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Antarrashtriya
Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

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Editor
Mamta Kalia



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Editor : **Mamta Kalia**

Editorial Assistant : **Madhu Saxena**

Editorial Office :

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Editor's Note

Being one of the delegates to an International Hindi seminar in Tokyo and Osaka Universities on November 26, 28 and 29 in 2010 was a learning experience. To see hundreds of Japanese scholars speak in fluent Hindi was an affair to remember. The Japanese have a yen for mastering the arts and crafts of a language. They get to the roots of Hindi in a well researched way. It was a pleasant surprise to meet Prof. Fujii Takeshi, Director of Centre for Documentation and Area-Transcultural Studies in Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS). Like me, he is an alumni of Hindu College, Delhi University and speaks flawless Hindi. He generates vitality and exudes energy to the cause of propagating Hindi at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Japanese students were seen conducting the seminar in Hindi. The hall was jam-packed. As visiting Prof. Suresh Rituparna rightly pointed out, interest in learning Hindi is not simply cultural but economic as well. Many prominent Japanese companies that have or aspire to have a foothold in Indian market are always on the lookout for Hindi speaking Japanese who can become interpreters of their programmes and projects. It goes without saying that if academic knowledge of a language generates employment it is welcome all over the globe.

Prof. Fujii took us round TUFS' library which houses 618615 books in all. In the Indic languages section there are books in Hindi, Awadhi, Brajhasha, Rajasthani, Bhojpuri, Pahari (Kullu) and Maithili. Among rare books there is a separate section entitled Navalkishor Collection comprising of 987 books. The library staff is alert and co-operative. Every regulation is displayed and flashed when you approach a particular section. I turned the pages of an 1805 publication of Singhasan Butteesee translated into Hindustani from Brajhasha by Meerza Kazim Ulee Juwan and Lalloo Lal Kub, both of whom were munshies in the College of Fort William, Calcutta. Singhasan Butteesee has anecdotes of the celebrated Prince Vikramjit and these are related by 32 images that supported his throne. Another rare book in my hands was 'Les Hindus' by Tame Premire. It had hand painted pictures and text that described different communities and their vocations.

The stacking system was space-effective what with sliding stacks at the touch of a push-button. Much standing area is economised this way and the book racks look clean, compact and coherent. After you have browsed to your heart's content, you have to pass through an exit door which has a book-detector device. No one minds, the Japanese are a disciplined people.

On my way back to Sunpatio Hotel in Nishikasai, Edogawa-ku, I thought of the libraries in our incredible India. Indeed our libraries are like Tihad jails for books with sleepy and sullen library staff. No wonder, whenever a borrower gets access to a useful volume, he is able to make off with the printed treasure. No one checks no one and everyone is happy.

The current issue packages some rare material culled from various sources. Our focus is on Dr. Namwar Singh's article on Premchand written in English by Namwarji himself. The celebrated literary critic does not mince words while discussing Premchand's realism. Another article on Premchand by Prof. Luthar Lutze also advocates Premchand's realism toned by idealism in his short stories and novels.

Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi's views on Kabir have been oft-quoted but his analysis of Tulsidas is equally scholastic. Shriprakash Shukla elaborates on Dwivediji's thesis. Vidyaniwas Mishra's friendship with Agyeya was a valued relationship. On Agyeya's departure, his sense of loss can be felt in his memoir 'A fire snuffed out'.

We bring you Mannu Bhandari's well known short story Trishanku and younger writer Raju Sharma's contemporary story I.T.O. Crossing.

Chandrakanta has made a niche for herself in Hindi fiction by writing about her hometown Kashmir in a wistful manner. A few pages from her novel 'Ailan gali zinda hai' are being given here.

We have a few poems by Kedarnath Agrawal and one by Shamsheer Bahadur Singh. Both these great poets share their centenary year in 2011. No two poets could be more different. Kedarji excels in shorter poems whereas Shamsheerji's forte is the longer, leisurely genre.

Our book reviewers Pallav and Meenakshi bring us their studies of Swayam Prakash's and Meerakant's books.

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NOTES ON NOVEL AND REALISM

Namwar Singh

When he was asked how he would have written Premchand's 'Godan', the well-known Hindi novelist and Premchand's junior contemporary Jainendra Kumar summed up his position thus:

"I would not have touched the Hori who is depicted struggling alone before fate and is yet shown helpless— I would have kept him the same. Still, I would not have tried to define fate by some immediate circumstances or individuals—as if Hori were the hunted and the others his hunters. My attempt would have been to show that everyone is after all the hunted and attempts in vain to hunt each other. In fact the Powers are impersonal and one need not divide one's sympathies in them to abide by truth and fight untruth. If I could do it I would have considered my 'Godan' successful."

Thus we find that Jainendra Kumar feels uncomfortable at the sight of Hori being hunted by others—he would rather deny the very existence of the hunters and the hunted and would rather have us believe that neither anybody kills nor is anybody killed, all are victims, in their own ignorance, of their collective fate. The almost hysterical desire to negate the social—the realistic roots of human suffering and exploitation is too evident to comment upon and what follows is a logical corollary of the reality-denying postulate—an escape into the modernistic concept of all men being alone, all men suffering in their loneliness, loneliness as the given natural condition and an unknown, impervious, rootless and causeless fate presiding over in its modernistic existential pose over the destiny of the suffering doomed man—making all of them equal, where neither one hunts nor is he often hunted, where no one

inflicts suffering on others and none becomes its victim.

Jainendra Kumar is not the only author to oppose the realism of Premchand. The next in succession is Agyeya who is considered to be the father of modernism in Hindi. He has also waged a constant battle to free the novel from this "strong hold" of realism. As he understood it, he wished to "Liberate" the novel from realism with the sole intention of capturing reality by reaching deeper. In an essay entitled 'Reality : Grasp and Stranglehold', published in 'Naya Prateek', May 1975 he writes:

"It was to make reality perceptible that the important novelist of our age abandoned realism. The relinquishing of the 'realistic' vision and re-acceptance of the 'poetic' vision to capture reality—this, it may be said, is the most important turning point in modern literature and modern art. If one must take a strong historical view, then we may refer to the middle rung—after the 'realistic' vision came the 'modernistic' vision, then there was a liberation from this latter prejudice too and attention was again drawn towards the possibilities of the poetic vision."

But the Reality he desires to grasp in the novel becomes ultimately so abstract, beyond time and space, that the Reality as we know and recognize becomes very insignificant for him and he abandons it totally.

Nirmal Varma also attacks Realism from another plank. His opposition is apparently not to Realism as such, but to the 19th century realism. He considers the 20th century realism of Joyce and Proust comparatively preferable. Therefore, denying completely the realistic norms in the evaluation of the novel, he says:

"We cannot evaluate the novel by asking how close it is to life (which life, what sort of life), how credible are its incidents (credibility was never a touchstone for literature, or else Shakespeare would have been our most unsuccessful author), how realistic are the characters in it ('Reality' is not a lamp near which a literary form glows and becomes dim when away from it.) The meaningfulness of the novel is not in its reality but in the process of its organization, in the inner motive force of its structuring."

Negating realism itself while opposing the 19th century realism is not a coincidence. And the tendency is not restricted to Hindi alone. The Neo-novelists of France did the same. Alain Robbe-Grillet also appears to be finally fighting shy of realism as he criticizes the realism of Balzac. It may be mentioned in passing that Alain Robbe-Grillet is one of the novelists Nirmal Varma admires and he has published an interview with this French neo-novelist.

In fact the opposition to Realism is the keynote of Western Modernism and

Avant-Gardism. It is in reality a sort of Aestheticism which is appearing under the mask of cultural radicalism. The messiah of the New Radicalism of the sixties, Herbert Marcuse, has advocated this Aestheticism and tried to present it as a revolt against bourgeois society, bourgeois culture and bourgeois sense of reality.

This anti-realism has a distinct politics behind it to which many thinkers in the west have drawn attention. This politics of liberation, which apparently opposes bourgeois power, is doomed to be assimilated by it and become a part of it. As Christopher Lasch says:

“At one time, the defense of autonomy of art constituted a necessary and constructive, even a revolutionary political art. But defense of the ‘autonomy of art’ no longer serves any critical purpose. An art that ‘subverts the opposition between the true and false’ in Barthe’s words, merely completes the work of the advertising and propaganda industries, as does an art that liberates words from ‘signification’ and substitutes images for concepts. It is not ‘aesthetic dimension’ we need to recover the sense of reality itself. Actually the truth of art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e. of those who established to define what is real.”

Those who oppose Realism should remember that the advent of the novel and Realism in Hindi is connected with the active participation of the mass of

the people in the freedom struggle in which the role played by the Indian peasants was the most significant.

While in the west the novel may have evolved as a bourgeois art-form, in India—especially in the Hindi region—it was born as an epic of peasantry, as is evident from such novels of Premchand as ‘Premashram’, ‘Rangabhoomi’, ‘Karmabhoomi’ and ‘Godan’. This is a trait peculiar to the Hindi novel.

In Hindi, the novel became a mighty weapon in the hands of Premchand for an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle and in this process it developed realism as an aesthetic principle. As the struggle for Independence became more and more intense and it leaned towards more and more rights to the masses, this Realism was further refined. This development in realism can be clearly seen in the writings of Premchand himself—they become richer in their content and a refinement of form is visible. His last novel ‘Godan’ and his last short-story ‘Kafan’ may be seen as examples.

That anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle has not entirely ended yet but it is passing through a new stage with the change in circumstances. Therefore, we still need realism in this struggle—undoubtedly, development of realism is needed to suit new reality and not to abandon it and chase an imaginary New Reality. Realism is needed to understand this reality and to change it after this understanding.

Hence Realism is not outdated, because Realism as an aesthetic category exceeds the boundaries of any particular school of realism and can therefore have

no boundaries because “the development of human reality has no limits.”

Courtesy: Dharatal 1979.

[Presented at the International Seminar on Premchand, New Delhi]

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

TRISHANKU

Mannu Bhandari

Translated by
Jai Ratan

The four walls of a house give one a sense of security but they also hold one within their confines. Schools and colleges while developing the brain and mind of a person also curb personality in the name of discipline, rules and regulations. The fact is that everything carries the seeds of its opposite within itself.

No, these are not precepts culled from tomes. I don't go in for such bulky, pretentious books. These are just fragments of the debates and discussions that go on night and day in our house. Our house, that is, the haunt of intellectuals. Here, amidst cigarette smoke and cups of coffee, imposing edifices of words are raised, verbal revolutions are activated. In this house there is plenty of talk but little action. I can't quote, chapter and verse in support of my contention but based on the observation of what goes on in my house, I have a strong feeling that action is barred for intellectuals. Every day my honourable mother does her three-hour stint at college and feels liberated. Then she does a little bit of reading and writing and spends the rest of the day stretched out on her bed or wagging her tongue. She labours under the happy delusion that the mind is sharpened when the body is at rest. In this manner, out of twenty-four hours she spends at least twelve sharpening her mind. As for my honourable father, he is two steps ahead of my mother. Left to himself, he would bathe at his desk.

We expend the largest volume of words on one subject—modernity. But wait! Please don't get me wrong. This is not the bobbed hair

and fork and knife variety of modernity. There is nothing ersatz about it; it is the genuine article. What it actually is even I do not know. But there is a lot to it, especially with regard to going off the beaten track. But you have to pay the price for everything and even then, more often than not, get it in the neck.

Our discussions tear to pieces everything under the sun. But one topic is a hot, perennial favourite and that is the institution of marriage. Marriage, that is, the first step towards disaster. Starting on a light note, the discussion soon rises to an intellectual level. The institution of marriage, it is argued, has become an empty husk. The husband and wife relationship is false and extraneously imposed. And then a thousand innuendoes are cast upon the institution of marriage. In the discussions men are ranged against women in a clear distinction of male from female. Soon the atmosphere gets so surcharged that I feel sure a couple of divorces are on the way. But nothing of the sort ever happens. All of them are as firmly esconced as ever in their marital bliss. And of course, the tone and momentum of the discussion are the same even today.

Just think, if you pick holes in the institution of marriage doesn't it follow that you do the same with free love and free sex. In particular, men wax so eloquent about it that even a mere discussion of the subject gives them vicarious pleasure.

Father himself is a great votary of these ideas . Or was, till one day a distant and quiet young cousin of his, in whose, mouth even butter would not melt and never took part in the raging discussions in the house, sprang a surprise by giving a tangible shape to these ideas. At one stroke our modernity vanished in thin air. It transpired that ultimately Mother hand-led the situation with great skill and made the girl's life 'meaningful' by binding her in the meaningless bond of marriage. All this happened long ago and I only heard it whispered about.

For that matter Father and Mother too had had a love marriage. It is of course a different matter that since I came of age I have never seen them behave like a couple in love but only like a couple in hot arguments. Before taking this daring step Mummy too had to argue a lot with her maternal grandfather. This pre-marriage session of arguments extended over a long period of time and spilled over into the post-marriage years too. Even so one cannot call theirs a marriage of arguments but a marriage of love all right. Mummy speaks of it with great pride. Not pride in the marriage but in the manner in which she had trounced my maternal grandfather. She has so often narrated the wranglings between grandfather and herself that now I can reel them off by heart. Even today when she talks about it her face glows with pride at having gone off the beaten track

Well, this is the atmosphere in which

I am being brought up—so very uninhibited and independent. And suddenly one day I realized that I had grown up. This realization of being grown up came not from within me but from outside. There is an interesting story behind it. The thing is that in front of our house there is a one-room *barsati* set with an open terrace. Every year a couple of students come to stay in this flat, poring over their books and promenading the terrace. But I never took much notice of them. Perhaps I had not reached the age of taking notice. This time I saw two boys there. Just two. But by evening other friends would be storming the place. What a racket they created! The whole neighbourhood rang with it.

They sang and laughed, teased each other and threw innocent-seeming comments at any girl who swept their attention. The focus was our house—to tell you the truth it was me. I had only to step out on to the verandah or just flit by and remarks would come flying at me, like a shot hitting the bull's eye. A tremor would go down my spine. For the first time I felt that I existed, not only existed but was the cynosure of someone's eyes. To be honest, the first feeling was thrilling. I became new even to myself—new and grown up.

It was a peculiar situation. I would fume when they made me the butt of their jokes, although there was nothing indecent about those jokes. It was all innocent fun. But when the boys were

not there or were engrossed among themselves I would miss them. A vague uneasiness would take hold of my mind. Things came to such a pass that my thoughts were centred on them ceaselessly and I found a thousand pretexts to come out onto the verandah.

But the hullabaloo that these young men made became a cause of concern for the entire neighbourhood, it almost drove away their sleep. Our neighbourhood was mostly inhabited by businessmen from Hathras and Khurja. They had their daughters to think of and these boys had become pests. The elders thought it was time they rolled up their sleeves and dealt with these young chaps with a firm hand. But strangely enough, Mummy and Papa were blissfully ignorant of the goings-on. The fact was that they had become an island unto themselves; they lived in the colony and were yet not of it.

One day I said to Mummy, 'Mummy, the boys living in the opposite flat keep passing remarks at me. I won't have any more of it. I'll pay them back in the same coin.'

'Which boys?' Mummy asked me in surprise.

Incredible! So Mummy knew nothing about it! With a mixture of dislike and elation I told her the whole story. But it created no impression on her. 'Show me the boys,' she said coolly and went back to her book. I did not like my mother's indifference. Any other mother would immediately have gone into action

and whipped these boys right and proper so that its memory would have gone down to the seventh generation of their family. But here was Mummy looking so unconcerned.

In the afternoon when those boys assembled on their terrace I said to Mummy, 'Look, those are the boys who ogle me all the time and pass comments on whatever I do.'

It beats me completely why Mother reacted in the manner she did. She just stared at me and smiled. For a while she scrutinized those boys. 'They appear to be college boys,' she said. 'But they are just children.'

I wanted to ask her if she expected old fogeys to tease me and not boys. But before I could open my mouth, she said, 'I will invite these boys over to tea tomorrow evening and you can get to know them.'

I was stunned.

'You mean you want to invite these blokes to tea?'

'Certainly. In our times when boys and girls could not meet they had to content themselves by throwing glances and long distance banter. But times have changed now.

I was in the seventh heaven of delight. How daring of Mummy to make such a suggestion! She was indeed great and out of the ordinary.

So these boys would step into our house and make friends with me under our own roof. Suddenly I felt I was

very lonely and in need of friendship. I did not mix with anyone in our colony. Only Papa's and Mummy's friends came to our house.

I spent the next day in great uncertainty. I wasn't sure whether Mummy would keep her word or had said it in the excitement of the moment. In the evening I said meaning it as a reminder, 'Mummy, are you going to call on those boys?' These were the words but what I really meant was, 'Mummy, go to them, please.'

And Mummy actually did go to them. She rarely went out visiting in the colony and this was one of those rare occasions. I waited with bated breath for her to return. What if Mummy brought them with her? What if they were rude to her? But no, they looked a decent lot. Mummy returned after an hour or so. She was looking cheerful.

'They were utterly taken aback when they saw me,' Mummy said. 'So far people had been threatening them from their own doorways and they thought I was walking right into their den to break their bones. But they fell over themselves to entertain me. Such sweet kids real . They have come from outside and couldn't get into the college hostel so they have taken this room. When your Papa comes in the evening we shall call them over.'

I had never realized that time could pass with such excruciating slowness. When Papa returned from office, Mummy told him the whole story with gusto.

She was feeling exuberant at doing something out of the ordinary, going off the beaten track. Papa was not to be outdone. 'Call them over,' he said delightedly. 'Let the kids have a good time. When else will they let themselves go if not at their age?'

Here was an opportunity for Mummy and Papa to prove their modernity. Papa sent the servant to fetch the boys and they showed up the next minute. Mummy introduced them with great decorum. Hi's and Hello's were exchanged. 'Tanu, dear, get the tea ready for your friends,' she said.

Damn it! Tanu dear! I had to prepare tea once for Papa's visitors, Mummy's guests and now for these boys too. Tanu dear had to be on her toes.

In any case tea went off very well. There was great fun and a great deal of laughing and joking. The boys defended themselves by declaring that the neighbourhood was unnecessarily prejudiced against them and that there was nothing wrong with their behaviour. It was all just for fun and no harm done.

Papa supported them. 'Everybody does it at your age,' he said. 'If I had a chance I would do it still.'

Waves of laughter followed his observation. Two hours later, when they were leaving, Mummy said, 'Look. treat this as your own home. Drop in whenever you feel like it. You will be good company for our dear Tanu. You can help her with her studies. And listen, if there's

anything special you want to eat, let me know and I'll cook it for you.'

They went away bowled over by Papa's open-mindedness and Mummy's friendliness. But the poor girl who was supposed to make friends with them was relegated to the role of a mere spectator.

We kept talking about these boys till long after they were gone. To invite these eve-teasers to tea, especially when the target of their attack happened to be the host's own daughter sounded so thrilling. From then on Mummy talked about it to all and sundry—in fact to everyone who dropped in. Mummy was a raconteur par excellence. She could make anything, however drab, sound highly interesting. And here was a tailor-made episode which would bear telling to great effect, without requiring any frills. 'Only you could have hit it off,' Mummy's friends said. 'You have a very healthy attitude. People talk big but they keep their children on a leash all the time. If they become suspicious they even spy on their own children.'

And melting in the praise, Mummy would say, 'Don't I know? Be free and let others be free—that's what I believe in. In our childhood we reeled under so many do's and don'ts that our lives became hell. Atleast let our children be spared so much oppression.'

But Mummy's pet daughter was passing through another kind of crisis at that time. In the drama that was being enacted, Mummy had herself assumed the role of the heroine—a role

which rightly belonged to her child.

The upshot of the tea party was that the behaviour of these boys underwent a sea change. The decency that had been foisted upon them made it obligatory for them to act in accordance with norms of good conduct.

Standing on the roof, whenever they spotted Papa or Mummy then would send across a namaskar to them wrapped with the proprieties and on seeing me they tossed a Hi wreathed in smiles. Instead of badinage we would have a regular dialogue, open and uninhibited. The distance between our verandah and their roof was not large and by raising our voices we could converse freely. Of course it was another matter that our neighbours so heard us without difficulty and with keen interest. As soon as we got going, half a dozen heads or so would suddenly appear in the neighbouring windows. Not that there were no love affairs in our colony. There were many, even elopements. But all this would happen under the cloak of secrecy. When our neighbours' probing eyes got wind of these goings-on, they got a kick out of them and discussed them with savage delight. The men would twist their moustaches and the women wave their hands in the air, and broadcasting these events from one end to the other, with many embellishments. Some of them would boast of being highly experienced and say none could throw dust in their eyes. They would snigger without words as if they had divined what was brewing.

But in our case the situation was very different. There was nothing clandestine about it. Actually, we were so open that our inquisitors had to be posted behind barred windows and even so, to their chagrin, they could find nothing incriminating in our talk.

But as generally happens the whole affair snowballed. What happened next was that these meetings came to be held in my room, and not on the terrace as before. Every day, two or three boys would drop in and we would have a whale of a time, gossiping and laughing. We would sing and keep up the tea drinking. In the evening when some friends of Papa or Mummy dropped in they would find one of the boys still entrenched in my room. The very people who advocated liberation now frowned at our activities. As I could discern, their eyes would darken with a strange kind of suspicion. One of Mummy's friends, even said in a subdued voice, 'Tanu is going very fast.' Mummy herself had lost her zest for going off the beaten track. She had perforce to face the naked truth, that her daughter, a raw, inexperienced girl, was hobnobbing with three or four young boys. Mummy was in a quandary. She could neither fully accept the situation of her own making nor could she disown it.

One day she called me and said, 'Tanu, my child, these boys come every day and set up camp here. This is seriously interfering with your studies. How long can things continue like this?'

'I study at night,' I said.

'Oh, do you? Don't give me that crap. There's hardly any time left for studies, as I can see. I don't like this rumpus, I tell you. I don't mind their dropping in once in a while. But they have made it a regular practice. One or the other of them is always hanging around.' The note of irritation in Mummy's voice was mounting.

'You have become so free with them,' Mummy continued. 'I know they won't take it amiss if you tell them to look sharp about their own studies and also leave you to yours. If you think you are not up to it, can't I tell them?'

But the need for all this never arose. Partly because of their studies and partly because of the various diversions provided by a big city like Delhi their visits decreased. But Shekhar, from the opposite room, came regularly, sometimes in the afternoon and sometimes in the evening. What I had not noticed about him in the company of those boys surfaced now with force. He spoke little but the little that he spoke was loaded with meaning. Suddenly I began to understand this unspoken language of his. Not only did I begin to understand it but also to respond to it. It did not take me long to realize that something which they called love was growing between us. I would not have known the meaning of it. But those who are fed on Bombay films do not find it difficult to understand the implications of this phenomenon.

As long as there was nothing between us, our minds were free-wheeling and everything was open, but as soon as something appeared, the wish to hide from others, also appeared. The other boys would come pounding up the stairs, talking loudly. But Shekhar came up almost on tip-toe and would talk in whispers. Actually there was nothing special about our talk—just about college and studies. But the ordinary gains special meaning when spoken in low whispers. If love gathers an aura of mystery it becomes thrilling, otherwise it is flat as flat can be. But Mummy had a sixth sense by which she could smell out the secrets of all members of the family. Even Papa suffered because of it. Even if Shekhar came secretly, Mummy would appear from nowhere or ask from her own room, 'Tanu, who's in your room?'

I saw that Mummy was greatly perturbed by this behaviour of Shekhar's and an expression of dismay swam in her eyes. But I never imagined that she would be so dismayed. A house in which love affairs had been the staple of conversations and scandals, extra-marital affairs, love triangles and so on, the infatuation between me and Shekhar should have passed un-noticed. If I was friendly with boys I could as well be in love with one or two. Mummy perhaps thought that this affair would develop along the lines of Bombay art films, of which she was a great admirer and in which nothing sensational happened from start to finish.

In any case, I shared Mummy's anxiety to some extent. She was not only mother but also a friend and companion. We discussed things with each other without reservation. I wanted her to say something about this affair but she just did not oblige. Only when Shekhar came she shed her indifference and hovered around my room with alert eyes.

One day I was coming downstairs to go out with Mummy when we ran into a lady of the colony right at our door. After greeting Mummy she came straight to the point, 'Those boys living in the house opposite yours—are they related to you?'

'No.'

'Oh, I see! Since they come to your house almost every evening I took them for your relatives.'

'They are Tanu's friends,' Mummy said with such nonchalance that the lady turned away, her dart completely missing the target.

We got rid of her all right but I feared that there would be an aftermath, that Mummy would give me the works to unburden her mind of the anger that was lying bottled up within her.

But what she said came to me as a bit of a surprise. She said, 'Haven't these people anything better to do except poke their noses into others' affairs?'

I felt not only reassured but, also took it as a signal and stepped up my pace. I did take care to devote to my

studies one hour of the three that I spent with Shekhar. He taught me with all his heart and I enjoyed being taught by him. In between he would scribble sweet nothings on slips of paper and hand them to me. They would galvanize me to the very core. Even after he was gone, the words he had written would keep ringing in my ears and send a thrill down my spine. It was like wallowing in a sea of emotion.

A new world, very bright, very full, was taking shape within me. I needed no one these days. I was fulfilled and self-sufficient. Even Mummy, my constant companion, was moving out of my life. I had stopped taking any notice of her except to exchange trivialities.

Days passed. Lost in myself, I was sinking more and more into my own world and had almost become oblivious of the external world.

One day I returned from school, ate my food with gusto, and I had just returned to my room when Mummy who was resting in bed called out to me, 'Tanu, come here!'

When I went to her I found that her face was flushed with rage. My heart missed a beat She picked up a book from the side table, took out from it five or six pieces of paper from the book and flourished them before me. Heaven help me! When I was going to school Mummy had asked for a book to read and I had given her this one, forgetting that Shekhar's scribbled notes were in it.

‘So this is how your friendship is sailing along!’ she said sarcastically. ‘So this is what you study and this is what he comes to teach you!’

I was silent. There would be no greater folly than joining issue with Mummy when she was in a temper.

‘I gave you freedom but it does not mean that you should change it into license.’

I was silent.

‘A slip of a girl and look at her doings! The more I give her a long rope the more she runs amuck One resounding slap and all your romance will vanish in thin air.’

Her last sentence made me shiver with rage. With a jerk I raised my head and glanced at Mummy and then fell back in amazement. This was not Mummy at all. Neither was this foul temper hers. And yet what she said seemed very familiar. Hadn’t I heard all this before? And it flashed through my mind—my maternal grandfather—my *Nana*. But my *Nana* had passed away many years ago. How had he come back to life? And that too in Mummy—Mummy who fought him tooth and nail and opposed him in everything?

Mummy’s grandfather-like sermons continued for sometime. But most of it left me cold, the only thing that bothered me was how Nanaji had got into Mummy.

A strange, tense silence fell over the house—to be precise a silence between

me and Mummy. No, between grandfather and me, for Mummy was really not in the house. It was grandfather speaking through her. Generally Mummy and I operated on the same wavelength. I could put my thoughts across to her and she could to me. But Grandfather? I did not understand his language, much less his tone of voice. To communicate with him was out of the question. As for Papa, he was indeed my friend but in an entirely different way. I played chess with him, played the game of bending elbows with him and wheedled him into granting me the favours I had failed to get from Mummy.

As a child, I used to have piggy-rides on his back and even today I can ride on his back without a second thought. But in spite of his being such a friend it was only with Mummy that I shared intimate secrets. And here she was, utterly silent. *Nana* had taken complete hold of her.

I showed Shekhar the red flag and he studiously stayed away from the house. The evenings hung heavy on my hands.

Many times I thought of going to Mummy and asking her openly, ‘Why did you get out of temper with me?’ She knew of my friendship with Shekhar. I had not hidden this fact from her. So why this sudden volte face? did she think ours was a brother-sister relationship! Then suddenly it occurred to me that it was no use talking it over with Mummy. She had no independent views of her own, having been eclipsed by grandfather.

Four days passed and I hadn't had a glimpse of Shekhar. On the slight hint from me, the poor boy had even stopped coming out on the terrace, let alone coming over. His friends were not seen on the terrace either. If anyone of them had dropped in I could have asked him about Shekhar. I knew he was sentimental to a fault. He didn't know what had passed between Mummy and myself but her anger seemed to have cast its long shadow over everything. Seemingly, the thought of her anger had sent everyone into hiding.

Actually since yesterday Mummy's face had been looking a little less taut as if the three days' anger which had congealed on her face had started melting. But I had decided that it was for Mummy to take the initiative to get us out of this impasse.

After finishing my bath I was ironing my school uniform behind the door while Mummy was getting the tea ready and Papa sat engrossed in his newspaper. Probably Mummy was not aware that I had finished my bath and was there: I heard her talking with Papa. 'You know what happened last night?' she said. 'I felt very bad after that and could not sleep.' Her voice was soft and gentle. I stopped ironing. 'It was about midnight. I got up to go to the bathroom. The terrace opposite was plunged in darkness. Suddenly something red glowed like a star. I peered into the dark. Shekhar was standing on the terrace smoking. I came back on tip-toe. After two hours

I peeped out again. He was still standing there and smoking. Poor chap, I felt very sorry for him. And for Tanu too. She had also been in low spirits of late.' Then she said in a voice that sounded full of self-reproach. 'First we give them a long rope and when they start prancing we suddenly pull short. Does it make any sense, really.'

I heaved a deep sigh of relief. I felt so overwhelmed that I felt like running up to Mummy and hugging her. It appeared that after a long time my Mummy was once again her real self. I held myself back at that time, deciding to have a frank talk with her later on. For the last four days my mind had been swarming with questions. But now it was all over. Now Mummy had come out of grandfather's spell and I could talk all I wanted with her.

But when I returned from school in the afternoon I was astounded at what I saw. Shekhar was sitting in the chair holding his head between his hands and Mummy was sitting on the arm of his chair, caressing his back. Seeing me she said in a most natural way, 'Look at this idiot. He has missed college for the last four days and has not eaten a scrap of food. Ask him to sit down with you at lunch.'

And Mummy sat down and cajoled him into eating. But Shekhar did not stay after lunch. He went away weighed down by gratitude towards Mummy. As for me, such a flood of joy broke within me that all my questions were swept away in it.

It took time for things to settle down in their old grooves but settle they ultimately did. Shekhar started coming to our house but only once in two or three days. And we spent most of the time talking about our studies. Shekhar was apologetic at his behaviour and promised Mummy that he would not give her a chance to complain again. The days on which he did not visit us we would make up by talking with each other from across our houses. Since the goings-on between us had my parents' approval, the neighbours' tongues had stopped wagging. They blamed the times for it and hopefully waited for things to go wrong.

But I did notice one thing. Whenever Shekhar stayed on a little longer in the evening or turned up in the afternoon, grandfather would start tossing and turning in Mummy's mind and his presence would be reflected in her face. She did her best not to allow grandfather to speak. Yet she found it hard to put him completely out of the way.

Yes, the situation had become a subject of discussion between me and Mummy. Sometimes she said in jest, 'This Shekhar of yours is slithery and soft as jelly. At his age, boys should be footloose and carefree. They should steel themselves to take the hard knocks of life. But all he does is to hang around on the roof like Majnu and stare this way.'

I just laughed this off.

Sometimes she would get sentimental and say, 'Child, why can't you realize

that I have high hopes for you? The dreams I have for your future!'

I would laugh and say, 'Mummy, you are just wonderful. You dream your own life and you dream my life too. Please leave some dreams for me.'

Sometimes she was in a mood to pontificate. 'Look, Tanu, you are too young to understand the ways of the world. Apply your mind exclusively to studies and drive out these silly ideas from your mind. Of course, when you are grown up, get involved in this rigmarole of love and go in for marriage too. I am not going to look around for boys for you. I'll leave that to you but you must be mature enough to make the right choice.'

I would catch the hint that she did not wholly approve of Shekhar as a life companion for me. I asked Mummy, when she fell for Papa, did grandfather approve of her choice?

'My choice? Don't forget I had completed my studies and was twenty-five years old. when I chose him. With complete understanding. There was little possibility of my going wrong. Do you understand?' She would say, changing her bewilderment into anger. 'Studies and age—these are the things about which she was always at me. Age was the only point on which she could score over me. I was good at studies so Mummy could not nag me on that account. As for age, I felt like telling Mummy that what her generation did at twenty-five our generation could do at fifteen.

Couldn't she understand such a simple thing? But I would not press the point for fear of arousing grandfather in her.

My half-yearly examination was close at hand and I studied hard for it, closing the doors on all visitors. Mummy was pleased; she felt reassured. After finishing my last paper I felt as if a load was off my mind.

'Mummy, tomorrow Shekhar and Deepak are going to the pictures. May I go with them?'

I had never gone out with them but after such strenuous studies I was in a mood to relax and I had a right to some liberty, so I believed.

For a moment Mummy scanned my face and then said, 'Come here, sit down by my side. I want to have a word with you.'

I sat down by her side wondering what there was to talk about. Mummy is given to talking. Even 'yes' or 'no' does not come easily to her. It is wrapped in a torrent of words and becomes explicit only after fifty or sixty sentences.

'Now that your exams are over I was myself planning to go to the pictures. Which picture would you like to see?'

'Why can't I go with them?' I was feeling so irritated that Mummy just kept gaping at my face.

'Tanu, my child, I've given full liberty to you to do all you like. But walk just fast enough for me to walk with you.'

'You tell me plainly whether you will

let me go or not? Why this useless talk of your keeping pace with me? Who's talking of your walking with me?'

Caressing my back, Mummy said, 'Walk together we must. If you fall headlong there must be someone near to help you get up.'

I realised that she would not let me go with them. If 'she said 'no' so sweetly one could not even quarrel with her. And if one argued with her it meant a long sermon in return—regular class of fifty minutes. But for the world of me, I could not understand what harm there was in my going with the boys. Must she always be negative? As she had told me once, she used to resent being denied freedom in her childhood—don't do this, don't go there—and now she was denying the same freedom to me. She just talked big. I had seen through her. I got up and walked off in a huff to my room. But not before I had tossed a sentence into the room, 'Mummy, those who walk must fall, and those who fall will rise and walk again. They won't need others' help.'

I don't know whether it was a reaction to what I said, or a sense of guilt but I found that in the evening she had called over Shekhar and three or four of his friends for a get-together in my room where she regaled them with mouth-watering delicacies. We had such fun that it washed off my afternoon's resentment.

The exams were over and the weather was pleasant. Mummy also seemed to

be in congenial temper. Subsequently my friends resumed their suspended rounds of visits. Things went on smoothly. But I was in for another jolt.

One day when I returned from my girl friend's house I heard Mummy calling me in a hard voice, 'Tanu, come here, will you?'

The tone of her voice was a danger signal. For an instant I lost my nerve. Mummy was looking very stern.

'Do you go to Shekhar's room?' she fired at point blank range. It instantly occurred to me that someone in our colony had been wagging his tongue. I wanted to tell Mummy that whoever had passed on this information must have told her the rest too, with some frills added. But Mummy seemed to be in a nasty mood and so I discreetly held my tongue. But what could be at the back of Mummy's anger? There must be more to it than was apparent to the eye. Could my going to Shekhar's room create such havoc? But Mummy doesn't act on reason only. She is often governed by moods.

My silence made Mummy more edgy.

'Don't you remember I had forbidden you at the very beginning not to go to his room? Isn't it enough for you that he pitches camp here for three to four hours at a stretch?'

Sorrow, anger and fear were battling on her face. I did not know how to explain things to her.

'The good woman living across the lane put me wise to the whole thing,'

Mummy said. 'Do you know that I have not bowed my head before anyone? But I felt so humiliated that I could not look her in the eyes. I have lost face on account of you. Oh, how they deride us!'

Good heavens! This time the entire colony seemed to be speaking through Mummy. Surprising how she was speaking the language of the very people she had been so snooty about.

Mummy continued with her harangue while I withdrew into my shell and just closed my ears to her vituperations. I thought I would discuss the whole thing with her after she had cooled down. Why was she making a mountain out of a molehill. I would ask her.

The atmosphere in the house had again become tense. It appeared, this time Mummy had taken Papa also into her confidence. He did not join issue with me though he had surprisingly kept himself out of the whole affair. But this time I marked the tension on his face.

Two months before when things had first come to a head I was shaken to the core. But this time I had resolved that if Mummy wanted to act like grandfather. I would have to take her up in the same manner in which she dealt with him. I was firm about it in my mind. I shall show her that I am her daughter, true to her grain. She had deviated from the beaten path and had always boasted about it. But now that I had taken the first step she had herself wavered and was trying to pull me back to the line drawn by her.

I had a lot of arguments tucked away in my mind to be brought forth when it came to a show-down with Mummy. I shall tell her plainly that if she wants to keep me in chains she should have from the beginning brought me up differently. Why this pretence of freedom when she did not mean it? This time I was so worked up that my mind was burnt to embers. I decided that I would remain cooped up in my room. If my feelings overflowed I would give vent to them through tears. I, who was the cynosure of all eyes, who chirped happily all through the day, had now retreated into myself. I kept repeating to myself the refrain,—‘Mummy, you must realize that come what may, I shall do just what I want to do,’—although I didn’t even have the ghost of an idea what it was that I wanted to do.

I don’t know what happened during these three or four days. I remained confined to my room, planning my strategy to beat Mummy at her own game.

But that afternoon I could not believe my ears when I heard my Mummy calling at from the verandah: ‘Shekhar, tomorrow all of you will be leaving on your vacation. Have dinner with us tonight. Bring your friends along too.’

I don’t know what kind of crisis Mummy had to pass through to reach this stage.

Shekhar was at the dinner table that night along with Deepak and Ravi. Mummy was all attention to them. And as was his wont, Papa was indulging in his light-hearted banter. A few faces were visible plastered against the neighbouring windows. Everything had fallen into place, with not a note of discord anywhere.

Only I stood apart from the whole scene, taking a detached view of it. Then it suddenly occurred to me that grandfather was grandfather—hundred percent himself, which must have made it easier for Mummy to hold her ground against him. But how am I to fight with Mummy, who is grandfather one moment and Mummy the next?

Mannu Bhandari, born 1931, a celebrity in Hindi fiction of the ‘nai kahani’ period. She retired from Miranda College, Delhi University where she was professor of Hindi. She has a dozen collections of short stories, novels like ‘Apka Bunty’, ‘Mahabhoj’, and books for children. Her latest book, a selective autobiography ‘ek kahani yeh bhi’ has attracted great notice for its frankness and sensitivity. Mannu Bhandari lives in New Delhi.

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

ITO CROSSING

Raju Sharma

Translated by
Anil Sud

Standing at the crossroads of life, indicates a deserted, isolated crossing. Four roads going in different directions pose a dilemma and present a moment of decision. The background imagery, if one goes deep into it, is one of falling, dried and yellow leaves.

Waiting at the ITO crossing traffic lights, these thoughts were far from the professor's mind. The Crossing was not the best place for such sublime thoughts but the unending crowd at the Crossing and the hullabaloo accompanying it, seemed to free up his mind in a strange way. It would somehow seem to become an island insulated from the chaos created by the surrounding multitude: and it is here that profound thoughts came to him randomly; and he was adept at applying them in his professional life.

For example, it is here that he recalled a statistic that the population of vehicles in Delhi had exceeded six million of which two million were cars, that the total length of roads in Delhi was 31000 kilometres and if all the cars were arranged bumper to bumper, in a line, its length would be 13000 kilometers. He only forgot the number of crossings in Delhi.

He dwelt further on this example. Suppose on an unfortunate day, on each crossing, one car or truck were to break down at the same time, what a situation that would be! Unless there was an aerial intervention and all the vehicles were airlifted by helicopters, one by one, the resulting traffic jam would last for years!

While narrating this disastrous eventuality to the Vice-President

one day took it one step further. What would happen if by the time one helicopter lifted a vehicle, the engine of the one behind would conk out.....and thus would render our Delhi *road* less !

Roadless ! You are beyond compare, buddy, said the Vice President and went into peals of laughter. Both of them went to the same university (at one time the professor was even a student of the Vice President) and the same club. Once the Vice President, while reviewing a book authored by the Professor, said about him: This gentleman, my inveterate friend, is only an authority on history but a virtual know- all. He may be artistic and highly ingenious, but he does not even know his vast potential.

This allusion was to Dr Sukumar Deb, senior history professor of Delhi University. He was also widely renowned for his practical wisdom on several related subjects, though some pundits had reservations on the “renowned” / “su-vikhyat” bit.

There was no objection to his being referred to as ‘vikhyat’ (famous), talented or successful, some people would say in muted tones, but to refer to him as ‘su-vikhyat’ (renowned) would be outright sycophancy .As it is, Sukumar had the prefix ‘su’ before his name, as if it was his birthright to use – and ravage- the edifying prefix. It should stop at the name and we should be spared the prefix. However, since Sukumar was the Head of the Department, had the keys to fellowship grants and the budget

and was the chairperson or member of almost all the committees, there could be no open opposition to him. A few asides, some oblique remarks for fun and it would stop at that.

As far as Sukumar was concerned, he remained completely unfazed. OG was his infallible weapon which had no equal. This unfailing panacea had always helped him to be dead on target in executing his schemes.

OG stood for ‘Opening Gambit’.

The phrase was originally used for the initial moves in chess but has also become popular in describing the opening strategies on a battle front. The concept of OG envisages that the outcome, victory or defeat, is generally decided in the first few moves.

The law of OG is a Rambaan, an invincible super missile, Sukumar would tell his colleagues, the nodding dummies. A book’s cover, the first lines of a text, the first strategic moves in a meeting or negotiation, a momentary opportunity to ensnare and corner the rich and the famous: either your work is done in an instant or not done ever. The professor felt relaxed in the company of young persons. He chided them if they laughed at him but would soften instantly “My dear lads, this OG principle is equally effective in personal relationships. Your first liner will decide whether you get into a girl’s bed or gather dust on the road. Love is not desperate for the first few meaningful looks; it is hungry for

the first morsel of your opening words”.

Till a few weeks back, ITO Crossing was Sukumar’s favourite place for his most rewarding OGs. To call it a four way junction did not convey the same meaning as the word Crossing which had a peculiar pull.

One had to pass the ITO crossing on the way to the university. The other routes were not dependable; you never know when they would close up. He had tried all entry and exit routes in the past few years. The result was the same; there was no getting away from the ITO Crossing jams. They had become an inseparable part of his life.

Sukumar called this habitual wait “My Cross”. Just think of this: Jesus bore the burden of the real cross and gave his life for it; I am bearing the ITO Cross and I am sure, (with a fleeting mixture of compassion and mockery), my funeral procession will also get stuck in the ITO crossing jam. That would be my final wait at the Crossing. His listener, if he was a man who mattered, would come out of his shell and Sukumar, in a matter of a few moments, would weave his spell on him.

The ITO Crossing was an unlimited and veritable resource which gave the OG methodology its colour, shape and essence. The caliber of Sukumar’s groundwork and innovativeness reminded one of the strategies adopted by a professional chess player. For example, Sukumar could initiate a

dialogue in a unique manner but with a deadpan expression which would floor the person on the other side of the table: Do you know that there is an open jail in your city where I have spent two months of rigorous imprisonment in the last twenty five years.... Don’t get startled. I am not a convicted offender; just an insignificant offender of the ITO Crossing. And when he would start elaborating on this, he was unstoppable. He would go on thus: 25 years; 200 days, on an average, of going and coming in a year; a reliable calculation would tell us that for 80% of the people, the wait at the crossing is 5 minutes, for 10% it is 10 minutes and for the remaining 10% it is 20 minutes. So the average stopping would be : multiply 8 by 5 and add to it 10, multiply by 10 and add 10, multiply by 20, and the resultant total of 240, if divided by 30, would yield an average of 8 minutes. Thus the total detention time in jail (stopping at the crossing) would be 25 times 200, times 2 times 8 divided by 60 ie 4000 divided by 3, ie 1333 hours, which divided by 24 will give us 55.54 days, which would mean a detention of a little less than 2 months, in a year, for the to and fro journey every day.

Unleashing of such an onslaught would overwhelm the person on the other side to instant acceptance of Sukumar’s proposals, in spite of reservations.

That is how Sukumar created his smooth pathways, more or less. He had the boon of his prefix ‘Su’ which displayed

his attitude amply in the thumbnail introductions on the back cover of his books.

Sometimes he would hit a green light and whizz past it when it would be hard to pinpoint his thoughts. An equal mix of a feeling of a disconnect, relief or irritation perhaps.

That day it had rained, heavy and unabated, so much that the drains were in reverse flow. When he reached the Crossing, there was a big jam. He switched off the AC and downed the window panes. It was hard to say when the jam would clear up. One could see the rain drops bouncing off dry leaves, trees, umbrellas, raincoats and the wheels or roofs of cars. The entire convoy of vehicles was crawling hopefully as if there was nectar awaiting them at the centre of the Crossing).The dark grey clouds hung low in the gentle breeze.

Sukumar took a deep breath, not perturbed at all about the whiffs of petrol and diesel-seasoned as he was in such matters. During his research and teaching years, he had gathered more than his share of dust in numerous towns and villages. The fire of pure research on poverty was still smouldering in some obscure corner of his mind. Sukumar reached out and switched on the radio. The thick, deep voice of a female radio jockey came out at him, too close for comfort. He always visualised behind the voice, a well endowed figure of a pretty, fair girl.

The jarring rumpus at the crossing continued and showed no sign of letting up. On this crossing, Sukumar was perhaps the only person whose inner calm and equanimity were not ruffled. Anger and tension did not touch him one bit.

The silk smooth expression of tranquillity and contentment on Sukumar's face was not unnoticed by a boy standing across the road, his gaze fixed on Sukumar. He had a brown bag slung across his shoulder, like a water carrier's leather bag, and in his hands there were a dozen paper backs wrapped in plastic sheets – neat and orderly.

Actually, the boy had been constantly observing Sukumar for a week: every day, morning and evening. He did not lose sight of Sukumar for a moment even, in spite of the fact that he did not have a moment to spare: making his way through the jungle of cars and crowds, following a quick- sell drill - fresh newspapers in the morning, followed by magazines and books, big and small. The Sukumar vigil affected his sales but only marginally. He was on the threshold of future, although the image of that future had not yet formed clearly in his mind. A hazy patchwork of better times to come in a distant future. An entrepreneurial resolve seemed to have made inroads into his system and settled in.

It was a coincidence that on Friday last, at about the same time in the evening,

when the weather was clear and bright, he spotted this person and his eyes remained glued on him, magnetically transfixed. An uncanny thought crossed his mind, that when he grows up, may be 30 or 35 years from now, he might resemble this man, who was now about 50 years old, with a long face, and head covered by a thick, restive flock of hair. Then he daydreamed a mellow image: one day he might be wearing a clean white shirt with black trousers, a shiny dark coloured belt from which hung his cell phone, perhaps he would be sitting in a car; may be not his own but belonging to a close friend. The last few rungs of an ascent are scaled slowly, first a cycle, then a scooter, a mobike and finally comes the car...just then a car horn blared which shook him up and made him spring to the safety of the pavement.

In a flash the youth sized up the man at the Crossing whose attitude set him apart from the others. The boy never saw a ripple of restlessness on Sukumar's face. On the other hand as the congestion thickened and the collective impatience escalated, Sukumar would lose himself in an illusory dream world, a faraway nook architected by him..... the boy surmised that the man was some kind of a teacher, like in his hometown but of a higher calibre. As the man mumbled softly to himself, the boy imagined him to be in the middle of a lecture. He had seen the files, and papers strewn across the back seat of the car. He had

also made a fleeting count of the books lying there. He recognized some of the books which he had seen in the shop or godown of his master Budhiram. He could not link the titles with their ISBN number but could definitely identify the titles.

This natural hunger for knowledge and an instinct for self preservation along with a strong sense of self - esteem, had sharpened his talents and skills and equipped him to face life.

The boy appeared to be 15 years old. Three years ago he had run away from his home and made the roads of Delhi his home. At that vulnerable age, the child was surrounded by the unseen dangers which he could only visualize vaguely. His innocent, guileless mind could however clearly grasp the decisive significance of protecting his body. You bend once before the evil desires of a child abuser, and the sense of shame will hound you for life. The survival instincts from the soft pounding of the harsh realities of life had endowed him with the cunning of a fox and the swiftness of a hawk.

A foreboding of the impending danger and staying two steps ahead to face it, were the grim guidelines that ran his day to day life.

He would sense the danger before it would manifest itself. The lad would understand the body language of a predator and read his intentions effortlessly. The imperceptible chords

in the eye, the quiver of the invasive but invisible nerves, the fleeting shadow on the face, the sinful tightening of the arms, the momentary breath of devious intent, the distortions of motion and feeling.... the entire spectrum of a potential adversary's body and thought signals would appear unprompted on his radar. The boy could sense the inner meaning of words, of words underneath the unspoken words, the smell of predatory desires, unscripted and gauged only by animal sixth sense.

This endeavour in self preservation, a machaan and a fortress in the urban jungle, had shaped and hardened as a rock solid piece of sculpture. This was the key to self preservation and it was natural that the skills, honed and sharpened in the midst of dangers in which he grew up, actually transformed into his weapons of defense.

Hearing a knock on his window pane, Sukumar raised his head. The boy was standing hopefully, holding books in both hands, displaying them like an open pack of cards. Professor, lowered the glass unhurriedly. In the meantime, the traffic lights went out and a few cops were busy trying to tackle the massive build up of traffic. The Professor looked at him closely. And for a few moments, he was stunned at what he saw. A drop of hot molten glass seemed to ooze from his head, roll down his arms and trickle down his thighs and legs!

In one frozen moment he thought: Does this boy not look similar to if not

identical to Sukumar at that age? It was more than just a thought; it was a piercing awareness that the two of them had a strong resemblance to each other. If the boy were to freshen up, wear a clean set of clothes, clip his hair short with a parting in the middle, he would be a spitting image of Sukumar of years ago. The chain of thoughts continued..why could this boy not be his son? Sukumar had two daughters, one abroad and one in Bangalore but his desire for a son had remained unfulfilled.

Sukumar kept this revelation well guarded. The boy must also have noticed the striking resemblance but he waited expectantly, without batting an eyelid.

Why do you sell these books, Sukumar said in an even tone, there are no takers for these, not one in a hundred?

The boy was unmoved and without a trace of dismay, smiled, curling his lips; a smile that Sukumar had seen in his mirror and was a reminder of his own past.

He heard the boy's voice for the first time: There are numbers beyond hundred, Sir. The tone was different and Sukumar was relieved at not being debased by his own words.

Have you ever sold these books? Sukumar persisted inquisitively.

Sometimes, but the margins are good. Who knows you may buy some of these? The boy turned his eyes towards the books that were lying scattered on the rear seat of the car.

Oh! Aren't you rather smart?.. and the professor laughed, feeling a misplaced sense of pride at being put on a scholar's pedestal.

Sukumar glanced at the books in the boy's hand, arranged like an open pack of cards. They were all paperbacks found in abundance at all market high streets. Sukumar picked a compilation of science fiction stories.

How much?

The price is printed at the back.

Why? Why not any discount?

No discount, said the boy in a businesslike manner, it eats into my margin.

How much is your margin?

Not much but it is OK. It takes care of my daily bread. Also, I get an opportunity to talk to people like you.

Unafraid and eye ball to eye ball contact, Sukumar said with a hearty laugh. This boy is different and easy to converse with.

Why should I buy if there is no discount? Sukumar said pretending to be grave.

Pat came the reply: Because it is like home delivery, no charge. Professor was amused. He liked the reply. This boy is different. Most of the boys would try to dump on you glossy and provocative periodicals, specially the ones with semi nude pictures. But this one segments his customers unlike others

who knock at the cars indiscriminately. They are restless, eager and impatient to find a buyer. This one is really clued in and is in no hurry.

Sukumar took out notes from his wallet and bought the book. Exact amount; no hassles about change. In the meanwhile the flow of conversation continued.

So, what next? You have hit a jackpot today. Will you call it a day now?

I don't know. Let me see. He was not keen to leave even after having made a sale.

Do you know what a jackpot is?

Yes, I do. My master utters the word jackpot on his mobile when he is dealing big.

Where is your master?

Connaught Place. He owns many locations there and has a godown from where we pick up our stocks every day.

Where will you go now? Home or someplace else?

Wherever. Have'nt thought of which road to take today.

So you live on the streets? The boy nodded.

And when it rains, like today?

There are lots of options. It is not a problem at all.

The police must be harassing you? the professor asked.

The boy just shrugged his shoulders and let the question pass.

What is your name?

My name? Lobaan.

Lobaan, is that your real name then?

Of course. What do you mean by real name? He felt a tinge of irritation, though it was not because of the professor; sometimes, such questions can lead to trouble.

Does not look like it is your given name.

And why not?

Your parents must have given you another name...Professor was being unnecessarily chatty. He was stuck on this name. He perhaps noted a streak of irritation on the boy's face.

OK. I was just guessing. Do you know what Lobaan means?

Yes. People burn it as incense, use it for Poojas.

You know a great deal. But you did not get burned Lobaan?...and feeling sheepish at his feeble joke, and then collected himself.

Do you know that Lobaan is an Arabic word and also means dhooni....

The boy, interrupting for the first time, said: Do you want more books?

Even if I do, how will you find me?

I will find you, don't worry. I can get you any book, whatever you want.. even those, pointing towards the books on the back seat.... really.

Very well! And just as he was about

to say something, the traffic started to move and the horns blared out all around in unison, as if a mass drill had started. The professor raised his hand in farewell and put up the car window. He engaged the gear and changed the radio channel. He could see the boy in the rear view mirror, hopping and skipping around cars, buses and trucks like a deer in a steel and concrete jungle. When Sukumar was Lobaan's age, he had picked the bad habit of pinching money from his father's wallet. Not much, just petty cash and small value notes which would go unnoticed. But the habit took roots. He would buy snacks with the stolen money. Not that he would eat a lot or enjoy the food; sometimes he would have a little bite and throw away the rest or share it with friends. It seemed to give him a phoney platform to declare his identity. One Saturday his grandfather asked him to go along with him. They hired a rick and went to an office building swarming with people, mostly old. Even Dada looked young in their midst. That day Dada had to draw his freedom fighters pension. He would do that twice a year. Sukumar was very attached to his Dada. He was tall, his hair totally grey and sometimes Sukumar had difficulty in following what Dada said. He always wore a white dhoti and walked with long strides. Sukumar kept his fingers crossed and wondered why the dhoti had never come loose and what would it be like if it did. Once when dada was going for Sukumar's annual school day, Sukumar

cried and brought the house down, insisting that he would not go for the function if Dada wore his dhoti.

But why?

Because if the dhoti came off, his friends would laugh and he would be deeply embarrassed. That day Dada wore a pair of trousers which had a different cut. He put a ring clip below the knees to avoid the trouser bottoms getting caught in the wheel of his cycle. Sukumar watched him getting ready with unwavering amazement.

You don't use a ring for the dhoti?

Where's the need? The flying dhoti doesn't get stuck into anything, isn't it? And Dada laughed heartily. Dada was so good and at times so quaint! In his childhood also Sukumar had these contradictory views: Dada looked so good in his dhoti but Sukumar could not bear to see him clad in a dhoti for his school function! The day he accompanied Dada to the pension office, Dada told him that in his younger days when he was a school principal, he used to wear trousers and a crisply ironed shirt. He could not tolerate a crease going astray. That was the time of the British. And when the time of Gandhi came, Dada forsake the trousers for the dhoti.. .. he said. That day it was a long wait in the line. When his turn came, he signed the receipt and came out with the money. Then Dada took him to another office, sans crowds, where a Padre and Sister could be seen. Sukumar

learnt that it was a residential school for orphans.

Dada gave the entire pension to Sukumar to donate to the school. However, I have saved some money for you, he said to Sukumar with an impish smile. He took out four or five rupee notes and gave them to Sukumar: This would be handy if you want to impress your friends in school or if you are tempted to eat something. This is between you and me, OK ? Sukumar was not sure if Dada had seen him putting his hand in father's wallet. Be that as it may, Sukumar took a vow never to steal money or misuse it. Sukumar was an adept strategist in games of intellect and power but was vigilant and untarnished in handling official finances. This was perhaps his return gift to his dear Dada.

What were Lobaan's plans for the future? What can one say? He is perhaps an orphan or a runaway from his village which had nothing to give him except pain and distress.

He certainly did not have a Dada who wore a dhoti and got a freedom fighter's pension.

What will be his pathways to the future? What were his plans at this point of time?

He poured out his thoughts in a dew laden voice to Rima Ganguli when he went to her late one evening. In his lonesome moments he called her his jelly-rakhelly and Rima would respond not by scratching his face but putting

him on her lap and would caress him as her vaara nyaara gudda. That day, Sukumar's wife, Ratna, was away on tour to Chennai. Ratna was a senior Income Tax officer and had gone to carry out a raid. During the last raid, she and her team unearthed from a built in vault heaps of gold along with a live snake!

How is the snake here, Ratna enquired from the trader.

He hissed: Are we any different from being snakes and yet are we also not alive, Madam?

Rima was a librarian in the University. She had been totally immersed in the world of books for three decades, away from the thought of marriage or a relationship. The delusion was dispelled one day when Rima proclaimed in the library before a full house that she was sick and fed up with books. Sukumar was present too and he was the only one who understood the pain of Rima's aversion. They became friends and then lovers.

Rima's horizons of study were much wider and bigger than Sukumar's. She now perceived them as a squandering away of her precious years because she had read all that she wanted to, by the time she was fifteen. She would have done better as a member of a devotional singing group, with God as a fall back, she would say. When Sukumar heard such loose talk, he would sense the streak of doubt and insecurity in her. He was sure Rima was reading on the sly..she was going through a difficult phase and

Sukumar's presence was a stabilizing factor in her life.

Evening followed by night. Two empty glasses were on the table, a spent pair. Sukumar ended Lobaan's story, adding and editing as he went along. As if Lobaan was character in a screen play. It is like a film story, Rima said, and her eyes showed flecked emotions urging her to hum some old, forgotten melodies. Just then, recalling from the back of his remote memory cells, Sukumar started humming:

You are my whole world

Only you are like my god,

Somewhere in the depths of your heart

I found you in your shadows,

You have burned in my desires

Like Lobaan burning somewhere

The professor did not know where and when he had heard this song. But Lobaan was being consumed in this song... ..And is Lobaan not a replica of his own life? Along with Lobaan, Rima was also afire, within him. This is how they were going up their love ladder, but today Sukumar had spearheaded their journey of love. In this moment of bliss and lonesomeness, Sukumar had a fuzzy awareness of Lobaan's entry in their life as an OG. Lobaan and his story were the Opening Gambit. Around this awareness a pinkish, white moon was rising in the distant horizon overlooking the love lost couple.

At that very moment, Lobaan's inner

eye saw in a flash an opening, an opportunity. A solid prospect of bagging a lot of money. Budhiram often used to say that one can never forego such a chance and Sukumar presented a golden opportunity for Lobaan.

How?

It was a complex stratagem. The road map was not clear but the destination stood out like a solid rock.

But he knew, deep within his heart, that there was no scope for soft or romantic thoughts. He did not have a home or a fallback shelter. He was a lone digit in the here and now of this world. The strategy was like the peeling of onion layers or more appropriately, plucking the petals of a rose, one by one: savouring the juice and then discarding the petals. Lobaan's desire was intense: like peeling a hard sweet lime all the way and squeezing out the last drop of juice .. .that is what and how much his thirst was.

In the evening, Lobaan deposited the unsold books with Budhiram as usual and collected his daily earnings. There was no need to question a set formula. Budhiram had formulated an open offer: You get a minimum amount of twenty rupees; you had to make a minimum sale of two hundred rupees otherwise you could face a retrenchment and if you sell more, no one can stop you from earning a commission. It is another matter that no one could recall any one clearing a commission in Budhiram's two decade old business. What Budhiram does

out is final and he is fair, in his own words; he may have lost thousands in his business but has he ever deducted from anyone's salary?

The day's wage was sufficient for one's meals: 5 rotis 2 onions, dal and a few green chillies with a plate of potato curry. Today the restaurant owner had some reason to be happy so Lobaan got a bonus, a complimentary bowl of dal and half a plate of rice. The 'extras' made him belch twice and Lobaan started to think about his shelter for the night.

There were heaps of stones, bricks and concrete lying around in Delhi due to the massive construction work going on, so that there was no dearth of secure night shelters. The weather also was not inclement; neither hot or cold. But the onslaught of mosquitoes was unbearable. The collective experience of the homeless millions had a solution: the sidewalk in the middle of the road was avoided by mosquitoes because of the fumes and smell of the diesel. But Lobaan had abandoned this refuge after the BMW case in which seven persons, sleeping in the middle of a sidewalk, were mowed to death.

He spent the night in a life size cement pipe near the Hanuman Temple. He found the pipe dry and cosy . The pipe was about 40 feet long and right in the middle was a woman with her two children. The children were sleeping but the woman was sitting and dozing.

As Lobaan lay down he could see through a hole in the pipe a few stars

twinkling behind the clouds. Lobaan started calculating, plus, minus, add, subtract. He was so sharp that sometimes Budhiram would have his ledger written up by Lobaan. His method of calculation was unique and original. He had a lightning speed but would never falter. If his earnings stayed put, so would his life remain where it was. He could clearly see that. And there was no way of increasing his income. He had in all these years got a full grasp of the business of books and magazines. He could run this business better than Budhiram, many times over. This was his unshakeable belief. How could he compete with Budhiram when he had no money to start a business. As they say, this was a million dollar question.

If and only if he had the seed capital. Even ten thousand rupees, he could double his savings every year given his panache in managing the Money Circle, as the financial pundits say. Once it picked up speed you could press on the accelerator. This magical cycle is no different from the cycle of disease, hunger and pain.

Lobaan inhaled deeply and breathed out. He wondered if he made a mistake in coming to Delhi and getting into this trade. If only he could load his efforts with so much energy, animation and power that the question posed by the challenges that Delhi threw up, would itself become irrelevant. He had talent and the self confidence emanating from his capability. Was it then not a sign

of weakness and defeatism if he did not achieve his goal?

He had trouble in getting to sleep because of his overeating. He took out and wore his vest from a small sack which doubled up as a pillow also. Then from his sparse baggage, he took out a mirror which had a sharp edge on one side and thus could be used for other purposes also. He peered at the boil in his gum which had been bothering him for a couple of days.

Then all of a sudden, the professor's picture seemed to form itself, right in front of him. He could see its reflection in the mirror. If he looked like the professor then he could be as successful as him. O, may be not!

Lobaan dreamt that Sukumar stopped his car, and he got into the front seat alongside the professor and the car moved on.

I can get whichever book you want, he said, as if to rationalise his sharing of the front seat. If two persons are sharing the front seat, there could always be a business in the offing, Lobaan thought.

Any book? the professor dared him.

Yes..within three days... from anywhere in the world. There was a touch of challenge in his tone.

How? Is your trade spread over many countries? The professor did not miss the chance of having a dig at him.

Lobaan changed gears and replied in a serious tone: There are places in

Delhi where you can source a book from any part of the world. I know this..I can get it.. on 15 days credit. And Lobaan thumped his chest. This time the professor changed the subject.

Professor: Up to what level have you been educated?

Lobaan: Up to grade eight. It is enough for what I am doing. I was a master of maths. Add, subtract, multiply...like this.. .. and he flicked his fingers. The professor tested him twice with sums and when he checked on his calculator, the answers were correct.

This narrowed the gap between the professor and him and boosted his self confidence: Where do you teach, Sir ?

I teach History at the Delhi University, young students, older than you but not as wise as you are.

This time there was no mockery in his tone. The car was cruising at a good speed.

The next day what stood out from his dream, like the echo of bells ringing, were numbers, calculations, ways of multiplying his money and enlarging his money circle, as outlined by Professor. Before that Lobaan had explained to Sukumar how he would start his business if he had five hundred rupees as start up money. If he bought a book for 125/- he could sell it at double the price. And then both were immersed in this exercise, complementing each other and it looked as if they were going over their arithmetic tables.

First month..sold 4 books..for Rs 1000
Second month.. 8 books for 2 times
1000

Third month.. .. 16 books fetching
4 times 1000 rupees

Fourth month.. 32 books..for 8 times
1000 rupees

And this went on to:

Twelve months..8192 books sold for
2048 times 1000 rupees.

8192 and twenty lacs forty eight thousand rupees became his lodestars in the sky which he had to possess. His eternal resolve was to bring this North Star down to the earth.

It took Lobaan 24 years, not 12 months, to set up a flourishing business in books and after being so many years in the business he did sell 8000 books in a year and his turnover was touching 20 lacs. Later, his trade grew and with experience he learned that the money circle of business belonged to the realm of the ideal, a pure desire which is the driving force that puts business on a fast track. Ultimately, the decisive factors are skill, talent and luck. Of course, he had also learned at a young age that without blood sweat and tears, even dreams would let you down.

The next day he saw Sukumar's car in the morning as well as in the evening. He could spot him from his face and the cluster of his hair. But both times the green light slowed down but did not stop the traffic. He could easily exchange greetings with the professor

but he checked himself for his own sake, perhaps. His bitter experiences had taught him to respect the restraints and the inviolable boundaries of acquaintance, however deep or shallow it may be. Violating this Laxman Rekha could be damaging to his interests. It was desirable to talk to Sukumar only during jams and when the red light was on. He was not sure why it had to be like that, but he did what he felt was right. He knew the car number, the model and its colour by heart. Sukumar had a steel grey Honda City. Lobaan was sure he could spot this car in hundreds. After some time, he could even recognize the car by the idling sound of its engine.

On the third day, Sukumar got a red light. He saw Lobaan heading towards him. Another car driver beckoned Lobaan but he ignored him. That man was probably holding a hundred rupee note in his hand. Maybe he wanted change or a magazine. Sukumar had seen many car owners asking the sales boys for change and not too graciously. And the boys would willingly arrange the change. But Lobaan came straight towards Sukumar.

Their dialogue, still at a shallow level, started like a TV serial: a quick recap followed by the next episode - the set, environment and characters were all there.

Sukumar: Let me make it clear at the outset, I am not going to buy a book today, raising his hand and smiling.

Lobaan : I know. I have only

magazines today and my load is lighter.

Sukumar: The load is light, and how is the business?

Lobaan : So- and- So.

Sukumar: I know the phrase OK or So - So; what is this SO- and - SO?

Lobaan : If you think everything is good, it is So-and-So and if you think otherwise, it is so-so also..it is how you look at it.

This boy is so different, for sure.

You do not sell on other crossings, Sukumar asked.

The slots are allotted and rotated after two months. The rates are different for each area.

You mean the owner charges you rent?

It is deducted from my earnings, in the name of rent.

What is the rate here?

Very high. Next to Connaught Place, for which the rate is the highest. There is a lot of jostling for this zone.

The professor was mighty pleased with his discovery. It is possible people like Budhiram were in league with the traffic police – to fix the duration of traffic light changes on a particular crossing. Not possibly but it is definitely so, Sukumar concluded.

Alright, what happens if you cannot come on any day, suppose you are ill.

Nothing. I will be here the next day.

A substitute is not sent?

We get a leeway of three days; I can arrange for my friend to take my

place. We have a setting amongst ourselves. After three days of absence, Budhiram imposes a penalty.

Has it ever happened to you?

Not so far. I am careful about my health, Lobaan said and smiled.

How?

Nothing very complicated. I eat cooked food only, nothing raw. Am very careful about water.

How?

I drink filtered water, nothing from here and there.

Do you buy Bisleri, Sukumar asked, surprised ?

Not really, and Lobaan looked self assured, I have sources – shops, offices, warehouses..

Nobody stops you?

No, I have lots of friends, guards, electricians, liftmen.

They also live on the streets? Sukumar asked, continuing with his unending barrage of questions.

No.. .. they have homes and families though some of them live on the streets also.

Do you also aspire for a home?

Lobaan paused for a moment and said..who does not want a home..but right now the itinerant situation suits my itinerant life. Besides, I save money and there are fewer hassles. Just then the road hassle eased and the cars, with their festive, high decibel horn blowing, starting moving but came to a sudden

halt as the lights went out again. A pandemonium set in and cars from all sides started closing in towards the Crossing. There was an unfortunate policeman in the thick of the crowd, waving his arms desperately like a drowning man calling for help. His white uniform and self- importance, reminiscent of the times when the ancestors of this crowd had suffered lathi assaults from the British rulers, seemed to hold out some hope that he would be able to restore some order. But it would take time, like the resuming of a Parliament session adjourned due to disorderly behavior of the members. People on the street have more respect for democratic values than the Parliamentarians have, but this arena rules out the scope for any walkouts as in the Parliament.

They could now pick up the thread of their fragmented dialogue which had been interrupted. Both were aware that their conversations had been formal and on customary lines. There was nothing unusual or different; the same path had been tread by hundreds of people and it will continue to be so. That is the crux of the matter. Sukumar quickly finished sending an SMS and Lobaan understood from the language of the fingers that it was a confidential hide and seek stuff. He had surmised correctly because he deleted it instantly after sending it. Sukumar smiled conspiratorially, as if taking Lobaan into confidence, and said: One has to appease so many people, people who control

your mind, body, soul, your life.

Lobaan commented: They all have different dynamics, mind, body and soul, making things more difficult.

Who teaches you to speak so profoundly? asked Sukumar.

Meaning?

Talking in metaphors and similes, could be true or just a fib.

Don't know, maybe I got it from my ancestors or it has come straight off the street.

He thought and added: But my life is not so complex; I have one objective at one time, and one worry, one master. He is a god as well as a devil; fight him or hug him.

Are you fond of reading, asked the professor?

I have never thought much about that, Lobaan replied.

But you do want to study? Do you know your mind is very sharp, a galloping one, Sukumar said with a touch of affection.

Not likely. I will not be able to concentrate on studies.

But you think hard, don't you?

Yes but so what; everybody thinks.

True, but some peoples' thinking is like a sharp knife, making absolutely clean cuts. They fish out the kernel and grasp the core of any matter in their hand, like this, and Sukumar opened and closed his fist to endorse his statement.

But do you carry a knife, Sukumar asked.

No, said Lobaan, guardedly.

Any other weapon for your protection?

It is better not to have one, said Lobaan. If you are not watchful, someone may steal it and your own weapon may be used against you.

Yes, you are right but in our life such things pan out differently, and Sukumar's mind had now strayed somewhere else.

How? asked Lobaan.

We do not declare our intentions or weapons. We use them to conspire. So the knife looks like a flower; sweet words can be the harbinger of disaster for you. It is difficult to differentiate between giving water to a thirsty person and poison to a friend. The biggest plotter is the mightiest.

The professor laughed oddly. Lobaan knew that the professor was probably talking to himself, so engrossed was he in his point of view. It was like changing his clothes in the open, on a roadside. A wicked smile flashed across Lobaan's face. The professor saw it but he was feeling listless and somewhat fatigued.

You seem to be highly amused.

No, not really.

There is something interesting.

No, nothing, actually.

Lobaan was reluctant but Sukumar persisted. Then Lobaan cooked up something: I was wondering what would it be like if you and I exchanged places?

A spark was ignited in Sukumar's mind. His life, despite his preoccupations and aspirations, was running on a fairly uneventful track which left the curious and whimsical facets of his personality unsatisfied. Off the beaten ideas thoughts were few and far between.

Means you teach my students and I stand here and sell books.

Lobaan, taken aback a bit, affirmed with a nod.

Sukumar applauded: Bravo! That is indeed a great idea.

It was an absurd thought, Lobaan tried to cover up.

What matters is who wins? What do you say ?

Who knows? It would be like shooting in the dark, Lobaan replied, scratching his nose.

Sukumar stretched the conversation a little bit more; it was like a whiff of fresh air so he wanted to inhale it as much and as deeply as he could.

He patted Lobaan on the back and said: It was an interesting flight of imagination. That is why you smiled and I caught you.

Such things happen in films, Lobaan said, trying to explain it away.

Yes, said Sukumar, and also in stories..Dada's image floated before him. At one time he had read out several stories to Sukumar from the 1001 Arabian Nights. One story joined to the second, to the third, fourth and so on..like a garland of flowers.

Yes, besides films, you will find such things in good books too.

If they are found in books then they must be happening in reality also.

Lobaan's child like mind was touched by a warm feeling.

Maybe yes, maybe not.. .. here is a challenge for you. You boasted, didn't you? Now you get me a book called 1001 Tales from the Arabian Nights. A thick blue coloured book. The name of the author, no, the translator or the editor is on the cover: Richard Burton.. ..OK? I do not know its price but it is not out of print.. .. that is certain. Books like this one are perennial sellers.. every single day, all over the world.

The traffic moved and so did the car and Sukumar stuck his head out of the window: You get it and take it for granted that I have bought it.

Lobaan waved like he would to an old acquaintance. Sukumar felt a little bad as he parted from Lobaan. He had consumed so much of Lobaan's time. He could have sold a couple of magazines.. .. I should have at least bought a magazine, Sukumar mused regretfully. Let us see if the chap brings the book or not. Two days later, Lobaan just had enough time at the Crossing to place the book in Sukumar's hands. The price was Rs 950.Sukumar gave him two five hundred rupee notes but did not wait to take back the change. Sukumar's lip movement from the moving car seemed to suggest: Fifty rupees is the reward for your hard

work. In his rear view mirror Sukumar saw a smile of success and triumph on Lobaan's face.

After two decades of academic manoeuvres, Sukumar had got firmly ensconced in the elite group of intellectual giants who were embedded in the world of intense endeavours, projects and initiatives. His opinions were decisive in a debate and the anchor for a consensus.

He may not have liked this example but in the inner depths of his heart he knew the truth; that he had become like a plant whose wild growth in all directions was impeding and depriving the nourishment for other projects in public interest. But how could Sukumar help it, being a patchwork of the times and circumstances. The strategems employed by him in his early life to attain his legitimate objectives had defined his predatory practices in later years. All this was now a part of his life – chairing committees, piling with power and influence, perpetual incursions into the media world of print, radio and TV, the pull of conferences, the wielding of academic and financial authority.. ... all this would make the bells of authority ring continuously in his ears.. .. and make him think that one should have a cult of one's own.

And yet, amidst this tumult there was every possibility of being toppled and dislodged. Blink your eye and there is someone waiting to strike.

There was a time when Sukumar had

turned out superb academic works. For example, his seminal book on old Delhi and the Partition was based on an extensive, fundamental research.

In some constituencies, it was believed that Sukumar had surrendered to individualism and authority. Or was he violating the sanctimonious boundaries of the academia. Ruthless, inhuman and bereft of feeling, etc. But was this Sukumar's real persona? Was this an accurate appraisal of him ? Actually his intrinsic personality was emotion dominant. His first reaction to anything and anyone was rooted in feeling. The truth was that he had failed to bridge the awkward gap between schmaltzy and the materialistic,logic ridden world.

He had not forgotten how he had combed the streets of Delhi when he was writing his first book. It took him two years. His legs manifested an intent that was idealistic, enthusiastic and honest. He got ample appreciation for his hard work and brilliance... .. twenty years had elapsed and life had run a full cycle. The radials of profession and aspirations had also changed. But the job is never completely done for a man. There was still a dim fire in his belly. But now his focus and energy had shifted from means to the result and the end was more important than the means. Even then, he would need the help of someone young. It was beyond his capability. A tentative idea struck him, still to be shaped and honed, that the

link between the excluded, homeless children of Delhi and its streets could be highlighted through live presentations. It could be a monumental exercise and could Lobaan be the “Appu” of his modern epic?

Dreams are a subject of widespread deliberation and debate. A consensual view is that we live our dreams before we see them in our sleep. Sukumar knew his idea was still a dream but he was set upon making it come true.

One day, over a cup of tea, he apprised the head of Indian History Research Institute of his project of creating an extensive data base on Delhi’s street children for live multi media presentations. He told him that his team had already started work on this project estimated to cost rupees eighty lacs and was banking on the Institute to pick up a substantial part of the tab .While detailing his tentative project, Sukumar had, as a backdrop, a fuzzy image of Lobaan on the day he had bought the Arabian Nights from him.

A month passed and during this time, his meetings had fallen into a set pattern. The lines of destiny were being drawn to underscore a necessity. The daily meetings had become an unconscious part of his life; the axis around which his life began to revolve. The meetings on the Crossing had begun to overshadow his other important aspirations also.. ..am I giving undue importance to these commonplace moments.. .. looking for gems in the

dust? It is true that the street side transactions and formal how-do-you-do’s run into thousands. Car owners buy myriads of things, ice cream, corn cobs, spicy snacks and savories, toys for children, sun shades, obscene literature. People are commonly seen buying, mattresses and chairs. Anything that can be put in or on top of a car. This kind of flea marketing and informal trading takes place all over the country.

But in this case there are solid indications that the rationale is different. True, this reality is still shrouded in the unconscious but it is clear that these meetings are not providential or coincidental. There is a deliberate effort and a plan behind every meeting, a roll-over from the previous meeting.

Sukumar and Lobaan were on the threshold of entering into a new relationship, with their respective motives and expectations.

But what do they expect and get from each other? At this juncture we can only surmise thus:

1. Sukumar is an emotive person and the flow of emotions is obstructed by his professional preoccupations which are the cause of his restlessness.

2. Lobaan has occupied a special place in Sukumar’s life, as a muse or a mascot, keeping in mind his successful principle of the Opening Gambit (OG). Lobaan’s collected thinking, the way he spoke, his innovative plans, were all a bargain

in this game. In the meanwhile, Lobaan had taken long strides in his calculative skills with reinforced confidence in his ability to start and run his business. He felt so close to fulfilling his aim that he could virtually touch and feel it.

3. Thus both appear to be close to the realization of their dreams. Sukumar's desire was to set the academic world on fire with his epic of live presentations. To obliterate the spots of criticism that had come his way in recent years. And Lobaan had already seen the magic of the growing Money Circle .

In this dream world, each was a protagonist.

Their paths were therefore bound to cross and may be clash and the eventual outcome was unpredictable.

But only one month had gone by, so far.

Another fortnight had passed during which the frequency of their meetings had increased and the energy quotient intensified. The agenda was getting settled and clearer. They had become ITO Crossing pals, like friends in a bar, a game of bridge, tennis, etc. Such a circle of companions or friends, anchored in a common hobby or interest, keeps growing, for example, in activities like mantra chanting, Yoga, cigar, cheese and wine tasting and a host of similar interests. Both had been drawn towards each other in an inexplicable way, bonded by opposing tenets of the forbidden and the candid.

Sukumar continued to buy books regularly from Lobaan, at an average of two per week. Apart from this he would buy magazines randomly, some of which he never bothered to open. Lobaan noticed that Sukumar bought one book twice and the second buy was not for a gift. Apparently, Sukumar was trying to win over Lobaan with a motive and buying books had become an addiction, almost a necessity.

Lobaan sold books and magazines worth Rs 5220/- to Sukumar in two months. Budhiram was not a part of this direct deal. Lobaan had to part with 10% of his margin to obtain credit from the wholesaler. Even then he cleared a neat profit of Rs 2088/- and kept this money aside, including the eight rupees he received in coins. This cache was a living proof of his business model. The piggy bank not only contained currency notes but encapsulated his entire universe.

Lobaan had noticed that Sukumar was being increasingly nosy about Lobaan's life. And there was a growing sentimentality. Actually the OG principles of Sukumar were pushing him in that direction. Homeless children and stories of street children were prominent in his OGs. He would narrate episodes from Lobaan's life – true, false, real, virtual – with a consummate skill that held his listeners spellbound.

There was no deliberate or malicious motive behind these narratives whether they were real or imaginary. After all

he was a successful and renowned historian who would never underplay the value of substance and validation. He was by no means a sensational gossip.. .. his stories were always rooted in some true facts. When the tempo of his stories reached a peak, with the listeners in a trance and on tenterhooks, the facts would run out and be replaced by some element of fiction, to keep up the momentum... and Sukumar would carry the narrative forward with some fictional events while retaining the true core. He rationalised his tentative deviation from truth by drawing upon the simile of a reflection in a mirror or water which though not real, did not distort reality. In reality, his imaginary forays were not farfetched or improbable; that they did not actually happen in real life was only providential. Thus in a way, Sukumar was faithful, by and large, to Lobaan's imperceptible and virtual image. And from a broader, objective point of view, he was not deviating significantly from the common guidelines for a creative historian, so as to cause an uproar in literary circles.

On the other hand ,if one wants to bat for Sukumar, one could say he was raising the level of this debate. After all his concern and thinking encompassed the entire society, even the whole world. He had dramatised the unique situation of Lobaan and made the helpless and conflict-ridden life of Lobaan the cynosure of history's searchlight.

The same day he told the UNICEF

Director how the thakur sarpanch of Lobaan's ancestral village had repeatedly violated his mother.

Everyone was familiar with this situation in which the woman as well as the entire village was mute. The Panchayat was both deaf and dumb. Poor Lobaan was the only eye witness of this heinous crime. He had to escape from the village to save his life.. ..Yes, you have guessed it right, Lobaan was a dalit.

The truth is that Lobaan's mother was never raped and he belonged to the gujjar caste which had a dominant influence in his village.

On another occasion, Sukumar let it slip, to regret later, that Lobaan was the youngest sibling of three sisters who had committed suicide collectively.

Now Sukumar had added to his OG repertoire many more stories of street children engaged in petty merchandising: wayside vendors, food carts, skilled labourers, children employed in workshops and hazardous manufacturing activities, and in hotels and restaurants, children who were often used as front men by the police, middlemen, and petty criminals.

Sukumar was gradually becoming a valuable resource for any information on such children. Here was a reliable and dependable hoard of statistics. Sukumar had for his current project, a novel, unparalleled, ready data base on Delhi's street children. Considering his diligent work on Lobaan, which was

proving to be a trump card in his OG applications, it was imperative for him to delve deep into Lobaan's personal life and his past and about his associates. Generally, he was looking for facts to substantiate his conjectures, at least some look alike facts and some fiction.

This reverse practice – going from the imaginary towards the real - did put Sukumar in a delicate dilemma. Not that Sukumar was apprehensive that Lobaan would guess his motives. As it is, the professor had persuaded himself to believe that he was not deviating from the truth. He formulated a philosophical concept suggesting that he was giving a different direction to truth. There was an intrinsic truth in his concept; that he was promoting truth through the fictitious in pursuit of a higher, nobler aim. After all, he was devoted to the H in History.

Despite all this, the apparent contradiction made him appear weak and somewhat contemptible in the presence of Lobaan. Putting questions to Lobaan was like begging. Lobaan sensed this and promptly added it to his arsenal of tools for his self-protection. Sukumar would, to placate Lobaan or divert him, call him Dhoni, instead of Dhoni or Lobaan. He told him who Dhoni was: Skipper of the Indian cricket team, country's priceless diamond, the highest paid celebrity for endorsements, with an annual income of not less than rupees fifty crores, a house with two swimming pools, one for him and the other for

his dogs... .. undoubtedly, Lobaan knew of Dhoni. He had seen him on the TV, hitting sixes and winning the World Cup.

Do you know, asked Sukumar, smiling unabashedly, Dhoni was no one once; may be he was from a modest background.

It happens.. .. you have the talent and you get timely help and an opportunity, and then you.. .. zoom up in the sky like a rocket.. .. even the sky is not the limit. Who knows what our Dhoni can achieve, maybe you may become a maths teacher. Why is it not possible?...

In one OG Sukumar said about Lobaan: I am telling you this that street kid knows calculus. Hard to believe? He sells cheap magazines on the road. But he can differentiate and integrate mathematical equations. Have you heard of something so unique, so stunning and so incongruous? If we do it right, we can pick up a Kosambi, Nirala, Bose or Ramanujam right here in the streets. This is the depth of our profound civilization - after all we have been sweating it out for 4000years - and the horizon of our potential is limitless.. ..But to realise that potential it is imperative for you, me and like minded people, the rulers of our country, to come down to earth and gather some dust off the roads.. .. it might improve the flavour and transform the nation.

Lobaan's response was one of cool detachment and caution. His posturing could be a lesson for a politician. It is not that he surrendered abjectly to

Sukumar's sustained prying. He had his own dice to throw in. He did not lose his composure nor lodge his protest despite Sukumar's relentless nagging. He did what he wanted to and what was in his interest without letting Sukumar get a scent of his plans. He did not let the bond between them snap nor did he go out of his way to strengthen it. His total energy was directed towards stretching the gains he had made, to create more openings and not to miss the opportunities that came his way.

Having made a profit of 2088 rupees, he had understood well enough that Sukumar had a crucial role in enhancing his prospects. He was sure that Sukumar would provide the ladder for his ascent and the climb was not going to be an arduous one either. How and when this would happen, he could only vaguely visualise.

One thing however, was evident; Sukumar's entry into Lobaan's life was indeed a divine intervention. Consequently, he always endeavoured to say things which would please Sukumar. He pretended to be what the professor wanted him to be.

Lobaan was progressing on this pathway principle and if in the process a few untruths were required, he would not hesitate.

Lobaan's rural background was not underscored with pain or helplessness, or one that had made him a victim of social injustice. Gujjars had influence and prestige in that village. Lobaan's

folks owned a house, cattle, land.. .. better than many, comparatively.

Lobaan was the only child living with his mother. His father died long ago when he was perhaps one year old.. .. beyond his memory..there were no photographs either. But his father left them 14 bighas of land which was given on contract harvesting. The money and food grains that they got from the unscrupulous contractors were sufficient for them. There were the cattle in the house and Amma would earn more by doing some small chores in the neighbouring homes. So, they were not on the brink, financially.

Life was going on an even keel when suddenly, Lobaan's mother died. A four day fever consumed her when Lobaan was just twelve. An amply endowed, distantly related uncle in the village assumed charge of Lobaan. Lobaan moved into his unmarried uncle's house. The child missed his mother but could not open out to anyone and felt low. His link with old friends snapped and he would see dark shadows in broad daylight, naturally so. A couple of times his uncle asked him casually about the land papers, while tucking his cord into his pyjamas.

Your mother did not have any papers?

Without a thought, Lobaan heard himself say: No I never saw any papers.

He could not make out whether or not the fat Mama was pleased with his answer. But one day when the uncle was out, Lobaan took out the old boxes

and rummaged through them. He found a plastic bag containing some papers carefully placed and interleaved with a calendar and pictures of some gods. He understood that as long as he was not as big as the fat uncle, he had to keep the papers hidden from him. But where? For want of a better hiding place, he put the plastic bag in his school bag. He was sure his Uncle would never open it. That is how he carried the burden of the land and the farm on his shoulders, day in and day out.

.. .. The uncle behaved OK with Lobaan. In the beginning he made a pretence of being affectionate towards him but all overly intimate gestures were spurned by Lobaan. Gradually the uncle drifted away, not too close, not too distant. He wouldn't ask Lobaan about anything; no questions asked, and no curbs on him. This suited Lobaan but he could overhear Uncle talking in whispers to his cronies in the adjoining room. On one occasion, a stranger gave Lobaan two chocolates. One year passed in this manner and then one day Lobaan picked up his shoulder bag and ran away from the village. People had done this before also and he generally knew which bus he should take and from where.

Lobaan knew the fat uncle would not bother to check his whereabouts. Also, that his uncle would now till his land. This had been his desire all along which was now turning into a threat for Lobaan. The papers in the plastic bag were a source of comfort to him,

reminding him that his link with his land would not be snapped. He was sure that one day when he grew up to be as big as his uncle he would return to his village with the money he had earned and the land would be his. But that would take many, many years. Sometimes while lying down, he would draw images of the land with his finger, images which would encapsulate the spread of the land, its smell and his childhood memories.

When he narrated his past to Sukumar, there were deviations and concoctions tailored to suit Sukumar's liking. For example, harrassment by police on a number of occasions. He depicted the fat uncle as a cruel, unscrupulous and dangerous ruffian. Lobaan also weaved in several untruths about himself: untruths which raised him in Sukumar's esteem. Like he was passionately fond of books: how he had travelled eight miles to meet his maths teacher to resolve a problem since the teacher alone had the book with the solution.

Lobaan's untruths were really half truths. Three years ago the fat uncle may have appeared to Lobaan as an evil devil who knew black magic, and had an eye that never blinked, a stone eye may be. He was quiet because he was guilty. Lobaan had categorised people into those who were satanic like his uncle and those who were good like his mother and that crazy beggar who would keep laughing despite being rebuffed unkindly. Sukumar was the first person who did not fit into either of these categories,

good or evil. Perhaps he was both good and evil and Lobaan had an awareness of himself falling between these two categories.

One day Sukumar showed Lobaan a photo album which had a separate envelope full of loose pictures. There were photos of his daughters, parents and his wife Ratna.

This is my wife Ratna.

Full bodied Ratna appeared to Lobaan as a taut and hard lady. He was reminded of the calendar photo of a goddess before whom his mother would bow every day. Hanging on a wall, the calendar would, from time to time, flutter capriciously. That used to startle Lobaan during his sleep. He would cling to his mother's bosom and she would comfort him in her sleep. She was very gentle and soft.

Sukumar did not hesitate to show Lobaan his beloved's photo also perhaps driven to do this by some internal compulsion. She was alone in one photo and with him in the other. Lobaan was the first person to whom Sukumar introduced Rima without any awkwardness.

This is Rima Ganguli.

We are both, he said, and added with a slight hesitation, good, close friends.

He liked to put it across this way. It seemed to liberate him from an unidentifiable burden. He felt he had broken free from the need to keep a secret.

Lobaan caught on instantly.

The second wife.

No, not a wife, really.

Then who else? He was looking for a suitable epithet for her. In his village such relationships had profane connotations and it would be blatantly demeaning to extend it to this relationship.

You may say she is like a second wife, Sukumar said with a wild quiver in his voice.

What is her name?

Rima Ganguli.

And how do you find her? Different?

She is great. To me she is.

But your wife does not know?

No.

And the girls? Do they know?

No. It is comfortable this way.

Something inside was telling Sukumar that this dialogue was a godsend and he had not felt like this before, ever, with anyone.

My mother was also the second wife, Sukumar heard him say but a real wife. The first one died. That is what Amma told me.

Sukumar almost felt grateful for this easy going conversation and that day bought two books from Lobaan.

Lobaan had become the panacea for all the problems in Sukumar's middle aged, self absorbed, emotional life. Whenever he felt lost, Sukumar would seek refuge in Lobaan's true – and – not – so - true stories. Lobaan had become

an Aladin's lamp for him, his magic wand.

Sukumar's personal life was getting infested by a cancer of worthlessness and helplessness. His love triangle was complete but all three of them were fidgety, for their own reasons. Each one of them, encircled by darkness, were looking for an exit gate and deliverance, but it was eluding them because of the surrounding maze of status quo, frightening and unalterable.

Rima wanted to retract. She could not possibly hold on to the destination she had reached now. She had been on a sabbatical from the library for a year. An ideal world of books beckoned her. She felt a sense of freedom in that world.. .. but she also wished there was a fresh direction and purpose that would impart a meaning to it.

Ratna felt she had been distanced from Sukumar and it was her fault. She was unrelenting and had slipped up in her obligations as a wife. She could perceive in Sukumar's eyes the pain of her indifference towards him. She got so engrossed in resolving tax issues that her relationship issues remained unresolved. It had become important to fill up the fissures that were showing in her relationship with Sukumar and she was seeking an opportunity to regain his affection.

Sukumar was a victim of his sunset years. Even his fulfilment left him thirsting for something and he was so alone in his pre-occupations. There were unmistakable strands of remorse while

he basked in the glory of his fame. He could see pale shadows of the past on the expanse of a colourful future. When he moved ahead, he felt a desire to retrace his steps into the past and if he followed the path of the past, the worries of the future tormented him.. ..actually Sukumar was very uneasy in his nest of comfort. He would feel an intense desire to go out and get soaked in the rain, drench himself so thoroughly that his entire past would be washed away.

Lobaan was the beacon who could steer them out of this quagmire.

Lobaan's image flickered before Sukumar as he nestled in Rima's fleshy lap, perhaps for the last time, and implored her to come back to the university library and to participate in the initiative to impart education to the street children to enhance their income and raise their level by linking up with the capital's library network.

In course of time, this is what Rima did. Books and magazines began to be sold through social organisations which assigned a prominent role to such children. The money saved out of the elimination of the wholesalers was utilised for opening afternoon schools. Children began to read and retail books. Sukumar described this development graphically as he planted the last kiss on Rima's lips: An uneducated street child, whose life source were books, could move freely in and out of middle class homes by selling the Library's books. And he was

thus promoting reading habits amongst this class. This was no less than a revolution of equality and inclusion in the field of education.

In the context of Ratna, Lobaan's shadow cast a different pattern. Sukumar had realised he was losing Ratna, bit by bit. There were just the two of them in the house. The pattern of domestic life had undergone a sea change. He could see her receding just like the dream girl in films, the queen of the heart, slowly fading away in the midnight blue of the horizon. Sukumar was seeking the lyrical song that would defer and turn away the moment of parting, and would bring Ratna back into his arms.

A similar note was struck in Lobaan's fictional world.

When Sukumar was at home his face would be drawn, sometimes. Ratna empathised with his silence. He was drinking more than usual. He would often recline on the sofa, turning over old photos in an album. He was also spending more and more time on the computer. She finally asked: Why are you so lost these days? Is anything wrong?

Sukumar fended: I am digitising all old photographs.. .. and added after a pause..the future will always be a pale shadow of the past, comparatively.. .. we are getting on in years, Ratna.

Unknowingly, there were subtle changes in their behaviour and actions and he felt a warm comfort in Ratna's lap. Both of them had a drink, taking their time over it. Then Sukumar started

talking:

You know what happened one day, he began in a way that forebode something extraordinary was in the offing. Ratna was startled for a moment. The fear of the unknown sent shivers down her spine. Then Sukumar told her how he had met Lobaan on the ITO Crossing and how strikingly he resembled him.

You would have been taken in completely.. ..looks as if he is my child. You would have clawed at me asking me to explain this illegitimate progeny. Sukumar was laughing and Ratna was amused too. She bent and her lips touched Sukumar's, and a ripple of sensuality touched her.

It was Ratna who spoke now: A son..how we yearned for one.. and it just did not happen. We thought having three children was not a smart move.. what does it matter if it is a girl or a boy.. and people would deride us for having a gender bias.. .. how wrong we were. And she kissed him again, a deep and long one.

Did you meet him again? Ratna's protruding breast was soft, as she asked.

Yes, many a time. We have had several conversations. I buy books from him. He is a very sharp lad.. .. I feel like doing something for him, taking over the responsibility for his education, if he is willing.

Why not.. but only if he consents to it. What is his name?

Lobaan.

Now they were talking in low tones, just to each other.

You know, Sukumar said, sometimes one realises the work of destiny or fate..Is it not possible that a few generations ago one of my ancestors, may be my grandfather, may have sired an illegitimate child and then abandoned him... .. whose life took a different path and a street child called Lobaan was that son.. ..and there is perhaps a divine indication that we, Lobaan and I, could have been bonded as blood relations destined to meet at the ITO Crossing. This is a chance in a trillion, but if it has happened, is there a deeper meaning and an intent behind this meeting?

Ratna was silent but her fingers were caressing Sukumar's entire body; was she trying to erase his memories or perpetuate them? and Sukumar continued.

All this reveals a profound truth about the dynamic motion of life.. .. That which is immutable, indestructible, all pervasive.. .. that inner and immortal truth which has been lying dormant within us and has receded into a remote past.. .. how everything is intertwined.. the dance of Shiva and Vishnu's maya.. .. and here we are, obsessed with our petty problems and trifling desires, making mountains out of them. Imprisoned by our ego, we allow ourselves to be tormented by our insignificant problems.

Sukumar went on but his words had now lost their rhythm. In its place he was experiencing the now lost sensuality

and the call of the passion from his body. They were recapturing the scent of passion, on this new earth, which was familiar, like the smell of their bodies, and reassuring.

That night, Sukumar was speaking the truth from his heart, not trying to mislead Ratna in any way. His intense suffering was authentic and without any pretence. Elements of fiction, not untruths, were the reality of his thoughts and emotions.

Lobaan had reached his moment of decision. The rope had been strung up and was ready for tugging and testing. The moment had come to check out how trustworthy Sukumar was; how much weight did the professor's smooth talk carry; how much substance there was in his words of encouragement. He had to find out the catch, the pitfalls. Lobaan proceeded to explore very cleverly.

For three days Lobaan avoided Sukumar despite long stoppages at the traffic lights. Unseen by Sukumar, he wanted to see the effect of his unexplained absence on Sukumar. What he saw was just what he wanted to see. He could see that his meetings with Sukumar had become an inseparable part of the professor's life. He was undoubtedly becoming an instrument of Sukumar's plans. It was clearly a symbol of assurance for the professor- a cure for some malady of Sukumar. There was some disability or inadequacy which only Lobaan could remedy.

The third day Sukumar appeared to

be breathless with excitement. As if he had lost something precious on this Crossing. He turned his head all around a few times and then came out of the car, right in the middle of the road. His eyes were constantly searching for Lobaan. He almost bumped into an oncoming car. For a moment Lobaan was filled with pity. He had an impulse to run to Sukumar and clasp his hand.. .. a child's emotion perhaps.. .. but Lobaan stopped short. It was a momentary feeling which drifted away as it came.

Lobaan was confident that his preparations were now complete. It was time for the chickens to come home and roost. The time had come to strike.

It was not a very complicated plan. He was making plans to ask for Rs 15000 from Sukumar for starting his business. His total focus was on how to get the money and start the business. At this point he was unmindful of how he would repay and whether he would continue to meet Sukumar.

Anyway, Lobaan was well prepared for the next meeting. He would fabricate some excuse, illness, famine, theft, legal expenses to face fat Mama etc. He had no intention of sharing with Sukumar the real purpose of asking for money.

Lobaan got what he wanted after three days, though not in the way he had intended. Destiny casts its own, uncharted patterns. This is because at the same time, Sukumar was also formulating his own plans. The time had also come for the fulfilment of his mission. The time

had come for a confrontation and collision of their shared dreams, by themselves harmonious and consonant, to be unveiled for their respective self serving ends.

Their last meeting took place in the evening. The street lights were lit and were playing with the twilight rays. Winter had not set in but there was a nip in the air.

Lobaan saw Sukumar park his car on the extreme left close to the lights though he used to turn right normally and it surprised Lobaan, being the first time it had happened. The car was hugging the sidewalk behind a bus stop but there was ample space for the buses to pass.

Lobaan came close, knelt down the window and put on a lost, sad expression so that Sukumar should ask him for the reason and that would be his chance to spell out his business proposition. His heartbeat had accelerated and he wanted all this to be over and done with quickly.

You will catch a chill, Sukumar cautioned him. It is getting colder and you need a light pullover.

Lobaan shivered again, maybe due to tension, and pouted his lips outward.

Sukumar warned him again: You should not be falling sick.

It is not very cold yet, Lobaan said.

You may not feel it from outside but it can consume you from within and don't tell me you do not have a sweater.

When did I say that?

Because if you don't have it, go and buy it right now. There are a lot of shops in Janpath where they sell all kinds, local, imported and the price ranges from thirty to hundred rupees.. .. got it?

Lobaan nodded, showing impatience.

Sukumar persisted: Don't tell me you can't afford it. You can easily buy sweaters worth thirty to sixty rupees.. .. you earn enough and if you are tight for money, let me know frankly.

What has happened to the professor, thought Lobaan. How to put his thoughts across?

And where is your bag today? Your shoulder bag? Are you having an off day from work?

Of course not, Lobaan replied in weak voice, I have left it over there – and he pointed towards the pavement.

And if someone flicks it from there? There was a touch of unfounded anxiety in his tone.

The professor was not his usual self today, Lobaan thought.

Look sir, a serious situation has cropped up suddenly. Lobaan had no choice but to pour out his thoughts haphazardly, to weave his convoluted story which would climax in the demand for fifteen thousand rupees.

Hang on for a second, said Sukumar and moved up his car next to a vendor, opened his bonnet and set the hazard lights flashing. Lobaan had lost the reins

of control again and he looked at Sukumar in mute amazement. Sukumar rubbed and clapped his hands: Now its fine.

What happened? Lobaan looking silly.

Nothing, Sukumar replied deliberately: All this set up is for the traffic police. Our car has conked out and we are waiting for the mechanic to arrive. Now they will not bother us.

Sukumar was looking at Lobaan, with his hands tucked into his pockets, unmindful of the din of traffic, lost to the world. He was looking intently at Lobaan and sizing him up too.

.. .. I have something very interesting and important to tell you, it is for you and for me, as he took out a swanky leather bag from the backseat and sat on the passenger seat of the car. A lock of hair had fallen across his forehead that seemed to make him look a good ten years younger. He motioned to Lobaan to sit in the driver's seat. Lobaan took awkwardly long to settle in but this was his first time in a car and the professor was sitting next to him!

Sukumar was rummaging through the bag and for a moment Lobaan fantasised himself as the owner of the car conferencing with a middle aged man. May be he is buying something.. .. and the moment came alive when Sukumar fished out two objects from the bag which he dangled before Lobaan and between the two objects, Sukumar's face flashed a broad smile. Lobaan at once recognised that the objects were Sony products.

One was a slim digital camera, the other a voice recorder, as far as Lobaan could make out.

Do you know what these are? asked Sukumar, raising his hands.

Lobaan burst out laughing, unable to restrain himself?

What is so funny? and Sukumar looked down and wondered if his fly was open. It happened once and his daughters had laughed in the same manner.

Lobaan was a little sheepish: You look like a salesman selling these goods to me, just as we sell to you.

Oh! And the professor's hands just dropped. After a brief pause, he continued: Anyhow, I have to teach you how these things work and what they are used for.

I know it all, said Lobaan casually and went on to explain in detail the functioning of those gadgets about which Sukumar did not have a clue. Lobaan knew the make, the model their technical features, almost everything.

How do you know all this? You must be a wizard, said Sukumar, gaping in disbelief.

We have factories too, he said and then collected himself when he saw a worried look on Sukumar's face. I have a friend who repairs and sells a lot of these machines and that is where I have picked up expertise.

Then Lobaan explained how the street children are engaged in multifarious trades and professions.. .. and when they

meet they talk and learn from one another.

Fantastic, exclaimed Sukumar; so this is the wayside polytechnic which is neither run by the Government nor the private sector.. .. it is self propelled and is carrying on, on its own momentum!

Sukumar's attention was diverted when he saw a cop coming towards the car. It looked as if he was going to knock at the window pane, then he walked towards the bonnet, appearing to examine the engine, wiped his face with a handkerchief and walked away.

Sukumar realised that he should now get on with his mission. He addressed Lobaan: I have a proposition for you. I am launching a big research project in which you will have a stellar role. A hero's role you may say. It will go on for a year at the end of which there will be a report and then a thick, heavily illustrated book.

Lobaan's curiosity was aroused at the mention of a book. What kind of a book? He asked.

A real book not fiction. A treatise on the lives of children like you. And you do not have to give up your work.

What am I supposed to do? Asked Lobaan.

Sukumar was waiting for the question and he was now in full flow.

Look, you just shoot photographs with this camera. As you like, whenever you like. Just capture scenes of your day to day life, your normal activities, no bars, no rules. The photos should

depict what you are, what you do. There is no need to wander around or think too much about what you photograph... .. about ten on an average per day.

The photos can be on any theme.. .. your friends .. no need to pose.. the places you frequently go to, where you eat, sleep, bathe and have fun.. .. where you learn things.. happenings here and on other streets.. ..images of life that you may have liked to send to your mother, or to your friends in the village.. .. natural and spontaneous .. nothing should appear contrived.

Sukumar's body language was peculiar, may be because of excitement. He was talked incessantly, interspersed with elbow jabs or a thump on Lobaan's back, for emphasis.

These photos are supposed to be a slice of your life - an orange full of juice and a good deal of sourness too. A sharper elbow jab this time.

The camera has a memory card for 200 images. Every week or so I will download the images on my computer and clear the memory for you to begin afresh.... you will have to keep its battery charged but I know you are resourceful enough to manage that.

Sukumar paused for breath and his face was animated and it seemed he had concluded.

Lobaan's eyes had a sparkle as he looked at the tape recorder and asked: And what is this for?

Oh yes, I forgot! You have to speak

into this, all kinds of stuff. Whatever and whenever you want to say something: about you, your cronies, how the day went, people you met, books you sold, your comments on the boss - good or bad - people you liked or disliked, about me, any headline event.. .. just switch on and get started without thinking or rehearsing, as you would talk to a friend or me. And then switch it off.

.. .. Talk into it whenever , wherever. Record your inner thoughts, songs, jokes. Anything will do but it has to be natural.

.. .. and then the night falls and you lie down but are not able to sleep. Your mind is at rest and yet roaming at the same time. You must talk to the recorder at that time... .. old memories, childhood days, your future plans. Talk faithfully, laugh if you want to, cry if you have to, understand?

Sukumar picked up the cassette recorder and continued: There are three empty cassettes in this pouch besides the one in the recorder each with a capacity of two to three hours of recording. When three cassettes are full, give them to me and I will give you three more. Have you understood the whole procedure?

Lobaan had assimilated everything thoroughly and he nodded.

You will do this for me, wont you? Become my hero? The hero of entire Delhi?

Sukumar was smiling and his expression had an admixture of

compassion and gratefulness. He was being a giver as well as a seeker.

But he had missed the quiet alertness on Lobaan's face. Furrows of a predicament lined his forehead. He was adding up the price of both the machines, mentally.. ..they must be worth 20000 rupees at least? What can they fetch him in the market? Rupees 16000 to 17000 is assured.

And this assignment is not for free, said Sukumar, patting Lobaan's cheek. I will pay you.. ..not I but the Project will reimburse you for your effort. Thus you will earn some extra income. You will start with say, thirty rupees a day. If all goes well, there is every hope of an increase in your remuneration.

Both the machines are then mine, asked Lobaan eagerly, his lips parched. Can I start this assignment right away?

Why not? The sooner the better, Sukumar replied promptly, put the machines in the bag, zipped it up and handed it over to Lobaan. He leaned forward, perhaps wanting to hug Lobaan but finally just ruffled his hair and stepped out. Lobaan came out from the other door.

They resumed their respective positions: Sukumar in the driver's seat and Lobaan leaning through the window on the other side. In the meantime, Lobaan had dropped the bonnet of the car.

Perhaps both felt warm and flushed but for different reasons. Both felt

triumphant at having bagged a good deal. This latent ignominy was tempered by softness and gratitude towards each other. That is why they did not articulate their joy in an unbridled manner. There was also a touch of sadness and regret. But such feelings amongst friends are common and are evanescent at the same time.

These are professor's unexpressed thoughts: You win some, you lose some and life goes on. And in Lobaan's language : I found what he lost and he picked up what I dropped. That is how fate plays out the game. It is also a fact that both of them were fatally bonded to each other. But now the time had come to go their different ways.

Do you know Lobaan a day may come when you will be very famous. Who knows ? Undoubtedly my project will put you on the stage for the world to see.

Lobaan did not comprehend these lofty ideas .He just nodded his assent,formally. Slumdog Millionaire had not been released otherwise Sukumar would have certainly cited it as an example.

The lights turned green, Sukumar waved and Lobaan kept standing, watching the tail light of the car. The bag was firmly in his hands. He knew this was their last meeting.

After that what happened was but natural and inevitable. Lobaan sold the two machines and started his independent business. He continued to work for Budhiram for a few months and got his

beat shifted from ITO to Karol Bagh where it was easy to avoid an encounter with the Professor. As far as Sukumar was concerned, it took him longer to recover from this episode. It was not the theft of the machines. That hardly mattered. What pained him most was that Lobaan had betrayed him; more than anything else, it was a breach of faith. Ultimately, he was doing all this for Lobaan's good. And the kid knew it. He would have eventually got the machines, so why was he in a hurry? Why such despicable behaviour? Sukumar was seen at the Crossing for a few days, lost in thought, his eyes seeking someone.. something. He would forget to move the car at the green light. So much so that one day a cop commented brazenly: What happened Uncle? One too many last night or is it a matter of love-shove?.. .. Let the car and life move on.. such things happen all the time. And then Sukumar decided that enough was enough and he composed himself. He would have to realign his OGS though it may take some time.

His project progressed after the start had been ignited. After the initial push, a momentum had been built up, sufficient to keep it going. There was no dearth of extraordinary, intrinsic, original talent of the street children... .. Lots of Lobaans were stalking the streets and the crossings. Still, whenever Sukumar thought of Lobaan, "our "Lobaan ,he would be emotionally moved. While he had reconciled with the situation mentally,his

sensibilities were still raw.

The relationship of the Professor with Lobaan was a clear example of the Pareto Principle. No third person had been hurt in their interaction with each other. As far as the two of them were concerned, they gained more than they lost. At least their aspirations had been raised to a new level. Such interactions are rare. Yes, there is some bitterness embedded in them like a medicine but to recognize or reject that bitter truth is a matter of an individual's beliefs and inclinations. And the swirls of thinking can create turbulent and cruel waves.

We are still left with the curiosity about what happened to our two protagonists. Did they ever meet again? Had it been a film, a dramatic reunion or encounter would have inevitably taken place. This indicates a follow up or Part II situation but such an ending is not in vogue in stories, not so far.

Be that as it may, there are no artistic restraints on unveiling the future. Both protagonists of our story are leading their separate lives. Both are contented and complete in their own world. It took Lobaan 24 years to achieve his monthly target of selling ten thousand books for twenty lacs of rupees which was predicted to be achievable in one year by the " magical money circle" pundits. But Lobaan knew he was blessed by destiny which contributed to half of his success, with blood, sweat and tears contributing the other half. Apart from organising his distribution network

for books, he had also started a small publishing house. The successors of his employers he used to work for were now working for Lobaan. He was fair but strict in his business principles. One eccentric trait of his remained unexplained. He exhorted all his agents to maximise the sale of the five or six books of a historian called Professor Sukumar, even if the margins had to be dropped to as low as 5% or negative even.

That was the only losing line in his business.

Sukumar had retired but was promptly honoured with a prestigious post. He was not very creative now and he did

not need OGs anymore. He had a good reputation and enjoyed young professors and researchers trying their OGs on him.

Life unfolds itself in cycles.

If you tell this story to them, both the Professor and Lobaan will be amused. They might say that authors invent events and all that they create need not be necessarily true.

Yes, it is probable that both of us may have met at the ITO Crossing. Such interactions are common, nothing extraordinary in that. But how is it conceivable that all that is described in this story, actually happened.

It is just not possible.!

Raju Sharma, born 1959, has been a Science scholar inclined towards theatre, films and creative writing. He was in the I.A.S. since 1982 and has recently given up his professional career to devote more time to writing. Some of his books are shabdon ka khakrob, samay ke sharnarhi, halafname and visarjan. He has translated a few plays. He lives in Delhi.

Anil Sud, MA, Economics, St. Stephens College, Delhi University with 40 years of experience in civil and private sector services. Interested in music, arts and literature. Has translated several important authors. Lives in Gurgaon.

Poetry

FIVE POEMS

Kedarnath Agrawal

Translated by
Shalini

1. Time's tide

I stand
unswayed
by time's tide.

Deception
I fight.
Truth is my
Guide.
I shall
Not crack
Like a rusted pipe.

2. With My Own Might

I have
conquered difficulties
with my own might.
I've scaled

mountains
and kissed the heights.

Water too comes
tumbling down,
nothing stays on top
for long.

Stagnancy melts
in a similar fashion
conscience of the brave
when creates a storm.

3. Child

He made the ripples quiver.
The child with his pebble
made the ripples quiver.
Not the pond alone,
he made eternity quiver.

4. That Man Shall Never Die

He who has grown up licking the dust of life,
he who has weathered storms and
stood upright with his might,
he who has bent iron and dug gold,
he who runs the chariot of gods,
that man shall never die
never die!!

He was forged in the fire of life,
an iron fist, hood of a serpent like,
he who crushed injustice and bent power,
he who runs the chariot of time,
that man shall never die
never die!!

5. The Powerful One

The powerful one is in the house now.
Strong as an elephant,
arms wielding enormous strength are in the house now.
Carrying the glow of the sun,
one with keen eyes is in the house now.
The masses are shouting,
the one to take care of them is in the house now.
Listen o ye, the government,
one who'll bring apocalyptic changes is in the house now.

Kedarnath Agrawal (1911-2000), An eminent progressive poet whose poems are full of elan vital. He is equally expressive about love and landscape. Some of his collections of poems are: 'yug ki ganga', 'neend ke badal', 'lok aur alok', 'hey meri tum' and 'phool nahi rang bolte hain'. He was an advocate by profession and lived at Banda.

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.

OUR BABA— NAGARJUN BABA

Shamsher Bahadur Singh

Translated by
Anamika and Arlene Zide

Our *baba*, Ali baba
Nagarjun baba!!

'Open Sasame!' in front of everyone—
said he—in front of absolutely everyone—
Caves full of treasure
fell open to everyone
classic revolutionary treasures

Vibrant soldier of brave poetry,
The brave anthems
 never admitting defeat of the invincible masses
 and the vivid sagas
bringing a twinkle to the eyes,
and warmth to the heart,
translating today's history
 into verse:
—sometimes in slow humming,

sometimes with toe-tapping satire
and sometimes in compassionate stillness.
Then, sometimes blowing a bugle
and sometimes clanging tongs;

sometimes making kids laugh
sometimes charming the young
and bringing back delight
to the eyes of the old
—showering such treasures of poetry
into our bags

Our *baba* Ali baba

Nagarjun baba!!

“Why bother, ...” singing this
line from a filmsong!!
with his son,

— I still remember that scene!
when I heard it for the first time

Snap snap snapping...
trying to snap away
hunger and poverty

My Ali baba,
At the spread tablecloth of songs
throwing back a drink of poetry
thick with poverty
Carefree,
Right on cloud nine
Trying to enjoy the bitter gulp of anger and passion—

making something sweet of it,
Burning in the fire
of burning poverty

Dancing
raining a bizarre nectar

quenching souls,
taking a holy dip in the Ganges of the epoch
in an outlandish masquerade,
there he comes, my *baba* Ali baba
Nagarjun!!

Shamsher Bahadur Singh (1911-1993), A major poet of Hindi who figured in 'doosra saptak' edited by Agyeaya. He experimented with various poetic forms as can be seen in the present poem which felicitates an equally important contemporary 'Nagarjun'. Some of his books are: 'kuchh kavitayen', 'kamini', 'Hushshoo aur pee kahan' and 'chuka bhi hun nahi mein'. He lived in Allahabad, Delhi and several other towns.

Anamika, born 1961, writes poetry and prose. A major poet, she is recipient of numerous literary awards including the recent Kedar Samman, Saviri Bai Phule Samman, before which she already earned Bharat Bhushan Puraskar, Girija Km. Mathur Samman and Parampara Samman. She teaches English literature in a college in Delhi University.

Arlene Zide, born 1940 is a poet, linguist and translator. She edited and translated Penguin's Book of Indian Women Poets 'In Their Own Voice'. She taught at Harold Washington College, Chicago, U.S.A. and is now an independent writing and editing professional.

Poetry

FIVE POEMS

Pawan Karan

Translated by
Rashmi Bajaj

Woman '*In toto*'

I wish
To be a woman
Not the part woman
Who lives inside
Every man
But a woman
For ever -
An irrevocable woman
A woman
In body, mind and heart
A woman
Inside and out.

My words
Shock and amaze women
Confronting them
With their
Innermost desires
Their simmering fires

My writing weaves
And unweaves
The warp and woof
Of their existence
My words tease
Tickle and titillate
These women

I write
A woman's
Darkness-filled days
I write
A woman's
Gloom-filled nites.

My poems are
The mirrors
Reflecting the whole-being
Of a woman

In my poems
Women meet themselves
And discover
What they have
Not known
All along.

But still
I remain
Essentially
A man!

I wish

To be a woman -
With all distinctive womanly
Flairs and flavours
Aromas and odours
Joys-and fears
Smiles and tears
Highs and lows

I wish to be
A woman
Inside and out
I wish to be
A woman
In *toto*.

Album

The old lonely woman
'Amma' as we call her
Has an eternal companion
Her cherished Album

Ancient like
Her ever crumbling house
The Album is
Constantly wearing out
She keeps it
Covered, safe and locked
Enshrined in
Her favourite box
Whenever she opens

The Album's box
Her frightening loneliness
Gushes forth

Her heart throbs
Not in the rib-cage
But in the Album
Locked in the box!

Her Grief

Today she
Is sad
Today she'll
Stare at herself
In the mirror
For long
Today she'll
Touch and feel
Her skin
A countless times
Today her fingers
Will count
Her years
Today the
Smallest sound
Will alarm her
Today her
Womanly grief
Will drown her...

Vishvpala

Wandering and Meandering
Through the Ancient Vedic streets
Me-an Atheist
Came across you
O Vishvpala.

Seeing you scraping
With your crutches
The ashes from
The yajna - site
Of the *yajna*
Performed in Rigveda
I had asked:
“How come Vishvpala
How are you
Still on crutches?”

With the ironfoot implanted
Your lameness cured
Those *Vedic vaidyas*
Ashwini and Kumar
Had their fame
For ever secured

Vishvpala!
Why then are you
Still holding onto those crutches
Why are you
Still scraping off the *yajna-ashes*?

Come on, get up
I wish to see you run
I wish to see
The Yajurved-miracle in Action

O Vishvpala,
Why don't you
Just look at me
Why don't you
Simply stop scraping
Why don't you
Throw the crutches away
Tell me, why?

Vishvpala!
This is the 21st Century
And you have been
All along sitting and scraping
The *yajna* ashes.
Give me your hand, with me
Come, step into this century

Vishvpala!
Are you not yet
Fit *to* walk ?
Are you still disabled ?
Break your stony silence
And speak up, my dear
Tell me the truth
Tell the poet the truth :

Did THAT happen to

You also that day
What still happens to women
In this century today ?

***Vishvpala:** Vedic- Age lame woman who was given iron-foot implantation by two *vaid*s Ashwini and Kumar—the act immortalized in Vedic hymns.

Burqa

Time and again
You drum it,
My man!
God himself
Designed this veil
For women
I just
Don't believe
What you say
Night and day.

Following your command
As I put on
This damned veil
My battered body
Rebels and wails :

Not God
But you
Have forced it
On me.

In Making

Me a wretched burqa-clad
You have enjoyed
Playing the God !

Pawan Karan, born 1964, he is emerging as an important poet with a pro-woman stance. He is postgraduate in Hindi and in Mass Communication and Human Resources. He has three poetry collections out of which 'Stree mere bheetar' and 'Aspatal ke bahar telephone' have been widely read and reviewed. He lives in Gwalior.

Rashmi Bajaj, is head of the department of English in a college in Bhiwani. She writes and translates when she likes what she reads. She lives in Bhivani, Haryana.

PREMCHAND: LITERARY THEORY AND PRACTICE

Lothar Lutze

In order to make a character appear exemplary and ideal it need not be flawless- even the greatest of great men have some weakness or other. In order to put life into a character it will do no harm to point out its weaknesses, On the contrary, these weaknesses turn that character into a human being. A flawless character will become a god and we shall not even be able to comprehend it. Such a character cannot make any impression on us, (63)¹

The centenary spectacle is on again, It is Premchand's turn this time. The patterns are known only too well. People who haven't read a single line of his in the original are discussing his merits and demerits as a writer; others, who write in English, are, or pretend to be, concerned with his relations to the masses for whom they themselves, as long as they write in English; in India, refuse to write; the *maulvis* and the *pandits* are once again unearthing the old bone of contention in the name of Urdu and Hindi, which, according to Premchand himself, are just "two names of one thing" or, linguistically speaking, two shapes ('swarup') of one language (106, 153), Even those who sincerely mean well tend to smooth over the unevennesses in his work, to ignore the problems Premchand had to face in his day and which make him, or rather his work, a problem for his readers today.

All this has happened before and to others, with the result that many a centenary celebration ended in the celebrity's being shelved as a 'classic', which is the literary variety of a first-class funeral. Premchand's survival this year will depend on an honest assessment of his literary work as the product of a man's

endurance of enormous tensions-cultural, social, environmental, political, linguistic-and on his critics' willingness to judge him not by his extra-literary intentions but by his literary achievements.

It is against a background of questions left unanswered, of problems only partly solved that the best of Premchand's writing stands out all the more brightly. There, in a handful of short stories perhaps, he attains the wisdom founded on the acceptance of human imperfection, the serene state of compassionate detachment which his German colleague Theodor Fontane, strikingly but untranslatably, called 'heiteres Daruberstehen' and which is the distinguishing mark of what is greatest in art.

II

But within this one century, or in even less time if you like, the short-story has triumphed over all the other literary genres and we may be justified in saying that as in a previous age poetry was the most comprehensive form of literary expression it is now the short-story. And this proud achievement is due to the talent of so many great European artists, the most important of whom are Balzac, Maupassant, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky and others. In Hindi, until twenty-five-thirty years ago the short-story had not even been born, But today there is not a single journal without

two to four short-stories—there are even several journals offering nothing but short-stories. (49-50)

Premchand was justly proud of his literary success, all the more so as it had been achieved in the field of fiction, i.e., more precisely, of the short-story as well as the novel, the latter of which "Indians had absorbed more than any other genre of European literature" (81); and both of these genres had until recently not been recognized as serious literature in India. [Even Premchand still seems to be in two minds about this: "Actually, novel-writing is considered light literature", he says in this context, "because readers are entertained by it." (81)]

Who would question Premchand's 'Indianness' in view of an opus depicting a *comédie humaine* whose very life-blood springs from North Indian provincial life in the last few decades of the nineteenth and the first few decades of the twentieth century; but as any truly modern work of Indian literature until this day, it is the outcome of a creative conflict between this 'Indianness' and certain Western aesthetic ideals. One such ideal, embedded in names of literary genres like English *novel* and German *Novelle* (long story), is that of novelty.

With us, the desire (for something new) either never arose or we trampled it into a torpor. The West has been making progress continuously—it was hungry for novelty, irritated by the chains of

propriety... In literature, too, it initiated a revolution. (49)

It is with the same pride that Premchand proclaims his indebtedness to “so many great European artists”, whom he had read either in the English original or, in the case of the French and Russian writers he mentions, in an English translation—in a language, that is, which in a different context he doesn’t ever tire of condemning. In an address on “The National Language Hindi and Its Problems”, delivered in Madras on December 29th, 1934, he compares the predominance of the English language in India to a prisoner’s chain:

The prisoner is troubled by the chain more than by anything else. The prison may be better aired, more clean and neat than his own house. He may also have better and tastier food than he does at home. From his family he sometimes is separated for years of his own free will. What reminds him of his punishment is this chain alone, which never parts company with him, whether he stands or sits, sleeps or wakes, laughs or speaks, which never allows him even the illusion of being free. (101-102)

From the point of view of language policy, especially concerning the establishment of a national language, Premchand had taken an unequivocal stand: it was to be the *one* language spoken by the largest possible number of people in India, an open language for an open society, its name being of

secondary importance: Hindustani if the country’s name was to be Hindustan, Hindi if it was to be Hind—not Urdu, according to Premchand, as there could be no Urdustan. (155)

On the other hand, the literary—i.e., the creative—use of this language posed a number of different and more difficult problems, and Premchand was very much aware of this. In one of his comparatively rare statements on the language of the novel, of his novels, he emphasizes the importance of dialogue for characterization: the author himself should keep in the background as much as possible and by no means impose his personal style on his characters’ dialogue, a task which he finds is most difficult in a rural setting: “The language of the educated society is the same everywhere... but the villagers’ dialogue throws us into a dilemma.” (78-79)

Needless to say here that in spite of this dilemma modern Hindi prose owes Premchand some of its greatest passages, and in his rural scenes more than anywhere else, especially as long as his creative spontaneity remained undisturbed by the language reformer and politician in him; unevennesses in his style are largely due to his feeling of dual obligation to ‘Urdu’ on the one side (which in his Madras address, i.e. as late as 1934, he still considered more natural to himself than Hindi (107)) and, mainly for patriotic reasons, to ‘Hindi’ on the other. It must be left to detailed studies to examine how much

of his creative spontaneity, and along with it of his stylistic excellence, was lost in the processes of Hindification of texts originally conceived in 'Urdu' and of Urduization of others originally conceived' in 'Hindi'.

From his European masters Premchand also borrows his concept of the 'sahityakara', the serious writer as opposed to the professional entertainers:

The position of the writer is much superior to this. He is our guide, he wakens our humanity, communicates the nobler feelings in us, widens our view. (64)

His ideal reader, accordingly, has developed a refined, literary taste and looks for intellectual satisfaction in literature; at the same time, he is imaginative enough to ask for the mere outline of a story so that he can insert the colours according to his own liking. The successful novelist will make him identify himself with the characters in his novel by drawing them as clearly and intimately as possible and making their development appear so natural that the reader cannot but fully agree with the author. (55-56,71,75-78)

There is one problem, however, which Premchand takes up in his essays again and again; he almost seems obsessed with it. It is a problem German readers, and other readers of German literature, are familiar with through the theoretical writings of Bertolt Brecht: the reconcilability, or perhaps non-

reconcilability, of the lightness of art with social commitment. In Premchand's essays, the most coherent and convincing presentation of this argument can be found in the one on "The Novel" ('Upanyasa') (60-72, esp. M-65). First, he makes it very clear that "the highest ideal of literature is that it should be created only for the fulfilment of art. Nobody can object to the principle of 'Art for art's sake'... As long as literature is created for the propagation of some social, political and religious opinion, it loses its superior status. But, he continues after thus taking his readers by surprise, "nowadays circumstances are changing so quickly, so many new ideas are being born that now no writer can possibly heed this ideal of literature." And, a little later:

The time of 'Art for art's sake' is when the country is prosperous and happy. But we find ourselves in the grip of all kinds of political and social restrictions; wherever one casts one's eyes one sees fearful sights of suffering and misery, hears the pathetic laments of distress—how is it possible then for the heart of a reasonable being not to be alarmed?

Again, Brecht comes to one's mind, with his poem "An die Nachgeborenen", where he apologizes *To Those Born After* that the times when Brecht wrote did not allow him to produce literature for literature's sake—which he, too, obviously considered an ideal, most probably never to be attained. It is perhaps this common

note of renunciation that explains much of the enthusiastic (and creative) reception of Brecht outside the Affluent World at a point when in Western countries, including' the one of his origin, his conversion into a 'classic' is making rapid progress.

But Premchand continues:

Certainly, the novelist should try and express his ideas *indirectly* (italics mine), and see to it that the inclusion of such an idea is not detrimental to the naturalness ('swabhavikta') of the novel; otherwise the novel will become insipid ('nirasa').

With all this, Premchand insists that providing entertainment—literary entertainment, of course, which is of a higher kind— is the writer's main duty ('pradhana dharma', 57; 'pradhana kartavya', 91); the word he uses for 'lightness' as well as 'simplicity', both of which make up Brecht's *Leichtigkeit*, is 'saralta' (44, 74, 90): the writer should cultivate it and avoid obscurity ('gudhta', 74) if he wants his work to be esteemed by the people. In theory, Premchand, the great digressor, is outspokenly critical of digressions (75), and he is well aware that "in stories written with (an extra-literary) purpose... the greatest difficulty is that he (the writer) is forced to usurp the position of a preacher" (89). The proficient writer ought to combine reformative zeal with the attractiveness of the story (89). Ideally, according to Premchand (and,

incidentally, quite in agreement with classical Indian poetics), literature, by adding 'rasa' poetic sentiment, to its search for truth, is meant to produce 'ananda', ultimate aesthetic joy (46-47).

III

If realism opens our eyes, then idealism lifts us up and takes us to some charming place. But as long as this is a quality of idealism, there is also the risk of portraying characters which are nothing but the embodiment of principles—in which there is no life... Therefore one considers those novels excellent in which the real and the ideal have been incorporated. You may call this 'ideal-oriented realism'; In order to put life into an ideal, one has to utilize reality, and this is what makes 'the difference in a good novel. (63)

As pointed out previously by the present writer², one, may distinguish between two contrasting creative attitudes towards reality.

On the one hand, there is the literary artist as a sculptor, who manipulates reality, perhaps for his special interest in form (formalism) or in some extra-literary 'message' (idealism). If there is an ideal, or an ideology, art may serve as an *exemplum* to a *sermo*, or as a mediator between theory, law, rule on the one hand and practice, application, realization on the other (Type A).

In the opposite case, the literary artist is perhaps comparable to a receptacle: he is open to reality, lets

things speak for themselves; the creative process, as it were, is turned in the opposite direction (Type B).

Whereas Type A strives to achieve universality by getting as close as possible to what may be called 'truth', Type B works for authenticity through precision.

The tendency towards timelessness and ubiquity in Type A is opposed by the extreme care in placing plot and characters in time (historically) and space (socially-geographically) of Type B; stylization (A) by aimed-at objectivity (B); the use of artistic or artificial or at least 'high' language (A) by the use of 'common' (colloquial, everyday) language or dialect or idiolect (B).

Statistically, the generalization tendency of Type A can be shown by the frequency of verb forms expressing habituality—e.g., 'hota hai' as opposed to 'ho raha hai'—, of proverbial and plural expressions, indefinite pronouns, the impersonal passive.

With regard to the semantic categories 'word'— (linguistic) 'context'— (extra-linguistic) 'situation', a linguistically comparatively self-sufficient, 'situationally free' style in Type A is opposed by a 'situationally bound' style in Type B.

Cognition as the central feature of the reading experience in Type A corresponds to re-cognition in Type B.

After examining Premchand's theoretical approach to literature in Part

2 of the present essay, we may now, before this background, proceed to study his literary practice. The following observations are based on an examination of about the first one hundred pages (Chapters 1-7) of his last completed novel, *Godan* (1936). The locale of this novel are Semri and Belari, both villages in the province of Avadh. "There is no need", the author assures us, quite significantly, "to tell you the name of the district" (16): Semri and Belari are meant to be typical of any North Indian village. This generalizing tendency is supported, from the very beginning of the novel, by proverbial statements like, "When your neck is being trampled under the tyrant's heel, the safest course is to keep on lickling his feet" (9/5)³; "Men are not men before sixty" ('Mard sathe par pathe hote hai', 10/6); "Can a two-eyed man ever feel the hurt that a one-eyed man feels at the taunt of being called a one-eyed man?" (10/6); "Without a wife the house becomes an abode of ghosts" (13/9), which is announced as an "old saying" 'purani masal'). Hori's individual case becomes that of the peasant in general. There is no doubt that the peasant is selfish to the core. It takes a lot of wheedling to get a bribe out of him. He is a past-master in driving a hard bargain. To get a single penny of interest condoned, he supplicates himself before the moneylender for hours. It is difficult to tempt him against his conviction. Nevertheless his entire life is wedded to nature. The trees bear fruit

but for others; the land yields grain to appease the hungry mouths; the clouds send showers to assuage the parched earth. In such a scheme of things there is hardly any room for selfishness. (14/11)

At Mr. Mehta's sight, Miss Malti is provoked into a digression on philosophers: "Philosophers are dry as dust. Always lost. They look at everything, but see nothing, they hear everything, but catch nothing; they live in a vacuum." (60/45) Malti herself, "in high heels", quite in contrast to Kamini, Khanna's wife, "who, in *khaddar*, had a look of meditation" (60/44), is introduced as "the visible embodiment of the New Age."

She has returned from England after studying medicine and sets up a practice. She is a regular visitor to the landlord's palaces... A tender body, but full of artificial capriciousness. No sign of timidity or restraint whatsoever, an expert in makeup, extremely witty, a good connoisseur of masculine psychology, considering diversion the essence of life, highly talented in the art of flirtation. In the place of the soul, there is show; in the place of the heart, there is coquetry; any expression of feeling is under strict control, by which her wishes or desires have somehow been extinguished. (60)

Somewhere else, not satisfied with merely portraying the widow Jhuniya, Premchand interpolates a short reflection

on widowhood:

She is a widow. Once her husband had been sitting as a guard at the gate of her womanhood. She had been carefree. Now there was no guard at that gate, therefore she keeps that gate closed all the time. Now and then she cannot stand the loneliness in the house and opens the gate; but as soon as she sees anybody come, she gets frightened and shuts it again. (29)

As a separate genre, these miniature portraits of social types closely resemble the 'Characters in the Theophrastus-Joseph Hall-Sir Thomas Overbury-La Bruyere tradition; in the context of Premchand's novel they are instances of author's interference, just like the poetic digression on the type of 'Life (here: married life) is but a day' in the middle of a Hori-Dhaniya dialogue:

Early married life throbs with youth and desire; like the dawn the span of life seems suffused with a roseate glow. The afternoon of life dissolves illusion in its stinging rays, bringing us face to face with reality. On the hectic struggle descends the peace of the evening when, like tired wayfarers sitting on a cliff, we brood over the past and casually watch the stir and swirl of life below, so remote and alien. (36/26)

Most of the time, however, these digressions are of a didactic or moralizing nature; the author interferes because he has a lesson to teach, a 'message' to communicate. Again and again, in

what may be called a sermon style, episodes in the novel are used as *exempla*, followed by some moral application. When Hori wants to make a little extra profit at his brothers' expense, he tries to ensure Damri's co-operation by calling him 'brother'. "We may misuse the meaning of 'brother' in our daily practice as much as we like" the author contemplates, "but the purity of its spirit will never be soiled by our blackness" (33). Hori's scheme fails; had he gained his two ruppies and a half, he would have swollen with pride. "Only when we receive a blow do we tread with caution... If you succeed, you may boast of your deceits; everything is pardoned by success. But the shame of failure can only be swallowed" (37). Somewhere else, when Mehta carries Malti across a river on his shoulder, the water is suddenly up to his neck. Malti, woman of the world, implores him not to proceed, for God's sake. "In this emergency Malti remembered God, whom she used to make fun of", the author triumphs. "She knew God was not around so that he could come and save her; but where else could she find the support and strength her mind needed" (83).

Sometimes such insertions are delegated to some character or characters, who, in a language obviously not their own, will then serve as the author's mouthpieces in spreading his ideas. Such portions are, e.g., Jhuniya's account of Panditji's misbehaviour (52-53/37-38), Gobar's introduction by her

to the ways of the rich (53-54/39-40), the discussions of the provincial intelligentsia, which are characterized by the Raisahab's interventions (56-60/41-44): "Let's not be personal, Panditji", the Raisahab said with fake disapproval. "We are discussing the institutions of society."

In the Raisahab's self-portrait (18-20/14-15), the author takes up his favourite theme: the contrast between words and deeds in the world of the 'great' (see also 62/46, 63/47,89/62):

Hori noticed the quick change in the Raisahab's attitude. All along he had been waxing eloquent on duty and goodness but it did not take him a minute to flare up at the *chaprasi's* news!

This New World (54) is in its turn sharply contrasted with the simple ways of Hori and his like; in the confrontation between the young woman of the forest and Malti (85-91/60-64), the former is idealized very much in the style of Rousseau: "one fresh as a wild flower in full bloom, the other weak and small like a potted plant."

Mehta, the male judge, cannot but take the side of the wild flower in this competition, for the "pure and simple life of the countryside had always fascinated" him, "I write and speak volumes on universal brotherhood and universal love" he says self-critically. "But she practices it. Professing is so much easier than practising it. You know it."

This contrasting technique, which, as in the present case, may amount to outright black-and-white drawing, also determines the plot structure of the novel ('transparent composition'): the devotion to the villagers' life of Chapters 1-5, the announcement of the counter-world of the 'great' at the end of Chapter 5 (53-54/39-40), the presentation of this world in Chapters 6 and 7, the choreography in Chapter 7 (81-105/56-75), consisting of three *pas de deux*: Malti-Mehta, 'Raisahab-Khanna, Khurshid-Tamkha.

Godan is generally accepted as a great novel; but whatever greatness it has is there *in spite of* the imbalance and inconsistencies in the language (such as the confusion of character language and author language) and in the characterization (such as the incompatibility of rural characters and urban types); it is there *notwithstanding* the discrepancies between the theoretical ideals posited by Premchand himself and the reality of his literary practice. In order to do critical justice to his work, however, one will have to distinguish between Premchand the *novelist* and Premchand the *short-story writer*, bearing in mind the distinctiveness of the respective aesthetic laws by which the two genres concerned abide, if only on account of the difference in length.

It is in his later *stories*, according to Kamaleswar, a New-Story writer, that Premchand provided a point of departure for his successors:

The enormous disintegration of the Indian middle class which had begun after World War-I is not only echoed but distinctly audible in Premchand's stories, but at the same time his idealism predominates like a romantic deception, which he shakes off in his later stories; and in stories like "Pus ki Raat", "Kafan", "Shatranj ke Khilari" his eye explores the third dimension of reality, i.e., he explores Man *through* his environment (instead of presenting him *with* his environment, as he would do in his earlier stories). Therefore, those of Premchand's stories in which man has been explored through his environment are stories of deepest human distress, the third dimension of which is the platform of social history (which gives birth to the present).⁴

It is in some of his later stories, we hasten to add, that Premchand attains greatness in the context of *Weltliteratur*.

IV

It is appropriate to say that psychology is the basis of the present short-story or novel. Events and characters are introduced only for the sake of establishing that psychological truth. Their position is quite a subsidiary one. E.g., in 'Sujan Bhagat', 'Muktimarga', 'Pancha Parmeshwar', 'Shatranj ke Khilari' and 'Mahatirtha',—in all these stories of mine the attempt has been made to disclose some psychological mystery or other. (56-57)

In his review of Satyajit Ray's film on 'Shatranj ke Khilari' (*The Times of India*, 1-10-1978), Nissim Ezekiel, in the condescending manner Indo-English writers occasionally assume when dealing with colleagues writing in the "vernaculars", devotes a couple of sentences to "Premchand's story on which the film is based". It "is slight if engaging, with an allegorical motif. Ray's scenario, scheduled for publication this year, expands both the original sketchy, episodic plot and its larger historical context till it becomes a full-fledged—what?"

We shall not attempt to answer Mr. Ezekiel's question here; he takes care of that himself, and quite convincingly so. It is obvious that he judges the original story with the full-length film in his mind. What one should do, however, is to try and do justice to the literary original by taking it for what it was conceived to be: a short-story, no more and no less. Quite possibly then, what is bound to appear slight in Mr. Ezekiel's perspective may only be the fruit of a conciseness and economy which oblige the writer, according to Premchand himself, to make do with the minimum number of words and an occasional hint in place of a lengthy elaboration (52). The plot, sketchy and episodic in Mr. Ezekiel's view, is actually the product of the writer's discipline, of a plan (48) which does not allow of a single incident that does not contribute to the overall purpose of the story: the manifestation

of the characters' changing emotions (53).

Once one has accepted these and other rules of the game of short-story writing, the question arises whether a short-story, meant to take its effect in a moment (44), can at all provide enough matter, enough substance for a full-length film-successful screenings of literature, however scarce. they may be, are usually based on novels—, and whether Ray's scenario is not an expansion but rather an inflation of the story into a full-fledged something that in the end, as Mr. Ezekiel would agree, leaves nobody really happy.

Premchand wrote his story immediately after his arrival in Lucknow in September 1924; it was first published in the following month in *Madhuri*. Almost simultaneously, he wrote another of his well-known stories, 'Sava Ser Gehun' (published in "Chand", November 1924), which in its rural straightforwardness and austerity should be seen as complementary to 'Shatranj ke Khilari'. There, the old city of Lucknow—which is very much the Lucknow of Ratannath Sarsar, whose *Fasan-e Azad* Premchand translated into Hindi about that time—provides a historical setting to a story which is more than "the story of a bygone age", "Had that age really been a bygone one", observes Amritrai⁵, "nobody would probably have thought of writing a story about it, least of all Munshiji—it is not bygone, therefore the tale is told, and that's where its allegory lies,"

In one of his 'hints' in the story

itself, Premchand has made the same point, subtly, without disturbing the flow of the narrative: "Unto this day, the defeat of the king of an independent country cannot have come about with so much peace, without any bloodshed like this," And then, in a topical reference; "*This was not the non-violence that makes the gods happy*" (italics mine)⁶.

This 'hint' is given towards the end of the story, which opens with a broad canvas of the life in the city of Lucknow during the reign of Wajid Ali Sah. The keyword in the first paragraph, occurring four times in close succession, is 'vilasita', luxuriousness, debauchery (270). "Nobody knew what was going on in the world" (270), and nobody cared to know: for the duration of the story, Lucknow will try to keep its own microcosm intact, will defend itself, unsuccessfully in the end, against the incursion of political reality. The two heroes; Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Raushan Ali, are introduced, along with their daily routine revolving around the fad with which they are obsessed: the game of chess, that ominous game, that evil disease. We also meet Mirza's wife, his 'begam sahiba', and meet with her well justified anger, which for the time being, and for want of opportunity, she has to vent on her servants and, also by proxy, on her husband's companion-in-indolence.

But one day, 'ek din', she had headache... (271). This 'ek din', which occurs several times in the story, always

announces a change in the narrative tempo, from total view to close-up, and is followed by a tightening of the plot and a dialogue becoming more and more laconic and ending up as dramatic dialogue (with only the names of the speakers given for the reader's convenience).

The news of the *begam's* headache is ensued by a delightful bout of wits between the two chess-players, who alternately try to achieve their respective purpose without openly admitting it, a kind of seesaw whose delicate balance is upset only by the sudden appearance of the afflicted lady (273)—the first dramatic climax of the story at the end of the first chapter, at which the two cheaters find themselves cheated and decide to change the venue to Mir Sahab's house.

This decision, unintentionally, affects the private life of Mir Sahab's *begam*, who for some unknown reason had no objections at all against her husband's absences from their marital abode (274). Here, the story-teller, who throughout the narrative retains his position of omniscience, pretends to be ignorant, and in doing so adds a touch of the "Decamerone" to his story. A little later, on the sly, tongue in cheek, he offers a key to the reader, when he keeps the two antagonists' *hukka* "burning like a lover's heart" (274). Follows the mock-alliance between the domestic servants ("Not that we want to complain" they complain, "...but this is an ominous game",

274; cf. 271) and their mistress, whose daily routine is disturbed by the game at least as much as that of the servants, but who, instead of agreeing with them whole-heartedly, curtly replies: "I don't like it myself. But they just don't listen, what can one do about it" (275).

After this, the canvas broadens again; via the neighbours the city of Lucknow appears, with its 'vilasita (275; cf. 270), but along with it, though still at a distance, the outside world, the political reality in the shape of the 'Angrez Company' and its Resident (275).

Then the tempo change in the narrative is repeated ('kai mahine guzar gaye'—'ek din', 275), and suddenly a horseman, officer in the Royal Army, appears; raising his voice somewhat conspicuously (a familiar theatrical device), he conducts a dramatic dialogue with one of Mir's servants, meant to be overheard by the master himself, who, along with the other chess-player, is hiding inside the house. He has brought a summons ('talbi') for Mir, he shouts, and as he is not at home, he, the horseman, will have to come again for him tomorrow. For a moment, the reader is led to believe that 'the world' has finally caught up with the chess-players, but he soon learns that this is only a mock-incursion, arranged by Mir's *begam* and the Royal Horseman (her lover) to rid themselves of the troublesome company. Anyway, threatening keywords like 'talbi' and 'morcha', battle-front, take their effect, and our two heroes decide not to "remain

at home from now on even by mistake" (276).

The moment the scene, at the beginning of the third chapter, changes to "an old deserted mosque across the Gomati" (276), it takes on something remote and unreal. The city itself, left behind on the other side of the river, has been surrendered to 'the world'. From now on, the action runs along two parallel lines: on the one hand, there is the political situation, growing more and more frightening until, with the Nawab being taken away, unresistedly, into captivity by the Company troops, the political degradation reaches its climax (278). On the other hand, there are the two chess-players, without care ('fikra'), forgetful of the world, speechless almost, bent, within their reduced lines of defence, over their mock-battlefield ('sangram kshetra'); and when, 'ek din', they can no longer close their eyes to the grim political reality, their concern is feigned, their patriotism false (277-279).

In the fourth and last chapter, they are again left alone with nature and their game; but now, in a brilliant reversal of action, the game turns deadly earnest, what started out as play is converted into murderous reality: they face each other "as if two blood-thirsty warriors were fighting against one another" (279); once again, the general situation (grammatically marked by the prevalence of the imperfective aspect of verbs) is tightened into a special one (marked by the durative and perfective aspects);

in the dramatic dialogue that follows they first insult each other's chess-player's honour, then each other's family honour, and at last, in a breath-taking denouement, history catches up with them: after all, this was the time of the *nawabs* and "the two creatures who hadn't shed a single tear for their King gave their lives defending a chessboard queen" (281); in return, as no human

being was left to mourn them, "it seemed that the two kings, seated on their thrones, were bewailing the death of the two heroes" (281).

What thus emerges during a close and sympathetic reading of 'Shatranj ke Khilari' is a literary masterpiece, which alone should secure its author a place among the great short-story writers of the world.

- 1- Page numbers with quotations from Premchand's theoretical writings refer to his essays in *Sahitya ka Uddeshya*. Allahabad: Hansa Prakashan, 1967. The translations into English are by the present writer.
- 2- Part 3 of the present essay is based on Lothar Lutze's "Features of Localization in Contemporary Indian Fiction: Hindi", *South Asian Digest of Regional Writing* 1 (1972), pp. 19-31.
- 3- Figures before oblique refer to Premchand, *Godan*. Allahabad; Saraswati Press, 1961 (1st edn. 1936); figures behind oblique to Premchand, *Godan: A Novel of Peasant India*, translated by Jai Ratan and P. Lal, Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 3rd edn. 1963 (1st edn. 1957). If the translation is missing or inadequate in the latter, only the original will be referred to. The translation will then be the present author's.
- 4- Kamaleshwar, "Nayi Kahani ki Bhumika", pp. 4-16, in: Kamaleshwar, ed., *Nai Dhara* 11/91-12, Samkalin Kahani Visheshank, Feb.-March 1966, here: p.7 (translated by the present writer). The essay appeared again on pp. 9-20 in: Kamaleshwar, *Nayi Kahani ki Bhumika*. Delhi: Akshara Prakashana, 1966.
- 5- *Premchand: Kalam ka Sipahi*. Allahabad: Hansa Prakashana, 1976 (1962), p. 336. The translation is by the present author.
- 6- The translations from *Shatranj ke Khilari* are by the present writer and based on the edition of the story, pp. 270-281 in: Premchand, *Manasarovara* 3, Allahabad: Hansa Prakashana, 1979.

Dr. Lothar Lutze, Professor of Modern Indian Languages, South Asian Institute, Hiedelberg University, West Germany is a scholar who is much respected for his interpretation of literary texts. He unifies Hindi and German literature.

LITERATURE AND SOCIETY: A CRITICAL REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Subhash Sharma

There have been various attempts by different sociologists as well as social and literary critics to link literature and society in different ways. While some sociologists have emphasized on the social and historical conditioning (literature as a 'reflection' of society) of a literary work, others have taken a different stand by declaring literature as a force, a lamp, being ahead of the time, indicating new ideas and paths of human development. Tony Morrison (African American novelist) rightly says that wherever history is silent, literature becomes vocal. Hence a literary creation is both literature and history. Actually literature liberates the masses from the terror of 'the history' (mainstream history), especially in the novel a historically and socially conditioned man gets expressed and with a novel society penetrates into the realm of history and history penetrates into the realm of society. To be specific, there are five major conceptions of sociology of literature.

(a) 'Sociologically aware' study of literature:

Here the focus is on the literary work, not on the sociological problems. Actually such social critics refer to the social coordinates and conditions on the literary work. For instance, they use the concept of 'alienation' in their literary works. Malcolm Bradley takes this position in his work "Social Context of Modern English Literature" (1971).

(b) Literary work as a 'kind of sociology':

Here literary work is focused as a source of data, or as a carrier of human values or as a new information about social institutions.

For instance, Lewis Coser in his work "Sociology Through Literature" (1963) shows that social life could be understood by analysing literary works with the help of concepts like role, anomie, bureaucracy and deviance. Similarly Joan Rockwell shows in her work "Fact in Fiction" (1974) that language is the significant mechanism of social transformation.

(c) 'Social genesis' of literature:

This view perceives as to how literature arises in a society, that is, how social forces affect a literary work. Here literature is seen as social facts or contradictions (including structuralism, and some forms of historical materialism) or as the symbolic transformation of social reality (semiotics). This approach overemphasizes the social genesis at the cost of unique creativity and imaginative power of the author. For instance, David Cauter accuses Goldmann for reducing the author to merely a 'midwife' to help at the birth of a literary work.

(d) 'Literary work 'may affect society':

This approach believes that a literary work brings in social change, though indirectly and slowly. For instance, Bertolt Brecht emphasizes this positive aspect of a literary work and argues that socialists must use the literary works for social transformation. To Bertolt Brecht, writers should turn to the people for reliable allies and should 'speak their language'. For him, 'popular art' and

'realism' are natural allies. To him, the popular art is for the oppressed masses who have been the 'objects of politics' so far, but now they should become the 'subjects of politics'. However, he admits, literary works cannot be seen as factories. Hence only courageous and unusual things should be realistically produced for the masses. According to him, in each case of analysis of a literary work 'one must compare the depiction of life in a work of art with the life itself that is being depicted, instead of comparing it with another depiction'. Hence he suggests for a 'living', 'combative' and 'truly popular' literature and one must keep pace with the 'rapid development' of social reality.

(e) 'Literary work as both 'social product and social force'

This approach perceives literary work as a creative product of society as well as a social force leading to social change by providing political education. Writers like Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin, Sartre and Raymond Williams have taken this position of dialectical relationship between literary works and society in a historical way.

Karl Marx himself did not believe in literature as the mere reflection of society. Rather he saw those writers who directly expressed a class interest in their creative works as mediocre artists for the 'immediate' transposition of economic and political interest into literature transforms it into ideology and

thus a bad art. Second, in Marx's view, only when a writer transcends his own class viewpoint, he reflects truthfully the nature of society and man's relation within it.

Lucien Goldmann correctly talks of 'real' and 'potential' consciousness – whereas the positivists tried for the most exact and meticulous photography of an existing society, the dialectical sociologist tried to isolate the potential consciousness, the developing tendencies and possibilities in a society.

Marxist sociologist Raymond Williams has developed a 'cultural materialistic' theory of literature where a literary activity is seen as a part of culture. According to him, there are three kinds of relationship between art and society with emphasis on different aspects:

- (a) emphasis on social conditions of art;
- (b) emphasis on social material in art works; and
- (c) emphasis on social relationship in art works.

As far as *social conditions* of art is concerned, some Marxists emphasise on the origin of typology of art, e.g., Plekhanov (relating art to 'primitive instincts' or drives) or Kautsky (relating the development of art to evolved animal behaviour), or Caudwell (relating art to the 'genotype') and Fischer. Such Marxists have given more weightage to apriori concepts than to the evidence. This

position has been correlated to some extent by Mukarovsky and Morawski.

Second, as far as *social material* in art work is concerned, it is more historical and recognises the theory of 'base' and 'superstructure'. Here the basic 'facts' or 'structure' of a given society or a 'historical period' are established by general analysis, and their 'reflection' in art work is directly traced. For instance, both the content and form of the new eighteenth century realistic novel is dependent on the already known facts of social significance of the commercial bourgeoisie. Lukacs takes this position.

Third, as far as *social relations* in art work is concerned, here the idea of 'reflection' is modified or replaced by the idea of 'mediation' which refers "primarily to the necessary process of composition, in a specific medium; as such it indicates the practical relationship between social and artistic forms. But in its most common uses, it refers to indirectness of relation between experience and its composition." This indirectness is interpreted differently; for instance, Kafka's novel "The Trial" may be read from different positions: (a) a *mediation by projection* - an irrational and arbitrary social system is indirectly projected as alien; or (b) *mediation by the discovery of 'an objective correlation'* - a situation and characters are composed to produce the subject or actual feelings objectively; or (c) *mediation as a functioning of the fundamental social process of*

consciousness in which some types of crisis that can not be otherwise directly understood, are 'crystalised' in some direct images and forms of art - such images are fundamental conditions as a general alienation. Here the basic condition means the nature of a whole epoch, a particular society at a particular period, or a particular group within a particular society at a particular period. All three conditions, especially second and third, are potentially sociological. Benjamin, Goldmann, Adorno and the Frankfurt School applied this concept of 'mediation' in their works.

Raymond Williams further talks of relation between artists and markets as the historical production for the market involves the conception of the work of art as a commodity and of the artist as a specific type of commodity producer. There are three phases of commodity production.

(a) Artisanal: Independent producer offers his art work for direct sale as he is totally dependent on the immediate market though his work remains 'under his own direction'.

(b) Post-artisanal: It has two sub-stages; first, the producer sells his art work to a *distributive* intermediary who becomes his occasional employer; second, the producer sells his art work to a *production* intermediary, and capitalist social relation exists there because the intermediary purchases it for the sake of profit and he has direct

relation with the market; for instance, the book sellers evolve into publishers.

(c) Market professional: In literature, due to a complex situation, there is both increasing capitalisation of productive intermediaries - modern publishers and increasing professionalisation among writers. Two indicators of such changing relations are 'copyright' and 'royalty'. Thus the author becomes the participant in the direct market process of sale of his literary work. Therefore, there is a new kind of 'professional' independence within integrated and dominant market relations. New intermediaries like literary agencies have emerged in this developed phase.

To Raymond Williams, some novels are 'works of art' and others are 'not-art', or 'not really art'; the latter novels are 'pulp fiction', 'commercial trash', 'sub-literature' or 'para-literature'. The third category in between is of 'routine', 'mediocre' or 'lending-library fodder'.

In his view, a 'bad novel' does everything that the category of novel connotes but it "fails to do something else either in its 'aesthetic process' or in terms of its 'seriousness' or its 'relation to reality'". In his view, a language exists only to the extent that it is 'capable of reproduction'. R. Williams also points out four situations under which 'innovation' can be socially related:

(a) The rise of new social classes or their fractions which bring in new kinds of producer and interest and/or support

new work;

(b) *Redefinition* of an existing social class or fraction, of its conditions and relations, or of the general order within which these exist and are changing, so that new types of work are essential;

(c) *Changes* in the means of cultural production that provide new formal possibilities but these may or may not be *initially* linked with (a) or (b);

(d) *Recognition*, by particular cultural movements, of the situations hinted above in (a) and (b), at a level preceding or not directly joined to the articulate social organisations.

In his view, cultural reproduction occurs mainly at the changing level of 'the dominant' in different ways. On the contrary, 'the residual' often works in different societies and times for the dominant which tries to absorb them. Yet there is always a new work trying to go beyond the dominant forms and their socio-formal relations. Williams also argues that the 'emergent' (new kinds of work) is related to, but not identical with, the innovatory. He further adds that some types of innovation (for instance, subjective expressionism) are 'movements', and adjustments within the dominant and become its new forms. However, there is generally a tension and struggle in this arena. In his view, some innovations would tend to destroy 'the dominant' in any of its form just like some new social forces would tend to destroy the social order rather than

reproduce or modify it. It becomes very difficult to determine whether these are new forms of the dominant or are genuinely emergent. In historical analysis the matter is solved as the 'emergent' becomes the emerged, as in bourgeois drama, and then often the dominant. But due to complex relation between innovation and reproduction, the problem is at a different level.

Raymond Williams perceptively observes in his book 'Culture' that realism is not an object 'to be identified, pinned down, and appropriated', rather it is a 'way of describing certain methods and attitudes.' But it is not 'naturalism' - 'that unnecessary faithful portrayal of offensive incidents'. Strindberg defined naturalism as the 'exclusion of God' and opposed to super-naturalism. To Williams, naturalism in art was reserved to the simple technical reference, while realism was used to describe subjects and attitudes to subjects. He also traces out the Soviet Socialist realism that had four major elements:

(a) **Narodnost**: requirement of popular simplicity and traditional clarity - restatement of ordinary technical meaning, in contrast with the difficulties of formalism;

(b) **Ideinost**: ideological content/ attitude;

(c) **Partiinost**: party affiliation - revolutionary party attitude;

(d) **Tipichnost**: 'typical characters in typical situations', as Engels defined, but

it is not something frequently encountered - rather the truly typical is based on 'comprehension of the laws and perspectives of future social development'.

The concept of 'tipichnost' changes 'realism' from its sense of the direct reproduction of observed reality to a 'principled and organised selection'. But is the 'typical' simply 'the most deeply characteristic human experience'?, Williams says no because such 'convincingly real' criterion is prevalent in the West in both realist and non-realist art works in technique. So Williams explains the realist tradition in fiction as 'the kind of novel which creates and judges the quality of a whole way of life in terms of the qualities of persons'. He gives equal importance to individual (unit) and society (whole).

He points out two separate traditions of 'social' novel and 'personal' novel: "In the social novel there may be accurate observation and description of the general life, the aggregation; in the personal novel there may be accurate observation and description of persons, the units. But each lacks a dimension, for the way of life is neither aggregation nor unit, but the whole indivisible process". Social novel is of two types - 'documentary' social novel and 'formula' social novel. Documentary or descriptive social novel creates a general way of life, a particular social or working community. It is usually about life in a mining town, in a university or on a merchant ship or

on a patrol in Burma. On the other hand, in the formula social novel, a particular pattern is abstracted, from the sum of social experience, and a society is created from this pattern. For example in the field of future-story, the 'future' device removes the ordinary tension between the selected pattern and normal observation: 'Brave New World', 'Nineteen Eighty Four', 'Fahrenheit 451' and all serious science fictions are formula social novels in which a pattern taken from contemporary society is materialised, as a whole, in another time or place. Though formula novels are lively, they lack a substantial society and correspondingly substantial persons.

Personal novel is also of two sub-types: documentary and formula. Some of the best (personal-descriptive) novels are those which describe subtly selected personal relationships and these are like 'parts' of the realist novel - there is some continuity in the method and substance, e.g., E. M. Forster's 'A Passage to India'. Here a society, a general way of living, is apparently there but often a highly personalised landscape to frame an individual portrait rather than a country. So often an unbalance between individual and society occurs, though there is a 'surface of realism'.

In personal formula novels, on the other hand, a particular pattern is abstracted from the experience and human individuals are created from that pattern - Joyce's 'Portrait of the Artist' is a good example wherein a world is

actualised on one man's senses. Further in Joyce's 'Ulysses', three ways of seeing three worlds, of Stephen, Bloom and Molly, yet the three worlds compose one whole world of the novel. So is the case in Cary's 'The Horse's Mouth', Amis's 'That Uncertain Feeling', and Wain's 'Living in the Present'.

To Williams, it is very difficult to write realist novel in present era because a realist novel needs a genuine community: a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship - work or friendship or family - but many, interlocking kinds. It is obviously difficult to find a community of this sort. Reality, says Williams, is that which human beings make common, by work or language. It is continually established, by common effort, and art is one of the highest forms of this process. Yet the tension can be great and many kinds of failure and breakdown are possible.

Gramsci differentiates between 'hegemony' - associated with equilibrium and consent - and 'domination' - associated with coercion and state power. Hegemony is identified with the 'civil society' institutions like family, church, education, etc. On the other hand, direct domination is identified with the State or 'political society' (army, bureaucracy, police and so on). He sees superstructure consisting of an 'effective operating reality' and it commands obedience of the subordinate strata. Gramsci also found a relationship of the author with

the bourgeois classes as there is problematic cause; in his view the bourgeoisie can not train its own intellectuals, therefore it takes them from the professional and landed strata. Further he was of the view that "all men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals." He distinguished between 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals. While the former are in older and more diverse, and often indirect class relations, the latter are directly attached to a serving social class (especially the rising class).

Another Marxist theorist Terry Eagleton ('Criticism and Ideology') invokes Althusser's argument against 'empiricism' (the appeal to immediate experience) to show Raymond Williams' inability to make a genuine break into the theory of sociology of literature. His two concepts 'whole way of life' and 'structure of feeling' suggest unwillingness to differentiate theoretically between subjective experience and objective social conditions of this experience. Following Althusser, he argues that criticism must break with its 'ideological pre-history' and become a 'science'. The main problem, to him, is to define the relationship between literature and ideology since in his opinion texts do not reflect historical reality, rather work upon ideology to produce an effect of the 'real'. The text may seem to be free in its relation to reality (as it can create a character and a situation at will) but it is not free in its use of ideology.

Here ideology refers to systems of representations (aesthetic, religious, judicial, etc.) which shape the mental view of the lived experience. Thus the meanings and perceptions produced in the text are a reworking of ideologies' own working of reality - thus ideology is not a conscious political doctrine. However, Eagleton does not share Althusser's view that literature can distance itself from ideology because it is a complex reworking of existing ideology. But the literary result is not merely a reflection of other ideological discourses, rather a special *production* of ideology. Therefore, criticism is not concerned with just the laws of literary form or the theory of ideology, but with the laws of the production of ideological discourses as literature. However, in late 1970s, due to the impact of post-structuralist thought, there was a shift in his thought from the 'scientific' attitude of Althusser to the revolutionary thought of Brecht and Benjamin. On the one hand, Eagleton viewed that deconstructive theories (Derrida, Paul de Man, etc) could be used to undermine all certainties, all fixed and absolute forms of knowledge but, on the other hand, he criticised the deconstruction for its petit bourgeois denial of 'objectivity' and material 'interests' (particularly class interests). This contradictory view was the result of his shift towards Lenin's view that a correct theory 'assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly

revolutionary movement' Thus the Marxist criticism was now guided by politics, not by philosophy - the critics must break received notions on 'literature' and reveal their ideological role in shaping the subjectivity of readers. Later he also appreciated Brecht's radical approach to meaning: 'a work may be realist in June and anti-realist in December'.

Various theories over-emphasise one or more aspects of social reality at the cost of other aspects. Therefore, we try to point out features of critical realist perspective, especially with reference to the analysis of Hindi novels:

We see literature in general and novel in particular not merely as a reflection of social reality but as the 'creative product' of the existing socio-economic and political forces of society at a particular period of history, a 'literary form' in its own right, and also as a 'social force' leading to social change by providing disenchantment and disillusionment with the existing social reality and indirect hint towards social change for an alternative system, sub-system or paradigm.

The relationship between the literature and society is not direct, easy, one dimensional and causal, rather it is multi-dimensional, complex, indirect and associational. In fact, there are several 'mediations' between literature and society, like author's socialisation, especially in family, formal education,

occupational experience, participation in political life, sharing others' consciousness, etc that articulates his values and it has an indirect influence on his literary works. As the revolutionary Marxist Leon Trotsky rightly says: "artistic creativity is a very complex web which is not woven automatically... but comes into being from complex inter-relations ...". In fact, the relationship between literature and society is of complex nature in terms of correspondence, interaction, interdependence, tension, conflict, two-way dialogue and communication as well as contradiction. However, there is no deterministic relationship between literary work and the external world. Actually, a novel should be seen (but not reduced to) in a context (social, political, economic and historical). For instance, a novel written during freedom struggle of India, needs to be linked at least indirectly to the freedom struggle being the major epochal reality, otherwise it will become escapist.

The worldview or vision of the author is important as far as analysis of a literary work is concerned because it will decide, whether he takes literature for the sake of human liberation and collective empowerment or pursues art for art's sake. That is, the deep insight of a genuine literary creation actually raises certain questions about the existing system or its functioning.

Literature, in general and novel in particular, is a creation close to collective

consciousness in a society. The novel intensely depicts the 'whole life' of a society in totality. It tries to penetrate into different layers of social reality, though more often indirectly, hence 'life-experience' expressed in the novel is to be analysed in a dynamic and dialectical way in order to understand the parallel universe of the novel different from the real world.

For sociologically analysing a novel, one needs to see the characters from different angles because the social reality depicted through characters is multi-dimensional, hence characters' gender, caste, class, rural-urban setting, age, education, employment status, political affiliation, level, range and depth of exploitation, linkage with the outside world, etc. are to be analysed critically. Thus one needs to analyse 'multiple identities' of different characters, emphasising the 'dominant identify' at a particular period and place.

The 'potential' personal and collective consciousness in a society is also to be analysed. For instance, one should see whether the novelist sees the possibilities in main characters only as males or as males and females both, or as upper class / caste only or upper and lower classes / castes both. One needs to analyse as to whether the novelist moves with the time, is ahead of his time or lags behind his time, the last resulting into 'aesthetic lag'- on the pattern of 'cultural lag'.

While analysing a novel sociologically, one also needs to analyse the consensus and conflicts depicted in the novel, that is, how the social forces of 'continuity' and 'change' work simultaneously through different characters and situations, and which forces become victorious in the struggle and how.

It is very significant to analyse as to whether the novelist has been successful to understand the social reality in depth and is there its deep expression in his novel rather than superficially depicting the details covering a wider range with one-sidedness. This is so, because a person's self-experience need not always be authentic.

It is not necessary that only somebody, who has lived in a particular situation and self-experienced the dynamics of that specific life, can write a novel or other literary works because of three reasons: (a) the person who has self-experiences, may not have the intellectual capability to understand the complex reality 'from within'; e.g., a rickshaw-puller or a prostitute may not be able to depict vividness of his or her own life artistically; (b) an outsider, with a genuine vision and intellectual capability may be able to depict other's social life in a better and more artistic way due to his genuine 'empathy' (putting oneself in other's position); (c) non-human world can not be expressed by the non-humans (animals, plants, hills).

In the analysis of a novel, the diversity

and difference are to be taken care of; however, unlike the post-modernist, while emphasising the difference and diversities other aspects (of equal importance) like unity and similarity should not be neglected altogether. One may deconstruct a text for analysis but it is equally necessary to reconstruct it for correct understanding - hence, 'construction' (as text), 'deconstruction' (for meaning) and 'reconstruction' (for critical understanding) are required.

As far as the relationship between form and content of a novel is concerned, it is neither static nor deterministic, unilinear and causal. Rather it is dialogical, interactive, tension-ridden, dynamic, multi-dimensional, non-causal or associational and dialectical. Message (content) and medium (form) are to be analysed sensibly. Novel by its very nature requires newness or 'discovery' in form or content, or style or language or plot or treatment. It is emphasised here that in a novel, form is more than a form, as Milan Kundera has rightly observed. Its narrative may be macro, meso or micro depending on the characters, theme and situation. Thus some form of a linkage between the local, national and global is to be grasped from the novel.

Finally, language of a novel is very important as Mikhail Bakhtin rightly emphasizes on the way language is made to derive authority and liberate alternative voices. He rightly talks of text as multi-levelled and poly-phonic.

Not only the general structure and flow but also the 'key words' used typically are very important for analysis. So the language used by the characters or for depicting situations is not neutral, rather it is linked with some kind of world-view. Meanings to the words and utterances exist in one's relations with others. It makes us capable to peep into the past (and learn from the history at least theoretically) as well as to look forward to the future to apply that past

experience in concrete situations. Hence language is not merely a system of signs but also a larger social relationship of communication wherein the new and better ways of expressing the struggles in everyday life are certainly found.

We may conclude that while analysing a genre of literature, we should critically and intensively grasp individual aspects as well as societal aspects in a dynamic and dialectical way.

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

Hindi Literary Journalism **SINCE BHARTENDU AGE TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

Bharat Bharadwaj

Translated by
Ravindra Narayan Mishra

The publication of Kahani is historical because in its annual issue the much talked about stories of Amarkant, Markandeya, Shiv Prasad Singh, Kamleshwar, Mohan Rakesh and Bhisham Sahni were published. It was published under the editorship of Bhairavprasad Gupta and Sripat Rai. Namwar Singh wrote his column Bakalam Khud in it. Possibly in 1955 the publication of the monthly magazine of Bharatiya Jnanpith Gyanodya started under the editorship of Kanahyalal Mishra Prabhakar. Later on Sharad Deora and Ramesh Bakshi became its editors. Its Pranaya Visheshank drew lots of attention. This magazine closed even before the eighth decade. After quitting Gyanodya Sharad Deora published 'Anima' a monthly magazine of stories of new genre from Calcutta. This was a memorable magazine. Ramesh Bakshi was an anarchist and revolutionary. That is why he initiated Laghu Patrika Andolan by publishing 'Avesh' from Delhi in 1967.

In Nov 1952 the publication of Avantika started under the editorship of Lakshmi Narayan Sudhanshu. from Ajanta Press, Patna. Its last issue came out in Nov-Dec 1956. This magazine is remarkable from the point of view of poetic-criticism. In 1956 two magazines got published from Patna- Patal from Mohan press Patna under the editorship of Shiv Chandra Sharma and the magazine of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan 'Sahitya' which was edited by Shivpujan Sahay. Later on Ramdayal Pandey became the editor of Patal. This magazine

had published the introduction of Nalin Vilochan Sharma proposed Naken 'Bibbo ka Bibbok.' In 1955 the magazine Kavita came out from Patna under the editorship of Nalin Vilochan Sharma. In 1958 Aprampara collection was also published from Patna under the editorship of Dr Narmadeshwar Prasad. In the inaugural issue Renu's story Tisri Kasam i.e. Mare Gaye Gulpham got published. In all, three issues of the magazine came out.

In the first half of the sixth decade many important magazines came out. 'Lahar' came out from Ajmer possibly in 1957 under the editorship of Prakash Jain and Manmohini. This magazine was really a representative magazine of youth writing. This magazine got unparalleled cooperation of younger writers. From time to time this magazine brought out special issues. Particularly the poetry-issues drew lots of attention. A big controversy was raised when the materials selected by its guest editor Saumitra Mohan were returned. But Prakash Jain did not buckle. Lastly using the same materials as an alternative to Kavita Visheshank of Lahar Saumitra Mohan published the magazine 'Athva.' In 1957 Kavita Mandir's Kavi got published from Sankalp Prakashan Varanasi under the editorship of Vishnuchandra Sharma. The inaugural issue of the magazine came out in January 1957 and the magazine kept coming out regularly till October 1957. The magazine did not come out in November and December and a joint issue of January,

February and March came out as a special number and after that the magazine closed. This magazine had published Trilochan, Muktibodh, Kedarnath Singh, Namwar Singh and Kirti Chaudhary among ten special poets. Namwar Singh used to write Vivek column of the magazine by the pseudo name of Kavi Mitra which used to have comments on poems published in papers and magazines.

The publication of representative magazine of criticism Samalochak started in 1958 from Vinod Pustak Mandir, Agra under chief editorship of Ram Vilas Sharma. The editors of the magazine were Rajnath Sharma and Vishwambharnath Upadhyay. The special issue published on Yatharthvad (Realism) aroused quite a bit of interest. The magazine closed the same year. In his essay Ati- Adhunik Hindi Kavita Men Yatharthvad published in the special issue Vishwambharnath Upadhyay used only Gajanan for Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh which made Muktibodh angry. The publication of Vasudha (founder editor Harishankar Parsai) Naya path (founder editor Shiv Varma) and Naya Khoon (Muktibodh was intimately associated) brought revolution in the field of literary journalism in the real sense.

In 1958 the publication of the monthly Kriti started under the editorship of Naresh Mehta and Srikant Varma. The magazine received a warm welcome. The magazine continued to be published for two to two and a half years. But due to differences between the two editors

the magazine got surrounded in controversy. Nearly 15 to 16 good issues of this magazine came out.

In 1960 Rajkamal Prakashan started the publication of story-monthly *Nai Kahaniyan* from Allahabad. The first story of its inaugural issue was *Barsane Ki Radha* (Nalin Vilochan Sharma.) With its publication this magazine drew the attention of Hindi readers very fast. Its price was 37 paise. After *Kahani* it was second such magazine in which stories of both new and old story writers used to be published. It also used to have Namwar Ji's column *Hashiye Par*. This magazine generated a lot of interest in launching many new stories. Later on Bhisam Sahni, Kamleshwar, and Amrit Rai also edited this magazine. But due to continuous change in editorship this magazine met an untimely death. In November 1960, a monthly magazine *Kadambni* got published under the editorship of Balkrishna Rao from Allahabad. Among the magazines published from Allahabad between 1960-61 were *Ka Kha Ga* (editor Raghuvansh) and *Madhyam*, a magazine of Prayag Hindi Sahitya Sammelan whose editor was Balkrishna Rao. Reviews of much talked about books were published in *Gosthi*, under a column *Vivechna* of *Madhyam*.

Sarika was published from Bombay in 1960. It was mainly a short story centric magazine. Its first editor was Chandargupt Vidyalkar. After Mohan Rakesh Kamleshwar became its editor.

In the first half of the ninth decade this magazine closed down. Among its famous columns were *Aine Ke Samne*, *Gardish Men*, *Mere Humdum Mere Dost*, *Raat Ki Bahon Me* etc. When Kamleshwar became its editor he raised a parallel movement. But after 1960 the scene of Indian politics changed rapidly. The defeat in the China war led to our disillusionment with the Nehru age. From the dream world we had suddenly collided with the world of reality. The voice of poets had changed. The *Akavita Andolan* had started under the leadership of Jagdish Chaturvedi, Rajkamal Chaudhary and Dhumil under the influence of American Beat Generation led by Allen Ginsberg and the starving Bengal generation led by Malay Chaudhary.

In February 1965 weekly publication of the *Times of India Dinman* came out under the editorship of Agyeya. The associate editors were Manohar Shyam Joshi, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, Srikant Varma and Raghuvir Sahay. This magazine made a milestone in the field of history of magazines. In the eighth decade under the editorship of Surendra Pratap Singh the weekly '*Ravivar*' was published. The *Laghu Patrika Andolan* that started in the second half of the seventh decade had the feeling of neglect and detachment of the young writers towards magazines coming out from commercial enterprises and by the editors towards young writers. But they had anger against the system amidst fast changing circumstances. This is not for no reason that not only the

youth from Hindi regions but also from non Hindi regions had registered their anger against the system by publishing dozens of small magazines in the second half of the seventh decade.

Laghu Patrika Andolan was a big explosion in Hindi journalism. In the second half of the seventh decade half a dozen magazines — Sambodhan (Kakroli editor Kamar Mevari), Vatayan, Tatasth and afterwards Kirti edited by Vijender, Sampreshan from Jaipur edited by Chandrabhanu Bharadwaj were published. Similarly Aarambh was published from Lucknow under the editorship of Naresh Saxena and Vinod Bhardwaj. Amukh from Varanasi was published under the editorship of Kanchan Kumar. In 1966 the inaugural edition of vayam under the editorship of Vishnu Khare, Matantar (editor Anand Prakash) Rupambra (Swadesh Bharti) Galp Bharti etc were published. Dhwajbhang a magazine of a firm came out from Patna in June 1968 on the occasion of first death anniversary of Rajkamal Chaudhary. Its editors were Shivkant Singh, Kulanand Mishra, Siddhnath Mishra and Nand Kishore Naval. Only three issues of this magazine were published. The inaugural issue reviewed seven books of poems. On the main page out of twenty books x mark was put in front of thirteen. This was the audacity of the young writers. The second issue that came out in memory of Ramnarayan Shukla on November 22, 1968 had review of seven short stories. The third and the last issue of the magazine

published in 1969 was focused on seven long poems. Around this time Vijaykant published Purush from Muzaffarpur. In 1969 under the editorship of a famous story writer of Allahabad, Markandeya 'Katha' was published. I got its inaugural issue during my sojourn in Mizoram. Three reviews of Ramvilas Sharma's book Nirala Ki Sahitya Sadhna (First Part) were published in it. This magazine is still being published. Latest issue has come out now. Thirteen issues in nearly forty years. But when Katha comes out one learns that Markandeya jee is still active.

To my mind Ashok Vajpeyi and Nand Kishore Naval have been ahead of others when it comes to publishing magazines in Hindi. Till now Ashok Vajpeyi has published many magazines starting from 'Samvet' of Sagar, Purvagrah, Samas and then after becoming the vice chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University he published - Bahuvachan, Pustak Varta, Angrezi Men Hindi and now he is associated with Natrang. After Dhwajbhang Nandkishore Naval started publication of the magazine 'Sirf' from Patna on his own. The inaugural issue of the magazine came out in March 1970.

But the flood of small magazines did not stop even in the eighth decade, actually it marched ahead with vigor. The Naxalite movement was in its full bloom and even the protest against the system had not stopped yet. Under the editorship of Chandrabhushan Tiwari the magazine 'Vam' came out. Under the editorship of Gyanranjan a small magazine

'Pahal' came out whose tone was more aggressive and anti system. When anti Fascist conference was held in 1974 this magazine brought out anti Fascist issue. It has been against the system since then and it has been trying to spread a scientific consciousness in the country.

After 'Pahal' Savyasachi published Uttarardh and Uttar Gatha. The publication of Kalam started from Calcutta under the editorship of a critic Chandrabali Singh. Under the editorship of Ayodhyanath Shandilya a quarterly Dharatal was published. It was a small magazine and its sponsor editor was Nand Kishore Naval. But the scope of its literary concern and debate was very big. This magazine did a great job by underlining the generation of young poets. 16 or 17 issues of this magazine came out. It seems necessary to mention Aveg (editor Prasanna Ojha), Pashyanti, Dastavej (1978, Gorakhpur, editor Vishwanath Prasad Tiwari), Pragati (editor Vijendra Anil) The publication of Kathan started under the editorship of Ramesh Upadhyay in July 1980. After 20 issues this magazine closed. The publication of this magazine resumed in 1999. This magazine is making considerable intervention in literary forms.

In 1984 Vibhuti Narayan Rai started the publication of the monthly Vartman Sahitya. Akhilesh, Dr Dhananjay and S.R. Yatri got associated with its editorship. The number of special issues this magazine brought out in Hindi is a study in milestones. In 1991 Ravindra Kalia edited

two great issues on short stories by V. S. There is a long series of special issues of this magazine- short story, criticism and cinema. In August 1986 famous littérateur of Hindi Rajendra Yadav started republication of Hans (1930) originally edited by Premchand. This magazine has completed 24 years in his editorship. This magazine has not only realized the dreams of Premchand but also played a great role in bringing contemporary literature to the fore. It has particularly put dalit and women debate on the agenda of literature.

Nandkishore Naval is a resolute editor. He had announced in the inaugural issue of Kasauti in June 1999 that he would bring out fifteen issues of this magazine. He said, 'We don't claim that we would change the scenario of Hindi literature with these issues because we are familiar with the expanse of Hindi literature but we believe that these issues would be meaningful intervention in that direction. We are again repeating the fact that our objective would be to clear the mist, not to create new mist or to thicken the mist that is already there.' Really according to its pre-announced resolve the fifteenth issue of Kasauti which was its concluding issue concentrated on the classics. The October and December 2002 issue of the magazine which were published late were dedicated to people in a function organized in the conference hall of Delhi Sahitya Akadami in July 2004. Then the publication of the magazine was closed. It is a unique

example of the resolve of an editor. Dr Naval had also edited Uttatarshati from Patna. In continuation the mention of Sakshatkar (editor Shani), Samkalin Bhartiya Sahitya (editor Shani), Kank Samvet (Calcutta editor Pramod Bedia), Yuyutsa, Janamat, Vagarth (Calcutta) seems necessary.

The discussion on Hindi literary magazines would remain incomplete without mentioning the publication of

Tadbhav Under the editorship of famous short story writer Akhilesh in 1999. This magazine is still being published regularly. Over here I would also like to mention a quarterly magazine Kathakram from Lucknow under the editorship of story writer Shailendra Sagar. Lastly I should also mention Bharatiya Lekhak a magazine edited by litterateur late Bhim Sen Tyagi the special issue of which has come of late.

Concluded.

Bharat Bharadwaj : born 1945 Gyanpura, Vaishali, Bihar. He is a literary critic, essayist and editor of various books. He writes a regular column in the literary magazine 'Hans'. He has edited the controversial volume 'hamare yug ka khalnayak : Rajendra Yadav'. His original works include. 'Sahitya Ka nepathya', 'Parikrama! Hindi Sahitya', 'Samkalin srijan Sandarbh and Betartib' (all literary essays). He retired from I.B., Govt. of India. He lives in Delhi.

Ravindra Narayan Mishra teaches Political Science in Khalsa College, University of Delhi. He writes in original as well as likes to translate at will. He lives in Delhi.

ACHARYA HAZARIPRASAD DWIVEDI'S APPRECIATION OF TULSI

Shriprakash Shukla

Translated by
Ravi Nandan Sinha

While talking about Dwivedi ji's appreciation of Tulsi, among the many questions that arise in one's mind, the primary one is this: Does Dwivedi ji quote *chaupaaais* from Tulsi in the same manner as a critic or a speaker quotes lines from a *ghazal*, simply to embellish his discourse, and not because of some additional respect for those lines considered independently? Are such lines used only as supporting (secondary) material in the context of a larger understanding of the subject; or alternatively, is there some instinctive interest in those lines, which arise spontaneously from the heart in a condition of mental fatigue?

This needs to be asserted here because Dwivedi ji's views on Tulsi have always been relegated to a secondary position primarily because his appreciation of Kabir has been highlighted. This happens sometimes because of his understanding of tradition; and sometimes because of his aesthetic preferences, which get suppressed by the frequently mentioned question of 'conflict', while the fact of the matter is that Dwivedi ji approaches Tulsi not as his secondary interest, but as his primary concern; not in a state of mental fatigue, but with the joyousness of triumph.

When I think of Dwivedi ji's understanding of Tulsi, I feel that in Tulsi (as indeed in *Meghdoot* of Kalidas) Dwivedi ji sees a projection of his own sense of exile; and of course it is indeed significant that in his entire thought process he appears to be

very close to Tulsi's life. One of the prominent features of 'displacement' (and also of exile) is the objectivity of an individual, which provides the basis for considering the total man from the point of view of humanity. Simultaneously, it is also an attempt to achieve a sense of 'being human' in which the individual changes into a social unit. Wherever he is, he experiences a sense of 'non-attachment'. In that situation, a kind of emotional distancing takes place that helps him to stand in favour of human values. Tulsidas's Ram himself is an exiled individual and that is why he could keep himself above love and hatred and be objective in his social relationships. This is the reason why Dwivedi ji's Tulsi too could free himself from emotional bondage because like Ram; Tulsi too was displaced from home, in the same way as Dwivedi ji himself was! Between Dwivedi ji and Tulsidas there is this beautiful similarity of being in exile, in the context of which it is possible to understand Dwivedi ji's appreciation of Tulsi.

In his entire thought, Edward Said, the famous thinker of the 20th century, has considered the experience of being in exile in its historical context and has described himself as a displaced person. If we analyze carefully, we shall come to the conclusion that the history of modernity has been the history of exiled people. At places, this sense of exile tends to move towards a re-establishing of the broken links with one's own people. This gives birth to a

globalized individual who has no home of his own. The German philosopher Adorno says, 'It is a part of morality not to be at home in one's home' (*Minima Moralia*). In all his works, especially in his *Representation of the Individual*, *Reflections on Exile* and *Out of Place*, Said has considered these points in detail and going to the root of history has tried to explain how a person in exile is inspired to connect the broken links of his life and how at the same time, he gets attracted towards a dominant point of view. In other words, an exiled person considers the state of being in exile to be an important aspect of history, and at times even overemphasises it. In a chapter with the same title, Said writes in his book *Reflections on Exile* (p. 175): 'As a subject of discussion exile may appear to be very attractive but at the level of experience it is extremely terrifying. Exile is the name of that break that takes place between an individual and his birthplace, between his self and the real location of the self. It is a wound that never heals. It is impossible to be free of the pain associated with it. It is true that literature is full of stories that are a little romantic, glorious and full of the elation of conquest, but all those narratives are nothing but a desire to overcome the terrible anguish of separation. All the accomplishments of an exiled person cannot compensate for the things he has lost for ever.' (English translation of Professor Ramkirti Shukla's Hindi translation of Said). Here Said

further says, 'A major part of an exiled person's time is spent in creating a world over which he can rule and thus he tries to compensate for the frustrating sense of loss he experiences. It is not a matter of surprise that so many exiled people have become novelists, chess players, political activists and intellectuals.' It is clear that the biggest example of an exiled person is Said himself, but going deep into history, he has made an important assessment of the writings by displaced persons, which include the German Jewish philosopher Theodore Adorno, Joseph Conrad of Poland, V.S. Naipaul, the Italian philosopher Vico, and Jonathan Swift whose writings he has considered important. Among these also the real displacement (compulsory displacement) is Ovid's (who was exiled from Rome to Black Sea) and Adorno's.

It will not be an exaggeration to say here that the work that Said did in the context of Conrad, Dwivedi ji had already been doing in his study of Tulsi. Actually both Said and Dwivedi ji were trying to discover themselves in their efforts to discover the aesthetics of the exile and that is why they were also establishing the validity of the exile in their writing. It is an established fact that Said was exploring the aesthetics of the exile in order to understand himself, though his own exile is not really a forced displacement. Even then, the facts that he has collected in this exercise are important in understanding the whole

century. The most important fact in all this is the search for a similarly displaced person who can act as a protagonist. If Said found that protagonist in Conrad, Dwivedi ji found him in Tulsidas, though the latter is a poet of the medieval period. Entering the medieval period and trying to understand the sensibility of the exile in this manner attests the foresight of Dwivedi ji. Here another fact is important, and that is that despite their concern for Tulsi how many other thinkers there are who can reach the 'heart' of Tulsi and who can quote him the way Dwivedi ji does? Is it accidental, or is there in it some other kind of sensibility working? Is it not obvious that for a modern man in exile, Tulsi's Ram is more appealing because he himself is a displaced character; or, is it not true too that if a modern displaced person wants to search for a protagonist for himself, where else will he go? And it is also true that though important this search is equally dangerous because as the context changes, it will lead to a dangerous situation the result of which will certainly be reactionary. **That is why, the search for a protagonist in order to escape from the pain of displacement, and the emergence of a Hindu-centric mentality concerning that protagonist, both can be seen simultaneously in modern India. This is the reason why Dwivedi ji speaks of an escape from the pain of exile only in the boundaries of a historical**

consciousness, because he knew that the moment the context changes, that approach will become unsafe. It is this approach that he has rejected as shortsighted.

In this context, one is again reminded of Said. In the Foreword to *Reflections on Exile* he writes, 'Exile can produce rancor and regrets as well as sharpened vision. What has been left behind may either be mourned or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses...Exiled situation can also be used to practise criticism.' It is clear that exile not only develops an understanding in a critic but also creates a strong attraction for that which is left behind! And what is left behind is not only one's motherland, but also those places where a person ultimately wants to live but is unable to live. Therefore, in the anguish of exile, even those places play a role which may not be a person's birthplace, but where he wanted to work, and finally because of the pressure of circumstances, he had to leave them. In this context the attraction that Dwivedi ji felt for the past took him to Tulsi and at the same time his pain of displacement (which should be understood as his pain of leaving Kashi) resulted in a critical insight in him that is based on the profound understanding of reasons that are at the root of a person's exile. The first is the act of understanding the individual, while the second understands society. While an individual is understood with sympathy, society is understood with

the help of criticism. Please note that Dwivedi ji's attraction for Tulsi is an attraction for Tulsi the man (his personality), a personality in which there is a deep love for life, and curiosity (something that shows Dwivedi ji as a modern) and his criticism is the criticism of Tulsi's society in which a man suffers the pain of exile. This is the point with the help of which Dwivedi ji's social consciousness and his modernity can be understood.

At this point it is important to understand that the reference to 'jijivisha' (the ardent desire to live) that frequently occurs in Dwivedi ji's writings is in some ways an attempt to rise above the pain of exile. Please note that after 1960 the word 'jijivisha' has changed its meaning in his writing, one aspect of which is *Kutaj* (1964) and the other is *Anamdas ka Potha* (1976). It is in these conditions that Tulsi finds a place in his heart and from here he moves from the nonchalant abandon of Kabir to the 'social consciousness' of Tulsi, when he adds a new meaning to an 'all-embracing sensibility' and 'co-ordination'. One has to say this because as the personal struggle of Dwivedi ji intensifies, he speaks of 'all-embracing sensibility' while moving towards a social consciousness. In *Anamdas ka Potha* Ritambhara says to Raikva, 'Son, I feel that the thing people call soul must lie somewhere within this love for life. These children- these whose legs are emaciated, or those who suffer from a swollen belly,

if they somehow manage to keep alive, then it is possible that some of them will grow into great intellectuals and great entrepreneurs. I speak of possibility.' (2/377) If there is love for life, there will also be life. If there is life, there will be limitless possibilities. (3/377) And in this possibility lies the attempt to be 'free from the severalising intellect'. This is what Dwivedi ji had called 'a friend in need' in *Kutaj*. *Kutaj* seems to be the first stage in Dwivedi ji's journey to Tulsi and his model Ram in order to find a role model for himself.

It is clear that exile develops in a person the ability to understand the individual. Kabir is not a displaced person. Tulsi is, because to move to Kashi was a conscious choice of his. This exile of Tulsi develops in Dwivedi ji a kind of insight into literature that is characterized not only by balance but also by a quest for 'heroism'. Every modern Indian approaches Tulsi with this consciousness of modernity. Here it can be said that while Kabir is the perennial interest of Dwivedi ji, Tulsi happens to be his 'contemporary compulsion', and in this contemporary compulsion lies the answer to modern man's primary predicament; a phenomenon towards which thinkers in the West have pointed again and again. In this 'contemporary compulsion' lies the common sense of the average Indian, which, beyond a certain point gets converted into balance. Dwivedi ji has neither concealed this fact, nor was there

any need for him to do so. If Kabir expresses the 'youth' in Dwivedi ji, Tulsi shows the 'wisdom' in him. 'Youth' sees only its own side (and in this sense only one side). Wisdom considers the whole man in all his dimensions. That is why when he approaches Tulsi, he does so with the understanding that he (that is Tulsi) appeals to everyone in some way or the other. He addresses not a fragmented man, but the total man. This is the reason why (and to understand it, one will have to step a little outside the boundary of the 'Brahminism' of Tulsi as well as that of Dwivedi ji) the verses of Tulsi are so popular among the common people for their multi-contextuality and for the width of knowledge they encapsulate.

In this way it is clear that while accepting Tulsi's wisdom to understand the whole of humanity, Dwivedi ji has expressed through his work on Kabir that aspect which was somehow overlooked, and also that he did this before he wrote on Tulsi. At the same time, it is also true that Dwivedi ji has made full use of Tulsi's ability to influence a man in his entire innerness. **That is why I suggest here that Dwivedi ji be understood not only in the context of Kabir but also in the context of Tulsi, and I am saying this with a total awareness of the fact that in this there is strong possibility of politicizing Tulsi through a reactionary approach, and so there is a need to try to**

avoid it.

Now so far as the question of Dwivedi ji's appreciation of Tulsi is concerned, he has always been trying to seek the exiled Ram through Tulsi, and in him only he has seen the breaking open of his 'creativity'. 'After considering everything I thought it proper that instead of getting into the tangle of expressing other people's opinions, I should say my own. Then I will at least have said what those 'sahridayas' are thinking, those in whose minds rise doubts about what to do as well as feelings of guilt.' (4/518) After this self-indulgence, he offers his views on Tulsi, 'I have experienced an exceptional joy when I have thought about Tulsi. This man, who is so revered by all of us, who is providing sustenance to the hearts and minds of millions and millions of Indians was neither some king, nor some favoured son of Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth), nor some fame-seeking scholar defeating pandits in their academic gatherings, nor some hero winning the unseen battle of scholarship in the harsh battlefields of some university, but a man who was born in a very ordinary family. His economic condition was much lower than the average. In his occasional impulse to reveal his poverty this great man has sometimes said things that make the heart heavy. Oh! How hapless that child must have been who lost both his parents soon after he was born—'Mata-pita jag tajyo—aur phir—vidhihu na likhi kuchh bhal bhalai.' (4/518) Further, 'Those who

are facing problems, who are disquieted by penury, should not worry. Whenever I Think of Tulsidas, I feel that circumstances can hurt a man, push him around, but they cannot crush him out.' (4/518) Here it is obvious that Dwivedi ji includes himself also among 'those who are facing problems', and this is the main basis of his closeness to Tulsi. Seen in this light, the life of Tulsi inspires the average man with a new hope, a new exuberance and a new enthusiasm.

Dwivedi ji has given so much respect to Tulsi only because he felt that this man can be the ideal for an average man. And the paradox is that he is described as being opposed to the common man. Kabir too can be a similar ideal. Then where is the difference? The difference lies in the life styles of these two people; and in this sense also that the life of Tulsi is closer to Dwivedi ji's own life. In this connection, Namwar Singh in his book 'Doosari Parampara ki Khoj' has referred to an autobiographical fact in the context of Dwivedi ji, 'The twentieth century of the Vikram era had hardly ended when I came into this world. I was born under that *nakshatra* about which it is said that when Tulsidas was born under that, his parents threw him somewhere.' It is clear that Dwivedi ji feels the pain of being displaced from Kashi. Please note, while Tulsi is displaced from Banda, Dwivedi ji is from Balia, but in the centre of the displacement of both is Kashi. About Tulsi he writes, 'The pandits in

Kashi tormented him a great deal He was abused and slandered. But it has always been like that.' (4/518) And what about Dwivedi ji himself? Then refer to parts of the letter of 18.08.48 that he wrote to 'Suman', 'Some letters have arrived from Kashi, and are still coming, that are very hateful. There are no human feelings in people writing them.' (Reference, 'Doosari Parampara ki Khoj—Namwar Singh, p. 24) Those were the same people who became the reason for his exile from Kashi in 1960. It was from the same Kashi about which he had written in 'Meghdoot' (1957), 'Kashi is a city of *sadhakas*. Kashi is *karma kshetra*, *alka bhog kshetra*, here only the *sadhakas* can see the cosmic dance of Shiva.' (8/30) In this sense Dwivedi ji has been tormented by the self-appointed pontiffs of Kashi, whom beginning with Tulsi, Dwivedi ji and then Namwar Singh has suffered and whom also the active generation of today is cursed to suffer! Even today such people carry bags full of letters of all kinds. How the forefathers of these people besmirched Dwivedi ji and then how he finally escaped to the Shivalik! Tulsi did not have to go that far, but to live in Banaras and to suffer the pain of exile while living there was no less traumatic than living outside Banaras and suffer that pain. It was the similarity of 'circumstances' that led Dwivedi ji to Tulsi and then to Tulsi's 'Ram', who himself had to suffer the pangs of displacement. When he reaches this point,

Dwivedi ji feels a special empathy for Tulsi.

Dwivedi ji has considered Tulsi's Ram 'sanshay vihag urawan hari'. For Tulsi, Ram is a man who destroys all kinds of incertitude. Dwivedi ji emphasises this fact. This is because Ram too enters the status of 'transcendental homelessness' (to borrow a phrase from Lukacs). Once a person leaves home, then he has nothing else to lose. Ghalib has called it the desire to build a home ('hasarate tamir') and by doing so has lent a special meaning to the phrase. This is how the pain of homelessness and the self-confidence born out of it have reached from Tulsi to Ghalib and then to the all embracing consciousness of Dwivedi ji.

While writing about Tulsi, Dwivedi ji underlines the specific 'rasa' in the story of Ram. He goes beyond 'rasa' in a general sense and emphasises that particular emotional experience. This is what is called 'bhakti' (devotion). This 'bhakti rasa' is not merely a condition that comes after rasa; it is rather the reality that transcends 'rasa', rather we can say that it transcends the very consciousness of modernity. A displaced person does not try to search for his roots; rather he tries to understand his roots. This is the postmodern reality and the manner in which Dwivedi ji has highlighted it as a specific emotional experience attests his understanding of Tulsi. One who gets bored while listening to the story of Ram does not experience

this particular 'rasa' (Ramkatha je sunat aghahin/Rasvishesh jana tinh naahin'). But which story of Ram? And that too from Shiva, who himself represents 'rasa'. When Shiva says this, one feels that 'rasa' lies somewhere beyond Shiva, and that he himself is somewhere in the story of Ram, and not in Ram himself. I think that in this story of Ram the incident of Ram's exile is very important and this is the particular 'rasa' that gives strength to the modern man. This is the connection between Ram and the modern man in exile. It is entirely another matter that some 'Hinduist thinkers' of today see a particular kind of politics even in this story of Ram. When the concept of Ram changes from faith to fanaticism, this is what happens. In his writing on Tulsi Dwivedi ji has highlighted this broad-mindedness, this noble character and this power to give. He has written in one place, 'The glory of man is in his power to give. One who constantly gives himself for the welfare of everyone is really a great man'. In the words of Tulsidas, 'So ananya us jaahi kar mati na tare Hanumant/ Mein sevak, sacharachar roop rashi bhagwant'). Here the generous feeling of considering all creation in the world as divine and becoming its servant has been expressed. (10/393) (The essay entitled 'Shiksha ki sarthakta', 1974). In the same essay Dwivedi ji quotes this line from Tulsi, 'Parhit bus jinke man mahin/ Tin kah jag durlabh kahu nahin'. This is the 'transcendental homelessness'

of Tulsi which expresses itself as the emotion of renunciation in Dwivedi ji's appreciation of Tulsi.

It is obvious here that through the story of Ram Tulsidas tells the story of the destiny of the modern man. In him Ram is liberated, but because of this liberation, he is also bonded with society. That is the reason why there is a cosmopolitan perspective in him that is closer to the social man than to the individual man. This is what is known as the social consciousness, which Dwivedi ji has stressed. He has explained it in detail in his 'Lalitya Tatva'. One can be misled by every other thing, but not by this consciousness. This is what beauty is and this is what man is! On one hand his dynamic consciousness makes him a modern, on the other the depth of his emotions makes him traditional. It is in this manner that beauty is created in Dwivedi ji, but one must realise that his 'social consciousness' is not some text (commandment) from the West, but a sort of Indian common sense. It is this common sense that makes him modern because in it there is logic, knowledge, skill and thought and at the same time there is much that can only be revealed in a particular situation. Only man has this common sense; gods do not experience its joys. Because Ram has this quality, he is a man and Dwivedi ji has immensely liked this aspect of Ram's personality. He has written that in 'Manas' Ram has been conceived in terms of the historicity of social

consciousness. Because of this all embracing social consciousness, we have a crow like Kakabhushundi narrating the saga of Ram to 'Garud' (an eagle). It implies that any one can receive this story provided he is not corrupt and not dull. Both Tulsi and Dwivedi ji admire this sacred quality of the saga of Ram which enables it to be received by anyone.

Along with this fact, it is also important that it was possible for Ram to return from his exile. Everyone goes to Chitrakoot to bring him back. But since he symbolizes social consciousness, he refuses to return. He knows that going back will give him only a momentary pleasure. There will not be any bliss there, and certainly no 'rasa'. That will happen because everyone will impute motives to his returning. At the same time a wise man like Ram does not want to forego the joys of being in exile, because it provides him a great opportunity to work for general welfare. Ram is wise and discerning and is also modern because he has common sense. It is not simply his 'leela' (the worldly acts of a god incarnate) but it is expressive of a kind of aesthetics motivated by a desire to create. In him there is a longing to know himself; and a realization that he has to be the giver. He knows that the more one gives the more one receives. He does not want his human life to be successful; he wants it to be meaningful. In him there is not only wisdom, but also the desire to renounce. And then like a wise man he says to

Vashishta, 'Uchit hoi so keejiye natha,/ Hit unhit sab raure hatha'. What great wisdom is this that awakens the wisdom in Vashishta and takes him towards renunciation! This is the renunciation that gives a direction to wisdom and distinguishes a man. Vashishta understands this and quietly supports Ram's decision to be exiled to the forest. But he did even that with prudence. He did not tell Ram directly but first speaks to Janak and then sends Janak to Bharat who then says to Ram, 'Sabse sammat sarvahit kariye premu pahichani'. When the victim himself works for common welfare, where is the problem then? In a way it was the awakening wisdom in everyone. Tulsidas has described this entire episode very beautifully. The interesting thing is that Dwivedi ji himself loves this whole episode greatly. Behind this was working perhaps that modern sensibility in which to establish something a kind of dialectic is necessary. It needs a kind of confrontation of wills, because the enlightenment that comes out of that is permanent. Dwivedi ji himself describes this entire dialectic thus, 'Ram could say only that much! Then feeling shy, he said nothing. The clever guru understood his meaning. Ram ji does not want to return. He himself wanted Ram to somehow go back, but the bonds of dharma and affection kept him silent. Even then he went to Janak and told him about Ram's decision and about his nobility of character. Janak was a very

wise man. But was caught in a tangle of emotions; he had developed attachment. Even his sense of non-attachment seemed to have left him. His power to discriminate between right and wrong was telling him that Ram's exile to the forest was proper. He began to think—I should not have come here. In this situation it seems difficult to offer the correct advice. The proper thing for Ram was to follow his father's wishes and to go to the forest, but being his father-in-law how could Janak have given that advice to Ram? When the entire Ayodhya wanted Ram to return, how could Janak ask him to go to the forest? Vashishta ji had said that Janak is the only man who could clear the doubts in other people's minds, but now he himself was in doubt. He comes to Bharat in this state of mind. He says to Bharat: you know the nature of Ram. He loves truth, and he loves everyone, but he is too gentle to say what he wants to say. So you tell me what we should say to him. Actually Janak wants Bharat to talk to Ram but very sweetly and subtly he is able to express his own desire'. (4/539) Clearly, it is a rare example of a victim insisting that justice be done. It is as democratic as it is socially correct. This does not indicate in any manner that Bharat was forced to act according to the wishes of someone else. Dwivedi ji has termed this situation 'a search for harmony' because this is what brings peace to a troubled man. This is that particular 'rasa' in which

there is a blending of the stream of world's music with the individual's music, a kind of harmony which is its final aim. (4/540) It is this condition which Tulsi Baba calls 'mangal' (everyone's wellbeing). For Dwivedi ji also this is what 'mangal' means, which is only another name for a harmony between the music of the individual and the broader music of society. (4.540) In this situation selfishness turns into altruism; the individual into society.

Imagine what would have happened if Ram had returned to Ayodhya because of his love for Bharat. Then brotherly love would have triumphed, but the social consciousness would have been lost with the result that the very sense of history would have been undermined. Tulsi is alert to this sense of history and that is why he provides the solution to this problem through Bharat himself. This appears to be a democratic, loving and modern solution. That is why he writes about Tulsi, 'That simple question of that age disturbed Tulsidas so much that everything in him responded to it. He became one with the essential goodness of the human heart and created values that are unique. Thus, in this manner all that is the finest, the best, the greatest, the most humane and the most glorious in India's spiritual achievement struggles to find expression in him. (4/544)

Please note that it is not a sentimental man speaking; it expresses Dwivedi ji's dictum that 'man is the ultimate goal of literature'. While moving towards this

goal, a person may feel 'a sense of individuality' but the important point is: how far has he been able to transcend that individuality. Tulsi has been able to do this and that is why he is valued. There is a 'sublime hunger' in him. That is why he saw beauty in harmony. It is only natural that because Tulsidas could reconcile with social consciousness he was able, in the words of Dwivedi ji, to create the character of a 'non-attached person'. Here Ram comes before us as a multisided personality. The same Ram is a 'kalp purush' who is seen to be growing continuously. By the time Tulsi's Ram reaches Dwivedi ji, he begins to look like the representative of the modern man. This is what is called 'rasa vishesh'. It is man's common sense that he is able to create historical characters in concordance with the circumstances. Thus, the exile of Ram gets connected with the exile of the modern man, and I think that this is the point at which we can pause a little to understand the popularity of Ram (and also of Tulsi's).

Along with the issue of exile, another reason that makes Tulsidas popular in the modern time is his ability to understand the importance of 'doubt', and to offer a solution to that problem. While discussing Tulsi, Dwivedi ji has not only paid attention to this fact but has also explained it in detail. It is clear of course that the question of 'doubt' is a major concern in modern man's life. When he speaks of Ram, Tulsi's takes doubt as the doubt of totality, in which

a man is seen moving away from God. In the context of Tulsi Dwivedi ji uses the word doubt in the sense of doubt of completeness in which man has already been separated from God and in order to show his importance he moves towards quest, in which he sees his fulfillment. When a person is in exile he is compulsorily in doubt, and this doubt leads to curiosity. Dwivedi ji tries to understand this doubt in the modern context. Though Tulsi through this curiosity manages to remove the doubt, he does so not as a full-timer in faith but as a rational and a wise person. Dwivedi ji has given considerable attention to this fact.

It is to be noted here that Tulsi takes the saga of Ram as one that removes doubts ('Ramkatha sundar Kartari/ Sansay subhag urawan hari'). Modern thinkers believe that man himself is responsible for fighting his sense of uncertainty. As Ram, though he is a family man, and the son of king Dashrath, is in exile, he is modern in his outlook. There is creativity both in Ram and the modern man. In both, doubt leads to creativity. Tulsi believes that to remove his doubts a person should spend time with the wise ('satsang')—'sant milan sam sukh kachhu nahin'. For Dwivedi ji also the solution to the problem of doubt lies in dialogue, which is at the centre of modernity. Highlighting the importance of 'satsang' Maharshi Ausasti tells Raikva in *Anamdas ka Potha* (1976), 'You have done a great deal of 'tapasya' (spiritual

exercise) but one of the essential elements of 'tapasya' is satsang.' This satsang is nothing but dialogue in which a person is freed from fanaticism, indifference and the arrogance of scholarship. In his book *The Argumentative Indian* Amartya Sen has considered dialogue as the central feature of Indian thought. Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*, published in 1605, says that doubt has two advantages. In the first place, it prevents us from making mistakes, and secondly, it inspires us to know more about a thing. The second point is important, because during Tulsi's time in the 16th century, which was almost the same time period as Bacon's, doubts about Ram lead to a greater enquiry into all the contexts of his story. So the final conclusion is that ultimately Ram comes through as a man, and when this is accepted Tulsi reaches the next logical conclusion that even a man can achieve greatness, because 'Even heavenly things do not become beautiful before then come into contact with the earth' ('Ashok ke Phool'). It is clear that Dwivedi ji fully believes that doubt leads to enquiry.

Here it is important to note that focusing on the figure of Ram while Tulsi removes doubts, Dwivedi ji does not seem to be in a hurry to do so. Despite the fact that Dwivedi ji likes Tulsi's ability to end all doubts, he knows that being in doubt is the destiny of the modern man. Without this, neither dialogue is possible nor balance. Actually, Tulsi

wanted to destroy the doubts cast on the figure of Ram by *nirgun* (who worship a formless God) saints. But Dwivedi ji knows that in modern times, to remain in doubt is to enable oneself to be in quest of all centres of knowledge. That is why although he understands the doubt of Tulsi, he also combines with it determination to create that the modern man has. It is clear that the doubt in Tulsi is the result of the conflict between ideas prevalent in society and 'sanaskaras' (character and belief system) while in Dwivedi ji it is born out of the conflict between the multi-centred nature of knowledge acquired in the external society and the pain of displacement that he felt in his heart. That is the reason why all his life Dwivedi ji experienced this sense of uncertainty and what is known as the other tradition is the result of doubting the first tradition. Though Dwivedi ji likes the social consciousness of Tulsi, he is more in favour of the aggression seen in Kabir rather than of the harmonizing nature of Tulsi. That aggression appears during that stage of exile when a man attacks all that is dead and rigid in the old.

Dwivedi ji has given sufficient importance to the dilemma born of doubt. He has written that this dilemma has not only led the sensitive nature of Tulsi to criticism and argumentation but it has also animated his creativity that has resulted in the establishment of timeless human values. (4/544) Because of this beauty born out of this dilemma,

Dwivedi ji has asked us to ignore the somewhat limited vision of Tulsi and has written that in the contexts of the illumination provided by the *Manas*, small weaknesses do mean much. Naturally, only by saying so he could prove that Tulsi was a leader of the people, and in 'Hindi Sahitya ki Bhoomika' (1940) he has even said it.

It appears that the third reason why Dwivedi ji goes to Tulsi, and he does it again and again, is that Tulsi has given importance to the 'name' of Ram as signifying a set of qualities. Instead of giving importance to Ram as a figure of worship Tulsi takes the name of Ram to represent an essence, and this essence is what is there at the centre of the modern man's consciousness. To emphasise essence is the sign of modernity. This essence is what makes a person special. When this happens a man is freed from confusion, plight, weakness and dependence on others. This is 'what gives self-respect to people who have been without it for centuries'. That is the reason why though a person may be in a 'special' situation he 'wrings his self like a grape and offers it to the others'. Ram is special, but in his being special, he also represents what is noble in society. He could become a leader of the people only because of this quality. People are not impressed by the figure of Ram, but by the idea that he stands for. The figure of Ram has attraction, but his name stands for action. Modernity lays emphasis more on dynamism rather

than on the attraction that person has for others; it is more on action than on the beauty of the body. Only that is beautiful which can destroy stagnation. 'Innocent beauty is that in which the sweat from the head flows to the ankles and which washes off all the evil, (*Meghdoot - Ek Purani Kahani*, 8/44). Modernity sees beauty in this form only and the importance of Kalidas is based entirely on this fact. Despite this, Dwivedi ji discusses the meaning of 'name' in a particular context and uses the struggle born of this idea in his essays as well as in his evaluation of historical characters. Here it is important to know that in his earlier essays he sees human struggle as the life force of history, but after 1960, when this struggle turns into his own struggle, he understands the value of 'name', and of Tulsi and writes *Kutaj*. Dwivedi ji did not know that this history will become his own history and he will have to move from Kashi to Shivalik. Dwivedi ji came to know of the value of 'name' during those days only and it was during that time that he developed an 'exceptional' love for Tulsi and Ram. Essays about Tulsi such as 'Sugam Agam Mridu Manju Kathore' (1974), 'Ajasra Prerna Ka Srot Manas' (1974) and 'Ramkatha Sundar Kartari' (1973) were written during those days.

In this way we see that exile, 'name' and dialogue—these are the three conditions in the context of which he tries to understand Tulsi and it is also true that despite his great reverence

for Tulsi, he does not overlook the weaknesses of Tulsi's personality, but unlike the petulant critics of today, he does not stick only to the negative. He understands Tulsi in his totality, but only that Tulsi who inspires the common man.

He has seen in Tulsi a source that enables a person to understand society completely. He has written in 'Sahitya ka Marm', 'In this age of democracy those who reject Tulsi as a propagandist for monarchy forget that what burns, is not light. Light is something different from that. Heat is only the purpose, light represents its richness. It is the additional bounty given by it. The poetry of Tulsidas provides enlightenment beyond the purpose for which it was written. It spreads the name of Ram, but only that fact does not define it. It expresses the joys and sorrows, hopes and aspirations of man with all its richness. It declares the triumph of all

that is noble and great in human life. It speaks for that value of humanity that has become more beautiful because it has been blended with the light of religion, and because it has been lighted by the glow of heroism.' (7/128)

In the end, one thing that needs to be said about exile is that as long as exile creates in a person a desire to look for his roots and takes him to cosmopolitanism, it is attractive, but when it begins to celebrate itself, it gets tagged with a harshness in decision-making and creates a desire for revenge. The exile of Tulsi's Ram begins to look wrong at this point, something that Dwivedi ji has not accepted. Rather it can be said that to compensate for this he went to Kabir, and that too before he approached Tulsi. But after that he returns to Tulsi's 'homelessness beyond the senses' and does full justice to Tulsi. It is another matter that he has done it in his miscellaneous writings only.

Shri Prakash Shukla, born 1965, is a poet and an emerging literary critic. He teaches in B.H.U. and his major publications are: 'Namwar ki Dharti', 'Sathottari hindi kavita mein lok saundarya'. He edits a literary quarterly 'parichay'. Has two collections of poems.

Dr. Ravi Nandan Sinha, edits *The Quest*, a journal of Indian literature and culture. Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust India have published books of Hindi poetry and fiction translated by him. His poetry and literary criticism have been published in India and elsewhere. Presently, he is Head, PG Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Ranchi.

The Case of Hindi Teaching at Takushoku University, Tokyo:

HINDI AS A MEDIA TO COME CLOSER TO THE HINDI SPEAKING PEOPLE

Sakata Teiji

[0] Takushoku University established in 1900 has been eager to educate its students to be friendly with the people all over the world since its foundation

Takushoku University established in 1900 has the following five faculties:

- Faculty of Commerce
- Faculty of Political Science and Economics
- Faculty of Foreign Languages (Departments of Chinese, English and Spanish)
- Faculty of Technology
- Faculty of International Affairs

[I] Hindi courses open to all the students at Takushoku University, but Hindi not popular

A. Hindi is the second foreign language open to about two thousand students admitted every year.

- English is the first foreign language.
- As second languages, regular courses offered are: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.
- Regular courses consisting of only two periods every week are offered for freshmen and sophomores.

For juniors and seniors, courses as optional subjects are offered.

- B.** Hindi is not popular at Takushoku University: only about twenty students register for Hindi classes every year. Chinese, French, German, Korean are popular.

[II] Scholarship offered to stay in the areas the languages are spoken

1. Students to choose Hindi as the second foreign language are limited in number, but they get deeply interested in the language and the Hindi speaking people.
2. Some fifty students are offered scholarship to stay in the areas the languages are spoken during summer vacation every year.
3. Hindi students, limited in number but deeply interested in India, are highly estimated to receive the scholarship; three/ four students enjoy the opportunity to stay in Hindi speaking area every year to develop deeper interest.

[III] Some young graduates developing Japan-India friendship

Some students who received scholarship to visit India may later

find chances to work in developing Japan-India friendship. Some examples are given below.

- A graduate teaches Japanese language at Blue Bells School International, New Delhi as a teaching staff of Japan Foundation, New Delhi. Having basic knowledge of the mother tongue of the students, the lady teacher can teach Japanese language effectively.
- A graduate is working as an adviser for rice cultivation in Punjab, communicating with the people there in Hindi/ Punjabi.
- A lady graduate, after learning Hindi at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, now works in Delhi office of a Japanese firm.
- A graduate, after learning Hindi at Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, is preparing for further study in an MA course of Indian studies. He may apply for the scholarship of ICCR.

Note: Evening courses of Hindi offered at Takushoku University.

Takushoku University also offers evening courses of many foreign languages including Hindi; courses in Basic Hindi, Intermediate Hindi and Advanced Hindi.

In this case also the number of registration is limited, but learners are

very eager to attend classes after their work during the day; some to enjoy

Hindi cinemas, some to communicate with Hindi speaking friends, some to visit mountain areas.

Teiji Sakata's publications include:

U. Sachidanand & Teiji Sakata (eds.) *Imaging India, Imaging Japan: A Chronicle of Reflections on Mutual Literature*. Delhi: Manak, 2004.

"The Exchange of Services and Gifts at the Birth of Hindu Boys as Described in Hindi Bhakti Literature and Folk Songs" in M. Horstmann (ed.) *Bhakti in Current Research*. Delhi: Manohar, 2006. pp. 268-272.

Sakata Teiji, is professor emeritus, Takushoku University, Japan. He speaks fluent Hindi.

INTENSIVE HINDI COURSE IN THREE DAYS—A RECKLESS TRIAL

Chihiro Koiso

I have taught Hindi as a second-foreign language at three universities for about 20 years. It was so interesting that the numbers of students who took this course would change due to social affairs and incidents. When a cult group committed a crime, the numbers sharply decreased, and after the 9.11 terrorist attack, not many students attended for a while. Usually we have an hour and a half class once a week, and the course includes each 14 classes in the first and second semesters, totally 28 periods per year. We seek to finish basic grammar within these periods. For it is a second-foreign language, most students seem to have less to do with Hindi and forget even its letters after graduation. Here, I would like to speak partly about Hindi in the regular course, and report the approach of the intensive Hindi course in three days. I am so glad to tell you some positive results in the reckless intensive course.

The target of the first semester in the regular course is to learn Hindi pronunciation, letters, imperative forms, genders and numbers in noun, adjectives, and present forms, ultimately give a speech of a simple self-introduction by heart. As some active students go on a trip to India during their summer vacations, I always remember to add some simple daily conversations. I teach them some Hindi songs between classes as well, which is also an effective way for a switch, and let them memorize one of the songs for their self-introduction speeches. First they complain that they are too shy to sing but they all look enjoyable and start to sing properly. If they could pass their exams only by singing, it would probably appear so attractive for them! One of my students who

saw me a few years after graduation said to me, 'I am sorry to say I have forgotten all Hindi, but I do remember its songs' and I was deeply moved to listen to his songs. On the other hand, one told me that she was told to sing at the wedding ceremony she attended in India and was highly praised to sing Hindi songs. It is somewhat difficult to select songs, but I would like to tell you the way in speaking about the intensive course.

It is *Miyagj Gakuin Joshi (Women) University* where I teach the intensive Hindi course in three days during summer vacations. The girls who attend this university are from good families in the region and so polite that it is so pleasant for me to teach them. Here, we have five classes a day, totally fifteen classes within three days. More than ten years have passed since I started teaching the course here. I remember being at a loss to see more than 50 students gathered in a lecture hall for the first year, thinking that a three-day- Hindi basic learning must be no doubt a reckless trial. It is essential to study pronunciation and letters properly because without them you will have much trouble in self-study, so I forced myself to end at least pronunciation, letters, and basic grammar.

At the international cultural faculty in this university, there is a cultural anthropological teacher who does field explorations for a village near Banaras. She takes some volunteer students to the field only once in few years, when the number of students zooms sharply. Those students are so conscious of their

studies that they are well-grounded in the approach of India and really teachable in classes. Compared to them, optional courses of second-foreign language at other universities require quite a lot time to motivate students to get interested in India or Indian culture. But here, things go on smoothly without those time and efforts.

At the beginning of the class, I introduce myself writing 'Namaste! Mela Naam Koiso Chihiro Hae' in big Hindi letters, and introduce myself in Hindi. Needless to say, all students look as if they make no sense, but I always decide to do it so that they can feel the air of the language they are going to learn. After my introduction, I ask each student to say a greeting in Hindi just as 'Namaste! Mera Naam O O.Hae' and tell the reason why she chose Hindi among other languages, the thing she is especially interested in India both in Japanese. Then the class leads to the relationship between India and me, the attractiveness of India, and its various language situations.

After that, I always show them a video clip of the movie "Bombay". The music 'vande mataram' arranged by A.R. Rahaman in the celebration of the 50th independence anniversary goes with several pictures around the country, which intends to give the impressions that India possesses such a broad land with varied nature and people. The beautiful dancing scene of the movie "Bombay" arranged in it gives a significant impact on them. Thus, the day's first

class is over in no time.

For the day's second class, we start practicing pronunciation of vowel and writing. First we pronounce 11 vowels and write them properly, then give them out. In terms of consonant letters, we give priority to pronounce them in order. We especially try to practice aspirate and retroflex rightly that we do not have in Japanese. If you become able to pronounce consonant lists, then learn the 11 intra-syllabic forms. This enables you to pronounce all letters referring to the consonant list. After explaining a series of how to write consonants and practicing spelling in drill books, we practice writing names of our own, famous people, and cities in Hindi.

Later that, I write down the lyrics of their first song, "honge kamayaab". We make sure that everybody can read them and practice the song over and over. Even though they may not be able to follow the letters, it is amazing that they somehow get into the rhythm of it and become able to sing it. The atmosphere tells me that the students are working on just feeling excited.

After singing, we practice pronouncing with simple picture books, impressing the letters on our eyes. What is important to remind here is never use any Roman letters for the pronunciations. If you do that, you can never learn consonant letters. I tell them to put the letter list aside them all the time and practice to find pronunciation referring to it, no matter how long it takes. If we have time for a break, we sing some simple

Japanese children's song, "hathire", interpreted in Hindi.

Five classes for the first day almost end by this time. The day's homework is proper pronunciation of the consonant list and practice writing intra-syllabic forms on all consonant letters.

The second day goes on to grammar. In this case, I plan to start with imperatives so that they can work on them easily. I explain verbal dictionary forms and the second person. Imperatives express not only speaking orders but also the distance of our relationships (for example to father aap, to mother tum, sometimes to god tu). You can use it directly in daily conversations or your traveling, so it is fun to practice with proper scenes, which requires vividness. We set up a scene that we invite and entertain a friend to our house, and perform a skit. Gestures add to the fun.

When they think Hindi as accessible around here, I start to explain the genders and numbers of noun, adjective flexions briefly. However we have less time to explain in details, light explanation is essential for not making the students' rejections. And that takes at least three classes. For the rest of the two classes, we move to the present tense. The students understand that the tense is necessary to introduce themselves. Then with an explanation, we practice the subjects except the two person and copula verb. They write compositions with subject using 'I' or 'We', and stock them for self introductions. I do explain other

subjects in the present tense, but we always use self subjects in writing compositions or practicing conversations. If somebody asks 'Where do you live?', then you answer as 'I live in_'. 'What time do you get up at morning?' and 'What time do you go to sleep at night?' We practice questioning and answering as 'What time do you go to sleep at night and get up at morning?' Finally they get to be able to express themselves as 'I study_at_university.'

After practicing the present tense, we learn the sentence structure and make sentences about themselves as 'I want_' 'I can_'. We learn the way of answering 'Yes, I can' 'No I can't' out of the question 'Can you_?'. Meanwhile, we practice singing the national anthem "Sare jahaan se accha" "kal ho na ho". Also, we practise a part of the song "My shoes are made in Japan (mera jutaa hae japanii)", watching the first part of the video which is subtitled "Shri chaarsaubiis". Here, I talk about the job of movies' subtitles and get them understand that Hindi and Japanese have a big difference in the amount of information in the same time.

By this practice, we write compositions about ourselves, mark them up, practice reading properly. In the intensive course, it is difficult to bring to memorizing, but in terms of songs, most students can stand up and sing

"honge kamyaaab". That is the end of the 15 classes in three days. I am aware that the course is just a step to prompt them to study Hindi, but the students study hard with patience as if it is torture and concentrate on studying. The numbers of students vary from year to year, but I am always surprised that it is only a few that drop out. I am also glad that we can skip cultural introduction and concentrate on Hindi, for the students have high level of interest and motivations. Some students spoke a smattering of Hindi in the survey and deeply moved to find that they could communicate with the natives, then studied harder, and finally entered Banaras Hindu University or studied in Delhi. It is encouraging to see that they use Hindi effectively as one of the communication tools. But everyone feels that only Hindi does not work out. As they realize that Hindi and also English are both required in dealing with them in India, English study is likely to generate a synergetic effect.

That is how I recklessly teach Hindi in the intensive course. Both students and I are practical about it and enjoy the time, so I would say that I take pride in it At least, I can probably say that the course contributes to the production of quite a lot of Indian freak female university students.

Chihiro Koiso, teaches in Osaka University and she presented her experiences of teaching Hindi to Japanese students in the seminar. Her sense of humour was much appreciated.

A FIRE SNUFFED OUT, WARMTH LOST : AGYEYA

Vidyaniwas Mishra

Translated by
Deepa Agarwal

I don't want to believe that Bhai is no more, but the trees and plants on Keventer Lane look so sad, there is such emptiness all around, and the way my arms feel devoid of strength, the way light has withdrawn, informs me that Bhai has tricked us and left. Many months ago he had promised that we would go to Vrindavan together, now he has gone to Golok, all alone. The companion of so many journeys, dreams of journeys, so many literary undertakings, so many wagers, has left me without a self. When he was there, I had everything. I still have the same bow, the same arrows, the same chariot and I—the same charioteer whom Bhai had helped to mount that chariot. Only now it feels as if everything has lost its charm. When Bhai was there, he would draw me into one task after another. Now it feels as if there is no task at hand, nothing to be done.

He was fifteen years older than I, But never allowed me to feel the difference, he always called me brother. When he was annoyed or wanted to tease me, he would call me 'Panditji', otherwise it was always 'bhai'. If I ever called to say I was just coming or that I might get late, he would get angry and say, 'Bhai, you are a very disorderly fellow'. He would reproach me so often, there would be so much affection in these reproaches and I, useless fellow that I was, would take pleasure in it.

Now the one who reproached me thus, has gone. The one, who bestowed the honour of being his younger brother on me, has gone. I used to say, I have always been a bad boy, never been able to do any of your work properly, still he never lost faith in me. I took his advice in so many literary endeavours. Sometimes I would keep waiting for him to come just to consult him on the usage of one particular word; now the brother who helped me to achieve such heights has gone.

Countless memories...there are a flood of them. My first encounter with him in Allahabad on Hastings Road - we needed a description of the seasons from Sanskrit poetry for each issue of "Prateek." I asked my friend Machwe to suggest someone and Machwe took me to him. His calm, measured speech, his discerning taste left a deep impression. Subsequently "Prateek" opened up a door into literature for so many, apart from myself.

When I was in Rewa, Bhai visited me often. He had to write a book on the art of Khajuraho. At that time decent accommodation was not available for visitors there. An utterly basic room, which might have been used as a cowshed once, was his residence. Bhai lived there for several weeks, drawing water from a well and taking photographs from God knows how many angles and corners. He took more than 1600 pictures—dressed in shorts, balancing somehow on one leg, putting himself at risk, he photographed numerous sculptures.

Living on the plainest of food and drink, but possessed with an unquenchable enthusiasm, almost a kind of addiction. It was as if this enormous universe of art infused him with an endless source of energy. Many of the statues that Bhai photographed have been stolen, removed from India since. Bhai changed his residence so many times since 1947; I visited him everywhere, stayed with him everywhere. I witnessed his life as a nomad as well as a householder. As a nomad so spartan that he managed to make do with just a cloth bag and as householder so particular about decor that each and every object had to have its allotted place. How often the very same room would be transformed into a study, a living room or a bedroom, and each time it would be furnished in a different way. He'd ask, 'Bhai, what do you think of the change?' I'd sense that the heart of an enthusiastic boy lay behind this constant desire to redecorate. For Bhai, ornamentation or beauty was something to be explored, a quest that could never be satisfied.

He loved forests, absolutely wild, untouched forests, or houses that had been furnished with close attention to each detail. Any kind of excess or monotony bothered him. He was always natural; his refinement was natural too. He would never address anyone familiarly as 'tum'. This courtesy was innate, not put on.

His respect for women was inborn too, perhaps because he saw his elder

sister reflected in them, and maybe how many other affectionate female role models. He could never tolerate any impolite behaviour towards any woman. I recall an incident when a somewhat inebriated American made a coarse remark about Indian women. Bhai flared up immediately. He approached the man and asked him gently, 'Will you repeat what you said just now?' Foolishly, the man repeated it and received a stinging blow from Bhai. He fell, rose and Bhai slapped him again and asked, 'Will you repeat it again?' The man began to beg for mercy, but Bhai's anger was not appeased. With great difficulty I calmed him down.

I, rustic as I am, have stayed so often at his house. I used to feel nervous in the beginning, that a disorganized person like myself might upset the order. But after spending a lot of time with him I learned that this obsession with order was just a game for him. It was his temperament. There was no effort behind it. Whatever he did was accomplished with such finesse, paying full attention to its suitability, using the appropriate skills, but he was equally delighted with natural beauty or an artless creation. He would experience a great oneness with writers struggling to negotiate new heights of creative endeavour. And with works that had reached the pinnacle of creative excellence. He would read great literary works over and over again and loved to discuss them. Bhai was a bridge between

the oldest and the newest in literature. This absence pinches so much now.

Bhai was extremely stubborn. He would sacrifice anything for what he had embraced as his truth, and when he set out to accomplish something he would not rest till he completed it. 'Prateek' and 'Naya Prateek' went into huge losses but he insisted on keeping them running. 'Naya Prateek' had to be shut down. He was devastated. When I launched 'Abhiruchi' he was overjoyed. His was the first interview we brought out. Before I could present him with the first issue of 'Naandi' he went and bought it, and gave me a portion of his unpublished novel to use. He would not separate the element of communication from literature, and for this reason he considered newspapers and journals an inalienable medium of dialogue between the reader and the literary work in the era of print. Though solitude was more to his taste, he would insist on an interchange of ideas. He wished to share truths he had experienced or discovered, for this reason he was open to the truths others had experienced or discovered. He was as empathetic to another's assertion, as he was firm on his own.

When he lived abroad I stayed with Bhai for months, visited so many forests and waterfalls, so many sea shores, so many art galleries with him. Accompanying him to such places was an extraordinary experience in itself, because half of the pleasure was derived from watching him. He would become

so rapt in these sights that the very spirit of beauty seemed to descend on the spot.

People called him a foreigner, but whenever he went abroad he would lose himself in memories of home. Last year he got into his head that there should be a discussion on the Indian home. The discussion was launched on the late Radhakrishnan Das Memorial Day, but he was not satisfied. He wanted to arouse greater awareness of home, matters concerning the home, relationships connected with it, festivals, its joys and sorrows, the way they have been depicted in art and literature and the importance of home in Hinduism. He was possessed with the longing for a vastness in which everyone and everything was his own, the inanimate and the animate, pillars and arches, birds carved in wood, flowers carved in wood, murals, alpana patterns

traced on the floor with rice paste, the fire that provided a home with warmth and energy, eyes whose longing for each other was lit up by firelight, the random, disconnected talk of joy and sorrow, the courtyard, the threshold, the lamp placed on the threshold, he wished to see the whole world alive in all this, wished to keep on looking at it.

What will home feel like, bereft of this kind of a wandering home lover?

When my father died it felt as if the sky that I could call my own had turned alien, when my mother passed away, it felt as if the world that was my own, the earth that nourished me, whose concern gave me such solace, had disappeared that day, taking away all comfort with it. When Bhai left I felt as if with that fire snuffed out, I have become a stranger to my own self.

Courtesy: Hindi Jagat

Vidyaniwas Mishra (1926-2005), was a prominent scholar and spokesman of Indian culture. He wrote many books of essays and memoirs. His long association with Agyeya was an example of lasting friendship in an age of alienation. He died in a road-accident.

Deepa Agarwal, is a freelance writer in Hindi and English. She writes poems and short stories. She also writes books for children. She lives in Delhi.

ABHIMANYU ANAT, ABHIMANYU ANANTA

Harish Naval

Translated by
Ravindra Narayan Mishra

This happened eight years ago. The bell of room number three of the guest house of Mahatma Gandhi Sansthan, Mauritius, rang a little. I could guess that some civilized guest has arrived. I opened the door, what a surprise! the civilized guest was an extremely important literary figure of Mauritius, Abhimanyu Anat. Finding me stunned he normalized me saying 'Naval jee you are welcome on the land of Mauritius'. Saying this he entered and sat in a chair and said 'you did a right thing by coming to the guest house leaving the hotel. There would have been formality and compulsions there. Here you would be informal and free. This place is very good. I have been working at this very place for years'.

The discussion carried on. Both of us were lost in the memory of the World Hindi Conference organized in Mauritius in 1993-94. The seeds of friendship had sprouted from there. Even I have been an admiring reader of Abhimanyu Anat for four decades. To me he has always been a great elderly litterateur. I look upon him from the angle of an admirer even in moments of intense intimacy. It is his generosity that he keeps putting me at ease and tells smart jokes entertainingly.

That was my third working day at the Mahatma Gandhi Sansthan. I was appointed external examiner and observer of the Sansthan and Mauritius University. I had to live in Mauritius for ten more

days. Abhimanyu jee had come not only to meet me but also to invite me for lunch at his house. I was being humbled by that request. I was aware of the height of his stature in the Hindi world. That day his stature had appeared to have become even higher.

To me it was a rare moment. One of my favourite litterateurs had come to invite me. Years ago I had read his novel Lal Pasina which was published as a serial in an important magazine. Those days the name of the writer used to be published as Abhimanyu Anat Shabnam. This novel was a source of inspiration for Indians to understand the literature of the non- resident Indians. This novel is a heart rending saga of the Indian workers. The conditions in which they had to go there and live were pathetic. Till date Lal- Pasina is symbolic of Anat jee's great literature.

To have food at Abhimanyu Anat's house is like going through a cultural ritual. At lunch two other intellectuals of Mauritius- story writer, satirist Shree Ramdev Dhurandhar and Ajamil Matabadal were present. We had lunch in the drawing room. Mrs Anat's affectionate hospitality was turning me emotional. I had felt that I had set out on a special pilgrimage. After lunch, sitting in the verandah and looking at dense greenery around, the four of us were lost in the discussion on Hindi literature of Mauritius. We had discussion on history and fiction. Lal –Pasina flashed in me. Anat jee had written that when

the king of France needed a book of history he used to order "bring the greatest lie of the world in front of me". Lal-Pasina doesn't claim to be that history. It is not history also because rulers, politicians, governors and other powerful people as such are not its characters- its characters are those who are ground in the roots of history. But their being ground has been history. Such is the claim of the novel. Shree Ajamil Matabadal believed that Lal- Pasina is tale of the woes of the oppressed humanity in general and not of the non-resident Indians. Ramdev Dhurandhar held that in Anat jee's Aandolan the dominant voice is that of humanism. Suddenly I remembered a statement of its character Ravi, this is a movement which aims at work, food and happiness for everyone...youth movement wants to protect humans from humans... we are not asking for moon and stars; they should enjoy it who can afford it, we don't ask for luxury, we only ask for the right to live.

During discussion when I called Anat Premchand of Mauritius I felt he has objection to that. He likes being called Abhimanyu Anat of Mauritius only. Yes, he knows that some of his novels may fall in line with novels of Premchand era. Dr Krishna Kumar Jha, a critic of Mauritius puts the novel Ek Bigha Pyar of Anat Jee in the category of novels of Premchand era. This novel characterizes two brothers marching ahead relentlessly who give importance

to attributes of commitment, hard work and sense of duty as found in the novels of Premchand.

Another novel of Abhimanyu jee which I like very much is : Gandhi jee Bole The. This novel has been prescribed in one of the papers of MA course of Hemvatinandan Bahuguna University, Srinagar, Garhwal. I had the occasion of setting its question paper. I had got this opportunity courtesy my great intellectual friend Dr Harimohan. Harimohan and I had stayed together during fourth World Hindi Conference organized in Mauritius. That time we had met Anat jee together. Since then Gandhi jee Bole The had occupied a place in the heart and mind of Prof Harimohan.

I had been setting question papers centered on novels Gandhi jee Bole The and Susham Bedi's Havan. The story of 'Gandhi jee Bole The' is based on Gandhi Jee's lone Mauritius trip. Then addressing a public meeting Gandhi jee had emphasized proper education for children and importance of political consciousness. The public meeting of Tohar Bag is historical. This novel is capable of giving practical shape to Gandhi's principles. Surely public consciousness has spread through this novel. Whenever I used to check answer-sheets based on this novel I used to find that students answer questions whole heartedly. The point to be noted is that while answering they reveal their minds also. Generally students used to quote the passage narrated by the main

character Prakash, "the working hours of workers should come down, there should be hike in wages, leave be granted, provision for medicine should be there. Attention should be paid to pension scheme, Some percentage of the annual profit of the factory should be shared among workers".

Five years ago Anat jee and I were walking in the splendid market on the Ajmal Khan road, Delhi. A labour carrying a sack was looking imbalanced due to excess load. Even before I could offer help to the labour Anat Jee helped balance the worker. I could read the feeling of praise on the face of the labour and the feeling of satisfaction on the face of Anat Jee. Anat jee had come to Sahitya Academi. I had accompanied him from Janpath Hotel. He wanted to buy some gold jewellery. He had the address of the jeweller. I had been able to achieve the feat of Columbus by locating the shop. Both of us had started selecting jewellery from that small shop. Anat jee bought jewellery of his choice. He didn't indulge in any bargain or discount. While returning I said, Dada it was a small shop; there are so many big show rooms, and you?

He said, I am scared of big show-rooms. This shopkeeper is a favourite of the residents of Mauritius. Everyone has faith in him. My wife had requested me to buy gold from this very shop. Now brother what difference does it make whether the gold is good or bad? How do I know whether it is pure or impure.

I have passed through all the exams on the basis of faith? Saying this he had laughed and I was finding the signs of his generosity. This was in 1994. Shree Brajendra Madhukar Bhagat was taking us to his area of work. Acharya Vijendra Snatak was also there. The bus was passing through a beautiful path. At one place addressing everyone Madhukar Jee said, "now just after turning see upward you would see a boy standing on the mountain." Excitement had spread around. Then whisper started doing the rounds. In whisper some one said, this is Mudiya mountain.

When I looked up it felt really some body is there. Even I had heard the story of Mudiya – there was a cowherd named Sayantak who used to dance with fairies. Fairies used to give him gold. They used to say 'don't tell any one'. But one day he told some one and got cursed to turn into stone. That—Mudiya like human being is actually Sayantak.

The same night I had discussion with Shree Rajendra Arun and Abhimanyu Anat. During preparations of Kavi Sammelan we were on the same slope over a dinner, where now there is the guest house of Mahatma Gandhi Sansthan. From 2002-2004, I stayed here every year in June for two weeks. Shree Anat had said in a philosophical style Mudiya mountain is sleeping exactly like the labour here, they have to be woken up. He had said even this that he is weaving the plot of a novel on the idea of Mudiya Mountain. Just after two or three years

his novel Mudiya Pahad Bol Utha got published.

Mudiya Pahad Bol Utha can be called a novel with political narrative. Its narrative includes role of Panchayat, shenanigan of opposition, workers' struggle, nationalization of factories for the benefit of workers and share of workers in the profit of factories. There is no need to say that this novel is a process to change Mudiya in to Sayantak again so that he is exonerated from the curse. Dignity of labour can be seen every where in the writings of Anat.

In June of the year 2004, I was again in the premises of the Mahatma Gandhi Sansthan. This time another professor of my college Dr Harinder Kumar was also there. His friend Dr Krishna Kumar Jha had invited him. Prof Rashmi Kapoor of South African Studies deptt. had also come for research work in the institute. Her husband Prof. Sudhir Kumar a teacher in the statistics department of our college had also come with her. Dr Harinder stayed at Krishna Kumar Jha's residence. The Kapoors were paying guests of a Chinese lady in the first building situated outside the Institute. In their verandah we used to lounge till late in the moonlit nights. When Abhimanyu Anat came to know that so many of us have come together from India, he reached the guest house and generously asked me to come to his house over lunch with all the people.

This time the food was arranged not

in the drawing room but in the kitchen. Yes Anat Jee's kitchen is very big—exactly like his and Bhabhi jee's heart. Not every body was given food in that kitchen. This time we were special; we meaning I, Dr Harinder and the Kapoor couple. Smt Rashmi Kapoor was fascinated with Anat Jee's library and Bhabhi jee's kitchen. In the words of Dr Harinder the pleasure of that day's feast was beyond everything.

Anat jee's creative wealth is huge. The process had started in 1971 with the publication of *Aur Nadi Behti Rahi*. Apart from that; *Jam Gaya Suraj*, *Tisre Kinare Par*, *Chautha Prani*, *Tapti Dopahri*, *Kuhase Ka Dayra*, *Shephali*, *Hartal Kab Hogi*, *Chun, Chun Chunav*, *Apni Hi Talash*, *Apni Apni Seema*, *Par Pagdandi Nahi Mitati*, *Faisla Apka*, *Maraktwain Ka Swarg*, *Abhichitra*, *Pasina Behta Raha*, *Ghar Lot Chalo Vaishali*, *Lehron Ki Beti* and *Chalti Ho Anupma* have been published and the process is still on. The novel-journey of four decades is a very important journey. Out of these I have opportunity to know *Shephali* and *Lehron Ki Beti*.

In *Shephali* the signs of post modernism can be visible. From the point of view of narrative and style it is different from Anat Jee's other novels. Its story runs thus—*Shephali* is a prostitute who loves *Aashit*. In spite of having relationship with many men she starts longing for this one man. *Ashit* had proposed her years ago which *Shephali* had turned down. The flow of time forced *Shephali* to attempt suicide. Though she

survived but her libido died.

Another worth mentioning writer and critique of Mauritius, *Shree Prehlad Ramsharan* was behind my knowledge of the book *Lehron Ki Beti* who had presented me his book *Lehron Ki Beti—Ek Anushilan* and requested me to give my comments. The evening I got the book next morning I met *Abhimanyu Anat* with his close friend and my respected senior a brilliant intellectual *Kamal Kishore Goenka* in a programme in the conference hall of the institute. In Delhi I used to meet Dr *Goenka* but it was different to meet him in a foreign country. We three had spent a lot of time together. Then Dr *Goenka* had told me about *Prehlad Ramsharan* [whom I had already known] that his writings also depended on Anat's writings.

Meeting him that evening was not an unexpected coincidence. I had met him before. I took *Lehron Ki Beti Ek Anushilan* and on coming to the guest house gave it a late night reading.

I started it but found that this book appeared to be part of a conspiracy against Anat jee. *Prehlad Ramsharan* appeared to be whole heartedly trying to dwarf the great novelist in Anat Jee. There were less of arguments and more of bad arguments and immaturity was present with full maturity. He had forgotten that a story writer is a visionary. He shows the possibility of what does not seem to be happening. A story-writer is not a historian, he

has the capital of imagination. Imagination is the main material of his creativity.

When I got another book of Prehlad Ramsharan from the publisher then I learnt that really Abhimanyu Anat is a very great writer. This time 'Gandhi Jee Bole The' had been attacked severely. When I met Abhimanyu Anat I congratulated him for being such a great writer. Like always he just smiled on it and withdrew to silence. He keeps doing his work- he is in the poise of a sage, he scans every thing. He is aware of the 'movements' taking place against him. He believes that after lighting fire when the hearth is extinguished—the embers keep burning— slowly for a long time. Anat jee keeps writing—the fire of envy is kept alive by others. Anat jee keeps writing, earns fame- the prolonged slow fire continues. Even his close people do not read him as much as the critics read him.

Like Premchand, Anat Jee is a story writer of a high quality. He has written—short stories also. *Insan aur Machine* is his short story collection. There are twenty eight stories in it. In short stories mythical style is Anat jee's favourite. Satire is the dominant voice of this collection. It has the best form of satire which culminates into—'Woh Beech Ka Aadmi', 'Ek Thali Samander' and *Khamoshi Ki Cheetkar* are his main story collections. In Anat's story the environment of neighbourhood is reflected. He undertakes psychological and

philosophical analysis. Readability is an essential attribute of this story writer.

He is called National Poet of Mauritius. On the occasion of the fourth World Hindi Conference, lines of his poems were prominently displayed on hoardings at different places in Mauritius. 'Gulmohar Khaul Utha', 'Nagphani Mein Uljhi Sanshe' cactus Ke Dant and 'Ek Dayri Bayan' are his representative poetry collections. The dramatic language of his poems is noteworthy.

Why only dramatic language, Abhimanyu Anat Jee is a successful dramatist too. To me sometimes he appears more of a dramatist than a novelist. His dramatic sense is contemporary. He keeps doing fusion of eastern and western dramatic elements. He keeps experimenting on a continuous basis. There is a great dramatist in him. He had started Ajanta Arts at the age of fifteen only. He is an accomplished director as well who has directed five dozen plays. An important dimension of our intimate relationship is stage. He was very happy with this fact that I had done a short research on the plays of Mohan Rakesh during Mohan Rakesh's lifetime. He was heartened to know the fact that my doctoral thesis was related to theatre. When he had become the Chief of the theatre at Ravindra Bhavan he had taken me with him. He took me to every part of the Ravindra Bhavan—starting from the green room, back stage to rehearsal room. He showed me the acoustics, the conference room and his

office whole heartedly. He had not taken charge there as yet, construction work was under progress. A Bengali song programme was also there that day. While watching and listening to that programme I found that he had good knowledge of music as well.

Anat jee has also written radio and T.V. plays. He is a broadcast specialist also. He has been associated with the drama department of the youth and sports ministry. His play Gunga Itihas has carved out a separate place for itself. His plays have been staged in India also. In 1994 I had seen the play Gunga Itihas for the first time and was highly impressed. His other prominent plays are Virodh, Teen Drishya, Rok Lo Kanha and Urte Rahenge Safed Baj.

Multifaceted Shree Anat is also an accomplished editor. For years he has been ably editing the magazine 'Vasant' published from Mahatma Gandhi Sansthan.

He says that the journal Vasant has stayed longer than any other literary magazine of any language of Mauritius. Its reach has touched more than eighty countries. The literary titans who were paid tributes through its special issues include Surdas, Ravindranath Thakur Premchand, Vasudev Vishnu Dayal,

Somdat Bakhori. In the interviews Agyeya, Vishnu Prabhakar etc have participated. Vasant Chayanika edited in 1993 by Anat Jee was a big success. It contained selected works from seventy six issues of fifteen years. I learnt from the introduction that Vasant had done the important work of publishing initial works of 200 new writers.

This editor has also edited Hindi Ekanki, Mauritius Ki Hindi Kavita and Mauritius Ki Hindi Kahani— I had asked Anat, 'when do you write'. He said I keep writing in mind and then on paper.

It is said that God is infinite and so are the stories about him. I say the same for Abhimanyu Anat and his infinite stories. Abhimanyu Anat is an influential personality in the real sense. He is a first class litterateur and even a first class person : actually even above it— simple, natural, trustworthy, truthful and infinitely affectionate.

Whether Abhimanyu Anat agrees or not in some sense he is entitled to the legacy of Premchand because he was born on August 9, 1937 and he should recall that Premchand died on October 8, 1936. That is exactly after ten months. What is the meaning of ten months, are you listening brother? Could you make out?

Harish Naval : Satirist and poet, Harish Naval teaches Hindi at Hindu College, Delhi University.

AILAN GALI ZINDA HAI

Chandrakanta

Translated by
Manisha Chaudhary

A day of sunshine and happy breezes sliding off mountain tops! A day when you want to waltz in a shikara on the generous shimmering expanse of the Dal Lake. Feel the wind on your face as you pedal boat. Ride a horse in an effort to cast off the tortoise paced ennui of your life. Avatara however, chose to take a bus ride to the gardens as time was short. Just for a day. There was no time for a trip to Gulmarg or Pehalgam.

Although the Tourism Department had started running luxury buses to the gardens and in about twenty rupees you could see the sights but it was time bound. Avatara and his friends chose to take the local bus.

Passing Gupkaar Road, the road turning towards Jethiyaar lay silent among a dense grove of Chinar and Keekar trees and Avatara was transported back to the ruins of the past. Holding Lacchi Kaki's pallu, dragging his feet in exhaustion and whining to be carried! Poor Lacchi Kaki took him on her shoulders. He had insisted on being carried by her and she was panting because of the climb already. He had felt very lofty and secure astride her shoulders and after she set him down on the steps of the temple, she sat down for a long time trying to catch her breath. Thinking of Kaki brought back a flood of her memories. Kaki's stories, potatoes roasted in her kangdi, *yaji* made from rice flour, the *varimuth* which she made specially for him.

The island of Sona Lock in the Char Chinar of Dal Lake looked

solitary even as tourists moved back and forth in shikaras. He was suddenly overcome. Perhaps somewhere deep inside, he had begun to feel alienated from the land permeated with the smell of his own people. He was flooded with memories of the past. The picnics with friends, learning to swim in the lake with a rubber wheel, boat racing with college mates. Scenes from the past unspooled in succession. He looked intently at the stork waiting for fish on Charchinar and Banta teased him, 'What are you looking at so closely. Are you going to take lessons in meditation from him?'

Avatara came back, 'I learnt that a long time ago, thanks to friends like you. But I was further back...'

Indeed, Avatara had wandered far back into the caves of memory. The waters of the lake slapped against the spreading roots of the old Chinar. He saw Mai was scrubbing some steel plates clean with the sandy soil on the other side of the trunk where the fat branch hung low. Avatara is sitting close by staring curiously at the stork hidden among the branches. He glances at the vast expanse of water uncertainly. He is trying to identify shapes of faces in the clouds hovering near the tops of the snowy headed mountains on the right. Why is he intoxicated by the watery lotus whiffs rising from the waves?

Ma industriously scrubs the vessels and hands him two plates, 'Come now, get up. Go and sit inside the shikara.

You must not sit here alone.'

Tiny grey and golden fish near the bank raise their mouths roundly for food. Little Avatara looks at them lost, 'I'll sit here Mai, see that long beaked bird is also looking at the scenery...' 'That one?' said Mai looking up at the tree, 'It is a stork. As if he will look at the scenery!' Ma had smiled at scenery, 'he is looking to catch fish, the sinner...'

The stork had dived in Jhapp! And caught a tiny wiggling fish.

'Saw that! Come now. An eagle or something might swoop down if you are alone...'

He was tiny. A scared five year old. But he had been surprised even then. Doesn't Mai feel the heady smell of the lake? Why isn't she driven wild by the wild sweetness of the wind straining through the carved leaves of the Chinar? Laden with whiffs of *gulbakawli*, *gulchini* and *gulab*? Why does that happen only to Avatara?

But now he understood that Mai and many like her had absorbed that fragrance in their lives. It was their own. Like henna changing colour on a palm.

Avatara went with his friends to Nishaat, Shalimaar, Harwan and Naseem. In Nishaat, they sat on a green lawn surrounded by daisies and ate naan and kebabs listening to the tune of gushing water. Karima's wife had made the kebabs. At Naseem, they played cards and talked about everything under the sun.

Sailing in yachts in Nagin lake, they

silently watched shifting shapes of clouds atop blue mountains. The air was crisp, clear and white. It carried the fragrance of almond and peach blossoms. They giggled like children trying to catch sparkling droplets rolling like balls of mercury on the petals and broad leaves of lotus blooming among the dancing waves. They lay in the deep reflective shadows of Chinars, reminiscent of great yogis and hoary seers and listened to the age old complaints of the *gugi*, '*gu, goo, gu goo, gu goo, maji loynam, kajvat satya, byani loynam yani kaani satya...*' (Ma hit me with grinding stone, sister hit me with reels of thread...)The Chinar pacified them with reassuring pats of leafy hands.

The branches of ranks of weeping willows on the banks flirted unabashedly with the water and raised seductive ripples. Enchanted Avatara was carried away as if he saw his land for the first time:

*Gar Firdaus Bar Ruey Jamin Ast,
Hamin Asto, Hamin Asto, Hamin
Asto.*

(If ever there is paradise on earth,
it is here, it is here, it is here)

'Who said this Chandan?'

'Mughal Emperor Jahangir.'

'The air from the lakes and waterfalls
must have entered his veins.'

'Yar, you seem to have gone to heaven.
You've forgotten our gali completely,'
nudged Karima.

'It is all like dal from home for us,
Bhaiya!' Banta had begun to sound like
the elders looking after his father's shop,
'Avatara Bhai, will now come for a
fortnight like a visitor once in two years
then surely he will tour the gardens
like a visitor and not stay at home.
It is for people like him they say, *Subaho
Dar Baghe Nishaat, Shaam Dare Baghe
Naseem, Shalamaro LalaZaro,
Sairkashmir Asto Bast.*'

(The morning in Nishaat, the evening
in Naseem, the flowers in Shalimaar and
Lala, that is all there is to see in Kashmir,
nothing else.)

'Yes, then you can only see paradise,'
commented Shamu with a smidgeon of
bitterness. Lately, it had become his
nature to nitpick even in straightforward
exchanges. 'Yes, my friend, we are there
left behind to drink the poison of the
gali like *neelkanth* who kept it in its throat.
You can even call us frogs in a well.
Carry on muttering the gali-puraan, enjoy
the fine air and water and bring up burps
of satisfaction...'

'No Shamu,' Avatara contradicted
him, 'The gali is a part of my blood.
Far more than these lakes and waterfalls,
I remember the wrestling bouts we used
to have, the '*chann kabbaddi* and '*kath
shale bom*' contests. Perhaps, you will
laugh at me but it absolutely true.'

'Shamu, you are lucky in many ways.
At least you are deeply rooted in your
own land. Nobody thinks of you as aliens
here.' Loke's own pain surfaced.

Teja worked as a charge man in a firm in Patiala now. He often missed the tastes of *shalgam*, *nadru* and *kaanul saag* of home. He said, 'The air and water...they make a big difference too. Even the fish and meat there tastes like grass. Even the water here is sweet...'

'Tej Bhaiya, this is the frog in the well in you that is speaking up. Science has shrunk the whole world. People are traveling to other planets. And you are still stuck in your age-old love of your land and home.'

Amarnath's Loka is an engineer in Bangalore in HMT. He also has a fund of bittersweet experiences. He disagreed with Shamu, 'You might travel around the world Shamu, but you do feel like an alien in the big cities. You can't live without the memory of home. That has been my experience. I have a good job there for sure. There are chances for growth too. But do you know the kinds of questions I have to answer? In my own country too?! It is not even as if I am abroad.'

Loka's voice fell with the memory of humiliation, 'I was asked in the interview itself why I came from Kashmir to Bangalore to work?'

'They do ask...' agreed Avatara.

'But the questions they ask along with that, I found them most insulting. The Chairman said that the Indian government does so much for you, special incentives, loans etc. Even then no Indian can buy land and settle down here. When

you all have separated yourself then why do you expect to settle down anywhere in India and find good jobs?'

Loka's face grew dark.

'We will have to bear barbs about the political and economic scenario,' Teja's tone was despondent.

'But such questions, don't they make you feel awful? As if you belong neither here nor there?'

'Forget it Loke, why are you getting so worked up? Once you go out you might have to listen to such remarks anywhere. Don't the people who go to America or England have to face all this?'

'But India is our own country, isn't it?' Loka refused to be pacified, 'Actually, we are like nomads. The people who became homeless during partition when Pakistan was made, at least they get some sympathy, but we are only the butt of anger. Every year so many engineers and doctors get degrees but how many of them can find employment in the Valley. We have to go elsewhere for work.'

'Who is making you homeless? Who is forcing you to go anywhere? Your own ambitions, isn't it?' Banta said wisely, 'Look at me, I earn well enough in my own house. I'm fine and have no problems. At least I have no daily complaints!'

'Ailan Gali lives in Banta!' Avatara smiled pointedly.

‘If you have no ambitions then it is better to become a mendicant. After studying for half your life and acquiring degrees, you can’t really be a shopkeeper after that!’

In the grip of a nameless frustration and helplessness, the boys had begun to needle and scrape each other for no reason. Shamu held a grudge because his father would not allow him to cross the seas. Even though Narendra Bhai had promised to fix him up somewhere in America. Shamu vents his frustration by calling his father old fashioned, and with a mind like a frog in a well.

Shamu had asked Master ji to plead his case. He had said to Shamu’s father, ‘Let the boy try out his fortune, Bhai!’ But his father could not muster up the courage for an experiment that was akin to axing his own foot. He had his own reasons. Shamu was his only child, his only hope in his old age. How could he experiment with his advancing years?

Shamu’s eyes were dazzled with dreams of a thousand lights. Looking at the trembling hands of his aging mother as she scrubbed vessels with ash and cooked rice on smoky, moist twigs, he felt a huge directionless anger well up in him. Seeing his old, ramshackle house in the gali with fading walls, he felt cruel towards those who lived in well appointed bungalows. He was seized with an acute distaste for his own society where people spent all their time in complaining about the problems of other’s and solving them

while they paid no attention to their own. He longed to breathe free in a place far away from this society so steeped in age old beliefs. Instead of poking his nose into the business of other people, he wanted to find meaning in living for himself. Education had also led to greater expectations. He did not want to eat *saag* and *bhat* morning and night and bow before Lord Shiva for a roof over his head and rough clothes on his body and express satisfaction like his parents. They appeared ignorant, poor and helpless to him. The pleasures concealed in the bags that others carried...why couldn’t Shamu have a share of those?

‘One hundred American dollars means eleven thousand rupees Bante. If I could go there somehow and if I sent Babba even four hundred dollars in a year or six months we could bid goodbye to the poverty of seven generations...’

‘But your Babba has never asked you for money, Shamu Bhaiya.’

‘Yes, never. Whenever I speak of money, he trots out the tired, deaf argument, ‘Money is fine beta, but it cannot stroke the bones of an old man. It cannot put two drops of water from the Ganga in the mouth of a thirsty man. You sons of Brahmins have begun to think like traders...’

Shamu’s father reflected the average attitude. Familiar and tired... they all fell silent. Revolt was brewing within Shamu, ‘Actually, Babba hates the sound of Narendra’s name. He says, how will

that Narendra show you the way, he is lost himself. He has married a second time after settling in America. His wife and children are suffering here...'

'Now, tell me who can tell him that he has no right to interfere in his personal life. He must have had his reasons. He is still fulfilling his duty. Every few months he sends a generous cheque-does that count for nothing! His children study in convent schools and eat butter and ghee! If Narendra had stayed here, would that have been possible? But if you say that to Babba, he has a ready reply, 'Can the money give his wife the love of a husband and his son Nika the love of a father?' It is only because old Jiya and Guni are still alive that they are carrying on. Only God is their saviour after they are gone,' He feels that boys want to shirk responsibility and roam around like stud bulls...but is that really how it is?'

The elders rue the murmurings among the young people. They think that the boys are wrapped up in themselves. But the boys are rebelling against this disapproval, 'Heaven knows what they want from us?' This question feels like acid on their sensitive skins and even as they know the answer, they can't bring themselves to agree.

'Why must we live in this old fashioned way? Will there be no change when you move from darkness to light? Will there be no change in attitudes?'

The boys want to find themselves

in new contexts and chart new paths. Shamu has a grouse, 'If you remain tied to your parents' strings, you will always have to stifle your own desires. You might like to call it adjustment. Can the difference between generations ever be bridged?'

Shamu's forehead showed lines of tension as he spoke. His voice broke repeatedly with emotion. All the boys felt this tension in one way or another. But today's picnic was not the place to raise these eternal questions.

Chandan was relatively quiet. He had nearly completed his PhD thesis as he worked in College. His hazel eyes sparkled with determination. Seeing his ability and application, Master ji had often wished for better facilities for him. He could go for a year or two to a good university to learn new techniques. But Chandan himself refused to go elsewhere.

'If I were in Chandan's place, I would have gone with my eyes shut.' This was obviously Shamu's comment, 'What improvement is he hoping for here? He is ruining his future.'

But Chandan did not feel this way. If he harboured no great hopes for the future, he certainly hoped for some improvement and he wanted to begin at home.

But all of them cannot be like Chandan. Their experiences were different. A deluge of difficult experiences in his formative years had made him reflective and serious. The history of his brother's

suicide and his sister's insanity were like a shattered full length mirror in which he could see the many faces of life at once. His heart was full of compassion. Perhaps that helped him be sympathetic to the shattered world of his father's ambitions which had made him such an implacable disciplinarian. Chandan had also been influenced by Gandhism from his childhood. He would say, 'When my own land will be too small for my capabilities, I will go and explore the whole world. Right now, I'm fine here.'

Not just Avatara, all his friends were impressed by Chandan. Seeing his efforts to rise above his limitations even as he stayed within them and the ability to see the brighter side of things brought the lines of the poet Mahzoor to mind,

*Valo Ha Bagbano, Nav Baharuk
Shaan Paida Kar.*

*Pholan Gul, Guth Karan Bulbul, Tithi
Samaan Paida Kar.*

(Gardener, come bring the glory of the new spring in the garden. Create to let the flowers bloom, the bulbuls sing.)

It was evening by the time they got back home. Darkness fell in delicate strands on the wavelets of the Dal Lake. The glow of the mercury tubes on the boulevard brought their trembling uncertainty into focus. The wind carried the chill of the snow peaks. The group, laden with bags, stood in silence at the bus stop. Suddenly Shamu touched

Avatara's shoulder and said in a quivering voice, 'Avatar Bhaiya, can't you do anything for me over there?'

The tears in his voice shocked Avatara. Had there been bitterness like before, it could have been ignored. Banta might have even mocked him, 'If Shamu leaves home and goes anywhere, he is sure to come back as Einstein, Archimedes, or at least Plato-Socrates. What can he do, poor soul, there is no 'scope' here...'

But Banta was also sobered by his tone. Shamu was obviously deeply disturbed by something. Or he had grown so large that a perfectly nice house looked like a hen coop to him where he couldn't draw himself to his full height.

'Do something for him, Yaar. He will also get to see life elsewhere. He will be satisfied then. Traveling widens your experience...'

Karima threw these words over his shoulder and ran towards the advancing bus. He had begun trading in shawls. He had wasted a year or two in agricultural training and left midway. He was not really inclined to study. His father had assessed his capabilities and suggested trade in shawls and this had agreed with Karima. He was making a tidy profit.

He could tell the difference between Amla and Kani shawls. He could tell you stories about the famous 'ring shawls'- which could be passed through a ring and were known since the Mughal period. He understood the intricacies of chhabhi,

chikan, doori, eerma and amli embroideries and point them out to you but could not comprehend the fine differences in matters of the heart. He was busy with calculations of profit and loss in his business and rarely had a chance to fly a kite in another direction. His expectations were limited to his business. He traveled two or three months in the year to distant states for his work. This was necessary to keep it profitable. But he was like a bird on a ship which soars afar but is eager to head back to the ship.

Perhaps Avatara, Loka and Teja were also like this who were forced to be far afield because of their jobs. They had to migrate because of their livelihood even as their hearts were often in and around the gali.

But migration had also become the truth of life because it had expanded their minds. The curiosity to see and know a larger world was also much stronger in them.

The sharp mix of curiosity, struggle and the pulls of trying to fit themselves in an alien environment did create tension but they were also eager to test their capabilities. It was also true that many young men were quite happy to stay in the gali. When the elders sighed warmly and said, 'Look at the times! Life is cheaper than rice,' then the young men who stayed behind would concur, 'Poor fellow! He is putting up with so much hardship just for two square meals...'

Some of the young men had been forced by circumstances while the others had left the gali of their own will. But even they could not free themselves of their attachment to the gali.

You could understand why a frog in a well was upset to see the expanse of the sky of expectations but if you had run away because you were not satisfied and still looked back constantly, how do you explain that?.

But there was a reason for sure. Like fragrance permeating a flower, like the red hue of henna hiding in the green leaves.

The day Avatara left for Bombay, many friends and elders from the family and neighbourhood with moist eyes and loving advice came to bid him farewell at the tourist reception centre.

Among the cadences of blessings, wishes for his long life and strong emotion, Avatara thought about the tug of his gali. What was it about these people who had lived their lives in unquestioning allegiance to tradition that even as you disagreed with them about so much and ran, something pulled you towards them?

An orchestra of voices rang in Avatara's ears. Many voices calling out, advising caution as his foot slipped. Entreating voices to keep himself whole and above all, Anwar Miyaan's old man's quaver, 'Never forget the feelings from your land, children ! Your land is your mother. Just like you can never repay the debt of your parents, you cannot

repay the debt to your land.'

After the impressive tooting of a horn and the revving of the engine when the bus stayed put, the passengers peered out sensing trouble. Near Avatara's window, a lunatic swathed in a blanket from head to foot, leaned against the bus and sang, '*Kalhan Gani Te Sarfi, Sairab Kari Yami Aban, Suy Ab Sanya Bapath, Jehre Hilal Astha?*

(The water of the land which nurtured learned men like Kalhan, Gani and Sarfi,

will that water turn to poison for us?)

Avatara recognised the voice and he looked out. Oh, it was Bhoota alias Lambodar Prasad Kakpori. For some reason, emotion welled up in Avatara and he felt his throat constrict. His neighbour in the city did not know him till now though he had lived there for many years, but Bhoota from his gali...not only did he know him, but had knocked on the doors of his mind with a flurry of questions.

Chandrakanta, born 1938 in Srinagar, is a Vyas Samman laureate who is known for portrayal of Kashmir in its varied shades and states. Her major books are: 'Ailan Gali Zinda hai', 'katha satisar', 'mere bhojpatra', 'abbu ne kaha tha' and 'antim sakshya'. She lives in Gurgaon, Haryana.

Manisha Choudhary, has translated short stories, novels and documents for various publishing houses and organisations in both Hindi and English. She lives in Delhi.

RAKESH PANDEY IN CONVERSATION WITH ABHIMANYU ANAT

Translated by
Ravindra Narayan Mishra

Abhimanyu Anat: This is our fortune that in our country one gets opportunity to learn English, Hindi, French and other languages. French has been my very favorite language. French has a very rich literature. I get opportunity to meet and also to read the littérature of those languages. I always start with the assumption that literature can't be written in the language learnt in school. It can only be written in the language that flows in the veins of the writer. Hindi was flowing in my veins. Therefore I had no option. Although I worked as a journalist, as a columnist of the best selling magazine in English for twenty five – thirty years yet when it came to creative writing like composing poems or writing story, drama and novels I had no option except to writing in Hindi.

Rakesh Pandey: You have written in different genres. Among all these which one you feel closer to?

Abhimanyu Anat: See, I have made interventions in all the genres but I look at myself as a novelist because till now I have published 35 novels. One thing more, story is the most difficult genre for me because one has to say what one wants within a limited frame and canvas. I consider it a difficult work. On the other hand a novel is like a stream. While writing it every author derives pleasure. While writing the author lives with his characters and shares their pain and pleasure. Poetry is purely a matter of heart. When there is a churning within, one experiences oppression or pain and one wonders why it is like this, then poetry flows.

Therefore poetry is more entwined with pain. Similarly almost my seven books of drama have come. This is a genre different from all these in which the author finds himself face to face with his characters, has dialogue with them. When his characters represent his works and the audience watches and listens it seems that conversation is taking place among audience, reader and the author.

Rakesh Pandey : Lal- Pasina Girmitiya is the saga of worker's struggle. Actually it won't be an exaggeration to say that it has become a synonym of your introduction. Where do you place Lal- Pasina closer to reality or imagination?

Abhimanyu Anat: Lal Pasina is my best novel according to my readers I also give it more importance. But I have written one more book- 'Lehron Ki Beti'. That is my most favourite book and I feel that is the most powerful novel I have written. This is not only my opinion. When we were going to Trinidad to attend World Hindi Conference Pandit Vidyanivas jee was also with me. He gave this comment that you have written this unique novel. I don't think that any author of any language in India has portrayed the inner and outer life of sea like this. In this novel I have tried to show that however vulnerable a woman may appear from outside her inner strength is much more than any male. Its main character, Mirdula proves this. The other thing is that Lal- Pasina is a triple story. It is an excellent novel

of its kind. I believe that Kamleshwar jee played a big role in making it famous. Kamleshwar had published it in 'Sarika' serially. Not only this, that novel had a great fortune. When later on Sarika started getting published from Delhi Nandan jee and Mudgal jee together had published it. A unique thing happened with the second part 'Gandhi jee Bole The' also. Those days Sheela Jhunjhunwala used to be the editor of Saptahik Hindustan. For the first time in the history of that magazine the whole issue was devoted to a novel. This issue of the magazine contained nothing except my novel. This way all the three parts of Lal Pasina became much talked about. It was because those days these magazines used to penetrate vast areas. But Lehron Ki Beti was deprived of this facility. I hold even today that Lal Pasina is a classic, an immortal saga of the struggle of the Indians. This is true and it gives me pleasure. But I have written on the inner strength of women. I was afraid whether I would be able to do justice to it or not. But today I am happy that I invented a character like Mirdula. It gives me pleasure to say that the French translation of Lal Pasina added a new dimension to it. A French writer lived in Mauritius for two months to complete the translation. Nobel Laureate Jean – Mary Leximo declared it as an immortal work in the introduction to the translation.

Rakesh Pandey: Is it also true that the characters of Lal Pasina are characters of your life as well?

Abhimanyu Anat: Among the characters of Lal Pasina the main character is Kishan Singh. Kishan Singh was my maternal uncle. From my own conversation I gathered inspiration and information that was not an indentured labour. He was a revolutionary in Uttarpradesh. When the revolutionaries were being sent to Andaman – Nicobar there being not enough space some prisoners were sent to Mauritius. My maternal uncle was among them. The story of struggle of my maternal uncle starts from here. As I have stated earlier I have based this novel on the story of my fellow workers and the story of my maternal uncle. Although I never saw my maternal uncle but as my mother said my maternal uncle was voice of all those workers on whom whips were rained, who had to suffer oppression. This is reality. But to underline facts I have taken help of imagination as well. This is also required to give place to beauty. So far as this question is concerned whether it contains more of reality or imagination I have to say that it contains both in equal proportion. I have taken in to account this thing. It contains the oppressions of my maternal uncle and his fellow workers and then I have put imagination also in equal proportion. These days nobody reads history because it is highly bland. But when I blended history with imagination and presented it, many editions of this novel have come out. In spite of that I begin with this assumption that my female characters

do not claim but still they do not let their dignity be tarnished.

Rakesh Pandey: This is true that you have written numerous books, you have enriched literature. But why it is that you have to write time and again. Do you want to convey some message to the readers and you miss them. This makes you come out with a new work. Do you agree with this?

Abhimanyu Anat: I do not agree. I have never been a messenger. If I had to give message I would have been a messenger. I have been performing the tradition of always asking question, which is the tradition of Nachiketa. Had Arjun not asked questions to Krishna Geeta would not have been written. It means that in my writings I ask questions from society- why this situation is like this? Whatever impediments are there whether they are social, political, economic or religious why they are there? Why labor is labor even today? Those who were well off why are they becoming even more well off? These days many voices are being raised in support of women but what freedom have we given to women? We Indians had a tradition of keeping women ahead. Our English friends speak of Romeo and Juliet. They keep men ahead and then women follow. But in our country we say Sita-Ram, Radhe-Krishna, Uma- Shankar and we had the tradition of giving importance to women. Why that tradition has been broken today? I ask this question. My writings say it forcefully.

Rakesh Pandey: World Hindi Conference has become a tradition. What would you like to say about world Hindi conference, what are your suggestions?

Abhimanyu Anat: I am not against such functions. But I only raise questions. What is the contribution of the eight world Hindi conferences organized so far? The other question is whether the achievement of Hindi conference is in terms of entertainment. Had any one said that the condition of Hindi has climbed from third stairs to twelfth stairs it would have given me satisfaction. But I feel after every Hindi Conference Hindi climbs down one stair. This is my sorrow, this is my agony. This is why I don't want to participate in Hindi conferences. Last time also I got the opportunity but I did not go. Because I know there would be speeches, high sounding words would be said but nothing concrete would come out. Just now I asked the journalists in the Bharat Bhavan when leaders from Russia, Japan, America, England, France come do they talk in Hindi or English? Recently French leaders had come to your country did they speak Hindi? No, they all talk in their own languages that are translated. But in our country the leaders don't do like this. I have complaints against Hindi cinema artists as well. Their kids are brought up on earnings from Hindi but when journalists ask them questions in Hindi they answer in English. This way we are trampling Hindi. In such a situation what is the relevance of Hindi Conference? I believe

this is useless expenditure of money.

Rakesh Pandey: Does the young generation of Mauritius also have inclination towards Hindi literature?

Abhimanyu Anat: Inclination can be generated. If it is there what would you do? I know one such person who goes to Mauritius as Indian representative and says I don't know Hindi, I have n't read Hindi books. He has said even what you would do by wasting time on Hindi. What assistance this representative would give us for promotion of Hindi as the French embassy does for the French speaking people. Can't Indian government also give such assistance? There are so many things, many issues. If one dwells upon them the whole night would be consumed.

Rakesh Pandey: I have seen your serial broadcast by Mauritius broadcasting corporation also. How did you foray into making serials from writing?

Abhimanyu Anat: We will have to keep pace with time. These days the universe of media and television is expanding. I don't say that people should stop writing because media and television can't survive without writing. Because they need word power they need poetry and drama. I don't see any danger to writing. But surely we can reach great distance through these mediums of communication. For example only two hundred people read my story when it came in book form, but when it comes

in the form of serial on television more than half residents of Mauritius watch. This is why from your place these serials are being made. The fact is if we have this scientific achievement then why not benefit from it. My purpose is not to enamor my story with it but to bring issues more to the notice of people which they otherwise fail to do. Time and again I tell people nose is so close to our eyes that we don't see it. To see it we have to go near a mirror. I am showing the serial to people like mirror and people are watching.

Rakesh Pandey: I will tell you one thing more and this comment I hear time and again from the people of Mauritius as well that you are known more as an Indian author than one of Mauritius.

Abhimanyu Anant: Our ancestors have left many phrases for us one of those phrases is pravasi. Then it is natural. People used to say about Tulsidas that he is writing in rustic language. Even Shakespeare had faced rejection and people had not spared even Kalidas and had said he should cut grass. These things have been there but if writers do not face such impediments what would they write. To me it is a matter of encouragement. Acceptance makes us proud. What I understand is that by comparing India and Pakistan if it is said that I am read more in India than in Mauritius then there is only one reason and that is what I have said time and again that I am a citizen of two countries.

Mauritius is my birth place while India is my cultural land. If my birth place could not give me so much importance it is because of its own constraints. But it is my fortune that the land of my culture knows me more than Mauritius. The readers from India respect me more than the readers from Mauritius. I have got my identity because of readers from India, I bow before them.

Rakesh Pandey: Who are the Indian authors who have influenced you?

Abhimanyu Anant: I have been influenced by many authors from India and it has been my fortune that I had occasion to rub shoulders with them. The list includes Nagarjee, Agyeya jee, Bharati jee Kamleshwar and Dinkar jee. There are people whom I met or didn't meet like Muktibodh I never met. But I have read them, appreciated them. Yes, I would admit that I have been more influenced by Sharad Babu. I had read his books within four months. Those days I was between 15 to 18 years of age. That is why I respect them even now. Among the people I have found closer to my heart they belong to Latin American literature. For example the poems of Octavio Paz seem to be Indian or Mauritian poems. Garcia Marquez who is a Nobel laureate and author of 'Hundred years of Solitude' and 'Love in the times of Cholera' is a great author. It seems that these writers are talking about you, your society and culture.

Their ideas seem to be so close to us. I have intimately known French

authors also. I have read a lot of French literature.

Rakesh Pandey: What suggestions would you give to enrich the Indian and Mauritian literature.

Abhimanyu Anat: As I have already said I do not give messages. What I have to do I have been doing. Indian culture and literature are our

identity. No body can survive without it. In the same way I think of Mauritius. They may wallow in riches and allurements but India would continue to flow in their veins. The Ganga and Yamuna would continue to flow. The dignity of the Himalayas would continue and our literature would continue to be enriched.

Courtesy : ICCR

Abhimanyu Anat : born 1937 at Triole, he is the most prominent Hindi author in Mauritius. Has been president of creative and publication deptt. of Mahatma Gandhi Sansthan and edited the journal 'Vasant' for 20 years. Has published more than 60 books. His most famous novel 'lal pasina' has been translated into many Indian and foreign languages. Lives in Mauritius.

Rakesh Pande : edits a magazine 'pravasi sansar' from Delhi. Widely travelled journalist who has his own publishing establishment. Lives in Delhi.

HEAD ON ENCOUNTER WITH QUESTIONS OF OUR TIME: SWAYAM PRAKASH

Pallav

Translated by
Satya Chaitanya

It has not been many days since writers used to seek out reasons for not writing. In those days, it was a matter of prestige for writers that they wrote just two or three short stories in a year. And the greatest virtue of a short story was that it was a short story. Other kinds of writing were of course irritants, mere nuisances.

It is good that this state of affairs did not last for many days. The newly emerged People's Movement once again joined writers with the life of the common man. Ramesh Upadhyay, Sanjeev, Swayam Prakash, Pankaj Bisht, Asgar Vajahat and Uday Prakash were writers for whom writing was not a pastime but social work. That is the reason why these people did not confine themselves to gaining popularity by writing short stories and novels, but found it necessary to write plays, street plays, sketches, essays and translations and do editing... meaning, they felt that they should do everything that would destroy existing social perversions.

Swayam Prakash who began his writing with *Ek Kahanikar Ki Notebook* [The Notebook of a Storyteller] is pre-eminent among those writers who ceaselessly wrote on several issues central to life. After *Doosra Pahu* [The Other Side] and *Rangshala Mein Ek Dopahar* [One Afternoon at the Theatre], this is his third collection of essays, which has recently come out from Antika Publications.

Swayam Prakash is one of those rare storytellers of his generation

who has gained the singular affection of his readers. It is his social commitments that stopped him from the luxury of becoming a pure short story writer, and he has written in some seven or eight different genres. It is this commitment that makes him a people's writer. In his essays he encounters head on with the same questions that made him restless and forced him to write novels and short stories.

We may call these writings essays for our convenience, but their conversational nature and small size make them technically different in form from essays. He has written here on topics related to culture, religion, art, TV, literature, children, language and the market. And along with that, he has also included here ten pieces from the column Prasangvash [By the Way] that he writes for the quarterly Sambodhan. The essays written about his own writing process and characters give us an opportunity to know and understand the writer from close by.

His assessment of contemporary social and cultural events begins with such sensitive but essential questions as the ones about understanding culture. In 'The Place of Thought in Culture' Swayam Prakash asks questions about the basic tenets of our culture. He refuses to accept the existence of any single 'Indian culture' in an India filled with diversity and contradictions. And then, searching for the place of thought in this culture, he asks why cultural events always begin

with the staging of the performing arts. He writes, "There is very little chance for clash of opinions in the performing arts. The main thing there is enjoyment. It is pleasure. We need a community of aesthetes.

The arts are entertainment. You do not have to think much. For this reason, the performing arts have stopped in the middle ages."

He speaks of new forms of terror and oppression in the name of culture. "Civilized societies respect differences of opinion and consider it as a sign of mental health and intellectual freedom. The absence of differences of opinion is an indication of regimentation, suppression and autocracy. It is possible that you see the sky as blue; but it is also possible that a child sees it as green, like the water in a lake. Will you then punish the child?" he asks.

Further ahead in two or three essays he has discussed from different points such subjects as the need for religion and atheism. Here he gets into a debate with the advocates of Hinduism and those who consider atheism as blasphemy. Look at the beginning of 'Where are the Hindu Well-wishers?' He says: "Those who speak of Hindu interests should not be considered as inferior, contemptible or confused, nor should they be rejected. Eighty percent of the population of this country is Hindu. Meaning, those who speak of the good of the Hindus are speaking of the good of the majority

of the population of this country. If any individual or organization makes the life of eighty crore people even a little better, then they are doing work that is of historical importance.”

Without discussing the real ambitions of Hindu organizations, Swayam Prakash, one by one brings up for debating such topics as the filth in temples, the poor condition of rivers considered sacred, authentic recensions of religious texts, dowry, prostitution, women's liberation and untouchability and then asks, “Now let Hindus think this over: How many of these works have their organizations, the heads of the maths, the mahants, sants and Hindu well-wishers done, or plan to do. Are they really serious about the interests of the Hindus? Or are they playing the politics of Muslim hatred in the name of Hindus?”

It is a matter of fact that we will not be able to make the masses understand their real nature by merely calling them communal. That is why Swayam Prakash searches for solid reasons. It is his guilelessness and integrity that he does not take recourse to popular political idioms. Secular democracy cannot mean that no one can speak about the religion of the majority. Or that believers of religions should be left to the care of pundits and mullahs. That is the reason why he feels compelled to talk about atheism.

At the political level this is an uncomfortable question because in a

country where slogans such as ‘Victory to Dharma, Death to Adharma’ are chanted and where atheism is interpreted as adharna, and in fact even as blasphemy, it is very challenging to talk about atheism. Swayam Prakash writes, “In fact, faulty religion is engendered by our interpreting myths and Puranas wrongly. And today even in history there is this strong tendency to misrepresent myths . What the atheist has to say is based on proofs and logic, which theists too find acceptable. But what he says is so totally against traditional thinking that when the theist hears it, he feels hurt and finds it difficult to accept. Those who are in the profession of selling religion, for this reason, throw their arms up in the air in advance and say that this is not a matter for argument but one of faith. They tell their devotees even this—that even if you merely listen to such matters you accrue sin. Meaning, accept whatever we say, and don't think.”

Here he describes the processes of man's search for God and of his founding religions based on it and discusses those leaders of modern times who were atheists. His conclusion is: “In fact, after Marx, Darwin, Freud, and Einstein, the world did not remain the same as it was before them. These people changed the thinking of the world. There is no reason why we should look down upon atheism or use the word atheist as a dirty word. That is also one way of thinking. In fact, that is a more logical and scientific way of thinking.”

The market has been accepted as the greatest villain of our times. With the process of liberalization that began in 1991, the things that have been most abused, along with communalism and casteism [in fact, even before these], is the market. Don't we have any need for commerce then? History tells us that our Hindi language was born through market needs. And how many good things haven't the market done? Why then this condemnation? Swayam Prakash writes: "The job of the market is to buy and sell, and not controlling production or consumption... In brief, commercialization is people becoming animals for the sake of profit, and literature is against this. For this reason, in the eyes of ordinary people too, the market has become the villain."

Prior to this, he also makes a profound interpretation of commercialization. He says: "Commercialization is defiling the sanctity, the joy and purity, and the wholesomeness of everything and transforming each thing into a marketable good." Then, in his next two essays entitled "The Arrival of Democracy in the Arts" and "Is Remix the Death of Music", he analyses the evil cultural impact of this commercialization.

Instead of taking the easy course of blaming the market, he goes deeper in the essay written on the disappearance of poetry from the stage. According to him, "The greatest blame for this lies with the bigotry of Hindi poets who have given over the stage to third grade and

fourth grade poets, considering it something beneath their own dignity. They did not care for the Hindi speaking people. They were not in fact writing for people. I do not know for whom they were writing. But they certainly were not writing for the Hindi speaking people."

In the same way he tells "thinkers" who consider themselves relieved of their responsibility once they have criticized the TV: "If by blaming and cursing alone things will turn out all right, then it is a different matter. But one thing is certain. This thing that has come, this thing called television, it hasn't come to go away. And you will not be able to stop the internet either." He adds further : "Children's IQs are not lower than ours; in fact they must be higher. And they are watching. And they are watching us more than they watch the TV. Watching our behaviour. And the moment they reach maturity, they will analyse this and they will internalize culture. TV cannot ruin anything for them, provided there is good understanding between you and them, provided there is friendship between you and them. [TV and Children]."

Swayam Prakash could be seen to be stressing on purity of conduct everywhere in the book. This is his openness; and this is a healthy thing—and this has added credits to the leftist movement. In our Indian society filled with myths and beliefs, your conduct is still of great value, losing which it

is impossible to go ahead far.

There are a few essays on literature in the book, and the very first one is on plays. The title is: "Where Have Hindi Plays Gone?" Holding National School of Drama most responsible for the sad state of Hindi theatre, Swayam Prakash writes: "What was wrong with this plan was that it was thought that there was nothing to be learnt from folk, amateur, professional and traditional theatre artistes from across the nation—instead, they were all to be taught everything. And even if some things were found good in them, those things could be taken from them as suited one's convenience, without acknowledging any gratitude to them. The state of the theatre all over the country will be decided by Delhi alone! A totally colonialist mental attitude!" One could agree with Swayam Prakash's analysis, or one could disagree with it; but it is absolutely essential that we enquire into the truth of the theatre's argument that there are no Hindi plays available, even when scores of Hindi plays are published every year. Swayam Prakash also discusses in his essays the fundamental difference between a playwright and a director and says that it is in response to all this that street plays and the collaborative writing of them came into being.

Writing about the disappearing genres of Hindi literature, his greatest worry is about the disappearance of letter writing that is happening now. Letters are our most spontaneous means of

expression, and if letter writing disappears, what will be the state of our expression, he asks. It is essential that people express themselves so that they do not end up as unthinking citizens.

Swayam Prakash expresses his thoughts about children and children's literature in two separate essays further on. Here again what he lays emphasis on is character: "This is not the generation of followers, but of adventurers. I have nothing with me to give them apart from yellowing old books of memories and ceremonies filled with inhuman stupidities."

One big reason behind Swayam Prakash's popularity and wide acceptance is his happy art of storytelling. Here, writing about his own writing process, he uses this storytelling art of his and gives his readers an opportunity to dive deep into the author through articles such as "My characters and I," "How a Story is Born" and "Guru Barma, Buru Sharma."

Swayam Prakash is not one of those writers who does not speak about his writing or about his genre. He also talks freely about his contemporaries and where he feels it necessary, frankly criticises them. As a matter of fact, his principles are very clear to him and compromising on them is not acceptable to him. Writers hypocritically occupied with self-praise frequently immerse themselves in pulling other people's legs. But writers like Swayam Prakash appear

to be searching for the power of his own creativity in his contemporaries.

But it is not true that this generosity of his is always maintained. One section of the book consists of Swayam Prakash's comments in 'Prasangvash'. In the article 'Baat Niklegi to,' he observes confusions and narrowness in Dalit literature. In reality, this should be considered a self-contradiction in the perspectives of a traditional leftist writer who by stretching arguments such as 'Only a Dalit Can Create Dalit Writing' reaches so far as to say what he says in 'Remove Muslims from India'. It is true that the tool of literature should ultimately be literary, but how can we deny that before dalit criticism came into being, dalit creativity was not visible to anyone?

Some other articles in this column [Prasangvash] are must reads. In his "Have writers Associations Become Redundant" he says emphatically that associations save creativity, art and writing from turning useless, commercial and anti-people. Similarly the definition he gives of the Premchand tradition is not only useful but also worthy of emulation. "To join the tradition of Premchand is not only to become a realist,

but also a humanist and a modernist; it is also to become scientific and to turn away from narrow-mindedness. It is to be transformed totally."

The short story is Swayam Prakash's genre and he loves talking about short stories. In the book there are three or four articles on short stories. In these, he not only presents to us the rich picture of the contemporary short story, but also points out its weaknesses where he sees them.

Reading the whole book is a rich experience that not only gives the reader insights but also endows him with the power to rebel. Swayam Prakash finds the thoughtlessness arising from commercialization the reason for his greatest worry and he encounters it forthwith. In this encounter he takes the risk of searching for those routes that do not pass through the market. It could be said that the desire to educate people is frequently seen in these essays—but that should on no account be treated as a weakness. When thousands of books like *Jeet Apki* and *Who Moved My Cheese* teach us to love the bloody hands of the market, someone should also give us the wisdom to understand the market.

Book reviewed: Ek Kahanikar ki Notebook se [From the Notebook of a Storyteller]: Swayam Prakash; Essays, 2010; Antika Publications, Ghaziabad.

Pallav, a young literary critic, is a lecturer in Hindi at Hindu College, University of Delhi. Prior to this, he was in Rajasthan.

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

EK KOI THA / KAHIN NAHIN - SA— MEERAKANT'S SILHOUETTE OF KASHMIR

Meenakshi Khar

Meera Kant's powerful, deeply researched, and reminiscent work comes at an unfortunate point in time in Kashmir's history. Meera Kant, a contemporary litterateur, has very delicately darned (*rafooed*) the frayed edges of the *Phiran* by interspersing the disturbing events of the last couple of decades with an authentic Kashmiri voice.

The characters in her novel, *Ek koi tha / kahin nahin-sa* are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of the strife ridden valley. Since 1930, Meera has followed Shabari and Ambarnath through those once bubbling lanes of Habba Kadal to the hearts of those who suffered at the hands of the social irregularities. Throughout the three chapters of Kashmir's by lanes the author, has painted the eternal sufferings of women, who on one hand are seen as representing the honour of the social structure, and on the other, being stripped of the same honour at the hands of the 'custodians' of the society.

The angst, sacrifice and aspirations for kashmiriyat of reformists like Kashyap Bandhu and Ambarnath in the first phase 'social reform zindabad' kindles a lamp in the pathway of Shabari's efforts towards the education of young girls. The Yatra of Shabari, one of the central character, along with many others from one phase of suffering to another forms a continuum of lament. She becomes victim of typical biases against women— orphaned when she was a small child, she underwent the agony of being ill treated by her sister-in-law and later was married to an old widower with grand children. The details of her suffering as a child, young girl and later as

a widow is a touching account and Meera Kant has presented it very close to reality. Shabari's brother Ambarnath with his revolutionary vision saves her from further humiliation and pain and involves her in the reformist activities.

With nimble fingers Meera Kant has woven the fascinating songs portraying the social background and reforms initiated by Kashyap Bandhu into her tale. Interestingly, songs like these have been beautifully translated in Hindi keeping the nuance intact. Her research also brings out interesting historical facts like, how Pandit Narayan Das came up with the first two-storied houseboat, 'Victory' in 1918.

As the novel progresses and enters the second phase, *Barf ka ghar*, the struggle of reformists intensifies and strikes jarring notes. The author also brings attention to the economic strife of the grief stricken Kashmir, which, post independence, was trying to find its feet. The young and old were looking for occupations and in the search stepping outside the boundaries of the dale. The death of Kedarnath, Ambarnath, other reformist leaders and exodus of pundits and finally Shabari shifts a part of Kashmir to other parts of the country. The heart rending geographical rehabilitation process has been described with a sprinkle of little incidents now and then. The entire social spread is stained with the blood of innocents. Meera has in a very sensitive manner written about the emotions that grate the inner soul of

those who had to leave, who were never ever really able to rehabilitate completely. The incidents of dogs ripping apart new born babies, rare metaphors of loss of identity, frustration and above all hopeless future.

The third part of the novel—*Chautha Chinar*, accompanies Jaya (Shabari's grand daughter) to revisit Kashmir. Her heart skips a beat at *Char Chinari* when she sees one *chinar* missing. It dawns on Jaya, that this fourth *chinar* is rooted in the hearts of those who are not in Kashmir anymore, who live elsewhere with this heaviness as a part of their soul. An integral part of char chinari has been uprooted—however ironically, it still goes on to be known as Char Chinar.

Meera Kant's novel, *Ek koi tha / kahin nahin-sa*, brings out the similarity between those who were left behind in the valley and those who have come out and are trying to build a life. Their pain of not being able to arrive. Those who had to leave are living a life in a diaspora and those left behind are forced to live in the constant fear of terrorism. Those in the camps, ironically have to be identified by a c/o Refugee Camp ... address in their own country, and those, who are still in the valley, are looking for their lost kith and kin through organizations like, 'Association of Disappeared Persons'. It is ironic that a place which reminded of heaven on earth seethes with anguish and pain of human lives.

The illustrative power of the author illuminates the shadow that cannot be seen but exists— *Ek koi tha / kahin*

nahin-sa. This is not merely about Shabari but a silhouette of kashmiriyat.

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Meenakshi Khar, translates from Hindi as well as writes in both languages.
She lives in Gurgaon.

CONTRIBUTORS' ADDRESSES

1. **Manisha Chaudhari** : 87, Godavari Apartments, Alaknanda, New Delhi-110019.
2. **Chandrakanta** : House No.3020, Sector-23, Palam Vihar, Gurgaon-122017.
3. **Raju Sharma** : A-16, Teachers' Flats, St. Stephens College, Delhi University, Delhi.
4. **Ravinandan Sinha** : 202, Preeti Enclave, Chandni Chowk, Kanke Road, Ranchi-834008.
5. **Anil Sud** : A-23/6, DLF Phase-I, Gurgaon-122002.
6. **Shri Prakash Shukla** : 68, Rohit Nagar, Nariya, Varanasi-211005.
7. **Mannu Bhandari** : 103, Hauz Khas Apartments, New Delhi-110016.
8. **Jai Ratan** : C-12/14, DLF City, Phase-I, Gurgaon-122002.
9. **Dr. Namwar Singh** : 32, Shivalik Apartments, Alaknanda, New Delhi-110019.
10. **Bharat Bhardwaj** : 18-B, Una Enclave, Mayur Vihar-I, Delhi-110091.
11. **Ravindra N. Mishra** : A-26, Shakti Apartments, Sector-9, Rohini, Delhi-110085.
12. **Pawan Karan** : Savitri, 1-10, Site No.-1, City Centre, Gwalior-474002.
13. **Rashmi Bajaj** : 154, Vijay Nagar, Bhiwani, Haryana-127021
14. **Anamika** : D-II-83, Kidwai Nagar (W), New Delhi-110023.
15. **Arlene Zide** : arlene@yahoo.com
16. **Subhash Sharma** : D-71, Nivedita Kunj, R.K. Puram, Sector-10, New Delhi-110022.
17. **Shalini** : M-49, Ramkrishna Vihar, Plot-29, I.P. Extension, Delhi-110092.
18. **Deepa Agarwal** : D-123, Preet Vihar, Delhi-110092.
19. **Meenakshi Khar** : U40/13, DLF Phase-III, Gurgaon-122001.
20. **Chihiro Koiso** : Osaka University of Foreign Studies, 8-1-1, Aomatani-Ligashi, Minoh City, Osaka-562-8558, Japan.
21. **Sakata Teiji** : Tokushoku University, Japan.
22. **Satya Chaitanya** : 151, New Baradwari, Jamshedpur-831001.