

A Journal of
Mahatma Gandhi
Antarrashtriya
Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

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

Volume 7
January-March 2012

Editor
Mamta Kalia



Published by
Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

Hindi : Language, Discourse, Writing

A Quarterly Journal of Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya
Hindi Vishwavidyalaya
Volume 7 Number 1 January-March 2012

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

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Editor : **Mamta Kalia**; e-mail : **editor.hindi@gmail.com**

Editorial Assistant : **Madhu Saxena**

Cover Design : Vazda Khan

Editorial Office :

A-73, Lajpat Nagar-I
New Delhi-110 024
Mob. : 9212741322

Sales and Distribution Office :

Publication Department,
Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya
Hindi Vishwavidyalaya
Po. Box 16, Panchteela, Wardha - 442 001

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, 10295, Lane No. 1
West Gorakh Park, Shahdara, Delhi-110 032

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LANGUAGE DISCOURSE WRITING

January-March 2012

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Editor's Note

'Hindi' is primarily a translation based journal. Every quarter we receive scores of contributions from authors and translators. It is strange to find that authors seldom translate well even though they are in complete control of the subject matter. It is usually the translators who prove torch bearers to their work of art. Even bilingual authors do not prove to be good translators of their own work; they may write with finesse in each of their source language but they fail to build a bridge.

Harper Collins India organised recently a one-day seminar on precisely this problem. The participants discussed various avenues of translation. Some felt that an English translation should read like an original English text while some others held that a translation should retain the flavor of the source language. Again what are the possibilities of a translated text. Does it get polished or dimmed in the process? There was much to say for and against each proposition. Authors of quite a few regional languages feel that they are not given a fair share in the world of translation. They hold that Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam and Oriya works are translated into English more often than Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Assamese. The tilt of the English language publishers in favor of Hindi, Bengali etc. also influences the translator's choice. Finally what is the rapport between the author and his translator? Do they have a dialogue and care for each other or are they encased in their solo occupation? Very often the publisher decides whether a certain language book is viable for translation and sales. To him a book is a product like any other product that has to sell. A book may have a longer shelf-life than onions and potatoes but ultimately no businessman likes his ware in the cold storage. A publisher is a businessman whom we often mistake for a missionary.

In any discussion on translation, the translator should be the nuclear point. It is worthwhile to know how a translator looks upon his onus of recreating a book or an article or a poem? First and foremost, he has to like what he reads and decides to translate. Then on he has to subject himself to the discipline of two languages, the source language and the language of translation. The assignment

has to be carried out as per a certain time schedule too. Obviously the translator finds himself under pressure. Usually translation becomes an exercise in love's labour lost because of the time it consumes and the meagre remuneration it carries. No wonder in Hindi, translation work is often done by talents who are biding their time for better employment. They give up translating as soon as they find a regular job. It is only seldom that geniuses like Mr. Jairatan, Ravinandan Sinha or Dhiraj Singh take up to translate from Hindi to English so flawlessly that their texts breathe through brand new lungs.

We value all our authors and translators who labour hard to take east to west so that the twain keep meeting.

Manoj K. C.

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EK TOKRI BHAR MITTI

Madhav Rao Sapre

Translated by
Nishi Tiwari

A humble dwelling adjoined a landlord's mansion, the abode of a poor, destitute widow. Not content with his possessions he wished to encroach upon the widow's bit of land. He applied all his genius to make her concede to his demands. But she could not bring herself around to do so, because she had been living there for a very long time and was tied to it with long cherished memories. By and by all her loved ones had been snatched away from her. Her dear husband and her only son had passed away in that hut. Her daughter-in-law too had died leaving behind a five year old daughter. This child was her only hope and support. She would break down bitterly in agony whenever she recollected the past. And since she had come to know of her neighbor's greedy intention it accentuated her grief draining all life out of her. She could not think of leaving her humble abode except at her hour of death. When all stratagems to persuade her failed he tried to get it by foul means. By bribing the corrupt lawyers he succeeded in getting the legal possession of the hut. Already lonely and destitute she took shelter elsewhere.

One day when the landlord was wandering near the hut, surveying the work being done there by his men, the old widow came there with a basket in her hand. Greatly displeased with her arrival, he ordered his men to drive her away. Tearfully she entreated him

“my lord this hut is yours. I have not come to take it. Could I make a humble request?” When the landlord told her to proceed, she said, “Since the day we left the hut, my grand-daughter has not taken food. I tried to bring her around but all my attempts have failed. She insists on coming back home, only then will she touch food. So, I thought I would take a basket full of earth from here and make an angeethi out of it in order to cook food for her. Perhaps! If god wills, this will induce her to eat. Lord, please allow me to take a basketful of earth from here”.

When the widow went inside the hut, old memories flooded back into her consciousness, tears streamed down her wrinkles. Suppressing her intense agony, she filled the basket with earth and brought it outside. Standing in supplication in front of the landlord she spoke “please help me to lift this basket and place it on my head.” Though annoyed at first, her

repeated prayers and supplications melted his heart and pity softly crept in. instead of assigning the task to his servants he himself came forward to assist her. But utterly dismayed he instantly realized that he could not lift it. Anxious to lift the basket he applied all the strength at his command but the basket did not budge an inch. Embarrassed and ashamed he admitted “No, I am unable to lift it.”

The widow replied “don’t take offence master, you cannot lift just one basket full of earth and there are thousands of basketfuls lying there. How will you carry their burden all your life? Please think over this.”

Drunk with the aroma of wealth the landlord had forgotten his duty. But words of wisdom jarred upon his consciousness and re-awakened him. Full of remorse for his misdeed, he apologized to the widow and returned the hut to her.

Madhav Rao Sapre (1871-1931) : A nationalist scholar, intellectual and journalist belonging to Bhartendu period. His mothertongue was Marathi but he adopted Hindi for his creative expression. He is credited with writing one of the first short stories in Hindi. He worked for journals such as Chhattisgarh Mitra, Hindi Kesari. He wrote under many pen names. He also translated Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s Gita Rahasya into Hindi besides many other literary Marathi books. In all he wrote four short stories out of which ‘ek tokri bhar mitti’ is better known for its moral message.

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

THE IMPORTANCE OF MADHAV RAO SAPRE

Manager Pandey

Translated by
Nishi Tiwari

It is a self-evident fact that the struggle against colonial rule, was not only political, but cultural as well. The quest to develop and nurture a national perspective, that had the ability to confront the onslaught of an alien culture, seeping into the national fabric, as a result of colonialism,--- continued. The Renaissance was the byproduct of this quest. It was a period of transition in every field, inclusive of the literary arena. The exponents of the Hindi Renaissance were literary men. Unlike the exponents in Bengal and Maharashtra, these men were not social reformers. Renaissance in Bengal and Maharashtra was propelled and given direction by acclaimed literary figures, and the intellectual class. Their role in speeding up the process of the Renaissance and making it all pervasive was commendable. But it was the Hindi writers and scholars who were the true fathers of the Renaissance. Since their soaring Renaissance spirit found expression in literary works, it was not as perceptible as that of Bengal and Maharashtra. The spirit of the Renaissance percolating into Hindi literature derived its origin from Bengal and Maharashtra and influenced it considerably.

A study of the history of Hindi literature reveals that, the exponents of the Hindi Renaissance, Bhartendu Harishchandra and Mahavir Prasad

Diwedi were influenced by the Renaissance taking place in Bengal and Maharashtra respectively. A number of literary creations go to their credit. The exponents of the Hindi Renaissance were not only literary men, but journalists as well. They were therefore, modern thinkers, analyzing the challenges, the society was then grappling with. It was this class of intellectuals that dominated not only Hindi Renaissance literature, but literature of other regions and languages as well. A vibrant wholesome trend of thought ensued which manifested itself in the philosophical thinking and writings of the intellectuals. The impact of the Renaissance ushered in a new era which brought forth, a broadening of vision in different regions and languages across the country resulting in rapid and radical changes in the national perspective. Regional concerns blossomed into far more encompassing national aspirations. Consequently, a re-awakening took place, fostering far reaching changes. The vista of perception in the literary field broadened, infusing, a spirit of nationalism which, in due course matured into a heroic endeavour to unshackle the bondage of foreign rule, and, a quest for freedom.

Under the impact of various forces, regionalism sublimated into nationalism. Prior to the Renaissance in Bengal and Maharashtra, regional problems had occupied the centre stage, drawing the attention of literary men e.g. in Bengal 'Bang Chetna' became pre-dominant, while

in Maharashtra, 'Maharashtra religion' was greatly expounded. However, the spirit of nationalism gathered momentum gradually, crumbling and dissolving regional barriers. The plight of India was already being depicted and vividly portrayed in Hindi literature, thus giving it a new direction and purpose. During this period, some eminent writers and scholars who, although belonged to other region, promoted and accelerated the process of renaissance in the regions to which they had migrated. Two outstanding personalities deserve mention in this regard. One was Sakharam Deyuskar and the other was Madhav Rao Sapre. Both of them belonged to Maharashtra. But, with the publication of his book 'Desher Kotha', Deyuskar helped in strengthening the Renaissance in Bengal. This book was published in Hindi, under the title of 'Desh ki Baat'. Madhav Rao Sapre's contribution to the Renaissance was, through his essays and journals. Tracing out Madhav Rao Sapre's various aspects of life—his struggle, his literary dedication, contribution to the development of Hindi journalism, his nationalist spirit, social zeal, political activism, Makhan Lal Chaturvedi, makes the following observation :

"Being myriad-minded and an original thinker, for the past 25 years, Madhav Rao Sapre has been a strong pillar of Hindi literature and co-producer and collaborator of literary, social and political organizations. Infusing the spirit of

nationalism into literature; society, and political organizations; touring the land, visiting villages to do so. Putting his writing skill to the best possible use, that of serving his motherland; Expressing the agonised cry of the people gripped in the clutches of foreign domination; delving deep into religious theology and compelling it to serve the motherland, erasing his identity completely. In order to highlight the importance of the people and organizations in order to immortalize them".Such brilliant writers and dedicated social activists have almost been forgotten. Neither are their books available, nor do people discuss them. With the exception of Devi Prasad Verma who had edited and published some of his essays and a collection of short stories, no other writer had ventured into this field. Sapre museum in Bhopal is trying to keep alive his memories. Similar to the group of writers belonging to the Bhartendu age, Madhav Rao Sapre was also a literary journalist. Being a journalist, he was vigilant and sharply aware of the burning problems of society. Being exceptionally daring, he had the courage to express his views boldly. Consequently, he was exposed to and became a victim of British policy of suppression, during his tenure as the editor of the Hindi weekly 'Kesari'. He was arrested on 22nd August, 1908. His book 'Swadeshi Movement and Bycott' published in 1906 was banned. In order to evade detection, and again becoming a victim of British policy of

suppression sapreji wrote articles under different names, some of the names that he used were : Madhavdas Ramdasi, Trimurti and Trivikram Sharma.

His writing tenure was not a very long one (1900-1920). His articles were published in many prestigious journals and magazines. A study of his essays reveals the depth and pervasiveness of his knowledge and wisdom.His essays on various topics ranging from politics, history, economics, sociology, psychology to science surprise and startle his readers. Keeping in mind the decline of Hindi prose at that time, Madhav Rao Sapre was one of those rare literary personages who successfully tried to introduce Hindi language as the medium of expression in Social Science. Sapreji was basically a Marathi. His ancestors were from Konkan region who had migrated to Madhya Pradesh and settled there. He was born in a village Pathari in Damoh district on 19th June 1871. Being born in a Hindi speaking belt, he adopted Hindi as his language and all his life, tried to promote it. His family living under the pressure of financial constraints, he was compelled to complete his education with the help of scholarship, cherishing a deep rooted desire to serve the society and the nation, and to contribute to the growth of literature. After completing his education, he took a vow not to enter a government job and kept his promise. He rejected two offers of government job. He did not live

long and passed away on 23rd April, 1926 at the age of 55. His entire life was a sequel of unremitting struggle and dedication. Financial difficulties did not deter him from taking up challenges and fighting on new fronts. He was constantly engaged in performing multifarious tasks—publication of journals; fanning nationalist sentiments; propagation of new thoughts and ideas, setting up of voluntary organizations in order to serve the society at large.

It was Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar, an eminent Marathi writer and thinker, whose inspiration urged Madhav Rao Sapre to adopt literature and politics as his career. From him, he learnt to express his views fearlessly and in a vibrant language. He was greatly influenced and inspired by Tilak in the political field thereby developing a radical point of view. The influence of Tilak was clearly evident in his journalistic endeavours and political ideas. His political acumen was also the result of Tilak's influence. Sapreji met Tilak in December, 1905 at the Congress session held in Benaras having gone there to attend the Congress Meeting as a delegate from Nagpur. His book "Swadeshi Movement and Boycott" published in 1906, was based on articles and essays published in "Kesri". In order to propagate Tilak's political ideas in Hindi speaking belt, Sapreji started the publication of "Hindi Kesari". The motive was the attainment of Swaraj by getting rid of political slavery. In 1907, there were very

few people in the Hindi speaking belt who dared to openly declare the attainment of Swaraj as the goal of the freedom movement. Madhav Rao Sapre was convinced that it was only through journalism that he could contribute a lion's share to—

- a. The Freedom Movement
- b. To the social arena of Madhya Pradesh
- c. To Hindi Literature and language.

Consequently in 1900, he started the publication of 'Chhattishgarh Friend', with the objective to the above mentioned goals. It was a persuasive and thought provoking journal. Although its contents covered a wide range of subjects like—News items, Poems, Short stories, Satire and Ideological essays, it was mainly reputed for its critical reviews. Therefore, Kamta Prasad Guru observed : The art of literary criticism in Hindi began and its influence spread with 'Chhattishgarh Mitra'. The latter was widely welcomed and highly acclaimed, with many writers joining it, but, unfortunately it had to be closed down in 1902 due to scarcity of funds. Being a person of indomitable will, he was undeterred by difficulties. In 1905, he established the association of Hindi book publication which rolled out a series of volumes. The first volume of Hindi Literary work was published in May, 1906, containing :

1. History of India, and other countries.
2. Biographies of great and eminent personages all over the world.
3. Historical plays.
4. Novels.
5. Contemporary/Current Indian Politics.
6. Science.
7. Critical Reviews.

Within its ambit was published Sapreji's 'Swadeshi Movement and Boycott' in August, 1906, where the significance of the Swadeshi Movement and the meaning of boycott was clearly explained. The book documents in detail the imperialist exploitation and plunder of India by the British regime resulting in India's impoverishment. Driving home his point forcefully he says, "So long as India doesn't attain Swaraj, efforts in other directions will fail." He was confident that India would definitely attain Swaraj, because, in the History of the world, there is not a single example of a powerful country holding the weaker one in an endless bondage of unremitting slavery." How could the government allow the publication of such a book? Hence, it was possibly banned in 1909. A study of "Swadeshi Movement and Boycott" makes it evident that Madhav Rao Sapre was greatly influenced by Tilak. In order to propagate Tilak's views on colonial rule and Nationalism, he launched "Hindi Kesari". The motive behind it was

to establish a parallel to the "Marathi 'Kesari' started by Tilak, so that the former would create some impact in the Hindi speaking belt, that the latter had done in Maharashtra.

It advocated the use of Swadeshi goods and the boycott of foreign ones, it brought out the significance of Swaraj and emphasized upon national pride and self-esteem. It boldly supported various movements and spoke in favour of revolutionaries. Besides dealing with the basic values it also contained translated essays taken from 'Kesari'. It fanned the government's ire, which increased in direct proportion to its increasing popularity. As a consequence Deshraj Press, and houses of Hindi Kesari's editors were raided on August, 22, 1908, and both editors—Kholhatkar and Sapreji were arrested. In the eyes of the government, this was the first act of treason committed in the History of Hindi Journalism. Tracking him down the years one discovers the poignant moments of his life. Sapreji's health had already deteriorated. It worsened during his three months' imprisonment. His friends advised him to seek pardon and get his release, but he refused. Later, he was compelled to give in when his brother, Babu Rao threatened to commit suicide if Sapreji did not apologise to the Government. Being pushed into a terrible dilemma, he had to relent, thus, he put his signature on the letter of apology addressed to the government. This incident

proved to be a political suicide for him. The 14th Nov., 1908 issue of Hindi Kesri enclosed a comment :

“By seeking pardon, Sapreji has ruined his political and public life”.

After his release, Sapreji lived in mental agony- tortured with a sense of shame, guilt, remorse and self abasement. Living in seclusion, for a year, in Ramdasi Monastery in Hanuman Garh. He earned his bread by begging. During this period, he studied and translated Samarth Ramdas, famous book “Dasbodh”. He tried to propagate the spirit of Renaissance but changed his modus-operandi. Renaissance is a process of re-awakening, a growth of wisdom and knowledge in every field. Another very important aspect of Renaissance was delving deep into ancient classical literature and art and interpreting it in modern context, thus throwing a new light on it. It was through his translations that Madhav Rao Sapre tried to throw a new light on the ancient texts. With this objective, he translated ‘Dasbodh’ in 1910. Its first edition was published in 1912. Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade in his article on ‘Ramdas’ has given a detailed and vivid description of ‘Dasbodh’. Sapreji’s article on ‘Dasbodh’ is greatly influenced by the latter. Another important translation done by Madhav Rao Sapre was of ‘Gita Rahasya’ by Tilak in 1950. Although, this book has been translated into many languages, the first translation was in Hindi. More than

twenty five editions of this book have been published. It had a tremendous impact on Hindi literature.

The third important translation done by Sapreji is ‘Mahabharata Mimansa’ which is a translation of Chintamani Vinayak Vaidya’s ‘Mahabharata ke Upsanghar’. Similar to other translations, here too Sapreji has given a detailed account of the author, period of composition, poetic style, narrative technique etc. A deep study of this translation reveals Sapreji’s depth of knowledge in Sanskrit. Another outstanding feature of Renaissance was the growth in the spirit of nationalism. In India, this was expressed in various ways, in different fields of learnings. Its greatest impact was seen in rise against Colonialism. After a long wait India was seen rising from its torpor. The tendency to self-introspect was an outgrowth of this phenomenon. Its aim too, is to strengthen and sharpen the anti-colonial movement. It has already been stated earlier that the Renaissance ushered in ‘ a brave new world’. Every branch of knowledge was explored. Acquaintance with classical literature increased. The immense vitality of the age, left nothing untouched— science, social science, art, adventure, world stirring events engrossed the mind of the newly-awakened people. New values were established, new perspectives developed. It reached the shores of Bengal. Here, its effect was more pervasive than in the Hindi speaking belt—touching every

branch of knowledge— natural and social science, art and literature. New discoveries were made, new patterns of thinking emerged. On the other hand, the Hindi Renaissance remained confined to Literature and Social Sciences only. Madhav Rao Sapre was a versatile genius. This is reflected not only in his study of politics, social milieu, economics and history, but extends to the field of literature, literary criticism, and story writing as well. But a jarring reality is that no book relating to his life and works has been published so far except his translated works in Marathi, and “Swadeshi Movement and Boycott”. Hence, the only source of information available to us are his articles and essays on social issues, politics, history, economics, literary criticism, published in periodicals and journals. In the first decade of 20th Century, the political movements and ideologies that dominated the national arena greatly helped in giving a concrete shape to Sapreji’s thoughts and ideas.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 was vehemently condemned throughout the country. Mass upheavels shook the country, rebellions broke, which later conglomerated into Swadeshi Movement. Sapreji’s opinion was that the partition was given effect with malafide intentions, that of destroying the growing unity of the masses, and of disrupting the process of cohesion that had begun. Putting aside caste differences, people wanted to work

as a united whole. This growing aspiration was nipped in the bud, in order to diminish the influence of the intellectual class on the people and decrease the strategic importance of Calcutta. In 1906, Sapreji wrote this book with the objective of propelling and strengthening the Swadeshi Movement. He observed:- “The time has come when we, with iron-determination and unity, must accomplish the task that lies ahead of us, otherwise relying on the mirage of our previous course of action, we will merely be displaying our oratorical skills without achieving any goal and remain shackled in an endless chain of slavery. The Boycott was complementary to the Swadeshi Movement. Without the boycott of British goods Swadeshi movement would fail to achieve its objectives. In order to drive home his point, Sapreji has emphasized the importance and utility of Boycott, in his book, ‘Swadeshi Movement and Boycott’. His stress on Boycott must not be mistaken to be an emotional impulse, but a historical urgency. Therefore, referring to the history of boycott in America, Ireland, China, England he says with conviction :

“No matter how weak the people of a nation may be, with strong determination and resolution cemented with a bond of unity, they can accomplish the impossible. It doesn’t matter, if they have no weapons. They can influence dishonest rulers, and inspire misguided statesmen to right action.” Sapreji’s words are as relevant today as

they were in the past. His book "Swadeshi Movement and Boycott" contains an article "How the English ruined our Trade and Economy." Going through the book, one is repeatedly reminded of Dadabhai Nauroji's "Poverty and un-British rule in India" and Sakharam Ganesh Devaskar's "Desh Kotha". In his book, Sapreji has proved how in the 18th and 19th Century, the British with a diabolical intention and in a callous manner ruined and destroyed India's Cottage Industries, Art and Craft reducing it to an agricultural colony of Industrial England whose function was to supply raw material to Britain.

The causes and consequences of 1857 revolt have been discussed on a large scale. The loot and plunder of India by the British was one of the causes leading to the revolt. Keeping in mind that the trade policy of Britain was based on economic exploitation of India the Swadeshi Movement and Boycott may be considered a trade war. He writes, "No weapons are required in this struggle. What is necessary is firm determination, strong unity and deep unflinching devotion to the country." The greater the degree of success in this battle, the richer the harvest. One of Madhav Rao Sapre's eminent articles "An investigation of National Awakening" was published in "Maryada" in September, 1915. Although this article was based on another one, published in the 'Indian Review' in 1912, Sapreji has expressed his deep understanding of National Reawakening.

Initially, using the word 'revival', he replaced it with 'rebirth'.

Analyzing the mental development of the people during the middle ages, he says :

"Due to lack of confidence in their intellectual ability, mental strength and skill, they were unable to initiate and accelerate national development and growth. Hence, they reverted back to conservatism, resorting to orthodox practices and dogmatic beliefs, thus stultifying the thinking and reasoning process, of the people, consequently Casteism flourished, and caste barriers became insurmountable". According to Sapreji, later on, with the spread of western education, and western culture, a liberal outlook developed and assimilation of new ideas began – bringing out unprecedented changes in the society. Elaborating his point further, he writes:- "Our ancient ideas, thoughts and beliefs were jostled with the new ones flowing in, questioning old values, customs and beliefs. This dynamic process of transformation once set in motion was not to be cowed down by an ostentatious display of words, and provided ample scope for examination and thereby giving a clarion call to the people to assert newly discovered truths and ideologies with conviction. The spirit of Nationalism was born under these circumstances. The principal signs of Nationalist spirit was a growing feeling of Swadeshi, which included devotion to

country, growing indignation at the plight of the nation, and a strong resolve to bring about national development. It gave birth to new political, economic, social and educational aspirations. Some eminent philosophers and thinkers thought not only in terms of colonial slavery, but also in terms of evils existing in the Indian society, saddled with caste and class differences. Social evils like untouchability, oppression of women, casteism etc. weaken the national bond. Sapreji was among such thinkers. The caste system had undermined the national progress. In "An account of national awakening" Sapreji wrote:- "Caste discrimination has resulted in loss of individual liberty, hampered trade all over the world, plugged the fountain of knowledge and the country is heading towards its national ruin." Sapreji was of the view that it was primarily essential to surmount barriers, and accord a respectable place to Dalits in society for the all-round development of the nation, and for national re-awakening. Thus, he says:- "Undoubtedly the importance of dissolving caste barriers is extremely essential for National development. The untouchables comprise 1/6th of the total population. So, it is high time we realize the tremendous loss being caused to the nation by the inherent tendency of the Upper Caste to shoo them off the mainstream. Contempt for the untouchables leading to their marginalization has had a tremendously negative impact on the labour resource

of the country. For the multi-faceted and sustainable development of the nation it is primarily important to root out social-injustice and prevent the ill-treatment meted out to them! Sapreji's concern was not merely limited to the oppression of Dalits, but also included the emancipation of women. In February, 1901 in "Chhattisgarh Mitra" he reviewed a book titled 'Balbodhini' which deals with the education of women. Here, he had expressed his views regarding the subjugation and emancipation of women. Somewhere in Balbodhini the four duties of a woman have been emphasized, where the husband is revered as Guru and is the recipient of her unflinching devotion. Serving him devotedly, and satisfying and pleasing him were the prime duties of a woman.

Commenting on it with sarcasm, he says— "You have very well enumerated the duties of a woman, Is this their only ability? Is this the purpose of their existence, the goal of their life? Is this their destiny? Alas, the lives of a number of women have been ruined to rubble because of this discrimination." In his review, Sapreji further states that the author of Balbodhini has strongly condemned the women who do not fit into this mould. Elaborating an idea, he writes :

"I question this set of values and ask, why shouldn't the man remain subservient to his wife's wishes. First and foremost

curbing the liberty of an individual is in itself highly deplorable.” Loss of liberty throttles love. A review of his views reveals the fact that Sapreji was vehemently opposed to oppression in any form and believed in individual freedom. Sapreji’s view on the emancipation of woman is far ahead of his times and he is deeply concerned about social development. Believing in gender equality, he clearly asserts that—“So long as men and women are not granted equal rights, and treated at par, social progress will remain a distant reality and there will be no mutual love and respect between them. Books proudly advocating the subjugation of women in various ways are being published even today. Geeta Press of Gorakhpur has published many such books. These are openly advocated and circulated among the less educated women that have had an adverse impact on their psyche. But so far, such work has not been critically reviewed.

In 1915, Sapreji wrote an essay titled ‘Women and the nation’ which was published in ‘Maryada’. In the very beginning he states that the rise and fall of a nation is directly proportional to the position of women in that particular society. With the upliftment of women, the development of a nation gains momentum. While their oppression leads to regression . Along with the growth in the spirit of Nationalism, the desire to reconsider the position of women has also increased. Analyzing the

history of subjugation of women in India, he has reached the conclusion that, it had been a slow process, with religion playing a vital role, not only in India, but other parts of the world as well. Consequently, women were relegated to the background and remained mere shadows of their male counterparts. He writes, “Most of the religions the world over have the inherent tendency to act as guardians of society. Allocating power to themselves, they have framed laws for the society, thus making marriage a religious ritual. Hence, for every woman, marriage has become an essential religious ritual. This has resulted in curbing the freedom of women under the garb of propriety. Referring to the unnecessary restraints placed on women, he goes on to say that, “Nations which respect the rights of women and ensure their freedom, march a step ahead of others. On the contrary, nations, where these issues fade into the background stagnate and lose their vitality, thereby losing their freedom.”

Madhav Rao Sapre’s political awareness is discernible in his deep interest in History. Anonio Gramshi has written, “History is always contemporary, hence political.” One of the chief characteristics of Indian Renaissance was the development of a new historical perspective. Colonialism is not just a geographical encroachment. It also colonises the history and the historical perspective of that particular nation. In the process of doing so, it dismembers

the consciousness of the colonized nation, and moulds it for its own end. In his book "A Glimpse at History" Hegel has written, "Hindus have never possessed any history of their own. Their development has not taken place in a manner, so as to attain a political stature. They never could gain victory over their foreign invaders, rather they have always been subjugated by them." This historical perspective has greatly influenced European historians who have dealt with Indian History. A feeling of inferiority complex crept into the Indian psyche, which in turn was supremely essential for the growth of national consciousness and the determination to unshackle the chains of bondage. It became imperative that along with growth in the feeling of anti-colonialism, a new historical perspective should be developed. Hence, in the 19th Century, new inroads were made through historical writings in the field of Indian society, culture and literature giving it a new dimension. This came to be known as Nationalist History. Such historical literature developed in different regions and in different languages, of the country. Although Madhav Rao Sapre has not written any historical book, he has written a number of articles and essays relating to them. He holds the view that, "for the evolution of human race, there is no better teacher than history." While dealing with any article relating to history, he always keeps in mind its political aspect. In 1907, he wrote

an essay titled "The Italian Patriot Mezzini". At that time the Swadeshi Movement had gained foothold in India, and a large number of youth were actively participating in it. Whether the youth should participate in politics or not, became a matter of great controversy. In his book "Swadeshi Movement and Boycott" Sapreji strongly supported and approved of the participation of youth in the political field.

Sapreji in his essay on Mezzini has clearly written that in the national awakening of Italy Mezzini had played a key role in inducing Garibaldi to become an active participant in the struggle. In the context of the political situation existing in India, the Italian revolution could serve as the best example. During the Swadeshi Movement, the glorious struggle of Mezzini and Garibaldi gained immense popularity across the country. Their highly inspirational life history came to be written in many Indian languages. In 1913, Sapreji wrote a series of six essays based on "Lessons to be learnt from European History", which were published in 'Saraswati'. Besides examining and analyzing the Greek and the Roman revolution, it also dealt with the English and the French Revolution, the Renaissance and the religious history of Europe. In one of his essays on Greece, he has written, "If the people living in different regions of our country, speaking different languages, following different religions, customs and cultures could draw inspiration from the

history of Greece by rising above internal barriers, wiping out mutual differences, and developing a feeling of solidarity and oneness, it would usher in a new era of progress and development, thereby leading to a glorious phase."Presenting Rome as an ideal, he urges his countrymen to learn the lesson of shedding selfishness.

From the English Revolution, he tells us to learn determination and dedication. From the French Revolution, is to be learnt to have faith in the power of thought. Thus, in this manner, he inspires and coaxes his countrymen to carry forward the Swadeshi Movement drawing inspiration and learning lessons from the history of other nations. The imperialistic power of Europe tried to extend its tentacles all over the world, under the pretence of civilizing them, thereby leading to colonialism, and the seeping in of western culture into the national fabric of the colonized countries. A study of imperialism in the last few decades reveals the fact that innovative measures were adopted to bring about revolutionary changes in the field of education in order to strengthen imperialism so as to exert supremacy over the colonized countries. Western thought with its emphasis on reason not only dismissed the Indian notion about nature, culture and society, but also imposed its ideologies on the Indian psyche. The Sepoy Mutiny led the British to believe that Indians were barbarians who deserved to be subdued, not reformed. When national

consciousness permeated the colonized countries and the desire for freedom awakened and intensified, the desire to get rid of colonial rule also grew stronger and ripened into firm resolution. Hence, in the struggle for freedom, we also witness a growing conflict between Indian and western culture. This conflict is also clearly evident in the Indian Renaissance. A growing tendency to adopt a western way of life was witnessed in the intellectual class of India. This caused anxiety to the founders of the Indian Renaissance, and was severely criticized by them. Sapreji too, was worried about its grave implications. Thus, he writes : "Having acquired the key to western education and culture, how far have we been successful in adopting its inner spirit and basic principles. We have been content to adopt only its superficial aspects."

Sapreji was well aware of the limitations and drawbacks of Indian culture. He wanted to free India from these smothering limitations, by wiping out these drawbacks. This led him to say : "It should be our duty to redeem India from its unreasonable and inequitable binding social conventions, casting aside religious, caste and class differences, widening the bonds of man's social perceptions in order to enable him to recognize his inherent abilities, his dignity as a human being, and his rights and social obligations. We shall be able to achieve this end only if these unreasonable differences are put aside,

and we rise above religious dogma, and bigotry which has distorted the Indian culture. Sapreji wanted the establishment of a modern society in India which would not only be free from its smothering orthodoxy but at the same time would not be a blind imitation of the west; which would be modern, yet, Indian. This new social order would consist of men with an ever-widening vision.

Sapreji's contribution also extends to the field of economics. He established a philosophical view of economics in Hindi. In the first decade of 20th Century when the 'Pracharini Sabha' of Kashi decided to publish a science dictionary in Hindi, Sapreji was appointed the editor of dictionary of Political Economics. According to Sapreji's biographer "Govinda Rao Hardikar", the economics dictionary published in 1904 contained 2115 Hindi terms for 1320 English terms of Economics. This dictionary was published in 1906. With Sapreji's efforts economics received an impetus. In 1904, he wrote a lengthy article on the trade policy of the British. His article on "Hartal" was published in "Saraswati" in 1907 where strike has been defended. He has written, "Generally, strikes are highly condemned and the workers are blamed for paralyzing work in factories. Although the owners incur great loss and the workers suffer, yet it can undoubtedly be stated that, workers have a right to defend their genuine demands."

Although, Sapreji had written a book on economics he did not have it published, because he found it unsatisfactory, but, he handed over the manuscript to Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi when the latter was writing "Sampatti Shastra." It helped him greatly. Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi has clearly mentioned in the excerpts that he had borrowed from Sapreji's unpublished book. Hence, the trend of economic philosophy started by Sapreji becomes, more organized in 'Sampatti Shastra' and this trend is carried forward by Radhamohan Gokul in his book "Country's Wealth" and Parasnath Dwivedi's book, 'Desh ki Dasha'.

Besides being a renowned journalist, Sapreji was also a man of literature, but he has not been assigned any place in the history of Hindi literature. He was a man of many talents; an eminent essayist, a skillful narrator and a brilliant critic. Devi Prasad Verma has tried to throw light on Sapreji's contribution to story-writing in Hindi. He has not only edited the stories written by him but, in his preface, has also evaluated his art of narration. An elaborate discussion on 'Hindi ki Pratham Maulik Kahani' was published in Sarika. Here Sapreji's story 'Ek Tokari Bhar Mitti' was considered to be the first Maulik Kahani in Hindi by some of the critics. Consequently, Sapreji's fame as a story writer was discussed at length. In 'Chahattisgarh Mitra' six of Sapreji's stories were published between 1900-1901, two of which were published under the title

'Subhashit Ratna'. This reminds us of Jatak or Hitopadesh stories. Their aim was to impart moral education, which was the main trend of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi age. But some of Subhashit Ratnas are still relevant today, e.g. in Subhashit Ratna 1, the story goes : "Once upon a time, a gardener tied a number of axes with a piece of rope and entered his garden. The trees in the garden began to tremble with fear at the sight. One of the old standing bushes in the garden tried to pacify them by saying : "Brothers, why fear. So long as one of us do not join the axe, nobody will be able to destroy us." It is true, only treachery by our loved ones can destroy us, nothing else has the power to do so.

In his book "Jungle Jathkam" Kashinath Singh has artistically and effectively dealt with this theme. With the change in situation, the meaning of the story changes. So it is relevant till today. During Sapreji's tenure as a writer, the British were ruling over India. It is a well known fact that, the British succeeded in establishing their supremacy over India with the help of our countrymen. The treachery of a handful of Indians led to the failure of the 1857 revolt. It was ultimately suppressed with Indian help. The role played by the handle in 'Subhashit' is similar to the role played by the traitors in 1857 revolt.

Kashinath Singh's ' Jungle Jathkam' is oriented around emergency. He

condemns those who supported govt. oppression during emergency. According to him, only those who give in easily become favorites of an oppressive govt. In the modern age of globalization, there is no dearth of such characters. When story writing started developing wings in India, it had the benefit of access to five different sources;-

1. Story writing in Sanskrit Literature.
2. Popular tales, fables in urdu.
3. Folk legend.
4. Stories from Bengali and
5. English Literature.

Sapreji has four stories to his credit of a traveller'

- a) EK Pathik ka Swapn 'The aspirations of a traveller'
- b) Samman kise kehte hain 'What is respect'
- c) EK tokri bhar mitti 'A basketful of earth'.
- d) Azam

Although the technique of "Ek Pathik Ka Swapn" follows the 'Dastan' tradition, the description bears the stamp of Sanskrit Literature.

Azam is a didactic story, based on one of Oliver Goldsmith's essays. 'Samman kise Kehte hain' is a tale of empathy where, there is a conflict between freedom and bondage on the one hand, and patriotism and treachery on the other, with the good

forces of liberty and patriotism triumphing over the negative forces. The theme of “Samman Kise kehte Hain” ripens into maturity in Premchand’s “Soze Vatan.”

“Ek Tokri Bhar Mitti” is the last of Sapreji’s stories. Besides structural brevity, it also has intensity of effect. Although it deals with social injustice, it expresses faith in the inherent goodness of human nature. The effect is a transmutation of mind and heart. It reflects Premchand’s initial stories. Madhav Rao’s contribution to the art of story writing is no doubt noteworthy but, much more important than that is the fact that he gave a definite shape to the art of literary criticism in Hindi. According to him, Literary Criticism plays a crucial role in the development of Literature. Therefore, he was always eager to develop the art of Literary Criticism. He worked diligently to achieve this end. He wanted to establish a “Nagri Pracharini Sabha” and a “Samalochana Society” for the development of Literary Criticism. He also desired the publication of a magazine “Nagri Samalochana.” Although his dreams remained unfulfilled, yet in “Chhattisgarh Mitra”, he tried hard to give a definite shape to the art of Literary Criticism.

Within a short period of two years in 1900-1901, around 20 critical reviews by Sapreji were published—ranging from poetry and novel to astrology, grammar, education of women etc. He also wrote

a critical review of a magazine “Bhasha Chandrika.” In the March, 1916 of “Maryada” Sapreji’s brilliant review on “Oxford Survey of British Empire” was published. It was humorously satirical, light-hearted in tone and full of wit. Glancing through the widely variegated range of his works, we come to the conclusion that his art of criticism was not limited to literature alone. These reviews establish the fact that he was a great linguist being well versed in Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit and English. He has brilliantly analyzed several literary translations. Examining “Bharat Gaurav”, Sapreji has expressed his views on Literary Criticism in the following manner—“Though the word critic has a positive meaning, it is generally associated with having negative implications. It is generally held that critical appraisal is akin to finding loopholes. Whatever be the quality of work, the duty of a critic is to set right and smoothen out the rough edges. This does not imply that a critic’s work is flawless. After all, he is human and liable to error.”

In ‘Bharat Mitra’ he writes : “Just as an appraiser of precious stones carefully examines his gems and evaluates their worth, similarly brilliant critics examine literary creation and evaluate its merits and demerits. This is literary criticism.” Sapreji has reviewed a number of poems especially those of Sridhar Pathak, who gained immense popularity as an experimental poet. His poems were both in ‘Khariboli’ and ‘Brajbhasha’. ‘Dhanvijay’

is a collection of poems in Brajbhasha. In his reviews Sapreji's has evaluated Sridhar Pathak's merits as an experimental poet, but also as a poet endowed with great social awareness. He writes: "Just as Pathakji has broadened the horizon of Hindi Literature and established a new trend, he will also make new inroads in the social field as a social reformer, fighting against social injustice." Here we get a glimpse of Sapreji's knowledge of English Literature. He has compared Wordsworth's and Shelley's comprehensive and universal sympathy with Sridhar Pathak's universal perception and understanding. He has written that some of the essential qualities of a poet are calm contemplation, equanimity, power of thought and imagination, and optimism. Along with 'Dhanvijay' he has also written a critique on 'Gunwant Hemant' a collection of poems in Hindi praising Sridhar Pathak as a poet of Nature. Sapreji has written a lengthy and detailed critique of Sridhar Pathak's "Jagat Sachai Saar". Here, the concept that the world is an illusion has been refuted. "One should not deny the reality of matter thereby becoming indolent. Rather, one should embrace its essence and thereby help God in his divine plan. In order to portray his thought, Sridhar Pathak composed 51 verses in "Jagat Sachai Saar."

In spite of all his love and respect for Sridhar Pathak, Sapreji does not hesitate to point out the shortcoming of his poetic

diction. He disapproves of an ostentatious display of words, and complexity of thought in poetry. He observes, "Many poets have wasted their poetic talent in the mere display of words. He advocates a simple, sympathetic expression of the world." In his critical review of "Jagat Sachai Saar" it is clearly evident that, in the field of Literary Criticism, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi and Ramchandra Shukla followed the path paved by Sapreji. Sridhar Pathak has translated two poetic works of Oliver Goldsmith, The Deserted Village as 'Ujad Gram' and The Hermit as 'Ekantvasi Yogi.' Sapreji has written a detailed critical review of these two translations emphasizing two focal points. "Firstly, if the translation corresponds exactly to the original text or not, and if the thought of the poet has been expressed explicitly and with complete perfection or not. Secondly, its poetic quality viewed independently regardless of the translation." It is needless to say that these points must be kept in mind while critically reviewing any work of translation. Referring to The Hermit he writes, "The translator has applied all his independent poetic ability." In his critical review of the deserted village he writes, "This translation will always help to establish his unparalleled poetic ability, his encompassing genius, his amazing poetic talent, and like a long standing memorial will always remain immortal, in the field of translation." A good literary criticism is possible only if the critic dares to express

his thoughts boldly, without fear. This daring skill can be found in Sapreji's critical works. Sapreji has written a critical appreciation of Mishra Bandhu's 'Lav Kush Charitra' which was published in 'Chhatisgarh Mitra' in five consecutive issues. Shyam Bihari Mishra was the Deputy Collector of Benaras and a renowned litterateur as well. It was highly appreciated by newspapers and eminent scholars. Sapreji did not approve of this unrestrained applaud. Therefore he stated : "If only singing praises of a literary work fulfills the criteria of a critical review, there is no need to write much." The first objection raised by Sapreji in his review is that, it is not in conformity with the interest and mental outlook of the modern day reader. Driving home his point forcefully he observes : " We are living in the 19th and 20th Century, a day of modern education and novel ideas, where the interests of the people are at great variance from those of the people of the 16th century. It will just be mere daring and wishful thinking on the part of the modern poet if he tries to win the approbation of his readers by vainly trying to arouse their interest using the same tools and methods that were used earlier by the 16th century poets." Emphasizing his point further, he says, "What I mean to say, is, before composing a poem or any subject, the poet must deliberate over some important aspects of poetry—country, time, situation, character. Those, who do so in proper

manner, their poetry becomes popular, and they succeed in attaining the status of a national poet.

Citing the example of Valmiki's Ramayana, Gemini Puran, Ramashwamegh etc, he says the poignant episodes have not been brought to light, while there are unnecessary and irrelevant digressions. Pointing out the limitations of its poetic technique he says that the very essence of the poem has been diluted, because of the excessive use of couplets. He has also pointed out the grammatical and linguistic errors. Viewed in totality, the critique is testimony of his disillusioned poetic wisdom and the boldness to express the truth with a daring that is unsurpassed. Many eminent critics of today are vying with each other to impart greatness to important literary personages in the bureaucracy- renowned I.A.S. and I.P.S. officers. In such a scenario, Sapreji's impartial and independent judgement coupled with truthfulness is profoundly astonishing and highly laudable.

Sapreji's keen historical perception is revealed in his critical review of "Bharat Gaurav Darshan", translation of an Urdu book. The translator claims with conviction that, on the basis of authentic evidence, India may be placed on a high pedestal of glory. But, a detailed study of the text reveals that undue praise has been showered on it without any authenticity

as some of the details are purely fictitious in nature. For example, somewhere in the book, it has been mentioned that Vyasji handed over a pair of binoculars to Sanjay in order to aid him to have a clear view of the battle field so that he could narrate it to Dhritrashtra. A reference from the text was also given in order to prove the authenticity of this imaginary allusion. But no quotation from the text followed it.

Giving quotations from the text Sapreji refutes the false statement made by the author, that Sanjay had used binoculars. He goes on to question its truth. His critique is exemplary. "Can the true India emerge out of this false façade hidden as she is under a veneer of glorification?" Such false conjectures that India had been a pioneer in every field be it in the field of education, governance, mathematics, astrology, geography, art, chemistry, and that she was an epitome of perfection and hence nothing more was left to be discovered in the field of knowledge—is in total opposition to historical facts. This hyperbolic picturisation may suit the imaginative genius of a poet, but not those who believe in historical facts. The Realists will never appreciate such exaggeration. Commenting on it, Sapreji says that such books are compiled in order to eulogize our ancestors and induce us to take pride in their versatility surrounding them in a halo of greatness. Even in the modern times we do come across writers

who are intent upon idolizing India, and assigning her the place of Jagadguru "World Teacher". Giving a clarion call to other aspiring critics, he says that such works based on imaginary allusions need to be severely criticized of which Sapreji is an excellent example.

In December, 1902, Sapreji wrote a detailed review on the eminent prose writer and Acharya, Dandi. Besides examining the different possible doctrines in vogue, during Dandi's time, he wrote a detailed critique of "Dashkumar Charitra." The latter gives us an insight into Sapreji's depth of knowledge of Sanskrit. Poets like—Kalidas, Bhavbhuti, Subandhu, Banbhatta. This was the beginning of comparative study in Literature. During the last few decades a new trend seems to have emerged—a quest for 'Hindu India.' As a concomitant to that quest deep rooted Indian values embedded in modern and classical Hindi Literature are being explored. Some literary critics in an attempt to pick out the Indian element in novels are intent upon placing "Dashkumar Charitra; Vasavdatta; and Kadambari" in the category of novels. Refuting this claim made by the critics Sapreji goes on to prove the contrary. He observes:-"The novel lacks a story, the most essential element in a novel. Neither has the poet tried to trace its legendary origin, nor has he tried to embellish his work according to the demands of a particular school of thought. Moreover, it does not reflect the

characteristics of the age in which it was born. In other words Sapreji has found no features of the novel in any of these works. When Madhav Rao Sapre was trying to give a definite shape to Hindi Literary Criticism, it was in its embryonic stage. Although, Hindi Literary Criticism commenced in the Bhardendu Age under the efforts of 'Balkrishna Bhatt', and Chaudhary Badrinarayan Premghan, it was due to Sapreji's efforts that it developed and its influence increased. It is really shocking that despite his immense contribution to the art of Literary Criticism,

there is no evaluation of his critical works any where, neither in the history of Hindi literature; not in the history of Hindi Literary Criticism. His name finds no mention any where. Is the negligence intentional or unintentional? Is this, what G.N. Devi calls cultural oblivion? Whatever it is, with reference to Madhav Rao Sapre, history of Hindi literature and history of Hindi literary criticism are guilty of negligence. Despite being an accomplished critic, Sapreji remained a name known only to the interested few.

Courtesy : 'Tadbhav'
edited by Akhilesh

Manager Pandey born 1941, is a very well known critic and scholar of Hindi. To name some of the numerous books penned by him—shabd aur karm; sahitya aur itihas drishti; sahitya ke samajshastra ki bhumika; bhakti andolan aur surdas ki bhumika; anbhay sancha, alochna ki samajikta etc. He retired recently from J.N.U. as professor in the deptt. of Indian Languages. He lives in New Delhi.

BAANBHATT KI ATMAKATHA

Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi

Translated by
Abram

Glory and victory be to the dust particles at the feet of the Three-eyed¹ That adorn the forehead of Baanasur, Kiss the circle of the crest-jewels of the ten-headed Raavan; sleep upon the heads of gods and demons alike And above all, shred to smithereens mundane manacles.

Although I am famous by the name of Baanbhatt, it is not really mine. Far better, if they knew no history of this name. I have sedulously tried to keep the public unaware of this genealogy; but owing to various reasons I am not now able to let it remain veiled. My shame bursts solely from the fact that this my story is a stigma on the fair fame of that illustrious Vatsyayan clan I was born into. Advanced scholars of the Vedas jostled in the homes of my father and grandfather and grand-uncles. Even the parrots and starlings of their household could pronounce the incantations perfectly well; and although people may treat it as hyperbolic, the stark truth is that my ancestors' students were in regular awe of their birds and parrots. From verse to verse they improved upon their faulty recitations. The houses of my forefathers forever were in smoke coming from yagyas and votive offerings. But all this is the story I heard. I have myself seen my father, Chitrabhanu-Bhatt.

If I say that Saraswati² herself making a descent used to soak up the strings of sweat produced at the time of his offering libation with her fresh leaf-like palms, then there may be no exaggeration.

For, when father having been engaged in consigning oblations to the fire from dawn to a bit more than one hour and a half of the sunrise got up drenched with perspiration, he would straight make for the small mat made of sacrificial grass to sit on. This was his repose.

At this very time while he was supervising the students' study of initiation in the Vedas, the sweat of strain dried up. What would I call it more than sponging of sweat strings with the hands of Saraswati? I was the son of such a father—learned, virtuous, and doing what was enjoined—myself a congenital gossip, vagabond, woolgathering fellow, and wanderer. When I had run away from home, I induced and enticed a good many striplings of my village to follow me. They did not stick to me till the end, still I had earned a bad name in the village. In the dialect of Magadh an ox shorn of tail is dubbed 'Bund'. There this saying has gained currency that a 'Bund' has not only his own egress, but also an escape with tether and other accessories. Thus, they began nicknaming me 'Bund'. Subsequently, with some ritualistic cultivation through the Sanskrit word 'Baan' (arrow) I retrieved this name. The 'Bhatt' was affixed much later. By the way, my real name was 'Daksh' (erudite). Lately, there has been a high-tide of love and respect among the public towards me. If they so like. they may turn it to Dakshbhatt. Very skilfully have I preserved this name elsewhere. I shall

tell its tale now.

My father had eleven brothers. I did not see all of them. One of my cousins was called Urupati. In point of age he was much senior, but he dealt with me at par. He was a famous logician of the period. It was he that worsted the Buddhist mendicant, Vasubhuti in a scriptural debate. His erudition and character had no little spell on Maharaja Harshwardhan, who on a sudden leaned towards the Vedic faith. None in my family had for me the affection that they had for Urupati Bhatt. He has saved me from many a misdeed. I shall dwell on him in reference at a proper place. Here this will suffice that when at fourteen I lost my father—mother had predeceased him much earlier—this very Urupatibhatt soaked me with that hearty concern and affection which was my mother's. But I must not start this story with sobs for my sad luck. I start it with the advent of my well-being. If at all tales of misfortune may intrude at times, the readers of this narrative are called upon not to think more of them.

A vagrant was I, indeed. From town to town, from any habitation to any countryside I bootlessly roamed and loitered for years. During this aimless wayfaring what all did I do? I was an acrobat sometimes, sometimes I showed the dance of marionettes; at times I organized a dramatic concert, at times hoodwinked the habitats by playing a folksinger. In brief, I left no occupation

untouched. God had granted me enough presentability and what is called the gift of the gab. In short, these two talents stood by me during the days of my adolescence and adulthood. Even though they started taking me for an 'adder' to see my array of deeds, I had never been lewd. So in a wandering spree once I landed at the town of Sthanweeshwar (Thaneshwar). I regard that day as the day of my good luck.

Entering the city I beheld much of festivity. On the highway, convex like a tortoise back, there was a huge procession in movement. Women outnumbered therein. Queens were seated in precious palanquins. The horizon was resonant with the tingles emanating from tiny anklets caused to collide gently on the feet of the attending maids keeping abreast of them. Bejewelled bangles grew restlessly playful because of quick and forceful raising of creeper-like arms. Effectually, hands also like creepers were stirring. Their palms turned upward, impressed one as if fully blossomed lilies in the galaxy had come down tremulously owing to the whiffs of breeze. Even as the jostling in the throng mounted, the blossoms in their ears started sliding. The maids bumped among themselves. Thus one's bracelet or armband interlaced with the other's outer garment effected some notch or slit. Their sophisticated cosmetics, thawed with perspiration were colouring their silk apparel. A band of danseuse as well was

accompanying them. To view their laughing and chuckling faces was to feel as if a coppice of lilies in full bloom was on the move. Their restive necklaces furiously agitated were clashing against their busts; unplaited braids and waving locks took a lingering halt at the point of vermilion. Constantly frolicsome flighty coloured powder was doing their hair brownish red and the entire highway reverberated with their enchanting melody.

Standing all along on a city cross-road I was watching this scene spellbound. The most delectably amusing part was that wherein the palace inmates such as the dwarfs, humpbacks, eunuchs and morons demented with a boorish and contumacious dance were on the run. An old attendant on the women's apartments was in a sorry pickle. Round his neck the outer garment of an engrossedly dancing damsel had got stuck up and amidst the pull and push the poor aged one became a laughingstock. Right in the middle of the procession was the place for the princesses. The song-and-dance was restrained, solemn, and entrancing. On the one side the earth seemed to be cracking from the sound waves of kettle drum, tabour, war drum, tube, pipe, and conch; and on the other the princesses' palanquins resplendent with their gemmed earrings agitated, loquaciously ringing at some turns of the mild chirp coming out from the feet delicately adorned with anklets. In the rear were the king's mimes, heralds,

and panegyrists going and singing praises. Some of them were so stupefied with pleasure that they made their mouths like a particular musical organ. The procession took full forty-eight minutes to pass out and I remained standing that long like a stock-still idol.

The procession out of sight, I got up as if from sleep. I gathered from the townsmen that a son was born to Prince Krishnavardhan, brother of Maharaja Shri Harshdev and today the child was going to be formally named. On hearing this I was crestfallen for a while. My own state flashed across. One is lucky enough to generate so much of festive celebration at one's birth—in contrast I'm so ill-omened that home and abroad are equally buffeting me. My own birth came to my mind. My mother passed away to the other world only some years after. Father had grown old then in his already multifariously duty-oriented life of study and teaching, worship and sacrificial rites, he had to take upon himself the heavy responsibility of my upbringing. Affection is a terrific thorn in the flesh, attachment a superlative vitality, inasmuch as to the tired life of my old father one more suffix was added; still he looked after me with an untiring mind. Up from the predawn when he seated himself on the grass mat, my dust besmeared body was usually in his lap. The ardour and affection I received from him simply outbalanced the learning. When I was fourteen even he left me an orphan.

Whatever is quintessential in my life is the love of my father. That marred me, that also made me. This tumult of pleasure today flung me into my father's hold and fulcrum. Once I looked upward. I felt as if my forebears were shedding upon me tears of sorrow. Whereas the ancient family of the Vedic redoubtables recognized in the seven spheres by the silvery beams of glory and standing, here I am a mere, wretched bund. Oh earth, cleave apart that I may hide myself.

Suddenly did it strike me why should I not go and congratulate prince Krishnavardhan on the occasion of his son's birth. To bless is a Brahmin's religious pursuit, moral obligation, and also a vocation. Although I fail to do anything after a worked out plan—and this explains why I could not complete any book—yet in taking decisions I never spin out. So, with the idea surfacing in my mind, I began preparing for the Prince's palace. That day I took a hearty bath, then besmeared the body with unguents of sandal, wore a wreath of white flowers, put on a shining outer garment up to the ankle—this was my favourite appearance; and off I was after offering my prayers washed with tears at the feet of the Three-eyed deity. It was dusk at that time. The rays of the sun god had not only left the earth surface and were atop the trees but also receded to sit on the summit of Sunset Hill #. It was then a slow pervasive moonlight. It was

the thirteenth of the bright fortnight. Thrilled in rapture I started wending my way to Prince Krishnavardhan's home. Not even once did I think if at all he would like to meet me. My mind was today overflowing with outlandish enthusiasm. Today itself as if all my grime had been cleansed and my mind and body were turned airy. By now I had made up my mind to wash away the stigma of dissoluteness forever. I must befriend Prince Krishnavardhan right today, and within ten days will also be reckoned the Maharaja's man after his own heart. Once again my home will be aglow with holy yajnas. Again at my door parrots and mainas pronouncing Vedic incantations will correct and admonish the celibate aspirants from verse to verse every now and then. I must not remain the taint and infamy of the Vatsyayan clan for ever.

My luck, however, was still entangled around a big thorn of the Unseen. What happened was fated and what ought to have happened could not materialize. After this I have to record such an event as makes me shiver with awe and apprehension at the time of its actual writing. What I had intended to keep from I was obliged to clash with. Who can cut corners with destiny?

Who can erase what fate etches with its mighty pen? Who has so far succeeded in pouring out the ocean of the Unseen?

I was going ahead fast. A man sinking and floating in his own colourful fancies about prospective life has seldom the respite to survey all. In a sense I was moving blindfolded. At this very juncture a soft and tenuous tone addressed me— "Bhatt, look here Bhatt, look this way, don't you recognise me?" This strain startled me. Who in this distant Sthanweeshwar is my identifier? Just as the reins pull up a racing horse, in the same way this voice stopped my flighty fantasies. I turned and looked back. Not a very pleasing idol-like colleen was summoning me. On her countenance was enough youthfulness there, but its sheen and dazzle had dimmed as if a lamp-wick were vomiting only smoke. In the pale light of the gloaming her eyes were aglow. Only too perceptible black lines on their fringes were insufficient to subdue that shine. She was seated on a betel stall. It seemed she was dealing more in smiles than in betels. I had plumed myself on my power of recognition. I took myself for an expert in distinguishing between a laughter-inducing sob and a lachrymose smile, but this chuckle was a kind apart. In it there was attraction, but no attachment; affection but no infatuation. Involuntarily did I glide towards her shop and made many an attempt to place her. She blurted out—"Bhatt, O gentleman, even you fail in recognition!" Oho, it's Nipunika. For a while I was simply standing almost churned within, partly aberrated, semi-insensate. Then suddenly and at once

I burst forth, "Aha, Niuniya!" 'Niuniya, is the Prakrit name of Nipunika. I had been more familiar with her natural features. With her big, lustrous eyes Nipunika reprimanded me, "Why make a noise, speak softly." And then sliding a suitable seat she asked thus, "sit down gentleman; do take some betel." I did sit.

Nipunika here needs a brief introduction. She descends from one of those castes today that were once regarded as untouchables but whose forefathers had fortunately got some employment under the Gupta rulers. By virtue of securing service their social status acquired some uplift. Nowadays they have been counting themselves among the holy Vaishya clan and are emulating the customs prevalent among the Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Only lately has their practice of widow marriage been given the go-by. Nipunika was married to a baker Vaishya who had become affluent (Seth) by raising himself from the position of a parcher of grains. Scarcely had even a year passed after nuptials when Nipunika was widowed. I was unaware of what pain or pleasure she had sailed through after widowhood, but she escaped from home. She had not revealed to me anything more about her previous life, but the story since is by and large my familiarity. When Nipunika had first approached me, I was in Ujjaini. There I was the manager of a dramatic company and chief interlocutor in the prologue to a play. She expressed her desire to join the company and I

agreed. She was admittedly no vision. No doubt her complexion vied with the colour of tubular stalk of 'shephali' [a flower that drops down before morning; but her most valued wealth of beauty was her eyes and fingers. I regard fingers as very significant ingredients of comeliness. Slender and tapering fingers effect a wonderful impression while making successful the reverential salutation of the actress rendered through the joining of hollowed palms and enacted through other emblematic episodes. So, I accorded permission to Nipunika for an entry into the company. Women in my dramatic entourage were better off than men. From my very infancy I have known how to revere womankind. Ordinarily, those of the softer sex who are dubbed fickle, forward, and fallen from the family have nevertheless divine stamina; this is lost sight of. I do not sink into oblivion. I take the feminine body for an equivalent of God's temple. I cannot bear with adverse comments on it. For this alone I had framed such stringent codes for my company that none could even speak to those women against their wishes. It was well-known to the public that Baanbhatt's danseuse lived under constraint and duress. But its upshot was fine. People began loving my dramatic company. Gradually I put Nipunika onto the stage, but not without her approval. One day in Ujjaini my own composition, a dramatic poem was to be enacted. There was much probability of

the supreme king's presence that day. I had made arrangements to the best of my principal actors to unfold and display the acme of their art on that occasion. Internally I fancied for a staging with perfect passion and pleasure interspersed with melodies produced by musical instruments. So did it happen. After the evening waving of lights before Mahakaalnath[1] people started flocking to the theatre hall. All the elite and affluent of the city were seated properly. A beat of the drum, and with fanfare and music I commenced the ritualistic proceeding of the prelude. Vocalists and instrumentalists took the assigned seats and concomitantly with the tinkle and clang of anklets of the danseuse, Indian lute, flute, tabor, and special drum rang and gurgled. On my entering the stage with a golden vase and banner for the placement of an Indra's[2] emblem I was immensely gratified to watch the interminably anxious expectation. My own acting was a marvellous success. After the raising of the Indra's emblem I returned expansively contented to the retiring room. Already, Nipunika was present there with the flower offerings. At my nod once again the drum received a beat and with flower offering for a reverential salutation Nipunika stepped onto the stage. From behind the curtain I was beholding her unprecedentedly wonderful dance. With the lute, flute, and tabor the plate of bell-metal was voluble and was rendering the clang and tinkle

of Nipunika's anklets all the more spellbinding. Suddenly the instruments felt a brake and against the backdrop of the echo of their mellifluous strain her soft tune was heard. Today I was wonderstruck and under a spell to view her deftness. On the completion of the song the sound of the tinkle of the anklets was audible with the instruments. With a delicate pose she presented her hearty offerings to different gods and retreated to the section behind the screen in beautifully slow movement.

In a moment in the deep of my mind a typhoon passed and subsided to tranquillity. I have been ever able to compose myself. Of this I am rather proud. For once I called in an entreating tone- "Niuniya". With a pause and ponder Nipunika stopped short—her left hand was placed upon her waist, the bracelet had slid onto the wrist, the right hand like a lackadaisical creeper of pepper was in a gentle swing, her comely curvaceous body because of the dance style was a bit bent, and the countenance was suffused with droplets from fatigue. I was reminded of Maalvika in Maalvikagnimitram. [3] With a laugh I recited that 'shloka' (mostly an unrhymed stanza) from Kalidas. Nipunika was quite innocent of Sanskrit; only God knows what she thought, what she took it for. A slender line of smile appeared on her lips and for quite a while her eyes were lowered. Right then a jasmine drooped and dropped from her flaccid

braid. The flower was punished forthwith for its folly. Nipunika began rubbing it to and fro with her toes. The image of Kalidas's Maalvika that had eluded Nipunika so far was also got to and I gave out a peal of laugh. Seeing my laughter she looked up. This time her eyes were wet. Slowly but steadily she made good her exit. I had a hunch that she could not put up with my laughter. I was engaged in a skein of chores. The play started and continued full two hours with celebration and circumstance. I was overjoyed that day. From the blissfully gratified features of the Maharaja it was only too obvious that I would be plentifully rewarded on the morrow. He replied that he would give me an audience in the court the next day. The dramatic performance ended amidst repeated plaudits from the assembled spectators. The day's work over, I came back to my dwelling. I was thinking of giving a plush prize to Nipunika, when someone informed me that she was nowhere there. I started as if I heard a thunderburst in a cloudless sky. The whole of night I was engaged in a search for her in vain. The next day, the third, the fourth – Nipunika was not to be seen again. I could not go to the royal assembly hall. At intervals the bedewed eyes of hers were nudging my heart. That my ominous laughter terrified me like a flower out of season. My dramatic company did I disband the very fifth day and consigned the play I had authored

to the fickle waves of the Shipra. It is six years since; I have given up the profession itself. Today when I am on to the regal court in the hope of an award, that very Nipunika appears. Will her sight pose a snag today as not seeing her had been a kill-joy then? Who can bar the Unseen?

For quite some time I could not speak. Only with unbatted eyes I remained looking towards Nipunika. She was preparing betel, but even this ignoramus of a man could divine that a terrific turmoil was raging there in her spirits. I was experiencing unprecedented ecstasy to observe her languid fingers roving on the betels after a big gap of time. On her lips was there a smile and a drop of tear in her eyes. She too, was silent. One folded and takable betel leaf could be ready in simply twenty-four minutes. Thereafter she gazed towards me. Tears could not be controlled. They trickled, they welled up, they gushed—in a chain. I saw this steadfastly, still and speechless. Yet, the tears were trickling. At long last I myself cried out—“Niuniya, weep not.” My voice must have been timidly gentle. She began sobbing. With a pulsation I got up to wipe her tears. Thereupon she turned cautious. “Pshaw, fie, what are you doing? We're sitting in a market; don't you see it?” Said she with mild upbraiding. “I don't care where we're seated. I shan't let you weep this way. O wretched, why didst thou flee away here?” There was firmness

and toughness in my tone. She once again scolded me with her sidelong glance and demanded, "Chew the betel." Now it was her characteristic throat. I grasped the betel.

Where I was bound for I could not go. Now I could not stir without fully understanding the weal and woe of this poor soul. After a long time I had the opportunity of sprucing up and improving the state and plight my careless and unguarded laughter had produced. Goodness knows which delicate wound of this distressed one my wild and wanton peal had rendered open; where she has loitered and been repulsed these six years continuously; and how she is smarting and fidgeting in which drain of wants nowadays – Baanbhatt cannot budge without knowing all this. This very sympathetic heart has turned him a vagrant. The expiation for the wild laughter that has been pecking at my heart for six years, today lays claim to tears only. I have no doubt at all about the fact that in the eyes of the righteous here Nipunika's tenor and character is too contemptible. Sitting in this shop I have tarnished myself. All this is there, but Nipunika is, more precious. Lifelong I have looked upon the feminine body as a temple of some anonymous deity. It is beyond me to let that house of prayer sink in mire for fear of public vilification. Again I asked, "Niuniya, why didst thou leave, where did you live, what art thou doing now?

I find you sad and stricken. I can't move a bit herefrom, letting you lurch in this plight. What's the heart of the matter that made you run away? Tell me. My soul and awareness has been, these six years, simply cursing me, uttering fie, fie. I feel I am the genesis of all thy grief. Just speak thou with thine own mouth that this my feeling is false. Am I innocent?"

"Ay, gentle, you're yourself the cause of my sneaking off, but the folly is not yours. The fault is mine all along," cried Nipunika with a longish sigh. "I'd taken quite a fancy to you. In the night of that enactment I'd a hunch for a passing minute that my victory was in the offing, but the very next moment you pounded my airy hopes into pieces. Hard-hearted, you had many a time spoken out that you treat woman's position sacred as a place of worship, but even for once you did think and realise that this temple is of flesh and blood, not made of brick and mortar! The moment when with all my hope I moved towards you, you then and there dashed my golden dream to dust. That day I had the conclusive conviction that you were an inanimate stony lump; that within you there was neither god nor animal, but only an immobile insensibility. That was why I chose not to stay there. Thereafter, I've sailed through a lot of afflictions, but no travail has buffeted me like the anguish of rejection of that moment. For six long

years in this guileful world I roamed about helpless, repulsed, upbraided; and now my fondness is turned into devotion. O gentle, you're my preceptor; you've taught me a woman's duty. On the strength of the six year cruelly tough experience I can aver that your insensibility was comparatively good— I was wretched indeed that I chucked off your shelter and came here. Is it necessary to know what affected, afflicted my life? These days I sell betel and reach it to the harem of the younger royal family. By and large I'm not unhappy. Cast aside any anxiety for me. Go where you've to. If at all you live in this city, then I must cherish the hope of getting at times some glimpses of yours. But you needn't stay long at this stall. Persons frequenting here don't consider the female frame as god's abode." Saying this much she with a laugh looked into my direction. In that glance was there a sort of repulsion and repugnance for oneself, but not even a trace of sorrow or contrition. Just a respite, and she again started her say, "Bhatt, I don't repent anything, any matter. Except what I am I couldn't have been anything else. But you can be far superior to whatever you are. Therefore, I say, don't linger here. If I'm contrite, then I won't get a nook even in the hell I'm in. If you pull yourself together, then you'll get to a place in that heaven I've myself no fancy for, nor have you in your mind. I've seen this world not a little. A gem

of a man like you on this earth is scarce." Nipunika's eyes were lowered; she had, as it were, uttered something that shouldn't have been said, and her fingers briskly engaged themselves in colouring the betel leaf with kattha.

Her last statement stuck deep into my recesses. If she expiates, then she won't get any nook even in the hell she has been inhabiting. She is a female fallen from family, what's the value of her good qualities in society? Bad attributes are more or less in demand. I once again looked at her eye-sockets. Tears had filled them. I burst forth, "Niuniya, thou liest. You're repenting, you're in trouble, you long for a refuge, you don't like me to move aside. What I was before I'm even now; not the entire world can separate you from my shelter. Close down this shop at once. Do live peacefully where none knows anything about you. I can't go my way leaving you in this puddle. It's good that your fondness for me has been dealt a cut. Quit the highway of this city besmeared black. How thine eyes are sunken! O you wretch, you're concealing from me even." This time Nipunika felt wounded. She started weeping. Some customers were simultaneously espied approaching the shop. Viewing them even from a distance she was forthwith her own self. With not a moment's delay she downed the shutters and gesticulated for my entry inside. Behind the shop there was a small courtyard, right in its

middle a basil plant. Nearby a small altar and placed thereon a magnificent idol of Mahavarah.[4]

The idol was rather smallish, but its sculptor seemed a perfectly mature artist. On the sphere of the earth raised on the projected fangs of Mahavarah the gesture of exultation and brilliant beauty was fit to behold, and behold. Both the hands of the Mahavarah were so cheekily fastened on the zone; and the muscles of the armpit projected such resoluteness that a mere look gave rise to a wonderful faith and confidence. I took not much time to realise that he was Nipunika's god served and worshipped and that she had a similar hope and trust of her own rescue and reclamation. With thirsty eyes, she beheld the idol; her throat was still choked; she signalled me to a small room to sit in. I sat there. She went outside and after a very quick bath she came back. She said, "Wait a minute, I'm coming shortly." She then seated herself on a small mat of sacrificial grass and before that Mahavarah started reciting a hymn with her blocked up throat. Tears were falling from her eyes. The yellow outer garment on her bosom was now wet with this flow of tears. I saw this scene with a fixed gaze. Nipunika is blessed, so is Mahavarah, the basil is lucky, and I, wretched Baan, am envisioning all the three; so I too am blessed. At one stage I was repentant of the lowliness of my pride. I was hardly able to give shelter and protection to

anybody. How mean, indigent, and insignificant is my own dwelling compared to the refuge and means of security Nipunika has had! The mettle of my manliness, the pride of my birth and family respectability, and the high notions of my scholarship fell apart in a trice. How mistaken I was in estimating her! She was reciting the hymn in a devoutly gratified melody, and I was looking at her with glued eyes— at that time the radiance of her figure looked other worldly, the socketed eyes as if filled with surging wavelets of water were fully developed like white lotuses ablossom; at intervals the length of her hair tossed in a way as if they were impatient to prostrate at the feet of Mahavarah. For a while I forgot that Nipunika was the selfsame familiar Niuniya of our dramatic company. It seemed she was a goddess and one never could tell when she would soar away renouncing this defiled earth. I mentally bowed to the supreme icon of love, the Mahavarah seated in the innermost heart of this young woman. At my first sight what I had taken for a lachrymose laughter and preened myself on my sensitiveness proved virtually the drop of a brick. In my heart I damned my indigence. At this time she was up and with it a big beauty no less than a wealth of peace and calm also stood up. In her gait there was still present an emotionally charged languor as if in a stupor of sentiments devotion herself were moving in a bodily

form. Now, once again there was a smile on her face. To take the countenance lustrous with compassion for a receptacle of sorrow and repentance was my madness. She came. She sat silent. Nothing could come out from my lips as well. After this hush and muteness of ours for some time, she enquired, "Gentle, can you actually help me?"

"Why this misgiving, Niuniya? Have I ever said anything I've hesitated to carry out?"

"But if at all in doing me service, you do some wrong?"

"Look here Niuniya, I've seen with my own eyes that besides him who's given you refuge you needn't have anybody else's assistance, still just to put me to test you're telling this. My reply is forthright. Generally, they've a tendency to think about right and wrong, proper and improper through a closed rut, I don't associate myself with such people. I do distinguish between the apt and inapt with my own sense. I treat all work done under the spell of attachment and greed as downright improper, but I've not always been able to steer clear of the twin foes. Today itself I've taken a great vow and resolution. I don't know how far I shall carry myself. I haven't been able to save myself from the unbecoming, but I've staked even my life to execute due things on occasions suggesting themselves. Tell me where I must stand by you. Thou knowest me. I trust you won't let me lean towards

the unseemly."

Nipunika laughed. "Now you're out for an escape. Don you expect from a woman like me to make you her ally for a rightful cause? You're naive indeed," said she.

"Then tell me what after all I'll have to do," although perturbed in reality, I rejoined with a little bit of firmness.

This time Nipunika laughed heartily, but confided, "Will have to rescue a house of prayer."

I got it: A temple, that is, a woman. It's no unbecoming work. I, too, with a subdued guffaw replied, "God Mahavarah has been a saviour unto you; I'm anxiety-free. Who is the other fly in the soup?"

"Bhatt, the semblance of a temple you've noticed in womankind so far was just an imagination, of your own innocuous mind. Today I'll show you a positive house of prayer. But, for the purpose you'll have to enter the junior royal family in the guise of a girl friend of mine. And must rescue that temple from a bog. Today's the most opportune. Mahavarah is my help indeed. He himself has sent you here. Even if you hadn't come, I was obliged to undertake it. Speak, gentle, will you be able to execute it? Do you have the nerve and daring to reclaim a fettered Lakshmi[5] from the fort of demons?"

Do you relish to liberate the eternally milch cow (of the gods) entrenched deep in mud? Be forthright, I've to depart

at once. Mahavarah has permitted me only today. Just likely, in the rescue operation of this Sita[6] you may lose your life like Jatayu[7]: Do you have The guts?"

I laughed. This I could definitely do. Just once did I mentally bow to my late father – 'Sire, today I'd have to remain disengaged from self-purification. On getting time and apt opportunity, it'll be done later. Don't know which grieved one's sacred rescue ritual has called me even to consign myself to flames. Let me be a family priest for this! Turning to look at Niuniya I said – "I'm ready. Bring forth my befitting costume."

References :

- [1] A name of Shiva.
- [2] The deity presiding over the Hindu heaven and the secondary divinities below

the Trinity. The Gandharvas (celestial musicians and demigods) inhabit this Indra's paradise and form the orchestra at all the banquets of the principal deities.

[3] Kalidas's first play.

[4] Vishnu in the boar incarnation.

[5] A very beautiful lady, sprung from the deep; wife of Vishnu. The goddess of wealth and prosperity

[6] Wife of Lord Ram. Taken away by Ravan to Lanka and left in confinement till it was burnt and conquered. A poetic character and religious symbol of love, duty, propriety, sublimity; yet a goddess full of sadness for herself but of benison and beatitude to others.

[7] Ram's devotee. A fabulous bird, while fighting against Ravan in the sky for Sita's rescue was ultimately killed.

Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (1907-79) : born in a village in Ballia, U.P. studied Sanskrit and Astrology at B.H.U. He worked at Vishwabharti, Shantiniketan for twenty years. He founded Hindi Bhawan there and edited Vishwabharti Patrika in Hindi. He was also head of Hindi Deptt. in Punjab University. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi was one of the foremost Hindi writers and critics with numerous published books to his credit. 'Baanbhatt Ki Atmakatha', 'Anamdas ka potha', 'Charu Chandralekh' are his novels, 'kutaj', 'ashok ke phool' are collections of literary essays. His volume on Kabir is of specific significance. Acharya Dwivedi's complete works are available in eleven volumes entitled Hazari Prasad Dwivedi Granthavali from Rajkamal Prakashan.

Abram, Abram's real name is Brajkishore Prasad (Born Nov.23, 1927), a D. Litt. in English, he is a retired professor. His important works are: 'India Regained (A dynastic Rule and the '77 Democratic Revolution)', Oriental Publishers, New Delhi; 'Thanjha Bhawan (Rendition of Wuthering Heights)', Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi; 'Strands of Indian Thought', Ocean Publishers, New Delhi. Translation of Acharya J.V. Shastri's 'Kalidas', N.B.T., India, New Delhi; 'Modern Religious Tragedy', Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, New Delhi. He lives in Muzaffarpur, Bihar

LIFE AND IDEALS OF PREMCHAND

Namwar Singh

Translated by
Nishi Tiwari

“My life is like a bare plain field, where one may occasionally come across a few pits and holes, but devoid of dense forests, deep valleys and ancient ruins. So, people with a taste for the hills and mountains will obviously be disappointed”.

This, in a capsule is, Premchands’ life history. There’s nothing romantic or adventurous here to enjoy with relish. It is just a simple tale of a common man.

About a hundred years ago on 31st July 1880, in village Lamhi, near Benaras, a son was born in Munshi Ajayab Lal’s house. The child grew up to be a great writer—Munshi Premchand. He was named Dhanpat Rai by his father and Nawab Rai by his uncle, but contrary to all expectations, destiny had other plans. Neither did he become rich, nor did he become a nawab. Having lost his mother at seven, and his father at fifteen, he had to fend for himself, and fight his way through life. His first marriage having failed due to frequent matrimonial conflicts, he remarried- this time a child widow by the name of Shivrani. Such a step in those days was considered to be greatly unconventional and an act of defiance. Living under great financial constraints he gave tuitions, and sold books in order to continue his studies. He passed his entrance exams and became a school teacher. During his tenure as a government servant, he stayed in a number of places in U.P., especially Gorakhpur.

When the Non-Cooperation movement started in 1921, at Gandhiji’s request he resigned from his twenty-one year old Government Job.

He took up jobs in Benaras, Kanpur and Lucknow for about 8-9 years. Ultimately, in 1930, he set up his own publication house, but his financial situation did not improve. On receiving an invitation by a film company, he went to Bombay in 1934, but deterred by the life in the metropolis, he returned, being unable to cope up with the life there. His health failed and he passed away on 8th October 1936.

His literary career started in 1901, writing in Urdu first, and then, in Hindi. But all his life he remained a bilingual writer. His collection of fine short stories "Soze Vatan" enraged the British Government greatly and hence, he was accused of treason. He was labelled a rebel and his books were burnt. The writer that we revere today rose out of this sacred fire. In his thirty-five year career of creative writing he spilled out an enormous amount of literary works—three hundred short stories, twelve novels, three plays, more than 200 essays and one dozen translations were published. This is an exceptional story of a great and noble struggle, and unremitting labor.

As Premchand has cautioned, people with a desire to explore hills and scale mountains would not find anything interesting, or breathtaking in this simple story. But, this very simplicity, is Premchand's speciality (bête noire). His simplicity, humbleness, and unassuming nature did not make him stand out in public. People often failed to recognize

him, resulting in a great deal of inconvenience sometimes. One such incident occurred when he de-boarded the train at Patna Junction. Contrary to all expectations, nobody came forward to receive him. His hosts were there at the station, no doubt, but having failed to recognize him in the crowd they did not come to him. All they had was a photograph of his. They asked many people, if they were Premchand, but did not ask the writer himself. As a result he was greatly inconvenienced, and was left with no other option than to spend the entire night at the railway station. In the morning when all the passengers had left and the platform was deserted, his young host asked Premchand indifferently: Have you come from Lucknow". Premchand replied "Oh! Yes, I'm coming from Lucknow."

Host : Are you Premchand?

Premchand: Yes, I am.

His tone had become stony. The host was nonplussed, and after greeting him with respect, took the water container which was clad in a dirty khadi handkerchief. His tone betraying guilt and shame, the host introduced himself. Premchand's face brightened with relief, joy and contentment with a trace of annoyance. But, he said nothing. When they got into the vehicle which had been sent to receive him, politely, the host asked, if he had faced any inconvenience. "Inconvenience!" Came the rhetoric "The whole night I was in a dilemma, considering whether I should wait, or return. I went to the platform

and the train also arrived, but could not board it. I thought, it would hurt your feelings.” When the host started giving the explanation for this misdemeanor, Premchand replied, “This is what I am saying-when you didn’t recognize me, in that case you should have called out my name. It wouldn’t have lowered my prestige.”

This is how Premchand was, completely devoid of pride and glamour. Always deeply concerned about the problems of others, but, not his own. This very simplicity of character is what makes him stand out as an extraordinary human being- held in high esteem by people who knew him. This simplicity is carried forward in his literary works as well.

It is not a coincidence that the subject matter of his literary works is the ordinary, common man full of humbleness. In the Indian context, this ordinary man is the peasant. Very early in life, Premchand understood that the progress of his country depended on its people. In one of his essays, “Daure Jajid” published in the Urdu monthly “Zamana” he wrote: The way things are changing in the world around, it is evident that, the coming years will be dominated by the Peasant and Worker classes. India cannot for long remain unaffected by this. Even the highest Himalayan Peaks cannot prevent it. Sooner or later, perhaps, soon enough, we shall witness the people of India, fighting for their rights. Before the revolution took place who had fathomed the energy and

strength lying dormant among the oppressed!

It is with this truthful fact in mind that Premchand wrote Premashram in 1921, in which peasant characters Manohar, Balraj, Kadir emerge in a new light for the first time in Indian Literature. Premashram is the first voice of dissent and organized rebellion of the peasant farmers of Awadh against “Begaar”. Later the movement against payment of lagaan gathers strength. In this novel a young man Balraj, addresses a peasant gathering in which his oratory creates ripples in the minds of his listeners—

‘You people laugh as if tenant farmers are of no value. They are only meant to pay Begaar Tax to the landlords. But the newspapers, that I have read, inform that tenant farmers have made a breakthrough and emerged as a powerful class there.’ This was the period when Gandhiji emerged on the political arena and inspired millions of poor people residing in the villages to participate whole heartedly in the freedom struggle. Premchand is the first novelist to have portrayed this growing feeling of nationalism in his novel. It was in those days that the celebrated poet Rabindra Nath Tagore’s article “the call of truth” was published in the “Modern Review”. Disagreeing with Gandhiji’s Non-Cooperation Movement, he wrote: “In the morning when the bird awakens and soars the skies in search of food, its wings embrace the sky, and musical song bursts forth from its very being”.

Replying to this, Gandhiji in 'Young India' said— " the poet lives in the future, and feels, we too, should do the same. He sketches the beautiful picture of the morning bird before our appreciating eyes. The bird who soars in the skies sings with rapture. But these singing birds have already fed themselves for the day, their tired wings have taken rest as well, and fresh blood runs in their veins. But I have the misfortune to see those birds of flight whose wings have become so weak, that they cannot soar in the sky. In India the human bird who pretends to sleep under the sky at night, is very weak. And when he gets up at morn he is weaker still. For millions of people living under the sky of India, their lives are either an endless waiting or a dejected stupor. Under the prevailing conditions, it is impossible for me to offer the consolation

of Kabir's Bhajans to the suffering millions".

If, anyone has accurately portrayed with compassion, Gandhiji's hungry, starving birds, capable of soaring the skies, but groveling beneath, it is Premchand. Like Gandhiji, Premchand too, was concerned with the existing reality. Premchand's gaze was focused on reality of his motherland, where, millions of people were passing through a phase of endless stupor, living in a state of unconsciousness. Unlike his contemporaries, he could not enjoy the luxury of leaving his suffering millions behind, in order to soar in the rainbow-colored skies, and bask in its glorious beauty. Premchand lived in ground reality and hence renounced high flights of imagination. In order to depict reality vividly, he took the risk of adopting realism in an age that was chiefly romantic.

Namwar Singh, born 1926, at village Jeeyanpur, Varanasi, is the most prominent literary critic of Hindi. His scholarly stature is revealed in the literary discourses he has undertaken. His views have often resulted in creating a point of departure to the stereotypes of literary thought. He has been professor of Hindi at Sagar, Jodhpur and Jawaharlal Nehru Universities, where he is professor emeritus as well. At present he is Chancellor of M.G. Antar-rashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha and Chief Editor of 'Alochna' a quarterly magazine of literary criticism. He writes pre-eminently in Hindi. Some of Dr. Namwar Singh's published works are: 'Bakalam Khud: Hindi ke vikas mein apbhransh ka yog'; 'kahani, nai kahani'; 'kavita ke naye pratiman'; 'doosri parampara ki khoj'; 'chhayavad'; 'vad, vivad, samvad'; 'kehna na hoga'; 'alochak ke mukh se'; 'Hindi ka gadyaparva'; 'zamane se do do hath'; 'kavita ki zameen aur zameen ki kavita'; 'premchand aur bhartiya samaj'. He lives in New Delhi. He has received a great number of literary honours.

THE CONCEPT OF INDIANNESS IN THE HINDI NOVEL

Satyakam

The birth of *upanyas* (Novel) in Indian languages in general and Hindi in particular is a discourse arising out of the reformist movement of 19th century and freedom struggle against colonial rule in India.

Talking about Novel in India or Indianness and uniqueness of Indian Novel in general and Hindi Novel in particular, one has to go back in history and venture for the tradition of story telling and writing in Indian subcontinent. The tradition of story telling in India goes way back to the time of before Christ. As per the Indian mythology the first great story teller (*kathak*) is Lord Shiva who told an epic story to his wife Parvati and it was converted into script by Gunadhya as **Brihad Katha** (vast story, originally written in a *paishachi prakrit* in 495b.c.) This traditional mode of *Katha* (fiction) in India developed into *kissa*, *kahani*, *charit*, *kadambaree*, *dastan* etc. The other mode of story is called *akhyaan* (story with the input from historical reality close to the word 'Realism' which became the yardstick for Novel in later time). **Mahabharat**, **Ramayan**, **Harshcharit**, **kadambaree**, **Dashkumarcharit** are the examples of *akhyans* of India. These are some of the examples of the greatest and finest tradition as well as rich heritage of depicting contemporary society through fables and fiction. Although these pieces have been written in Sanskrit and mostly in poetry, but in narrative style, may be depicted as the Early Novels (*upanyas*) in India. The word *katha* and *akhyayika* (different types of style

of producing the story) is derived from Sanskrit in Hindi. As mentioned earlier *Katha* is supposed to be fiction and *akhyan* is supposed to be factual and historical. The tradition of *katha and akhyayika* continues in Hindi Belt in the early phase of Hindi literature in *charit kavya* (narratives of hero in verses) like **Prithiviraj Raso** (Story of King Prithiviraj) by his court poet Chandvardai, **Kirtilata and Kirtipataka** by Vidyapati in 13th century a.d. In the age of *Bhakti* movement also poets like **Tulsi Das** and **Malik Muhammad Jayasi** created epics like **Ramcharit Manas** and **Padmavat** in story form. These are in one and another sense seen as different forms of *Charit kavya*. These writings have the quality of both *katha and akhyayika*. The poet uses his imagination to depict contemporary reality by using myths and symbols known as *kathanak roodhiyan* (traditional symbols supposed to be used for telling a story. For example telling a story through dialogue between birds is one of the *kathanak roodhiyan*). In the beginning of 19th century **Rani Ketki ki Kahani** by Insha Alla Khan is also an example of continuation of this *katha-kahani* tradition. Early Hindi novels derive many characteristics from these *charit kavyas* and *katha-kahani* tradition prevalent in India for centuries.

The story is the focal point of the Novel which also tells a story. Influence of *gadya kavya parampara* and *champu* (one of the varieties of narratives prevalent

in India where the mixture of prose and poetry is being used to tell the story) is clearly evident from the early novels of India particularly in Hindi. Therefore it is a misnomer to conceptualize that the novel in India emerges out of the direct influence of western novels particularly English Novels and there is nothing Indian in it. The style of novel writing in different Indian languages as also in Hindi carries the traditional style of story telling/writing of *kissa, kahani, dastan and akhyan*.

The characteristics and essence of the tradition of novel writing is defined by its birth and the culture along with which it grows. The uniqueness and Indianness of Hindi novel also lies in the circumstances in which the novel in India emerged. The birth of novel in India is an amalgamation of the traditional legacy of story telling and contemporary circumstances in India in the 19th -20th century.

Besides the factors connected with the advent of prose and the birth of the novel, like coming of new technologies in the form of printing press and birth of a middle class who aspired to tell its agonies and aspiration through this new genre the readers were also mostly from the same class. These factors also helped in the birth of the novel in India. But emergence of the novel in India is totally different from that of Europe which is said to be the birth place of novel although the credit

of first novel goes to the **Genji Monogatari** (The Tale Of Genji/1000 A.D) written by **Lady Murasaki** from Japan. Here, I'm not going into the details of the rise of the novel worldwide since neither it is the topic of discussion today nor the time permits that. What I'm trying to say is that the rise of the novel in India is a product of its own conditions and circumstances which I'm going to narrate now. This may help us in defining the Indian Novel and particularly Hindi Novel which is the topic of deliberation today.

The Freedom Struggle of India in 1857 may be considered as the benchmark in the history of India since it is the first major outburst to overthrow the colonial rule from India. It is interesting to see that at this juncture many Indian languages produced their first novel. **Alaler Gharer Dulal** (A prodigal son/Pyare Chand Mitra/1858) in Bangla, **Yamuna paryatan** (Travelogue of Yamuna/1857/Baba Padmji) in Marathi, **Umrao Jaan** (Mirja Muhammad Hadee Rusva/1899) in Urdu, **Saraswatichandra** (Gowardhan Ram Madhav Ram Tripathee/1887-1900) in Gujarati, **Chaman aath Gunth** (A piece of Land/Fakir Mohan Senapati/1897) in Oriya and so on and so forth.

Centrality of women in early novels and depicting position of women in changing society are the striking features of Early Hindi Novel. Influence of social reformers is clearly

visible on Hindi novels. In the early Hindi novels the theme of training women through education to conduct themselves is direct influence of reformers of that period.

In early Hindi novels like **Devrani Jethani ki kahani** (Tale of co-sisters/Pandit Gauridatt/1870), **Bhagayvati** (Pandit Shraddharam Phillauree/1877) and **Parikshaguru** (Lala Shriniwas Das/1882) the conduct of women is the focal theme. Going through these novels one can see a remarkable similarity in the theme and content of these novels i.e. emancipation of women, widow remarriage, education of women, etc. This was the direct effect of the Indian reformation which was pioneered by great reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekanand and Jyotiba Phule among others.

Parikhsa Guru like **Alaler Gharer Dulal** in Bangla depicts the shortcomings of western influence. This is actually a voice of opposition to colonial rule and its policies in a precarious way.

Devrani Jethani ki kahani by pandit Gauridatt (1870) actually falls into the tradition of oral story (*kissa-kahani*) in written form. There is not a single comma or full stop in the whole story. This is a typical example of the Indian form of 'Novel' (*upanyas*) in the form of traditional Indian *upadeshakhyan* (Moral Fable). This is the story of a joint business family living in Meerut near Delhi. There

is no protagonist in the narrative. This is written with a purpose. The writer says in his foreword: "There are many books written for educating women but I have written this story in a 'new form' I believe that both men and women will appreciate and get benefitted after reading it. I have tried to use the spoken words of real men and women in the dialect of this region of the business class" In this novel not only the language is 'real' but life depicted is also 'real'. This 'novel' is written for establishing the importance of education for women. Education makes woman's outlook broad and liberal whereas uneducated woman is narrow minded and can't handle her family properly. This 'novel' supports widow marriage. This is the direct influence of reformist movement in India in the 19th century. In this novel customs prevalent in business class of the region are told elaborately. The mindset of the 19th century Indian society is also reflected in this narrative. Early 'novels' like **Vama Shikshak** (1872), **Bhagyawati** (1877), **Amrit Charitra** (1888), **Nissahay Hindu** (1881), **Pariksha Guru** (1882) continue the same trend and centrality of women is worth mentioning.

Dalit (oppressed) Discourse

On social front the Hindi novelist also took up the cause of the downtrodden of the Indian society especially from so called 'untouchables among lower caste'. Mahatma Gandhi had given the

nomenclature '*Harijan*' (son of God) to this caste group. The Indian constitution abolished untouchability and made it a criminal offence. Dalit thinkers and the followers of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, chairman of drafting committee of Indian constitution and undisputed leader of Dalits preferred to call them Dalit (oppressed). Emancipation of Dalits was also one of the goals of Indian Reformers. Jyotiba Phule and Dr Ambedkar were the champions of this cause.

As far as my research goes a novel written in Hindi **Ghar ki Raah** (Search for a Home/1935) by Indra Basawada is the first dalit novel written in Hindi whose protagonist and writer himself comes from dalit society. I'm aware of the fact that the great Indian novelist and story writer Premchand has written **Rangbhoomi** (1925/battlefield) in Hindi whose protagonist is a poor, blind beggar and belongs to dalit caste. But the theme of this novel is not Dalit discourse. Therefore **Ghar ki Rah** may be treated as the first dalit novel in Hindi. May be among all Indian languages. One more interesting aspect came to surface when I discovered this novel that its foreword is written by no other than the greatest Novelist Premchand. **Ghar ki rah** is search for home by a dalit (untouchable) boy Munnu who is ten years old. For the first time in the history of Hindi Novel A dalit boy emerged as protagonist and the reader looks at society from the eyes of an

untouchable boy. The boy is from 'bhangi' (scavenger) community and he is an orphan also. In this novel the novelist explicitly and without mincing words depicts the attitude of so called upper caste society and individuals towards the untouchables. This novel clearly criticizes the attitude of the society through protagonist Munnu, who is orphan, poor, weak and above all belongs to the untouchable community. When a doctor gives shelter to this poor boy when he found him injured and lying unconscious outside his house the Brahmans (priestly class) and other upper caste members make a hue and cry and press the doctor to abandon this boy. This has been seen as 'degeneration of dharm' by the upper caste brahmans. In this way this novel becomes the mirror of backward Indian societal attitude. In fact this is a surgery of caste system prevalent in the Indian society. This is a peculiar Indian problem and by depicting this problem this novel becomes unique (Indian) in its nature.

The reformist movement, Gandhi's ideology and Premchand's writing had great effect on this novel. Ironically there is little effect of Dr. Ambedkar's Dalit movement on this novel. This seems strange. The writer is influenced by Gandhian ideology who believes in coherence and coexistence in the society and would like to solve the problem of untouchability with nonviolent tools such as change of heart by love, amity, friendship

and by creating the environment for assimilation, fraternity and understanding among all the castes of Indian society. In this novel Basawada tries to arouse compassion for untouchables in the heart of every individual and society at large. The novel attacks and opposes the idea of 'poorvajanm ke karmon ka fal' (This birth is the result of one's doing in previous birth and one should accept it as grace of God) and Punarjanm or Rebirth (If one does good things in this birth one will get better life in next birth) constructed by Brahmans to befool weaker section of the society so that they can control the resources and enjoy the lavish life unchallenged so far. Gandhiji on political front and Premchand on literary front oppose this oppressive idea manufactured by Brahmans to defend their dominance on the Indian society. The novelist also rings the bell regarding the efforts of Christian missionaries in India under colonial rule to lure dalits to change their religion. The protagonist boy of this story is saved by a Gandhian who gives him shelter in Gandhi Ashram. The boy gets education in the ashram with other inhabitants of the ashram without any discrimination. So this novel not only depicts the current scenario of the society at that time but also tries to produce solution of this age-old problem of the Indian society. In this way this novel is unique and Indian in its nature and treatment.

Search for Nation

The novels written during the freedom struggle are a creative effort to search for a nation.

Bankim Chandra, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Tarashankar Bandhopadhyaya (Bangla), Premchand (Hindi), Fakir Mohan Senapati (Oriya) were trying to search for a nation in their writings. It can be said that Indian novel in general and Hindi in particular were creating India in their novels. This voice gets stronger in Hindi novel with its progress.

Before the advent of the great Hindi novelist Premchand an interesting phenomenon happened at this juncture. Novelist Devkinandan Khatri starts writing a serial Novel named **Chandrakanta** and **Chandrakanta Santati** (Sons and Daughters of Chandrakanta/1891 onwards). This is the first Hindi thriller fiction and it is understood that many readers in India learnt Devanagari script to read this unique and wonderful fiction which can be compared with today's Harry Potter series. The central theme in these novels tells a typical love story with the blending of chivalry, treachery, spying, magic, scientific temper with logical framework and temperament. Although this fiction was written only for the purpose of entertainment it carries a deeper meaning. While going deeper into the inner layers of the story one can find the case study and analysis of basic cause for India

becoming the colony of British Empire. The small kingdoms depicted in these thrillers are always at loggerheads with each other. No body is bothered about the NATION INDIA. Every individual is playing his own cards and there is no place for gentlemanly play. Everybody is engaged in foul play. The voice is clear that India was divided and it was very easy to conquer a divided India. Premchand (1880-1936) in his famous short story **Shataranj Ke Khiladi** (The Chess Players) had echoed the same sentiment.

Premchand is the greatest writer of Hindi for centuries to come. Till today no Hindi novelist or short story writer reached this height. For Premchand writing has great aim and that is towards making a nation INDIA. His writings are a war against colonial and imperial rule. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, India, was waging the war against colonial rule on political front whereas Premchand through his literary movement like a catalyst was helping in injecting nationalist feelings amongst the people of India.

Premchand's novels are national allegory. He is not only waging a war against colonial rule but trying to strengthen the inner soul of India by criticizing and opposing the caste system and prevalent communalism due to the interference of colonial rule under the policy of 'Divide and Rule'. Premchand had to face the wrath of upper caste Brahmins and orthodox

religious leaders. Premchand in his novels and short stories also fought for the rights of women. There is a clear influence of 19th-20th century reformist movement and especially Mahatma Gandhi on Premchand's writings.

Godan, Rangbhoomi, Premashram, Kayakalp, Sevasadan, Gaban, Nirmala are the famous novels of Premchand which tell the story of contemporary India. The structure, style and theme of Premchand's novel is unique. He tells the story in Indian *kissa* style by addressing the readers directly as if they are listeners. He starts preaching readers in *updeshakhyan* style. Thus his novel becomes a wonderful mixture of *kissa* and *akhyan*. In **Kayakalp** he uses the notion of rebirth and myths and magic, dream methodology while constructing the story. This methodology was first used in Hindi Novel in **Shyama Swapn** (Dreams of Shyama) by Thakur Jaganmohan Singh in 1888.

Premchand's famous novel **Godan** (Gifting the cow/1936) is a classical novel not only in its theme but also in style. The novel starts with the dialogue between Horiram and Dhaniya (wife-husband) but the writer switches to story telling mode and starts telling the background situation of this dialogue. Very swiftly he starts depicting the nature which plays a creative role in depicting the situation. Premchand is a smart story teller so the reader at

once does not feel that Premchand has changed the band. Premchand got this technique in heritage from the century old *katha* and *akhyan* style. So the style of Premchand's story telling is purely Indian.

This is an anti colonial and anti imperialist novel. This is also a cultural expression of India. A belief in Indian mindset persists through tradition that if a person gifts a cow before or while dying to a priest, all his sins are forgiven by God and he directly goes to heaven. Premchand uses this belief in a satirical and symbolic way. In agricultural society in India the role of the cow is very pivotal. The cow is treated as mother and also a symbol of prosperity. Every Indian farmer has a dream of having a cow of his own. Premchand tells us the story of a farmer Hori Mahto who wishes for a cow, struggles to get a cow, fails in his ambition but while dying the priest asks his wife Dhaniya for presenting him a cow. This is the irony of the story where a farmer couldn't fulfill his lone ambition of getting a cow but was asked by the priest to present a cow while dying. The story starts and ends with satirical note. This becomes a satire on the whole Indian culture and society. Within this framework Premchand constructs the story of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism apart from criticizing the Indian society especially the upper caste who are also hand in glove with the rulers who in turn protect

their interest against the downtrodden of the society. Premchand is in favour of these downtrodden people. By characterizing Dhaniya Premchand keeps his faith in woman power. He also advocates live-in relation by depicting Mehta-Malti relationship. Malti is a doctor and Mehta is a professor. They love each other but decide not to marry but to have a live-in relation. Here Premchand clearly departs from Indian tradition and indicates the futuristic Indian urban society.

Here it is worth mentioning **Shekhar Ek Jeevane** (Biography of Shekhar/Agyeya/1940), in two volumes and **Tyagpatra** (The Resignation/Jainendra/1937). These two novels take a lead from Premchand and project changing Indian society in respect of position of women in man dominated Indian milieu. In my opinion Mrinalini of **Tyagpatra** is an extension of Dr.Malti of Premchand's **Godan**. These two characters represent the changing mindset of women in India where they challenge the traditional husband-wife relationship. In **Shekhar Ek Jeevane** also the novelist Agyeya creates a love relationship between Shekhar and his cousin sister which is no way acceptable in Indian society and this depiction has been criticized by many critics and they look upon it as vulgar. These two novels jolted the Indian mindset and became the torchbearer of new ideas and thoughts emerging in Indian society. These two novels are departure from

Premchand's novels in their narration, structure and style. **Tyagpatra** is written in the mode of autobiography. **Shekhar ek jeevane** is a biography of a revolutionary in which the protagonist is writing his own story as a third person by fictionalizing it .So neither it is a biography nor autobiography of the protagonist. This novel is a search of a revolutionary's mind and tries to depict how a revolutionary's mind gets formed. In a way this novel is also influenced by India's war of independence and particularly of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, RajGuru, Bismil and others. In fact this is a deep analytical story of a revolutionary who was waging war against the colonial rule.

The urge for searching for a nation continues in Hindi novels even after India got independence on 15th August 1947. **Maila Aanchal** (Dusty terrain/Phanishwarnath Renu/1948), **Aadha Gaon** (The Village divided/Rahi Masoom Raza/1968), **Raag Darbaree** (Song of the Night/Shreelal Shukla/1968) are three prominent Hindi novels of early phase of India's post independence era.

These three novels depict the scenario in India after independence and problems faced in the path of making it a sovereign and secular nation that is envisaged in Indian constitution. The main problems faced by India as a Nation after independence are as follows:

· Partition of India and growth of communalism afterwards.

· Progress of democracy in India.

· Problems of the emerging Urban Middle Class in post independence era.

· Problems of marginalized and oppressed groups and struggle for space for them in Indian society.

These are peculiar Indian problems and above mentioned novels confront these problems candidly. **Maila Aanchal** is a political commentary and a real picture of future India in which a follower of Gandhi is murdered by a merchant (read capitalist) who is also a merchant turned politician and member of a national political party under whose leadership India got independence. The murder of Gandhi was a turning point in Indian politics and the whole vision is changed dramatically. It is obvious from this novel that power is being captured by the rich persons and Gandhi's vision of India is dropped. This is a 'true' story of India where the caste oriented society and its struggle and fighting with each other can also be seen in this novel.

Aadha Gaon is the manifestation of the partition of India where everybody-individual as well as community- is confused by the decision of the leaders of those times. The village in this novel represents India where everybody is confused by the idea of partition. It is not division

of nations, countries, land or geographical area but in reality it is the division of hearts which makes India a sorrowful independent nation. The novelist Rahi Masoom Raza has opposed vehemently the two nation theory based on religion upon which India was divided.

Raag Darbaree is the most popular and critical novel of post independence India. This is the best selling novel of Hindi. This is the first novel of Hindi where the story is told in a satirical way. The story of novel starts, progresses and concludes with metaphors by which the novelist criticizes the bad shape of democracy, judiciary and educational institutions which turn every thing into mockery. This novel is an introspection of the Indian society.

Here I would like to attract your attention towards Hindi novels which tell the horror story of partition of India and its implication afterwards— **Tamas** (The Darkness/1973/Bhishma Sahani), **Jhootha Sach** (Untruthful truth in two volumes- **Vatan aur Desh** (homeland and country)/1958, **Desh ka Bhavishya** (future of a country) /1960/Yashpal), **Kitne Pakistan** (How many Pakistans/Kamleshwar/2000), **Inhee Hathiyaron se** (With these weapons only/Amarkant/2003).

Amritlal Nagar's Novel **Nachyo Bahut Gopal** (Lord Krishna dances/1978) and Giriraj Kishor's Novel **Parishishta** (Appendix/1984) are two other important

Hindi novels which talk about specific concerns related to 'untouchables' in Indian society. Nagar rejects caste system in this novel. He creates a story of a Brahmin girl who is married to an old man. The Brahmin girl falls in love with a scavenger boy and elopes with him from the toilet space since her suspicious husband locks her while going out. She becomes a part of the scavenger community after marrying the boy. Here she dedicates herself for the upliftment of this community. Likewise, in **Parishishta**, the novelist picks up the problem of a Dalit student who couldn't bear the brunt of the hostile atmosphere in a premier educational institution and ultimately commits suicide. This is a typical Indian problem arising out of caste based Indian society in spite of all provisions of Indian constitution to give every individual an equal opportunity barring caste, creed and religion.

After independence many women novelists got prominence by depicting so far an untouched problem of Indian society. A great novelist of post independence India Mannu Bhandari came into prominence after the publication of her novel **Aapka Bunttee** (Your Bunty/1971/). She depicted the problem of woman who is separated from her husband and lives with her only son Bunty. Here one comes across the trauma of a child who loves his father and doesn't approve of his mother's relation with another man. This is a new problem of growing middle class in urban India.

Scores of Indian women novelists like Usha Priyamvada, Krishna Sobti, Mridula Garg, Manjul Bhagat, Prabha Khetan, Chitra Mudgal, Chandrakanta, Rajee Seth, Geetanjalee Shree, Maitreyi Pushpa etc. created novels which depicted the problems of Indian society in different ways.

Concluding this paper it can be summarized like this— The Hindi novel is a protest literature as well as replica of Indian culture, psyche, development, aspirations of different classes and communities which is unique in its content and form. In fact the novel transcends boundaries and it is not only difficult but almost impossible to put the creative expression in watertight compartments. Here, I have only tried to say in a few words how the genre novel flourishes in India and its main characteristics. No doubt It is unique in its content and form and its linkage with the past is evident but basically it talks about humanity which links it with the novels being written all over the world.

Thank you very much for listening to me patiently. I wish to convey my thanks and gratitude towards Prof. Dr. Eva De Clercq and Prof. Dr. Rishikalp for inviting me in this International Hindi Conference at Ghent and giving me the honor to present my views here.

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Satyakam is professor of Hindi in Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi. He has written several books of literary criticism and edits a quarterly journal 'Samiksha' from New Delhi where he resides.

THE NOVELS OF AGYEYA : A SOCIOLOGY OF LITERATURE PERSPECTIVE

Subhash Sharma

Sachchidanand Vatsyayan 'Agyeya' was a prolific Hindi writer who wrote in different genres of literature like poetry, short story, novel, reminiscences, travelogue, diary etc with the same speed, range and depth. He got social recognition and sanction as a major writer with the publication of his first novel 'Shekhar : Ek Jivani' (Shekhar : A Biography), volume I and II (a third volume was written but not published). However, most of the leftist critics like Ram Vilas Sharma and Namvar Singh did not appreciate and recognize the greatness of this novel, probably because of three reasons: first, he was not a 'declared' leftist in his ideology; second, he was not a 'realist' literateur but an individualist existential writer: third, he was associated with an organization called Congress for Cultural Freedom which, in turn, had a symbiotic relationship with United States of America and its Ford Foundation. However, in 2011 during the celebration of his birth centenary, Namvar Singh accepted in a public function at Varanasi that Agyeya was a greater poet than Nagarjuna (whom he had called the 'Modern Kabir' long back). But some leftist writers like Pankaj Bisht and Ajay Singh branded Agyeya in recent past as reactionary, a spy of the British Empire and so on. On the other hand, the rightists have also accused Yashpal as a British spy, with a vengeance. It is really worrisome that such mudslinging has jumped from the arena of politics to the arena of literature. To my mind, both of them are great writers with distinction. Undoubtedly, Raghuvir

Sahai, Nagendra, Bhagwat Sharan Upadhyay and Ram Swarup Chaturvedi recognized Agyeya as a revolutionary writer. Many Hindi critics, a huge number of Hindi readers and students have liked 'Shekhar : Ek Jivani' very much and this is corroborated by the fact that this novel is still popular among young generation and many young researchers have re-discovered many nuances of this novel in many universities of India and abroad.

It is notable that Agyeya openly spoke for individual freedom at any cost and he evaluated any person, organisation, government or society by this parameter. Once he vividly remarked, "Freedom is the foundation wall of other values. Freedom is the goal of human being as well as the evidence of his humanity." Shekhar, the hero of the novel, is as much modern and revolutionary as Agyeya himself was. Since his very childhood he was a rebel and negated worldly comforts and desired the liberation of the self from the worldly comforts and also desired the liberation of the self from the worldly affairs. Needless to say that the sources of his revolt are existentialism and modernism - and these are obviously associated with romanticism. He used to be bored with the short stories with moral teachings. He did not consider anything impossible, sinful or unethical. In this novel the patriarchy has been challenged in different ways as the hero openly states to destroy the conspiracy of distrust in women and of considering them as sinful. The educated heroine, Shashi, is married

to an administrative officer, Rameshwar, despite her unwillingness. Once Shashi stays at night with her cousin (Shekhar) and therefore her husband and in-laws blame her of loose character and oust her from their house. Her kidney gets damaged due to Rameshwar's beating and kicking and later she dies. Thus the cruel patriarchal system destroys the intellect, freedom and dignity of a woman. However, it is surprising that the novelist depicts Shekhar's character as a revolutionary rather than Shashi's when the latter stays at night with the former. Further despite her unwillingness Shashi was married to Rameshwar at the advice of her mother and when she went to Shekhar for blessing, he was annoyed. But often Shekhar thinks of her welfare in order to prove his greatness - and this fact corroborates his individualistic existentialism. Similarly, when Shekhar goes to a prostitute and a half - naked girl begs him for money by catching hold of him, he, seeing flowers of kumud being sold nearby, suddenly remembers the natural beauty of Kashmir and runs away from there. Here he does not question and revolt against the social evil of prostitution-which symbolises patriarchy—rather he simply escapes. This shows the cowardice of the hero because he is an angry youngman as in most of Hindi movies but his anger is not properly channelised for a cause of major social change. Actually his rebel character does not struggle with the existing circumstances of exploitation and subordination. His words are not transformed into deeds. Thus there is

actually a negation of historicity in this novel. Similarly then Indian women were participating in the freedom struggle (under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Subhash Chandra Bose) but Shashi does not show an iota of social - political participation or even any kind of restlessness for the liberation of women. This aspect negates historical circumstances in no uncertain terms. Thus 'Shekhar : Ek Jivani' depicts more of an 'artist' Shekhar and less of a revolutionary Shekhar, who is normally in the company of the rich elite, not of the labour class. Obviously the novelist fails to depict the 'truth of epoch' and probably Agyeya later became conscious of this fact as he admitted in an interview that the language of this novel was outdated and complicated. However, despite such shortcomings it is a major novel that established its recognition - not only in Hindi literature but also in Indian literature.

His second novel 'Nadi Ke Dweep' is a character - oriented, not an event-oriented novel. All characters here belong to the middle class, especially the educated professional ones. Different characters like Bhuvan, Rekha, Gaura, Chandra Madhav and Hemant usually meet one another in a coffee house in personal capacity, not as family members. They behave very decently as gentle men and women but are quite egoists from within. The heroine, Rekha, performs two roles, one as a woman of good character and second as a bad character. Rekha usually says to the hero, Bhuvan- "I will move away before being

bored." She is a matured and experienced woman and Bhuvan accepts that talking to her gives him mental energy. Rekha tells him once. "I have no greed to reach any destination, I am on such a journey that leads to nowhere, endless — I will not become a cart before the horse I will leave the day my luggage comes — Bhuvan, I will come in your life and will go away. I know the limits of my destiny." Obviously she desires to live every moment of the relevance of life. "Whatever exists now, let it be beautiful, Bhuvan; when that is no more, its non- being is also beautiful .. ," That may be snatched away, but till it is, it is the best, that is joy. " Needless to say that it reflects the philosophy of the phenomenologists who talk of 'here and now' - believing in the immediate present more than in the history, or in the future. Thus Rekha wants to live a given life happily without bothering much about the future because often waiting for a better life results into the loss of the present life itself. Therefore in order to become self - dependent, she takes up small jobs but refuses to marry Bhuvan at his request. To put in her own words, "I had asked you for love. I did not ask you for future, nor I will take that." Why does she decide so? Because she thinks 'marriage as some kind of restriction, because she had given her word to Gaura, because Bhuvan did not express his feelings clearly, because she did not want to be dependent and because she is conscious of Bhuvan's future. The scientist Bhuvan speaks a lot of literary idioms and loves

two women (Rekha and Gaura) simultaneously, Here the triangle of love is not like a Hindi film's 'one flower and two gardeners', rather 'one gardener and two flowers', hence more complicated. Here the love between a teacher (Bhuvan) and student (Gaura) is shown in a sublime way idealistically. Like Rekha, Bhuvan too is careful and disciplined. Subsequently Rekha married Dr Ramesh Chandra. Rekha feels the existence of a desert while Bhuvan does not accept life as a desert: As he rightly remarks, "The roots of man are not in the homes but in social life." But Rekha thinks that her roots are lost somewhere in the outer space. Thus Bhuvan is more optimistic than Rekha. Gaura is sad to know the intimate relationship between Bhuvan and Rekha but does not interfere. However, when their relationship was broken and Bhuvan got astray, Gaura took care of him. She perceptively remarks, "Rekha didi, now I have no philosophy, there is just one belief and a little bit respect, and dedication to learn, to bear and to give something; it seems to me that through your and his love I would stand in the midst of free flow of water; a negligible group of persons, a tiny island of existence..."

Undoubtedly all the characters of 'Nadi Ke Dweep' are thinking persons - they are mentally alert and aware rather than concerned with outer events. One character Chandra Madhav finally becomes a communist activist but the novelist has made a sarcastic remark in this regard: 'only an uneasy person becomes classist.'

Agyeya has depicted Chandra Madhav as sexmaniac, superficial, inimical and envious. To depict him later as a communist to express the anger at its climax is like compartmentalising reality into black and white boxes, hence it is an unrealistic depiction. However, this novel has wonderful intensity and depth at mental plane. Here love is not overt at physical level but to be realized at mental level with finer elements of sensitivity and maturity. Undoubtedly the depiction of character of Rekha is more artistic than other characters that often seem unartistic and lifeless. Further Agyeya has often quoted Bangla and English poems— this is more naturalistic rather than artistic. This aspect actually goes against the artistry of Agyeya. Therefore the famous critic Nemichandra Jain finds in this novel 'evidence of experience' and 'discipline of expression' on the one hand, but introvert and self-centred, on the other.

His third novel 'Apne Apne Aijnabi' is considered the narrative of interview with the reality of death. It is a long story of two ladies Selma and Yoke. In their view, there are many things in life which cannot be limited by time and place. The novelist has deliberately not stated the name of the place wherein its plot is set. Yoke always fears death. When she imagines the fall of the entire rock alongwith the snowfall, she is badly frightened. On the other hand, the old lady Selma, who actually suffers from cancer, makes all kinds of preparations to celebrate Christmas. Further the young lady Yoke has a feeling

of hatred towards the old and terminally ill Selma, but Selma is full of love for Yoke and wants from the core of her heart to remove the fear of death from Yoke's mind: "How one could live with absolute outside fear?" In addition, Yoke imagines arrival of the 'satan' in lieu of Saint Nicholas while Selma, forgetting the nearing death, awakes and sings to celebrate Christmas but becomes sad when her cry during singing is recognized. Interestingly, Selma asks Yoke as to why the latter always concentrates on death. When Selma sings at the time of birth of the god-child, Yoke feels appearance of death. Undoubtedly this is a symptom of existential psychology. Selma's following words are quite perceptive. "You think yourself free, that is the root of all difficulties. Neither we are alone, nor free. Rather we are not alone and can't be alone, so are not free... and therefore the right to choose or decide is not ours...Imaginations of all such freedoms are mere ego..." These are existential issues. One day Selma expresses her desire to marry Yan and executes a will for all her property in his name. To Selma, other's presence itself is like God's presence. Finally, Yoke accepts her defeat and wants to commit suicide by addressing this world as bastard. Thus there are two perspectives about death—are these two perspectives Indian and European in essence? Chandrakant Bandivadekar considers such categorization as simplification. However, there is no doubt that this novel is existential individualistic and more artistic than real.

Thus in these three novels Agyeya

has opposed Marxist classist view of reality. Though he averred that a writer may get inspiration from even small things or events but in practice he made the range and depth of lives of elites as the final theme of his writings. He did not see the labour class as revolutionary, hence his perspective to social reality differs from that of Marx and Gandhi who provided a central place to the common man. All these novels have preference for individual characters to social system. That is, there is less sociality in these novels, though these are full of artistry, poetics and literariness. On the other hand, in Nagarjun's novels, especially in 'Balchanma', there is more sociality than artistry, poetics and literariness and as such he is more realistic than Agyeya. The famous sociologist C. Wright Mills talks of 'sociological imagination' with three aspects of life : biography, history and society—and these have dialectical and dynamic relationship with one another. But unfortunately in these novels of Agyeya there is only expressive biography; actually history and society are missing. At the most there is a concern for inter-personal relationships among some characters but society is much more than the sum total of individuals. The process of socialisation starts in the family since one's birth and ends only with the death through various norms and values. That is why C. Wright Mills rightly observes that 'private troubles' of individuals are not of much concern, rather only when private troubles become 'public issues', these are the real collective concerns of the society, hence more

significant. Since real aspects like history and society are negligible in these three novels of Agyeya, these novels are, on the whole, one - dimensional (existential - individualistic) and unrealistic (lacking societal and historical elements). A critical analysis of a creative work expects a realist depiction of society and history and therefore realist perspective focuses more on social concerns. An interest in literature means an interest in man/ woman, society and civilization. The famous Hindi poet and critic Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh rightly called criticism as 'sabhyata - sameeksha' ('critique of civilization'). But unfortunately Agyeya (following Aristotle who usually talked of 'autonomy of literature' which, in turn, means 'art for art's sake'. But this view may be criticized on three grounds: first, any art is directly or indirectly, crudely or minutely, associated with life because a writer or artist is first and foremost a human being and his economic, political and social conditions affect his art. The inter-connected ideology, hegemony and other forces remain active in real life; second, even the subconscious or unconscious of human mind affects one's thoughts and forms of

arts, as S. Freud has rightly proved; third, as structuralists have pointed out, a creative writing is to be contextualized and decoded by the critics or readers in a larger structure because an author is an agent who encodes his message from the language (which is a structure of signs)— thus a writer is not fully original and autonomous in true sense. We tend to agree with Lukacs who finds the novels of Leo Tolstoy and Balzac more realistic (despite not being leftist) than those of declared Marxist - novelists because the former depicted social reality as reflected in their characterization in historical contexts. A piece of literature, especially a novel, shows the trends of social deviance, tensions, conflicts contradictions, instability and disharmony in a contemporary society. But Agyeya's three novels somehow lack these sociological dimensions (hence lack 'sociological imagination') because of his closeness to individualist - existentialism. However, there is no doubt that these three novels are notable because of their literariness, poetics, idioms, and attractive style.

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

THE LANGUAGE OF THE SUBCONTINENT

Vibhuti Naraian Rai

Translated by
Meenakshi Pawha

The most interesting aspect about language is that if on one hand the elite use it to strengthen their control, on the other hand, the deprived use it to protest. Man, in his different stages of development, has also developed language. Of the factors which evince the various changes, as a result of development, language will be on top. If we were to see it in the Indian context, Hindi is a language which is free from the shackles of grammar. To a large extent, it is a contact language which has helped us become a nation-state. But, it is also responsible for sowing the seeds for the fissiparous tendencies to divide the nation on the basis of religion. Without getting into much elaboration, two examples can help us understand. Arya Samaj, in those days was quite a revolutionary movement. It helped eradicate, to a large extent, the rituals and caste-system that seemed to have the North-Western India in its tentacles. But when it came to the issue of language, its perspective proved to be divisive. The slogans of Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan inspired the Hindus of Punjab to write Hindi as their mother tongue during a census survey. This is a strange contradiction. When people, who always confabulated in Punjabi in their homes, started to write Hindi in the column of mother tongue, it created a rift between the Hindus and the Sikhs, despite their very similar traditions and customs. Later, whatever else factored in the Khalistan movement, this ostensibly was one very major reason for the chasm that was created between the Hindus and the Sikhs.

Another very major challenge that emerged due to language in front of the Indian nation-state was in the year 1965. It may be recalled that according to the provisions in the constitution, within fifteen years from the date of its promulgation, Hindi was to become the official language of the Indian Republic.

It is a long story as to how Chakravarti Rajgopalachariji gradually became an opponent of Hindi. As time drew near for Hindi to become a national language, the anti-Hindi sentiments became stronger in the states which were non-Hindi speaking, particularly in South India and in the East. To a large extent, the advocates of Hindi are responsible for this. We had Dr. Raghbir's **colloquial** dictionary which was frequently quoted for jokes. Akashwani used difficult Sanskritized language, and one had to take recourse to a dictionary for it to be intelligible. While on the other hand, there was the arrogance of the Hindi speakers who wanted that every non-Hindi speaker ought to speak Hindi but not read any other language apart from English. Though the three-language formula was formulated, no Indian language could create a space for itself in the Hindi speaking regions. In most places Sanskrit began to be taught as the third language.

A bad example of the intolerance of Hindi society was Seth Govind Das, who demanded that if the 'Madrasis' (the people of Tamil Nadu) refused Hindi, then the

armed forces must be called upon to enforce Hindi. The only saving grace was that the political leaders did not take serious cognizance of his remark. But what did happen in Madras was, that this statement ignited the wrath of the people and there were massive protests and arson. The offices of the Central Government were looted and several police persons were burnt alive. This incident made one thing very clear that if an attempt were to be made to enforce Hindi on the people, then it might lead to the disintegration of the nation. Hence, since then up till now, no serious attempt was made to make Hindi the national language. Every year, the central government offices celebrate the national language fortnight only as a tokenism – they promise to work in Hindi, to use Hindi and subsequently forget all about it. I am recapitulating the Indian context, primarily to help us understand the experience Pakistan has had (as a nation) vis-a-vis the use of the language. The situation in Pakistan is slightly different from that of India in the sense that Urdu which was considered to be synonymous with Pakistan was not the language of even a single region in that country. Pakistan's five sub-national cultures had their own languages.

Generally speaking, we can say that it was Bengali for East Pakistan, Punjabi for Punjab, Sindhi for Sindh, Baluchi for Baluchistan and Pushto for Frontier Provinces, Saraiki and Dari for those states,

which were struggling to assert their identity. Urdu emerged as the national language of Pakistan which was not spoken in any of its regions . Urdu was the language of those refugees who had been displaced from different parts of North India and had reached Pakistan and were called Mohajirs.

Why was Urdu made into a national language? The reason is very obvious. By that time, Urdu had been accepted as a marker of Indian Islamic identity. Despite the fact that a large number of non-Muslims-particularly Hindus had a major contribution towards its development – it was believed that Urdu was the language of the Muslims and it be made the national language of the country- especially created for the Muslims. It was quite similar to the situation regarding Hindi which had become a mark of identity for the Hindus. The division of the nation was based on two-nation theory based on religion, and despite the fact that the very concept of the division of a nation on the basis of religion was highly unrealistic and full of mockery, a lot of people believed in this concept and at least one nation came into being on its foundation. It was only after twenty-five years that the two-nation theory proved to be disastrous after the creation of Bangladesh. In fact, in 1947 itself, after India became a secular republic rather than a Hindu nation, there were question marks on its legitimacy and the

two-nation theory became a debatable issue. Religious and secular nations seek different solutions for the challenges that beset them. This is the difference which is seen in these young nations, and in the methods they employ to solve the problem of the language.

Jinnah went to Dacca in 1948. His speech delivered to the students of the Dacca University is the biggest example of the intolerance of a nation based on religion. It is a universal fact that the insistence of the Bengalis of East Pakistan, regarding their language was markedly different from any other language nationalities–Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi or Pashto. What was more important than this was that Bengali was by far the most widely spoken language in comparison to any other language in Pakistan, but it was also the language of more than half of its population. Language, for them was not just a medium of self-expression, but more than this it was responsible for the identity formation in a multinational society. Apart from this, in a fast emerging nascent nation there was political space, and government jobs were being procured on the basis of language only. In this context, Jinnah's assertion in front of those students in Dacca, that only Urdu will be the contact language in Pakistan and that it will be the medium to impart higher education as well, proved to be the biggest blow to the process of nation building. The

students of Dacca University had taken to the streets, during the period Jinnah was on his tour of the country. In order to stop their protests the police had to open fire. Even today, there is a memorial for those students who were killed in the police firing, thus ridiculing the two-nation theory.

What disastrous consequences would have been, had the Indian nation- state attempted to solve the language problem in this manner? I am fully convinced that if the advice of Seth Govind Das had been adhered to and the army had been called upon to implement Hindi, then the process of disintegration of the nation would have been initiated from that day itself.

Despite many deficiencies in secularism and drawbacks in our less than perfect democracy, it has given us a great degree of tolerance which enables us to have the patience to listen to the voices of dissent. Similar to the issue of language is the issue of cow slaughter. Everyone is aware that in large parts of the country cow slaughter is not prohibited particularly in the North-East where beef is a staple part of food. The Hindutva people were at the helm of affairs for six years and despite the fact that they wanted to, they could not promulgate a ban on cow slaughter. A large society can exist only on the principles of democracy and secularism.

Pakistan's very foundation rested on religion. Like any other new nation based on religion, its evolution has been on the path of intolerance that prohibited democracy. This state was not prepared to face any dissent. It adopted the same attitude with regard to language too. It is a different story that this has led to the disintegration of the nation, and with an acute possibility of it being on the precipice of further disintegration in future.

Modern Indian society and modern Pakistan have a similar perspective when it comes to the issue of language. Both societies are on the defensive regarding English. At the beginning of the 20th century, English became the language of the elite, and today it is the cherished language of the middle class in both the societies. English is not merely a window to the international market. It is not only a medium to get jobs in both the countries, but the speakers of this language enjoy a certain prestige. As liberalization and open economy are being expanded, the need for English is increasing.

As a student, I have been a part of the 1967 language agitation. This agitation had veritably brought an end to the hegemonic supremacy of English in all Hindi speaking regions. The study of English as a compulsory subject was over. Instead of English, higher education was being imparted in Hindi, and Hindi

became the language of government affairs. But I find one thing very interesting about this agitation. If you were to sit down with the list of those young leaders who were part of this agitation, you would find that many of those young leaders belong to the higher echelons of Indian politics today. There are various Chief Ministers and many Cabinet Ministers now who are products of that agitation. The most unique thing about them is that they all sent their children to English medium schools. They retained the dual education policy. The result was that those who were affluent sent their children to English medium schools and only those people sent their children to the Hindi medium who had no other option. Since the last few years, all government schools are in a mess, and in the villages, the mohallas

and in the cities there seems to be a deluge of English medium schools.

On a very recent trip to Pakistan, I tried to seek information as to what was the situation there with regard to this scenario. I was quite amused to know that the elite in Pakistan have duly emulated their Indian counterparts. Those who declare Urdu to be synonymous with Pakistan and Islam have sent their children to English medium schools. Amongst these are political leaders and army officers, the rigid Islamic Mullahs are also one of them, who, while they send the children of the poor to the Madarsas, educate their own children in English – the language of the devil, and when given an appropriate opportunity send them to the United States or to the UK- the land of the devil!

Vibhuti Narain Rai : born 1950, is a prominent progressive author whose books have made a mark in Hindi literature for their clear thinking, modern analysis, social understanding and human concern. His novels are : Ghar; Shahar mein Curfew; Kissa Loktantra; Tabadla and Prem ki bhootkatha. He has been honoured with Indu Sharma antarrashtriya Katha Samman, Kamleshwar Smriti Samman and Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan Puraskar. He has been a senior I.P.S. officer. Currently he is Vice Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalay, Wardha.

Meenakshi Pawha, Reader in English in Lucknow University, is a gold medalist and awardee of Charles Wallace India Trust Fellowship to Cambridge University. She has been a fullbright scholar. Her areas of interest are 20th century Indian, American, Australian and British drama, post colonial studies and film studies. She lives in Lucknow.

THE BHARATNATYAM HERITAGE IN SURINAME

Bhawna Saxena

Bharatnatyam is a flourishing dance form in Suriname, a country 16,000 kilometres away from India, a country where indentured labourers were brought 138 years back in sixty four ships starting from Lalarookh and ending with Dewa. The descendants of these immigrants, that is, the present Surinamese Hindustanis take great pride in identifying themselves with their roots and Indian heritage. Dance is an integral part of the culture adopted by these third and fourth generations who have not only preserved it but have always had an insatiable desire for more.

In addition to other traditions they are carrying through the most ancient of all the classical dance forms in India based on Natya Shastra – "The Bharatnatyam" and it is indeed a great pleasure to witness how this dance form has even transcended the religious barriers. Anything connecting the Surinamese Hindustanis to their roots is welcomed with open arms be it from any religion. This was witnessed in two shows staged recently in Suriname. The first being the Arangetram performance by 17 year old Ambrien Pierkhan, the daughter of a proud Muslim father. Ambrien started learning Bharatnatyam when she was five.

The second show was "The Dancing Feet" a celebration of the tenth anniversary of Arangetram in Suriname. Arangetram, the first solo performance by a Bharatnatyam dancer which is actually a graduation performance reflecting the different stages of consciousness of a danseuse.

This debut performance is organized only when the Guru(teacher) feels that the shishya (learner) has attained the capability to do so. This is not only the test of the dancer but also of the teacher as the audience is considered to be the judge. Under normal circumstances it takes about ten to twelve years for a learner to attain that level. In the last ten years twelve dancers from Suriname have performed Arangetram.

The theme of the 10th anniversary show was– "dance as a way of life". A full house audience for three consecutive days in a country of five hundred thousand with only one third of them Hindustanis is indeed a matter of great pride and honour, it depicts the love for classical dances in Suriname. Worth noting is the fact that the audience also comprised of Non-Hindustanis.

138 years back when the immigrant labourers came to Sri Ram Desh they definitely carried with them the traditions, religion and culture as a whole. Singing was an integral element for expression of joy and sorrows, some casual dances from eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar such as Ahirwa ka nach and Nautanki may be associated with the indentured labourers. However Bharatnatyam is not so old a tradition in Suriname and the credit for establishing this dance form in Suriname is to be given to the danseuse Mrs. Madhoerie Jagmohan, Madhoerie didi to her students

and formally known as Mrs. Mateshwari Hardin.

A sensitive and dedicated guru, successfully imparting the skills of Bharatnatyam as also recognising the innate strength of each student performer and encouraging the growth of their individualities Madhoerie imparts to her disciples the details of the dance form and also her own sensitivities and message of love, righteous practices and trust, which makes an artiste humane. She has established the Guru-Shishya tradition in Suriname and related it to the modern society. Her dedication as a guru of excellence can be seen in her elegance, sensitivity and grace.

Born in district Nickerie of Suriname on 13th September 1947 to Shri Swamiprasad and Rukmini Rambocus, she spent her childhood in a big family with nine brothers and sisters. Father Shri Swamiprasad was himself the child of immigrant labourers and was born in South Africa. He reached Suriname with the last boat Dewa. The parents who had seen much hardships not only motivated them to work hard but also instilled in them strong cultural values. Madhoerie lost her mother at the early age of fourteen but found a mother in her sister-in-law who compensated for the loss. Then as Suriname faced some difficult times politically, many a people migrated to Holland and most of her family did the same. Madhoerie

and her husband also migrated to Holland and along with their full time work started a group for socio-cultural interactions.

The desire to dance was first kindled when as a young girl she watched Vaijyantimala dance in a film but the dream could not be fulfilled as there was no dance teacher in Suriname in those times, and gradually as the pressure of establishing business and family increased, the dream became dormant and was awakened some years later when they received a call from a friend that a dance teacher required a couple of hours in order to get a licence to stay in Holland, Madhoerie still nurtured the image of Vaijyantimala dancing Bharatnatyam and decided to enrol her six year old daughter in dance classes but ended up taking the classes herself. It was a kathak teacher. She was 31 at that time and herself admits that it is an age when established dancers start considering to quit and settle into family life.

She smiles and adds "then I could not even differentiate between Kathak and Bharatnatyam" but right after 3 classes she felt this is not the same as Vaijyantimala was performing and she mentioned it to her Guru demonstrating roughly the postures involved and what she wanted, she was then told that what she was looking for is Bharatnatyam. However she continued the kathak lessons for three years, initially with Guru Abdul Gaffoor

Kawa and continued with Shri Veeru, the disciple of Pt. Birju Maharaj. The arrival of Mrs. Chandrika Sundarraman in Holland opened the gates of Bharatnatyam for Madhoerie. She learnt from her but it was a long distance to travel to and fro and she was referred to a Dutch Bharatnatyam dancer Mrs. Lizbeth Bennink who stayed closer. Mrs. Lizbeth Bennink made her start afresh as she felt that Madhoerie had learnt in another style. Though Madhoerie could already perform some steps she followed her Guru's advice and started afresh with great patience. Later as Mrs. Bennink felt that her disciple was learning very fast she took her to her Guru Smt. Rajmani from Bangalore who was living at Netherlands. Later when she discovered that various deities like Ganesh Vishnu and Shiva were associated with Bharatnatyam and she could perform the stutis and vandanas she exhilarated in the feeling of being a catalyst in the promotion of Hindustani culture.

Madhoerie performed her Arangetram in 1987 only after six years of learning Bharatnatyam. It is a common perception that it takes about ten to twelve years of dedicated practice to perform Arangetram but this devoted dancer accomplished it in a short span of six years only. She gives the credit to the constant support she received from her husband Mr. Jagmohan. And since then

her journey has only been uphill. She has visited India year after year to polish her skills. Madhoerie says that as she learnt, something deep within motivated her to learn more and she felt she had to make an effort to keep this 4000 year old tradition alive. So when the Hindu Muslim organization HIMOS approached her with a proposal to start Bharatnatyam dance classes in Suriname she was dumbstruck.....leaving behind a well settled business and family seemed impossible; the honorarium being offered by the organization was not even a tenth part of what they were earning in Holland and the thought of leaving the kids behind tore her but finally the deep rooted cultural values won and she decided to come back to Suriname for the sake of Bharatnatyam. She decided not to charge anything from students and thought of it as her contribution to society. Deeply committed, involved and aware of people and their problems Madhoerie started her lessons with 18 students in the garage of another socio-cultural activist Mrs. Sonia Quintusboschz.

Some time later as the cultural activists were planning Hanuman Jayanti, Madhoerie happened to mention that she could perform Bharatnatyam on Hanuman Chalisa. It was a matter of great curiosity and also some opposition as till then dancing in temple had never been envisaged and when the performance was scheduled great crowds were drawn into the temple yard and the

outstanding dancer, a consummate artiste, she blazed a trail as she presented this challenge to the spectators. The very next day 65 new students enrolled into her class and then started the real journey of Bharatnatyam in Suriname which has seen 12 students perform their Arangetram of which about five are today established teachers and have their own dance schools. Another five of Madhoerie's students have performed Arangetram in Holland one of whom is her daughter Arti Jagmohan, making her mother proud, running her own dance school.

Multi-faceted, successful and dynamic Madhoerie presents a challenge to today's spectator. Her life and her works have made her a role model for many girls of the younger generation of today. She has performed in a number of countries such as Europe, India, Trinidad, Guyana, French Guyana. Every atom of her body lives and breathes dance, her eyes light up at the mere mention of dance and is full of energy even when talking about it. A visionary leaving behind a legacy of believing and living a personal commitment, she displays an infectious zest for life but which rests on a solid foundation of rigorous training and sensitivity, deep thought, intensity and incredible hard work. She is individualistic, contemporary and ever dynamic, which make her performances mesmerizing.

The most overwhelming performance

for her has been the one at Chidambaram, an ancient and renowned shrine in Tamil Nadu noted for its cultural significance and associated with Nataraja or Lord Shiva in his Ananda Tandava in the cosmic golden hall. She says it was a dream come true to perform there and is grateful to her Guru Smt. Rajamani for bestowing the opportunity on her.

As a teacher she is satisfied with her disciples who are now teachers and have opened their own dance schools and feels that they are doing well individually and when required, work together in unison

to give great shows like Mother Earth, a charity show to create awareness about sensitizing people . Of the teachers Ms. Sadhana Mohan is doing her masters in law and proudly mentions that she has not taken a vacation since she started her own dance classes. She loves to fuse the classical and the modern in order to make it interesting to her students. Namita Ajodhia, Kavita Ramphal, and Maalti Nidhaansingh are other teachers dedicatedly taking Bharatnatyam far in this multi ethnic society.

Bhawna Sexena is Hindi and Cultural attache in Indian Embassy of Suriname. She lives in Paramaribo.

Interview

PALLAV IN CONVERSATION WITH SWAYAM PRAKASH

Pallav

Pallav—You have completed forty years of writing without break or breather. During this period you have written almost 250 short stories, hundreds of articles in newspapers and magazines, a few plays and five novels. You have published more than 30 books; edited two significant magazines and translated a good number of works by important authors. How do you look back at all this? Do you look back in anger?

Swayam Prakash—Not exactly. Anger... but anguish...certainly yes. We started our journey with a strong belief that the world will change the way we want it to change. It may take time but later or sooner it will have to change as per our desire and design. But like they say somebody somewhere was listening to us and laughing at us. As if remembering Ghalib 'baaji ch e atfal hai duniya mere aage;hota hai shabo roz tamasha mere aage'...and when in the eighties every thing had fallen apart we were just aghast! Just speechless!

Pallav—But retrospection has also been done.

Swayam Prakash—Yes...But I don't think it has been done honestly. Like true communists used to do in good old days.

Pallav—Why do you think so?

Swayam Prakash—Everybody said there is nothing wrong with the theory, just the practice went wrong. Tell me is it possible that more than one countries went on doing wrong practice for seventy

long years?

Pallav—Did it reflect in your writing?

Swayam Prakash—No.

Pallav—Why?

Swayam Prakash—May be I am a coward. I do not have enough courage to vindicate my thoughts loud and clear. May be I am afraid of losing friends. But for sure I think this should have been done by Indian marxist thinkers and historians-which I am not.

Pallav—Why not by politicians?

Swayam Prakash—You mean Indian communist politians? Where are they?

Pallav—As far as I know you are very fond of writing lengthy letters to your friends; and you are a prolific letter writer. You are known for writing long, frank and probing letters. Did you not discuss this with your friends?

Swayam Prakash—I tried to, but they were also as ignorant as I was. I must admit that we failed to answer the questions posed by time before us.

Pallav—Back to literature.what do you like to write most? Novels, plays, essays or short stories?

Swayam Prakash—Of course letters to friends.

Pallav—Would you like to get your letters published?

Swayam Prakash—Sure. Particularly

now when people have stopped writing letters. It is a place where you can express yourself uncensored-even give vent to your foolish and not so foolish ideas and where your creativity knows no bounds. But will anybody be interested in reading my letters?

Pallav—How do you rate yourself as a story writer?

Swayam Prakash—May be eight out of ten!!

Pallav—Why not ten out of ten?

Swayam Prakash—Please let me remain at the doorstep of masters.

Pallav—Ok. And how do you rate yourself as a novelist?

Swayam Prakash—I am an utter failure as a novelist and as a playwright. I am ok as an essayist and interesting as a columnist. The acid test is—read what you have written after ten or may be twenty years. If it still interests you...then it is worthwhile, otherwise not.

Pallav—Is it necessary for a story writer to write a successful novel for proving his worth?

Swayam Prakash—Yes. Publishers and therefore critics think so. Publishers' liking for novels can be understood.Novels sell like hot cakes. They sell at higher price.They can have many editions. Every edition can be fatter and costlier. If you want to become Mr. Somebody in Hindi literature you must have a hit novel to your name.

Thereafter you need not write anything in your entire life. They will go on pouring awards and rewards and glory and invitations for lecture and what not upon you. Look at Arundhati Roy! She has written only one novel and she is considered a bigger writer than Rohinton Mistry. Look at Alka Saraogi. She was given academy award on her first novel. Did she write anything worthwhile after that? During the last sixty years not a single sahitya academy award has been given to a short story writer. During last sixty years not a single Jnanpith Award has been given to a short story writer. And this is when we consider and claim ourselves as grand children and great grand children of Premchand-who was primarily a short story writer.

Pallav—Do you see any influence of your style on your junior story writers?

Swayam Prakash—None whatsoever!

Pallav—How do you explain it?

Swayam Prakash—Perhaps they are motivated by commercial success of one of my contemporaries and have placed him as their only ideal!

Pallav—Are you jealous?

Swayam Prakash—I am sad. You know why? I think satire is a very useful weapon to expose fallacy, idiocy and absurdity of the system. I am sad because this element is no more seen in contemporary prose. People have simply forgotten Parsaiji. Satire is something with the help of which you

stand erect in front of atrocities- even cruelties. You are not dominated and defeated as long as you have your faculty to laugh intact. Losing it is...

Pallav—Defeatism!

Swayam Prakash—Exactly. I never frightened my readers by picturing callousness of market economy or barbarianism of bureaucracy or wickedness of politicians or crookedness of intelligentsia. I wanted my readers to believe that they can change the system. I am sorry but now the will to change the system is not seen, what to talk of confidence that the system can be changed.

Pallav—Are you computer savvy?

Swayam Prakash—No.

Pallav—Do you ever visit Hindi sites?

Swayam Prakash—Not very often.

Pallav—Why?

Swayam Prakash—I find them boring. Perhaps till date the net could not take the shape of a forum for serious discussions. Till date it is mostly an abode of those who could not find a suitable place for themselves in the print media.

Pallav—Are you a blogger?

Swayam Prakash—No.

Pallav—Have you seen Hindi writers on the net?

Swayam Prakash—Most of them do not update themselves regularly. I hate

publicising myself and my writing by opening a 'show room' sort of thing.

Pallav—What do you think of contemporary Hindi writing?

Swayam Prakash—One thing should be understood clearly. Like politics or journalism, writing is also no more a social service. It has become a profession. Like every professional, the writer also has to consider what sells and what doesn't. Reading and assessing the mood of the market and sales promotion etc. follows. Publishers have become almighty. They are not bothered about readers. Technology has further strengthened their selfish designs. They have a large number of titles but hardly any repeat editions. If you devote three precious years of your life to write a book, the publisher publishes it in an edition of three hundred copies...and after six months you are out of shelves. Your book has simply disappeared. New stuff has silently replaced you. In such a situation the idea of social commitment has become almost irrelevant and redundant. As a matter of habit some writers are still following traditional realism. But where are the takers? Who is reading them? Look at the younger generation. How many students of tenth standard can recall—just recall the names of five contemporary Hindi writers? They are reading Harry Potter or Tuesdays with Morris or the Monk who sold his Ferrari or similar junk. And I tell you, here lies

the secret of change in their behaviour with parents or with friends. Do your own thing--this is the tag line of the Indian youth. Do you know what the biggest abusive word is these days? I tell you. It is LOSER.

Pallav—C'mon...You are getting cynical. Things are not that bad. I stay among students and you should believe me. Things are really not that bad.

Swayam Prakash—Ok. Let us assume they are not.

Pallav—So what is the future of the Hindi short story.

Swayam Prakash—I envisage it like this. The short story can acquire the form of collective writing. The writer will write on his or her blog or site and invite suggestions from readers. He may as well give a few options in terms of plot of the story. The option fetching maximum votes will be developed. So story writing will become sort of video game of today. The short story may also acquire other dimensions. It can have a video version. Actors may recite favourite stories. There can be contests of short story reading for teens. Technology has made it possible and feasible. But one thing is sure. It will no more remain a mode of protest or mass awakening.

Pallav—You mean its role as a teacher and conscience keeper is finished?

Swayam Prakash—Yes. As a matter of

fact art was never a conscience keeper or teacher. Preacher may be. But who likes him anyway! Pallav, I am fed up of this self glorification of literature. No other art form boasts of it. culture comes in superstructure which is always largely based on the base.

Pallav—What are you at these days....

apart from cursing?

Swayam Prakash—I am writing funny stories for kids. This is something which I never did. And believe me, I am enjoying.

Pallav—Thanks. It was fun talking to you. I wish you speedy recovery and good health.

Swayam Prakash : born 1947, is a prominent progressive author, critic and literary activist. Mechanical engineer by profession, he gives a cautious craft to his novels and short stories. He writes about the common man and his struggles. His famous short stories are—Kya tumne kabhi sardar bhikhari dekha hai, Partition, Admi jaat ka Admi, Taza khabar and Manju Faltu. He has written 'hamsafarnama' which portrays his contemporary writers as his comrades. He lives in Bhopal.

Pallav, born 1977 teaches in Hindi Deptt. of Hindu College, Delhi University. He is specially involved with criticism of contemporary fiction. Has published his first book of literary criticism, Kahani ka loktantra. He lives in Delhi.

BUDHIA

Ramvriksha Benipuri

Translated by
Mangal Murty

All of a sudden, a goat-kid came frolicking, and started nibbling and chewing the soft, supple leaves of the chameli plant. I hadn't by then developed the aesthetic sense to be totally entranced by the merry prancing of that little beauty, joggling her long ears in each which way as it nipped arid munched the lush leaves, looking hither and thither with her large black eyes as it chomped on, and also occasionally bleating *meyn-meyn*, as if calling its mother-goat. Rather, that day I felt such pity for the delicate chameli sapling which I had brought with great care from the neighbouring hamlet and which I had planted with my own hands, watered it, and felt delighted to see its tiny leaves budding forth each day. But this little rogue had now undone all! Furious with anger I tried to hit it hard. But like a swift doe it leapt away, as I ran chasing it.

'Don't hit it, Babu.' This was Budhia. A small girl of hardly seven or eight years. A red rag with several patches wrapped round her waist, barely covering her knees. A totally bare body sullied with lots of dust. A dark race with black tousled mop of hair, also filled with dust and surely with lice. Yellow snot trickling out from nose which she tried to slick in every time. Hearing her words and looking at her grimy face I felt like slapping her cheeks instead. Till I looked down around her feet, and my child's heart got riveted there.

'Oh, what's all that you have made?' I peered closely at the clay figures spread around her small muddied feet. Clay toys she had freshly made of soft, wet clay from the nearby pond. Artfully decorated with

little flowers of mustard, gram and peas growing all around in the fields. Toys not with properly carved faces, but of course with limbs like humans, and bedecked with flowers of varied colours, imbued with their own charm.

'What's all this?' I asked. She felt shy. 'You won't beat me? Then I'll say'.

'Surely I'd have beaten you. But you're pardoned'.

She stood smiling. 'Please sit down here.'

But how could I sit in that mess. I only bent down for a closer look. And she started

'This is the bridegroom with the wedding cap', she said pointing to the mustard flower stuck on its head. 'And she is the bride, with her colourful skirt of the gram and pea-flowers. They are getting married. With all the marriage music, of course'. And she tapped on her belly, and whistled with rounded lips - 'With the drum and the pipe. And this is the *kohbar*, where they will spend the wedding-night.' She pointed to a walled square, also made of clay. 'And this, their marriage-bed'. A few green mango leaves sprinkled with tiny pink flowers. 'Here they will sleep. And I'll sing the marriage songs for them.' And her crooning began at once. Singing and swaying. I was under a spell. For a while. Then I suddenly remembered my chameli sapling, and ran there, counting each torn leaf and lamenting. Swearing all the time of devouring the cursed goat-kid alive, and showering abuses on Budhia.

'Babuji, would you kindly help me lift this load of grass?' I heard a voice as I was on my evening stroll north of the village, lost in my own thoughts. My bent head rose up.

Daylight was waning into evening. Down in a field beside the road stood what looked like a young girl. A big tied bundle of grass lay beside her feet. I got irritated by her temerity. I was now a city man in clean clothes, keeping myself away from the filth of the village people. And after all I wasn't a grazier or a grass-cutter to lift bundles of grass on others' heads. Who in the village could dare ask me for such a thing. But look at this young girl...

'Please Babuji!' She entreated.

I gazed at that face, sizing up the face and the voice. Arre, Budhia! A full grown young lass? Grown up so fast? I looked around. No one was there. The evening was darkening. Who could help this poor, lone girl here. Out of sympathy, I helped raise the bundle on her head. Soon swaying rhythmically she walked away with it.

Just then a loud laugh burst forth, and the next moment I found Jagdish by my side.

'So now she has got a new fish in her net!' Jagdish had an impish twinkle in his eyes, and raillery in his voice. Then he started his long recital of Budhia's story.

'Budhia is no longer that girl of patched skirt. She now has a flowing *choonar* that is ever colourful. And her *choli* is now stitched by the Sewaipatti tailor. True, you

find her carrying loads of grass on her head every day, but her palms you'll not find calloused, nor dirty. Her skin is still dark, but not with the sullenness of the stagnant pool. It now bears the rippling music of the *Kalindi*, with many a *Gopal* playing their flutes on its banks, and many other *Nandlals* dreaming of a romantic union with her. Wherever in the open fields she walks, life surges and sways. Her black locks are now set with fragrant jasmine oil, her forehead adorned with a resplendent *tikli*. In place of one *Gopal* in the *Vrindavan* with a thousand *gopis* around, you now have one *gopi* surrounded by a thousand *Gopals*. Even *Gopal* wouldn't have felt the gaiety in slinging the thousand-headed *Kalia* serpent and dancing on its hoods which this Budhia now feels in stringing together so many *Gopals* and making them dance to her tunes. As if, Radha of the *dwapar* era is avenging herself through Budhia on today's menfolk in this *kaliyug*. That Radha ever pined for Krishna's love, and this Budhia makes all the *Gopals* always crave for her company.

Damned wretch! - My virtuous soul cried. And in the growing darkness I slowly wended my way, with bent head, back home. Jagdish, too, went his way. And hardly had I walked some distance towards the village when I suddenly felt an electrifying touch of someone rushing past myself. Instinctively, I looked back. 'Kindly forgive me for this second fault'. She said and stood still. It was Budhia. I fumed in anger - 'Wicked girl', I shouted. (I'd almost said - Slut!) But

instead of blushing or looking bashful, she burst into a loud laughter. Coming closer, she giggled - 'D'you remember, Babu, my goat-kid had eaten your chameli plant?' And her pearly teeth shone in the dark. 'Get lost, naughty girl!' My face must have burnished like red coal.

'And that bridegroom and his bride, that wedding-night chamber, that flower-bedded bed, and that song! Should I sing it again for you, Babu?'

The wedded bride goes to her hubby's home,

And yet she trembles in fear as she goes ...

Singing it tunefully she ran away, swinging and laughing. Oh, how shameless, how brash indeed! - I kept muttering between my teeth. But her giggles and laughter kept echoing as she fled.

The wheat harvest was on. My brother said, 'Bhaiya, there'll be a large number of labourers today. They might try to steal. Come to the fields with me. You'll have only to be there. The work will go on smoothly.'

It must be the farmer's blood in my veins which made me walk to the fields just to have a new experience. The harvest had already begun in the small hours of the morning, so that the ripe corn would not be jerked off the stalks. With the pale moon still on the horizon casting its fading light in the fields. It was already over - the harvesting. The labourers were tying up

their bundles of the harvest. And their womenfolk and children were picking up the stray fallen ears of corn. I had been deputed to watch lest they stole some of the harvested stalks instead of the fallen corn. I just stood there keeping an eye, when I saw, at a little distance, in a corner of the field, behind a labourer, a middle-aged woman, her children hastily picking up corn, and also, perhaps, doing some 'foul play'.

'Aye, you there, that woman, what're you doing there?'

She seemed to be completely oblivious of my loud call. Though her man appeared to be warning her. Once, twice, thrice -all my shouting went unheeded. Seething in anger I proceeded towards them. Seeing me coming all four of her children - well within six years of age - all got close to their mother. The youngest one of a year and a half hid behind her feet. From a distance, I shouted again - 'Aye, what're you doing?'

Bending down in the field, without stopping work, she just turned her face towards me and said, 'Salam, Babuji'.

'Arre, Budhia?' It was Budhia, the same Budhia, the little girl who wore the red rag wrapped round her waist. The Budhia whose *choonar* never went faint. Uff, but what had happened to that merry childhood, that blooming youth ... and now this old woman, in a torn *sari*, and even the *choli* gone, hair all dishevelled, face shrunken, cheeks and eyes - all sunken. And, oh, those two well-rounded, proud blossoms of her youth which once maddened the young men of

the village, as she was bending at work, hung like the udders of an old goat -lifeless and cold!

'Budhia?'

'Yes, Babuji.'

Turning her faded face, she gave a faint smile, and went working. Her man, who had by then tied up his pile, called her - 'Hey, come and give a hand.' Budhia left her work, straightened up, gave me another wan smile, and proceeded to help. with heavy steps. As she stood straight, I noticed a pregnant belly.

'Wait, Budhia, let me help,' I blurted.

'Na. Babuji. I wouldn't ask you to do it: You may get angry.' Her two front teeth glowed with emotion. My heart missed a beat. Old memories cascaded in. That dark evening, her bundle of grass, her pleading for help, Jagdish's sarcastic remarks, my exasperation, her frivolity. Just then her youngest child broke into a cry. She turned to the child, and I went to help her man lift the pile. The strong, hefty young man walked away in a swaying rhythm with his pile on his head. And Budhia, trying to push her shrunken breast into her child's mouth, kissing, smooching and pacifying him, said to me - 'How many children do you have, Babuji. Look at these kids. The wretches are so wicked. They have sucked me dry, spoilt my body, and still would not let up. They're a pest.'

The other three children stood by her side. She would stroke the head of one, and

pat the other's back, and with her moist eyes poured her love into each one of them, cuddling the one in her lap close to her breast. And yet, exuding contentment, she kept prattling of this and that. My gaze stayed fixed on her face. Eyes staring and the mind musing.

The rainy season was over. And the

floods had receded.

The river again flows with a tranquil, serene visage. The floods are over, as is all the brouhaha of life. Even the mud has dried up, and all weeds and straw washed away. Absolute calm reigns on the river.

And I have angelic motherhood before my eyes - only to be revered and worshipped!

Ramvriksha Benipuri (1899-1968), born in a middle-class farmer's family, belonged to a village Benipur, near Muzaffarpur. Dropping out from school, he joined nationalist journalism during the first Non-cooperation movement, editing journals like 'Tarun Bharat', 'Balak', 'Yuvak', 'Yogi' and 'Janata', spending over nine years in jails in several short or long spells, the longest (1942-45) in Hazaribag jail, where he was a co-conspirator in Jayaprakash Narayan's daring escape from prison. A close friend of J. P. Benipuri was among the founder members of the Socialist Party, taking an active part in the Kisan Andolan in Bihar. But the full flowering of his literary genius came in the late 40s, after his release from Hazaribag jail. His prison writings include most of his masterpieces: 'Patiton ke Desh Me', 'Kaidi ki Patni', 'Mati ki Mooraten', 'Ambapali', etc. - a total of more than 70 books of stories, novels, plays, memoirs, and children's literature. His biography of J.P. became a classic in Hindi. Later he also edited famous literary journals like 'Himalaya' (with Shivapujan Sahay) and 'Nai Dhara' - all from Patna. He was elected to the Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1957. His 'Granthavali' has been published in 8 volumes by Rajkamal, Delhi. He died on 7 September, 1968. 'Budhia' (a name, not meaning 'old woman') is the last story in 'Mati ki Mooraten'. The meanings of the *italicised* words are almost self-evident in the context. *Kalindi*, *Kalia*, *Dwapar*, *Kaliyug*, *Nandlal*, *Gopis*, *Gopal*, etc. refer to the Radha-Krishna story of the Hindu mythology. - Translator]

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

PAANI

Gyanprakash Vivek

Translated by
Ravi Nandan Sinha

At night, Jakhal station seemed to be dozing. Tired voices punctuating the all pervading silence. People sprawling on benches. Pale light lying scattered on the platform. It seemed as if a few orphan melancholics were roaming about the place. Without its trains, coolies, vendors and passengers, the building of Jakhal station looked restless.

Jakhal station dozing. Jakhal railway yard wide awake. It was a strange paradox. The yard, its tracks stretching far into the distance, would see the silence of the night with its hundreds of sounds. A fine sawdust of sounds floated about. Now and then, wagons left for loose shunting would crash into one another. There would be a loud rumbling sound filling the dome of the night.

Carrying their red and green lights and whistles, the shunt-men and yardmen would move from here to there between the tracks of the yard, working to get the load ready. When the load was ready, the engine driver and the guard would come out of the running room and meet the A.S.M. (Assistant Station Master) of Jakhal station. They would receive the load. If there was a 'caution', they would collect its slip or token and then move on. The goods train would be given the line clear signal. Then it would leave. The same process of getting the next goods train ready would begin again. In the meantime, cups of tea would tinkle at the tea-stall near the gate. Laughter and bantering. Gossip. Some distance away from the station, people would sit around a camp fire, gathering warmth. With the

tea break, it would also be a break to warm the hands and would turn into a little picnic for the men. During summers, large pitchers full of water would be kept there. And there would also be the tea. Neither the shunting stopped, nor did the tea sipping.

Around the gate one could hear the music of life: the melody of life playing among the shunting engines. There was a rhythm, the rhythm of struggle. There was a note seeking to defeat problems. It seemed as if the railway gate was like a stage-play that would never come to an end. Characters would change, but the play would continue. Dialogue would change, and so also would the time, but the play would go on...

The tea-stall of Raka Masih near the railway gate was in fact a life-stall. Such a carefree man like Raka Masih! How could business and that happy-go-lucky attitude go together...? He did not sell tea. He dispensed good wishes. In front of him the engines would shunt. In front of him the 'load' would be prepared. The suspended engine driver Raka Masih would become sad. Rueful. Silent. And then, like some great source of light he would begin to glitter again. When he guffawed, his entire thickset body seemed to laugh. It was not he, but his whole body that laughed. People thought, Raka Masih was a very happy man. People were ignorant. Raka Masih, who was laughing, would be very

sad inside. Those who laugh a great deal create fear: why are they laughing so much? Raka Masih created fear when he laughed endlessly. When he stopped laughing, people would often notice that his eyes had become moist. And after that, there would be a Lamp's cigarette in his fingers and he would puff smoke like a locomotive engine! Masih's entire service period of some twenty-five years was spent driving goods trains. Now, he had been under suspension for two years. Suspension or no suspension, he couldn't care less. He did not try for reinstatement nor submitted an application or gave an explanation. Yes, he was a strange man, this Raka Masih! He had been an engine driver in the railways. Fairly good salary. Free livery. Free pass. He still had his B-Type quarters. He also had his half-salary. But his relationship with speed had been snapped.

Even in that situation Raka Masih was a happy man. While making tea, he would often break into a song, sung out of tune. When the tea was ready he would narrate some incident. Raka Masih was an album of experiences and a thick book of reminiscences. To hear him talk was like watching a memorial, a memorial that talked. And in a memorial's life countless stories are written.

When Raka Masih narrated a story, everything would be still. The brick oven for making tea would be alit. The water on the brick oven would be boiling. People

would become quiet. At such moments some kind of absent understanding would begin to take shape through Raka Masih's words.

Raka Masih knew everyone. From the yard master to all the engine drivers, firemen, workers of the locomotive workshop. But only Raka Masih spoke. When he was speaking it seemed as if, not he, but the past itself were speaking. At such moments it did not matter to Raka Masih that his business suffered. He was neither a shop keeper, nor he cared for his shop keeping. It seemed as if he was an open book of time. When the book opens, some story begins to float in the emptiness.

In Raka Masih's shop keeping, there was more good fellowship than shop keeping. Once a day he would offer free tea to the cobbler, to the barber and to the betel leaf seller. Twice a day he would carry tea to Paglet Baba sitting near the dispensary. That tea too was charged to God's account...If some old driver friend came to his stall for tea, he would not charge him anything. He would laugh and tell him, 'You came here for tea, that itself shows your large-heartedness. To accept money for the tea? That would be an insult to friendship.'

And there was one more thing about him. The others said Namaste or good morning; he would say, 'Brother! Right time!' which meant, may you have good

health!

Raka Masih could play the mouth organ fairly well. He had learnt it from someone in his childhood or youth. He had learnt to play the violin also but time had snatched away the chords of his violin. Only the mouth organ remained. In the night when there was no one at his stall, and when the night began to deepen, the sound of his mouth organ could be heard far in the lonely, bare night. That sound of the mouth organ hemmed in by the noise of engines' shunting. In that cacophony of sounds floated that innocent tune. Everywhere that tune would wander. It seemed to be calling the sky, the moon, the stars, the fireflies, the dew, or God knows whom. After wandering about the place, the tune would return to him. It seemed as if with the help of the sound of his mouth organ Raka Masih was trying to recall his old days.

One night...it was a winter night. At some distance from Raka Masih's tea stall they had built a fire of red hot coal. Sitting around that fire there were men belonging to the railways. A few R.P.F. constables were also there.

A cold night. It was eleven or half past eleven. The whole city had gone to sleep. But the yard of Jakhal station, the gate, the kiosk, the cabin, the heap of embers and the tea stall of Raka Masih were still awake.

There was a mouth organ in Raka Masih's hand. But he was not playing it. He was lost in thought. It was then that two drivers, a fireman and the shed in-charge, came there and sat down. All of them were Raka Masih's old friends. Raka Masih said in a soft voice, 'Right time, brothers!' Then without asking, he prepared tea for them and offering them the cups said, 'Time rushes forward, but sometimes my mind begins to run backwards.'

'Are you reminded of some old story, Raka?' David, an old driver and also Raka's old friend asked.

'Yes, David, I am reminded of that incident in Quetta. Whenever I think of Kanmitrajai station located somewhere at the far end of Quetta, I really feel disturbed.'

'You have mentioned Quetta a number of times. But you have never told us about it Raka.'

'I'll tell you now,' said Raka lighting a Lamp's cigarette. He sucked deep at it. The smoke began to rise, and with it rose the thoughts of Raka Masih...

'It happened a long time ago. It seems as if ages have gone by. But even today, I remember it clearly, as if it had happened only yesterday.'

Raka Masih picked up the cups lying on the bench and put them aside. He removed the water kettle from the brick oven so that its warmth could reach

everyone. Raka Masih finished his cigarette. Then he began to narrate that incident about Quetta.

'Then I was a fireman. I was able to drive the engine. I had also taken the driver's test twice and had cleared it too...Then there was an advertisement of vacancy for drivers. But all the jobs were for the remote areas. But what did I care? I was without a family. I accepted all the terms...There were ten vacancies and three people had applied. All the three were selected as drivers. There was a three-month training period. Then I was to report at Quetta.'

For a moment Raka Masih was silent. His voice and the night's silence. When he fell silent, the night would deepen still more. And it also became more sorrowful!

'Everyone tried to scare me. They scared me a great deal saying that I was not going to work there but to die. I didn't care. I ignored all those warnings and went to Quetta to join duty.'

'But when I reached Quetta I realized the situation I was in. It was a Pathan country. They were ever ready to quarrel. They would kill a person even for a petty reason ...At that moment, friends, I also felt that I have come to invite my death.'

'Raka, you are a brave man, and still you got scared?' Raka's driver friend asked.

'Yes, I was really scared. The stories

people told me about the place made me tremble inside. But then I gave myself courage. I told myself—those who are afraid have to die before their death...Depositing my suitcase and bedding in the running room, I called the cook. He was also a Pathan. Besides Pashtu, he could also speak a smattering of Urdu. He advised me that I should neither be friends with those people nor be their enemy. Both things were dangerous. And what was most important, I was not supposed to even look at a Pathan woman. In such matters those people did not wait even for a minute and would cut a person into pieces.'

'Some time ago, there had been an earthquake in Quetta. Everything had been destroyed. Everywhere there were signs of destruction. But all around the place there were mountains. Snow-capped peaks looming far into the distance. Total silence. Tall trees. A few houses here and there. A wilderness stretched into the far distance...It was indeed a beautiful place, but even such a beautiful place made me apprehensive. I felt more terror stricken because I was a stranger there. I thought: there is another place where there is a church, Fathers, prayer, Christmas, cakes, partying, joy and friends like me; and in this place there is such wilderness...Everyone looked at me with suspicion. I was scared of everyone. I would spend my time in the running room. Sometimes I thought of playing the mouth organ, but the very next moment my mood

would change.'

'Did you start driving trains there?' someone asked Raka. 'No. I had not been put on duty till then. But I also had a fear: if Quetta was like this, what kind of place will those forested areas be where there was neither education nor the law....Before I began to drive I had heard all kinds of true and false stories about the place. I was scared to my bones. For many days I did not stir out of the running room. It was really strange that they did not put me on duty after my training was over. But there must have been a reason and that is why I had not been given the load till then. Sitting in the running room I was feeling bored.'

'One day, I came out of the running room. The caretaker of the running room tried to stop me. But I did not listen to him. I came out. It was a small market place. A strange kind of place. The pleasant morning of the hills. But in my heart there was fear. All around me there were tall and lean Pathans. Some of them had their turbans on, others were bare headed. All of them were fair with sharp features. All of them were men. There was not a single woman there.'

"Frightened, I shuffled slowly across the market place, looking around in a confused manner. I stopped in front of a shop. There were some people sitting in it. It was a kahwa house. The shop owner of the kahwa house looked at me.

He was watching me in a strange manner. Those who were sitting on the bench were also watching me continuously. I just stood there, as if my feet had been nailed to the ground. My legs shook. My heart thudded. I was thinking, these people would first rob me, and then kill me.'

'Then?' someone asked with curiosity.

'Then!' Raka took some deep breaths, perhaps twenty or so, and then again looking into the past continued, 'I turned to go. I had begun to walk back when the owner of the kahwa house called me. I was confused. I couldn't decide what I should or should not do. Meanwhile, he called me again. Feeling scared I went into the kahwa house. He looked at me; I looked at him. He gestured to the people sitting on the bench. They made room for me, vacated their place for me. I was told to sit down. With fear, hesitation and feeling like a complete stranger I sat down on the bench. I was more scared now. I was thinking: first of all they would beat me up and then, my body covered with blood, they would throw me into the street.'

'It was natural for you to be afraid,' someone said.

'Undoubtedly,' looking at his old driver friends Raka Masih said. And then he entered the past once again.

'Sitting on that bench, I was trying to imagine what they were going to do to me. And then, pouring the kahwa into

a copper tumbler, the owner offered it to me saying, 'This is for you, sir.'

I was terror struck. The feeling of fear, the danger of being killed, being a stranger there, the frightening stories about those people and that tumbler of kahwa offered to me so hospitably—they somehow did not go together. Immediately after offering kahwa to me, he placed before me some kulcha in a china clay plate with a sort of design on it. Then he said, 'Babu Saib (Sahib), this is for you.'

'For me? But I didn't order it,' I said with hesitation and fear. I was still afraid.

'It's all right, please take it,' he said innocently.

'How much is it?' I was worried about its price.

'No charge,' that man said. He paused, and then looking at me with steady eyes said, 'You are my guest. Can I take money from the guest and send myself to dozakh (hell)? So, Babu Saib, drink your kahwa, it will do you good in winter.'

'The kahwa was exceptionally good. Those people also were remarkable. I didn't know them but now I was not afraid of them. I ate the kulcha. I drank the kahwa. After thanking the owner, when I rose to go everything had changed. Everything looked beautiful and attractive. I felt that everything around me had

established a relation with me.'

'I was amazed. Even the station master of Quetta did not appear to be so bad to me now. His face was hard; his eyes were cold. They were scary. But the same eyes now looked moist to me. The same face looked relaxed. When I met him he said laughing, "Raka Masih, you must be very bored! From tomorrow, your duty begins. There will be a load of just eight wagons. There is an acclivity ahead. The engine cannot pull more than those many wagons. You have to drive the goods train at a slow speed. The tracks are old. If there is a derailment, it will be a bigger problem. Even the passenger trains have to be driven at a slow speed. It is a meter gauge track. The driver has to be very careful".'

'I will be very careful, sir,' I said.

'Definitely. Safety is not merely a word; it is a part of the whole system.' The station master said.

'Yes sir,' I only said.

'With the engine there is also a water tanker. There are two small villages on the way. People there are in dire need of water. The shortage of water makes people weep. The stations are small, so you will get a run through signal. But if you want, you can stop the train there for one or two minutes. The rule says that you have to take the load without

stopping. But for humanitarian reasons, you can stop your goods train. The people there are extremely poor and illiterate. And on top of it, nature is hard on them.'

'I will keep that in mind, sir,' I said.

'Raka Masih, it is not an order, but simply a request.'

'Sir, I'll consider it an order for the sake of humanity.'

'Thank you. Though some drivers do not stop their freight trains and their water tanker comes back full. Their attitude is really strange.'

'I respect you sentiments, sir.'

'Thank you. I find that your intentions are good,' the station master said.

'Did you start the next day with a load of eight wagons?' someone asked.

'Not eight, but only seven wagons. It was a goods train, a goods train with seven wagons. There were wooden sleepers in all the seven wagons. At the end of it there was the guard's break van. The guard's name was Ramlal. He explained to me that those people there were hungry, savage and uncivilized. They were ready to die for water. To avoid that problem the easiest thing would be to run through those stations. We are supposed to reach the load. We are not there to supply water to the villages.'

'It was my first day. I kissed my cross

and bowed before the engine. I saw the water tanker behind the engine. I cast a glance at the other seven wagons. That load of seven wagons was a small load. I could see the guard and the guard could see me. I don't know who the fireman was. He was silently looking at the spade and the coal.'

'Before I left, the station master had told me that I should never stop the train at the Kanmitrazai station, "If you stop the train, just after that point there is an acclivity. You will then have a problem and will have to sweat in that cold. You will get a run through signal and therefore you should not stop the train".'

'But when I stopped my goods train, it was near the Kanmitrazai station. I had the run-through signal. The guard was waving his green flag. The fireman was feeding coal into the engine with his spade. But I let the vacuum of the engine fall. There in front of me there was a crowd, waving their hands and making a noise. There were empty buckets, pots, drums, and copper utensils in the hands of the people in that crowd. And there also was the green flag of the guard, and the run-through signal.'

'And you stopped the train?' someone asked.

'I stopped the train. Applying the brake of the engine, I got down from it. The guard also got down from the brake and

said to me in anger, 'I told you not to stop the train here.'

I was silent.

The fireman also said in the same voice, 'Sir, you don't know these people. They are all dangerous. Don't get involved with them. You still have time. Drive away the train from here.'

'Then what did you do, Raka?' a man sitting on the bench asked.

'I did what one man should do for another. I saw people waiting eagerly for water. If they had been dangerous, they would have attacked the train. They would have opened the tap of the tanker behind the engine and would just have taken the water. But they were waiting with empty buckets and almost no hope. They had heard what the guard and the fireman had said. They thought I would drive away the train immediately.'

I said in a loud voice, 'All of you stand in a queue. Yes, all of you in a queue. There should be no crowding here. Everyone will get water, but only after you stand in a queue.'

'There was a long queue. In it there were mostly men and just a few women. There were three or four girls too. They were wearing the burqa.'

Two women and one girl were asked to stand out of the queue. When I asked the reason, the man who was organizing

them in a queue said, "Saib, they do not have money".'

'Money?' surprised, I asked.

'Money for water, Saib,' he said flatly.

'So is water sold here?' I asked.

'Yes, Saib. One taka per bucket, one paisa for a small pot, one anna for a drum...Sometimes some saibs charge even more for the water.'

'So this woman and this girl have no money?'

'Yes, Saib.'

'So will they remain thirsty?'

'I don't know, Saib,' the man said and placed the coins on the wooden sleeper under the tracks—one anna coins, takas and a number of paisa coins.

'What's this?'

'We have collected this money, Saib. If it is not enough, I will ask them to bring more.'

He had just finished speaking when the guard stepped forward. He tried to pick up the coins lying on the sleeper. I held his hand. He said with some anger, 'So you want to take all this money?'

I called that man and told him to pick up all the coins on the sleeper and return everyone's money. He thought I was angry. He was frightened. He said, 'Did we do anything wrong?'

I said, 'I have not come here to sell water, I have come to distribute it.'

When that man told the others what I had said everyone was surprised. They were also glad and felt reassured. They were very poor people. Only God knew from where they had managed to get those one anna, taka, and paisa coins. They received water and also their money. They were very happy.

Blessing me an old woman said, 'Will you never take money for water?'

'No.'

'Why?'

'Because, amma, the clouds, the rivers and the wells, do they ever charge money for giving us water?'

Filling up two buckets each, they began to go back to their homes. They were very happy and very satisfied. When they had gone some distance, they paused, put their buckets on the ground and raising their hands saluted me.

Finally, the girl who had been standing out of the queue also filled her two buckets. She looked at me through the burqa and said very softly, 'You're a good man...thank you.'

All of them were going back to their homes. I stood there watching them go. They were strong people but poverty had shattered them.

Climbing down the slope, that girl put the buckets on the ground and lifting the veil of her burqa, looked at me. She was very beautiful as if she were some fairy. I watched her with wonder.

When I returned their money, they became my admirers. It was not really a question of money. It was a question of feeling, the feeling that sows the seeds of human relationships. They were very emotional people. They could kill someone, but they could also die for someone. They were strong people, full of life, tall and handsome. The scarcity of water in that area had made them helpless. Everything seemed to be against them. They had taught themselves to live in poverty. They did not have many means of earning their livelihood. They had very little money. They also had very few desires. But some desires had become necessities of life for them, such as water.'

'Raka, you gave them water, so they were happy,' someone spoke when Raka fell silent. In this manner, for a long time Raka had continued to tell his story. He was carried away by his feelings...Then another friend said, 'Raka Masih, if you had put those coins in your pocket, then?'

'If I had put those coins in my pocket, nothing would have happened. Even then I would not have become a rich man. But then, I would not have understood

the meaning of life...If I had taken the money every second day, I would stop the train there. People of Kanmitrazai village would come. They would stand in a queue. They would give me the money. And then after filling their buckets with water, they would have gone. But in that case I would not have had either the memory of Kanmitrazai village, nor would those people have the kind of feeling towards me that they had.' Raka Masih sighed. He was silent for some time. Then for a while he gazed at the brick oven. His friends were silent, and so was he. There was only the sound of a shunting engine. It seemed as if some shunting engine were going to and fro in Raka Masih's heart.

After a while he continued, 'Every second day, I would set out with a load of seven wagons. That was my duty. But I felt that it was very important to reach water to the people of Kanmitrazai village. It was another duty beside my duty. I don't know what name that duty can be given. Perhaps that duty was called friendship...They too knew how to be friends. They would bring for me figs, apricots and pine fruit. If I refused it, they would be displeased. In their dirty, smelly clothes they would bring kulchas for me. They would insist that I should eat it in front of them...People called them savage, barbarian, illiterate, uncouth and God knows what not. Those were the same people. When I stopped the train, they quietly

stood in a queue, like children praying. Those same people. At the end of the queue stood the girl who would sometimes lift the veil of her burqa and look at me...Very beautiful that girl was, full of the very meaning of life, a sacred being. Whenever I looked at her, I would wonder ...It was very strange. The people I was most afraid of were people who looked simple, innocent and were like my own friends.'

'But one day something went wrong. At the Quetta station, when they were linking the water tanker to the engine, its cuff-link broke. The water tanker was removed from there. The load was ready, but there was no water tanker with it. I looked at the Kanmitrazai station from a distance. I had the run-through signal. And there were those people standing with empty buckets. There was no water tanker attached to the engine. Had I wanted, I would have taken my goods train past the run-through signal. But I stopped the train near that crowd.

There were people standing there. There were empty buckets. There was I. And there was the goods train too. But there was no water tanker attached to it. People stood there disappointed for some time and then they began to leave. That beautiful girl, whose name was Nazia, stood quietly at a distance for a while and then walking up to me, said in a voice full of great sadness, 'You did not bring water today,

Babu Saib?'

There was such sorrow in her voice that I cannot describe it. I wish I had thousands of clouds then. I would have asked all those clouds to rain there. For some time I only stood there, feeling embarrassed. Then I tried to explain the situation to her.

After she had listened me out she said, 'For the last two days, no one has stopped the train here. Today all of us had come with great hope.'

I looked at her. She was wearing a burqa. But I could see tears in her eyes.

The next day, the driver who was to take the train fell ill. No one wanted to do duty in the place of another driver. But I was ready to go. When I reached Kanmitrazai station with the water tanker, people were very happy to see me.

'Raka you did a good thing,' his old driver friend said.

'Definitely, he did a good thing,' the other said.

With a sigh Raka Masih said, 'I had joined on the condition that I would work in a remote area for two years. But even before my two years were over, I was transferred to Jalandhar. When I told the people of Kanmitrazai about my transfer, they became sad. Nazia lifted the veil of her burqa and looked at me. I saw that she was actually weeping. That day they

filled their buckets without saying anything. After taking water, they remained standing there. I said to them that I would return after three days...for the last time. But I could not go there for the last time. My load was cancelled and after that I was transferred to Jalandhar...Probably they had been waiting for me. Friends, waiting is a very painful thing. If it changes into memory, it haunts you all your life.'

In the course of telling the story Raka Masih suddenly fell silent. His voice had become the voice of a man who was inwardly broken. He was unable to continue. Words did not come to him. Eventually, all his friends rose from the bench and left. Only the sound of the mouth organ floated in the emptiness of the night. Only the memories of Raka and Kanmitrazai remained.

Courtesy : Doaba Quarterly

Gyan Prakash Vivek : born 1949, Bahadurgarh, Rohtak, is a contemporary Hindi author of fiction and poetry. Has published a good number of books, some of which are : dhoop ke hastakshar; darar se jhankti roshni (poetry) alag alag dishayen; Shekhar gavah hai (Short stories) gali number 13, Akhet, chai ka doosra cup (novels). He also writes ghazals. He lives in Bahadurgarh, Haryana.

Dr. Ravi Nandan Sinha, edits The Quest, a journal of Indian literature and culture established in 1987. Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust India have published his translations of poetry and fiction. Member, Sahitya Akademi awards committee. Presently, Head, PG Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous). He lives in Ranchi.

THE BOOSTER IS ON

Rajesh Jain

Translated by
Shailendra Nath

Now and then, he used to point out to himself — 'I am really sick'. Saroj also kept on confirming this notion of his, 'It is your delusion... you had been working in the plant for so many years. It appears that due to staying so long amidst iron and steel and heavy machines, its din and bustle has stuck into your ears; that is why, you hear those sound here in the city also.'

'But I am telling you the truth, I really hear the sounds. My ears get buzzing, almost as if a thousand horse-power feed pump or the boiler fan is rattling... '

'You are strange.' Saroj used to reproach, 'Where is the plant here? There is no chimney, nor your boiler, nor your transformer Here there are only lifeless high-rise concrete jungles. There is no movement in them. People live comfortably. They earn and enjoy luxuriously.' He used to be left speechless. His wife is not wrong. He is no longer in the plant, but its effect is still settled on his consciousness. Its germs have dissolved in his blood. When he was in the plant, he used to hear daily the same rattling sound—the shrieks of the safety valve... the constantly panting pumps and the harsh sounds of the fans. An untiring incessant race...

He had also to face within himself a psychological world equivalent to the mundane world diffused around him. He often used to feel the physical world of the plant is pervading his other world. The

clamp of the sounds is gripping him. He used to hear myriad types of sounds. He used to be taken aback, get up in the night all of a sudden. The phone would be ringing. Half awake and rubbing his eyes, he used to try to be quick of mind. If Saroj got up, he used to say, 'It must be from the plant, there must be some problem.'

'Definitely, who will call at this time to extend courtesies?' Saroj used to turn over.

He used to put the phone to his ear.

'I say, you are an engineer or a doctor. Even doctors don't receive so many emergency calls. ' Saroj used to taunt, 'The plant always has some problem or the other.'

He also used to feel almost likewise. The phone, as if not the sound, but a limb of the plant used to come out and shake him, 'Get up friend, you are sleeping comfortably. See me, I work round the clock. I am having headache. Do something.'

And he used to feel it his duty to do something. He used to get engrossed in his work, take complete report about the defect in the plant, give a ring to the concerned staff, give directions, and when the phone did not prove to serve the purpose, head towards the plant in his car leaving the family members sleeping in the house. Street lights on the deserted roads in the desolate night appeared to

him to be whispering!

The plant is his bosom friend, a part of his consciousness. He cannot see it in pain. Even while taking a round in the plant, he used to feel as if there are scattered around him not the machines but his pet animals. That he is not in-charge of the plant, but of some zoo. Lions here ... deer there ... snakes yet there ... all attached to him, and he loving them. On the complaint of the motor getting hot, he used to put his hand on it, caress it, as if he was consoling some sick pet animal. His hands had acquired the thermometer type of the magic touch. Without looking inside, he used to tell the temperature just by a touch of his hands.

He had developed a magical relationship with sounds. The sounds of the machines almost directly used to talk to him. By the sound of the safety valve or a change in the rhythm of the turbine, he used to get the message that the machine is groaning.

These very sounds had frozen in his ears. Sounds soaked in coal and ashes—meanings getting jumbled up, data like flourishing bushes in the farms of light, His maximum time had been spent in the plant; therefore, he had cut off from the outside world. Saroj used to say sometimes, 'Like the tribal people, we are plant people. Our children also should get the reservation quota in all the services. You are not

aware what is happening outside. Sometimes, take leave and attend to your parents for sometime, then you will find what is happening to the family property. See, we will not be able to construct our house and your younger brother Vinay, who lives with your parents, will manage everything. He will wangle the best portion of the house.'

Saroj 's words used to appear to him as meaningless voices coming from far off. 'Everything will be right, why to hurry. For the time being, sincerely perform the work in hand. This is the only significant thing.' he used to think. He used to convince himself and Saroj too.

Really, his ears had become so habituated to the sounds of the plant that he developed distance from the outside sounds. And one day he realized that the membrane of his left ear was losing its sensitiveness. He was becoming hard of hearing - hearing test also confirmed the same. He was shaken from inside. The voice of any person in front also seemed to him to be coming from afar. When he could not properly hear other persons in the meetings, then he used to hesitate in giving decisions - either he used to nod, or turning his right ear towards that side in helplessness, used to request people to repeat. He was embarrassed many times due to his handicap. But since he was the chief of the plant, nobody could directly point to him his weakness; rather,

everybody used to help him out only — used to speak loud enough for him to hear. On his back, people used to pity him and say. 'The scoundrel is deaf. But he quickly picks up the things of his interest; for other things, he remains deaf.'

'What were the things of his interest?' he used to think, ' the sounds of the machines; yes, they had not lessened for him. He was not deaf for the machines. He was not dependent on his ears to hear and understand the sound of the machines. Through his extra-sensory power, the pain of the plant almost used to rise on the screen of his mind.

There was an emergency in the plant that night. The safety valves shrieked. The steam of the 'hagger' kept on roaring for long. A phone call came for him from the control room - the phone kept on ringing, but the phone was not attended. The shift engineer was surprised - what has happened to Sahib? Earlier, it had happened so many times that sahib had heard the sound of the pain of the plant from his home before him, and he had come to know about it afterwards on phone. But today... now ...

Putting his hands on the ears, somebody spoke, 'these have retired. The body parts start retiring one by one before the superannuation of the officers. First, his ears have gone, and then eyes will go. The body and its parts age separately.

The speaker fell silent all at once since he had suddenly appeared at the control room door in his night suit.

'Sir, I was making a call to you only.' The shift In-charge said, taken aback.

'I had gone straight to the boiler. I am coming from there only. The furnace has opened up near the 'C' row burner. Such a big leakage! What were the other indications?'

Everyone in the control room used to get stunned beyond wits. All the things started moving in the right track — as usual!

After his departure, whispers started again, 'The old man is incorrigible. It appears that some transmitter of the plant is directly connected to his mind.'

When his difficulty started increasing in the meeting, he started using the 'hearing-aid' machine much against his desire, heeding to Saroj's advice and the doctor's. He used to keep the battery in the pocket and put the machines in his ears. He used to feel awkward. Immediately after the meeting, he used to take out the machine as if till then he was doing some obscene activity in the open. He could not manage much for long. It appeared to him that by using the machine, his weakness had become evident to the world. He himself used to feel inferiority in his personality. People used to be over-awed by his brashness without the machines. Many

problems relating to management used to get solved by the dint of his command. He appeared to lose this facility due to the machines. Sometimes, he used to think - A man's body becomes dependent on so many crutches - specs for the weakness of the eyes, hearing machine for ears and wig for a balding scalp. If he starts using all the crutches, it will seem as if he was part of some drama with make up. He is not living his real life.

Then he used to hear the voice of the plant. 'See me, how much I limp. You can see the stress on my limbs. There is no proper care still I am running. I am going on producing with varieties of make ups.'

This does happen. The world moves in this way, like the law of nature. Men and plants keep on moving, not like the trees, but like mountains, moon and the sun, and the rotation of the seasons. Nobody pauses. As if the man made plants are also a part of nature. To keep them moving is the same divine work like keeping the time in motion. Coming to this turn of his thoughts, he used to experience unfathomable self-confidence and power of the Creator of the universe within himself and feel re-assured.

But after coming to Delhi, this re-assurance seemed to be slipping out of his hands. He was feeling himself helpless. Surrounded from all sides by buildings, roads, vehicles and cosmopolitan thinking

of people, he had become restless and unprotected. He was not able to understand which complicated plant he is embroiled with. Conversant to the core with the site plant, he was a total stranger for this cosmopolitan plant. As if the same plant had totally changed on paper.

On his transfer to Delhi, congratulations had poured in from all sides. 'Sir is going to the headquarters. Delhi is the control room of the company. The whole country is controlled from Delhi. It appeared that Sir has long hands on his approaches; otherwise, people spend their whole life and never reach Delhi. Now, the exile of his career is over. Now he will enjoy the city life. It will be easier there lobbying for the next promotion. Approach with the big shots becomes easy - in Delhi. In any case, he is due for promotion. There is competition too. It appears that they have chosen you only; that is why, they are calling you to Delhi and have sent Saluja Sahib here at the site in your place.'

In spite of being happy superficially, he knew that things would not be so easy in Delhi. Going to Delhi on official duty for some days and staying in luxury hotels and moving throughout the day in taxi, and living in Delhi are two very different things. He used to say to the people — 'Brother, I am not going to Delhi as PM. The problems there are different.'

He got a house at a rent of nine hundred Rupees more than his entitlement. He bore these nine hundred Rupees as residence tax of Delhi. Saroj was prepared in advance. She sold off many items at the site itself. There it was a huge bungalow with four - five rooms, and here only a flat with two bedrooms. When it pinched, she used to say — 'It is a house or a nest. Just stay—hovering... it was so spacious there. I used to grow all the vegetables. And also used to distribute in the colony there, it is an additional fine of nine hundred...'

He also used to feel the brunt when he could find parking space with much difficulty after coming back in the evening. There were more vehicles than the number of flats. There was a scramble for space. He used to remember his site bungalow where the guard used to run to open the gate at the hoot of his car. Here there was no company car or the driver. His own Ambassador car, unused for long, was the only support. He used to drive it himself. Due to the company vehicles with him for years together, personal Ambassador was in a bad shape. Now it was perhaps taking revenge of this neglect. In any case, it was not habituated to movement nor had any experience of Delhi traffic. Like him, the car also didn't have any experience of the cosmopolitan plant. Both used to sympathise with each other and also were apprehensive. Neither, he had confidence in the vehicle, nor the vehicle in him.

That day, he came down from the office. The car didn't start. Most people had left. He started feeling helpless and unsafe. People were passing by but nobody was concerned in the least. Could it ever happen in the plant? He had just to indicate to anyone passing by, and he would have stood there with folded hands, for carrying out his orders. By now, tens of people would have assembled. Besides, another vehicle would have come quickly.

Seeing no other scope, he concentrated on his engineering knowledge and started checking the battery terminals after opening the bonnet. He was always engrossed in the intricacies of the huge machines of the plant, he never paid any attention to the car. Today, this machine is becoming a challenge. Along with sweat, his patience also started shedding. He also started panting. Whom to approach for help? Till now, people have been approaching him for help. Now when he has come to the state of seeking help, he realized the pain of this situation.

He was not having the ear machine, still it was as if he was hearing the loud sounds of the laugh of people. Although everybody was going his own way in a detached manner, he was feeling as if everyone was passing comments on his helplessness.

From time to time, he was looking at the passers by with the hope that on

eye contact, somebody might enquire, but here everybody seemed accustomed to avert such a glance. He was engaged in the wires of the car. Theoretically, he was grasping the snag, but did not have the courage to open the distributor with the spanner and screwdriver. Giving up, he locked the car and asked the shopkeeper in front— 'Where can I find a mechanic?'

The shopkeeper guided him. He set out in that direction pessimistically. He was feeling awkward. Such a big engineer of such a huge plant is dependant today on a small-time mechanic.

'It is the vagaries of times', he consoled himself. After crossing dirty lanes, he enquired about the mechanic. He found the mechanic in a thatch near the drain. 'The car is just not starting', he said humbly.

'I will check immediately; what is the make?'

'Ambassador.'

'Ok', the mechanic heard and got busy with his work. Two more people were standing. After repairs, he started talking to them. He kept on looking at him for a few minutes. Then he started feeling restless due to this neglect. Darkness had also started spreading and a sense of insecurity had started thickening in him.

'That car...'

'We will just go there, Sahib.'

'Please hurry up. It is getting dark.'

'If you are in a hurry, you may check with someone else; yes, I will charge a hundred Rupees for only checking the vehicle. '

Gulping this insult, he said, 'First, start it.'

'It is not my concern whether it starts or not. If there is any major fault, then repair charges will be extra. I am telling in advance. Afterwards, I won't have any argument.' saying this, the mechanic again got busy with another work. He did not care to know his reaction. He was having intense reaction within himself. He had the sudden impulse to return and try himself. The increasing din of the traffic, thickening darkness, rising dust, enveloping smoke - everything together was increasing the sense of insecurity in him. During emergency in the plant, he had got the work done by standing throughout the night - despite all the tension, he had never felt such insecurity, inferiority and anxiety as he was feeling that day for his personal car. Suddenly, he took the decision that it was useless depending upon that mechanic and he returned without saying anything. He thought it of no use enquiring about any other mechanic. Finding a taxi, his management oriented mind thought of an idea. He told his problem to the taxi-driver and proposed to him to tow his car home. The taxi driver asked for double the fare. It occurred to him

- Saroj is right that if you want to run the vehicle of life smoothly in Delhi, you have to fill it with the petrol of currency notes. Recalling this stratagem, he agreed with alacrity. That day, Saroj said before sleeping— 'Our car has become old. Sell it off and take a new Maruti.'

'That is fine, but you know the price of a new Maruti. How will we afford it? Almost half the salary is exhausted on the expenses of Punit and Navnit. Now it is not the hostel life of our days that monthly expenditure would be managed within a few hundred rupees. These days, the monthly expenditure of college students exceeds seven — eight hundred rupees. This is the monthly salary of many people.

'We were having a nice time at the site. We are caught up in Delhi. We are yet to find any positive point. About the office, you know better. In running the household, I am facing problems only.' Saroj said irritatingly, 'Now, this water crisis is another problem. '

'What to say of the office? It may improve after sometime. Till now, things are so so. I am still trying to comprehend it. I cannot understand the office set up here. It seems that files also move like vehicles in the heavy traffic. I am not habituated to such an atmosphere. If I move cautiously, there is a danger of lagging behind. I cannot apprehend when the junior person overtakes. It is an ocean Saroj, where officers are sailing with different

sizes of boats of their respective posts. They are drowning one another. There are big ships in this ocean . Compared to them, the small boat of my post is a dwarf. Now, what do I say? We are trapped like rats in small air-conditioned holes of multi-storeyed buildings according to the entitlement of our posts and keep on nibbling the papers of the files falling in our hands. We have to pull important files; otherwise, there would be nothing to nibble. The garbage of responsibility comes to our share; whereas, either seniors devour the cream of importance, or the junior misappropriates it in collusion with the seniors.'

'Why don't you also become cunning like them?'

'It is difficult. Even if I try, the risk of failing and becoming a laughing stock is there. You know well that till now I have been discharging my work in this, manner only -like a satellite revolves with a constant speed by getting set far from the earth in its orbit so that it faces the specified side and does its job. I have worked by maintaining a similar distance from the top management. Still, I have to re-think now.'

'You will become Director by next year, and then it will be comfortable. Then we will get the company's car and driver, and also a big bungalow.'

'Khanna will retire next year. There

is a chance. Everybody says that I have been called to Delhi in place of Saluja so that I may replace Khanna Sahib when the time comes; but nothing can be said.'

'Why, has something gone wrong?'

'I cannot understand the equation here. There is a lot of liquidity in the official atmosphere of Delhi. Its shape is never fixed. The map changes daily. I am not able to assess my position. Still, I have all the hopes.'

'God will take care of everything. You have got work done throughout your life. You have erected and run many plants. One CMD has commended you. Khanna Sahib himself likes you. Whenever he visited the site, he used to come to us over dinner ...'

'That is fine. But let us see what happens.'

'Now the water problem has started. It appears that water does not reach the overhead tank. Earlier, it was not so. Direct supply of water is only for half an hour these days. Now how much water can we store?'

'Why, what do residence association people say? They must be doing something.'

'They say that shanty towns have increased in the nearby areas. Another colony has also come up. The demand for water has increased; therefore, they have reduced the time. This year, the summer is also acute ...'

‘But Mrs. Verma of the front flat and Mrs. Roy down below are not so much disturbed. Whenever I talk about water, they sympathize with me, but it does not appear that they are really worried.’

‘True, you cannot tell about anyone by superficial exchange of words who is worried how much due to what reason, and not worried for what; but they are well-settled in Delhi for long.’ ‘Not only well-set, they are happy too. They say there is no heaven like Delhi. You can have all the facility with money. Every service at your door is just a phone call away.’

‘But from where do they bring so much money?’

‘It comes of its own. Mrs. Verma was saying - You need to have only your own house in Delhi and one secure job or shop. Then money pulls money. She has invested at many places, has booked two flats, has also booked Maruti. They also invest in the real estate, advance loans on interest. Their money increases automatically without their having to do anything. Delhi has many chances; it is just like a flowing river. You just have to put your wheel in it; it will go on spinning on its own.’

‘And perhaps water also does partiality with such people. Only they have more supply and it avoids us.’ He said.

‘Who knows? Why do comforts and

facilities shun us? We must again go on pilgrimage to Haridwar— Rishikesh. Taking a dip in the holy Ganges, it may do us some good. It was my intention also to go on pilgrimage throughout the north on coming to Delhi.’

‘What will come out of it?’

‘It is a matter of faith. People say putting on the bell-metal ring of that place gives one a peace of mind and many such things give favourable results.’

‘As if this bell-metal ring is an influential leader or officer that will get the things done just by a wink.’ he said and himself got surrounded all at once by the mist of his beliefs. Perhaps Saroj may not be wrong, but his conscience also does not want to rest upon these beliefs; it oscillates every time. Can he say with firmness that whatever he has gained and lost till date, he himself and his deeds are responsible for that? Such a vast system, such huge plants - are they running only because of some divine power? Or whatever everybody is doing with his limitations, that is his specified contribution in running the grand plant of the whole creation - like a small cog.

Suddenly, guttural sound started coming from the water tap. Saroj said, ‘It seems that water has come. I keep the tap turned on in the night to know when the supply comes.’

‘You will store water at two O’clock

in the night?’

‘Yes, you take it as the tax of living in Delhi. Otherwise the overhead tank will not fill.’

Saroj got up, but he got engrossed in even deeper thoughts. At the site, untimely phone calls from the plant used to awake him, and here water taps start coughing anytime in the night. Is his sleep so meaningless and valueless as to be sacrificed for a necessity like water. He was strangely terrified. Has he got trapped in some conspiracy by coming to Delhi? Are all these things a matter of fate? If he becomes Director, his posting to Delhi will be called auspicious. Motives are formed like this. Something is destined to happen, that is why he is here. Otherwise, depending upon his vigorous exertion, he should strive and go back to the site. Had he wanted, he would have declined to come to Delhi at that time itself. Be that as it may, one cannot control all the consequences. If the deeds and exertions of a man act ninety nine per cent, the last one percent definitely belongs to the unknown power. And that is the deciding percentage. Till the time that unknown chairman and managing director signs it, no file of any consequence is cleared.

His consciousness also started getting darkened along with his thoughts and he started listening to sounds of rumbling.

That day, while getting down the stairs,

he heard the same rumbling sound from the flat in front - after all, what has happened to me. What is this sound? He scratched his ears. He set out towards the colony park . The same sound in the flats adjacent to the park were heard. He felt that he has actually become a victim of delusions. After all, it is a residential area of concrete - not an industry of machines; then why does he continue to hear the sound of the running machines.

After coming home, he said to Saroj, ‘See, what sort of rumbling sound is coming from the flat above.’

‘They must be using the washing machine or the mixie.’

‘Yes, you are right. Everybody is having washing machines here, mixies also. But so much vibration by their running. It appears to me that something else also runs in their flats. Sounds come from the garages in the passage also.’

‘What could it be? Some people have installed boosters.’ Saroj said suddenly.

‘Booster pumps’, his eyes glowed. ‘That is why, they are not having water problem.’

‘You also get one booster installed. Water will rise to the overhead tank. It will be a great comfort.’ Saroj suggested.

‘It is a rented house. The landlord should install it. Why should we spend? You know the expense of installing the booster. Then all these are illegal.’ He

was agitated.

'The house may belong to the landlord, but for the time being, it is ours. We have to cope with it. Illegal, my foot. Here people keep on draining water without telling anyone.'

'Other's share also. You know, now I understand why there is deficiency of water. Those having boosters draw the pressure out of the pipeline. Nothing is left for others. Those who don't have boosters, face difficulties.'

'That is why, a booster is essential, whether you install it in the garage or in the bathroom. Have you not seen, the tank of Mrs. Roy always overflows. In our tank, there is not even a drop of water.'

'But due to this lack of trust, if everyone goes on installing boosters, what will happen to the general system and the common man?'

'Same, what is happening to us. Get up at unearthly hours in the night, fill water and spend life in wrangling.'

This time he could not dispute Saroj's logic. Till now, he had not noticed this truth. If one wants to draw adequate water for one's, convenience from the public pipelines laid for the distribution of water, then it is necessary to install a booster, regardless whether others get the water or get less. Within himself, he started calculating the cost of pump head for the

booster and the motor rating, but his mathematics was not getting clear in the twilight of understanding.

As usual, Saroj was apprising him of the colony news. 'Mrs Verma has a stock of woolen clothes. She is giving pashmina shawl for four hundred only. Should I take two or three. I will send it to my mother's house. They are very costly there.'

'What is the guarantee that they are cheap here?'

'Goodness, they are known to us.'

'But business from home?'

'Some acquaintance of hers has kept the stock. She is giving me for four hundred. Otherwise, it does not cost less than five hundred. And listen, saris are available cheap at Mrs. Kaul's. Here everybody is doing some part time business sitting at home. Mrs. Roy was offering me to start some part time business jointly. Let us start a school, run a beauty parlor or make pickles or papad. Whatever you do, it flourishes.'

He was clearly seeing the image of the passion natural to women in his wife's voice. 'You decide for yourself. Otherwise also, wives of big shots do all such things illegally to save income tax on paper.'

After that, whenever he passed in front of the flat of Mr. Roy, the rumbling sound used to sound louder. In any case, he used to hear the same rumbling in a low

sound coming from all the flats.

He had a strange frustration. Whenever he used to go to Lajpat Nagar Market or Connaught place with Saroj, he constantly used to hear the same rumbling sound coming out of the splendid shops and show rooms. As if the sound had frozen in his ears. Different from the din and bustle of the traffic, that rumbling sound of the machine-pump - it used to spin around. Despite his desire, he was not able to share his anguish and agony with anybody. When he told Saroj, she averted it. She said as always - 'You are habituated to the plant. You hear the same sounds here in Delhi also. People use washing machines, mixie and booster here. That is all... can their sound be that loud?'

Suddenly Saluja entered his cabin. He often comes from the site. Feigning a smile on his face, he used to get cautious, 'Welcome Saluja, when did you come?'

'I have reached just now.' Saluja said.

'What is the matter? You are paying regular visits to Delhi?'

'Coming here is essential. I have come straight to salute you. Brother, some pleasantries without any investment. Tomorrow you will become Director, then you will have some consideration for small-time people like us.' Saluja laughed with a grin.

'Why are you making fun.' he said.

But he was happy within himself. 'Tell me, what is the news of the plant?'

'You consider that it still remembers you. One has to admit, you have made a good impression there. People apart, even the plant sings your praise. I am an inept. I have left Delhi for the first time. I don't much understand the plant. You assume that I am reaping the harvest of your good deeds. You have managed so well that there is no problem there.'

'A flood of happiness had welled up in him. He fixed his gaze on Saluja - perhaps he was right. But he must not forget that this juggler of words sitting in front is his competitor. Can he himself praise Saluja by saying with ease - Oh, Saluja, if you become the Director by chance, then have some consideration for me. Please register my cornice in your court from now itself.'

On coming home, he told Saroj, 'Today Saluja had come to the office. '

'Well, what was he saying? He makes trips of Delhi very often.' Saroj said.

'What can he do, his family and home are here.'

'Then he must be trying his level best to come back to Delhi.'

'Who knows?'

'You must be a cause of unease for him very much. He had to go to the site because of you. '

‘It could be said. But he is very clever ... he was telling - if I become Director, then his investment on flattering me will stand him in good stock.’

‘That means he has also guessed that you have been brought to Delhi to replace Mr. Khanna as Director. ‘

He wanted to say that she was right and that there was nothing wrong in it. After all, Saluja has spent his entire career comfortably in Delhi. He has never faced the dust of the plant. What does he know about the plant.

But overtly he said, ‘Nothing can be said. Let us see what happens. If everything goes well, then let us take it as a reward for all our struggles and inconveniences after coming to Delhi.’

Such apprehensions turned any time into voices hovering around him. The cloak of urbanism was spread everywhere. He used to think that people have put with ease the ‘hearing aid’ of cosmopolitan thinking in their mind. This machine is any time more powerful than his real ‘hearing aid’. Even after taking out the ‘hearing aid’, he used to hear loud and strange sounds.

That abiding moment of verdict came and passed by too. That evening, he silently lay on the bed after coming home—he was despondent, as if a huge bulldozer had crushed him. He felt like crying his heart out. Otherwise also, he was feeling

a lump in the throat. Saroj kept mum. She had already known it through his phone call.

‘How did it happen? Till yesterday, your name was doing the rounds. Suddenly, today...’ He burst out, ‘Oh, Saluja has kept under his thumb Khanna and many other big shots. It is as if he wears the bell-metal ring in his fingers. It is all the effect of this.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘The meaning is dawning upon me now. When Saluja’s order came out, Raina was telling—Sir, it is an old game. Saluja is Khanna Sahib’s pub-chum. They often drink together in the evening. Saluja has a big hold. His brother is a very big builder. He has got relations in the Ministry. He managed the plot for Khanna Sahib and got his house constructed. He was retiring. Saluja had only one hindrance in becoming the Director in his place that he was not having any site experience. Therefore, in the last moment, he was sent to the site in place of you just to fulfill this formality. You have been used just like a pawn in this game. It was already fixed with Khanna Sahib that Saluja would become the Director.’

‘Oh, now I get the point.’ Saying this, Saroj also sulked.

He became silent. With the stillness, spread the terror. Many sounds started creeping towards him like serpents. He

got up and came in the balcony. A dumb uproar was rising far and away. Diabolical, dumb voices were emanating from the high-rise buildings, mansions and streets;

he was not surprised - his ears were buzzing; but now he was no longer finding the machine- sound of the heavy boosters unfamiliar.

Rajesh Jain, born 1949, has been an engineer by profession and a writer by passion. He has authored a great number of books in Hindi, some of which are— Bird Hit, Sooraj mein kharonch and Baandh Vadh. He has many collections of short stories too. He has penned a few science based books for children. He retired from the post of general manager NTPC. Rajesh has been honoured with Arya Smriti Samman from Kitabghar. He lives in Delhi.

Shailendra Nath, is director of National Academy of Defence Production in Nagpur and he likes to translate from Hindi to English whenever he likes what he reads. He lives in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

THE PIANO

Rekha

Translated by
Jai Ratan

A beautiful kothi nestled among lofty pine trees. It is called *Sunny Cradle*. It is no doubt old and in a dilapidated condition but even so its appearance suggests that it must have been a beautiful building in the years gone by.

Going through the iron gate if you turn to the right, you come to a lawn behind the *kothi*. The lawn has suffered from neglect and holds an old solitary iron bench, the kind one still chances upon here and there along the lonely and isolated Shimla hill roads. These benches remind one of middle-aged Memsahabs, English boys off from their schools and old retired army officers who must have sat on these benches for a breather before resuming their walk.

I am sitting on the bench in the lawn. Close by my side sits Nurie, her back resting against the bamboo trellis of the verandah looking onto the lawn. When Nurie starts talking she goes on and on. Looking like a character stepping out of a story, even now there is no stopping her as she starts spinning out a story.

“Yes, Saheb, it was a beautiful *kothi* once upon a time,” she says.

“But now it looks as tumbledown and bedraggled as the people living in it.”

I hear a piano being played somewhere in the *kothi*. The musical notes come wafting on the air and float round me and Nurie.

“Who’s playing on the piano, Nurie?” I ask her, halting her flow of words.

“Grace Miss Saheb. She was a piano teacher once upon a time.

“When she is sad she is at it for hours together. If she takes a liking for you she won’t mind playing for you too.”

“Since when are you here, Nurie?” I interrupt her to ask.

“I must have been fourteen or fifteen when I came here. I know you will ask her age. Saheb, it’s not easy to tell her age. She’s not like Hindustani women who solidify as soon as they turn forty. She is a white Memsahab. What’s her clan and what’s her caste I just don’t know. In fact nobody knows. White skin is the only distinguishing mark of this race. People say one can find the age of a tree from its bark. As for her, you can do so only if one can see her from close quarters. Her legs are like the branch of an eucalyptus tree and she covers them with nylon net... ”

“Nurie, what brought you here to stay with them? You should have been the owner of a village *haveli* (mansion).” I looked into her alert, gray eyes to read her past. But she brushed aside my question and continued. “So, Saheb, as I have been telling you I used to come to these *Saab log’s* house with my mother. These people called my mother ayah. She had spent her entire life in the service of these people.

My mother married me to an employee of the *kothi*, a man with an odd sort of name. Oh, yes, they called him Steward or some such thing.

“When mother became very old she went back to her village and I took her place and did the same work that she did. I almost became a part of this place. I don’t remember how long ago it was. I have lost count of the years. But I suppose I’ll be sixty this winter. It was about ten years ago. I remember it for we had a heavy snowfall that year. It was Christmas night. It was in the adjacent *kothi* that my man drank off a full bottle. He fell asleep and never woke up again. From that day till this day I’ve managed to pass my life here. May God give long lives to these sisters. It’s because of them that this Nurie who’s now sitting before you has not gone without food even for a day... As for tomorrow, I leave it to God.”

“Nurie, did anyone else live in this *kothi* before them?”

“Oh, I see. So that’s what has brought you to this *kothi*—the talk that’s going round about it. Now that you have asked, I shouldn’t hold back anything. People say that this house does not belong to these sisters. They had an Auntie. She was childless and had called these sisters to live with her in her old age. Now it is upto them and upto their ways what they do about it. For that matter, at the

time of her death the old woman did not bequeath this *kothi* to the sisters. This hag was a drunkard and an inveterate gambler. When dead drunk she would assign *Sunny Cradle* to anyone on whom her eyes fell. No one knows what the legal documents say but the general belief is that *the kothi* legally belongs to the sisters. Even the hillock on which the *kothi* is situated goes by the name of Memsahab's Hillock."

"Memsahab's Hillock! What a name, Nurie! By that token, they must also be calling it Memsahab's Kothi."

"Saheb, it seems you are new to this place. Otherwise you would not have come to me to enquire about this *kothi*. Who is not familiar about the 'saga' of this house? There are so many stories current about it. Some say it's a haunted house and even now the old woman's soul stalks this place. Others think that it is the abode of ghosts. Saheb, to tell you the truth, some even hold the view that these Memsahabs are mad

"What these sisters talk among themselves is anybody's guess. I don't understand a word of it. And how can I? The foreign tongue they speak is a harlot. Even after so many years it has refused to be mine."

"Nurie, when you don't understand their language how have you been able to carry on with them for so long?"

"Arre, Saheb, what's there to understand? Don't take this Nurie for a stupid woman. She can easily get the hang of things. What else could they talk about except those glorious times and the glorious hill station that Shimla used to be—*kothis*, bungalows, villas, clubs, gymkhana, when life was an unending round of fun and more fun.

Oh, how the British ruled over the country. But with Independence everything was gone in a trice. The tents that the Britishers had pitched centuries ago were uprooted in a minute and the vilayati sahebs sailed away to their country in shiploads. They were all gone but not these two sisters. God knows why they remained pinned to this place. If asked, they replied, 'We were born here. This country is dear to us'. Their parents are dead and gone and have become dust unto dust. Whether they have any kith and kin only The One Above knows. Oh, yes, about ten years ago—my man was living at that time—they went on a sojourn to Vilayat. We thought they were gone for good. But back they came after having a jolly good time there. That day has merged into today and they still wander inside and outside the *kothi* following each other like shadows—still virgins, I mean spinsters."

"Nurie, have they no old friends living in the city? Somebody must be coming to meet them?"

“No, none-none that I know of. Saheb, now only prospective buyers call on them. People like you. Some more may call in the evening. This has been going on for the past many years. but who can say when the sale will come through? Well, I must make a move. I have to sweep and clean the drawing room. Whenever a visitor is expected Memsahabs remind me about it half a dozen times. Saheb, I’m getting late. The cigarette that you are smoking must be an expensive one. My mistresses have stopped smoking. It’s an expensive habit, they say .. They scrape and scrounge and it’s only then ... well, what’s there to say? The only thing that I have learnt from the white sahebs is to mind one’s own business ...

“So, Saheb, if you want to meet them come in the role of a buyer.

They don’t trust others. Jot down your name and address on a piece of paper and I’ll take it in to them. They will call you in if they are so inclined or ask you to come some other time. ‘We are very busy just now. Some urgent work,’ they will put forward the plea.”

“What kind of urgent work, Nurie? They can’t be upto much in this old age, anyway.”

“So you want to know what kind of urgent work? They darn holes in socks, stitch hooks on brassiers, open old boxes and taking out old clothes from them, fold and unfold them. They unlock and re-lock fifty doors of the house, discuss

women’s fashions from fifty year old English magazines. If an electric fuse blows up out goes a petition to the Minister of electricity and if an old handkerchief is lost they address a report to the senior most police officer. When there is no response they end up by abusing the country and its useless government.”

Suddenly Nurie gets up and goes in. Perhaps it is in response to a signal from her mistress. She returns with a pen and piece of paper on which I am asked to jot down my name and address. She goes in again and keeps me waiting for about ten minutes before putting in another appearance. This time she looks very formal as if it was someone else who had been talking to me. “Come tomorrow morning,” she says. “Sharp at ten. My Memsahabs will meet you in ‘Morning Glory’-that is in the morning room. You may go now.”

It is the beginning of December. ‘Morning Glory’ is in the eastern part of *Sunny Cradle*. Rising like late latif, the sun coming through the many windows caresses everything in the room. Miss Grace is bending over a map spread on a table. She almost jumps in her chair as she spots the names of some cities on the map and circles a name with a long slim pencil.

“Ruby, come here. Be quick!” Ruby goes up to her. “What’s it?” she asks. “Won’t you let me sit in peace? Can’t you see the swelling in my knees? What a terrible winter! I don’t know when ...” She takes

out a handkerchief from the pocket of her hand woven brown woollen skirt and wipes her nose.

“That’s what I want to tell you, dear. When we go to England, home sweet home, we shall stay in posh hotels in all the cities that I’ve marked on the map .. Ruby, don’t be so gloomy, dear. What a beautiful sunshine! Now smile Ruby.”

Grace is wearing a long deep blue tweed skirt and a sky blue pullover with polo neck and over it a necklace of big glass beads. She is about two inches taller than Ruby. It appears in her youth she must have been a bit lanky and Ruby plumpish.

Grace’s enthusiasm does not seem to work on her. “You just read out to me the names of these cities,” she says in a listless tone. “Today my eyes are watering more than usual.”

“Hm, a week in London. Make it a fortnight if you so wish it.

And then ... and then ... Oh, how I wish we had all that money.”

“Grace, let me make it clear to you. I’m not going to live here any longer. Not under any circumstances. I hate this country, this atrocious weather.”

“Don’t worry, my dear. We shall sell off the house, the lawn and the servant’s quarters-everything. All told, it will fetch us a lot of money. Listen, this time I’m going to buy you a new coat. Your coat looks so worn out. Ruby, when did we

buy it?”

“We never bought it. How forgetful you are! When I was working in that London store its proprietor ... ”

“Oh, Ruby could there be a greater fool than you? You should have known that he was in love with you. You should have married him. You were indeed a fool. What if he was older than you in age? He would have died that much earlier. You wouldn’t have to bear with him for long.”

“How could I have married him, Grace? You would have been left alone. I couldn’t desert you.”

“I could have lived alone all right. And there was that army doctor.”

“Yes, I remember him. A brave man indeed if there was one.

You called me a fool but what about you? If only you had fallen in with his wishes ... “

“No, Ruby, no. I know better. He was bold no doubt but he was something of a philanderer too. You must be remembering our last quarrel. I wish I knew if he is like that even now.”

“Now? He must be sleeping in his grave now. If I remember correctly he was seven years older than you. You know your age don’t you?”

“Maybe eighty.”

“Not eighty. It’s I who am eighty and

you are three years older than me.”

“Oh, Ruby, once upon a time we were also young.”

“Please don’t remind me of those days. Let’s go to the other room.

Grace darling will you play for me for a while? My mind has started woolgathering.”

“All right let’s go.”

“What’s the time? It must be getting on to be afternoon.”

“Oh, how I miss that wall clock! A pity that we sold it for fifty rupees. But there was no way out. For many days I had been pining for a sip of brandy.”

“Grace, we have still some *pilau* left. Get up. We shall eat in the dining room. Today I have laid the mats on the table—the ones which Major Douglas had sent to Aunt Lucy from Singapore.”

“You should have taken out those silver spoons too. There are only four of them left. We are not going to sell them. We must live in style. They should know that we belong to the race which has ruled over these people for ages. The wretch, Dhanpat! He was our butler and yet he had the audacity to purchase our cutlery. Oh, Ruby, why didn’t we also go away? Why didn’t we?”

“But Grace, where could we go? We were born here and grew up here. And that beautiful railway bungalow where we

lived. This city is like a native land to us. We are in love with it, aren’t we, Grace?”

“There was a time when we were in love with it, but not now. Is this hill station still the same as it was then? And are we also still the same? These people hate us. They will kill us.”

“Get up, Grace. Please get up ... This house is still beautiful. If . only I could get the roof painted.”

“But we are going to sell the house, aren’t we?”

“Of course, yes. We are not going to spend the next summer in this house. Before I become stone blind I want to stand on the London Bridge and look at the rippling water of the Thames from there.”

Before they know the December morning has merged into afternoon.

The last patch of sunlight has gradually dwindled and then disappeared. From the drawing room Grace and Ruby have moved into the other room called ‘Noon Tide’. Outside ‘Noon Tide’ lies an easy wicker chair whose green colour is peeling off in scaly patches. Near the chair lie some flower pots some of which hold geraniums which look flaming red in the creeping winter cold. Ruby and Grace are sitting in rocking chairs facing each other. Grace is steadily looking at her swollen finger knots while Ruby is dozing, a fluffy fat

cat with closed eyes perched on her thighs. Close by a mottled dog is lying stretched out on a dull green carpet. In *the* verandah a black bitch whimpers as she sniffs at her six puppies.

Suddenly Grace looks flustered and says, "Ruby, come here, come here. Look at my fingers. The scars look deeper and the knuckles have turned blue and red like beetroot. The skin also looks broken and rough. The hand looks so ugly like an animal's paw. How beautiful my hands looked when I played on the piano! How will I play on it now? Oh, my God!"

"It's the doing of those mischief mongers. When you are sleeping they scratch your fingers with blades. To disable you from playing. Grace, how can you live without playing on the piano? That's your life, your love. Oh, how you suffer, my dear, dear, sister!"

"Ruby, why is your hand shaking so much? Oh, my God! Oh, my precious Ruby!" Forgetting the pain in her fingers, Grace held Ruby's hands in her own.

"Those evil-minded women have done it. They badly twisted my hand while I was sleeping.-It almost bent double. I felt so embarrassed that I kept my hand tucked in my pocket. That reminds me of that youngman of the famous Jim Corbett family who as you know was in love with me. He was full of praise for my hands and said that they looked so beautiful and

small. I would tell him in jest that I could hold the reins of the most restive horses with those small hands of mine. Grace, once he had promised to take me on a long ride And then everything changed. Look, how my hands tremble."

"Ruby, do you mind coming a little closer? What's this mark that I'm seeing on your throat? How did it happen? And your eyelids! Your eyelashes look so thinned. Oh, God save us from those devils."

"They want that we should look old and scraggy. They don't know what an exalted family we come from."

"And look at my hair! They have thinned so much that I almost look bald. How thick, curly and golden my hair used to be! When we were in Bangalore one day the padre's son said to me that he wanted to touch my hair just to see how it feels to touch them."

"What a lovely city Bangalore was! The way the boys and the girls of the school where I taught music doted on me! Ruby, I've still got their group photograph. It was I who bought all the musical instruments for the school. They trusted me ... And now. I've to count the rupee change over and over again. So forgetful I've become."

"It's not that, Grace. This Jangbahadur who runs errands for us filches money while making purchases for us. He-always gives us two paisa or four paisa short.

He thinks we are fools and will never know. "I'm sure this snooty fellow makes us inhale something in our sleep. It befuddles our minds and we start behaving like fools."

"I say, are you hearing it? The *thuk, thuk* sound under the floor?"

It's again that machine at work. They must be making more of those counterfeit notes. Don't I know? They want to tempt us so that we fall into their trap and are put behind the bars. You know it, if they could have their way they would even put us in the lunatic asylum."

"Won't they be punished for it, dear Grace?"

"Of course, they will be punished. Did you hear that hurtling noise last night? The police had dumped these fellows in a truck and carried them off to jail. But no, a great change has come over the police officers too. Can we ever forget our cousin who was in the police? After Independence when Lord Mountbatten handed the rein of office to Jawaharlal Nehru—oh, how can you forget it? we saw the entire ceremony from beginning to end in that documentary film. Oh, God, our cousin looked so dashing!"

"Ruby, I fear Mountbatten is no more. I had written him a letter explaining to him that we were very unhappy here. We were feeling homesick and wanted to come back to England. But there was no

response from his side."

Nurie is sitting there set against the bamboo trellis undoing an old woollen sweater. I come and sit down on the same old iron bench and taking out a packet of cigarettes from my pocket light a cigarette. Nurie looks at my cigarette with greedy eyes. I offer her one and she takes it with alacrity. It is for the first time that I see a small tattoo mark on her chin. She must have been very vivacious in her younger days. I search for that young face through the rising cigarette smoke.

While unwinding her sweater, she also unwinds another story:

"So you have heard their life story," she proceeds. "I tell you, nobody ever strays this side. Not even thieves and their forefathers. As you know everyone grows old at one time. They had a gay time in their youth, dined on *murgh-e-musallam* (full baked hen), drank the choicest wines, went places. They had a whale of a time. But the little money that is now left in the bank how long is it going to last? And they are tormented by fears, most of them imaginary. Fear in their case takes two shapes. A man by the name of Chakravarty and a blue-eyed prostitute. It is such a bizarre mix-up. They will meet you, sit with you, chat with you. But the moment you are out of their sight some fellow by the name of Chakravarty immediately takes over

their imagination. And if the visitor is a woman, then as if by magic she changes into a blue-eyed prostitute. Perhaps their memory has got muddled. But they will never accept this fact. On the other hand they will put you in the wrong and start believing that you must be Chakravarty."

"It's not their fault, Nurie. In old age one becomes senile."

"I agree with you, Saheb. But I don't understand one thing. They vividly remember even the smallest details of what transpired years ago. For instance, on the last day of October in 1930 when there was a dance at Annandale which woman was wearing which frock? Was it lined or floral? They forget nothing. Not to talk of relatives and servants they even remember the names of cats and dogs that the family owned from time to time. Saheb, is it some kind of mental illness?"

"I'm not sure. It could be some kind of illness," I said making a grave face.

"If it's an illness how is it that both the sisters have identical trouble? If something has gone wrong with the heater Chakravarty is responsible for it. If the shoe hurts it's due to that blue-eyed prostitute. If the milk has curdled it's Chakravarty's doing."

"Nurie, how do you feel living with these sisters? Don't you get bored?" I asked in a subdued voice.

"Saheb, I pity them sometimes. They

look scared all the time, with not a moment's peace of mind. For hours they remain obsessed with one thing or the other. But can one fight against nature, Saheb? Sometimes I think that I should call it a day and spend my time in prayer and saying the rosary. But I can't leave them in the lurch like this, not at the fag end of their lives. They are solely dependent on me... *Arre*, I just forgot. What's the time? I'll be back in a minute. I must open the evening room."

The evening room is known as 'The Evening Shadow'. It holds three or four chairs and a teapoy. An old bookrack rests against the wall and a table in a corner. On a shelf rest some family photographs and a beautiful flower vase with flamboyant red flowers. In this room all the windows open onto the west through which the elongated shadows of the pines sway on the wall. The last rays of the sun falling on Ruby's silvery hair turn them golden. In this house everything looks so antique that it looks like an open page of history. Even Grace and Ruby look historic. Their faces framed against the windows are reminiscent of the centuries old British rule over India.

Nurie has already told them that I am here.

"Come in, please," Grace says without looking in the direction of the door.

"Good evening."

“Good evening. You may take this chair. In the evening I don’t like to sit with my back to the window.”

“I’m Nath-a Fellow of the Institute.”

“Please sit down, Mr Nath. I’m Grace Leacock, retired music teacher. And this is my sister, Ruby Leacock. She ... ”

“I’m not doing anything. I was a nurse. But I did not work as a nurse in this country.”

“I’m pleased to meet you.”

“Do you want to buy our house, I mean *Sunny Cradle*?”

“Yes, I would like to.”

“What do you mean I would like to? Don’t you have the money for it?”

“I’ve the money but...”

“Is it too big for you?”

“It’s not that.”

“Oh, I understand. You are a scholar and cannot look after *Sunny Cradle-is* that what you mean? Look, scholars are a bit soft at heart. Even the servants don’t listen to them. And scores of people live here. The cottages on the lower side of the building-look in that direction, to the right of the window. It was all our property but now the tenants have established their right over it. They don’t even pay us the rent. They say that the place does not belong to us.”

“Grace is right, Mr Nath. Yesterday

someone picked up a quarrel with her. They call us ‘Old Witches’. They keep teasing us in so many ways. They say that after our death *Sunny Cradle* will pass into their hands. Oh, they are going to kill us.”

“Miss Ruby, it can’t happen like that. The law is on your side.”

“Do you really think so? But I can’t believe it. Mr Nath, they say that the law is also in their favour. Nobody knows us here. The lawyers and the judge who were our friends have either passed away or have become too old. These new people just do not know us. They don’t know which family we belong to. Ruby, I think we should sell *Sunny Cradle* to Col. Batra. He looks so ferocious-the man who can throw out these troublemakers.”

“No, Grace, Mr Nath is the right person for us. He looks a gentleman and speaks immaculate English like us. Mr Nath, do you love animals?”

“Oh, yes, why not? I particularly love dogs. My wife and our daughter are also very kind... I mean to the dogs.”

“Oh, how nice. In our family we kept dogs of very good breeds.

We were proud of our pedigree dogs. Grace’s Hunter... wait I’ll show you his photograph.”

“And your Diana, Ruby! Just let me see. I may also have her photograph in the album.”

“Grace, you discuss the deal with Mr Nath. In the meanwhile I’ll go and give milk to Puffy. Poor Puffy, today we couldn’t spare an egg for her.”

“Mr Nath, when you come to live here you must take care of Puffy and Tom. They are like brother and sister. Ask your wife once in a while to give her an egg whipped in milk. Puffy is also very fond of pudding while Tom likes Marie biscuits. I wish we could take them along with us but there’s nothing we can do about it. Today Puffy drank off my share of milk. These animals can’t understand that times have changed. Hello, Puff, hello, Tom! Come, come. Look a friend has come.”

Two fat cats appeared from nowhere and began staring at me. “Look, how clever and obedient they are, Mr Nath,’ Ruby made caressing sounds. Grace suddenly remembered something.

“Mr Nath, once we were taken for a ride. You know our Henry.

We were really proud of him,” Grace said. “One day we realised to our surprise that Henry was only a dog to look at. In fact it was a bitch. A terrible loss indeed. We named her Henrietta. What else could we do?”

Ruby went in laughing.

Grace called after her, “Ruby can we get some tea?”

Ruby replied from inside the room, “But it’s going to be black tea. And there’s

no sugar.”

Grace suddenly turned grave, adjusted her glasses over her nose and brushed down her skirt. “Well, let’s talk business now,” she said.

“How much do you want for this *kothi*?”

“Some customers are willing to pay six lakhs. But you may pay five. ”

“Five lakhs?”

“Is it too much? Can you pay four lakhs? Two lakhs before we leave for England and you may pay two lakhs later on. O.K.?”

I took a long sigh.

“Now what’s the problem?”

“It’s quite a large amount and it will take me time to arrange for it.” “Mr Nath, there’s one Mr Dutt, a businessman. At one time he was also interested in our house. He was willing to pay five lakhs but we refused. We learnt that he was not honest. He evaded income-tax. We want clean money. We know you are honest, aren’t you? You must be. A scholar has to be honest. When you come to live here we shall leave all the books that you see in this rack for you. We won’t charge you anything for them. It will be a friendly gift for you. Only we won’t part with the gold embossed Bible. Ruby will like to take it with her. I hope you won’t mind it.”

“Miss Grace, can you show me your house documents-your will and all that?”

I want to make sure that everything is in order and in conformity with the law.”

“Sure, I’ll be back in a minute.”

Grace returns with an old but artistic looking wooden box from which she takes out some crinkly looking papers, gone yellow with age. From these papers she fishes out a small piece of paper.

“Here you are! This is Auntie’s will. But there is a rumour that some unscrupulous people had procured another will from her. Our lawyer is fighting a case against them. The government has also assured us that if we can prove that our will is the genuine one there will be no bar to our selling the property. There is no doubt that *Sunny Cradle* is ours. You can see that our grandfather’s and grandmother’s pictures are still hanging here.”

“Miss Grace, till the issue of your will is settled how can you sell *Sunny Cradle*?”

“We shall petition the Viceroy.”

“You can’t petition the Viceroy,” I said giving her an incredulous look. “But you may petition the Chief Minister.” I said this just to humour her. “Wait, let me bring pen and paper,” she said in all seriousness.

“Now please dictate,” she said coming back with the material.

“I’ll write in my own handwriting. Please start.”

“We have fallen on bad times,” I dictated. “Our money in the bank ... ”

“Wait, Mr Nath. We shouldn’t write this. They will think we are poor.”

“But what difference will it make?”

“Of course, it will make a difference. Nobody will respect us. Nobody will obey us.”

“All right, you may strike it out then.”

“I’ll write we are no more rich.” I further dictated-“We want to go away because we have grown old.”

“No, Mr Nath, we shouldn’t write like this. Instead I’m going to write that we are no more young.”

“As you like it. You are free to make any changes in your mature wisdom.”

I had started losing interest in the *kothi*. But the two sisters seemed to have pinned their hope in me. They offered me tea and urged upon me to come again.

Nurie came with me up to the gate. “Did they discuss the sale with you?” she asked. “Good, now you’ll be coming here quite often. They all come for a few days and hover around their lawyers with a copy of the will. And when they learn that even in her death this Auntie has not lost her hold on the *kothi* they give up in disgust.”

“So a lot of people come here? On the face of it, it appears that nobody ventures near the *kothi*. “

“Saheb, the real fun starts when two parties happen to visit the place at the same time. They fly at each other’s throats like paramours of the same woman. Anyway, it recoils to the advantage of my mistresses. These buyers compete with one another in pleasing them. But I know it for certain and so do the people living around here that this *kothi* will not change hands during their lifetime nor will they leave this place. I am myself in a fix. Although we have gained freedom I am still reeling under the slavery of these two women. I can’t usurp the small one-room outhouse in which I live and turn my face against them. After all there is something called humanity also. Nurie is no less faithful than their dogs.”

“You are right, Nurie.”

“Saheb, I don’t know what’s right and what’s wrong. We all seek our own interests. Oh, I forget everything once I start talking. They are expecting another caller. They can smell your presence right at the gate. These callers come thinking that they are too clever for these women but one never knows who is cheating and who is being cheated.”

Kothi or no *kothi* (for the question of the will was a complicated matter) to spend some time with Grace and Ruby was no less entertaining than watching cheap TV programmes. I enjoyed their company after racking my brain over books the whole day. Sometimes my wife and

daughter accompanied me. The two sisters were lavish with their comments on their dresses. “Mrs Nath, you wear beautiful saris. Is this your favourite colour? I also like pink in all its shades.” Grace has a keener eye. “Look, Ruby, what beautiful material! Is this an Indian-made sari? Really? I just can’t believe it.”

It is a winter evening. Sitting by the fireside we are basking in their past. Grace complains about the prohibitive price of firewood and says that she prefers to lie in bed rather than sit by the fireside. I feel happy that I had arranged for some firewood for the house. As the firewood crackles into a blaze the two sisters forget their woes and turn the golden pages of their past. Puffy starts purring and then cuddling herself in Ruby’s lap starts dozing. The sisters’ eyes remain fixed on the swiftly moving kaleidoscope of the past. They mumble transforming the pictures into words. They take into their stride cities, elephants, horses, armies on the march, constituting a whole cavalcade of the past.

Many a time Grace has taken me to the room where her piano rests.

It is a wonderful experience to see her playing on the piano. At a gentle touch of her fingers each note leaps up to caress her and the crowmarks on her face start fading. It would appear as if she has reversed half a century and returned to her thirties.

When I went to meet the sisters three days before Christmas, Ruby shifted closer to me and said in a grave voice, "Mr Nath, may I ask you one thing? Tell me the truth-are you a Jew?"

I knew in what light they generally held the Jews. Their fears, their vicissitudes, their racial tragedies were all eclipsed by one national trait-their inherent deceitfulness. Perhaps my friendship had become suspect in the eyes of these sisters. When I had no intention of buying their property what was my purpose in visiting them? What did I want of them? Was I also involved in some conspiracy against them?... That elusive Chakravarty...

I recognized that trembling fear behind Ruby's staid expression.

"Miss Ruby, I'm a *Hindustani*," I said in a reassuring voice. "What made you think that I'm a Jew?"

"There are Jews living in India also. But I can understand now.

They must be telling lies. The Vermas-they are also interested in buying our *kothi*."

"Forget about the *kothi* for the moment. Can't we meet as friends? Have you any objection to that?"

"Not at all. They told us that people wanted to kill us by poisoning us. All of them have their eyes on our *kothi*. Oh, yes, your wife had brought such

delicious *kheer* for us, Mr Nath, we haven't had *kheer* for years. Can you believe it? The sweepress who lives in our servants quarters was telling me the other day that they eat chicken every day. That's why she is so strong and can flap the *durrie* single-handed."

"Oh, no, she must be joking." •

"Then she must be eating chicken once a week if not every day."

"Maybe."

"And we haven't had chicken for the last six months."

Grace gave a start as she heard some noise. There were some monkeys in the garden.

"They come here in search of food," Grace said, "Our aunt used to sell all the fruit trees except one apricot tree for the monkeys to have a free run of it. The monkeys were happy. As they say if the belly is full nobody creates trouble. You understand?"

"Mr Nath, when we were studying in Loreto Convent a monkey snatched away my water bottle," Ruby said getting into a reminiscent mood. "You remember it, Grace, don't you? When we went with friends on a picnic to Jakhu we took a lot of nice photographs of monkeys. That baby monkey sitting on your shoulder..."

"Forget about it, Ruby. It is so painful to spend the remaining days of your life

in a city where you had spent such happy days. Even if I try to smile at the thought of those happy times it only brings tears to my eyes.”

“Grace, when did we go to the Mall Road last time? You remember we also had coffee at the Coffee House? When was it?”

“About three years ago when we had to go to the court in-connection with our will.”

“I don’t know when are we going to visit the Coffee House again. It’s impossible to walk such a long distance and the rickshaw fare is so forbidding. Are you listening, Grace?”

“Ruby darling, if you ask me, no more visits to the city. We should stay put in our *kothi*. And ... ”.

“Miss Ruby, thousands of tourists visit Shimla,” I said interrupting her. “It’s a beautiful hill resort. They call it the Queen of the Hills.”

“Queen of the Hills my foot! It’s a Beggar Queen, Mr Nath! With so many ugly buildings around, it creates such a chaotic scene. I feel like fainting.”

“Yes, Mr Nath, this place is not the same that we had left behind years ago. Oh, my beloved Shimla! It looks like a slum now.”

“Listen, have you ever been to Bangalore?” Ruby suddenly asked me as

if springing a surprise on me.

“Tell me the truth,” she continued without waiting for my answer.

“What does Bangalore look like now? I know like others you’ll also say that it’s a beautiful city. But we have heard that it has changed a lot and is not what it used to be when we were there We have an eye for beauty ... Don’t mind, Mr Nath. Just try to understand.”

“R-u-b-y!” Grace almost cried as if warning her sister not to run berserk. “India is a beautiful country,” she said turning to me. “And the people of this country are so nice. And it is quite possible that Bangalore is still as beautiful as it was before. And Shimla too ... “ She became sad.

“Then why do you want to leave this country?” I asked trying to give the talk a new turn.

“You won’t understand how cruel the winters here are. They make Ruby cry.”

“But the London winter is equally severe, isn’t it?” I countered.

“And you are used to this climate. The English had selected Shimla because its climate is akin to that of your country.”

“Yes, Mr Nath, you do have a point there. But the living conditions here and there are so dissimilar,” Grace said in an animated voice.

“ ... Mr Nath, the truth is that we

do not want to starve to death before the very eyes of the Indians. You have only to look at our bank pass book. Only another year to go. If we cannot sell *Sunny Cradle* during this period we shall never be able to leave for England. Do you know how much two air tickets cost? Oh, I dread to imagine this wretched end." Grace started sobbing.

"Be brave, Grace," Ruby said consoling her sister. "We have always put a brave face against our troubles." She gave me an apologetic look. "Please don't mind, Mr Nath," she said. "Today Grace is feeling very bad."

"Has something untoward happened?"

"Yes, something very sad. Today we have sold off our piano. The last song of our lives. It's gone for ten thousand rupees. A beautiful piano. It was with us for the last sixty years. A gift from Papa. You know Grace was a piano teacher. She could relate her fears, her sadness, her tension to-the piano through her fingers. Like a sympathetic friend the piano would

listen to her patiently. But. .. but what's going to happen now? Mr Nath, it was the last of our costly possessions which could stand by us. Mr Nath, I suppose ten thousand is quite a handsome amount, isn't it? To tide over the period till we sell our *kothi* and get our air tickets ...

Grace was sitting quiet resting her head against the back of the chair. Looking lost she kept staring at her fingers. A tear trickled down through the wrinkles under her eye.

Ruby gestured me to go with her out of the room. "I've to tell you something in secret," she whispered, looking warily around.

I held her hand in mine and pressed it gently. Feeling reassured she said, "You work in Viceroy's house, don't you? They have many old pianos lying with them for sale. If there is a cheap piano going at the auction please buy it. In your name. I want it for Grace."

Courtesy : Indian Horizons

Rekha, born 1951, has been principal of a govt college and has written several unforgettable short stories. Her collections are— chindi chindi sukh and apne hisse ki dhup. She lives in Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh.

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.

Memoir

To BE BABA NAGARAJUN

Bageshri Chakradhar

Translated by
Nishi Tiwari

Everyone is aware of the fact that Baba had adopted Buddhism. This shows that he was not influenced by the Vedic Vaishnav-Sanatan Dharma followed by those in power then. He was more in touch with the aspirations and longings of the common man. Moreover besides being influenced by the different sects of Buddhism, like, Mahayana, Hinayana, Sahajyana and Vajrayana, he was also influenced by the experiences of the Siddhas and Nathas (self realized persons and masters). That is why all his life he remained a wanderer. He saw a reflection of the current form of Buddhism in the leftist movement that shook Russia as a result of the Russian revolution. This made him a leftist. Thereafter his inner consciousness prevented him from flattering those in power and becoming a court poet.

He always identified himself with the common man and always defended the poor, the exploited and the deprived. Atrocities against the unprivileged enraged him, and he was filled with indignation. It pained him greatly to witness the inequalities in society: poverty on one hand and the luxurious life led by the rich on the other. Whenever he saw the politician's indifference to the injustice being done to the poor, he composed poems denouncing it. That is why he did not attain recognition so long as he lived. People feared that, they would be deprived of the facilities they were receiving or could receive.

Now, when he is no more among us, his poems are being highly

admired and appreciated. In the 70s and the 80s we, who came from Hathras-Mathura found ourselves in close proximity with him. We felt closeness with him which very few must have had the chance to feel. We have been very fortunate to be very closely associated with him for over a number of years. Due to the fact that we were very close family friends, he was very loving to us. But, he never tried to assert his superiority over us.

Now, when we turn around and review the past, and go through his poems, we find that he was not only a great poet; but also a great philosopher, thinker and an intellectual.

After completing her graduation a 19year old girl came to Delhi from Hathras in 1973. It was a very difficult procedure, because in those days girls were not given so much freedom. Everyone at home objected strongly to this decision. It was because of my brother Mukesh Garg that I could go to Delhi for my post-graduation course from Delhi University. He became adamant. But with kaka giving his approval everyone had to relent and I landed in Delhi in 1973. Unable to get a hostel in the beginning I, along with Shashi stayed with Mukesh bhaiya at 242, Tagore Park. Shashi was doing post-graduation in Sanskrit from Daulat Ram and I took admission in Hindu College, in the Post Graduation, Hindi department. Many teachers of the Delhi University resided in Tagore Park, Model Town during those days. A lot of

good-will and friendship existed among them, so much so that there was a feeling of camaraderie among them. 48, Tagore Park, the house where Sudhishji lived was like a commune. Bhaskar Pauchari, Chakradhar Ji, Rajpal, Anil Chaudhari were frequent visitors. And Baba lived among them. We never realized his greatness and eminence as a scholar and a poet at that time.

Frequent regular meetings on "Pragati" would be attended by Agyey, Shamsher, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, Raghubir Sahay and others. All of them seemed great, but Baba was so loving and familiar, that he never appeared great to us. There used to be an aura surrounding these great poets. They had many admirers who always tried to remain in close proximity to them, attended reverence on them, going to receive them, and making arrangements for their meals, etc, their arrival in room no 22 at the Arts Faculty was considered to be an occasion. But as for Baba! He was very humble and modest,(surrounded by none of this glamour) He in his pyjamas which ended a little above his ankles, and a dirty-brown kurta, with a bag slung over his shoulders was a familiar sight. Very simple, unaffected and modest among the students, he met them with great love and affection. He listened to them with interest, and read out his poems to them. There was no feeling of discrimination in him. He appeared to be careless, but on the contrary he was not. Rather, he was

deeply concerned about the neglected, the deprived, the exploited and the miserable.

In Tagore Park there were many meeting places where Baba would turn up suddenly. Sometimes at Karan Singh Chauhan's , or Sudhish Pachauri's or Mukesh Garg's place. Once, when I and Shashi were at Mukesh bhैया's place, Baba arrived. Mukesh had gone to Shradhanand College to take classes. He asked us, what we had cooked. We had taken our meal, but we felt that Baba was hungry, so we decided to cook. We made parathas. This was the only talent we had brought with us from our village. We knew Baba could not control hunger and must have food served immediately when he was hungry. He was a connoisseur of food but not a gourmand. Rather he was abstemious in his food habits. We got busy in preparing the meal. LPG was a rarity in those days, but it was available for us. When Shashi started peeling the potatoes Baba told her to cook it unpeeled, because it has many medicinal properties. We were astonished at Baba's knowledge of Sanskrit, as he had never revealed that he was a great Sanskrit scholar. He was a linguist. Besides Sanskrit he had studied other languages like- Oriya, Bengali, Guajrati, and Marathi. He never made a display of his learning; rather he was full of humility while speaking about himself.

"I am no exception, everyone knows a little. You have come to do M.A., you will also study. I have done nothing. I keep wandering here and there. My name

is Yatri."

He told us to put black rock salt in the potato curry we had cooked. When we said that there wasn't any, he enumerated the various qualities of black rock salt. We were astonished at his knowledge. After the meal, he told us that he was very hungry, that is why he had told us not to peel the potatoes. The fact was that he liked peeled potatoes. But one can't do anything about hunger. It must be satiated. He said that the youngsters are always talking of revolution, but they don't know that our stomach is the greatest revolutionary. Many types of leftists live here. Some are Vaampanthi and some are Vaamdhandhi.

He found a very attentive audience in us. We were ignorant and lacked wisdom. He was venting himself out in front of us, because somebody had found fault with his leftism which hurt him. He went on to say that there were very few people who were true leftists. Most of them are leftist only in name. Some adopt it as a profession. Then, confiding in us, he told us not to reveal his views to Sudhish and Karan. They would become violent. You just tell them that Baba made the curry, and we all had it with great relish. Then he left us. He could never sit in one place for a long time. He kept moving. I am reminded of another incident which I would like to share with my readers. Kakaji was a frequent visitor to Mukesh bhैया's house. Once when kakaji had come

there, Nishant invited all of us to his house. Mrs. Nishant Siddiqui was our local guardian. When we reached there, we found that Nagarjunji was already present there. Baba and kakaji met each other with great warmth. Kaka was a very popular figure in 'kavi-sammelan' and enjoyed the position he held there. Baba recited a poem there. After listening with deep attention, kakaji commented that, although it was a good poem, he would be hooted out if he recited it in the kavi-sammelan . Actually he judged a poem's merit on the basis of its success in the kavi-sammelan. But kakaji accepted his merit and declared him to be a great poet. He said, just see his face Lalli, it resembles mine. If he trims his beard a little, and cleans himself up, he will look like me. This is true. Baba did not maintain personal hygiene. He didn't bathe for days together. After having adopted Buddhism, he must have lived the life of a Bhikshu (monk) in different places and under various conditions. Perhaps because of this, he had got into a habit of not having a bath. He used to visit us in Sunlight Colony also. He stayed with us for many days at a time. Although we lived in a small house, we welcomed poets. Our house was like a rest-house to them. The number of guests that I received in that little house far exceeded the number of guests I receive in the Duplex house now. But it was not easy to put up with Baba's unhygienic habit of not bathing for days together. The purity of his thoughts, his

poems and his simple loving nature was adorable. But his dirty clothes.....!!

Once when he shook his waist-coat, lice fell out of it and he started killing them one by one. Then, we found ourselves in a dilemma, as to what we should do. I felt that Baba should stay elsewhere. In spite of all this, we took great pleasure in his company. Baba too didn't stay at one place for long. Dropping a postcard announcing his arrival, he moved elsewhere. He carried very little luggage, just a bag slung over his shoulders, with a bundle of clothes in it. But, he was a moving encyclopedia, a treasure house of knowledge. He judged, not according to a fixed ideology but, according to his experience. If a person opposed to his views, was a good human being, he accepted him whole heartedly. He even accepted people having opposite views, if they were good and honest. He did not reject and hate people having different ideology. In spite of having an accommodative perception he did not hesitate to pour out his venom on those eminent personalities, whom he strongly disapproved of. He made them the target of his bitter satire. His poems on Nehru ji and Indira ji are very straightforward and do not fail to strike the target:

*"Devi, tum to kaale dhan ki,
Baisakhi par baithi hui ho"*

or

*"Maada ajgar ho tum toh,
Nigal liye hai andae apne"*

He had no desires and he was fearless. He did not want any favour from politicians. He wanted social reforms, and placed his hopes in the younger generation. His poem 'mein tumhe apna chumban dunga' became very popular among the students, where he says—

*"Mein tumhara hi pata lagaane
ke liye,
Ghumta phir raha hoon,
Saara-saara din, saari-saari raat,
Agaami yugon ke mukti sainik,
Mein tumhari jutiyen chamkaunga,
Dil behlaunga tumhara
Kuch bhi karunga tumhare liye...
Mein tumhe apna chumban
dunga."*

Through these lines he wants to convey that although he cannot be a part of processions or make posters, he can serve those who make posters and those who rebel against oppression, because his desire for freedom is very strong.

Later on, we came to know that Baba went to jail a number of times. Once, when he wrote a poem on the man who killed Gandhi ji, he went to jail. He was a mixture of Rahul Sankrityayan and Nirala. He inculcated the roving tendencies from

Rahulji and the satiric language from Nirala.

He did not live with his wife for many years, having left home in 1934 and coming back in 1941. But, this poem 'sindoor tilkit bhal' (vermillion smeared forehead) touches our heart deeply and stirs deep emotions. It appears to be an autobiographical poem. His poem 'danturit muskaan' shows his deep attachment to his children. In spite of this, he renounced the happiness and comforts of a family life in order to adopt a larger family, i.e. the common man. His love did not remain confined to the four walls of his home, but extended far beyond. He went out in search of those people whose contribution and dedication would bring about the much needed social changes. Later in life he gave up his itinerant habits and settled down in Sadatpur. One reason was his deteriorating health. The last time that I met him was in Sadatpur. He had become so thin that I could hardly recognize him.

He was a person who interpreted ideologies on the basis of his experience. He wanted to eradicate poverty and misery from the lives of people.

(Courtesy : Samavartan)

Bageshri Chakradhar, is asstt. professor of Hindi at a college in Delhi University. She also has a postgraduate degree in music. She writes poems, literary criticism and essays. She has also written for children. She is involved with film and documentary production and is a semi classical singer for Akashwani and doordarshan. Bageshri has attended conferences and seminars at USA, UK, Canada, Trinidad, Tobago, Thailand, Indonesia, Nepal and Australia. She has been honoured with a number of awards. She lives in New Delhi.

MANTO IN MY DREAM

Musharraf Alam Zauqui

Translated by
Shyamji Mishra

I had been seeing him there for three or four days. When? Where?—perhaps it is not possible for me to describe sequentially... or you might say this also that I am possessed by a psychological fear, and it is for that reason that I am unable to tell you anything. At night I wake up abruptly because of fear. And then I feel as if I were on an unfamiliar road or in an unknown bus. And again I feel—a police van comes and halts in front of my bus. The policemen are surrounding the bus. They are in an offensive mood. And then, lying on the road, there is a dead body soaked in blood and encircled; the story of a false encounter. and the policemen, dreaming of their promotion, busy in preparing reports...

No. Perhaps now I need not tell you at all who I am and where I live. I am a minority girl belonging to the community that is a large one, as much as, it will be a mistake to take it to be less than 20-25 crore, as the census will verify. I don't know even why our political leaders have doomed them by impressing upon them the sense of being a minority when such a large population is larger than that of many a country. Let the matter pass on. I don't want to indulge in such political mazes. I simply want to come to the dream that amazed and startled me.

Clad in white but unclean kurta—payajama, a pair of worn-out sandals, on the eyes a pair of very old fashioned spectacles, the eyes dangerously sharp... wearing the shine that would surpass the shine in the eyes of the eagle. But, at present a deep solemnity had replaced the shine.

He was in the room, at the writing table, without my permission. He had rendered his teeth dark and fingers yellow by constant smoking. His hair was in a mess. He had not considered it necessary to brush it. I had been seeing him for the last three days. I had got frightened on the first day. An unknown male person in my room; frightened, I had asked him in confusion:

‘Who are you?’

‘Oh; a mistake’, he replied in a very low voice.

‘What are you writing?’

He turned his eyes towards me,

‘Want to write something, but...I,ve lost the words. Can you recall, there was a time when I would write one story everyday, and comfortably too?’

‘Don’t pose. A story every day! This happend only once. You didn’t have money to buy your cigarettes and wine. you would write a story, give it to the editor of the magazine and buy a bottle of liquor when you got the money. You didn’t care for your dear wife even...’

But it seemed as if he did not hear me. He was looking into space.

‘I had words and words, even at the moment when TobaTek Singh was about to close his eyes on the no-man’s-land.... and... all that comes to my recollection... that disastrous afternoon... when hearing the voice of the doctor the girl had begun to unfasten her shalwar. No I had words even

at that time.’

‘And now?’

As I was still looking at him he disappeared.

He, that is Manto. Saadat Hasan Manto.

I had got badly startled by the dream.

Well! let me tell you even my name. Kausar Bee... or... why don’t you choose a name for me that might please you?

The times were disturbed even when I was born. Now and then fierce disturbances erupted even when I had grown up to be a girl. The tiny bells tied round the ankles of barbarity and terror produced the noise so very grating to my ears that I befriended books at a very tender age. And, unawares, reading the books gained friendship of this Manto who wore glasses on his large but deceptive eyes. To me it was almost inconceivable that this lean and thin person, sick looking man of letters, could intervene between me and my dreams.

No. It is necessary to give you a reference of that day.

Once again the city was overcast by the vultures of terror. Police vans visited the area populated by the minority caste much more frequently than they otherwise would. Not a long time elapsed since the unfortunate happening had taken place two or three years ago. The disaster was alive once again, in a different guise though.

I am not a journalist. And you can see

such scenes on TV screen happening every day. I can recall only this much—

It had rained heavily that morning. Frightened, we stayed secluded, self-imprisoned, within our own home. What is it like to feel alienated in one's own home, you may imagine that. On that day we had an early supper. As none of us was interested in the telecast stories of false encounters, we went to bed early. I came into my room, closed the window and lay down quietly.

No. Oh! I must beg your pardon for that weird dream. But, that night, Manto was in my room once again. And this was not a whim of my eyes.

'Let us go for an outing.'

'Have you gone crazy! ...There is a curfew-like noiselessness outside.'

'I know. The conditions are not good.'

'Then? The police will arrest you.'

'It won't arrest,' he said laughing, 'Perform an encounter directly.'

'You know all this..., yet a proposal of an outing!'

Suddenly he turned grave.

'Nothing will happen. We shall get back after a round of a mile or two.'

'A mile or two...on foot?'

'Sssh! I've got a car, by stealth..., he was laughing. 'It is known to a few only that I had chauffeured for Quayade-Azam-Mohammad Ali Jinnah too.'

'I know. You drove his car into a

collision.'

Manto was laughing. 'You needn't worry. I shall be driving this time carefully.'

I looked at the clock. It was three at night.

The road was deserted. I opened the window. The ground was still wet. I couldn't understand what an attraction was there in this 42-43 years old, lean and thin creative writer that I accompanied him, enchanted.

The road, wet because of the rain, the sounds of dogs barking and whining. We took seats in the car. It sped fast. Drowsing police vans appeared at short interval. But Manto was lost in his own thoughts. It seemed as if he desired to fill up his eyes with the vision of the city and its solitude. At one or two places the police stopped us and asked him a question or two. What answer a laughing Manto gave them is unknown to me. I only saw this much that in the dark Manto had put a holy sandal mark on his forehead. He would laugh over the fright that held me captive.

'Hadn't I told you that nothing was going to happen to us?...Let's cover just a little more distance...'

And now Manto steered the car into such a direction as made me cry out :

'Where are you going?'

'Sssh!' he put his finger on his lips. 'History does not die in such a short span of time. No need to say anything. Just keep on moving.'

I wanted to say, 'History never dies', but I don't know what made me keep my silence.

It was past four now. Now we were in a poor colony inhabited by the minority, where there stood mud and thatched huts of labourers or those who kept draught horses.

Dogs were still barking. Morning was already there for some of those houses. In some house kitchen-fire was alive. Some children were also seen in front of a few houses... the women were seen doing something and going and coming out of their huts... And suddenly that accident occurred... a terrible accident. There happened to come in front of the car a little minority boy, and also a little calf, at one and the same moment. To Manto, who was driving in a carefree mood, it was the very time to take a decision within a flash of time.

No. If you prefer you may leave the story here. I won't ask you to continue reading... for what you are going to read now is impractical, loathsome and violat-

ing the Human Rights as well.

In the last fraction of the second as I was shutting my eyes in desperation I chanced to catch a glimpse of the young calf bolting away. ...Manto had steered the car towards the minority boy...

No. I repeat. Please separate the cruel words said here presently from the story.

We were back home.

Manto was standing near the window bars. His spectacles were soiled with dust. He was smoking recklessly.

'You could have saved the boy,' I shrieked out.

'Only one—either the boy or the calf.' Manto shrieked out more vehemently. 'The casualty of a minority boy will be forgotten within two hours. But, do you know what the accidental death of a calf in that locality means?'

Manto turned. He tore the papers on the table into little bits and threw them into the dustbin.

Manto disappeared, but the chair on which he had been sitting was still rocking.

Musharraf Alam Zauqui describes himself as an obsessive, compulsive writer in Hindi and Urdu. He has written numerous short stories and a novel 'bayaan' which centres round the tragedy of the Babri Masjid's fall. He is also involved with television and cinema. He lives in Delhi.

Shyamji Mishra, a teacher by profession, translates from Hindi to English.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION : UTOPIA VS. REALITY

Rajeev Ranjan Giri

Translated by
Manpreet Kaur

She ran away many times

Saw the same dream, each night, many times

Lest she forget the will to freedom

Keep alive the dream, even in bondage

Keep alive the effort, even in inertness

Dream – A Hindi poem by Arun Kamal.

The woman protagonist in this poem keeps running away from her in-laws' house. Battered. Sometimes, spends hours on any temple's stairs. Then, returns when it's dark. Sometimes, lodges a few odd days at an acquaintance's or a distant relative's house. Sometimes, goes back to her parents' place (naihar). But, reverts, tired, to the same place, be it in a week or month. It would be more apt to say that she *has* to return to the same place. This is her compulsion. It must be kept in mind that everytime she runs away after being beaten, she is beaten up everytime on her return. Does the woman then not know of her tragic fate? The poem says that she knows

precisely that she has to, time and again, return to exactly what she runs from after being beaten up. And that she would be beaten up again. *She knew there was no way out/ There was no final refuge/ She knew, this time too, she would revert.* Still, she runs. The river Ganga wasn't too far from where she was. Rail-tracks were close-by too. And yet she, knowing her tragic fate, that she will have to come back and be beaten again, runs. Even if this escape is transient. She does not embrace death. She does not consider suicide a course. So, the fact of Ganga being not-so-far-away, or rail-tracks being close-by, does not present her with an alternative. Escaping being maltreated by ending her life is unacceptable to her. Because all these times, she has been running away not from life to death, but from death to life. Her struggle is like that of *a calf tied to a hook running to the end of its lasso/ then twisting its neck to slacken the hook.* After all, what hook is this that the woman is tied to, which she fails to uproot with her repeated attempts? It is emphasized that she tries till her neck is twisted, and even though she can't release herself; she does slacken the clasp of the hook. Trying till her neck is twisted. Slowly but surely this hook is going to at least break, if not ripped out. Because that woman sees the same dream, each night, many times. Lest she forgets the will to freedom. Dream being, *to keep alive the dream, even in bondage,*

and to keep alive the effort, even in inertness.

In this poem, where this woman runs from and has to revert to, to be beaten up yet again, is evidently her in-laws' house. The poet Arun Kamal hasn't used the term 'home' or 'family' for this place. Is this mere chance? When once married, according to this social composition, this is her 'home' as well as 'family'. The word 'home/ house' (ghar) occurs once in this poem. The place where she lodges for a few odd days. *Sometimes at an acquaintance's or a distant relative's house* – visibly, here too she doesn't *live* for a few odd days in her life, she merely lodges. Sometimes, runs back to her parents' place. But for how many days? A week or a month. Worn out, returns from there too. It is implied that even at her father's place (peehar), she can only stay and be tolerated for a few days. Though maybe a tad longer than at an acquaintance's or distant relative's house. Returning tired, points at two things. One, life has not been lived, she merely lodged. Two, the present composition does not allow for her parents' place to exist as an alternative for her anymore. Come what may, she has to anyhow buoy (nibhana) at her in-laws' place. This social framework upholds that the bride's palanquin (doli) has left her parent's doorstep, her casket (arthi) is when she'll leave her in-laws' doorstep. In this context, can that place where a

woman is repeatedly beaten up, be called 'home' or 'family' in its true sense? Absolutely not. It is just a 'place' for her. Neither is 'home' merely the shelter that a roof provides, nor 'family' a provision to stay with some people. Till mutually sentient relationships and their resultant warmth are absent, it cannot be termed 'home' or 'family'. After all, if it's not 'home' and its inhabitants not 'family', why is she there? With which 'hook' is she so tightly fettered with a strong 'lasso' that she has to twist her neck and try to wring herself free every-time. This 'hook' is the patriarchal structure. To note is that patriarchal structure does not solely mean that man is the head of the family. Had it been just this then this 'hook' would have been uprooted long back, or the 'lasso' would have ripped apart. Does it need to be said that this structure has been configured shrewdly and deftly, and continues to be consolidated today. Economic, religious, political, constitutional and cultural frameworks, and values, limits, yardsticks, ideals and various manifestations of different beliefs, social relations and thought processes come together in an intricate composition for this. Through this, Patriarchy institutes and sets forth the misconception of man being better than woman.

In the poem, the woman has no way out and no final refuge. It is evident that she has to chart her own way and be

her own refuge. The woman knows this. This knowledge and a strong wish keeps her from heading to the rail-tracks or the river. Therefore, running away repeatedly after being battered is not simply exodus but a step in charting the path to formulating an alternative. It is also crucial to remember the feeling of pain of being physically beaten. Without this feeling, the dream won't remain and the thirst to change her life would lose its urgency. Without this urgency, she won't be able to twist her neck for all she could to try and slacken the 'hook'.

On one hand, Patriarchy has held the woman captive within the house and disregarded the value of her domestic labour. On the other, she has been conditioned to rationalize her exploitation as normal through disseminating various ideals and values. Absence of economic independence and the presence of social values and customs stop the woman in this poem from finding her own abode. These ideological constraints are so pressing that only so far as her lasso can take her, i.e. temple stairs, parents' place or a relative's house, become the limits of her perimeter. Then, to return to her in-laws' place is her tragic fate. But her recurrent dream of every night will be her route to gaining freedom, changing her life. The reasons that compel one to contemplate this poem in its detail are that along with it being the reality of

a common woman and her aspiration to liberation, it also portrays her courage to take the risk of twisting her neck to carve her Utopia.

One reason to examine this poem titled 'Dream' is that the common battered woman that this poem talks of as its subject does not aspire to be free having deliberated upon the tenets of feminism, it is instead born out of the reality of her life and world. It is important to clarify here that it is not intended that something is wrong with a woman moving towards her emancipation, having been influenced by feminism and its associated ideologies, it is in fact appreciable. It is also a victory for emancipatory beliefs. This has to be said especially keeping in mind those who disapprove of feminism and associated ideologies the belief that it has little to do with common women. This poem reveals that the patriarchal framework affects this woman too. It is plausible, her being born and conditioned within this framework. Of specific note, however, are her 'dream' and her 'endeavour' to realize it from within that very framework. This dream and this endeavour are going to take her to emancipation too.

In any case, all communities, societies, religions and nations of the world recognize their imminent patriarchy. As a result, it is normative to consider women as inferior to men, even though some may be free of this belief, albeit they exist as an

exception. It is visible that all these manifestations of patriarchy are not uniform or singular. They persist with their specificities. Over time, it has collaborated with several forces to shape-shift and transform. So, it doesn't appear the same over time and regions.

Some intellectuals are of the opinion that patriarchy is born out of feudalism and exists only within this social framework. Therefore, they also believe that it dies out by itself with capitalism. This includes both, those who are saddened by patriarchy's decline and those who wish patriarchy's oppressive and inhumane face fade away. Those who wish to strengthen patriarchy lament the old days, and critique capitalism and the changes it has brought. Clever supporters of it, however, align themselves with the new structure to keep the patriarchal tenets alive therein too. On the other hand, the above-mentioned intellectuals critical of patriarchy tend to expect a lot from the new framework from capitalism. It is for certain that patriarchy doesn't exist only in a feudal setup. If it were so, it would have been vanquished from developed capitalist nations. Facts demonstrate that even in this structure, patriarchy exists, albeit in different forms. This is not to say that feudalism and capitalism are the same with respect to treatment of women within patriarchy. capitalism is definitely several steps ahead in this regard. It has subdued patriarchy

to an extent, altered it, and allowed women some freedom. But seeing its own benefit in patriarchy, capitalism colluded with it. Within the patriarchal mould, women's labor is assessed inferior. This works in favor of capitalism. Similar is the matter of the woman's body. Capitalism and its many products played their role in liberating the female body at one level. But at another, it has also conspired with patriarchy for its own profit in making it a mere object. It is vital to liberate the female body. Women should have absolute sovereignty over their bodies. But lending the slogans for liberating women's bodies to make them available for themselves, and for everyone else, is also a matter of tact. In other words, women's bodies were to be freed from patriarchal tenets, rules and values. Through capitalism, it has been liberated way more. Women have also developed this consciousness that their bodies belong to them. But this 'liberated body' has been transformed into a body 'available' for male relish and consumption has been the shrewd adroitness of patriarchy's apparatus to keep it alive. Also, the various devices of capitalism, like media, etc. have amply demonstrated and transmitted the female-body. Leaving the precincts of one's home and accessing public spaces is in itself a step towards women's liberation. But it must be reviewed if merely stepping out can lead women to a liberated Utopia? Or, is the patriarchal apparatus molding and re-presenting itself in further

'objectification' of women's bodies? It is even possible to see the women consenting to this. But what must also be seen are the powers that construct and influence this consent. If we disregard this, neither can we understand the reality of women's liberation struggle, nor carve the intended Utopia. As a matter of fact, these circumstances are fraught with such complications that one can neither fully reject nor endorse just one aspect of it. Therefore, capitalism and its associated devices have to be commended for the progress they've produced. At the same time, their 'profit' oriented oppressive system and its ties with patriarchy have to be understood and condemned.

These two social structures aside, what has been the position of patriarchy in socialist/communist states? (For now, brushing aside the question of how successfully Socialist or communist these states have been.) It is important to ask this question since some people believe that the onset of socialism is going to concurrently resolve the aim of women's liberation. Actually, this derives from an operative understanding of 'base' and superstructure. Not just women's liberation but caste-related causes have also been seen in the same light. Some see the matter of women's liberation (in context of their gendered existence) as relating only to the superstructure. They feel that post-revolution when the 'base' itself would

have changed, the superstructure will have to change logically. So, the question of a separate women's liberation struggle is mooted. Patriarchy will be over. Such an understanding overlooks the complexity of the relationship between patriarchy and the 'base'. Those who see patriarchy's ideals as embedded only in the 'base' can also easily have the confidence that once relations of production change, women will automatically be liberated. It is crucial to say in this context that patriarchy operates hand in glove with both 'base' and cultural superstructure. To privilege one over the other is to disregard their complex inter-relationship. It is also of note that if 'base' changes, 'superstructure' does not entirely transform. Had base and superstructure shared such a simple relationship, many issues would have resolved themselves. Without understanding the dialectics between base and superstructure, they cannot be understood in their entirety. Although, even if women haven't achieved absolute liberation in these socialist nations, their condition has improved considerably. A socialist state is more conducive to women's progress and liberation compared to Capitalism.

Carving this Utopia of women's liberation is complex also because a woman's identity is not solely and exclusively as a woman. And, it cannot be. Therefore, her problems also persist

on various levels. Woman is not a 'class/category' in itself. All women do not encounter the same problems, nor would they espouse a uniform solution. Yes, all women have been oppressed in one way or another. For instance, both rich and poor women are oppressed, but since they belong to different classes, they don't share a uniform path to welfare. It is possible that while the rich woman suffers from patriarchal obligations on the part of her family and her society, she oppresses the poor woman herself from her privileged class position. In other words, the woman stratifies herself into 'categories' based on caste, religion, class, etc. So, can we say that despite the surface uniformity of sex and gender, these stratifications are an obstruction in applying the concept of 'universal sisterhood'? Can these differences in strata be overlooked? Also, 'sex' and 'gender' are distinct – sex being a biological construct, and gender a sociological one. Sex is natural and biological, while gender isn't. Historical forces influence and inform social and cultural codes and values to construct gender. That is, a woman is different from a man in her 'Sex'. The difference in their 'gender', however, emerges from patriarchy's need to mark women as generally distinct from and specifically inferior to men. From this perspective, it can be seen how distinct 'Sex' and 'Gender' are. Patriarchy declares and disseminates 'gender' as natural and inherent too. Women liberation is, therefore,

liberation from this 'gender'. Still, sculptures of the Utopia of women's liberation will have to take into cognizance the stratifications of the woman. Mutually contradictory perceptions of self/ identity may exist within a woman in several ways. Underlining these identity-perceptions will only make the cause of women's liberation and its Utopia stronger, more meaningful and more feasible. Although these stratifications present themselves as a challenge, a sound and sturdy path to liberation will come forth only via those challenges. A comprehension of gender bereft of the understanding of how it's affected by caste and class is inaccurate and insufficient to lead to the sought Utopia. Further, a conception of this Utopia won't be fully successful until it encompasses and provides space to all women. This is to say that this Utopia of women's liberation cannot claim that one section of women will be liberated today and another later. Despite mutual differences, all women are oppressed by patriarchy and all equally seek and must claim this Utopia.

Whenever women's liberation is discussed, gatekeepers of patriarchy broadcast it as peril. They announce and spread ideas like liberation-seeking 'bob-cut' women are, indeed, women who hate men, break families and burn bras. They don't have an organic, stable domain. In point of fact, there is no one line of thought

behind all women who seek liberation, nor do all women mean the same things by liberation. Like any substantial project, this too involves people working from various ideological strains and social compulsions. Any identity-based, liberation-seeking group can plausibly posit itself in relation to its oppressors, and evoke enmity, in order to amass support of their 'own' vs. the 'other'. It must be noted that if this tendency to see the 'other' as enemy takes hold, then the liberation movement becomes yet another dominating power, instead of it being a truly successful effort. Then it begins to threaten the democratic values instead of espousing them. Therefore, it is imperative that the liberation-oriented Utopia of any group be investigated in the context of the space and sentiment it affords to its 'Other'. It is a good thing that women-groups do not feel hatred for their 'Other' (men) group. It shows a lucid understanding that the struggle is against manifestations of patriarchy, and not against men as individual entities. The Utopia of women's liberation would have equal rights and space for men. Women like these are not those who spread enmity; in fact they seek to establish equality, compassion and harmony. If however, the family structure doesn't adapt to become democratic and continues to adhere to patriarchal ideals, then why is it necessary to uphold it? In making the current 'family' based on patriarchy democratic, it will have to be

ruptured for it to be plied into a better family. This new 'family' (or it may have another name) will embody equality of man and woman. Both will have equal rights. Need it be said that this is necessary for the welfare for not just women, but also men. The oft-discussed 'bra-burning' must also be understood. Actually, women struggling for liberation saw bras in relation to their 'gender'. During a world beauty competition in America, feminists took off and threw their bras in the garbage can. They also appealed to all women that bras are a symbol of bondage, so they should remove them. The feminists believed that breasts are to feed infants, and not for male consumption. Patriarchy rationalizes use of bras to conform them into a desirable 'shape' for the enjoyment of men. In essence, a 'bra' converts what is part of the female 'sex' into a sign of her 'gender'. Therefore, it is essential to fling and burn this symbol of bondage. Do note that Feminism today has moved leaps and bounds from that understanding. Secondly, 'bra-burning' need not evoke such hue and cry. It is similar to the incident when during the protests demanding right to abortion, along with Simone De Beauvoir, several feminists in France ran and signed a public signature campaign acknowledging that they had aborted. It is a claim that abortion is their right, and be accorded to them legally. This provided them legal rights as well as helped eradicate the taboo associated

with it. This shows how such historical incidents can be understood properly only in their specific contexts. Having said that, this may be expected only from upholders of equal rights, not defenders of patriarchy.

Supporters of feminism and the Utopia of women's liberation have been accused of not having local native roots. This accusation seeks to suggest that these ideologies are foreign and do not pertain to our past, civilization and culture. Also, that this 'liberation' has no meaning for our women folk. Well firstly, should we discard an ideology or a line of thought merely because it did not originate in our nation? Should nations where democracy and modernity did not originate relinquish those values? One needs to be cautious of such narrow-mindedness. Secondly, Feminism has had roots here too. Feminist intellectuals have dug deeper into our substantial heritage, investigating and evaluating its presence. Since the very inception of patriarchy, voices of women against it have also been there. Don't these voices also represent a wish towards women's liberation? Pain-filled accounts from these women underline a deep-felt desire for being free of shackles. Voices of numerous women including Gargi, women from Theri tales, Aandaal, Akka Mahadevi, Mirabai, Sehjobai, Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde, Mahadevi Verma, et al reflect the pain of subservience and resistance to the Patriarchal Order. Patriarchy has worked

at several levels. Instances of visible violence from curbing their voices to destroying their works are easily detectable, but indirect violence and ways of silencing them are not so. The extent of this has been so immense that the author of the great text 'Seemantani Updesh' has been none other than an 'invisible hindu woman'. Her name is not known till now. Is it not the sorry result of indirect violence? It is not so that women have resisted patriarchy only in Europe or India. Every nation that had patriarchy witnessed resistance. If one looks at recent past, i.e. the nineteenth century, Jiu Chen from China, Gajman Nona and Sugla from Sri Lanka, Kartini from Indonesia, Kurrul ul Ain from Iran, etc. present themselves as ready instances, along with many others. It is true that they along with the urge to resist patriarchy, can also see the limitations of their struggle specific to their respective times. This legacy has to be understood without attempting to undermine or exaggerate it. To build constructively on this legacy, both its achievements and its limitations are valuable and must be owned up and discoursed upon.

In our country, the Independence struggle brought women out of the confines of their households. During this, multitudes of women partook in significant social and political work. The matter of women's position in society as a political question

emerged in this period. Moving out of homes, attending meetings and participating in socio-political projects is in itself a step towards empowerment. Leaders of the independence struggle must be given credit for it too. But, it must also be remembered that just like dalits and farmers, women were also merely part of the larger cause of independence, instead of it being a question of women's liberation. Inferring, forerunners of the Independence struggle raised women's position in society in service of their own mission, i.e., the nation's freedom. It was a historic need to liberate women from the confines of their homes and align them to the cause of the nation. That is the reason why in 1917, Sarojini Naidu led a delegation of women to meet Montesque to distinctly voice and support, specifically in their position as women, the demand for Swaraj already voiced by Congress, Muslim League and the Council. Leaders of the Freedom Movement were themselves in the grip of 'gender' based doctrines. They felt that men were better adept at doing certain errands for the Independence struggle as compared to women. This can be understood through the Salt Satyagrah initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji used to encourage women to join in the Freedom Movement but he dissuaded them from participating in Dandi March. He felt that women would tire of the long march. Some women, including Sarojini Naidu persisted against this and insisted they march too.

Seeing their unbending resolve, Gandhiji had to comply and allow them to join. Dandi March and its culmination—the Salt Satyagrah – proved how women could in fact work more and harder than men. Many such instances show the influence that these leaders harbored coming from ‘gender’ based prejudices begot by the patriarchal order. Many factors ensured that Indian women’s struggle for emancipation was easier when compared to those of Europe. European women had to struggle long and hard to earn their political rights and suffrage. In 1928, Sarojini Naidu put forth the proposal to allow women their right to vote councils in a Congress meeting held in Mumbai (then Bombay). Madan Mohan Malviya took strong exception to that. The proposal was passed despite his opposition. It can be said that the educated middle class participating in the Freedom Movement used to support women in their path to empowerment, even if for a few steps.

In India, feminists and supporters of women’s liberation have done perilous struggle not just for their own cause. Feminists have led and have been part of several social movements, like Bodhgaya Mukti Movement, Chipko movement, and the struggle in Andhra Pradesh against alcohol which also destabilized the then government. Women have also been fairly successful in these attempts. In this respect, it has been the unique accomplishment

of women’s struggle in India, besides being a marker of the expanse and depth of the movement.

A century ago, a Utopia of women’s emancipation was authored by Rukaiya Sakhavat Hussain in her work titled ‘Sultana ka Sapna’. In it, men did all the household work and women looked after the public matters. Although the idea for this Utopia was not seated in hostility, it did reverse the operation of society to realize itself. The present discourse of women’s emancipation is far ahead of that thinking. It doesn’t merely invert the binary; instead it seeks to ensure collaboration, independence and equanimity.

It is of note that Utopia and Reality are not mutually exclusive. Both are in a dialectical relationship. Understanding and unraveling layers of reality lead to Utopia taking shape. The concept of Utopia, on the other hand, allows us to perceive our reality better, and aids us in grappling with and resolving its conundrums. The Utopia of women’s liberation can, therefore, not be carved without understanding the many aspects of reality. Patriarchy has a multi-layered relationship with the structure of society. Therefore, it is only by keeping these aspects in cognizance that the roadmap to this Utopia can be formulated. Given the complex web of Patriarchy, it is impossible to emancipate women completely without changing the entire social structure. One day, this Utopia

of women's emancipation will realize itself and become a reality. The dream to be free will turn into reality. The poet Venu Gopal also supports this view in his poem when he says :

*So what if there's nothing,
But just a dream.
It can start with a dream too,
It is a start indeed,
That there is a dream.*

Rajeev Ranjan Giri : born 1978, is M.A., M. Phil from JNU. He has edited a number of books including '1857 Virasat se jirah'. Widely published in literary journals like, Tadhav Alochna, Hans and Vaak. He is assistant professor in Hindi Deptt. St. Stephen's College, Delhi University and hon. editor of 'anasakti darshan' a journal.

Manpreet Kaur, born 1984 is M.A. M. Phil from JNU and is assistant professor English deptt., St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi.

Poetry

THE NEW EPITAPH

Bhawani Prasad Mishra

Translated by
Nishi Tiwari

*Write something ere sleep enfolds.
Read something ere sleep entails.
Having risen,
Once again,
Heavily,
Slumped back,
Into
My couch,
Enwrapped in sleep
And
Stagnation.
Our fondness for life
Is,
Akin to,
A child's love
For,
It's toys;
Playing,
Without understanding,
Without
Comprehension.
Obstinately holding
And*

*Pursuing rigidly,
A fixed desire.
It is wrong,
It is fruitless.
Create something ere sleep enfolds.
Read something ere sleep entails.
Resume a new
The quest afar
When
You re-awaken in the morn.*

*In wondrous admiration
Offered,
Numerous salutations
To
Nature's art
Verdant trees
Sparkling streams
Leafy canopy
Shuttered houses
Expansive green fields
Balmy breeze
Drenching showers
Dryness and suffusion
And
Keenly perceiving
the experience of the day
of
self and others.
With the golden halo
Of
That consecrated song
Enwrap your mind.
Resume a new
The quest afar
When,*

हिन्दि

You re-awaken in the morn.

*The mystic song
That
Phoebes writ
With his pure beams
Across,
The firmament;
Whom,
The birds
Hailed out by name;
The Symphony
That,
The wind played;
The rain that fell;
The consecrated song
That
Condensed into,
Little wavelets
On,
The river.
Ascend the stairway(If there is)
Of,
The consecrated song
Ere sleep descends.*

Bhvani Prasad Mishra (1913-1985) a very wellknown poet who excelled in writing poems in a distinct colloquial style. He had strong faith in Gandhian ideology. He was honoured with Padmshree Samman and Sahitya Akademi Award. He wrote 22 books in all including 'buni hui rassi' and 'geetfarosh'.

FIVE POEMS

Chandrakant Deotale

Translated by
Nishi Tiwari

PELTING STONES

Our compassionate prime-minister
Went for a Save Tiger Campaign.
But why did he pass by the neglected children
Of
Jhabua-Dhar?
Perhaps! If the tribal children had been
Tiger cubs,
Their turn too, would have come some day.

Oh sure!
These wild beasts are surely,
Heritage of nature, a unique manifestation of its beauty.
But, look at these children
Wrapped in a million rags
Pining endlessly for a morsel to chew.
They too must have their moorings my lord!

Well accounted for are these
Tigers of Sunderbans.
Their numbers, hyperbolically presented.
How strange!

Ten tigers shot down in Sariska within two years!
But, the area is assumed to be
Not poacher infested.

While here,
Outside the jungle reside lawful hunters,
Wielding their authority to exploit.
See the plight
Day and night
In lakhs and thousands
These children.... devoured by poverty.....
Living on leftovers.
My lord,
Riding in phaetons,
Let fall your benign gaze
Upon these children too!

Innumerable innocents...the malcontents, glued to poverty
Enter the world of crime,
Sinking into vice, deeper and yet deeper
With
Poverty nimbly perverting their souls
Degenerating into urchins
Are they not too,
The heritage of the jungle
Whose past is bruised....wounded?
And the present?
Clothed in nakedness
Don't they too deserve
Your benevolent justice?
For them too,
Should we not set up
Some Jeeve-Daya society taskforce?
Providing them right to education
And
Food for survival?

Why spurn their appeal hidden in,
Misery-laden eyes?
But noble deeds and tasks humanitarian,
Lie not in their destiny.
Your officersincapable of compassion.
Spent is their whole life in
Unholy deeds, pandering the base desires,
Of those enthroned,
Filling their coffers and
Collecting the leftovers
To stow away somewhere
A life time spent in banqueting and revelry

Contemplate on,
The incongruity of my compassion
Tigers and children of the
Forest and slums.
Compelled by the habit of pelting stones,
From which,
Fly off burning sparks of fire,
Exhorting the wise.
I'll continue pelting them
My lord!
Prompted by your great enthusiasm
And genuine concern for tigers
The agonized cry of these children
Starts echoing within me.
And I think,
Not the least unconstitutional will it be,
To invite your gracious presence
To this slowly pining region of Abhujmand
Tied to the wheels of poverty.

DESPITE BEING INVISIVBLE

Just as
The directions of our forefathers
Resonate as murmuring whispers
Even after they have long passed away
Lost, in the depths of time
And which,
Many a time, as little tear drops
Seep into our slumber.

So also
Some poets
Who even after having dissolved their beings,
On a funeral pyre
Or
Lying in repose entombed
Keep hovering over us like warning signals
Through their immortal verse
So much lies 'tween the words
That , besides
The grinding of the earth
Are also heard warning bells.
Perpetually warning us
Against
Hordes of evil-doers, the hideous killers-
Sheltering behind charitable donations
Distributing alms.
These,
Relentlessly keep sounding warning bells
About dangers lurking
Warnings,
That electrocute our speech!

IN A CONFLICTING WORLD

Far...far beyond the region
Where winds blow,
Barred are the see-through gateways of the wind.
Leaving for us, no empty space
Even to stand
And left far...far behind
Are frenzied, wrathful times
And opportunities of hearings.

Are we intruders or exiles?
We know not
And then, gently, unhurriedly
The cadence of rippling waters and swaying trees fade away.
But, nevertheless
Some dark visionless shadows, are discernible on the horizon
Groping for, something
Where nothing is!

From the casements of eternal justice
Issue forth, shrieks of agony
And
Like feathers dropping in the infinite silence,
Enter the region of eternity,
Into an ancient museum .
Where,
Transmuted into granite
Do they eternally stand.
The Department of History
Throws light on these
Which,
The people of the age consider
Nourishing for themselves.

We find ourselves
Imprisoned within a conflicting world

हिन्दी

Of a whirlwind of information
And statistical data
Lodged forever, in a contradictory world
Of imprecise theories....
Now primitive....now contemporary
Modern declared by some
Post modern etc.
Our peace and tranquility guarded by
Ferocious, blood-thirsty monsters
And there, high up in the sky
Soar the haut-monde
From capitals great and small
(themselves surrounded by tight security)
For our well being.

OUR MANURE IS DIFFERENT

You,
Who reside in the galaxies
Never can you peep into our universe
Hedged in by, raging fires.

Our inspiration in itself is peerless.
The voice of our grandsires
Like the essence of water
Nourish our very roots.
In our silence, lie raging furnaces
In our thoughts, lie latent,
Hot magma awaiting eruption.
We extract the essence
Out of, our impressions
And dissolve them in our very beings.
Thereon,
Like shepherds do we scatter our words
To graze among the pastures of mankind
And thereby, imbibe all

And make it a part of our very being.

Early in the dark
Do we venture forth
Out of the thorny enclosures of dreams
And to purge the feet of life
Do we reach
The depths of seas and rivers
Fields and verdant meadows.
We are not afraid of death.
Shunning it merely
As if
Wary of the enemy
To shield ourselves against danger.
Not only are we like the trees
Standing,
Clasping the hands of the breeze
But also
Like the ants crawling on earth.
And
In the eyes of millions of peering rocks and stones
We,
The inhabitants of this continent.
Those,
Whose destiny
You try to shatter are, at the moment
Musty, stinking of religiosity
But we,
Have unwavering faith
In the ultimate judgment
When,
Your shallow ideals, false oases
Will betray you
No one will hold you.
Your adorned gods and goddesses
Sitting in crowded bazaars

And on whose shoulders,
Are placed the hands of
Some monster
Or the other.

UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF VENERATION

The infuriated scorpion, envenomed,
Basking in the aura of veneration
Look, look
How tranquil, in repose
In the noble company of gentlefolk
And amidst glaring flash lights
Lost in amazement
Where, for a while
In the twilight of courtesies
Suddenly lulled are his perceptions.

Like dark stains
Do appear
Our own....our very own tribe.

Can you bear this
Heart rending alienation, this drifting apart!
And, who is this bystander, this puny man?
Yet, his sky is full of lightning
And his promises, scatter like dry leaves
In a whirlwind .

With what superb expectations are you standing there?
You,
With temples afire and parched tongue.
With furtive glances
Searching for dagger hidden in the ribs, somewhere
Can you hear within yourself the sound of tingling blood
Like warning bells?

The warning bell does not ring once
For the last time, but, continually
Even when you seem to touch the skies.
And then,
You have to dive beneath
And smell the sweat, the earth
And have to, peer into the eyes of sorrow.
In which,
Ever rises and falls your world.
And then,
Arranging blossoms
Will you feel the glowing warmth in the red hot kiln of faith?

(Courtesy : Vani Prakashan)

Chandrakant Deotale, born 1936 in Betul, M.P. is an eminent contemporary poet. He has been long associated with the academic world. Deotale was Head and Dean of DAVV Indore until his retirement. He also wrote regular columns for leading newspapers. He has been honoured with Muktibodh fellowship, Shikhar Samman M.P. govt. and Makhanlal Chaturvedi kavita puraskar. He has also received Maithilisharan Gupta Samman, Pahal Samman and Bhavbhuti alankaran. Some of his famous books are : lakadbagga hans raha hai; bhookhand tap raha hai; ujad mein sangrahalay and patthar phenk raha hun. Presently he lives in Ujjain, M.P.

HER PIECE OF SKY : A CRITIQUE

Subhash Sharma

'Her Piece of Sky' is a collection of contemporary short stories edited by Deepa Agarwal. It includes only women Hindi short story writers (eleven in number) probably with the perceived notion of feminist literature. But, nay, the editor claims not to be confined to the stretches over the courtyard. Rather her intention was to cover 'the variety of voices in contemporary women's writing in Hindi' (P.2). Hence along with six older women story writers, she has included five younger ones 'who are making waves and whose work is exciting, new, complex and multilayered' (P.3). At first authors suggested their stories, then the editor made her choice and finally the translators selected. Thus there is no specific theme of this anthology – and this is both its strength and weakness.

The first story entitled 'the cremation ground', by the legendary story writer Mannu Bhandari, is the best story of the collection. It has a philosophical and aesthetic flavour because the prime dialogue takes place between the cremation ground and the hillock adjacent to it. The story begins with the recitation of Kabir's couplet by the 'dom' (guard of cremation ground): 'jehi ghat prem na sancharai, soi ghat jan masan' (The heart devoid of love is like a cremation ground). The cremation ground expresses its sorrow to the hillock that the more it loves humans, the more they hate it. A youngman suddenly started weeping bitterly there as his wife had died and her corpse was to be cremated there. He was not only remembering his wife there the next day but also expressing that he could not live without her as his life had become meaningless and pleasureless.

The cremation ground too became sad and thought that he would die of grief, but the hillock smiled. The youngman visited the cremation ground again and lamented for the departed wife. However, the same youngman appeared there after a gap of three years and wept bitterly. Now it was the death of his second wife after five years of his first wife's death. After her cremation, he went home and came back to the cremation ground again in the evening and started rolling in the ashes of his departed second wife. Then the cremation ground's faith in the sublimity of that man's love was shaken. It appeared that this time he would die because he could not bear the grief of his second wife's death. The hillock smiled again. After a few years he again came wailing to the cremation ground because his third wife had died. While crying he remembered the distinct virtue of his three departed wives : the first was his follower, the second was his companion and the third was his guide. He was crying that he could not live without that guide. But the cremation ground understood the myth of man's sublime love and the hillock perceptively remarked: 'Driven by the desire to live, he bears every separation every agony because — man loves himself the most' . Such a superb ending leads to the climax. Though here it is shown that man is more selfish and forgets the grief of departed wife by marrying again and again yet the

message is about both man and woman being capable of bearing the separation because everybody loves oneself the most. This story is short but full of aesthetics and social reality simultaneously. The translator Madhu B. Joshi has done a commendable creative translation but words like 'dom' may not be understood by the non-Hindi readers. Second most significant story is entitled 'Jagadamba Babu is coming to the village' by Chitra Mudgal. Here a social worker Jagdamba Babu donates a hand- driven tricycle to a poor handicapped boy, Lallona, whose mother thinks that his future would be bright but all of a sudden that tricycle is taken back because in another function Jagdamba Babu is to dole out tricycles to other handicapped people but such tricycles have not arrived at the place so far. However, the story reaches the climax when Jagdamba Babu's men ask Lallona's mother to tell a lie to the society : 'If anyone asks..... say it was stolen.' (P.95). This shows the cruel world of political NGOs who talk more but do the least social service. The translator Deepa Agarwal has wrongly translated 'cart' and 'vehicle' for the hand-driven tricycle which is used by the handicapped persons. Similarly she has casually used a term 'Newspaper people', rather it should be 'press persons'. Further she has used dozens of Hindi words without their English synonyms : 'ghunghat,' 'ekadashi', 'khoya,' 'tika', 'chachiya', 'pranam', 'tantrik' 'gauna',

'kangan', 'babool', 'badkau' etc. Nonetheless, this is a very impressive story.

Another significant story is 'The Dispossessed' by ChandraKanta and is located in Kashmir valley wherein the central character Laspandit represents the trauma of the Hindu Pandits of Kashmir who were uprooted due to the militancy in the valley. She rightly mentions that he cannot be expected 'to think after all the nuts and bolts in his mind have slipped from their moorings' (P.97). His closest friend was Subhaan Ju (a Muslim in Kashmir) – their different faiths never obstructed their friendship. He was a devoted Hindu priest, chanting 'mantras' correctly but at the same time had a large heart. He was of the view that TV and VCR have led the youth astray, that is why they do not imbibe social and moral values. His son Gasha questions his theory of 'Karma' because lakhs of people suffering due to militancy may not have done bad 'Karma' in their previous lives; why a whole generation has become homeless, landless and unemployed? Why living as foreigners in their own country? Why killings, rapes and arson? One day some Muslim boys sarcastically commented: 'We want Pakistan without the Pandits but with the Panditanis' ! Hence Gasha asked his father to leave the valley, as anything might happen any day. One day four militants entered Laspandit's house; he and his wife pleaded for mercy but they

took away their beautiful daughter. The family was helpless, hence they fled away from their ancestral house in a truck. They performed the 'tarpan' (ceremony for the dead) for Jaya. They then became refugees! Their identity faded away like the extinct 'hangul' deer in the valley. The refugee families were dumped in temporary shelters without separate space for women. Laspandit becomes almost deaf and dumb. He realises that gods and guardians of the country all are powerless against the cruel militants. Suddenly one day their daughter comes to the refugee camp with a baby girl and the family as well as the camp are shocked. Other families in the camp object to her residing there due to dishonour and 'adharma' as well as fear of the militants. Gasha asked Jaya as to why she did not leave her baby girl away from the camp. Jaya took her daughter in her lap and went away. Her father tried to stop her but she did not. Her mother fainted after beating her breasts. In the dark night Laspandit also vanished along with his bedding. This is a wonderful story with its indelible mark on readers and translation is quite appreciable.

Among the young writers included here, only Alpana Mishra's story 'Homeless in the Cantonment' is worth mentioning. The problem of accommodation for army officers and subordinates, parents are not included in family, hence no rooms for

them. The author belongs to an army officer's family, hence she has an insider's view of the problem like phones as life line, problem in native village, call for war etc. However, the story could have been better had there been lively dialogues between characters. The very long (2 pages) story 'Utopia' by Vandana Rag suffers from unnecessary details. She has tried to follow Udai Prakash's style of long story (like a novella) but she miserably fails to sustain it throughout. Poverty of Nijjo's family, celebration of Hindu festivals with great pomp and show, division between Hindus & Muslims during Indo-Pak cricket match, preparation for building of Ram Temple at Ayodhya, abduction of Nijjo, objection of Maulavi to Muslim girls' visit to see Hindu goddess Durga's idols, and other details have not succeeded creatively to make it a good story – it is too casual, superficial and disconnected to be believed.

Other stories of Pratyaksha (The Hunt), Kavita (Transformation), Manisha Kulshreshtha, (There is Nothing Romantic

At All), Rajee Seth (Morass) and Mridula Garg (The Second one) are somehow ordinary, especially in terms of content. Though treatment, style, form and language matter in a story, yet a story is first of all a narrative that should be new, interesting and impressive to make the readers move, a little bit, if not get changed in their hearts and minds. Of course, any attempt to produce Hindi story writers into English language is welcome, yet the selection of stories should have been strictly and rigorously on merit basis so that the new readers in English version get a genuine taste and a real picture of the quality and variety of contemporary Hindi short stories. Unfortunately only three stories of older generation viz Mannu Bhandari, Chitra Mudgal and Chandrakanta deserve appreciation and the rest of the stories of this volume 'Her Piece of Sky' are not the right representative of contemporary Hindi fiction. However, the overall production of the book is quite good, with an aesthetic cover design, good printing and paper.

*The Book reviewed : 'Her Piece of Sky'; Translated by : Deepa Agarwal;
Publishers : Zubaan, New Delhi; Price : Rs. 295/-; Edition : 2011*

CONTRIBUTORS' ADDRESSES

1. **Dr. Manager Pandey** : BD-8A, D.D.D. Flats, Munirka, New Delhi-110067
2. **Ms. Nishi Tiwari** : C/o Jitendra Gandhi, E-85, I Floor, Krishna Gali
Old Gupta Colony, Opp. Kalyan Vihar, Delhi-110009
3. **Dr. Brij Kishor Prasad** : South of Church, Mithan pura,
Muzaffarpur-842002
4. **Dr. Namwar Singh** : 32, Shivalik Apartments, Alaknanda,
New Delhi-110019
5. **Dr. Meenakshi Pawha** : Whispering Palms, 9B, Tilak Marg, Near Moti Mahal,
Hazratganj, Lucknow-226001
6. **Dr. Satyakam** : Prof. of Hindi, School of Humanities, Indira Gandhi National
Open University, Maidangarhi, New Delhi-110068
7. **Dr. Subhash Sharma** : D/71, Nivedita Kunj, R.K. Puram, Sector-10,
New Delhi-110022
8. **Mr. V.N. Rai** : Vice Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi
Vishwavidyalay, Gandhi Hills, Wardha (MH)
9. **Ms. Bhawna Saxena** : Attache, Embassy of India, Paramaribo, Suriname
10. **Mr. Swayam Prakash** : 33/3, Green City, E-8, Arera Colony
Bhopal-462039
11. **Dr. Pallav Kumar** : Deptt. of Hindi, Hindu College, Maurice Nagar
University of Delhi, Delhi-110007
12. **Dr. Mangal Murty** : D-64/94, A-6, Grace Residency, II Floor,
Chandrika Nagar, Varanasi-221010
13. **Mr. Gyan Prakash Vivek** : 1875, Sector-6, Bahadurgarh-124507, Haryana
14. **Dr. Ravinandan Sinha** : 202, Preeti Enclave, Chandni Chowk, Kanke Road
Ranchi-834008
15. **Mr. R.K. Jain (Rajesh Jain)** : 40, Karishma Apartments, 27, I.P. Extn.
Delhi-110092; Mob. : 09717772068
16. **Mr. Shailendra Nath** : Director, National Academy of Defence Production
Ambazari, Nagpur (MH); e-mail : shailendranathiofs@yahoo.co.uk
17. **Dr. Rekha** : Principal Swami Vivekanand Shaskiya Mahavidyalay
Ghumarvin, Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh
18. **Mr. Jai Ratan** : C-12/14, D.L.F. City, Phase-I, Gurgaon-122002 (Haryana)
19. **Dr. Bageshri Chakradhar** : J-116, Sarita Vihar, Mathura Road, ND-110044
20. **Mr. Musharraf Alam Zauqui** : D-304, Taj Enclave, Link Road
Geeta Colony, Delhi-110031
21. **Mr. Shyamji Mishra** : Mishra Bhawan, Purab Tola, Balrampur (U.P)
22. **Dr. Rajeev Ranjan Giri** : Asstt. Prof. in Hindi, St. Stephen's College
Maurice Nagar, University of Delhi, Delhi-110007
23. **Dr. Manpreet Kaur** : Asstt. Prof. in Hindi, St. Stephen's College
Maurice Nagar, University of Delhi, Delhi-110007
24. **Dr. Chandrakant Deotale** : F-2/7, Shakti Nagar, Ujjain-456010
25. **Ms. Urvashi Butalia** : Auban Publications, 128-B, Shahpur Jat, Ist Floor,
New Delhi-110049