago on the mindscapes of young students is no less a portrait of a tragic, chaotic hero of a play or a novel . . . Now, when I connect the dots, I am in a position to see things more clearly, that the hero was none other than myself or maybe my teacher and myself both. Similarly, like this gentle, hardworking and erudite man was another lecturer who was also very learned – who could not, even for a moment forget - infact was convinced that the colour of his shoe polish was absolutely the correct shade. He had used the shoe brush rather vigorously to get adequate shine to it. Either he or his wife may have fulfilled this duty. The reason I say this, is probably it was not only demeaning but also impossible for him to bend down and do it himself! He was impeccably turned out like an army officer. This character was like a chocolate hero, living in a world of his own. Our teacher and we, the students had been kept apart from each other in very distinctively separate metaphorical levels.

On many occasions I used to find myself very disappointed when I saw books locked up in a cupboard. I would quietly slip away, either to my room or go out and start walking towards my home. I can never forget that dramatic moment, when an inspector of schools came for an inspection and he found that all the

beautifully bound expensive books were all locked up and decorated in the cupboards of the school library. His immediate question was that why were all the books locked up in a cupboard and rarely used. I was quite happy with this scenario and told myself – ‘Shamsher not everybody is cast in the same mould. I got a novel as a prize. It was about a naval war. To be very honest, I did not like the novel one bit, and did not feel like reading it. It was very evident that it was not a well written novel, it was barely alive. Classes 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> were like a stage for actors – where hardly any play was staged. I felt that this was quite a struggle in this world of an unimaginative heart and the world of fantasy. This would not yield any results. The things that I can see very clearly now is that a small army of intellectual questions seem to be doing a drill in front of me. It does not convey any kind of change either in the present or in the near future.

I want to further add a remark that in those days Father would get Urdu magazines like ‘Alhilar’ ‘Alhikmat’, Mastana Jogi’ etc. The stories of Premchand were always published in them. Father had started subscribing to Madhuri but I hardly saw any issue of ‘Madhuri’ while I was in Gonda.

Nevertheless, I did borrow and read, from my classmates books of Hindi which were prescribed in our syllabus. The period

from 1918-1920 was time when I read literature voraciously, though with the sole objective of entertainment only.

I had another hobby in those days. On a nice notebook, I used to copy all the good poems which were published in 'Sudha' and 'Madhuri'. It was in this manner that I had a literary introduction to a very famous poet Gopal Sharan Singh who was renowned for his poetry in Khari Boli. His simple, straight-forward and lucid poetic compositions bowled me over completely. Besides copying my favorite poems, I developed another hobby in classes 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, and that was conceptualizing and editing a literary magazine. I would copy the essays and poems of some bright students in beautiful calligraphy-written in black ink. In between these, I would try to make a small sketch. I was very hesitant to show my endeavour to any of the teachers, and barring two or three, the others were completely oblivious of this enterprise. We had a teacher who was a follower of Aryasamaj. He took a keen interest in all these activities. But I found his perspective very narrow, rather rigid so that I used to feel stifled. Though there was no lack of enthusiasm on his part, I think we did manage to publish five to six editions of this magazine. We had named it 'The Rising Art'. It was simultaneously published in Hindi, Urdu and English. It wasn't a very idiomatic title, but it exuded enthusiasm.

Another interesting thing happened. Infected by the enthusiasm of my classmates we inaugurated one issue. At the beginning of every issue there used to be a front cover with an artistic creation. I was the one who always sketched that picture. It was time to give a new direction to the magazine. Father also used to get 'Anand Bazaar Patrika' weekly which we read with enthusiasm.

I do remember when Dr. Ansari became the president of the Congress and Sarojini Naidu became the President maybe a year before or later. Father also subscribed to the 'Modern Review' which apart from Articles from Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu had articles and stories from many other learned people. On one hand I had made a scrap book of all the coloured pictures published in 'Modern Review', yet on the other hand, I was very fascinated with its prose which I read very enthusiastically. For example Edgar Snow (the name of an author) and the entire series 'The Decline and Fall of East India Company' was an excellent long series which I read with keen interest. Dr. Sunderland was the author of this series. Its discourse is vibrant, even today. This book was later banned. 'Modern Review' selected and published the best of all - economic, social and cultural issues published in different magazines and periodicals across the country and then provided its own critique. Later, it lost

its energy. The reason being that Ramanand Chatterjee, Editor 'Modern Review' had adopted a very rigid stance and became a very strong critic of the Congress. However our generation did not relish this at all. For what concerned us - was Jawahar Lal Nehru or Subhash Chandra Bose and close to them in the background was the haloed being of Gandhiji.

There was a moment of enthusiasm in my life, when we published a special issue of 'The Rising Art'. Two writers were given a special gift of that issue with a view to encourage them to contribute to the magazine. Kamiruddin was given an album which had been put together with some pictures from some of the old issues of 'The Modern Review' and some from elsewhere. Another one as far as I can remember, was Aurobindo Ghosh's 'Songs of the Sea', edited by C.R. Dass, which my classmates had gifted a copy to me very ceremoniously in a meeting. It was a very beautiful book and was one of my favorite ones.

I was doing my B.A. in 1933-34. During these years, I did write extensively in English, but it was more of an experiment with different meters in English. There was a lot of emotion in those poems. When I reflect on certain things, I do feel sad. But those things happened the way they were supposed to happen and I moved a few notches ahead. My poems had gradually evolved as a result of my

enthusiasm, and were part of my private world. I was very enthusiastic to use new meters. But I had no one to share this enthusiasm with. I had this terrible habit of destroying my literary works on one pretext or another. These incidents had occurred two to three times before 1937, and I had destroyed many files (three-four) of my literary works. I was a witness to the destruction of the last file by none other than myself. It contained an entire collection of writings in English of which at least half were poems. In an act of foolishness, I kept offering these poems to the fire. I had got the approval of a British critic, who found these poems worthy of publication. But these were not meant to see the light of day. I do not have a single copy of these poems. One could feel the rhythm of the meter in them. Most of the poems were predominantly love poems infused with an element of sadness. An ordinary incident had shaken me out completely. I had seen a film - 'The Sign of the Christ'. It portrayed the persecution and torture of those who believed in Christ. The various scenes of torture were very heart-wrenching. This film took me up completely. Thousands of Christians suffered the atrocities perpetuated by the Roman Emperor and the administration. The next day I sat in my room, taking stock of my emotions, and interrogating their very depths. There was a deep anguish in my mind. One question kept flashing incessantly in my mind :

it used to lash against my consciousness. 'What is the meaning of this struggle? Maybe nothing.' On one hand were these martyrs whose history was being written in blood, on the other hand was the hollow hedonistic philosophy of life of the highly arrogant Roman Emperor who unleashed unbridled barbarianism.

I have a feeling that this world is hurtling towards destruction and the sacrifice of the youth can only save the nations from this path of self- destruction. My mind was overwhelmed by such frenzy and enthusiasm that everything in life, including my poems, seemed to be an exercise in futility. I started to tear the pages one by one and threw all my poems in the dustbin. Over the years, I began to realize that old world, old traditions and customs and old repositories of knowledge cannot salvage us. I can say this more fearlessly now. Love for each other, half-baked philosophical enthusiasm infused with religious frenzy, particularly just enthusiasm will not get us anywhere. That is certain.

All my life I have deeply detested gold and silver chains or old coins of gold and silver being strung together as pieces of jewellery or as an object of exhibition. I would like to name this emotion equivalent to hatred. I was nine years old when my mother died. I do not know what it was that ousted my natural emotions and literary outpourings out of my mind

and heart. When I look at my distant childhood, I recall some great - grandmother - paternal or maternal, would visit my maternal grandfather's house. It usually used to be during lunch time. If I had not had my lunch till then, it became virtually impossible to have it once any one of them had arrived. Father called us and told us to meet our mother. My brother Tejbahadur and I lay by the side of our mother. It is very difficult to recapitulate what thoughts or emotions flashed in my mind at that moment when we lay in bed, with our mother. There was an abysmal silence. Mother, gently stroked my body with her hand and said a sentence, that I never seem to forget. She said very simply, impossible to erase from my eyes ... 'Son you are cursed'. That is all.

Mother was suffering from typhoid for nearly two months and was completely bedridden. Completely lifeless yellowish body. Only her eyes seemed to have some lustre. Her voice, her face... beautiful, the creatures from another world were taking her away... forcibly in front of my eyes. She was completely incapable of talking with us. Words cannot express the galloping speed of the illness which had reduced her to a veritable shadow... and then a mere vacuum - just nothing... the speed of exit and a sense of helplessness to arrest it. Both these were outside the context of the body - abject silence. The sudden

disappearance of Mother from our midst - as though she had merged into nothingness. On the other hand, Mother becoming a part of another unfamiliar world, which prohibited our entry. It was all happening so readily in front of my eyes. We cannot even lay a claim to being an audience.

It was an unusual crossroads where, a previously experienced world held us in a way that even Mother could not have guided our path. 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1920, I seemed to be standing at a similar cross roads lost, looking in all directions, introspecting inside me and looking into the outside world. Both the worlds - the inside and the outside seemed to merge indistinguishably and yet were distinctly far apart from each other. I sat with my father on the 'ikka' that carried Mother's body for cremation at the ghats in Ayodhya. This ghat barren, hot and dusty, lies entrapped in front of our eyes - but to what use? The last utterance of Mother has become a kind of legacy for us. The journey that began in 1920 still continues. Not very disappointing but persisting in being able to energize myself, in the last phase of my journey.

I have received an inland letter from Shivkutilal Verma today. Besides other things, I saw a discernible enthusiasm for Ghazals in him. One can't call it absolute enthusiasm - rather an enthusiasm that invigorates a poet's sensibility. His simple, lucid reassuring direct style compels one

to write similar letters. He was associated with Gorakhpur University till nearly one and a half years ago. He is the most popular poet today. He is a very good essayist and a poet. A very distinctive quality in his style is its self - invigorating prose and if I do not add another sentence and seem to be content and satisfied then this remark is in itself no less a credit to an ordinary writer.

**1/7/ 1986**

I am quite satisfied with whatever I have written regarding the poetry of Shivkutilal Verma. To be able to write it with conviction is certainly not a matter of critical judgment. Since I myself am a poet, I do not appreciate the writings of an ordinary poet with conviction. But only to say this and to leave... it is not the complete story. There is no doubt that one must exercise one's right to keep a sense of balance - a trait worthy of respect.

Mother and son had decided to remain silent by mutual consent.

My wife's name was Vidyapati. She was probably in High School - maybe class 9th or 10th. The average graph of her fever seemed to be going on the higher side. The occasion was the engagement of Tejbahadur. I was to go to Bulandshahar. I went with my brother and my family. My gauna needed to be performed. Nobody thought it necessary to do it. In fact,



it was not even required. My wife's face was probably a bit broad and firm and with stern emotions. I can give evidence in an indirect manner. only, not otherwise. Doctor had said that now you can send her off to her own mother's family. Doctor Captain Mitra had served in the army and was a retired government doctor. He was very well known in town. Anyhow, we started for Shimla (towards Dharmapur) from Bulandshahar. There was a Vaidyaraj who was very well known to father. As long as she was in Bulandshahar it was my duty to stay along with her. Dharmapur was like a village, where doctors have opened sanatoriums where an expensive treatment of TB is done nowadays. I had perfectly understood that the bed of a TB patient has to be disinfected everyday and the food should be boiled everyday - fresh air, nourishing food, diet etc. Every alternate day in the afternoon, I would go to the Dharmapur market place with a bag. I would buy fruits and vegetables from the market and would make boiled vegetables like cauliflower for myself. There was a provision of Chulha to make a few chapattis. I would be lying on a wooden bed in that tiny room. I used to sleep there at night. The arrangements for patients was in barrack type rooms and for attendants those very tiny rooms which constantly had drafts of cold breeze were there.

Apart from Mussoorie this was my

first experience of the hills. Instead of leaves the pine trees had needle like leaves, very smooth and light weight. The leaves that fell from the pine trees completely covered the ground below. The market of Sabatu, like all Himalayan villages, was on both sides of the road, and extended towards the northern part of the village. I vividly remember and why shouldn't I, that the wife of Pandit Ji (Jawaharlal Nehru) Kamala Nehru, also, despite being in jail was a very special patient in this Shimla sanatorium. All patients and their attendants had a natural concern for the health and well being of Kamala ji. The report on her medical condition was of utmost concern to all of us.

There were no signs of improvement and fever was on the rise and all possible parameters were indicative of alternative treatment elsewhere. There was a Parsi doctor in Dharampur in those days, where I took my wife. He did not give me much hope. As a result of Vaidyaraj's recommendations, Tejbahadur had been appointed as assistant MO in the same hospital. I do not remember his exact designation but the kind of self confidence Tejbahadur always exuded was still intact. In between, things which were relevant were told to me confidentially - their meaning was clear, no offences meant but definitely worrisome. We camped for three days in the medical tent of Nanavati. I had been told that her days were numbered.

The end was here. God knows why Tejbahadur went and bought a Kafan on his own, which I hid on the top of the roof of the tent very carefully. I often wonder why such things happen the way they do, that these incidents and events have a pressure on our minds and we are also bound by them. The truth is what these incidents declare. The doctor's table, the visits of the compounder, even the doctor himself at times - one had had enough. Tejbahadur seemed to have got the wind of it from somewhere and he had called for a taxi, and a photographer also emerged and took some snapshots. I did not get to see a single one after that day. Any way. There were bare essentials of belongings, we reached Haridwar soon enough. And started to prepare for our onward journey. We did not light a pyre, but gave her a watery grave. Many images and memories flashed in front of my eyes. They too disappeared. Maternal mother-in-law and maternal aunts too had reached Haridwar. The kind of mental pressures that I had faced in the last four to five months; one's mind would want to run away from them. But all this was not in one's control. That's it.

From there I came back to Bulandshahar to be with my father. It seemed everyone was sulking. I don't know why? Anyway, I took permission from my maternal aunts and father in law that I want to go back to Allahabad to complete my education.

I had very little hope that I was going to achieve something great. Despite having friends like Bachchan, Narendra and a few others, I felt very lonely. Nobody had anything to do with me.

In the mean time Tejbahadur got married again. In fact to be precise, it was for the third time. The girl's family was from Dehradun. (After this Shamsheerji had made a map, which I am unable to give - Ranjana).

**4/7/1986**

I got a room in the Hindu hostel which had four beds. The warden was happy. Last year also he had counselled me 'Do not take a break in your studies, complete your studies.' To me it meant - two more years. Pant ji (Sumitranandan Pant) had written a letter to the in-charge of the Hindi section of the Department of Indian Press, recommending my name for translation work. I had started to do so well that I made about Rs. 50, every month, which was sufficient for me. I used to work very hard at translations. Even today anyone can compare my translations with the primary text in English, and I can assure you he will not find a better translation elsewhere. It was my utmost endeavour that the translation should not dilute the spontaneity of Hindi and must retain the uniqueness of the primary text.

The money that I earned from Indian Press for two years was approximately

Rs. 200. That is Rs. 50 for every page. When I requested them for a raise from Rs. 50 they said this is what they were giving to Nirala. This is the maximum they paid for Hindi. I had completed two years of active translation and had started to live in Benaras.

I had received a letter from the Registrar of the university, regarding the payment of my dues. 'What money you owe to the university, kindly pay or else you will not be allowed to write the examination'. Both the things were virtually impossible for me. To give the remaining balance to the university or take the examination. Who to borrow the money from in order to pay the penalty to the university was something I could not fathom. Moreover, my preparation for examination was virtually negligible. Actually, after painstaking efforts at translation work everyday, I was bereft of any energy to pursue my studies. Hence month after month I continued to meet my translation commitments. The poetry segment of the course I had definitely thumbed through. The rest - criticism and prose, I had barely touched. The direction and condition of my literary work had taken a different turn now. Pantji was publishing a monthly or maybe a quarterly from Allahabad. Its title was 'Rupabh'. I used to do all kinds of office work, for example, translations, review, comments etc. Invariably every issue had

some prose contributions from me.

During this period my creative writing included Urdu female poets, some essays on translations, some miscellaneous essays etc. which were either for 'Hans' or 'Rupabh'. In this context, it is necessary to mention that I had prepared some material for 'Hans' - translations or a few creative writings. They were certainly not written with my heart and soul in it, however, I had to create my specialization. A new ground seemed to have opened up in front of me, and that was journalism. It did not appeal to me. Even if it appeared interesting to me, it seemed to be demanding a lot of hard work. To study a lot of material and then quickly prepare an essay on it, was certainly not very easy for me and I did not proceed in that direction.

Let me share my stay in Banaras. After discussion with Amritrai for two to three days, I gave my consent to assist in the editorial team of a magazine which was to be published by Saraswati Press. It was an entirely new experience for me in Banaras. I did get into it with a lot of enthusiasm. I did take out a few special editions. The language of the magazine and its tone was modern and became a bit progressive. I did start a new experiment. We used to read all the stories published in Hindi magazines every month and then select the best of them all and we brought out a brief summary of it in our own magazine. The story writers

we selected were not necessarily the well established names. What we did give special attention to was the uniqueness of the story. Once we chose a story of Pahadi and published its summary. Pahadi was extremely curious and he told me that 'I have read the story many times, but I could not understand that it has been summarized but from where?' It was as difficult for me to explain this as it was for Pahadi. Not a single new word had been added to the story. Two thirds of the main story had been cut short, and a new story was in front of us with its very essence. If someone were to read the original story very carefully, and then were to see each paragraph of the summarized story, after reading its two pages they would come to know its secret. The only secret to it is that we must first understand as to what the story-teller is trying to say and then edit all redundancy. Then narrate it in your own words and style and the story will achieve its objective. We must not forget that after all, every story-teller is also a designer. He has his own style and the milieu in which he writes, it is very important to understand this milieu. And this alertness is very important while summarizing the story, we must not forget the craft (which was Pahadi's own) and not even a single sentence should be omitted.

I learnt a lot of new things with regard to the publication of a story magazine.

I myself came to know a lot of nuances about the craft of a story. I came to be more discerning about this. The biggest thing that enriched my experience and which became a part of my consciousness was introduction to Trilochan Shastri. For me it was an introduction to a new world from close quarters. There was an ignorant looking young artist in front of us who was a storehouse of hard work. He was not unaware of his strengths. But there was something or the other which was a hindrance in his progress. As far as I think, Trilochan Singh had given his High School examination as a private candidate. He had to attend school for his intermediate. For MA he had to appear in the examination hall every year, even if it meant going there and coming back without taking the examination. This is a very unusual story about talent, where on one hand he would be assisting his weak batchmates and friends, in writing of their thesis and helping them to get the necessary marks to pass, yet on the other hand he was afraid to wear the mantle himself.

Trilochan is a very peculiar character. At times, he is extremely reliable, yet to believe everything he says is as good as not believing. The entire character building of Trilochan Ji had taken place by the various incidents in his journey of life and the people known to him. Trilochan Shastri in trying to escape these

varied and mutually opposing influences got further mired in them. It would be extremely interesting and very useful and helpful in our work, if we were to analyze both his sonnets and other poems with such a perspective. It would also be useful to see how Trilochan Shastri's creative resources energized him and how does he come to his independent conclusions. Another method which can also prove beneficial is to understand the development of his thoughts by analyzing his writings very closely. All these are highly demanding and require a lot of hard work. At some juncture we may have to think of separating his popular poems. This kind of study will enable a historical interpretation of his works.

**15/07/86**

There is a youth who wants to communicate something through his language of whistling. When people get into a skirmish with him, he gets into it with equal enthusiasm. A slight vacuum develops after two to three minutes. He stands with a globe of silence, as though he was Hercules. As though he would challenge everyone - "Is there any one in this world or another world who dares to defeat me" — and he seemed to announce "What is this globe? A world which is obstructionist in everything we do. You have named it Atlas after all. There you are - I kick this Atlas World."

It was not only virtually impossible for any woman to be a part of this world, but equally hard to suddenly assume an important role.

**16/07/86**

Who are her sons? We need to look up a dictionary of Mythology to know what their names are? Whether they exist at all. I am sure I am bound to locate their names in one of those exhaustive world encyclopedias. And also to know what work have they done. Where have they been of help to their father, and what is the value of this help they have rendered.

I have experienced father's love and a mother's compassion. It is true that this love was not as deep as Tejbahadur's love for Saroj, the love Sonu's mother had for him. Every love is as profound as the other, it is only different in its manner of expression. That is the only difference between different kinds of love.

**17/7/86**

Convene a Congress Committee Annual Meeting, and tell them that a prominent poet of Hindi, Shamsheer Bahadur Singh wants to give a statement.

"Since my life has been spent in reading and writing and this is the only thing I have been concerned with throughout my life, I want to tell my contemporaries across the world that they should take

stock of their work. There seems to be a kind of threat to our literature and culture.

Year 83-84. Dr. Nigam from Philosophy spoke fearlessly and without hesitation. Our informed discussions were usually open and without any prejudices. Actually, these frank discussions remain open in formal dialogues, never aspiring to traverse the realms of higher philosophical thoughts. Without meddling with long, serious philosophical concepts, researches or thoughts, he brought us closer to human aspects in a very interesting manner. I like this method. Through readings of abridged biographies, we entered into the arena of conflict of ideas and gradually passed through open areas of clearer, deeper thoughts. Infact I would have preferred a little more of the element of the story telling and if amusing anecdotes could be longer. Actually, it is a writer's own style and is inviolable.

(This autobiography was doing fairly well so far, but in the following description it will be clear why this could not be carried on further – Ranjana).

I wanted to bring up the subject again with him after giving an interval of few days, but his condition is evident from his descriptions of 18/7, 19/7. 18/7 and his subsequent autobiographical descriptions became more of a narrative in self pity.

He did remain in good health for many years after that, but unfortunately, I could not continue this task any further. (Ranjana)

**18/7/86**

Shamsherji, have you ever fallen in love? Seeing your oeuvre, it seems that you are sitting atop that furnace, where the lid has been just removed and the liquid in the pot is still boiling. As though it had been simmering for the last five thousand years, only it has been brought into my notice recently. Nobody seems to have paid attention to it. Often . . . statues which are, may be five thousand or ten thousand years, simultaneously breathe in their distances - in their desperation they have started arguing with me. Even before I can respond to them, they seem to re-gurgitate it themselves. But there is a repressed anger in their tone and mannerisms. That is why on many occasions, I would call these statues and just as we fool around with children by speaking nonsense, I would defer the moment. Since they were quite agitated, I did not want to aggravate their anger. Now, I am a poor writer, that too unwell, their anger and their childish stubbornness has, to some extent, made my story comic. In between the audiences have started whispering amongst themselves, 'climb down Panditji, you are feeling sleepy'. Others can feel sleepy too. But instead of taking your work forward, your sleep, as if in anger wants to silence it.

(Shamsherji could not make a distinction between day and night since many years, now. Hence, he would wake up at night, read and talk, and it is in this context that I tried to persuade him to write. But after reading the description it is evident that persuasion had become a point of stress for him. Possibly, it was

his unwillingness to write, that we have this kind of writing from him. Subsequently, I locked up the research scholar in me forever and assumed the role of a care giver. Whatever follows after that, is only to provide a glimpse of his mental condition to his readers, which was an integral part of his journey till the end.)

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## A NOVEL OF RURAL BIHAR : MAILA ANCHAL

Sham Lal

*We have the privilege of carrying Shri Shamlal's article on Phanishwar Nath 'Renu's' novel 'Maila Anchal'. The archival significance of the piece is that it is the first discourse on that classic work, preceding even Hindi reviews that followed later on. The Times of India's editor Shri Shamlal took notice of this work of fiction and chose to write on Maila Anchal with appreciation and admiration. It was first published in July 15, 1955 issue of the Times of India. Mr. Manoj Mohan, a freelance writer has been instrumental in procuring this bookreview for us.*

—Editor

Who said that “a man of action is always ruthless”, that “no one has a conscience but an observer?” That’s a double lie. To act is often to redeem the suffering of others. And to observe often means to act. It all depends on what you observe. a leaf? A hand? A lone tree against a blue sky? A live fish struggling on a hook? They don’t impel you to act. But then you also see a faint smile on a face, hear a loud sob, look into people’s eyes and hearts, watch how they wrap themselves up in silence and suspicion or hurt each other. You explore the circumstances which press upon their lives. You make others see what they don’t see as a rule. As you remove the blinkers from their eyes you act.

Phanishwar Nath Renu can claim that he has seen more of life in the Bihar village which is the scene of his first novel than others. “There are flowers in it as well as thorns; dust as well as *gula*;



slush as well as sandalwood; beauty as well as ugliness”, he writes, adding : “I have not been able to escape any of these things.” Why then should he be apologetic for recording all that he has seen? It only makes for fullness. The large village of Meriganj in Purnea comes to life in our imagination. Its people are timid, ignorant, gullible, superstitious, prudish. They have their loves and hatreds, their peasant humour, their tattered dreams of a better life. And as the chaotic winds of new ideas blow about their village in the months preceding *swaraj* even the poorest of them try to join the struggle. They are defeated for the time being. But how can so many lives be warped for ever? The doctor who comes to live among them to fight the double scourge of malaria and kala-azar and is arrested on a charge of inciting the Santhals to grab the tehsildar’s land returns at last to the village. All is not lost.

No one after Prem Chand has woven so rich a tapestry of Indian village life as Renu. For the rest his *Maila Aanchal* has little in common with Prem Chand’s *Go-Daan*. Prem Chand’s novel develops in a straight line. The issue is always in focus. We have our hands on Hori’s pulse all the time and as we watch his sufferings his face burns itself into our minds. He is not a lone individual. He is the Indian peasant. His circumstances may have crushed him but they have not put out the spark of humanity in him. We know

he is worth saving, that we must fight for the human possibilities in him.

Renu’s canvas is too crowded. We get the close-up of a face now and then. Yet, there is no central figure. Prashant, for all his love for the village, remains an outsider. And in any case he is not a peasant. There is too much distraction, too much dissipation of emotion in the action of the novel. We are involved in too many inter-caste quarrels. The political creeds, even when they come to the village, remain distant echoes of controversies in the cities. The Santhals who fight for a few bighas of land remain shadowy figures. We sense the horror of these barren lies though the issue remains somewhat out of focus. And even when in jail Prashant sees the truth of the casual remark of Tehsildar Viswanth that “true *swaraj* will come only when the people begin to look upon zamindars... as lepers and madmen”, it all sounds too clever. His words do not convince unlike Hori’s: “These are lean days... to put on fat is a disgrace. One puts on fat by making a hundred others lean. Where is the comfort in this? Real joy will come when all prosper.”

This is not to say that Renu’s meaning is lost altogether. *Maila Aanchal* may lack the intensity of feeling in *Godan*, but its distractions never muffle the all-important questions: What do these people live for? What is the point of it all? Why do they continue to suffer? Even when we are most

shocked by their behaviour we never take it for granted. We are aware of the social roots of the violence that enmesh their lives and of the ignorance that blights their humanity. We know it need not be so. Indeed, we are surprised that their circumstances have not completely cramped their heart, that they still retain their sense of humour. We know Prashant is the writer himself, for that is the only character with whom he is in entire sympathy. He is not one of them but he does his best to become one. Even his love affair with Kamala merges with the life of the village. It does not cloud the main issue. The tehsildar may be Kamala's father but he remains the social enemy until the moment of his conversion.

The meaning of *Maila Aanchal* may be somewhat diffused. But what is most significant in the novel is the writer's means of exploration. The story does not swell to a climax. Indeed, there is not one story. There are half a dozen tales which develop at the same time, now running along parallel lines and then intersecting each other. Renu draws upon the cinematic technique. As one scene dissolves, another comes into sharp focus. We are in the tehsildar's house at one moment, in the Math the next, at the village feast now and soon after in the new dispensary. The camera eye moves at different speeds. Yet there are no deadpan shots. And while the camera records the close-up of a face—weather-beaten, quizzical, flushed with anger or

battered into idiocy—while the sound track catches the exact accent, metallic, gruff, cringing or an incoherent mumble, nothing is lost.

The local speech irritates at times. But who thought it was so rich and that the imagination of these people could give such wild and fanciful turns to their words and sentences? We may have to consult the glossary at the end of each chapter. What is important is that the speech is all the time flavoured like a pineapple or a papaya. Kamala's eyes are "slices of mango". The Darogha's eyes are "like an owl's whenever he is puzzled". Rampiyirya is sharp "like pepper" and there is "a tang in her words". And she needs "a maund of soap to get the smell of garlic out of her body."

The flavour of speech is not all. At the slightest provocation the characters supplement their words with a homely saying that has all the surprise of poetry, snatches of folk songs or a line or two from Tulsidas or Vidyapati. "The clouds are the enemy of the moon; the wide net is the enemy of the fish; and a woman's enemies are her two eyes—they reveal the secret of her heart." Bits of folk speech are an integral part of the local culture. They do not merely add a new dimension to the language. They also act as ironical counter-points. They highlight the dark shadows that fall between reality and fantasy, between what is and what ought

to be, between men's carnal desires and spiritual craving. Torn between his commitment to the Congress and his passion for Lachchmi, Baaldev can only catch hold of these straws. And so is Lachchmi again and again impelled to swallow the little pills of an unworldly philosophy torn between her infatuation for the moron Baaldev and her religious passion. The spiritual texts show up the down-to-earth behaviour of those who cite them.

At moments Renu tends to get too maudlin, particularly in the love scenes between Kamala and Prashant. "In the garden the branches of *gulmohar* were aflame with red flowers. The yellow blossoms of *amaltas* recalled the yellow head-dress of the new bride. Petals of *shirish* were scattered like good wishes." Interludes such as these reek of sentimentality. Luckily,

such gushing passages are few. The larger part of the book is shot with an irony that is never too pointed. Even when we feel that these men have been defeated by their circumstances, that they have been estranged from themselves and alienated from others, we never feel that they are mere machines that have been put out of gear. They retain their humanity to the bitter end—"flesh and blood, nerves and temperaments". Renu has not fully explored the dialectic of their struggle and kept the loose ends of his story. But can the hazardous enterprise of living be ever tied up into neat little knots?

—*Maila Aanchal*

I Edition

by Phanishwar Nath Renu  
(Samata Prakashan, Patna)

The Times of India, July 15, 1955

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

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# Poetry

## **EIGHT POEMS**

Vishnu Nagar

Translated by Premlata

### **Turned into a machine**

He was no more  
a man;  
he turned into a machine  
Never got tired  
though he got  
heated.  
Never fell ill  
though needed repair.  
He was not given  
medical treatment  
but only received repairs.  
Earlier he was working  
now producing.  
He never died  
but became old.  
So when he was sold in trash  
the owner  
made good money.

### **Song of the killers**

Now  
the killers will sing

It is only evening  
yet  
till morning  
many more  
will come

### **Prayer of a killer**

Tired of the day's  
killings  
The killer bathes  
lights the lamp  
and incense  
performs evening poojas.  
He prays—  
'when I die  
along with my  
sons and daughters  
O God!  
only you would survive  
and remain immortal'.

### **After 23 years**

After twenty three years  
of married life  
he asked his wife  
shall I write a love letter  
to you?  
will you laugh at me?  
Embracing him  
she said : why?  
why should I laugh at you?  
write it  
and write it right away  
then—  
I will also write  
a love letter

I write, you reply  
we shall go on  
writing to each other.  
then—  
we shall love  
each other  
stealthily!  
The letter is yet  
to be written.  
The wife is waiting;  
She has noted  
some verses in her diary,  
to be quoted  
in her letter.  
She is scared—  
if some one  
finds her writing  
love letters!  
What explanation will she give  
to her children?  
What is it?  
that has happened to her!

### **Crying in love**

I cried  
many times in love  
love made me cry more  
more than the difficulties.

I am not talking  
about  
the difficulties  
of being in love.

Nor about  
lack of love

during difficulties  
bu I cry in love.

**She was crying**

She was crying  
while laughing  
No one else  
but her mother knew  
that she was crying.

Mother had advised—  
her dughter— ‘cry like  
this otherwise  
your in-laws will say  
you don’t even know  
how to laugh’.

**That house is not a house**

This house has  
many houses  
where  
pigeons, sparrows,  
lizards, ants  
bugs, cockroaches  
rats, spiders  
and mosquitos live  
Independent of each other,  
oblivious of  
each other.

The house is not a house  
where  
there aren’t  
many houses.

### **Six Girls Drown in a pond**

Six girls  
drowned in the pond  
they were young.  
Young were their boobs.  
Touching their body  
a sharp current  
ran into you.  
They were shapely  
like magic dolls.  
Two years would  
have passed.  
Then five, eight  
and eighty.  
A century would have  
passed the death of  
young and fully  
vibrating girls.  
Yet, these girls  
won't let these  
centuries pass just like that  
Tomorrow  
they will come  
naked  
in someone's dreams.  
They will give  
their hand to someone  
but wouldn't lift their eyes,  
not caring to see  
Six girls will  
turn into six thousand  
many more will come  
and will go on drowning  
in the pond.  
you will be tired  
of their drowning.



Six girls will come back  
like sparrows  
and shall go on  
dropping twigs/straws  
No one should  
ever think  
that the girls are  
won over,  
just because  
the six girls  
drowned,  
drowned in a pond.

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**Vishnu Nagar**, born 1950, is a poet and satirist whose oeuvre holds a variety of texts. He has spent long years in journalism in senior positions of editor and executive editor. Some of his poetry collections are— mein phir kehta hun chiriya; talab mein doobi chheh larkian; sansar badal jayega; kuchh cheezen kabhi khoyi nahin; hansne ki tarah rona. He also writes short stories and novels. Presently he is chief editor of fortnightly 'Shukrawar'. He lives in Delhi.

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

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# Poetry

## FIVE POEMS

Jitendra Srivastava

Translated by Pramod Kumar

### SONCHIRAI

(After listening to a Sohar\*)

This is a very old tale  
In a family  
There was a girl called Sonchirai

When she laughed  
There was light, Radiance,  
Flowers blossomed

When she walked  
There was cool breeze all over

Wherever she went  
People passionately welcomed her

And as it happens in every tale  
She also was married to a Prince

The Prince doted upon her  
His lips opened only to praise her  
His tongue lost all tastes  
Except for her love  
His eyes lost sleep  
And his mind peace

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\*A celebratory song on the occasion of the birth of a male baby.

And thus years passed by  
Sonchirai could not conceive  
Nanad (Sister-in-law) did not get a nephew  
Saas (Mother-in-law) her descendent  
The Husband did not receive the prize of his masculinity

Sister-in-law called her Infertile, Stone-wombed  
Mother in law called her barren  
And the one who remained glued to her like breaths  
Said your golden body is useless  
Better if you leave this house  
Even your reflection is not auspicious for my lineage

Sonchirai wept  
prayed  
but no one cared

With tears in her eyes, a woman  
After being thrown out of her home  
Wandered in the world

In the forest, she met a tigress  
She narrated her tale to her  
And pleaded that the tigress should eat her

The tigress said go back from where you have come  
I can not eat you  
Otherwise I too will become barren

What could Sonchirai do!

From there she reached, a snake's pit.  
She met a nagin  
The nagin heard her sad story  
And said go back from where you have come  
If I bite you  
I will be barren

Sonchirai got disheartened  
What could she do

Weeping and crying she reached her mother's doorstep.

The mother consoled her  
Asked, Dear darling what troubles you?  
She shared her anguish and  
Prayed for some living space.

The mother said a daughter should not  
Be with her parents after marriage  
What will the society say?  
Go back from where you have come  
And listen! Do not feel bad  
If your shadow falls on my daughter-in-law  
She will become barren.

Saying this, the mother closed the door in her face  
What could Sonchirai do now?

She pleaded before earth  
You give me refuge, mother  
The pain is unbearable  
My feet can not move  
Those who gave their life for me  
do not have even an inch of space for me  
Where to go except in your lap.

The Prithvi said your pain is colossal  
But what do I do  
I can not do anything  
Go back from where you have come

If I keep you in my lap  
Then I will be barren

And friends what happened next  
Is not a part of any tale

It so happened, after being disappointed from every side  
Sonchirai sat on the bank of a river

One day passed

And the other  
Third day in the afternoon  
One handsome young man  
Down with thirst came to the river bank.

He looked upon Sonchirai  
And lost the whole world for a moment

He got emotional and asked Sonchirai softly  
About the cause of her pain  
After knowing everything, he entreated her  
To come away with him

Sonchirai hesitated for a while  
And then she went with him

Having lived a good old age  
When she died  
Her eight sons wept in grief.  
They earnestly  
Shouldered her last bed.

Sonchirai was a mother of eight sons  
She was a woman  
And women are never barren

They create  
They create and therefore you and I live  
And that's why the world exists  
Man does not have the courage to create.

Men are Men  
Because of them

### **JUST LIKE YOU**

Alone I am on the far mountains  
There you are in the house with daughters

Standing on a high peak now  
I gaze with nostalgic eyes the passing clouds  
With the sun visiting the houses

I am reminded of your face

I do not know what you'd be doing  
Right during these moments

May be.... After giving daughters a bath  
You would be combing their hair  
Looking at their faces  
People say  
Elder one's eyes are like mine  
Younger one's like yours.  
For the last few days  
Looking after the entire household  
I get tired many times  
In handling my own work  
And there you are, doing so much so swiftly

I know it is a crime  
But what to do  
From where to bring  
A woman's soul in me!  
That too at a time  
When girls are killed right in the womb

I wish when I come home this time  
You tell me where do you store away your temper  
And what has happened to your speech  
That could have expressed your likes and leanings

I remember  
From the time we are together  
Whenever I come back from my travel  
Before I utter a word you have lapped up my pain  
I know it very well  
You identify the colour and language of my pleasure  
But even after years of togetherness  
I can not say the same for myself

I know it is wrong  
Almost a crime  
But how do I conjure up

The soul of a woman!  
At a time when  
Girl children are killed in the womb

Even then I have this intense desire  
That this time when I get back home  
You speak up for yourself  
And for those like you,  
And I give you my ear  
Just as you give me yours

By the way let me know  
Do you think I would make a good listener  
Just like you!

#### **IN WASTEFULNESS**

Enjoy when you occupy  
A seat in a bus  
Make your nose accustomed to that  
Make that a habit  
Let it be his fragrance  
Or his perspiration  
Do not make faces at him

The person sitting along  
Treat him as your equal  
And do not tangle your mind in a car  
And body in wastefulness

This world is not big only in sayings  
It's big in its existence  
And life of billions of people  
May be small  
But that refuses to shrink  
In the palms of  
A few thousand people  
And moves ahead

If you differentiate among people  
Someone can call it the  
Insult of opportunity

But stubborn people  
Understand better  
The travel of tortuous mountains of life.  
Through drowning in the well of opportunity

### **DELIGHT IN BLOOD**

I asked  
With slight inhibition and affection

‘How is your partner  
Does he care for you’

She said  
Out of her mirthful merriment  
‘Yes, very supportive  
Understands my limitations  
His own too’

That day my inner self kept murmuring with  
air and flowers  
kept asking the wellness of stones on the wayside

chewed the neem leaves strolling there  
but the happiness was so heightened that the  
delight was not lowered

I said to myself  
It’s good that at least one daughter is happy  
There will be many more with passage of time.

### **I WILL DEFINITELY GO TO CALCUTTA**

How far is the city Calcutta  
The same Calcutta  
Where our Mirza Ghalib reached and came back  
With the modernity of mind

How many times I have repeated  
That couplet  
Like a lesson  
In which with turbulence  
A poet searches for



The way of life

The question there is not  
That of morality and immorality  
Nor that of religion and secularity  
The question there is of a new light

After hundreds of years of  
Ghalib's journey  
A humble Hindi poet  
Is going to Calcutta

There is deep restlessness inside  
Our cities have changed  
The trees of souls are getting  
Invisible there  
There is no wild wind  
To blow away the layer of illusion

This is the time of magical advertisements  
Time of forgetfulness

To talk about relations these days  
Is like talking of Stone Age.

Our cities have changed  
Calcutta too must have changed.  
But how far is that city  
The back is aching  
The desire is soaring  
How much time Ghalib would have taken  
To reach there  
Not only his body  
His soul must have cried.

For him Calcutta was  
Not simply a city  
This travel was not that of a tourist

When we look at a city  
The city also looks at us

Calcutta must have seen our mega poet  
His tears  
His sadness  
His pain  
Would Calcutta have seen  
The soul of our mega hero  
The ever flowing river flowing inside him

In Calcutta  
How would I identify that stone  
Where he negotiated with time  
And rested for some time  
The face of our poetry  
The master of Rekhte

I wish to see Calcutta  
Whatever pain my back may have  
Whatever may be the exhaustion  
I will not go back to Delhi  
I will definitely go to Calcutta

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**Jitendra Srivastava** a noted young poet has four volumes of poetry to his credit: In Dino Haal Chaal, Anbhay Katha, Asunder Sunder and Bilkul Tumhari Tarah. This is in addition to the four volumes of literary criticism. Several awards to his credit include Bharat Bhushan Agarwal Puraskar, Ram Chandra Shukla Puraskar, Vijay Dev Narayan Sahi Puraskar, Kriti Samman, Ram Vilas Sharma Alochana Puraskar, Parampara Rituraj Samman etc. Jitendra is an Associate Professor in the faculty of Hindi at Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

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## THE EVENING BEAT

Govind Mishra

Translated by the author

How cunning!

Both slipped away early at dawn so that he didn't wake up and stop them or accompany. In the morning when she was not sighted, he got alarmed, asked the grand children-'where is your grandma?' 'Daddy has gone to the railway station to see her off-' was the reply. He felt choked.

That she would go was certainly in the air. The day before she sat near him all the day long under the beautiful winter sunshine. She was sitting on the mat. He brought out the small cot for her—"Sit here, you can stretch also". She sat on the cot, knitting before him. He felt nice. Strolling around her he talked about sundry things, Let us go for a few days to Rishikesh this summer, to Ayodhya next winter— arrangement of our stay shall be made in Srinagar Bhavan...let us visit old places and meet the near-ones by turns, now Panwari, next time Sisolar. God knows how much time is left: we will see them the last time.

When initially she had raised the issue of going alone, he had objected - No, you can't go, moving here and there uselessly, wasting money. If death has taken place in daughter-in-law's home, let them go, she or our son. It is they who have to keep the show going, we are beyond seventy now, can't keep running.

But the day before while sitting on the cot under the beautiful winter sunshine, when she again raised the issue, he okayed—so happy

was he — ‘all right, go ahead. It would be a change. Bring with you singharas, a kg. or so. They abound the markets these days’, It is clear now that it was cunningness, pure and simple... cunningness on the part of the son. He was to go, instead he passed the buck to his mother. When she would go, she would naturally spend from her pocket and she... she is ever ready to travel even on a small pretext. She was knitting while she sat on the cot but would very cleverly raise the issue in between.

She was looking nice, sitting on the cot under the beautiful sunshine. How much does he wish that she always stays with him like this, sleeps nearby in the night too. He advised her in a thousand different ways but she like a cow, smitten by an insect, jumps and runs away at the very idea. She would sleep inside with the grand children like a cat with her kitten. She doesn’t have the desire... or he smells, old guy that he is, now how to get fragrance of the youth! and as for him, his blood starts running faster even if the maid-servant is sweeping the floor nearby. Feels guilty also that with a wife living, he pines for another woman!

Once in a round about way he broached the subject before all—‘he lies alone in the outer room, can’t see properly at night, may require something or the other at an odd hour... or suppose he falls sick all of a sudden, age after all? It’s a big

help even if she sleeps in the hall nearby. What’s the difficulty?’ Every one, sort of, agreed... but nothing came out of it. Who cares when she herself doesn’t? She has followed the footsteps of ‘Thakurain’. While Thakur was working - “Guddi’s father, should I make some tea for you?’ and as soon as Thakur retired, Thakurain started muttering. Poor fellow! if he by mistake happened to request for tea, she would thunder— ‘Keep quiet, you will get when tea is made for all. No work, no occupation— whining for tea all the time!’

Probably fear has gripped her. He used to beat her every now and then, used to shout also— You will dance at my bidding or something of the sort. Of course he never meant it...

She won’t understand... The idea was that the two of them live together lovingly, move together, talk and whisper day in and day out. When in service they were never at one place—he was teacher in a village, she in the town. Damn the authorities! never posted them at one place. After retirement of both, life could be so sweet... but she runs away from him, as if he is a man-eater.

She will be brought round slowly. Women want that you implore repeatedly; they desire to be treated delicately, whereas he happens to be rough, tough and uncouth. So he permitted her to go, do as she desires—although he never wished it, can’t pass even a day without her. That sort

of attachment! Had he come to know in the morning that she was going, might have stopped her, despite having okayed the proposal a day earlier, or might have insisted that he was coming along.

She had promised that she was going for three days only... but seven days have already gone by. She had gone for a death-ceremony, moved on to a marriage from there. She had gone to Sagar, proceeded to Chhattarpur from there.

How cunning! They would all whisper together—advices and counter-advices, then all of a sudden, a ‘check’ to him, as in the game of chess. She in any case is a cheat by birth, is now on the support of her son. Had the son not been in the picture, they—husband and wife—would have been living together in their house, she cooking for him. She first made him and then herself dependent on the son. Sent all of their belongings here, wound up in one stroke the entire household made with life-long efforts. Now where to go. She would keep on flattering the son and the daughter-in-law and it is a burden to utter a few good words to him. She would chatter with them inside while he would lie dumped in the outer room like a piece of furniture. He pines for her company here, while she in Chhattarpur, right now would be doing the chores of others.

How so ever much he advises himself against being mad about such a creature,

but what an attachment! Worrying about her day in and day out. There is nothing in the world if she is not there. If she is not around, he doesn't relish anything, be it worshipping, roaming out or talking to someone. But why does she avoid him all the time? Is she by any chance, carrying on with Ramnath who became a widower two years back and is eager to set up a house?

She must be called here somehow, must be properly managed thereafter. If nothing else, this time she will be maimed so that she is not able to go anywhere.

Next day he sent a telegram to her on behalf of the son 'Seriously ill, come soon.' Had it been on his behalf, or about his illness, she would have swept it aside. Son's illness... she came running 'whatever happened to my dear son!' She arrived in the evening and immediately the mischief which he had played was unveiled. She bore a swollen face, kept busy inside throughout the night. In the morning while going for a walk he tried to engage her in talking; she went away as if it was below her dignity to talk to a cheat like him.

He controlled somehow till the afternoon, whereafter he lost patience and called loudly from his outer room—'Aye, listen. Get my cot tightened, see a pit has developed in it. I Can't sleep.'

She came anyhow. After getting her engaged in the tightening of the bed, he

tried to inspire in her pity for himself - 'See, I sleep in a pit like this, no one cares. Whom to tell except you...

Both were doing the errand together. One would pull from this side, the other from that side. What a thrill in doing some work with her!

"Did you bring the 'singharas' for me?"

"Who will think about singharas after getting a telegram like this."

"Had I made a plain request, would you have come?"

"Had I gone to live there?"

"All right whatever happened, has happened. Now do as I say."

"I have told you-I shall not hear your abuses, nor will I tolerate your beating. Done enough."

"Don't do things which lead to..."

"I don't do any such thing. You want that I should always be in attendance. I will do only within my capacity. After all age is with me too."

"Alright don't do anything, but start sleeping here."

"Same thing? I told you, I don't like to display this humbug in public."

"Is it humbug - that our son and daughter-in-law sleep in one bed?"

"It is different with them. Did we ever live in this style that in old age we now parade it?"

"Then one should not sleep with one's wife?"

"Look at your wrinkles now, this drooping flesh. You have crossed seventy. Engage yourself in religious things."

"I will do that, but first you come here..."

And he caught hold of her suddenly, put her on the bed and started pressing her down— "now tell me, would you sleep here or not?". For him it was a pretext to lie over her in love but she got scared, was struggling to get out, cried - "Killed me, this fellow... the murderer... help, run, help me..."

She was making such noise that the whole world would collect there. He got so enraged that he took the stick, lying in the corner and started beating her left and right — "Bloody wife! would dance to the tune of others; if he happens to utter a few words of love, would pose as a holy woman, preach him, tell him the scriptures..."

Grand children and daughter-in-law rushed immediately to mediate. He struggled with all and in between whenever got a chance, beat her from here or there— 'Bloody, whole life you did like this - pampering others and hell to me."

They took her out. She was put in a room inside, where he couldn't reach. The son was called from the office. He came, caught hold of him and turned him

out- “Get out. Civilized people stay in this locality. If you behave in an uncivilized manner, this place is not for you. Get out.”

Bloody hell with you, civilized people! She is his wife or some one else's? You separated her from him to get your chores done. If he protests, you say she is independent, she will move for divorce. Teaching her wrong things, spoiling her. You would never advise properly, should say— ‘yes, it is his old age after all. If the wife will not look after him who else will?’

How insulting! Bloody wife! She put him here, wait for a while, you will meet the same fate one day. Those whom you regard your dear ones today - they would catch you by hand and throw you out similarly.

He was thrown out. Whole day long he sat outside with face drawn as that of a monkey. They gave a jar of water, followed by numerous abuses. In this big city can't go anywhere. Bloody rascals, they brought all his household here; took away their precious possessions with sweet and deceptive talks. They keep her, his wife in the forefront to safeguard things which once belonged exclusively to him and his wife. Now no home which he can call his own. To top all now they have taken his wife over to their side. They all united, and inside, he all alone and thrown out.

In the evening he was not stopped from coming inside; dinner also was sent to his room. They had a conference until late at night. In the morning, she, his wife, was not there. She went away on her own or was sent somewhere... as if he was a killer, would swallow her, if found alone.

How cunning!

He had planned that she returned, when she had gone earlier. She had returned also but the rascals struck again. He hit her with the stick only twice... but hell was let loose. On top of it - she was made to disappear. Three days passed by and no news as to where is she, where has she gone. Whom to ask, no one pays any heed. Where to search for her! Now at his age, how to cope up with this combined conspiracy. He is lying helpless in the outer room.

Oh Dear! Oh God!! Oh Master of all! Oh Almighty. Father of the helpless, please help. What ill-luck! What deceit! All have conspired to put him in this plight, to get choked to death in this butcher-house. There is no one, whom to explain his plight and complain. Oh God, Oh my Master... now only you are there. From this little room, he can't be heard. Big drums beat inside, how can the delicate sound of a soft instrument ever enter there!

Probably the time has come; he will die his father's death. His father was put

by his sons, outside the house under a tree. Father had turned blind and there was no one nearby even to give him a glass of water. He, his third son, was of course not there at that time but can imagine vividly how his father must have died. The heat of summer, heat of body in temperature, feeble voice emanating from dry throat— ‘Oh Khimma, Oh dear son... The old man, gathering his full strength might have got up to reach the earthen pot of water... but lo! the pot was empty...

In the morning he was found fallen under the cot... dead.

Whenever this image of the father rakes up before him, he starts shivering. How pathetic is the end! What helplessness! a man’s end... one who in life performs what not... how many big fights he takes on himself over land and woman and ultimately both desert him.

Here he has not done anything which he had not done before. Between him and his wife... such skirmishes, little beating too... these were indeed the order of the day, nothing new. What has he done after all that he is being tortured like this. Time alone is powerful - same Arjun and his arrows— also the earlier ones—could not save the Gopis! He could keep his wife under his control all through with these very methods... but now? The son, she delivered has turned into a bull! Perish... all those who made him homeless, rootless...

No one comes near him. He lies in the outer room like a dog. At meal-time food is sent, then lie there talking to yourself. Once in mid-night suddenly it struck him that for the past so many days he has not talked to anyone. The very idea made him restless. Felt as if he was dying - how lonely and dark, no one for miles and miles... he is dying and no one near about... Suddenly he picked up his stick and started beating the steel jar- ‘run - rush... he is dying... come, anyone’

Sound as that of a fire - brigade. Son, daughter-in-law, grand children - all rushed- what happened?

“I am dying... the end has come. Oh God, Oh Master of all... Oh Father of the helpless! Turned out of the house, yet dragging on like an orphan. What insults. God... send for me now.”

“Why do you think like this? You have yet to live for ten years more.” The son consoled.

“You people have made me half-dead already. I unnecessarily fiddled with the bee-hive and the bees all together bit me. Oh Lord, Master of all... call her at once, life is going out of me...”

“When Amma doesn’t like your company, why are you wasting yourself, pining for her? Let her go to hell. You be happy here.”

“Indeed...! Let her go to hell! Why don’t you let your wife go to hell? Yes...



be happy! You be happy, it is your day. You finished us. When you people were not there, your mother and I carried on merrily. While in service, away from you people - she was all right. She had sworn by the Ganga that after retirement, she will live with me without any gap. Call her and ask. Let her face me and rebut if she can. You people came forward to spoil... Now make it up ... Oh God, Oh Lord... Oh Almighty, call her, otherwise I will fast unto death, will die at your door-step.'

They consoled and went away... as if he was a child crying for a sweet. They always divert like this. They will not call her...but he is hanging on to a fine thread—she may come on her own. Let her come this time, he will touch her feet. There are three demons inside a man - passion, anger, greed. Of them one alone is capable of finishing everything of the man in a moment. Great souls like Vishwamitra also came under the spell. He will throwaway these laddoos given by the Aurvedic doctor, who said this is traditional medicine to improve health, increase manliness... God

alone knows what did they contain that the moment he ate one, he was possessed, got mad. Caught hold of her; when rebuffed what anger! He lost his mind. The whole game was spoiled.

No, you my wife can't go away like this. What have we not seen in life together! Togetherness of forty years! Now on our way out of life, you can't finish everything like this. Don't follow your son and daughter-in-law. They are dangling us on the swing of their selfishness. What do they care? We are only pawns for them, not human beings. Try to understand. They uprooted us from our place and thus made us helpless. Now they are cutting us apart, trying to separate us from each other. They advise you to divorce. They are enemies, not our children. Understand their devices. We spent our entire life together, abusing each other, little beating too. Whatever new has happened now that you got away, leaving everything behind. Oh! you... you accompanied me thus far. Only a little more is left, put up with me. Don't leave me with these wolves!

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**Govind Mishra**, born 1939, is author of forty five books. He has received a number of literary awards prominent among which are Sahitya Akademi Award (2007), Vyas Samman (1998) and Subramanyam Bharti Samman (2001). He has travelled widely and was Chairman, Direct Tax Board until 1997. He lives in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

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## UTOPIA

Vandana Rag

Translated by  
Anu Jaidev

Najjo did not have a father.

He had passed away when she was barely two. Najjo couldn't remember what he had looked like. She had once seen a faded black and white picture in Ammi's trunk, the one with pink flowers and green leaves on its lid. While playing, she had run into the dark, suffocating little room at the rear end of the house. It was pitch dark. You couldn't see anything there, but the inexplicable allure of the petal and leaf-strewn lid of the trunk drew Najjo on. Tripping and tumbling, she reached the trunk and climbed on it. There she stood, preening, daintily clutching the edges of her frock and swaying from left to right. It suddenly struck her that all her acrobatics had failed to set the trunk clanging...why? She plonked herself down cross-legged in front of it, and proceeded to wrestle with the lid. Her little palms found the latch and her eyes lit up. She clasped it tightly, tugged hard and the lid sprang open. Wah! Inside was lots of interesting stuff, shimmering and glittering. She saw pearl studded purse, a hand fan with a blue chenille frill, lots of silverware, which had a dingy grey appearance, and beneath, much beneath all these things, lay buried a gharara suit with a somewhat blackened sheen. Najjo's eyes gleamed even more.

"Ya Allah! A wedding dress!" She had seen several such dresses

at those innumerable weddings she had attended holding Amrni's finger, clinging to her, inseparable as her shadow. This quirk would often invite much bantering "Najjo, let go of your mother's finger. Will you take her away as part of your dowry? Let go!" Little Najjo's eyes, would tingle with tears, but her spirited obduracy would blaze through them: "I'll never leave my Ammi and go anywhere."

"Oh yes?" the women would retort, rolling their eyes and twirling their hands. "You won't get married?"

"No!" she'd cloak her obstinacy in an angry scream. "I'll never get married."

The women would laugh heartily and Ammi would immediately turn her palms over her little head to ward off the evil eye, saying, "May Allah have mercy! That's not to be said, child!"

But this early stubbornness lingered to become part of her personality and continued to resonate firmly in her heart. Her family came to understand this much later in retrospect... Najjo, however, knew everything. It was all her game. She had planned it.

Najjo pulled out the dress and turned it over and over untidily. The very idea of marriage repulsed her, and yet the wedding dress warmed her heart with an incomprehensible joy. She wanted to dress up in the red outfit and prance around and show off, and yet never leave her

Ammi's side. Her inordinate attachment to Ammi often worried her brothers. "Ammi, agreed she's the only daughter. Agreed, she's the youngest. Agreed that Abbu is no more, but this excessive attachment does not seem right. And you, too, let her get away with a lot. She's turning more and more stubborn day by day." Ammi would stop ladling the saalan for just a moment. She'd turn around to size up her three sons and her heart would warm to them.

The pain of her husband's loss would be half reduced. All her three sons had grown into sensible young men. Her beloved Pappu, Guddu and Raja. His father's employers had taken Pappu on, as a driver after the latter's demise. He had then managed to get similar jobs for both his brothers, using his contacts. Together, the three brothers managed to raise an income of ten to twelve thousand rupees a month. As of now, all was well. But Ammi knew that everything would have to be reworked once their brides arrived. Najjo's marriage too would have to be arranged in another four or five years. She was the darling of her heart, but she couldn't really hug her to her breast forever. She was pampered no end. Perhaps that had made her a little self-willed. But Ammi didn't make much of it. She knew that by the time girls are nudging twelve or thirteen, they begin to mind themselves with great alacrity. Good sense slices right through

their frolics and tantrums, and takes complete charge. Then they don't even need to be told to take care of their dupattas. The slightest hint of a slip and they become alert and watch out for themselves. Ammi too, had grown up traversing the same route. Had learnt to keep her dupatta in place, abide by the strictures of the namaz along with acquiring efficiency in cooking saalan. So while she understood her sons' concern, she didn't give it too much importance. What was to be done? Girls will grow unrestrained like the shoots of a wild shrub, and they must. It was a matter of just a few more years. Then where would Najjo prattle about their house? She'd have to go and thrive elsewhere, under someone else's protection. Completely within it. Ammi often worried herself sick over this. Her husband had never insisted on the veil: she did not have to don a burkha, was merely expected to cover herself with a chador. But who knew what Najjo's in-laws would be like?

Ammi's eyes would smile benignly at her sons, reassuring them. She was there for all of them. The boys respected Ammi. They were employed, they worked sincerely, they stayed away from unnecessary quarrels and arguments.

Stirring her saalan, suddenly Ammi thought of her daughter, who had been missing for a while. Missing daughters inevitably rendered homes traumatized and forlorn, Ammi knew. This little bird flitting

about her home added exquisite meaning to her existence. She felt lonely without her incessant chatter. But where was she? Brushing away the cobwebs that had sprung up on their own, Ammi called out, "Najjo... Najjo! Najjo!"

Najjo hadn't even examined the gharara suit properly when she dimly registered her mother's voice calling her from far as if echoing from a mountain to the plain beneath it. Not that Najjo had seen any valleys or mountains. She hadn't even seen villages or fields properly. Not even mapped the contours of this very town with her eyes for that matter. For her, this half plastered, half brick-lined house, a little away from the Rajiv Nagar locality, was effectively the whole world. Sometimes she'd set out on a jaunt to town, when any of her brothers finished their duty and still had the car with them. They gladly obliged her with these joyrides as often as they could. That apart, clinging to her Ammi's hand, she'd go visiting neighbours and relatives and that was it.

Ammi's echoing call terrified her no end, goodness knows why. Startled, she dropped the gharara suit. When it fell to the floor she heard a crackling sound and with it came the magical patter of Ammi's steps. "Arre, Najjo. what are you doing here in the dark...? What have you smashed...? Illillah! What shenanigans will this girl come up with next...? Where the hell are you...?" For the first time in her

life Najjo heard her Ammi rage like other mothers. For the first time she encountered the stinging, sharp edge of her mother's palm instead of its usual rabbit softness.

For the first time she learnt that in smashing that buried article, she had damaged the one precious thing her mother had secretly treasured for so many years. That day, for the first time, a sad melody stirred in her little heart. That sorrow wrenches the heart and streams out through the eyes - Najjo learnt this too, that very day. Despite the calamitous magnitude of her distress she had somehow gleaned that Ammi's rage was justified. When she was pulled out of the dark room and flung into the light, she understood that even light could hurt the eyes when they are suddenly forced open after darkness. It feels as if nails are being hammered into them. In between this painful dose of knowledge Ammi informed her, while showing her the photograph with its shattered glass and fractured frame over and over again, how she had thoughtlessly smashed the only photograph of her father. That day, she had learnt how dark her Abbu had been. Dark with a long, brown beard. In the midst of her newly earned tribulations she had found a sliver of happiness. She wasn't like Abbu at all; she was like her Ammi, fair and beautiful. Tearfully, she extricated Abbu's picture from Ammi's limp hands. Now she was in Ammi's lap wrapping Ammi's arms

around herself, removing her from the vanished past to the present and lending them a sense of purpose yet again.

"You crazy thing!" Was Ammi speaking, or just sobbing? "There was just one picture of your Abbu, and now it'll have to be framed again."

"Ammi," began Najjo, pushing everything away with the frank curiosity of her years, "why do you keep Abbu's picture locked in the trunk? It could've been hung up here with these," she pointed to the bright pictures of Mecca and Medina embossed on black fabric. "I am sure they wouldn't mind, and we could've seen Abbu everyday, even though he wasn't around."

"No..." Ammi's gloom was dense. Najjo couldn't reach through it. She was too young.

"Why not, Ammi?" she persisted; her impetuosity getting the better of her distress. Ammi was thrown *off* balance. How could she make this little mite understand? She had a firm belief she'd learn on her own. Being a girl the right demeanour, the boundaries of her life, roza, namaz and whatever else, would be learnt soon enough.

She tenderly hoisted Najjo from her lap, stood her on the floor and tried pulling the edge of her frock below her knees - in vain. It couldn't be pulled any further. The girl had shot up. Soon it would have to be salwar kameez. Her legs were growing

so long and smooth, and, inshallah, she had a gloriously bright wheatish complexion. She had big, black eyes, and her hair was long and black. Her plait kept bouncing on her back. The sooty outlines of her eyes snaked out to sting. No wonder her younger sister-in-law had declared, “Baji, Najjo will come into our family only. The men of this family look completely unimpressive, as it is. This girl will bring cheer to our eyes. And hopefully improve the line.” Ammi had long sensed the earnestness masked in this casual repartee. The prospect terrified her. Wouldn't her darling be suffocated with such a stern mother-in-law? She would say “yes”, and inwardly summon all her prayers that it may never be so. She had even told her sons once that Najjo would be best settled outside the family. Her sons had stopped giving importance to such utterings. They knew that when it came to Najjo, Ammi and Ammi alone would decide everything; no matter what they said.

The next afternoon Ammi slipped out, leaving Najjo playing at home, braving the blistering heat for an all important purpose. She had a running account at Agarwal and Sons. The seth saw her and brightened with joy as he would at the sight of such customers. In this small town, his trade thrived thanks to those customers, who unable to pay cash down, were perpetually in his debt. This way their

number never decreased, even if it meant that he couldn't recover his costs immediately. He was content in the assurance that they could never desert him. This was a classic case of deferred returns, which would yield dividends in, the future. The seth did not worry too much about his debtors. Where could they possibly disappear? Eventually they'd pay up, and if not, well, there was the police and the party workers ever ready to assist him. After all, he paid hefty taxes to both, being one who was numbered amongst the big businessmen of the town.

“Tell me, what would you like to see?” he infused a syrupy sweetness into his voice. Ammi regarded the seth as acceptably decent, even though somewhere she sensed he wasn't. Despite her many debts, his syrupy sweetness had remained more or less consistent. The embarrassment of being in debt can be killing enough, without the shopkeeper's rudeness to add to your woes. Moreover, as of now Ammi had to fend for her brood, so she had to maintain her relationship with this expensive but sweet syrup. She put her hand on a roll of cotton fabric with a beige base, printed with little red flowers.

“Bhaiya, three metres of this and a red georgette dupatta to match the flowers.”

“Dupatta would be...?”

“A meter and a half.”

The seth looked into Ammi's eyes and

thickening the syrup said, "Oh! You're shopping for bitiya? Then why this cotton? There's this Benarsi stuff that has come in. Take some of that. The wedding season is also round the corner. She'll dazzle in this. Ay, boy! Show her the Benarsi fabric." His sweetness transformed into the severity of a broom's harsh stroke. Ammi didn't mind. He had maintained her status - above that of his servant: The boy dumped the roll of cloth down with a hint of defiance. Ammi sensed it and bolstered by the strength of the syrup said, "Arre bhैया, show it properly." The twice-battered servant sat with his legs folded and got on with his job with thorough professionalism. The lesson to keep his emotions out of his work was something that had been administered to him in childhood like an essential tonic.

"Here, take a look. Which one?" Ammi's eyes opened wide. What gorgeous fabric, what lovely colours! All brocaded in gold. As if golden flowers were growing out of the fabric itself. She liked the yellow one best of all. She felt these golden flowers on turmeric yellow would suit her darling's glorious wheatish complexion and she'd blossom like a thousand blooms. Yearning, she asked, "But this would be expensive?"

"Not at all... It is Benarasi, but at half the price." The seth shored Ammi up by adding, "Benarasis now make cloth for folks like us too." Ammi ordered three meters of the fabric and' shelled out two

hundred rupees from her worn old purse. "Get the dupatta matched and add the remaining amount to next month's account." The seth swooped on the money, wrote three hundred in the remainder column, and in his usual post transaction gesture, fixed his gaze on the drawers of his table.

Ammi too, picked up her purchase, stuffed in blue polythene, and left the shop. She thought she'd stitch the cotton suit herself, but get the seamstress Shakeela to do the Benarasi one. She stitched excellent ladies' suits. She had recently made one for herself. Thinking about her suit, Ammi was overcome by a strange embarrassment. She suck'ed in her breath. She had never worn anything but a sari all these years, but some time back her eldest son, referring to some conversation after the namaz in the mosque had said, "Ammi, Maulvi sahib was saying that women will have to wear salwar kameez at namaz. Saris are too revealing." Hearing her son talk like that at her age, she shuddered. At fifty-five, even if a bit of her stomach was visible, what was there to see? Half revealed stretch marks and loose, hanging skin? Did that qualify for nakedness if anyone's eye fell on it? It was simply the result of bearing many children. Most of the neighbourhood women had respected the maulvi's injunctions and taken to wearing salwar kurtas. Something like a fledgling anger would rise within Ammi.

She feared she'd be made an outcaste for not heeding the maulvi's call. What if somebody said something offensive to her...? As a result, hesitantly, she began wearing salwar suits for the namaz.

Shakeela had a hearty laugh when she saw the cloth. "Why, Najjo's Amma, have proposals already begun to pour in for your daughter?"

"No, no..." Ammi supported Shakeela's enthusiasm with a smile.

"Arre, your daughter is like the moon, cover her up as much as you will, she'll glow all the same. You'll have to guard her carefully. There's a growing army of lads in the locality. And these Hindu boys have become too overbearing. As it is, things are not too good. And for a girl-how does Hindu or Muslim matter?"

All this filled Ammi with an unknown trepidation. "She's only in the fifth standard as of now. When she is in the eighth, I'll get her engaged," she decided, and only after forcing Shakeela to reduce her charges did she leave her shop.

The heat beat down oppressively. Ammi felt she would melt away by the time she got home. She pulled her pallu over her head and quickened her pace. Her steps made her light blue sari swish in the breeze. Ammi just couldn't figure out when she ran into Maulvi Usman Ali. He stopped short on seeing her and after saying, "Salaam Valekkum," stopped her

for a little chitchat. Ammi's eyes turned wary. She glanced past him to check out the visible folds of her stomach, tried to figure out if any nakedness was apparent. Maulvi Sahab meanwhile was proclaiming in his sharp tone, after ejecting a spray of paan: "The times are bad, Bibi, the young ones, the boys, will have to be given guidance. It's all because of this TV and cinema...! Now, how many sermons can I give? When the family elders don't understand, what can we possibly expect to tell children? Young men have stopped coming to the mosque for namaz. Now they turn up only on Fridays. This isn't right." The Maulvi stroked his long brown beard with an air of dejection. Something seethed in Ammi's breast. She found this discourse utterly unendurable.

She whispered, "Yes, yes." and tried to get away. And lo and behold! Maulvi Usman stepped aside and began to walk along with her. Trying to make the best of the situation, Ammi said, "My sons, Maulvi sahib, try to abide by the namaz, whenever they are not on duty, wherever they may be."

"I didn't mean your sons. I was talking of the world in general. Bibi, money! Big money is being squandered by all the well-heeled seths on Hindu festivals. Now look at this. They have the gall to set up their Nav Durga Samiti right next to the mosque. All this is to harass us. There's an army of goons, who go around singing



and drumming, creating a ruckus to disrupt our namaz.”

“Oh yes, “Ammi replied to cut him short.

But the Maulvi was in no mood to stop, he railed on, “This time that young fellow has become in charge of the Samiti. The good-for-nothing!”

“Who?” Ammi inquired. “Arre, the same one - from your locality. The one whose father used to set up a fruit stall at Farookh Mian’s shop. What a decent man he was! Farookh and he got along so well. And look at the son? Has never done a stroke of work, but is getting up to all this. They spoil the atmosphere, Bibi.”

Ammi’s furtive eyes now sought her heart. The boy Maulvi sahib was talking about was someone she had found very sweet till a few years back. Najjo’s father had had a good equation with his father, and they’d often visit each other’s homes. These were all tales of bygone times. Now it wasn’t possible. Ammi let out an embarrassed sigh. It seemed as if the entire social fabric of this town had altered. She had indeed coddled and pampered that boy much as a child. He had such lovely pink lips, as beautiful as a girl’s. Yes, she didn’t quite like his name, a lengthy tongue twister of sorts. Achyutanand Gosain. He would play in the vacant plot adjacent to her house with other children of the locality. They would often gang

up and come to their house seeking funds for the Durga festival. During the last two years, this fund raising expedition had petered out. Earlier, when they came asking for money, it felt like a nuisance to Ammi, but the disruption in this practice, so many years old, registered harsh and loud. Its venom often erupted afresh, like pain in a festering wound, pointing to a change that Ammi was not prepared to acknowledge readily. This town was so unlike the town of her childhood years. The Muslims today were, of course, different from what they had been in those times. Education, employment, in everything the graph was going up, but there was also this inexplicable failure to understand each other, this hardening to the very core. This hardening impacted just about everything around. It was within the Muslims and without, within the Hindus too. Ammi’s sons would carry news of the whole world. They used to take out big ‘parties’ for tours to Agra, Delhi or Mysore. She would hear about those places and see them all, from the Lal Quila to the Taj Mahal. She even began to understand leaders and politics a little, thanks to her sons, the newspapers and Tv. She knew very little, but understood a great deal. “Be careful” was becoming the philosophy of her existence. When, almost imperceptibly, people’s faces were changing and the warmth of relationships that had existed for years began to melt and flow away, then one just had to seek cover, take hold of one’s feelings and

withdraw into a shell; into grimy pigeonholes -like singed rams crammed in their stalls. Afraid, but carrying on the business of living, fortified by false hopes, the belief in the security of sticking together. Who knew who might be stationed outside the pen, on the lookout for fresh meat? Maulvi Usman Ali's discourse, though unacceptable, did toll the alarm bells of truth. She felt like shooing off the wretch to some place else, he only aggravated the confusions she was trying to fend off. She began to say, "Khuda Hafiz," but cut it short just in time. She was used to this greeting ever since she was a child but of late was using 'Allah Hafiz' - more at the behest of her sons. 'Allah' insisted on a substantial acknowledgement of His existence. People in the community now preferred the weight and verbosity of 'Allah' to the pleasant lightness of 'Khuda'. As a result, 'Allah Hafiz' too had become a part of her being like salwar kameez. She mustered all the composure she could and said, "Allah Hafiz." Maulvi Usman Ali did not like being short changed like this. He began to complain, "Ay, won't you even offer me a cup of tea?"

"Oh!" Ammi's objection was effective. "I have to go to the market, there are no vegetables at home."

"All right," the Maulvi replied, clearly airing his disappointment, but Ammi just would not take the hint. She turned him away from the very door of her house

and hastened inside.

The outer room was cemented and plastered and adjacent to this was Pappu's room. Ammi thought she'd get at least three rooms plastered by and by. For the brides of her three sons. Najjo, inshallah, would leave for her husband's home. As far as she was concerned, it didn't matter. A bed could be laid in the outer room for her. Allah be thanked, the desperate circumstances they had fallen into following the untimely demise of Najjo's father, were improving steadily.

"Najjo.. Najjo!" she called out. Najjo appeared, pulling the red dupatta Ammi had brought over her head and began posing coquettishly. Ammi immediately turned her palms over her head, and pressed her knuckles to her own temples, warding off the evil eye. Najjo's blooming paved the way to imminent dangers. She decided that she'd stitch loose, baggy kurtas for her daughter and instruct Shakeela to do the same.

A gang of lads from the locality used to create a ruckus on the empty plot next to Najjo's house, which they used as a playground. Lately, Ammi had prohibited Najjo from going and playing with them, because every evening she would come home looking harassed. Earlier, she used to be a regular participant in the cricket games played there. The boys would make her field and laugh at her clumsy, awkward gait as she struggled to

keep up with them.

There, once Atchyutanand Gosain had hit numerous shots and made her chase the ball endlessly. The boys doubled up with laughter at her plight, and Najjo, finally unable to bear her exhaustion and humiliation, sat in a heap and buried her sobbing head between her knees. When she raised her head again, Atchyutanand Gosain had his first encounter with two burning pomegranates framed by hissing snakes. For a moment he was frightened and began to descend into an incomprehensible dejection. For some reason, he felt like crying. He wanted to pluck out those pomegranates from her cheeks and fling them away. Why were they so red? He wanted to pierce her eyes. Why were they so black? Why were they hurting him? He closed his eyes, and when his friends finally nudged him to open them, Najjo had disappeared from the scene. He felt as if the landscape before his eyes had gone absolutely blank, like a gaping chasm of terror that could never be filled up. Najjo never came back to occupy that empty space and its emptiness, took possession of Atchyutanand's heart like a threat that would never go away.

A year passed in growing up. Atchyutanand acquired downy moustache. His voice cracked and turned hoarse. His clothes became smaller and he stopped playing cricket on the plot next to Najjo's house. The boy was beset with two

simultaneous misfortunes. His father's untimely death forced him to abandon his carefree freedom and sit at the fruit-seller's shop; and the incessantly growing blank space in his heart made him increasingly restless. Thus afflicted his mind descended steadily into a hazy chaos.

One day, he was sitting in the shop, overcome with boredom, when Councillor Sri Ram Mohan appeared and told his brother, "Why have you tied up the boy in this business? Let him join us. We'll train him in the party work. Settling your accounts at this age, he'll turn grey in the first flush of youth."

The elder brother had no talent beyond his trade. Overwhelmed, he folded his hands and replied, "Take him sir, turn him into a proper man. I'll hire someone to help me. Please take him under your wing."

Councillor Sri Ram Mohan began to laugh, "Come get up and come with me right away. Hold this bag of fruits..." Papayas and cheekoos were nursing each other's bruises inside the bag. Atchyutanand was furious with himself. Why did he see people imaged in fruits, and fruits imaged in people all the time? At times he felt like chopping people up like fruit. First bite them with his teeth and then, if they proved too stubborn and inflexible, slice them through with a sharp knife. He experienced everything as struggling inside a fog in his mind. This haze had deepened with

his father's death. He had been expelled from school after flunking thrice in a row. Even otherwise, how long could a seventeen-year-old continue to study in the seventh standard? He enjoyed playing the role of the local tough for a year or two, but eventually even that got boring. Atchyutanand was looking for viable alternatives and goals when Sri Ram Mohan incarnated in his life. He didn't like him very much. Fat, podgy, with cheeks like watermelons. He was often tempted to put a knife to them to see if they were really red inside. But he was a useful man. He knew how to grow money, to provide a living to unemployed young men like him. In return, he also knew how to get much work out of them. And by assembling them together in a group and encouraging them to pursue certain activities, provided them with a sense of purpose beyond the immediate.

Initiation would begin with an excellent meal. Then the boys would be made familiar with the etiquette of drinking, beginning with beer. When they got into the habit of visiting his den, their coaching would begin. They would be made to listen to inspiring discourses on Indian culture and religion. Cadres would be trained to organize yajnas in town, and as members of the Festival Organization Committee they would take care of the celebrations of Hindu festivals. The boys would thus acquire an objective, and become devoted

fans of Sri Ram Mohan. During the last two years, in the final phase of coaching for recruits, videotapes of various sadhus' speeches were being distributed throughout the town for spiritual cleansing. It was hoped that caught young, these lads would imbibe the lessons properly and aid in the transformation of the atmosphere of the town.

The first assignment for Atchyutanand Gosain was to organize a yajna for Pakistan's defeat in an India-Pakistan cricket match. An auto rickshaw with a loudspeaker went blaring around the town. Banners were put up at important places in the market place and at the station. The whole town was soon abuzz. All the inhabitants were requested to affirm their faith in the nation. All the young party cadres were summoned. Many people turned up and all sat down to pray for India's success. Along with the live telecast, people watched Atchyutanand Gosain's face flush crimson in the midst of chants of, "Om Swaha.. .Om Swaha..." His face glowed with the radiance of his passionate devotion to the nation. His chest expanded, so much so, that he began to cough fitfully. People rushed to him with water. When, later, India defeated Pakistan by five wickets, his supporters hoisted him on their shoulders and carried him through the town. Cadres got into an open jeep and danced some sort of a balle balle bhangra to mark their celebrations. Atchyutanand

was gaining the stature of a hero, as the townsfolk watched silently.

In the house next to the vacant plot in Rajiv Nagar colony too, everyone watched this on TV. The brat, who had made a girl from this house chase after a ball, was no longer an amateur cricketer of the locality. He had turned into a young man who worried more about the nation than a cricket ball. After watching the news, the rotis cooked in that house were baked on fires consumed with restlessness and suffocation. They tasted of smoke. Najjo wanted to spit out that taste in the bathroom and rinse it out with water. A spark of rage began to crackle within her. Nothing should be ruined by that ashen taste. Neither beds, nor chairs, nor doors, nor walls nor bathroom. The hearths should be washed afresh and the doors tightly shut to wall out those victory songs wafting in from the road. They belonged to the street. They were unworthy of being brought in. A kind of poison added intoxication to those songs and Najjo, for the first time since she began to grow up, articulated a dogged resolve the logic of which was lost on Ammi, despite her years and intelligence. "Ammi, put heavy curtains on these windows. There's just too much light and heat and dust. Especially on the windows facing the vacant plot. A searing loo blows in from there!"

Atchyutanand was being honed well. He was achieving an inner enlightenment

but it battled with all sorts of impediments. It was full of different kinds of fruits, people in fruits and fruits in people. There were undefined gashes of memory, which cast dark shadows. This was a battle between illumination and fog, from which Sri Ram Mohan's training programme held out a strong promise of deliverance. His first encounter with this enlightenment came when he watched a video recording. He was dumbfounded. His arms and legs turned cold, freezing him into a heap. Somewhere, an old mosque. In some town called Ayodhya. In some corner of India. The video said that the mosque was built on false foundations. As the commentary continued, the mosque was being pulled down. "They ruled us thinking that we were lowly cowards, they ruled us... At least get together now and destroy this mosque, or be branded impotent. You need to give out the message that our race is not impotent, and those people need to understand that if they have to live here, they have to be loyal to this land."

The moment Atchyutanand heard the bit about them being loyal to this land, his temples began to throb. The glowing crimson pomegranates he had glimpsed some years ago kept flashing in his eyes. His mind kept reverting to the vacant plot and the inhabitants of the adjacent house. What was the connection between the video recording and the people of

that house...? Be still! He let his taut frame relax and stepped out of Ram Mohan's den. Outside, the translucence of the evening was about to spread its wings. A rainbow hue slowly stretched across the sky. He turned into a kite strung between the sky and the road. He flew on, measuring the street, first the market place, then the station, then, with an inexplicable excitement, Rajiv Nagar and beyond it - the empty plot. He sat opposite it and noticed that the gulmohar tree at the end of the plot had grown swiftly and was blossoming with red flowers. This was a new development, since his departure from this place a few years ago. The sight of the young tree's red blossoms brought a thrill. He rose and tore off several bunches of flowers and placed them in that empty space, filling it up. The same blank spot that still bound him to this place; which was the reason for the endless, gaping vacuum within him. Placing the flowers before him, he sat in the dust and closed his eyes, soaking in a rare delight— with the impossible thought that some part of his past might return to him right here. But only dark and ghastly images greeted his eyes, which possessed the terrifying face of some Babur and a clumsily demolished mosque. There were thousands of bricks, fresh from the kiln with the ineradicable name of Maryada Purushottam Ram engraved on them. And along with all this, legions of people who were carrying these bricks on their heads. In the midst

of all that screaming and clamouring, just one sentence stood out with the strength of the assault of the multitudes, "Give it one more push."

Atchyutanand Gosain was overwhelmed with rage. For the past three years, the haze that Sri Ram Mohan, Councillor, had been trying to brighten had only grown denser. The evening had turned into night. It was getting dark, but the darkness spreading within was much greater. Atchyutanand groped for his eyes. He forced them open with a great effort and saw an almost invisible circle, the solid void trapped within him that he had tried to fill up with gulmohar blossoms. But no miracle occurred, nothing brought him joy. He got up abruptly. The dismembered flowers were withering fast. He trampled them with all the strength of his booted feet, kicked at the vacant spot and making a cloud of dust fly into the hazy dark, departed.

Ammi was right. There was no way to halt Najjo's blooming. Neither Ammi's loose fitting kurtas, nor the folds of her drapes, nor the rozas, nor the regimen of namaz, nor the safe confines of home and hearth. Beyond the locality and outside Najjo's Urdu School campus, long lines of admirers sprang up to catch her attention. But Najjo had become wise, exceedingly wise. She was totally devoted to her roza and namaz. Her conduct was often cited in Muslim households, and she felt safe

in such homes. She felt that despite the thousand desires raging in her breast, she was better off as an Allah-fearing Muslim. She prayed that she'd never stray from the correct path. She was no longer the kid prancing around with her frock edges picked up. Now she wrapped her clothes around her properly and covered her face and head with her dupatta when she went out.

Meanwhile, her friends had a good time. The wooers suffered new pangs whenever they set their eyes on her. Almost every day they would find this particular Majnu, pushing back his hair, serenading away: "*Jhalak dikhla ja, ek bar aja aja aja...*" (Just show your face once, just come to me once) Her friends would laugh their guts out, teasing Najjo all the way, exuding a heady and pleasant fragrance in the breeze. Growing up definitely seemed like a lot of fun.

One day, the girls decided that after coming home from school, they'd change their clothes and go to the market. This time the Nav Durga Samiti had put up a fabulous idol on display next to the mosque on the hillock. The idol was decked up in a dazzling dress and jewellery, and alongside there were some exhibits of religious scenes with moving electric lights. The girls set out, properly decked up. They glittered themselves, brightening the market place.

The dense crowds were being

marshalled into neat rows to witness the decorations and the pageantry. The girls got into the queue and giggled their way forward. "Come on, move on please, don't crowd here," the volunteers issued instructions and people kept walking on. In the midst of all these voices, a deep, empty one was heard, "Please hand out the prasad, bhai!" Najjo's ears too registered the fragmenting syllables of that voice. She was irked by both - the vacancy and the heaviness. She raised her head to take a look. It was wrapped in her dupatta; only her face was visible while her frame was locked away in the folds of her dress. The people around her caught a glimpse and realized that she was a very young girl, merely trying to look older. The heavy but vacant voice, which seemed to be that of an old acquaintance, proved to belong to Atchyutanand Gosain. He became apparent first as a voice that eventually turned out to belong to a body. He too, looked up and his heart leapt, recognizing the object of an old quest. Amidst the dense crowd, his vision was absolutely clear: and he only saw fruit. Two crimson pomegranates framed by hissing serpents, which had created a tumult in his life some years back and then had sulkily disappeared leaving a gaping blank in his heart. Atchyutanand Gosain fell silent, and cutting through the files of people on both sides, across the rope restraining them, came right up to the girl. Standing next to her he whispered in his lost, silent

voice, "Najjo... you're Najjo, na?"

In the clamouring surroundings, a new tumult broke loose. This tumult was neither black nor white. The ensuing din too cannot be properly expressed in words. It was an amalgamation of sorts, indicating the making of something new, yet un-formed, therefore a little fluid. That turmoil did not have the soft patter of water, it had noise. It did not seem to refresh, it threatened to wash away; and perhaps because of all this, the girls became exceptionally fearful. With hysterical impatience they pushed Najjo forward. "Let's Just get out of here..." they whispered in some haunted tongue. Tripping, falling, they somehow extricated themselves out from the tent. Atchyutanand remained there, rooted to the spot.

The girls decided amongst themselves that they would bury this incident in their breasts and not breathe a word about it, or they would never be allowed to set foot out alone ever again. "Don't utter a word, or these brothers..."

"Yes..." Najjo grimly thought of her own brothers and agreed. "They shouldn't get a whiff of this."

Maulvi Usman Ali's sudden appearance at this moment felt like an invasion of djinns to the girls. They were dumbstruck. With great trepidation they managed to blurt out, "Assalaamvalem" The Maulvi's intrusion into their secret jaunt seemed

like a warning, and they doubled up with apprehension.

The next day, in the house that lay near the vacant plot Najjo struggled to rid her mind of the phantoms chasing her. But time had taken hold of this undesirable matter and was adamant about punishing her, because girls like her could be redeemed only through retribution. There was a family skirmish in progress on TV and Pappu Bhai had to raise his voice over the din, because Najjo would stubbornly never lower the TV's volume, and Ammi never said a thing to her. "Ammi, Maulvi Usmaan Ali was saying that these girls went to see the Devi yesterday. This is sacreligious. The very shadow of that idol will pervert them."

Najjo shuddered today, just as she had shuddered another day long back in her childhood. A sudden encounter with inconvenient truths and their consequences can only be unnerving for a young girl. She waited anxiously to hear her mother's response full of a sinking, shrinking feeling. But for all her avowed abidance of the namaz, her mind revolted at the logic of being perverted by the mere shadow of an idol. "How can inanimate things pervert anyone?" She had said it, and now she sat breathlessly awaiting the verdict. She could hear her heart beat, as if throbbing within the fist of a hide and seek game of her childhood gone awry. She just sat, cocooned in a silence which



was deeper within than without, and which seemed familiar even though it had surfaced after a long time.

She could feel the texture of every strand in Ammi's voice: "I'll talk to her. She won't go out on her own again." The silence became an unbaked mud pitcher, which shattered within her. A cricket ball had hit it, and it had all happened so surreptitiously that there was no time to gather up the wreckage. If a sob could help gather any shards, it refused utterance. She brooded over Atchyutanand Gosain - how he had bestowed nothing on her except abject humiliation at every juncture. What was this bond between them? He was so distant from her, and yet seemed intent on destroying her life. Why was he everywhere? He was in the vacant plot, on TV, in the marketplace, in the Nav Durga Samiti tent. Between her and her friends, her and her Ammi, her and her brothers and even between her and Maulvi Osman Ali - an obstacle, paving her path with thorns; creating fissures between her and her loved ones. With clenched fists and shaking frame, she stood up, pulled aside the curtain with maroon flowers at the main door and spat out the knot of misery gathering in her gut with as much venom as she could muster.

Now a new etiquette made a forceful entry into Najjo's inner world. The dreams that were a constant part of her existence were perfumed with music as fragrant as

sandal scented incense. She gave words to that melody and her heart proclaimed loudly: "Hatred alias Atchyutanand Gosain." He was her other, the one apart, the one who was discussed in whispers around her. She too knew that all these matters had taken birth in her town with the story of some mosque. They all showed it on TV, how people like Atchyutanand Gosain had demolished a mosque in some town called Ayodhya when she was about two. This town too had felt the tremors of that demolition, as had several others in this country in a kind of chain reaction. This sequence, which had begun when she was two, had continued over the years till date. Meanwhile, she too had been growing all these years. Now she had toughened with this new protocol of hatred because it made her more secure and acceptable amongst her own people. Every year on December sixth, from the time she could read, she had read those inscriptions in saffron on the walls in her town: "Ramlalla, we will build a temple there." This phrase never went out of vogue, but would gleam afresh at this time of the year. In her own house every year preparations would be made in advance for December sixth. The curtains would be tightly drawn. Doors would be locked. Kerosene canisters would be stocked and daggers sharpened. Ammi would be overcome with gloom. She didn't know any Babur. She knew very little about Ayodhya or its boundaries. Sitting in this

town, what did she care if the mosque remained or was razed...? But Pappu, Guddu and Raja cared. Maulvi Usman Ali made sure that they did. And in this way the difference between them and us would be infused in the air like an essential sentiment in an extremely inflammatory but clandestine manner.

Atchyutanand Gosain lay dozing, sprawled on the wooden couch in Sri Ram Mohan's house. The cards, balloons and dolls strung up in the Archie's showroom in town flashed in his eyes. Heart shaped balloons in red, white and pink. Real hearts capable of bursting with pain! Real hearts utterly broken! He had burst them, wrecked them, with his very own hands this year on February 14, when something called Valentine's Day was being celebrated as the day of love, the day when love could be demonstrated freely. At Sri Ram Mohan's behest, Atchyutanand along with six of his accomplices had landed at that shop and wreaked havoc. All displays of love got a thorough battering that day. He had throttled everything with his own hands. But today, after almost eight months, he recalled those balloons and dolls clearly. That pillaged shop and those hearts.. grabbed and popped...

His friends were not familiar with this despondent aspect of Achchu bhaiyaji, as they fondly called him. They tried to tempt him with bottles of chilled beer, but he wouldn't deign to look at them. When Sri

Ram Mohan was told about bhaiyaji's plight, he smirked and winked mischievously. Not only was he well aware of the needs of his young aides, he also had adequate provision to fulfil them. "Go take him out for a picture-victure, get him some good booze and make some arrangement." The arrangement could be named Reena, Saira or Meena, and it would be available at the other end of the town in some neighbourhood by the railway station. The disciples hoisted bhaiyaji on their shoulders, just as they would during any celebration, and bhaiyaji would twist and turn his neck like a swan and accept all the accolades. But today he just let his body fall limply into the jeep while his friends drove him away in the quest for some pleasurable arrangement.

The Reena, Saira, Meena list was pretty extensive. The arrangements had many valuable assets, and all were served up in gleaming gilded platters to suit bhaiyaji's tastes. But bhaiyaji's body seemed to burn as if he were suffering from sunstroke, and his heart was like a tired sun moving westward, eager to rest. He didn't even look at the offerings. The disciples were worried now. They couldn't fathom what was wrong with him. They finally took him to his elder brother and bhabhi's house to recuperate.

"What happened to Achchu?" asked his bhabhi, surprised to see him back home after so long, in this state. "He is not

too well, bhabhi, some kind of fever. We'll get the doctor to check him out tomorrow."

Bhabhi nursed Achchu as well as she could. She rubbed the soles of his feet and his palms with cool oil, massaged his throbbing head, but to no avail. He lay depressed, totally devoid of energy. His face remained lifeless, pale, and shrivelled. Bhabhi called up his disciples: "Seems like he's shadowed by some evil spirits. Get an ojha. He'll exorcise him. He kept muttering 'naj, naj,' the whole night."

"Oh-h...!" The friends were now able to figure out the connection between the 'naj naj,' chant, the lacklustre face and Achchu bhaiya's withering vitality. They began to complain.

"Kya bhaiya?" grumbled follower Number One.

"Kya bhai...iya?" repeated Number Two.

"Kya bhaiya? You should've given us a hint!" Number Three displayed his exasperation openly.

"Bhaiya, if that is what you wanted, you just had to ask. It wouldn't be difficult to carry her off. In any case, it's a different high, abducting their women. The rascals keep running off with our girls every now and then." Atchyutanand Gosain's limp body convulsed and his eyes blazed like embers. They were already red with fever, but now they began to burn. The fellow

who made the comment lost his nerve, he had merely repeated the rhetoric he had been taught in the course of his training.

The fog in Atchyutanand Gosain's mind was assailed by leaping flames. A variety of images would dissolve in it anyhow. He wanted to separate these images and examine them in their different contexts. He wanted to ask Sri Ram Mohan as to what the connection was between the images in the video recordings and this girl who lived in the house next to the vacant plot. None! But he never could ask, because he could not separate and identify them individually.

The disciples let their thoughts gallop on and the remnants of innocence gleamed in the mirrors of their eyes. "Achchu bhaiya's set his heart on that Miyaien!"

The December sixth celebrations this year would be extraordinary. That Miyaien and her family and her community would be taught a lesson. The rascals are bent upon plaguing Achchu bhaiya. Their mosque was demolished so that they'd get some sense into their heads. but the rascals just don't seem to understand. Keep creating some disturbance or the other...

Sri Ram Mohan, councillor, organised a meeting of his cadres and issued orders to prepare for December sixth a month in advance.

Ammi's heart turned heavy, it hurt, weighed down by gathering anxiety. The

thought of arranging Najjo's marriage burgeoned, gnawing at her. Ammi secretly decided on the dates for the engagement and wedding. There was no dearth of proposals for Najjo. But Ammi had to consider each and everything carefully and then arrive at a decision. Prepare for the wedding at the same time. She felt she wouldn't be able to manage all of it in one go, so she thought that she'd begin with getting clothes stitched little by little. Then, maybe she would get some jewellery made. She'd ask her sons to buy household articles like a mixie and a gas stove whenever they went to Delhi, Mumbai. This way a year would just about suffice for getting everything in order, and they'd be saved the trouble of raising funds all at once. She began to visit Agrawal and Sons on a regular basis.

The programme had been set for the night of December fifth. Sri Ram Mohan had issued secret instructions. Not too many, just around three four households had to be done away with, whose sons spoke of pseudo-secularism from the dais of other parties. The rascals always collected weapons at least a week in advance.

There were no special preparations in Najjo's house this year. Pappu and Guddu Bhai were both on duty, and the day of honour for all its colours seemed a little lacklustre this year. This brought some relief to Ammi's troubled heart and Raja too planned to just sleep through his two

days' leave from work.

Ammi made up her mind to go and payoff the debt at Agarwal and Sons. True to habit, Najjo began to pester her to be taken along. The same childish obduracy. Ammi just gave her a silent invitation from the corner of her eye. Najjo, the same Najjo, happily tagged along, inseparable as Ammi's shadow. The shop was quite crowded. Sri Ram Mohan councillor's boys were there, directing him to keep the shop closed the next day and join in the procession. The seth heard them out carefully and nodded his head in affirmation. In the midst of all this, the seth noticed Ammi. After all, their association had spanned several years. With his trader's enthusiasm he declaimed, "Please step aside. Let them come in, let the customers come in."

The boys wore spotless white pyjamas. Some shining brows were adorned with a triangular tripund mark. They looked fresh, newly bathed, glowing with vigour and enthusiasm. Hearing him, for a moment they stood still, then shrank back to free a tiny fraction of space. Ammi squeezed through first and was shoved on to the seat meant for customers, followed by Najjo, who true to her childish habit of not letting go her finger, was jostled onto the seat beside her. A nameless disciple of Achchu bhaiya had pushed her there. He watched her intently, as if to ascertain whether this thing he had thrust forward

was a mere thing or something that possessed life. His heart jumped into his throat when he realized that this thing was quite alive tender being, and it was the very same tender being because of whom poor Achchu bhaiya was burning with fever.

Meanwhile, a rage began to simmer within Najjo. Her dupatta had slipped from her head and now lay on her shoulders. Each face present there seemed to somehow look like the absent Atchyutanand Gosain's face to her. She felt like spewing her pent up rage on that diminutive odious kurta pyjama clad creature who had pushed her. Atchyutanand was there somewhere in him. All right Atchyutanand had so many heads!

However, when the seth had collected his money and was displaying glimmering suit lengths, Najjo's loathing shrank and hid itself. She was charmed by the colours and designs. The shades and textures glowed in her face so that for once even the seth was touched with a feeling like paternal concern. But he checked himself immediately, reverted to his business, and resolved to treat the duo just as customers. He proceeded to scribble a balance of Rs. 2500 in Ammi's account.

By the time Ammi and Najjo stepped out of Agarwal and Sons, the evening shadows had already begun to descend. The market seemed to be in a hurry to close down and head home. Ram Ratan

Bartanwala was hurriedly gathering up the glasses, serving bowls and jugs spread outside. Gudiya Bangle Store was readying to shut down. There was a considerable crowd outside O. K. Daily Needs and Jain Bookstore though. There was a smaller crowd outside Alpana Cinema Hall, as there was still some time to go before the nine o'clock show. The chaat-papdi hawkers outside the complex, however, were already leaving. Fewer people went to watch the nine o'clock show. The dewy hint of winter rain rendered the cold breeze even colder. A hazy wintry silence was spreading over the town roads. Ammi's steps were turning brisk and Najjo slowly trailed behind her. Memories of childhood crowded around her. She remembered how she'd walk with Ammi and pester her to tell her stories on the way. She wanted to leap back into the past with Ammi.

"Ammi, this is where the rider used to come, no?"

Ammi did not like her mentioning this. Slowing down she accosted Najjo, "Why are you talking of such things now? Are you out of your mind or what?" Najjo found Ammi's manner strange. Was she so grown-up that she couldn't even talk about her childhood? Najjo remembered how Ammi would narrate stories of this peer who would set out as a rider on such desolate roads on wintry nights. "May Allah have mercy on us! Many people actually saw him face to face. This legend

is centuries old and even today travellers have claimed that a lone rider waylaid them with, 'Who? Who are you? Go, go carefully.'

"Who? Who are you?" a stunted, spotless white kurta pyjama clad figure accosted her. Najjo's mind somersaulted. She wondered how the ghost rider from her childhood tales could have appeared in person. How did the story come alive? Her befuddled eyes tried to make sure, the rider hadn't come on a horse, but in a closed jeep, and he didn't resemble any peer, but the unclean face she'd seen a while ago, in the crowd at Agarwal and Sons. A shudder passed through her entire being, she was too stricken to even cry out. She felt dizzy and fearful of what she saw before her. She closed her eyes as if to escape it.

Ammi turned. Had someone called out to her? But when she looked, she found no one calling, nothing at all. The entire scene had melted into silence. She felt as if her motto of trying to stay safe had resolved to betray her today. What was this? Where had her Najjo gone? This was happening in another world, and she should be in a different one. She felt she ought to die. If only she could die by wishing for it... Ammi thought she had found death and began reciting the kalma... "La Illaha llillaha..." when a heavy object struck her forehead. But as she fell, she definitely saw them force Najjo into that

jeep. And leaving behind a huge cloud of smoke and lamentation... the jeep vanished into the black silence of that damp, chilly wind.

The watchman of Nai Duniya Lodge knew all of Sri Ram Mohan's boys. This lodge was about twenty-five kilometres from town. It was a den for the boys as well as a hideway for Sri Ram Mohan for encounters of the intimate kind. There were just three or four servants and they were perfectly trained. Their job was to serve the boys as unobtrusively as possible. They pretended not to notice them and stayed out of their way. Opened the rooms. Changed bed sheets. put fresh towels in bathrooms, clean water in jugs and then disappeared into their anonymity till summoned again. The gaps beyond these preliminaries did not require their presence or assistance. It was all predetermined.

Atchyutanand Gosain lay in room no. 1 of Nai Duniya Lodge. Before him was a round table with a floral plastic cover, blossoming with red flowers. A half empty whisky bottle was placed on it with a half empty glass lying in a slapdash manner beside it. Prone on the bed, Atchyutanand glanced at them again and again, wondering why he didn't like whisky any more, or why it didn't hit him as it used to with that slow, simmering intoxication. Just then, two of his followers barged into the room, their arms and shoulders supporting a limp, half-falling shape. This shape seemed

to resemble that of Najjo's, which occupied his thoughts so. But how? He sat up with a start and saw that this shape had been laid next to him with a pillow under its head. He suddenly experienced an overwhelming high. He glanced down with his inebriated eyes - the pomegranates glowed all right. The shape seemed to be alive, throbbing with life. He wondered how? It was his mind conjuring it all up. Disappointed, he laughed like a crazed man. It was all an illusion, all of it. Seeing Achchu Bhaiya laugh after so many days, the disciples felt heartened and said, overjoyed, "It's a gift for you, Bhaiya. Unwrap it tomorrow. Goodnight!"

Achchu bhaiya thumped the bed with a childlike artlessness and stammered, "Saale... behen... Is this real or is it a dream? Can't seem to figure out anything?"

"Bhaiyaji, it's real, absolutely real, we swear! Go ahead, touch her... " And with this they were out of the room.

After they left, Atchyutanand Gosain re-entered the fog of his mind once again, to make sense of this development. What had these guys done? Had they really? He decided to touch the shape beside him to confirm whether it was real or just a dream... What? First, he tried to assess the heat in those searing pomegranates. His fingers trembled and when he touched them, he singed his hands. He was confused and angry. First of all he had burnt his hands and secondly,

the hissing serpents framing the pomegranates were nowhere to be seen. He gathered his fingers together to pinch the shape's arm forcefully and elicited a faint cry. "Ahh..." A voice seemed to come from afar, soft, faint, and stuck to the walls like a spider. Atchyutanand was overjoyed. His dream had a voice. It had traversed a long distance to reach him and had finally become true.

Passers-by on that desolate stretch brought Ammi back to consciousness. She had fallen in the middle of the road, but found herself on the side when she arose. Her helplessness stabbed her painfully. She wanted to cry out loud, "Hai! My Najjo!" but thinking of her daughter's honour, she wept silently. She allowed herself to sink into that abyss within her, which had occupied such a huge space at the time of her husband's demise. The passage of time had slowly filled it up, but today it had brazenly excavated even greater depths. It was tearing at Ammi with the knowledge of Its existence, along with her sobs...

"What happened?" "Arre, look what has happened' "Behenji, what happened? Did the hooligans rob you of anything?" "Yes, yes, yes...No! No!"

A scooterist passing by was stopped and Ammi was transported to Rajiv Nagar. Beside herself, Ammi rushed towards the

house in frenzy. Raja was sitting outside with a group of friends. "Najjo!" Ammi cried out, and collapsed. Before the entire incident could be figured out, the boys had armed themselves and were all set to avenge the dishonour.

Maddened, Ammi cried out, "Arre, how will this fighting help me find Najjo? Inform the police first..."

The boys became furious. Anger and humiliation brought tears to Raja's eyes. "Let us wipe them out today. The whole lot of them!" he roared.

Ammi began to lose ground despite the logic of her arguments, and began to plead, "Police, ask for the police's help!" The boys left her, setting off to enlist other youngsters from Rajiv Nagar in their campaign. Necessary preparations for such encounters had in any case been under way. Driven out of her wits, Ammi staggered to the stuffy room at the end of the house. A trunk covered with pink flowers and green leaves still lay there, where long back, little Najjo had been temporarily lost when she tried to climb on top of it.

Ammi began to search for Najjo's footprints in the half darkness.

Atchyutanand couldn't believe his luck. He wanted to scream and call out to Najjo with the full intensity of his passion, "Najjo

is that really you, so close to me?" But he couldn't. Suddenly he caught sight of the two black serpents, seeking whom he had lost himself a while ago. They sat with their hoods poised right in front him, ready to strike. Even though he was still riding high on his triumph, he faltered for a moment. He bent to confront the visage of the shape, which had by now emerged from the shadow to turn completely into Najjo's face. When it did that something slimy and repulsive splattered on his face and seemed determined to enter him through his mouth. He began to feel awful. He pulled out a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped Najjo's face and then his own. He heard some fractured words spill out of Najjo's mouth and tried to focus his mind and ears on them. When he joined those scattered words together, the hate-filled emotion suffusing them became apparent.

The poisonous barbs too, were obvious. He was surprised how could such a lovely, delicate girl harbour such venom? His mind exhausted itself trying to figure out all these new developments. To find some relief, he changed his position. He plonked himself in the chair beside the bed in an attempt to gauge Najjo's sentiments. Suddenly he heard the clock ticking. The sound brought back memories of all the video films he had seen at Sri Ram Mohan's house. That vandalized mosque, and the thousands of kar sevaks milling around,



people atop the mosque and the cries, "Give It one more push!" His whole being was aroused, and he rose to meet the challenge. Voices clamoured and jumbled up in his mind yet again. The ticking of the clock, the changing times, the

commencement of a new day, the creation of a new world... the whole earth shook with the sound of those words and out came the sun, flaunting itself, as it saluted the anniversary of the victorious dawn.

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## NOTES ON KAILASH VAJPEYI'S 'DOOBA SA UNDOOBA TARA'

Kuber Dutt

It has been said: 'The course of destiny and the course of time unfolds in actions, incidents accidents, creation and destruction, eventually getting articulated through words, like an ever playing film reel. 'Dooba sa Undooba Tara' a long narrative poem by Kailash Vajpeyi has Ashwathama as the central narrator. Ashwathama is one of the immortals of Hindu mythology, who is condemned to live forever, in perpetual suffering. From beginning to the end the poetic narrative spans time and its tales in a format with the poet himself also launched on this complex journey.

This poetic narrative portrays mythical plots and characters in their original tenor, while simultaneously illuminating the cruel darkness of the present times. It establishes a continuum from the times of the Mahabharat to the here and now, all the while asserting the permanent nature of what is good and true. Connecting humanity to the mythological figure of Ahwathama, the narrative straddles the dual path of the past and the present, the good and the bad, the true and the false. Sushil Sidhartha says Dooba Sa undooba Tara 'is full of auspicious hope', weaving mythological stories with contemporary concerns. The poem is a ballad about modern man's sense of alienation, the deteriorating human situation and consequently an erosion of human values, as well as the acutely suffering environment. However it is not only despair that the poem documents but it also holds out hope and faith in the future of both nature and humanity.'

The poet considers trees to be the protectors of life, but everything is caught in the flow and flux of time. The following lines reflect just this thought:

Jo hawa pee rahe tum  
Jis dharit par sasband ho  
Uska sab byora ankit hai  
Dik Kshetra mein. (page 91)

As a matter of fact time is the archive of eternity, manifesting itself in many forms. Its one dimension exists in myths, another in history, the third is that which flows through human consciousness. 'Dooba Sa Undooba Tara' captures and reflects this flow.

Actually this long narrative poem meditates upon human suffering in the midst of scientific and technological advancement and in the midst of wisdom of many mythological characters and great heroes, messiahs, saints and sages. Man's engagement with violence persists and the poet prays...

Is durmad Kaal mein  
Koi Parachetana aaye  
Jhakjhor Kar Jagaa de hamein

2

Gehri neend se (Page 164)

In the 'Upodghat' of the narrative poem 'Dooba sa Undooba Tara' the poet says that when his uneasy mind turned a search

for the origins of foeticide, he found Mahabharat, Ashwatthama who had tried to kill Parikshit in the womb of youthful Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu.

According to the Bhagvadgeeta (10/26) the sacred Ashwatth (Peepal) tree is a continuous transmitter of 'praanvaayu' or oxygen. Ashwatthama is immortal but his immortality is cursed, setting him on a quest for positive creative energy to counter his negativity, and thus Ashwatthama seeks out the four famous Peepal trees or the Aswatths. the first one of these is in Prhabas Kshetra, Second in Bodhgaya, the third one in Maheshwar and the fourth one is in Kabir Chaura. Before visiting all these places Ashwatthama, introduces himself by saying—

Mein Kaalchakra ke gale padaa  
phanda hoon  
Mein vidambana hatbhagya  
Heya sharminda  
Zinda hoon zinda ghawa liye  
maathey par  
Jo aaj aaj tak dekha wahi Kahoonga  
Itihaas rahe na rahe  
Mein hoon - tha - aur rahoonga (Page 13).

The poet also says that Ashwathama is not the beginning of imagination but

its conclusion. By the time Ashwatthama reaches the 21st century he discovers that the monster of machine has changed everything and humanity feels that it is teetering on the edge of some gold mine...even though rivers have been imprisoned ....green forests disappeared into tables and chairs, newspapers and doors. He is floundering in the midst of various shadows, forms and sounds of modernity and in the midst of this technobabble, A new born Peepal / Ashwatth whispers that–

Asti aur bhawati ke  
Antaheen daur mein  
Sthir, sthaayee hai niyam parivartan  
ka  
Rati-virati  
Viyog-yoga  
Harsh-shok, kewal sanchari. (page 159,  
160)

The poet intervenes and tells Ashwatthama:

Naman Karo nanhe Ashwattama ko  
Jaise Jaise ast hoga yeh drishya-jagat  
Tumhara abhishapit Swatva bhee  
Tirohit ho jayega

3.

Phirbhi abhi der hai. (Page 160)

In these words 'Phirbhi abhi der hai'

the poet holds out the fragile thread of hope. This is the point of departure from where the poet sometimes travels to the far past and sometimes appears in his circle of the present, halting in several places of last 5000 years. He returns to narrate what other protagonists of the cavalcade felt or said. For instance Vidur describes the nature of sleep:

Neend to lihaf hai din bhar  
Majoori karne walon ke  
Nange jism par  
Phaila akaash...  
Neend ki kahaani mein  
Bare mor hain  
Kaamee, hattyaron, dhan-pashuon se  
Neend ki adawat hai. (page 22, 23)

When in Prabhas Kshetra Ashwatthama encounters the hunted and wounded Krishna in conversation with his hunter, Krishna is trying to absolve the apologetic hunter of his guilt, by explaining to him the compulsions of hunger...

Sun Jara Vyadh -  
'Bhoo'aur 'kha' kore akshar nahi  
Bhoomandal se lekar khagol tak  
Sub taraf bhook ka pasaara hai.  
Bekar hai pashchataap

Sub kuch yahan sub kuch ka Ahaar  
(Page 31)

**Krishna cites the example of a coin** – whose one side is morality and the other sin, and this is because the stream of ambition is without banks.

The dialogue between Krishna and Jara Vyadh continues, and Krishna elaborates the thin line between love and violence - the poet says.

Chah kar na chahkar  
Har koi Hatya hi karta hai.  
Un trishrenuon ki Jo nigod hain  
Shishu choosta hai stan jo  
Safed dravya ma ke sharir ka  
Woh choosna maheen  
hattya bhi hai, upkar bhee  
na piye paiy to chhaati phat Jaye ma  
kee

4.

.....

Har tarah ki satta ka mahal  
Hattya kee neev par khara (page 37,  
38)

But murder is something more also!  
Keshav recounting his childhood days  
says: ‘There is murder even in love ....  
Raha prem  
uska sanghaat to aur jaan leva hai  
ham prem karte hain

Til til kar hattya bhee karten hain uski  
Mujhe hua tha jisse aur jisne  
Mujhe de daala apna sarwasva  
Kya hua uska? (page 38, 39)

Listening to Keshav the hunter recalls all those animals whom he had killed for his hunger. He feels remorse but Krishna tries to help the hunter emerge from the deep well of his shame as he grants him a boon by explaining that the entire episode of the hunter having killed Krishna should be looked at as ‘karmphal’ or the consequence of actions. Since Rama had killed Bali in Treta-yuga, in Dwapar the same Bali, in the garb of Jara Vyadha had come to kill Krishna – thus no one escapes the consequences of one’s actions, which pursue one across births and time-spans. Time flows on, but the fruits of one’s action pursue one from one age to another.

Again ascetic Krishna says that the truth or superabundance of the truth... is not remembered or even what is to be forgotten, is also not remembered, then that is the real remembrance.

During the onward journey the poet/ Ashwatthama sees Siddharth, sitting beneath a Peepal tree in the forests of Uruvela. The same Siddarth who was a prince, and had a beautiful wife and a new-born child.

Enter Sujata, who it seems knew

everything about Siddharth, and on the basis of those past incidents accuses him. All the while Ashwatthama is witness to the most interesting and unknown aspects of Siddharth's life.

Sujata asks Siddhartha a number of questions and in his reply Siddhartha says:

You say I did not see poverty,

I say, I have!

I did not go to Maan-sarovar

But have seen the flamingos,

I have not seen shells

but I have seen garlands of pearls,

I was afraid of war

5.

I had heard the cries of widows from my childhood

And, had seen every thing

the most sickening, situations of human life. (page 62)

When Sujata offers Siddhartha the Kheer she has brought for him, the poet says

Uski sugandh

Tan-man se bhukhe Siddhartha ke

Rom rom mein sama gayee

Bharma gayee chetna

uga ek neela nakshatra

Mathe ke bheetar ke

Shant sarovar par

### **Sthir Tairata**

Siddhartha Buddha ho chuke the

(page 70)

From Uruvela, Buddha reached Saarnath and said to his disciples:

Sukh, sada se anuman hai

Aur dukh ka bhi koyee pratilom nahin

Tumne na janam dekha apni ankhon se

Shav bhi apna dekh kahan paaoge?

Isliye kal ka dar bheetar, se nikal do (page 89)

The poet goes on to recount each and every essential element of the knowledge of Buddha in the poem: Buddha, says: Catch hold of the hood of the cobra of desire. Keep away from excessiveness and diversion. All are selfish, therefore virtuous nature and non violence are inalienable. Confidence in one another is essential:

Is tarah, socho

Tumhara kaupeen bhee

kisi bun-kar ke haath ka pasina hai (page 92)

Kushinagar is intimately related to Buddha

It was there that he had realised the nature of ultimate truth. The poet has called Kushinagar the supreme existence of non existence just as Buddha himself had explained the meaning of eternal bliss, Kailash Vajpeyi reflects on the same, standing on the same land.

Ud gaya kapoor hai Kushinara

6.

Bina lade, Sooraj ki Kirnon se

Kho jana os ka

Lapat se chhitak kar

Videh ho Jana chingari ka. (page 96,97)

× × × × ×

Pagal ka Swapn nahin Kushinara

Sapnon ka Paagalpan se chhutkaara  
Hai (page 97)

From Bodhgaya Ashwatthama reaches the Ashram of Mandan Mishra which is situated beneath the third famous Peepal/ Ashwatth at Maheshwar and witnesses an involved discussion between Shankar and Mandan Mishra. Shankar propounded the theory of Maya and Mandan Mishra believed in rituals, ceremonial acts and sacrificial rites as narrated in the Vedas, The great debate ends and Adi Shankar emerges as the victor. Bharati the wife of Mandan Mishra, Challenging Shankaracharya with her logic asks:

Tum Haathidant ki meenar mein baithe

Is poori srishti ko

Jhootha kahne waale kaun ho

Shapath lo ki tum nahin janame the

Ma ki kokh se

Aakash se gire the dharti par

Shapath lo ki tum

Anaasakt ho

Bhookh aur pyas ke

Durnivaar jaal se (page 102)

Bharti goes on raising question after question. What is the meaning of menstruating what is the meaning of wedding night. Why are the two bodies entangled in senseless intercourse unaware....? Again making fun of Shankar's monism she says—

Wahan jo visphot hota garbhlok mein

Tumhara advait pahle pahal

Wahan ghatit hota

Band ho jata dwar

Sirishti Phalwati hone ke upakaram  
mein

Rachne lag jaatee nayee kaya, naya  
roop

Maya ka phata dhol yaheen phenk kar

O adhekachare Acharya

7.

Pahle manjeera to bajaana seekh aao

Rati rani ka. page (103, 104)

The poet writes about the reaction of Adi Shankar and how he decides to have the experience of physical love.

After experiencing all, Adishankar returns to his own self and requests Bharati to establish the fact again as to what was that formula with which chariot and charioteer are tied. He accepted that in this world there was heavy load on every one's shoulders.

Ashwatthama again witnesses the cycle of History: People with swords, killing thousands of innocents, destroying cities and burning the library of Nalanda. Ashwatthama narrates how he saw the Somnath temple collapse and Padmini immolate herself.

Maine dekha Nalanda ke  
Gyankosh ko raakh hote  
Dekha atmdah karti  
Padmini ko, aur dekha

Samarpan, Sher Singh ka (Page 103, 104)

Time flowed on at its own speed. And Ashwatthama arrives in the time of Kabir, the spiritual reformer poet and saint.

Kabir also thirsts for knowledge. While on one hand Kabir accepts that none is alien, all are one's own, but he also says that this world is like a ball of entangled thread with no beginning and no end. The child Kabir had asked his mother

Neema as to why the leaf falls down and what was there on the other side of the sky. Neema, herself a simple woman urges Kabir to seek out Baba Peetambar, who would tell him what he was looking for. Baba, sings a song.

Sab apne hain apne hain sab

Koe hain birana

Ga re mann Maulana

Aya kaun yahan apne se

Aur kise kab janaa.

Ga re mann Maulana. (Page 144)

Ashwatthama is silent witness to the whole drama, from Prabhas Kshetra to Kabir chaura, at last he says :

Krishna, Buddha, Shankar Kabir ke  
Antarman mein Jhaank liya  
Bharsak divya paksh sabka  
Sach kaise kahun ki aank liya  
Sakshi bankar jhela har khela  
8.

Sabka ankiya kiya

Aisa jala ki jalta hi jaaraha chala

Yeh pran diya

Bikhra hua dukkh mera

phaila hai sabhi dishaaon mein

Ek tarap pal rahi deh ki

dah dah neel shiraone mein



Baasi lagta hai. intna kyon  
Saanson ka aana jana  
Jaise paani mein machhli ka  
Paani se ukta jaana (Page 146)

Though the poet reiterates that inspite  
of fearsome circumstances hope prevails...

He says:

Shesh bache pakshi  
Bunte hi rehte hain neer  
Mor, Papihe ab bhee gaate hain  
Hote hi rahate hain swaimvar  
Meethi kilkaariyan  
Sun parti yahan wahan  
Rat-jaga hota hai

Tamam vyadhiyon ke bavajood  
(page 140)

But because of the continuous and  
persistent pain, sorrow and frustration,  
everyone is a victim of tragedy and  
accursedness. Aswatthama, by now is  
fully disappointed and says:

Sirph prarthana bharki ja sakti is  
durmad kal mein  
koi  
Anam Parachetan aaye.  
Jhakjhor kar hamein  
Jaga de gahri neend se (page 164)

Ashwatthama is full of grief. He has  
been witness to five thousand years of  
bloodshed, great thoughts of philosophy,  
even greater philosophers, saints, highly  
enlightened persons, poets, artists, thinkers  
but the flood of blood and violence has  
never stopped. Now he finds himself in  
the darkness of 21st century . He says  
every house is on fire.

Everyone is suspicious of the other,  
darkness fills the earth and the sky even  
as the cacophonous media and lit up malls  
invite buyers to buy useless stuff.

9.

Bol kharieedar kya khareedega? (page  
152)

Ashwatthama has been thinking in  
remorse that monster machines have taken  
over and control humanity.

I have had lengthy discussions around  
this unique narrative poem with the poet  
Kailash Vajpeyi several times, and sought  
answers to several knotty problems: For  
example I asked 'What is parachetana?  
(Super-consciousness)'

He said 'every reader is free to draw  
his inference because the movement of  
incarnation and ascetics has been seen.  
'Then I asked 'Is that super consciousness  
not crores of people who got many regions  
of the earth emancipated from the claws  
of tyrants and even now are busy in the  
war of independence?' The poet said this

is the best idea which is true also.”

In the long narrative poem of many meters and songs, masculinities, plots, Buddhist stories, dialogues, soliloquies task, myths, realities histories, imaginary worlds, dramatic characteristics musical elements, new crafts, new experiments complete linguistic style of Kailash Vajpeyi which is distinct for orderly arrangement of texture are also all those elements which are in Ramcharit Manas of Tulsidas the gatha, the Vedic Richas and Das Kapital

of Karl Marx. Anything might have transformed but Kabirdas throbbing in Kailash Vajpeyi was visible to us. Many portions of this work are to be on the tongues but many of them are such also which reside in the hearts of readers like me many songs of this work can be sung easily by any body and they can also be set to music. As a matter of fact ‘Dooba Sa undooba Tara’ is a unique work of the past present and the future.

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**Kuber Dutt** (1949-2011) was a poet, painter and telemedia personality. He was responsible for much of the literary focus on national channels of telemedia. He had five collections of poems, besides his creative and research work for national archives of doorarshan. He passed away suddenly on October 2, 2011, in Delhi.

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## TOWARDS A POETICS OF PURUSHARTHA

Sudhir Kumar

### I. Prastavana:

#### **Poetics of Purushartha: Sahitya (Literature) As Satyagraha/ Ethical Action Foregrounding Truth or Soul-Force:**

I want to propose the following points in the essay :-

- A. Writing sahitya or literature is a form of satyagraha (soul or truth force) in the Gandhian sense. That's why, great works of sahitya or literature tend to establish satya (truth), ahimsa (love or non-violence), and compassion (karuna). That may also explain why in Indian theories of sahitya, "shringaara (aesthetic emotion of love)" and "karuna(aesthetic emotion of pathos or it should be called – karunaa or compassion) are established as the "pradhana rasa (the most important aesthetic emotions). In a Gandhian or an Indian framework, a writer's dharma (duty) is to represent life around her/him in her text in order to help others attain the purusharthas or four cardinal principles of life , that is, dharma( sense of moral conduct), artha (wealth, resources, power etc), kama( sexual desire or otherwise), and moksha( spiritual liberation in the widest sense- inclusive of social, political, economic and cultural freedoms). It is also true that most of the literary representations foreground the coordinates of artha (politico-economic power, or the political economy,) and kama( sexuality or desire) but these are to be tethered to the different aspects of dharma or ethical duty.
- B. It is also true that if one represents the desirability or significance of "purusharthas", one can be said to practice "satyagraha" as a writer. In other words, a writer transforms "truth" into

“poetic truth” in direct proportion to his willingness to practice “satyagraha” in his aesthetic and ethical action.

- C. Didn't Gandhi say candidly enough- “Satyagraha is literally holding on to truth and it means, therefore, truth force. Truth is soul or spirit. It is, therefore, known as soul-force. It excludes the use of violence, because man is incapable of knowing the absolute Truth..” (*Young India*, March 23, 1921). Used in the field of literature or sahitya, a writer's satyagarha implies his insistence on truth and non-violence, his resistance against the forces of oppression, injustice and exploitation and his quest for atmabodh or self-realization. Writing/creating art is also a socially and spiritually symbolic act - the intensity and genuineness of which derives from and contingent on a writer's satyagarha or holding on to truth. While describing the duty or dharma of a satyagrahi or a non-violent activist Gandhiji seems to underline what a writer as a satyagarhi is also supposed to do:- “It should be an article of faith with every Satyagrahi that there is none so fallen in this world but can be converted by love . A Satyagrahi will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, himsa by ahimsa. There is no other way of purging the world of evil.” (*Young India*: August 8, 1929).
- D. In the process of writing/speaking/

producing “sahitya or literature” or art, infinite aspects of truth or satya are mediated/imitated/represented through vaak (speech) and transformed into “kaavya satya or poetic truth”. It is in this context that good or true sahitya (or literature) may well be called a kind of “vaani-tapa” (penance of speech) as written or verbal form of utterances used to represent realities or ideas in “sahitya” should be grounded in “satya (truth)” “ahimsa(non-violence)”, and the notion of welfare of humanity (priyahitam). This foundational principle of “bharatiya kaavyashastra or Indian poetics” is the constant undercurrent in the Indian theories of literature or sahitya. Even *The Bhagavadgita* (Chapter 17.15) explains the vaangmaya-tapa (penance of speech or all those products of creative speech/language suffused with vaak or the creative energy that animates imagination - hence vaak+maya=vaangmaya):-

“An utterance that does not offend, is truthful, pleasing, and the habitual reading (of scriptures) constitute verbal penance.”<sup>3</sup>

It is worthwhile to see how Ramesh Chandra Shah's poems anthologized in *AK* foreground the “vaani tapa” and four purusharthas or cardinal principles of life.

The very first poem of the collection- “Usane Kahaa” makes poetry an agent

of action:-“Kavita / kahane mein nahin/ Karane mein hai/Usane kahaa/ Kavita/ Vaha kriya hai/Jisamein/Ek poora vaakya aakar/ Bahane sahane rahane/Lagata hai.”

The poet holds that his poetry gives rise to “time or time-consciousness”- “Mein nahin hoon samaya mein/Mein khud samay hoo/Samaya mein hoti nahin hai buddhi, atmaa/Aur ...kavitaayen/Samaya ko janma deti hain.”(AK, p. 41)

The dharma(ethical action) of the poet has thus been underlined:- “Rachana/ Bach janaa hai/Apane aur tumhaare/ Sabake/Vish ka/ Pach janaa hai.”(“Rachana Bach Jana Hai” p.44).

The Purushartha of artha ( the political economy) is highlighted in his poem, “Smarana” thus:- “ Ek gharib mohalla/ Sarvajanik nal ke neeche/ Raat bhar thithurate/Khaali bartan.”( p.46). In a comic mode, the poem,” Kavita Ji Khud” raises issues related to dharma and artha while another poem in the collection, “ Naam Kaat Do” is rooted in the quest for power (artha) on the part of a marginalized person. The political economy and power-politics that characterized the Emergency period have been represented in the “artha-centric” poem-“Harishchandra Aao” (pp77-78). The poem “Atiprashna” suggests an overwhelming question of the attainment of “moksha”:-“Gaanth ke bheetar /Vaha kaun see gaanth hai/

Jo/Kabhi nahin khulati?”(p.88). Similarly, the poem, ”Ghamaasaan” (p.125) beautifully brings out the inner torpor experienced by one who is in quest of truth (moksha and dharma): “Kya hoga sach ka/Jo rachata hai khud/ Rachane wale ko”. The Purushartha of “moksha” has been the theme of yet another poem,” Dashaavataara”(191-95) which ends on this note:-“ Shrinvantu vishve/ Amrtasya putraaha”. The political economy of “Empire or Imperialism” has been the subject –matter of such poems as “Shivaalik Express” and “Sapane Mein Viceroy” pp.196-99). And in order to reiterate that life itself is poetry, the poet ends the anthology with the lines with which he inaugurated the anthology:- “ Kavita/ vaha kriyaa hai/Jisamein/ Ek poora vaakya aakar/Bahane sahane rahane/Lagata hai” (p.211).

It is in this sense that poetry/art/ literature reflects purusharthas according to Indian theories of literature. And all good, civilizationally significant literature is an example of the writers’ satyagarha.

## II. Vaada: Anuvaada: Samvaada In Indian Contexts: Translation as an Intra-/ Inter-Cultural Action

In any social and cultural context, call it Indian , global or what you will, anuvaada or translation may be considered as an inter- as well

as intra-cultural action involving the agency of existing networks of (political) power that largely mediates the transfer or carrying across of the signified (artha) from one language system( source language) to another( target language). The purpose of the present essay is to critically examine the process of anuvada or translation as a form of cultural action (sanskritik karma) in the Indian/global contexts in which through ‘anuvada’ a connecting cultural link is established between discourse or vaada and dialogue or samvada both intra- and inter-culturally. One may conveniently understand how the Indologist, the Orientalist, the colonialist and the so-called postcolonialist trajectories of translational politics were the different processes of the above-mentioned intercultural/intra-cultural transfer of “arthas or meanings” called “anuvada or translation” that necessitates a proper understanding of the political and economic power-structures that supervise(d) and regulate(d) the translational projects.

We may begin with the analysis of some of the basic terms of reference here: the process of anuvaada presupposes the existence or prevalence of vaada( discourse) first. Generally speaking, any text available to a translator (anuvadaka) in the source language may be called “vaada” which is to be transferred to the target

language in which it will be called a “anuvadit or translated text” and this process may be called “anuvada or translation”. But the point is that neither the text-for-translation nor the translator as a human agent nor even the translation-process exists or can exist in a cultural – political vacuum. Etymologically, vaada comes from Sanskrit root ‘vad’<sup>4</sup> that stands for:-

-to say, to speak, to utter, to tell, to report, to speak to, to address, to adjudicate, to adjudge, to indicate, to proclaim, to announce, to foretell, to allege, to affirm, to raise the voice, to utter a cry, to mention, to communicate, to name, to dispute about, to contend, to lay claim to, to cause to speak, to make much ado about oneself, to recite, to rehearse,, to desire to speak, etc.,<sup>5</sup>

Suffice to say here that in Indian tradition, the root of translation or anuvada, that is “vada” is loaded with meanings that largely cover most of the aspects of communication ( oral or written) between , at least, two or even many cultures or subjects in which “ bhasha or language” plays an important part .

- From “vada” emerges “vaada” that signifies, inter alia:- to speak about, to cause to sound, speech, discourse, talk, utterance, statement, to speak about, to mention, a thesis, a proposition, an argument, a doctrine,

a discussion, a controversy, a contest, a quarrel, an agreement, a demonstrated conclusion, a result, an accusation, an exposition, a report, a rumour etc., (MW, pp. 939-40).

Thus, in the Indian tradition, the transformation of “vada’ into “vaada” does not only refer to the semantic or shaabdik change, it also obviously connotes the possible transmutation of human statements, discourses, conversations and all modes of oral/written/aesthetic communications into some crystallized forms of what is today called “ism” or “ ideology” or “rhetoric”, or “discourse in the Foucauldian sense, or a kind of “poorvagraha or bias” or even a vivada or controversy. This is in sharp contrast to the etymological journey of the word-“translation” – the Indo-European root ( ter<sup>6</sup>)of which suggests only the process of “carrying or crossing over” of meaning from one domain to another. The lexical meaning of “translation” may also suggest the repetition or imitation of meaning in another target language. But the kind of subtle semantic, semiotic, cultural and political implications suggested in “ vada” and its cognate “vaada” in the Indian contexts, are conspicuous in the etymological make-up of “translation” in the western/English tradition.

From “vaada” arises “anuvaada” with

the addition of prefix-“anu” (after, along, near to, under, with etc.,). Now “ anuvaada” (MW, pp. 939-40) ,in the Indian tradition, has certain startling significations which are absent in the entire ecology of the word “translation” itself. Anuvaada refers to “saying after or again, repeating by way of explanation, reiteration with corroboration, explanation with illustration, explanatory reference to something already said, slander or reviling”.

Analyzed thus, “anuvada” involves the transfer of meaning from one source language to another target language or the repetition or re-statement or re-placement of a statement or an utterance in other words in any intra-cultural or intercultural /multicultural contexts.

Thus, the possibility of an event of “samvaada” (dialogue or conversation) between two subjects or cultures necessitates an enactment of “anuvada” – a process which involves the interplay of various social, cultural, political and economic forces that are at times hidden in the semantic and semiotic commerce taking place between the “source” culture/language and the “target” culture/language. This “samvaada” may also result after or even before a “vivada”( controversy) or even give rise to “prativada” (counter-discourse) in the interface/ encounter between two or more cultural communities.

Thus, a culturally vibrant space (a family, or a group, a society, a nation-state or a region), specially in the contexts of multiculturalism and massive influx of populations in the wake of globalization, is marked by the recurrence of such cultural actions as *vaada*, *anuvaada*, *vivada*, *prativaada* and *samvaada* at all times.

It is worthwhile to mention here that the apparently innocent usage of such adjectives as “source” and “target” in defining the process of translation as an “action” and “event” seems to be demonstrably grounded in the epistemology/vocabulary of war-mongering in the western traditions.

The point is that in the existing critical theories/frameworks being used in the “teaching machines” in the departments of literary /cultural studies situated in India, the very absence of Indian perspectives/theories is a standard practice. Similarly in the field of translation-theories, no effort is made to postulate and study the Indian perspectives on “*anuvada*”- ruling out the possibility of a constructive and equal “*samvaada*” (dialogue) between Indian and Euro-American or even other theories of translation. It is only through this enabling and constructive intercultural dialogue with other knowledge-traditions that the Indian intellectuals can attain a sort of “mental decolonization” in the face of oppressive dominance of Euro-

Americo-centric theories in the departments of literary/cultural studies in India. Ironically enough, now we can no longer blame any “colonizing power” for our prevailing pitiable self-generated intellectual and cultural amnesia. We have no choice but to engage with the theoretical tools available in our own languages/traditions through “*anuvaada*” and “*samvaada*” in order to understand “who we are” and talk to others in the world with self-respect and confidence. Understanding the dynamics of *anuvaada* as a cultural action is a pre-condition to understand the “meanings of India”- given our multi-lingual, multicultural, multi-religious contexts.

The second part of the essay deals with the proposition that the process of “*anuvaada*” is also grounded in the poetics of “*purushartha*” (four cardinal principles of life)—the representation of which is performed through either writing of translating a literary text.

### **III. Anuvaada and Poetics of Purushartha: Shabda, Artha, Purushartha:**

Shri Ramesh Chandra Shah is one of those writers in contemporary Hindi literature whose oeuvre including novels, poetry, criticism, and non-fictional prose works underlines a unique feature of Indic culture in which the coordinates



of “Saundarya” and “Sahitya” (the Aesthetic and the Literary) have always been grounded in the purusharthas that is, (the four cardinal principles of life- namely- dharma or the moral/ethical duty, artha or the creation of wealth/ political economy, kama or desire and moksha or spiritual liberation- subsuming social, cultural, economic and political freedoms). One may fairly easily quote either Bharatamuni (*Natyashastra*) or Bhartrihari (6<sup>TH</sup> Century A.D.- *Shatakatriyam*) or Mammata (*Kavyaprakash*) or Acharya Vishwanath( *Sahityadarpana*) to see that the objectives of art/literature and those of human life are identical in as much as art as well as human existence is only a means to attain true freedom or moksha through the ethically-oriented ( dharma-sapeksha, not nirapeksha) performance of kama (desire) and artha (pursuit of wealth and power). Likewise the poetics of Premchand and Muktibodh is also rooted in an integrated vision of life in which representations in art or literature are tied to the inseparable aesthetics and ethics-in-action. Needless to say, let us save sahitya or literature from the onslaught of so-called specialized theory that reduces and deifies a literary text as an object of esoteric conversation that involves a few specialists-insulated from the larger civilizational-social concerns. By locating a sahityik-kriti (a literary text) on the

purushartha-axis, a reader may well rediscover in it newer and newer significations pertaining to sanskriti (culture), samaj (society), dharma (ethical conduct), artha (political economy), kama (desire) and moksha(liberation).

In other words, all kinds of representations in arts and literatures should help us attain true ananda (aesthetic bliss) by highlighting the significance of the pursuit of dharma (moral–ethical conduct), artha (power and wealth) and kama (desire) for the realization of true liberation (moksha). So much so that Bhartrihari, the sage-poet castigates those who live out their existence without any “taste for music, art or poetry”. Ramesh Chandra Shah aptly translates the sage-poet thus:-

“Men with no taste for music, verse or art/Like beasts in jungles play their senseless part./Save horn and tail and herbage as repast/ Their lot’s in every respect with them cast.”(p.27).

One is immediately reminded of how Matthew Arnold (*Culture and Anarchy*) in his (in) famous notions of the Barbarians and the Philistines, in respect of the “modernity” of the dominant British culture, echoes Bhartrihari. Driven by the (post) modern ideas of a highly secularized life-world hemmed in from all sides by the spectacles of techno-modernity and media-manufactured images, the

(post) modern human may end up being reduced to “sakshatpashupucchavishanahinah (a true beast-human without horn and tail). That’s why T.S. Eliot, like Gandhi, lamented the loss the spiritual (which he calls the supernatural in the following quote) in modern ,secular civilization of the west:-

“What I do wish to affirm is that the whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I call secularism, that is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life; of something which I assume to be of our primary concern.” (*Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, London, Faber& Faber, 1975, pp.104-105).

Even the so-called postmodernist Salman Rushdie seems to be in agreement with the so-called modernist Eliot on this point. In his recent interview published in *The Hindu* (“Literary Review” 4 July 2010,pp.1-2)-“Religion and the imagination”:-

“But when I’m writing books, something weird happens. And the result is that these books clearly do contain a large amount of what you would call supernaturalism. And I find that as a writer, I need that in order to explain the world I am writing about.”

Vis-à-vis western modern, secularized

literature, the entire range of bharatiya sahitya together with its aesthetics derives its sustenance from the spiritual/ethical/ mythical/magical / supernatural aspects of life- which Eliot and Rushdie both fondly call the supernatural. Eliot would have agreed with the following observation made by Anamika, the contemporary Hindi poet-novelist-critic) on the characteristic features of Indic civilization that have always inspired the writers and artists in India:

“We have a unique composite culture, a unique moral geography of our own where gods and ghosts, animals and birds, the flora and the fauna, even the tiniest insects live together in a strange amity... Despite caste and class divides, supernatural and human elements here emerge as one family.(from Anamika’s “Interview”, June1,2006, “Poetry And the Good Girl Syndrome” , Poetry International Web).

In this way, a true “sahitya” (union/ harmony/solidarity/togetherness) between the secular and the sacred, which are inseparable in Indian traditions, is a remarkable feature of Indian sahitya (literature). Therefore, an Indian writer at any point of history, never seems to be self-consciously striving , like so many so-called post-modern writers today, for the tricks of “magical realism”- as the “real”/the surreal, the magical/the mythical , the

temporal/the eternal always are blended in her/his creative imagination or kalpana.

Similarly, Ramesh Chandra Shah, commenting on the non-dualistic(advaitic) poetics that characterizes the form and content of Bhartrihari's *Shatakatriyam*, rightly says:

“This is something, which could not have happened if the poet had not had a direct, unmediated experience of oneness with the Universal spirit where all dualities- even the duality of Man and woman- dissolve and disappear”. (“Preface” to *Thus Spoke Bhartrihari*, Ramesh Chandra Shah, p.11).

Even Muktibodh, the avant-garde Hindi poet-critic concurs with Ramesh Chandra Shah's views on the significance of the “value-based” literature/art:-“By the literature of the people” is meant a kind of literature that establishes the values and ideals of and for the people and inspires them to follow the path of “mukti or liberation. This “liberation” includes the political freedom and the freedom from ignorance also.”

The structural poetics of Bhartrihari's work is advaitic (non-dualistic) in as much as it integrates the four purusharthas i.e., dharma, artha, kama and moksha in the textual space. Thus, the verses on the right or proper kind of niti (that means conduct,

behavior, management, policy, strategy, political economy, suitability, plan, political wisdom etc.) to be adopted and practiced by human beings for attaining worldly success and fame lead the reader to the verses on the analysis of the pursuit of the pleasures of the flesh that underlines an important aspect of human life. Thus, “nitishataka” (one hundred verses on the ethical conduct) and “shringarashataka (one hundred verses on the pleasures of the flesh) foreground the three purusharthas, namely, dharma, artha and kama (or trivarga) whereas the section on ‘vairagyashataka” (one hundred verses on the gradual withdrawal from life leading to renunciation) focuses on the fourth purushartha, that is , the realization of liberation or moksha (or the spiritual pursuit).

Similarly, anuvada or translation is also an act of propagating / disseminating or carrying across (etymological meaning of translation) “artha” (or meanings) from one culture to another. In Indic aesthetic traditions, arthas or meanings present in the field or space of a text or its translated text are always anchored in the ever desirable four purusharthas of human existence. Hence, anuvada as a cultural-ethical project fortifies the above-mentioned four cardinal values/principles of human life. One may, however, add that anuvada always emerges and emanates from

vada or discourse- both etymologically and epistemologically. If the samvada or dialogue between two cultures is determined by the discourses or vada of caste, class, race, gender, colonialism, slavery etc., the resultant anuvada will inevitably carry the traces of the dominant/ master discourse or vada. The Saidean narrative of *Orientalism*(1978) is an example of this kind of vada-anuvada-samvada happening between the colonizing and the colonized cultures.

Even the poet-critic Anamika in her poem "Translation" reinforces the notion of translation as an ethical action whereby the poet-narrator justifies her existence:-" I translate this space/ not as 'breathing space'/ but 'outer space'/ because I sent my flying saucers out". (Anamika, -Poetry International Web).

Applying Anamika's above-mentioned notion of translation or anuvada as a metaphor of transferring the meaning from the inner to the outer cultural spaces of life to Ramesh Chandra Shah's translational poetics, one may say that Ramesh Chandra Shah through his anuvada (translation) of Bhartrihari's immortal work carries across or communicates the arthas or meanings of Bhartrihari's text from the inner "breathing space" available to an insider of the Indic tradition to the outer space available to an insider of the English or western tradition. Suffice it to say that the

insider/outsider positions are only relative and mutually transferable , and therefore, translatable. This process of anuvada happening between two subcultures within one culture or between two different cultures may rightly be termed as sahitya (harmonious co-existence, togetherness) between the Sanskrit and the English languages.

#### **IV.Purushartha in Bhartrihari's Poetics:**

According to Ramesh Chandra Shah, Bhartrihari as a poet "must have known the extremes of pain and pleasure, displeasure and exultation, sophistry and conviction, indulgence and detachment... he must have seen it all: the unabashed voluptuary, the remorseful moralist and the exultant ascetic- all did inhabit the self-same body and did share the same mechanism of sensibility" (Preface, p.10):-

"Enough of empty logic: I have found/  
Two goods in life: — either in amorous  
moods/With carnal pleasures let thy  
bed abound/Or seek the peace of  
jungle solitudes." (Shringarashataka,  
p.51)

Bhartrihari presents vada (discourse) and prativada (counter-discourse) in the lovable ambivalence:-

"Pursuit of pleasures only ends in  
pain/ Still do our bodies pamper we  
with zest./They curse the flesh all  
day, but then again/Voluptuous

passions sway their feeble breast.”(p.51)

Ramesh Chandra Shah through his anuvada brings out how well Bhartrihari “deconstructs” the image of woman as abala or weaker sex in a humorous manner:-“Poets who say—women are weaker sex/Are either fools; or willfully obtuse./The wiles that even in trance a yogi vex/ No masculine strength can resist or refuse.” (*Shringarashataka*,p.53)

Niti or nripaniti (the political/economic strategies of the ruling power) may be disguised in all kinds of hypocritical forms to win over the masses:- “ How diplomacy can itself disguise/In many shapes e’en as a harlot does./it can be true or false, foolish or wise./Selfish or generous, sweet or venomous.” (*Nitishataka*,p.37).

Long long ago in India , when there was no possibility of either Marx or his “ism”, it was Bhartrhari who underlined the political economy of the rich and powerful in his *Nitishataka*:- “ He who has wealth, his shall it be to win/The glammers of high birth and learning’s weight./ All sorts of virtues strive to dwell within/ The man of gold and not of spirit great.”(p.33). This may well explain how the multinational corporations at present hegemonize the so-called sovereign under-developed nation-states and justify

the ways of exploiting their resources. Bhartrihari seems to roundly criticize the intellectual impostors of today who may display the loads of learning without any trace of ethics. These impostors must be shunned by all:- “ Avoid the polished man of heart deformed/Immersed though he in depth of learning be./ We meet some snakes with jewel-embellished head/ Does it then mean- they are from poison free?” (*Nitishataka*,p.27). Bhartrihari exposes the fickleness of those who are obsessed with the gratification of lust: “ The lady whom I always contemplate/ Has given her secret love to another man;/ And lo! He on another lass does wait./ Curse be on Cupid, myself, her, the man.”( *Nitishataka*, p.21). Ramesh Chandra Shah ably brings out in his “angrezi-anuvada” the evocativeness of Bhartrihari’s epigrammatic utterances on the division of humans on scale of goodness/villainy, choosing right words in right order:- “ Selfless souls who live for others are of this wide earth the cream,/Those regarding self, still doing good to others next thou deem/ Monsters they, who ruin their fellow out of motive self centred;/ What shall we but call the motiveless villain of crimes abhorred!” (*Nitishataka*, p. 43). Thus the humans on the basis of their conduct, can universally be categorized as satpurushas( good humans),samanya purushas(ordinary people), manava-

rakshasas(human-monsters) and the unmentionably wicked humans.

In Bhartrihari's *Vairagyashataka* - verses the sublimation of sexual passion has been hailed as a necessary condition for the attainment of true knowledge and vairagya (renunciation) in his *Nitishataka* and *Vairagyashataka*. Shah beautifully translates the verse:-

"The joy companionship of women brings/ End in despair and disillusionment./Self-knowledge is the only certain good/Leading to calm of mind, all passion spent" (*Vairagyashataka*,p.99).

The sensual should give way to the spiritual- only then the human beings may experience the Shanta. A Yogi (integrated human) has a remarkable equanimity and equipoise of mind and heart:-" The Yogi walked; they started and beheld;/All sorts of idle sneers on him hurled;/ All this he heard and smiled and heeded not./ He- master of himself and all this world." (*Vairayashataka*, p.91).The heady yet consumptive spell of "desires" is well recognized by the saint-poet in this oft-quoted verse-"Bhogo na bhukta vayameva bhukta..." which appears equally telling in Ramesh Chandra Shah's anuvada:- "The spring of Life knows dying not a bit/ But we are too worn- out to taste of it./ Time hath killed us, nor we it, as we thought/ Life dwindles;

but Desire!—Not a whit." (*Vairagyashataka*, p. 77). Lost in the ways of the world, the human beings fail to see the divine spark in life:-" Drunk with Delusion's ever-tempting wine/We mortals fail to see the spark divine./Caught in the vicious whirl of nights and days /never stop to think of its decline." (*Vairagyashataka*,p.75)

### **Upasamhara or Conclusion: Anuvada as an Intercultural Activity**

When published first in *Yojana* and *The Aryan Path*, Ramesh Chandra Shah's anuvada of Bhartrihari's timeless verses won admiration from a fastidious Sardar Khushwant Singh, the editor of *Yojana* and even more fastidious Sophia Wadia, the editor of *The Aryan Path*. Ramesh Chandra Shah does not translate the text literally as was done earlier by such pastmasters as B.Hale (London, 1886), C.H.Tawney, Sri Aurobindo, Barbara Stoler Miller (1988) and Dharnidhar Sahu( 2004). His anuvada is less of an anukriti (copy) and more of a samvada( creative dialogue) with the original text. Thus through his creative anuvada, Ramesh Chandra Shah succeeds in establishing a constructive samvada or dialogue between two languages and cultures. Contrary to AK.Ramanujan's much quoted comment on translation as cultural action<sup>8</sup>, Ramesh Chandra Shah makes an honest attempt to translate the native cultural vada or discourse of

“purushartha”( cardinal principles of life) into the non-native language culture. In the process, he also manages to “Sanskritize” (in the sense of giving it a new sanskara or impression) the English language.

**Endnotes:**

1. *Adhunak Kavi: Ramesh Chandra Shah*, Allahabad, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan,2010. Further cited in the essay as AK with page numbers in parentheses.
2. *Thus Spoke Bhartrihari*, (Trans. By R. C. Shah), Delhi, Rajpal ,2010. All references to *Thus Spoke Bhartrihari* in the essay are from this edition of the book.
3. *Bhagavadgita Bhashya of Sri Shankaracharya*,(Trans.Dr A.G.Krishna Warriar),Madras,Sri Ramkrishna Math,2002, , Chapter XVII.15, p.538.
4. See *Sanskrit-Hindi Kosha*, ed. Vamana Shivarama Apte, Delhi, Motilal Banarasi Das, 1997, pp. 893-94. Subsequently referred to as Apte in the text with page numbers in parentheses.
5. See Monier Monier Williams (Ed), *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Delhi, Motilal Banarasi Das, 2002 (F.P.1899),p.916. Subsequently cited in the essay as MW with page numbers in parentheses.
6. See *The New Book of Knowledge*, Vol II, Massachusetts, Houghton Mifflin Company,1981, p. 1545-46. Subsequently cited in the essay as TNBOK with page numbers in parentheses.
7. “Janata Ka Sahitya Kise Kahate Hain?”, *Muktibodh Rachananvali*, Volume 1,(Ed. Nemichand Jain) New Delhi,Rajkamal,1998, p.76.
8. AK.Ramanujan in his “Translator’s Note” added to his translation of U.R.Anantha Murthy’s *Samskara*, says: “A translator hopes not only to translate a text, but hopes ( against all odds) to translate a non-native reader into a native one.”(New Delhi,Oxford University Press,2004). Ironically enough, what Ramanujan forgets is the fact that it is not the non-native reader who becomes a native reader through “anuvada”, the non-native only co-opts the translated text into her/his own already existing (often) dominant cultural fold. The non-native( often a European/American) reader reads/interprets the translated text through the translated signifiers peculiar to her/his own culture. Paradoxically, the cultural conversion of a native reader into a non-native one through translation is the established fact of colonialism and postcolonialism!! To illustrate the argument further, it may be asked how many non-native English or European-readers learned Kannada or other Indian languages as translated native readers! Ramesh Chandra Shah’s anuvada, like most other acts of translations from Indian into western languages, makes a bilingual native reader an outside critical observer of her/his own cultural productions.

The books reviewed : Thus Spoke Bhartrihari/Adhunak Kavi

Writer : R.C. Shah

Publisher : Rajpal and Sons, Delhi / Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad

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