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**Hindi Vishwavidyalaya**

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

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**Mamta Kalia**



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April-June 2010

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## Editor's Note

Those who have a passion for books, realize at some point in life, that the books they have read fall into two categories; either they are too adult or not adult enough for them. In other words, we all are either too young or too old to have read them. The realisation comes much after the moment of experience. In summer time, when days are longer, reading or re-reading a book is the best way to beat the heat. My suggestion is that a book lover can always give a second chance to a book that he did not grasp in the first instance. Classics seldom fail their readers and they generate enhanced vitality at every read.

Autobiographies have always been a popular form of writing. The amazing range and reach enjoyed by Mahatma Gandhi's book 'My Experiments with Truth' is a miracle of our time. The book is available in abridged version for school students and strikes a chord in every heart. Autobiographies of Nehru and Swami Yoganand, occupy the second row.

Dalit writing in Hindi has come of age. Its days of struggle have been long and painful. Significantly dalit autobiographies reveal their dungeon world of dark and stark realities. History has hushed unnumbered instances of atrocities on dalits. A few fearless souls have survived the social landslide to speak out the truth. Their autobiographies are an expression of their predicament and problems. We have focused on Om Prakash Valmiki's famous autobiography 'Joothan' which exemplifies the agony of an outcast child who has to grow up in a hostile social environment. Valmiki disrobes himself to the nadir point only to announce the apathy of a society that boasts of its humanity and compassion. Valmiki was much dissuaded by his friends from writing this confessional book but he said, 'why should one feel awkward in telling the truth? Only he or she who has suffered this anguish, knows its sting.' Joothan drew wider attention when it was translated in English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee. It went on to win the New India Foundation's best book award in 2004. We carry a few pages from Joothan. Prof. Mukherjee writes about this book with empathy and admiration, Dr. P.C. Joshi speaks about localism, nationalism and internationalism with special emphasis on Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand has since been made a separate state but the point Dr. Joshi makes still holds true.

In discourse we have a comprehensive study of post modernism by Subhash Sharma. The article on translation in language section reverberates with some of its contentions. It is always significant to know about the survival of Hindi as a language or medium of culture in far off lands. Pushpita

Awasthi gives us a first hand report of Hindi in Suriname.

The contemporary scene in poetry and prose is always an amalgam of older and younger generations writing at the same time. While we have eminent poets like Alok Dhanwa and Arun Kamal, we also have Vimal Kumar and Neelesh Raghuvanshi to herald the new wave.

The short story form rejuvenates itself from author to author so that there is no watershed in its progress. We bring you Tejinder, Harjendra Chaudhary and Awadhesh Preet in translation.

Films form an important area of study. Lalit Joshi's article on Iranian cinema gives a window view of attitudinal differences in the cine medium. Sudha Arora is frank and forthright in expressing her dissent and dissociation with the outcome of the film 'Bawandar'.

With this issue we begin a much awaited column, the book-review. Vibhuti Naraian Rai's latest novel 'Prem Ki Bhoot Katha' has drawn much attention of the Hindi reader and critic alike. Recently it was presented on stage by students of National School of Drama in New Delhi. We bring you a review of the novel. Publishers and writers are requested to send us their recent publications for this column.

This is the centenary year of five great Hindi writers like Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan Agyeya, Shamsheer Bahadur Singh, Kedarnath Agrawal, Nagarjun and Upendra Nath Ashka. We hope to bring their heritage to our readers.

*Manda K. C.*

## JOOOTHAN

Om Prakash Valmiki

Translated by

Arun Prabha Mukherjee

Our house was adjacent to Chandrabhan Taga's gher or cowshed. Next to it lived the families of Muslim weavers. Right in front of Chandrabhan Taga's gher was a little johri, a pond, which had created a sort of partition between the Chuhra's dwellings and the village. The name of the johri was Dabbowali. It is hard to say how it got the name of Dabbowali. Perhaps because its shape was that of a big pit. On one side of the pit were the high walls of the brick homes of the Tagas. At a right angle to these were the clay walls of the two or three homes of the Jhinwars. After these there were more homes of the Tagas.

On the edges of the pond were the homes of the Chuhra's. All the women of the village, young girls, older women, even the newly married brides, would sit in the open space behind these homes at the edges of the pond to take a shit. Not just under the cover of darkness but even in daylight. The purdah-observing Tyagi women, their faces covered with their saris, shawls around their shoulders, found relief in this open-air latrine. They sat on Dabbowali's shores without worrying about decency, exposing their private parts. All the quarrels of the village would be discussed in the shape of a Round Table Conference at this same spot. There was muck strewn everywhere. The stench was so overpowering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights, this was the environment of my childhood. If the people who call the caste system an ideal social arrangement had to live in this environment

for a day or two, they would change their mind.

Our family lived in this Chuhra *basti*. Five brothers, one sister, two chachas, one tau and his family. Chachas and tau lived separately. Everyone in the family did some or the other work. Even then we didn't manage to get two decent meals a day. We did all sorts of work for the Tagas, including cleaning, agricultural work and general labour. We would often have to work without pay. Nobody dared to refuse this unpaid work for which we got neither money nor grain. Instead, we got sworn at and abused. They did not call us by our names. If a person were older, then he would be called 'Oe Chuhre'. If the person were younger or of the same age, then 'Abey Chuhre' was used.

Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human. They were simply things for use. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away.

A Christian used to visit our neighbourhood. His name was Sewak Ram Masihi. He would sit with the children of the Chuhras around him. He used to teach them reading and writing. The government schools did not allow these children to enrol. My family sent only myself to Sewak Ram Masihi. My brothers were all working. There was no question of sending our sister to school. I learnt my alphabet in Master Sewak Ram Masihi's

open-air school, a school without mats or rooms. One day, Sewak Ram Masihi and my father had an argument. My father took me to the Basic Primary School. There my father begged Master Har Phool Singh; 'Masterji, I will be forever in your debt if you teach this child of mine a letter or two.'

Master Har Phool Singh asked us to come the next day. My father went. He kept going for several days. Finally, one day I was admitted to the school. The country had become independent eight years ago. Gandhiji's uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere. Although the doors of the government schools had begun to open for untouchables, the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much. I had to sit away from the others in the class, that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Sometimes I would have to sit way behind everybody, right near the door. And the letters on the board from there seemed faded.

The children of the Tyagis would tease me by calling me 'Chuhre ka'. Sometimes they would beat me without any reason. This was an absurd tormented life that made me introverted and irritable. If I got thirsty in school, then I had to stand near the hand-pump. The boys would beat me in any case, but the teachers also punished me. All sorts of stratagems were tried so that I would run away from the school and take up the kind of work for which I was born. According to these perpetrators, my attempts to get schooling were



unwarranted.

Ram Singh and Sukkhan Singh were also in my class. Ram Singh was a Chamar and Sukkhan Singh was a Jhinwar. Ram Singh's father and mother worked as agricultural labourers. Sukkhan Singh's father was a peon in the Inter College. The three of us studied together, grew up together, experienced the sweet and sour moments of childhood together. All three of us were very good in our studies but our lower caste background dogged us at every step.

Barla Village also had some Muslim Tyagis who were called Tagas as well. The behaviour of these Muslim Tagas was just like that of the Hindu Tagas. If we ever went out wearing neat and clean clothes, we had to hear their taunts that pierced deep inside like poisoned arrows. If we went to the school in neat and clean clothes, then our class fellows said, 'Abey, Chuhre ka, he has come dressed in new clothes.' If one went wearing old and shabby clothes, then they said, 'Abey, Chuhre ke, get away from me, you stink.'

This was our no-win situation. We were humiliated whichever way we dressed.

I reached fourth class. Headmaster Bishambar Singh had been replaced by Kaliram. Along with him had come another new teacher. After the arrival of these two, the three of us fell on terrible times. We would be thrashed at the slightest excuse. Ram Singh would escape once in a while, but Sukkhan Singh and I got beaten almost daily. I was very weak and skinny those days.

Sukkhan Singh had developed a boil on his belly, just below his ribs. While in class, he used to keep his shirt folded up so as to keep the boil uncovered. This way the shirt could be kept clear of the puss on the one hand, and on the other, the boil protected from the blows of the teacher. One day while thrashing Sukkhan Singh, the teacher's fist hit the boil. Sukkhan screamed with pain. The boil had burst. Seeing him flailing with pain, I too began to cry. While we cried, the teacher was showering abuses on us nonstop. If I repeated his abusive words here, they would smear the nobility of Hindi. I say that because many big-named Hindi writers had wrinkled their noses and eyebrows when I had a character in my short story 'Bail ki Khal' (The Ox Hide) swear. Coincidentally, the character who swore was a Brahmin, that is, the knower of Brahma, of God. Was it possible? Would a Brahmin swear...?

The ideal image of the teachers that I saw in my childhood has remained indelibly imprinted on my memory. Whenever someone starts talking about a great guru, I remember all those teachers who used to swear about mothers and sisters. They used to fondle good-looking boys and invite them to their homes and sexually abuse them.

One day the headmaster Kaliram called me to his room and asked: Abey, what is your name?

'Om prakash,' I answered slowly and fearfully. Children used to feel scared just encountering the headmaster. The entire school was terrified of him.

‘Chuhre ka?’ Headmaster threw his second question at me.’

‘Ji.’

All right... See that teak tree there? Go. Climb that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after all, your family occupation.

Go... get to it.’

Obedying Headmaster’s orders, I cleaned all the rooms and the verandas. Just as I was about to finish, he came to me and said, ‘After you have swept the rooms, go and sweep the playground.’

The playground was way larger than my small physique could handle and in cleaning it my back began to ache. My face was covered with dust. Dust had gone inside my mouth. The other children in my class were studying and I was sweeping. Headmaster was sitting in his room and watching me. I was not even allowed to get a drink of water. I swept the whole day. I had never done so much work, being the pampered one among my brothers.

The second day, as soon as I reached school, Headmaster again put me to sweeping the school. I swept the whole day. I was consoling myself that I will go back to the class from tomorrow.

The third day I went to the class and sat down quietly. After a few minutes the headmaster’s loud thundering was heard: ‘Abey Chuhre ke, motherfucker, where are you hiding... your mother...’

I had begun to shake uncontrollably. A Tyagi boy shouted, ‘Master Saheb, there he is, sitting in the corner.’

The headmaster had pounced on my neck. The pressure of his fingers was increasing. As a wolf grabs a lamb by the neck, he dragged me out of the class and threw me on the ground. He screamed: ‘Go sweep the whole playground... Otherwise I will shove chillies up your arse and throw you out of the school.’

Frightened, I picked up the three-day-old broom. Just like me, it was shedding its dried up leaves. All that remained were the thin sticks. Tears were falling from my eyes. I started to sweep the compound while my tears fell. From the doors and windows of the schoolrooms, the eyes of the teachers and the boys saw this spectacle. Each pore of my body was submerged in an abyss of anguish.

Just then my father passed by the school. He stopped abruptly when he saw me sweeping the school compound. He called me, ‘Munshiji, what are you doing?’ Munshiji was the pet name my father had given me. When I saw him, I burst out sobbing. He entered the school compound and came towards me. Seeing me crying, he asked, ‘Munshiji, why are you crying? Tell me, what has happened?’

I was hiccuping by now. In between my hiccups, I told the whole story to my father: that the teachers had been making me sweep for the last three days; that they did not let me enter the classroom at all.

Pitaji snatched the broom from my hand and threw it away. His eyes were blazing. Pitaji who was always taut as a bowstring in front of others was so

angry that his dense moustache was fluttering. He began to scream, 'Who is that teacher, that progeny of Dronacharya, who forces my son to sweep?'

Pitaji's voice had echoed through the whole school. All the teachers, along with the headmaster came out. Kaliram, the headmaster, threatened my father and called him names. But his threats had no effect on Pitaji. I have never forgotten the courage and the fortitude with which my father confronted the headmaster that day. Pitaji had all sorts of weaknesses, but the decisive turn that he gave my future that day has had a great impact on my personality.

The headmaster had roared, 'Take him away from here... The Chuhra wants him educated... Go, go... otherwise I will have your bones broken.'

Pitaji took my hand and started walking towards our home. As he walked away, he said, loudly enough for the headmaster to hear, 'You are a teacher... So I am leaving now. But remember this much, Master..., This Chuhre ka will study right here... In this school. And not just him, but there will be more coming after him.'

Pitaji had faith that the Tyagis of the village would chastise master Kaliram for his behaviour. But what happened was the exact opposite. Whosoever's door we knocked, the answer was,

'What is the point of sending him to school?'

'When has a crow become a swan?'

'You illiterate boorish people, what

do you know? Knowledge is not gained like this.'

'Hey, if he asked a Chuhra's progeny to sweep, what is the big deal in that?'

'He only got him to sweep; did not ask for his thumb in the *gurudakshina* like Dronacharya.'

And so forth.

Pitaji came back, tired and dejected. He sat up all night without food or drink. God knows how deep an anguish Pitaji went through. As soon as the morning broke, he took me along and went to the house of the pradhan, Sagwa Singh Tyagi.

As soon as the pradhan saw Pitaji, he said, 'Abey, Chotan? ...what is the matter? You have come so early in the morning.'

'Chowdhri Saheb, you say that the government has opened the doors of the schools for the children of Chuhra and Chamars. And that headmaster makes this child of mine come out of the class and sweep all day instead of teaching him. If he has to sweep the school all day, then you tell me when is he going to study?'

Pitaji was supplicating the pradhan. He had tears in his eyes. I was standing near him and looking at him.

The pradhan called me near him and asked, 'Which class are you in?'

'Ji, the fourth.'

'You are in my Mahendra's class?'

'Ji' ..

Pradhanji said to Pitaji, 'Don't worry.

Send him to school tomorrow.'

The next day I went to school with fear stalking my heart. I sat in the class in trepidation. Every second I worried that the headmaster was coming... Now he comes... At the slightest sound my heart pounded. After a few days, things calmed down. But my heart trembled the moment I saw headmaster Kaliram. It seemed as though it wasn't a teacher who was coming towards me but a snorting wild boar with his snout up in the air.

At harvest time, all the people in our neighbourhood used to go to the field of the Tagas to reap the crop. Cutting the sheaves of wheat in the midday sun is a very hard and painful task. The sun pouring on your head. Fiery hot ground underneath. The roots of the cropped wheat plants pricked your feet like spikes. The roots of mustard and gram lentils hurt even more. The harvesting of these lentils presented an extra difficulty. The leaves are sour and stick all over the body during harvesting. Even bathing does not get rid of them completely. Most of the reapers were from the untouchable castes of the Chuhras or Chamars. They had clothes on their bodies in name only. There was no question of shoes on their feet. Their bare feet got badly injured by the time the crop was brought in.

The harvesting would often lead to arguments in the fields. Most of the Tagas were miserly when it came to paying wages. The reapers were helpless. Whatever they got, they took after protesting a bit. They kept fretting after

coming back home, cursing the Tagas. But their protests died when confronted with hunger. Every year there would be a meeting in the neighbourhood at harvest time. People swore to demand one sheaf out of sixteen as wages. But all the resolutions passed at the meetings evaporated in thin air the moment harvesting began. They got one sheaf for cutting twenty-one as wages. One sheaf had less than a kilo of grain. Even the heaviest sheaf did not yield a kilo of wheat. That is, a day's wage wasn't worth even a kilo of wheat. After the harvesting, the grain had to be loaded on bullock or buffalo carts and unloaded. Neither money nor grain was given for that work. Sooner or later all of us had to drive the bullocks on the threshing floor, again without payment. In those days there were no threshers for cleaning up the wheat. The bullocks would be taken round and round to break down the sheaves into straw. Then the grain would be separated from the chaff by blowing it in a winnow. It was very long and tiring work, performed mostly by Chamars or Chuhras.

Along with these field labours, my mother also cleaned the baithaks and the ghers of eight or ten Tagas, both Hindus and Muslims. My sister, elder bhabhi—sister-in-law—and my two brothers, Jasbir and Janesar, helped my mother in this work. The older brother, Sukhbir, worked for the Tagas like a permanent servant.

Every Taga would have ten to fifteen animals in his cowshed. Their dung had to be picked up and brought to the

place where uplas or cow dung cakes were made. There would be five to six baskets of dung to be taken out from every cowshed. During the winter months it was a very painful job. The cows, buffaloes and bullocks would be tethered in long hallways. The floor would be covered with the dry leaves of cane or straw. The dung and the urine of the animals would spread all over the floor overnight. The matting would be changed after ten or fifteen days. Or sometimes a layer of dry leaves would be added on top of the soiled one. To search for dung in the stinking cowsheds was extremely unpleasant. The stink made one feel faint.

To compensate us for all this work, we got five seers of grain per two animals; that is, about two and a half kilos of grain. Each Taga household with ten animals gave twenty-five seers of grain a year—about twelve to fifteen kilos, a leftover roti at noon every day, specially made by mixing the flour with husk since it was for the Chuhras. Sometimes the joothan, the scraps, would also be put in the basket with the rotis for us.

During a wedding, when the guests and the baratis, the bridegroom's party, were eating their meals, the Chuhras would sit outside with huge baskets. After the baratis had eaten, the dirty pattals or leaf-plates were put in the Chuhras' baskets, which they took home, to save the joothan sticking to them. The little pieces of pooris, bits of sweetmeats, and a little bit of vegetable were enough to make them happy. The joothan was eaten with a lot of relish. The bridegroom's

guests who didn't leave enough scraps on their pattals were denounced as gluttons. Poor things, they had never enjoyed a wedding feast. So they had licked it all up. During the marriage season, our elders narrated, in thrilled voices, stories of the baratis that had left several months of joothan.

The pieces of pooris that were collected from the pattals were dried in the sun. A cloth would be spread on a charpai to dry them. Often I would be placed on guard duty because the drying pooris attracted crows, hens and dogs. Even a moment's lapse and the pooris would vanish. Hence, one would have to sit near the cot with a stick in hand.

These dried up pooris were very useful during the hard days of the rainy season. They would be soaked in water and then boiled. The boiled pooris were delicious with finely ground red chilli pepper and salt. Sometimes they were mixed with gur or molasses, to make a gruel and this dish was eaten with great delight.

When I think about all those things today, thorns begin to prick my heart. What sort of a life was that? After working hard day and night, the price of our sweat was just joothan. And yet no one had any grudges. Or shame. Or repentance.

When I was a young boy, I used to go with my parents to help them out. Looking at the food of the Tagas, I would wonder why we never got to eat food like that. When I think of those days today, I feel nauseated.

This past year, Sukhdev Singh Tyagi's

grandson, Surendra, visited my house in connection with some interview. He had obtained my address in the village. He stayed the night with us. My wife fed him a very nice meal, and while eating, he said, 'Bhabhiji, you make such delicious food. No one in our family can cook so well.' His compliment made my wife happy, but I was deeply disturbed for quite some time. The incidents of childhood began knocking at my memory's door again.

Surendra had not even been born then. His elder aunt, that is, Sukhdev Singh Tyagi's daughter, was getting married. My mother used to clean their place. Starting ten to twelve days before the wedding, my parents had been doing all sorts of work at Sukhdev Singh Tyagi's home. A daughter's wedding meant that the prestige of the whole village was at stake. Everything had to be perfect. My father had gone from village to village to collect charpais for the guests.

The barat was eating. My mother was sitting outside the door with her basket. I and my younger sister Maya sat close to my mother in the hope that we too would get a share of the sweets and the gourmet dishes that we could smell cooking inside.

When all the people had left after the feast, my mother said to Sukhdev Singh Tyagi as he was crossing the courtyard to come to the front door: 'Chowdhriji, all of your guests have eaten and gone ...Please put something on the pattal for my children. They too have waited for this day.'

Sukhdev Singh pointed at the basket

full of dirty pattals and said, 'You are taking a basketful of joothan. And on top of that you want food for your children. Don't forget your place, Chuhri. Pick up your basket and get going.'

Those words of Sukhdev Singh Tyagi penetrated my breast like a knife. They continue to singe me to this day.

That night the Mother Goddess Durga entered my mother's eyes. It was the first time I saw my mother get so angry. She emptied the basket right there. She said to Sukhdev Singh, 'Pick it up and put it inside your house. Feed it to the baratis tomorrow morning.' She gathered me and my sister and left like an arrow. Sukhdev Singh had pounced on her to hit her, but my mother had confronted him like a lioness. Without being afraid.

After that day Ma never went back to his door. And after this incident she had also stopped taking their joothan.

The same Sukhdev Singh had come to my house one day. My wife had welcomed him with open arms, treating him with the respect due to a village elder. He *had* eaten at our house. But after he left, my nephew Sanjaya Khairwal, who is studying for his B.Sc. degree, said to me, 'Chachaji, he ate only at your own house; at our place, he did not even drink water.'

My elder bother Sukhbir was a year round servant at Suchet Taga's. I was in fifth class then. He would have been around twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. He was very dark complexioned, tall and muscular. One day a wild boar came inside the village. He had injured a lot of people with his sharp horns.

He had entered the cowsheds of the Tagas and injured the oxen, buffaloes and cows. All the people had climbed on the rooftops to watch this spectacle. No Taga showed the courage to catch the wild boar and throw him out of the village.

Sukhbir was returning from Suchet's field at the time. When he asked the screaming and shouting Tagas on the rooftops as to what had happened, they told him about the boar. Sukhbir drove that boar out of the village with just a stick. His confidence and strength impressed the whole village. They had discussed his feat for a long time after that.

One day when he returned from work, his body was hot with fever. He was in bed for a week. He died without proper medication or treatment. It was as though lightning had struck our family. Everything had shattered. Pitaji was totally broken down by this tragedy. Ma was so overwhelmed by Sukhbir's death that she would faint at short intervals. Bhabhi had become a widow at a very young age. Our family's condition that had been improving because of my brother now took a turn for the worse. I remember that ever since our brother had started to work, no younger brothers, sister or bhabhi went to work in a Taga's house.

I never had to sweep anybody's house.

After my brother's death, Pitaji and chacha had joined a road construction crew. They would take on whatever job they were offered.

In our community, widow remarriage

was an accepted practice. Unlike the Hindu tradition, we did not see widow marriage negatively. In the presence of relatives and village elders, my deceased brother Sukhbir's father-in-law betrothed his widowed daughter to Jasbir, the brother who was the next in line to Sukhbir. Everyone in our community accepted this arrangement. At that time my elder brother's son Narendra was about one and a half years old, and bhabhi was pregnant. Devendra was born six or seven months after my brother's death.

After Sukhbir's death the entire burden of the family had fallen on Jasbir's shoulders. Whatever we could earn in the village was not enough to make ends meet. The financial condition of the family was precarious. One day Jasbir left for Adampur to work for a construction company, Tirath Ram & Company.' In those days an airport was being built in Adampur, Punjab, for the Indian airforce. After some time that company had moved to Bagdogra, Bengal, to build the airport there. Jasbir's letter came many months after he went to Bagdogra.

Ma had thrown a tantrum when she heard the name of Bengal. Mother's idea of Bengal was based on folk myths about black magic and casting of spells, about women who transformed a man into a ram with their magic and tied him up in their courtyard. Her Bengal was not the Bengal of Rabindranath Tagore or the revolutionaries. Ever since we got the letter, Ma cried day and night, 'One son has left the world and the other

is in a foreign land.' A pall fell on the house. Bhabhi was ill. There was not enough food for us all. We ate whatever we could scramble together. No one laughed; no one talked.

Bhabhi would sit wordlessly, her head on her knees. All of us seemed to have got locked in our shells.

I had passed class five. I had to get admission in the sixth. The village had 'Tyagi Inter College, Barla,' which has now changed its name to 'Barla Inter College, Barla'. There was no question of taking admission given the circumstances the family found itself in. How could one think of studies when one didn't even have food?

My heart would become heavy when I saw my schoolmates passing by with books in their hands. Janesar was my elder brother. Both of us would leave home early in the morning. We would go around the fields, collecting wild grass for our buffalo. A few days before his death, Sukhbir had acquired a buffalo in barter from Suchet Taga. We hoped to make some money when she calved. Both Janesar and I were constantly busy, attending to the buffalo. I also had the responsibility of grazing the pigs in the afternoon. Pigs were a very important part of our lives. In sickness or in health, in life or in death, in wedding ceremonies, pigs played an important role in all of them. Even our religious ceremonies were incomplete without the pigs. The pigs rooting in the compound were not the symbols of dirt to us but of prosperity and so they are today. Yes, the educated among us, who are still very minute

in percentage, have separated themselves from these conventions. It is not because of a reformist perspective but because of their inferiority complex that they have done so. The educated ones suffer more from this inferiority complex that is caused by social pressures.

One day I was coming home after grazing the pigs. On the way home I met Sukkhan Singh who stopped me and asked, 'Why have you stopped coming to school? Aren't you going to study further?' I shook my head in refusal. He kept talking a long time about the new atmosphere of the school. Now it had desks and chairs whereas before we used to sit on mats. The teachers also did not beat the students as much. And there was a separate teacher for each subject.

I returned home with a sad heart. There was something bubbling inside me. My inability to go to school had made me hopeless. The majestic building of the Inter College was constantly before my eyes. As soon as I returned home, I said to my mother, 'Ma, I want to go to school' There were tears in my eyes. Seeing my tears, my mother also started to cry. When Ma cried, her complaints and grudges would be recounted in a loud voice that brought forth all the neighbourhood women who would surround her. The harder they tried to console Ma, the harder Ma wept.

Bhabhi was crying too, sitting all by herself My brother's death had caused a wedge between her and the rest of the family. As something that could be called jewellery, bhabhi had a silver anklet



that she kept with great care with her wedding outfits.

Ma was crying as loudly as ever. Bhabhi opened her tin box, took out the anklet and put it in Ma's hand.

'Sell it and get Lallaji admitted.' All the women were overwhelmed by her affectionate gesture. I embraced bhabhi and cried. At that moment, I missed my brother deeply. The memory of that day still continues to empower me.

Pitaji had tried very hard to dissuade bhabhi. 'No, Bahu... don't sell it. I will arrange somehow to send him to school. Don't you worry... You have just one ornament... How can we sell that too? ...Go on, keep it.'

But bhabhi wouldn't listen to him and insisted on putting it in Ma's hand.

Vaidya Satyanarayana Sharma used to pawn and buy gold and silver ornaments and act as a moneylender apart from his regular job as the village priest. Ma pawned the anklet with him and thus was I admitted to class six.

Ram Singh and Sukkhan Singh were in a different section. My roll number was right at the end, and therefore I sat in the last row. Shrivankumar Sharma sat in the next seat. Although we had been studying together since class one, now we became really close because of our sitting together. Shrivankumar was handsome and very attractive. Delicate like a girl. Caste never came between us. This was a unique experience for me. Ram Singh and Sukkhan Singh were also my classmates, but Sukkhan Singh never came to my house. I would

often go to his house. We sat together, studied together. Later on we also developed relationships at the family level. Today his older son Rajneesh treats me and my wife with a great deal of respect.

Perhaps Sukkhan Singh was a little remote, unlike Shrivankumar. Then we became friends with a third person. His name was Chandrapal Varma and he came from village Mandla. He was a Gujjar by caste. He used to bother Shrivankumar a lot. Sometimes he would pinch his cheeks and sometimes he would push him. Sometimes he would hide his books. These were daily occurrences.

One day, as we were coming out of the classroom, he gripped Shrivankumar tightly and bit him on his cheek. The whole class saw him do it but no one said a word. Everyone was laughing loudly. Shrivankumar began to cry. Chandrapal Varma was also laughing. I don't know what happened to me at that moment but I grabbed Chandrapal's neck and pushed him down even though he was twice my height and weight. Chandrapal kept squirming to free his neck but I did not let go of him. Chandrapal did not get angry with me but kept laughing. Later, he also begged forgiveness from Shrivankumar.

The three of us had become good friends after this incident. Our friendship was so deep that we felt incomplete without each other. After school, Shrivankumar and I did not return via the main road. We walked home through the fields and the footpaths. This became a regular routine of ours. The effect

of my friendship with Chandrapal had become instantly visible. I had been released from the taunts and the hectorings of the Tyagi boys. Now I did not have to stand waiting near the tap for a drink of water. They all lost their tongues when Chandrapal was around. He could hit anyone he wanted. Even otherwise, the Tyagi boys were afraid of the Gujjar boys.

I had stood first in my section in the half-yearly exam. My results bolstered my self-confidence. I was made the class monitor after the examination and my seat was moved from the back of the class to the front. The behaviour of some teachers, however, was still unfriendly. They were indifferent and contemptuous of me.

I was kept out of extracurricular activities. On such occasions I stood on the margins like a spectator. During the annual functions of the school, when rehearsals were on for the play, I too wished for a role. But I always had to stand outside the door. The so called descendants of gods cannot understand the anguish of standing outside the door.

All the teachers were Tyagis, and among the students too Tyagis were in the majority. No one could afford to say anything against them. During the examinations we could not drink water from the glass when thirsty. To drink water, we had to cup our hands. The peon would pour water from way high up, lest our hands touch the glass.

There was a library in the school where books were gathering dust. It was in the library where I first became

acquainted with books. By the time I reached class eight, I had read Saratchandra, Premchand and Rabindranath Tagore. Saratchandra's characters had touched my child's heart very deeply. I had become somewhat of an introvert, and reading had become my main passion.

I had begun to read novels and short stories to my mother in the faint light of the wick lamp. Who knows how often Saratchandra's characters have made a mother and son cry together? This was the beginning of my literary sensibility. Starting from *Alha*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* to *Sur Sagar*, *Prem Sagar*, *Sukh Sagar*, Premchand's stories, *Kissa Tota Maina...*

whatever I found, I, the son of an untouchable illiterate family, read to my mother.

In April 1993, an invitation came from Rajendra Yadavji, editor of *Hans*. He had organized a programme called 'Katha Kathan' in the labourers' colonies of Delhi, and I too got the chance to tell my stories there. The first event was at the Valmiki Temple at Mandir Marg. I experienced a strange emotion while narrating my story. That day the memories of my mother had come afresh all of a sudden. What better way to bridge the gap between literature and reader than Katha Kathan? The illiterate masses cannot read literature. Those who can read are unable to buy books. Katha Kathan provided an avenue for a meaningful dialogue between readers and writers.

As my studies advanced, I began

to lose touch with those companions of my age group in the neighbourhood who did not go to school. Satpal and Hiram Singh of the Bhangi basti had started going to school. So only three boys out of thirty families of our colony went to school.

Ram Singh, Sukkhan Singh and I had once again come together after class six. Ram Singh was the brightest of us all in his studies. Ram Singh and I had joined the Scouts. The Scouts had to go to the city for a district-level meet. The school had issued us khaki half-pants and shirts. The Scout teacher Rameshchand had asked that the uniform be washed and ironed. Up to that point I had never worn an ironed piece of clothing. Whenever I saw the starched and freshly washed clothes of the Tyagi boys, I wished that I too could go to school in such clothes. At times I had to wear the castoffs from the houses of the Tyagis. The boys teased me when they saw those clothes. But even those castoffs could not cover our helplessness.

I had washed that khaki uniform with great care. The problem was how to iron it. There was a dhobi's son in my class. I asked him. He told me to come to his house in the evening. I took the uniform to his house that evening. As soon as his father saw me he screamed, 'Abey, Chuhre ka, where do you think you are going?' His son was standing near him. I said, 'I need to have the uniform ironed.'

'We don't wash the clothes of the Chuhra-Chamars. Nor do we iron them. If we iron your clothes, then the Tagas

won't get their clothes washed by us. We will lose our roti.' He had answered me point blank. His reply crushed me. I came back without saying a word. My heart was heavy. I had lost faith in God. One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste.

I had a teacher named Yogendra Tyagi who was from Kutubpur. He was a nice man and a good teacher. He taught history and English. I used to be very impressed by the way he rattled off dates in history. I felt he had a great knowledge of history. It was he who made me interested in history, and it is an interest that I have retained to this day. He knew my father. Whenever he saw Pitaji, he would tell him, 'Chhotan, don't prevent your son from studying.'

Despite all his good intentions, he used to cause me great distress in the classroom. Whenever I made a mistake, instead of thrashing me, he would grab my shirt and drag me towards him. All my concentration would then be focused on my shirt, as I feared that it would get ripped any moment. Pulling me by the shirt, he would ask, 'How many pieces of pork did you eat? You must have eaten at least a pao.'

Whenever Master Saheb said things like that, I would begin to cry. My eyes would fill up. The whole class used to laugh at Master Saheb's comments. The boys would torment me about them. 'Abey, Chuhre ke, you eat pork.' At such moments, I would think of all the Tyagis who came in the darkness of the night to the Bhangi basti to eat pork. I felt

like calling out the names of all those people. Those who came to eat meat secretly at night, in daylight observed untouchability in front of everybody.

One of these was Teja Taga. Many people took loans from him. He demanded pork and liquor before he would give the loan. He was fond of the heavy, very hot, spiced food cooked in the Bhangi households. Pitaji had taken a loan from him once. He had offered him country liquor that day. And pork. Sucking at the pork slices; his face had resembled a spotted dog's. His eyes red from drinking, had looked satanic. His interest rates were so high that one could spend a whole lifetime paying the interest, and the principal would remain untouched. Most of the residents of the Bhangi basti were drowning in debt. Hence they could not afford to protest too much against any injustice done to them. Most people of our basti suffered everything in silence. Honour and prestige had no meaning for them. Being threatened and controlled by the higher-ups was an everyday occurrence for the basti dwellers.

Jasbir had returned empty-handed from Bagdogra one day. Let alone money, he didn't even have half-decent clothes on his body. Despite working all these years in Tirath Ram & Company, his hands were empty. Defeated and tired, he began to do wage labour in the village. The situation of our family was deteriorating rapidly. Meanwhile, Janesar had also got married. Once again we had had to borrow money from Teja Taga for the wedding.

Mama had called Jasbir to Dehradun. Mama was a sanitation worker in the Dehradun municipality. He also worked at eight or ten homes as a scavenger. He had just one son, Surjan. In the beginning, Jasbir worked under Mama. Afterwards, he found a permanent job in the Survey of India. Although it didn't pay a lot, at least it provided some security. A regular income boosts a person's morale. Jasbir began to develop self-confidence after joining the Survey of India.

The days of the rainy season were hellish. The lanes filled up with mud, making walking very difficult. The mud was full of pigs' excrement, which would begin to stink after the rain stopped. Flies and mosquitoes thrived like clouds of locusts. It became extremely difficult to go outside. Our arms and legs would get smeared with dirt. The feet became mangy. The space between the toes filled up with reddish sores. Once these sores started to itch, they would itch non-stop.

The lanes were full of muddy water for months. There was no other way to get to school except through crossing these mudfilled lanes. There were several johris around our locality and their water would seep into the lanes. There was one well in our basti, People had raised money to get it cemented. Both the plinth and the parapet of the well were quite high. Despite this safeguard, the water in the well was full of long worms during the rainy season. We had no other alternative but to drink that water. We did not have the right to take water from the well of the Tagas.

It rained a lot in the year 1962. All the homes of our locality were made of clay. The non-stop rain that fell over many days was disastrous for these clay houses. Our house had sprung leaks all over. We would set a pot under the leak. Every time a drop fell in the pot it made a sound: tup, tup. We had to stay awake during these rainy nights. A fear constantly dogged us: who knew when a wall might collapse. Sometimes a huge big hole would suddenly open up in the ceiling, and to close such a hole was a very difficult job. Climbing up on the roof of the clay houses was a very dangerous undertaking.

One night, when it was raining cats and dogs, a big hole opened up in our roof. I was entrusted with the job of going up on the roof as I weighed the least in our family. Since the rain was pouring down on me, I could not see a thing in the pitch dark. Placing my feet on Pitaji's shoulders, I climbed up on the roof. Pitaji guided me from below, 'Careful Munshiji ... steady feet... Don't walk towards the middle... Stay near the wall.'

I had a big lump of clay in one hand while I looked for the hole with the other, in complete darkness. Pitaji called out to me non-stop, 'Munshiji, have you found the hole?' At last I succeeded, found the gap and sealed it with the clod in my hand. I had a very hard time climbing down after closing the hole. I could not keep my eyes open in the pouring rain. As I was slowly climbing down, orienting myself by Pitaji's voice, my foot slipped.

For a second I felt I was up in the air. But Pitaji's experienced eyes had seen me even in that pitch dark and I had managed to regain my balance in his strong grip. My screams had brought my mother out, and she was relieved to see me safe. I was shivering from the cold. My mother wiped me dry with a cloth and set me down by the chulha.

That night a huge piece of our baithak had collapsed. Pitaji and Ma had not slept for a second. Many homes had fallen down in our basti. People were screaming and shouting. Pitaji had gone out and shouted, 'Mamu... Is everything all right?' Mamu had yelled in a voice as strong as my father's, 'Everything is all right... the back shed has fallen down.'

A big commotion started at the crack of dawn in the colony. Everybody was out, looking for a safe place. The rain was continuing to pour. The remaining houses could collapse any minute. Pitaji had gone towards the Tagas' houses and he had returned very soon. 'Hurry up,' he called. 'I have got the baithak of Mamraj opened up.' Ma gathered up some essentials in a hurry, and we left for Mamraj Taga's baithak, our belongings perched on our heads and our bodies drenched in the rain. Mamraj's baithak had been locked up for years. No one used it. Even the plaster on the walls had crumbled. Still it was a sanctuary.

We hadn't even put down our stuff in Mamraj Taga's baithak, when another thirty or forty people came in after us. The rest of the people of our

neighbourhood had gone somewhere else. Within the batting of an eyelid, the baithak had filled up. There was stuff lying all over. The basti people had brought cooking utensils as well as some other necessities. Everything else had been left behind.

A great many people had sought shelter in the baithak. Our greatest problem was how to light the chulha. No one had any fuel. The firewood we had was completely soaked in the rain. We had borrowed uplas, cowdung cakes, from the Tagas to light a fire. Eight or ten chulhas had been set up in the baithak. Well, there weren't any real chulhas. Three bricks had been put together as makeshift chulhas. Those who could not find bricks were making do with stones. The smoke rising from these chulhas had completely transformed the baithak. One couldn't even breathe in that smoke. The men had assembled in the veranda and were smoking the hookah. The women were battling with the stoves. The children made such a racket that you could not hear a thing.

As soon as evening fell, the baithak had gone absolutely dark. No one had a lamp or a lantern. The burning dung cakes in the hearths were making an unsuccessful attempt to dispel the darkness. Sitting under one roof people had forgotten their old grudges. Whatever they had, they wanted to share with others.

Ma had boiled gram that night, with just salt for spice, and that was all we got to eat that night. The taste of those salted grams, the feeling of content that

they provided has not come my way again, even in five-star hotel food. That night no dal or vegetable had been cooked on any stove. Roti, onion and salt: no one had anything else besides these three items.

The next day, afternoon came, and yet no chulha had been lit. The rain had brought us to starvation's door. Life had come to a standstill. People were wandering all over the village, hoping to find some grain so that they could light the stove and cook it. At such times one can't even get a loan. Many had returned empty-handed after searching all over. Pitaji had also returned with empty hands. Hopelessness was writ large on his face. Sagwa Pradhan had laid down his condition for giving grain: indenture a son on an annual lease and take as much grain as you want.

Pitaji had come back without saying a word. But mother had managed to get a few seers of rice from Mamraj Taga's house and that tided us over. After many days, we were going to have a proper meal. Ma put a big pot on the hearth to boil the rice. It did not have too much rice, but it was filled with water right up to the brim. The smell of boiling rice permeated the entire baithak. Little children were looking at Ma's chulha with expectant eyes.

The water was drained after the rice had boiled. Ma divided that water into two containers. One part was given a baghar like dal, and all the children were given a bowl each of rice water from the other. This mar or rice water was as good as milk to us. Whenever rice

was cooked at home, we all got very excited. Our bodies felt energetic after imbibing this hot drink.

There were Julahas' homes near our neighbourhood. During the marriage season when dal and rice were cooked in their homes, the children of our neighbourhood ran there with pots in their hands to collect the mar. Thrown away by others, the mar was to us even more valuable than cow's milk. Many a time the Julahas used to scream at the children to go away. But they stood there shamelessly. The desire to drink the mar was more powerful for them than the scolding. The mar tasted very nice with salt. If once in a while gur was available, then the mar became a delicacy. This taste for mar wasn't brought about because of some trend or fashion. It was due to want and starvation. This thing that everyone discards was a means to quell our hunger.

Once in school, Master Saheb was teaching the lesson on Dronacharya. He told us, almost with tears in his eyes, that Dronacharya had fed flour dissolved in water to his famished son, Ashwatthama, in lieu of milk. The whole class had responded with great emotion to this story of Dronacharya's dire poverty. This episode was penned by Vyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata* to highlight Drona's poverty. I had the temerity to stand up and ask Master Saheb a question afterwards. So Ashwatthama was given flour mixed in water instead of milk, but what about us who had to drink mar? How come we were never mentioned in any epic? Why didn't an epic poet ever write a

word on our lives?

The whole class stared at me. As though I had raised a meaningless point. Master Saheb screamed, 'Darkest *Kaliyug* has descended upon us so that an untouchable is daring to talk back.' The teacher ordered me to stand in the *murga* or rooster pose. This meant squatting on my haunches, then drawing my arms through my inner thighs, and pulling down my head to grasp my ears, a painful constricted position. Instead of carrying on with the lesson he was going on and on about my being a Chuhra. He ordered a boy to get a long teak stick. 'Chuhre ke, you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya . . . Here, take this, I will write an epic on your body.' He had rapidly created an epic on my back with the swishes of his stick. That epic is still inscribed on my back. Reminding me of those hated days of hunger and hopelessness, this epic composed out of a feudalistic mentality is inscribed not just on my back but on each nerve of my brain.

I too have felt inside me the flames of Ashwatthama's revenge. They keep on burning inside me to this day. I have struggled for years on end to come out of the dark vaults of my life, powered by little besides the rice water. Our stomachs would get bloated because of a constant diet of this drink. It killed our appetite. It was our cow's milk and it was our gourmet meal. Scorched by this deprived life, the colour of my skin has altered.

Literature can only imagine hell. For us the rainy season was a living hell.

This terrible suffering of village life has not even been touched upon by the epic poets of Hindi. What a monstrous truth that is.

That year, most of the houses in our basti had collapsed. It took us months to build them again. No grants or subsidies had reached that basti. All we could

rely on was the strength of our own hands. Those ramshackle homes were rebuilt again. The same story was repeated almost every year. Even the houses that the rains spared underwent considerable damage.

Courtesy Samya, Kolkata

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## **JOOZHAN: A DALIT LITERARY TEXT**

Arun Prabha Mukherjee

Experiences like Valmiki's, his birth and growing up in the untouchable caste of Chuhra, the heroic struggle that he waged to survive this preordained life of perpetual physical and mental persecution, and his transformation into a speaking subject and recorder of the oppression and exploitation he endured, not only as an individual but also as a member of a stigmatized and oppressed community, had never been represented in the annals of Hindi literature. He, therefore, has broken new ground, mapped a new territory. Besides a few stray poems and short stories by canonical Hindi writers, which portray Dalit characters as tragic figures and objects of pathos, Dalit representations are conspicuously absent from contemporary Hindi literature.

A literary critic, reared in an educational system that taught a canon of literature focused solely on the experience of the privileged sections of society, whether of India or of the West, must tread cautiously in this new territory, utilizing the benchmarks provided by Dalit literary theory and being continuously on guard against those kinds of formalist analyses that privilege form over content.

How far removed Valmiki's subject matter is from the day-to-day experience of an urban middle class reader is evident from the very title *Joozhan*. It proves the truth of Dangle's claim that Dalit writing demands a new dictionary, for the words it uses are as new as the objects, situations, and activities they describe (252). The Hindi word 'joozhan' literally means food left on an eater's plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle class, urban home. However, such food would only be characterized

‘joothan’ if someone else besides the original eater were to eat it. The word carries the connotations of ritual purity and pollution as ‘jootha’ means polluted. I feel that English equivalents such as ‘leftovers’ or ‘leavings’ cannot substitute for joothan. While ‘leftovers’ has no negative connotations and can simply mean food remaining in the pot that can be eaten at the next meal, ‘leavings’, although widely used by Ambedkar and Gandhi, is no longer in the active vocabulary of Indian English. ‘Scraps’ or ‘slops’ are somewhat approximate to joothan, but they are associated more with pigs than with humans.

The title encapsulates the pain, humiliation and poverty of Valmiki’s community, which not only had to rely on joothan but also relished it. Valmiki gives a detailed description of collecting, preserving and eating joothan. His memories of being assigned to guard the drying joothan from crows and chickens, and of his relishing the dried and reprocessed joothan burn him with renewed pain and humiliation in the present.

The term actually carries a lot of historic baggage. Both Ambedkar and Gandhi advised untouchables to stop accepting joothan. Ambedkar, an indefatigable documenter of atrocities against Dalits, shows how the high caste villagers could not tolerate the fact that Dalits did not want to accept their joothan anymore and threatened them with violence if they refused it. Valmiki has

thus recuperated a word from the painful past of Dalit history which resonates with multiple ironies. Gandhi’s paternalistic preaching, which assumed that accepting joothan was simply a bad habit the untouchables could discard, when juxtaposed against Ambedkar’s passionate exhortation to fellow untouchables to not accept joothan even when its refusal provoked violence, press against Valmiki’s text, proliferating in multiple meanings.

It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the most powerful moments of the text is Valmiki’s mother’s overturning of the basketful of joothan after she is humiliated by Sukhdev Singh Tyagi. Her act of defiance sows the seeds of rebellion in the child Valmiki. The text is dedicated to her and Valmiki’s father, both portrayed as heroic figures, who desired something better for their child and fought for his safety and growth with tremendous courage. Valmiki’s father’s ambitions for his son are evident in the nickname, Munshiji, that he gives Valmiki. The child Valmiki rises on their shoulders to become the first high school graduate from his basti. He pays his debt by giving voice to the indignities suffered by them and other Dalits.

Valmiki’s inscription of these moments of profound violation of his and his people’s human rights is extremely powerful and deeply disturbing. *Joothan* is constructed in the form of wave upon wave of memories that erupt in Valmiki’s mind when triggered through a stimulus

in the present. These are memories of trauma that Valmiki had kept suppressed. He uses the metaphors of erupting lava, explosions, conflagrations and flooding to denote their uncontrollable character. The text follows the logic of the recall of these memories. Instead of following a linear pattern, Valmiki moves from memory to memory, showing how his present is deeply scarred by his past despite the great distance he has travelled to get away from it.

Valmiki presents the traumatic moments of encounter with his persecutors as dramatized scenes, as cinematic moments. The event is narrated in the present tense, capturing the intensity of the memory and suggesting that the subject has not yet healed from the past traumas so as to put them behind. We see a full dress re-enactment of the event, from the perspective of the child or the adolescent Valmiki. Many Dalit texts share this strategy of staging encounters between the Dalit narrator and persons of upper castes. Often these encounters are between a Dalit child at his or her most vulnerable and an upper caste adult in a position of authority. The fullness of detail with which they are inscribed suggests how strongly these past events are imprinted in the narrator's mind.

The Dalit narrator relives these traumatic experiences again, but this time to go past them by understanding them in an ethical framework and passing judgment on them, something that the

child could not do. By documenting these experiences of the Dalit child, first by dramatising them so that we see them for ourselves, and then by commenting on them in the ethical language of guilt and responsibility, from the perspective of the victim, Valmiki and other Dalit writers break through the wall of silence and denial behind which the Dalit suffering had been hidden. Valmiki's encounters with his various school teachers show how Dalit children are abused verbally, physically and publicly, without anyone coming to their rescue. The text, as testimony to crimes suffered, acquires the character of a victim impact statement.

Valmiki places his and his Dalit friends' encounters with upper caste teachers in the context of the Brahmin teacher Dronacharya tricking his low caste disciple Eklavya into cutting his thumb and presenting it to him as part of his gurudakshina or teacher's tribute. This is a famous incident in the *Mahabharata*. By doing this, Dronacharya ensured that Eklavya, the better student of archery, could never compete against Arjun, the Kshatriya disciple. Indeed, having lost his thumb, Eklavya could no longer perform archery. In high caste telling, the popular story presents a casteless Eklavya as the exemplar of an obedient disciple, rather than the Brahmin Dronacharya as a perfidious and biased teacher. When Valmiki's father goes to the school and calls the headmaster a Dronacharya, he links the twentieth

century caste relations to those that prevailed two thousand years ago. By showing his father's ability to deconstruct the story, Valmiki portrays Dalits as articulate subjects who have seen through the cherished myths of their oppressors. When in a literature class, a teacher waxes eloquent about this same Dronacharya, Valmiki challenges the teacher, only to be ruthlessly caned. Valmiki's reconfiguration of the myth also intertextualizes *Joothan* with other Dalit texts, which frequently use the character of Eklavya as representing the denial of education to Dalits. The modern Dalit Eklavya, however, can no longer be tricked into self-mutilation.

While the education system is indicted as death dealing for Dalits, Valmiki pays tribute to the Dalit organic intellectuals who help nurture the growth of a Dalit consciousness in him. While one of these is his father who has the temerity to name the headmaster a Dronacharya, another is Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu ('Jigyasu' means 'curious' and is an acquired identity after shedding a caste-based one) whose rendering of Ambedkar's life is put into Valmiki's hands by his friend Hemlal. Like Valmiki, Hemlal, too, has shed his stigmatized identity as a Chamar by changing it to Jatav. Reading this book is a transformative moment for Valmiki, rendered in the metaphors of melting away of his deadening silence, and the magical transformation of his muteness into voice. This moment, narrativized

at length in *Joothan*, gives us a key to how marginalized groups enter the stage of history. Valmiki underscores the way Dr. Ambedkar has been excised from the hagiography of nationalist discourse. He first encounters him through the writing of a fellow Dalit, passed on to him by another Dalit, in a library run by Dalits. In my interview with him, Valmiki told me that Jigyasu used to publish cheap and accessible materials on Ambedkar's life and thought and sell it himself by putting up makeshift stalls. Valmiki says that emulating Jigyasu, he, too, sold Ambedkarite literature on Ambedkar's birthday in front of the Indian Parliament in Delhi. *Joothan* thus has the twofold task of celebrating and honouring Dalit assertions, and attacking and dismantling anti Dalit hegemonic discourses.

Valmiki mocks and rewrites the village pastoral that was long a staple of Indian literature in many languages as well as of the nationalist discourse of grassroot democracy. Valmiki portrays a village life where the members of his caste, Chuhras, lived outside the village, were forced to perform unpaid labour, and denied basic requirements like access to public land and water, let alone education or fellow feeling. We read about the cleaning of stinking straw beds in the cattlesheds of higher caste villagers, of the disposal of dead animals and their hides. The tasks involved in reaping and harvesting are described in terms of intense physical labour under a scorching

sun and the needle pricks of the sheaves of grain. Valmiki shows that he performed most of these tasks under duress, and was often paid nothing. The most painful of such episodes is the one where Valmiki is yanked away from his books by Fauza and dragged to his field to sow sugarcane just a day before his maths exam.

Such a portrayal of village life is very unlike the lyric mode of Hindi nature poetry where the sickle-wielding, singing farm worker is just an accessory of the picturesque landscape. Valmiki juxtaposes his harsh portrayal of the village life and its exploitative economy to a famous poem by a canonical Hindi poet: 'The poetry by Maithili Sharan Gupt that we had been taught in school, 'Ah, how wonderful is this village life...' Each word of the poem had proved to be artificial and a lie. Such juxtapositions expose the caste and class bias of curriculum makers whose evaluation criteria judged such poetry to be the benchmark of excellence. And they reveal Valmiki's antagonistic relationship to the canon of Hindi literature.

Valmiki does not trust that his upper caste readers will understand his point of view, or believe the veracity of his experience. He pre-empts such responses by addressing them in his Preface: 'Some people will find all this unbelievable and exaggerated... Those who say, "such things don't happen here", I want to say to them, the sting of this pain is known only to the person who had to suffer it.' Every time Valmiki describes

a violent encounter with the oppressor, he inserts the challenging and dissenting voices that constantly deny his testimony. His voice acquires a bitterly ironic tone when he addresses these deniers. In fact, one of the distinctive aspects of *Joothan*, which marks it as a Dalit text, is its interrogative discourse. The text is full of questions that demand an answer: 'Why didn't an epic poet ever write a word on our lives?' 'Why is it a crime to ask for the price of one's labour?' 'Why are the Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalits?' Such interrogatory rhetoric, which brings out the contradictions in the dominant society's ideology and behavior, reminds one of Ambedkar's fiery writing and speeches which are peppered with witty, pungent and harsh questions like the following:

*I asked them [our Hindu friends],  
'you take the milk from the cows  
and buffaloes and when they are  
dead you expect us to remove the  
dead bodies. Why? If you carry  
the dead bodies of your mothers  
to cremate, why do you not carry  
the dead bodies of your 'mother-  
cows' yourself?' (Ambedkar  
1969:143)*

*Joothan* is full of similar conundrums. They jolt the reader out of the contrived normativity of the high caste value system that denies the truth claims of the Dalit speaking subject, a subject who has come to voice after centuries of enforced namelessness and voicelessness. By bearing witness to these routinized

atrocities, and passing judgment on them, Valmiki brings them into a new discourse of human rights and justice.

It is interesting to note in this regard the caste and classbased responses to a short story by Valmiki in the May 2000 issue of the Hindi monthly *Hans*. The short story entitled "Ghuspaithiye" (Intruders) describes the physical violence directed at Dalit students in a medical college. The June issue of the publication had a letter from a reader saying that Valmiki was perhaps remembering things that had happened in his youth and claiming that such accounts of the past were no longer true.

A letter in the July issue supported Valmiki, reiterating the truth of his rendering.

Valmiki, like many other Dalit writers, demands the status of truth for his writing, taking issue with those who find Dalit literature lacking in imagination. Valmiki's insistence that all persons and events in *Joothan* are true poses a considerable challenge to postmodernist critics who propose that autobiography's truth is 'constructed,' that the autobiographic narrator shapes a presentable self by reprocessing his/her memories in order to fit the present. Dalit autobiography *claims* the status of truth, of testimony. Naming people and places by their real names is one of the strategies through which Valmiki establishes the status of *Joothan* as testimony and it gives *Joothan* the status of documented Dalit

history.

The timbre of the voice, for that reason, is exhortatory. It demands answers, and points out contradictions. While the text has many moments of deep sadness and pathos, its predominant mood is ironic. The narrative comments are inevitably in an ironic voice, pouring sarcasm on the cherished cultural ideals and the myths of high caste friends. Valmiki makes fun of their wellmeaning advice to him to write about universals rather than about the 'narrow circle' of particularism. He relentlessly exposes the double standards of friends who are greatly interested in literature and theatre, and yet practise untouchability in subtle ways like having a different set of teacups for their untouchable visitors.

Indeed, *Joothan* demands a radical shift from the upper caste and upper class reader by insisting that such a reader not forget his/her caste or class privilege. Unlike canonical Hindi or English writing where the reader's, or the writer's, caste and class are often considered irrelevant, *Joothan's* dual addressivity problematizes the reader's caste and class. While Valmiki's irony, satire, harangue and anger are directed at non-Dalit readers, Dalit readers are seen as fellow sufferers.

While 'we' is demarcated to mean 'we Dalits' in the text, the upper caste and upper class readers are distanced by the use of pronouns 'they' and 'them'

as well as the rhetorical use of the interrogative sentence without a subject. *Joothan*, by thus bifurcating its readership, inscribes the divisions of a caste, and class based society. Valmiki does not, cannot, claim the authority to address a national collectivity. On the contrary, he aims to point out the exclusion of people like him from the imagined community of the nation.

While the indictment of an unjust social system and its benefactors is one thrust of the text, its other important preoccupation is to examine Dalit lives substantively. *Joothan* combines representations of struggles with the external enemy with the enemy within: the internalization by Dalit people of upper caste brahminic values, the superstitions of Dalit villagers, the patriarchal oppression of Dalit women by their men, the attempts by Dalits who have attained a middle class economic status to 'pass' as high castes and the attendant denial of their roots, their inferiority complex which makes them criticize the practice of rearing pigs by rural Dalits, all these aspects of Dalit struggle are an equally important aspect of *Joothan*. This self critique has earned him brickbats from many Dalits who find the frank portrayal of Dalit society to be humiliating. For them, it is tantamount to washing dirty linen in public. Valmiki accuses these Dalits to have succumbed to Brahminism. His frank critique of his own family members who

hide their caste and therefore deny their relationship to Valmiki in public must have been very painful to the persons involved, particularly since they have been named.

*Joothan*, then, is a multivalent, polyvocal text, healing the fractured self through narrating, contributing to the archive of Dalit history, opening a dialogue with the silencing oppressors, and providing solace as well as frank criticism to his own people. Its overall effect is truly paradoxical. For the fact that Valmiki has become a speaking subject indicates that Indian democracy has opened some escape hatches through which a critical mass of articulate, educated Dalits has emerged. On the other hand, the harsh realities that he portrays so powerfully underscore the fact that the promises made in the Constitution of independent India have not yet been fully met. *Joothan* stridently asks for the promissory note, joining a chorus of Dalit voices that are demanding their rightful place under the sun. A manifesto for revolutionary transformation of society and human consciousness, *Joothan* confronts its readers with difficult questions about their own humanity, and invites them to join the universal project of human liberation.

Courtesy Samya, Kolkata

# Lecture

In Memory of Rahul Sankrityayan

## LOCALISM VERSUS NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

With Special Reference to Uttarakhand

P.C. Joshi

It is a matter of great happiness and pride for me that the Rahul Commemoration Lecture Series, organized by *Pahad*, is being inaugurated with my lecture. At the same time, I am also conscious of my limitations. I had even told Dr. Shekhar Pathak that a lecture in the memory of Rahulji and that, too, the first in the series should be delivered by someone with a deep knowledge and understanding of the legacy left by him. I am not particularly conversant with that legacy. I should have been but I am not, and this I admit in all modesty. Despite this limitation, I have accepted this invitation.

Although I had not been familiar with the thinking and creative works of Rahulji, I was certainly acquainted with him. I was greatly elated when turning the pages of his book “Koormanchal”, I found a photograph. Although, I was not there in this photograph my maternal uncle, maternal aunt and a few other persons from Almora could be seen in it. Then I remembered that in 1950 or thereabout

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English rendering of the revised version of the first Rahul Sankrityayan Memorial Lecture delivered on May 6, 1986 under the auspices of Pahad at Nainital, Uttarakhand, then part of Uttar Pradesh. The explosion of regional demands for separate statehood in different parts of India to-day (e.g. in Telangana, Vidarbha and some other parts) makes the discussion of the theme in this lecture relevant.



he used to come to our house in Almora. He visited us a number of times. I also participated in the discussions with him and in spite of not being familiar with his views and works, the impression his personality had left on me has been revived. My inner voice, therefore, prompted me to accept this invitation from *Pahad* and also the topic given for the talk. I remembered that Rahulji was not only a scholar; he had also written a lot on the Himalayas. The Himalayas, in their many aspects, were a source of inspiration for him and he had great attachment for their people, their society, culture and civilization. Today, in this region of Uttarakhand as in many other regions of India, serious problems are arising; great turmoil and turbulence is being witnessed and new hopes and aspirations are emerging. In what backdrop should we view them? From what perspective should we consider them? What direction should we give to the mass awakening of which we find explosion in the hill regions in many other regions. Giving thought to all these issues, I realised that we need Rahulji's comprehensive way of looking at things and his capacity to trace a problem to its roots. We should not only accept his thinking but also his method of analysis and habit of a ruthless enquiry and research. His analysis was not based only on statistics and recorded facts or confined to a study of dead history but was also permeated with the desire to draw the local people

and communities as partners in bringing the live manifestations and flow of traditions to light.

What modern anthropology calls "field work or participant observation" the wondering researcher that Rahulji was undertaking throughout his life and on its basis had given us a new insight into social transformations and cultural and civilisational processes beyond anything that a research based merely on books or records could give us. The age-old conflict between the dead and the living elements in our cultural legacy, Rahulji could comprehend in all its aspects only because his study of Indian culture was not based merely on what the eminent social scientist, M.N. Srinivas, has called a "book view" but also had a foundation in a "field view". This study was not circumscribed by limitations of any dominant class or caste outlook. By internalizing the perceptions and experiences of the people, it provided a new range and depth to his discovery of India. I feel what we need today is this view from below which alone can show us the right direction.

If you will turn the pages of Rahulji's research works on Kumaon and Garhwal, you will find that, on the basis of his deep study, he has drawn some conclusions. At the end, in four or five pages only, referring to this region's cultural legacy he has called it the legacy of "cultural accommodation". In his view, this history of the Himalayas is not a 'regional history' in a narrow sense, nor

can it be called a regional culture, regional economy, a regional social system in the narrow sense in which many people understand regionalism at present. At the present juncture a narrow definition and outlook of regionalism are being projected forcefully from outside, asking us to look afresh at our local history from their sectarian perspective. In this narrow sense, Rahulji was not regional. He had made a deep study of regions and of regionalism which was holistic and all-encompassing in its range. He was a great scholar of Sanskrit, of classics and of traditions. For him knowledge derived from books alone was incomplete. He did not confine his study of a culture to Sanskritic and sacred texts. He believed that if a tradition is confined to books and texts only, it is a dead tradition and, therefore, it is of no value. Only when it has become a part of people's life, it has got assimilated in their life system and has influenced their every day living and provided momentum to it, can it be said to have a permanent significance. To identify this living form of a tradition, a wanderlust is inescapable; one had to be a lifelong wanderer like Rahul. From this point of view, Rahul made as much use of his feet as that of his brain. What strenuous journeys on foot he undertook to reach the conclusion that much more than what you learn from a study of scriptures, records or books, you learn from talking to the people, interacting with them face to face and examining things directly! In this context, he

provided a new depth to the answers to the questions that had been raised by Maithli Sharan Gupta: "What were we, what are we and what would we be now?" From this stand point, he undertook a study of India through studies of regions like Uttarakhand and reached the conclusion that Uttarakhand's civilisation is not regional in the manner a cactus plant, which is found only in a particular region and derives its specific identity only from it, is.

According to Rahul, the hill civilization is a unique blend of diversity and distinctiveness on the one hand and similarity and unity on the other. The uniqueness of this culture consists in its being a product of several elements, trends and influences. It is, therefore, both a regional and a multi-regional culture; while its roots are in one region which has given in its distinctiveness, its branches, by spreading out into many regions, have given it a multi-regional character as well. Rahul has said at one place that Uttarakhand culture is truly like the Himalayas which, in spite of having a specific geographical location, is representative of the entire country and delineates its contours. You will not find any literature, culture, poem, book or epic, or any language of India which does not have a link with the Himalayas. Just as the Himalayas belong to the entire India but are located in a particular part of the country, in the same way, Uttarakhand's culture,

although drawing its special characteristics for its rootedness in a part of the land carries the imprint of the cultures of many other regions. On one side, a uniqueness born out of local factors and, on the other, the dynamism, changeability and a capacity for assimilation born out of a continuous interaction with influences from outside. This dialectical dualism makes Uttarakhand's civilization an illuminating example of India's tradition of "cultural accommodation ". This is the reason why Uttarakhand has, on the one hand, nurtured a local civilisation which has been influenced by the cultures of all the regions of India and, at the same time, been open to influences from the neighbouring countries like Nepal and Tibet and to interaction with them.

If we use the words of Gandhiji we can say that Uttarakhand's windows have always been open to cultural winds from several other regions. In spite of this openness, till the advent of the British rule no external influence could dislodge Uttarakhand from its cultural roots. This unique blend of localism and multi-regionalism can be seen in all spheres of Uttarakhand's social life. Uttarakhand's economy, its technology, social customs, religious beliefs and rituals; language, dialect, folk culture, that is folk songs, dances, poetry, folk tales and all their sectors of life, according to Rahul, implied the synthetic cultural character of Uttarakhand. Take, for example, nature and composition of Uttarakhand's

population. Besides Uttarakhand's indigenous people, people belonging to several high and low castes from outside had settled here and lent diversity to its population. This, too, Rahulji has proved and established through his studies. Looking from Rahulji's angle, we find that the dynamic, diverse, culturally pluralistic and liberal picture of Uttarakhand that emerges from them is different from the sectarian, and separatist picture which, on the basis of a narrowly defined localism, is sought to be presented today not only in politics but also in sociology and culture. Uttarakhand's aristocratic castes are not indigenous but are emigrants from Maharashtra, Gujarat, etc. which have acquired a lot from the indigenous people and also given to them. If Uttarakhand's history is to be written by denying this tradition of interaction and assimilation at the cultural level, it will not only be a false history but also ominous and damaging.

It has repeatedly been said about India that it has always accepted and assimilated new influences, new life-giving elements and yet preserved its identity and character. The same can be said about Uttarakhand's culture that while accepting new influences, it has retained its entity, individuality and character. This character is specific to the region and yet is also a shining symbol of the Indian culture which has been attracting the people from all over the country towards it. Those

intellectuals from uttarakhand who have had an opportunity of travel in other states of the country must have had the experience of their identity and peculiarities of character receiving universal acceptance and also respect. I cannot forget my experience in a village in Gorakhpur where my link with Uttarakhand made me a centre not only of attraction but also of curiosity, respect and consideration. I had the same experience in Bengal which has great attachment for Uttarakhand.

If you will visit other states of India and try to study them deeply you will find that, in its diversity, the country has its unity and in its unity you will also experience diversity. The same can be said of Uttarakhand as well. I want to look at regionalism from this very comprehensive, broad-minded and holistic angle. This is not only an intellectual question but also a practical one. Where do we want to take Uttarakhand? Do we want to cut ourselves off from India's larger stream? Does our future lie only in looking at our problems in isolation? Are our problems different or are they linked with those of the country as a whole? All these questions have relevance today. This is also the major challenge before us whether we want to make the entire India alive to its responsibility towards Uttarakhand or not. We have to tell the entire country that Uttarakhand's weakness is its own weakness, it is not the weakness of Uttarakhand alone. The leaders of India's

renaissance and its freedom struggle had understood this basic truth. It was Uttarakhand's deep integration with India that had brought many great thinkers and sages and common people to it. What was the attraction that brought Shankaracharya here, brought Vivekanand here, brought Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal, Uday Shankar, and scientist Bosi Sen here? It was not only that the awakening on the national plane caused a convulsion in Uttarakhand, the awakening in Uttarakhand also provided quiet strength to the nation. The national movement acquired a national character in the real sense only when it made local problems of land, forest, *Coolie begar*, *folk* culture etc. a part of the national programme and related this awakening to the people's life at the grass roots and their sources of inspiration. In this way, the achievements of the Indian renaissance, its strength, also became the strength of the people in Uttarakhand. Also its weaknesses became our weaknesses. Mahatama Gandhi had said: Know your country correctly; understand your people and go in their midst. Thus, for the people of Uttarakhand this discovery of India began with the discovery of Uttarakhand itself. The same was the inspiration behind the efforts to trace the history of Kumayun and Garhwal and to study the folk culture and the language of the hills. Be it the agitation for reform of the land system and the end of *coolie Begar* or the control over

the forests, or the discovery of language and culture, behind everything was also this inspiring power of the national movement. The upper caste, upper class intellectuals of Uttarakhand, by dedicating themselves to the service of the people, to an extent rose above their class and caste limitations and became servants of the nation, of Uttarakhand and of the people of Uttarakhand.

In this way there is a very close relation between the national awakening and that at the regional level. The two had been tied so inextricably with each other and continue to be so tied, that be it in the field of culture, or that of technology, a small region like Uttarakhand produced personalities who attained the peaks of national leadership. Pandit Gobind Ballabh Pant and Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna in the National Congress, Comrade Puran Chandra Joshi in the communist and the left movement, Mukundilal, Sumitranandan Pant, Pitamber Datt Barthwal and Chandra Kunwar Barthwal in art and literature, Dr. Nilambar Joshi in medical science, Bhairav Datt Pande in administration, all these luminaries shone on the national firmament as representatives of Uttarakhand. At the same time, hundreds of patriots who were the gift of the national movement aroused radical, national and social consciousness in the villages in the hills.

Not only this, in the national and cultural leadership, which in the beginning was confined to high castes

and classes, representatives of the toiling sections also began to emerge as leaders. Just as the discovery of India under Gandhiji's leadership in the form of discovery of the villages and the toilers got transformed into the discovery of the sources of India's real strength, in the same way the discovery of Uttarakhand by its educated classes drew them into discovery of its village communities, toilers and their folk culture. The high caste and upper class people who, through the study first of Sanskrit and later of English and through the medium of classical Sanskrit or subsequently that of English had regarded Indian classical or western culture to be the only real cultures, by their contact with the people began to get acquainted with the people's cultural tradition and also began to try to understand the people's contribution in the cultural field.

As a result, parallel to national development and reconstruction, a programme for development and reconstruction of Uttarakhand also began to take shape. The effort reached its peak when side by side with Gandhi's "India of my dreams" an outline of "Uttarakhand of my dreams" began to emerge not only among the intelligentsia but at the popular level.

Here, two mutually contradictory tendencies in the process of awakening of the national and Uttarakhand's levels need to be acknowledged. On one plane, this awakening compelled one enlightened section of the privileged class to join

with the toilers, who played a notable role in the fields of physical production and culture, and, to that end, assumed the responsibility of taking knowledge, both scientific and other, to them in their idiom. At the same time it also created the urge among talented young men and women from higher castes to understand, learn and accept the life-sustaining folk culture created by masses over the ages. On the other plane another large section of the upper middle class who had acquired mastery over the English language tried to adopt what Gandhi called (Angrejiat), that is, the English pattern of behaviour and way of thinking and of treating the common people as an illiterate, backward lot. This tendency of Anglicisation led it to turn its face against its own traditions and to become indifferent towards them. Understandably, this tendency created a yawning gulf between the elite and the common people.

Both the tendencies can be seen in the awakening at the national level and in Uttarakhand. If in the Gandhian era, the first trend appeared to be stronger, in the post-Gandhian period the second trend went on gathering strength. As a symbol of the defeat of the first trend or tendency, the example of Uttarakhand's popular leader, Pandit Hargovind Pant, brings out clearly the dual face of the leadership. In the Gandhian period, as a participant in ploughing the field and, thereby, cutting

himself off from the Brahmanical tradition of looking down at physical labour as demeaning, Pantji had taken a revolutionary step. But later, by undergoing penance at Haridwar to placate the enraged Brahmin community, he sought to prove his continued belief in this very Brahmanical tradition. Not only in the national awakening and development, but also in that of Uttarakhand, it is essentially this weakness of character of the elite whose pernicious consequences confront us today. That is why the place of the old or nationalist leadership has been taken by revivalist, backward-looking social elements who have emerged as a new force. Their espousal of the cause of making Uttarakhand autonomous also hides their hostility to the issues of equity, of social reform and of a cultural renewal which were raised during the freedom struggle.

We will have to face this bitter truth that at the root of this damaging development are the economic, social and cultural changes of the British period which had given birth to a spurious middle class. The principal tendency of this class led it into accepting the English way of life and mode of thinking. As a reaction to this tendency other sections mistaking the dogmas of tradition to be the core of tradition got entrapped into a campaign for revivalism.

It also has to be accepted that in the national movement in its developed form there had begun to take root a healthy trend which was different from

both the above-mentioned tendencies and, basing itself on the knowledge, science and ideals of justice and equality acquired from the West was trying to strike a new balance. This quest for a new balance between the best in the West and the East was as active at Uttarakhand's level as it was at the national level. It will also have to be accepted that this healthy trend could not become the mainstream of either the nation or Uttarakhand. Forces heading the process of Uttarakhand's renewal today can tap this very great asset bequeathed to them by yesterday's radical social activists and political workers.

In this context I want to draw your attention to a paradox. In the colonial period, the national awakening against the colonial rule and exploitation had gripped the entire country. Uttarakhand of those days was backward in terms of transport and communication facilities and only a few people could travel to places outside the region. The position then was very different from what it is today. Today, a miniature Uttarakhand can be found in all the major towns of India and also those in other countries. The Uttarakhand society of that period was to a great extent a locality-centred society. So also was its economy. The food we ate, the clothes we wore, the other things we needed, only a small part of them came from outside. Most of them we produced ourselves. What is called "self-sufficient" was to a great extent our system. It was not a system

based on market expansion. How was it that, in spite of our economy being local, our consciousness was national? Be it the villages or towns, the nationalistic wave had encompassed the entire Uttarakhand especially after the arrival of Gandhiji on the scene. **"Akal ko keedo O boodo Gandhi" (Embodiment of big wisdom, O old Gandhi)!** The line of this song was on every child's lips, young and old person and the spinning wheel had reached every village. At that time, there was neither radio nor television, nor was a newspaper available to everybody. One wonders what was the communication medium which took Gandhiji's message and that of numerous local Gandhis to the masses.

But today the situation is different. Today, we are an inseparable part of the national economy, market, communication system. Now, the frontiers of localism at the economic, social and cultural levels have been breached. Now our daily necessities are being met from outside through the market mechanism. A large part of our labour force is outside the region and it is being regulated by a market for labour. That is why a substantial part of our income comes to us through money order giving our economy the nickname of a "money order economy". In the fields of culture and information, radio and television, have opened us to national and international influences. But how is it that while on the one hand Uttarakhand's economy, society, culture,

communication, labour force, etc. have become now strongly linked with the national and international systems, on the other, its consciousness and understanding at the popular level and politics, based on them, instead of evolving parallelly with the developments at the national and international levels are regressing into localism. That is to say, while the physical basis of existence is becoming increasingly national and international, this consciousness, constricting itself in a reverse direction, is getting localised. What explains this strange, paradoxical phenomenon? The intelligentsia has given little thought to it.

In the colonial period, the two streams of localism and nationalism supplemented each other. Why are they emerging as mutually antagonistic today? And why is the effervescence of localism providing strength to obscurantist and revivalist elements and not to development-oriented, progressive forces? This is a very important but difficult question of which we have to find an answer. I feel this regression has some basic sources and it is the duty of the intelligentsia to identify these sources and present them before the people. I feel what Karl Marx had said about the British regime in India also provides the key to an understanding of the present situation. He had said that after the British invasion of India, the Indians were in a state of melancholy and the reason was that while as a result of the British rule the

country's traditional socio-economic structure had been destroyed, no new modern system had come up as its substitute. The Indians had been faced with a vacuum which would have to wait for independence to be filled up. What happened in the entire country also happened in our hills. But the hills had certain geographical attributes which did not permit the British to bring about the basic changes here which they had brought about in the plains. The process of modernisation here started rapidly only after independence. Particularly the changes that took place in the wake of the India-China tension on the northern border and the network of roads spread out in the region for reasons of security, and, to some extent, of development, opened Uttarakhand to commercial, administrative and cultural influences from outside and deprived it of the protection its geography had provided to it. Perhaps, from a long-term point of view, this end to this isolated existence and exclusiveness may turn out to be a boon. From its immediate results, it has proved to be a curse. The common people with their simple means of livelihood, and the educated persons seeking security in government service could neither take to new vocations like truck and bus driving, running hotels and restaurants, horticulture, dairying, commercial exploitation of forest resources, trading etc. in a big way, nor save their vocations in the case of competition from more skillful and



enterprising elements with more capital organisation and political patronage at their disposal. They suddenly began to feel like strangers in their native land. Not only this, a large section of Uttarakhand's population, children, youth and adults, found itself being drawn to large and medium towns outside. While the common people began seeking domestic jobs and work as coolies, peons, watchmen etc.; the educated section sought clerical and similar other work. Only a few persons with higher education could be absorbed in high government jobs and other professions with high income.

In this way, in the decades after independence, processes of disruption of Uttarakhand's traditional economic and social system, which had started during the British rule, gathered momentum. But the process of reconstruction of the economic structure and the society which should have gone on side by side in the post-independence period was palpably slow. Because of corruption and red-tapism it also lacked popular support and also was wanting in its concern for the people. In other words, the security the common people, particularly the women were assured of in the traditional system because of their collective rights and integrated and cohesive community life, got destroyed with this disruption of the old pattern. The community rights were snatched away by heartless government departments on the one hand, and by

the newly rich class emerging strongly out of road building, forest based enterprises, hotels, horticulture etc. on the other.

These negative developments through their disruptive effect on the peoples' life have given rise to this anger, discontent, sense of insecurity and dissent that has made local sentiment and consciousness so explosive.

When we talk of basic changes in the traditional structure we should remember that because of its geographical position, Uttarakhand's economic, social and cultural relations with neighbouring hill countries like Nepal, Tibet, etc. were closer than with the plains within the country. Not only that, the entire Terai area provided work to its working people during the winter months when economic activities in the hills were at a low ebb. Tibet's incorporation into China and deterioration in India-China relations, increased vigilance and restrictions on traditional exchanges on India-Nepal border coupled with resettlement of the Punjab refugees in the Terai area leading to decline in the job opportunities for the hill people; all these negative factors had their ill effect on their lives. The prosperous Bhotia community was pushed into a state of penury because of this disruption. Similarly, the transport of goods by trucks from one place to another rendered unemployed thousands of traders and porters who had been engaged in hauling of goods on mules or on their heads.

In this new situation, Uttarakhand's enterprising and talented persons, because of lack of encouragement, capital and training could not have a share in the new emerging economic processes in the region and it was mostly the people from outside who became dominant within the new economy. At the same time, with the expansion of transport facilities in Uttarakhand it became very easy to take out its physical and human resources which gave rise to the feeling among the discontented people that their region had been reduced to a hinterland of the country's affluent classes and regions, a kind of inner colony in popular perception. This sentiment got a fillip when there was a large scale drain of the educational talent from Uttarakhand. With opportunities for gainful employment, the young and the adults both educated and illiterate, from the toiling castes and communities began rushing to towns leaving their children and women to face the rigours of life without any security or protection whatsoever.

If we ponder deeply over this entire process we will find that despite its short time span of four or five decades it had brought about such basic changes as had not been effected over several centuries and which had totally transformed Uttarakhand's traditional pattern. It was such an economic and social earthquake that it had totally destroyed the old and, cutting the people away from their roots, had left them

in a vacuum to face the buffeting winds. The human cost of these changes cannot be measured from statistics.

While this process of change had its negative implications it also had the potential of immense possibilities for reconstruction and reinvigoration of this region. How is it that the former came to have the upper hand and not the latter? It is in this imbalance and distortion that the anger and discontent which have enveloped Uttarakhand and which certain aggressive elements are taking into the wrong direction of confrontation between localism and nationalism, have their basic source. If this confrontation has yet not taken a violent form which has been witnessed in some other parts of the country, the credit is due to the national movement and its legacy which had always adopted the path of reconciliation between nationalism and localism and had always respected the expression of a healthy localism. However, the process of nation-building and development in the last few decades has failed to give shape to "an Uttarakhand of our dreams". Not only that, this process, instead of narrowing the gulf between the ideals and the reality, has been widening it further. The growing tension between localism and nationalism (i.e., the nation state) clearly shows that howsoever liberal and pro-people be the intentions of the nation-state, the consequences of some of its policies and practices and (lack of relevant policy) have been

quite opposite to them. This has only increased the alienation of Uttarakhand's people from the state at the national level. This is also clear from this increasing loss of confidence of Uttarakhand's people in the national parties and organizations which have their roots in the national movement. This is also responsible for its passing under the influence of political and social ideologies which are either revivalist, (anti-equity and anti-social reform) that are busy in pushing the country backwards into the centuries of mediaeval mentality or are driven by isolationist impulses which see Uttarakhand's future only in cutting it away from the nation's mainstream.

If today politics in Uttarakhand appears to be entering sometimes a dark tunnel the responsibility mainly is that of the national forces which during the past decades have not tried to understand the problems of the country's backward regions through a continuous dialogue with their people and with real, committed local representatives on the basis of a scientific study and research. Nor has it made an honest effort to work out a suitable plan of action to resolve the problems and act on it faithfully. Impelled by the politics of power, the national parties have engaged most of the time in turning these backward areas into their "vote banks" and, some of them in the name of raising teams of local political workers, and using muscle and money, and political manipulations have given birth to a class of corrupt and

characterless persons who can act as middlemen and touts between various sections of the population and its leaders. People's anger is centred on these middlemen and touts who, without any service to the people, hard work or contribution in the technical field, have emerged as the "novex riche" and, on the basis of their newly-acquired wealth, strength and power, have been dominating the people.

In the same way there have emerged in the economic field powerful elements whose prosperity has not resulted from any real effort on their part to modernize agriculture or industry. These elements have become rich by misusing the subsidies and facilities given under the government's Five-Year Plans. In their malpractices, exploitation of labourers engaged in road building under various contracts through underpayment of wages, and in the name of establishing new industries, resorting to practices that have been described as "black economy", figure prominently. Reckless cutting down of trees and illegal trading of the other physical and human resources of the hills are also included in their repertory of malpractices. This "new rich" class has become fully dominant on the economy, society and politics of the region. This new class has developed such deep overt and covert links with prominent politicians of the state and its administration that because of them the state, too, has lost whatever of the old prestige it had been able to retain

and has acquired the image of a mere instrument in this vicious circle of immorality.

If we analyse dispassionately the Five Year Plans and other economic, educational and cultural programmes to find out to what extent they have a local character, we will discover that in several plans and programmes the distinction between the hills and the plains is not clear and these plans and programmes prepared in Lucknow or Delhi have been mechanically made applicable to the hills. In the absence of decentralised power, neither a leadership familiar with the local conditions or committed to development of this area has emerged at the village, block and sub-division levels, nor have the programmes provided any scope for contribution of local representatives in their preparation and execution.

On the administrative plane also no special effort has been made to build an appropriate administrative cadre from amongst the educated community in the hills. It is unrealistic to expect from officials born and brought up in the plains and unfamiliar with the conditions in the hills and with no attachment with the hill people any significant effort or contribution in the development of the region. This is not to deny that there are always some officials who provide the exception to the rule.

What hurts the people in the hills most is that although Uttarakhand has

produced not one but three Chief Ministers of the State who, in course of time, also became top leaders of the country, none of them succeeded in making any notable particular contribution in introducing an element of seriousness in the reconstruction and development process in Uttarakhand and accelerate its pace. Uttarakhand has yet to produce its Dr. Parmar who changed the very face of H.P. Uttarakhand has given a lot to the nation in nationally-renowned scientists, economists, administrators and artists also but did it get from the nation what it should have. Is this merely an imaginary or sentimental feeling or does it reflect a realistic assessment of the situation? This is a subject deserving deep thinking and study. Here I am raising a question and want to awaken the country's administrators and intellectuals to the pain and anger that the shattering of the dream after independence of a new and prosperous Uttarakhand – the dream the people of Uttarakhand had come to have in the background of the national movement – has given rise in them.

There is another aspect of the process of change in Uttarakhand which has given rise to a great and horrible intellectual vacuum in the region and that is the large scale exodus of its gifted educated people. This exodus is being witnessed from some other regions also but the educated section in these regions keep at least some link with its roots. In states like Punjab, there is even a

considerable “reverse flow”, that is, a tendency to utilize their earnings made and skills acquired outside for the benefit of the home State. But in Uttarakhand in the absence of any infrastructure, that is, professional institutions and other facilities required for a civilized existence, there is no such tendency discernible among its emigrants. Of official or other institutional encouragement and support in seeking avenues for progress within the region, there is, of course, practically nil.

I myself feel very much ashamed in admitting that although I have worked to the best of my ability in the field of social sciences in Calcutta and Delhi and also got recognition nationally and abroad, I have made no contribution in research work relating to reconstruction and development of Uttarakhand. I also feel ashamed that Digoli village where I was born and which has produced a number of talented personalities who have earned fame in education, administration and other fields has not received anything by way of contribution in its development from these people. I had once been made aware of this bitter truth by an economist in Georgia. He had said that he had grown with his village and its entire community. On his asking I had to admit that my growth is no index of the progress of my village and my area, but has perhaps been at its expense. No national progress at the cost of local progress can ever be stable. Howsoever great be the

contribution of Uttarakhand’s intelligentsia in the national progress, its staying aloof from Uttarakhand’s problems and its indifference to development of the region not only testifies to its incompleteness, and deficiency of achievement but is also a great tragedy at the national level.

It will be a mistake to believe that the source of all hurdles in building up and development of Uttarakhand is outside and consists in the region’s exploitation by the selfish external elements only. *The truth is that the hill society’s internal hurdles also are so formidable that they have prevented it from benefiting from the facilities and opportunities offered in the wake of independence and specially by the Five Year Plans.* Uttarakhand’s high caste and class educated community has always sought security and respectability in government service and not in technical education and new enterprises and professions which help in economic development. Its sense of status superiority, kulinta, and caste consciousness have not been confined to social relations and categories. Professions and employment have also been affected by them. The talented educated class has always been averse to taking up any work involving physical labour or risk. It is because of this mentality that the emergence of a new enterprising and virile class which has been the mainspring of economic revolution and modernisation

everywhere has been extremely slow in Uttarakhand and it is the more enterprising communities from outside which have derived the benefit of the new economic opportunities in Uttarakhand. Fruits, vegetables, milk, new agricultural crops, animal husbandry, the funds allotted under every development scheme have not been properly used but, on the other hand, misused for this very reason. The state is also responsible for not facilitating basic changes in the old mentality in accordance with the needs of development. The education provided in the new universities, schools and colleges, which have been established in large numbers, is also of the same pattern as had been used to produce officers, clerks and peons for the colonial administration. It still does not produce technicians, engineers and scientists whom Uttarakhand needs in the new situation. The newly rich are constantly exerting pressure to open new educational institutions but that the education imparted in them should help in developing capabilities for participation in development activities has not been insisted upon by any enlightened section of the population. The newly rich are more desirous of acquiring degrees as "status symbols". They also aspire for the position occupied by the old high caste aristocracy. They have still not acquired the will and courage to take up the role of a vanguard in the economic building and

development of Uttarakhand. That is why there is no indication yet of any intention on their part to give a new direction to education.

The same is the state of the women's and adult education, that is education for those who have never been to any school, college or university but are keen to learn any thing for technical development of their vocations. Facilities for such adult education in Uttarakhand are limited.

If we look at Uttarakhand in terms of its resource endowment, both physical and human, we will find that it is richly endowed in all such resources as can form the basis of an indigenous economic reconstruction. On one side, it has land, forests, water, livestock, minerals and other physical riches, on the other it also has skillful and expert farmers, artisans, craftsmen and traders who, if given the benefit of modern technical training and knowledge can both initiate the process of economic regeneration as well as develop the capability to spur progress in agriculture, industry and commerce. If they are provided with capital and with scientific and other necessary knowledge for building up human resources and, together with these, through collective organization and decentralization of power, enabled to share power to be able to take decisions independently regarding economic development of their region, then it would be possible to have a new experiment in economic upliftment of Uttarakhand

on the basis of a new model. This new model can end the intelligentsia's isolation and alienation from its toilers and bind the two into new ties. It can also encourage nationalistic elements outside the region to look at Uttarakhand's development as a national task and help in taking it up in that spirit. If this happens this great effort of today will be linked with the great effort of the period of the national struggle which had given rise to the vision of "Uttarakhand of my dreams" to its intelligentsia.

Today's effort, by turning into the great effort to make this dream a reality, will succeed in giving to the present anger, discontent and dissent in Uttarakhand a constructive, positive turn. In order to give this effort legitimacy and strength the Union Government can make Uttarakhand a separate state like Himachal Pradesh and, if that is not immediately feasible, it can in the interim initiate the process of forming an Uttarakhand autonomous development council as it has done in the case of

the Darjeeling area of West Bengal which has full financial and administrative powers. Or it can convert Uttarakhand into a centrally administered territory with a legislative body and executive authority of its own. By taking such steps, which fulfill local aspirations, the confrontation and schism between localism and nationalism, accentuating over the decades, can be removed. At the same time, through such an initiative this tension can be transformed into a healthy and constructive partnership of harmony and cooperation. This will bring back the memories of the national movement when localism and nationalism supplemented each other.

At the end it will be quite relevant to say that Rahulji too had conceived of a bright future for Uttarakhand in this integration of localism and nationalism. Today, we can meet the challenge of the tendencies and attempts to aggravate the conflict between localism and nationalism by drawing inspiration from his philosophy which itself was a gift of the national movement.

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Dr. Puranchandra Joshi, born 1928 in Almora, is an eminent sociologist and academician. His areas of specialisation range from culture, literature, political ideology to rural development, communication and economic growth. Some of his well known books are: Bhartiya Gram, Parivartan aur Vikas Ke Sanskritik Ayam, Azadi Ki Adhi Sadi, Avdharnaon Ka Sankat, Mahatma Gandhi Ki Arthik Drishti, Sanchar, Sanskriti Aur Vikas and 'Yadon Se Rachi Yatra'. His memoirs in hindi quarterly 'Tadbhav' have been highly appreciated. He has received life time achievement award from Indian Social Science Council along with other honours elsewhere. He lives in New Delhi.

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# Poetry

## **FIVE POEMS**

Alok Dhanwa

Translated by  
Minu Manjari

### **Train**

For every man there's a train  
Which takes him towards his mother's house  
Hooting and billowing smoke.

### **Rivers**

Ichhamati and Meghana  
Mahananda  
Ravi and Jhelum  
Ganga, Godavari  
Narmada and Ghaghara.

Even name taking hurts.

We meet them only when  
They come in our way.

And even then  
How little our mind goes to them



Our mind  
Clouds with the din of  
Looter's mart.

### **Sunset Skies**

So many skies of so many sunsets  
As many their shades.  
Evening on long streets  
Slowly, very slowly shadowing it.

A halo of lights around hotels.  
Crowd  
Faces in the crowd showing till far.  
Their shoulders  
Their known- unknown voices.

Someday poets will write about them  
As happenings in this very land.

### **Goats**

If there be bushes in space  
Goats certainly would be there too.  
They'd graze leaves to their fill  
And return  
To some familiar yard on earth.

When I got to the mountains  
For the first time  
On the razor blade heights

Goats met me.  
As greenery slowly vanished  
In summer from the slopes.

But shepherds  
Were nowhere  
Must be sleeping  
Under some peepal  
This pleasure is only theirs.

### **District Magistrate**

You are an inadequate speaker  
You speak in a language  
Of protest against kings  
The language of an age  
Before the birth of the parliament

Do you think  
The parliament has kept  
The language and matter of protest  
As it was in the age of kings?

And this man  
Listening to you from the other side of the table  
Very attentive, very near  
Is the D.M., not the King  
He's the D.M.  
Generally much more educated than kings  
More eager and more concerned

He's not born in any castle-  
In the desert of riches.  
He's a lad of our own lanes.  
Reared between our follies and failures  
He knows  
Our courage and greed

Much more concern and patience he has  
He's more able to create illusions  
He's more adept at keeping us distant from freedom

Close-  
A very close watch  
Needs to be kept on the best brains of government

Sometimes we may even have to learn from him.

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Alok Dhanwa, Born in 1948 in Munger, published his first poem 'Janata Ka Aadmi' in 1972. The same year saw his other poem 'Goli Daago Poster'. Both these poems became a fiery expression of Leftist movement. After this Alok Dhanwa looks at life from a different point of view and the result are poems like 'Bhaagi Hui Ladikiyaan' and 'Bruno' Ki Betiyaan'. Now he writes shorter and more sensitive poems. He has long lived in Patna. At present he is writer in residence at Mahaatama Gandhi International University, Wardha.

Minu Manjari works in an office of the Ministry of Defence. She translates in many languages. She is also doing her D. Phil. in English from Patna University. She lives in Patna.

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# Poetry

## THREE POEMS

Arun Kamal

Translated by  
Minu Manjari

### Gain

Desire to pare pencil to the keenest point  
All that remained  
was a residual stump.

### AS

As  
I can't hear many sounds  
The sound of ants nibbling sugar  
The sound of petals opening one by one  
The sound of life sap trickling in the womb  
The sound of cells breaking in my own body

In the fast, very fast blowing tempest of earth  
As I can't hear many sounds  
There are persons who can't hear  
The sound of gunfire in rapid bursts  
And ask-"what is the hue and cry on this earth?"

## Such Is The Time

Such is this time  
That the crop is reaped  
And it isn't the time for sowing anew

Fields are nude  
The soil looks dejected at this sudden exposure  
Shades of boundaries at a little distance  
Stubbles shine and  
Sheep graze far  
Mice holes  
And crushed earth before anthills

Such is this time  
That what remains is old  
And the new yet remains to come.

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Arun Kamal, Born in 1954 in Rohtas, has published three collections of poems- 'Kewal Apni Dhaar' "Saboot" and Naye Ilaake Mein'. The last published collection also won him the Sahitya Akademi Award. Arun Kamal's poems show a sincere effort to observe, to understand life. They have a keen insight into day-to day life. Nothing is preplanned here . Everything depends on the life that is observed . His poems also have a deep sense of morality. But it is not professed aloud. The implication, however, is clear-cut. He is professor of English at Patna University.

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# Poetry

## FOUR POEMS

Vimal Kumar

Translated by  
Shalini

### Who all will you kill?

Will you kill the moon?  
Or the stars?  
Or is it the jumping,  
laughing, playing,  
dancing, shouting,  
rejoicing children  
that you will kill?

Will you kill that stone?  
Or that tree?  
Or will you kill those women  
chopping vegetables,  
selling peanuts,  
cleaning rice,  
airing clothes?  
Will you kill the lake?  
Or the sea?  
Or will you kill the men  
tending fields,

manning machines  
returning home, after a hard day's work?  
Will you kill the flowers?  
Or the bees?

You will destroy the houses  
which after years of  
hard toil and labour  
are built.  
Those lanes you will desecrate  
playing and frolicking where  
boys become men.  
Those cities you will raze  
the memories of which  
chase one  
till the day one ends.

Will you kill the patients  
convalescing in hospitals?  
Or the mothers  
writhing in labour-pain?  
Will you kill all those  
with heads bowed who are  
praying to god?  
Or will you kill the birds trying to build their nests?

The running and prancing deer?  
Or the thirsty cub  
drinking water without fear?

What will you gain?

Looting the broken window  
of a falling tower?  
Snatching bits of the tattered  
blanket of a widow?  
Grabbing, from the bundle  
of the old woman,  
twigs of dried flowers?

You do not turn back  
and look that the lions in your own jungle  
have started roaring at you.  
Snakes from your own hole  
have started hissing at you.  
Will you kill the dreams?  
The expectations?  
To triumph over darkness  
will you kill the light?  
After all, to conquer  
over which death  
will you end this  
beautiful life?

### **Renaissance**

Oh what a change in me in all these years!  
Moonlight peppers my hair,  
Harsh sun has created patches on the cheeks.  
And what to say of my moustaches.  
Have fought so many times and could not save them in the end.  
Even my voice has changed.  
The way a city changes in front of your very own eyes.  
When I call out to my wife and children,



I have to tell them each time  
that it is me who is calling.  
There is a slackness in my walk now.  
People steadily walk past me in the morning.  
I cannot run the race of my childhood any more.

Indeed how changed am I in all these years.  
Of no use are old shirts to me, nor old trousers.  
With clothes, has also changed my language,  
a new grammar I have learnt.  
I have adopted a new style, and make do with it now.  
Even my own old photographs surprise me.  
Was that me sitting and laughing on that bridge?  
Was that me indeed who used to be star struck and  
loved a girl of my colony?

I have changed because the portrait of the nation has also changed.  
That is why my nephews and nieces have started saying—  
chachaji, mamaji, what a miser you are!  
And I, a little shy, a little smiling  
hug them and have started searching for some meaning in life.

I did not want to change  
when people started changing.  
When started changing the sky and the ground beneath my feet.  
I had drawn some lines in my life,  
on which I wanted to walk all my life.  
Till wherever possible, I even did that. Fell too here and there on the way.  
But I changed because time changes too.  
And on that I have no control.  
I changed because if I had not, I would have drowned straightaway in  
the river

because there is a lot of water and no boat.  
I changed, because in all this while, my society changed too.  
A society which I had been dreaming of changing all these days.  
I changed, also because it is essential to.

But I hope you would not have any complaints  
with this changed man.  
Who has at least taken care to ensure  
that when people meet him, they recognize him instantly.  
And feel compelled to say—man you are still the same.  
just the way you were ages ago,  
you haven't changed all these years.

### **Immortal Man**

That man died.  
Having walked for a thousand years in darkness,  
he lay there in the middle of the street.  
Probably crushed by a bus.

The sun had not risen,  
nor the birds chirped yet.  
A man came running  
and said—this was my friend,  
was going somewhere,  
how did he die?

The crowd on the street  
prompted a woman  
to alight from a rickshaw.  
She looked at the dead man  
and started crying.

Said—I used to love this man.  
Had got his letter only yesterday,  
He wanted to say so many things to me.

That man, was as if listening to everything.  
As if it was only sleep that he had  
fallen into, on that street.  
He wanted to narrate the cause of his death.  
He did not want people  
to have misconceptions  
about him after his death.

Just then, came an old man  
from some far-off land  
and said—this is my son.  
I knew he would not be  
able to survive in this world.

That dead man on the street  
came back to life for a while.  
Shook hands with his friend,  
kissed the woman  
and greeted his father  
with folded hands.

Said he—please go home  
and live in peace.  
Look, I am not dead yet.  
And the man became immortal  
as soon as he said that.

### **Preparing for a second journey**

Finally, I returned from your world to my own.  
Walked for many lightyears,  
traversed distances over a million, billion, trillion and a zillion miles,  
over countless mountains and rivers, peered closely at stars,  
gazed at trees, fish, sea-horses, insects and worms,  
at imposing roads, magnificent buildings, huge hotels,  
giant bridges, long embankments and deep valleys  
and deep gorges underneath them all,  
at darkness, just next to blinding light.  
I have come back now.  
To a small house in a jungle,  
near the quiet breath of a sleeping man in a garden,  
around the dreams of children frolicking  
in the playground.  
I have come back.  
After a long journey.  
Preparing for the next.

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

Shalini is a senior journalist with M.A. in English Literature from Delhi University. She has worked in leading newspapers and journals like Financial Express and India Today. Presently senior editor with a leading business weekly. Lives in Delhi.

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## FIVE POEMS

Nilesh Raghuvanshi

Translated by  
Shalini

### The Urn

The ancient and beautiful urn,  
grain and water are where now kept  
Used to house dreams earlier  
which today have often wept.

When she got married,  
the girl had brought this urn  
with her from her mother's home.  
The door of her house she  
would have seen in it  
on that entire journey.  
Her childhood stuffed in it,  
The urn was filled with her star-soaked dreams.

The girl is no more.  
No more are the star-studded days,  
nor the enchanting dreams.

The urn is there still.  
Alive in it  
the life of parents' and husbands' house.  
It still reeks of the desire to live.  
It still traps the woman's wail.  
Registered in it is how  
she kept looking after her house.

Lest someone else breaks down,  
lest someone else goes astray  
The urn rolls all day in the house,  
trying to save some innocent dreams.

### **Father**

Quivering like a candle in the wind  
comes his voice over the telephone.

From far-off,  
sad and anxious,  
covering miles  
over telephone wires.

Grumbling and cursing  
the phone in one moment  
clinging to it the next  
like a child.

Twinkling like a star  
dropping, connecting voice.

How dear it is to hear him so!  
His voice, sharp like a thunderbolt  
how frail it sounds over telephone.

For long would he have held on to it.  
Father, caressing his  
children,  
long-distance over telephone.

### **Mother**

I remember you  
when I see a woman  
nervous on the platform.

A basket in hand,  
covering her head with her sari,  
searching for someone,  
she stands.

What frightens you  
even today, O lady?  
Does the chirping  
of birds  
beguile us in vain everyday?

### **Girl**

There is no sky in  
her dream.

Nor trees, mountains  
or the scorching  
heat of the noon.  
Not even the warmth  
of the morning sun.  
A chirping, dancing  
girl when she is seventeen  
thinks only of tying the knot  
when she is eighteen.

Happiness she always searched  
in others.  
Never looked for anything within.  
Was taught this every moment  
that a girl's happiness  
lies inside  
the four walls of a house.  
The girl only  
thinks about a house.

The girl who is the life of the house  
will become a quiet river one day.  
Quietly will she do all chores,  
there will be no spring in her gait.  
Her feet will become heavy one day  
but never out of dancing too much.  
For aeons will she tread slowly on the earth.  
For tread she will,  
but never think about the earth, the girl.



Never willed anybody  
for a girl to sit on a tree.  
She herself never thought  
of taking flight like a bird,  
or flying high in the sky.

Never will a girl be able to see a river  
descending from the sky,  
the mountain rising from the river,  
the birds flying over  
the mountains.  
None will ever reach the  
eyes of the girl.

O dear sister  
Who has just turned seventeen,  
why don't you run off in the fields?  
Or sing a song?  
Why isn't there no bounce  
In your dreams?

### **Books**

Publishers!  
Reduce ye the prices of books.  
This is not some expensive wine.  
Create a desire in your heart  
that children come running after books  
the way they run after butterflies.

I want to keep books  
as close to me  
as are my dreams.  
Books, you stay here with me  
along with my unfulfilled desires,  
lest in this maze of coins  
gets entangled the loneliness of my dreams.

I want to gift these books  
to those who were going to be mine  
but got lost in the game of hide and seek.  
To those too who could never be mine.  
In this twenty-two year long life  
never could I pen my name on any book.

O costly books,  
please become less dearer.  
I want to descend  
in your mysterious, enchanting world.

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Nilesh Raghuvanshi, born 1969 is a postgraduate in Hindi and linguistics.  
She works at Doordarshan, Bhopal. Recipient of Bharat Bhushan Agrawal  
puraskar, she has three collections of poems. She also writes for children.

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## POST MODERNISM: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Obviously post-modernism refers to something of a process 'after' modernism. But unfortunately it is a highly contested conception, often meaning contradictory things to different scholars and practitioners, like a Hindu mythological story of seven blind persons who described different things by touching different parts of an elephant, but could not recognise as an elephant. The term 'post-modernism' was first used by John Watkins Chapman in 1870's to mean post-impressionism. Later, in 1934, it was used to refer to a reaction against the difficulty and experimentalism of modernism. In 1939, Arnold J Toybee used it to mean the end of the 'modern' western bourgeois order dating back seventeenth century. Further in 1945, Bernard Smith used it to mean the movement of socialist realism in painting. Later, in 1959, Irving Howe and in 1960 Harry Levin used it to mean a decline in high modernism. Further in different disciplines and genres of art the term was used to mean varyingly. For instance, in the arena of architecture, the post-modern architecture turned to the vernacular and history re-introducing 'a humanising narrative'. However, as points out Hans Bertens ('The Idea of the Postmodern', 1995), for most of American cities, post-modernism is a move away from the narrative and representation – a move towards a radical aesthetic autonomy, towards pure formalism. Actually the functional and formalized shapes and spaces of the modernist movement were replaced by the diverse aesthetics; styles collide, form is adopted for its own sake, and so on. Philip Johnson, John Burgee, Robert Venturi, Frank Gehry etc. are post-modern architects.

Second, in the field of dance criticism, according to Sally Banes, this term has been used to an early movement toward functionality, purity and self –reflexivity and subsequently to ‘rekindling of interest in narrative structure’.

Third, in the field of language, the term post-modern referred to combine polemical tone and new coinages. Further it sees language as the idea of ‘play’- the meaning of a series of ‘markings’ is imputed by the reader, not by the author, hence the reader *constructs* or *interprets* the text. Post modernism in language has been identified with poor writing and communication skills – ‘pomobabble’ illustrates this trend here.

Fourth, in the arena of art, this term denotes diversity and contradiction; it rejects rigid genre boundaries and favours eclecticism, the mixing of ideas and forms. It promotes parody, irony and playfulness (‘jouissance’). It talks of ‘accessibly’ seeking more connection with audiences. It prefers mixing of words with art, collage and other movements in order to create more multiplicity of medium and message. Here mass media is regarded as a fundamental subject for art. It also elevated cinema in artistic discussions because of blurring of distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ arts and also because of the recognition that cinema represented the creation of simulacra that was later duplicated in arts.

Fifth, in the arena of photography, ‘content’ is associated with realism and

modernism, whereas post-modern is associated with anti-representational, anti-narrative, deconstructive photography of Cindy Sherman, Sherry Levine and Richard Prince.

Sixth, in the field of literature post-modernism stands for expansion, return of reference, and celebration of fragmentation. To them, the present is different from the modern era, hence it requires a new literary sensibility. Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Don DeLillo and David Foster Wallace may be put in this category.

Seventh, in the field of philosophy, Thomas Kuhn and David Bohm are seen as post-modern as they reject mathematics as a strictly neutral point of view.

Finally, in the field of communication, Marshall McLuhan observed that ‘medium is message’- the ability of broadcasting was seen as a liberating force in human affairs, though some scholars viewed television as ‘a vast wasteland’. In the second wave of digital communication, with the introduction of internet, scholars like Esther Dyson, it makes fragmentation of modern society a positive feature and anybody can get access to the artistic cultural and community experiences of his or her choice easily. Thus it is presumed that fragmentation of society and communication gives the individual more autonomy to create his or her environment and narrative.

Needless to say that various scholars have talked of ‘post industrial society’

(Daniel Bell), or 'post-modern time' (C. Wright Mills) or age of 'mass culture' (B.R. Burg). Further there have been declarations about several types of ends by social scientists and litterateurs. For instance, William Hamilton talked of 'the radical theory and the death of God', (1996), Daniel Bell talked of 'end of ideology', J Derrida talked of 'end of man, (1982), F. Fukuyama talked of 'end of history and the last man', (1991) Victor Vergin talked of 'end of art', (1986), S. Karnan talked of 'death of literature' (1990), Rolland Barthes talked of 'death of author' and Michel Foucault talked of 'death of critic'. These declarations on deaths have some manifest or latent connections with the post-modernism, or better to say post-modernity.

In 1960's, during the period of 'counter-culture', post-modernism was seen as 'an attitude of counter-culture' or a new elective and radically domesticated sensibility of rejecting the exclusivist and repressive character of liberal humanism and its institution. In 1970's, post-modernism entered into the structuralism, taking inspiration from Rolland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuge and Felix Guattari. To quote Hans Bertens, "Like post-structuralism, this post-modernism rejects the empirical idea that language can represent reality, that the world is accessible to us through language because its objects are mirrored in the language we use. From this empirical point of view, language is

transparent, window on the world, and knowledge arises out of our direct experience of reality undistorted and not contaminated by language. Post-modernism gives up on language's representational function and follows post-structuralism in the idea that language constitutes, rather than reflects the world and that knowledge is, therefore, always distorted by language that is by the historical circumstances and the specific environment in which it arises." Thus a post-modern subject is largely other-directed, that is determined within and constituted by language.

Subsequently, in late 1970's and early 1980's, the post-structuralist modernism of Barthes and Derrida became linguistic, i.e., textual in orientation. Their attack on foundational notions of language, representation and the subject is combined with a strong emphasis on 'free play' (Derrida) and 'inter-textuality'. According to R Barthes ('Image-Music-Text', 1977), a text, with the 'death of author' is a 'multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash'. Further a text is 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture'. They talked of the 'end of representation'-failure of language to represent anything outside itself- and death of the subject. But it gives birth to a problem. To Brenda K Marshall ('Teaching the Post-modern: Fiction and Theory', 1992), since all the representations are political in that they

cannot reflect the ideological frameworks, the end of representation leads us to 'whose history gets told? In whose name? For what purpose?'

On the other hand, in 1980's, the second strand of post-structuralist post-modernism, that of Foucault and Lacan, accepted the actuality of the textuality and sign, of representations that do not represent but emphasised on the power and the constitution of subject. To the positivists knowledge was neutral and objective while to the Marxists it was politically emancipatory, but for Foucault and Lacan, it is necessarily bound up with power, hence suspect. They rightly question the power inherent in knowledge, language and discourse. They desire to undo the institutionalised hierarchies and hegemony of a single discursive system through a focus on difference, pluriformity and multiplicity. This strand stands for the 'other'- women, coloured people, non-heterosexuals and children. Foucauldian view had a democratising influence within cultural institutions and in the humanities, and brought post-modernism closer to feminism and multiculturalism. Foucault raised some fundamental questions: Is it possible to distinguish between the claims of truth and those of power? Is power outside the knowledge or is knowledge distinguishable from power? Does science, in the age of development, coming closer to the truth finally remain far off from the truth? Does knowledge become more capable as a technology of repression? Foucault

provided five major premises: First, in the history of modernity there is unbreakable relationship between knowledge and power, humanism and terror, reform and hegemony; and logic always became helpful to totalise the forms of hegemony.

Second, power does not have only one source (state), rather power has many thoughtful behaviours-rules related to sexuality, jail, etc a study of which is possible in many autonomous areas; there was no history as an enterprise of freedom, rather there were histories of power, production and subordination.

Third, the real problem is not the exploitation of labour but 'the technology of body'-i.e., 'normal' is entered into the human body through violent religious, moral, justice-related, medicine-related and sexuality-related measure.

Fourth, power is scattered in numerous speeches and behaviours but there is no network of individual or institution(s) or interests in which the behaviour of power may be sought. Every speech of power constitutes its own point of tension and struggle and the resistance may be only multiple, local and temporary. Thus power is prior to history.

Fifth, power produces man and puts him in his fixed place.

Thus these premises are acceptable but unfortunately Foucault does not give due focus to question state power, colonial power and industrial capitalism's power.

According to Jameson and Baudrillard, the commodification of late capitalism has blurred the distinction between the economic and the cultural. Industrial production has been replaced by 'semiurgy' (Baudrillard)- the production of signs. Second, the epistemological orientation of modernism- 'knowing' -gives way to the antological orientation of post-modernism- 'modes of being'. Further, modernist self-reflexiveness, its urge to question itself and its own foundations in its search for essential timeless meaning is replaced by a post-modernist view of meaning as inevitably local, contingent and self-sufficient. Third, as Fiedler points out, the anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism, repressive and reductive rationalism and elitism of modernism gives way to the liberating, democratic, open, respectful to both humans and non-humans and sensitive to desire aspects of post-modernism.

Further, existential post-modernists like William Spanos viewed that the criticism can make 'a difference in the world' and for this an existential subject is very much required. But he does not recognise the priority of language. In other words, he does not incline towards the rhetoric, towards the surrender to language and towards the 'end of man' (Derrida's terms).

In his book, 'The Post-modern Condition': A report on knowledge, (1984) J.F. Lyotard defines post-modernism as a distrust or 'incredulity towards meta-

narratives'. To him, modernity sees history in context of two major myths; history as a story of the freedom (as originated in the French revolution); myth of history as turning of the ideal into real through logic. But Lyotard considers that talk about humanity for modernity is to get entangled in the universalism of enlightenment and this gives birth to integrated metanarrative, whose tendency is autocratic. So he wants the replacement of manufacturing of material goods by the information as a central concern in post-industrial societies (of the west). Now, he says, knowledge has become 'an informational commodity' and science has abandoned its original integrity and has become just an instrument in the hands of power. Meta or grand narratives justify the objective of western civilisation as 'whiteman's burden' is popularly spoken by the so-called rational western elites. But, now these meta narratives have been replaced by the numerous 'language games' (to use Wittgenstein's terms), ranging from Wittgenstein's modes of discourse-several forms of utterance (denotative, performative, prescriptive, etc) to the discourses used by social institutions and progressions to full scale narrative. These language games may have only limited social and historical validity due to their very nature. In French post-modernism there have been two camps: Saussurean Camp - (the early Barthes, Lacan and Derrida) focusing on language & structure and Nietzsche's Camp- (Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari) focusing on

power and desire. There was a general drift from linguistic position to power and desire position but Lyotard reoriented from the latter to the former, celebrating desire even in its negative manifestations. Deleuze and Guattari perceive desire as a positive force but it could be appropriated for negative ends. Lyotard says in no uncertain terms that subject, representation, meaning, sign and truth are links in a chain that must be broken as a whole for political emancipation. Further, Lyotard rejects the binary opposition between science and narrative as science is also a kind of meta narrative. Three meta narratives legitimize science:

- a) creation of wealth- science is considered legitimate because it leads to progress and is essentially a drive for industrial- commercial growth.
- b) Working subject- science is considered to serve for the liberation of humanity from exploitation, drudgery etc.
- c) dialectics of spirit- science is considered legitimate because it leads to the emancipation of ideas.

But these three meta narratives are falsified in real life situation as science has also given birth to the arms race, nuclear bomb, and attack on less powerful countries by super powers like US and USSR (now only one super power, US). The very claim of science for objectivity and value- neutrality is suspected and, therefore, Lyotard argues to 'abandon

meta narratives and embrace the post-modern condition of uncertainty and relativity'.

In his book 'Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture' (1966), Robert Venturi preferred for the 'difficult unity of inclusion' to modernism's 'easy unity of exclusion'. He also preferred elements like 'hybrid', to 'pure', 'ambiguous' to 'articulated', 'conventional' to 'designed', 'accommodating' to 'excluding', 'redundant' to 'simple', 'inconsistent' and 'equivocal' to 'direct and clear', 'perverse and impersonal', 'boring and interesting' and 'vestigial and innovating'. Thus he stands for the 'messy vitality over obvious unity'. Thus preferring 'both-and' to 'either-or' categorisation, his architecture evokes many levels of meanings and combinations of focus, as various levels of meanings come in pairs and a new meaning is superimposed upon or merges with, an older meaning. To achieve double meaning, one needs to use conventions or 'vestigial' elements in new ways. Thus Venturi does not break completely with the immediate past, unlike some post-modernists, who focus only on the present. In the context of Hindi literature one may say that. Nirala and Muktibodh are as much significant as Dharmvir Bharati and Agyeya, representing different shades of Indian social reality in Hindi poetry.

Later Charles Jenks developed a concept of 'double-coded post-modernism' ('The Language of Post-



Modern Architecture', 1977), implying post-modern pluralism. His perspective is 'committed to engaging current issues to changing the present' but he has no interest in Avant-gardist principle of 'continual innovation or incessant revolution'. He is inclined to metaphysical buildings, 'the vernacular', 'historical memory' and 'local context' though indulging in modernist strategies like irony and parody. Jenks tries to get over the modernist elitism not by dropping it but 'by extending the language of architecture in many different ways into the vernacular, towards tradition and the commercial slangs of the street'- thus his double-coded architecture speaks both to the elites and the ordinary people by 'extending' modernism.

Subsequently Robert Stern ('The Doubles of Post Modern', 1980) talked of 'traditional' post-modernism and 'deconstructionist' or 'schismatic' post-modernism. Traditional post-modernism depends on representational as opposed to 'abstract or conceptual modes' and it 'opens up artistic production to a public role which modernism, by virtue of its self-referential formal strategies, had denied itself'- here he finds a 'genuine and unsentimental humanism' that expresses itself in a deeply felt sense of 'social and cultural responsibility'. Thus, to him, post-modernism implies humanism in art—an act of communication, rather than of production or revelation, Similarly Heinrich Klotz's post-modernism

('History of Post-modern Architecture', 1988) is more humane with 'fictional representation', 'poetry, 'improvisation and spontaneity, 'history and irony', and 'contextualism'.

From above it may be inferred (Bertens) that there have been, at least, three types of post-modernism:

- a) a return of representation and narrative-especially in painting;
- b) an attack on representation and narrative (Barthes, Derrida)-denial of presence, origins and coherent subject;
- c) a non-discursive immediacy, a sacred fullness- artist and his art is seen in shamanistic terms, a dialogic space is preferred to a monolithic mode.

F.J. Schuurman, in his book, 'Beyond the Impasse' (1993), talks of heterogeneity of post-modernism due to its three sub-routes:

- a) Neo-conservative communitarianism- here social anomie is opposed by a return to tradition and history- some kind of romanticism.
- b) Progressive communitarianism- In lieu of socialism, search for other types of local sources of resistance against governing power and knowledge system- new social movements. Foucault wants to involve there even the hospital patients, prisoners and gypsies.

- c) Nihilism- to Baudrillard, the masses would become so numbed by media bombardment that they can no longer be indoctrinated.

Similarly, Habermas distinguishes between three different conservative positions:

- a) The 'pre-modernism' of the 'old conservatives'- e.g. F.R. Leavis.
- b) 'anti-modernism' of the 'young conservatives' (Foucault, Derrida).
- c) 'post-modernism' of 'neo-conservatives' (Daniel Bell).

The neo-conservatives accept the finality of the separation of the spheres of science, morality and art from each other and also from the 'life-world' (to use Habermas', terms). Thus their functional rationality is at the cost of morality in the social organisation (politics)- and this position cannot be acceptable theoretically and practically.

In the long post-modern debate, Habermas and Jameson took part for traditional left, Baudrillard for radical left, and Lyotard and Rorty for domesticated post-modernism. Habermas defended the still unrealised potential of the enlightenment but finds monolithic rationality as the cause of the ills of modernity, hence pleads for the communicative reason ('Theory of Communicative Action', 1981). To Habermas, there is a problem of three 'cultural value spaces' that Max Weber distinguished- the theoretical (science),

the practical (morality) and the aesthetic (art); and due to specific innerlogic of each, these cannot be reconciled. These have different forms of augmentation-empirical- theoretical discourse, moral discourse and aesthetic discourse- Habermas calls these as 'rational complexes' which have become exclusive coteries of experts, hence instead of enriching daily life (as enlightenment expected) these have distanced themselves from 'the life world'. Further, under 'capitalist modernisation' the empirical-theoretical or cognitive-instrumental rationality complex (means-end rationalism) has dominated and marginalised other modes of knowing. Therefore, in Habermas' view, it cannot be modernity. Further Habermas gives language a central place. Habermas moves from modernistic, subjectivistic 'philosophy of consciousness' to a 'philosophy of inter-subjectivity'- i.e. of 'communication and consensus'. This inter-subjectivity is all - inclusive and brings 'ultimate consensus', enabled by communicative reason- thus anti-representation would be emancipatory. Criticising Habermas, however Lyotard observes that since consensus is only 'a particular state of discussion, not its end', political emancipation may be realised through dissensus, not consensus. Actually, to him, consensus is the end of freedom and thought while dissensus allows us to have freedom and to think- that is, to extend our possibilities. Thus, unlike Habermas, for Lyotard emancipation depends on the

perpetuation of dissensus – on a permanent crisis in representation, on an ever-greater awareness of the contingent and localised- the unstable-nature of all norms for representing the world. If we take a critical view of consensus and dissensus, we find that these are two poles (black and white) but the social reality often lies in between (grey): there may be ‘consensual dissensus’ (of low, medium or high degree) or ‘dissensual consensus’ (of low, medium or high degree). That is, there is nothing like absolute consensus or absolute dissensus. In Indian context often the consensus is achieved through suppression of the marginalized people’s voice either by domination (force) or by cultural hegemony( consent), hence it is less democratic and less emancipatory. On the other hand, dissensus implies to be more democratic and more emancipatory because the voice of the marginalized people has an autonomous space for expression of world views.

Further, for anti-thetical radicalism of Robert Rorty, there is a need for a ‘detheoreticised sense of community’. He finds Lyotard right in his rejection of meta-narratives and of Habermas’ ‘universalistic philosophy’ (search for communicative rationality) but, on the other hand, he finds Habermas right in his insistence on ‘liberal politics’ that post –modernists want to abandon in order to avoid universalistic philosophy. But this is an ambivalence of Rorty

because for a detheoreticised sense of community, one has to go beyond liberal politics of civil liberties to emancipatory politics of inclusion and diversity.

Baudrillard thinks that all repressive and reductive strategies of power systems are already present in the internal logic of the sign, as well as those of exchange value and political economy. Therefore, to restore meaning (symbol) is a ‘total revolution’ (not to be confused with Jaiprakash Narayan’s terms)- but it is not the proletariat’s revolution. This radical anti-representation and his subordination of political economy of the sign (based on consumption) led him to dissociate from his earlier Marxism. Since Marxism is still associated with ‘western rationalism’, to Baudrillard, it is only “a limited petite bourgeois critique, one more step in the banalisation of life toward the ‘good use’ of the social”. He clearly observes that the concept of mode of production now gives way to a ‘mode of signification’ that, in turn, is controlled by the ‘code’. He is of the view that the mass media prevent communication because of their very form. In the first order of ‘simulacra’- period from renaissance to the industrial revolution- the value was still ‘natural’ (grounded) but in the second order (of industrial era) value was commercial- based on exchange. In the third order, at present (post- industrial era), an order of differential value of sign- of ‘simulation’- is controlled by the ‘code’. Now, especially through electronic media the

'hyper real' has replaced the 'real'. Thus advertising and television shows have destroyed both the public and space- now advertising intrudes everything as the public space (the street, monument, market, scene) disappears and the private space 'the most intimate processes of our life become the virtual feeding grounds of the media'. Thus the distinction between the two spaces disappears and what is left is the 'obscenity' of 'transparence and immediate visibility when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication- this leads to a schizophrenic state (too great a proximity of everything) and a loss of the real because the information now does not produce meaning. Its one concrete example may be found in the role of media in the general elections of Lok Sabha in India in Apr-May 2009, where the mass media as a gatekeeper became a thief because a large section of both electronic and print media adopted following practices:

- a) A substantial part of the pure and exclusive space of news was sold at a high rate to the political parties and candidates contesting elections;
- b) Some newspapers published special supplements or even published weekly magazines/papers; e.g.; Hindustan (Hindi) published 'connexion' for some localities of Delhi/NCR; Dainik Jagaran published Plus in order

to devote maximum priced space for publicity;

- c) News, views and ads were highly mixed up, so that the false may be shown as real.
- d) Many newspapers circulated new rates of publishing coverage of election news items of political parties and candidates- these rates were separate for black and white, and coloured;
- e) Both the media mughals and editors of such dailies/periodicals did not feel in this act a sense of immorality or guilt, though it was a clear violation of code of conduct for the press;
- f) Some correspondents/stringers/ editors took a lump sum amount from political parties/candidates for publishing only positive news for the entire period of canvassing- here a clear cut commission for different levels was fixed;
- g) Political parties/candidates prefer red ads in the form of news items because ordinary masses trust the news items more than the views and ads.

These are dangerous and unhealthy practices cutting the spinal chord of participatory democracy whose cardinal principle of freedom of press is under threat.

Further Baudrillard rightly observes that often information turns into non-

information because of media's binary structure of question and answer that programmes all responses through opinion polls, exit polls, game shows and reality shows- there the structured questions expect structured answers (e.g. the audience/readers have only restricted choices). In Indian case, in Kaun Banega Crorepati?(KBC), Dus Ka Dum, Kya Aap Panchavi Pass Hain? and other game shows, most of the questions related to mythology (that was often shown as real history), fashion, styles and so on. For instance, in the game show of Dus Ka Dum one question (asked by filmstar Salman Khan) was: what percentage of Indian women use their 'aanchal' (front of saree) for different purposes? Or how many males were caught red handed cheating their girlfriends? Obviously these superficial questions are not relevant but only if their responses match with the pre-determined answers, the players get a huge amount as reward. Thus real questions and real information get replaced by such non-serious and hyperreal questions. That is why Baudrillard rightly avers that while the real is produced, hyperreal is reproduced – it is a reproduced real, the real as 'the generation by models of a real without origin or reality', constituted from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models- 'a meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another reproductive medium'. He is of the view that in the hyperreal the idea of representation has

become irrelevant, and labour production, the political, everything persists but lacks all referentiality and is reduced to the status of meaningless sign.

But all assumptions of Baudrillard cannot be accepted. I tend to agree with Mark Poster, Craig Calhoun as well as S. Best and Douglas Kellner who criticise Baudrillard on following grounds:

- a) he does not define terms like 'code' and his writing style is 'hyperbolic and declarative', often 'lacking sustained, systematic analysis';
- b) he totalises his insights and does not qualify and delimit his claims;
- c) he paints a very bleak view of the world simply basing on television images, ignoring social (race, gender), political (state) and economic situations in the real life world;
- d) he ignores the positive side of media – e.g. providing vital information about wars, communal/caste violence and so on;
- e) he often takes contemporary trends as finalities;
- f) since there is a substantial internal differentiation among 'the masses', hence it needs to be studied by focusing on cultural variation.

Frederic Jameson makes an important observation that the boundaries or

separations between high culture and mass or popular culture have disappeared in present age. Like Baudrillard, he also finds a causal relationship between new developments in western capitalism and the rise of the post-modern- 'a new society of the media or the spectacle or multinational capitalism', characterised by new consumption patterns, fast changing fashion and style, planned obsolescence, ubiquitous presence of advertising and the media (especially TV), explosion of suburbia (at the expense of city and rural areas) and automobile culture. In this list, one may add internet, mobile phone and fast food culture. The deeper logic of new social system has led to 'the disappearance of a sense of history' in the culture, to a persuasive depthlessness and to a 'perpetual present' from which the memory of tradition has disappeared. In post-modern art, he observes, the deeper logic of new social system brings two features: (a) 'pastiche' and (b) 'schizophrenic discontinuity'. Pastiche is a 'blank parody'- without parody's 'ulterior motive, without satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something normal compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. In this context we may cite the various laughter programmes on Hindi channels in India or even such programmes like 'America's Funniest Videos' on foreign English channels which are more imitative, artificially comic, unrealistic and remote from normality.

Further these programmes make the audience insensitive to the victims of accidents and even tragedies – laughing when one falls! On the other hand, his concept of 'schizophrenic discontinuity' is a language disorder resulting from the subject's failure 'to accede fully into the realm of speech and language'. He elaborates that since language gives us our experience of temporality, human time, past, present, memory, the persistence of personal identity', such a failure leads to an absence of the experience of temporal continuity in the patient who is condemned to live in a perpetual, always discontinuous, present: 'schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence.

Thus it transpires that Jameson's post-modernism is 'the transformation of reality into images, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents-history has disappeared and the present is dissolved in images. In his view, the pastiche and radical discontinuity had only a marginal place in the 'modernism proper' but now they have a central place in the contemporary cultural production. Unlike Lyotard, who perceived anti-representationism as a necessary defensive manoeuvre against the terror of representational consensus, Jameson argues about the impossibility of representation as the end of an emancipatory politics. He saw later (1984) post-modernism 'dialectically as

catastrophe and progress together'. He again (1991) talks of a new concept of 'cognitive mapping', that is a code word for 'class consciousness'- thus he shares Marxist representation of history as a story of class struggles, hence issues of gender, race and ethnicity are not significant in his theorizing. He borrows conception of semi-autonomy from Althusser, notion of schizophrenia from Lacan, Deleuze & Guattari, concepts of 'intensities' and 'sublime' from Lyotard, idea of 'simulacrum' from Deleuze and Baudrillard, and idea of 'homeopathic' strategy ( a version of 'fatal' strategies) from Baudrillard. He rightly says that under post-modernism feelings become 'intensities' (Lyotard) in that these " are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria".

Later Jameson followed E. Mandel's 'Late Capitalism' (1978) regarding periodisation: the first period, dominated by market capitalism and by its aesthetic corollary 'realism'; second period of monopoly or imperialist capitalism that gave rise to modernism; third period (current one) of late capitalism that corresponds to post-modern aesthetic- there is expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas, especially in the west late capitalism has penetrated and commodified representation (media) itself. To him, current technology- computer, TV set and other ' machines of reproduction' rather than production- no longer possesses ' the capacity for

representation' that characterised the technologies of earlier stages of capitalism. But disagreeing with him, Mike Davis is of the view that modernism, at least in architecture, remained the functional aesthetic of late capitalism. Second, Jameson's focus on class struggle as the centre of political struggle- working class as the agent par excellence of progressive change- has not been proved true in many situations ranging from factories to nation-states going beyond class struggle. Third, he has not given due focus on feminist, ethnic and ecological politics that has been of primary significance in both developed and developing countries.

J. Derrida talks of 'difference' 'decentering' and 'deconstruction' as there is no universal and final truth. Hence a text has several interpretations, meanings, by the readers, independent of author's intention- thus there is 'death of author', as interpretation by the reader is a different species of production. Therefore, there are multiple local possibilities, no absolute, universal, objective, permanent, homogenous and single possibility. Second, knowledge goes beyond the parameters of scientism (western science and technology) as there are indigenous narratives (stories and fables invented by people to give meaning and significance to their everyday life world) that exist in local, personal and social contexts. Derrida rejects metaphysical premises- the transcendent signifier – upon which empiricism is built.

Thus his post-modernism gives up language's representational function and argues that language constitutes, rather than represents/ reflects the world and knowledge is, therefore, always distorted by language that consists of a set of 'signifiers' that do not give access to reality. To him, western philosophy largely rests on binary opposites like truth-falsity, unity-diversity, man-woman etc whereby the former is considered superior to the latter. But at present symbols have become more important than the message they carry, hence binary distinctions between science and ideology, reason and rhetoric, essence and semblance become blurred due to apparent reality created by mass media.

Thus from above, it is crystal clear that there are several streams/routes of post-modernism. However, its following tenets may be considered common to most of these streams:

- a) language constitutes, rather than represents, the reality of the life world;
- b) the autonomous subject of modernity is replaced by a post-modern agent whose identity is largely other- determined and always in process;
- c) there are no final, universal, homogeneous, uniform and permanent truths;
- d) there are several meanings (due to difference in culture),

independent of author's intention, depending on the reader's interpretations of text through deconstruction;

- e) there is no objective, scientific grand/meta narrative, rather binary opposition between science and narrative is no more present in social life world; western science is Eurocentric and ignores indigenous knowledge systems of developing countries;
- f) Mode of production has given way to the mode of cultural reproduction (i.e. signs, images, media), hence economy's central place in modernity is challenged and 'decentering' is required;
- g) Knowledge counts only within a given power structure;
- h) It gives importance to local specificity, difference, diversity, plurality and multiculturalism. It questions the state politics of modernity.

But on a critical examination of post-modernism, I find the following demerits in post-modernism:

First, though post-modernism rightly questions economic determinism postulated by Marxism's mainstream, it, too, suffers from cultural determinism as it ultimately gives culture the central place in society and thus its conception of multipolarity is lost.

Second, due to its rejection of scientific knowledge and universal grand



theories, it has encouraged identity politics based on ethnicity, gender, caste, religion, region and language- and this has resulted into several divisive and fissiparous tendencies leading to socio-cultural fission in most of the developing societies that have been struggling for social cohesion and national integration over a long period of 'divide and rule' policy of colonial powers there. Actually the failure of modernity project in most of the developing countries should not be misunderstood as post-modern situation- this misunderstanding is leading to political demobilisation and neo-conservatism. But it is also true that modernisation is not westernization, hence developing countries should opt for culture-specific routes for modernisation. As Anthony Giddens rightly says: "No knowledge under conditions of modernity is knowledge in the 'old' sense, where to know is to be 'certain' ". He observes that there is nothing like post-modernity because critique of certainty is inherent in modernity itself. So we are experiencing 'radicalised modernity', not post-modernity. Actually scientific temper is to be preferred to scientism and technologism. For instance, many human traditions and customs in developing countries like India (Sati system, child marriage, preventing widow-remarriage, polygamy, purdah, untouchability, etc) need to be seen from a rational –scientific angle and ultimately to be questioned for human liberation.

Third, post-modernists are often neo-populists, who romanticise tribal culture, peasant culture, locality, ethnicity and feminism, forgetting that class analysis may be an additional useful mode of understanding social reality that is complex and sometimes goes beyond the purview of gender, ethnicity, language, region/locality and culture. Actually post-modernists often forget their own preference for 'and –both', in lieu of 'either-or'. Thus multi-dimensionality of social reality needs to be perceived critically. In 2009 general elections of Lok Sabha the Indian voters, by and large, rejected the identity politics and voted for development.

Fourth, post-modernists lack depth of understanding and focus on superficiality, appearance or virtual reality created by media. No doubt, media often blur truth and falsity but a conscious and critical thinking may differentiate between content and form, message and medium. Actually as a 'mantra' of Rigveda rightly says: 'Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti'- truth is one but the scholars interpret it differently. A mythical story of seven blind men unfolds that they touched one part of an elephant each and described differently as per their sense but were unable to recognise the whole (elephant), because of lack of knowledge as whole is always greater than the sum total of its parts. Unfortunately, most of these post-modernists are unable to see the social reality as a whole.

Fifth, post-modernists don't give due importance to history, rather they talk of 'end of history' but in practice historical analysis of social reality or even of texts gives an added advantage of knowing the context in the past and linking that with the present. Any social reality cannot be seen fully in the present, as it partly owes to the past, to the memory and to the history of institutions, organisations and societies. Time- space dimensions play a significant role in critical understanding of a social phenomenon or a text- a text requires a context.

Finally, most of the post-modernists

deconstruct the text for its understanding but they don't reconstruct it and thereby delinking- disconnection- leaves a gap or void or vacuum. Deconstruction may be the first phase of understanding but reconstruction is the second, and equally important, phase of understanding in totality.

Thus we find that post-modernism has several streams. It has added a new perspective in understanding of a text by giving significance to difference, deconstruction and decentering but its over-emphasis on these concepts leads to an eccentric view ignoring other facets of social life or a text.

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# Interview

## A CORRESPONDENCE WITH PREMCHAND

Indranath Madaan

Translated by  
Sanjay Dev

*After completion of student life, Indranath Madaan had, in 1934, twice sent Premchand a few questions which were replied to by him on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1934 and 26<sup>th</sup> December 1934. Premchand's first reply is available in Hindi, and the second in English. Here's the Hindi interview by correspondence.*

**Madaan** : How would you like to recall your childhood memories?

**Premchand** : My household childhood memories are quite normal. Neither very happy, nor gloomy. I lost my mother when I was eight. My memories prior to that are very blurred. How would I sit and watch my ailing mother who unlike all good mothers, was equally fond as she was tough whenever required.

**Madaan** : Tell us about your early writing period? When did you start writing and how you shifted to Hindi from Urdu?

**Premchand** : I began writing for Urdu weeklies and then for monthlies. Writing was a pure hobby for me. I never dreamt that one day I would finally be a writer. I was a government employee and wrote during my holidays. I had an insatiable hunger for novels. I would devour whatever I could lay my hand on. I had no grace to distinguish between a good and bad one. My first

article was published in 1901 and first book in 1903. This literary creation merely satisfied my ego, and nothing else. Initially I kept writing on topical incidents. My stories were translated by others in 1914 and they were published in Hindi magazines. Then I learnt Hindi and started writing for Saraswati. After that came my 'Sewa Sadan' and I quit the job and started living my independent literary life.

**Madaan** : Any affair happened in your life?

**Premchand** : No, I never had any affair with anyone. Life itself kept me so involved, and earning bread was such a task that it offered little space for romancing. There were some minor attractions as happen to everybody, but I can't call them love affairs.

**Madaan** : How do you see an ideal woman?

**Premchand** : To me an ideal woman is an embodiment of service, sacrifice, purity- all rolled into one. A sacrifice that never ends, a service with smile, and a purity nobody can raise a finger at.

**Madaan** : Tell us something about the romance of your married life and some other facts?

**Premchand** : There is nothing like romance in my married life. It is just about an ordinary thing. My first wife passed away in 1904. She was an unfortunate woman. Not a bit beautiful, and though I was not satisfied with her

I kept carrying on without any grudge or grouse, as all old husbands would do. When she died, I married a child widow, and am happy with her now. She has developed some literary aptitude and writes stories sometimes. She is an intrepid, bold and uncompromising simple woman who is dutiful and sentimental to a fault. She participated in non-cooperation movement and was sent to prison. I'm happy with her. I Never ask anything of her which she can't give. She may break, but can't be bent.

**Madaan** : What's life been like to you? Whether economically you've been content?

**Premchand** : To me, life has always been work, work and work only! When I was in government service, even then I gave my entire time to literature. I enjoy working. You are hard put to it when faced with money problems. Otherwise, I'm quite content with my luck. I got more than I deserved. I'm a failure, economically. Can't do business, and hardship never leaves me. Have never been a journalist, but have been forced to be one by circumstances, and whatever little I earned from literature, I lost in journalism.

**Madaan** : How do you weave your story line?

**Premchand** : In weaving a story line, I'm guided by the idea of bringing out whatever is beautiful and manly in human characters. It is a complex process.

Sometimes inspired by an individual, or by an incident, or a dream, but it is necessary for me that my stories have a psychological ground. I always welcome suggestions of friends, with pleasure.

**Madaan** : Where do you derive your characters from?

**Premchand** : Most of my characters have been picked from real life, and have been imperceptibly veiled. Unless

a character has some existence in reality, it remains uncertain like a shadow, and lacks in assuming convincing force.

**Madaan** : What's your style of working? Whether you write regularly?

**Premchand** : Unlike Romain Rolland, I do believe in writing regularly.

*Courtesy 'Nirvachit Kahaniyan'  
Ed. by Vikas Narayan Rai*

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Indranath Madaan; Late professor and Head of Hindi Deptt. in University of Punjab, He was a leading critic and author of several books notable among them being 'Alochna aur alochna', 'Kriti Ki Rah Se' Kavita aur Kavita. He encouraged younger authors to write and was jovial friend to stalwarts like Hazari Pd. Dwivedi, Mohan Rakesh and Kamleshwar. He lived in Chandigarh.

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## FIRAQ GORAKHPURI IN HIS MOODS

Anita Gopesh and friends in a long chat with Firaq Gorakhpuri

Translated by  
Sanjay Dev

Firaq Saheb was taken to Delhi for an eye surgery a few days before his demise on April 3, 1982. He had been having eye problem for sometime. It rendered him unable to read and write. His constitution was gradually failing him. In his own words—‘I am reduced to be a veritable wall, unable to move.’ But despite his reduced bodily state, his mind was young and voice, vibrantly resonant. Still able to hold forth on any subject for hours together. Over many such meetings with him, the following excerpts were jotted down:

No talk would begin without a little discussion on politics. On being asked, ‘Given the present political scenario, how do you view the future?’, Firaq Sa’b answers instantly, ‘It is difficult to say, as politics is no longer predictable. Today’s newspaper admits as much, and I too suppose—‘We shall have to wait and see?’

‘You have seen Nehru and his grandeur closely. How do you view him?’

‘What a man he was! Often people say whatever he became, was because he the was son of Babu Motilal Nehru. But the truth is Jawahar Lal grew to be Jawahar Lal Nehru, not because he was Motilal’s son—even if he were to be the son of my servant, he would be the same Jawahar Lal he was. Never misconstrue abilities for luck. Abilities don’t denote luck. Chance can get you a job, not leadership of India.’

‘How do you consider politics, is it for groups, or individuals?’

‘Politics is not for all. As democracy is not for the unlettered. The ‘groups’ or ‘masses’ here are apolitical. They want comforts and nothing else. It’s a different thing that they need something to talk—why not politics. Of course they may differ in their approach.

‘I personally hold for a little dictatorship in administration. One can’t be civil without being a little cruel. But too much of it would be bad.’

‘See, nothing per se, is bad; its application or use makes it good or bad’

‘What is the relevance of literature in such a topsy-turvy situation of politics and country?’ I mean, what one can do in such a situation?’

‘Nothing’ an arrowy answer escaped him, ‘except that one should continue presenting before public both pros and cons of the scenario. Be ridden with disease and show symptoms, so that the doctor can have his pulse on the disease?’

‘It means you don’t hold with revolution on the strength of the pen?’

‘I don’t put literature on so high a pedestal—Not every litterateur can be a Marx.’

‘What then, mere pushing of pen serves—accepting or rejecting is a matter of personal conviction. To hold with a thing is one thing, to assimilate it in life is quite another. How many writers are there today who live by what they write?’

‘Remember one more thing—every revolution in the world bears testimony to this fact that accumulated pain and stifling of years go into the making of a revolution; apt situation and preparation go before revolution. When all this happens, only then the pen becomes effective.’

‘A particular era is ascribed to Indian history where poems were written to inspire and incite people—be they valour poems, or aesthetic poems.’

Surely that era would not have been civilised and refined. Only uncivilised and uncultured races could be inspired or incited through poems. Poetry is not meant for inspiration and excitement. Lenin’s personality is not derived from poetry. It revolutionized without poetry.

Shall we then say poetry or literature does not impact society at large?

‘Why not? It does, to a great extent. Poetry keeps human beings rooted in humanity. But poetry is not to eradicate evil. It has its place. But can’t reach the top’. Which evil ‘Abhigyan Shakuntalam’ tends to remove? Was ‘Kumar Sambhav’ written for social reform?’

Deliberating on his thoughts for a while he spoke thoughtfully—To give the poet the status of a social reformer is to do injustice to him. Poetry is not a potion. It is something like shining moonlight. Poetry cannot be composed with deliberation and effort, as a good turn is not done consciously—it is done spontaneously—the mighty oak doesn’t provide shade wittingly.

—What is good poetry in your opinion?

‘A simple touchstone of good poetry is that it directly sinks deep into your mind. Poetry not only requires simplicity, it requires civility too. Apart from aesthetic adoration my poetry has place for nothing else. Of course my interpretation of beauty will have to be understood yet.’

‘Firaq Sa’b, why not tell it yourself?’

Firaq Sa’b has a typically original



and set definition for everything. Would certainly have one for this too, which would be deep and intriguing—this thought had only prompted me to ask him.

‘Good, that you have asked, or else the discussion would have remained incomplete.

“Beauty doesn’t mean form, complexion and features”—stressing typically every word Firaq Sa’b spoke—the internal beauty that radiates on face that is beauty. You see, as of now, Firaq thinks too highly of himself—but if Kabir were to come and sit alongside him, Firaq would be effectively demolished,’ suggesting the cutting down of his stature with a flick of his hand, Firaq said.

You’ve mentioned Kabir and that too with so much reverence; this piques questioning whether a poet is born so, or becomes one circumstantially.

This one is not so easy as to answer in a yes or no. I don’t think any poet is a ‘born poet’ or ‘innate’. He may be having seeds of poetry in him which may blossom in a creative environment and turn him into a poet. His becoming one requires a suitable ‘physical supplement’. I guess when he is a child, a little ‘aristocratic aloofness is necessary for this nurturing.’

There have been several debates on necessity of a beloved behind a creative person. What do you think about it? Whether a beloved would be deemed to be having a role in the making of an author?

Why not? Of course, but to some extent only. Beyond a certain point that sublimates from ‘love for person’ to ‘love for universe’. Love shapes his intense sensibilities and to such an extent that transcending an individual, he starts

thinking in terms of the universe.

Even today names of the beloveds of several poets are cited significantly, for example, Keats.

Sharply cutting in on my conversation, Firaq Sa’b said, ‘at the same time there are many whose beloveds find no mention e.g. Tennyson, Goldsmith, or in our country, Kabir. Where did they get inspiration from? We don’t find any mention of such a reference to them. Read carefully the literature of Keats who is considered to be a poet of love. There’s a lot more in his poems than mere love or beloved.’

Elaborating on what he was saying, he continued—‘in fact, inspiration is a complex thing. Sometimes a woman’s beautiful personality enralls one; sometimes the poem itself gets created. Driven by physical inspiration, if a poet gets into a dozen affairs, then the beloved in his literature would reflect the composite of goodness of them all.’

Let me relate a small incident involving me. Poetess Vidyavati Kokil would visit my place. Her husband also accompanied her. I liked the voice of her husband. I captured his harmonious voice in the voice of my beloved in the following couplet—

sham ke saye ghule hon jis tarah  
aawaz mein,

thandkein jaise khanakti hon gale ke  
saz mein.

‘This means you believe in the power of love.’

With this Firaq’s big eyes widened. ‘Who can deny it? It is the force of love that rests the earth on its axis, or else hatred would have swallowed it.’ Man is born to love and sublimate

in it. But remember one thing—A person who's in love with blind dedication will come to nothing. For a man to have varied interests is a big deal, at least he should have human interest.'

Firaq Sa'b, taking courage from the context, shall I ask you another question?

'Why not my dear girl, you can ask ten', seeing Firaq Sa'b in good mood, I dared ask him.

'So much is famously said about you that it seems as if you've become a legend in your own time, going by all that, don't you think you look somewhat an unbalanced personality?' He was ready with the reply instantly. 'I'm not unbalanced, I'm unhappy. Because I'm unhappy, I use this scurilous language. Had I been happy, I would have deemed speaking loudly an offence; using scurilous language an incivility—My ideal is eight-year old Munia, Ramesh's (an intimate acquaintance's daughter, who had been living with him) wisdom plus innocence. Innocence adorned by knowledge.'

For a while Firaq Sa'b got lost in the thought of Munia playing with a rabbit in the courtyard. This aspect of Firaq Sa'b was unheard of and unknown. For a long time, we let him be. He soon returned to his usual self from that state. 'I hold one thing highly sacred—and that is home. So I somehow tried to set up a household. That turned out to be the bitterest and saddest incident of my life.'

We knew this episode and hence changed the subject immediately to bring him out of this unsavory memory.

Firaq sa'b has been very controversial because of his views on Hindi. Without circumlocution, we shot a straight question—will Hindi be able to take the

status of national language?

Nodding his head in a distinct style, he said, 'Sounds difficult, the thing is that the well-wishers of Hindi themselves present Hindi in an unattractive way. What is language which is not spoken? That which is spoken is language alone.'

'Language should be fluent; it should be spontaneous; that is to say, to continue the discussion, I added. Firaq Sa'b's large eyes widened further. 'Not only—the spontaneity it should be selective', I couldn't get what he meant.

'I mean the first thing is to reduce the number of compound alphabets. Such as 'Kha', 'Dha', 'Da', 'Bha'. Yes, forget those that are audibly pleasant e.g. 'Bha', like in Tum Bhi (you too). The second is to do away with alphabets like 'Dha', 'Ta', and 'Da' which are unpleasant on ears. They should be spared for use.

Thirdly insist on the use of non-Sanskrit equivalents of Sanskrit words, and not on their Sanskritised version. Also the current Persian word in your language will have to be accepted. Say not 'Bas', rather say 'Jor'.

And at last, your personal choice. Language shouldn't sound strained.'

But Firaq Sa'b when the thought is deep, the language would be a little difficult—

Absolutely not, when you start losing from all sides, you start saying—the thought is sublime. The more impoverished the thought is, the more difficult the language would be. We feel we are greater than we know—tell me which word in the sentence is not understandable even by a seventh-grader? But ask the meaning to be unraveled, even an MA student would

be hard put to explain. Or take this one—‘Har liya hai kisi ne Sita ko, jindagi hai Ram ka Banwas (Sita has been abducted by someone, and Ram’s life is exile)— which word is difficult in it, tell me? Difficult language emanates from a cruel heart. He is dishonest who wants to entangle in words. The language should at best have the refined spontaneity of civil life.’ Know one more thing—

‘A child picks up his language from his mother. When the women would be coarse, what language you and I will speak?’

‘I should like to relate you an incident in this context.

One of my acquaintances was hospitalized. A girl from nearby room visited him every day. Meanwhile she didn’t turn up for two days. When on the third day, she came the acquaintance asked ‘Baby, why did you not turn up for past two days?’ the girl replied my mother forbade saying ‘Roj roj jaogi to ajiran ho jaogi’ (She would be unwelcome, if she visited daily).

Now you try to understand where this word ‘Ajirana’ came from? Etymologically it is ‘Ajirna’ meaning ‘chronic’. Generous acceptance of such new words constitutes a language.’ Firaq Sa’b concluded what he was saying.

‘For a language in the making, we will have to write for a while with conscious effort. Only then will it be established’, we put forth our dilemma. He was ready with his answer ‘you, being conscious, don’t wear shoes where you do a cap, do you? Don’t wear scarf around your waist. Well, why say ‘Rogi ki nisha’ for ‘Bimar ki raat’ (both mean patient’s night in English), but the former version is more Hindiaised than Hindi) Where

‘Bimar ki raat’ says it all. Then again it is Hindi—the colloquial Hindi.’

‘Kaun tha aapse jo bahar tha, Aap aate to aapka ghar tha (who was an outsider, had you come, it was your home only)’. Tell me which of the words in the sentence is Arabian or Persian? Now being unduly conscious, you may spoil it in the name of Hindi. Whether the sentence is not Hindi?, We all were answerless. Firaq Sa’b, could hold forth on the subject for hours together. Without allowing him any chance, we changed the topic at once. Well, who all are the poets, you like in Hindi? Firaq ensconced himself by leaning against the wall. I used to listen to the recitation of the Ramcharit Manas ever since I was very young. Since then, I liked Tulsidas very much. Even today I do. No poet in the world is as lyrical as he is. Also I like Kabir—Urdu-lovers consider him as their sire. In prose, I like Premchand.

Well, why did you like Premchand?

‘Perhaps, he was touching to the mind. No doubt his writing is great. But his writing suffered a major deficiency. Can you tell me what it was?

The reply to it didn’t occur to a friend who was sitting beside me and doing research in Hindi—After waiting a while, Firaq himself said, ‘In his novels problems emerged very vitally but solution is suggested nowhere. And it is expected of a writer of Premchand’s stature that his writing will afford a solution, or at least a hint of it.’

‘On occasions like these, he used to wrongly use Gandhism—Besides, he would set so much store by individual goodness as to render the talk of collective awareness out of question. Though not all are able to suggest a solution, a

personality like Lenin is rare who dare say—the problem would be solved this way, and curiously enough when the problem was seen through, his very same staunch associates would turn his enemies.

Firaq Sa'b did you ever meet Premchand?

'Oh yes, several times' lipping the cigarette, an affectionately fluid smile flickered across Firaq Sa'b's face.

Do you remember?

I remember in a meeting, they were talking about love and affairs etc. In a matter of fact manner, I asked Premchand, dearie, did you ever love someone? Not worth mentioning he said, but there was a time when I would take a fancy for this grass-cutter woman.' Did the affair make any progress, I asked Premchand said, 'This much only that whenever I spotted her, I would lovingly place my hand on her shoulder and tell her, look, here is the grass, there it is,

and every time she would tarry her grass cutting activity.' Persisting in silence for a while Firaq Sa'b spoke. Whether we need such a Premchand today, who can say, look, here is grass, there it is, not only here but on a different land too. Whether we will ever be able to cultivate this sensibility and manner to tell someone the same thing and sow in our being this emotional sublimation of love?'

'Having said his mind Firaq Sa'b got lost in his own thoughts; turned off the fan connected to the switch close to his bed, and lit a cigarette. Turned the fan on—He is seated almost propped against the wall, nearly motionless. What a wonder, despite his lower limbs being listless, his voice was forceful. Not only for speaking, but for singing too!'

Yes, now he was murmuring his own couplet 'Tujhe ay jindagi, hum door se pahchan letein hein' (O life we can recognize you from afar)—as if his faraway gaze was really looking at life..in person!

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Firaq Gorakhpuri (1886-1982) the legendary Urdu poet surpassed his contemporaries in his frankness of expression, both in life and literature. He was professor of English at Allahabad University. He received Jnanpith Award for his outstanding work 'Gulenagma' in 1969.

Anita Gopesh, born 1954, is a Hindi short story writer and a poet. She is professor of zoology in Allahabad University. Her first collection of short stories 'Kitta Pani' has been published by Bharatiya Jnanpith. She was a close neighbour and soulmate of Firaq Gorakhpuri who was great as a poet and greater as a patron of the younger generation. Anita lives in Allahabad.

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## CAMEL WITH SILVER WINGS

Tejinder

Translated by  
the author

It was two thirty at mid night. That was intensive care unit of Alfred Hospital Chennai where he lay on bed number twenty seven with the smell of medicines around. He was not asleep. Last night something went wrong. He had severe chest pain. As if somebody was hitting his lungs with the edge of stones. He had a feeling of losing everything around him. He still recalls, his wife had acted swiftly contrary to her nature. She had knocked the door of their neighbour, Mr. Anantha Padamanabhan and he was brought to the hospital. Mr. Anantha Padamanabhan was driving, Mr Pankaj along with his wife Anupama were in the backseat. His head was in her lap and she was engaged in a light massage on his chest. Even then, he had no idea that he had a massive heart-attack, although he was feeling as if someone had poured bottles of gum in his heart so that flow of blood is stopped. Who was he? He did not know.

Pankaj was looking constantly at the nurse who was short and smart. He was looking at her since morning. May be she was on double shift. She had an innocent and happy expression. She was sitting on a wooden stool. Her head was down on the steel table. She was asleep. She was at ease as if she was queen of this Intensive Care Unit. Her face was like a dark rose. She was dressed in white and the dark rose appeared to be more prominent. She was smiling in her sleep.

He wanted to awaken her. May be it was negativity in him

or may be out of fear of death. Maybe she was sleeping with a joyous smile and he had just seen death that was irritating him. She was not only sleeping but smiling too, whereas she was there on duty for him. He was sick and unable to sleep. He had nothing to say. He did not require anything but wanted to disturb her in her sleep. He thought twice but ultimately could not resist himself.

“Nurse” — Pankaj called her. There was total silence around, as if the world was over. Even if a cockroach tried to come out of earth one could listen or feel the slipping away of soil erosion. But she did not respond. He was irritated further and cried back — “nurse thanni kudu” (nurse, get me water)

The nurse woke up with a shock. Probably another shock for her was to hear Tamil from him. She looked at his dry face. She was as fresh as when she was asleep. She must be around twenty five. She had covered herself with the blouse and cloak. She had a white-cap. He did not know how to name her dress-code. Even Ritu Kumar or Manish Malhotra may not be aware of this as they do not work for nurses and nuns, he thought.

She got up with ease. Filled half glass of water from the jug, which was kept on the table itself and came closer to him. When she was handing over the glass of water to him he looked into her eyes. Instead of getting hold on the glass, he got hold of her hands. As the

glass was just half filled, water did not spill out.

Pankaj immediately pushed away his hand.

“You please have this pillow at your back and I will give you sips”— She said in a normal voice. He thought that he was behaving abnormally.

“No, I shall take it.”—He controlled himself and took the glass from her hands. As soon as he finished she took back the empty glass and put it back on the table. Then she turned, came back to him and said— “Sir, do you want anything more.”

He didn’t say a word but caught hold of her hand.

“Sir, do you want anything more?” —She repeated her question. She had a balanced voice full with confidence.

“What is your name?”

“Nurse”

“I am not asking your profession”

“Sozen Franklin”—She surrendered. She did not involve herself in further discussion.

“Can’t you sit near me? Please bring that wooden stool near my bed.” — He pleaded.

“Doctors have advised you not to talk much.” — she said.

“You just sit by my side, that will give me solace and ultimately that will be good for my heart.” — He was pleased. He had tried to convince her.

“No sir, you require rest.”

His logic had no impact on her.

“ I assure you I will not talk much; I will simply listen to you.”

“What can I say sir”— she felt amused.

“You can tell me about yourself, your life, your dreams, to whom you were talking and smiling in your dreams?” He said.

She was just shocked. “How did you come to know that I was in my dreams?” She had asked. She became happy. She immediately brought the wooden stool and sat near his bed.

“O.K. now tell me, who was in your dreams.” He had asked her almost cheerfully.

“Sir, I have nothing to share with you and even this is not part of my duty.” —she had again turned tough. He was just confused.

“But, I am looking at you in this Intensive Care Unit right from morning, what is your own share in your duties of hospital?” — He had asked straightaway.

“How are you concerned with this?” — she had a rough reply in store.

“I just wish to know; you are with me for more than twelve hours, to which place do you belong.”

“I belong to Chidambaram”

“With whom do you live in Chennai?”

“In nurses hostel”

“How much salary do you get?”

“Five thousand a month plus double shift duty allowance.”

“Like you are doing today”

“Yes”

“How much you get for additional shift”

“Are you Personal Assistant to P. Chidambaram?” —she said and joked with him. He was stunned, but he posed happy. He had enjoyed the comment. “No, I am working with media which has a section on economic and financial matters too.” He had pacified. She came a little closer to him. He was surprised. Her attitude was changed. He could feel it.

“Yes, tell me.”

“The hospital authorities are charging rupees four hundred and fifty for the additional shift from patients but they are passing us just one hundred and fifty rupees. So hospital earns even more than us for each additional shift of a nurse and you know the living conditions in our hostel are worse than hell and any doctor may enter any room any time. Sir, can you communicate this message to the larger society, you are in media, I will pray for your early recovery to Lord Jesus”— she had said. Her eyes had moistened.

“It won’t be Lord Jesus but it will be you who will give me a healing touch.” — Pankaj said in an emotionally choked voice.

She stood up and brought a glass of water. The darkness was getting

intense.

She was lost somewhere. He was thinking about the relationship between his boss and the Alfred Hospital trustees. They were so close to each other that he just could not discuss such non-issues with them. Nurses for them were just tools to carry out their machinery. These tools were available in open market, even at cheaper rates.

She again stood up and helped him in sitting on the bed with her cosy hands.

“Sir, you have to take medicine”—she had a small pill in her hands.

He simply took the medicine and lay down. He closed his eyes. She sat on the wooden stool. After a few minutes when he opened his eyes, he saw her sitting like a statue. Her eyes were wide open.

“Listen”—He called her. This time she stood up and came near him along with the wooden stool and sat on it. She was trying to look beyond closed windows.

“What are you looking for”—He asked her.

“Sir, often I see a camel with brown silver wings, this camel flies in the air like a horse of Phantom crossing all deserts, seas, forests, it is driven by Thomas who comes to tell me that he is coming soon. He is a reality and not a fantasy.” —She said. She had a charm in her glittering eyes.

“Where is he? Can I see him?” He

was excited. He had put his hands on his chest.

“Sir, are you feeling o.k.? Should I give you Sorbatide?”—She asked quickly. Even in her fantasy she was alert enough to her duties. He was moved.

“No, you just tell me about yourself, I am feeling o.k.”

“Sir, next month I am getting married to Thomas, he has gone to middle-east to earn money, he is a technician, he has earned a lot of money. I am also working double shift here but you know how difficult it is.”

She had turned sad again.

“Why are you feeling so sad?”

“No, Sir, I was just thinking that in such a big hospital they earn three hundred rupees in one lie with just one nurse per shift, so I was counting the number of total nurses and the number of nights, it’s a huge amount”—she was talking like an accountant.

“Tell me, how much do you love Thomas.”— He had tried to deviate her. He had succeeded. She replied “More than the sea at Marina Beach.”

“Since when have you not met him?” — He inquired.

“He always lives within me, daily he comes to me on the wings of the camel.

“No, what I mean is since when he is in the middle-east?”

“Almost three years. He is returning



next month.”

“To marry you?”

“Yes” —She had a confident voice but she was not looking at him. Pankaj had observed that she had put flowers of jasmine (mullai) in her hair. The flowers had dried up but the fragrance was there.

“Can you tell me, how I was brought in this Intensive Care Unit?” He had come back on himself.

“You had a massive heart-attack and your cute fat wife brought you here in Alfred Hospital.”

“So , my wife has saved my life.” This was his turn to get emotional.

“And she saved herself” She had a sarcasm full with emotion in her voice. That was strange. She had laughed. She had white teeth, no gaps, no cavities.

“What do you mean?” He was just shocked.

“You understand and even then ask so many questions”—she had said. She spoke in a very low tone but in the deep silence of the Intensive Care Unit, her voice was sounding well. The room had no open window, no passage for any cross ventilation. Her voice was echoing. She evaded reply.

She had checked syringe bottles. For him that was his food as well as medicine. Then, she picked back the wooden stool and put it in its own place. She had put her head on the table and closed her eyes. This time he did not challenge his authority as a heart patient. Rather,

he thought, this should be the right time when Thomas must be approaching her, sitting on the wings of his camel, from the Middle East.

Every night when Sozen was doing double shift, Thomas used to visit her, sitting on the back of the camel-seat, crossing deserts and forests, towns and rivers, mountains and seas and then stopped at his last destination outside the doors of Intensive Care Unit of Alfred Hospital where his Sozen was on the job. Thomas who was a technician and whose hands had turned into iron-sheets, loved Sozen to such an extent that when he touched her, she had a feeling that Thomas’ hands are made of sponge. Sozen who was otherwise busy in injecting patients for the whole day, giving food through drips also used to come up like a blossoming flower. She used to take his head in her small hands and kiss him.

Camel with wings waited for his rider Thomas outside the Intensive Care Unit. Sozen was very happy on that day. She had told Thomas about Pankaj. She had also informed him that he is working with media and he will talk to hospital authorities about her night-shift allowance. Thomas felt happy.

Pankaj was aware of the reality but kept mum. Even the camel standing outside ICU was happy. Thomas was equally doing double duty as Technician. Camel also thought that things are same everywhere whether it is middle-east or

Kerala or Rajasthan in India. Something is strange every where. Even with media. He thought ahead of Thomas and Sozen. But he was just a camel. He had to act as per the wish of his rider, Thomas. Otherwise he could have dashed into the glass-walled rooms of management trustees anywhere but he had no words, no vocabulary.

In the dark of night, inside the room of Intensive Care Unit of Alfred Hospital of Chennai, there was no one except Sozen and Pankaj. For Sozen it was a matter of routine, a daily affair, but for Pankaj it was different. It could have been the last day of his life. He had seen the last moment but surprisingly, he was not shattered. He had become part of Sozen and Thomas at the last moment of his life. But no, that was not end of the light. He had crossed a thousand lights mosque on the way. One thousand lights was an attractive chance of life. It was not only one ray of light or hope. It was a collective preposition of one thousand lights. He thought, he will go back from the same road of Gemini Bridge Chennai to life. He looked at Sozen. He thought one thousand lights of the Shia Mosque of Annamalai are glittering on her face. He had seen the end of life almost, but was driven back by whom, by his cute-fat wife in the words of Sozen, or by one thousand lights. He did not know. He had simply heard a voice. "Where are you moving? There is nothing outside except darkness. That is another planet

about which we do not know anything."

He had looked back. He had seen Sozen. There was no one else. His wife Anupama was waiting outside and mosque of one thousand lights was around.

Pankaj had looked at Sozen and had turned back, to his bed.

"You are a different person I know, but you look like Thomas." —she had said.

"When can I meet Thomas?"

"I had just passed through the end of my life, but still I wish to meet a new face." Pankaj said. He was surprised at himself.

"He may come anytime, he owns a camel with wings" —she said and smiled.

She looked back. By then Thomas was there.

Thomas' face was familiar to those moving around Chakrata and Biharigarh of Uttarakhand around Dehradun. The road to Chakrata was not that difficult but it was so narrow that one had to move by sizing it. It was ninety kilometers away from Dehradun. There were gates at identified spots. After you pass through twenty kilometers, you had to wait. These gates were opened and closed at a particular time. The distance was like our age. You run twenty kilometers. You live for twenty years. Then stop and wait. First you allow the caravan of vehicles which is coming back and then the gate will be re-opened. You can see around you, women collecting dry-wood

from the jungle or people in their huts without proper roof-top even in the chilling cold. Those women were also leading life like nurses of the hospital. There double shift duty time was not even accounted for. He had thought. Once he had crossed gate number six. There was no passage after that. There were only hills, dry hills, the trees had lost their colour, even the small plants which had come up on hill stones were not green. He had seen bones of human beings in the dry-wood branches buried on the hills. There was a time when those plants were alive. There were no planned gardens. That was an image of a rough patch. One, two, three, four and then dozens and hundreds of rough patches of dry-wood. There was no one to collect-wood. The other side was invisible. That was “still shot” of a garden of which he was about to become a part. It was so simple but so horrible. He would have fallen down on it and would have turned into part of it in the shape of a dry-wood piece.

But, it was so sudden, Sozen had rushed. She had called Pankaj back. He was amazed. He was very much there along with Sozen and Thomas and of course the camel with silver wings, waiting outside the intensive care unit. His wife was also there waiting for him but she did not know about the camel. None of them knew about Chakrata and its dry-wood.

She had introduced him to Thomas. He also belonged to Chidambaram. Both

of them had grown together. They were known to each other since years. Thomas may have joined this world at the most two years earlier. A good number of people from Kerala and the border of Tamil Nadu were acquainted with the camels with Wings. The Ameers and Sheikhs of the middle-east were always in search of such people. That was simple mathematics. Sheikhs had money but no workers. Here people were in search of jobs, they knew the job but did not have opportunities. So Thomas laughed and had assured Sozen before leaving the country that he will earn a lot of money and he will hire a camel, which will have wings and he will regularly come to meet her. Sozen believed him as Lord Jesus had said – “Believe me and I will bless you.”

Thomas had migrated. Sozen remained here. She got a job with Alfred Hospital. She had told Thomas that not only for three years, she can wait for him even for three centuries. She can take re-birth for him.

“You see I was on the verge of my last breath. Sozen saved me, now can you do me a favour, this is like last wish of a man who is to be hanged.” Pankaj pleaded to Thomas. That was three o'clock in the morning. There was no one else in the Intensive Care Unit of Alfred Hospital. Sozen had gone out to get medicine. His wife who had brought him there, was not allowed to be inside. He was not even sure himself at which bench outside the Intensive Care Unit

she would be lying down. When he was brought here his daughter was sleeping at home. He was not even knowing that she is aware of his being shifted to ICU. But no, he had not left her. Until women like Anupama, his wife or nurses like Sozen are around, he just cannot Die.” He had assured himself.

“Can you lend me your camel with wings for a while?” He pleaded.

“But how can you go out in this condition” Thomas was surprised.

“I wish to go to Chakrata, I had negotiated a plot to construct my home there. I wish to give it as a gift to my only daughter. I am not sure I will get this opportunity later or not.” He was almost at his feet.

“But both your arms are tied up with syringes, you may require oxygen any time and more over Chakrata is a hill area and when in the early hours doctors come, how will Sozen face them.” — Thomas put dozens of questions at a time.

“Please do not worry, I shall return before doctor takes a round”— Pankaj had assured him.

“How?”— He had put a big question mark.

“When you can come and go back from middle-east before morning then I am going inland only.” He had reasoned.

“But, I am called here by Sozen, who calls you there?”

“Some one, say my land, which I

had chosen.”

Thomas did not question further. He simply handed over the stick in his hand which had a bunch of silver keys. Sozen had come back and he opened up his arms.

For sometime Thomas and Sozen had taken over the bed under the roof of Intensive Care Unit of Alfred Hospital.

When Pankaj was getting out of Alfred Hospital, he had seen the pretty and drowsy face of his wife. He could see his own face in her open eyes, but she could not. That was strange.

Within a few moments, Pankaj was at Chakrata. He did not stop at Dehradun, where he had a number of friends. They loved him. But he was feeling scared of their love. He did not want to lose them. He was afraid that they could accept his death as a wish of God and register his absence with a meeting of mourners. Afterwards he would be out of their “Samvedana” meetings. For the camel with wings Chakrata from Dehradun was just a few steps away. Not even check points after every twenty kilometers had any relevance for the camel.

Pankaj still remembers when he was searching for a plot to construct a house, Chakrata or Biharigarh were the priority areas for him. He loved Goojars, who were Muslims. In Nineteen hundred and forty seven, when the country was divided on the basis of Hindus and Muslims, they were not aware of any such divide.

They were refugees of permanent kind living in the lower hills, since centuries. For them uprooting was part of their life. It had no different meaning. It was part of their destiny and they had accepted this as well.

He still recalls when they had called him at an outer isolated place, he was all alone. They were good in numbers. Fifteen to twenty or may be even more. The language which they spoke was mixture of Hindi, Urdu and Garhwali. There was not a single word of Tamil or English. That was a deserted ground under the crude shadow of once green trees. Two elder persons were sitting on a cot surrounded by others. Both of them were enjoying hukka. A young boy who appeared like a slave was filling hukka with fire-coal and tobacco. It appeared as if they had not taken bath since years. The beard on their face was like grass. Their heads were covered. They wore pathan-suits although they were not pathans. He was the only outsider among them but he was not feeling scared. Those were the months of December and January of acute winter but they were feeling hot.

“Oh, what a hot-wave?” — the man sitting on the cot had said.

“Allah” — all others followed. Their voice had echoed in the open jungle. It was almost dark.

In the months of winter when there is a snow-fall on the top hills of Himalayas as it is snow all-over they come down

and spread over in the down-hill villages of Chakrata and Biharigarh. They make their huts and live for almost three months. As soon as the winter is over and the snow melts from the top hills they climb back. Next year when they come back they search for new locations to live in. Like this every year they slip down from snow for three months and then take a re-birth to go back to top hills. They do not know Sozen and Thomas. They do not know even Jesus Christ. But they die every year when snow-falls on their heads and then as soon as it melts they have a re-birth. There is no Alfred Hospital for them.

That was a rare co-incidence. When he had approached them for the first time to purchase a piece of land, he had eaten pakodas with a cup of tea. That was a hut made with earthen-soil and bamboos. He sat on a bamboo chair which was shaky but even then had enjoyed his tea. Then he had approached them.

“I wish to purchase land.” — he had asked the man sitting on the cot.

“How much?”

“Thirty bigha”

“What you will do with such a big area?”

“I am not alone; I have my colleagues with me.”

“Where are they?”

“They have assigned this work to me.”

“You will repent.” – The other man sitting on the cot had said. The old man who was enjoying hukka had laughed. There was sarcasm in his laugh. All other Goojars had also laughed. He just could not understand what was wrong; the old man said – “Can you take responsibility of your own self?”

Pankaj kept mum. He had started looking around. There were a few women at a distance. They were in colourful dresses. They had half covered faces. They had heavy breasts. They used to collect dry firewood and then cook food in the “earthen chulha.” When one looked at their scattered small mobile residential locations, it appeared as if no government existed in the down hills, there was no rule of law.

These are houses of mud which will re merge into soil after sometime. The residents will go back to the hill top. The “Basties” will dissolve into cold breeze.

“Baba will you sell this plot to me?” – He gathered all his confidence and asked him.

“We live on this and, we don’t sell it.” – he was clear in his reply.

“Why?”

“Because this is a sin.”

“I don’t get it.”

“You who belong to cities, you can sell even that land which is not yours, so you will not understand.” – He said and then laughed. Once again every body

present there followed him. Pankaj had felt sad and lonely. He could not see the half-covered faces of women around but he could observe their tilting bodies. The upper portion of their breasts had an exposure but there faces were covered.

“I want to purchase land here and construct a permanent colony which should never be deserted.” He cried back.

“Such colonies are destined to rust.” – the old man replied.

“I will take care that it is not rusted.”

“It is not in your hands.”

The man sitting on the cot and enjoying hukka was talking like a philosopher. Pankaj did not answer.

He had returned.

When he turned back he had looked at the big size “Kansathal” and daal in the tattooed hands of a woman who had to cook. She also had aatta of bajra which was of green colour like her ghaghra. There was an appeal in her eyes. He thought that she wanted to tell him, he may not be in a position to purchase a piece of land but certainly he deserves a meal, cooked by her. She was living in a hut which did not belong to her. She just wanted to offer him food but she could not offer in presence of so many men around. He could read it in her eyes but could not afford to tell. What kind of protocol is this in which a woman who has collected the firewood herself and cooked the food with her own hands has no right to

offer it to a man! He had thought. That was food for which she had stored the Gahad daal in the top hill itself and then she had brought it down with so much of care. She herself had cooked it and that had a taste beyond words, the smell itself was telling the story. It had no relationship with m.d.h. or everest masala. The smell itself was of Himalayan heights and for such food a woman can't stop a man she likes and tell him to wait to have taste of it. This is nothing but tragic. But he had to leave. He had turned back fast.

He was listening to the voice of azan from the nearby mosque. That was not the mosque of one thousand lights which was just behind the Alfred Hospital. Gujjars had started moving towards mosque with the azan. Some one had told him that the children of these Gujjars study in the Madarsa which is inside the mosque. After years one among them becomes the preacher and one Qazee. Then both of them sit on the cot and take control of hukka. They were living like this since the time of mughals. They were peaceful citizens and had migrated to the hills during war times. For them Chakrata or Biharigarh was their nation. It was neither Hindustan nor Pakistan for them. Not even name of any other nation. Uttarakhand which was a new state, they never bothered for this. Badrinath and Kedarnath were not far away although they were on the other side. Even pilgrims who toured the hills from outside used to pass through them

as if they were passing through stones or dead wood. Dehradun was not far away from them distance wise but it had no relation in their lives. They were innocent people who studied in Madarsa only. There was no role of "percentage" in their studies. It was one hundred percent. They were not aware of DOON SCHOOL. They were not knowing anything about subsidies. They were happy with gahad ki daal, pakodas and bajre ki roti. At the time of azan they visited the masjid and counted the days religiously when snow will melt and they will go back to hill-top to live a peaceful life in their green-land of Bugials.

But, for Pankaj snow was melting at Alfred Hospital. He had to return. He had returned from the door-steps of death. The camel was waiting for him. Sozen and Thomas must be feeling restless. Camel with wings was not an expert at flying in the hills. He had to reach back in time with Thomas on his way back to Middle-East. He was in anger. He was feeling scared. Pankaj too. He had said "Bye Bye" to the woman who had a wish to feed him. He was not an expert to fly on the wings of the camel. He was not even aware of the exact parking place or provision for camel outside the Alfred Hospital.

But the camel was smart enough. He had dropped him just outside the Intensive Care Unit and had moved to his parking place within minutes.

Sozen and Thomas were waiting for

him eagerly. They had become part of Intensive Care Unit. Their heart-beats were high.

“Where had you gone?” — Thomas was worried.

“To purchase a plot for me” — He had replied.

Sozen laughed.

“Who is the person who is selling you land?” — she had asked.

“The nomads of hills, around Chakrata and Biharigarh.”

She had not known anything about Chakrata, or Biharigarh but she got hold of the word nomads.

“Only a Nomicide can sell his land to a person who is admitted in Intensive Care Unit” — She had said smilingly. Pankaj had also laughed.

“What will you do with the land?” — Thomas had questioned this time. He was serious.

“Once I had seen land there and I wanted to present it as a gift to my daughter, that’s it.” — He started explaining.

“It’s not that simple, now you had a heart-attack and Sozen had brought you back somehow and what about your wife.”

Thomas did not say anything further.

“You may complete your sentence.” — He said.

“No, you please understand, you are living in Chennai which is a metro city

near sea shore in south and you want to purchase land near hills which is a jungle, that is the reason of your heart-attack. Do you understand?” — He completed his sentence.

Pankaj was shocked. “How do you know about my destination in hills.”

“My camel was sending me waves.” —He said.

“What?”

“He has informed me that you were getting emotional in dry hills. You can’t run life on two paths, parallel, that is the reason we pay a heavy price and reach in ICU’s and you must understand that when you have a stroke it is not advisable to take food cooked by a lady you love.” — Thomas had said.

“You are wrong Mr. Thomas, it’s not as simple as you feel.”

“Then what’s that?”

“All of us have a camel with wings, but we lose it.”

“You are right; I am always scared that a day will come when I will lose it. someone will snatch it away from me, even today when you were late I was feeling insecure.”—Thomas had said.

He was clear in his concept.

Sozen laughed and said—“Forget all this and please fight my case of double-shift with hospital authorities when you are discharged.”

“But at first you see your bill” — Thomas had intervened.



“At times they charge so much for saving your life that you have to re-think about the purpose of your living, and then even this camel with wings becomes helpless as Sheikhs of middle-east keep them in their custody.”

“You are right Thomas, these Sheikhs are everywhere may be with different names.” — Pankaj said.

“Even Baniyas are Sheikhs and Sheikhs are Baniyas, this is something complicated.”

“But sir, what about my double-shift allowance? You will fight for me isn’t it?” — Sozen had pleaded once again.

Thomas had flown away on his camel with wings; morning was approaching. Doctor had to come on round. Sozen was back on her wooden stool. Pankaj was also lying down on his bed intact with syringes in both his arms. No one knew where he had gone in the midnight.

He was looking at his running electro-cardiogram. He could not read that script. he was not sure whether Sozen will get justice for her double-shift rates or not but he was sure of two things — one that he will attend the marriage ceremony of Sozen and Thomas on the day of their wedding and second that a day will come when he will eat the food i.e., gahad ki daal and bajre ki roti cooked by the woman at Chakrata hills, where he shall have his piece of land as a likely gift to his daughter.

All of a sudden he felt the touch of a warm hand on his forehead. It was Anupama, his wife who was telling Pankaj that God had saved his life for her. He looked at her innocent face and recalled the words of Sozen. Then he thought that Sozen was right. He will fight for her double-shift rates, once he is out of this hospital.

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## SLUMBER

Harjendra Chaudhary

Translated by  
Purabi Panwar

It was a silly telephone call that woke me up.

—‘Are you the only law abiding SP in Haryana? I’ll send your transfer orders immediately from Chandigarh. Pack your bags to go to Madhuban Training Centre at once.’ The angry words were followed by the sound of the receiver being slammed down. The time was between 12.45 and 1.00 a.m. and my sleep was disturbed by this uncivil call.

I had been running around the whole day and reached home only at ten at night. Had bathed, had dinner and had gone off to sleep after tossing and turning a few times. The mobile had rung within the hour.

—‘Hello, Mr Barua?’ It was a query from the other side.

—‘Yes, who is calling?’ Sleepily, I looked at the alarm clock, it was almost 12.45 am. The screen was about to display ‘011’...From Delhi? At quarter to one at night? Who can it be?’

—‘Here, talk to him.’ The same voice again.

—After saying ‘hello’ I had to wait for some time, holding on to the receiver. I could guess that it was a call from CM saab. A few more seconds of waiting. Then a very heavy authoritative sounding voice, not that of the CM of the state said, ‘Hello, are you the SP saab speaking?’

—‘Yes, who is...?’ I could not recognize the voice.

—‘Mister Barua, I am Chaudhary Narender Singh speaking.’

I could only say ‘Namaskar’. After all he is a powerful minister!

I have been in this job for a number of years now, this was common courtesy.

—‘Namaskar is all right, but what is this that you are doing?’

—‘What sir?’ I asked, suppressing my anger.

—‘Yaar, you have put our own men behind the bars!... Ring up SHO Sadar immediately and tell him to release all those arrested in the Jamalpur case, immediately.’ The commanding and decisive voice disturbed me.

—‘But sir, it is a case of murder. They killed a young woman who had come from somewhere in Assam.’ I repeated verbatim what the SHO had told me in the day.

—‘It was no murder. The woman had constipation. She drank Jamalghota, the bitch must have taken an overdose. She died. Who is to blame for this? Tell me!’ The slurred voice smacked largely of anger and alcohol.

—‘Sir, the post mortem report mentions pregnancy and poisoning...’ I wanted to give the honourable minister some information but he interrupted me. ‘Fuck the post mortem report. Ring up the SHO immediately and tell him to set free all those arrested in this case at once. They are our party workers. How can they be criminals? You catch hold of any respectable man and make a snake out of a rope...Your SHO is asking for five times of what those men had bought the woman for...Next week I will come and teach the bastard a lesson.’

As soon as there seemed to be a pause in the angry outburst of the honourable minister I said, ‘Sir, I will certainly take action against corrupt officers, but how can one release criminals arrested on a

charge of murder...’ my words prompted the minister to fire his missile.

—‘Leave law-shaw, Mister Barua. Do what I tell you. Tomorrow I am in Haryana Bhavan, Delhi till the afternoon. Report to me here, after releasing my party workers.’

—‘.....’ I kept quiet.

—‘Is that all right?’ The pressure was on again.

—‘Sir, I will be able to take a decision only after I get to know the details of the case. If everyone is let off like this, the law...’ I could manage to utter only one and a half sentences to save myself when I heard the roar.

—‘Are you the only law abiding SP in Haryana? I am going to send your transfer orders immediately from Chandigarh. Pack your bags to leave for Madhuban Training Centre at once.’ The receiver was slammed down. This was how a stupid phone call disturbed my sleep.

### **The Diary of that Night**

I could not go to sleep. I thought I would make entries in my diary. It would have been good if I could have got some sleep. Would have got up feeling fresh. It had been decided that I would take my son for his admission to school the next day. I had already spoken to the principal about it, there was no problem regarding admission, but all the formalities would have to be completed...now if this uncivilized minister were to send my transfer orders...what then? This sort of uncertainty always troubled officers like me...When I was a student and lived in a hostel of Delhi University, I had a romantic

notion of this sort of turmoil, which had seemed rather feeble and insignificant compared to one's rebellious and counter aggressive nature. In the beginning I was not scared of transfers or of ministers. This continued even after marriage. Even when our daughter was born there were no major problems. We were always mentally prepared for transfers— Ambala to Gurgaon, Gurgaon to Sirsa, Sirsa to Faridabad, Faridabad to Hissar, Hissar to Kurukshetra, Kurukshetra to Rohtak – always ready to be sent anywhere. As SP I suffered a number of transfers but there were no major problems...But when transfer orders came within two months of getting my daughter admitted to a good school, I was jolted, angry, felt helpless...and for the first time I had sleep disorder...Now my son was about to be admitted to a good school and transfer was hanging over my head like the sword of Damocles...

The crime rate in Haryana, once considered a comparatively peaceful and well off state, was going up very fast. When caught, almost every offender managed to get someone to phone the authorities on his behalf. If a strong, pressurizing phone call came even before the case came up for hearing, sometimes it came to nothing. Many times, officers at the police station 'solved the case at their own level', the officers did not even get to know about it....And how was this SHO of the Sadar Police Station involved in the Jamalpur case?

I should have gone to that village on an inspection trip today. I did think about it, but had to go to the local Government College as the chief guest on the occasion of an inter-college debate competition. Dr.

Ranbir Singh who had been my classmate in Ramjas College, teaches there and I could not refuse him. I too experience a sense of freedom and 'change' on such occasions. After the competition, when refreshment was being served in the college hall, the SHO called on my mobile and told me that they had arrested the offenders in the Jamalpur case, who happened to be three brothers....

During the debate competition, I remained almost as free of tension as I am while reading a good book. The topic was also very contemporary and a burning one – in the opinion of the house 'In Haryana the greatest problem facing the state is the deteriorating ratio of men and women'. Some participants had argued for the topic while others were of the view that unemployment, dowry system, poverty, the increase in population, alcoholism, superstition, shortage of basic resources like electricity and water for irrigation, suicide by farmers etc. etc. as well as a major rise in the crime rate are even bigger problems. If one can control those, the deteriorating male-female ratio will possibly get all right by itself. This meant that one section of participants was looking at the deteriorating male-female ratio as a result of other problems, while the other section considered it the main reason of a number of other problems. Every participant considered this problem grave but it was argued whether this was the greatest problem or not. A girl student who spoke for the motion was awarded the first prize. Listening to many of her arguments, I was reminded of the team of American researchers which had come to my house for a 'talk' last year. I also

remembered my old friend Professor Sandip Kumar Jena who teaches at Cambridge University and strongly opposes results found after research along with opinions from the West most of the time...

In Haryana the male-female birth ratio has been disturbed to such an extent that for every thousand men there are only eight hundred and twenty five women left. Many young as well as middle aged men here are buying 'brides' from states like Bengal and Assam. Since a number of social and traditional values in our country are given legal status, there is no compulsion of registering marriages. Under such circumstances, it would be difficult to differentiate between women who have been 'bought' or 'married and then brought over'. The police cannot take any action in the matter of women being 'bought' in the absence of any sustainable evidence. Nor can any legal action be taken against tests like amniocentesis or even female foeticide.

In this city, Dr. Sangwan, Dr. Yadav and Dr. Mehra have earned crores of rupees by conducting gender tests like amniocentesis and induced abortions, but no action is possible against them. These doctors have a strong network extending to Delhi and Chandigarh. The same 'honourable' minister inaugurated the new block of Sangwan Nursing Home last year. I had to stay there for quite a long time for protocol and security arrangements and could not reach home in time to meet the American research team. They had to wait for about thirty five minutes. They wanted to know what role the police was playing in cases related to female foeticide. After the formal conversation

was over, a senior professor with deep blue eyes expressed his concern over a cup of tea and said, "Mr Barua, this male-female imbalance is going to be very explosive some day. Any sensible person can assume it..I agree that most of the societies in the world are male dominated, but still I am completely unable to understand the mentality and the logic behind termination of the unborn female child though it is not something new. Even in medieval times female children were killed just after they were born, but that practice was limited to the higher or the upper middle class in a few castes. But now, there is no such limit. This is insult to the nature and is against its law of balance...This imbalance is likely to lead to a war in South Asia...and ultimately it may lead to even world war...'

When the senior professor finished, I refuted his argument about war and world war. Prof. Nelson (that was his name) had softened his stance a bit and had argued that in states like Punjab and Haryana when young men would remain deprived of love and unmarried because of scarcity of young girls, they would prefer to join the army. After a certain age an unmarried person starts behaving abnormally- either he or she gets very aggressive or very introverted, timid, fearful and dejected. Some will join the army, some will enter the world of crime, another will land up in mental asylum. In such a situation even if there is no war there is sure to be a spread of anarchy.

I was not in a position to accept that male-female imbalance could possibly result in a regional battle or the next and last world war. I still am not. A few

days after this incident, when my friend Prof. Sandip Jena from Cambridge came to Delhi for a vacation, I referred to this topic.

—‘These people are preparing new grounds in order to sell their arms and other products. These conclusions arrived at after stretching a lot of arguments are not merely ‘academic’, there may be a ‘deep political strategy’ behind them.’ Prof. Jena had exploded at once. His opinion was that many investigative researchers are ‘told’ what the ‘conclusions’ of their ‘research’ would be. The astonishing thing is that these conclusions are accepted as the positive result of the research. Investigations and institutional research conducted in underdeveloped and developing societies by researchers from most developed countries concluded with such general surveys and analytical conclusions’. I was shocked to hear this.

—‘And it is the limit Mr Barua that here in our underdeveloped nations there are some very enthusiastic ‘ultra modern’ intellectuals, who have some compulsions—financial or cerebral or a great desire to attain fame or suffer from an intellectual emptiness. They are the ones who feel proud and happy to propagate and popularize these ‘scientific deductions’. These persons snap up every ‘idea’, mannerism or thing that has its origin in Europe or America, one does not know why. Opinions from our own country seem significant and contextual to them when their importance is stressed by some American or European scholars. Most Indian ‘intellectuals’ seem like parasites to me, mouthing and digesting western views... You should try to understand your

circumstances in your own way, try to find some solutions to them. Go in the midst of the people and their problems, only then you will know what the reality is. Where is the need to depend on the ‘data collection’ of the whites? You may explain this to them time after time, but nobody is willing to listen.’ Prof. Jena completed what he had to say by slapping the table with both hands.

...What all am I writing in my diary. I started with the debate in college and somehow managed to link it with the American team and Dr. Jena’s words. ...Well.

I had come out immediately after giving away the prizes and having refreshments. The Deputy Commissioner had a routine meeting with all the high officials of the district at two thirty. As soon as the meeting was over, news came that in Kheda village there had been incidence of firing between two groups of the same clan over land dispute and long standing feuds. Three persons had been killed on the spot, five injured, two of whom were in a very critical condition. I had to leave for Kheda along with the police guards. There I got to know that the local MLA was planning to visit the victims at local civil hospital, so I had to go there as well. So what if he was not a minister, he was very close to the CM...As soon as I returned to the district town, news and TV reporters arrived. I just about managed to talk to them when the city SHO gave the information that in a posh residential sector outside the main city, some robbers had entered a house by force and looted cash and jewellery. On their way out they had shot at a middle aged woman and her young son. I had to rush there....By the

time I got home it was ten at night.

And now this stupid phone call had disturbed my sleep...I have just got up and taken a little wine so that I get proper sleep. I am feeling sleepy but not able to doze off. Thoughts, dreams and reality, everything is getting mixed up. Women from Assam – Bengal, Jamalpur, Government College, Kheda village,...two killed, three injured, five in a critical condition... no-no, five injured, three in critical condition...male-female imbalance... danger of a war-world war...background of selling arms... transfer-order, pack up your luggage...there in Madhuban Training Centre keep penning everything like clerks-no power, no recognition. Constipation, jamalghota (poison), post mortem, Haryana Bhavan, New Delhi...transfer-order, Chandigarh...school-admission and Saint John Paul School interview... sleep... Chaudhary Narender Singh mobile phone...rascal, ill mannered dog...

### Diary of the next day

Utkarsh had his interview today. The principal of Saint John Paul has said that the list will be out by the 30<sup>th</sup>. I should deposit the fees by the 10<sup>th</sup> of next month. I had a headache throughout the day because of inadequate sleep. On my way back from school I went to my office for half an hour. Spoke to the Deputy Commissioner from there....No transfer order had come today, but this Narender Singh is an uncouth man. Today the SHO Sadar said that some two and a half years back he had slapped a young ASP. 'He is a bloody goonda. When the government changes we will have our time back, put

handcuffs on him. Sir, you have no cause to worry.'

The SHO also gave me some details on the Jamalpur case. There were three brothers. They had four acres of land between them and no other resources. They crossed thirty waiting to get married. Ultimately, the second brother went with an agent from Delhi by Tinsukia Express and returned to the village with a 'bride'. She was a sort of 'Draupadi' to all three brothers. Her name was Durga. She was not a mature woman sir, a young and pretty girl of seventeen-eighteen years. They had brought her from some village in Kamrup district. The father had sent his daughter far away for 'marriage' for only ten thousand rupees. The agent had explained to him in the local language that there was a lot of food and drink in Haryana-Punjab but a scarcity of girls. Anyone who got married there had a good time, lived like a queen and was given a lot of respect. When Durga reached this village in Haryana, it really seemed so...the women in the neighbourhood performed *aarti* to her, welcomed her like a new bride...

A middle aged woman in the neighbourhood even wanted to know how many unmarried younger sisters she had. This neighbour was very concerned about the 'marriage' of her two young sons who were still unmarried.

If no good neighbour had informed the police, the three brothers would have cremated Durga. The real matter has not come to light as yet. Some say that the three brothers suspected their 'Draupadi' Durga of having an affair with some young unmarried boy in the neighbourhood. In

a drunken fit, the bastards made her drink poison. Someone has said that they took her to Sangwan Nursing Home for a 'test'. The test revealed that she was carrying a female child. Durga did not agree to an 'abortion' so all three forcibly made her drink something. one held her arms tight, the second opened her mouth by force with his thumbs pushed into her cheeks and the third made her drink something out of a glass. All three were together in killing her. All three are murderers. An elderly man in the village was saying that the middle brother told him that now they knew the place and the 'rate' as well.'This time we will pay the price of a buffalo and get two wives, be sure *tau* (Uncle)!

#### **Diary of the Following Day**

Today we went to Badkal Lake and Suraj Kund. We went boating. Rested for a while in the Tourist Hut. My daughter was at school. Utkarsh was with us. The programme was not pre-planned, suddenly we had felt like it. Utkarsh was making buildings with his plastic blocks and the two of us were resting in the Tourist Hut. Then we went to Suraj Kund and had a late lunch. It was a day well spent but the evening was full of tension. Some aggressive women who were part of an organization called 'DurgaVahini' descended on us at our residence. Well, I had got the information earlier that 'DurgaVahini' was on a *dharna* in the office lawn. They came in a rush and started firing questions as to why the Jamalpur case had not yet gone to court. It is a clear cut case of murder by poisoning. We talked to many villagers yesterday.

Here the *thanedar* had made the criminals sit in the police station for three days. Police is not supposed to make a mockery of the law of this country, Mr Barua! Maybe there were six or seven of them. They were very aggressive in the beginning, all of them speaking at the same time. One went to the extent of saying, 'If you are aware of the case, then I suppose you are a corrupt officer...and if you don't know the details of the case, then you are an inefficient...'

—'I understand your feelings madam, please take a seat.' I said to the most aggressive and outspoken woman, suppressing my anger. I made all of them sit down. My wife had also come to the drawing room. She sat with them and started saying to them, 'do you know that Mr Barua has not been able to sleep for the last two nights! He has lost his sleep over this case. I am also deeply hurt.'

The servant had placed some eight or ten glasses of water on the table. The women of the 'DurgaVahini' got involved in ideological debates on the degenerating condition of women in the country and the world. My wife was also saying something now and then. I was quiet. At some point of time I felt drowsy and went out of the drawing room on the pretext of going to the bathroom. I re-entered the drawing room when the servant had served the guests cups of hot tea, hot *samosas* and *gulab jamuns*.

I said to them, 'The enquiry is going on. Have faith in us.' Just then my daughter entered the drawing room. All the women made her sit down affectionately. The woman who had been most aggressive in the beginning, asked her a number of questions



about her school, syllabus, timing, the nature and qualifications of her teachers etc. After some time she looked at me and my wife and then said, 'Sensible parents, sensible child. Happy family.'

I said 'thank you' to her and then my wife also remembered to thank her. The atmosphere had become homely by then. Their anger had disappeared. At that moment it seemed to me that they had even forgotten the reason behind their anger. All of them said good bye and went out. Suddenly one of them remembered, 'The memorandum that was to be handed over to Mr Barua is lying in my purse' She came back and gave a copy of the memorandum to my orderly...

Late in the evening I got a call from SHO Sadar informing me that the situation during the day was calm except for a demonstration of the women belonging to the 'DurgaVahini'. Members of the Jamalpur Panchayat had come in the evening. The Sarpanch (head of the Panchayat) there is a woman. She had brought three tempos full of women from the village with her. The entire Panchayat was of the opinion that this was an accident,

not a case of murder. The woman had constipation and she had drunk Jamalghota or something to get rid of it and died. Sir, the post mortem report did not mention the kind of poison and *Jamalghota* is a something of that kind. Two or three seeds are enough to churn the stomach of a person lethally. The three brothers belong to a good family and not too well off. Why should they kill a woman whom they have brought to their house with such difficulty? Today, some time back, all the three have been let off because of what the Panchayat has said.

There was a call from the Minister at about nine thirty at night. 'Hello Mr Barua, good night. How are you? Many many thanks, you have set our men free. But *iss SHO ki nakel kheencho, saala bahut paisa peet raha hai*. Thank you.'

I was amused for a long time at the Minister's attempts to speak English in a Haryanvi accent.

The next week we will deposit Utkarsh's fees at Saint John Paul. Now I will stop writing, am feeling very sleepy...

Courtesy : 'Vagarth', Kolkata

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## RUTHLESS

Avadhesh Preet

Translated by  
Minu Manjari

After the uproar about the death of Comrade Vijay Mitra, the Government had suspended Dr. C.K. Bhagat and formed an inquiry commission of three members. The commission was to submit its report within fifteen days and keeping the sensitivity of the issue in view, was instructed to focus its inquiry on following points:

- a) The real cause of the death of the patient Vijay Mitra under treatment of Dr. C.K. Bhagat.
- b) Dr. C.K. Bhagat doing duty in I.C.C.U. on the night of 1<sup>st</sup> January despite his being off-duty.
- c) Personal conduct of Dr. C.K. Bhagat.
- d) And the legal validity of the death certificate issued by Dr. C.K. Bhagat.

Dr. Rajnish Acharya, Cardiologist, Dr. Jeevkant Yadav, Neurologist and Dr. Ramashish Dev, Psychiatrist were members of the inquiry commission. Specialists of their respective fields, they began their work by taking into view the witnesses, their statements and the circumstances. They summoned each and every party related to this enquiry and asked them to give their statement. All concerned parties cooperated and gave their statements as follows:

### **The statement of Dr. C.K. Bhagat**

This is true that on the night of first January, I didn't have the duty at Cardiology, so I was in my quarters. I was just conducting

my paralysed wife from bathroom to bed when the call bell rang. I thought at first to help my wife recline on the bed and give her support of the pillow and a blanket on her feet, but the call bell kept ringing and a knocking also began. It seemed someone was in great hurry and trouble. So I left my wife as she was and opened the door almost running. The P.G. Student Dr. Sujata Roy was there. She was looking troubled. She was panting as if she had come running.

As it is the custom, P.G. students always greet their Senior, but Dr. Sujata Roy forgot doing so and before I could ask anything, she herself started – “Sir, just... just now a serious patient has come.... I have admitted him to the I.C.C.U.... but there isn't any senior doctor, sir...sir, I couldn't find anyone... so I had to trouble you... Sir, please... come and see him.”

Even after the request of Dr. Sujata Roy, I asked her indifferently, “Dr. Roy, is the patient your relative?”

“No, Sir!” Sujata Roy faltered.

I frowned, “Then why are you being so emotional?”

Dr. Sujata Roy couldn't answer. She just said, “Sorry Sir.”

“Whose duty it is?” I asked in a dry voice.

She said, “Dr. Choudhary's!”

“Then! Where is Dr. Choudhary?”

“Sir, Dr. Choudhary hasn't come yet.

I tried to ring him but nobody responded... perhaps false ring.”

I cut her sentence, “Isn't there any other senior in the campus?”

“No Sir, the director has gone with the team of senior doctors to the C.M. House, ... for routine check-up.” Dr. Sujata Roy tried to give reason for coming to me.

My first thought was to escape with the excuse of it not being my duty or because of my wife's situation, but in view of the helplessness and trepidation of Sujata Roy it seemed immoral to me. So I assured Dr. Roy, “Just a minute Dr. Roy! I am coming after arranging for my wife. She has just come from bathroom... You know, she is unable to do anything... and our maidservant is on leave.”

I left Dr. Sujata Roy there and came to the bedroom where my wife lay on bed. Topsy-turvey. I helped her sit comfortably, put blanket on her and switching on the T.V., told her – “One serious patient is there... I am going to see him.”

My wife wanted to say something but I quickly came out. Dr. Sujata Roy was waiting for me with a curious mixture of guilt, apprehension and terror. Looking at her, I said, “Dr. Roy, do you know what's the first condition to be a doctor?” She looked at me, I said, “no sentiments, no involvement... no emotions.”

Don't know whether she became normal or not, but while going to the

Institute building with me, she said –  
"I have never seen such quiet crowd,  
one just can't ignore it. Perhaps that's  
why I'm looking so excited and troubled."

I felt she's giving an excuse. Perhaps  
my comment hit her. I wanted to see  
her face but couldn't due to the sudden  
increase in her pace. I thought it better  
to keep silent. And we were silent all  
the way.

When I entered I.C.C.U., Sister Elvin  
had fitted the I.V. line to the patient.  
She wished 'good evening' with a smile.  
But it was an effortless professional smile,  
I was used to it, so I didn't notice it  
much and took the chart from her to  
see the details.

In the chart his name was recorded  
Vijay Mitra, age-51 years. His blood  
pressure was alarmingly high. His E.C.G.  
report was showing dangerous signs. I  
glanced at the patient. He was under  
oxygen mask and breathing with problem.

The rising –dropping waves on the  
E.C.G. monitor showed he was coping  
with death.

"Sir what do you thing... Is it a case  
of Myocardial Infarction?" I couldn't  
understand the meaning of Dr. Sujata  
Roy's question, I was surprised at such  
innocent question, then stared and asked  
"what do you mean?"

"Actually....!" Dr. Sujata Roy hesitated.

Her hesitation was beyond my  
understanding. I felt she's a little bit  
extra conscious about the patient, so  
I asked– "Dr. Roy, something wrong

with you?"

"No...no...Sir!" Sujata became  
embarrassed as if I had caught her. She  
tried to recollect herself and said –  
"Sir, I think this man can't have  
Myocardial Infarction."

"Why, how can you say so?" I wavered.  
I looked at the screen to assure myself.

"Sir, a man like this who believes  
in bloodshed...who can easily kill  
anybody...whose name is synonymous  
with massacres, can he have a thing  
such as heart?"

The words of Dr. Sujata Roy were  
so very agitated that I couldn't remain  
indifferent I saw her with surprise, is  
she a doctor or an ordinary girl.

I tried to find something in her  
eyes...innocence.... Melancholy, but  
couldn't conceal my surprise, "I didn't  
understand, Dr. Roy?"

"Sir, this man is a naxal leader. You  
know, Naxalites do believe in  
bloodshed!," her voice was faltering.

Dr. C.K. Bhagat stopped at this point  
while giving his statement, because he  
remembered what his mind had thought  
when Dr. Sujata Roy had said –"Naxalites  
do believe in bloodshed."

That time his forehead had creased  
as if trying to remember something. The  
recorded name Vijay Mitra jumped to  
his memory and something whispered  
in his mind–Naxal leader Vijay Mitra!  
Suddenly he got up and went to the  
patient. He hadn't seen him closely due

to the Oxygen mask. And then, there wasn't any curiosity too, but now, at this time he was looking at him intently, straining his memory.

Despite the similarity in physical stature and complexion, the adulthood of the face, grey in the hair and the shut eyes of the patient didn't match with the Vijay Mitra he had seen years ago. His eyes grew big with pleasant surprise remembering the Vijay Mitra of twenty five or six years ago. He really had become emotional at that moment.

Psychiatrist Dr. Ramashish Dev addressed Dr. Bhagat, seeing him quiet and slightly agitated — "what happened, Dr. Bhagat?"

Dr. Sujata Roy had also asked the same question — "what happened, Sir?"

Instead of answering her I called Sister Elvin, she came to me almost running. I ordered her — "Sister, send his blood sample to Biochemistry and, call his attendant."

Sister Elvin went back straight. Dr. Sujata Roy had given the patient streptokinase. I checked the I.V. line to satisfy myself. Then I sat near ECG monitor and waited for Sister Elvin. Dr. Sujata Roy addressed me, perhaps seeing me very serious — "Sir, what are you thinking?"

Dr. C.K. Bhagat remembered vividly what he was thinking about Vijay Mitra at that time. In the third year of medical college, the boy who became his room-mate was this Vijay Mitra. Wheatish-

complexioned Vijay Mitra was of normal stature. He generally kept silent in the class room. Steeped in himself as if his body and soul were at different places. Till second year he was just a hi-hello acquaintance. In third year when they became room-mates, he chanced to know Vijay Mitra. In the beginning Vijay Mitra talked just necessary things with him, but after some time the formalities crumbled. Now they talked more freely.

Those days, Vijay Mitra kept late nights and studied by his table lamp. Since he wasn't in the habit of late nights, he slept early. But whenever he awoke at night, he found Vijay Mitra reading. One such night when he awoke, he found Vijay Mitra was not in his bed. He thought he must have gone to bathroom and slept. But after that often he found him missing from his bed. This night bunking of Vijay Mitra was as curious as it was mysterious. After all he had asked him one day — "Partner, where do you vanish all night? Is there some affair?"

Vijay Mitra neither got surprised, nor there was any feeling of being caught. Just a little smile came to his face — "No crushes, friend! Just go off to wander."

He wasn't satisfied with this explanation. But the manner of Vijay Mitra was such that he couldn't ask anything further. It felt like intruding into his personal matters. He suppressed his desire to solve the mystery.

But his mystery couldn't remain

unsolved for long. On his bedside, between course-books some books appeared which had no relation to medicine. Sometimes he read the manifesto of Communist Party, sometimes Das Capital. Often he remained absorbed in the books of Karl Marx, Angles, Lenin, Mao-tse-Tung and when tired, thought something with closed eyes. He thought Vijay Mitra is wasting his time. Being his room-mate, he didn't like this deviation of Vijay Mitra and he had tried to advise him —"Vijay, why are you wasting your time in these worthless books."

Vijay Mitra was ready for this attack. He had said quickly —"The books you are calling worthless will change the world one day."

"But these won't let you become a doctor," he had protested.

"Perhaps yes!" Vijay Mitra had shown flint instead of wavering, "perhaps I won't be a doctor... perhaps I won't heal patients...but the disease that's eating away human society... I will try to heal it, surely."

He had looked at Vijay Mitra, speechless— as if his mind were disturbed. But no, Vijay Mitra was looking at him, smiling. He had tried once more, this time attacking his heart— "Vijay, don't you think, you'll hurt your parents. They have sent you here to be a doctor. They must have a lot of expectation from you. I think this is too much for them."

This time Vijay Mitra didn't protest, but he had not agreed, it seemed. He

felt the meaninglessness of his effort and a deep silence had come between them.

It was clear now that what Vijay Mitra read or what he did at night outside the hostel wasn't related a bit to medical studies, he had become almost suicidal. This was sad. He felt for him and wished well from all his heart. So strange were his feelings towards Vijay Mitra that he couldn't check himself to advise him time and again. He always asked him at such times — "Vijay, don't you think you're wasting yourself? This opportunity of being a doctor, you are losing it... a great career, a great future.... Above all you're losing a chance to a better human service."

"I respect your feelings, Comrade. I know what you say is more attractive... life can be more comfortable but....", he was emphasizing every word, "poverty, inequality, hunger, injustice, exploitation,.... Insult of man's labour — I can't stand it... I get hurt.... And feel guilty. I don't think I can be part of this machinery."

A decided attitude of Vijay Mitra was flourishing day-by-day. He now spent his nights in slums. And days passed in movements... protests... seminars. He didn't return to hostel for days. And as these activities increased, his interest in medical studies decreased.

Whenever he tried to catch Vijay Mitra he shut him up with some sharp question. He often said, "comrade, this behavior with medical students... this

treatment like bonded labourers, it must be protested. Students should be united against it.”

The ideas of Vijay Mitra made him tremble. He used to look here and there. What if anybody hears. He checked the room and corridors. He used to be frightened with him in the room. He used to be uneasy with him but couldn't stand his absence either. It was a grotesque attraction.

Those days, suddenly one day police came to check the room. It was heard Vijay Mitra was arrested. His blood froze with this news. One police officer had asked him many questions about Vijay Mitra before going, but he had answered in negative,. His seniors, classmates and many professors had assured the officer about the good conduct of Bhagat and that he was the best student of the college and he hadn't any relation with Vijay Mitra despite sharing the room.

That day he couldn't get out of it even after many hours. His trembling and recurring thoughts of Vijay Mitra agitated him. He couldn't understand how to keep himself aloof from this whole incident. The bronze face of Vijay Mitra, his shining eyes came before his eyes and he asked questions as if from himself — why did Vijay Mitra go to Naxalbari? How had police arrested him there? Was his way right or wrong? Why did he prefer revolution to his career?

The unkempt bed of Vijay Mitra troubled him much that night. For some

time he tried to keep himself aloof. For some time he coped with the memory of Vijay Mitra. For some time he debated in his mind. At last he got up. Put his books into the rack. Picked up the mattress and arranged the sheets. When he was arranging the pillow cover, something was there. He found a diary with red plastic cover. Vijay Mitra had written many things in the diary — anecdotes ... thoughts... incidents.

Vijay Mitra's diary was full of his personal comments. He was becoming excited and terrified in turns while reading it. At one place Vijay Mitra had written — “ Due to the lack of analytical attitude many of our comrades don't want to analyse the complex problems, but want to jump at solutions, which are either too positive or too negative — Mao-tse-tung.”

He could understand the mind of Vijay Mitra then, it seemed this comment was addressed to him. It often happened that he disagreed suddenly with Vijay Mitra and blowing all his reasons to wind, said — “Don't live in fool's paradise.”

Dr. C.K. Bhagat's lips moved. He was murmuring— “the fool!”

Neurologist Dr. Jeevkant Yadav was startled. He addressed Dr. C.K. Bhagat— “Dr. Bhagat, are you all right?”

Dr. C.K. Bhagat recollected himself but couldn't hide his embarrassment— “Yes... yes, Dr. Yadav, I'm absolutely alright!”

And before anybody could guess his mind, he himself resumed his statement— “When Dr. Roy asked me what I was thinking, I questioned back— “By the way, do you know this patient?”

Perhaps she didn't expect this question, so for a moment she was surprised, but seeing him looking at her, said, “Sir, I keep reading such things in papers.”

“I see!” I smiled, “I thought you knew him personally.”

“No Sir,” Dr. Sujata Roy was as if intent on clarifying. “The people who have come with the patient, I guessed from their talk that this man is a naxal leader.”

Suddenly I remembered that Sister Elvin hadn't returned yet. So I instructed Dr. Sujata Roy about the patient and came out of ICCU quickly.

Sister Elvin met me on her return. She looked very irritated. Looking at me she almost exploded— “Sir nobody is there. Biochemistry lab is locked.”

“Why?”, I was stunned. This anarchy in this institute was nothing new, but this time I felt irritated. I was almost angry. I told her to go to ICCU and went forth quickly.

On the verandah outside the institute there was a silent but restless crowd. Many pairs of eyes glued on me as I came out. There was hope... there was apprehension in those eyes... with curious silence there was brimming entreaty. I

didn't have the courage to face them. Trying to ignore them I went towards doctor's chamber. Suddenly the whole institute became dark. Load shedding. In that unlimited darkness, it seemed everything stopped.

In that hideous darkness two faces flashed in my consciousness at once, first my wife's, second patient Vijay Mitra in ICCU. Both the faces collapsed in each other and I was helplessly waiting for light.

I was wondering why the generator hadn't started yet. In this unexpected delay and the dread of darkness it was almost impossible for me to wait. I went towards ICCU in the darkness. As I entered ICCU light came, or generator started. In that sudden gleam my eyes started flipping my lids I gazed at the ECG monitor screen. The graph denoting heart-beats was not there. Only a plain, shining line. I ran to the patient. I tried to feel his pulse. I was so troubled and agitated that I couldn't check his pulse. I tried to give him cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, but Dr. Sujata Roy stopped me, “Sir, the patient is no more.”

I noticed Dr. Sujata Roy was neither emotional nor uneasy. Her voice was calm. I felt she was noticing my emotions and uneasiness, but the truth was that I would not accept his death. I told Dr. Sujata Roy in a hopeless way— “No, Dr. Roy, we could not save him!”

Dr. C.K. Bhagat stopped in between the statement. There was sweat on his



forehead. His mind wandered towards many memories when he was taking out the handkerchief.

Vijay Mitra could not be saved even after much effort. Many students including himself had argued that the political loyalty of any student is his personal right, he shouldn't be rusticated on that basis. But college administration was not ready to hear a word, strict measures had been taken in the campus. Police was deputed as precaution and before the thrashing attitude of some professors the courage of students failed. The rustication of Vijay Mitra was first the matter of discussion and then was forgotten.

But on his consciousness Vijay Mitra remained alive for a long time. His bed, his books, trunk, table lamp, his clothes made his memory deeper. He could never understand the weakness in his heart for Vijay Mitra, his words, his emotions, his style, his attitude.

Suddenly one day when Mitra's father came to take his things. He melted. Seeing the hopeless, tired and broken personality of the old man, he could hardly say— "We tried but..."

He couldn't understand what to say after this 'but' and Vijay Mitra's father didn't want to know anything. During the packing and loading of his things on the rickshaw there was a hard silence, through which much was said in a way that words could not. He kept looking at the rickshaw going out of the hostel

gate. In a few minutes Vijay Mitra's father changed into a shadow.

He was depressed. Now there weren't things reminding of Vijay Mitra's presence, but there was an insipid emptiness in that corner. He felt this throbbing emptiness. For the first time he had heard a silence buzzing as if someone were saying in his ears— "Comrade, why did you keep my diary with you?"

This was Vijay Mitra! Was Vijay Mitra inside him? He glanced around the room, then very carefully put out the red diary and questioned himself— "why did you hide the diary of Vijay Mitra from his father?"

And there wasn't any answer of his own question. He began passing the pages of the diary as if the answer will come out of it. Suddenly his eyes became glued to a page. Vijay Mitra had written on a page— "the proletariat must try to get help from farmers and prepare for armed revolt. The farmers should make revolutionary committees in countryside and prepare to capture the lands. The labour class will have to take the leadership in their hands, then only revolution will succeed. —"Lenin".

Reading this page he was at once filled with terror and guilt and he thought it imprudent to keep the diary. The sentimentality which had provoked him to keep the diary, was now again provoking him to escape from it. He stood up at once and marched towards

the railway station with the diary in his pocket.

He found Vijay Mitra's father sitting silently. He handed him the diary saying he had forgotten to return it. His father's hand was trembling as if he were taking the corpse of his son.

"Dr. Bhagat , if you are not feeling well your statement can be taken later", Dr. Rajnish Acharya said seeing him wipe sweat off his forehead.

Dr. C.K. Bhagat answered clenching the handkerchief in his fist, "No Dr. Acharya, I'm quite normal."

In an abnormal silence Dr. Bhagat kept speaking in as normal a way as he could—

"When Vijay Mitra's body was carried out of ICCU, the crowd in campus began shouting— "Long Live Comrade Vijay Mitra!" The whole institute echoed the slogan.

I couldn't decide what to do? I came helplessly to Doctor's chamber. Dr. Sujata Roy also came after me. Due to the noise and excitement outside she was looking terrified. I sat silent. Sister Elvin was doing her work.

When I saw Dr. Choudhary entering the Doctor's chamber, I sighed with relief. Dr. Choudhary came surprised and panting— he came in and faced me, "Dr. Bhagat , what's all this? Why this crowd... is everything alright here?"

"One patient... Naxal leader... those are his supporters." I answered dejected

and got up to go home, "Dr. Choudhary I am going home. Now you've come... issue the death certificate."

"I...", Dr. Choudhary stammered. "How can I give the death certificate! I haven't seen him... I don't know even his case history."

I stared. Outside the noise was lessening. Inside an unexpected situation had arisen. I didn't understand what to do? I reminded Dr. Choudhary in a solemn tone— "Dr. Choudhary, you are on duty. Its your case according to rules". But Dr. Choudhary wouldn't hear anything. He was adamant. In such a situation, the dead body, excited crowd, an apprehension of coming incidents and my helpless wife in the quarter, alone, veins of my mind strained. Before I lost my temper, I thought it better to write the death certificate.

#### **The statement of Dr. Sujata Roy**

I, P.G. Student Dr. Sujata Roy was on duty in Dr. choudhary's unit when Naxal leader Vijay Mitra was brought unconscious in cardiology. After primary check-up I found that the patient was very serious and the crowd with him very excited. Feeling frightened and helpless I instructed to admit the patient to ICCU and tried to ring Dr. Choudhary. But I could not communicate with him, since I knew till then that this patient Vijay Mitra was a Naxal leader and the people outside were his supporters I was very much frightened. In this mental situation I came out of the back door

in search of any senior doctor.

Since it was the night of first January, the campus was uncommonly silent. Whether it was my terror or this silence, the atmosphere seemed dreadful. Then I looked at the light coming from Dr. Bhagat's window and the shadows there. I thought Dr. Bhagat must be there. Filled with worry and anxiety I rang his doorbell.

Dr. Bhagat was the person to open the door before he could ask me anything I told him the serious condition of the patient and asked him for help. Seeing me anxious and helpless he agreed to come.

Hearing the name Vijay Mitra at the ICCU Dr. Bhagat started as if, I noted, he tried to remember something. Next moment he reached near the patient, saw him attentively and after a deep breath asked me— "Dr. Roy, do you know this patient?"

Yes, I knew the patient Vijay Mitra and I didn't know him only because he was a Naxal leader, I knew him because I was born in Naxalbari, where Naxalite movement also was born and my family was one of its victims. But I hid this from Dr. Bhagat. In fact, I felt Dr. Bhagat also knew him some way or the other. In his eyes there was a soft glow of remembrance and his face had grown sad.

Dr. Bhagat looked very attentively at his situation. With every change in ECG monitor screen his forehead creased. I felt Dr. Bhagat had become very

emotional and worried. So to draw him out of it or my fear of the Naxalites prompted me and I asked a foolish question— "Sir can such a ruthless man have a heart?"

Dr. Bhagat looked at me with curiosity and then seeing me looking at him said with a sigh; "Dr. Roy, the world this man fought for, was not in the power of any common man."

It was obvious that Dr. Bhagat not only knew much about the patient but also was very familiar with him in some way. I wanted to ask him whether he believed in Vijay Mitra's fight or not, but cross-questioning any senior is neither wise nor appropriate for us P.G. students.

Seeing me silent, Dr. Bhagat became even more anxious. He as if said to himself— "This patient must be saved, Dr. Roy!"

But that patient could not be saved. Dr. Bhagat couldn't save him even after many efforts. That time he was looking like a robbed journeyman whose everything is lost but he can't complain anywhere. Dr. Bhagat sad, hopeless came out of ICCU with heavy steps and sat down in the doctor's chamber. I too come behind him and sat on a chair.

After some minutes, Dr. Choudhary also arrived. Outside Vijay Mitra's supporters were shouting slogans. Seeing Dr. Choudhary, Dr. Bhagat got up and told him to give the death certificate, Dr. Choudhary expressed his inability

to do so. They quibbled on this issue and I saw Dr. Bhagat sitting uneasily in the chair. He was seething with anger and began to write the death certificate.

Dr. Bhagat signed on the certificate, rose with a jerk, left the piece of paper there and went out of the chamber like an arrow.

#### **The Statement of Sister Elvin**

I, senior sister Elvin Hembram was on duty on the night of first January. That night when a crowd came with patient Vijay Mitra, P.G. Dr. Sujata Roy examined him at once and instructed to put him on Oxygen and admit him to ICCU. After some time, Dr. C.K. Bhagat came with Dr. Sujata Roy in ICCU. He examined the patient and told me to send his blood to Biochemistry. I went out on his order. Biochemistry was locked. I informed Dr. Bhagat and he was very anxious and went running towards the verandah. Suddenly the power was off. When it came I saw Dr. Bhagat entering breathless in ICCU. Dr. Bhagat looked at the ECG monitor and cried— “Oh No!”

My attention went towards him with his cry. I saw, Dr. Bhagat was trying to check the pulse of the patient. He was very anxious and restless. Perhaps he couldn't understand anything. Then Dr. Sujata Roy told him— “Sir, the patient is no more!”

#### **The Statement of the Generator Operator**

On the night of first January when the

power cut occurred, I was on duty. I tried to start the generator quickly. But due to some deposit in the generator it took time to start. How much time did it take, I can't say exactly, because I didn't have any watch and I have never felt its necessity.

#### **The Statement of Dr. Choudhary**

I, Dr. Neelkant Choudhary was on night duty on first January. I don't have quarter in campus so I live in town on rent. That night when I started for duty, I heard that the main road is closed due to the procession of governor. The way was diverted so there was traffic jam on all these roads. And I couldn't reach on time. When I came on duty a crowd was shouting surrounding a dead-body. The crowd was excited. In fact it could become violent any minute. I reached Doctor's chamber where Dr. Bhagat and P.G. student Dr. Sujata Roy were already present. Dr. Bhagat told me to give the death certificate. But since I hadn't attended the case, nor knew the case history, so issuing death certificate was neither practical nor wise for me, so I expressed my inability. Dr. Bhagat lost his temper.

In that mental condition he wrote the death certificate.

On seeing that certificate I was surprised. I couldn't believe my eyes. I gave it to Dr. Sujata Roy to read. She also was puzzled. Dr. Bhagat had written the cause of death of patient Vijay Mitra — “ Due to failure of system.”

The inquiry commission felt it was necessary to ask for clarification from Dr. Bhagat on this point. So Dr. Bhagat was summoned once more. Dr. Rajanish Acharya asked on behalf of the inquiry commission— “Dr. Bhagat, you’re a senior and responsible doctor, why did you issue such a certificate?”

“Why, have I written anything wrong?”

Dr. Bhagat smiled with such calm that all the members were astounded.

“Are you sure, Dr. Bhagat that you’ve written right?”, Dr. Ramashish Dev could ask with difficulty.

“Yes... yes! I’m hundred percent sure!”

There was flint and edge in Dr. C.K. Bhagat’s voice. “Any more questions?” he asked.

The inquiry commission didn’t ask any other question. The director of Cardiology and other doctors weren’t questioned because they didn’t have any direct connection with this incident and they didn’t come under the area of inquiry. The report which the three members prepared on the basis of evidences, circumstances and statement of witnesses was as such—

**Dr. Rajanish Acharya, Cardiologist**

Due to the (unavailability of patient’s blood biochemistry, Myocardial Infarction (Heart attack) is not proved. But the blood pressure and ECG report show the patient was very serious. His proper care and observation was necessary, which wasn’t taken. This is

a plain case of irresponsibility and against medical ethics. In my view the reason of patient’s death is lack of proper treatment.

**Dr. Jeevkant Yadav, Neurologist**

The evidences, circumstances and background of the patient show patient Vijay Mitra had suffered serious “nervous break down” due to which his mind had stopped working. Such a patient is brain-dead but living physically. In such cases, a neurologist must be consulted immediately which was not done. In my view the reason of patient’s death is ‘brain-death’.

**Dr. Ramashish Dev, Psychiatrist**

Since patient Vijay Mitra was a Naxal leader and activist, his being under terrible stress and strain is obvious. He was habituated to live in world of dreams and fantasies as such persons are prone to be. Actually it’s a type of mental disorder. At the height of such disorder either such patients suffer insanity or acute depression. On the basis of evidence, circumstances and statement of witnesses, my conclusion is that the reason of patient Vijay Mitra’s death is ‘stress and strain’.

But the members of inquiry commission were unanimous in some respects. They were unanimous that on the night of first January it was Dr. Choudhary’s duty and he couldn’t reach on time due to traffic-jam, this is possible. But Dr. Bhagat shouldn’t have treated the patient in Dr. Choudhary’s duty. Dr. Bhagat not only took the responsibility

of patient Vijay Mitra's treatment but also crossed the rules and regulations of the institute.

The members of the inquiry commission were unanimous on this fact also that due to the suicide of his son, his wife's long suffering and the court-case about not being made the director of Cardiology Institute, Dr. Bhagat has become hopeless, complexed and frustrated. His mental situation also doesn't seem normal.

About the legal validity of the death certificate issued by Dr. Bhagat, they gave this conclusion—

Since Dr. Bhagat wasn't on duty on the night of first January he shouldn't have issued the death-certificate. This will not only develop anarchy but a wrong tradition will also develop. The death-certificate

issued by Dr. Bhagat is against the rules. However, an opinion of legal expert is expected on this issue.

### **The decision of the Government**

According to the opinion of members of the inquiry commission, the attached statements of witnesses and circumstances, it is clear that Dr. C.K. Bhagat had close relationship with the Naxal leader. Vijay Mitra, and due to this he issued the illegal death certificate under a preplanned conspiracy to defame the government, which shows serious indiscipline and breach of conduct of a government servant. Due to the contravention of medical ethics and irresponsible conduct, Dr. C.K. Bhagat is discharged immediately.

### **The reaction of Dr. C.K. Bhagat**

Comrade Vijay Mitra, if only you didn't have a heart!

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Aadhesh Preet, born 1958, writes short stories in hindi. Four major stories are to his credit— 'Nrishansa', 'Kohre Me Kandil', 'Ham Jamin' and 'Hastakshep'. He has received Phanishwar Nath Renu Samman, Vijay Verma Katha Samman, Surendra Choudhary Katha Samman. At present he is editor of daily news paper, Hindustan, Patna.

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## GENDERING THE 'LOOK' IN CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN CINEMA

Lalit Joshi

Filmmakers across the world have had to contend with the question of the look—particularly when the image to be looked at happens to be a woman. The challenge has been to direct and anchor audience gaze by appropriately positioning the image of the woman on the screen. Moreover, spectatorship has to be constituted in such a way that the intent of the filmmaker can be affectively communicated. But one must remember that films are made within multiple constraints, the screen always being a contested space for rival ideologies. The modern state tries to resolve this by designing a system of censorship poised dangerously between popular aspirations, market forces and the pressures of its political constituencies. Also, filmmaking still remains an enterprise dominated by men. Thus, despite resistance from women's organizations, feminist writers and women directors of international acclaim, cinemas across the world have tried to achieve gendering both at the level of scripting and the deployment of technology. A gendered narrative is a powerful guarantee against box-office failures, even though every filmmaker is aware that little can be done to manipulate interpretation and meaning, which remain until the end, resolute domains of the audience. This essay is concerned with the production of the gendered look in contemporary Iranian cinema. I also examine how filmmakers have accomplished subtle transgressions of censorship regulations even when the bulk of the filmic narrative is synchronous with patriarchal imaginings.

It is challenging to read Iranian films in India<sup>2</sup> particularly at a time when the art film movement has practically withered

away and screen space seems to have become the singular habitat for hegemonic Bollywood. In contrast to Bollywood films, Hollywood productions are positioned second or even third (when the rival is a regional Indian film) in the order of preference by Indian audiences. Other foreign films, including Iranian, are not normally screened in Indian cinema halls. This is however not the case with Iran where audiences for Indian cinema had existed even in the pre-revolutionary period. Reading foreign films in India means, displacing them from their contexts of production and locating meaning in a culture with different codes of exegesis. In the case of Iranian cinema, a major encumbrance has been that my familiarity with Persian is restricted to words etymologically related to Urdu. Also, like other national cinemas, Iranian films deploy narrative devices that owe allegiance to local forms of telling and traditions of performance. To understand majority of the dialogues, I have to depend on the English subtitles. Palpably, words do get lost in translation.

The Iranian cinema I am referring to in this essay is largely post-revolutionary cinema. I do not know how correct would it be to term low-budget, post-revolutionary Iranian cinema as 'art' or 'realist' cinema, even though the Anglo-European scholars would like all cinemas to be seen through categories designed by them. At no point did the Islamic revolution of 1979 mark a complete break from the earlier genres

of Iranian cinema. Indeed, many Iranian directors were engaging contemporary themes even before the revolution.

Modern Iranians are inheritors of the tradition of Islamic Drama called *Taziyeh* or *Shabih Khwani*. Such performances were aimed at presenting dramatically, the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. Staged in inns, the *Taziyeh Khani* (like the passion plays of medieval Europe), involved the narration of events at Karbala. All roles were performed by men. *Taziyeh* became an institutionalized feature of Iranian popular culture during the reign of Fateh Ali Shah Qajar (1779 – 1834). Other forms of audio –visual narration included (a) the *Pardeh-khani*, where the narrator unveiled a series of paintings during narration (b) *Nagali* in which the *Nagal* or the storyteller enacted scenes with songs and dances in the background (c) *Khaymeshab-bazi* or puppet shows and (d) *Rouhozi* or comical plays. Thus, when cinema arrived at the dawn of the twentieth century, Iranian filmmakers had a whole range of narrative forms and practices to draw upon.

The pioneer of cinema in Iran was Muzaffaruddin Shah Qajar's photographer Mirza Ibrahim Khan Akkas Bashi. A few years later Ovanis Organians – a Russo-American, produced and directed Iran's first feature film *Abi and Rabi*, followed by *Haji Agha, Actor-i-Cinamai* (1932). Around this time, the first Iranian talkie *Dokhtar-i-Lor*, directed by Abolhossein Sepanta and produced by Ardeshir M. Irani (founder of the Imperial Films in



Mumbai) was released in Iran and cinema halls in Quetta and Peshawar, in the NWFP. Four more Iranian films were produced in India in the 1930s. Indigenous production of films in Iran started in 1948 when Ismaiel Kooshan (father of modern Iranian cinema) returned from Germany and established Mitra Films and Pars Film studios in Iran. The first film made by Kooshan was *Toofan-i-Zindegi*. Kooshan produced and directed low-grade films which later came to be called "Film Farsi". These were often crude imitations of contemporary Hollywood, Indian and Egyptian films.

In what seems to be the first serious attempt of the Iranian state to look at its film industry, the Ministry of Interior announced a code of conduct for scripts, film production and exhibition. The Ministry made it clear that "Films in conflict with the foundations of Islam and the twelve Imam versions of Shi'ism, Films in opposition to the constitutional monarchy...Films that encourage political revolution...Films opposed to the nation's customs and traditions...Films depicting female nudity...foul language...naked couple in bed..."<sup>3</sup>were to be proscribed. Along with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Culture, the Department of Media and Radio and the Iranian police were authorized to enforce the regulations. Also, under the new dispensation, imported films were subjected to arbitrary cuts. With the advent of the dubbing industry in Iran,

the new technology was increasingly deployed to enforce censorship regulations. In 1959, the Exhibition Department warned studio owners that any transgression would invite immediate prohibition.

One of the predominant features of Iranian cinema in the 50s was the growing popularity of the song-and-dance format. The phenomenon can be understood in the context of the rapidly changing cultural landscape in Iranian cities. By the second half of the twentieth century, Iranian cities like their Islamic counterparts in Egypt and Turkey were opening their doors to cafes, cabarets and night clubs. The woman performer occupied a central position in the newly created public space. For the majority of the poor urban residents "who couldn't afford to attend these establishments, the only access to music was through watching films or listening to radio shows."<sup>4</sup> Thus, even though the song-and-dance feature in Iranian film was distinctly an alien import as it did not have any antecedents in Iran's visual and performing arts, it acquired immediate popularity.

*As a seductive spectacle of movement and fantasy, however, dance easily lent itself to film. Films featuring dance particularly to women – a growing part of the Iranian middle-class film audience– and was undeniably associated with their new-found sexual freedom. The liberation of Iranian women on screen was crystallized in dance. From this period, until the Revolution in 1978, Iranian cinema would continue to exploit*

*the popularity of song and dance.*<sup>5</sup>

This also explains why cinema became a victim of purging in the hands of radical Islamists in 1978-79.

Finally, a quick look at the representations of Iranian women in pre-revolutionary cinema becomes necessary to understand why gendering became a powerful instrument of making films that were in line with the guidelines evolved by the revolutionary government in Tehran. Like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, Iranian filmmakers began to play up the traditional woman against the modern. There were some who satirized her while others exploited her. In film after film, Esmat Delkash, a popular actor of the 50s and 60s, played the fallen (modern) woman, who depended on her body for surviving in a society dominated by lusty men. The image of the fallen-woman (party girl/prostitute/cabaret dancer) was in striking contrast to that of the innocent girl who was represented as the dutiful wife and mother. The fallen-woman not only provided voyeuristic material to spectators “but also reinforced the sense of female vulnerability in the face of male power and aggression.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it was on account of such developments, that the restoration of traditional womanhood became a major priority of the new patriarchal state after the revolution.

The 1960s through the 70s witnessed dramatic developments in what has been

called the march of the Iranian film industry towards documentary realism. Three filmmakers who took the lead in this direction included Dairush Mehrjui (*Gaw*), Massoud Kimiai’s (*Qeyser*) and Nasir Taqvaie (*Aramish Jolu-i-Deegran*). Their efforts paved the way for the birth of a new genre – the Iranian New Wave or the Iranian Art film. In fact both *Gaw* and *Qeyser* were screened after throwing a challenge to Iran’s censorship laws.<sup>7</sup> As Safawi and Dehlvi have remarked, “the purposeful drift of ideas, the subtle transportation of mundane human existence to the experience of an inner self, the simplicity of portrayal, the hidden voice of protest all combined together to put these films together in a complete genre from Film Farsi”.<sup>8</sup> The New Wave movement also attracted the attention of Iranian intellectuals such as Furugh-e-Farrukhzad, Gholam Hussain Saedi and Dairush Mehrjui, who began to write regular columns about cinema. Though still far from being seen as a global phenomenon, the new Iranian cinema also caught the attention of European and American audiences. Some Iranian directors came to be recognized as *auteurs* during this period. Abbas Kiarastomi won the Palme d’Or at Cannes in 1997 (for his film *A Taste of Cherry*) and was compared to Jean Luc Godard, Kurosawa and Ray.

The Islamic Revolution of 1978 completely transformed the way in which Iranian cinema came to be made and viewed domestically and abroad. In the

early years of the revolution, the *feqh* rules provided the adequate justification for categorizing the media and the arts as Islamic (*halal*) or un-Islamic (*haram*). Though a minority disagreed, significant numbers among the ruling clergy felt that cinema was a western excrescence contaminating young Iranian minds. Of particular concern was the exhibition of the female body on the silver screen. Consequently, in a burst of revivalist fervor, almost 180 cinema halls were burnt and razed to the ground (32 alone in Tehran), including Rex - Abadan's most prestigious cinema hall. Moreover, the *Pasdarān* (Revolutionary Guard) began to hound filmmakers and actors, either eliminating them ruthlessly or driving them underground. The Revolutionary government set up an inspection group to cleanse the system of film exhibition in Iran. Consequently, out of the 2000 odd films (Iranian and foreign) selected for this purpose, 1800 were rejected outright. This however, did not diminish the import of foreign films; only the focus shifted to comedies or war and science fiction genres. Also film production suffered because films had to be re-edited to conform to Islamic guidelines. But once religious passions subsided, the revolutionary regime realized that a more effective way of dealing with cinema would be to Islamize it. A change in government position also helped to transform the public space, which increasingly turned into a site for animated debates about Islamic art

and aesthetics. In his two seminal publications *Kashful Asrar* and *Velayet-i-Faqih*, Khomeini denounced cinema as an un-Islamic excrescence which served the interests of western colonialism. However, he was also aware of cinema's potential reach and influence:

*We are not opposed to cinema, to radio or to television...the cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake of educating people, but as you know it was used instead to corrupt our youth. It is the misuse of cinema that we are opposed to...*<sup>9</sup>

Clearly as Khomeini viewed it, the project of cinema had to be reworked so that it could become an effective instrument in the hands of the revolutionary state for creating an Islamic society in Iran. However, Khomeini's pronouncements evoked little response from the film community. This was primarily due to the extensive damage caused to the industry in the early months of the revolution. Iranian filmmakers were also apprehensive that public perception about cinema was far from favorable. But the creation of the **Farabi Cinema Foundation** and the **Ministry of Reconstruction**, gradually helped to restore the filmmaker's faith in the avowed agendas of the Revolutionary State.<sup>10</sup>

The most significant event in this period however, was the creation of a regulatory framework for the exhibition of films and videos in 1982. The **Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance**

(MICG) was assigned the task of enforcement. Henceforth, no films or videos could be screened without a permit. The government also imposed a ban on all films and videos which:

*Weaken the principle of monotheism and other Islamic principles; insult directly or indirectly, the Prophets, Imams, the guardianship of Supreme Jurisprudent... blaspheme against the values and personalities held sacred by Islam and other religions mentioned in the Constitution; encourage wickedness, corruption and prostitution; encourage or teach dangerous addictions and earning a living from unsavoury means such as smuggling; negate the equality of people regardless of colour, race, language, ethnicity and belief; encourage foreign cultural, economic and political influence contrary to the 'neither West nor East' policy of the government...show details of scenes of violence and torture, misrepresent geographical and historical facts...<sup>11</sup>*

The most important of these dealt with the way Iranian women were to be projected on the screen. For example, it would be mandatory for women to wear the *hijab* in all conditions; there could be no physical contact between men and women (not even between mother and son); all women were to be filmed in long shot, plots that had central women characters were to be avoided. <sup>12</sup>

But there was also a flip side to the regime of restrictions and controls. Khatami who took over as the Minister of Culture and Islamic guidance, was among the few to realize that bringing art under complete purview of the

government would be inimical to the long term interests of the Islamic state. He therefore created the **Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF)**, with Mohammed Beheshti at its helm in 1983, to provide general direction to the film industry and regulate the import and export of films. Later, the **FCF** also began co-production of films. Another organization created during the period of the revolution was the **Foundation of the Oppressed** (Bonyad-e Mostaza'fan) created by Khomeini in 1979. Producing seven films a year in the 1980s, the **Foundation of the Oppressed** became associated with some of the top directors of the Iranian film industry such as Daryush Farhang, Rakshan Bani-Etemad and Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Makhmalbaf's *Cyclist* (1989) and *The Wedding of the Blessed* (1989), were produced by the **Foundation**. Another institution was the **Arts Centre** (Howzeh-ye Honari) of the Islamic Propaganda Organization that produced war and propaganda films. Makhmalbaf's early films including *Justification* (1981), *Nasuh's Repentance* (1982), *Two Sightless Eyes* (1983) and *Boycott* (1985), were all produced by the Centre. With the increasing popularity of Iranian films among European and North American audiences, several films have been co-produced by companies owned by foreigners or by the Iranian diaspora.

Khatami also encouraged the growth of New Wave films by exempting many filmmakers from the onerous procedure

of getting their scripts approved before commencing actual shooting. But when Rafsanjani took over in 1991, the radicals in the government began to look at cinema suspiciously. Actually, it was Khomeini's death in 1989 that had made the clerics in Tehran uneasy. By 1991, the situation became so volatile that Khatami was forced to resign. Rafsanjani's government banned many films and charged filmmakers of supporting western imperialism. Rafsanjani's presidency also witnessed the privatization of many industries. This led to the partial removal of government subsidies from many industries including film. In 1995, 214 people, associated with different departments of filmmaking in Iran wrote an open letter to the MCIG, demanding simplification of rules related to the production and exhibition of films. Six years later Khatami was elected president, defeating Rafsanjani and his radical supporters decisively. Filmmakers like Seyfollah Dad and Mohsen Makhmalbaf played an important role in Khatami's victory. During Khatami's tenure, pre-revolutionary veterans like Abbas Kiarostami, Dairush Mehrjui and Mohsen Makhmalbaf rose in stature, while a younger generation of filmmakers such as Majid Majidi, Abolfazl Jalili, Jafar Panahi, Samira Makhmalbaf and Behman Qobadi became international celebrities.

Post-revolutionary Iranian cinema is certainly different in the way spectatorship is constituted, women objectified and the look organized. It

is this difference that requires further exploration. According to film scholar Shahla Lahiji pre-revolutionary cinema (Film Farsi), portrayed women as "unchaste dolls". They appeared on the screen as semi-naked dancing stars. Post-revolutionary cinema sought to render her into a "chaste doll".<sup>13</sup> All real women (working/professional/rebellious) were banished from the screen. According to the MCIG regulations women were to be portrayed as chaste, God-fearing housewives or mothers; their bodies could not be displayed or shown walking provocatively, eye contact had to be avoided with men and she was expected to remain covered with a chador even in the presence of her closest kin. For the Islamic state, gendering cinema was both an ideological necessity as well as a pragmatic measure. Here Lahiji's metaphor of the "chaste doll" for the woman in the new Iranian cinema seems somewhat quite misplaced. A careful reading of the cinema of this period reveals that many filmmakers were successful in challenging and transgressing MCIG regulations. For example, as early as 1994, Abbas Kiarostomi deployed panning and close-up shots for his celebrated film *Through the Olive Trees*. Later, similar techniques were adopted by Samira Makhmalbaf in *The Apple* (1998) and by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseni in *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998).

Incidentally, when Hojjatoleslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Speaker of

the Majlis declared in March 1987 that “Our entertainers, male or female, did not enjoy the same esteem that they enjoy today from lay and religious people...this is a real revolution”,<sup>14</sup> he was perhaps referring to the slackening of the state’s stranglehold on cinema, even though censorship regulations had remained the same. He also went on record saying that “It is true that a film must have a message, but this does not mean that we must deny its entertaining aspects.”<sup>15</sup> Rafsanjani’s successor Khatami moved a step further by stating that “I believe that cinema is not the mosque...If we remove cinema from its natural place we will no longer have cinema.”<sup>16</sup>

This brings us to the last segment of our essay. Can the slower pace of editing, long shots, location shooting, non-continuity editing can be seen as a realist but at the same time non-modernist strategy of figuration? The question assumes critical importance in the light of the new Iranian cinema’s attempt to relocate women to new sites within the diegesis. The widespread tendency in Iranian art films is to shoot mainly or exclusively in the exterior. Undeniably, limited budgets, small crews, outdoor locations and local characters add to the realism of the film. But there are also three other ways in which post-revolutionary Iranian cinema differs from other cinemas of realism – (1) The way the look is organized within the diegetic space (2) The near absence of close-

up shots and (3) the limited use of the shot-reverse shot and the absence of the spectacle. Besides veiling also influences *mis-en-scene* and filming style. Objects and boundary marking features such as fences, walls and columns, constantly obstruct vision. Long tracking shots with these obstacles in the foreground highlight them as a visual barrier and as metaphors for modesty and veiling.

The American feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane has suggested that veiling generates a fetishist desire for the onscreen woman. She argues that a supplementary surface over the face “functions to hide an absence.”<sup>17</sup> But Islamic ideologues argued just the opposite. It came to be widely held that by veiling, female bodies became healed and emblematic of chastity. This is why the new Iranian cinema encouraged greater visibility of women provided they appeared veiled and purified on the screen. Actually, veiling can be a double-edged sword. Naficy reminds us that:

*For every stratagem of veiling . . . there is one that violates it or plays with it, turning the veil not only into a powerful semiotic and political icon, but also into a dynamic instrument of power, sexuality and transgression. . . . Walls and veils may segregate people but . . . they tend to provoke curiosity and to offer visual pleasure by exhibitionism and voyeurism. . . . By playing with the veil, [women] create the necessary distance that promotes scopophilia (pleasurable looking). At the same time, these strategies turn them, as the subjects of scopophilia, into erotic objects, thus, ironically,*

*subverting the rules of modesty and the religious 'commandments of looking', which are designed to prevent women from becoming sexual objects.*<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the *gharbzadeh* (westoxicated) woman came to be viewed as the embodiment of all social ills. Publicly visible, wearing an overcoat (*ru-posh*) and the headscarf (*ru-sari*), and a super consumer of imperialism, capitalism and foreign goods, a propagator of the corrupt culture of the west, the *gharabzadeh* was believed to have undermined the moral fabric of Iranian society.<sup>19</sup> Redemption was only possible if women could be reclothed. Modes of veiling could be borrowed from other cultures. As Lindsey Moore has suggested, "In Iran, as in more conventionally "postcolonial" sites of knowledge production, the relationship between vision and embodied, gendered objects is both culturally specific and informed by cross-cultural encounters as well".<sup>20</sup> The Iranian *chador* which was revived in 1979 is similar to other forms of veiling such as the *haik* in Algeria. However, from 1982 onwards, the *chador* was displaced by the ubiquitous *hijab*, indicating some kind of Pan-Islamic engagement between Shiite Islam and its non-Shiite followers in the Arab world.

In the late 1980s and the early 90s, a younger generation of filmmakers was already contesting the gendering of Iranian cinema by bringing it in line with the *feqh* regulations. This resulted

in a foregrounding of female protagonists in films such as Bani Etemadi's *Banu-e-Ordibehesht* and Mohsin Makhmalbaf's *Naubat-i-Ashighi*. Few years later women filmmakers began to question the way in which Iranian women were being represented in the films. From three women directors in the pre-revolutionary Iran, the numbers have now swelled to eight, including internationally acclaimed directors such as Samira Makhmalbaf and Tahmineh Milani. This inspired Mehrjui and Mokhtari to reappraise the roles women played in Iranian films. The result was the production of strong women-oriented films such as *Sara* (Mehrjui, 1992) and *Zinat* (1994).

Contemporary Iranian cinema has emerged as the site where Iranian culture and identity (*iraniyat*) can be constantly negotiated and women seen as its filmic bearers. New Iranian cinema has been acclaimed by international audiences for its realism, reflexivity and narrative strategies that are different from those of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Critics and scholars have also noticed the nuanced portrayal of characters, particularly the roles of women in everyday life. For example, Moore has suggested that "One of the remarkable features of recent Iranian films is its allegorical use of gendered tropes, in particular the (in)visibility and (im)mobility of women in social space."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, rejecting the charge that censorship (veiling) has inhibited creativity, Hamid Naficy argues for a

nuanced reading of the strategy of veiling:

*...veiling as a social practice is not fixed or unidirectional; instead, it is a dynamic practice in which both men and women are implicated. In addition, there is a dialectical relationship between veiling and unveiling: that which covers is capable also of uncovering. In practice women have a great deal of latitude in how they present themselves to the gaze of male onlookers, involving body language, eye contact, types of veil worn, clothing worn under the veil, and the manner in which the veil itself is opened*

*and closed at strategic moments to lure or mask, to reveal or conceal the face, the body or the clothing underneath.*<sup>22</sup>

A creative reappraisal of gendering the look in Iranian cinema therefore assumes critical importance. Especially, when the success of Iranian films internationally has helped restore pride among the Iranian people in their culture and heritage and when Iran stands demonized as a terrorist nation in the international media.

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#### Notes and References:

1. To a great extent watching films is about looking at and identifying with the screen image. There are three different ways in which the look is organized – (a) characters inside the diegesis looking at each other (b) the diegetic audience looking at the characters of the film and (c) the audience inside the cinema theatres looking both at the characters and the diegetic audience.
2. I began watching Iranian films in International Film Festivals in India 1998 onwards. But then I did not ask questions about their contexts of production or their channels of circulation and reception worldwide. At the same time I realized that there was a need to differentiate between Iranian cinema seen in the film festivals from the Farsi cinema, which is similar in many respects to mainstream Hindi cinema or Bollywood in form. Since 2001, the popular Indian television channel Eenadu TV (Urdu) has been occasionally screening Farsi films dubbed in Hindi. Also UTV World Movies and NDTV Lumiere, routinely offer contemporary Iranian films (with English subtitles) to its discerning audiences.
3. Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema, A Political History*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2006, p.66.
4. Ibid, p.77.
5. Ibid, p.78.
6. Ibid, p.82.
7. Houshang Golmakani, Stars Within Reach, in Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar and Rashmi Doraiswamy (ed.), *Being and Becoming, The Cinemas of Asia*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 2002, p. 191.
8. Azarmi Dukht Safawi and A.W.Azhar Dehlvi, *Revolution and Creativity, A Survey of Iranian Literature, Films and Art in the Post revolutionary Era*, Rupa & Company, New Delhi, 2006, p.189.



9. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Tr. Hamid Algar, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979, p.258. Also see Michael M. J. Fischer, *Imam Khomeini: Four Levels of Understanding*, in *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (ed.), John L. Esposito, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983, pp.150-174.
10. Richard Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema, Politics, Representation and Identity*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2002, p. 7.
11. cited in Hamid Naficy, *Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update*, in Richard Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema, Politics, Representation and Identity*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2002, p.p. 36-37.
12. Safawi and Dehlvi, p.193.
13. Shahla Lahiji, *Chaste Dolls and Unchaste Dolls: Women in Iranian Cinema since 1979*, in Richard Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema, Politics, Representation and Identity*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2002, pp. 215-226.
14. Naficy, *Islamizing Film Culture in Iran: A Post-Khatami Update*, p.49.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. *Femme Fatales: Feminism Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p.48.
18. Hamid Naficy, "Parallel Worlds: Shirin Neshat's Video Works," in Gerald Matt and Julia Peyton-Jones (ed.) *Shirin Neshat: Exhibition Catalogue*, Kuntshalle, Vienna, 2000, p. 47.
19. Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State, and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam, and the State*, Macmillan, Hampshire, UK, 1991, p.65.
20. Lindsey Moore, *Women in Widening Frame: (Cross)-Cultural Projection, Spectatorship and Iranian Cinema*, *Camera Obscura* 59, Volume 20, Number 2, p.1.
21. Ibid.
22. Hamid Naficy, *Veiled Voice and Vision in Iranian Cinema: The Evolution of Rakshan Banietemad's Films*, *Iran Chamber Society*, November 17, 2008.)

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## THE MAKING OF 'BAWANDAR'— A WRITER'S DILEMMA

Sudha Arora

Translated by  
Seema Sharma

Often filmmakers and writers are drawn towards stories whose main protagonists are alive and famous. The lives of martyrs and dacoits have inspired commercial as well as art film directors. That is why when I heard that a film was being made on the life of Bhanwari Devi, a worker of the Women's Development Programme in the village of Bhatari in Rajasthan, I was not surprised. This story had all the requisite sensational ingredients – the ups and downs in the life of a simple village woman worker from her child marriage to sexual victimization, social boycott, gang-rape, the evils of casteism, backing of women workers, legal intricacies, corrupt police force, vote bank politics, series of demonstrations for and against her and finally the historic judgement in favour of the rapists and their release on bail.

To make a feature film on the struggles of a living person is not only challenging as it invites controversies, but also puts an additional responsibility on the director to present the characters in a way which elicits an empathetic response from the audience. 'Bandit Queen' made on the life of Phoolan Devi was a sensitive film despite the controversies and the commercialisation associated with it. Such was the impact of the film that not only was the case against Phoolan rescinded; she was even allowed to stand for elections. The contribution of Shekhar Kapur's film in her election victory cannot be underestimated. Even though the comparison seems far-fetched, Bhanwari Devi does appear as an idealistic version of Phoolan's character as she is devoid of any negative aspects of the latter. Phoolan took law into her own hands and ended up as a politician. Bhanwari opted for a legal course, but came

back insulted & a loser . She was socially boycotted, her rapists went scot free, and were even garlanded on stage in front of a crowd of seven thousand people amidst slogan shouting. Phoolan extracted twenty lakhs from the film makers by objecting to the film's entry in the Oscars. Bhanwari on the other hand has not got even a single penny for her film. All she could claim was a token 101 rupee which the film's producer-director placed on her palm after she tied 'rakhi' to him. This moment was captured in a photo and was well publicized in the promos of the film.

The film 'Bawandar' was released on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2001. The film director Jagmohan Mundra, gave several interviews in the newspapers claiming that he had given three thousand pounds to Bhanwari and would give two and a half thousand dollars more to buy land for her. It might seem unbelievable but nothing has reached Bhanwari till now. So much so, the cheque of three thousand pounds given by a women's group in London after the film screening has been deposited in a Jaipur bank in an account held jointly by Bhanwari and a Mumbai-based friend of the director. The pass book and cheque book are with him and according to him the money is in safe hands. Now that friend refuses to forego that money. I called him up and introduced myself before going to Jaipur. The moment I talked of the bank account, he was livid, "I will go to Jaipur after Diwali, tell her to meet me then. I cannot be at her beck and call. And I don't want you journalists to trouble me. I have spoken to Jagmohan, he does not know anybody by the name of Sudha."

I recalled his earlier statement, "

I want to return to my roots. I belong to Rajasthan and I want to make meaningful cinema. I have made many films ; earned a lot of money, but now I want to work for my own satisfaction. I am taking a big risk. It is possible that the film may incur heavy losses, but I want that people should see it and give justice to Bhanwari." This double-faced attitude of Jagmohan Mundhra disturbed me . But I learnt the lesson that cinema of any kind--mainstream, or low budget parallel--is at bottom pure business and lies and deceit are often used as stepping stones to money and fame.

This incident happened in January 1999. Jagmohan Mundra had procured all the documents regarding Bhanwari's case from the Jaipur session court. He also collected clippings from Hindi, English and regional newspapers. I had also written about Bhanwari in Mahanagar, Jansatta and other newspapers, especially after the November 1995 decision against her. The opposition was very active in defaming her. The local MLAs exploited this opportunity to the hilt to create a Gujjar vote bank. They staged a rally of seven thousand people in Jaipur where Bhanwari and other women activists were liberally abused. Renowned activist from Jaipur — Kavita Shrivastava's reports on Bhanwari were forwarded to Pramila tai (Pramila Dandvate). All women's organisation under the banner of 'Mahila Atyachaar Virodhi Kriti Samiti' took out a rally in Azad Maidan....but all in vain. When Nikhil Wagle wrote strongly against the judgement, Judge Jagpal Singh filed a case of defamation against him. For four years Wagle had to appear in the Jaipur court until the case was finally dismissed without any hearing.

I first met Bhanwari in Mumbai's Birla Kreedra Kendra, where Kiran Bedi was felicitating her in a programme organised by a women's organisation. She was a thin dusky figure huddled in a chair. When asked to speak on the mike, she spontaneously sang a song in Rajasthani. That time her hair were black. But the trauma of the past seven years--the judgement against her and the hostility of her own people after the film--has turned her life upside down. Her now silver hair are witness to this.

A woman who had never wanted and never dreamt that she should be the subject of plays and novels, that films and documentaries be made on her life, suddenly found herself in the limelight because of these series of demonstrations. All she had desired was that the accused should be punished and she should be able to live a normal life away from media glare. Unfortunately the reverse has happened after the film. I blame myself also as a co-writer of this film as much as the film's producer for her plight.

When Jagmohan Mundra had started research for the film in January 1999, Bhanwari's case files were gathering dust. I agreed to write the film in spite of opposition from my well-wishers. They had seen his cheap formula films like 'monsoon' but I had only seen 'Kamla'(scripted by Vijay Tendulkar) which impressed me. There is no dearth of film writers but I thought I will be able to do more justice to Bhanwari's character. But I was misguided. The film as a medium belongs to the producer and director. A writer is never allowed to be a part of it.

I gave a brief draft of the film to Mundra in March '99. When he told me

to write a full version, I thought he had taken my work seriously. When I went to my daughter's house in America, in June '99, my briefcase was full of write-ups and reports on Bhanwari. I remained in touch with Mundra through e-mail and wrote the whole screenplay along with complete dialogues. This took more than a year.

The script was near completion when Mundra said that he was 'hiring' another writer who had won that year's National Award and he would improvise my script. This was a blow to me. I had taken this film as my moral responsibility, working ceaselessly on it for more than a year. Then he asked me to write a couple of scenes which were not acceptable to me. One was a scene in which the women activists were shown to be exploiting Bhanwari's name for their own end. I argued vehemently on this point. Bhanwari's case had gained prominence because of the active support from women's groups and showing them in a dark light would not only distort their image but also disturb focus of the film. I was forgetting that every director had his own vision . If that vision is prejudiced, it will become evident in one scene or another. Since I had given a lot of my time in writing this film , I wanted him to consult me if any changes were made during the shooting. But he did not keep in touch after the full script reached him. Later I came to know that he had 'hired' someone else for dialogue writing.

After the writing of the film, I was posted a long agreement which stated that the script was now the property of the director and I could not get it published etc etc. I refused to sign saying that my name should not appear in the

credits of the film. Jagmohan's elder brother Brijmohan Mundhra was an old acquaintance and he convinced me to sign just a week before the press show of the film in Goregaon Film City.

I saw the preview along with my senior journalist friends Lajpat Rai (well known for his anti-BJP columns in Middy), and Asha Panemanglore. I was extremely disappointed with the film, especially some scenes which were very loud and made mockery of the sensitivity of the film. The long-stretched scene of the hawaldar dancing to a song on radio with a 'lehenga' in hand, the frivolous conversation of the women activists in Bhanwari's unrealistically beautiful 'made up' house and the indecent dialogues of women constables were unbearable. But what worried me the most was the narration of the film through the eyes of two foreign journalists--a film tailor made for international audience. Is this called 'returning to one's roots?' Seeing me almost on the verge of tears Lajpat Rai was amused and started giving me tips on film writing--"Take your money and forget the rest. If you are so emotional then just write stories where your characters are in your control and not puppets on the director's fingers ". Asha Panemanglore, a Marxist worker, was trying to console me--" Try to see this film from the point of view of the average viewer, you will like the film ." My expectations had been belied. I was analysing the film from Bhanwari's point of view and feeling the burden of guilt. After the film release, I told Mundhra to deposit my remaining one-fourth remuneration as screenplay writer in Bhanwari's account. Was this token donation enough for me to get rid of my guilt ?

The film was released internationally and garnered considerable attention. Nandita Das even got the best actress award in a festival in France. She was invited by several women's organisations for film's shows abroad. Jagmohan Mundhra wanted to change his image as maker of soft porn films and he finally succeeded. But in India the film got stuck in censor board for some time. The music release function of the film was held at J 49, a pub in Juhu on 22nd October, 2001. Vishwamohan Bhatt and Rekha were posing for the shutterbugs in beautiful silk attires. The premier of the film was held on 21<sup>st</sup> November with great fanfare. The newspapers were full of press conference photos of Mundhra and Nandita Das. I did not attend these functions. The invitation card on the artistic handmade paper, seemed to be teasing me. Even Vishwamohan Bhatt's soothing music failed to uplift my spirits. Once I had praised 'Bandit Queen' to the skies, had opposed the protests of women organisations and stated that this film was like a nude sculpture, which if installed in art galleries seems a touchstone of high art but deserves to be covered if put on a crossroad in a slum. But now why had my aesthetic sense been paralyzed? Was it because for me Bhanwari was a flesh and blood woman whose struggles were very close to my heart . Phoolan on the other hand was a dacoit, a villain, a third person, whose film I could see with objectivity.

Mundhra told me that several women's organisations had invited him along with Bhanwari for a talk and film screening. He said, "I told Bhanwari to come with me and see Europe but she refused." Before I could ask anything he said, "She is

afraid of you all that if she accepts any money you — women activists will say she has sold herself. So we have deposited the prize money of three thousand pounds in her bank.” Well, there was no other alternative as the cheque was in Bhanwari’s name, but the money had not yet reached her. Mundhra’s friend wanted half the money for himself. In response to my query on the phone, he shouted, “I took great pains to get her the money and now she is acting pricey that she does not need it.” If this cheque did not reach Bhanwari , my gift to her had no chance. It too got lost in this fraud.

The 2002 IIT ‘Distinguished Alumnus Award’ was given to Mumbai’s ex-student Jagmohan Mundhra. This was an achievement for him. He deserves applause as he succeeded in changing his soft-porn film maker image. The film

ran in Mumbai for 5 weeks -- not a bad financial proposition. Even I gained the credit of writing the film. The only one who suffered was Bhanwari . Kavita Srivastava’s words reverberate in my ears, “Boys in school really trouble Bhanwari’s son. They tease him, “how much money has your mother taken, you son of a bitch...aren’t you ashamed of living off your mother’s fucking.”

Bhanwari’s son has now come to Jaipur. He often writes letters to my friend Urmila Pawar asking for financial assistance for admission in another college. His letters and Kavita Srivastava’s words prick my conscience.

It’s an irony that we , the so called ‘creative’ artists, actors, writers, merely use the struggles of flesh and blood people for our selfish purpose, our name and fame. What role do we play in helping them to achieve their goal?

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Sudha Arora, born 1946 at Lahore, is a feminist author and activist who is also involved with theatre and films. She wrote the screenplay and dialogues for the controversial film ‘bawandar’ and recounts her frustration at film-writing. She is not the first to face the fire. A number of creative writers have been drawn to cine media and have felt disillusioned. She has written and edited a great number of books on women’s issues. Honorary director of Vasundhara, a book centre at Mumbai where she lives.

Seema Sharma is professor of English at Jaihind College, Mumbai and translates from Hindi to English and vice versa.

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## **HINDI LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE NETHERLANDS**

Pushpita Awasthi

Translated by  
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After the independence of Suriname in 1975, scared by their insecurities about life and livelihood, a large section of Surinamese people of Indian origin migrated to Holland [Netherlands]. The Netherlands government made arrangements for the livelihood and security of these Indians who had fled from Suriname in their thousands. Over the time, with the help of the government, several self-managed organizations came into being in the Netherlands. These people of Indian origin, in order to promote community spirit and organizational power within their community, started study classes and regular teaching. Several organizations were formed by Sanatan Dharma and Arya Samaj.

Thus, with the aim of protecting their religion, language and culture and safeguarding their faith in these, people began teaching and learning the Hindi language. People of Indian origin from Suriname like Gurudatt Kalla Singh and Karta Ram wrote plays in order to preserve Indian culture. Similarly, dauntless efforts were made by troupes of musicians and dancers to re-establish Indian folk culture of Suriname in the Netherlands. Many Dutch scholars wrote books of Hindi grammar as well as numerous articles on Hindi literature, both modern and that of the Bhakti era. These helped deep roots of Hindi language and literature grow into the hearts of their students. From time to time scholars from India too were invited to contribute to this process. The people of

Indian origin in Suriname too played a significant role in the promotion of Hindi in Holland.

Hindi Day is celebrated on 14<sup>th</sup> September in Holland today. On this occasion debates as well as speech and essay writing competitions are organized by different organizations.

As a matter of fact, the state of Hindi language in Holland is the same as it is in Suriname. The truth is that Indian diaspora in Holland is mostly made up of Surinamese Indians. Hindi speakers here are extremely small in number and the basis of their culture and lifestyle is that of the Indian community in Suriname. Their Hindi is essentially Sarnami, even though the foundation of its structure and syntax is that of the dialects belonging to the Hindi family. Sarnami has evolved from the folk culture and conventions of the dialects of Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magahi and of Tulsī's Manas and Kabir's songs. This language is born of the dialects spoken by the farmers and labourers who had gone to Suriname from the lands of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and even today retains its original sweetness. Hindi-based linguists still consider Sarnami a dialect of the Hindi family but the Indian community of Suriname and the writers and poets who use Sarnami consider it a language on its own, and write it in the Roman script. In Holland too people of Indian origin call their language Sarnami and this is what they use for their speech

and everyday transactions and for literary expression. Thus in Holland too there is today a community of writers who write in Sarnami language and there are many established writers in whose novels and poems we come across sensitive portrayals of the struggles of their ancestors.

Dr Theo Damsteegt, Professor of Sarnami language at Leiden University [Netherlands] went to Mathura to do his Ph.D. there after he did his Master's in Hindi and Sanskrit and did his research on the stone edicts there. He travelled to Allahabad, Varanasi, Patna and Ayodhya to study the relationship between Hindi and Sarnami. At Karen Institute, which is part of Leiden University, there is a separate department for Sarnami too, along with departments of Hindi and Sanskrit, where Sarnami is taught systematically. Theo Damsteegt has been able to get Sarnami the recognition of a language to be taught at the university level.

Alongside with Sarnami, the work of teaching of Hindi too is making progress in the Netherlands. Several organizations are active in this area. At the Indian Institute in Amsterdam Hindi teaching and training goes on along with teaching and training of Sanskrit and Bangla under the direction of Dr Dick Plucker. They also have discussions and discourses on the Ram Charit Manas, Mahabharata, Vedas and Upanishads. Parts of these texts have been translated into the Dutch language and introductions to the texts



and some reference material are also available in Dutch, which are very helpful to those who are interested in Indology and in Indian culture and religion. Dick Plucker is engaged in the service of Hindi language and culture with the commitment of a devotee and he does this using his own personal resources and whatelse he is able to gather from others. He has also authored two books, which contain two CDs too, for teaching Hindi, particularly to Dutch students. The books are very useful and extremely popular and their fame has spread even to those students who want to learn Hindi in Suriname.

Another person who is promoting Hindi in the Netherlands is Dr Anait, who does this through an organization called Samvad. From time to time, she selects groups of students interested in Hindi and teaches them. Apart from this, during important occasions celebrated by different organizations, she also gives lectures on Hindi language and Indian culture as befitting the occasion.

Apart from these, a few other organizations that are basically related to Suriname are also engaged in spreading Hindi in the Netherlands. They are run by people of Indian origin from Suriname. In spite of being Sarnami speaking people, they have founded organizations for the spread of Hindi and they keep basic Hindi alive by conducting annual exams based on the syllabus of Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti of Wardha.

One of these organizations is Hindi Prachar Sanstha, Netherlands [HPSN] whose President and Director was Dr Urshdev V Ramdas, a gynaecologist by profession and a supporter of Hindi. He was an advocate of pure Hindi, who wrote in his article “Pure Hindi Alone is Our National Language” published in the December 2001 issue of his periodical dedicated to the promotion of Hindi: “Indians living abroad and Indian diaspora do not understand that like Arabic, Persian and Turkish, English too is a language of conquerors and oppressors. We corrupt our language by using in it foreign vocabulary, even though there are plenty of words in Sanskrit which will add to the richness of Hindi. We must popularise such Hindi in which there is either no foreign vocabulary or very little of it. We must accept such Hindi alone as our national language. It is only when our work results in such Hindi that south India will accept it as our national language without protest.

Dr Ramdas accepted Sarnami as a dialect, but did not give it the status of an independent language.

Dr Ramdas had obtained the degree of Acharya from Wardha. It was under his editorship that the 32-page Hindi bilingual Hindi Prachar Patrika began appearing from time to time from July 1997. It was a foundation level magazine which gave details of the activities of the organization, news about the work of promoting Hindi, information about

examinations, results of examinations, prize distribution, certificate distribution, and so on.

Along with this, under the presidentship and direction of Shri Narayan Mathura, there is an organization called "Hindi Parishad, Netherlands", which organizes every year the Prathma, Madhyama, Uttama, Praveshika and Acharya exams of Wardha Rashtrabhasha Parishad. Lovers of Hindi from among the people of Indian origin hold free classes for preparing candidates for these exams at many places. The Arya Samaj and several other organizations and institutions of Sanatan Dharma play active roles in the promotion of Hindi language.

Among people doing such work, Surya Prasad Bire's name is prominent – he has been engaged heart and soul in the work of promoting Hindi language and Indian culture. He has made notable contributions to promoting Hindi through a weekly one-hour TV programme and through the cooperation of other organizations. Apart from being the priest in-charge of Arya Samaj, he also has an excellent knowledge of Sanskrit and Hindi languages.

Eleven thousand four hundred and two certificates have been distributed so far by Narayan Mathura of Hindi Parishad, Netherlands. He has been serving the organization for twenty-five years [by 2009] and on an average five hundred students sit for these exams every year.

From around the year 1993, a bilingual magazine in Dutch and Hindi, called Vishwa Jyoti, began coming out, which had material on learning Hindi along with material helpful on living a life balancing Indian culture and multinational culture. This was a cultural and social magazine in Hindi. In the 80s, a twenty-page magazine called Sarnami used to be published which used to highlight Sarnami literature and promote Sarnami language on the one side, and on the other, it used to declare Hindi as the mother [mahtari] language of Sarnami and give on the cover page information about devnagari letters.

In this way, Hindi has been available for reading for a while through magazines and booklets but essentially the standard of Hindi here is extremely low. If the work of teaching and learning Hindi has been going on, it is because of the amazing love people have for Indian culture. But no creative work of literature is visible in Hindi. One might say, though, that some meaningful literary work is going on in Sarnami. But the authors [poets and writers] of these works consider themselves Sarnami writers, and as distinctly separate from Hindi writers. They are engaged in giving expression to the life and culture of their ancestors in Suriname and the cultural struggles of people of Indian origin in the Netherlands. These writers have their own individual groups and their own strategies to establish themselves among the people of the Netherlands.

It is for these reasons that the Roman script is being used for writing Sarnami. The assumption is that if the script is Roman, it will be easier to understand and even people of other languages will be able to read it. But the question of understandability still remains since the readers do not understand the words. The Roman script has been accepted specifically for achieving universal readability of Sarnami because the primary basis for the global study of Sanskrit language and literature is the Roman script. In countries like Suriname, colonizers wrote down in Roman script whatever Indian labourers said— for easy remembrance and also so that the names of these people could be pronounced correctly. Subsequently, the children of these labourers did their studies in schools using the Roman script and they started writing their dialect too in the same script which eventually was recognized by the government as the Sarnami language.

There has been progress in the spread of Hindi in the Netherlands during the last five decades but generally there have been a lot of hurdles to its uninterrupted growth. Since here too Dutch is the language used in official transactions and in office jobs as in Suriname, the new generation gives primary importance to Dutch and focuses its entire attention on it. And the guardians too desire the same so that their children can have a meaningful future.

In Europe there are about twenty-

five lakh people whose mother tongue is Hindi and who speak Hindi. In the Netherlands, hurdles have come in the way of the growth of Hindi from Sarnami language too. There has been universal and open opposition to Hindi several times in the past from movements that promote Sarnami. The Sarnami movements were led by students of Leiden University in the decade of the 1970s. Once, in a Hindi conference organized at Paramaribo, the supporters of Sarnami did not only oppose Hindi but declared Sarnami as the original language of their ancestors, though even at that time a few people gave importance to Hindi and accepted that it is the mother language of Sarnami.

In Holland, in the 50s, Surinamese Indians were very few but whoever was there was kept involved in the promotion of Hindi by an organization called Manan. Through this organization, Hindi was promoted in temples, schools and other institutions.

It was Prof Fogel who began the teaching of Hindi language in Leiden University. Subsequently other universities too were influenced by Hindi and they too have started teaching Hindi.

As in other countries of Europe, in the Netherlands too Hindi received less attention compared to Sanskrit and it remained a second-grade language. But in spite of that, it has remained the language of livelihood for the Dutch-Hindi scholars of the Netherlands. Also,

looking at the policies of the Dutch government, it looks like as if the teaching and learning of Hindi will come to an end here, just as in the case of Indology and Indian knowledge. But in spite of this we will keep singing slogans of the victory of Hindi at the global level without making attempts to find out the actual state of Hindi in other countries of the world.

Even if the Netherlands government withdraws its hand from promoting Hindi, the governments of other countries in Europe should seriously consider that

the help they give other minority communities and groups for different reasons should be extended to Hindi organizations too. The fact of the matter is that the future of Hindi in Europe will be secure only when India becomes a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and Hindi becomes accepted as a language of the United Nations. It is only then that, as in the rest of Europe, in the Netherlands too Hindi will gain establishment and popularity as English, French, Spanish and Portuguese have gained.

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## TRANSLATION: A QUEST OF POSTNATIONALISM

Minu Manjari

*“KOS-KOS pe pani badle, Das kos pe bani”*

[The quality of water changes at every mile and that of language at every ten miles.]

This saying common throughout the Hindi belt presupposes two things about ‘bani’ which are worth noting .

- a) it concedes to language the state of flux and fluidity as water.
- b) the diversity of language is as natural as the occurrence of water.

In presence of such taken for grantedness it is hardly possibly that we think of translation consciously as theory or practical or anything even while translating. Doesn’t everybody use two or three or more than three languages every day? Is there anything to be put “in theory” in this ?

It is as Sujeet Mukherjee says:-

“..... We have been practicing translation for so many years- so many centuries in fact that we forgot to stop and theorize. But odd things did happen in the colonial period which must be affecting our postcolonial outlook on translation without us realizing it, and this needs to be studied .....”

Several issues can pile up here in a mini Bower of Babel fashion-

First of all what do we mean by translation? Linguistic transfer? What are the other issues that this transfer entails? What “Odd

things” did happen in the colonial period? What even more “Odd things” are happening today? What is the fate of translation in the “global village”? How does translation relate to the posts of post-colonial and post-modern? To tackle these issues, it would do good to problematize and historize translation and do so fast so that not translational “indologists” should arrive, and theories trickle to us manufactured in Paris and sent to New York, (to borrow a phrase from Edward Said).

### **Translation “in theory”**

The etymology of “theory” goes back to the greek word “thea” “meaning” “vision”. Thus the idea is basically “to see”. And this vision cannot be just monotiered . Theory has to see and question the prevalent modes of thoughts and practices, as well as see “beyond” and “seek” what alternatives are out there. Theory is “the critique of established practices and the beliefs and values that justify this practice and second, the inspection of new theories and forms of practice that get proposed as substitutes for what has formerly been in place .....it remains skeptical if also hopeful about alternatives for the future. Thus theory is simultaneously a connection to and a disjunction from the temporal. Even the Hindi word for theory “Siddhant” (Siddha + Ant) speaks of an end (‘ant’) which is not here, but desirable, to be strived for (siddha).

Translation in theory first of all leaves the simplified guise of being just a

“linguistic process”. Earlier any study of translation was pursued under either of two different subjects or disciplines- linguistics and comparative literature. Translation was seen as a sub-section of linguistics, on the basic assumption that it was a “negotiation, a transaction between two languages”. Thus the definitions like- “Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language first in meaning, secondly in style” (Nida). J.C. Catford’s book “A linguistic theory of translation: An essay in Applied Linguistic” (1965) was perhaps the last major work written on this premise, in which he defines translation as comprising, ‘a substitution of TL (i.e Target language) meanings for SL (i.e. Source language) meaning.’ He also explains translation as “the replacement of textual material in language by equivalent textual material in another language.” But still we can see the shift from syntactic to semantic equivalence.

But gradually it was seen that language was just a part of the big picture called culture. Language is in fact, a carrier of the culture. Whole chapters in traditional translation text books were devoted to discuss the “cruxes of translation” i.e. the items which proved particularly, tricky to “translate, often described as being “culture specific” for example words like kurta , ganga –nahana, maya, payal, dupatta etc. Then the realization grew that not only these so–

called words but whole languages were specific to indeed the culture they belonged to, to some degree or the other.

Thus in a crucial paradigm shift, the translation of literary text became a transaction not between two languages, or a somewhat mechanical sounding act of linguistic 'substitution' as Catford has put it, but rather a more complex negotiation between two languages. "The unit of translation was no longer a word or a sentence or a paragraph or a page or even a text, but indeed the whole language and culture in which that text was constituted". It is as if translation too moved from the structuralist to post structuralist phase, where it stands compatible to the "increased valorization of diversity and plurality" in cultural matters. This expansion of scope has brought socio-economic and political matters in the folds of translation and vice-versa. The postcolonial theory is one such example.

#### **Post national and Post-colonial**

An important test that center staged "Post-colonial theory" was Orientalism (1978) by Edward Said. Said applied a revised form of Michel Foucault's historicist critique of discourse to analyze what he called "Cultural Imperialism". This mode of imperialism imposed its power not by force but by the effective means of disseminating in subjugated colonies a Eurocentric discourse that assumed the normality and pre-eminence of everything "occidental", as well as, representing the "oriental" as an exotic

and inferior other. Said says- "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the orient and (most of the times) the occident". Thus a very large mass of writers among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and the West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, mind, destiny and so on."

Postcolonial theory looks closely at the "enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post Enlightenment period". In other words it questions the grand narratives of the West. Here it seems to be in a similar position to Lyotardian post modernism.

Jean-Francois Lyotard is a significant Post modern voice who gave it its undeniable cognitive-epistemic status in the seminal text "The Post modern Condition". He uses the term "modern" to designate any thought or science that legitimizes itself with reference to the meta discourse by making an explicit appeal to a "grand narrative" such as, for example, the dialectics of spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning or the creation of wealth. Lyotard simply defines the

postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives. And this incredulity brings about the plane space of cultural autonomy. Thus the metanarratives ring out, ringing in a cultural space that is populated by 'little narratives'. And this cultural space is not hierarchical, the discursive forms of life are allowed to flourish alongside each other. Another postmodern theorist who pleads for a plane-space is Giles Deleuze. Deleuze gives forward the idea of a rhizomatic structure as opposed to the arborescent hierarchical image. The arborescent calls "into presence the image of a root that grounds the textual and cultural complexes in a foundational matrix in order to upload a unified, central and hierarchical system". The rhizome, on the other hand, signified the decentered and uprooted line that constitutes multiplicities.

Constituting and containing pluralities and multiplicities is where the idea of post nationalism comes in. Nationalism was one of the most powerful ideologies pitted against the subjection by imperialism. The idea of nation gave the colonised subject /subaltern a sense of identity. An identity which facilitated the solidarity. But when the tenets of identities become rigidified, the idea of nation becomes what Benedict Anderson calls "a discursive construction". Žižek further qualifies this idea by interrogating the Nation as "The thing to be enjoyed by a given community or a race. The thing is constructed by fantasies about

a particular way of life encoded in a set of cultural practices. This way of life is perceived to be threatened by the other..". And this enjoyment of a certain state called nationalism is as relevant to "West", as it is to the "rest".

In postcolonial contexts, it informs the discourses of nativism that participates in what Edward Said calls a 'politics of blame'. In the process of constructing a unified national identity that would challenge colonial domination, the discourse of nationalism challenges marginal people and struggles. And the results are not hard to see. In India itself we can see the various forms of unrest and protest against the absolutism of the state. This corruption due to the power and fundamentalism were the reasons behind Gandhi's advice that the congress should be dismantled once Independence is won.

It is against this politics of representation that post nationalism proposes to work. Ideally it strives for "pomo" world – without centres, without borders. What has to be seen and questioned is that whether this obliteration of boundaries is really effected? In what way and to what extent? Or whether this obliteration is just another fake encounter? And if it is so how can translation be. (a) a tool to let in the voice of "double consciousness", a perceiving of the "negotiation between the elite avant-garde and the subaltern"; (b) a tool to truly transcend the boundaries-virtual or otherwise.



### **Translation in the global village**

The “global village—whole world as one globe” is being celebrated today. While the term ‘village’ itself needs to be interrogated, the other question is “whether this global village really rests on the tenets of post? to look at the world as a ‘village’ is either an absurd perception or a crafty euphemism. In what sense is the world a village? Shall we believe that we live in a quiet, tranquil verdant nook with birds chirping and fresh breeze caressing the harvest ? This! In the face of realities like nuclear bombs and global warming!

But when words are butchered, when words like “peacekeeping”, “daisy cutters” and sentences like “10 Iraqis detained for interrogation” tell nothing about the brutality and humiliation (this is how words are put to shame before ‘deeds’) of which the pictures from Abu-Gharib were just a trailer, it is too much to expect that what is said is also what is meant. Thus when it is said that the world is becoming a “small world”, one needs to carefully examine what it is all about ? We are being shown continuously that the days of the nation—state are over, at least in the West, thus there are formations like the European Union and treaties like GATT or NAFTA . But as Radha Krishnan shows in his brilliant essay “Postmodernism and the rest of the world” “.....despite all claims of free trade, clearly, there is a home and a not home, an inside to be protected and an outside that is

really not our concern. And how do we distinguish between who is “us” and who is “them”? Of course, through the good old category of “nationality” .....

No theory can be blind enough to evade the dangerous kernel of nationalism, infact fundamentalist nationalism is the fruit of globalization that we seem to relish so much. Of course “there is no country on God’s earth that is not caught in the cross hairs of the US cruise missile and the IMF cheque—book. Argentina is the model if you want to be the posterboy of neoliberal capitalism, Iraq if you are the black sheep”.

In such a world, translation, the act of carrying across—can help in creating a dialogue—on equal terms not just politico-economic corporate collaboration. There have been instances in the colonial period when translation has served as the vector of hegemonic scenario. The translator can certainly strive for a negotiation between the difference of other and signification. As Homi Bhabha writes- “Cultural Translation, is not simply appropriation or adaptation, it is a process through which cultures are required to revise their own systems and values by departing from their habitual or “inbred” rules of transformation.”

After all, to translate is to dispel the comfortable illusion of unity that the primary languages give us. It is a disruption of the *safir-whorfian*

contentment where one's horizons of thought are safely ensconced within our language.

But on the other hand it has also a synthesizing role. Janus-faced as the act of translation is; or rather, Panchmukh like Brahma as it has so many voices to contain and enunciate); Schulte writes, ".....the paradigm of translation offers

an integrating model. Everything in a text and a culture is related to something else. In its final act, translation recreates the wholeness of a work and teaches us to feel comfortable with the complexity of our modern world.

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## COUNTER-TELLING OF THE UNILINEAR COLONIAL MODEL

Awadhesh Mishra

Translated by  
Satya Chaitanya

Queen Victoria was already dead in 1901; but about a hundred years ago, in 1909, when India was still being ruled by the British, the social and cultural conventions of the Victorian era were still at their peak. Two incidents happened in that year in the hill station Mussoorie of the then United Provinces: the arrival of electricity and the murder of the English chemist James. This was the first murder that took place in Mussoorie. The murder was not an ordinary incident because the man who died was English and the one who was hanged for the murder too was an English soldier. And still more importantly, both the victim and the murderer were friends. Vibhuti Narayan Rai's fourth novel *Prem ki Bhoot Katha* [Love: A Ghost Story] is based on this murder.

Much has changed in a hundred years. British rule has come to an end but imperialism in its new incarnation has assumed a still more terrifying form. These are the times of homogenization of languages and culture that the blinding storm of globalization has brought about and this finds expression in the novel. The foreign-returned daughter of the owners interferes so much in the newspaper, she has begun to feel that there is no need for Hindi newspapers at all. But even large corporate houses need a local newspaper, be it as a safety valve, because even though the new generation of leaders reads English newspapers, its voters still obtain their news through 'desi' languages. For this reason, even if it is with the crutches of translation and crime stories, Hindi newspapers have to be kept run-

ning.

The reporting of the 'crimes of the century' is a result of this scenario, for which purpose a Hindi newspaper journalist has to go to Mussoorie to report on a murder that took place there a hundred years ago. The plan to write about such murders 'in which the court has given punishment but in the minds of people there are doubts about whether the man who was sent to the gallows was really the murderer,' is a result of an editorial plan born of the new grammar of sensationalism and the market.

The doubt over the court decision forms a direct equation with the interest of the readers – that is, with the size of viewership. It is an index of changing times that the amalgam of truth and gossip that used to be until now material for crime magazines has now been included in the editorial plans of newspapers. And what the search for entertaining stories in events suggests too is this – *“Such straight, simple stories in which the real murderer was sent to the gallows are useless for us. We need to search for such stories in which an innocent man was sent to the gallows; or at the least in the narration of the story this has to be proved that the man who was sent to the gallows was innocent. It is only then that the readers will take interest in our stories.”*

From the womb of this crime story, a love story is born. In the court version of the James murder story, Corporal Allen is the murderer and he has been sentenced to death. When the Editor of the newspaper describes the sequence of events in such police/ court terms as murderer, victim, crime scene, etc., what he actually does is

to present before us once again the decision of the court. This is the first introduction of the sequence of events to the reader. Here the Editor is playing the role of the narrator.

In Fr Camillus's diary, in the entry of August 14, 1910, the entire sequence of events is recorded in the words of Major Alberto. Here you also get glimpses of those streaks of anger that had stirred up the tiny Anglo Indian community of Mussoorie at that time. There is no sympathy toward the alleged murderer in Major Alberto's narration. Neither does he believe that Allen will free himself of his guilt by confessing before Fr Camillus. *“I don't think so, Father. Before the court too, he stubbornly kept insisting that he hasn't committed the murder. The police had taken him to the crime scene hoping that he would break down in repentance once he was there, but the place had no impact on him either. As a matter of fact he is a monster, and he will never confess.”*

A new face of this murderer is unveiled in the subsequent pages of Fr Camillus's diary. We also get a different picture of Allen from the service book that can be found in Allen's file. *“While reading about Allen, I was constantly wondering what happened to this pleasant, light-hearted, playful young man praised by everyone on the night of 31 August 1909 and how he murdered his close friend in the most brutal way.”* This service book of Allen must have been presented to the court too but it does not raise any doubts there, or arouse any questions, as we can see in Fr Camillus' diary. The court gives capital punishment to Allen. The system of witnesses and proofs on which

the Victorian legal system, run on the concept of no tolerance to crime, is based, itself becomes its limitation too. *“Even though there was no eye witness against Allen, all the circumstantial evidences were against him.”* Even after a hundred years, in government records Allen is still recorded as a murderer.

Every narration gets enlarged and transformed in the process of retelling. The equation between the narrator and the audience [reader, listener, spectator] leaves its impression on the narration. The picture of the James murder case that unveils before us through the medium of the Editor, the journalist, Fr Camillus and Major Alberto, is that Allen is of course the murderer; but whereas the Editor wants to search out the possibilities of Allen being innocent, major Alberto calls him a monster.

In diaries and personal correspondences, one is less armoured and more revealed; in the narrations here, there is no direct interference of external agencies. Large, powerful tellings generally do not recognize these, but these companions of neglected and unprotected realities still have this much power that they can counter-tell authorised narrations.

The other side of Allen’s personality is revealed in Fr Camillus’ diary. In the beginning Fr Camillus was relaxed in his belief that Allen could be persuaded to confess but ultimately he too writes: *“Throughout the hearing the court had found him guilty, so in the beginning I too had no alternative. But subsequently as I kept meeting him, doubts kept arising in my mind.”*

Major Alberto’s belief that Allen will not confess, transforms into reality here; here he is not a monster but an innocent man who does not require any confession. In Camillus’ diary itself there is mention of another woman who has been given capital punishment. She is accused of the murder of her husband. Fr Camillus writes: *“Did she really need forgiveness? Her confession is just for me and God and so I cannot write about it but had I been in her place, would I not have killed the husband? Who needed confession? The murdered husband or the murder-accused wife? It was difficult to decide. I wonder why the dividing line between sin and virtue is becoming so thin.”*

The suggested meaning of the question marks against a confession entered in the personal diary of a catholic priest is indeed a deep secret. The question mark is also against the Victorian judicial system.

Every society and every culture has, apart from its main narrations, some hidden transcripts too. These transcripts are occasionally presented before us through individuals who are openly representatives of the power system. Fr Camillus’ diary and the letter written by Allen to the girl are the hidden transcripts of contemporary events. The apt use of these in the text of the novel deserves praise. It is the information we can get from these that gives the crime story the dignity and depth of a love story. Madam Ripley Bean’s ghost makes some letters available to the journalist. The ghost story of love begins to unravel here: *“There are some letters written by Allen in the bundle that you can see in the Almirah in front of*

*you. No one has read them in the last one hundred years. Read them and then we shall talk further.”*

These letters are great achievements of the novel – outstanding examples of prose drenched in love. Victorian morality that considers all contact between men and women outside marriage taboo matches amazingly with eastern notions. The sanctity of the woman’s body and the fear of it being polluted through sexual contact dwarfs before the exalted love of Mitva and Chhutku. But Chhutku is missing in direct narrations.

During questioning by the police, it comes out of Allen’s mouth that when the murder took place he was with the girl, but in the court he maintains silence. Allen’s silence itself becomes the cause of his being sent to the gallows. This is an outcome of the Victorian moral values surrounding the purity of a lady. If we speak in terms of the frame of the novel, this silence finds its voice the first time in Fr Camillus’ diary. But here too all he says about the girl is: *“Can you cause a bad reputation to the person you love?”*

Vibhuti Rai has used the technique of visual images too in this novel. The ghost of Madam Ripley Bean shows some scenes to the journalist. This is in fact a re-adaptation of one of the ancient techniques of Indian narrative tradition. Bhavabhuti in his Uttara Ramacharita shows the past story of Rama through this technique. From the scenes the ghost of Madam Ripley Bean, playing the role of a video operator, shows the journalist, fill the blanks of which we get clues from Allen’s

letters and Fr Camillus’ diary. Now the alternative scenario is revealed, in which we meet Allen and the girl Chhutku. Here contact between the pahadi [mountain] culture and colonial culture is at a different dimension. The love of two lovers who have connections with the ruling class finds expression through pahadi songs and folklore. The Victorian fear of ‘going native’ is meaningless here. The letters and visual images are estimable parts of the novel; at the same time, these non-traditional mediums are also tools in pursuing the truth.

Actually, there are three pivots to the frame within which the love story takes shape – Fr Camillus’ diary, Allen’s letters, the scenes shown by the ghost of Madam Ripley Bean. Seen in the context of this frame, Allen, who is recorded as a murderer in government documents, emerges as a playful lover and a living human being.

In the contemporary memories of Mussoorie, Madam Ripley Bean exists as a miserly, mean old woman who fears her father as a teenager does even at the age of seventy-five – and this even though it has been years since her father died. In the construction of the novel, ghosts contribute in several ways. There is no need to mention here that in fact it was her father’s ghost that Madam Ripley Bean feared. The seller of old books, who had purchased Madam Bean’s father’s books, says: *“When I started going there, it had been many years since the father died. But he used to visit her every day and rebuke her severely, though Madam was already approaching old age then.”*

The mention of Madam Ripley Bean's fear of her father in the very first introduction of her in the novel gives us an important clue. The answer Madam Bean gives when the journalist asks her who the girl was and why she remained silent even though she knew her saying in the court that when James's murder took place Allen was with her could have saved Allen's life unveils the secret. The key that makes it clear that the girl in question is really Madam Ripley Bean herself is the fact of the girl's fear of her father. This is the last meeting of Madam Bean and the journalist. Madam Bean's answer is: *"The girl was a coward. How much she desired to cry out to the world that Allen is not the murderer! But she was afraid . . . The girl was afraid of her father. You don't know what kind of times they were."*

*"I had got my answer."*

In fact, there are other indications in the novel that Madam Bean herself is Allen's lover. Like, the existence of Allen's letters with her, and finding in her book the last message that Allen had sent her through Kallu Mehtar and Fr Camillus that said 'No regret my love.' The technique of revealing clues gradually all along the development of the plot of the novel caters to our pleasure by whetting our curiosity and then satisfying it.

The progress of the story through the medium of a relay race of ghosts – this, in fact, can be found in connection with an ancient Indian narrative system too. Gunadhya's Brihatkatha has been narrated through the medium of ghosts and

Gunadhya had written it down with his own blood. Kathasaritsagar is the extant form of this Brihatkatha. K. Ayyappa Paniker calls this 'chain narrative' but Vibhuti Narayan Rai has improved upon this technique in his novel – here the chain is of narrators. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator is a journalist, who subsequently plays the role of the audience. The presence of this 'audience' in the very text of the novel endows it with throbbing life. When the thread of the story is in the hands of ghosts, the novel assumes a magical quality. The combination of amazing storytelling, hidden transcripts of time and visual images renders a rare beauty to the story. The role of the audience keeps alternating here from between those of the reader, the spectator and listener. And the three dimensional narration is tightly integrated with the thread of the story.

Contemporary English novelist Allan Sealy adopts the structure of Kalidasa's Ritusamhara in his novel Everest Hotel. This is an outstanding example of the encounter of contemporary realities with Indian narrative traditions. The latest novel of Vibhuti Narayan Rai is significant from this standpoint too that here we find a counter telling of the unilinear colonial model of narration.

*Courtesy : 'Tadbhav', Lucknow  
ed. by Akhilesh.*

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