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

**hINDI**

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

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Editor  
Mamta Kalia



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April-June 2011

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## Editor's Note

*In spite of the stigma attached to books—that books don't sell, that people are losing interest in buying books etc.—books are being published in Hindi and English like never before. Everyday there are a dozen book launches in a single city and it is difficult to honour all the invitations. Every announcement gives you a high, 'ha ha another book-launch announcing the survival and revival of a fellow-writer'. In the intellectual circles a book launch is much like the Friday release of a new movie. So far so good. What happens thereafter! Press-coverage, some random book-reviews later the book adorns the publishers' godowns gathering dust and ddt. The writer's role ends there and the marketeer's role begins. Fortunately publishers in Hindi are also good marketeers, they sweat it out through the length and breadth of the country and do not like to leave things to their managers alone. Books are like fish, if they don't sell, they stink and perish.*

*In the midst of this milleu we have a few writers like Rabindra Nath Tagore, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Premchand, Agyeya and Nagarjun whose one or one and a half centenary we are celebrating with aplomb this year. We have to pause and ponder. What makes their writing so different and durable? We want to read them again and again. Especially Tagore transcends all territories and reigns supreme as someone who lives on and on. The vast range of his writings scales over all hurdles of language and diction, fact and fiction, longitude and latitude. He is able to speak with equal ease and grace to children, teenagers, youth and older people in his poems, short stories, plays and novels. He loves life in all its forms and features. He faces no crisis of communication. The reader is struck by his social consciousness, idealism, human concern and empathy for all. He was a noble soul who brought the nobel home.*

*Premchand's longevity as a writer rests upon not simply the fact that he wrote more than three hundred short stories and fourteen novels besides many essays and editorials, but also on his constant involvement with the common man's lot. Widely translated, published and presented on stage, Premchand literature celebrates the existence of the ordinary vis-a-vis the extraordinary. Premchand is remembered as the mouthpiece of Halku, Hamid, Surdas, Hori and Gangi. There are no elitist*

pretensions in Premchand's writings. He brings in focus the 'aam admi' as none before did. The sale of Premchand's books is so stupendous that had he been alive he would have received royalty in crores of rupees. Authors like Tagore and Premchand share the rare honour in the world that even when they are not living, their works remain. Like Shakespeare and Shaw, like Homer and Kalidasa they disappear to appear in their works. They do so because they get fresh oxygen of readership in every generation. They have passed the test of time.

The worst punishment for a writer is to be forgotten during his life-time and to be dumped before death. No one writes to remain unread or unheard. We have to constantly revitalise our psychology and hone our creative tools to survive the test of time.

In this issue we bring you Jankivallabh Shastri's short story along with other short stories by Hari Shankar Parsai, Rangeya Raghav, Padma Sachdev, Harjendera Chaudhary and Subhash Sharma. In Heritage we have Jainendra Kumar's views on literature and society. Discourse comprises of articles by K.M. Malathy, Ashok Tripathi and Yordanka Boyanova. Three of them have interesting themes to discuss. K.M. Malathy talks about the concept of feminism, Ashok Tripathi analyses Kedar Nath Agrawal's poetic genius in detail and Yordanka Boyanova discusses the meeting points of two cultures of the east and the west through the Bhagvadgita.

Hindi has a rich heritage of memoirs. Shivpujan Sahay remembers the time he spent with Premchand in Lucknow and Varanasi. This reminiscence reveals the literary and human angles of Premchand as well as Acharya Sahay. The younger writer Akhilesh shares space with him in this slot when he gives us a moving narrative of his childhood days in 'woh jo yatharth tha'. Akhilesh however chooses to call it non-fiction.

Our poetry section is varied and vibrant. We have poems of Savita Singh, Priyadarshan, Hareprakash Upadhyay and Nishant. Our language slot brings you an article on future of Hindi by the renowned linguist Suniti Km. Chaturjya and another on status of Hindi teaching in Budapest University, Hungary by its visiting professor Dr. Vijayasati. Dr. Badri Narayan gives us a candid account of Bhojpuri surviving in alien climes.

*Manoj Kumar*

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## LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

Jainendra Kumar

Translated by  
Satya Chaitanya

A majority of powers emerging in Hindi literature today enjoy no social recognition. Until a while ago our literature was upper class; people who produced literature were well established in society. But today the vast bulk of writers is not so. Even those with no room to put down their foot in society write today. This raises the question: what are the expectations of the society and literature from each other? What is their relationship with each other?

Literature is becoming more and more personal and individualistic. It was comparatively more social in nature in the past. In those days, literature used to reflect accepted social customs and traditions precisely as they were. Today in the same literature, what we find predominantly is the protest and revolt of the individual against those accepted and predetermined credos and beliefs. For this reason it could be said that if in the past literature was like a mirror that represented in the form of reflection social realities as they were, today it still is a principle that reflects the society but not in any complimentary form but as a whip that lashes at it so that society is taken forward. Today literature is inspirational too. It not only depicts the society today, but also drives it. It is not only our past that it contains today, but also our will and our desire, our dreams.

Those who rebel against the society, those who tread their

own path rather than live to safeguard the mores and traditions, the ethics and values of the society, those who are exiles from society and punished by it, even such people can no more be considered totally unfit for creating literature today. On the contrary, we see around us people who are rejected totally today, but become ideals tomorrow because of their commitment and the uniqueness of their literary genius. When we look at those who are like bright stars in the literary sky of the world, we frequently find that they were initially scorned and rejected, but in the end received honour from the same society. In growing up in life, they ignored society's censure just as they ignored its honours. Their imaginative hearts chose an ideal for them and they just kept moving straight towards it. It was for the society to either ignore them or worship them. As far as they were concerned, they confined their work to keeping alive the flame they saw burning in their hearts, and to incessantly making offerings to it. True, in the beginning the society kept them poor, called them uncultured, perceived them irresponsible, even tortured them, laughed at them. But they remained committed to the path of the common good they had chosen and kept moving on that path with an unflinching attitude of benediction towards all. Eventually the society did come to see that there

was some noble power in them and it is the society that needs to change its belief systems, reform its ways.

Such people were initially rejected but eventually worshipped. This is what we get to see in the case of great men of the world. Their relationship with society is not one of slavery, but of leadership. They tread their own paths. The society laughs at them, but it also finds that it is their examples that illuminate its path ahead.

If we go by differences in the nature of literature rather than by the authors, we can find two different kinds of literature around us— one that is necessary to retain and sustain the society as it is, and the other that makes society dynamic.

Literature can serve both purposes. But if we are to consider what is most essential, most pulsating with life, the longest lasting, then we find that it is literature that accepts the dangers present on its path, even when they are in the form of whip lashes, and takes the society forward. Such literature is idealistic, is futuristic, ever new— but such literature is also not always accepted without a battle against it.

Two principles are seen to be at work in society. All individuals in the society could be understood as representatives of these two principles, more or less. One is the principle of collecting together, holding together and the other is of



spreading out, of scattering. One is collectivist; the other individualistic. One finds its centre within itself and the other looks outside itself, depends on external forces, for its driving powers. One is dynamic and the other static, conservative.

Social life and the individual in society are blends of these two principles in different proportions. On the one side is the village trader who has been sitting from the time of his grandfather and great grandfather in his shop that sells salt and oil, and is constantly engaged in making money and improving his family and property. And on the other side are such people as have nothing to do with family and home, who spend the night where they find themselves, who find no pleasure in marriage and family life, and keep wandering about. Literature has place in it for both these kinds of people – for the dynamic ones and for the conservative ones. It finds neither type acceptable and neither kind of people to be shunned.

But society is not very sentimental in nature and for that reason, it is not very generous either. Society unhesitatingly accepts conformist principles and individuals representing conformist principles. With the other class of people, the nonconformist ones, its attitude is more of disrespect and conflict.

What I mean to say is, the society

is run predominantly by men of the commercial class; the fakir is unnecessary for its affairs. The trader, the merchant will wield power in his hands, and the fakir will live on his generosity. If the fakir does not accept the generosity of the merchant gratefully, then the merchant will create the court and the prison house for him. That is how matters are with the society.

But the same society in its literature will sing the praise of the fakir. The merchant finds the ideals of the fakir very close to his heart. If the fakir does not create problems, then the businessman will give him a place of honour in his house and thus arrange the affairs of his other world too satisfactorily. But if his sons and grandsons speak one word about treading the path of the fakir, then he grows restless.

What should literature that accepts both principles equally expect from the society that has but one dimensional life? What should its relationship with the society be? The only possible answer is that a writer's relationship with his society will be decided by his own individuality, his personal inclinations.

Coins made of metal are solid substances. When those people, whose imagination does not soar higher than the solid metallic level nor plunges any deeper, write, the relationship of their

writing with society will be that of acceptance, obedience or appreciation. It is also possible that we will find on the surface of their writing, rebukes against the society but those bitter sounding disparages will be like the irritated speech of a momentarily furious wife against her husband. From those bitter words we come to know that the author is begging for the mercy of society, its attention, its heedfulness and care.

Those who covet money, those who live for money, write honeyed words or spicy things and make an offering of these to the society. Who does not know that if sweets sell in the market, so do spicy savouries? The relationship of such literature and such writers with society is that of the shopkeeper who wants to see everyone as his customer, or that of the wife who knows she has no life without her husband. There may be sharp, burning arrows of satire in their writing – plenty of them – but it is all written fundamentally with an eye on the society's acceptance. There is a lot of entertainment in such writings, but comparatively less intensity, little power.

But fakirs– spiritual tramps, vagabonds– are rare and few. I mean such fakirs for whom “fakirhood” is not commerce. What is the relationship of such fakirs with society? They are the well-wishers of society. They do not know

how to swear at society, how to berate it, but they can keep away from the marketplaces of society, having no interest in such places. They do not look towards society for keeping themselves alive. If they write, they write because they are the well-wishers of society. They write to fulfil their duty– their obligation, their dharma– towards society; and for establishing the truth, for establishing in the society that form of truth which is deeply rooted in their heart, but not in the outside world. That is to say that they do not write for those who spread their nets in the marketplaces of society. Their relationship with the society, it could be said from their standpoint, is of wishing the best for the society with no expectations of anything in return, of desirelessness, of selfless altruism. And from the side of the society the relationship is of neglect, accusations and exile in the beginning, and of respect and worship later.

It is such people we see as creators of immortal works of literature. They made their own journeys in life; they walked their own paths. Their central desire was not to be accepted by people as good; they chose to appear before the society precisely as they were. It is possible that today the society counts them amongst its greatest, but out of necessity it was bound to call them

villainous and wicked in their own times, because society moves forward at a very slow pace. In the brilliant light of their greatness, without a doubt the deeply held dogmas of society get transformed. In spite of this, it must be said that the ways of society cannot change fast enough to accommodate all kinds of greatness.

It is for this reason that it couldn't help crucifying Jesus, whom two-thirds of humanity today holds Godlike. What was Jesus' relationship with the world? He was the saviour, the teacher, the servant. And what relationship did the world make with him? It crucified him and in this way, cleared the thorn in its path. And what relation has the world made with him today? The world calls him Lord, the descent of God.

Men of literature, meaning writers of the other type, live more in the future than in the present. They want to do good to the world rather than to please it. For this reason the world is helplessly bound not to understand them but to ignore them, or, as the other extreme alternative, worship them, fear them. The world cannot understand them from near, and therefore it is the misfortune of such writers – or maybe it is their good fortune – that they get burnt by themselves, as happens to a flame. They do not want to please the world, do not want to cajole it– they only want

its welfare. But why should the world desire its own good– it only wants pleasure.

The majority of people give the world of literature toys for entertainment and indulgence. This is the literature for the senses. In poetry, about eighty percent of literature belongs to this class, meaning, literature that eventually results in grief – leads to a kind of light intoxication and forgetfulness. The relationship between such writers and society is one of mutual acceptance. They are the society-pleasers, buddies and partners with society. They have neither the time for, nor are they concerned with, identifying with the deep pathos in the heart of society.

The other type of writers, who live accepting the state of untouchability that society offers them, are not engaged in giving the society any means of pleasures for its wantonness. Their eyes are not fixed in the direction the society takes, but towards its diseases. These people are extremely humble and soft, but are also equally hard and stern. They want to see the present coloured in the hues of their dreams. Their relationship with the society is not one of acceptance, nor that of aggressive non- acceptance and rejection– it is as though they are individuals with no desires of their own.

In this way, one literature is that which makes the society's pleasure its

call. The other literature is what is created for showing it the future that is desirable. The society relishes the first kind of literature, it becomes pleased with it, enjoys it thoroughly. The other is seen by the society in the beginning as rather weak, difficult and heavy, but later on it treats it like medicine that is intrinsically good. In the same way there

are writers who can be seen as widely accepted and enriched by society, and others who are exiled.

This is how the relationship between literature and society has been right from the beginning. And I do not think it will be in anyway different in future.

*Courtesy:* Sanchayita

*Published by:* MGAHV, Wardha

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Jainendra Kumar (1905-1988), Premchand's contemporary with a different, individualistic trend of creativity; was a prolific writer of novels, short stories, essays and philosophy. He was known for his Gandhian ideology. His major novels- 'tyagpatra', 'parakh', 'sunita' and 'dashark' advocated an avant-garde attitude towards man-woman relationship in society. He experimented with new ideas and was the centre of many controversial issues. He reflected on literature, culture and society and published several volumes of essays. To name a few- 'Jainendra ke vichar', 'samay aur hum', 'samay, samasya aur siddhanta'. During his lifetime he received several national and international honours. Received sahitya akademi, bharat bharti and Tulsi awards. He passed away in 1988 in Delhi.

Satya Chaitanya, born 1952, has his management consultancy. He is visiting professor at XLRI and several other management studies' institutions. He knows Hindi, Malayalam, Sanskrit and English and translates multilingually. He lives in Jamshedpur.

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## ON THE BAGMATI BANK

Acharya Jankivallabh Shastri

Translated by  
Abram

Who will enlighten a man why he renews his reminiscences while in all regularity he tries to forget?

Yes, he was actually of a very high family. His name was Ramchandra, Features, exactly like the name, were swarthy, hefty. Rather short statured; utmost middle height. Long and elevated nose. Taut moustaches. Fleshy face. He had no opportunity to study beyond the *Ramayan* of Tulsidas and the Sukhsagar. But whatever he read, he lived up to it in life. Very ordinary livelihood, nearing half an acre of land. But any bother about it he never had even in his dreams. For dress only a coarse dhoti woven on the weaver's loom, but never dirty, Kurta<sup>1</sup> also only one, but very clean. The subject of his conversation was the esoteric meaning of the four lined stanzas or the unearthly anecdotes of Lord Ramchandra's life. His eyes tended to be tear filled at the hearing and narration of tales about God and devotees; his voice got choked. And his interest did not lie in humour and irony, back-biting and calumny, cards and chess. No such place could bind him even for a moment.

Ramchandra was looked upon with respect by the whole village. Although above thirty or thirty-five, he could not be married. No father of any girl was inclined to give his daughter in marriage to a poor, unqualified young man like him.

Undoubtedly, bored with loneliness in life he did feel the desire for marriage; but it did never mean that he was amorous and given to erotomania. No, he never looked at other people's girls and women with any evil motive. Even during the blazing noon of his youth his heart-beat knew no flutter to behold damsels and virgins, his spirit felt no expansive thrill. Yes, this did he surely ponder - alas, he too, might have been married.

When on one occasion or two the naughty boys in his village giped that they had noticed him engaged in conversation with Jagni in stark privacy, he wept bitterly. For, he could have borne with any sort of stigma but never the faults related to character. Scholar, connoisseur, or wrestler, whosever, they were not venerable to him unless he was fully convinced of the limpidity of their characters. In accordance with his thinking the loftiest learning, the greatest art was character alone. Any want of it was unpardonable in any situation. This was by all means not the case that doing and valuing so he, in a changed context, was patting himself.

His nature was so simple, obeying, and undefiled that even to imagine so about him seemed an act of sin.

Such was the state that Ramchandra was not married. And, sometimes he was pressed with anxiety why no one

married him.

Nobody's door was ever shut upon him. He could step into any courtyard anywhere. Anybody's daughter or daughter-in-law experienced a sense of pride and elevation in speaking to him. Still no one over-sixty or under-sixteen harboured any doubt about him. The word 'doubt' had lost all its meaning around him.

Somehow or other he had mastered from Tulsidas<sup>2</sup> 'Ramshalaka Questions' the knack of augury. He was almost accomplished in telling the future; in getting the lost thing located, and prophesying somebody's coming in or going out. As a matter of fact he did not usually go to anybody's residence despite persuasion, but if at all he augured, it came true. That is why his prestige in the women's world had shot up all the more. They all almost always asked him to solve their problems. And at his departure when no special humour struck their minds, they confessed they got all the solutions correct but implored him to speak out when he himself would be wedded. After a bit of laugh, he at once left the place. But nearing home his countenance was grave. He thought he never would be married.

Ramchandra had his own views of dying a bachelor. On knowing one day that in the village Pandeyapura,

Gharghuman Pandey, exactly his age, had married a boatwoman of Palamu district, he turned up his nose in scorn and abhorrence that dying a bachelor was much better than fathering outside one's caste. If there be marriage, it must be within the caste, into a high family, with a virtuous girl; otherwise learned or illiterate, whosoever she maybe there is no dearth of whores, from street to street can be found fluttering the end of their sari and stepping forward salaciously with batting of the eyes.

Ramchandra's marriage could not be solemnized. That society which washes its black spots in the murk with soap made of foreign lard disallowed him marital happiness. The know-all society which took him for an idler and a nincompoop did not tolerate his almost insignificant longing to be gratified, compared to the fifteen hour office pen-pushers for mere fifteen rupees per mensem or the matriculate dying of heart failure by the age of twenty-five. It refused to value his morals; it cared a fig for his simplicity.

Ramchandra never brooked any vengeful idea to rise in his generous heart against so debased a society. Perhaps, not educated in the urban mode and genre, he had no faith in retaliation.

Thus did the days pass, nights arrive. Giving rounds upon rounds of reading

of the *Ramayan* and the *Sukhsagar* his age went beyond fifty. He brought himself to believe that no person of caste and fine family would now give him his daughter. On his head cannot sit the nuptial crown; he cannot be seated as bridegroom in a palanquin. And his life has been a big blank; alas, with no scrawl on it.

His health only till yesterday in the pink of physique, had started sagging, becoming almost anaemic. On every page of the *Ramayan*, in every line there, aye, in every letter he espied only this simple fact that his marriage would not be solemnised; and that he would have to die a bachelor with all his virility and manliness wasted.

Sometimes he pondered how after all a wife and husband quarrelled, or had bickerings; how even lovely women were deserted, discarded, or divorced; and how even on women abounding in virtues or qualifications man did not sacrifice himself! He could not be married; otherwise the world might have witnessed how he would have regarded his wedded wife. He would have addressed her as "O goddess mine," might have read aloud the *Ramayan* and the *Sukhsagar* to her, and have shared and partaken whatever coarse corn and vapid vegetable God bestowed. At least one son might be born to them; he must have been absolved of the innate indebtedness to his father!

And God would have given him some niche at His feet of plenty in accordance with his deed, action, and behaviour.

Formerly how many kids of three or four surrounded him! Mixing the unimpaired rice offerings, jaggery, and holy basil leaves and calling the mix-up God's oblation, he asked them to a treat. The selfsame boys refusing at home to take even the finest foods after hundreds of coaxings snatched away from him by force rice and treacle and ate them, Such was Ramchandra as roamed in the by-lanes with boys perched on his shoulders, one on his head, two on the sides. Thus he resembled the deity Hanuman carrying the mountain that yielded life-giving herbs. But now he himself quickly giving them the oblation drove them away or on their stubbornness he would box their ears or gave them two slaps each or sitting near them asked each and all—

“Speak out Mohan! when'll you be married?”

“Tell me Lallu how tall will be your wife?”

“What, Bachchu! In which direction will you be married?” In reply these boys chuckled. Then cajolingly did he train them with answer to each question, and then elicited from them after recitation and repetition, and then he lifted them to his lap.

And, he could not so entertain himself long. Despite efforts and perseverance he could not forget to dream of his prospective marriage. From day to day his health declined and declined. The same Ramchandra appeared like his father (call him Dashrath or anything).

It was the month of Bhadon.<sup>3</sup> In the Bagmati the flood had been in its fury for some time. One day standing and catching hold of the trunk of a tree he was viewing long the ebbing youth of the river, looking at the waning flood. Nearby a conference of crows was in session. Sometimes one crow cried gibberish, at times the other plumed itself on making a powerful speech, and occasionally all in a body with one voice shouted, as it were, “Vive Revolution”. He stared and stared at all this, all this he heard and listened to. But neither the heart changed, nor the mind got recreated.

Ramchandra stepped towards the last stage of his journey without telling anybody what passed inside him, without venting the innermost excruciation of his anguish.

Sitting on the bank he meditated upon the Almighty. He remained sad and sat long full of inquietude. About half an hour of the night passed. All round the sky looked overcast. When suddenly his eyes opened, he saw near his feet that



something was floating on the water, something like balloon of effulgence, a mass of light in solidified dark. He shuddered, started, cried out. Again, checked himself, gathered pluck. composing his heart he lowered his eyes on the light. He gave stress to his vision. It was no foam, no wood, but a girl's corpse.

With courage did he lift and place it on the bank. He thought she must have been drowned just now. She has bulged a little because of some intake of water. But there has been no perceptible change in the face. Undoubtedly, she must have come to fetch water, her foot might have slipped and... or, she might be hysteric; got suddenly giddy on seeing the waters.

She must have cried out to somebody for help, before passing onto the other world. But her word must have gone downward towards the nether world, never upward to the sky. And so, God also did not hear it. Yes, he lives pretty above the sky, in the kingdom of heaven.

Thus she has come afloat this side two to three miles away, hasn't she? –and touched the landing here. Right oh, there is a whirlpool there at the turning. Wobbling and whirling slowly in the back current, not going towards midstream has she reached this side, must have got drowned near the landing.

Which kind one could have pushed her to the main current to remain afloat?

He tried his fullest and best to recognize her—she was not of his village. She must never have addressed him with any lofted relationship like Brother, Uncle, or Grandpa... in the dark itself he began looking at her with concentrated gaze. She is unmarried, she is a maiden. No sindoor on her hair parting. He smelt it. There was not even the faintest aroma of vermilion. He looked at her long enough. Then looked around, everywhere there was only darkness. He left her there, just flew wildly towards the village. In utter loss of sensateness he started running. Reaching home he threw the idols of God down into the gutter. He then broke his basil rosary; burnt his *Ramayan* and *Sukhsagar*. That time a volcano was ablaze on his face and his eyes were bulging, coming straight out.... He opened his only tin chest. Taking some red and yellow clothes, mother's two or three broken ornaments, and a vermilion casket (nobody knew where he had safely preserved these) he returned to the river side, at great speed. By now night's two hours passed. With utmost labour he decked the corpse, filled the hair parting five times with vermilion and himself put the yellow dhoti on. He joined the knots of the sari and dhoti, hummed some shlokas. Then he caressed her fondly. At that

moment tears were dripping past his eyes and on one side dogs barked and on the other side jackals remained ululating.

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1. A shirt-like thing, longer but without cuff and collar.
  2. 'Shalaka' means spokes, match-sticks; it has some hint of divinity attached to the Lord.
  3. Equivalent to September. At times, late August.

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Acharya Jankivallabh Shastri (1916-2011), was a veteran Hindi author with a vast oeuvre of works in verse, prose and fiction. He was a Sanskrit scholar and he knew Urdu, Bangla and English well. His novel 'Kalidas' had recently been published by National Book Trust, Delhi and it was likewise translated by Abram. He lived in Muzaffarpur in an ashram like home called Nirala Niketan which he had converted into a shelter for stray cattle and other domestic animals. A man of principles, he had declined to accept 'padmashri' by saying 'it was of no use to him'. He wrote a historic epic poem 'Radha'. He passed away recently in April 2011 in Muzaffarpur.

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.

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## **BHOLARAM KA JEEV** **(The Lost Soul of Bholaram)**

Hari Shankar Parsai

Translated by  
Jai Ratan

Such a thing had never happened before.

For aeons Dharmraj had been assigning places to the dead in Heaven or Hell on the basis of the sum total of good or bad deeds performed by them in the course of their sojourn on this Earth. But what had transpired in this particular case was something exceptional.

Sitting in front of Dharmraj, Chitragupt again and again wiped his spectacles and wetting his finger with his saliva turned the pages of his Register and carefully ran his eyes over each page. But in spite of close scrutiny he failed to find out where the entry had gone wrong. At last, in utter disgust, he banged the Register shut, trapping a fly within its pages. "Maharaj, my record is correct to the very last detail," he said turning to Dharmraj. "To be sure, Bholaram had cast his soul out of his body five days ago. He had started for this place under the vigilance of the messenger of Death. Full five days are gone and yet to my chagrin he has not reached here till now."

"And that messenger of Death? Where's he now?" Dharmraj asked.

"Maharaj, he is also missing. There's no trace of him either."

Just then the portals of the great hall suddenly flung open and a messenger of Death, looking utterly bewildered entered the hall. His face, which in normal course always wore a hideous

look now looked still more hideous and disintegrated out of fear and fatigue.

“Oh, where were you all these days?” Chitragupt almost jumped in his seat on seeing the messenger. “And where’s Bholaram’s soul?”

The messenger of Death folded his hands in supplication, “O, Merciful One, I wish I could tell you,” he whined. “But I myself do not know what has happened. It’s all so bewildering. Not once have I ever been caught on the wrong foot like this. In all my life no one has ever been able to dupe me. But this time that fellow Bholaram gave me the slip. Five days ago when his soul cast off his body I caught hold of him in my vice-like grip and set out for this place. Reaching the outskirts of the city I was going to ride a tornado in order to fly to this place when he got out of my clutches and disappeared from sight. During these five days I have ransacked the entire Universe but have failed to track him down.”

His explanation greatly annoyed Dharmraj. “You fool, your hair have turned gray escorting the dead to this place and yet you were diddled by the soul of a doddering old man of no consequence!”

Bowing his head abjectly, the messenger said, “Maharaj, I was exceedingly careful, leaving nothing to chance. Even eminent lawyers have not been able to hoodwink me at this game. But this time something extra-ordinary seems to have happened for which I can’t vouch an explanation.”

Chitragupt said, “Maharaj, these days

a strange kind of business is rampant on Earth. For instance, people send gift parcels of fruits to their friends but they never reach their destination. These railway people pilfer them enroute. The railway officials remove socks from parcels of hosiery goods and wear them. Goods wagons are openly detached from goods trains and diverted to other places. And the funniest thing of all is that the leaders of political parties kidnap their counterparts in rival political groups in broad daylight and lock them up in some unknown places. Something similar could have happened with this Bholaram. Someone having a long feud with him might have stolen his body with a view to despoiling it after his death.”

Dharmraj gave Chitragupt an amused look and remarked, “Your brain also seems to have got addled - a clear pointer that it was time for you to call it a day and retire from service. Tell me, could anybody stand to gain anything from a down and out man like Bholaram? He must be very meek and humble - and a man of such lowly means.”

The sage Narad who was out on his usual peregrinations happened to stray that side. Seeing Dharmraj lost in thought he said, “Dharmraj, you look so worried. Is something troubling your mind? Are you still groping for a solution to those construction jobs in Hell?”

“Venerable sage, I’m not thinking of that problem,” Dharmraj said, “I had settled those matters long ago. In the past few years a lot of clever craftsmen have descended over that place. They have things their own way. There are building contractors galore who charge

through the nose and end up by constructing defective and sub-standard buildings. There are engineers who join hands with these contractors and pocket money right and left from the funds earmarked for these construction jobs during the currency of the Five-Year Plan. The overseers, not to be caught napping, pocket the wages of non-existent labourers whose names are fictitiously mentioned on muster rolls. In this manner they have constructed many such buildings in Hell in record time. That problem has now been resolved to our satisfaction. Presently we are worried about one Bholaram who kicked the bucket five days ago. This messenger went to his house to take possession of his *jiva*, that is soul. But that soul gave our messenger the slip on the way. He has searched high and low all over the Universe but he has not been able to trace his soul anywhere. If things start happening in this manner we shall lose all sense of distinction between evil and good. It's a very serious matter indeed. My mind boggles at the very thought of it."

Narad asked, "Were there any arrears of income-tax against his name? It is just possible they might have detained him."

"Income-tax on what?" Chitragupt countered. "He would have paid tax if only he had income. He was no better than a pauper."

"A very interesting case indeed," Narad said. "Well, give me his name and address. I intend going down to Earth."

Chitragupt consulted his Register. The

man, Bholaram by name, was a resident of Jabalpur, where he lived in Dhamapur mohalla in a one and a half room house, situated by the side of an open drain. His family included his wife, two sons and a daughter. About sixty years of age, he was a government servant and had retired from service about five years ago. He had not paid his house rent for the past one year and the landlord was therefore threatening him all the time to throw him out of the house. But Bholaram had ultimately got the better of the landlord by leaving the world itself, not to talk of the house. Today was the fifth day of his death. It was quite probable that the landlord, if he was really the lawful owner of the house, would have by now evicted the deceased's family from the house.

"It would be quite a job for you to locate Bholaram's family," Narad was warned. "You will have to go from place to place in search of these people."

Narad was however lucky. He was able to identify Bholaram's house from the heart-rending cries of his wife and daughter emanating from the house.

Going up to the door, he cried, "Narain! Narain!"

The girl eyed him and gestured him to move on. "Maharaj, leave us alone," she said in a sickly voice.

"I'm not asking for alms," Narad promptly replied. "I want to make some enquiries about Bholaram. Beti, send your mother out. I would like to have a word with her."

Bholaram's wife came to the door.

"Mother, what was the nature of

Bholaram's illness?" Narad asked her.

"It pains me to tell you," she replied, "he was suffering from penury. He retired from service five years back but he did not get even a paisa against his pension which was legally due to him. Every fortnight or so he would send a petition to the government but to no avail. Either there was no response and if at all a reply came it was couched in the same stereotyped language that the matter was receiving the government's attention. In these five years he sold off all my ornaments, one by one, just to keep us going. After that it came to selling our utensils. And then there was nothing left to sell. We just starved and starved. He felt so famished and on top of that he had his worries to cope with. That brought about his end."

"Mother, you couldn't have done anything about it," Narad said. "He was destined to die like that."

"Maharaj, don't say that," Bholaram's wife said. "He could have lived a long life. He was entitled to Rupees Fifty per month by way of pension. The amount would have gone a long way in sustaining him in life. He would have also taken up an odd job here and there. But that was not to be. Five years passed just sitting idle and not a paisa in hand."

Narad had no time to listen to this tale of woe. He came to the point. "Ma, tell me, was he in love with someone which should have helped him in biding his time?" Narad asked.

"No, Maharaj, one lives only with one's family."

"Even then one can love someone

outside his family-fold. What I mean... say, some woman..."

The woman growled and then glared at Narad. "Don't talk rot, Maharaj," she said. "You are a *sadhu*, not a vagabond. Otherwise... Well, all his life he did not even raise his head in the presence of a woman, not to talk of staring at her."

Narad laughed. "Yes, yes, you may be right, mother. Such makebelieve is the very basis of conjugal happiness. Well, mother, I must be going now."

Bholaram's wife said, "Maharaj, you are a *sadhu*, a pious man. You have attained the height of wisdom. Can't you do something to get my husband's overdue pension? The money that will thus come by will be a windfall in keeping my children from starving for sometime."

Narad's heart oozed with compassion for the hapless woman. He said, "Nobody cares for *sadhus* these days. And I don't have a following of religious mendicants to lend me prestige. No one will lend me his ear. Nevertheless, I will knock at the government's door and do my best for you."

Narad went to the government office which dealt with pension cases.

Entering the first room he talked to a man sitting behind a desk about Bholaram's case. The man listened intently to Narad and when he had finished the man said, "I'm conversant with Bholaram's case. He had sent umpteen petitions but they didn't have any weight over them and hence they flew away."

Narad said, "Bhai, I see many paper weights on your table. Why didn't you

use one of these to keep the petition from flying?”

The man laughed. “Being a *sadhu*, you don’t know the ways of the world. Such petitions cannot be secured under paper weights. Anyway, you better go and talk to the man in the next room.”

Narad went to the adjoining room where the man he approached sent him to the third man and who in turn sent him to the fourth man and on to the fifth. In this manner after he had danced attendance on about thirty men and their superiors, a peon accosted him and said, “Maharaj, why have you got yourself entangled in this rigmarole? Even if you keep running around this office for full one year nothing will come of it. You go straight to the *Burra Saheb*. If you can win him over, your job will be done in the twinkling of an eye.”

Narad entered the chamber of the head of establishment. His peon was sitting outside his chamber, dozing merrily and there was no one to bar Narad’s way into the Saheb’s office. The *Saheb* puckered his brows. “You should have sent in your visiting card first,” he said. “Do you think this is a temple that you barge in headlong? You should have at least sent in a *chit*.”

“How could I?” Narad said. “Your peon was busy having forty winks.”

“All right, state the purpose of your visit,” the *Saheb* said in a commanding voice.

Narad explained to him how his office had been defaulting on Bholaram’s pension.

“You are a man of the other world,”

the big boss said, “Innocent of the rules and regulations which govern official business. In the first place, Bholaram was clearly at fault. *Bhai*, a government office is also like a temple where one has to make a votive offering. You appear to be Bholaram’s friend, in any case, a wellwisher of his. You know Bholaram’s petitions have kept flying about all the time. They have to be secured in this place with some kind of weight. Bring some weight.”

“Oh, again the same accursed business of weights!” Narad said to himself.

“*Bhai*, this involves government money,” the *Burra Saheb* said. These pension cases travel to scores of offices which entails a lot of delay. The same thing has to be recorded twenty times in twenty different places. It is only then that the case is fully confirmed. The cost of the stationery used in such cases is almost as much as the quantum of pension. The matter can be expedited but...” The *Burra Saheb* paused.

Narad said “But...?”

The *Burra Saheb* gave a cunning smile. “But we must have the weight,” he said. “Can’t you understand such a simple thing?” he said, a bit exasperated. “Look, this beautiful *veena* of yours can as well serve as a weight to keep Bholaram’s petition in place. My daughter is learning music. I’ll give her your *veena*. Beautiful sounds and fine musical notes come out of a *sadhu’s veena*. If my daughter learns music fast her marriage will not be delayed for long.”

Fearing that he may lose his *veena*, Narad lost his nerve for a moment. But



he quickly regained his mental poise and placed his *veena* on the *Saheb's* table. "Here, have it," he said in a gracious tone. "Let your daughter make good use of it. But kindly pass orders for Bholaram's petition right now."

Pleased, the *Burra Saheb* offered Narad a chair to sit on. Depositing the *veena* in a corner of the room he rang the bell.

"Bring Bholaram's pension file from *Burra Babu*," he said to the peon as he came in.

The peon came back with the file. It was a thick file, loaded with more than 150 petitions and other papers relating to the case.

The *Saheb* examined the name on the file and then he looked up at Narad. "Which name did you say?" he asked Narad to make doubly sure that it was the correct file.

Narad thought that the *Saheb* was

a bit hard of hearing. "Bholaram!" he said in a booming voice to make sure that the name registered with the *Saheb*.

Suddenly a voice came from within the file. "Who's calling me?" it said. "Is it the postman? Have my pension papers come?"

Getting a fright, the *Saheb* tumbled from his chair. Narad looked up startled. But it took him no time to get the hang of the whole thing.

"Bholaram? Are you Bholaram's soul?" he asked.

"Yes," the voice replied.

"I'm Narad," the sage said. "I've come to fetch you. Come they are waiting for you in Heaven."

"No, I'm in no mood to go," the voice said. "I'm entangled in this mass of petitions. I am happy where I am. It would be unbecoming of me to foresake my petitions in this manner."

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Harishankar Parsai (1924-1995), was a renowned satirist who commented on post-independence Indian society. He was equally involved with human concern about his peers and partners. His essays are available in many volumes, prominent among which are 'sadachar ka taveez' and 'jaise unke din phire'. He lived in Jabalpur.

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

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## WOH JO YATHARTH THA

Once Upon a Reality

Akhilesh

Translated by  
Subhajit Bhadra

Everyone loves to recall one's childhood. Is it for the simple reason that childhood is very attractive and beautiful? If it was really so, then why would some recall the same whose childhood had been replete with pangs of sufferings, those who bore the brunt of hunger and disgrace? Who would recapitulate those days as their favorites, but even then, one desires to remember such trouble-ridden childhood days.

Are our childhood days recalled as our present is filled with troubles, unfavorable and insignificant conditions, so much dipped in sighs, tears and roaring laughter that in order to smile, for the simplicity of innocence, need we go some years back? Is the childhood a picnic-spot or a tourist-place that we need to pay a visit to refresh our minds as and when we get tired or bored with the present?

Some persons hold the opinion that childhood needs to be called back to our memories, so that we may get strength and inspiration. The memories of childhood make an adult energetic and brilliant. It is also true that remembrance of childhood deeply connects us with our roots, customs and values. To enliven our heritage and to save ourselves from the forgetting of our identities, we need to fall back upon the talisman—coming across our childhood once more.

But do we recall our childhood much in the same way we recall our youth, middle age or our life spent some time ago? When we look back into the moments of youth, middle age or time spent some time back, we normally have a close look and try to find ourselves there. We feel the transformations and the excesses and relationships that had been part of our development. The influences that our sensory organs receive those days – the felt things are re-awakened. Whether the memories be filled with weal or woe, they have the power to make ourselves expiate with an overwhelming sense of loss. The feeling is not about our riches or progress but a sense of vacuum that pervades our senses. It seems as if we were proceeding towards our final destination. As if we had lost something or something had been destroyed. But this does not happen with our childhood. The awakening of childhood or getting back to childhood offers freshness and cheerfulness. Reaching there we do not have a feeling of loss or the sadness of parting from our near ones. But it seems as if we had many inherent qualities which had been forgotten due to hustle and bustle and the rat-race of life, now we are recognizing them again and getting them back. In place of the feeling of separation from our near ones -- we have the feeling that we have not been coming across our near ones for a long time, and meeting them anew. Why the near ones alone, we are coming to terms with a medley

of colors, sounds, persons, places, incidents and images.

Sometimes the thoughts of childhood give birth to a kind of depression, but this depression is not so barren when it is compared to the one that we feel as we think about our youth. Creativity lies there. This depression may well be compared to the feeling that one gets when one watches the widespread sea from the sea-side. Or else it may also be compared to the feeling when one watches his own house standing on top of a very tall building. The thoughts of childhood are not like the thoughts of youth that are short-lived. The thoughts are flowing forever here. They are immortal. Childhood is lying hidden within us, playing hide-and-seek. It seems as if it blushes once it has been caught hold of.

When one remembers one's adolescence or youth after reaching one's adulthood or middle-age, then there seems to be some amount of acrimony and meaninglessness in it. Because he can remember his earlier image which has now been transformed and broken to mimicry. They offer us wound after wound. However powerful one's remembrance may be, he cannot well remember the image of one's childhood. Therefore quite opposite to our images of youth, the images of our childhood never let us down.

Secondly, during our childhood we are not in a position to leave an impression

on the things and situations, which, in later years, are developed more or less. For this reason, after the relapse of a period it seems as if the time were wasted and if the time was properly utilized earlier, then we seem to hanker after the recurrence of that time period. We repent for not having tried; otherwise the moments of happiness could have been much longer and better. While you can neither stop childhood nor it can be stopped, one may desire to remain young forever. As far as childhood is concerned, a child also does not wish to remain a child forever....

Now the crux of the matter is that it has been mentioned that no one remembers the image of one's childhood. One can hardly remember one's clothes, ways of behavior, and ways of interactions during the childhood. It also becomes difficult to remember exactly the true sounds and colors of the memories of childhood. It will be difficult to tell about their time and space exactly. We reawaken the halo of the light of our childhood with the help of a narrow dazzle of light that flashes upon our mind and a few dusty or illegible images. But why, after all, do they look so close to our heart, seductive and fresh? Why do they have a long-lasting appeal?

We tend to forget the few words we spoke the other day. During our leisure, we fail to remember the words we spoke now and today. Then, why are the early memories not forgotten? One of the reasons seems to be such that the

incidents or the things the children find similarities with; they do not have a pre-conceived knowledge about them. This is about the children of some years back, when there was no television and there was no explosion of information system. Then the things reached the hands of the children directly. It was not such that the details about a thing had reached the hands of the children earlier and the things in themselves reached later. It was, therefore, quite natural that the sudden and direct contact with the things will make a lasting impression in the memories of children. After all, one hardly remembers a river if one crosses it through the bridge while one remembers it once the river is swum across. Secondly, in the minds of the children, unlike that of the adults, there lie no dense forests of faces, places, things, colors and sounds. In such a dense forest, a new face or a thing may be forgotten easily. In such dense forests, there are elements of violent forces which tear apart a new experience whenever it enters. Even if the new experience exists, it cannot be seen in the dense forests. How can such highlights of experiences be found within the darkness and confusion? There are only a handful of people and limited experiences in the world of children, and if a new one enters, then children will take part in it with much jovialness and vigor, they make themselves a part of that very experience. Thus a deep and an unending bond is formed. As for example, the modern men can not have the same measure

of affection towards the earth, the sky, the water and the flora which their ancestors had. The children can take in and comprehend the matters pertaining to the world around them much quicker than the adults.

The memories of childhood experiences are just like the first spell of romance of a young couple, which is unique and unforgettable.

Why would I, after all, like to write about some memories of my childhood? Why should one ask about the childhood of a common and ordinary person like me? What's so special about me and my childhood? Actually, the childhood of an ordinary person may have narrative significance, on the condition that they should contain such truths, which may help to reduce troubles of struggle of people. But even such things did not take place in my earlier life. My childhood is not even interesting. Normally some readers prefer to read the stories about childhood with acute poverty, insults, a childhood replete with paucity and sadness. My trouble is that my childhood had neither suffering due to acute poverty nor the luxuries of the rich- which attracts a person for its wealth and shine. I was born in a lower middle-class family, the trouble of which was that neither we were dying of hunger nor we had varieties of food items in plenty. I was leading a tasteless, colorless and shapeless vegetable life. In such situations, the children of those days were used to nagging and were blamed about trying

to get on the nerves; they would cry with cacophonous notes. I would have been like that only.

The reason for saying 'would have been' is that I can hardly remember the face and physique of my childhood. Although I can remember that I would wear briefs or under garments and when I became seven or eight years old I had a shirt of teryline fabric whose color was perhaps pinkish or chocolate-brownish. But I can't remember at all how I looked like with my clothes on. I would see my own face on a regular basis in a small mirror that we had at home. I saw myself through the huge mirrors at the barber's shop many times. I saw my own reflection in water and in the eyeballs of my friends. But I can't remember that phase of myself today.

The rented house we lived in was situated in a small neighborhood of a small district that lay in between the old and the new colonies. The old colony started from there and also ended there. Even the new colony started and ended from there on the other side of the house.

I can't remember whether the house was a 'kuchcha' or a 'pucca' one. Perhaps it was a mixture of both. Some of the parts were 'kuchcha' – and some others were 'pucca'. I cannot fully remember the entire house now. Only a few parts of that are flashing upon my mind. The kitchen with 'kuchcha' floor is shining the most. The 'chullah' or the oven was earthen in the kitchen with earthen floor. The utensils were kept nearby. There

lay a few tin-cans and jerry-cans at some distance. Everyday mother would ask me to pick up a can or two while cooking and I would do it readily. She would demand some tools like tongs, tweezers or the utensils and I would deliver them all. My mother would be pleased and she would praise me even. It is a matter of surprise that I fully forgot my acts of delivering the kitchen tools to mother. But I can well remember mother's demands for the items, her catching hold of the utensils or tin-cans and becoming happy. A few things I forgot entirely like those, such as the utensils kept on top of the 'chullah', but the oven is still fresh in my memory. The earthen chullahs used to be open towards the front. There would be a rounded hole at the back of the oven. Two utensils could be kept on the oven. The bigger oven would be in front while smaller one would be at the back. Many times a round broken earthenware piece or any object was used on the oven to maintain the balance of the utensils. The flame also went up through the rounded hole at the back of the 'chullah'.

The image of the bathroom also comes to my mind. That lay on the left side of the entrance to our house. One may call it a bathroom but it actually was a covered area surrounded by brickwalls.

The living memory that I can recall more than my act of bathing was that there was a maid-servant named Phulmati who would scrub and wash the utensils there. And perhaps there lay a small

and rough stool there or possibly it seems to me that there lay a wick stool there to sit on.

The bathroom lay on this side. The kitchen was on the left. The verandah lay at the front and on the right side. The rooms were there just after the verandah. In the verandah at the front there was a chheenka from a beam where milk-cans were kept. A swing was there in the verandah on the right-side. I cannot see myself swinging there; A door with blessed items was also shining in the name of the room. There was another room about which a kind of darkness prevailed once the same was remembered.

The most surprising thing is that some objects of that old house came to my mind even though in a blurred way, and among the inmates of the house, my mother's presence can be remembered. Although there used to be my father and my elder brother, but none of their faces are secured in my mind. After all, why is it that some reflections, the images of certain objects and their sounds are saved in our memories while some others get vanished? We do not choose and do not even want some images to last and others to fade away. So, how does this take place at all? It does not also happen that people remember some important occasions and the remembrance of trifling things is obliterated from the consciousness or go a long way away from our minds. Because if that happened

at all, then a bathroom whose importance is less than the rooms, was remembered, not the rooms. Or one of my distant uncles also lived in the house, some of his usual bumps and jumps still peep into the mind but the more important figures like the father and the brother are seen lesser than the uncle. When forced or when the dust of forgetfulness is wiped off, the memories of my father and brother come to my mind but related to that distant uncle. As for example the father is scolding the uncle and my brother running errands. After all, why does our childhood do this naughtiness that it preserves some experiences while it does away with a host of others even though they are unique and necessary? Perhaps it has got some resemblance with the fact that a child gives more importance to its toys and dolls than itself. The clothes worn by the toys have more importance than their own clothes. This statement is not about the children of the present times. At least not about the children who are wealthy and those who live in the cities. It is about the children of other times when they did not possess so many toys. Many times their mothers or grandmothers or sister-in-laws would prepare rag dolls and the children would stubbornly demand new apparels from old rags for their dolls. It was also seen that the girls would not comb their own ruffled hair, instead, they would comb the tresses of their dolls. This could also be said about the places. The children would worry much about the small houses of the dolls than

their own ones. The children love the yards, the roofs and the door-sides more than any other part of their houses. There they can play and run at ease and under the open sky. There their balls would go high up in the air or would move a long distance.

There was a well on the right hand side ten to twenty steps away from the house. A tailor would sew his clothes in a small room a little way off. His sewing machine would run with the help of his feet. There lay an unforgettable huge pair of scissors in his shop. There lay a heap of clothes with different colors and designs which would attract the attention of the children towards that shop. I cannot say for sure if there was any shop nearby that room. It can be said that there was a big tree in the front-side of the shop and there lay a cot under it. It is evident that the cot did not lie in the same way withstanding the sun, the rain and the changing seasons. But what can I do? Whenever I think of that place, the image of the cot comes to my mind. To speak the truth, I could remember the place only through the cot under the tree. It generally happens many times with the past that we cannot reach the minor objects or characters by means of the major ones. On the other hand, a minor thing or a trifling subject matter leads us to the chief subject matter. For example, if you can locate a small switch in a dark room, then the room becomes bright as soon as it is switched on and the entire room



becomes visible or an expert crime investigator reaches the reality of the case by means of a casual sign.

The road lay a few steps ahead of the well and the tailor's shop. There were shops on either side of the railway track. One of the cloth-shops belonged to Mr. Munnu Sao, our landlord. There were clothes in the shop. There lay a big white cloth on the floor of the shop. Many chairs were there. Munnu Sao along with two or three persons would sit and display clothes, measure and cut them. The white cloth, the chairs were very attractive. During the hot summer afternoons, Munnu Sao, and his workers would yawn and move the hand-fans. In the summer, all the shop-keepers of the neighborhood would comfort themselves by moving the hand-fans.

Munnu Sao lived in front of our house. His house was bigger, pucca and of better quality in comparison with ours. There were many rooms and so were the occupants. They would buzz round like bees. Men, women and children would quarrel with one another. They would backbite one another. Their house looked worse than mine even though they were wealthier. There was dirt all around. The traces of rice and vegetables on the utensils made them look horrible. Only the wife of Munnu Sao looked better than all others in the joint family. She was thin and short. A wide girdle of silver would be around her waist and it was called ~~श~~. There would also be a big bunch of keys attached to the

girdle of Munnu Sao's wife. She also wore *payals*. When Munnu Sao's wife moved around, a tinkling sound would be heard, or at least it would look like that to me.

Getting out of Munnu Sao's shop to the right and to the left of my house, there lay an underprepared by-path which vanished a little way off. There were numerous trees and shrubs there. There was also a 'chakbar' tree. The shrill voices of the nicest of birds could be heard which are popularly known as 'peacocks'. Sometimes some peacocks would reach the doors of our home. We derived much pleasure out of the peacocks and the 'chakbar' trees. My friend and I would see peacocks dancing with their wings wide open and we commented that the peacocks gobbled up snakes. I did not at all know that the peacock is our national bird but I was fond of the peacocks. I was even fonder of the sparrows. The sparrows would come to our yards, hop and eat up the bits of rice strewn all over. The moment I wanted to catch them, they would fly away in a jiffy. Once I put some bits of rice on a piece of paper and kept it on the open space of the yard. Tying a knot with a piece of string, I stood away at some distance. One end of the string was being held by me. I thought that as the sparrow would come to eat up the bits of rice, I would draw one end of the lasso and the bird would be tied up. But all my efforts ended in smoke as the sparrow flew away

hurriedly. Once later, the bird was tied up but the moment I drew up the lasso, it flew away with the string. Once I caught a sparrow but let it fly away.....

The peacocks, of course, had their own grandeur. But the reason for our visit to that thin forest was not the peacocks but the 'chakbar' tree. We would keep the leaves of that tree on the elevated portions of our hands and press them with the other hand, and the leaves would be torn into two pieces. The boy, who could make the most pieces in that fashion, would be considered as the real 'hero'. In that thin forest, there were some leaves of a tree which would peel off the skin when rubbed and blood would ooze out from there. One of the trees had leaves which had a combination of sweet and sour taste when chewed. We chewed them like the tamarind leaves. Besides the jungle-jalebis were special munchies found here.

I went to study in a local school. On the first day I was taken to the school, then I noticed the class being taken under a tree. A teacher was sitting on a chair under a jackfruit tree. Some children sat on the ground in front of him. That did not necessarily mean that there was no building of the school. The only primary school in the neighborhood had a right kind of building where there were classes up to fifth standard. Perhaps the number of the classes and the teachers were the same. Perhaps the classes were being held outside under the tree to avoid the hot and humid atmosphere

of the month of July. The power supply had already been there in the neighborhood but there were no ceiling fans. Even the houses of officers and Tehsildar had no fans. In those olden days, the rooms of the offices and those of the wealthy persons had a big cloth fan attached on the ceiling and a man sitting on the threshold of the door would draw it back and forth for the air to flow with the help of a string. The blowers of the fans were known as 'pankha coolies'. But the school was neither an office nor a home of the rich. Thus the classes had to be set under the trees to have natural airflow for the teachers and children alike. In the same way, the classes were held out in the open to enjoy sunshine during the winter.

My father had a short conversation with the teacher sitting under the tree and I was admitted in the school from that very moment on that day.

Once, as soon as the classes were set in the open, the teacher started saying that Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri passed away. The school was closed. The boys hardly knew who Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri was and what his importance was. They rushed to their houses the moment the school was declared closed.

My home was quite near the school. When school gave over we would go home making lots of noise. I remember one place on way from school to home. There was a narrow strip of kuchcha road after getting downhill which got mixed with the main road and opened



in front of a hospital. Actually, this was not the main road; it was merely a short-cut. The kuchcha road was not short. There were raised dunes on either side of the road on which there lay some evergreen 'behaya' trees. We would love the beauty of the innumerable violet flowers that grew on the tree. The 'behaya' tree had its poetical utilities; the real utility was that we used the branches of the tree to fight against one another. When the wars among the children would take a serious turn, we would abandon the branches and use our slates as lethal weapons. The battlefield remained the same, the kuchcha road that lay between the raised portions of the ground....

Now, I am facing an unusual problem. The problem is of mixing up of the time periods of the past. There have been already many memories of the past, which, it is difficult to say which period they belonged to. Were these earlier or later incidents? Actually, even in the period of our adulthood, we can't say from our experiences, which time frame they belong to. Because experience is a kind of feeling and the time-frame happens to be a detail. But the advantage with an adult is that one can search out the forgotten time-frame with the help of all other experiences. The related time-frame becomes clearly visible. But the childhood experiences will find it really difficult to do such things. Because the experiences of that period or its images are so vibrant and independent that those cannot be compared with any

other experiences . For example, there was a field of my primary school where weeds grew. When we would be afraid of being beaten up at home, we would pick up the finest pieces of the weeds from the carpeted cover of the grasses grown on the field. We would tie them together in knots. We thought that this way we would be spared from imminent punishment at home. Once we were saved, we would untie the weeds on our way to school the next day. I can't fully remember whether this type of activity started since I was in the first standard or in the second. Likewise I have forgotten whether I carried a slate in the beginning. And I can't associate these words with my previous experiences.

It may also be a fact that for children the entire childhood is an independent time-frame. This may be true. Because children hardly have anything to do with the time-frame. For them, the watches, calendars and diaries may look good or bad due to their colors and shapes. But they do not have any individual importance of the time for time's sake. If time has to surrender the next day, it will do so in front of childhood. The childhood will not even accept an inch of that individuality. The rejection means an utter defeat of the time frame at the hands of the child.

Presently, I am calculating the different parts of my childhood memories and these are due to the queries and necessities that crept up in my mind as I grew up. And it will be a successful

growing up from my childhood if I succeed in finding out the time-frame. At the same time, I feel that as soon as I shall touch the childhood with the weapon of my adulthood, my childhood will be vanished. It will come to dust. As for example, in one of the favorite bed-time stories, a magician gave a lot of golden ornaments to a woman and warned her not to disclose their whereabouts, lest they should turn into a heap of charcoal; that woman's husband asked her where she got them from, who gave them to her and when she bought them. Being tormented by her husband, she disclosed the truth and the ornaments turned into a heap of coals.

It may become a cause for laughter to rack our brains about the necessity of using a philosophical term like time-frame while talking about childhood. It does not make any difference whether a child threw a ball into the air at the age of three or five. Then, is there no relationship between a child and the time-frame? Here I would like to add that a child does not care for a time-frame or time. He does not understand it that well. But in the course of his playing games, he comes face to face with time. When a child lifts the ball in the air for the first time in life, he really tears apart the time frame he has been a part of till he throws, and then steps into a new time-frame, on the other hand, he extends his energy upto the space. The next time when he will extend his energy in the same way, then it

will not be told that he has torn apart the time-frame and has stepped into a new time-frame.

One of the most renowned poets of Hindi literature, Kedarnath Agarwal composed a short, famous and a unique poem with a view to show the relationship between time-frame and children:-

^rky dks djik fr;k  
 ॐ+ ls dyd us  
 rky dks djik fr;k  
 rky dks ugr  
 var dy dks djik fr;k\*

(He made the pond quiver.

The child with his pebble

made the ripples quiver.

Not the pond alone,

he made eternity quiver.)

The second example is of children climbing up the trees. The first attempt to climb up. In the process, the force will be applied by their hands, feet and the fingers on the barks of the trees. Their touch will be there. The trees are having many such touches. Do the trees have the same kind of feelings with regard to the touches of the hands of children and adults alike? Do you have the same kind of feelings when you shake your hands with persons of your age on one hand and touching the palms of children and women on the other? Not at all. When a woman or a child climbs up a tree, then it would be filled up with a deep excitement. It becomes extremely happy. Why the trees alone, –let a child

create a shape on the sands on one hand and let an adult create another. Simply observe which shape the sands will be pleased with and shine.

Now the question that arises is—does it really matter if the attempt was first, third or fifth while climbing up a tree? It matters. Because, when a child tries to climb up a tree for the first time, there is a rhythm of his unskilled attempts—a fear of falling down or inability to climb up. There comes a faith of success in it. It tunes itself up with the tree using its palms, fingers, legs, brain and eyes. There are attachments and deep excitements between the child and the tree. The extent of pleasure that children derive at success can never be regained.

To revive the memories, it is thus essential to have a proper understanding of the time-frame. It is also essential from the point of view of social studies. As it was once published that a child got influenced by a programme aired on T.V. and jumped down from the floor of the house and died. Therefore, this child can not be a child of my childhood. It must not even be a child of an earlier period of time. As for example, we become extremely happy to see an ice-cream vendor selling two ice-creams in exchange of five paise- this cannot be a recent story, it is at least a thirty years old story. Because such ice-creams will not be available today. Even if they are found in the hands of the poor and backward children, those will not surely be available at the same rate.

If the search of time is so valuable, than the things forgotten for non-recurrence for a long time, then what is the harm in finding out their exact information from our predecessors. As I can't remember some events of my childhood, they can be known from our parents or relatives. It will be simplistic to do so. But the main theme of the memories, their souls will be destroyed. Because the things we shall receive from others, will not be called memories but a commentary only. They will be devoid of feelings. As a child will be heartily happy to jump in our laps with its unbalanced steps, but the same kind of happiness can't be found if the same child is carried to us by others, or a child is shifted to your custody in its sleep. Surely the happiness will never just be the same as the first instance. In reality, the plant of memories gets withered away as soon as it reaches another's hands and those lifeless facts will come back to us. One part of this is also true that our predecessors will bring in their memories while attempting to search our memories and hand them over to us as our memories. This mixture will destroy the purity and poetry within such memories. Because the memories of different persons cannot be co-related to one another. Likewise, there is no alternative to raise our own memories. If a person throws away some pearls in the wilderness, then how our search will be worthwhile? Either too many persons are needed to be brought in

and they find them out or learning the process of finding out the pearls and finding them out. Perhaps many such pearls of our memories are lost in the jungle of that time. I wish all of them would point out to us, "Look, here we are. And look at ourselves, here they are...near you...inside you."

It may be sometime later than the period of my getting admitted into the school that we left the rented house of Munnu Sao and started living in another

rented house. Perhaps it was the time close to the birth of my sister. My sister was born in the house of Munnu Sao. I can't remember the incidents of her birth-period. I can only remember that my mother would lie down in one of the rooms. Initially I was not allowed to go near my mother. But later mother would call me from her bed but I would not visit. I would stay adamantly outside the door of her room. But I would not go away from there.

*Courtesy: Rajkamal Prakashan*

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Akhilesh, born 1960, is a major author whose short stories and essays have proved a point of departure in Hindi. He has been awarded Shrikant Verma Puraskar, Parimal Samman and Indu Sharma Katha Samman. Edits a literary quarterly, Tadbhav from Lucknow.

Subhajit Bhadra, born 1980 in Guwahati is a gold medalist in M.A. English from Tezpur University, Assam. His areas of interest are Modern European and Indian literature. He lives in Hojai, Assam.

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## FOUR POEMS

Savita Singh

Translated by the poet

### A World of Terracotta and Gold

Will you come to see my little world  
To recognize the fragile darkness  
In which prosper myriad colors and sounds  
The utensils stored during my great grandfather's time  
Brass, bronze, the glaze less silver,  
Self assured gold; but also china, terracotta;  
The moth eaten woolens  
And the prosperity of the white termites  
Settled with their colonies on the books  
Long after history has stumbled on us

Will you come and walk with me  
On the narrow paths  
Which terminate in an alley  
Drawn by an artist, patronized by some great uncle  
And enter into that dimly lit corner  
Where is stored equipment of power:  
Whips, sticks, rifles and plough  
But do see closely  
There are also odd pieces of instruments of music;  
Look how sadly lie a pair of tabla!

And a tattered divan spurned around, drowsing  
Still holding hands of the golden chairs

Will you come and see  
That a strange person still handcrafts a replica  
of my little world of wonderment  
And many darker rooms are being filled with  
So much gold and terracotta

### **Life's many longings**

I wonder if some wind would take me along  
On its journey to those rivers, forests and mountains.  
Where myriad creatures live

Show me how life pulsates  
Through its toughest moments

How a ten o'clock flower does not lose life  
Even if disjoined from its roots;  
How it begins to live again  
In the cramped crevice of a rock  
With little soil and water stashed in.

How a branch of a sturdy tree breathes  
After being broken in a storm,  
If still aligned, even slightly, to its trunk

I wonder if this fateful wind would show me how  
Millions of insects, worms and viruses  
Live their secret lives,  
How no pain destroys them,  
No other creature misleads them;  
Nothing snatches their truth,  
Neither could any force stop them  
From going beyond this life.

### **Nude girls in the picture**

I understood that painting exactly the way  
The girl with the bare back in it wanted me to,  
That wherever this painting would be hung  
She would make a window in front,  
And when others would be watching her naked back  
She would be looking outside her window.

When I saw the painting again  
This time more intently,  
I found many other girls there  
Covering their faces sometimes,  
At times their breasts,  
With their insufficiently spread palms  
Leaving the whole body hang punishingly,  
Their veins lying on their bodies  
Like so many slow breathing serpents.....  
Restless as they were, these girls,  
Ready to escape from their windows and  
Get dissolved in landscapes out there

Later there were only  
Windows in the painting,  
With curtains swaying  
Eagerly to cover the nudity

Already shed by the body.

### **Unattended Things**

My heart missed its usual steps this morning  
Dew drops were vanishing before  
I could approach them with my unsure feet  
And the rose petals fallen on the ground, perhaps late at night,

Looked so much like  
What had been lying within me, unattended for some time,

My mind paced strangely this morning  
The red and blue and even my favorite green of the rainy sky  
changed colours I had not seen before  
Earlier where there were words, there was only a patch  
Of a confounding muttering silence  
And all that was a void of some sort I knew almost well  
Was now a ditch full of pinkish mud,  
In place of clarity there was an uneasy compassion,  
The neighbor's cat that vexed me often  
Was sitting in his balcony postured so meekly  
That for once I thought it was such a sad way to be  
Especially if it was drizzling and it was a Sunday morning

Sometimes this is how things are, even the mornings,  
Or may be they look so  
As this morning looked today  
Or may be this is how I saw it showing itself to me  
As some day those unattended things,  
Lying within like the sad meek cats  
Would show themselves  
As they should be looked at.

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Savita Singh, born in Bihar, has studied at University of Delhi and McGill University, Montreal. Has two Hindi collections 'apne jaisa jeevan' and 'neend thi aur raat thi'. She received Raza award for this book for the year 2005. Her bilingual collection of poems (Hindi and English) with Sukrita Paul Kumar entitled 'rowing together' appeared in 2008 and also bilingual collection (French and Hindi) 'je suis la maison des etoiles' in 2008. Her poems are translated in many Indian and foreign languages. She is Professor and Director, School of Gender studies and Development, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Delhi. She lives in Delhi.

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## Two POEMS

Priyadarshan

Translated by  
Asad Ur Rahman Kidwai

### **An elegy for lost friends**

Those were the days of school and innocent mischief  
when we became friends, to loiter on the streets for the next  
umpteen years,  
and one day  
to part in such a manner  
that death came to remind me that we were friends once.

on counting, I found that Gappu is the fourth friend from  
childhood till now  
whom I have lost in the midst of my life.  
he did not leave suddenly  
death prised him away slowly  
everyone knew that this intoxicated life  
won't be able to steady its steps for long  
but few, very few understood  
that more than a high it was the helplessness of life that led  
Gappu towards his death.

Gappu's departure reminded me of Bhuvaneesh,  
After sitting for some hours at the paan shop of his elder brother, at the  
corner of the road,  
whenever he emerged with catechu smeared brown fingers  
and headed towards that undulating field where we used to pitch our wickets,  
his face reflected the open sky instead of the corner shack  
his laughter bubbled over  
proving him the most effervescent and courageous friend amidst us  
who also fished from a passing stream.  
he was stricken by a host of ailments, I learnt one day  
and his brother didn't have enough money for treatment  
but he was either carefree or ignorant  
he never sat in the shop again, or came to play on the field,  
he must be somewhere in a corner in the sky,  
with our fading faces, between memory and forgetfulness.

Kauseen wasn't a friend  
a little less than a friend, maybe a little more  
she was far and close - her eyes reflected the nervous clouds of uncertainty  
in which sailed the boat of hope  
A very intense fear and even more stubbornness to live  
with her fearful wariness making it possible again and again in this arduous  
world  
and I remembered those days too when she was walking on the paths chosen  
by her  
lying on and tucking under her earth and sky  
though this sounds romantic in a poem, in life it was hard

but neither she knew nor I  
that one day death will surround her in a street  
years later a friend gave me this information

and snatched away those moments of my life  
proudly retained, when at a difficult moment I was able to be of help to  
my innocent friend

there are many others who in life flashed like a star and dimmed  
I remember Saba, the girl with shining eyes  
who wrote a big thank you for a small act of help,

who used to charge in everytime with determination, as a matter of right  
and go away with a smile on her lips  
a humdrum working relationship we had, but the day death broke it off,  
I found something breaking inside me.

there are many others to remember, those who went away - faces, relations,  
names,

even those who remained more than friends, so close to the heart and to  
life

that while writing about them, the pen will shiver later,  
first, the body shudders thinking of them, eyes well up.

I will keep on delaying those stories in the hope that  
one day I will become so able or so insensitive that I will be able to write  
my own seemingly emotional tale of dying every moment; wasting away, yet  
surviving

which will be so incomplete, so hollow that to cover it up I will resort  
to philosophical and ideological lies

linked to life and being

┌

this incomplete poem only knows  
that anyone amongst us can be taken away anytime  
fighting his pains in a government hospital like Bhuvneesh  
at home melting away drop by drop like Gappu  
out in the streets, in an accident like Kauseen  
or like Saba who drowned in the sea  
anyone - known or unknown  
who will be veiled one day by the merciless death.

I can say that even then she won't able to finish them.  
after all they are alive within me  
but the truth is  
that even within me they will keep fading away, dying every moment  
Like me, one day.  
Whom, years later someone will foggily remember, when  
someone else amidst us will have taken leave.

#### **14 Years Later**

14 years after departing Mother returned.  
I enquired if she keeps well,  
She kept on working with me in the kitchen  
Even went with me for the evening walk  
I was hiding those writings, those essays  
which mentioned her illness and her death.  
I asked: "Do you know, my book got published? I have a son?"  
She knew  
We were together for a long while  
She said that she starts feeling drowsy by 9:30 at night  
She was mentioning some unknown city



I thought that she was just thinking of me.  
Unaware of her travails, her illness and her death.

This was the dream of the morning of 8th December  
When I awoke  
I felt such a bright, soft and calm morning  
Had never come in my life.

---

Priyadarshan, born 1968, Ranchi, is a poet, essayist and short story writer besides being a journalist. His published books are 'uske hisse ka jaadu' and 'itihas gadhta samay'. He works in NDTV India and lives in Ghaziabad, U.P.

Asad Ur Rahman Kidwai, born in Lucknow, has been a student of history and is with NDTV India. He lives in NOIDA, U.P.

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# Poetry

## THREE POEMS

Hareprakash Upadhyay

Translated by  
Nishi Tiwari

### The Night of Spring

Late night  
Deprived of sleep  
I lie wondering  
Is someone, somewhere longing for this night?

Perhaps not,  
No one, nowhere is restlessly longing for me!

Perhaps!  
All my dear ones  
Are asleep,  
Lost in dreams!

Oh! What agony is that torments me!  
With memories anew  
So late in the night?

O! into which afternoons  
Does this dark night lead me through?

My anxiety is not born out of sleeplessness at all!

But,

I hope no one is out in this dark solitary night,

Longing for me,

In silent lamentation.

I am at peace

Having left behind

The world of fancy.

For how long will she spend

Restless nights in her couch!

I wonder,

Oh! For how long shall I

Torment her!

How will the moon-smile

Glimmer through the night

Seeing her

Lament thus!

This night of spring

And outside,

Moon beams

In peaceful repose!

See!

My heart has become a gushing fountain

Of love!

For how long

Shall I deceive myself

For how long?

**The Darkness of Incomplete Love!**

Precious were  
All your whims  
To me,  
I picked each of them  
And treasured them in my heart.

The flowers that you liked  
I gathered from  
Far and wide!

I wonder if you  
Remember,  
The lovely hues,  
The lights  
The pond, the banks of river  
The boat  
Sheoli flowers  
Raining down upon us  
Those messages of  
Mischief and passion  
Exchanged from  
Night to morn!

And whenever  
You applied Mehndi  
On your hands,  
You wrote the first alphabet  
Of  
My name.



Hidden in them  
Keeping our hands  
Locked together  
O! how many  
Oaths taken and promises made  
But,  
Promises,  
Never kept  
Those secret moments  
Tears,  
Handkerchiefs  
And yet,  
We became strangers!

O! some enemy took you  
Away  
From me!

I don't know dear,  
After all,  
Is it possible to live!  
Having lost,  
One's memories  
And  
The past?

What can I say about my love?  
This story is  
So complicated  
I never could  
Understand it.

One day  
I took out  
All your letters  
And found flowers in them,  
Peacock feathers,  
Park, river  
Lake,boat  
Tears  
Laughter  
Complaints  
Concerns  
Holding  
The fingers of the moon,  
Like little children.

I was a coward dear!  
Being afraid  
Of the darkness

Whenever we ventured forth  
We came back, before dark,  
Having parted from each other.

We were lovers  
Of a small town,  
With little courage  
Otherwise  
We would have faced  
The dark night.

Had we loved, would there  
Be no dawn for us??

### **The Times**

Slowly and stealthily  
The times are becoming difficult.

Slowly and stealthily  
The times will become more difficult.

Will times  
Slowly and stealthily become more difficult?

Will this phase come  
During our time?

Which phase will come  
When times become most difficult?

Slowly and stealthily  
Will times become less difficult?

Will this change  
Come about  
On its own  
Effortlessly?

During whose period  
Will this stage come?  
How? And  
When?

Tell me  
Oh ye! Soothsayers  
Tell me.

Tell me,  
The rich.  
Tell me,  
The statesmen.

There are many phases  
In one phase  
To whose share  
Will come  
What?

Who will solve  
This riddle?

*Courtesy : Alochana quarterly*

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Hareprakash Upadhyay, born 1981 in Bhojpur, Bihar is primarily a poet with a few short stories to his credit. Has received Ankur Mishra award and has a collection of poems 'khiladi dost aur anya kavitayen' from Bharatiya Jnanpith. He lives in Lucknow.

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

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## AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-EIGHT

Nishant

Translated by  
Nishi Tiwari

Really,  
This is the right age for her  
To love,  
Where,  
In her dreams  
Is blossoming forth a red hued rose,  
Seeped in purity

An age,  
When true prayers,  
Burst forth  
From the heart,  
Which  
The society hesitates to accept

An age,  
When wings spread out  
To soar far above  
And explore the skies

An age,  
When wheels get attached to feet  
Measuring forth  
The entire earth

This is a very significant age  
Where,  
The most important thing  
Is,  
The experience  
Of,  
An experienced lover.  
But Alas!  
Judging tenderly our experiences of love  
To be,  
The epitome of perfection,  
We delude ourselves.

Sometimes we win  
But  
While celebrating the victory  
We catch ourselves  
Red-handed.

Here,  
The body does not  
Overpower the mind  
Untouched by,  
Corporeal desires  
The mind is...  
Light,  
Transparent

And  
Pure at this age.  
The language that it speaks  
Is,  
Not of the body.

I have passed through  
Those stages  
When  
Your eyes  
Were,  
The sole reservoir,  
Of joy  
And  
Your talks  
The only solace.  
But  
More important than these  
Is  
The continual blossoming of the  
Red hued rose seeped in purity  
In the heart.

But  
What should I do?  
When I wake up in the morning  
As if  
From a nightmare  
Of raging passions  
Carrying my mangled corpse  
As one  
Wildly trampled under

The paws of a  
Wild animal

I feel  
Without making you  
My own  
Love is just an act  
Being  
Staged out.

Many a time  
I thought of  
Telling you  
Consummation of  
Love  
Occurs  
Twixt  
two  
bodies  
clasped in an embrace.  
But  
Each time I thought of  
Doing so,  
Something prevented me-  
Your eyes of crystal purity  
And  
The red hued rose,  
Seeped in purity,  
Blossoming in your heart

O!!  
What made me feel



I was returning home  
With  
My mother  
After having taken  
A holy dip in the Ganges  
Perhaps!  
My mother is also there  
Hidden within you

Once,  
Being driven by my fear of purity  
And  
Having donned  
A mask of purity,  
I proposed-  
'Let's marry'  
But,  
You declined  
Desiring,  
To complete your education

Gazing into  
the crystal purity of your eyes  
I know not why  
The animal within me  
Remains,  
Chastened and subdued.  
That day, that moment too,  
It remained thus..... subdued  
Though  
At night it reared its head  
once more

and I,  
helpless under its spell  
went on  
letting myself,  
be trampled under its  
wild paws,  
repeatedly asking forgiveness  
of  
love and chastity.

The instinctive urges  
Of  
A twenty eight year old boy,  
Far surpass  
Your understanding  
You,  
Who are just twenty four.  
After all  
You are younger  
And I too  
Have lived through this age.

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## MEETING POINTS OF TWO CULTURES

Yordanka Boyanova

The intention of this article is to disclose an intra-cultural and humanistic aspect of the literary and cultural connections between the East and the West revealed through the Bhagavadgita– an emblematic Sanskrit text of prolonged existence throughout millennia. It will also discuss its transmission across the time and space boundaries within and without the Sanskrit world of discourse. The dissemination of this quite enigmatic text into Western and other non-Sanskritic cultures continues today, even despite cultural gaps between the culture and the literary form of the ancient original, and the distinctive character of contemporary recipient cultures. The clear reason for this lies not in the differences and the distinctions between two inter-reacting cultures. On the contrary due to the existence of a cultural intra-space, a common place where the two cultures meet they merge to blur the boundaries between them. In this respect the Bhagavadgita is a unique treatise of theoretical and practical knowledge and importance in that it postulates, explains and gives practical solutions to basic human problems: problems which deeply touch in an innermost way the essence of life, desires, aspirations, goals and actions of each human being, regardless of external conditioning and external parameters of existence. The subject matter of the text consists of three major themes of universal meaning: the origin and natural mechanism of human suffering, the way of liberation from suffering and the character of human nature exempt from suffering. These three themes act as a functional aim and framework constituting the entire text and its literary structure, its semantical and referential meanings.

On a literary structural-semantic level the triple thematic is revealed simultaneously in a logical progress and in synchronization, corresponding to the functional aim of the text. Inherent to the logical structuring of the themes is the primary role of an initiating, underlying and graduating principle for the dynamics of the plot and the structural-semantic formation of the text as a whole. The major theme arises in the first shloka as a cornerstone and basic meaning of the shloka overarching and framing the entire text. Here the notion of suffering is depicted through the character of the blind king Dhritarashtra, the father of the Kauravas. This notion is further developed in the character of the leading Kaurava Duryodhana on the battle field before the beginning of the battle. It then culminates in its incredibly devastating force completely destroying the human being, as expressed in the character of Arjuna situated between the two armies at the moment when the signals for the commencement of the war are given.

The problem of human suffering in the Bhagavadgita is made manifest and exposed with the utmost psychological and cosmological depth, objectiveness and humaneness. It is postulated as universal human nature, touching upon and striking the existence of all people through the universality of its natural mechanism of origin, impact and final result. At the core of the problem the Bhagavadgita incorporates the notion of

death developed as literary character through the figures of Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana and Arjuna.

The notion of death arises in the very first shloka and develops as a direct text of both implicative and explicative wording throughout the first chapter until the 9th shloka of the second chapter.

The first shloka formulates the question of the blind King Dhritarashtra towards his royal minister and advisor Sanjaya "On the field of Dharma, on the field of Kuru having assembled, eager to fight, what indeed did mine [my sons] and the Pandavas do, O, Sanjaya?" Here the suffering of physical blindness is the reason why Dhritarashtra seeks the assistance of Sanjaya, so that he might cast light upon the ongoing events at the battle field in order to participate in these events. The question of Dhritarashtra plays a very basic role—that of a cornerstone for the plot of the Bhagavadgita in as much as the further text represents Sanjaya's answer. The first shloka thus possesses a framing and programming structure. It overarches the whole text defining in totality the thematic environment.

Although the blindness of Dhritarashtra motivates his asking, his physical suffering is not part of the subject-matter of the framing shloka and can be deduced only from the context. The first two compound-words of the shloka, namely "the field of dharma" and "the field of Kuru", which denote concepts of fundamental meaning of the

entire structural-semantic and referential dimensions of the text, are left behind and act as a mere background to the literary subject-matter and pathos of the framing shloka. The logical accent of the sentence-question is put not upon the fundamental notions of “dharma” and “Kuru”, but on the interrogative pronoun “kim” what and the verb “akurvata” (“did”) at the end of the shloka, i.e. the question of Dhritarashtra is “what did mine and the Pandavas do” while gathered together on the battlefield “eager to fight”. The pathos of the shloka is thoroughly defined by the possessive pronoun “mamaka” (“mine”) disclosing Dhritarashtras’ fatherly feelings of affection and attachment towards his sons. The metaphor of blindness also permeates the literary semantics of the possessive pronoun ‘mine’ as an expressive notion of possession and attachment. The literary pathos of this shloka is the concern and the fear of a father who faces a real war with the real possibility that his sons may be killed. They will either kill the Pandavas, or will be killed by them. In other words the question of Dhritarashtra “what did mine and the Pandavas do” means “who was killed, are my sons alive or not” asked with the natural fear and suffering of a father.

Thus in the very first framing shloka the notion and the character of death arises from the speech characteristics of Dhritarashtra. Here the figure of death is constructed as a mixture of fear and

embarrassment based on a very natural human psychic condition when the eventual death of beloved ones, those to whom one is deeply attached and has love and affection for in a possessive family way is expected. Death here is presented as human suffering, occurring only as a reflection of the observation of someone else’s death, i.e. as a reflection of the real experience of the death.

The second phase of the progress of the plot comprises the text from shloka 2 to shloka 11 of the 1st Chapter. In this segment Duryodhana observes before Dronacharya the force of the two armies. The depiction further develops the character of death which completely negates the previous one constructing a new figure, hypostatized into a “positive” and “negative” disposition. The positive hypostasis is styled by the reflection of military wisdom and strategy, the power of armaments and the super capabilities of the warriors in the army of the Pandavas. The reflection of the army of the Kauravas through the speech characteristics of Duryodhana creates a terrifying picture. Seeing the sufficient and victorious military force of the Pandavas and the insufficient and ineffective force of his army Duryodhana experiences the direct fear of death. Through the words of Duryodhana for the first time direct wording about death appears on the surface of the text. His heart terrified by fearful feelings counterreacts with a vigorous desire to fight against the

obvious menace of death. Turning to Dronacharya he explains that all of his men are ready to give their lives for him. He then commands all of them to stay firm in their lines to defend the grandfather and commander-in-chief Bhishma.

Thus in the second descriptive stage in the depiction of the two armies the character of death assumes a much more concrete and direct military and human exposure. Death divides itself into a two sided phenomenon – a positive hypostasis, i.e. the army of the Pandavas, epitomizing death/killing others/as a means of victory in the name of justice, and negative, i.e. the army of the Kauraves, epitomizing death (to be killed) as defeat in the name of hatred.

This bi-structuring of the figure of death as a division into and co-relation of a positive and negative image is further developed and brought to a conclusion in the next segment of the plot (12-20, I) which marks the beginning of the battle. Seeing the fear in Duryodhana's heart and to reassure and encourage him to fight, grandfather and commander-in-chief Bhishma blows his conch, followed by all Kauravas who too blow their conches, kettledrums, tabors, trumpets and cow-horns. Then Krishna and Arjuna and the rest of the Pandavas start blowing their conches.

This action, marking the commencement of the war, explicates two peculiarities. On the one hand the instruments of the Kauravas are

terrestrial and their collective sound is earth-shaking indeed. However, the conches of the Pandavas and their brave warriors are celestial. The sound made by them in response to that made by Duryodhana's army is so tremendous that pierces the very hearts of the sons of Dhritarashtra. The simultaneous sound of the Pandavas echoes, wave after wave, bouncing from the earth to the sky and back again. The magnificence of this battle sound pervades the entire atmosphere creating panic amongst the opposing army. In this description of the turmoil of war cry the metaphor of the "pierced" hearts of the Kauravas is the final stroke, outlining the negative character of death as an unbearable, tremendous fear before the face of inevitability whereas the celestial extraordinary power of the Pandavas' instruments and their sound gives the final stroke to the victorious, joyful, i.e. the most positive image of death expressed through the presupposed, inevitable death of the Kauravas.

On the other hand in this segment of the plot death is emphasised as inevitability in both of its hypostases. The metaphor of the "pierced" hearts refers, not only to the distress of the Kauravas due to the extreme power of the opposite army but also implicates the aggressiveness and the vigor of hatred in their hearts. These characteristics here naturally are extrapolated to their extremes in order to cope with fear and military weakness and to secure their

self defense. Therefore, in this textual segment it seems already inevitable for the Kauravas to fight vigorously against the Pandavas. Correspondingly the eagerness of the Kauravas to fight makes the counter-action of the mighty Pandavas also inevitable. Thus, the character of death here is introduced as inevitable, destined, fearsome suffering for the heroes lacking morality (namely the Kauravas, their army and their father), and an inevitable, destined, joyful justice for the heroes, led by morality in their action, namely the Pandavas and their army.

Following the next segment of the plot the enlarged metaphor of war remains a background for further deconstruction of the character of death, as developed in the previous segment, to give way to a new, completely negative, figure. Artistically this is achieved by bringing the main heroes of the Bhagavadgita Krishna and Arjuna to the fore and especially by directly introducing Arjuna's character. As the sounds of war overwhelm the entire atmosphere, the earth and the sky and the Kauravas take up their weapons ready to attack. Arjuna, commander of the Pandavas, also grabs his bow and asks his charioteer Krishna to drive him to the borderline between the two armies to observe the warriors he must kill. He undertakes this military tactic with the confidence and high spirits of a mighty invincible warrior, for which he is known from the Mahabharata. Here Arjuna's action directly represents the

positive, heroic and victorious hypostasy of death as depicted above. Having stopped at the borderline though, while observing the opposite army his understanding about death and killing thoroughly changes. It is in this place through the speech characteristics of Arjuna that the new negative figure of death arises (26-47, I).

Standing at the best vantage-point in his chariot Arjuna sees only kith and kin in the opposing army. Assembled and ready to fight are his closest and most respected people: right in front of him are Bhishma, the grand old man of the Kuru clan and acharya Drona—both invincible, both enjoying special relations with the Pandavas and very important for both the armies; then he sees all the elders of the Kuru dynasty connected to him through the paternal and maternal sides - parents, uncles, brothers, sons and grandsons - all directly or indirectly related. Then there are in-laws, friends and noble people, well wishers of both the armies. Now on both sides Arjuna sees his own people and in the opposing army he sees no enemies, Arjuna is completely shaken up. His limbs give in, his hands and legs fail to move, his mouth dries and his whole body trembles, his skin burns, his hand releases the celestial bow Gandiva. It becomes impossible for him to stand, let alone fight. Arjuna falls into such a blank despair that he thinks he is losing his mind. Driven by this awful psychosomatic condition Arjuna evolves before Krishna

a visibly logical and consistent anti-war philosophy of life and wisdom based on humaneness, high morality and respect for laws of nature and society. Contemplating vigorously with his restless mind upon the anti-humane and anti-social effect of using killing and death as means of victory and the evil and the destruction his victory through war will bring, he comes to the conclusion and firm decision that it is better for him to enter the battle without weapons and without any struggle whatsoever and allow the armed Kauravas to kill him, instead of him to commit the sin of massacre of brothers/relatives/friends, respected ones.

The depiction of Arjuna's suffering accounts for a relatively large fragment of the text. It consists of 28 shlokas which is a good half of the first chapter and ten shlokas of the second. Furthermore, in the colophon of the first chapter it is entitled "The Despair of Arjuna". These are formal factors additionally emphasising the importance of Arjuna's despondency as a mechanism of the plot. However, the focal point for the entire text and a key mechanism for its further development and structural-semantic change is the figure of death as depicted in the speech-characteristics of Arjuna which express his despondency. The death of his kith and kin around which all his despair rotates creates a new figure of death. Arjuna's unbearable suffering is provoked by a very deep and relevant co-

experience of the inevitable - the very imminent death of his close and very respected people. This then gradually expands into an unbearable despair bringing him to the totality of suffering - the deepest suffering, which overwhelms the "three worlds" (35, I; 8, II) - the terrestrial, the celestial and the one between them. Thus, in his sorrow and in the no-man's land between the two armies, Arjuna implicates the character of death through his deepest awareness of it as a social and cosmic totality, violating the essential values of life. This new hypostasis of the figure of death in fact is the logical reason and the suffering which it causes to Arjuna is the motivating situation, and, accordingly, the moving-force mechanism of the plot, which provokes the rise and the existence of the Bhagavadgita itself. Thus, in order to assuage Arjuna's despair and inhuman suffering, from which he sees no way out, that the master and charioteer of Arjuna's chariot, "sings" his knowledgeable song before him between the two armies at Kurukshetra. Every word, every shloka, and every chapter of the text, starting from shloka 11, Chapter II where Krishna starts "singing" this song to the end, are a means of liberating Arjuna from his suffering- the suffering which has transfigured the invincible warrior into an incapable person, ready to die.

The whole text subsequent to this point is dedicated to the problems and



the questions of the devoted and deeply intelligent disciple Arjuna and his transition from the plain of death and suffering to the plain of life and happiness. The text turns into a didactic discourse, where the preceptor gives to the disciple knowledge and well-founded instructions concerning different principles, methods and concrete practices of yoga, leading him towards liberation. Under the pressure of these instructions the text changes its character into a didactic textbook setting out a “master” - “student” relationship, as well as the highest goals of this relationship. It manifests the emblematic features of the best exponents of the ancient classical educational system. The text contains an enormous continuum of knowledge about the human being on the whole - about the structure of his nature and personality, the dimensions of his natural capabilities, the essence of freedom, of immortality, etc., as well as the way and the methods to achieve such values. The individual chapters follow their consequent order like the beads of a mala, the joining thread of which is the annihilation of Arjuna’s suffering. The very “song” of the preceptor starts where Arjuna drops the bow saying “I will not fight” (9, II) and finishes where he exclaims that all the delusion has been destroyed and “I will follow your instructions” [to fight] (73, XVIII). In this way the basic text migrates around the suffering of Arjuna spiraling up with the aim of elevating his knowledge, awareness and self-realization.

To generalize what has been discussed above I would like to deduce the fact that the movement of the plot of the Bhagavadgita forms a specific geometric shape. The first four major segments, although displaying events along a linear time connection, are structured vertically one above the other, completely covering the lower one. The last, the upper segment is Arjuna’s sorrow and denial to act/fight. This segment of the plot structure forms a centre around which the structure further migrates, rotates in a vertically spiraling geometrical form to return to the focal point - the upper centre, or the aim, i.e. Arjuna’s cheerful readiness to act/fight (annihilation of Arjuna’s sorrow). In other words the end is the beginning - the last segment of the plot brings the whole story back to the fourth one, bringing back the same Arjuna, but with a new character. Therefore, the structure of the plot assumes the geometry of a vertical spiral where any horizontal cross section will have the geometry of the disc (chakra). Arjuna’s human problem is situated in the centre of each disc-section. The elimination of the problem is the moving principle of the upward spiraling disc-structure of the plot. The last segment where Arjuna’s transformation has been already completed (he is ready to fight), brings the whole plot back to the fourth segment without any structural changes whatsoever but changing the semantics of Arjuna’s character. The last segment coming down into the fourth is the last development of the plot by which the

vertical structure is laid and the whole geometrical structure assumes the form of the disc. So we may maintain that the functional structure of the plot is the geometry of the [sacred] disc (chakra). At the centre of it is the force, motivating its rotation, i.e. the human being, and the semantics of the “rotation of the disc” is the transformation of the human being from the plane of suffering death in any of its forms to the plane of stability and undestroyability of human personality; i.e. beyond the very nature and the processes of human suffering.

When we speak about the Gita as an emblematic text of Sanskrit literature/verbal art, we should not ignore the fact that it is emblematic for the entire classical and traditional Indian culture. Not only the literature/verbal art in Sanskrit, but the enormous literary ocean of ancient and medieval Indian literature (much of which still not deciphered) abounds with similar texts, the literary form of which has been designed to play

the role of a preceptor transforming human awareness and personality to the stability, devoid of distress and rich in qualities. The proper study of such text in different ways and on different levels, starting from grass-roots education could be inserted into the Western educational system, which is lacking exactly the human character-building element. This would be quite appropriate and could be developed as one of the important points of confluence between India and the West. The educational character of the universal humanistic values of these texts makes them critically needed as text-books for Open Universities to meet the needs of people of all walks of life who seek transformation. Their number is quite enormous and certainly increasing.

In this way Indian literature and particularly its ancient and medieval conglomerate has through the ages been, and still remains, an important common place and a vortex where the Eastern and Western cultures meet.

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## KEDARNATH AGRAWAL AS A POET

Ashok Tripathi

Translated by  
Ravi Nandan Sinha

Hindi progressive poetry and Kedarnath Agrawal are synonymous. The aesthetics of Kedarji's poetry is also the aesthetics of progressive poetry. The growth of Kedarji's poetry is also the growth of Hindi progressive poetry.

To be progressive is to protest against injustice, exploitation and oppression; to support the exploited; to struggle against the exploiters; to act; and at the same time, to have firm faith in man's 'continuous journey towards victory'. This is for the reason that it is this faith that gives strength to the struggle. If there is no hope for victory, there will be no impetus to struggle and to act. To be confident about victory is a key factor in the success of struggle. Kedarji proclaims this fact, and in the opinion of Ramvilasji, because of the nobility of his personality, this proclamation turns into poetry—

'Main hoon anaastha par likha/aastha ka shilalekh/nitant maun,/ kintu sarthak aur sajeev/ karma ke krititwa ki suryabhimukhi abhivyakti:/ Mrityu par jeevan ke jai ki ghoshna.' Whatever factors are necessary to make 'man's continuous journey to victory' successful, are all present in full measure in the poetry of Kedarji. Whatever noble, positive, creative, valuable and acceptable can come within the ambit of our thought or imagination is a natural constituent of Kedarji's poetry, for instance, faith, assiduousness, vital force, enthusiasm, enlightenment, love, struggle, nature (the sensate and insensate both), humanitarianism and so on. But negative elements

such as lack of faith, despair, frustration, depression, darkness, desperation, neurosis etc. are difficult to find in his poetry.

Kedarji is the poet of struggle for truth in life. In the course of fighting this battle for truth against the guileful savagery of opposing forces, there have been some occasional moments of melancholy (though never of despair or desperation). Sometimes these moments offer new alternatives. In these moments the struggling man reconsiders the next strategy of struggle. And then, with a new enthusiasm and with a new strategy he enters the battlefield. In Ram ki Shaktipooja when Mahashakti makes the 108th lotus disappear, for a moment Ram seems to lose heart, but the very next moment 'Rajivnayan' (the lotus-eyed) Ram thinks of an alternative to it.

Sometimes Kedarji too faces similar moments of hopelessness, but immediately, he is able to overcome them. Although some of his poems like 'Aur Ka, Aur Mera Din', 'Bundelkhand ke Admi', 'Bap Beta Bechta Hai', 'V.P. Ka Rupiya Dena Hai' may appear to be exceptions to this rule, they do not constitute the primary tenor of his poetic consciousness. Even in these poems, annoyance and anger often accompany melancholy.

Poems, written when Parvati Devi, the poet's love, was struggling against death in the Vijay Hospital of Madras, do have a note of momentary melancholy in the earlier part but later, they are

able to break free of the grip of that emotion aided by his life's philosophy of Marxism and declare the triumph of life over death—'Maun pari hai priya priyambad/ Bina bol ka munh khole,/ Pyar pulak ki aankhe meeche/ Dukh mein doobi saanse leti/Pas khada main/ Mahakal ko/ Rok raha hun./ Kavitaon ka ghera dale/Yahan na aaye unko lene/ Jeevan ki jay/Premyogini paaye.' (Kedarji had sent this poem to me with some changes in the original version on 26.12.1985 in an inland letter, which I am reproducing here).

Such profound faith in poetry, such trust that only poet can show who champions human values in poetry and who believes that 'Chammachon se nahin/ aakunth doob kar piya jata hai/ Dukh ko dukh ki nadi mein/Aur tab jiya jata hai/admi ki tarah admi ke sath/admi ke liye.'

Poetry for him is not merely a hobby or a part time work done in leisure. For him poetry is his life's work; it is a weapon to change the mindset, a means of triumphing over the harsh realities of life full of travail, of conquering death—'Dukh ne mujhko/jab-jab toda/maine/ apne tootapan ko/kavita ki mamta se joda/jahan gira main/kavitaon ne mujhe uthaya/Hum dono ne/wahan prat, ka surya ugaya. Some of Kedarji's readers/ critics consider him to be a poet of the rural consciousness, others of the urban life, some call him a poet of struggle, while others think that he is a poet glorifying hard work, or beauty, or nature.

Some think he is a poet of political consciousness, some consider him a satirist while others think he is poet of beauty and rasa, and so on. But the fact of the matter is that Kedarji does not belong to any one particular domain mentioned above.

He is the poet of life in its totality. He is not the poet of life in fragments, but one of the fullness of life; he is a fully alive poet armed with social concerns. The worker, peasant, landlord, capitalist, businessman, dalit leader, officer, clerk, lawyer, judge, an accused, a criminal, a policeman, children, wife, woman, man, moneylender, lover, beloved, unsophisticated pilgrims to Chitrakoot, squirrel, baya bird, woodpecker, sparrow, an ox called Bhogila, a dog called Moti, Madras, Mahabalipuram, Ooty, sea, kabar, kachhar, padua soil, poet's friends, litterateurs, artists, village, city, small town, summer, spring, winter, rains, hot winds, moonlight, tree, cloud, lightning, wheat, paddy, black gram, linseed, mustard, breeze, water etc., all are present in his poetry and appear in their individual existence. Kedarji does not write on the Ganga but on the local river Ken. He does not write on Nandi bull but on Bhogila ox.

Kedarji is a poet of the profound realities of life; he is not a poet of mere imagination. A poet committed to realism believes more on what he has himself seen. That is why in his poems, the word 'see' has been used repeatedly.

That is also the reason why his poetry is full of new and unique images and one of the characteristic features of his poetry is that it evokes visual images.

Kedarji is not a poet of the 'heard' reality but of the reality that has been seen— 1. Desh ki chhati darkte dekhta hoon 2. Chita jali to main ne dekha 3. Aaj main ne rakt roop prabhat dekha 4. Maine usko jab jab dekha 5. Main ne bagi ghora dekha 6. Din mein hi jagar Because he is the poet of the verb 'to see' he is also the poet of the pronouns 'I', 'me', 'mine' etc.. This is because there must be a subject who sees. This 'someone' is the poet himself. He has great faith in himself, even to the limits of egoism and this faith expresses itself in bold declarations. At some places the two are seen enlaced together : 1. Main samay ko sadhta hoon, 2. Maine aankh larai gagan viraje raje ravi se, 3. Khara pahar chadha main apne bal par, 4. Main samay ki dhaar mein dhans kar khara hoon, 5. Dukh ne mujhko jab jab tora/ Maine apne toote pan ko kavita ki mamta se jora, 6. Aaj nadi bilkul udas thi...maine usko nahin jagaya, 7. Gathri choron ki duniyan mein/ gathri maine nahin churai, 8. Mere desh tumhari chhati ki mitti main ho jaunga, 9. Dheere uthao meri palki/ main hoon suhagin Gopal ki, 10. Manjhi na bajao bansi mera man dolta, 11. Main hoon anastha par likha/aastha ka shilalekh, 12. Main ghoomunga Ken kinare, etc., etc.

This 'I' of Kedarji is not the 'I' of individualistic egoism; it is the self-

confident, socialistic democratic 'I'. Because his individual consciousness merges with social consciousness and then giving it a new set of human values, turns into images of socialism and democracy, his 'I' changes into 'we' that includes all of us. His poems belong to him as much as to us. The poetic world of Kedarji is immensely vast. The entire universe has been covered by it. The poetic oeuvre of Kedarji deals prominently with a number of subjects, and that is the reason why his poetry is sometimes identified with any one particular subject, in the manner of 'syadvad'. As a matter of fact, farming occupies a prominent place in his poetic thought stream and the farmer is at the core of it. Clouds are ineluctably related to farming. A poet whose primary concern is the farmer must write on clouds. Nirala, Kedarji and Nagarjun exemplify it.

Kedarji has written scores of poems on clouds or on subjects related to clouds. These poems are not merely descriptions of nature; they express the very spirit of life in its fullness. As clouds are important to a farmer so are the bullocks. That is why Kedarji writes poems like 'Bhogila Bail' and 'Devi ke bail koi khol le gaya'; he talks about driving the bullocks, writes about breaking the ground with the sharp ploughshare and declares that the farmer should be given his right. Although Kedarji was born in the vanik caste, he belonged to the village and therefore his family was engaged in agriculture. The sanskara of a farmer

had become part of his being.

Apart from writing about it in his poetry, whenever he mentions his poetry in his expository prose too, he speaks in terms of farming. 1. Kavita na maine pai, na churai. Ise maine jeevan jot kar kisan ki tarah boya aur kata hai. (Foreword to 'Lok aur Alok'). 2. Yeh to kaho ki bhautikvad ke hal ki muthia pakar li hai maine aur jeevan ki parti dharti ko rat-din jote ja raha hoon, beej boye jar raha hoon aur har vakt taake ja raha hoon, isase sahityik akaal mein bacha hoon, varna main bhi Bengal ke 35 lakh mrit vyaktiyon mein ek hota. (Kedarji's letter to Ramsharan Sharma 'Munshi' 26.8.1947). 3. Woh (Ramvilas ji's letter) kya aya jaise kisan ke khet mein badal aya. (Kedarji's letter of 4 May, 1964). 4. Premchand ko pana koi khel hai ki aj ke kathakar unke sir ka bal chhoo lein. Sabke sab pesha karte hain—jeevan nahin pakarte, hal ki muthia ki tarah. (Kedarji's letter of 8th April, 1974).

He has written a number of songs and poems on activities related to agriculture, such as harvesting, hoeing, winnowing etc. He has also written 'Kisan Stavan'.

Watching the thickly growing crops, Kedarji's heart becomes 'aula maula', to use an idiom : 1. Abki dhan bahut upja hai/per ekhare dugan gaye hain. 2. Asman ki odhni odhe/ dhani pahne/ fasal ghaghariya/ Radha ban kar dharti nachi/ nacha hansmukh krishak sanwaria/kheton

ke nartan utsav mein/bhoola tan man geh dagariya.

‘Chandragahna se lautati ber’ and ‘Basanti hawa’ are spontaneous and unhindered expressions of this peasant consciousness. Even the spring breeze (basanti hawa) cannot match Kedarji’s ‘Basanti Hawa’. The spring breeze in Kedarji’s poetry is a re-creation of the breeze in Nature. This is Kedarji’s own spring breeze. Its youthfulness, its playfulness, its enjoying itself, its carefree nature, its pace, its rise, its laughter, and presence throughout this world takes us into a unique world of beauty. Perhaps it will be difficult to come across another poem of its kind in ‘Chandragahna se lautati ber’, ‘Phoolon ki bauchhar se’, ‘Ankhon dekha’, ‘Rang daurate hain rangin phoolon ke’, ‘Basant aya’, ‘Basant mein’, and his poems written on sunlight are unique examples of beauty and are poems of profound sensuousness and emotional intensity.

Kedarji is the poet of the simple, harsh and moving truths of life. ‘Kanpur’, ‘Ghar ka anubhav’, ‘Aankh dukhon se aanj rahi hai’, ‘Zindagi’, ‘Bap beta bechta hai’ etc. attest this fact. About such poems Ramvilasji writes in his letter of 14.4.66, ‘There is the blow of the hammer in poems like ‘Kanpur’, ‘Bundelkhand ka admi’, there is the colour of realism, plain but heroic. In your poems the language, style and the metaphors, all are such as one sees in a folk poet—and even among great poets, very few are gifted with that ability.’

The river Ken is the life-line of Banda. But for Kedarji it is not merely a river as a source of water; in his poems it is also a river of consciousness. He is so disappointed with the deadness and lack of sensitivity of the people of his region that he calls them stone—‘Pani, patthar chat raha hai gumsum/Sahma rahi/ Taak raha hai gumsum’. The river of sensitivity also is not able to move them. This disturbs Kedarji again and again.

Kedarji has presented the sum of the experience and thought of his life with the help of the image of the Ken river. He has many different kinds of relationship with the Ken. One of such relationships is also that of a beloved—‘Aaj nadi bilkul udas thi/Soyi thi apne pani mein/Uske darpan par/Badal ka vastra para tha. Maine usko nahin jagaya/Dabe paon ghar vapas aaya.’ Kedarji is a wonderful poet of subtle and tender feelings. Whereas the breeze, who is the hero of Nirala’s ‘Juhi ki Kali’, is excited and tweaks the fair, full cheeks of his beloved, the poet hero of the beloved Ken comes back home softly (‘dabe paon’) when he finds her asleep so that she does not wake up. Not only this, when he sees the river shrinking and suffering in summer, Kedarji feels disturbed. For him the river is also a veena, ‘Nadi hai ki nitambini veena/Tat par dhari/ kabhi bajti kabhi maun’, ‘Nadi ek naujawan ladki hai/Jiski jangh khuli/Aur hanso se bhari hai/Jisne bala ki sundarta payi hai’. Poems like ‘Main ghoomunga Ken



kinare' and 'Baitha hoon bus Ken kinare' express his many other relationships with the Ken. That is why he is also called the poet of the Ken.

Kedarji is the poet of beauty. Beauty, whether of nature, of a woman, of a man, of a child, of character, or of river and mountain, animals and birds, farms and fields, the sun and the wind, of hard work, of peasants and farmers, of trees and plants, captivates him. Here I am not referring to an academic definition of beauty. Beauty lies in all those things, in all those actions that give us comfort, joy, energy, enthusiasm; that make us active, spur us to be creative, and give us pleasure, and it does not really matter what kind of beauty it is. That is the reason why he can see beauty in '110 ka abhiyukt' who fights against injustice. This is the poem which Kedarji had sent to Agyeya for 'Doosra Saptak' on his invitation, but Agyeya wanted another poem in its place. Kedarji said to him that if he wanted to publish a poem by him, it had to be that poem only. And thus, 'Doosra Saptak' came out without Kedarji's poem. That was a clash between two different viewpoints on beauty. He likes 'chhote haath' (tiny hands), which, as the day breaks, 'Lal kamal se khil uthte hain/karni karne ko utsuk ho/dhoop hawa mein khil uthte hain.'

He sees beauty in 'Mukt yuvati' who challenges social orthodoxies, in the farmer ploughing his field in 'Ek hathaure wala', in protesting people, in the

'Gumman eint' that builds skyscrapers, in 'Garranala' crossing barriers, in the 'Bhogila bail', which is the source of a farmer's strength, in a working man 'Bhagauta badhai' and in 'Ayodhya ki lalten'.

Of all kinds of beauty the beauty of a woman is among the most widely noticed, the most intoxicating, the most overpowering, the most potent and the most magnetic. Here also Kedarji does not prefer the slow moving women, wont to spend a great deal of time in bed, decked in rich clothes and ornaments and wearing make up. He likes women as in 'Kaun albele ki nar jhamajham pani mein'—he likes women who work hard. Till the end his childhood memory of two women who came to collect water remained with him. Referring to them he would say, 'When Nanki and Sudi—well-built, healthy and beautiful—walked moving their hips carrying on their heads three pitchers one on top of the other, one understood the meaning of full-bodied beauty. It was from them that I developed an awareness of feminine beauty.'

When he was having a confrontation with Ramvilasji about Dinkar's Urvashi he wrote to him in a letter dated 16.4.1962, 'It would have been more exciting if the heroine did some hard work with her lover, and after that in gratitude for doing that work they had embraced each other and fallen in love' ('Mitra Samvad'—280).



A large number of Kedar ji's poems are about love and about voluptuous beauty coupled with love. Considered in terms of numbers, this is the most favourite subject for Kedarji. Kedarji is a poet of actualities. The beauty of the female body is also a pleasant actuality. To reject it is to reject reality. In such poems love and beauty blend together. The love shown in Kedarji's poems is not love for someone else's beloved. It is purely domestic love for his wife. Even those of his poems that describe explicitly the female voluptuous body and give the impression that they are about the beauty of someone else's beloved are actually poems centred on the poet's wife. Kedarji's acceptance of this fact indicates this—'Meri bibi sahiba abhi prayag mein hi hain. Na jane kab aanyengi. Kami mahsoos ho rahi hai, sach poochho to unhi ko pyar karne ko man ho raha hai. Na kavita chhootegi, na woh chhootengi.' 'Par is spasht kathan ko bura na mankar yeh samajh lena ki mujhe bhi vasant aa gaya hai. Shayad inhi tarah ke kshnon mein maine un par kavitaen likh di theen.' (Kedarji's letter of 8.2.1957 to Ramvilas ji). 'Moolta main patni premi raha hoon aur meri prem ki kavitaen unhi ke prem aur soundarya ki kavitaen hain. Kahin kahin kabhi kabhi kuchh kavitaen aisi jhalak de jaati hain, jaise ki unke alawa bhi doosari nariyon se ghanishtha roop se sambaddh raha hoon. Baat aisi nahin hai, jo main likh aya hoon, woh keval paramparik kavya sanskar ka parinam

hai, jo ghar ki chahardivari ke bahar pahoonch gaya hai.' ('Mujhe Bhi Kuchh kahana hai'- 'Jamun Jal Tum'). Look at some examples: 1. Hey meri tum/ jab tum apne kesh khol kar/ taran tal mein lahraogi/Aur naha kar chanda si bahar aaogi/Do kumudon ko dhake haath se/ Chakit dekhti hui chaturdik/ tab main tumko/ yugm bhujalon mein bhar loonga/ Aur chandani mein choomunga tumhe raat bhar 2. Tum mujhe kuchh na do/ na apni ungliyon ke sparsh ki vartul lahariyan/na apni aankhon ki chumbakiya bijliyan/na apne kandhon par jhuki hui madandh raaten/na apne gaalon ke gulabi prabhat/na apne nitambon ka charno tak bahta hua mahollas'. In poems such as 'Prem Tirath', 'Statue', 'Phool si komal ungliyan', 'Din ab bhi garam aur gudguda hota hai', 'Picasso ki putriyan' and 'Main gaya hoon doob' there is an expression of overt love, which is at times steeped in eroticism. In a sense, in the early poems of Kedarji, the female element has been prominent. It was so prominent that in 1943 itself, Ramvilasji had to say—1. 'Write less on woman in your poetry' (Ramvilas ji's letter of 10.2.2943). 2. 'Avoid making woman an obsession. You have already written a great deal on her.' ((Ramvilasji's letter of May 1943).

But Kedarji did not seem to pay much attention to what Ramvilasji said and continued to write in the same vein. However, there is no sense of lechery in it. Sensuality, of course, it does have. It is an expression of a responsible feeling of love. At times this love is touched

with eroticism. In the context of Kalidas he has also accepted it. In his letter of 28.9.1956 Ramvilasji writes, 'There is a great deal of eroticism in Kalidas. Otherwise he was also a sensible man.' In his letter of 30.9.1956 Kedarji writes, 'I too am enamoured of it and that is why I too was replete with the sweetness of eroticism. Brother, it is such a powerful thing.' Sunlight is a very favourite subject of Kedarji because he is not a poet of darkness but one of luminescence, light, faith, struggle and action. The sun gives us energy and warmth. It is the sun of the morning that tells us—awake, arise and act. There are numerous concrete images of sunlight in the poetry of Kedarji, rich with emotion and illuminated by the clear glow of light, but each image is different from the other, with its independent significance located far away even from a shadow of repetitiveness, with its profound sensuousness and with the power to re-create the image in our imagination— 1. Dhoop nahi, yeh/ Baitha hai khargosh palang par/ ujla/ royendar mulayam—/ isko chhoo kar/ gyan ho gaya hai jeene ka/ phir se mujhko. 2. Bhool sakta main nahi/ye kuchh khule din/ Onth se choome gaye/ujle dhule din/ jo tumhare saath beete/ ras bhare din/ baware din/ deep ki lau se garam din. 3. Dhoop dhara par utri/ jaise Shiv ke jatajoot se Ganga utri. 4. Dhoop chamakti hai chandi ki sari pahne/ maike mein beti ki tarah magan hai. 5. Rachi usha ne richa diva ki. 6. Dhoop hansii doodhiya deepti se. 7. Dheere se paon dhara dharati par kiranon ne/ mitti par

daur gaya lal rang taluon ka/ chhota sa gaon hua kesar ki kyari sa/ kacche gahr doob gaye kanchan ke pani mein. 8. Khila hai agni prakash.

His poem 'Prabhat' shows how the first ray of the sun fills the entire creation with joy and how it gets suffused with a feeling of joyous love.

Kedarji is not a poet of renunciation but of emotional engagement. We find a constant tussle between this sense of renunciation and engagement in the poetry of Niralaji. In Kedarji's poetry, the idea of renunciation will be seen only as an exception; there is not even that mood of renunciation that people get into during a funeral. At those moments the funeral pyre is at the core of that mood of renunciation. But a poem written on the funeral pyre— that too on the funeral pyre of his wife— is a poem of great love, not of renunciation. Normally, the scene of a burning pyre evokes a sense of disgust—we have been taught that the description of a burning pyre is an example of the veebhatsa rasa (evoking a feeling of disgust). But the way the pyre of the poet's beloved Parvati Devi is described takes us into a wonderful world of beauty, where the flames of the pyre are compared with the golden petals of a kumud flower and where the pyre's ash turns into the pollen of love— 'Chita jali/maine dekha/ dahan dah mein/kanchanvarni pankhurion ka/kuvlay kumud khila/raj ko/rag parag mila.'

Such glorious and loving imaging of a burning pyre is probably the only one of its kind in entire literature. A deep faith in the ultimate significance of noble love and a belief in the historical dialectic materialistic philosophy of life only can create such a consciousness. Here the flames of the pyre compete with the flames of a yajna and defeat them. It is the profound love for 1. Maine aankh larai/ gagan viraje ravi se. 2. Main nayan mein/ surya ki alok abha aanjta hoon. 3. Is jeene ko/ sau sau man se jeena hai/...is jeene ko maut mar kar jeena hai.

Kedarji's poetic journey begins from 1930-31. The poems of the first 6 or 7 years are those that have emotion as a prominent element, are divorced from the reality of life and do not show a presence of a well-thought out life's philosophy. They are impressionistic kind of poems that evoke emotions only as they are read or heard.

During his days as a student of law in Kanpur when he went to meet Nirala ji (he had cycled from Kanpur to Lucknow to meet Niralaji) he met Ramvilas ji, a meeting that gradually turned into friendship, and then his emotionalism began to turn towards an analysis of the harsh realities of life. The contradictions and paradoxes of the world that he saw around him began to raise questions in his mind. The effect of this change of perspective on the world began to be seen in his poetry. The value of importance of hard labour, the beauty

of hard labour began to inform his poetry and became its central concern and it also lent charm to it. His 'Dopahri mein nauka vihar', written in 1937 as a reaction to Pant's 'Chandni raat mein nauka vihar', is a result. These two poems represent two different outlooks on life and two different ways of living life. One of them represents an easy going life and parasitism, while the other highlights action, hard work, the beauty of labour and self-reliance. Pantji enjoys life on the labour of the boatmen. Kedarji rows the boat himself resulting in callused hands, but his pleasure is no less than Pantji's because he knows the art of kissing those calluses and turning them into 'meethe dakh' (sweet resins), and also gives us the new mantra of 'work is beautiful'. Coming out of harems and drawing room, his poetry begins to run with joy across fields and farmhouses, across pastures and stony paths full of thorns.

Ramvilasji believes that in the poetry of Kedarji politics plays a decisive role. If we analyze the story of his poetic growth, the truth of this statement is fully attested.

The poetic journey of seen and felt truth that began in 1937 and continued incessantly till 1994-95 has been a journey that has seen him fighting against his times and the politics of his times. The poems in 'Kahen Kedar khari khari' are witness to it. He criticizes the anti-people politics of the country and also that of the government. In his political

poems his tone has been biting—poems like ‘Aag lage is ramraj mein’, ‘Neta’ ‘Na maro nazaria’, ‘Yadi aayega dollar’, ‘Kya laye’, ‘Chunav morche ki antakshari’, ‘Hum to unka vote na daibe’, ‘Vastav mein’, ‘Lar gaye’ exemplify it. The satire in these poems is responsible satire. ‘There is an uncompromising purpose and self-control in the satire of Kedar that gives his entire satirical writing a steadfast belief in the victory of the people, a touching humanitarianism and power.’

Whenever there is a people’s movement in the country, an uninterrupted stream of vitality, enthusiasm, manliness and struggle flows in the poetry of Kedarji. ‘Ek hathaure wala ghar mein aur hua’ mazdoor ka janm is the result of this perspective. This poem is a unique expression of the beauty of toil and struggle.

The rhythm of the times through which Kedarji lived beats in his poetry. His poems document his times. In order to understand his poems, one needs to understand the entire period between 1937-38 and 1994-95 and the fact that his poems complement the history of that period.

The social truths of his time are mirrored in his fearless comments on the various happenings, 1. ‘Panchvarshiya yojna ki reedh/ rin ki shrinkhla/ pet Bharatvarsh ka/ aur chakoo dalari hai’. 2. ‘Desh ke bhitar dahan aur dah hai/ antarrashtriya star par vah vah hai.’ Here is another comment on the hypocritical,

anti-people politics—‘Na aag hai/na pani/ desh ki rajneeti/bina aag pani ke/ khichari pakati hai/ janta hawa khati hai.’

‘Aayog’, ‘Yadi aayega dollar’, ‘Desh mein lagi aag ko’, ‘Unko mahal makani’, ‘Aadmi ki chandmari’ and ‘Dher laga diye hain hamne’ are poems of this kind.

The poems of Kedarji are a clarion call against injustice, oppression, exploitation, fatalism, orthodoxy, superstitions, shirking duties, laziness, insensitivity and so on. His poems like ‘Bagi ghora’, ‘Garranala’, ‘Ghan garje’, ‘Eka ka bal’, ‘Shapath’, ‘Hathaure ka geet’, ‘Jab tab’, ‘Doshi hath’, ‘Aankh khuli’, ‘Kar utha’, ‘Kam kar’, ‘Morche par’, ‘Shakti meri bahu mein hai’ are fired with the spirit of struggle.

Kedarji is a poet of the people, of the world, of the local, and not of the ethereal. The local element gives authenticity to his poetry. All over his poetry there is Bundelkhand—with its distinct natural surroundings, its rough terrain, its language bringing people together and also with all its contradictions. But its reach goes beyond the regional and becomes national and international. Kedarji is not a poet who depends only on his personal experience to write his poetry; he is also a well-read poet. In his ‘Mitra Samvad’ one comes across the names of books and references that reveal that Kedarji has learnt as much from a deep study of these books as from the stark realities of life, and he has learnt also from his deep analysis of these realities, trying

to find the reasons behind them and developing the art of shaping them into poetry. When Namwar Singh saw the list in Kedarji's condolence meeting in Delhi organized on 26.6.2000 by Janvadi Lekhak Sangh, he said that Kedarji has been 'reincarnated'. Kedarji is a poet whom the people trust and he is also a poet who trusts the people. As a poet, since he understands how society has developed and knows history he is aware of the fact that only heads of states, rulers and exploiters decline and die. The people are always alive—they are immortal. Only the heads of states change; people always remain the same. Kedarji declares the fact of the people's immortality—'Kisi desh ya kisi rashtra ki/ kabhi nahin janta marti hai.'

Because, 'Janta satyon ki bharya hai/ jagrat jeevan ki janani hai/ mahamahi ki mahashakti hai' ('Janta'). The poem 'Woh jan mare nahin marega' also proclaims this firm faith. Kedarji is a poet in quest of noble human values and humanity itself. It is difficult to remain human in these difficult times today when a question faces man—'Kaise jiyen kathin hai chakkar/Nirbal hum bali hai makkar/tiljhan tabartor katakat/haddi ki lohe se takkar.' Kedarji looks for that man who is able to retain his humanity in this difficult situation—'Main use khojta hun/ jo admi hai/aur ab bhi admi hai/tabah hokar bhi admi hai/charitra par khara/devdaru ki tarah bara.'

In order to protect his humanity in the face of all kinds of pressures,

temptations and upheavals a man has to be eccentric. A fickle minded man, a man who is busy calculating profit and loss cannot pass the test of remaining human even in the most difficult situation. That is why 'Khabt hai mujhe/admi hone ka/bekhabt admi/ saand hai/siyar hai/ pet bhar leta hai/neta hai'. What can be a greater attack on political leaders!

Kedarji was a lawyer by profession and that provided for his livelihood. The courts showed him paradoxes about the naked truths of life, the real face of society, the victory of injustice over justice, the double-faced nature of man, the victory of falsehood over truth, and so on. It is from the courts that he learnt about the realism of life and the life of realism. Had he not been a lawyer it is difficult to say whether the realism of his poems would have been so authentic and impressive. Perhaps it would not have been so.

There is no natural connection between poetry and law, but one will have to accept what is true despite the fact that it appears to be a miracle. 'You can write poetry while practising law, this has been a miracle for me.' (Letter of Ramvilas Sharma dated 27.8.1959).

Hindi poetry has inherited this tradition. The professions of the saint poets and their poetry have already made this miracle possible. Kedarji stands in the same tradition.

Although his comments on the contradictions and the inhuman face of

the judicial system and the judicial process are brief, they have been the result of a very deep dissatisfaction and disagreement. For example, 'Sach ne jeebh nahin payi hai/woh bole to kaise/.../ Nyayi baithe jeebh pakarte/.../sach jeete to kaise/ nyaya mile to kaise/asli ka nakli ho jata/nakli ka asli ho jata/nyaya nahin hansa kar pata/neer ksheer vilage to kaise/ sach ki saakh jame to kaise/.../jhooth mare to kaise'. That is why 'Sach/ ab nahin jata/adalat mein/khal khinchwane/moond mudwane/har torwane/khoon chuswane/sach/ab jhank nahin pata/adalat mein/nyaya nahin pata/adalat mein.' 'Sach Jhooth' (Kahen Kedar Khari Khari—169) and 'Chiria' (ibid—156) are such. If there is some other concept of feminism different from the concept of 'freedom from the body', then that concept is seen since the early poetry of Kedarji, the same concept that one finds in Premchand. In poetry, Kedarji is a writer who carries forward the tradition of Premchand. The poem 'Pati ki Tek' ('Jo Shilayen Torte hain', p. 42) written on 27 March, 1933 has a touching description of the pathetic conditions of women. Poems like 'Mullo Ahirin' (ibid, 69), 'Gaon ki auraten' (ibid, 77), 'Dehat ka jeevan' (ibid, 91), 'Jahari' (ibid, 135), 'Seeta Maiya' (ibid, 150), 'Rania' ('Gulmehndi', 48), 'Byahi Unbyahi' ('Kuhki koyal khare per ki deh, 188) etc. touch upon the various dimensions of feminism.

If one of the conditions of dalit writing, that is, dalit literature will include only

that written by a dalit writer is set aside, then dalit consciousness can clearly be seen in the poems of Kedarji. Poems like 'Lakadhara' ('Vasant mein prasanna hui prithvi', 19), 'Mallah' (ibid, 23), 'Takvaiyya' (ibid, 26), 'Chandanwa chaiti gaata hai' (ibid, 32), 'Devi ke bail koi khol le gaya' (ibid, 66), 'Mochi' (ibid, 144), 'Chandu' ('Gulmenhdi', 46), 'Chaitu' (ibid, 47), 'Mazdoor' (ibid, 44), 'Kuli' ('Jo Shilayen', 153) etc. attest it.

'Roti' is a short poem of four lines. The revolutionary power of 'roti' is stronger than the 'Jab roti par sankat aaya/ tab bhooke ne droh machaya/ raj palat kar roti laya/ roti ne itihās banaya'. The power of the proletariat is bigger than all kinds of power.

Those who have not read the poems in the series entitled 'Hey Meri Tum' are under the illusion that all poems in this series are love poems. It is not true. Barring some poems, most poems are on all kinds of subjects, for instance, the pain of birds killed by a bird hunter, the fear of merciless death, nature, the contradiction of monarchy, the ugliness of democracy, summer, wars, falsehood, the courage to retain the flame inside, the glowing old semul tree standing to suggest revolution, not stealing in the world of thieves, and arrogance of a penurious monarch. Exactly like his poems, Kedarji was a man who led a simple life. He understood the dangers of praise and honour. These have two dangers. One is that if a person does not have the ability to handle fame,



it can go to his head. Secondly, because of the respect he gets, a person turns into a thing that is meant only for worship—people turn him into a stone idol or wear him like a talisman and then forget him. He becomes meaningless in real life. That is why he writes 1. 'Mujhe na maro/man pan se/ malyarpan se yashogan se/ mitti ke ghar se nikal kar/ dharti se upar ucchal kar. 2. Sabse aage /hum hain/paon dukhane mein/sabse peeche/hum hain paon pujane mein. 3. Utar kar dhar diya hai maine apna barappan/ wahan us murda ajayabghar mein. Jahan marnoparant dhar di jaati hain/ baro baron ki utrane.'

Kedarji is the poet of realism, of truth, of objectivity. But his objectivity does not appear in its bare form in his poetry; it first builds up his faith in himself and then an organic synthesis of the two creates his poetry—'Akattha ko humne kaha nahin/ asatya ko humne saha nahin/katthya ko humne sanwara/ tab kaha/ satya ko humne dulara/ tab kaha.'

Kedarji is a poet of short poems of profound meaning. He was inspired by the Greek poet Sappho to write poems on ordinary subjects. While living in Kanpur he came in contact with Balkrishna 'Baldua' who was a lover of literature. In Balkrishna's personal library he was able to read Sappho's poems. He was greatly influenced by her poems. In our literature 'doha' and 'sortha' have always been examples of compact poetry. In the short poems of Kedarji too we have

metaphorical richness and profound significance. It is remarkable how in just a few words he is able to suggest the relationship between man and nature in the context of the growth of the entire human race, 'Ped nahin. Prithvi ke vanshaj hain/phool liye/ phal liye manav ke agraj hain'. His poetic oeuvre is full of such poems. Let us look at another example, 'Balak ne/kankar se/ tal ko kanpa diya/ tal ko nahin/ anant kal ko kanpa diya.'

Poetry must transform the transient into the permanent. All those things that came into existence only to be annihilated in the cruel onslaught of time have become permanent in Kedar ji's poems, such as Garra nala, gumma eint, Bhogila bail, Bhagauta barhai, Rania, Jahri, gilhari, Baya etc etc. The way the environment is changing, the Ken river and Tuntunia hills may also disappear but in the poetry of Kedarji they will always remain there.

Except in his childhood, Kedarji always lived in towns such as Raibareli, Katni, Jabalpur, Allahabad, Kanpur, and then in Banda. But he always maintained his connection with the village and in that his profession as a lawyer also played a part. That is why the countryside was never very far from his consciousness. The village, the village environment, village characters and the contradictions in the village life have been the axis of his poetry. The glow of the people has always been there in his poetry like lamps lit behind marble walls. Some of his poems are in fact very close to folk

poetry. One of the characteristic features of folk poetry and folk songs is the refrain. In the oral tradition the refrain is very effective aid to memory and is used to stress the main point. In many poems of Kedarji this refrain style is evident. In such poems, the language, the style, the expressions and the idiom has been drawn from this wealth of folk literature. 'Aalha', greatly popular in the Bundelkhand and Awadh regions, is a favourite, effective and acceptable form of folk poetry. On the naval rebellion in Bombay in 1946, Kedarji wrote an aalha entitled 'Bambai ka raktasnan'. At that time Safdar, Ramvilasji and some other people were writing aalha (Kedarji's letter of 15.3.46). 'Kamayani' has also been written in the fundamental style. Kedarji is a poet of simple language and rhythm. At the level of language, most of his poems are simple and are written in the idiom of folk literature. But simplicity does not mean monotony. In his poetry, there is a variety of imagery with a wide range of metaphorical expression. In the later half of his poetic career, when he had stopped practising law and his contact with the real world of men had become minimal and was closer to the world of books, his language began to acquire an urban touch—'Jag soya/jaagi gandhali/ There are very few of his poems that do not have rhythm. His poems may look apparently unrhymed but at places they border on musicality and have the effect of rhyme. Some such unrhymed poems have been

set to music by Pandit Jasraj, which he has been able to do only on the strength of their rhythm. One of the reasons why his poetry has this quality may be the kind of early poetic training he received. As a part of his poetic training he learnt to write kavitt, savaiya and other meters that are rich in rhythm and rhyme. In the early part of his career Kedarji himself wrote kavitts, savaiyas and rhymed poetry. But all that remained effective only till he limited himself to emotion and lyricism. But when he began his journey on the rugged terrain of realism, he began to feel hemmed in by rhyme and the grammar of meter and then despite the advice of Ramvilasji he freed himself from it. (Seeing Kedarji's preference for free verse Ramvilasji called him 'free verse, my love' in one his letters). But rhythm, like an underground stream, continued to flow in his poems with ease. Rhythm is as much interwoven into his poetry. Kedarji believes that merely calling a thing beautiful does not make it beautiful—it is also necessary to explain why that thing is beautiful. Only saying 'Dhoop sunder dhoop mein jagrup sunder' will not make the sunlight look beautiful; one will have to say why it is beautiful.

If we take the image of sunlight itself, Kedarji does explain why the sunlight is beautiful; he draws an image and paints a picture of the beauty of the sunlight.

Progressive poets are poets of great human values. They are poets supporting the freedom of man. They are poets



rejecting imperialism and war, and defending peace. In the poetry of Kedarnath Agrawal all these elements are present in all their power and honesty.

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## **CULTURAL ENCOUNTER AND SYNTHESIS: The Concept of Indian Feminism**

K.M. Malathy

There has been a long tradition of women's writing in India in which we can find the aspiration for liberating women. But the contemporary women's movement in India is interrelated to the global women's liberation movement in many ways. The encounter with the contemporary western feminist movements has resulted in a rejection and assimilation. The Indian feminist movement evolved mainly as a part of the socio-cultural renaissance of modern India. As far as India is concerned the image of woman has been that of goddess or shakti - the supreme power. But, because of the historical and feudal circumstances women lost their social status and they were often treated as slaves. Hence the Indian feminist view demands that women may be given equal intellectual and social status with men in all walks of life. The Indian feminist view challenges many values imposed by the patriarchal powers. At the same time it upholds the values of motherhood, maternal love and the emotional family relationship.

The reformers of the modern Indian Renaissance focussed on the liberation of women in their socio-political movements. The discovery of the freedom loving women writers of the Buddhist Theri Gathas and the revolutionary ideas of women's liberation of the medieval Indian Bhakti poetesses proved to be the inspiring force behind the modern Indian women's liberation movement. The Buddhist nuns who composed the Theri Gathas were the first advocates of the freedom of women. They were inspired by the teachings of Buddha who emphasised on the equal social and religious status of women. Tamil devotional poetess Andal (8th century),

the Kannada poetess Akka Mahadevi (12th century) and the Hindi poetess Meerabai (16th century) have expressed their strong protest against patriarchal tyranny. These women writers opted for independent approaches and they challenged patriarchal injustice. Andal organised women through the Margazhi festival for the social and religious awakening of women. Akka Mahadevi protested against the atrocities of her husband. She could overcome the patriarchal prejudices in her own way. Meera Bai fought against the man-oriented feudal social customs and established the freedom of women in society. Marathi saint poetess Mukta Bai challenged the supremacy of men in the spiritual field. Through the organised social movements of Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj, women's education became popular in modern India. In 1829 Sati system i.e. the burning of wife along with the dead body of her husband was banned legally by the admirable efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) the famous social reformer. During the 19th century Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890) and Savitri Phule (1831-1897) tried to educate socially backward women and they started a strong movement for according justice to women. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) reiterated that motherhood is the real identity of women. He declared that the idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence<sup>1</sup>. Citing the example of Mother Sarada Devi he considered women as the symbol of motherly power

and declared that women have got the power to solve their problems themselves, once they are educated. Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928) worked for the educational and cultural development of women belonging to socially backward and downtrodden communities. Periyar (1879-1973) of Tamil Nadu launched the self respect movement to liberate women from the clutches of Brahminical priesthood and patriarchal slavery. Modern education inspired women writers like Tara Bai Shinde (later half of 19th century), Kailasbasini Devi (1837-1900) and Pandita Rama Bai. Kailasbasini Devi in her book *Hindu Mahilaganer Hinabastha* (The Degraded Condition of the Women 1863) depicted the situation- "The birth of a boy is heralded with music, offerings are made to Brahmins, the poor are fed, many rites and rituals are observed, gifts are widely distributed, all in the hope and prayer for the boy's long life ... No such celebration marks the birth of a daughter"<sup>2</sup>. Sarala Ghoshal founded the first women's organisation named 'Bharat Stree Mahamandal' in 1910. Rokeya Sakhavat Hossain (1880-1932) and Sarala Ghoshal were contemporaries. 'Sultana's Dream' (1908) written by Rokeya itself is a satirical fantasy which reveals her attitude towards patriarchy and her anger against the unfair restrictions on women, 'Stree Purusha Tulna' (Comparison of Woman and Man, 1882) of Tarabai Shinde and 'Stree Dharma Neeti' (1882) of Pandita Rama Bai are two such important works. The book entitled 'The High Caste Hindu

Women' (1888) written by Pandita Rama Bai was an eye opener for the real problems faced by Hindu women. These writings created a new awakening among the newly educated young generation.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) brought the woman power into the independence movement of India. Many women writers and social workers like Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Deshmukh, Kamala Devi Chatopadhyaya were directly inspired by Gandhiji. Gandhiji took up the cause of injustice done to women and gave the tool of non violence and satyagraha for fighting against this injustice. Women's participation in the freedom struggle proved to be a challenge to many prejudices against women in the Indian society. "In a way, Indian women feminised nationalism and in turn the national struggle helped them to liberate themselves from some age old social taboos and traditional norms".<sup>3</sup> In the contemporary period women have successfully applied the Gandhian techniques in the eco-feminist movements, like 'Chipko Movement', 'Save Narmada Movement' and the 'Nandi Gram Movement' of peasants. Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar (1891-1956) inspired the contemporary feminist and dalit movements. Baba Saheb questioned the Brahminical laws codified by Manu which were against the freedom of women and dalits, the oppressed section". In the world scenario Amritanandamayi Amma has proved that the concept of universal motherhood is relevant in the globalised

world to establish peace and harmony in society and nature. She is giving her motherly love to the suffering humanity especially the struggling marginalised women all over the world through her spiritual messages and concrete social services.

The radical feminist views and some of the theoretical views expressed by Marx and Engels seem to be quite irrelevant in the Indian context. Hence the impact of these ideas on Indian feminism seems to be very peripheral. "The radical feminists conclude that women's liberation requires a biological revolution. They believe that only through technology women can be liberated from the fundamental inequalities of the bearing and rearing of children. They talk of achieving this through the development of techniques of artificial reproduction"<sup>4</sup>. The Indian feminist writers give importance to the human, emotional and spiritual aspects of women's life rather than considering her a biological phenomenon alone. In the Marxist view the establishment of personal property is the root cause of suppression of women. Frederick Engels believed that class struggle starts from the family relationship i.e. dialectics between husband and wife. According to him "Within the family the husband is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat"<sup>5</sup>. These ideas have been more or less rejected by the Indian women who are being empowered through education, employment and participation

in the democratic process. Indian feminist writer Urvashi Butalia has mentioned about the marginalisation of women in politics by the Marxist politicians. The reason she attributes is the patriarchal hegemony in the political structure<sup>6</sup>. The awareness of their political power among Indian women has proved that they cannot be marginalised any more. In their fight against gender discrimination and injustice, the writings of women writers of all regional languages have emerged as a great force.

The cultural vision expressed by these women writers present a synthesis of traditional values and new global vision. This we can call the 'Indian Model' of feminism. The feminist discourses in all Indian languages give voice to this model. Mahadevi Varma in her collections of sketches in Hindi entitled 'Srinkhala Ki Kadiyan' and 'Atit ke Chalchitra' presented the portraits of struggling women folk who are more or less illiterate. Apart from writing about their problems she worked as a forerunner to educate the rural women in northern India. Bengali writer Maheshweta Devi worked as an activist to change the fate of tribal women. Oriya novelist Prathibha Ray in her novel 'Draupadi' and Hindi novelist Prabha Khaitan in her 'Chinnamasta' have used powerful Indian myths to express the contradictions and conflicts of women's life. In the tradition bound Indian society the valuable service rendered by women has always remained invisible. The feminist writers have

authentically presented the struggle of Indian women to establish their identity in the changing social scenario. They fight against the inhuman barriers imposed by caste-hierarchy, social evils like dowry, bride burning, etc. Female foeticide is the most serious issue. The conflicts and stress faced by women at home and in their work places form an important theme of these writers. Indian women writers like Mannu Bhandari, Chitra Mudgal, Mridula Garg, Mamta Kalia, Chandrakanta, Kamal Kumar, Meharunnisa Parvez, Arundhathi Roy, Madhavikutty, Sugatha Kumari, Sara Joseph, P. Vatsala, etc. have succeeded to create political and social awareness by articulating women's issues in the Indian society.

### **Conclusion**

The Indian feminism is the outcome of modern Indian Renaissance. Still it is related to the global ideas of providing equal status and equal opportunities for women. The canvas of Indian feminism is very wide which encompasses socio-political, cultural and economic ideals of Indian women. The women's movement in India gives utmost importance to motherhood, family relationship, and other cherished values of life of Indian society. At the same time they are very critical of the patriarchal canons based on the code of Manu to substantiate slavery. This model of Indian feminism can be very well observed in contemporary Indian women writing.

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## MY REMINISCENCES OF PREMCHAND

Shivapujan Sahay

Translated by  
Mangal Murty

The Civil Disobedience movement began with the dawn of the second decade of the twentieth century. Blown off my feet in the storm of the movement, I had landed up in Calcutta. It was there that I first met Premchandji in the Hindi Pustak Agency which was then situated at the junction of Harrison Road and Chittaranjan Avenue. My literary mentor, Pandit Ishwari Prasad Sharma introduced me as the editor of Marwari Sudhar. Premchandji presented me a copy of his first collection of short stories Sapt Saroj with his blessings.

This first meeting was a chance encounter. The second time, I became close to him in Lucknow when I was working in the editorial department of Madhuri. Soon afterwards, he came there as the editor of Madhuri. It was just then that his major novel Rangbhumi had arrived there for publication. It was the first time that he had written in his own hand, in Devanagari script, the manuscript copy of the book. Shri Dularelal Bhargava, owner of Ganga Pustakmala, gave it to me to redact the press copy in accordance with the house style of the publishing firm. The huge tome written in his own hand in Nagri script was of historical importance. I wish that press-copy were preserved and available today!

The editorial department of Madhuri had just been shifted from Aminabad Park to Latouche Road. Pandit Krishnabihari Mishra

was also working in the editorial department. He was a gentle person of profound literary propensities. He had a rollicking sense of humour, and the loud ceiling-shattering laughter of Premchandji was paralleled by the sweet humorous smiles of Mishraji : both incomparable in themselves!

That first novel of Premchandji, written in Nagri script was in itself worth seeing – with hardly any cuts anywhere. One could veritably learn the language from him for years. The flow of the pen was such that one could hardly find cuts or amendments anywhere in the text. Any editorial concentration on the text would ever so often be distracted by the enticing interest of the narrative. Once caught in the sweep of the story all principles of redaction of the press-copy were easily forgotten. Reading the text with concentration made me learn many beautiful turns of phrases and use of language.

Many Urdu writers from Lucknow and outside would often come in the office to see him and seek his advice. He had earned great fame and prestige in the Urdu literary circle. He would often send his stories to the Urdu weekly Pratap of Lahore. I had seen many of these stories in their Persian script. The handwriting was very neat with fine letters. He was not habituated to write in the shiqast (flowing) style. Language was to him like his hand-maiden..

At that time, Pandit Shantipriya Dwivedi also worked in that office, and

we lived together. Shantipriyaji was very fond of fun and laughter. The witticisms of Pandit Krishnabihariji and the jokes of Premchandji had their own distinctive flavours. Mishraji would often recite amazing Hindi dohas (couplets), matched only by the brilliant anecdotes of Premchandji. Their loud bursts of laughter would startle those in the office inviting their bewildered gaze. Both the great literary giants loved Shantipriyaji as much as he, in turn, served as an object of their amusement. On holidays, Premchand would always offer shirni (sweet dish) to his visitors. In the office, too, the pan (betel leaves) served always came from him. At home, it would be the hubble-bubble for him. The chillum (clay fire-holder) would hardly ever go cold. He would himself buy his perfumed tobacco. His favourite sakhun-takiya (merry swear-word) would always trigger Mishraji's fountain of loud laughter, just like with Prasadji in Kashi. In the words of Rai Krishnadasji – "The two unique laughter-bursters of the Hindi world were – Prasad and Premchand!"

When Prasad and Premchand were together in Kashi – a veritable laughter challenge would ensue. Both would laugh their hearts out. Prasadji's nearly century-and-quarter-old shop selling zarda, surti-sunghani (varieties of perfumed tobacco) is situated in the coconut bazaar behind the Banaras Kotwali ( Central Police Station). Prasadji's literary group would sit on a projected stone slab in front of the shop. There was no literary figure



of that time in Hindi who had not sat on that stone slab for a while. (Once Premchand had written in his literary monthly Hans that Prasad only 'disinterred buried corpses' in his historical plays, and so on. But soon thereafter when they met, they talked and laughed heartily just as before, with no trace of malice in their hearts.) Every so often there would be loud peals and bursts of laughter which would elicit merry giggles from the houries standing on the balconies nearby.

When Premchandji started his Saraswati Press in Kashi for the first time, I, too, lived in Kashi. His press was located in a small house on the north-western corner of the Maidagin Park near the Nagari Pracharini Sabha. His office was in a small open verandah. After Lucknow, we had frequent meetings there. I would regularly go there to render some service. Every evening he would calculate the day's earnings in the press, and disburse some wages to the workers. When there wouldn't be enough, he would put the whole amount before them and laughingly ask them to share it amongst themselves, leaving something for his pan and tobacco and his ekka-fare to Lamhi. This would make his workers laugh, too, and then those wanting a rupee would be happy with an athanni (half-rupee), and others with a chawanni (quarter-rupee) for an athanni. Premchandji would be the happiest on days when his workers went home fully satisfied, because he had deep sympathy

for them in his heart. The feelings he expressed for the working class in his writings, were clearly reflected in his talk and his behavior. He would easily forget his own needs before those of others.

After paying wages to his workers, he would walk down with what remained from Maidagin to the Chowk. Often I would accompany him up to there. At Lakhichowtara – as was his daily routine - he would buy a bundle of betel leaves from his own tamoli (betel leaves seller) who gave him his choicest leaves. He would then roll the betel leaves neatly into his handkerchief and hang it at the back end of his furled umbrella, with the packet of mushki (perfumed) tobacco dangling at the front end. If at times he wouldn't have money left, he would walk some distance on foot looking for an ekka (hackney carriage), or go only up to Pisanahariya on the ekka, and walk down the rest of the distance to his village. Often he would narrate such ordeals with enjoyment while sitting in the press. Sometimes, he would say, he got the ekka of his village after walking down to Orderly Bazaar or the Varuna bridge. Once he bought a canvas shoe but turned it into a sandal by folding back its heel because, he said, it made walking easy. The economic hassles of the press often kept him worried, but his normal laughter bursts remained as lively as ever.

Later when the press shifted into more spacious premises behind a large gate

near the Mrityunjaya Mahadeva, the economic condition improved a little. Shri Pravasilal Varma, a printing expert, was then its manager. It was then that the monthly Hans and weekly Jagaran were being published from there under Premchandji's editorship. My articles were often published in both, and he would laugh his heart out on the satirical notes I wrote for the column 'Kshana Bhara' (or 'Just a Moment').

I used to live near Kal Bhairava and often went to the press, and I always found him kind-hearted towards his dependants. And his workers, too, treated him with great respect. Even for an act of indiscretion, he would just laugh it away. I had the good fortune of living for long in his company and seeing his generosity and warm-heartedness, without ever losing his cool. Even in his ordinary colloquy he would come out with rare witticisms. Once he said—“Anger if swallowed becomes nectar”. Such witticisms are to be found often not only in his essays, but even in his letters.

When a story-collection Nari Hridaya by his wife Smt Shivarani Deviji was published from the Saraswati Press, he asked me to write its preface. His ingenuous geniality was very heartening. Once when he was preparing a collection of others' stories, he included one of mine, too. He would often suggest topics for articles. Sometimes he would edit articles, write editorial notes and letters while sitting in the press; but mostly

he would bring such matter having done it at home. While writing in the press his pen would run very speedily but there would be no cuts or changes. It seemed to run quite in step with his thought process. He would write the editorials for the weekly in one go, and express his views on all national and social issues strongly and fearlessly. No such domain remained untouched by his pen; whether of politics or literature, even religious issues were not spared.

Premchandji's pen gave a popular style to Hindi, and probed every nook and corner of people's lives. He could always feel the heart beats of the nation, and lent his voice to the concerns of his age. His articles attested the affinities between Hindi and Urdu, though, during his life time, he received much greater respect in Urdu literature than in Hindi. The eminent Muslim leader Maulana Muhammad Ali brought out an Urdu weekly Hamdard from Delhi in which Premchandji's stories would often be published, and he would get a guinea for his stories every time. The guinea would come by parcel in a velvet-lined case. I had seen those guineas many a time, though I don't remember what their value was in those days. On receiving the remuneration from Hindi journals, he would just quietly smile.

Out of his exasperation with the Hindi publishers, he once went even to the cinema world, but after his return from Bombay he would regale us with its funny stories. His experiences there were often

entertaining, but also quite disgusting. He made Prasadji burst with laughter with those mystifying stories of the film world. He would never miss an occasion for mirth. Once he had gone in a Hanuman puja (worship) to Professor Ramdas Gaud's house, where he said to Gaudji – "Your house is a veritable museum, where Hanumanji happily lives in the company of ghosts and spirits."

In his last days he enjoyed Prasadji's company almost every day. He used to live near Benia Bagh in Kashi in those days, and both the literary giants would take a stroll together in the Benia park, discussing literary issues as they walked. He would frankly express his views on Prasadji's language on his face, and the latter would hear everything smiling gently. There never was any conflict of ideas between the two great writers. Wherever they sat, their talks never satiated us and were endless.

When I joined the editorial department of Madhuri after leaving Matwala, Shri Dularelalji Bhargava gave me some book manuscripts also for editing, besides the regular journal work. Initially I was given Asia me Prabhat and Bhawabhuti, and when luckily Bhargavaji was satisfied by my editing, I was given the manuscript of Premchandji's famous novel Rangabhumi which had reached Bhargavaji earlier. I felt rather shaky. Sapsaraj, Sevasadan and Premashram I had read while in Calcutta; within my heart, I was quite in awe about his wide literary fame; and though I was familiar

with his creative works and reputation, I was bereft of his regular company. I had also heard that he would first write his stories or novels in Urdu, and then get it transliterated into Hindi script by some knowledgeable person. But when I got the manuscript of Rangabhumi I felt overjoyed: the entire copy was written in his own hand – a great tome in two thick volumes; fine small and close writing, without any cuts anywhere, as if the entire thing had been written in a single breath!

I had become quite familiar with the editorial house-style of Bhargavaji's Ganga-Pustak-Mala, because, under the editorship of Bhargavaji, the same style had to be followed in Madhuri. But when I started reading the copy of Rangabhumi, I forgot those rules, and immersed myself in the delightfully exquisite language of the text. Then, after reading over fifty pages in the text, I would suddenly regain my sense of editorial obligations and return for the redaction of the text as per our house-style. There would be a few misspellings or instances of incorrect usage, but the syntax and the style were as limpid and fluent as river Ganga's flow. As per rules, a few letters here and there would have to be changed, some spellings set right, some expressions modified suitably, and the press copy would be ready. Bhargavaji would pass it and the printing would start.

It was just then that Premchandji had arrived. His great-heartedness was imprinted on my mind in that first

meeting itself. A new house was rented in Latouche road especially for his convenience. It was in that same house that Maithilisharanji Gupta had stayed for nearly a month and a half in connection with the medical treatment of one of his aged relatives. Later, the Madhuri editorial department in Aminabad was also shifted there, quite close by. The houses of Bhargavaji and Pandit Badarinath Bhatt lay on the same route. Those days, Pandit Krishnabihari Mishra also worked in the Madhuri editorial department. When Premchandji, Mishraji and Bhattji met together, fountains of laughter would shoot up to the skies. While Mishraji's laughter would dance only on his table, Premchandji's laughter-burst would rise up to the ceiling before it would dive out of the window on to the road below, uncaptured by Mishraji's laughter. All three would always laugh heartily. That laughter would be ringing in many a heart for ever. That smilingly eloquent face and that loud ringing laughter of Premchandji which would be a treat for the eyes and the ears, are now never ever to be forgotten.

Countless evenings were spent on the green grass of Aminabad park – in the corner of the park, where there was that shop of the kachalu-rasile-walla (a mouth-watering potpourri of boiled potatoes, yam etc.), where the expensive limousines of the aristocratic families would be found parked. There we had innumerable treats of dahi bade and

mutter (curd-cakes with peas), recalling, with loud bursts of laughter, the true story of the real person who had played the role of Surdas (blind man) in Rangabhumi. Oh, how glorious were those few days spent in Lucknow!

Whenever Pandit Roopnarayanji and Professor Dayashankar Dubey of Lucknow University would come, there would be a stiff laughter contest amongst them. And once the great poet Guptaji brought Munshi Ajmeriji, who, by demonstrating various types of laughter, brought Premchandji's stock of laughter almost to an end. Then Pandit Krishnabihariji couldn't stop himself from asking – "Which of the two wrestlers of laughter ultimately lost?" Exhibiting his typical laughter, Premchandji quipped – "I didn't fall on my back, but on my very face", which led to a roar of continuing laughter.

After the riots in Lucknow (September, 1924), I had gone back to Calcutta in Matwala. We wrote to each other occasionally – particularly when I started editing the monthly Upanyas Tarang published by Hindi Pustak Agency and Vanik Press. There was a regular stream of correspondence between us when he was editing Madhuri, and I had to write many letters in connection with Shri Pravasilal Varma's taking over the management of his Saraswati Press at Benares. I, too, lived in Kashi in those days as literary editor of the publications of Pustak Bhandar (Laheria Sarai), and many of those books were printed in his Saraswati Press. Shri Gururam Sharma

‘Visharada’, his co-villager, was his press manager at that time.

Before going to Lucknow, Premchandji always came to the press from his village on an ekka. I would also go to the press almost every day to supervise my publications of ‘Bhandar’. On the eastern side of Company Bagh (Maidagin park) is Nagari Pracharini Sabha and on the western flank of the road was Saraswati Press. An old, dark and dingy place – the press was in real bad shape. He was always worried for the press. I gave his press as much work of Pustak Bhandar as was in my hand, and which the press could easily handle, and also fetched work from friends. But the press had an elephantine belly – it just couldn’t have enough. It was in this precarious condition that he went to Lucknow. Then arose the issue of Pravasialji under my mediation, and after some correspondence, things were amicably settled.

Varmaji shifted the press from Madhyameshwar to Mahamrityunjaya-Mahadeva road. The new house belonged to the famous art connoisseur Shri Rai Krishnadasji, and it proved quite lucky and profitable for the press. Finally, Premchandji was relieved of his worries on that score. Varmaji’s capabilities also kept him satisfied. And for being instrumental in all this, Premchandji’s affection towards me also grew. Whenever he would come from Lucknow even for a day, he would send for me to the press. Once when Varmaji was to be

appointed he came straight to my house which was near the Kalbhairava crossing, and Varmaji was my close neighbor. Premchandji expressed no hesitation or qualms, and received Varmaji with open arms. While leaving, with a chowghada (foursome of folded betel leaves), he said – “I will have sound sleep today; the press had become a great burden, which is now off my shoulders”.

When he was still in Lucknow, the planning for the publication of Hans had started. Shri Jayashankar Prasadji, the great literary giant of his time, gave it its name, and with Premchandji’s consent, Varmaji started its publication. Premchandji would send his stories and editorial notes from Lucknow. But only two of the column titles from Prasadji’s original plan – ‘Mukta Manjoosha’ and ‘Neer-Ksheer-Vivek’ were retained; in Prasadji’s scheme stories did not have that priority, but under Premchandji’s editorship stories had to have that preference; as a result, Hans remained a short-story magazine for a long time.

For nearly a year and a half I stayed away from Kashi, though making regular visits there. During the period I was editing the monthly magazine Ganga ; and when I wrote to Premchandji for a short-story, he wrote back frankly – “Just because you write for free for my Hans, I would not do so for the Raja’s magazine\*. Get me a good price.” I had to keep mum, because when I was in the editorial department of Madhuri, Premchandji was paid four rupees per

page. Ganga would not like to pay so much for his stories, although it had paid Professor Ramdas Gaud five rupees a page for his review of Bharat Bharati.

I returned to Kashi after resigning from the editorial work in Ganga. Meanwhile, Premchandji had also left Madhuri and returned to Kashi. This time he asked me to write for the column 'Mukta-Manjoosha', and promised some remuneration, too, as I was now jobless. That remuneration proved of great help in those days of joblessness. He would then remark jokingly – "You are jobless, and I am formless!"

For hours we would have our sittings in the Saraswati Press, with never ending rounds of pan- gilauris (pyramid-shaped betel leaves). He would laughingly remember the peculiar Lucknow pans – swearing at them with his famous sukhan-takiya. He would often say that the particular swear expression was the gift of the Urdu literary soirees. "Fortunately, it doesn't sneak in into my writing, like in my conversation. If, perchance, it were to occur in my letters, that would be a big bother for both", he would frankly admit.

For long, he had been planning to bring out a weekly for advertising his own books. When the fortnightly Jagaran, published by Pustak Mandir, Kashi, under my editorship, ceased publication after six months, he took it over and started publishing it as a weekly under his editorship. That led to a special affinity between us. He would be in the press

for long periods, and I, too, would sit there reading proofs or newspapers. I had no job there, but would love to do some literary work or the other as was my wont. And most important was his company itself. Even from his casual conversation, there was always something new to be learnt – some new expression, some new turn of phrase, a new word, or some witticism. He would never falter or pause in his conversation. He was a master of Urdu prose, and had lived since childhood in the citadel of Hindi. He was so well-read, and with such vast experience of life, that the moment he would take his pen, a translucent stream of polished language would start flowing.

Even his letters would read like stories. Often in a few lines of a post card he would say things of great depth and profundity; laced, equally often, with delightful touches of humour. His style was exquisite. While reading, one would have a feeling that the writer's pen is flowing forward naturally, without even pausing for a breath, always carrying his reader along. Main articles and editorial notes for the weekly Jagaran and the monthly Hans, often a short story too; besides one or two short stories every month for other magazines, along with his novel under writing - indeed, he had so much to write, and yet he would write nothing which would fall below his own high standard. Whatever his pen touched became luminous, as it were. His mind would be as sharp, as his fingers would be diligent. And



yet he always lived in penury. Both Hans and Jagaran ran in loss. His books wouldn't have a good sale; and the Hindi publishers would pay him a pittance. In fact, the Urdu publishers paid him much better in comparison to his Hindi publishers, because, as he himself admitted, his Urdu books sold very well in Punjab.

[\*Ganga was published from Sultanganj near Bhagalpur, and was owned by the Raja of Banaili Estate, Kumar Krishnanandan Singh.]

Premchand's letter to Shivapujan Sahay: From Lucknow to Calcutta, 22.2.25  
Dear Shivapujan Sahayji : Vande (salutation),

You seem to have forgotten me absolutely. Here goes the book [Rangabhoomi] in your service, expressing the deepest gratitude, - the book on which you had spent months, battering your mind, - and entreats you to give it a couple of your hours of solitude, and then, whatever be your opinion about it, express it in your charming language.

I am still here, captured, as it were, for the publication of 'Bal Vinodmala'. Oh, how wonderful it would have been with you here! Yet, it would be an obligation if you could send for this 'Mala' some little, amusing 'cat-and-mouse' or 'crow and eagle' story. I shall be eagerly awaiting your review of Rangabhoomi. Yours: Dhanapat Rai.

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

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

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## THE FUTURE OF HINDI

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chaturjya

Translated by  
Nishi Tiwari

Over the years 'pachhahi khari boli Hindi' has undergone an astounding development. A century ago it was an unrevered and neglected language with literary creation having just a half century of history behind it. But all the same it had a rich literary background, in different regional languages of northern India. Urdu mixed 'khari boli' was predominant language during this period. For the prestigious schools of the Hindi – speaking belt Urdu was a predominant language learnt by the students irrespective of whether they were Hindus or Muslims. However, there is a marked transition as, Hindi, i.e. pure 'Sanskritized Hindi' written in 'Nagari' script has become the official language in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, while it has been partially adopted as regional language in Eastern Punjab. Today Hindi has attained the prestigious status of all India official language. Hindi dominates the region of its birth with its influence making inroads into the neighboring states of Bihar, Central India, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Eastern Punjab. The people of these states have adopted Hindi as a part of their education curriculum, literature and way of life. Together all these states have merged into a vast Hindi speaking world. Having spread gradually the Hindi speaking belt now encompasses a large region. Encircling this Hindi belt is the belt of 'Aryan' languages. Hindi as a language has seeped into the 'Aryan' & 'Dravidian' culture thereby influencing it to a great extent so much so that they have accepted it as the national language of India. Consequently,



this language has become all pervasive, but at the same time complicated. These circumstances have shaped the future of Hindi and made it the language of the nation, making the impact of Hindi apparent.

- (1) There are very few people whose mother-tongue or conversational language is only 'Khari-Boli Hindi' inclusive of the Hindi speaking people, their number not exceeding 1 to 1.5 crore. However, 'Pachhahi Hindi' languages like 'Braj, Kannauji, Bundeli, Baangru, Jaatu, Meeruti, Ruhellkhandi' or the 'Pachhahi Hindi' of Eastern Punjab, all are closely associated with 'Khari boli Hindi' to such an extent that we may include them among language of those people whose mother tongue is Hindi. Accordingly five crore people may be considered to be a part of the 'Pachhahi Hindi' clan. Among the various languages Hindi is placed on a high pedestal and is considered as an asset inherited from their forefathers.

Over the years these factors have influenced the grammar, usage and sentence structure (syntax) of the Hindi language. It would have been needless to discuss the future of Hindi, if this language had remained confined to these aspects.

- (2) Many Hindi-speaking people also speak 'Rajasthani; Malwi;

Kumaoni; Punjabi; Gharhwali' and other dialects at home. They can speak 'Awadhi, Bagheli, Chattisgarhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magahi' as well. Consequently, this has affected the 'khari-boli' Hindi spoken by them. To some extent this has adversely affected khari boli Hindi, though pure Hindi will remain unaffected, the regional languages will have a direct impact on it, it has happened in the past. Due to the fact of it having attained the status of a national language, Hindi no longer remains confined to the Hindi-speaking belt, rather it will be affected by the 'Dravidian' and other Aryan languages as well. Having imbibed the modern education and culture the responsibility of making Hindi 'Sanskritised' rests with the Hindi language. Therefore, the vocabulary of Hindi will have to be enriched. It is obvious that, as far as possible the words will have to be borrowed from Sanskrit so that, it becomes acceptable to the people of India. The future of Hindi as a language will not remain unaffected by the Hindi of the present day. As the people of Bengal, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, Nepal learn Hindi, so will they speak and write in Hindi. No matter how carefully Hindi is spoken it

cannot remain unaffected by the tone, grammar, pronunciation, syntax and vocabulary of these regional languages. The influence of languages like Sanskrit, Punjabi, Rajasthani and Gujarati on Hindi is clearly evident.

The influence of other languages on Hindi might easily be seen and felt. This influence may be seen at the beginning or the end of a word.

Recent developments in the Hindi language are as follow : while pronouncing 'kchh', 'ksh' instead of 'chh ch-chha' is being used 'talawaya sh' is being simply used in place of 'badi-na' and 'sheen' of urdu and 'sh' of English is the only sound being used in place of 'dant sa', and 'kh' for pronouncing 'murdhanya sa'.

This disappearance of the 'matras' in the middle or end of the word is very common in Hindi, but perhaps maybe very inappropriate in case of 'Dravidian', 'Maharashtrian', 'Bengali', 'Oriyan' languages. For example words like 'kamla, vimla, bhartiya' should not be pronounced as three or four lettered words, with the sound of the different alphabets standing out distinctively, like 'Ka-ma-la, Vi-ma-la, Bha-ra-tiya', but should be pronounced without segregating the different alphabets of the word.

If this is done 'theth Hindi' will not affect its pronunciation but according to my opinion, just as Sanskrit words are inherent in the languages all over

India, in the same way Hindi should become inherent in them. For example, the people of Punjab and the people outside the Hindi speaking belt cannot pronounce words like- 'Loksabha' correctly. Instead they pronounce it as 'Lo-ka-sa- bha'. 'Amala, janata, paramatma,' etc. are mispronounced by the students of Hindi as- 'amla, junta, pramaatma' which is highly unacceptable. The future Hindi, despite being associated with Sanskrit, will incorporate Arabic and Persian words that had entered the 'pachchahi' language in the form of 'takasali' words. The tendency to totally reject the use of such words by some Hindi writers and linguists must be discouraged.

There is no doubt that, the use of English along with Hindi in future will become more popular in independent India, because of its industrial, economical, scientific and cultural development( progress) irrespective of the acceptance or rejection by the staunch Hindi linguists. In the process many words of different languages like Dravidian, Kannada, Santhali, will also be introduced. It is a matter of deliberation and discussion as up to what extent changes will occur in current Hindi grammar which in turn will determine the future of the language. The existence of two types of Hindi simultaneously cannot be ruled out. Firstly, there is a possibility; a pure correct Hindi as is now in use will prevail as a regional language of Hindi belt. Secondly after

dropping the grammatical rules of gender, tense, number, nouns etc. Hindi may attain the status of a national language which will be used in communicative (conversational, spoken) Hindi.

However, this is a matter of controversy. As far as the Hindi script

is concerned it is my firm belief that we will have to introduce the Roman script, along with the Devanagri script in order to make it a convenient national language. But lack of time prevents any further discussion on the subject.

*Courtesy: Alochana quarterly.*

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Suniti Km. Chaturjya (1890-1977), was a linguist, educationist and litterateur. At University of London, he studied phonology, Indo-European linguistics, Prakrit, Persian, old Irish and Gothic languages. He taught at Kolkata University and was a national professor.

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## **BHOJPURI AND SARNAMI**

Badri Narayan

Although the migration of indentured labourers from East India took place from many linguistic and cultural zones of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh like Bhojpuri, Magahi, Avadhi, Braj and so on, Bhojpuri was the language which was most commonly used by the migrants after reaching their destination points in the various Carribean countries. Bhojpuri shares its vocabulary with *Sanskrit*, *Hindi*, *Urdu* and other *Indo-Aryan languages* of northern India. Bhojpuri and several closely related languages, including *Maithili* and *Magadhi*, form a part of the Eastern Zone group of Indo-Aryan languages which includes *Bengali* and *Oriya*. It is a very popular regional language spoken in parts of north-central and eastern *India* and is the native language of the western part of state of *Bihar*, the northwestern part of *Jharkhand*, and the *Purvanchal* region of *Uttar Pradesh*, as well as in the adjoining area of southern plains of *Nepal*. In addition, the immense magnitude of migration from this region to a large number of places both in India and abroad since historical times have conferred a global status to it as the migrants have carried their language with them, which has helped to spread it in all parts of the world. However, even though Bhojpuri is spoken by a large number of people across the globe the status of the Bhojpuri language in India has remained controversial since it was always looked upon as a dialect of Hindi and not a standard language in its own right. Even the Government of India while taking census, did not recognise it as an official language since till recently it was an oral language with a rich folk culture but without a literary form. With the spread of education in the Bhojpuri region, Bhojpuri has now developed a written form and both the Kaithi and the Devanagri scripts are used for writing Bhojpuri.

Today in India, Bhojpuri language and culture, which was mainly confined to the rural regions of Bihar and East Uttar Pradesh, is fast on its way to attaining the status of a prestige language due to the growing popularity of Bhojpuri folk culture with its rustic rural flavour, among the Bhojpuri speakers spread out all over the country. These Bhojpuri speakers, many of whom are now in powerful and influential positions, who once disclaimed Bhojpuri language and culture preferring to claim Hindi as their literary language, are now proudly asserting their Bhojpuri roots. In addition to the oral folk culture that has become extremely popular among them, a literary culture is also developing with many novels, short stories and poems being written and composed in Bhojpuri. This is facilitating to make Bhojpuri a literary language like the other standard languages of India.

Another major achievement of Bhojpuri is that today many Bhojpuri movies are being produced in Mumbai, the film city of India, that are drawing viewers from all sections of the society. Bhojpuri films were popular in India in the decade of the sixties but their viewership was restricted only to the lower strata of small cities and villages since the rural folk culture and values of the Bhojpuri region were not much appreciated by the growing middle and upper classes in big cities who found urban culture and values more alluring. Gradually the low scale Bhojpuri film

industry faded out and most of the actors and cinematographers moved to the Hindi film industry. The Bhojpuri films being produced today are big budget ones with casts that include top Hindi film actors and actresses. The reason for this change in the taste pattern of Indian movie goers in spite of the production of a large number of Hindi movies is that the morals and ethics portrayed in them adhere to the traditional age old values upheld by the close knit Indian society, and where family and social ties are given immense importance. Hindi movies on the other hand are more intent on catering to the tastes of the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) audiences for whom liberated western morals and ethics are the order of the day. The middle and upper classes of India have now become disillusioned with the development of the country on the lines of the developed countries of the world through the processes of liberalisation and globalisation that have strongly eroded the value system of families and consequently of society. These sections now prefer to revert to the traditional values and culture of Indian society as depicted in Bhojpuri films. Thus a powerful shift is visible in the cultural domain of India in favour of Bhojpuri language and culture. This phenomenon is being ameliorated by the considerable Bhojpuri diaspora settled in all parts of the world including the people who migrated from the Bhojpuri region to the Carribbean countries during the

colonial period and who have still preserved their Bhojpuri cultural heritage including the Bhojpuri language, albeit in a deviant form because of the influence of myriad languages and cultures over the generations.

### **Language of the Hindustani-Surinamese**

Between 1873 and 1916 the 34,000 indentured labourers from India who went to Suriname took with them several mutually related languages (or dialects) from their home country, amongst which were Bhojpuri, Magahi and Avadhi. The ensuing interaction among these migrants gave rise to a process that eventually resulted in a new, stabilized language which is not identical to any language in India, and which is called Sarnami Hindi, Sarnami Hindustani, or simply, Sarnami. This language does not seem to be influenced by non-Indic languages and the early evolution of Sarnami was based entirely on an internal process of interaction among the migrants belonging to different language families. The exact number of present-day speakers of Sarnami is not known (see 2004 census), but Marhé (1985: 14-5) estimated that in the early 1980s the language was spoken by some 130,000 people in Suriname itself, and by some 100,000 in the Netherlands, whereas around the same time, Sita Kishna (1983: 84) estimated the total number of speakers of Sarnami, in both countries

together, to be some 180,000 people (Damsteegt 2002: 249).

Sarnami, like Bhojpuri in India, was without a high status even for its own speakers, for whom the Indic standard languages Hindi and Urdu, and to some extent Dutch, were prestige languages, although a few scattered novels and poems had been written in Sarnami from time to time. In the mid 1970s a movement arose, primarily among the Hindustanis in the Netherlands, which aimed at generating more respect for Sarnami and also at promoting its use in more formal language domains, for example in written fiction and non-fictional texts. It was only with the Sarnami movement that the use of the language as a written medium started to spread more widely, and initially considerable results were produced, both in the Netherlands and Suriname. The movement also stimulated research on the language. It was partly due to these efforts that in 1986 a spelling legislation for writing in the Roman script was passed by the Surinamese government. In fact, texts had already mostly been printed in this script, but occasionally the Indic Hindi alphabet had also been used to arouse the interest of those Hindustanis who were primarily interested in Hindi texts. Though the number of readers must have remained small whatever script was used, the importance of the publications and other activities of the Sarnami movement can hardly be overrated (Damsteegt 2002: 251).

Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, hardly any activity has been discernable in the area of Sarnami, and the movement does not seem to have had a lasting impact. This does not imply, of course, that Sarnami is growing obsolete as a spoken language - on the contrary. However, we do not have any research data to quantify language maintenance. Although members of 'the other Surinamese groups occasionally learn to speak Sarnami in their daily contact with Hindustanis, the language is on the whole an in-group language of the Hindustani ethnic group. In formal situations it is sometimes used in speeches, somewhat hesitantly, alongside the prestige languages. Sarnami is hardly ever used in education and has no official status (Damsteegt 2002: 252). It was only with the publication of his poetry in *Sarnami* that the poet Jit Narain placed the Sarnami language with a bang on the map for all to hear and thereby giving notice of its presence and taking its rightful place among the other national languages of the land. There is no denying of its beauty, flexibility and reliability when skilfully manipulated and moulded by a disciplined craftsman. Jit Narain not only writes *Sarnami* but has also commenced writing poetically the history of a substantial segment of his society, and perhaps a segment of Caribbean man in his own language. And to top that all his deft use of the only 'Indic' language in the hemisphere has, through his poetic idioms, themes and metaphors, even retained its 'puranic' qualities, that is

to say that the poet, as all of us, got caught in the ever present web of memories that even the gods cannot escape from (Olivieira 2003: 153 f.). It is the stories, the histories and the memories, as the poet calls it, of the negative experiences and the hardship of these immigrants and their descendants that he is left with, that Jit Narain is mostly and deeply concerned about and which he deals with in his seven books of poetry published so far with Dutch translation overleaf.

Jit Narain (a nom de plume). is a third generation Hindustani Surinamer who was born in 1948 just outside of the southern limit of Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, in a semi-rural and linguistically homogeneous community where he grew up and attended (primary) school before he left Suriname in 1968 for the Netherlands to study medicine.

During and upon completion of his medical studies he settled and practised medicine in The Hague, while at the same time promoting the use, valuation and emancipation of *Sarnami*. In 1982 he started, edited and published a magazine, appropriately called *Sarnami*, entirely written in and devoted to the promotion of that language. In fact he practically singlehandedly filled this magazine every month - for a period of 5 years.

His first book of poetry, *Dal Bhat Catni* (Yellow Peas, Cooked Rice and Chutney) was published in 1977 in both *Sarnami* - the first ever literary product



in this language- and Dutch. The contract-labourers come into focus for the first time in Sarnami literature in this collection of poems that is filled with their pain and pathos. Their desperation and disappointment has been described with profound bitterness by Jit Narain. Between *Dal Bhat* and 2003 six more books of poetry were published plus a collection of his poetry up to 1988, scripted in Devanagari and published in India. Jit Narain's venture into the Sarnami language has encouraged many other modern poets to write in Sarnami.

### **Sarnami Language in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands Sarnami is spoken only by two generations of Hindustanis. The third generation understands the language but many of them are unable to speak it. Many Hindustanis do not even know that their language is called Sarnami. They still call it Sarnami Hindi or Sarnami Hindustani. Neither do they have any knowledge of their mother-tongue nor are they interested in learning it. Many Hindustanis are of the opinion that Sarnami may not be used outside the kitchen and sitting room as it does not have any prestige. In the mass media like FM radio broadcast and television the use of Sarnami is sporadic. The work of the few Sarnami poets and authors who used to write in Sarnami is not well-known. Hindustani parents don't even like to speak in Sarnami with their children at home since they think that

it will affect the performance of the child at school.

For the Dutch Hindustanis, it is Hindi which has acquired the status of a prestige language and Hindi lessons are given everywhere in Netherlands through private schools. The reason is the invasion of Bollywood films, film songs and frequent visits to India. Whereas earlier Sarnami formed a bridge with Hindi it now seems to be the other way round.

However, there seems to be hope for Sarnami language in both Suriname and the Netherlands since in spite of the negative feelings of Hindustanis towards Sarnami, a few concerned persons including poets and researchers have been trying hard over the years to make the Hindustanis aware of the richness of the language and revive its lost prestige in their eyes so that the language does not die out altogether. In 2003 a Sarnami-Dutch dictionary was compiled, which is an encouraging sign for the future of the language. Alongside a new breed of poets has emerged in the Netherlands and Suriname who have started writing exclusively in Sarnami inspired by Jit Narain's Sarnami poetry. One such poet is Raj Ramdas 'Kahan hai u' (2003). Along with his book a CD of the audio recordings of his poem is included which makes his work accessible to a general public. Raj's poems seldom deal with his background but his use of Sarnami proves how beautiful Sarnami can be. Every sentence is a challenge to those who doubted the



literary quality of Sarnami. Ghariertje Choenni's poetry in 'Asa' (1980) contains several poems written in Sarnami. The young and courageous poet Candani (1965) wrote her first poetry volume 'Ghungru tut gail' in 1991 and 'Ghar ghar ke khel' (2002). Shrinivasi is another Sarnami poet who composed 'Bulahat'. However he never explicitly got involved in the emancipation debates of the Sarnami language. Long before he had written and characterized the emotion of Hindustanis in surnami as no other poet could. Chitra Gajadin, another famous Sarnami poet started writing in Sarnami after switching over from the Dutch language under influence of Jit Narain. Apart from expressing their own emotions through their poetry, these poets also express the anguish of the

Bhojpuris who became Bidesias during the colonial period and the identity crisis which their future generations are facing because of not being able to come to terms with their present circumstances and who are still unable to answer the question 'who am I' - A Hindustani; a Hindustani from Rotterdam born in Suriname; a Surinamese in the Netherlands; or a descendant of ancestors from India, a PIO (Person of India Origin)? Hopefully the efforts of these poets will keep the Sarnami language alive in both Suriname and the Netherlands so that the history and culture of the Bidesias are not relegated to the archives of libraries and showcased in museums but remain the living history of their future generations.

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Badrinarayan, born 1965 in Bhojpur, is a scholar of history and literature. He has written a number of well researched books on social sciences and has published his poems into three collections: 'sach sune kai din hue', 'shabdapadiyam and khudai mein hinsa'. He has been honoured with Kedar Samman and Bharat Bhushan Smriti Puraskar. He is professor at G.B. Pant Social Science Institute and lives in Allahabad. This article is an excerpt from his project work on Bidesia in collaboration with contributors from Suriname and the Netherlands.

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## **HUNGARIAN INDOLOGY: PAST AND PRESENT**

Vijayasati

Hungary is situated in the heart of Europe, in the basin of the Carpathian Mountains. The capital of Hungary - Budapest - is the political, administrative, economic, commercial and cultural centre of the country. Budapest is also the academic centre of Hungary. Great number of universities and reasearch institutes are located here.

Eotvos Lorand University - ELTE -is the oldest and largest university in the country, which has been operating since 1635.

### **Department of Indo-European Studies at ELTE**

In the Faculty of Arts of this University, the Department of Indo-European Studies exists where Hindi and Sanskrit are taught.

The Department was established in 1873 in the Faculty of Philosophy of the University. Its first Professor was Aurel Mayr (1846-1915) who taught in the Department until 1905. His special field was history of Ancient Indian Law.

Professor Mayr's successor in the Department was Jozsef Schmidt (1868-1933). His lectures on comparative linguistics were renowned for the lively presentation of his own researches. His popular works, published during the 1920's include : Life and works of Kalidasa, The Light of Asia : the Life and Doctrines of the Buddha, Old Indian Epic Poetry, The History of Sanskrit Literature and Indian Philosophy. He published several translations including the Malavikagnimitra (The King and the Courtesan) of Kalidasa, The Mrichhakatika (The little clay cart) of Shudraka and the Panchtantra.

Unfortunately many of his unpublished manuscripts were later destroyed by fire.

In 1920 the Department's work had to cease for political reasons and was not resumed until 1948.

In 1948 studies at the University in this field were recommenced, being led by Oszvald Szemerényi for one year. Jozsef Vekerdi, later well-known as a translator of many Sanskrit works, was one of his students. After this Laszlo Gaal taught Sanskrit in the Department for a short time.

The Department of Indo-European Studies was formally re-established in 1952 when Janos Harmatta was appointed as its head. At this time the principal activity of the Department was the teaching of the linguistics of classical languages, Sanskrit was taught as an optional subject.

### **Indology in the Department of Indo-European Studies**

Indology has always formed a major part of the work of the Department of Indo-European Studies.

In 1956 Indology was introduced as a formal university subject in the Department. This was the first time such a course had been offered in Hungary and it remains the only such course in the country today. All Indologists currently working in Hungary were trained in the Department.

Professor Harmatta was Head of the Department from 1956 until his formal retirement in 1987. He continued to

teach here as a Professor Emeritus. His major specialities were : Indo-European Linguistics, Indology (Prakrit Language, Brahmi and Kharoshti inscriptions) He also translated Sanskrit works including some hymns from Rigveda.

Professor Csaba Tottossy has taught in the Department since 1953 and was Head of the Department from 1987 till 2000. Since 2002 he has been teaching as retired Professor. In 1963 he received his PhD on the subject of a work of Sanskrit literature, the Shukashaptshati. He established the university syllabus for the subject Indology. He has taught grammar, text-reading and analysis, history of Sanskrit language and literature etc. since then. He has also translated selections from the Manavadharma-shastra and Kautilya's Arthashastra.

### **Hindi in the Department of Indo-European Studies**

Studies on contemporary India, specially Hindi language and literature, began in Hungary 50 years ago. Nevertheless, Hindi was an integral part of the syllabus when formal training in Indian Studies started in 1956.

The first teacher in this field was Dr. Arpad Debreczeni (1911-1984). His PhD thesis was concerned with the role of stress and intonation in Hindi. His introductory language-teaching textbook, used internally in the Department, was the first in Hungarian. He translated several works of modern Hindi literature. Unfortunately his pioneering Hindi-Hungarian dictionary is still unpublished

but the first Hungarian-Hindi dictionary, published in 1973, was revised by him.

After Dr. Debreczeni retired, Dr. Eva Aradi lectured in the Department for one year. She prepared translations of Hindi short stories by Premchand and other modern writers.

From 1976 until his departure in 1995, Dr. Gyorgy Karsai taught Sanskrit here, specialising in dramas of Kalidasa.

Since 1981 Dr. Maria Negyesi has been teaching at the Department and became Head in January 2001. She obtained her PhD in Hindi Literature from Agra University in 1997. Her special field is Hindi Linguistics and literature. She has translated several Hindi short stories into Hungarian and vice versa. She re-organised the Hindi syllabus and introduced new teaching methods which have proved very successful. In collaboration with Dr. Asgar Wajahat, a renowned Hindi creative writer from India, she prepared a new textbook for university students of Hindi which will be the first one commercially available.

In March 2002 she organised an International Hindi Conference in Budapest in collaboration with the Embassy of India, Budapest, which provided the first occasion for professors of Hindi in Central Europe to meet and exchange views. Since 1993, she has been organising with the support of the Embassy of India, Budapest, an Orientation Course on Indian Culture and Hindi classes on four levels. The course and the classes have been popular among

several generations of India-enthusiasts, and they give an opportunity to the young Indologists to introduce themselves with the lectures.

### **The teaching staff in the Department of Indo-European Studies**

**Dr. Maria Negyesi**, Head of the Department, She teaches Hindi Language & literature.

**Dr. Csaba Dezsó**, Sanskrit - PhD Oxford, D. Phill, He teaches History of classical Indian Literature.

**Dr. Mate Ittzes**, Sanskrit and Indo-European Linguistics, PhD - Elte. He teaches comparative Philology.

**Dr. Hidas Gergely**, Tagore Fellow (2007-2010) D. Phill Oxford. He teaches Buddhist Studies and Pali.

**Dr. Csaba Kiss**, Tagore fellow (2011-continuing) D. Phill Oxford. He teaches History of Religion, Vedantasara & Upanishads.

**Dr. Imre Bangha**, Honorary reader Medieval Hindi Poetry

**Prof. Csaba Tottossy**, retired Prof. Sanskrit

**Dr. Ferenc Ruzsa**, part time Philosophy

**Dr. Zsuzsa Renner**, part time History of art

**Hajnalka Kovacs**, part time Urdu

### **Recent Activities of the Department**

2002 - International Hindi Conference at Budapest

**2002** - First International Intensive Sanskrit Summer Retreat in Csikszereda, Romania. In co-operation with the Centre of the County School Inspectorate, Csikszereda, the Department regularly organises Days of Indian Culture there.

**2003** - The second International Intensive Sanskrit Summer Retreat was organised in Pondicherry in 2003.

**2004** -The third International Intensive Sanskrit Summer Retreat was held in Poland in July 2004.

**2007** - International Indological Study Conference

**2008** -International Intensive Sanskrit Summer Retreat was held

**2010** - Letting the text speak - International Seminar

Since 2002 the Department has been conducting a research project supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund. The project comprises the following subjects:

1. critical edition, translation and analysis of Sanskrit texts

2. critical edition, translation and analysis of medieval Hindi texts : The Kavitaavali of Tulsidas

### **Outside the Department**

Indian literature had been published in translation in Hungary even before Indology was a field of academic study. The first such work was translated by David Rozsnyai in 17th century. This is the first Hungarian version of the Panchtantra, however the translation was

not directly from Sanskrit but from a version in Turkish. Several other 18th century Hungarian translations are likewise not directly from Sanskrit.

Sanskrit itself has been studied in Hungary since the 18th century. The life work of Sandor Korosi Csoma (1784-1842) is still a landmark in the history of Hungarian Indology. He spent more than ten years in Ladakh and discovered many ancient texts of fundamental importance concerning Indian history, literature, philosophy, religion and medical science. He was the first scholar to publish and comment on the Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary, the Mahavyutpatti.

In the field of translation pioneering work has been done by:

**Karoly FioK** - Abhigyanshakuntalam, Hitopadesha, episodes from Mahabharata

**Mihaly Babits** - Poems Ravindranath Tagore

**Ervin Baktay** - Ramayana, Mahabharata

**Jozsef Vekerdi** - Kathasaritsagar, Vetalpanchvinshatika, Geet govind and many more.

### **Graduates of the Department**

Graduates of the Department (more than 40 in number) hold distinguished positions in and outside the country, to name a few:

1. Geza Bethlenfalvy - Department's first graduate, was the Director of the Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre in New Delhi, he also lectured at Delhi University in Hungarian language.

2. Dr. Eldiko is the Head of the Department of Ancient History at ELTE University, Budapest. She has published a bilingual English-Hungarian bibliography of Hungarian works on India.

3. Dr. Balint Razsnyai is Head of the Department of English in a university in Hungary. He has translated English language works of modern Indian writers, one of them is - U. R. Anantmurthy's A rite for a dead man

4. Dr Ferenc Ruzsa teaches Indian Philosophy at ELTE University.

5. Zsuzsanna Renner is a specialist in Indian Art and is the Director of a museum in Budapest. She lectures on the History of Indian Art.

6. Dr Imre Bangha is a Lecturer in Hindi at the University of Oxford since 1998. He studied for his PhD at Shantiniketan. His research field is medieval Hindi poetry. He has in collaboration with Balazs Deri, translated poems of Meerabai and Anandghan which were published in book form with his commentary. He was the first lecturer in Hindi to be appointed at Oxford university. In 2003, he introduced Indological studies at the recently established Sapienntia University, Csikszereda, Romania.

In 1992 Dr. Asgar Wajahat of the Jamia Millia University, New Delhi joined the Department as a Visiting Professor under the Indo-Hungarian Cultural Exchange Program set up by Indian Council For Cultural Relations.

He was here for a period of five years. He introduced Urdu studies to the syllabus and made highly appreciated contributions in the teaching of Hindi Literature. He jointly translated contemporary Hungarian short stories into Hindi. Some of his works have been translated in Hungarian also.

Dr. L. S. Bisht Batrohi from the Kumaun University, Nainital was the second Visiting Professor. During his three years tenure he prepared an Anthology of Modern Hindi Poetry, which is still used as a study-aid.

In the coming years Dr. Ravi Prakash Gupt and Dr. Pramod Sharma from Kendriya Hindi Sansthan and Dr Uma Shankar Upadhyay from Poona University, joined the Department as Visiting Professors. Dr Ravi Prakash prepared the Hindi Conversation Text-Book while Dr. Upadhyay prepared Maadhymika- a text book of Medieval Hindi Poetry. Dr. Pramod Sharma presented the first Wall Magazine of the Department Prayas with the help of the students. Prayas is available on the web also. Dr Sharma taught Hindi typing on computer and the students now type their own articles.

Dr. Vijaya Sati from Hindu College, Delhi University is presently the Visiting Professor in the Department. She has taken to some new topics with the students like Dalit Vimarsh and Women's Writing in India. She is preparing a text-book on Women's Writing.

Guest Lectures are also delivered in the Department. Some of the distinguished guests were Bheeshm Sahani, Ajeet Kaur, Indranath Chaudhury, Abdul Bismillah, Satya Vrat Shastri and Kunwarpal Singh.

### **Course of study in the Department**

In May 2004 Hungary joined the European Union. This means the entire structure of Higher Education has been reorganised according to the EU system. The Department had the Indology Diploma Course (four years) which was equivalent to M. A. Starting from the academic year 2006-07, the B. A., M. A., PhD system has been introduced. Accordingly now the Department offers a full B. A. course in Indology as well as two Minor Courses in Sanskrit and Hindi. Besides the B. A. students who study according to the new system, the Department still has students finishing their Diploma Course (four years with a dissertation at the end, students study both Sanskrit and Hindi in parallel throughout the course).

From 2009 a new course M. A. in Indology has been introduced with two specialisations: one in classical Indology (Sanskrit) and one in Modern Indian Studies (Hindi).

There are more than 15 students in BA and one student in MA (Modern Indian Studies-Hindi)

Both in the old style diploma course and in the new BA and MA courses particular emphasis is placed on the

acquisition of language skills in Sanskrit and Hindi and on the philological training of the students, which are the key to higher-level studies in this field. The second and third years of the BA course as well as the two years of MA are based on the reading and analysis of a considerable quantity and range of Sanskrit texts, in parallel with similar work on Hindi texts. In Hindi, active oral and writing skills are also developed. Linguistics is studied from both the comparative and historical point of view, and students must also demonstrate their competence in English. Cultural studies take place in parallel with the philologically oriented classes.

### **Library of the Department**

The Department has a rich library. The books are gifted by the ICCR, Indian Embassy and some other personal sources. Students have access to the books and magazines, they just have to make an entry for that.

In the recent years students of the Department are preparing Research Paper on- Tyagpatr-Jainendra Kumar, Mahadevi kaa Gadya, Mannu Bhandari Kee kahaniyaan and Female characters in the short stories of Mohan Rakesh.

Recently a student of the Department has translated Manusmriti and Hari Shankar Parsai's work. Bheeshm Sahani's stories were translated by the students under the guidance of Dr. Maria Negyesi.

Students translate from Hindi to Hungarian in departmental functions.



They celebrate Holi and Diwali. On Hindi Divas they read out Hindi poetry and present Hindi drama also.

They participate in competitions organised by Hindi Samiti, U.K. and they have won prizes to go to india.

As will be apparent from this summary, Indian studies in Hungary has a respectable pedigree. The Department is optimistic about the future. A talented generation of young Indologists will build on the previous work and explore new fields of research.

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Dr. Ms. Vijayasati, born 1956, is at present visiting professor in Indo-European Studies department of ELTE University, Budapest, Hungary. Prior to this she was teaching at Hindu College, University of Delhi. She has published three books in original and several articles in magazines and journals. She is interested in contemporary Hindi literature.

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## GADAL

Rangey Raghav

Translated by  
Jai Ratan

Commotion outside. “Who’s there?” Dori called out.

“No reply came. Only a voice rang in the air, “Murderess, I’ll kill you!”

A woman’s voice came, “Let me see how you dare! I’ll devour your entire family like a witch. You seedless man!”

It was getting too much for Dori. He came out. “What are you doing, Nihal?” he cried advancing menacingly. “Why are you forgetting? She’s your mother.”

“My mother!” Nihal stepped back.

“Lift your hand to strike me and see what happens!” the woman snarled. “You idler, I’ll make cats go for your nose. What do you take me for? Don’t forget I’m not your purchased woman.”

“Bhabhi!” Dori cried, “how you babble! Come to your senses.”

He advanced and then turning his head he looked at the people standing around. “Go, all of you, go!” he cried.

Nihal fell back and the people soon melted away.

As if dazed, Dori stood under the thatched roof, holding its pole for support. The woman sat there defiantly, her eyes still blazing fire.

“I know,” she said. “Nihal doesn’t have the guts. You prompted him, *devar*.”

“Yes, Gadal,” Dori said in a subdued voice. “It was my doing.”

Gadal became tense. “Why did you do it?” she asked.

Dori was silent. A tremor ran through his body.

He was a tall and hefty fifty years old Gujarati shepherd. His moustache had turned salt and pepper and his head almost touched the thatched ceiling as he stood there, leaning against the pole. The dim light of the clay lamp was falling over his broad scraggy shoulders. He was wearing a vest, stuffed with cotton and his dhoti, stretching back in trim folds as it touched his knees, was tucked at the back. His hand stiffly resting against the pole, he stood there looking bewildered.

The woman rose to her feet. She was about forty-five years old. Though fair, yet in the glimmering of declining age her complexion looked a bit blotched. From appearance she looked quite agile. Given to hard work all her life, although her body had sagged with age, yet her agility had not deserted her.

“Don’t you feel ashamed of yourself, Gadal?” Dori said.

“Ashamed of what?” Gadal asked him.

Dori stood silent, at a loss for a reply when he heard a voice coming from upstairs. “Not she,” the voice said. “Only those who have a sense of shame can feel ashamed.”

“Nihal!” Dori roared. “Keep quiet!”

A hush fell over the room.

“Why did you call me here?” Gadal said breaking the silence.

“Have you eaten your food?” Dori asked, parrying her question.

“No,” Gadal replied, “where was the time for it? These scoundrels waylaid me while I was returning from the fields.”

“Nihal!” Dori called out. “Ask your wife to bring her mother-in-law some food.”

A woman’s voice, loaded with malice came from inside. “*Arre*, now she’s a woman of the Lohar clan. Will she relish poor Kharia’s *rotis*?”

Some women sitting outside smirked.

“Are you listening. Parameswari?” Nihal cried. “The world is laughing at us. You have tarnished the Kharia clan’s fair name.”

Gunna was only fifty-five when death overtook him, leaving Gadal a widow. Gadal’s eldest son, Nihal was getting on to be thirty. His wife, Dulla’s, elder son was seven years old, the second was four and the third, a daughter, was still a suckling babe. Nihal’s two sisters Champa and Chameli were respectively married in the families of Jhaj and Biswara villages and their children were old enough to crawl on their knees in the dust. Nihal’s youngest brother, Narain, was twenty-two years old and his wife was now the mother of a second child.

The same Gadal had gone away, leaving a large family behind and had

married a thirty-two years old shepherd of the Lohar clan, with whom she was now openly living.

Dori was Gunna's younger brother. His wife and children had died, leaving him to eke out a lonely existence. Gunna had asked him to remarry, but he had preferred to plough a lonely furrow. He ate from Gadal's kitchen. He gave his earnings to her, regarding her children as his own, Nihal doted on his uncle. The Kharia shepherds regarded themselves as superior to Lohars.

Gadal's new husband, Moni a widower, had a large family. Without taking Gadal's age into account, he married her just because she was a Kharia woman. He thought she would stay put in his house without creating any fuss. He was also in need of a competent woman to kindle the fire in his *chulha* and she was just the woman for it.

Gadal had gone away early in the morning but her sons had forced her to come back the same day. Moni, her new husband didn't even have an inkling of what had happened. His bhabhi blithely churned butter-milk, stretching out her legs. Wouldn't have Dulla, Nihal's wife derided her for adopting such outlandish postures? And imagine Gadal throwing herself among these people!

It was midnight. Gadal was lying on the floor while Dori was sitting by her side, smoking his *chelum*.

"Gadal!" Dori broke the stillness of the night. "Yes, what's it?" Gadal said

in a faint voice.

"So you took it into your head to go away'!"

Gadal was silent.

Dori spoke again, "All go away. One day your sister-in-law was gone. Then your three nephews were gone one after another. Next it was Bhaiyya's turn. But the way you left...well, nobody ever departed in that manner. The whole world laughs at us. You know that of course, don't you?"

"*Devar*, I'm not bothered by what the world says," Gadal muttered. "Let it laugh for all I care. I was fourteen years old when your brother first set his eyes on me in my village. You had come with him, carrying an oil-smearred wooden staff, to carry me away. You had accompanied him, hadn't you? And didn't I go with him? You may be thinking Gadal is now past her age. What need has she for a husband? But do you know why I left?"

"No."

"You must be thinking now that Gadal is gone, all your comforts are gone with her. You won't be able to have two meals a day according to your taste. You know your daughter-in-law would not slave for you. Well, you stood by your brother and me. And in return I also stood by you. Tell me, am I speaking lies?"

"No, Gadal, I never said so."

"That's all there's to it, *devar*. Now

who's there whom I can call my own over here? My man is dead. I drudged for him while he lived and because of him I showed deference to the other members of his family. Now that my master is gone why should I put up with all this rigmarole? These boys, these daughters-in-law? No, I refuse to slave for them."

"But aren't they your children? Even a cat goes round seven houses in search of food for her young ones. And you are a human. Why has your affection suddenly run dry?"

"And may I ask why has yours? Why didn't you marry again?"

"Because I could always lean against you for support."

"Coward! It was your brother who died but it was his sons who performed his last rites. When all was over couldn't you keep me in your house? For the sake of my belly I had to cross another man's threshold. You forced me to it. I'll blow into the *chulha* when I have someone to claim as my own. I am not such a low-down that I should waste my elbow-grease on doing household chores while others jingle their ankle bells. I'll fill my belly only when I have obtained the right price for it. Mark my word, *devar*. You lay low all the time and suddenly woke up to it when a blow flattened out your family's nose. You never thought of your family's prestige when your daughters-in-law tried to cow me down by giving me defiant

looks. No, *devar*, the die is always loaded against a helpless woman."

"Gadal," Dori said in a strained voice, "I was afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Gadal, I'm advancing in years. I feared people would heap ridicule on me. That your sons would think Uncle lived in sin with their mother and that was the reason he did not feel the need to marry again. Gadal, it would have brought a bad name to *Bhaiyya* also."

"Oh, how you talk!" Gadal said. "Did you ever care for your brother? When my father-in-law died, your brother fed the whole community. It was only after the guests had been fed that he put a glass of water to his lips. And how many people did you invite at your *Bhaiyya's* death ceremony? Not more than twenty-five. But why such a small number? You trotted out the plea that the War being on, there was a restriction on the number of guests. That the police would haul you up if the number exceeded twenty-five. You coward! I refuse to live in the house of cowards."

Suddenly Dori's tone changed. "Can you go and live under another man's roof while I'm still alive?"

"Yes, I can."

"Say it again!" Dori stood up.

"I'm prepared to say it a hundred times, Lala." Gadal said. She was still lying on the ground.

Dori advanced towards her.

“Come!” Gadal hissed.

Dori stopped in his tracks. Gadal watched him. Dori sat down. Gadal held him with her steady stare. Then she laughed. “So you want to marry me, *devar*?” she said. “But do you have the guts, *devar*? You know my new man. He is a *man*. I must tell you that. Sometimes I feel I’ve again got your *Bhaiyya* in him. And you?” she paused. “Call yourself a man? Does a man ever whine before a woman? If you had made bold and beaten me up, I would have said here is a man for me. He regards me as his own. I’ll live in his house.”

Dori sat there watching her with a blank expression. The night deepened. Spreading out the end of her *lehnga*, Gadal covered her body with it. Dori started dozing.

Sitting in the vestibule, Dulla took a yawn. “So the Maharani has returned?” she said. “Where did you spend the night?”

Venus had disappeared. Dawn was breaking. The bullocks had risen to their feet. There was a chill in the air.

“Don’t put on airs,” pat came Gadal’s retort. “I’ve daughters of your age. Going by our new relationship, I’m your younger sister-in-law for my man is younger to you in age. I’m your sister-in-law, not your doormat. Should I repeat it?”

Dulla got non-plussed. Moni had just woken up. “Where had you been?” he asked angrily.

Gadal pulled the veil over her face.

“They took me away by force,” she said, but the tone of her voice did not change. “I escaped at the first opportunity.”

Moni’s voice suddenly softened. His father came in, driving the cattle before him. Moni got up to go out.

“Where are you off to?” Gadal asked him. “To tend the field.”

“First decide about me,” Gadal said.

Dulla stood aghast at the demeanour of that middle-aged woman.

“What decision?” Moni asked. He looked so subdued before that woman.

“Have I come here to live with you or to drudge in your house?” Gadal asked. “We are only two of us. We can live apart and eat separately.” Without waiting for his answer, she continued: “I don’t mind parting with a share of our earning but no joint system for me.”

Moni stood before her as if dazed.

Dulla came out, tense with anger. “Speak up, *devar*,” she said. “Why have you suddenly lost your tongue? Have you brought a sister-in-law for me or a mother-in-law? Why don’t you answer me? Look don’t take me for granted. I’m not so inept that I can’t turn the *roti* on the iron plate. I’m the tough type. No, I won’t stand her tongue-lashing-understand? My mother gave me birth after eating the burnt earth of the *chulha*. Yes, I must tell you that.”

“Are you my co-wife to talk like that?” Gadal glared at Dulla “You may have eaten the scorched earth scraped from

the oven. So what? Does that turn you into a witch that you should devour the entire family? Take it easy. Live here I must. Your *rotis* are not so brittle that they will stick in my throat unless I eat them with a block of gur.”

Gadal’s diatribes had made Moni speechless. He quietly went out.

The afternoon was upon them. Dulla was working at the spinning wheel. Narain came. “Anybody there?” he called from outside.

Dulla pulled down her veil. “Who’s calling?” she asked.

Narain swallowed hard. “Gadal’s son,” he replied.

Dulla laughed behind her veil. “Elder or younger?”

“Younger.”

“How many are you?”

“It may be any number,” Gadal said coming out. “How does it concern you?”

“*Arre*, here she comes!” Dulla ran in.

“*Amma*, is she your elder sister-in-law?” Narain asked.

“What has brought you here? First tell me that,” Gadal said impatiently.

“*Amma*, I’ve come to collect punitive money from you,” Narain said advancing.

“Stay where you are!” Gadal said.

Just then Moni returned, holding *lota* and string. He saw Gadal’s bracelets and necklace lying in front of Narain.

“Is that enough to cover the fine?” he heard Gadal asking Narain. “Now don’t showup here again,” she added. “None of you. I’ll lodge a report with the police that at the instance of their wives my sons have usurped all my trinkets and turned me out of the house.”

Narain’s face turned dark. Picking up the ornaments he walked away. Moni’s mind was filled with apprehension as he watched Narain going away.

“Have you seen it, *devar*?” Dulla complained. “My sister-in-law has thrown away her jewellery. At last the knee has turned towards the stomach. She will go and sit in four places and earn enough to build a brick platform in front of her son’s house. I warn you. You are a simple man. You can’t understand a woman’s guiles. Her’s is a regular business.”

Gadal laughed. “You’re indeed smart, *Jethani* (elder sister-in-law),” she said. “It must be the custom of the women of your family to ask the new man to buy off the old husband. Gadal knows how to live as the full-fledged mistress of the house. Is that clear to you? Not as a slave but as a mistress. I’ll slave for my husband. But for others I care two hoots. Understand? But who are you to poke your nose in my affairs, may I know?”

Dulla looked daggers at Gadal and went away stamping her feet.

“Don’t talk big,” Moni said. “No more of this bragging. Learn to live like a

*bahu* in the house.”

“Telling me?” Gadal smiled. “*Arre*, you were not even born then, dear! I know everything. I’ve done nothing which could go against the norms of the community. If you find me transgressing the rules laid down by the community, pull me up for it. Pull me up a thousand times. But I refuse to be imposed upon by a woman who behaves like a co-wife.”

“Should I give you a taste of my beating?” Moni swayed his head in anger.

Gadal laughed. Going into the vestibule she got engrossed in work.

The cold wind had sharpened. Sitting under the thatched roof, Dori was smoking the hookah. Getting bored with smoking, he put the chilum upside down and sat there staring into vacancy.

Nihal returned from the field. Tying the bullocks he gave them fodder and turned to Dori. “*Kaka!*” he said.

Dori was lost in thought. It seemed he had not heard Nihal.

“*Kaka!*” Nihal raised his voice.

Dori looked up startled. “What’s it? Did you ask me something?”

“If I don’t ask you whom else will I ask? I couldn’t meet you the whole day. Chimman was telling me that you spent the whole day near Manmoji hermit’s sacred fire. Is that true?”

“Yes, son, I had been there.”

“What took you there?”

“Just like that, son. I felt like going there.”

“The bania’s man had come from town. He said he must have his dues. He was so insistent. We almost came to blows.”

“You must be careful, son. No one ever gets on the wrong side of the broomstick.”

Nihal picked up the chilum and raked the cowdung cakes for some embers. Placing them in the chilum, he returned puffing at it.

“I didn’t go there,” he said, “It would have ended in broken heads. I sent Narain instead.”

“Sent where?” Dori looked up, alarmed.

“To that infamous woman—the blot on our family.”

“You mean your mother?”

“I don’t know why you are so partial to her. You never get angry with her. I won’t call her mother. No, not that woman.”

“Son, you may not call her your mother but the whole world knows her as your mother. While a man is living people name his wife after him and after him as his son’s mother. It’s how things have always been.”

“You are right, *Kaka*, you are right,” Nihal muttered in anger. “But you have not asked me the reason why I sent Narain to her.”



“Yes, son, you haven’t told me about it. Tell me, why did you send Narain to her?”

“To get the punishment money from her. But before I could call the panchayat she forestalled me by flinging her jewellery at me.”

Dori smiled. “She wanted to incriminate us as defaulters for not having called the panchayat to dole out justice to her. She wanted to tell them that we wanted to drive her away from home. Did Narain bring the money?”

“Yes.”

Dori became thoughtful.

“May I go and meet her?” Nihal asked. “No, son. She has gone away in anger. That’s the only reason. Have you had your food?”

“No.”

“Then first go and have your meal.”

Nihal went away but Dori kept sitting there. The night’s darkness came from behind the evening like a curtain of black suddenly descending over everything.

The musical sound of *dhola* floated down to them from somewhere in the distance. Dori got up to go.

“Has *Kaka* had his food?” Nihal asked his wife.

“No, not yet.”

Nihal came out. Dori was not there. “*Kaka!*” he called out and set out in search of him.

Chiranji, the priest of the Hanuman temple was closing the temple door.

“Why are you in such a hurry?” he asked Nihal.

“I touch your feet, Panditji,” Nihal made his obeisance to the priest. “Did you see *Kaka* somewhere around here?” he asked the priest.

“*Arre*, he is listening to *dhola*. I saw him there only a short while ago.”

When Nihal returned with his uncle, Dori was down with fever.

“It’s nothing” Dori said. “Just an exposure, I think.” He stretched himself on the narrow cot and pulled up his legs. “No food for me.” he said. “I don’t feel like eating tonight.”

Nihal stood leaning over Dori’s cot.

“*Arre*, just think of it, son,” Dori mumbled, I’ve heard *dhola* after such a long time. Last time I heard it at *Bhaiyya’s* wedding and after that tonight.”

Nihal looked intently at Dori. His eyes closed, he was mumbling under his breath.

The day had declined into evening. Moni was sitting outside his house. Gadal came out with a *thali* heaped with hot crisp *rotis* and a large helping of mango chutney and placed it before Moni.

“They taste so nice,” Moni said. “Very tasty indeed.”

Gadal sat down by his side. “Why don’t you marry again?” she asked. “A



woman in keeping with your age?”

Moni gave her a quizzical look. “Is cooking for one person too much of a bother for you?” he asked.

“No, it’s not that,” Gadal replied. “You must be thinking I’m asking for a co-wife. But can one trust a man? My age is declining. I wish you had a child while I’m alive. If not, I could at least have the pleasure of ruling over a woman.”

Moni laughed. “Then say that—that you want to have a woman at hand to fight with. As I see, you still long for some excitement in life.”

As Moni finished eating, Gadal brought him a hookah. Then she sat down to her meal behind a wall.

“Arre, where are you going at this odd hour?” she heard Moni asking a passerby.

“Some urgent work, Moni,” the reply came. “Peshkar Saheb has called me.”

Gadal recognised the man. He was Giriraj Gawaria, from her own village. He must have stolen Peshkar’s cow.

“Why so late at night?” Moni asked. “Come, sit down, have a pull at the hookah.”

The man could not resist the temptation. Gadal picked up her second roti from the *thali*; and breaking a morsel from it put it in her mouth.

“Have you heard it?” Giriraj said, taking a pull at the hookah.

“What?”

“Gadal’s *devar*, Dori, is dead.”

Gadal stopped eating. She quickly washed down the food in her mouth with a drink of water from the *lota* and perked up her ears. Her heart started pounding hard.

“How did he die?” Moni asked. “He was quite hale and hearty.”

“He caught a bad chill.”

Gadal came out from behind the wall “Giriraj!” she called.

“Kaka, while dying your name was on his lips” Giriraj said. “A good man indeed.”

Gadal stood petrified.

Giriraj went away.

“Are you listening?” Gadal asked.

“Yes, woman, what’s it?”

“I must go.”

“Go where?”

“You know it.”

“But what for?”

“My *devar* is dead, you know.”

“*Devar*? He was no longer your *devar*!”

Gadal laughed, its resonance reverberating around her. “He will remain my *devar* in my next life too. Had he not shown such indifference to me these feet would have never crossed his threshold. He turned cold towards me and I took it out on him. I tried to pay him back in the same coin.” Her voice hardened as she spoke.

“You can’t go,” Moni said.

“Why not?” Gadal said. “Can you stop me from going? *Arre*, even my own sons, the flesh of my flesh can’t stand in my way. Now what’s left for me? The man I had the pleasure of imposing upon is gone. But who are you to stop me? I came here of my own sweet will. It’s for me to decide whether to stay or not to stay. You have not purchased me with money, have you? I’ve indulged long enough—the bitter things you have said to me. Had you been in my house I would have plucked your tongue out!”

“Oh, stop bragging!” Catching her by her hair, Moni pushed her into the house. Placing his cot across the door, he lay down on it and started smoking his hookah.

Gadal started sobbing. But her sobs coming in a low key did not reach up to Moni. Today Gadal’s heart was flowing out in the form of tears.

The third quarter of the night was gone. Moni had started snoring noisily. With all her strength Gadal lifted a corner of her thatched roof and wriggling out through the aperture like a serpent, she jumped out to the other side of the house.

Greatly agitated, Moni was thirsting for action. But he lacked the courage to rush to Gadal’s village, brandishing his lathi and bring her back by force. How he wished he could break the wretch’s legs. Dulla made fun of him, saying that his darling spouse had

decamped, leaving him high and dry, and tarnishing his name into the bargain. But he could do nothing about it except seethe within himself. When the other shepherds came to know about it, they tried to make light of the whole thing. “Why do you want to have bloodshed over a woman past her prime?” they said. “She had cost you nothing. Only two meals a day and she paid for it by cooking for you.”

Moni would flare up. Giriraj had apprised him of the whole thing. He learnt what had transpired when she returned to her village.

When she reached her village she found the Patel sitting in their house. “I warn you, don’t step into this house!” Nihal had thundered at her. “Why have you returned?”

The Patel had given her a startled look. “Yes, what have you come for?” he had repeated the question.

Gadal sat down at the door. She said, “When I was a young girl my *Devar* had come to my village armed with a lathi along with my husband. I had kept looking at his hands. What a man he was! I thought I would live in peace under his protection for the rest of my life. Tell me, Patel, when he could not take me under his wings after my husband’s death what other course was left for me? And see what happened to him when I was gone. *Kaka* has gone within two days of my departure. Would I have lived with him could things have

come to such a pass?”

The Patel said, “*Bahu*, but you never took the fact into account that you had grown-up sons and daughters.”

“You have a point there,” Gadal said “I was indeed conscious of this fact. But it was a question of prestige against age. He had hurt my pride and I had a grudge against my *devar*. But that is over now. Here is my son, ask him if I have in any manner contravened the customs of our community. If I have, take action against me as enjoined by our customs. Haul me over the coals. I will vindicate myself before the panchayat. I only ask one thing: when my sons spat on the community’s face why did you connive at it then?”

“When was it?” the Patel looked at her in surprise.

“You know it, of course. Who will know it if not the Patel? Only twenty-five men were invited to the feast given in connection with my husband’s death.”

“Are you mad?” the Patel said. “Don’t you know this is the law laid down by the government?”

“Law!” Gadal gave a contemptuous laugh; “Patel, you can see the law in actual practice everywhere. They carry away others’ cattle in broad daylight and nothing is done about it. Did the law apply only in my husband’s case? Or maybe my sons thought why waste good money over a man who was gone for good. Cowards!”

Nihal thundered, “Cowards! You call us cowards? And what are you? A lioness?” “Yes, I’m a lioness!” Gadal shook with rage. Have you the courage to do my bidding? Have you?” “What bidding?”

“Go and invite every member of the community to *Kaka’s* death ceremony. Invite all of them to join in the feast.”

Nihal stood there as if transfixed. “And what about the police?” he muttered at last.

“So you have shown yourself in your true colours,” Gadal said.

“This woman is talking through her head,” the Patel said. “She doesn’t understand the gravity of what she is saying. And what if there is firing?”

“You custodians of dharma have ruined the country,” Gadal said. “It is because of you that the whole land is gone to wreck and ruin. There’s no hope now. You are all cowards.”

“Should I take it upon myself?” she said after a pause.

“You?” Nihal looked at her in bewilderment.

“Yes, I’ll fill the breach,” Gadal said. “My name was on his lips when he was breathing his last. It’s incumbent upon me to make the arrangements.”

Moni was astounded. Giriraj had told him that the arrangements were in full swing under Gadal’s supervision. Everything was being done on a large scale. Gadal, it was rumoured, had bribed the police inspector. He would cock a

blind eye at the goings-on. People said she had not felt her husband's loss so much as she had felt Dori's.

Moni's heart was filled with venom. "Gadal, I'll not let you have things your own way," he muttered to himself. "I'm not Gola's son if I allow things to run their smooth course. You may have bribed the local police but there is a higher authority whose writ runs over the whole place. I'll complain to him."

The festivity was reaching its crescendo. Guests sat down in batches to eat. As one batch finished, its place was taken by another batch. Sweet rolls were frying in huge cauldrons and were served sizzling hot, dripping with ghee. Nihal and Narain had sold their grains at inflated rates during the War and had filled their coffers with silver coins and currency notes. The money had now come handy to meet the expenses of the feast. Things were done on such a magnificent scale that Nihal had thought nothing of running up a debt with the Bohra trader. That day people in Dang said that the entire credit for it went to Gadal. As for her sons, they had thrown the sponge but Gadal saw the thing through. "Is the law above the community?" she had kept repeating.

Utterly exhausted, Gadal was sitting among the women when she saw someone resembling a policeman moving in the crowd. She came out to investigate. Nihal was standing before a man with bowed

head.

"What's the matter, Diwanji?" she boldly advanced towards the man.

The man felt flustered at the sight of a woman facing him so brazenly.

"He says the proceedings must stop," Nihal said.

"Why?" Gadal gave the man an apprehensive look.

"The Police Inspector's orders," Diwanji said in a soft voice.

"But I've taken Darogaji's tacit permission," Gadal said, indicating thereby that she had already greased the Darogaji's palm.

"I know it," Diwanji said. "Darogaji is willing to connive at it but someone has reported the matter to the senior police officer. Darogaji will have to take official notice of the goings-on here. He has sent word that the crowd should disperse before he comes on his round. Otherwise he would have to take recourse to the law."

It set Gadal thinking. Who could have complained to the higher authorities? But no name came to her mind.

"Darogaji should have thought of it before," she said. "How can I turn away the guests at this stage? Diwanji, you also sit down and you shall be served. I shall face the consequences, come what may. I'll send word to Darogaji. Why should he take the trouble of coming over? He's the Raja of this place."

Diwanji said, "He's an employee of the Sarkar and may lose his job for dereliction of duty. He'll surely show up."

"Then let him come," Gadal said in a sharp voice. "Once a man gives word he cannot go back on it. I can't ask my guests to go away without eating."

Narain was worried. Diwanji had warned him that all of them may be put under arrest. "You must not defy the government," he said.

"Arre, is the government above the community?" Gadal said seething with anger. "We can't give up our dharma for the sake of the government."

Three batches had already eaten. This was the fourth and the last. Nihal peered into the dark. "Narain, hurry up. This is the last batch isn't it?"

Standing under the shadow of a thatched hut Gadal called out to Nihal. He came and stood before her.

"Are you scared?" she asked him. Moving his tongue over his dry lips he said, "No."

"Nihal, you must not bring dishonour to my motherhood," Gadal said. "Your uncle had regarded you as his son and he refused to marry a second time. Remember, he had no one else whom he could call his own."

Nihal bowed his head.

A boy came running. "Grandma!" he cried. "Yes, what's it?" Gadal looked at him apprehensively.

"The police is coming! It's armed!"

Nihal gave Gadal a meaningful look.

"I think it will not take this batch long to finish," Gadal said.

"But will the police stay away that long? They may not agree to it."

"But we must stop them. Block their way if necessary."

"They have guns:"

"Nihal, we too have guns. There is no shortage of guns in Dang."

"But what shall we eat afterwards?"

"We leave that to God."

The police van blew its horn. Nihal advanced to meet the van. The Daroga climbed down from the van. "Is there a feast going on here?" he asked.

Nihal was stunned. The man had accepted bribe from him and now he even refused to recognise him.

"Yes, we are entertaining guests," Nihal said.

"Are there more than twenty-five people?" "Darogaji, we never count the heads when we invite people to eat."

"But you can't break the law and get away with it."

"The government's laws were made yesterday but the community's laws were there from the very beginning. We are more concerned with the community."

"Then I must arrest you."

"Nihal!" It was Gadal calling her son. Nihal went to her.

“We must stop them at any cost till the batch has finished eating,” Gadal said.

“Then?”

“After that we shall hustle them out by the back door. If any guest is caught, it will bring bad name to our family.”

“But there is no stopping them. They may resort to firing.”

“Don’t be afraid of that. I have posted Narain on the roof. He is there with four men armed with guns.”

Nihal trembled. He looked so harried. “We have only muzzle-loaders!” he said, “while they have rifles.”

“Come what may, the last batch must eat”

“And then?”

“Then you all try to scamper away.”

Suddenly the lantern went out. There was sound of firing coming through the darkness. Out of the darkness came Gadal’s shrill voice, “You must swear by me. No one must get up without eating.” But no one was thinking of eating. They were all in a desperate hurry to rush out. Somebody shrieked and fell. There was a stampede near the exit at the back.

When all were gone Gadal climbed up to the roof. “Son!” she called out for Nihal.

Even in that commotion every fibre of Nihal’s body tingled as he dutifully responded to his mother’s call. Even

in that chaos her voice sounded so mellow and soft.

“Nihal, you must swear by your mother’s womb where I nurtured you, that you will not wait here a moment longer and will make a bid to escape with Narain and the children.”

“And you?”

“Don’t worry about me. I can see your uncle is beckoning me.”

It was no time to argue. Gadal took a loaded gun from a man who was standing by her side. “Go, all of you go!” she cried.

The youngmen caught in the coils of family attachment were lost in darkness.

Gadal pressed the trigger. Someone cried and fell. She laughed a sinister laugh. It went ringing in the air.

The Daroga was taken aback at the sound. But where were the men? The policemen rushed up to the roof. One of them fired. The bullet hit Gadal in her stomach.

The battle was over. Gadal was lying drenched in blood. The policemen had gathered round her.

Coming up, the Daroga peered in the dark. “I see nobody here,” he said.

“Hazoor,” a policeman said, “A woman—it’s a woman!”

Proceeding towards the gathered policemen the Daroga bent down to

examine the woman. "Who are you?" he asked.

Gadal smiled and said in a faint voice, "My task is accomplished, Darogaji. My soul is now at peace."

"But who are you?" the Daroga said testily.

Gadal said in a still feebler voice, "One who could not bear to live without me even for a day, I'm his..."

Her head tumbled to one side. There was a smile on her face—a smile, faint and ephemeral, like a lantern that shines in darkness for an instant and then goes out.

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Rangey Raghav (1923-1962) a prolific writer of fiction. His famous works are novels 'murdon ka teela', Aakhiri Awaz, Meri bhav badha haro. He had started writing short stories at the age of 13 and became famous by the age of 19. He died after an illness at the young age of 39. He received many awards like Hindustani Academy Award, Dalmia Award and U.P. Govt. Award.

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## CONVOY

Padma Sachdev

Translated by  
Ira Pande

For years Gulabi had counted her days according to the passing of the convoy through Banihal. Something about its movement had always held her in thrall. She remembered the exact sequence of the vehicles: khaki tarpaulins, olive-green Shaktiman trucks belonging to the army, khaki bedding-rolls and black trunks with names like Subedar P. M. Jamwal or Lance-Naik Jeet Dogra painted in white on the sides. Sitting on the mounds of luggage were the dozing army men, tossing around with every roll of the truck. Each truck looked like the previous one and the progress of the convoy down the road always reminded her of a herd of docile cattle being taken home.

One, two, three ...she'd count to a hundred and then start all over again. When these panting, over laden trucks come up the winding Jammu-Kashmir Highway, past the Pir Panjal through the Nehru Tunnel, the whole landscape of the Kashmir Valley changes.

Occasionally, a bold soldier from one of the trucks would wink at Gulabi as she stood on her balcony, she would blush and run inside, as the pine trees would laugh at her. The whole sleepy atmosphere changed.

Inside Gulabi's kitchen, the eggs have boiled by now and she twirls one to see whether they are ready to be peeled. Every morning, Gulabi goes for a walk along the Ramnagar road with her friend Bhimi. As Bhimi's house has no clock, she calculates



the time by looking at the stars and the dying embers of her kitchen fire. Occasionally, she miscalculates so that the two have once or twice set out in pitch darkness on their morning walk. Once, on such a day, Bhimi and Gulabi had started off long before the other walkers had arrived and had clung in terror to the hillside as the lights of the convoy bore down. Only when the lights had gone, had they stepped on to the road again. And then, out of nowhere a monstrous truck without any headlights had suddenly come looming at them like a rough bull. The two slithered down to the riverbed just in time. After they got their breath back, they gulped the cool water gratefully, bathed their scratches and then wept at the sheer relief of it all. They vowed, with the water of the Tawi in their palms that they would never speak of the episode to anyone, not even their husbands.

“Are we not going to eat today?” her husband Bilader’s voice thundered through the kitchen. “At once,” Gulabi replied nervously. “Your neem stick is on the window-ledge and I’ll set out your food as soon as you are ready.” Gulabi wondered what her father-in-law had in mind when he named his only son Bilader—a variation of the English ‘Brother’ perhaps? She giggled at the thought and a stray spark from the fire landed on her lap.

Once Bilader left for work, who knew when he would be back? Gulabi stepped on the verandah to watch the convoy

pass to lighten her heart. She looked at the road on which the trucks passed and dozed off. In her dream she saw Bilader riding a *ghori* and whispering something in his father’s ears. Gulabi had watched the wedding procession from her terrace at the instigation of her friends. The whole village had been amazed at her luck in finding such a prosperous groom. But then Gulabi had always been blessed by the Mata’s bounty—her face was covered with the pockmarks, which the goddess had blessed her with. Gulabi’s fair round face with its kohl-darkened hazel eyes was studded with pearly teeth. And yet when she reached her father-in-law’s home, no one came to praise her looks. Her bridegroom rolled in dead drunk well past midnight and hardly made it to his bed. The kohl from her eyes ran with the tears into the ruts on her face and disgusted by fumes from her husband’s mouth, she lay down on the mat on the floor.

God knows how many months passed by. In any case, she was a quiet little thing by nature and blushed when her friends asked her about Bilader. “Why don’t you take her with you?” the old man told his son one day. “She can cook there.” And so it was that Gulabi cooked for the truck drivers who passed by.

One morning as she went to the spring to wash up, the chattering women fell silent as she approached. Gulabi saw one pale, fifteen or sixteen year old sitting there quietly. She had already

heard one of the women tell the young thing to go further down to wash up and then turn to the other women and say, "So now we will have to share this water with Bilader's filth. I must speak to the men about this." The pale girl heard all this quietly and Gulabi digested this silently as she cleaned her teeth with walnut bark. The other women hurried away. Gulabi went closer to the girl now that she had composed herself. She asked her softly, "What is your name?"

"Sita," she said in response to the softness of Gulabi's hazel eyes. "But why do you want to know?"

"Who are you and what is your relationship with Bilader?"

Gulabi went on ignoring the girl's question.

"Didn't you hear the others? I'm the filth from Bilader's den."

"Forget what they said-I am asking you. What is the truth?"

"Who are you to ask me all this?" she asked. "I'm his wife-the one he married."

The girl laughed so loudly that a few birds flew away startled at the sound. Someone passed a nearby field singing, '*Husn chhui beparvaiye lo lo*' (Beauty is faithless, friend). "Look," said Gulabi, "don't be afraid to tell me where this den is. What do you do there?"

Sita fixed her gaze at some distant point in the fields and said, "You are his wife-how can you not know that

Bilader is impotent? He spends the whole night boozing there. My aunt used to service the place before me but now that she is in the Batot hospital with TB. I've taken her place. All Bilader's goons come there: they need someone to play around with and what can be a better toy than a woman?" her voice choked as she came to the end of her speech.

Gulabi was stunned— suddenly many things that puzzled her over last few months became clear. "Why don't you go back home?" she asked the girl. "Why do you stay on?"

"My father still owes Bilader six hundred rupees." "I'll give you the money— take it and leave."

Sita digested this silently. "Impossible. Do you think Bilader will let me off? But will you really give me the money?"

Mustering all her dignity, Gulabi looked back at the girl. "Impotent or no, Bilader is my husband and I cannot allow him to go to another woman as long as we are married. Besides, apart from us I do not want his impotence announced to the world."

"Even if I do as you say," Sita replied. "Bilader will carve you up if he finds out. His friend, that goon Girdhari who is as potent as they come will follow me to the end of the world. No, not in this life can I escape them," Sita said.

Gulabi had to give in. "But at least don't come here to bathe," she begged

the girl. "There is a little spring further up there-you can go there."

But Sita didn't say anything; in fact she didn't even budge from where she was sitting. Gulabi washed herself, filled her pot and left quietly.

She had hardly entered her kitchen when Bilader thundered: "Have you no other work except chatting with that creature at the spring? I'll rend your legs apart if I ever catch you gossiping there with her." Gulabi was trembling; never since they were married had she ever heard her husband address her directly. Then she mustered up her courage to look him squarely in the eye-she hadn't done that ever either. Bilader's eyes dropped with shame at the questions her gaze held. Softening his voice a little, he mumbled, "Look Gulabi, I haven't laid a hand on you so far: I couldn't. But marrying you was the only way to keep this name alive. My father decided to marry me off knowing full well that I would never be able to sire a child. And yet, if I die childless what will happen to my name, my flourishing business?"

Gulabi remained mute. "Do you know my truck driver Sardari? He will have to sire my children. I've asked Madho Pandit about the propriety of all this and he says such arrangements are mentioned even in the Holy Scriptures."

"Take this," Gulabi flashed as she swung a sickle in front of his face. "Go on, cut my throat. I'd rather die than

look at another man as long as we are married. If I am to bear any children, they will have to be yours."

"It's hopeless Gulabi." Bilader reasoned with her. "I've consulted every doctor I went even as far away as Amritsar. No one could change my condition." Then he changed his wheedling tone "I want children ...I don't care how you get them. And if you refuse, remember that I'll just have to find a more amenable wife." Then he turned his back and left her to howl with rage and anger. She sobbed as she cooked. how she wished her friend Bhimi were here today-she could have unburdened her heavy heart to her. But Bhimi had been married off and lived in far-off Udhampur now. There was no one here now for her to lighten her heart. Even Sita is better than me. Gulabi thought, as her eyes streamed.

That afternoon, Sardari came with Bilader for lunch. Gulabi didn't even look up and Sardari remained equally silent. Occasionally Bilader would break the oppressive silence and ask her for another helping of the food she was silently serving. Only after Sardari left, Bilader with *hookah* in hand, looked at Gulabi as she cleared up. "There's no hurry. I'll first make Sardari into a buddy and then each time Sardari drives his truck through this town, he'll stay here. But remember, no one must ever get wind of this arrangement. You will look after the honour of this house." Gulabi's silence encouraged Bilader and gradually he

warmed to his theme, talking of the arrangement as if he were discussing his trucks with her, telling her how his father had dreamed it up; how she will now have to keep all this a dark secret. Gulabi could not even bring herself to cry in front of this man—all she knew was that a hideous responsibility was hers now.

Sardari came several times after this episode but both he and Gulabi would avoid each other. Bilader feared his plans were going askew, so one day after Sardari left the kitchen, he asked Gulabi, “What are your intentions? At least give the man a chance. He’s not a bad person, I tell you. I’ve made over a truck to him and he has never cheated me even once. I must have a son in this house by this *Lohri*.”

Gulabi’s eyes filled over and ran down the tunnels of her pockmarked face. Bilader couldn’t figure her out—she defeated him with her silence, he’d never seen anyone like this. Finally, he folded his hands in front of her: “Gulabi I am not your husband. If it makes you happier, then today after I leave to go to the hills to buy material for my work, you can put a garland around Sardari’s neck in front of the picture of Shivji and make him your husband. This is my order to you.”

Early next morning, Bilader went off. Gulabi wept as she cooked an egg-curry. There was still time for lunch so she lay down wearily on her cot and dozed off. Her dreams were full of trucks. She

dreamt that as one came down the Upper Munda slope it rolled down the hillside and fell into a *khud*. She woke up bathed in her own sweat. A cool breeze from the mountains was gently rocking the calendar on the wall. Gulabi went out into the open and gulped the cool mountain air. There was no sign of any truck. The thought of eating that egg-curry turned her stomach, so she gave the lot to her neighbour’s children and swallowed some dry bread with a cup of *kahwa*.

How clearly that day is etched in her mind even today. She remembers she had made a *khichri* with *kulth* and rice, a heavenly smelling gruel and poured generous dollops of cream into it. Suppose, she thought, Sardari’s truck had fallen into the *khud*— what a waste of man, machine and material! To say nothing of the loss of his life— the father of her unborn children. Without tasting the delicious smelling *khichri*, she locked up the kitchen and went into her room to lie down, but today for no reason she felt scared of her own surroundings.

That night, Gulabi felt she could see and hear the darkness around her. The moon laughed at her fears from behind the chinars. The brook gathered all its silence into the running drops of the water and the shadows of the hill in front of other houses shook in the dark. Suddenly she felt something and a rough, calloused hand came and rested itself on her forehead as though feeling its temperature. It was Sardari. “The truck

in front of mine fell into the *khud*, Gulabi, that is why I got delayed,” he whispered. “That man could have been me. But I was saved.”

The night was slowly passing, the moon playing hide and seek among the chinars. Picking up the still warm *khichri* from the fire, Gulabi placed it between them and the two started eating. “I owe Bilader a debt, Gulabi,” Sardari said as he ate. “I once got involved in a murder at the banks of the Tawi and Bilader gave me shelter for two years until the whole thing blew over. I can’t refuse him anything but I didn’t realize that I would have to repay his debt through you. I have sworn by the waters of the Tawi that I will never breathe a word of this to anyone. Bilader is not a bad man, Gulabi. You must understand that he acts as being tough in order to cover up his impotence. And then, the children will be ours: all they will have of him will be a name. I promise you I will never marry if you promise to be mine. And Bilader has given me his word that he will not even touch you. Think of yourself as my honour in his care.”

Gulabi started crying. What was she—a woman or a sack of potatoes to these men? But for all that, she liked the plain-speaking Sardari. The next morning, Sardari drove off in his truck. And for the first time, Gulabi felt embarrassed that day to bathe with the other women at the spring.

Ever since then, Gulabi has waited

for Sardari’s truck. She stands at her balcony and counts the trucks of the convoy. A great wave of tenderness overwhelms her at the sight of the baby-faced jawans sitting inside the army trucks that pass by. They all look like little boys dressed by one mother in similar clothes. If she saw one looking pensive, she would think the poor boy was homesick. Some of them must be lost in thoughts of their beloved ones left behind. She wondered what thoughts passed their minds as they saw these romantic mountains and trees zoom past. If one of them passed an obscene comment on her once in a while, she never felt outraged. They looked to her like her own progeny.

And when her first son was born, Bilader went wild with joy. The following day was *Lohri* and he called the whole neighbourhood to dance on his terrace in celebration. On the twenty-first day, he sent for the military band from Udampur and would strut around with his son in his arms as though he had been given the moon. “These are your trucks now, you son of a gun,” he boomed into the baby’s ears. “You are now the *seth* of these shops.” And Gulabi’s heart would be in her mouth until Bilader handed over the baby to her.

“When will your father come?” she would whisper shyly into the baby’s ears as she nursed him.

She remembers very clearly the night he did. She was sleeping on her terrace when Sardari came silently and picked

her up and took her inside. Then he put his head against her shoulder and wept like a little child as he told her where he had been sent and why he wasn't able to come all these days. Gulabi sat him down on the cot and clasped him to her bosom.

The lamp was burning and Sardari saw his month old son for the first time in its flickering light. The sleeping child would shut its eyes against the light of the lamp and Sardari would move the light away. Then again he would take the light close. Finally, the child started to whimper. Sardari took the baby's fist in his calloused hands and the child started crying. Handing him over to Gulabi, Sardari said, "He will grow up to be a truck-driver: his hands won't be so soft then."

He had said the same at the birth of his second and the third sons.

Bilader and Sardari's friendship grew along with the boys. She would wait for his convoy as eagerly as she waited for her sons to come back from school. Once she told Bilader, "We are running short of vegetables, when is the convoy from Kashmir due?" And Bilader had retorted jealously, "Why? Aren't our local vegetables good enough for you any more? I don't want any more sons now. In any case, Sardari is getting married."

The next time Sardari came, Gulabi asked him, "Are you getting married?"

"Who said so?"

"Bilader. "

"Bilader may forget in his drunken moments but I can't forget that after the third one I had myself operated. Haven't you wondered why you have not conceived after his birth six years ago?"

"But I wanted a daughter," Gulabi wailed. "There is so much to give in this house. And they say there is nothing nobler than the *kanyadaan*."

Sardari wiped her tears with his rough fingers. "Gulabi, these aren't our children," he reminded her gently. "All the sons are Bilader's and if we had a daughter she would be his too. He would have given her away at her *kanyadaan*, not you and I."

"But why did you get yourself operated? You could have had a daughter of your own," she had said tearfully. "But you are my wife, the mother of my children— how can I forget that and marry someone else?" he had replied.

"What about your family?" she had probed. "Won't they say anything?"

"What family have I got left?" he had said sadly.

"In any case, I have told everyone I am impotent."

"But why?" Gulabi had asked.

"I am living someone else's life: if I had been hung for that murder, there would have been no Sardari and no Gulabi."

Years later, she had mustered up courage to ask him why he had committed the murder.



“The bastard had made my sister pregnant and then refused to marry her”, he told her. “She had drowned herself in the river Tawi. So I dragged him there and pushed his face into the waters of the Tawi until he died. Bilader saw all this and whisked me away to Banihal. He saved me from one sentence and then pushed me into another”, he had added ruefully. “But this is one punishment I bear happily,” he had said gallantly.

Gulabi had taken both his hands in her own and said “Sardari, in all my life I have loved only you: never give your heart to anyone else.” And he had given her his word on that.

All her sons grew up with a strong resemblance to Sardari. In fact; the other women often teased her about the fact that the boys resembled their *chacha* as they called him. Gulabi didn't lose her temper when she heard them say that but Bilader did. One day then he told Sardari, “*Chacha*, I think you should stop coming to the house. We can meet each other at the den.” Sardari threw away the neem stick he was cleaning his teeth with and snatching his towel, went off to take bath.

Months passed by and then years, but Sardari never came to the house. Bilader occasionally looked a little sheepish and Gulabi stopped asking him about Sardari. In fact she kept her conversation with him to the barest minimum, she slowly turned more and more silent and went about her work

like a zombie. The other women would envy her sons and her prosperity but nothing seemed to touch her. The fires were burning inside her. She stopped counting the trucks in the passing convoys. The seasons, the changing colours of the chinars— nothing seemed to excite her.

Then one day she saw a mouth organ in her son's schoolbag. “Who gave you this?” she had asked.

The boy, scared by his mother's interest, said haltingly, “*Chacha* gave it to me. His truck was standing near the water mill. He told me not to tell you.”

Hurriedly she served the boys their food and then got the neighbour to baby-sit for her children as she ran to the watermill. Sardari's truck had left but at least she knew this was the route he took now. One day she would see him. And then one day as she was returning from somewhere, she saw his truck near the trees around the mill. She looked carefully. Yes, it was his truck. It had the same couplet she knew he had painted behind it, and on her insistence, he had had *Phir Milenge* (We will meet again) written beneath it. She put her head on the truck and burst into tears as though it was his shoulder she was crying against.

Returning with the water he had filled from the nearby spring, Sardari saw her. What was he to do now? Ever since that fateful day, he had not even met

Bilader. He used to send his earnings to Bilader through someone. But what was poor Gulabi's fault in all this, he thought. He recognised the black shawl that she was wearing as the one he had got her from Kashmir once. She looked like a red rose when she wore it. He saw some women coming towards the truck; quickly he lifted the tarpaulin covering and pulled Gulabi into the dark interior.

Gulabi had fainted. Sardari wept as he sat holding her in his arms. As soon as the women passed beyond the truck, he splashed her face with water from his bucket and sprinkled some water to her lips. "What could I have done, tell me?" he said to the sobbing Gulabi.

"Couldn't you have sent word to me whether you are alive or dead? You are the father of my children, my husband! I didn't know whether you were even alive!" she wailed.

"And who will look after our children? I believe Bilader is looking for a girl for the older one? But he's not twenty yet."

"Bilader does not care for that. I believe that girl is the only daughter of some rich contractor. If he marries his son to her he ensures all the wealth comes to him."

"Will you come for the wedding?" she asked him.

"No, I don't want to see Bilader's face again."

"And what about me? Where do I figure in all this drama? I have kept this farce alive only for your sake." Sardari's eyes filled up. "I thought you had forgotten me after the children."

"Have you forgotten me? The children are there for me because of you: you aren't there because of them. Will I die before we can fulfil my dream of setting up a home together?"

"No Gulabi," Sardari replied sadly. "You and I can never have a home of our own. We truck-drivers can have no homes—we live from one night halt to another. I can never forget the debt I owe Bilader, this life was given to me by him— it belongs to him."

"But take me along. I no longer trust life or your promises of return."

Sardari hugged her fiercely. The tarpaulin was cooling rapidly under the icy onslaught of the Himalayan winds. It was getting to be evening and the birds chattered noisily as they went home to roost. The mill-owner was starting to lock up for the night. "Go home now," Sardari told Gulabi. "It's a long walk from here to your home. I'll wait for you next Thursday." "Is that a promise?"

"Yes."

"What about your cleaner?"

"He lives nearby, I'll drop him off on my way and call him only after you leave."

The next Thursday, seated on top of the sacks of walnuts and almonds,



the crates of apples and logs of wood, she had lovingly fed Sardari the eggcurry she had specially cooked for him. The truck was now her home and it seemed to Gulabi's happy eyes like her own palace-on-wheels.

A dark shadow sat in the shelter of the chinar, like a huge hive. Today was Bilader's son's wedding and he was dancing wildly in front of the wedding procession, his turban was in his hand. The only daughter of the rich contractor was marrying his son and the whole neighbourhood was dancing with him. Gulabi was wearing her huge nose-ring and her pink *chunri* was edged with gold. She was carrying the platter of bridal gifts and strutting like a peacock in front of women. All Bilader's trucks had been made to line up and dressed with buntings.

The second son's wedding, two years later, was another extravaganza. Again there was a hive-like shape under the chinars. Bilader's trucks had been lined up to salute her arrival in his house.

And today was the wedding of the third son. Gulabi felt a great weight was being lifted off her shoulders today and she pranced about with a light heart as she went about her work. It was a full month since she had seen Sardari. The last time she had met him she had said, "As soon as our third son gets married. I will be free."

Sardari had been up all night driving his truck. In his sleepy voice he had said, "You will come home then, won't you Gulabi?"

At the mention of the word 'home' Gulabi had burst into loud sobs. Suddenly, the spell was broken. Sardari was now wide-awake. "My eyes are open now Gulabi," he had said. "Open yours as well. You are now a mother-in-law with three *bahus*, the whole house is under your command. Bilader is also growing old. You can't leave now."

Gulabi could only weep in reply.

She reached home before dark. The women had started to sing the *ghoris*, and Gulabi had sat surrounded with her loneliness in the midst of the songs and laughter. One other friend had nudged her and said, "Why are you so pensive, Gulabi? Bilader is so rich he can afford to marry another eight boys off; he's got trucks that bring in gold."

When she passed the chinars at the head of the procession that time, she had seen a dark shadow again. The rest of the singing women had seen it as well and sang:

*Chadd janje baddal chhaya  
maharajju, chadya ee roop so aya..*

(Clouds have darkened the sky as the *barat* starts off. What a colour this has brought to the groom's face.)

Bilader came to her worried that he had lost the keys to the trunk containing the bridal gifts. What was to be done now?

"Don't worry," she had replied calmly. "I have a spare key. You carry on and I'll follow."

A woman from the procession had said, "You're getting old, Bilader. You can't tell a key from the coins that you're throwing away. How did you recognise Gulabi from all of us?"

And Bilader had replied gallantly, "You are my Gulabi, *bhabhi*."

And the sound of the accompanying laughter was lost in the noise of the band that struck up its opening bars.

As Gulabi hurried with the spare keys, she thought she saw a dark shadow among the chinars. Was it Sardari? She ran across: it was Sardari and he was burning with fever. "It's nothing," he said. "I saw you running and got worried. I'll be all right, you go, Gulabi."

But Gulabi would have none of this. "All my life I've listened to you," she said furiously. "Now you listen to me. And may you see me dead if you don't."

She took him through the back of the house to an attic where garlands of dried fruits and vegetables were stored. Only she had the keys to this room. She laid out a cot for Sardari here, quickly boiled some milk with turmeric and broke two eggs into it. Instructing him sternly to drink up the egg-nog, she left a burning *kangri* near him, locked the room behind her and ran to join the wedding guests.

Bilader was dancing with a neighbour. He took the keys from her and sat in the bus. When women started their celebrations in her home, she quietly slipped away and went to the attic. She made a heating pad with some cotton

from an old quilt and started warming his back. She didn't know when she dropped off. Suddenly she heard her name being called downstairs. Sardari was sleeping peacefully. She locked him in again.

The next day Sardari told her, "I feel perfectly all right now, let me go now. The *barat* will be returning tonight—I'd better be off now. There's no point in risking gossip."

"No," Gulabi replied firmly. "You are still not completely fit. The fever may have gone down, but you are still very weak. You need looking after."

"No medicine can cure me of the disease I have, Gulabi," he said sadly. "What I can't bear is for people to speak loosely about us. Stop worrying about me, I tell you I am well enough to leave. Don't stop me now."

"Then promise me that even if you leave this house, you won't drive off. Spend a few days at the shack near the teashop. I'll arrange for a doctor to come and see you there."

Sardari went rapidly down the stairs. A little later, the *barat* returned with the new bride.

Bilader was a satisfied man now. The next day he threw a bunch of keys at Gulabi's feet and said, "Here, this is your son's dowry."

Gulabi pulled a face. "If you had a daughter, you'd know what this dowry cost a girl's parents."

If you still want one, why don't you go to your lover, you bitch!" Bilader yelled.

Gulabi locked the door and taking a sickle in her hands shouted, "How dare you call me a bitch you worm! I have spent my life carrying two burdens. If I don't kill you tonight, I'll kill myself!"

The boys stormed into the room and Gulabi fainted. When she came round, she went to the spring to bathe. She came back, picked up a few clothes, handed the keys of the house to her eldest son and looked all around her. Everyone cowered before her determined countenance. They had never heard her

raise her voice before. Her sobs were lurking in the shadows of the corners and Bilader, afraid at what she might reveal if challenged, sought refuge in his *hookah*. Gulabi gathered her things together and left. She went to the teashop, woke Sardari up and sat in the truck. One look at her face and Sardari wisely held his tongue. The moon was slowly emerging from the dark clouds and shedding a silvery light on the mountains on the left and the stream on the right. The road was free of the convoy tonight.

The truck skimmed over it as thoughts of the beloved move over a lover's mind.

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Padma Sachdev, born 1940 in Jammu, is a Dogri and Hindi author of repute. Her Dogri poems won her Sahitya Akademi award in 1971. She has also received Soviet Land Nehru award, Raja Ram Mohan Roy Puraskar, Hindi Academy and J&K cultural academy awards. She has written a good number of books including her autobiography 'boond bawadi'. Her latest book is a biography of Lata Mangeshkar. She lives in New Delhi.

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## THE LASER SHOW

Harjendra Chaudhary

Translated by  
Purabi Panwar

The juggler would come at any time, he did not declare his arrival beforehand, whenever he came, it was his own self, heavy sticks of bamboo tied together with ropes, gripped tightly in his hands, carrying a number of big and small jute sacks on his back” The sacks contained *matkas* (earthen pitchers) of different sizes. His daughter would follow him, the rope slung across her shoulders going tightly round a small *dholak* (drum) that hung in front. As she walked, she intermittently pushed up the drum that came up to her knees.

They often came to the *chowk* of the small town. The programme would start with the proclamation, ‘It’s a question of livelihood’ (*papi pet ka sawal hai*) to the loud beating of the drum. The people assembled to watch them. A strong rope joined the ends of the strong sticks of bamboo secured tightly together. Blue veins stood out on the calves of the juggler’s legs. His feet were ugly and misshapen, but we did not see them, we saw his efforts and dedication to his art. He did not know any magic. The only magic he knew was hard work which involved taking a lot of risks. All this was done just to earn a livelihood. We watched him fascinated. He walked on the tight rope, first empty handed with nothing on his head. Then he would balance a number of big and small pitchers, one in each hand, one on his head, then two, then three...the number of pitchers increased. We watched on in amazement. Our amazement grew, so did our apprehension. Sahni Uncle’s daughter, Neha would get so scared that she would start trembling and

close her eyes. After the juggler had finished and we would start clapping, only then would she open her eyes properly. Then we would go home, insist that mother give some money, come back to the place still full of people and put the money in the old and dirty brass *thali*. He would bless us and we would feel happy.

We had been seeing them throughout our childhood. The focal point in what remained of our memories of childhood was the juggler, his daughter with him, At that point of time, the mother of the girl was sometimes present, sometimes absent. We were very small when she fell from the taut rope and broke her neck. Mother told us that after that incident, the juggler did not come for three or four months. When he finally came, his small daughter came with him, not his wife. His wife never came after that, it was his daughter who always accompanied him. We had been watching the juggler and his daughter for thousands of years...

Their coming was as natural to us as the coming of the rain or the sun. They appeared like a gust of wind and there was always place for them in the lives of people. Their coming was as regular as the coming of the milkman in the morning, or the newspaperman, or news broadcast on the radio or the coming of the *presswallah* on Saturdays. The juggler's visit was as significant as the coming of all these persons. Until then, we were not familiar with milk

in polypacks, there were no television sets or washing machines in houses, we knew nothing about computers or any such gadgets.

Our town was small and backward. On one side of the *chowk* there were some ruins, well spread out. We never went there because we all knew that they were haunted. On moonlit nights, a tall, well built Muslim faqir in flowing white robes and a long white beard could be seen on one of the roofs in the ruins. Many women had seen him. Mother had never seen him herself, but she believed that he haunted the place. So she would stop us from going there. After a few years, when we were older and started going there while playing, I noticed that only walls were left in the ruins, there was no roof...the tall and well built faqir with his long white beard must have haunted the roofs that were not there. The women who had 'truly' seen him on the roofs in the ruins, were not alive any more.

When we grew up a little more, quite a few ruins had been cleared up. The *chowk* had extended considerably. The *mohalla* was less claustrophobic. We were less scared than before. It seemed that the entire town had emerged from the closed cabin of an old rusted ship onto its open deck, as far as eyes could see there were waves of the sea, rising and falling endlessly...

After that, every year a new colony would come up like a wave and extend to a distance. The government would

set up a housing plan and allocate flats, property dealers would set up a number of colonies. In the meanwhile many guava orchards got destroyed every year. Crops were not grown in fields and they were enclosed by boundary walls. Electricity connection procured for tube wells was just ways of stealing power and a small canal simply vanished in the water works.

From time to time there were rumours that the district headquarters located about thirty kilometres away, might become the new capital of the state and this would push up the property rates. There would be disputes about ownership of land. Property dealers would mint money by selling the same plot a number of times. Our town was fast moving closer to the district headquarters.

In the northern side of this new city, I mean the old town, was a fort which had now come in the middle. People were afraid to go into the fort even during the day as there had been a number of instances of snatching and murder. The canal dug by Firozshah Tughlak which had at one time marked the outer boundary of the town, had dried up and was broken. There was no water, even tears in people's eyes seemed to have dried up and all limits were being crossed. We were growing up and time had an alarming way of confronting us.

When we had been young, water flowed in the canal. The countryside started on the other side of the canal. There were fields, guava orchards, there

was innocence. There was simple trust on both sides. There were very few accidents. Since they were few in number, they remained in the memory of the people for a long time. In those days there were very few policemen, even robbers were few in number. Even those who were there, believed in looting not in murder. Many robbers were legendary. They seemed to live forever. There were rumours that they robbed the rich to help the poor and as these tales circulated, they raised the stature of the robbers and made them heroes.

There used to be a well in the fort. There was an old mark of a horseshoe on the stone parapet of the well, said to be that of Prithviraj Chauhan's horse. Once in a while a European tourist would come to see the fort. Once an Englishman had taken a photograph of some children of the town. I was also there in the group of four or five children. We wrote our addresses in Roman letters, misspelled and had handed them to the Englishman proudly. About six or seven months later, an envelope travelled thousands of miles, bearing our photograph. Mother had offered sweets to the postman. For a number of days the excitement caused by the photograph remained in our hearts. since there were fewer incidents, they left a deeper impact. Memories were also very deep.

Once, we followed a group of English tourists to the *chowk* and saw a crowd. The ruins near the *chowk* were being cleared. The presence of the English added

to the crowd. Some of the shopkeepers nearby also joined the crowd. The juggler was walking on the tightrope. We were watching him, trying to control our palpitations.

The English were taking photographs, I was watching them as well. I was focussing my attention on the camera. The juggler was not focussing on the camera, he was concentrating on how to balance the rope and the pitchers. That day we did not go to our mothers to ask for money, we kept standing there, watching the English. One woman who was very fair and had round, bare calves, had given a ten rupee note to the juggler's daughter. The girl's eyes had shone like the flash of the camera. That day I had spontaneously compared the fair, rounded beautiful calves of the English woman to the juggler's misshaped, knotted, ugly calves. Along with the changes that had come of the city (town?) changes had come over me with a growth that I experienced that day.

Gradually, all around the *chowk* bright looking shops had come up. They were deep and high. There were basements below, with a number of floors that went up. The corner of the *chowk* which had a *dharmarth piao* (charitable place for drinking water) built by Seth Ruliya Ram in the memory of his late wife Angoori Devi had newly built shops which sold bottled mineral water of brands like Bisleri, Ganga, Himalaya and Chashmeshahi. With modernity surrounding the *chowk*, a McDonald's

outlet opened one day and on the opening day, people queued up till midnight to get a free Softy. Even now there are often queues there, but now you can't get Softy free, people have to pay for it. But people keep rushing as if everything is being given free.

Things which we had not believed in before, began to happen. Robbers and murderers came out of the fort and the incidence of crime increased in the city. The number of policemen had increased, so had the crime. Then, one day, there was news that the 'Bhagirath *Mohalla* would be demolished and in its place a five star hotel would be built. One day Bhagirath *Mohalla* was really demolished. People had been paid a handsome compensation for their ancestral houses. Bhagirath *Mohalla* was 'cleaned' with bulldozers. After that, the lake seemed to move closer to the *chowk*. There was less water in the lake, more filth. Since the *Mohalla* had been levelled, the rotting water in the lake came towards the *chowk*.

Those who had got the *Mohalla* cleaned up and levelled, had the lake cleaned up and made deeper. The Municipality had a proposal passed and sold the lake for a paltry sum. By the time the five star hotel was ready, there were high pavements on all sides of the lake, covered with red gravel, surrounded by green trees. The greenery of the trees and clear blue water of the lake had added colour to the entire surroundings. The lake, now brimming with clear, blue



water had receded to its earlier location and the five star hotel had taken the place of the Bhagirath *Mohalla*. The *Mohalla* was nowhere to be seen in this city, it must have remained in the memory of the old persons who had lived in the old town...

When the five star hotel and the lake were inaugurated, the local newspapers published a flattering supplement on it. There were delightful reports of the plans and possibilities of turning the city into a modern tourist destination, historically important at the national level. These reports were in the air for a while. Arrangements for boating had started on the lake. In the beginning, tickets were not needed to go near the lake, they were needed only for boating. Later, it became compulsory to buy tickets to enter the lake complex. Now the people had to pay to stroll on the side of the old lake in their own town. This money did not go into the public funds because the Municipality has sold the lake. This was the time of de-investment.

People in the city had not made a noise on the lake being sold. But when water from the canals was diverted to the lake instead of irrigating the fields, people in the surrounding villages were up in arms. Whenever the water was diverted to the lake, the farmers would fume. On a shared platform, their anger was organized and the farmers in the neighbouring villages started their agitation. There was a traffic jam for two days on the road leading to Delhi.

Farmers had cut big branches from trees and piled them at vital points on the highway. The entire police force in the area was pressed into action against this agitation, Many died in the firing that ensued. Finally a compromise was reached. It was decided that the Government would pay one lakh rupees to the family of the deceased. Those arrested in connection with the agitation were to be released and the rest of the matter was to be resolved through peaceful talks.

In the meanwhile, I had finished school and started studying in college. Outside our city, towards the east, a new college had opened. But instead of taking admission there, I had taken admission in a college in the big city nearby. Neha Sahni, daughter of Sahni Uncle who was our neighbour, started going to Tulsi Devi Memorial Kanya Mahavidyalaya. The building of this college and the atmosphere that prevailed there, were both very claustrophobic.. Girls seemed to yearn to breathe freely. Many boys hovered outside the college. There had been a time when people and localities in our city, earlier a small town, had been like villages. The wives and daughters of neighbours were considered as part of one's own family and treated with due respect. That is to say, there was a tradition of showing respect to them which was normally kept up. But now, this tradition, along with many others, was being broken. Scenes from films and the television roused me



along with the boys who kept me company and I thought of grabbing Neha Sahni...

Now, there were television sets in every house as well as washing machines. One could get polypacks of milk at any time in any corner. There was less and less space in life for the dhobi, milkman, news on the radio and the like. People had no time either to be guests or hosts. The television nibbled at most of their time.

In this city which was still expanding, a number of internet cafes had opened. Mostly students and unemployed persons were keen to use the computer to get what they wanted in the future. Some boy told me that Neha Sahni also went to the internet cafe in the evening, between six and seven. I also started taking an interest in computers and started going to the internet cafe between six and seven. It was a full house between six and seven. So I started going between seven and eight. We felt self conscious with each other. We spoke very little because of the remaining inhibitions of the small town mindset. Neha's elder brother was in America, she used to send him emails. One day I reached the internet cafe a little before seven and noted down Neha's email ID after looking at the computer screen secretly. The next day I created a new email ID and sent her a message saying "I love you. Guess who." It was very mean of me. While I was protected in the darkness of my secret ID, I gave her the opportunity to break all the

conventions of society in the small town. When there was no reply for one week, I started making other mean plans. My meanness was now ready to cross all limits of decency. Then, on the tenth or eleventh day, I got an answer from her on the email. It said, "Who are you? Where do you live?"

I did not dare to come out of my secrecy. I thought that Sahni Uncle, who had retired as SHO, would still have contacts in the police to get me beaten black and blue if my identity were established. I thought for a while and sent a provocative reply, "I live in your heart. Guess who?"

Then it all started. The email became part of our daily activity. I started to find it a source of great amusement.

I typed and sent her the message, "I love you. Don't you love me?"

I got the reply, "I don't love you because I don't know you."

It went on.

"Do you love someone?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who is it?"

"I won't tell. I can't tell."

"I am dying to hear from you."

"I have no words to express."

"But you have feelings."

"Yes, I do."

"Give some hint please."

"You initiate to give some hint please."

“Ok. Please join the McDonald Softy queue between seven and seven fifteen the day after tomorrow.”

“Ok, agreed.” As soon as I read this message sent by her, my heart started beating. I hoped that Neha did not tell her family the whole internet story and I get thrashed in the middle of the *chowk*. In that case, my father would also thrash me as soon as I reached home. My meanness and fear did not let me sleep that night. But, by the next afternoon, advice from some of my experienced classmates had made me ‘bold’. The next evening, I was fully prepared to be martyred. At exactly seven o’clock, I was in the corner from where I could see the stairs leading to McDonald’s. The internet cafe was also visible from there since it was on the first floor. I could see Neha. My heart again started beating fast. I was very scared, just like a kidnapper who had come to receive the ransom money. Neha was alone. There was no one even close to her. I dared to come out in the open, taking off my ‘bulletproof’. Neha looked wary as she climbed the stairs leading to McDonald’s, reached the counter and joined the queue where Softies were available for seven rupees each. She seemed restless, sometimes she would peer in front, sometimes to her back. I crossed the *chowk* quickly and went up the stairs. I went straight up to her and said ‘hello’. She also said ‘hello’ to me. I told her to come out of the queue, I would get Softies for both of us. She got out of

the queue...both of us had our Softies walking towards the *chowk* We did not talk.

“Now you go to the internet cafe. It is almost seven thirty, I have to go home. See you.” She said and she actually went away... She seemed in a great hurry, I was absolutely taken aback at this.

She did not ask anything about the email. Had she known beforehand that I was the person who sent her love messages through email?

The next day we met for two minutes outside the cafe. She told me that next week a new computer would be installed in her house along with an internet modem. So she would not come to the internet cafe every evening.

I felt that Neha was not beautiful. Really, she did not appear beautiful to me. Nor did I experience any excitement or happiness at having won her over. At night I dreamt that I was in a mango orchard and feeling hungry. As soon as my eyes fall on a huge juicy mango on one of the trees, it falls into my bag. The mango is so heavy that I hang on to the bag and feel like dropping it and running away.. Even my hunger lost its edge at the way the mango broke off from the branch and fell into my bag... Then I woke up. After waking up, I stared at the picture of Aishwarya Rai on the wall of my room for a long time.

The next week we could meet four or five times, that too for five or ten

minutes. I did not find her beautiful when she appeared before me. I even noted that there was a growth of hair on her upper lip. But when she was away from me, I would think about her. Then she would appear beautiful to me. As beautiful as Aishwarya Rai. Then there would be no hair on her upper lip, her eyes would appear big and blue, her complexion, not dark but fair and lovely. Whenever she was not before me, she appeared like a Greek goddess, but when she was actually there, she appeared ugly. Standing before her I wondered whether she would not look more beautiful even if she had her facial hair removed by laser...

The same week, all of a sudden, the whole city was full of advertisements of a laser show. For our city, I mean the old town, this was an absolutely new thing. We had not seen it, had heard about it for the first time. The posters advertising the laser show could be seen on the walls of practically every locality, colony, sector, vihar, in short everywhere. Then it was advertised on the television, local newspapers, over the loudspeakers in jeeps. The advertisements had created a sensation in the air all around.

The whole city was involved in the discussion of the laser show. It was a magical show created by sharp rays from a machine that created a colourful world. It was a wonderful blend of something that existed and was non-existent at the same time.

There was a computer in Neha's home. There was an internet connection as well. When she told me on the email that her Christmas vacations had started, I messaged her, "Don't forget to enjoy the sunny weather on the coming Sunday afternoon."

She messaged back her consent, "ok."

But next Sunday it was so foggy that there was no sun. For a long time there was nothing to do except standing on the terrace and freezing. She could not come to the terrace on the pretext of basking in the sun. I was very angry, not on the weather but on Neha.

I was sure that the person to whom I sent messages was not Neha but someone else. I imagined beautiful models who appeared in television ads answering my emails. Beautiful models! So close to me! Yet so far! Those who were there and yet not there.

I remembered that Neha had been sickly as a child. She often caught a cold and sneezed a lot. Once she had a bout of vomiting and loose motions. Then my father had seated her mother and her on the pillion of his scooter and taken them to the hospital. Till then the town had not been flooded with private nursing homes. Sahni uncle had been the *chowki* in-charge at another place. Our families were a great support to each other.

Once a snake charmer had come to our locality in place of the juggler. Suddenly he had shoved a snake dancing

to his been (Indian reed instrument) and thrown it away. All of us had got very scared and Neha had urinated in fear.

It could not be her. I could not send her a message or love letter. The object of my love was someone elsewhere, someone like Aishwarya Rai or even more beautiful, very ethereal, someone else... Someone else– who did not have a cold in her childhood, who never had vomiting or loose motions, who did not get scared by a snake and could control her urine...someone else, somewhere else...ethereal...splendid !!

The evening of the laser show was approaching. Christmas was over. A new year and a new century was approaching fast, singing dancing announcing its arrival with drumbeats and a sparkle in its eyes. The neo-rich class in the old town had started celebrating the New Year for some time.

I had started spending my time on time-tested sources of sensation and excitement at the internet cafe instead of sending and receiving emails. My classmates had told me about some private and secret websites and I would enjoy myself visiting them.

One day I checked my mail. I had thought that I would find a number of messages from Neha, but my mailbox was empty. She had not even come to the terrace that day and on top of that had not even said sorry to me. What did she think of herself? Was she a fairy or *hoor*? My anger mounted. I have

seen hundreds like you... I clicked on 'compose' and started typing– "I don't love you. I think I love someone else." I emailed her this last message.

It was the evening of the laser show. The juggler had come that day as earlier, suddenly and full of life. There had been nothing to advertise his coming. His daughter was now grown up, but she still strung her small *dhol* on her body. The string of the *dhol* was strung between her breasts and emphasized her curves all the more. She was more beautiful than Neha but not ethereal.

The large *chowk* was very crowded. The whole city had rushed there. The parking had been 'full' even earlier. Many cars were parked outside the shops. Passengers were getting off from rickshaws, autos, tempos and jeeps. Even people from the nearby villages had come in large numbers. One could see a sea of people at the *chowk*.

The sound of the *dhol* could be heard from some distance and the cry 'It's all for the *papi pet*' resounded. Some people crowded around in a circle. The crowd had come to watch the laser show. People did not understand which way they should face, where the 'stage' was. Should they face the east, west or the bazaar? But the bazaar was on all sides.

There was no stage. The loud speakers announced that the show was about to start. Everyone was wondering what it was that was about to start where would it be, how would it be? What would it be? What way would it be?

It became more and more cold but the queue at the McDonald Softy was very long...It was so long that there seemed to be no end to it.

On the other side, the *dholak* started playing and the bamboo poles were fixed into the ground. The cry 'it is a question of livelihood' was raised and the ropes were strung. The pitchers were brought out of the sacks. The crowds on all sides were watching the juggler with very little interest, most of it focused on the magical possibilities of the laser show.

After some time the juggler was walking the tightrope. On the basis of his hard work, he had raised himself higher than all of us and was walking, maintaining his balance. A combination of too little food and too much hard work had made the old, blue knots on his calves bigger, uglier. I noticed them and started looking the other way.

His hands were empty, there was nothing on his head and he was walking around six feet above the ground, on a rope. His daughter was playing the *dholak*, the beat of the *dholak* and the steps of the juggler were in harmony. His daughter started handing him the pitchers. Every time he would walk the tightrope with a new pitcher. People watched him but kept on turning back, keen not to miss the laser show...

The sun was about to set and the laser show was to start at sunset. People were keen as well as a little uncomfortable. They were waiting for the sun to set because they wanted to see the laser

show. Their interest in the juggler's lively display was very superficial, only till the time the laser show would start. It seemed their life depended on the laser show.

People were astonished that there was a sound of clapping from all around though they had not clapped. The *dholak* went off beat for a little while and the juggler controlled his balance with difficulty. The sound of clapping did not come from the earth, it seemed to come from the sky. People were standing around the juggler but not really looking at him. They were confused. They were looking all around them but not really able to see anything.

The juggler was walking the tightrope with five pitchers, two in his hands and three on his head. As if his work was double and his worries threefold. Maintaining his balance, braving dangers, he was walking the tightrope. This was the moment which made our hearts beat loudly in childhood. Neha used to tremble and shut her eyes with fear, as if by doing so, she would be able to ensure the safety of the juggler (or all of us).

Today Neha was not there, not in her childhood, nor in the McDonald Softy queue, not on the terrace of her house, not in the sun, not in the internet cafe, not in email, not in my head or heart, not in my world. She was not there because she was not beautiful. The sun was setting, there was reverse counting. The laser show was about to start.

Again there was a resounding sound of claps. But people were not clapping, they were looking all around them, keen and mystified. That is, they were not able to see anything.

Invisible machines were projecting the sound of clapping from the skies to the earth. Suddenly a long, shiny beam rose from the roof of the five star hotel, there was loud music...

That shiny beam, the sparkling diamond-like beam moved round and started coming down like a juggler...it

kept on coming...kept coming...and bumped into the ugly juggler carrying five pitchers for his *papi pet*... then it moved on easily. At that very moment, the balance learnt by the juggler for thousands of years, was spoilt, the juggler fell on the ground, his pitchers were broken, so was his head.

People did not see all this. Their eyes were on the blinding, sky-splitting beam...

The laser show had started...

*Courtesy: 'Vagarth', Kolkata, Feb., 2004*

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## ANCHAL

Subhash Sharma

“What is the name of your hamlet?” a surveyor made the first query.

“Madhuban”.

“Mauza?”

“Ujiarpur”

He opened Tauzi Number Thirteen, field book No. 409. Then he traced Plot No. 300 on the map and located it correctly after verification.

“What is the tenant’s name?”

“Ramkali, sahib,” pat came the reply

“Husband’s Name?”

“.....”

“Tell me your husband’s name” – surveyor repeated with irritation.

“.....”

The heat due to scorching sun was oppressive and the surveyor wanted to dispose of the day’s work in one go. So at the silence of this elderly woman he lost his cool and got a little impatient. Had she not been elderly, he would have fired his anger in a more imperious way but visibly relenting said: “I am repeatedly asking your husband’s name.”

Silence once again and the surveyor felt exasperated. Turning to the Kanoongo (Inspector) he said; “What a bad case, Sir? The very first case of the day has got on our nerves. What an annoying start!”



“Then tell us your father’s name”. The Kanoongo (Survey Inspector) diverted the matter into another direction. He noted the lady had no vermilion in her parting of the hair, therefore thought at the same time that she might be a widow and it might be painful for her to utter the name of her late husband.

“.....”, no reply once again.

“Alright, don’t tell us. We don’t have much of time. We record this plot in the name of Govt. of Bihar.”

And the surveyor did, in the fact, record plot No. 300 in Field Book No. 409 as under the ownership of Govt. of Bihar – Surveyor’s voice betrayed irritation as well as anger. In the remarks column he wrote, “In possession of Ramkali”

It was a team of Survey and Settlement Department, conducting revisional field survey for updating and records.

Afterwards the team knocked the door of the second house in the hamlet.

The surveyor began to write:

Hamlet – Madhuban, Mauja – Ujjiyarpur, P.S – Mahmudpur. Name – Mairam, Mosammat Mariam, Husband’s name.....

“.....”

“Tell us correctly, otherwise this plot too will be entered in the name of Govt. of Bihar”. Surveyor said angrily.

But silence prevailed all over there.

Her eyes were full of tears. And silence meant one more plot accruing to Govt. of Bihar.

The entire team kept moving gradually around the whole hamlet measuring and investigating. At one place red flag used to be fixed and measurement was taken with a chain straightened out; at another the standard yardstick was used from the permanent point. Area was compared on the map by plane table method. Square measurement of the given piece of land was also worked out. But each house had the same story to tell. When asked to tell the name of the husband or father, they just bowed down their heads and kept quiet. This annoyed the staff of Survey & Settlement Department and they entered all such plots in the name of Govt. of Bihar, while finalizing the formalities.

To the incharge of the team, this hamlet seemed to be rather peculiar. In the whole hamlet no male adult was visible. In the neighbouring villages the number of males residing was far less as most of them work in a nearby cement factory. But how could there not be a single male adult in Madhuban, puzzled the team incharge. If they are physically not present, their names should, at least, be in the records. Even in the old papers the names of only females were recorded. What, after all, was the fact of the matter? He could not guess easily. In some districts of Assam, Meghalaya and Kerala, he had heard of the prevalence of matriarchal



system but this was a typical hamlet of the Bihar province!

In the evening the whole team returned to the survey camp. The camp-in-charge was working in his tent. Tea was prepared on their arrival and they began to take tea. The Amin said, sipping tea, "Sahib! you would be very happy today to know that all the holdings have been recorded in the name of Govt. of Bihar".

"If this trend continues, the flag of the Govt. of Bihar shall wave here, there and everywhere".

But the camp-in-charge was not amused. In a vexed tone he enquired, "But what's the mystery behind all this?"

"Sir, in Madhuban any male adult is visible nowhere. There are women, and women and women everywhere. There are children too. The womenfolk don't disclose the names of their husbands or fathers as if they were either unmarried or widows. In any case they must have had their fathers".

"How many did you talk to?" he asked curiously. "Sir, we went from house to house round the hamlet. But silence seizes them all. They have no documents to show. If you press them further, their eyes go moist and tears become their silent answers. And, moreover, we could be misunderstood for asking too many questions", replied the surveyor.

The Camp-In-Charge felt very perturbed being a very sensitive man

who composed poems in his youth. He started thinking seriously for some clue to the mystery of these nameless and faceless women and children. He recalled the 'pujarin' (priestess) of his own village whose peerless beauty and unmarried life led to many a tale. Who knows if this village, too, is full of such 'pujarins' (priestesses).

Oh, these heartless Amins and surveyors! They might not have asked sympathetically. If they did, would these women not have told them their roots.

When the rest of the camp got busy cooking, he took out the old land records for an in-depth analysis.

The tauzi numbers and plot numbers in question were all recorded earlier entered in the name of one Guman Singh, son of Mochhinder Singh. When he traced back the pedigree, he found that it was quiet a large family – Guman Singh having six sons and each of them had two or three sons and they were all alive. It meant these plots of land were not without owners – then from where did the names of Ramkali and Mariam figure in it? The whole night he remained restless – puzzling over it. At moments he used to be reminded of the strictness of his superior officer. Any moment he may come for a surprise visit and then a lot of explanation would have to be given. He was deeply disturbed. Unable to get it straight, he felt the whole house falling down on him. Once he even shouted. Coming out of the tent he could see nothing, except the gloomy darkness all

around. The night would not end, it seemed to him. And perhaps it extended up to seventy-two hours!

The next day the Camp-In-Charge himself set out for Madhuban, while he sent the rest of the staff to another village.

It was veritable Madhuban. The delightful scenery captivated him- green trees, orchards, leaves and flowers all around. Skirting one side of it was a beautiful stream in full flow looking like the 'anchal' (front of saree) of the hamlet. He was delighted in his heart and to his lips came a line of his own poem composed in his youth. He felt his whole body being filled with the fragrance of incense sticks.

When he knocked the door of the first house, there came out an elderly lady with pleasing features. The surveyor had given such a vivid description of Mariam that he immediately recognized her. Once again he remembered the 'pujarain' (priestess) of his own village. Courteously he asked, "Maji, (mother) is this the Madhuban hamlet?" Ma !!! Oh God the great ! This sahib-like man calls me 'ma' what am I hearing? Tears of joy overflowed her eyes. She said, her voice choked with emotion. "Yes, my dear son! This is the infamous Madhuban".

"Maji, why infamous"?

"Oh, forget it, son! What use is it digging one's own grave?"

"Maji, could you give me a glass of water?"

Mariam eyed this sahib like man eagerly. Has some angel come down on the earth? First he called me 'ma.' Then he is asking for water. Will he take water of my house? A flash of emotion swept over her.

"Yes, my son! Why not! I'll give you a glass of water. But would you take water from a wretched person like me? Wouldn't you like to know about me?" Mariam mustered courage to speak.

"Why maji, is it necessary to know about the source of water for drinking water? Doesn't all water come from the earth?"

Mariam's face bloomed with joy hearing these kind words of the visitor. Oh Lord! What angel have you sent to my house! She went inside. In her seventy years of life, for the first time someone spoke to her with such tenderness and had given her so much respect. Her heart was gladdened, a stranger had called her 'ma, and without bothering to know about her past and present background was behaving like a dutiful son. What a strange world! Only yesterday the survey staff came and without ascertaining the truth recorded the whole village in the name of Govt. of Bihar. With inhuman temper they used to ask questions. Tell the name of your husband. Tell the name of your father. Otherwise the land will be recorded in the name of Government.

What do these gentlemen know about us? We've been here for the last fifty-sixty years, can't they see? And with a single stroke of pen it was recorded as government land. And here is this man who has honey on his tongue. He addresses me mother, then his intention must also be good, she was thinking and thinking. Taking out sugar candy from her box and putting it on a plate, she came out with a glass of water.

Mariam felt exhilarated as she watched the visitor eating the sugar candy and drinking water silently. The Camp-In-Charge could not decide where to start. What will happen if she took it amiss. He felt worried. If he didn't give the right introduction, she might be suspicious and then it would become next to impossible to know the truth. He reassured her that their land rights would not be transferred to the government, rather they might become the lawful holders if the facts were known.

"So, now, the talk would be between a mother and a son?", asked Mariam.

"Yes, be rest assured", said the Camp-In-Charge and once again looked at the elderly Mariam. He tried to read her history written in the script of the wrinkles on her face.

The tragic tale, Mariam narrated, ran thus: Guman Singh was the landlord of the area, the only son of his rich parents, spoilt and arrogant. He always eyed Madhuban with special interests. Gradually the wives and daughters of labourers and poor farmers fell prey

to his lust. The woman who caught his fancy was forcibly made his concubine and she would receive as largess a piece of land and a house. These hopeless women were ostracized from their own caste. In course of time his mistresses grew in number whereas care from his side dwindled. Besides legally, too, Guman Singh had three wives and half a dozen sons and as many daughters from them. As the sons grew, control over them tightened and Madhuban began to be defiled. This Madhuban, too, swarmed with Guman Singh's offsprings. With the passage of time these offsprings grew into butterflies and grasshoppers.

It was during this time that a cement factory started functioning nearby. The grasshoppers got household jobs at officers' quarters and there remained only the butterflies in the hamlet. The workers of the factory began to spread out in the hamlet and clip the wings of the butterflies. The hamlet came to be stuffed with grains, clothes, radios etc. and in the process grasshoppers and butterflies multiplied. It was the golden period of the hamlet with clothes, food and drink galore. What more the hamlet could wish?

But at length something happened that blighted this bliss. The officers and workers of this factory gradually got engrossed in their own selfish interests. The demands of the trade union were ever increasing like rubber. The strikes were called at regular intervals and the management continued

to clip their wings. In the tug of war that ensued the ever-stretchable groups of workers kept growing beyond their size and the management, tired of poring and pruning, finally declared a lockout. The announcement at once brought the union leaders to their knees. An agreement was reached between the two sides and after a month the factory started production once again. A wave of happiness swept through the workers. Butterflies fluttered their wings. The hamlet woke to a new life once again.

But after sometime crisis erupted once again. This time strikes were not called. A few union leaders and the officers, hand in glove from time to time, arranged to get many truckloads of cement out of factory, which had not been accounted for. Some equipment and machines, too, were taken out. After all, who cares for the security of materials and machines in a Govt. factory? In one month alone the rate of cement production came down from two thousand metric tonnes per day to three hundred metric tonnes. And there was a lockout once again. However, most of the workers struggled to wriggle out of the crisis, like goats about to be slaughtered, the lockout this time was once and for all.

Now was the time when those who kept the village prosperous themselves came to penury, began to die like insects. It was heard that the colony area itself had become crowded with butterflies. Without salary, the officers of the factory could hardly afford to keep servants.

All the grasshoppers came back to the native hamlet and it became a veritable dungeon. Now came on Chhangu with the message of hope and deliverance. He lived in the colony area of the factory and had just returned after having dispatched to a metro city a batch of butterflies. Butterflies were in great demand in metro cities. All the young butterflies of the hamlet got ready to go. One day Chhangu set out with all such butterflies.

It was on the fifth day that they got entry into the red light area.

The big change that came for them on entering the red light area was that these nameless butterflies got new names. Such names as would give them saleability. As a cold drink is branded Limca or Campa to suit the mood of the public, so these butterflies were attributed names such as fish, cuckoo, duck, she-parrot etc. One such enterprising manager had put up a signboard of Khadiboard, "Pure village items", written in middle-sized letters. He selected relatively younger girls and named them as Pure, Chanda, Malka and so on. Those who frequented this place were mostly Kahdi-clad big guns. They paid higher rates. The grasshoppers, too, got petty employment in hotels and houses. The hamlet gradually became deserted.

From the following weeks the postman began to be seen in the village. The senders would be Fish Queen, Miss Cuckoo, Mrs. Duck or Mrs. Myna. Once again the hamlet brightened up though

in a different way. In the pitch dark of desperation, there came a flash of hope. Like every light this light, too, had a thick coat of carbon behind it, though it was hidden with a screen.

Money orders and letters are regularly received in hamlet. In the letters it is usually written – send Guddi soon, she is already fifteen. Send Bitto, we've found a job for her. This time, I'd bring along Simmi, she's in demand. Every month a growing butterfly leaves for the city on the trail of her mother, aunt or elder sister.

While they were talking one eight year old Rahim came running, "The postman has come". And the postman did come with a money order. Mariam called out, "Shankar! Go and bring 'pan' (betel leaf) for the postman babu".

Shankar brought 'pan' and gave it to the postman. By then he had taken Mariam's thumb impression. The Camp-In-Charge signed as a witness. Now the postman handed over a sum of one hundred and ninety rupees. The Camp-In-Charge frowned at his pocketing ten rupees as a commission. He looked at Mariam but she hinted him not to speak. She explained after the postman had gone: "Once or twice in the past, I, too, didn't give him any tips. Then he played a trick by returning the money orders and registered letters on the ground of non-availability of the addressees. Since then I have to put up with this, agreed to swallow a bitter pill with water."

"Maji! May I ask one more question?", the Camp-In-Charge said.

Mariam nodded,

"There are two children in your home, Shankar and Rahim. Are both of them your own grandchildren?"

"Yes, my dear son! Rahim's father was a Muslim and Shankar's a Hindu. We take all possible care of it and by God! We are true in our faith", Mariam took a deep sigh as she spoke and again became silent. With a look at her somber expression, he realized he had touched her raw nerve.

Both of them kept quiet for a while. The Camp-In-Charge felt guilty looking at her. Mariam wiped her tears with her 'anchal' (front of saree) lest they should roll down her cheeks. Then, restraining herself she resumed her talk. "Dear son, after a certain period these butterflies are discarded and rejected from the metro cities and then many of them, being disappointed, come back to the hamlet. Today, the whole hamlet is crammed with such rejected butterflies. They come infected with diseases like HIV/AIDS and bring along unending chains of past memories."

As she ended her story, she said to the Sahib: - "That is why I had asked you if you would accept water from my hands. You replied that all water comes from the earth. Pray, don't feel defiled sahib, since you have already taken water from my hands."

Sahib listened to her in silence, drawing lines on the ground with his nails.

Mariam asked him again, "Tell me sahib, will this ceaseless chain of our sorrows and miseries every end?"

Sahib spoke nothing. Tears suddenly filled up his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

Mariam wiped them with her 'anchal'

and said, "This 'anchal' won't defile you, sahib! You called me 'ma' (mother) and thus gave also the right to wipe your tears with my 'anchal'. If our tale of woe moves a sahib like you to tears, hopefully it indicates that there will certainly be an end to our sorrows and miseries."

The deep silence pervaded all around the world.

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