

A Journal of
Mahatma Gandhi
Antarrashtriya
Hindi Vishwavidyalaya



Volume 5
January-March 2011

Editor
Mamta Kalia



Published by
Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University

Hindi : Language, Discourse, Writing

A Quarterly Journal of Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya

Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

Volume 5 Number 1 January-March 2011

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

© Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

No Material from this journal should be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the publishers.

The publishers or the editors need not necessarily agree with the views expressed in the contributions to the journal.

Editor : **Mamta Kalia**

Editorial Assistant : **Madhu Saxena**

Editorial Office :

C-60, Shivalik, I Floor, Malaviya Nagar

New Delhi-110 017

Phone : 41613875

Sales & Distribution Office :

Publication Department,

Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya

Hindi Vishwavidyalaya

Po. Box 16, Panchteela, Wardha - 442 001

Subscription Rates :

Single Issue : Rs. 100/-

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

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

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

Published By :

Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha

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

Printed at :

Ruchika Printers, 10295, Lane No. 1

West Gorakh Park, Shahdara, Delhi-110 032

2:: January-March 2011

हिन्दी



LANGUAGE
DISCOURSE
WRITING

January-March 2011

Contents

Heritage

Kahani Ka Plot	Shivpujan Sahay	7
Kunji	Shivpujan Sahay	13

Short story

Lapatein	Chitra Mudgal	17
Ma ka dama	Deepak Sharma	26
The Bhaiyya Express	Arun Prakash	30
The Rhythm of the Road	Susham Bedi	44

Drama

Summon the End	Meera Kant	55
----------------	------------	----

Poetry

Juhi Ki Kali	Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala'	106
Four Poems	Nagarjun	108
Seadusk	Nalin ViloChan Sharma	114
Four Poems	Pankaj Singh	115



Discourse

Hindi Renaissance And Modernism	Karmendu Shishir	120
Narrative of the Marginal	Devendra Chaubey	127

Language

Hindi in Fiji: Status and Future	Vimlesh Kanti Varma	138
The Tradition of Study and Research in Hindi in China	Chang Ching Khuey	144

Book Review

Creativity with Critical Vision	Ramesh Dave	148
cover Designe	Wazda Khan	

Editor's Note

If Jaipur was jam-packed in January due to the literary fest, Delhi was not lagging far behind. Penguin pampered Orhan Pamuk, the nobel winning author in a tête-a-tête at India Habitat Centre. Delhites thronged in large numbers. The main hall filled up in no time. Pamuk's books were sold at the book-counter like never before. Almost everyone bought a copy of his latest volume, 'The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist'. Pamuk read out certain pages from the book. It was an experience to watch the writer read his own words which acquired a glow and a warmth. Pamuk has a boyish charm and a handsome personality and speaks with timely pauses. Even his sore throat became a part of his presentation on that occasion. People listened with rapt attention and felt his magic influence. For once the writer was the hero of the day.

South India has a tradition of celebrating its writers and scholars. Tamilnadu has its poet's memorial erected at Kanyakumari in the middle of the sea like the statue of liberty. Thiruvalluvar the ancient saint poet holds his head high among rocks and resounding waves of the Arabian sea. As you move around you notice his words inscribed on the walls, you breathe learning. Thiruvalluvar has a scholarly neighbour in the vicinity, namely Swami Vivekanand. In Kerala Glory is imparted not only to the dead but also to the living. We went slightly off-route on our way to Jnanpith laureate ONV Kurup's residence in Thiruvananthapuram. We asked a passer by. He readily accompanied us to guide us through. The vast gathering of people at the Jnanpith award function and feast was ample proof of people's feelings for the famous poet. The study of Hindi language and literature is promoted passionately by tireless teachers and crusaders like Dr. Gopinathan, K.M. Malathy, Thankamoniamma, Jayamohan, P. Latha and many others in Kerala. They have acquired an expertise in Hindi and are equipped with information of Hindi's latest publications.

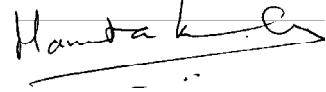
Hindi language and literature has a proud galaxy of scholars and authors who can be venerated in the same manner.

The current issue of Hindi showcases a few important milestones of literature.

Acharya Shivpujan Sahay carved a place for himself not merely by contributing to literary journalism but also to creative writing. We bring you two of his famous short stories. Nirala and Nagarjun are stalwart poets whose poems pose a challenge to the translator. We have attempted to translate both. The short story scenario is always vibrant with different strokes. Senior author Chitra Mudgal experiments with a bold social issue in her short story 'lapatein' whereas Deepak Sharma takes up a feminist stance in 'ma ka dama'. Feminist discourse is at the heart of much creative writing in Hindi as can be seen in Meerakant's one act play 'ant hazir too'. Susham Bedi's short story 'rhythm of the road' expresses dilemma of a marriageable daughter unable to break free of an attitude syndrome.

We always wish to know how Hindi fares in neighbouring countries and fortunately the response is encouraging in countries like China and Fiji. Dr. Ramesh Dave reviews three books of Prabhakar Shrotriya in his column. Younger poet Wazda Khan who is also a painter, has given us her painting for the cover this time. Her use of yellow brings to mind our amaltas or laburnum blossoms as also the icho trees of Osaka, Japan. Just when we were going to the press, we heard the news of a massive earthquake and tsunami havoc in Japan. The details of devastation are very disturbing and the sensitive soul wonders why this should happen to such a peaceful and pituresque place like Japan.

Contributions are invited on line at editor.hindi@gmail.com. Subscribers to note that those who will become members of our journal Hindi for two years, will get back issues of the last two years for free.



Visit **HINDI** on Internet: www.hindivishwa.org

6 :: January-March 2011



KAHANI KA PLOT

Shivpujan Sahay

Translated by
Mangal Murty

I am not a story writer. Nor do I have the talent for it. A story writer should naturally be an art connoisseur, and I am not even an art novice. But I have come across a 'plot' for gifted story writers, and hope they can erect an impressive structure on this 'plot'.

There is a small hamlet near my village. It has a very vulgar name. You will detest to hear it. An old Munshiji lived there— who is no longer in this world. His name also was peculiar— mixed up letters, with neither sound nor sense,— that is why I hesitate to reveal it to literary persons. Any way, he had a daughter, who is still alive. Her name? Don't ask; what use will it be to you. Nor will I disclose it. For the sake of convenience only, let's give her an imaginary name. Say, it's 'Bhagjogani'. As it all happened in a village, so a rustic name will be quite in order. Well, then, let's proceed further—

Munshiji's elder brother was a police inspector — in those days when the number of English-knowing persons was hardly as many as the number of people knowing the inner meaning of the holy scriptures nowadays. Only Urdu-knowing persons could get higher jobs. The amount of money the inspector sahib had earned on the basis of the rudimentary Urdu learnt from karima-khaliqbari costing hardly eight or ten paise, was far more than that earned by the lawyers today who have lapped up whole libraries in colleges and the courts. But whatever he earned, he burnt merrily as if to warm his hands. He left behind merely a mare which, though originally worth only

seven rupees, was more than a match even for the best Turkish breed— indeed, a real keg of gunpowder. Big shots among the British officers had their eyes on her, but he dodged them all. In fact, his promotion itself hung in balance on that account, but he never fell into their trap. And though, in every way, he was efficient, hard-working, honest, clever, brave and vigilant, yet he never rose above the rank of an inspector— for his sheer love of the mare.

But the mare also did not let him down. It repaid his love by providing for a marvellous funeral feast after his death. Had he sold the mare also, not a single Brahmin could have been fed in his funeral feast. Only thus was Munshiji able to repay his brother's largesse after selling the mare to a white officer for a handsome price. Many a ghee-lamp had he liberally burnt while his brother, the police inspector, lived. He would rub the best perfumes into the ganja he smoked— and the chillum would never go cold. A single meal would mean at least thirty two quails and fourteen chapattis. He would easily beat even his brother in courtesan deflowering ceremonies. They were annual events for him— these ceremonies.

But when the flood waters receded, it was all bare and barren. The death of his brother sent all his opulence up his arse. Not only the chillum, but even the kitchen went cold. The tongue which never tired of slurping quail-curry, was now compelled to sing the praises of gram-powder paste. The teeth that always

chewed chapattis soaked in ghee were now content with grinding gram only. People started saying—living on ill-gotten wealth of a police job and warming your hands on paddy straw are all the same.

The person who deflowered a fresh virgin courtesan every year was now treated with disdain by all and sundry. Even those who would rub palmfuls of Munshiji's perfumes on their clothes, found him longing for drops of mustard oil to soften his parched skin. Perhaps, there is no darning for the torn sheet of misfortune.

But behold the double stroke of bad luck! When his brother was alive, he was blessed with three or four sons, but they had all passed away. Poor fellow— when he was at the top of the world in life, none remained even to share a meal with him, and when his old age burdened his shoulders, he found both his legs caught in the morass of direst adversity, as a daughter was born to him, like an itch added to a leper. As if, already, the misfortune were no less abiding than his brother's beautiful mare!

To tell you the truth, it's a great folly to beget a daughter in this age of dowry. But what is the remedy against the norms of the age, in which infirm females themselves have become all important: in truth, man himself— poor creature— is being chased off by the all-powerful woman. So, why to blame poor Munshiji? When he feasted on ghee and relished costly spices, he brought forth sons only, but now this gram powder— how can

he produce sons with such miserable stuff. True it is— the grass of poverty growing on the grave of prosperity is extremely lethal.

Bhagjogni was born in his days of penury, and because the mother died in giving birth to her, everyone started calling her an orphan. But although she proved for the Munshiji an emblem of his misfortune, her beauty truly burnt like a lamp in his dark abode. Comeliness and charm of her kind had never been seen till then by anyone.

As it is and, as ill luck would have it, I had myself seen her radiant beauty. I had first seen her when she was only eleven or twelve. But, to tell you the truth, looking at her incomparable beauty set in her terrible poverty, my heart cried. Had some sentimental story writer or a sensitive poet seen her, a stream of commiseration would surely have oozed out of his pen. But my feeble pen doesn't have the strength to draw a true picture of her appalling poverty from its fearful image stuck in my heart. Nor can I recount her story in moving or artful language, as it is, indeed, a true story. As a matter of fact, language does not have the power to depict poverty in its actual hideous form, even though it may paint a dazzling picture of the great opulence and splendor of royal palaces.

Ah, Bhagjogni, even in that tender age, would just have a rag wrapped round her waist hardly able to cover her shame. Her hair, dry and knotted for want of oil, would look awful. Her large black

eyes would always give a dismal look. As if, the demoness of poverty with its cruel fingers had strangled the beauty of that little soul.

It is said that natural beauty does not need any elaborate make-over, because Shakuntala, embellished with the forest flowers, leaves and tree-barks, looked evermore lovely than she did after all her royal cosmetic makeup in the palaces of King Dushyant. And Shakuntala was surely not brought up in an atmosphere of misery and vexation. The demon of hunger had never ever howled into her ears. She had grown up always swinging in the lap of peace and contentment. That is why Kalidas' simile of her being 'like a lily entangled in water grass' is so befitting. But how could Bhagjogni's beauty bloom while she was mercilessly being ground in poverty's mill. She suffered the pangs of hunger for every grain of food, craved for rags to cover her shame. She could never even dream for a palmful of linseed oil to rub into her tangled hair. Not even for a day in a month could she have a proper meal. How could the goddess of beauty live in a cage of bare bones?

Ah, my heart broke into pieces the other day when Munshiji started telling his tale of woe through his tears. He said— "How can I tell you my story about the days gone by; it makes my head reel. The sting of my penury becomes all the more unbearable when I look at this girl. Look at her hair— how dry and matted they have become. Had her

mother been there, at least it wouldn't be such a lice-infested nest. My own eyesight is now so weak that I can't pick them out myself, and not even a drop of oil is there for her hair. If there were even a palmful of oil, she could have gone to a neighbour's house and got her hair combed and done properly; she wouldn't at least have this ruffled birdnest on her head. You know that this is a very small village, and only when in some family a child is born, good fortune would return to her dry and dirty hair.

"When well-fed boys in the village would come out of their homes carrying and munching on grams or nuts, she would wait for them and follow them everywhere, for an occasional fistful or two of the eatables she would be given out of pity. If she goes to some neighbours' home during meal time, people would just try to shoo her off for her inauspicious presence. Brother, it is an endless story of my woes, She doesn't even have a piece of cloth or anything on her, even to receive the alms given out of sympathy. She has to satisfy her hunger with whatever she can hold in her tiny palms. At times, she will bring a fistful for me, too, which will make my heart bleed.

"Some times she would come back in the evening after roaming around neighbours' homes for the whole day, and whisper to me in a faint voice— Babuji, I feel very hungry; can I have anything?— and then, I tell you honestly, I feel, I should just go hang myself,

or jump into a well. But then soon the thought will come— without me, who in this wide world will look after my poor child. Had her mother been alive, she would have been able to find some food for her by serving in neighbours' homes, doing odd jobs or grinding the grain for them. She would have brought her up somehow. And had my elder brother been alive, he would have held her as a blooming flower in his palms. He would, surely, have married her into some big landlord's family. I, too, was purblind enough to spend my days in unbridled wastefulness on my brother's ill-gotten wealth, and had no inkling of my coming days of misfortune. My brother also was such a wild squanderer of his fortune that he would not leave even a single cowrie behind to meet his funeral expenses. He sold out every single piece of land for his pleasure's sake, and only cultivated animosities with everyone in the village, and, as a result, there's none today to have pity on me. On the contrary, everyone would just treat me with utter disdain. There was a day when lamps would burn with my brother's piss, and there is this day when my bones would burn and melt away like candles in the fire of penury.

"Far and near in the vicinity, I have made scores of visits to all those of my fraternity for accepting the hand of this girl as a bride, and falling on their feet, even begged and bared my teeth, for showing pity on me. Leaving aside all sense of shame, I have even

implored them to make my daughter stand in a row with the choicest-looking daughters of big lawyers, deputy magistrates and even zamindars, and see if she does not easily outshine them all. I have said, they could reject her as their ward's bride if any single girl matches her in beauty. But, to my misfortune, in spite of all my beseechings on bended knees, no single heart has melted so far. I would find that one dismisses my plea, saying— the boy's mother wouldn't agree for the marriage for the simple reason that the girl has neither her mother nor a brother in her home, or that there is no capacity for a good reception for the marriage party; and another would say that a girl from such an indigent family would be both greedy and stingy, and would pollute the entire family culture. Most of them boasted that their son was getting so much of dowry and all, and still they were unwilling to accept; so how could they even talk about where there was absolutely no possibility of any dowry. There were as many pretexts as there were different tongues. Indeed, my luck is so deplorable that I am forced to countenance the 'behinds' of people even whose faces I wouldn't prefer to look at. "It so irritates me, and fans my anger, to find even the most ordinary of them asking for a dowry of five hundred or a thousand. But my poverty has broken off my wings to such an extent that I cannot even flutter them. How bizarre are these customs of the whole of our Hindu society? Those who haggle so hard

to barter their sons for exorbitant dowries still get respect in society, whereas those, poor fellows, who are compelled by poverty to sell their daughters are considered so depraved. Had I thought of doing so, I would have exacted such a price for my daughter which could have given me a life of ease and comfort for the rest of my days. But in my life, I would never take even a fly in lieu of my child— whether she remains unmarried or brings shame upon me by sins of her youth. And, as you can well see, youth is not very far off from her. Only the blight of hunger has smothered her growth, her blooming into youth. Had she been in some well-to-do family, by now she would have blossomed into full youthfulness— in fact, youthfulness shines only through a full-bloomed body. And, as you know, girls attain it much faster than boys, too.

"Babu Saheb, what more can I say. I am only reaping what I have sown. Cataract, arthritis and asthma have ruined my health. Even my tears of repentance have lost their power of melting God's heart. To tell you the truth, at this moment, I am only hanging by a slender thread of hope— one gentleman, after great persuasion, has promised to marry this girl, although I still have my doubts whether the villainous among my villagers will succeed in dissuading him, or allow my leaking boat across to the shore. The groom is a little older for her — around forty-four years of age, but there is no other option for me, except this. With this load of a heavy stone

on my chest, I will have to give away my little nightingale to..."

Munshiji could hold himself no longer and broke into heart-rending sobs, as poor Bhagjogni sat quietly in his lap. I failed to stop him from crying, or to give him any assurance in this context. It's not easy to console someone who is constantly hounded by destiny itself.

After hearing Munshiji's story, I appealed to many of my unmarried friends to rescue a destitute brother by marrying his poor though exceptionally beautiful daughter, and enjoy the bliss of marriage. But all of them ignored my pleas. Among them were also such persons who would vainly spill lots of ink on various issues of social reform. Even middle-aged widowers would shy away.

At last, that same gentleman took the

girl on a covered dola and had the marriage rituals performed in his home; thus rescuing poor Munshiji from the morass of his worries.

Thus though the heavy stone of misery was taken off poor Munshiji's chest at last, but there was no one now even to give him a glass of water. The only crutch on which he could lean in his old age was gone, and his health declined so rapidly that within the passage of a year he kicked the bucket. His co-villagers tied a pitcher to his neck and threw him into the river....

Bhagjogni lives today— a woman in full bloom, glowing in a fully developed, graceful body— a heavenly boon for her present youthful husband. Her first husband is now no more. But the present one is— her own stepson!

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

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

KUNJI

Shivpujan Sahay

Translated by
Mangal Murty

Had the taxi not been available at the last moment, I would have missed the train. Charging me an exorbitant fare, it did reach me to the Howrah Station right on time, but now the porters started haggling with me. At first they fell upon each other for the luggage, and then started bidding— a rupee, a rupee and half, almost like the priests in a temple.

Meanwhile, a monk appeared and lifted my suitcase, saying— “Take your bedding and hurry up before you miss the train”, He led me hurriedly, and I ran after him with my bedding, leaving the porters totally flabbergasted.

The moment I got in with the monk into an Inter class compartment, the train chugged off. The monk now said— “A young man like you should be self-reliant. Why should you go for a porter? Can happiness be yours if you depend on others? Or is it a sign of being rich? In fact, you should be ready to help others like a volunteer. But if you yourself need help, how can you help others?”

“My luggage was heavy and the train was about to leave. That’s how I got entangled with the porters. By God’s grace, if you hadn’t come to my help, I’d still be sulking in the waiting room at Howrah.”

“But where are you going?”

“To Kashi. One of my relations is ill. He’s in Kashi to die. I’ve got his telegram only today. Had I missed this train, I’d have been ruined.”

"Really, but how?"

"One who is dying is a big merchant of Bombay. I'm his accountant. If I reach before his death, I might get part of his riches."

"And how much that'd be?"

"Even if it comes to the worst, at least two lacs".

"Oh, then you're going for two lacs; not for your master."

"For both, if you please."

"But mainly for the two lacs, isn't it?"

"You're an ascetic, a monk, but we're worldly creatures. For us filthy lucre is like God."

My words made the monk serious and brooding. Drawing a deep breath, he said— "Bhaj Govindam Bhaj Govindam, Govindam Bhaj Moodhmate" (Glory be to God, O foolish being!)."

He looked up into space, and with closed eyes and folded hands, bowed his head; then looked at me again. I asked him— "Maharaj, what are you doing?"

"I was praying to the Almighty, who does all this rigmarole."

"What rigmarole?"

"What could be a funnier rigmarole in this world than this show of unabashed selfishness?"

"But is there nothing else in the world except selfishness?"

"Why not; but is selfishness not the most palpable? The rest is only vast vacant space. That invisible divine rigmarole cannot be seen with these mortal eyes."

"But for seeing that, has God given us any third eye besides these two?"

"Yes, the eye of wisdom which opens when these two close."

"Then does man become blind?"

"No, after sunrise the lamp becomes useless".

"Well, but when does that eye of wisdom open?"

"When God showers his mercy".

"When had the first shower of God's mercy fallen on you?"

This again made the monk silent and pensive. After a short spell of meditation, he looked at me again and said— "The God who made the swan white, the parrot green, the kokil black, the koknad orange, the chamka yellow and the rainbow many-hued, and painted the peacock's tail with resplendent colours, the same God overspread a thick layer of selfishness on this world. Just as we cannot take away the heat from fire, light from the sun, moonlight from the moon, fragrance from the earth, coldness from water, flash from the lightning, darkness from the cloud and fragility from the flower, similarly we cannot separate selfishness from this world.

"Just as penury and pain are inseparable, the world and selfishness

have a similar inseparability. Just as sloth is the cause of all diseases, similarly this world is the play-field of all selfishness. If this world was not scorched by the raging fire of the conflict of self-interests, it would be far cooler and lovelier than paradise itself. Every single atom of this wondrous world is full of the might of selfishness. If selfishness were to go from this world, all its marvels will lose their mystery.

"One who breaks the shackles of selfishness, can get freedom from this world-prison. He defeats the world. The world bows in his feet and he puts his blessing hand on its head, making it free from all fear. But selfishness like a rootless creeper engulfs the world-tree completely. It's not easy to slash this tangled mesh".

"Then how did you slash it?"

"I haven't been able as yet. But I hope I will.. And the flame of that hope was ignited by the fire of my father's blazing pyre".

"You make me so curious to hear your whole story. Could you please tell me that story?"

"If it does you any good, I can tell you in brief."

"But I'm sure your inspiring life-story will be beneficial for me. Nothing is more valuable than the company of saints. Your story will quench my curiosity and also bring me valuable counsel."

"So be it. I was the son of a very rich Zamindar of Madhya Pradesh. He

had four brothers. When my father was on his death bed, counting days, I was passion-blind; no worldly worries ever came to me. Often I would sit by my father's death bed and wipe the tears trickling down his cheeks. He would time and again kiss my hands. When I saw the final surges of his love, my heart would churn. The pious stream of his filial love still fills my heart and flows through my eyes."

As he said this his eyes filled with tears. Tears came to my eyes, too. Impatiently I asked— "Why did you become a monk?"

He said— "That's the story. The day my father died, he was in full consciousness. He was staring at the charming picture of Shri Radhakrishna hung on the wall before his eyes. Moments later his eyes froze in death. The whole house was filled with crying and wailing. My harmonious world turned into chaos.

"My mother consoled herself looking at my face. Taking me into her lap she forgot her grief. My wife, too, shedding some false tears, said— "Please take care of yourself. Don't grieve too much."

"That sounded the alarm for me. When my mother affectionately wiped my tears with her sari and, lifting my chin, said— 'I, too, am living only for you, otherwise what's the point of my life now'—I felt a kick in my heart, but even that kick couldn't break the pitcher of my delusion.

"Even earlier when my uncle sat beside my father's death bed asking him in

whispers about various money transactions, and I saw my father unable in great pain to answer his queries, I became extremely upset. But even that turmoil of the heart couldn't break the spell of delusive slumber."

I said— "Then did you flee from home because of the iniquities of your uncle?"

Cutting in sharply, he said— "Why do you interrupt me? Listen patiently to whatever I say. When my father's bamboo bier reached the burning ghat, I had to help his body on to the pyre and perform the final fire ritual. My heart felt like a stone as I did so. Soon the pyre burst into a blaze.

"Suddenly my elder uncle shouted— Oh, God, the string round the waist wasn't

broken. The key to the safe is still tied in it. Alas, we are ruined!"

"At once, on hearing this, my younger uncle hastily scattered the logs of the burning pyre. My father's half-naked body slipped from the pyre. The string round his waist was already burnt, and the red-hot key was lying in the smouldering fire. Picking it up quickly, my younger uncle covered it with ash.

"That key, that same key, yes, that very key was able to open the lock of my ignorance. It was there that I saw the true reality of this world. There it was that my third eye opened up. There and then light entered into my life."

Saying this, the monk at once lapsed into meditation; and I, too, sank into a strange and intense stream of thought.

LAPATEIN

Chitra Mudgal

Translated by
Abram

Inside their slum they were sitting terror-stricken.

Earlier they had already taken their breakfast of poha and now with the hot sips of tea were swallowing an outlandish type of psychic desultoriness.

They, that is, husband and wife and their twin daughters. The eldest son Babbu has just at dawn gone to a friend's at Andheri. Both of them are preparing for PMT and dreaming as prospective doctors. For that matter in this smallish dwelling there should have been an average sort of class III pupil Rajkishore Yadav alias Munuva; and had he been alive this hour, then even without a perfect pass he could have been a promotee class IV pupil. Why he is not living and keeping fit is to his family an unforeseeably calamitous incident. But to others it is blatantly commonplace specially in view of present day anarchic social mores. In communal riots very often many a household is done for. No survival even for offering water to the forefathers. In this family there does exist at least a young son to be in a reverie for being a doctor, who will never let his ancestors unslaked of their thirst.

The daughters were having a mind to stand on some verandah in front of a dwelling in the larger slum sector to enable themselves to take some other companions with an eye simply to dissolving into curiosity the sadness and desolation congealing within them because of the thermal effect generated in the outer world, but the mother's reprimand disinclined them from even a budge— 'Have

you forgotten your Munuva, what a granite heart you have!

The girls' refutation of the reprimand was an interior interlocation with a half second's stare at the floor, 'how strange you are mother'. You are joining some people with so different a set! Those assembled to listen to the address of Mr. Leader were, to say the least, our own neighbours. Can they ever be hostile?' But in actuality the girls fell short of opening their mouth.

Theirs was an old slum sector. Thirty-five or thirty-six years old. Under Malwani No.1 of Malad western area.

On the extreme right end of the long slum sector stood the dwelling of Agashe Sahib, owner of a small wholesale shop of Pandharpur Tobacco. In the open space of the verandah just opposite his dwelling— really open space in deference to Mumbai— inhabitants of neighbouring slum sectors had swelled brimfully. A Sunday it was. Almost 11 a.m. Any other day such a crowd filled with pledge and composure could not have gathered.

Right in the middle of the crowd a leader-like person in pajamas, kurta, sadari, and a Gandhi cap on head was haranguing the crowd: 'Whose place is this? Whose is this place?' He pulled himself up for some time in order particularly to let the impact of his bawl and challenge wedge enough into the minds of those already sunk up to throat under his influence. Then himself blurted out as if lending word to their collective

answer— 'Ours, isn't it? Our forefathers' indeed! We're being neglected on our own soil, are made prey to some colossal discrimination— why after all?' His extra alert vision like that of a cheetah scooted to grope the excitement afire on the face of the throng— 'On our own soil we're being governed and exploited by other provincialists, why? Outsiders have proliferated like flood water into our metro akin to the golden egg laying hen. And they're disseminating rot in the length and breadth of the city. These fellows came here in the days of yore in quest of bread and some job; right now these 'outsiders' have in our home esconced themselves as multi-millionaire magnates, very big bureaucrats, cinema super-stars, shop-owners, contractors and the like...' He paused. Observing the total transformation of excitement into flames of wrath he went on with a rising resonance in his voice— 'People of our own caste and fraternity are helpless, even obliged on their own soil by becoming stark unemployed to dance attendance on them as coolie, kabadi and clerk— why? All this is the Centre's politics. Just to keep us helpless and lacklustre. Now we want to warn them against any sort of imposition, want to tell them how in our place our policy, our politics will prevail, not theirs. We're not impotent. We can't view our interests slighted. To bolster up the care and well-being of our brethren, to safeguard their rights we've organized and launched a party, 'Lok Sena' (People's Brigade)! The

Leader's determination was welcomed in midst of raucous sound of clappings.

The august leader remained in a state of infatuation till the very last clapping of hands was completed. Once there was stillness again, he roared in unadulterated Marathi: 'Our own Mumbai, our own folk, this is the call of 'Lok Sena'. 'On hoisting the victory flag of our party everywhere in Mumbai we shall target the whole of Maharashtra. And rouse people in God's name!'

Mr. Leader promised the multitude that once in power his party would provide reservation in employment no less than business for 'own' brethren. They will obtain professional comfort and convenience. High ranking jobs will be easily available to them. In skyscrapers shall they dwell. They will be heroes and heroines on the silver screen, also technicians. For the attainment of all these goals they have, first and foremost, to enroll themselves as members of the Lok Sena. And for the flowering of the party they must raise donation and contribution generously. For, the Lok Sena is their own party. Nobody's parasite.

On Mr. Leader's call the throng took stock of their pockets. But Mr. Leader himself forbade them in that he would in no case accept contribution at the venue. He would, however, present himself at every door to personally solicit donations and contributions and subscriptions in order to fill the pious pitcher of Lok Sena with each drop of

their participation. Whatever may be the mite of whosoever. Any ceiling is out of the question. Be enthused and inspired by your own selves and come forward wholeheartedly.

Like a dinghy furrowing asunder the flurriedly surging and leaping waves of an ocean, still braving through the tumultuous victory-slogans of the crowd, Mr. Leader in a wrap of martyrdom reached the dwelling place of Agashe Sahib. Lending a colour of spontaneity to a well-planned programme, Agashe Sahib's wife in perfect gratification and gratitude put auspicious mark on his forehead and greeted him by bending at his venerable feet. Agashe Sahib seated him reverentially in a chair and made room for his bodyguards flaunting scarves round their necks.

Pulling the window curtain aside was a device not for a look at faces, but a contrivance for giving them a fleeting glance inside. A rabble of eyes at the window scaling over one another started shoving and elbowing so much so that there was every bit of apprehension of Agashe Sahib's dwelling walls caving in.

The programme made for the climax. Agashe Sahib's wife went inside for a moment.

When she returned, the combined hollow of both her palms was full to the brim with ornaments. Like a lady devotee offering flowers at the feet of the deity, she placed the ornaments at the feet of Mr. Leader. In the superlative

gurgle and rumble of clappings not only the crowd's ears broke their timpania, but also the eyes had their splitting ache not due to jealousy but due to wonder. The right palm of Mr. Leader overwhelmed with joy stretched itself in Lord Buddha's mien showering benediction. After more than enough of entreaty for some refreshment he acceded to the implorings by refusing to take more than a simple glass of cow's milk from the hand of the host's wife and forthwith got up from the chair.

Scarcely had he stood up when the disciples waving banner-like searves by their necks shouted the name of a historical victor maharajah.

The veins and sinews around the throats of the multitude began tightening themselves.

Mr. Leader repeated this ritualistic manner of mass awakening at every dwelling of the larger slum sector. What remained left or unapproached was the dwelling of that man alias Raghunandan Yadav alias milkman bhaiya. Whirled by the victory shout, footfalls from hundreds of pairs of feet descended aslant their verandah. With bated breath remaining indoors they were ever awaiting some knock at the door...

From behind the so-called shutter of the window the milkman's wife, his twin daughters observed Mr. Leader's caravan moving towards Shegre's larger slum sector, moving with the gait of an elephant in heat.

'Why did Mr. Leader leave our household alone?' said she in a flurried tone to her husband.

'The larger slum sector in its entirety gathered together in ovation to Mr. Leader. Why didn't Father go there?' His daughter asked.

'Shut up! Let him leave us, leave us; leave it. We're spared the contribution', the Father growled in reaction.

'Why tell lies... you didn't go there just because of the whirligig of party politics... but you don't understand how one's own policy and politics can't thrive on others' land,' the wife unfolded some inner knots.

'So?' having been subjected unendingly to narrow-minded slogan-shouting the ruffled spouse chose to browbeat her, 'it's democracy. Whosoever wants may stand anywhere; why are you hell bent on taxing your mind for no reason or rhyme?'

'The brains and heads are intact and safe, that's why this liberal utilization of these; if no head is left on the trunk, what will we argue about?'

'What's the import of your very very sacred edicts?' The husband in the know of the gist only too well tried to give a show of an ignoramus.

'Terrible indeed is the whole upshot. All the dwellers of the vast slum area paid their obeisance literally at the feet of Mr. Leader. From all the dwellings brimfuls of donation and contribution

were raised. Raised or collected, it's all the same. That yours was left untouched, any signal? Aye, the meaning is clear enough, you're an outcast henceforward! And I had forbidden the daughters from going outside. A sight of the crowd and I feel restless, get panicky for something inexplicable. Nobody knows how and when while changing strategy, they may turn crazy. But why did you choose to sit inside?

'What's your wish then?' the husband's eyebrows arched. 'Have been pungent and piquant in a cascade of words since then. Should I rub my nose against their obnoxious feet, and that too at their place? We've been neighbours of Mhatre Sahib, of Agashe Sahib for full twenty years and one. So, we're nothing of theirs? No relationship subsists? Let them leave us, let them. The crux of the matter is crystal clear: we're not of their caste, not of their land; may be of the same religion, so what, it's no use'.

'Even if you've understood the inner import, it doesn't make much difference!' Effortlessly did the tone and accent of the wife tremble.

'Granted, no difference.'

'Use your brains. What strikes me right now is that with no loss of time you rush towards the Shegre's forthwith and extend a respectful invitation to Mr. Leader for his presence at our dwelling...'

The husband posed not to have heard the wife's words.

The rising crescendo of the victory slogan made the wife all the more anxious and fidgety: 'Shun this sense of humiliation or your usual pigheadedness. If the whole situation takes the shape of a bullet triggered off already, then even marshalling of all means won't do.'

Suddenly losing all patience, suppressing to his utmost his tone in agitation, the husband was in a crack. 'Have you forgotten the last year's riots? Forgotten these people's Janus-like character! In the mask of saving us they made lethal attacks. Didn't they use grudge against us? Didn't they loot shops and burn stalls and sheds?'

Round mustachioed, the husband's countenance came off terrifying with gall and detestation. Innocent of newspapers, how can the womenfolk know of their double dealing and suave behaviour? Their mask? In the state assembly some north Indian legislators hauled them over the coals for their atrocities; then this very Mr. Leader in high-falutin tone came down as defence lawyer of his goondas that it was just possible by way of warding off onslaughts some flames might have reached their shops and stalls. On the contrary, had there been no workers of his, then not only their shops and chattel might have been reduced to ashes, but also, said he, the very hearth and home would have been burnt down. The legislators pressed the logic as to how chance occurrences encompassed a particular conglomeration, a specific caste; then as a counter attack he sternly

reprimanded the north Indian legislators how they were making a mountain of a molehill and trying to butter and roast their bread against the oven heat of an awful casteist communalism, caste compartmentalization...'

The yesterdays passed, yet filled with stark reminiscences refusing to ebb away!

The intense wrath of the husband turned moist in the wife's steadfast look at him: 'I'm also telling the same thing, can't there be a nightmarish repeat? Not that it's likely, but that it must be...'

The wife bolted the moisture within her throat. Helpless sadness and depression churned the heart with a burning hiss.

She thought thus: did our own people regard this part of land as alien ever! Were our chores and service for this city of elusiveness any time at a low key? If we remitted something to our rural home, then most likely we kept ourselves half-fed or underfed. Did we rob anybody, commit dacoities of their properties? Intent on earning bread, leaving hearth and home, our people had come out many, many years ago with treacle and powdered gram. Today we are treated as aliens in our own mother country. To the village, home and relations we are foreigners and nothing else. Father-in-law has turned utterly disenchanted, he says pointblank: 'daughter, if you don't inhabit your threshold with both the daughters, then take it as sure that the girls won't find

access to our brethren's families, much less married into them.'

We are neither here nor there. All the livelong day what we could earn even through bone-cracking labour up to the state of frazzle, we in all earnest setting aside his possible share regularly sent the amount to father-in-law staying back in the village. Who feels beholden? Is anybody under a feeling of thankfulness? When our own kith and kin don't have any sense of obligation for all our care and doings, then these are downright aliens and should be taken as such. These people's expectation or covetousness can never be allayed without some presentations. And if at all we've to live and die among them, then why have a hesitation? –better it is to sail convivially through their stipulated interest for punishment accruing against us.

The prolonged silence of the wife got on the husband's nerves. Wife has in all essence, a very bad habit. Any matter passing through the mind, or consolidating therein, this woman known as wife can then think in no other direction.

'Why this muteness?'

'Unawareness of the crux of situation has kept you woolgathering.'

'Once again the same wedge, the same stake. Nothing will turn up through extension of hospitality to them. Accept it. Our people are also now alive to the state of affairs; are getting organized;

are experiencing the importance of unity. If at all subjected to any attack, we'll in a body, counter it, may even repulse them. As of now it's no child's play for them to loot and digest us like well-baked hotch-potch;' raising his hand the husband then dashed it— 'we've also plastered the bricks of this city.'

'Will they be silenced or can they choose to sit idle on an encounter? Won't they try to settle score, will it be settled ever? Has the account been cleared up with those whose adverse clashes have been in hundreds so far in this society and country and are still continuing?'

'Are we effeminates? Why should we take things lying down?'

'Milking and milking of buffaloes has depleted your brains, filled the mind only with husk. Use your intellect even a bit. It's no wisdom to wage aquatic warfare with an alligator.'

'You're unnecessarily, rather redundantly taken in by bluster and suavity. Have justice, system, law and order lost all their meaning? ...'

'Do you think you're at even terms with justice in respect of Munuva? Might is right, what a pity you've failed to make out this mahamantram, despite being the master of a cattlefarm! Why do you go on underlining law and order and the like— in governance and administration men of their caste and fraternity jostle; now what we've come to realize is that not only the idlers or the unemployed but also the educated

are of the devils' party...'

By now almost reddened the husband pulled her up: 'We don't believe merely in unrestrained loquacity. All the preparations are afoot. For the legislative assembly our representatives are staking claim in greater and greater number.'

'Agreed, you've got the majority! Once the opportunity suggests itself, they'll align with them in a trice, they must play the fish in their blackened kettle. Could they come to safeguard you in calamity?...'

'Will this Mr. Leader of yours come headlong?'

'No; Mr. Leader won't come. Whosoever will come to our rescue, may be our neighbours. His followers. I've been saying only that; look sharp and get the blood stamp on your door wiped out forthwith.'

With the intent to cash in the very next moment the hesitation and lack of forthrightness suddenly generated inside her husband, she once again enthused him to action— 'The victory slogan leads me to surmise that the vehicle of Mr. Leader has reached right now the doorstep of Vasanti Auntie in the larger slum sector of Shegre.

The husband was not beyond the effect of dilemma. 'After all the neighbours are no fools. To see me invite Mr. Leader to our place they cannot but think where I'd been asleep so far— I, that is, Raghunath Yadav alias milkman bhaiya. The drums weren't percussioned in any

other locality.'

The shrewd wife had a feel of the fix. Came forward for redemption, only to suggest that he ought to tell Agashe Sahib that owing to the sudden indisposition of some buffaloes he was obliged to pass the night in the shed itself. On his reaching home just now and entering inside he had the intelligence that Mr. Leader without visiting his cottage had moved forward. At this he then turned round at once. The wife elucidated that as a matter of fact he had been, like a mouse, a house-dweller since the dawn; and that nobody had espied whether he was present there or not.

His dilemma got a crack. A bit out of sorts, he left the chair, stood up, and putting on his person the kurta hanging by the peg, he was face to face with his wife: 'Assess your decision once again, do you have the full awareness of the meaning of an invitation to Mr. Leader for his presence at our doorstep?'

'I've ruminated enough. We'll also contribute, offer more than his castemen and brethren.' The tone and tenor of the wife had risen.

Unbolting the door, he returned:- 'Don't be so expansive please, wherefrom you'll manage the sum for donation?'

'There's arrangement for that too.' With enough distrust he looked towards the wife. Didn't open the shutter of the door. 'For Babbu's admission as a medico the twenty-two thousand you'd raised

yesterday to be deposited in the bank I withheld. That'll be offered as our contribution.'

'Have you lost your senses?' He turned and was in a straight line against the wife.

'Don't be anxious for the admission. At the opportune time I'll sell these four bangles. They're of five tolas*.'

Full of ire, he was to blurt out something, but the wife did not let him. Her voice in the high tide of sentiment had a waggle- 'If life's safe, the world'll take care of itself; what worth is money? -you'll earn a lot. Can we procure children's lives? Tell me?' She could not utter the word 'tell' rightly. Her throat was choked.

The twin daughters, all disconsolate, were drawn involuntarily towards the mother: 'Why are you so much in jitters ma?' One asked her in bewilderment.

In reply a painful cry from her throat burst forth, but in an instant she checked it with a tug of her sari end into her mouth. Drawing a long hiccup she whispered- 'those men did not throw Munuva into the leaps of flame... Zahara, that Muslim chooriwali told me the other day that, she had seen with her naked eyes how after ransacking and looting the shop of Shetti the T.V. dealer, the goondas of Sattar's larger slum area threw Munuva into the flames after pouncing upon him. The chooriwali had seen this with her own eyes. She is like a sister, she won't lie. Don't you remember how

Sattar of the larger slum area came for donation and contribution last year for this very leader?’

There was a creep of stunning stillness in the fourwalls of the cottage.

Raghunandan Yadav i.e. Mumbai’s bhaiya became a stone statue at his spot. His daughter handed him a glass of water

brought from the kitchen at mother’s gesture, but he could not take a sip.

On a sudden, he flung the door wide open, without turning back he said to his wife: ‘Arrange nicely for Mr. Leader’s reception... I shall bring his caravan from Shegre’s larger slum sector to ours...’

* ‘Tola’ was previous measure for gold, equivalent to more than ten grams. Common people still avoid the term gram.

Chitra Mudgal, born 1944, Chennai, is an important author of the eighties. Has more than 35 published books to her credit. Best known for her award-winning novel ‘Anwa’, ‘ek zamin apni’ and ‘giligadu. She has written some rare short stories like ‘bhookh’, ‘kenchul’, beiman, mamla aage badhega abhi’ and ‘lapatein’. She has been honoured with Vyas Samman, Sahitya Bhushan, Udairaj Singh Samman and Chinappa Bharti Samman She lives in Delhi.

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

MA KA DAMA

Deepak Sharma

Translated by
Dhiraj Singh

As soon as Pa's back from work my aunt covers him like breath on a mirror. "They've announced a job. It's for women only... at the clothes factory. Morning shift, starting 7 till 3. The salary is also good. Three thousand rupees. It is a job made for Kartiki..."

"Made for her? That wheeze machine?" Pa says in mock surprise.

Pa keeps inventing new names for Ma. "If only she could get a hold of her breathing!" Pa is right. Ma is a chronic asthmatic but that doesn't stop her from playing seamstress to the whole damn locality. The result: we don't know when her wheezing stops and when her sewing machine takes over. Sometimes, in the night, I can hear her struggling to breathe. I fear that maybe this might be her last breath.

"Who else?" my aunt says trying to make light of Ma's wheezing, "you people think I have the time?"

My aunt is the undisputed queen of our house. She's been that for the last 17 years. She came to this house as a new bride—because my grandfather had wanted a wife for my uncle who was 23. My uncle was more keen on getting a job than getting a wife but my grandfather, who'd just lost his wife, insisted that the house needed a woman's touch. A woman who'd take care of a house full of men. His own 15-year-old daughter was a mental case. Someone had to take charge of the kitchen. But

pity, my grandfather couldn't enjoy my aunt's cooking for long. He died within a year-and-a-half of my aunt's arrival. My poor uncle also died four years later.

"What will she have to do?" Pa asks her.

"Bleaching work," says my aunt.

"Then Ma shouldn't be allowed nowhere near it," I can't help myself, "bleaching is done with liquid Chlorine, which is dangerous for Asthmatics..." This fact I've picked up from my class eight Chemistry book.

"Like you know everything," Pa glares at me, "do you know how hard it is to make ends meet? There are five mouths to feed here and only one man earning..."

I don't want to cross his path so I keep quiet. But I want to tell him that he isn't the only one earning, besides his teaching job Ma's stitching also brings in money for the house.

I am the only one who cares about Ma's health. Pa together with his mental sister don't much like Ma. Compared to the way they treat my aunt, Ma's like part of the furniture. But my aunt herself is all lovey-dovey with Ma. Ma says it's because she knows how much she's dependent on Pa.

"I can go and work there," Ma calls out from inside her stitching room, "I don't have a problem taking up that job." My aunt and Ma are cousins. In

fact my aunt was the one who got Pa and Ma married, 13 year ago, soon after my uncle died.

"I'll go and check out the place," Pa says, "and when she can start work."

Ma joins work at the clothes factory the next day itself. And because of that I don't get to see her in the mornings. Mornings without her are filled with silence. Like the silence of her sewing machine. When she comes back at 3 in the afternoon she's dead tired. She is neither able to go back to her sewing machine or sit down and talk with me. It's as if her wheezing has gone out of our lives. And because I can't hear it I feel the silence grow between us. I begin to feel Ma going far away from me... going into the arms of an impending death. I sometimes get these nightmares where I see her dead or dying.

One day our school breaks up after recess. The man who rings the bell has suddenly died. He fell from the perch from where he rang the bell daily. When our class teacher broke the news to us he did so in a mixture of grief and anger. "The old man had been ill for the last two years. We kept telling him to just take retirement but he kept coming back every day. He said he could do it... that ringing the bell was as easy as picking his nose."

Ma's job keeps her extra busy. One day I decide to go to the factory to

see how she's coping. I am told she's in the big hall where there are only women workers. I can't help myself so I sneak in. The hall is divided in two sections. In the first part big heaps of cotton are being rolled into spindles of thread. And in the next the thread from the spindles is being looped together into thick rolls of fabric. All the workers here are men.

In the next hall I am assaulted by the sharp smell of Chlorine. My eyes begin to hurt and brim up with tears. After getting used to the smell I realise that the thick vapours are coming from a square pit into which are dipping rolls of freshly woven cotton. This hall has only women. Some of them have their mouths covered with masks, the kind that doctors and nurses wear during surgery. I try to look for Ma among the hidden faces. I move to a corner for a better view. Ma is at the other end of the hall, where a group of women are unrolling the bleached cotton. I recognise her by her sari and not her face because it is covered in a mask. In that masquerade she is like a stranger to me, a strong and active stranger. Someone who has no cares in the world except the job at hand. Her eyes are fixed on the bale that she is unrolling. The muscles of her face are tightly clenched. As if her face has become a fist about to strike someone. As if

she would strike anyone who stood between her and her cloth.

She hasn't seen me walk towards her. "You laugh too much, Kartiki," a bossy woman says to her. Ma starts to giggle. And then breaks out into a full-throated laugh. I've never seen her laugh like that. Perhaps, it is this laughter that she has for so long kept under wraps, so long that it had begun to come out of her like a wheeze.

"Quick, move it," the bossy woman shouts, "faster. And be careful. Make sure there aren't any creases in the cloth. We have to send this consignment today..."

"God help us," these three funny-serious words I recognise. It's Ma's voice. It's the way Ma expresses herself... many times over in a day... when Pa rains fire and brimstone on her, or when his mental sister rats on her or when my aunt gives her some armchair advice.

"God help whom?" a woman next to her asks Ma, "help this lady Hitler?"

"Help everybody," says another, "except Kartiki's sister-in-law, who sent her husband to heaven to be with her brother-in-law and to make life hell for her..."

"But now it's all over," Ma says laughing, "that hell's not mine anymore. It's hers now. I've found my heaven. Here."

I am gripped by a strange sensation. A strange hesitation at approaching my own mother. Suddenly she feels so different from the wheeze machine I'd known all my life. She hasn't seen me but I have seen her, or a part of her

that I'd never known she had.

I am only a few steps away from her.

I turn to go to the exit door, knowing that I needn't worry about her anymore.

Deepak Sharma, born 1946 is a well known feminist author of twelve collections of short stories, prominent among them— hinsabhas, rannmarg, durgbhed, chabuksawar and ghoda ek pair. She was professor of English at Christian College, Lucknow and is now a freelance writer. She lives in Lucknow.

Dhiraj Singh is a short-story writer (writing in English), journalist, abstract artist and translator. Currently he is a Consultant to the Speaker, Lok Sabha. He lives in Delhi and his art and writings can be seen on his blog: <http://bodhishop.blogspot.com>

THE BHAIYYA EXPRESS

Arun Prakash

Translated by
Jai Ratan

The train had started picking up speed. Ramdev who was hanging by the door of a carriage found it difficult to keep his eyes open. Blasts of cold wind laden with coal dust kept hitting his eyes. It was becoming too much of a strain for him to hang on to the closed door in this manner. He loudly pounded at the door with his fist and just saved his bag from falling from his shoulder.

After persistent pounding the door at last opened. He gingerly entered the compartment and closing the door proceeded to sweep the corridor floor of peanut husks and cigarette butts with his *angocha*. The military man who had opened the door for him gave him a contemptuous look. "Fools, they just come here to die. Oh, how they swarm all over the place. Eh, boy, it's a reserved compartment. Do you have a reservation?"

Ramdev was silent. This was his first long journey by train. A dark complexioned, gangling youth of seventeen, till now he had only travelled up to Barauni, the railway station next to Tilrath. He did not know the meaning of reservation for he had never felt the need for it. Not to talk of Bihar, he had not gone beyond the limits of his own district. He had, of course, heard from his elder brother, Vishundev, the hardships one had to put up with while journeying to Punjab. According to him, it was less arduous to go to Punjab via Delhi by the Assam Mail. They said that at the Barauni railway station they made a dash for the bogey next to the engine and got jam-packed in it like dried chillies

in a bag. The less fortunate ones who were left out made a run for the carriages their eyes first landed upon.

"I've a ticket," Ramdev said haltingly.

"So what? This compartment is reserved. You dense-headed fool, can't you understand even that much?"

Ramdev felt helpless. He just kept gaping at the man with terrified eyes. Back home he used to feel so important as he strutted about in his lane in his hitched-up baggy pants and threadbare musty shirt, the colour of a worn-out handbag. But here everything looked so different that he eyed all with great curiosity.

A woman clad in salwar-kurta, who was sprawled on an upper berth reading an English novel looked at the army man. "This compartment is fast turning into a dharamshala," she remarked. "Is he a Bhaiyya?"

"Yes, looks like one," the man said testily. "Where are you going?" he turned to Ramdev.

"Punjab."

Fearing that he may catch everybody's attention if he stayed put where he was, Ramdev shifted to the end of the corridor and spreading his *angochha* in front of the toilet, he lay down on the floor, putting his bag under his head to serve as a pillow. The last week's goings-on till the time of his entering this compartment came vividly to his mind.

Soon after finishing his matriculation

examination, Ramdev's mother had started arranging for money which would provide the wherewithals for Ramdev's trip to Punjab. In view of the rampant violence in Punjab nobody from her village was willing to go there in search of Ramdev's elder brother Vishundev. When no one came forward to help her out, in utter desperation, she decided to send Ramdev to Punjab. The problem of money had kept hovering over her head like the fangs of a cobra. Her hereditary means of livelihood which consisted in parching grams in bulk now yielded little money for people had stopped coming to her. Eating *rotis* made from maize flour had gone out of vogue and the prices of *daals* had rocketed putting them out of people's reach. Things came to such a pass that people collected dry leaves and twigs from orchards and bamboo groves to stoke their hearths and cook a gruel to provide the day's only meal. At last Ramdev's mother took to making cowdung cakes and selling them in the bazaar. This just kept the family going. But if there was an unforeseen contingency she had to perforce take recourse to the village Panditji for a loan. She had run up a huge debt on the occasion of her son's marriage. It had put her in a great difficulty. The interest alone had inflated like the fast growing basil plant. At last her son had been forced to leave for Punjab with *thali-lota*, a blanket and his flute which was very dear to him, to seek his fortune in that distant place.

As money arrived from time to time, Vishundev's mother would hurry to the Panditji to pass the money onto him. She was on the verge of liquidating her debt when the money suddenly stopped coming.

Whenever the news of bloodshed in Punjab percolated to their village, Ramdev's heart would sink and his mother would start crying. The neighbours would taunt her. They would say that if her son was so dear to her why did she send him to Punjab specially when it was in the grip of violence? But why didn't they realise that she had to do it out of sheer necessity. If Vishundev had not earned money in time they would have been dispossessed of their house. Janardan had an eye on their house and of late Panditji's demand for money had also become more insistent. Vishundev's mother had also to think of her son's newly-wedded wife. It was a question of prestige. When a wife came to live with her husband for the first time she must have a roof of her own over her head. It was going to be a new life for her. How could her mother-in-law allow a young sapling to wither away? She had sent Vishundev to Punjab with a heavy heart. Everything was going on smoothly when suddenly money stopped coming.

While lying down Ramdev felt his secret pocket and felt reassured. Everything was intact-his rail ticket, the postcard bearing his brother's address and the money. Fixing the bag more

securely under his head he closed his eyes and tried to sleep. The clack-clack of the train and the stench from the toilet pervading the corridor were becoming too much for him. And there was a fear in his heart. The fear of what was happening in Punjab had become an obsession and haunted him even in his sleep.

The last time when Brother returned from Punjab he was full of stories.

"Didn't you get rice to eat? Only *rotis*?" his mother asked him.

"Ma, in Punjab whatever people eat is called *roti*," Vishundev laughed. "And what a big glass of tea! You don't get such tea here."

"Oh, how you talk! People do make nice tea here."

"No, Ma, no. There the tea served to farmhands is laced with opium. It drives away fatigue and we Biharis work all the harder for it."

"How many hours are you people made to work?"

"Starting from seven in the morning till six in the evening. In between there is a pause for food— an hour's pause."

"Then they are worse slave-drivers than our masters here. They are really cruel. And after sunset? What do they do after the day's work?"

"They play cards. But I am not fond of cards. I play on my flute. The mistress of the house is a nice woman. She loves to listen to me playing on my flute—

Vidyapati and the other country songs relating to the seasons. And she is highly educated— she's educated up to B.A."

"Your masters must be rich."

"Yes, very rich. They own motorcycles, tractor, jeep. And they live in a palatial house. They have two sons, both of them in good jobs in Delhi. And I was forgetting— they have a TV also."

"What's a TV?"

"It's like a radio. But on the radio you only hear music while on TV you also see photos besides"

"Does your master beat you?"

"Only sometimes. But he is generous with his abuses."

"Perhaps it's all in the game. To make a living is no child's play. You don't like it there I suppose"

"Not much, It's poverty that has driven me to that place."

As was the general custom it was time that Vishundev brought his wife from her parent's home to live with him for the first time, For this he had to make a second trip to Punjab to earn money. And also to decide his fate.

— TWO —

As Ramdev got down at the New Delhi railway station under the blazing neon lights, he feared he would get lost in the vast sea of humanity. A mad jostling crowd, each face a stranger and the blinding light. He pressed his bag against his chest to make sure that no pickpocket

would decamp with his rail ticket, the postcard bearing his brother's address and money. He suddenly stopped in the mad onrush of people. Where was the gate? Then he pushed forward with the flowing stream of people and crossing over the bridge came outside the station.

Rows and rows of taxis, cars, three-wheelers. It was all like a dreamland as he had seen in Hindi films. The Assam Mail had arrived five hours late, He knew from Delhi he would have to go to Amritsar by bus or by train. He proceeded towards the passengers hall to enquire from someone about the train bound for Punjab. But they all looked so forbidding and unapproachable like officers. In a corner of the hall he saw an ordinary looking man, wearing dirty clothes sitting beside a battered tin trunk and looking around with tired and weary eyes. He approached the man.

"Go and ask at the enquiry window in front," the man replied.

There were a lot of people crowding around the window. As they moved away he asked the Babu behind the window, "Has the train for Amritsar left?"

"Yes,"

"When is the next train due to leave?"

"Bhaiyya, the next train will not leave before tomorrow."

"But it is a big station."

"But you know these days no train leaves for Punjab at night."

As Ramdev stepped back from the window the Babu turned to his companion and said, "The whole country knows there are no night trains for Punjab and yet the fellow persists in asking." There was a tinge of mockery in the man's voice.

"He's a Bihari Bhaiyya, you know," the other man laughed.

"These people are everywhere—Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Ferozpur. They are swarming all over Punjab."

"The train from Bihar bound for Punjab is known as Bhaiyya Express. It is always bursting at the seams with Biharis."

"Don't they get enough work in Bihar?"

"If they could land jobs there they wouldn't be coming to Punjab to die a dog's death there. Hunger never ceases and therefore the Bhaiyya Express will never cease running. It's the government's rail track and the government's train. Who is there to stop it from running?"

Ramdev had overheard a bit of their talk. Their words were replete with meaning for him. He had passed the last four months in great mental travail. How was his Bhaiyya faring in Punjab? Every drop of blood shed there seemed to be spilling from his own body. Every shot fired there seemed to be penetrating his body. A shot fired— it must have entered his brother's body. The radio was not likely to give any news about Vishundev. But even then his mother went every day to Panditji's house to hear the news bulletin. Ramdev also went

to the teashop every day to read the newspaper. When a registered letter addressed to Vishundev returned unacknowledged his mother kept crying the whole night. The next day she went all the way to Begusarai to send him a telegram. But the telegram also proved infructuous; still there was no news of Vishundev. She would often go to the temple to ask for a boon. She asked Panditji to consult the almanac for some good augury. Then bitterly dejected she would start off for the Fertilizer Township to sell cowdung cakes.

Vishundev's in-laws often enquired if there was any news from Punjab. Ma feared they may annul the marriage. How could they take the responsibility for a girl who was growing fast? Ma feared her daughter-in-law was slipping out of her hands and her house was going to pieces. If only she could wrap it up in her *anchal*.

"Why not marry her off to Ramdev as a matter of expediency?" someone would suggest.

"Why not!" Ma would say absent-mindedly, without the least enthusiasm.

Ramdev's face turned red with shame. Marry a brother's wife? And if he turned up from Punjab in the meanwhile? Her swarthy, innocent face with big eyes swam before his eyes. They had gone crazy to harbour such bizarre ideas.

But Ma had not learnt to accept defeat. She wanted to cling to whatever she could retrieve from the bowels of

adversity. Every morning she would call at the Dak Babu's house.

"You had sent your son to Punjab out of greed," he would retort, "now why do you keep asking for letters?"

Ma's withered body, Panditji's mounting interest, Janardan's diabolical intention to grab her house, the worry about brother's safety, the daily bickerings, Ma's constant wailing—Ramdev would feel as if his house had turned into Punjab. He could think of nothing except Punjab. It had become an obsession with him.

While travelling to Amritsar in bus he was so scared with the bus passengers' talk that even the bus started haunting him like a nightmare.

Getting down from the bus at Amritsar he took a snap decision that come what may he would spend the night at the bus-station instead of proceeding to Atari in the night. It was only six in the evening but the bus station was already in a state of turmoil. Everybody seemed in a hurry to go as if a dam was going to burst and they wanted to escape the impending catastrophe. The shop shutters were being pulled down fast and the street vendors were pushing off with their trolleys. The bus drivers and their cleaners were making a quick job of their meals at the wayside eating shop, anxious to call it a day. The hotel boys were panting like race horses. They wanted to finish before the curfew was clamped at seven.

Following the peanut seller's example to the letter, Ramdev made some *sattu* gruel, gulped it down and lay down by the man's side to sleep. The peanut seller was Christian adivasi hailing from Ranchi side. He had left his home three years ago and had strayed to this place in the course of his wanderings. His long beard and the *gamchha* wrapped round his head like a turban gave one the impression of his being a Sikh sardar. When he laughed his teeth gleamed like pearls. Easily moved, his innocent eyes would brim with tears. James was so pleased to meet a man from his own *desh*. They lay huddled together like cloth bags in a corner of the waiting hall. There were so many other bags like them, all still and silent.

The curfew was on.

Ramdev peeped from behind his *chaddar*. Outside, everything seemed to have come to a stop. The bus station which roared like a locomotive in the day was now still and silent like a corpse. Out of fear, even a muffled scream trailed into frigidity like a slab of ice. A gunshot would remain arrested in the air. Even the earth seemed to have stopped revolving. The breaths were coming out soundlessly. One could only hear the buzzing of mosquitoes over the drains.

In the stillness, a jeep loaded with uniformed figures drove past. Ramdev felt as if a sharp edged knife had cut across his neck. "Over here it always happens like this," James mumbled. "Go to sleep and don't get up to piss either."

Ramdev tried to sleep. Although tired *and* weary with the day-long journey, sleep seemed to be defying him.

At about eleven in the night terror seemed to have been let loose over the bus-station. People were awakened with the thudding kicks of those booted and uniformed figures. Fifty questions leapt in the air at the same time. Where are you coming from? Why? If someone fumbled with his answer, out of fright, he was greeted with kicks and rifle butts. Three jawans dragged away three young men. Learning that Ramdev was from Bihar they left him alone but Ramdev kept trembling long after they had disappeared from sight. James went to sleep as if nothing untoward had happened. But Ramdev kept hearing the screams of those captive three like the buzzing of honey bees over his ears. He consoled himself that soon he would get accustomed to the new environment. And then the city congealed like blood.

– THREE –

Ramdev felt greatly relieved as he managed to buy a ticket and secured a seat on the train. He took out the crumpled and discoloured postcard from his pocket and studied his brother's address: Vishundev, Inder Singh Farm, Village, Raneke Bhaiya, Atari Dist. Amritsar (Punjab). After reading the address he held the postcard before a venerable looking sardar sitting on the opposite seat.

The sardar shook his head dolefully. "I can't read Hindi," he said. "I've read

Urdu all my life. I can, however, understand Hindi. Tell me what do you want to know?"

"I've to go to Raneke Bhaiya village. I am a stranger to this place. I'm coming from Bihar." Ramdev's hesitation dissolved at sardarji's sympathetic attitude and he read out to him Vishundev's complete address.

"Oh, you mean Santokh Singh of Raneke? You get down at Atari station which is the next stop. Then you enquire of any tongawalla outside the station. They all know him. You are a strapping youth. Two miles should mean nothing to you. Just foot the distance. Now listen, if you had caught the Burjjanwali bus outside Ambarsar, what they call Amritsar, it would have deposited you right outside Raneke. Santokh Singh's two-storied *kothi* mansion can be spotted just outside the village. Inder Singh's farm is in front of that *kothi*."

All that Ramdev could understand was that Raneke village was two miles away from Atari. The other facts had only vaguely registered on his mind.

"What has brought you so far away all alone? Are you a Bihari or from U.P.?"

"I'm from Bihar. I'm going to Raneke village in search of my brother."

"Not even a moustache has sprouted on your lip. Son, you are indeed brave. A spirited lad."

As the train stopped the venerable old man said, "*Achcha!*" and got down from the compartment. Ramdev kept

watching him from the window. As the train moved he found a ticket-checker standing before him.

Ticket? the ticket-checker said in a mechanical manner.

"Atari is how many stations away from here?" Ramdev asked handing the man his ticket.

"Are you coming here for the first time? Atari is the next station. Beyond that lies Pakistan." The ticket-checker punched Ramdev's ticket and moved on.

Ramdev got a jolt. Pakistan! Where was he heading for?

The train screeched to a stop. Ramdev got down hastily and proceeded towards the exit. As he came out of the station a tongawalla asked him, "Is this the Pakistani train? That train arrives about this time."

Ramdev made no reply for all this rigmarole was beyond his comprehension. Instead he asked the tongawalla, "Which road leads to Raneke village?"

"Just walk straight on and then enquire further up."

The sun was high over his head. His body was drenched in sweat with the exertion of walking at a fast pace. But the happiness of gaining his destination had set his mind at rest. The road was flanked by bare farms, wheat having recently been cropped from them. The sky was clear but slightly arched, very much like the sky vaulted over his village. The air was indolent and sleepy.

Sometimes dry leaves swirled up with the dust. The road looked deserted with not a wayfarer in sight even in the far distance. The day was getting hotter. As he walked, Ramdev kept thinking of his brother, Vishundev. How could a letter reach his village through those curfew-bound areas? But all the same he must have been waiting for letters from home. On seeing him his brother would jump with joy and hug him in a tight embrace. And he too would not be able to hold back his tears. He would give brother the sesame *laddus* Ma had specially made for him. How fond he was of sesame *laddus*! Surely, his brother would also enquire about his wife in a round-about manner. And about his studies and their vendetta with Janardan. But how could he tell him about so many things in the same breath?

A two-storied house by the side of the road came into sight. A sardarji was walking ahead of him. He accelerated his pace to catch up with him.

"Bhai Saheb, where's Inder Singh's farm?" he asked coming abreast of the man.

"Who are you looking for? Where are you coming from?" The questions were so abrupt that Ramdev was almost thrown off his feet.

"Vishundev. Bihar," Ramdev said looking flustered.

"I don't understand all this rigmarole you are talking. Come, I'll take you to the Sarpanch. You explain things to him."

He gestured to Ramdev with his hand to follow him.

Bewildered, Ramdev followed sardarji. After walking some distance they stopped in front of an imposing old-brick building. On the way sardarji had asked Ramdev his name and had told him his own—Kirpal Singh.

— FOUR —

"Sarpanchji, Sarpanchji, come down," Kirpal Singh called out in a loud voice. "A *pardesi* (a man from a distant land) wants to meet you."

A tall, hefty man in kurta-pyjama came down. Handsome and fair, he had a thin pointed moustache which looked so becoming on his face. He gave Kirpal Singh a smile and pulled him to himself.

"Kirpalia, who is this fellow? Where did you waylay him?"

"Sarpanchji, who am I to waylay him? This poor fellow has come in quest of someone. He speaks only Hindi. You ask him what he wants?"

The Sarpanch turned to Ramdev and scrutinised him intently.

"Boy, what's the matter?"

"My brother Vishundev is working at Inder Singh's farm. I'm coming from a distant place— Bihar. Here's the letter." Ramdev placed the postcard in the Sarpanch's hand. The Sarpanch examined the postcard by turning it over from side to side and then handed it back to Ramdev. "The address is correct," he said.

"Kirpalia, look, a brother's love has brought him so far away from home. Oh, yes, now I remember. Once I had seen a Bihari boy at Inder Singh's farm. Come, I'll take you to Inder Singh." Stepping forward, Sarup Sarpanch gained the road.

"*Achcha*." Kirpal Singh took leave of the Sarpanch and walked away in the opposite direction. Walking under the hot sun they came to Inder Singh's farm which was not far from there.

"Sat-Sri Akalji!" A woman greeted the Sarpanch, showing proper courtesy to him.

The Sarpanch accepted her greeting with a nod of his head. "Where's Inder Singh?" he asked,

"He had some work to attend to at Ambarsar. He's expected back tomorrow morning."

"This boy has come to meet his brother who is working in your farm. What name is he known by, boy?"

"Vishundev!" Ramdev replied promptly in a clear voice. Eagerness seemed to be breaking forth from his face like lava. The woman looked intently at him.

"Vishundev! Yes, there was a bhaiyya by this name. But he went away to Kapurthala three months ago. Last year we had brought him from our maternal uncle to work on our farm. This year again he came from Bihar to report for work. But he said he did not like it here and as I've said he went away to

Kapurthala about three months ago."

Sarpanch Sarup looked at Ramdev. He feared the boy was on the point of crying.

"Look Manjeet Kaur!" the Sarpanch said in a mellow tone expressing helplessness. "This boy has come all the way from Bihar. See how miserable he looks. He has only your address to go by."

"Please have a word with sardarji, my husband when he comes in the morning. Only he can throw light on it." Manjeet Kaur turned to go.

"Let's go, boy. Have your food and stay with me for the night. We shall sort it out in the morning."

The night was upon them. The Sarpanch and Kirpal Singh were having a chat in the courtyard. After short interludes their talk would again and again revert to the conditions in Punjab.

Ramdev was lying on a wooden *takhtposh* by the side of the courtyard wall, his face covered with a *chaddar*. Vishundev's face kept haunting him and he felt like crying. The sardarni to whose house he had been taken in the afternoon had been very nice to him. But as soon as Vishundev's name cropped up her attitude seemed to have changed. She had brusquely told them to leave her alone and have a word with sardarji when he returned in the morning. Vishundev, she said had gone away to Kapurthala three months back. During this period he would have surely written

to his mother telling her about his whereabouts. Even if he were in jail he would have most assuredly dropped his mother a line. With only two hundred rupees in his pocket how could he run about, harried and flustered, all over the place looking for his brother. Was Brother...! He started crying. His snivelling and hiccups gave him away.

Kirpal Singh came to him with alacrity and shook him by his shoulder. "Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Sarpanchji, come and see the state this poor boy is in."

The Sarpanch had already gauged the situation. "Don't worry, boy," he consoled Ramdev. "Tomorrow we shall pull up Inder Singh and ask him not to mince words but come out with the truth. We shall force him to tell us about your brother. If it is a question of money I'll stand by you. You go to Kapurthala and look up your brother there. What do you say to it, Kirpal Singh?"

"Yes, we must help the boy." Kirpal Singh was in full agreement with the Sarpanch. "The poor fellow!"

— FIVE —

Ramdev did not know when the night had passed.

Inder Singh was loud in his welcome of the Sarpanch. "Welcome, Maharaj. Manjeet Kaur was speaking to me about that Bihari boy. I had gone away to Ambarsar. My two boys feel so happy when I can spare some time to stay with them. Last night I phoned them up at Delhi from Ambarsar and had a

hearty talk with them. It came to me as such a relief. I started from there in the morning and have just arrived. Oh, how unbecoming of me, a fool that I am. Let's go in. Ohe, send tea or something."

Without taking any respite Inder Singh launched forth on the subject. "Yes, there's no doubt about it. He was a good boy. Last year also he worked at my farm. But this year when he returned I found him so lost and disinterested. It seemed his mind was not in his work. He went away to Kapurthala. May be to Manjeet's uncle.

One day he had dropped me some such hint. That was two months back. If you suggest I don't mind giving this boy some money to tide over the lean period."

Inder Singh's talk aroused Sarup Sarpanch's suspicion. Yesterday Manjeet Kaur had said that the boy had left them three months back and this man was specifying a period of two months. And why did he want to pay the boy something ex-gratia? Surely, there was something fishy somewhere.

"Inder Singh, is the boy living or dead?" The Sarpanch fired the question straight at him.

Inder Singh's face darkened as if someone had smeared it with ink. Ramdev got a jolt. Inder Singh forced a cunning smile on his face. "Who's talking of death?" he said. "The boy must be alive for all I know. He might still be in Kapurthala

or he might have gone elsewhere. Nobody can vouch for these Bhaiyyas of Bihar. Today here, gone tomorrow!"

Ramdev who was standing behind Sarup Sarpanch started sobbing. Manjeet Kaur entered the room carrying tea and some other items on a tray. She momentarily halted in her tracks on seeing Ramdev sobbing and gave her husband an intense look. Mechanically she placed the tea tray on the centre table and swiftly went out of the room.

The Sarpanch had no doubt in his mind that Inder Singh was hiding something. He was trying to cover up the situation by telling a lie. Manjeet Kaur too was playing the same game. What was the necessity of telling such lies? So Vishundev was not alive! This realisation hit the Sarpanch's mind like a hammer stroke. He squirmed with rage.

"Tell me the truth, Inder Singh. Is Vishundev living or dead? If he is alive you must give me his address."

"I've told you he is no longer with us. He has long since gone from here. He must be alive."

"Have pity on this poor boy. He has come from so far away. What's the use of telling lies?"

"Ohe Sarup how dare you call me a liar?" Inder Singh flared up. "You have lost in the election to our present Sarpanch and yet you strut about like a cock. Who are you to ask me? I refuse to tell you anything. Have you come here to settle scores or to help? You,

the boy's self-styled mentor!"

Sarup looked at Inder Singh flabbergasted. Ramdev burst out crying. Suddenly he advanced and fell at Inder Singh's feet. "*Malik*," he cried between wails, "Tell me, *Malik*, where's my brother. It'll be so kind of you, *Malik*. Tell me, *Malik*. Tell me..."

"You have the heart of a stone, Inder. A stone!" The Sarpanch gave Inder Singh a contemptuous look. Such a big farm, so much wealth, but not a trace of humanity, no fellow-feeling. So you can't help this stranger? Come boy, let's go!"

The Sarpanch got up from his seat and held Ramdev from his shoulders, helping him to rise to his feet.

"Just a minute, Bhai Saheb," Manjeet Kaur's sharp voice came from inside the room. Coming to the door she threw out a bag which landed near the Sarpanch's feet. "These are Vishundev's things," she said as if in a trance. "He is no more in this world." Manjeet Kaur started crying. "One day he told me that he was going to Ambarsar to buy some clothes for his people in Bihar as he would soon be going home. The bus by which he was returning from Ambarsar broke down on the way and it could resume its journey quite late at night. The bus was waylaid near Cheharta. There were killings. In that..."

Ramdev was struck dumb. Tears flowed from his eyes. Manjeet Kaur's words had left Sarup Sarpanch aghast. Inder Singh's eyes were riveted to the

floor like a soul caught in sin.

"I kept crying for three days," Manjeet Kaur said. "I too have sons and know what their loss means... He was hiding facts for fear of being hauled up by the long arm of the law. We kept quarelling over it the entire night. But why hide facts, I said! After all, he was also a mother's son and a brother to someone. Yesterday I told you a lie. You must forgive me for it, Sarpanchji."

She held Ramdev against her breast and wiped his tears with the edge of her dupatta.

A flute was peeping out from the bag lying between them. Like their tears the flute was also saying something. A hush had fallen over the place for no one was willing to comprehend what the flute was trying to tell them.

– SIX –

That day Ramdev kept sitting on the bank of the canal for a long time, breathing the free air and watching the rippling water. But everything seemed to be devoid of any meaning. He was told he would be given two thousand rupees the following day and the Sarpanch would himself put him on the bus bound for Amritsar. He decided he would visit the Sarpanch's house and reassure himself by reminding the Sarpanch about his promise. He was walking down the road when three military jeeps drove past him announcing something in Punjabi over the loud-speaker. Further down, he came across three more jeeps. Ramdev

felt alarmed and hastened his pace to reach the Sarpanch's house.

"Sarpanch Sahab, has the Pakistani army invaded us?" he asked the Sarpanch panting for breath.

"No, boy," the Sarpanch took a long breath. "It's our own army. But it's too bad the way things are happening.

"Why?"

"You won't understand it, boy. Only we people who live along the border can understand it. The army comes and goes but there's no remedy for the scars it leaves behind. Let's go to Inder Singh."

Ramdev felt as if he was groping in the dark. All that he could do was to hear the news on TV from Jalandhar and Lahore. But he just couldn't make out what was happening around him. A pall of fear lay over the entire Punjab. Wagha and Atari had put on the appearance of army outposts.

Even in the privacy of houses, screams bemoaning death lay muffled out of fear. Even the wind was being subjected to vigorous search. People would hide like pigeons scared of cats. In this tornado of hate even leaves refused to stir. They spoke only in the language of silence. Rumours flew like free-wheeling birds in the sky, and the night would lie awake, for people in bottle green uniforms kept trampling over the creeping stillness of the night.

Searches had become the order of the day which had a shattering effect on Manjeet Kaur's morale. Inder Singh

would remain glued to his TV in between switching on the radio to hear the news. Gloom hung over the house. The Sarpanch would come to console them.

Kirpal Singh's brother was a sevadar at Amritsar and could get authentic news from Delhi. "Everything is peaceful in Delhi," the Sarpanch brought Manjeet Kaur the latest news. "This is as it should be for is not Delhi the capital of India? You keep worrying unnecessarily. Keep up your spirits."

"How can I stop worrying, Sarpanchji? When a flower is plucked the leaves also get mauled up. When they bombarded us from across the border it put us on our mettle. But now the danger has erupted from within our own borders. Why don't people own them like their own sons and give them a place in their own hearts? The very people from whom we used to draw comfort are now out to strike terror in our hearts. Now only Wahe Guru is our redeemer." She kept worrying about her two sons who were living in Delhi.

The days passed with the force of a storm. When the curfew was lifted after twelve days they were gripped by grave uncertainty. Who died, who was missing? People were in the dark about so many things with which they were directly concerned:

"How long can you go on suffering like this?" Inder Singh said to Ramdev. "You had better go home. Leave for Ambarsar tomorrow."

Amritsar was reeling under an umbrella of terror. There was the silence of a graveyard. But on his onward journey Ramdev had to pass through that city. As he settled down in his seat he looked out of the bus window. Sarup Sarpanch and Inder Singh were standing outside by the side of the bus. The bus lurched forward with a jolt. Ramdev gratefully folded his hands together in salutation.

He sighed as they disappeared from sight. As he closed his eyes he saw his Ma standing before him. He wanted to fob her off by telling a lie. He had failed

to find Bhaiyya, he wanted to tell her. But then how would he account for those two thousand rupees? Vishundev's bag felt oppressively heavy as it lay in his lap, the flute peeping out of it. Vishundev's face revolved before his eye and his head reeled. He started shaking with a spasm of shivering. "No!" he mumbled to himself and firmly gripped the bar of the front seat. The bus growled as it sped on its journey. It had to trundle forward. The journey by the Bhaiyya Express lay ahead of him. The journey would never terminate.

Arun Prakash born 1948, is a famous author, critic and literary journalist. He has five collections of short stories, a novel and a selection of poems to his credit. He has translated a number of books. He has been editor of a literary quarterly 'samkalin bhartiya sahitya'. He lives in Delhi.

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

THE RHYTHM OF THE ROAD

Susham Bedi

Translated by
J.A.Kasturi

Neha concentrated as her father continued, "Listen to it. You have to recognize it, so you can keep time with it. On Manhattan, hundreds of other cars are all moving together with you. Watch your speed so you won't have to slam on the brakes at the next red light."

Her driving test was in two days. She had enrolled in a driving school but was nervous after failing her first test. Her father offered to help her practice, and he was an excellent driver.

Ever since she was a little girl, Neha had always wanted to learn how to drive. "Just wait until you're a little older," her father used to tell her, "and I'll teach you." But after she left for college she had no time for it. And now, back again in Manhattan, she was finally getting the chance. She was twenty-three.

In the suburbs, she knew, her friends were all driving by sixteen. But growing up in the city, Neha had never really needed a car. Otherwise she might have learned earlier too. But perhaps it didn't really matter that she was doing it so late in life. Her brother had also only begun driving after he got a job. And her mother, she still did not know how to drive.

And these days Neha felt like she was ready to learn anything. She had always been a good student, and always diligent about her classes. That was something her teachers had remarked about her, too. Preparing for her classes ahead of time made her work easier, and she was usually at the head of her class as a result.

But she remembered that once, when one of her mother's friends had referred her as a "precocious" child, it had been meant as a criticism, not as a compliment.

It had been a strange moment in her life. She must have been about eleven at the time. Her school friend Jenny had been asking other girls if they were still virgins. Neha had no idea what a virgin was, but she noticed that whenever a girl answered that she was one, Jenny and the other girls teased and made fun of her. Neha didn't have the courage to reveal her ignorance to her classmates by asking them what it meant. But when she got home from school, the first thing Neha did that afternoon was to ask her mother, who happened to be entertaining some guests: "Mummy, what's a virgin?"

And even before her mother had heard the question, Neha quickly added, "I'm not a virgin, am I?"

Her mother froze. Before she could respond, one of her guests broke in, "My God! What a precocious child! She's barely weaned and she's already worrying about her virginity!"

My dear child, you should be thinking about homework and playing with your dolls. And what would you do even if you knew what it meant?"

Her mother, recovering her senses, had scolded her, "Neha! You used to be a such an innocent little girl! You shouldn't be asking about such things. Stop hanging around with your American friends who talk like this. Just keep your mind on your schoolwork!"

Neha was still as innocent and well-behaved as she had ever been as a child, but she felt there had been a change in her parents' attitude towards her ever since that day. They seemed to love her most only when she played the part of an innocent little girl, one who was quite ignorant of the ways of the world. Her father would be especially entertained whenever she conversed with them in Hindi in a childish little voice. But when it came to her studies, however, they still expected her to be a responsible adult. If she ever received a bad grade on an exam she would be sure to hear, "Don't be so childish! You must always excel in your studies!"

Even after all these years, Neha did not know how to appear both knowledgeable and innocent at the same time. She still felt confused about what her parents expected her to know, and what she was not supposed to know at all.

One day as they were driving along, they arrived at a highway along the edge of Manhattan island. Neha was still in the habit of driving slowly and cautiously. Her father instructed her, "When you get on the highway you're going to have to speed up. The lanes are wider, and there aren't any traffic lights here. And the other cars are going so fast that if you slow down, you'll just get in everyone's way. That's why I keep telling you, pay attention to the rhythm of the traffic, it's the first thing you need to understand to become a safe driver."

These days, Neha also felt like she was ready for many of those things that her parents had avoided talking to her. For one thing, she felt that they were still unsure about whether their daughter should find a husband for herself, or if they should be arranging a suitable match. Recently, one of her cousins had an arranged marriage with a woman from Jodhpur. But after arriving, the bride began behaving in quite a bizarre fashion and they quickly ended up with a divorce. Ever since then her mother had been against the idea of finding someone for Neha in India.

Instead, her mother would occasionally hint that one of their relatives in America knew a nice young man for her to meet. And she would also quickly add that it was up to Neha whether she wanted to meet him or not. "I don't want you to feel embarrassed," her mother would insist. Yet at other times she would say, "It's great that you're so interested in your studies and in having a career, but be aware that women should be married by twenty-two or twenty-three. I was just twenty-one at my own wedding."

Her mother's attitude seemed to change based on who happened to be visiting her at the time: her American friends, her Indian friends, or her relatives. Her mother seemed too easily influenced by all of their different recommendations. Perhaps that was why sometimes she would also hear her mother say, "Look, I grew up in a different

time and place. In America no one is in a hurry to get married. If it works out with someone you love, then do it, otherwise just concentrate on your career. There's no reason why you have to get married. If we were in India, by now all our relatives would have been on our head about our unmarried daughter."

But then she would sometimes also add, "Even so, it is important for a woman to get married at a decent age, otherwise no respectable man will want you. Besides, you'll get set in your ways and finding a compatible person once you're older will become even more difficult."

Neha knew that her mother was alluding to Anshul. Neha's friend, Anshul, was twenty-nine. Three years before, she got engaged to a young man from India, and the two had started living together. Just a year later he declared that he did not want to marry her, but he was willing to continue living together. And he could not guarantee that they would get married in the future, either. Anshul broke off the relationship. And the relationships she had after that likewise went nowhere. For a while she had dated a Latino man whom she later decided she did not want to marry. After that there was a Black man whom she liked, but her parents were stubbornly opposed to their marriage. She might still have married him against her parents' wishes, but in the meanwhile the relationship had broken down on its own.

So at twenty-nine, Anshul had suddenly resolved to become a sanyasin, an ascetic, and to remain single. She stopped wearing dresses and her makeup. She constructed an elaborate altar in a corner of her apartment and would sit for long hours meditating in yogic positions, dressed in a plain white sari. She also began working on the project of an East-West cultural center, and became an activist for feminist causes. She cultivated a bitterness towards men and took it as her mission to pass on her resentment to the rest of society.

Neha had no desire to wind up so bitter. Her mother constantly worried that if Neha didn't get married at an appropriate age, who knew in what direction she might drift? She would mention Anshul and say, "She's too young to be a sanyasin. At twenty-nine a woman ought to be delighting in the pleasures of raising her family. What's wrong with your generation? Sometimes you are all so idealistic, and sometimes so cynical."

Neha laughed. "Mummy, it's just a fad. Tomorrow Anshul will meet some guy that she'll fall for again and she'll forget all about being an ascetic. And then she'll have to find some other obsession with which to pass the time."

"That's well and good," her mother replied, "but one needs some stability too. Shouldn't she be thinking about getting married while she still can?"

Neha herself was unsure of the right answer.

She couldn't imagine having an arranged marriage like her parents. But she was equally apprehensive at the thought of starting a relationship with someone on her own. Usually such relationships meant that one had to go all the way before any serious discussion about marriage could begin. And until the wedding the relationship would get tested in countless ways and who knows if it wouldn't just fall apart before then. This was precisely what had happened to many of her friends. And because of such doubts Neha had kept herself from being physically intimate with any of the men in her life. But it was not always possible to keep an emotional intimacy from turning into a physical one. And by the same token, what would be satisfying about a physical connection without an emotional involvement? What was the solution to this problem? So she was still a virgin. But how long could she keep herself this way? Her mother had taught her since childhood to save herself for marriage. Was she to remain unsatisfied unless the right person just happened to come along? It didn't make any sense to get married simply to finally experience physical intimacy. Of course she could never let that happen. Neha didn't understand what her mother expected from her! Sometimes she seemed like an open-minded American, and sometimes she sounded so old-fashioned and traditional.

Once Neha overheard one of her mother's friends saying, "Times have

changed. Who knows, tomorrow my daughter may come to me and say that she wants to live with a man before marrying him. And how could I stop her? The fear of that keeps me up at night. Her reputation would be totally ruined!"

The next day, perhaps because of that very conversation, her mother said to her, "If there's a boy you are attracted to, just let me know. If you're thinking of moving in with someone, we should get you both engaged. I won't allow it under any other circumstances." All day Neha had thought about what her mother said, and about how to keep her life on the right path. There was so much she wanted to reveal to her mother! But such conversations frightened Neha, she never felt comfortable talking about sex and marriage with her mother.

Neha didn't want to get engaged or married yet, she really just wanted to be with someone and to wait and see. But neither did she want to deprive herself of love and companionship. Her mother had been married by twenty-one. She was already twenty-three and would soon be twenty-four. Did she have the courage to tell her mother that the boy she spent her time studying with was an American? He wasn't the kind of ambitious man that her parents imagined their son-in-law would be. He had no desire to become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. He wanted to be a mere school teacher and believed in the importance of educating the youth

of the country. He genuinely liked working with children, and was pursuing exactly the career that he wanted. But how could she explain that to her parents? How would they respond? Neha had learned to expect certain complex responses from her mother. Mummy would initially surely be disappointed – a mere school teacher for a son-in-law? After that she would probably not speak with Neha for a while. She would lose herself in endless thought and worry. And she would resent that her well-laid plans for Neha had been disrupted. Her daughter was an architect, but her son-in-law was to be a mere school teacher? She had expected him to be another graduate of the School of Architecture, and instead he was to be someone who spent his time correcting the stupidity of high school children. She would be ashamed to tell anyone what he does for a living. Neha was quite sure that this is how her mother would feel.

Mummy had said as much about one of Neha's friends. "Niyathi is such a bright and beautiful woman, how did a school teacher manage to catch her?" she had asked. Neha felt bad about her mother's assessment. Trying to defend her friend, she explained, "Mummy, he's idealistic. He isn't just interested in making money. He wants to improve the education of children. If bright people don't go into teaching, how can this country expect to have educated citizens? If everyone wants to teach at the university level, who will be left to teach in the schools?"

Her mother told her to be quiet. "And don't worry about that," she added, "there are plenty of people to teach in the schools. I only meant to say that Niyathi could have done better. But if that's who she chose, what can we do?"

Neha tried once again to justify her friend's choice, "Just because he's now a school teacher does not mean he always will be one. People here change their careers all the time. He could always go for a PhD and become a professor or whatever else he wants to do. It's not like in India where once you choose a profession you're to stay on the same course all your life. And a school teacher's salary isn't much less than that of a professor."

"That's fine, don't argue with me. You're always giving me lectures." Her mother was irritated whenever her daughter lectured her as if she were the child! That's the gratitude she got for giving the child some freedom. "You aren't so brave with your father," she said ruefully, "You're afraid of him so you pay attention and understand what he says. But you never listen to your mother."

As Neha listened to her father explaining the rhythm of the road, she felt that he did understand a lot of things. Her father had long since stopped asking her to speak her childish Hindi. He sometimes laughed at himself thinking about how much he used to enjoy that. But now Neha was a young adult, after

all, and she ought to be spoken to as one. Driving along with him, Neha suddenly felt brave.

"Papa, after driving practice, can you drop me at Peter's house?"

"Who's Peter?," he asked, "A new friend of yours?"

"Not new. An old friend from college. He moved back to the city."

"Where are you going to meet him?"

"45th Street."

"At a restaurant?"

"No."

"He lives there?"

Her father didn't conceal his bewilderment as he asked, "You're going to his apartment?"

She could read her father's concern, alarm, and understanding, as they all appeared plainly on his face. He made an effort to restrain his voice as he said, "But you do know don't you, that when you go into a man's house like this... will there be others there?"

"I don't know... perhaps just me." She wanted her father to know the truth, but she was no longer able to find the courage to tell him. She desperately wanted him to understand but also to get his permission without saying anything more.

Her father continued, "So he's such an old friend, that..."

"Yes."

"Are you in love him?"

"What?! I don't know."

"If you're going to his apartment by yourself, only go if he is special to you. Otherwise if something were to happen, it would be a mistake."

"Papa, he is special."

"Does that mean that you love him?"

"I don't know. We're very good friends."

"And is there anyone else who is as good a friend?"

"No."

"Then he is your special friend. You are probably in love with him. You're just afraid to admit it to me."

"I don't know what to say, Papa. Perhaps I am."

Neha was perplexed at this unusual conversation she was having with her father. She suddenly felt that perhaps in her father's estimation she had indeed become a young adult. Her father clearly understood everything. Perhaps she was being unnecessarily fearful of the conversation.

"If you like I could meet him," he offered.

"But Papa, its not so serious. I don't know myself how this will turn out."

"If you're that unsure, why are you going to his apartment? Can I tell you something..."

She suddenly felt a chill – what would he say?

"Listen my child, I myself am a man, so I want to tell you something about

how men think. When a girl chases a man, he will not respect her. But if you play hard to get, men will fall over each other trying to get you."

"Papa!" She felt like saying that until now she had only ever played hard to get, and she was still waiting for someone to come after her. And if she kept her distance, how could she know if they were going to be special or not in the first place? Neha reflected that in the end, her father was only being her father. He was not trying to impose his views on her, but he was still preoccupied with thoughts of his daughter's honor.

So Neha sought to reassure him.

"I'm working on a film project with him."

"What film project?"

She wasn't really lying. She had spoken at length with Peter about it, though she wasn't going to see him specifically for that reason. They were just going to hang out and chat. But perhaps she too had calculated that in the privacy of his apartment she might be able to touch him, and perhaps do more than that... A shiver of anticipation passed through her body, and she felt more strongly than before that today she was ready for anything. But despite this, she also knew that she would be just as content if she only talked about the project with him for a while and then returned home. She was still unsure which outcome was preferable!

They left the highway and turned

onto First Avenue. As they approached a yellow light, there was some heavy traffic coming up behind her. "Keep going," her father instructed, and then he explained, "Usually you should prepare to stop at a yellow light, but if you are going fast and the light just turned yellow, just speed up and go through. Otherwise you might get hit by the cars behind you."

Then continuing, he asked, "What kind of a film project?"

"We're still writing the script. Its going to be a film on Sati."

"Sati?"

"Yes, you sound surprised."

"What do you know about Sati? What's the thesis?"

"We've set the story in the nineteenth century. There's a British reformer in it. He'll rescue a woman about to commit Sati, and through their conversation he will change her mind."

"You mean it is a critique of Sati."

"But she'll have to change her religion too because she becomes an outcaste in Hindu society for having escaped her husband's funeral pyre."

"Hinduism doesn't require women to be burned with their husband's body. That only reveals your ignorance. I don't see the sense in making a film like this."

"Its post-colonial stuff," she said, "There are two separate things, Papa. First, we want to make an international film, one that will be interesting to all

audiences, both here and in India. Secondly, we want to spread awareness of women's suffering. And also, the topic is one that will make it easy for us to get some funding."

"And whatever happened to your architecture career?"

"I'm only doing the film on the side. But not Peter – he left his high-pressure teaching job. This way he can have more time to work on the film. Its taking a long time to make the stage, and the script isn't even done yet."

That day her father dropped her off at Peter's house. It felt strange to think that he seemed to understand her, and that they were developing a new type of friendship.

Even when Neha was younger, her mother's attitude towards her was not consistent. Especially on the topic of Neha's future marriage, she had always seemed impatient and panicky. Her mother could be quite open-minded, but Neha thought that she was probably being pressed on this subject by her relatives and her Indian-American friends. And one time, Neha even brought up the topic herself.

"Just because Anshul became a sanyasin," she said, "you seem to think my entire generation is crazy. You think I'll become an ascetic too?"

"Its very important to get married before you are too old," her mother repeated patiently.

"And what if I don't?"

"That would be a great mistake."

"What is the mistake?"

"After all, marriage is an ancient institution. It's there for a reason, isn't it?"

"Yes, in order to make women bear children and do housework. But I'm married to my career, and I'm also committed to making films. Where do I have the time to take care of a home? If it happens I'll think about it, but otherwise I don't want to have to worry about it."

"That's exactly the problem," her mother said, "You think you can do without a family of your own. Even now, despite my nagging you still haven't learned how to cook."

"Mummy, lots of people eat out. No one here has time to cook. And if I ever wanted to learn, it wouldn't be so hard. But it's not a necessity the way you understand it."

Her mother ended the conversation with, "Who can argue with you?" But Neha would become anxious whenever her mother turned away from her like that.

Even though her mother used to declare that she would never pressure her daughter to get married, her attitude continued to harden with each passing year. And Neha's apprehensions were realized when her mother asked her about Peter. The day after her father dropped

her off at Peter's house, her mother asked her directly if there was any possibility of marriage with Peter. Neha avoided the question, but she had often asked herself the very same question, and had earlier brought it up with Peter, too.

That day at Peter's apartment, her father's fears were almost realized. But Neha had again hesitated to go through with it, since her father's warnings were fresh on her mind. Peter had barely touched her hand when she declared, "If you have no intention of marrying me, then I can't let this relationship go any further."

Peter withdrew his hand with a start. For a while he remained silent. Then he took her face in both hands, and kissed it. He patted her reassuringly on the shoulder and said, "Why are you so tense today? Relax!"

"I don't have time to relax, Peter! Everyday, one way or another, the topic of marriage keeps coming up." She disentangled herself from his embrace.

"Do you really want to marry me?" he asked.

She wasn't sure what to say in response. If she accepted a future with him, she would be throwing her entire relationship with her parents into doubt. So much depended on the answer to his question. Perhaps she wanted to say "Yes," but she was also filled with unease. She was faced with the most important question of her life, and she had no idea how to choose.

"I'm not sure what you want from me," Peter said. "I don't even want to think about marriage yet. And we haven't even known each other intimately..."

"We can only know each other that way after marriage."

"But I could only make a decision about marriage after we know we're compatible in every way."

"And even if we do, what guarantee do I have that you won't change your mind?"

"But no one has a guarantee, even after marriage. Could you give me a guarantee right now that you'll never leave me and walk away?"

"Yes, but if you get involved with someone else I wouldn't put up with that."

"And you shouldn't," he said, "If everyone had a guarantee about such things, why would so many people get divorced? Right now we have a great relationship, but tomorrow it could break down. We'll only know if we dive in fully, but you panic at the thought of that."

"You know my situation," she said, "I'm as impatient as you are."

"And still you want to complicate this with marriage. A marriage isn't only about being with each other. You have to worry about a house, a salary, children, everything. I'm not ready for all that right now. If you really love me you won't force me into all that right now."

And every time he tried to touch

her after that, she stiffened with the fear that she might be carried away by her passion and make an irreversible mistake.

"Don't you want to touch me anymore?" he asked. She sat silently, motionless.

She avoided seeing him again after that. Perhaps she needed to understand herself first. Whom should she trust? Peter, or her parents? Whom could she rely on? And what did she really want for herself anyway? So six months later, when her mother again asked her the question, Neha only wanted the tension to go away. "Don't ask me anymore! The men here don't believe in commitment! What can I do?" She turned pale and blushed at the same time. Her mother's fears returned and she imagined the worst. Neha may or may not have shared her mother's fears, but she needed to get away. She turned to her father, "We drive so little in the city, I don't feel confident. Can you help me practice some more?"

Before they left, Mummy said to her, "It's not too late to heed my warning. I'm warning you at some point I'll have to do something myself. Yesterday Uma mentioned that her friend's son was still a virgin too. Shall I set up a meeting between you two? You can meet him on your own, anywhere you like. We won't even get involved."

Her father intervened, "Why do you keep embarrassing her like that? When she's ready to get married, she'll let us know. She's an adult now, she can make her own decisions. You raised her to

have the same values as her friends here, why do you now want to force her back to another time?"

As she drove along Neha felt she was perhaps getting the hang of driving. Maybe with just a little more practice she'd be able to drive on her own with confidence. Suddenly she heard her father saying, "Always stop at red lights. Sometimes if there's no traffic around, it's human nature to want to speed through a yellow one. But if you get in the habit of doing that you will risk having an accident. Because it's always possible that when you're not paying attention a car will come out of nowhere and hit you." And then he repeated, "So don't cross the intersection against a red light. I'll always keep telling you that."

Neha was startled. Why was her father saying that? Did she really just go through a red light? Or was he just fulfilling his duty as a father to caution her? Perhaps he had some fears of his own... Had she been going through red lights, or standing still at green ones?

Her father continued, "I think you've learned everything. You're driving quite well. And as you continue, your self-confidence will grow. It's important to feel the rhythm of the road, don't forget that that's the hallmark of a good driver.

Otherwise you'll keep having accidents. In this country it's as necessary to know how to drive as it is to read and write. That's why it's very important that you move with the flow of traffic, listen to the rhythm of the road, follow its lead."

Suddenly Neha felt as if she was no longer listening to her father's voice, but to something else entirely. And what she was hearing, perhaps her father was unable to hear... Perhaps it wasn't even him that was speaking anymore. It was something she had never heard before, had never been aware of before. Like a distant voice arising from an ocean's depths... unclear... profound... saturated... a voice so heavy with its own weight that even as it broke the surface most of it remained submerged... out of sight... unrecognizable. And then like a wave, it disappeared back into the same place from which it arose.

Was that the "rhythm of the road"?

Her father was saying, "Drop me at home first, and after that go where you want to go." But it didn't sound like her father, it wasn't his voice. It sounded like her own... and the light in front of her turned green, or so it seemed... and she drove through...

Susham Bedi, born 1945 writes short stories and novels in Hindi. She is co-ordinator of Hindi Urdu flagship programmes in deptt. of Middle east and Asian Languages and culture, Columbia University, U.S.A. Her recent novels morche and maine naata toda were well received. She lives in New York, U.S.A.
J.A. Kasturi translates from Hindi to English and vice versa.

SUMMON THE END

English version of Hindi Play: Ant Haazir ho!

Meera Kant

Translated by

Vandana R. Singh

Summon The End

Myths are myths, not reality. Some family relationships have acquired mythical proportions too. When we encounter any deviation within these mythical relationships we make a quick detour and avoid coming face to face with the situation. We pretend they are non-existent. Meera Kant's play *Summon the End* steps on the sticky ground of some such relationships. It rips open these insulated liaisons and shreds them to pieces. Incest and rape within the family is neither a phenomenon nor a discovery of the twenty-first century. It is as old as the institution of family itself, but yes, with rising social awareness it has been brought to light and the sordid realities have increasingly been made public.

This play brings to the centre-stage those situations and incidents that make a young girl's life a living nightmare right from her early years. These situations, that often develop in a seemingly innocuous family set-up, eat into its familial fabric destroying it from within like lethal termite. It is the misfortune of society that it lacks the courage to rid itself of this malaise and allows the rot to set in and indeed thrive till it eats its way to the very core of that society. On the contrary, it sweeps these realities under the carpet, and ostensibly the business of life goes on as though nothing is amiss.

This play is not a story of either a rape or incest – it is the story of dishonesty within relationships. It is the story of treachery – with a wife, a daughter and of the sanctity of relationships. It is the story of treachery with the stability and purity of family life.

Summon the End focuses on situations when the home instead of being a symbol of safety and security turns into a danger zone. When traps are laid out in the house itself and the protector transforms into a deadly assailant. Moving far ahead of domestic violence and rape this play is about the slow, painful death of human values.

Dramatis Personae

Dheeraj	-	Age 30 years. Holds a Ph.D. (Hindi) for several years now
Sudhanshu	-	Age 27 years. Pursuing Ph. D. (International Relations)
Irfan	-	Age 27 years. Pursuing Ph. D. (Hindi)
Roli	-	Age 23 years. Student of M. A. (Sociology)
Shilpa	-	Age 23 years. Student of M. A. (Hindi)
Old woman	-	Age 70 years. Dheeraj's neighbour
Young man	-	About 25 years. Shilpa's cousin
Boy	-	from tea shop

Setting

A residential area of any contemporary metropolitan city and a university campus in the same city.

Part I

A huge, decrepit house – now locked up - with an outhouse that was once a garage. Outside the garage, carelessly propped against the wall is a worn-out board with the words-

A word is enough to hurt the heart

Like the nail that rips the tyre apart

What it needs is a quick fix care

That you get at the scooter shop for repair!

A string cot is lying in the courtyard outside the garage. Two small stools are randomly placed. The curtain goes up to reveal Dheeraj, Irfan and Roli earnestly trying to rehearse for a street play. Irfan is loudly beating a thali. He is also making loud sounds with his mouth to attract people. Dheeraj and Roli are ready to play their respective parts.

Dheeraj:	Arre bhai! what's all this noise.... stop it.... (<i>Irfan continues beating the thali and making the noises with his mouth</i>)What is this racket? What for? (<i>The noise continues</i>) Arre bhai! what are you doing?	Irfan:	I want people to gather here.
		Dheeraj:	Why do you want them to gather here? Are you going to make a speech for the elections?
Irfan:	(<i>Stopping the thali-beating for a moment</i>) I'm beating the thali, what else? (<i>Starts beating the thali again</i>)	Irfan:	(<i>Discontinuing the thali-beating</i>) For that you have to hire people. Where do we have that kind of money! (<i>Starts beating the thali again</i>)
Dheeraj:	Why are you beating this thali? (<i>Goes close to him and holding his hand.....</i>) Has someone had a son?	Dheeraj:	So then?
		Irfan:	(<i>Taking a deep breath</i>) So then nothing....I've got a story...
Irfan:	(<i>Freeing his hand</i>) These days there is no difference between a son and a daughter. In any case the days of announcing the birth of a son by beating a thali are long gone. This is the age of the Internet! (<i>Resumes beating the thali</i>)	Roli:	Oh! I see...so from the stage the story has now made its way into the street play as well! (<i>Irfan and Dheeraj continue as though they haven't heard Roli at all.</i>)
		Dheeraj:	Story! What kind of story! Whose story!
Dheeraj:	(<i>Placing his hands on his ears</i>) Then why are you beating the thali?	Irfan:	Everybody's story... Bahua's – that is Ma's story, Amma's story, Ammi's story, Aayi's story...Bahua's story.
		Dheeraj:	Bahua's story?

Irfan: Yes, Bahua's story and the story of the thali.

(Dheeraj turns around and sees a banner in Roli's hand— 'Babuji ki thali')

Dheeraj: *(looking at the banner)* Oh! so that's what it says here...this is the story ...the story of Babuji's thali!

(Roli goes and stands at the back with the banner.)

Irfan: Yes, the story of Babuji's thali which is actually Bahua's story....*(pointing towards the back)* that Bahua's story.

(To play the part of Bahua, Roli puts the banner aside and adjusts her duppatta like the palloo of a sari. Then slowly she moves to the center of the stage. Irfan and Dheeraj move away. Before leaving, Irfan quickly places his handkerchief on the center of the stage. Dheeraj takes off his shoes and carelessly throws them to one side. Bahua is visibly sad. She is attending to petty household chores. Frequently, she is on the verge of breaking down but holds herself back. Though nothing of any consequence remains to be done, Bahua is keeping herself involved

in odd jobs so as to keep herself from breaking down.)

Bahua: *(to herself)* I had folded all the clothes...then how is this handkerchief lying here? *(Slowly walks to the handkerchief, picks it up and folds it. In between she also wipes her nose with her palloo.)* Dal, subzi, roti, chawal... there was everything... then why... *(pauses to wipe her tears)* there was chutney too...and the aroma of the desi ghee in the dal had filled up the room.

(Sees the pair of shoes— both shoes facing different directions— and walks towards them.)

How many times I've told them this is inauspicious... shoes must be placed properly... but who cares... and who has the time? Am I not here to do it?

(Bends over the shoes. So as not to dirty her hands, uses her palloo to put them straight. Straightens up with an effort.)

How much enthusiasm and love went into preparing that thali...I woke up at the crack of dawn....to do it quickly... because he had to leave

early...but all in vain...(wipes her nose) All my life all I've wanted is to make him happy...I'd put everything on his thali with so much care....but he didn't even touch it...the thali just lay untouched.

(Her voice takes on a harsher tone.) He has crossed sixty...but he's headstrong like a thirty year old. (Voice now gentle.) I was just fifteen when I got married and came to this house.... and Babujimust have been about twenty-five or twenty-six. Ever since then I've been taking care of this house. Every morning as soon as the sun rises it's the same routine all over again....

(Bahua becomes a fifteen year-old bride. With her head covered calls out...)

Amma ji....

(On not getting any reply she addresses the audience.)

Shilpa isn't here yet...now who will be Amma?

Dheeraj: She should have been here by now...how can we carry on like this ...Sudhanshu hasn't come either...

Roli: (Uncovers her head) Forget Sudhanshu. First someone please do Shilpa's part

(Again faces the audience with her head covered.)

Irfan: Shilpa or Amma?

Roli: (irritated) Same thing...

Dheeraj: (to Irfan) You play Amma's part for her.

Irfan: (romantically) why only Amma? I am ready to become everything for her...just waiting to be asked.

(Irritated, Roli again uncovers her head.)

Roli: Dheeraj da, just tell him....jokes all the time...

Irfan: (cutting her short) Joke! The biggest joke of all is....that even when I'm not joking I become the joker!

Dheeraj: Irfan.....Irfan please....read out Shilpa's dialogues...(to Roli) Come on Roli...start.. (Roli again covers her head.)

Roli: (Covering her head and talking to herself in a lighter vein)

Now I'm a fifteen-year old bride. (Then speaks seriously as Bahua) Amma ji....which dal is to be cooked today?

(Irfan, as Amma, picks up an empty tray and bows to it respectfully as if to a puja thali.)

Amma: (in an irritated voice) Make arhar dal.

Bahua:	<i>(in a deflated voice)</i> Arhar! I cooked that yesterday too. <i>(Amma gives Bahua a frosty look. Then starts watering an imaginary tulsi.)</i>	Dheeraj:	Roli, please concentrate on the dialogue. <i>(Roli becomes Bahua once again.)</i>
Amma:	Jai Tulsi Ma.... Jai Tulsi Ma....	Bahua:	<i>(sighing)</i> Sometimes it feels as though I was born here—under this roof. It was his smile that played on my lips and his sadness that engulfed the household. What have I not done to bring a smile to his lips...right from my days of youth till this old age! Even after retirement did he ever lead a retired life? <i>(Bahua is lost in memories. Walking briskly like Babuji, Dheeraj comes to the fore. Bahua adjusts her palloo. Babuji does a couple of sit-ups. Bahua gets a glass and stands waiting. In the meanwhile Irfan passes a comment which Dheeraj and Roli ignore. They continue playing their parts with all seriousness.)</i>
Bahua:	<i>(enthusiastically)</i> Should I make sabut masoor?		
Amma:	Are you going to kill me with that heavy dal everyday? It gives me indigestion.		
Bahua:	<i>(softly)</i> But he likes it.		
Amma:	Sure he likes it. You slip of a girl....what do you know about what he likesAre you his mother or I? Make arhar dal...that's it. <i>(Amma exits. Now Irfan is himself on stage. Bahua has become old once again.)</i>		
Bahua:	<i>(to herself)</i> The same dal...same thali! As if there was nothing else left to life. I used to go to my mother's house only for weddings and family occasions....and then after a few years when Amma ji passed away even that stopped...how could I go? Who would take care of Babuji if I went? What would happen to the house? <i>(Suddenly Roli turns towards Dheeraj.)</i>	Irfan:	<i>(beating his head in despair)</i> Swine! Grabbed the best role for himself. Became the husband...while we just looked on like idiots!
		Babuji:	<i>(doing sit-ups)</i> What is it...why are you standing here?
Roli:	Dheeraj da, this Babuji is my husband, isn't he?	Bahua:	I've got warm water with lemon juice and honey.
		Babuji:	<i>(in a tough voice but</i>

panting) Leave it there. (Bahua puts the glass down. Then quickly disappears and comes back with something. Babuji has had the warm lime water.)

Babuji: (*wiping his sweat*) Yes...what is it?

Bahua: Two pearls of garlic.
(*Babuji takes it and puts it in his mouth. Drinks the remaining lime water.*)

Babuji: You don't have that today?

Bahua: (*flustered*) I do...I do... I'll just bring it (*runs to get something and soon returns*) Here it is....four leaves of tulsi and four of sehjan. (*Babuji puts all the leaves into his mouth*)

Babuji: (*chewing*) Don't you know the monsoon is round the corner?
Fresh neem leaves...

Bahua: (*perplexed, extends the plate she is holding in her other hand*)
Yes, I've ground neem buds into a paste. Please have.

Babuji: Leave it there. I'll have it before breakfast. What's for breakfast?

Bahua: (*anxiously*) Sprouted moong.

Babuji: Moong!

Bahua: Which dal should I make for lunch?

Babuji: (*wiping his sweat*) Tch!.... make whatever you like.

Bahua: Should I make arhar then?

Babuji: You know arhar gives me acidity.

Bahua: Should I soak some chana then? We haven't had for a long time...

Babuji: You have all this chana-vana....let the children eat! I have difficulty digesting it. For me just make some

Bahua: Sabut masoor?

Babuji: (*frowning*) Hmmm...
(*Babuji leaves. Bahua comes back to the present. She is again sad.*)

Bahua: (*to herself*) Today also I'd made sabut masoor just as Babuji had said....but he didn't even touch it! (*sighs and sits down*) Oh those days! The younger one was about four or so and the elder one...about fifteen. Babuji used to be in the drawing room....that too at the other end...near the staircase. But it didn't change anything for me...I was always in the kitchen or in the tiny room next to it. At night the tawa would be on and off the fire—waiting for Babuji to come

and eat. What a time it was...
(Lost in memories.)
 I would be sitting there keeping the fire going. I'd put the tawa on the angeethi to keep it hot ..and then put it down before it got too hot...Then the younger one would come bouncing in and tell me.
(Irfan enters playing the part of a young boy and speaks with a lisp.)

Boy: Ma...Ma...Babuji has stood up. He's putting on his slippers.
(Boy goes away.)

Bahua: After telling me this he would go back to check where Babuji was...what he was doing. And I would be on guard...and quickly make the rotis. The rest of the things would be ready in the thali.
(The boy again comes in and after delivering his dialogue goes away.)

Boy: Ma...Ma...Babuji has reached till Bhaiya's room.

Bahua: I would quickly flip the roti on the tawa and start rolling the next one. The younger one would run back. I would start roasting the roti...with an eye on the ghee ... ready in the katori...and then the younger one would come.

Boy: *(jumping with joy)* Babuji has arrived...Babuji has arrived.
(Suddenly Irfan sees Sudhanshu enter and forgets his role.)

Irfan: Well! Well! So Babuji has finally arrived.

Dheeraj: Irfan, again you are...
(Sudhanshu enters.)

Irfan: Yaar, I meant Sudhanshu has come.
(Roli stands up. The rehearsal discontinues.)

Sudhanshu: Sorry guys, I got late.

Dheeraj: Forget it now... we understand... it happens sometimes...

Sudhanshu: What happens?

Irfan: That the door of a hostel room is shut and then shows no signs of opening.

Sudhanshu: *(irritated)* Just see how his mind works! *(trying to justify)* Arre yaar, I've come on my own...from the university... was sitting with that gasbag.

Dheeraj: Gasbag?

Sudhanshu: Yeah...Devki Nandan ji! I'd gone to give him an article. And he took off with his long winding stories. Just sits there all day holding court with his cronies for an audience....

Irfan: They are pieces of furniture in his room. The fat sofa, the short stool and in the middle of all this is that glittering lipstick-laden centre-table.

Sudhanshu: Every now and then he makes it a point to announce that he has an appointment with the minister.....that he's getting late for it. But the bugger won't budge an inch from his place.

Dheeraj: So where's Shilpa then?

Sudhanshu: How do I know.....didn't I just tell you I'm coming straight from the newspaper office.

Roli: I know she didn't have any class today.

Irfan: Let her come....we'll take her class today.
(*Sudhanshu has a faraway look in his eyes.*)
Now where have you got lost?
(*Dramatically, Irfan recites a Ghalib couplet playfully teasing Sudhanshu.*)
Par hum aise khoye jaate hain ki woh paa jaaye hai!

Roli: Dheeraj da....don't you think we're wasting time?

Irfan: Why are you jealous, sweetheart. Here's one for you too.

(*Clears his throat.*)

Roli: (*interrupting him*) Please Irfan....

Irfan: What is it darling?

Roli: Dheeraj da, please stop him.

Dheeraj: (*jokingly*) Now you ask me to stop him....and when you made the first move then?

Roli: Dheeraj da....you too...

Irfan: Et tu Brutus!

Dheeraj: (*now serious*) Okay, enough is enough. All of you are spending your precious time here. Let's not waste it. Or do you intend following in my footsteps and languishing in the university for years?

Roli: This one certainly does. That's why he has chosen a topic like 'Birds and Animals in Hindi Literature' for his Ph. D. He'll dive into the ocean of Hindi literature, hang out with animals in the wild and also fly around with the birds in the sky....and that will take care of five-six years of his life.

Irfan: Arre, I'm MP....MP....

Roli: So?

Irfan: MP....not Madhya Pradesh...

Roli: Member of Parliament?

Irfan: Certainly not.....Maha Padhaku!

Roli: (*surprised*) What? Maha Padhakuyou mean a geek, a bookworm?

Irfan: Yes exactly, a geek....or whatever you like to say.....I'll complete my Ph. D. in just two years ...you wait and see my dear!

Sudhanshu: Sure! And what will you write in it? (*melodramatically*) The beloved's soul was imprisoned in the caged parrot across the faraway mountains.

Irfan: No, yaar, it's not like that. This is a modern approach to the description of the heroine from head to toe. What you call description – I name it environment and wild life.

For instance....walk like an elephant, graceful as a deer, a distinguished nose like a parrot's....what is all this? A link between human beings and nature!

Dheeraj: Perhaps we're digressing from our aim.

Roli: Dheeraj da, I want to say something.

Dheeraj: Go ahead.

Roli: I have a feeling this street play won't work.

Sudhashu }
Irfan: } (*together*) Won't work?

Roli: I mean it doesn't have that appeal for students.

Irfan: You mean the X-factor is missing.

Roli: Call it what you like...but....okay it focuses on women's problems but only the domestic kind which doesn't involve college-going girls like us. So I don't know....how much will they identify with this.

Irfan: Guys, let's just dump this feminism and all...let's have some fun. This is too crappyand in any case we've had enough of this!

Roli: What? Feminism? But on campus yesterday you were saying something completely different! That we have to bring women power on to the forefront...blah...blah...

Irfan: That's campus talk.....one has to say all that stuff.

Sudhanshu: This fellow is such a scoundrel!

(*Picking up the script of the street play Roli flips through its pages.*)

Irfan: Liberal at home conservative abroad!

Sudhanshu: So you've also got into shooting off a quotation at the drop of a hat!

Dheeraj: Hey, did you fall on your head ...at least say it in the correct order.

Irfan: This is the age of inside out...an umbrella turned inside out.

...I mean post-modernism!

Roli: (*going through the script*)
Dheeraj da, the dialogues also need to be more crisp.

Irfan: Do we have a problem with post-modernism?

Roli: Shut up! I was talking about the play.

Sudhanshu: Where is Shilpa? Why isn't she here yet?

Dheeraj: Only when she's here can we make changes in the script. All said and done, she is our script writer.

Irfan: In the meanwhile, let's have a cup of tea...ek chai to maaro!

Sudhanshu: You're really into Bambahiya Hindi.

Irfan: It is this Hindi that's being propagated by Hindi films and TV serials. Actually, classic Hindi is being....

Roli: There he goes again on his classic Hindi trip. It's so obvious he's doing Ph. D in Hindi literature.

Irfan: Hey.....sociology.....

Dheeraj: Now look everyone, no

discussion about subjects. And no personal attacks.

Irfan: Tell me... since when have subjects become personal?

Dheeraj: Okay, maybe not personal but it certainly is party politics. Don't we see bouts of shadow boxing happening in the university everyday?

Irfan: I guess you're right.....but there's politics everywhere. In each and every subject. There's politics even in deciding what is to be taught and what not.

Sudhanshu: It's the story of the egg in this country.....Sunday ho ya Monday, roz khao ande! Eggs are good for you...have an egg everyday! Then the next party steps in and says eggs are bad for the heartdump all eggs into the Arabian Sea. And lo and behold! The poor egg hits an all-time low. But as soon as the old party returns we are once again surrounded by pro-egg banners.....

Roli: Ooooh! I wish you wouldn't remind me of it!

Irfan: She is definitely thinking of omelettes.

Roli: Yes! And so?

Irfan: So nothing...I shall churn out one in a jiffy, my lady....Yaar

Dheeraj, how about a cup of tea.

Roli: Oh come on Dheeraj bhai, sometimes you too are....

Irfan: (*teasing Roli*) Really... sometimes you....

Roli: Dheeraj da, this Ph.D. is worthless. This board that is lying aroundif you had put it up properly and actually started a motor garage today we would have been having omelettes with our tea! Double omelettes, no less!

Dheeraj: You are becoming far too enterprising, Roli. What all do you expect from me?

Roli: Once upon a time when I was studying in college...

Irfan: That Moongphali Devi College!

Roli: Shut up! Dheeraj da, in college one permanently temporary lecturer had once directed a play called 'Literature Repair Shop'. Let's start one.

All together: Literature Repair Shop!

Roli: Believe me, it was a regular play which was put up on stage. What a situation it was! (*now acting*) A pretty young thing, a PYT you know, goes to the literature repair shop looking for a comedy for her college.

Irfan: To take on rent? Like a costume you mean?

Roli: The shopkeeper talks her into taking an old, weather-beaten tragic play. The PYT returns to her college with the play but the Principal thinks the play is too morbid for modern times. She's convinced that nobody would sit through the Devdas style tear-jerker. She suggests a fast-moving comedy with an assortment of characters and a liberal dose of double-meaning dialogue.

Sudhanshu: The sort that we see in serials with recorded laughter bubbling forth every few minutes, I'm sure.

Roli: Exactly. And so the poor PYT once again goes to the repair shop and refuses to leave till the shop-keeper finds her a comedy, leaving the poor man totally flustered.

Irfan: If I were the owner of the literature repair shop I would have told her, 'Young lady – what's the problem? When you enact out this serious play it shall naturally appear to be a comedy!'

(*Everyone laughs.*)

Sudhanshu: Jokes apart, this idea of a literature repair shop is a good one. Brilliant actually! I wish it could be true.

Roli: (*sounding encouraged*) Yeah, then we could have so easily sorted out this play of ours. Or at least changed its mood in seconds.

Irfan: Why just the mood? The whole engine. The theme itself. 'Babuji ki thali' could be the play, in which there would be a huge pot of clay full of nothing but dough or just hay. Sudhanshu: Literature Repair Shop.....like a cobbler's shop. Get an old pair of shoe....I mean..... get an old play and have it fixed. Put it on your feet and just walk away.

Roli: Put it on your feet? What – the play?

Sudhanshu: No I meant the shoe...no, no, I mean....

Dheeraj: Stop it now.

Irfan: What - the literature repair shop?

Dheeraj: Yes, your shoe shop... whatever...oh! Tea is here. (*A boy enters with tea.*)

Boy: Dheeraj bhai, bhabhi – who lives upstairs - wants to know what time will you come?

Dheeraj: (*looks at the time and says*

to himself) It'll take time. (*to the boy*) Say I'll be late. I'll come around eight or so.

Boy: Okay, I'll tell her....around eight. (*The boy leaves.*)

Sudhanshu: You keep lecturing to the whole world...what about yourself?

This bhabhi seems to be straight out of a Hindi literature romance.

Dheeraj: You people are just one-track minded. Bhabhi is Saloni's mother.

Irfan } (*together*) Saloni? Saloni
Roli: } who?

Dheeraj: Bhabhi's daughter.

Sudhanshu: (*teasing Dheeraj*) Bhabhi's daughter or... Bhabhi or daughter....

Irfan: Or Bhabhi and daughter?

Dheeraj: You guys are too much..... believe me I'll be going there for the first time today.

Irfan: Oho! First time, is it?

Roli: Please. Enough is enough. How can anyone even think like this about Dheeraj da!

Irfan: Why? Is he an ascetic or a sanyasi?

(*Roli gives him a scathing look.*)

Agreed – he's our senior. He has submitted his thesis and we have just about started out.....but don't put him on a pedestal.

Sudhanshu: Forget the pedestal – let's talk of 'upstairs'. Who is this Bhabhi upstairs? And Saloni?

Dheeraj: Now how do I explain? I've just started a tuition. And the Bhabhi upstairs is Saloni's mother.

Sudhanshu: And Saloni?

Irfan: Now he'll say she is Bhabhi's daughter.....that's all.

Dheeraj: Saloni is a kid, yaar! She's just in class ten.

Roli: Forget it now.....enough of all this.

Irfan: We're just killing time.....you tell us what else we can do.

Sudhanshu: Put your finger on your lips ...and wait for Shilpa!

Roli: *(like a child)* No....I'm hungry.

Irfan: Hungry!

Roli: Yes, hungry for samosas!

Irfan: Why are you always hungry only for samosa-kachauri or roti-chawal?

Roli: What do you mean?

Dheeraj: *(stopping him from saying more)* Irfan!
(Irfan dramatically puts a finger on his lips and is quiet.)

Sudhanshu, while we wait for Shilpa why don't you get some samosas from the halwai outside?

Sudhanshu: Sounds like a good idea.
(Stands up and puts one hand on the wallet in the back pocket of his trouser.)
And jalebis too?

Roli: No, I don't eat sweets.

Irfan: *(teasing Roli speaks to Sudhanshu)* This minority faction is becoming too overbearing. Better do as she says or you won't hear the end of it.

Sudhanshu: Alright, I'll get ten samosas only.
(Sudhanshu exits.)

Roli: Dheeraj da, *(pointing towards Irfan)* ask him to make tea, na.

Irfan: Tea? But we've just had!

Roli: That wasn't at all nice.....it was sweet syrup.

Dheeraj: Irfan, just check if there is any milk inside or do we need to get some.

Roli: We're not going to get anything....if it's there fine, otherwise Irfan makes superb tea without milk as well.

Irfan: Oh really? I can see the shape of things to come....it seems in the future too I'll be taking care of madam's kitchen.

Roli: *(playfully pushing Irfan)*
Now get up....the samosas must be on the way.

Irfan: Only on one condition.

Roli: What?

Irfan: You'll also have to be in the kitchen for as long as it takes to make tea.

Roli: Agreed.

(Both get up to go inside when an old woman enters from the other side.) Old woman: Dheeraj beta.....Dheeraj....

Dheeraj: Nani Amma, you.....!

Old woman: I thought God knows when it'll be eight o'clock for you.....so let me go and remind you myself.

Dheeraj: No, no.....you don't have to remind me....I'll come myself.....right now my friends.....

(Old woman comes closer and sits down.)

Old woman: Yes, yes, I know your friends very well.....sitting on the balcony I often watch your Ramlila.

Dheeraj: *(laughs)* Ramlila! Ha! Ha!

Old Woman: You really are a courageous

boy. Life has been rough on youbut youyou never gave up.

Dheeraj: Nani Amma, tell me what can I do for you?

Old Woman: All in due course, don't worry. You've grown up in front of my eyes....I've even seen your mother as a baby, may her soul rest in peace....poor thing lived through hell while on earth. And then your Nana-Nani brought you up like parents.

Dheeraj: Yes, Nani Amma.

Old Woman: Your father went and got another woman for himself and both your mother's brothers turned out to be complete wastrels...never took on any responsibility. As soon as your nana died they fought like vultures over the house that he had built. They didn't give up till the house was finally locked up. I wonder when this wretched lock will be opened.

Dheeraj: Court procedures take their own time.

Old Woman: That's true...a generation's lifetime is wasted in just waiting...your nani probably died of it. She was a good soul– couldn't bear to be a laughing stock. Thank God there is some place for you

to live in...even though it is only a garage and a courtyard....at least it's something. Both your uncles went and settled down in another country....had it not been for this, where would you have gone?

Dheeraj: Why Nani Amma.....I would have come to your place!

Old Woman: (*happily*) My dear.....that's also your home...come whenever you like....you are our very own...

(*Just then Irfan and Roli enter the stage squabbling and chasing one another. Irfan is in front. He's holding a sugar-pot and a spoon. Roli wants to take the sugar-pot and the spoon from him.*)

Irfan: This is not fair...

Roli: Irfan.....give it to me.....I say give me the sugar..

Irfan: I told you its not fair.....not fair at all.....okay wait....listen.....(*Keeps his hand with the sugar-pot raised so as to keep it out of Roli's reach. Roli wants to somehow take it but can't do so.*) Am I making the tea or are you?

Roli: You.....but sugar....

Irfan: No but-shut.....now just take a walk.....okay...

Roli: (*irritated*) Irfan!

Irfan: Since I'm making the tea I'll put the sugar too....you can't have your way here!

Roli: No, I'll put the sugar...as I like...that's final...okay..

Irfan: I'm not going to let you even touch it....just your touch will turn it into a thick sugary syrup. And the blame will come to me!

Roli: Irfan, please stop this stupidity....you're putting me off...give me the sugar...

(*Seeing the old woman at that point the two of them hesitate and giving up their fight turn around to go inside. The old woman calls out to them.*)

Old Woman: Hey, listen.....

(*Roli turns around to look at her.*)

Old Woman: You were looking lovely today with your head covered.

Roli: Me? Head covered?

Old Woman: Yes, yes, just sometime back when you all were doing your *nautanki*.

Roli: (*laughing*) Oh that! I was doing Bahua's role.

Old Woman: Bahua? Is she related to you? Is that your mother you're talking about?

Roli: (*laughing*) Mother! Yes....
not just mine....everybody's.

Old Woman: God alone knows what you
people say!

(*To Irfan.*) But your beating
that thali almost gave me
a headache. Why were you
doing it?

Irfan: Amma, a girl was born ..that
is why.

Old woman: A girl was born!

Irfan: Earlier wasn't this done only
when a boy was born?

Old woman: (*thoughtfully*) Everyone has
their own customs...in some
places when a baby is born
a thali is beaten and in some
laddoos are distributed....
and sometimes a messenger
goes and gives the good news
in every household....

Roli: But are laddoos distributed
even when a girl is born?
There is this thing about the
arrival of goddess Laxmi and
all that ...a lot of fuss is
made out of it. In other
words– the hope of becoming
rich with the birth of a girl.

Old woman: What Boy or what girl ..it's
all the same. Ask me....I have
an only son....he went to
Dubai to make money...and
now it's as though he never
was. It's been so many years
now....he never bothered to

check either on his wife or
daughter or his old mother.
Thank God for my daughter-
in-law - she's a good woman.
She keeps me with her. I
get food to eat and she takes
care of me if I'm unwell.
My own flesh and blood had
left me here to fend for
myself....I could beg on
streets or sleep on the
pavements for all he
cares....you think I should
rejoice at the idea of having
such a son? (*sniffing*) Is there
something cooking on the
gas?

Irfan: Oh my God!

Roli: I told you not to boil the
milk.

Irfan: I was making English tea for
you.

(*They both rush inside.
Dheeraj and the old woman
laugh.*)

Old woman: It's really lively when your
friends are here....(*suddenly
in a serious tone*) Beta, I
wanted to make a request.

Dheeraj: Come on Nani Amma, don't
talk like that. Just order me.

Old woman: My son has not left me in
a situation where I can order
people about. But then you
too are like a son to me....

Dheeraj: That's true...so tell me.

Old woman: Beta, please take care of Saloni...you're like her older brother that's why I'm saying it... she's not too well.

Dheeraj: Why, what happened?

Old woman: What can I say? She just keeps pacing up and down on the terrace all day....she's neither interested in studies nor in clothes nor food...

Dheeraj: But she is just a child....

Old woman: You may think she's a kid but that rascal didn't think so...

Dheeraj: Who? Who are you talking about?

(Covering her head with her sari the old woman asks Dheeraj to come closer. Dheeraj sits down near her. She looks around to make sure that no one is listening.)

Old woman: This is what I came to tell you....I think of it all day and have no one to talk to....we all have our shameful secrets...poor Saloni is really unfortunate to be born as my son's daughter....forget his mother and wife the scoundrel had no feelings for his own flesh and blood... never bothered to find out how she is.

Dheeraj: But this is an old story....my Nani used to talk of it sometimes.

Old woman: Yes, yes, she knew everything... my daughter-in-law used to sit with her for hours. But apart from consoling her what more could anyone do?

Dheeraj: Hasn't anything been found out about him?

Old woman: Arre, that's what we were trying to find out when that wretched Narinder started coming to our house. He was a very close friend of my son. Used to come home earlier also. We thought maybe he could help. He did write a few letters here and there...but it was of no use. All we came to know was that he had changed his job. Maybe he moved to a new place...who knows to which country. And that's how Narinder kept visiting our house. But what did a poor widow like me have? He used to work in that office with the sign of plus.....

Dheeraj: Which office?

Old woman: What do you call it? The one with that red and white plus sign

Dheeraj: *(laughs)* Oh! ... Redcross!

Old woman: Yes...the same. There was nothing else...we were really hard-up for money. ...he used to bring work for Bahu, my

daughter-in-law to make little flags. You know fix a pin and make a flag...fix a pin and make a flag. She used to do it. It brought us some money...made life a little easier. We were clutching on straws! Bahu was so young herself. I thought...it's good she has someone to talk to at least. But little did I know. I couldn't see through the man. I'll regret that all my life.

Dheeraj: *(trying to change the topic)*
Nani Amma, you were telling me about Saloni not feeling well.

Old woman: Yes, yes, that's what I'm telling you....we couldn't gauge the man's intentions. Because he used to visit so often Bahu asked him to help Saloni in her studies. God alone knows what he did ...but he cast a spell over Saloni – the girl lost her head completely. And before I knew what was happening both mother and daughter had got involved with him..... *(after remaining quiet for sometime)* when Bahu saw through the game he was playing she came to her senses and threw him out of the house. But ever since then Saloni can't get

him out of her head. Now tell me what to do? He was her father's age....we tried to talk some sense into her....but...*(Tears flow from the old woman's eyes. Just then they hear footsteps outside.)*

Dheeraj: *(with a hand on the old woman's shoulder)* Nani Amma, I've understood.... you don't worry.

Old woman: *(wiping her tears)* I don't know how I have said all this...had buried it deep inside me...you are like family so I could tell you....but keep it to yourself....nobody in the neighbourhood...

(Sudhanshu enters carrying samosas.)

Sudhanshu: *(in an announcement-making tone)* Piping hot samosas!

(Roli comes to the stage from inside.)

Roli: Hurray! Samosas are here!
(Irfan enters carrying tea on a tray.)

Irfan: Chai garam....

Old woman: *(getting up)* I'll leave now, beta.....

Irfan: Arre Amma, where are you going? Have a samosa and go.

Old woman: I can neither chew nor digest them! No samosas for me.

You all have...God bless you all....
(The old woman leaves. Everyone sits down to eat samosas. Irfan pours tea from the teapot into cups.)

Roli: *(eating a samosa)* Ouch! They're really hot.

Irfan: *(extending his palm)* Here's a plate for you, my lady!

Roli: This plate is likely to eat up the samosa itself. Thanks a lot!
(As Irfan offers tea to Dheeraj he finds him lost in thoughts.)

Irfan: *(to Dheeraj)* Yaar, hot samosas can be eaten with a smile.

Dheeraj: Yes, yes...

Irfan: Now what is bothering you?

Dheeraj: The most difficult thing in the world is to understand human relationships.

Roli: Dheeraj da, I hope you too are not getting down to writing a play.

Sudhanshu: *(to Dheeraj)* Who was she?

Dheeraj: She lives across the road.

Irfan: Oh, I see...is she Saloni's....

Dheeraj: Yes, she is Saloni's grandmother.

Sudhanshu: What was she saying?

Dheeraj: Just that she's a kid...only in class ten. The result has recently come out...she has failed in the exam.
(Shilpa enters as he is saying the last sentence.)

Shilpa: How do you know? Who told you?
(Everyone looks at her with surprise.)

Dheeraj: What?

Shilpa: That she has failed in class ten?

Roli: Who are you talking about? Are you okay Shilpa?
(Shilpa is visibly worried. She sits down. Looking at her everyone sobers down.)

Dheeraj: Shilpa....what is the matter?

Shilpa: *(in a heavy voice)* Yes, its true.....she has failed in class ten.....for the second time.

Sudhanshu: *(coming closer)* Please let me understand. Who are you talking about?
(Shilpa doesn't answer.)

Roli: Who are you talking about?

Shilpa: The heroine of my play.

Dheeraj: So now you are writing a new play! And who will sort out the old one?

Irfan: To think that we have already booked a street corner...

Roli: Jokes apart....but we have put up posters in the canteen too.

Dheeraj: Shilpa, the jury has concurred that your play is becoming too direct.

Sudhanshu: All of you are forgetting that you've had it re-written twice already.

Irfan: Now the shop is right here.....we can get as much repairs done as we want!

Roli: Irfan, give tea to Shilpa....(*offering Shilpa a samosa*).....samosa....

Shilpa: No, I don't feel like it.

Dheeraj: (*to Sudhanshu*) But you'll agree that in the end there is some lecture-baazi...

Sudhanshu: Is non-serious bantering your idea of a play?

Roli: That's what the trend is these days.

Dheeraj: (*controlling his anger and addressing Sudhanshu*) We are the ones who have rehearsed today. You were sitting in the durbar. What do you know of the background to this?

Sudhanshu: (*angrily*) I was late on just one day and all of you have made an issue out of it!

Shilpa: (*standing up and speaking as if making an announcement*) Please, please stop arguing. (*Everyone is silent.*) We will not do this street play.

Irfan: (*trying to save the situation*) Please don't take it otherwise. All that we were saying was...

Shilpa: (*cutting him short*) I'm trying to make a point here. Will you listen? Will anyone listen?

(*Everyone is silent.*)

Irfan: (*to Shilpa*) First have a samosa.

Shilpa: (*ignoring what Irfan said*) There's something else on my mind right now.

Roli: (*in an excited voice*) Why don't we incorporate problems faced by girls in our street play...

Shilpa: But why should it always be a street play?

Roli: Because we want to focus on girls and the..

Shilpa: (*cutting her short*) ...problems they facewe want to bring about an awareness regarding these issues.....we want the message to reach the people....awareness...awareness....

Sudhanshu: Shilpa!

Shilpa: Is a street play the only way of creating awareness? That too by beating the thali at street corners?

Irfan: (*gently*) But it's you who wrote all that.

(Then seeing Shilpa's mood sits down with a finger on his lips.)

Shilpa: (lost in her own world) Is awareness something like this samosa being sold at the corner shop.....which you're not allowed to carry with you on stage.

Roli: What are you trying to say?

Shilpa: I am trying to tell you that I'm working on a new plot and this time it's certainly not going to be a street play. But one way or the other it will also give a message. (getting excited) I want....I want....that it should shake up the audience (everyone is looking at Shilpa intently, she now speaks in an even voice)..That's the play we'll put up this time...yes.

Sudhanshu: Have a heart yaar....have mercy on us!

Roli: You can give whatever message you like but I can't learn new dialogues in ten days' time. In any case, I need Memory Plus.

Irfan: There's absolutely no doubt about that.

Dheeraj: Please be serious.

Shilpa: The truth is that I have got so involved with my new plot that as of now I won't be able to live the role of any other play or street play.

Irfan: That's cool! Take it or leave it! You are on the verge of attaining nirvana!

Sudhanshu: Yaar, you've changed the gears and the tracks so swiftly. What about us? With our PhDs to complete are we going to learn new dialogues each day?

(Shilpa is silent, looking a little sheepish.)

Dheeraj: Let's give her a patient hearing. Shilpa, first have tea then tell us what's on your mind.

Shilpa: On my mind... these days there is an image. There is a particular tree found in Africa. A poisonous tree....a blood-sucking tree. Whosoever stands under it, the tree bends over and under the pretense of giving shade sucks its blood. Yes, just sucks up its blood.

Sudhanshu: Is this a fact or a figment of your imagination?

(Shilpa doesn't answer.)

Irfan: This whole thing is getting more and more complicated.. (dramatically) Hello, is anyone around? One more cup of strong tea... kadak chai maybe presented right away...

(Sudhanshu indicates to Dheeraj to pack-up.)

Dheeraj: I think we should call it a day now.

(A little disoriented, Shilpa keeps looking at him.)

Roli: Shilpa, you're very tense today. You need to take rest.

Irfan: I don't know whether she's tense or intense!

Sudhanshu: Forget it now. It'll be better if we talk about this tomorrow.

(putting a hand on Shilpa's shoulder and talking to her)
You think about it...whatever is the decision, we're all in it. (Shilpa looks at him gratefully.)

Shilpa: Then I'll make a move now.

Roli: No, you will not. You've just come....and what about this samosa?

Shilpa: I just.....I mean I hadn't come for the rehearsal.

Roli: Okay, but now that you're here...

Dheeraj: (gesturing to Roli to be quiet)

It's okay Shilpa.

(Shilpa half-heartedly puts on her sandals to leave.)

Sudhanshu: Shilpa, wait...I'll come with you...Shilpa..

Shilpa: No, I'll go on my own.

Sudhanshu: Shilpa....wait....Shilpa....

(Shilpa leaves.)

Irfan: Yaar, you make yourself out to be a tragedy king but you're actually a comedian.

(Sudhanshu looks at him uncomprehendingly.)

She was leaving and you couldn't catch up with her. I'm telling you.....at this rate one day she'll just walk away.

Sudhanshu: This guy will never change.

Dheeraj: (in a serious tone) Everything changes – it's just a question of time. There was a time when this board worked as a lamp for this house! But today....

(Everyone looks at the worn-out board propped up against the wall.)

Part II

(Sitting in a garden in the university, Shilpa is busy writing. Suddenly she stands up and reads a few lines from a poem in her notebook.)

Shilpa: Words

The sparrow of my garden
Found her hopping, falling,
skipping and crawling...

Who hopped on my
shoulders...

Words! Yes words...

Yes, this poem...this...it will be heard from the background. In the second act when the heroine will be sitting surrounded by books torn to shreds....in her hands she'll be holding torn pages of the last book. She'll be tired of tearing books. Almost panting, she would be looking at the words on the shreds of pages in her hands. A long, fixed look...like this (*sitting down*) like this....here....and then the poem will be heard from the background. How will it sound? Let me read and see. (*Emotionally recites the poem.*)

Words

The sparrow of my garden.
Found her hopping, falling,
skipping and crawling...

Who hopped on my
shoulders...

Words! Yes words...

Words...

Warmth of the mother's
cheeks

A shield that saves from
every harsh streak

Words

In the shivering night

Alone on some path
A homeless - By the fire
Same words again today
The fire in the belly
The slippery, mossy path
In the relations - the living
death

The noon in June
With an empty hungry belly
'Loo' instead of 'roti'

Oh! Words
Feel like banishing you
From life
Mangle your face
Dismember each limb
Holding my heart in my fist
I walk towards you
It slips suddenly-
From between the fingers
Making a silent noise -

This is that word which
Held your hand once
That small tiny hand of yours
Full of faith...

Alas! Your hand...

(*Sudhanshu enters as the poem finishes.
On seeing Shilpa he stops.*)

Sudhanshu: My hunch was right.....I found you here after all.
(Comes closer to her and sits down.)

How are you?

Shilpa: (uneasily) I'm okay....it's just that play...

Sudhanshu: I know you're busy writing... but didn't you miss me at all in these five days? Didn't even think of me?

Shilpa: Actually I never came to the university....I was at home.

Sudhanshu: I know....I searched every nook and corner of the campus...everyday...for five days...when I called your home your dear Papa picked up the phone. I could do nothing but simply put the receiver down.

Shilpa: If you'd called you should have asked for me....why did you put the phone down?

Sudhanshu: (a little exasperated) Asked for you....to listen to your monosyllabic answers? Do you ever really say anything when I call you at home? I really can't understand the situationwhat is it in your house that you.....

Shilpa: (cutting him short) Forget it....every home has it's own problems.

Sudhanshu: (gently) Agreed, we're

talking about your home here....but that house also has something of mine....my Shilpa...surely that gives me a right to ask...

Shilpa: Sudhanshu I don't want to hurt you but...

Sudhanshu: (cutting her short) How will it work like this ...for how long...it's not as though you're writing something for the first time. You've been writing earlier and I know you need space when you write....you become a little distant when you're writing... but this time it's not that...

Shilpa: What are you trying to say?

Sudhanshu: I've never seen you like this before. You're totally off ...you're just lost somewhere. When we meet it doesn't feel like you're the same person. Shilpa...Shilpa what is it? Is there any tension at home?

Shilpa: No, Sudhanshu.

Sudhanshu: How is your mother keeping? Are you disturbed because of her?

Shilpa: No.

Sudhanshu: Then?

Shilpa: Because of Papa.

Sudhanshu: (surprised) Papa?

Shilpa: (lost again) I want to understand human beings..... Men.

Sudhanshu: Understand Men!! *(smiling)*
Do it at leisure...you've got
all your life.

Shilpa: Man beyond relationships...
without any label.

Sudhanshu: Our relationship too is
beyond a label right now.
*(Shilpa is not listening to
him. She's lost in her own
thoughts.)*

Shilpa: Tell me, beyond a certain
point are all men the same?

Sudhanshu: Why are you bothered about
everyone? I'm not like
everyone else....that's enough.
(Shilpa looks at him closely.)
I've told you I don't believe
in companionship alone but
in relationships. My family
knows about you. I've told
them everything. It's just a
question of a few months....as
soon I submit my thesis I'm
going to join an NGO. It's
been fixed. Just have faith
in me....and everything will
happen just as you want....

Shilpa: *(a little lost in her thoughts)*
Don't you think that we are
able to see only that part
of a relationship that is before
our eyes or that is presented
to us?

Sudhanshu: What do you mean?

Shilpa: *(moving away a little)* I
mean, for instance from

where I'm standing I can
see your face but I can't
see your ears. Specially the
left one.

Sidhanshu: Perhaps we're talking of two
different things.

(Irfan and Roli enter.)

Irfan: Great! Here a love-scene is
being enacted while we're
desperately looking for our
dramatist.

Roli: Yaar Shilpa! You've really
held us up.....the earlier play
is left hanging in mid-air..

Irfan: Out in the sun.....left to
dry....with a clothes peg to
boot

Roli: And we have no clue about
the next one. Come on,
decide... Shilpa.

Irfan: Where are you these days?

Roli: Come on, Shilpa, come out
of it....this is the trouble with
you literary types. You end
up being philosophers. Lost
in a world of your own....if
it's Hindi literature or Urdu
they certainly turn into poets
or *shayars*.

Irfan: So you think I'm a poet, do
you?

Roli: You have been cast in a
unique mould altogether...
even if you were studying
philosophy you would have
been like this.

Irfan: Like what?
 Roli: Like you are! What else!
 Irfan! Anyway, we shall deal with that later...right now Shilpa...(turning to Shilpa)
 Tell us, Shilpa, what are you writing now? To use the lingo of writers...is it taking shape?
 Shilpa: Instead of taking shape, it's all breaking up.
 Roli: What is the plot?
 Shilpa: There was an image in my mind....it has got disintegrated.
 Sudhanshu: You mean....
 Shilpa: I'd heard that creepers take support from trees. The tree gives sustenance to the creeper. But there are some unfortunate creepers which are swallowed by the tree itself – the supposed provider - in the name of sustenance.
 Irfan: You have become too sublime for me. (to Sudhanshu)
 Sudhanshu yaar, it's your call.
 Sudhanshu: (in a serious tone) Shilpa, would you like to talk about the play clearly?
 Shilpa: (shirking) Not possible yet.... let me at least put it together....I haven't yet found the end!
 Roli: Okay...so I say...show....lay your cards on the table....we'll all get together and think of an end.
 Shilpa: (putting her books together) How can we do it right now?
 Irfan: Why, we're all set.....what's the problem?
 Shilpa: I have to return some books in the library.....
 Roli: Return them after lunch.
 Shilpa: No...I...actually I had asked Mr. Singh to look for a book for me. I must have it issued before lunch otherwise...
 Irfan: Otherwise what Shilpa....you don't worry about Avtar Singh....he's a friend of mine...I can ask him to issue whichever book you want...
 Shilpa: No Irfan, I had shown such urgency and now if I don't reach on time.... it won't be right.
 Sudhanshu: Alright. But tomorrow is Saturday. Tomorrow evening you'll be coming to Dheeraj da's pad then we can talk about this new play.
 Shilpa: But the end is yet to....
 Irfan: Let your friends handle some things for you, yaar...
 Shilpa: I'll make a move.
 Irfan: Listen....(Shilpa turns around) Don't walk around

with a long face like
Sudhanshu....you used to be
so cool....smile
yaar....(*Shilpa laughs weakly
and starts to leave.*)

Roli: Shilpa, you don't laugh when
we ask you to.

Irfan: (*turning up his collar*) Well,
that's how it is!

Sudhanshu: (*calling out*) Shilpa, you'll
be coming tomorrow
evening.....
Shilpa....
(*Shilpa leaves. Sudhanshu is
lost in thought.*)

Is she going to be like this
till she finds the end?

Irfan: You fool...think of yourself....
I get this feeling that it's
going to be your end.

Sudhanshu: (*irritated*) What rubbish!

Irfan: It's not rubbish...I'm talking
sense. She went on and on
about the end and you just
fell for everything she said.

Sudhanshu: What are you trying to say?

Irfan: Do you really believe that
the ending is an issue?

Sudhanshu: What do you mean?

Irfan: Don't you get the feeling that
Shilpa is herself turning into
a character of an absurd play?

Roli: What'll happen to our theatre
group?

Irfan: Nothing.....pack-up time what
else.....then we'll work on that
idea of yours...what was it....
literature repair shop!

Roli: That I'll have to start anyway...
to beat you into shape.

Irfan: I'm ever-ready to be beaten
into shape, my dear!

Sudhanshu: (*lost in thought*) This is
becoming more and more
complicated.

Irfan: Then de-complicate it, my
friend!

Sudhanshu: Look Irfan, one can't take
your jokes all the time. Life
is not a a joke.

Irfan: Life is not all about brooding
either. This is my style. I don't
know how to say this to you...
but I feel that things are getting
out of hand. You are far too
involved with your thesis and
hanging out in newspaper
offices to notice anything.

Roli: Here I agree with Irfan. He
has a point.

Sudhanshu: What?

Roli: I've been observing for a
few days now....Shilpa is not
herself.

Irfan: (*to Sudhanshu*) Don't you feel
the same?

Sudhanshu: I do...but what to do? Don't
I know that she's bunking
classes these days....and her
home! If I call her at home

she doesn't speak at all. Yes-no, yes-no....or a long silence!

Roli: I also feel that there is something abnormal in her home.

Nobody is very welcome there. Her mother is of course bed-ridden for several years now. And Shilpa and her sister behave a little strangely. Her father too is....

Irfan: It's possible, but Sudhanshu all these are just excuses... only excuses and nothing else.

Sudhanshu: Excuses?

Irfan: Come on, I'm sure you have other places where you meet. Call her there and talk to her...

Sudhanshu: If something goes into the eye one shouldn't rub the eye. A few splashes of water are all that is needed. Rubbing hard can make the eye go red. It can also lead to injury.

Irfan: Who is asking you to rub it, you idiot. But at least go close and look into her eyes and gently try to find the problem. Sometimes one's own eyelash goes into the eye.

Sudhanshu: If you were in my place what would you have done?

Irfan: Would have tried to understand her problem... one way or the other. Understand the root of her problem... and first of all would have somehow got her to Dheeraj da's place tomorrow. Which is what you're going to do....you'll bring her there...somehow...

Sudhanshu: Me? How will I....tomorrow is a holiday....she'll have to come from home.

Roli: Can't depend on him for anything.(*speaking with resolve*) I will bring Shilpa with me tomorrow evening.

Sudhanshu: (*getting up*) Let me see where she is now....maybe she's in the library... (*Sudhanshu leaves.*)

Irfan: So finally you have found an excuse of getting away from me. (*mimicking*)) I will bring Shilpa with me tomorrow evening.

Roli: (*laughing*) Don't worry, eventually I'll come back to you.

Irfan: (*dramatically going down on his knees to plead as in a Greek play*) Can't you go without leaving, sweetheart, ...can't you go without leaving...

Part III

(Dheeraj da's den. Dheeraj, Irfan and Sudhanshu are waiting for Roli and Shilpa.)

Irfan: See Dheeraj da, despite your calling Shilpa, she still hasn't shown up. Even though she has an escort with her.

Dheeraj: It appears the problem is really serious.

Sudhanshu: Just as well I followed her to the library.

Dheeraj: Did Shilpa really go to the library?

Sudhanshu: She did....when I reached there I saw that instead of returning any books she was just sitting there with her head resting on a pile of books.

Irfan: So, all that about getting a book issued by Avtar Singh was just an excuse, was it?

Dheeraj: Be serious....she herself probably doesn't realise where she is drifting.

Sudhanshu: You're right....I picked up that pile of booksreturned them and took her out towards the canteen. We sat behind the canteen and had coffee... and talked for a while.

Irfan: (*impatiently*) Go on...what did she say?

Sudhanshu: What did she say? She almost fainted....she was in a very bad shape...as though she were sleep-walking.

Dheeraj: This new play....do you think it's about some personal problem of hers?

Sudhanshu: Doesn't look like it...but Shilpa was saying that a friend of hers living in the neighbourhood has given her a diary of her younger sisterShilpa was very upset about it.

Dheeraj: So this play is based on that diary, is it?

Sudhanshu: So it appears.

Dheeraj: Is everything still being conceptualised or has something been written ?

Sudhanshu: She has started writing it. She has very extensive notes....I've heard some of the dialogues.

Dheeraj: So what are we waiting for?

Sudhanshu: The end....which is not there yet.

Dheeraj: Oh!

Irfan: Arre... we'll get together and find one. This may be the maiden project of our literature repair shop.

Dheeraj: (*seriously*) In fact, it is the end that determines the flavour of the beginning. In newspaper language....every

incident is an inverted pyramid....Sudhanshu, tell us something about the play.

Sudhanshu: (*hesitatingly*) Shilpa should be here any minute. Roli will certainly bring her.

Dheeraj: You seem to be putting something off.....we're just wasting our time sitting around like this....why don't you start?

Irfan: (*in a lighter vein*) Yeah, let's get into the mood. Will you narrate with action or without action?

Sudhanshu: (*in a serious voice*) I think we should wait for Shilpa.

Irfan: Oh, come on. Why are you hesitating so much..... in any case Shilpa won't mind....ultimately we're all going to perform the play.

Sudhanshu: Who knows?To what extent will we be able to perform it...

Irfan: What do you mean?

Dheeraj: Sudhanshu, you're really dragging this thing ... What did Shilpa tell you?
(*Sudhanshu is silent.*)
I'm asking you, what did Shilpa tell you?

Sudhanshu: (*standing up*) We won't be able to do this play. I think we should continue working on our street play.

Dheeraj: Sudhanshu, after all what....

Irfan: (*cutting him short*) Dheeraj da please....(*to Sudhanshu*) Sudhanshu, will you come out with it or not?
(*Sudhanshu doesn't reply. For a few moments, there is complete silence on the stage. Then Irfan goes close to Sudhanshu and speaks as though hypnotising him.*)
You will tell us whether Shilpa told you something or did she read it out. You will definitely tell us.
(*Then stressing on each word.*)
You met Shilpa in the library. You returned her books. Then you took her to the canteen. Got tea from there.

Dheeraj: Coffee, not tea.
(*Sudhanshu looks at Dheeraj as though in shock. Hearing Irfan's voice he looks away from Dheeraj and Irfan.*)

Irfan: Yes, coffee. They got coffee from the canteen. Then they went and sat on the rocks behind the canteen.

Dheeraj: No, he had first made Shilpa sit down. Then he went by himself to get coffee. When he returned he found Shilpa sitting there. Looking very disturbed...

(Sudhanshu turns around to look at Dheeraj and then again looks away.)

Irfan: Shilpa was disturbed.....and quiet.

Dheeraj: You offered her the coffee. Half-heartedly she extended her hand and held the glass of coffee.

(Once again Sudhanshu turns around to look at Dheeraj and then quickly looks away.)

Irfan: You broached the topic while drinking coffee.

Dheeraj: Did you ask searching questions?

Irfan: What did she say?

Dheeraj: Did she read out the play or narrate from memory ?

Sudhanshu: (coming out of the spell but still anxious) I don't know....Maybe she read it....maybe she just knew it by heart...

Irfan: Maybe a bit of both...

Sudhanshu: (irritated) Yes, both.

Irfan: What did Shilpa say?

Sudhanshu: (in a hesitant voice) She said.....she said that this is a story of a girl.

Irfan: Which girl?

Sudhanshu: I don't know! Any girl! Maybe the younger sister of the girl whose diary she's read.

Dheeraj: Whose diary is it?...The younger sister's or the older sister's?

Sudhanshu: The younger sister's....the one who is still in school.... good in studies right from her childhood. (again irritated) Let Shilpa come...I won't be able to narrate this properly.

Irfan: The heroine is good at studies right from her childhood. She's still in school. Carry on...

Sudhanshu: (as if in a trance) But slowly she's changing.

Dheeraj: Who? The heroine?

Sudhanshu: Yes.

Irfan: And then?

Sudhanshu: One day her father....who is a professor....borrowed a book from a friend and got it home to read. When he was to return it he saw...

Irfan: What did he see?

Sudhanshu: He saw....

Dheeraj: Saw what?

Sudhanshu: All the pages of the book were half-missing - vertically. Someone had cut them with a pair of scissors....cut them ruthlessly. The father said it was the work of the younger girl.

Irfan: Which younger girl?

Sudhanshu: Yes...our heroine...I mean Chhoti.

Dheeraj: You mean there's an older girl also?

Irfan: Arre Dheeraj da...that girl....that friend of Shilpa's.

Sudhanshu: Yes, there are two sisters in the house...Chhoti and Badi.

Irfan: Was it true....what the father had said about the younger girl...Chhoti?

Sudhanshu: Who knows? She's not prepared to accept it.

(Sudhanshu, Irfan and Dheeraj are at one end of the stage.

There is a differently lit area on the other end where a scene between the two girls— younger and older—is enacted. The younger girl is followed by the older as they enter the stage arguing. Roli is playing the part of the younger girl who is about 17 years of age while Shilpa plays the older girl, about 21 years of age.)

Younger girl: Why are you all after me? Didn't I say I don't know anything?

Older girl: Then who did it?

Younger girl: How do I know?

Older girl: You're lying again.

Younger girl: I said it once....I've said it a hundred times...that's it....why are you after me. *(muttering)* I don't know why she's been called here after Didi's marriage!

Older girl: Then why is Papa saying that you've torn that book?

Younger girl: *(irritated)* So go ask Papa.

Older girl: *(composing herself)* Look Chhoti....It was Papa's book.....that too a book borrowed from Kohli Uncle....he's not going to cut it up himself. Ma never leaves her bed....that leaves me....now tell me.

Younger girl: What's there to tell? If that leaves you then it must be you.

Older girl *(angrily)*: Don't push me, Chhoti.....you are being very rude.

Younger girl: So then don't talk to me.

Older girl: But why did you spoil that book of Papa? And that too with a pair of scissors! What did you get out of it?

Younger girl: My God! You really are going on and on about that book, aren't you? Half the pages

of the book are still intact...go and read them...

Older girl: She's a strange girl!

(The younger girl goes inside quickly. The older one remains standing, uncertainly. Then slowly she exits. The light is now on the male characters standing at the other end and watching this scene till now)

Irfan: What book was it?

Sudhanshu: Some novel.

Dheeraj: Name of the novel?

Sudhanshu: Don't remember.

Irfan: Try to remember.

Dheeraj: Think hard.

Sudhanshu: *(looking harassed)* I think it was perhaps... The Burning Sand ...or The Burning Fire ...something like that...

Irfan: Again perhaps.

Dheeraj: Its one and the same ...The Throbbing Fire.

Sudhanshu: But this isn't about one but many.

Dheeraj: Meaning?

Sudhanshu: Within a few days it was found that all the books on the father's bookshelf had met with the same fate as that novel.

Irfan: As in?

Sudhanshu: As in... they all had half the pages cut torn.

Dheeraj: Exactly like the novel? All the pages of the books cut out length-wise?

Sudhanshu: Yes...cut away ruthlessly....

Dheeraj: What's bothering me is that why did the father suspect only the younger sister– I mean Chhoti - when Badi is also there in the house.

Sudhanshu: There was a history behind it.

(Suddenly Sudhanshu looks at the other end of the stage and putting a finger on his lips asks his friends to be quiet and to look at the scene across.)

Shss.....

(At the other end of the stage the older girl enters looking for something.)

Older girl: I don't know where I've kept them...only yesterday Papa gave them to me in a new bottle-opener key-chain... ...God knows what all goes on in this house...scissors themselves fly to the book rack and cut away pages of books... where should I look now...how can it just vanish like that?

(The younger sister enters nibbling at an apple. She finds the older sister looking for something.)

Younger girl: Badi ...what are you looking for?

Older girl: You mind your own business.

Younger girl: Yes...and you mind yours...keep looking....keep on...

Older girl: *(turning around)* You are at the root of all this hassle. If you hadn't done that foolish thing....Papa would never have put everything under lock and key!

Younger girl: Will you come out with it or not... what has got lost... what are you looking for?

Older girl: *(looking under the table)* Oh God!

Younger girl: You think God will be hiding here under the table? Look somewhere else!

Older girl: *(irritated)* You are incorrigible! Really!

Younger girl: That's true...the only reason why I'm asking you this is because whatever it is that you're looking for.....the blame for it also will come on me....so you may as well tell me now...

Older girl: *(angrily)* You've again started talking rubbish!

Younger girl: Okay....what do I care...keep looking...

(Starts eating her apple. The older girl is trying to remember.)

Have a bite of this apple..... you'll remember everything.

Older girl: *(without giving an answer again starts searching, all the while talking to herself)* I was in the kitchen...that time it was with me...yes it was....then suddenly Ma called me...I went to give her water.....it was in my hand.....yes of course...then? Then I think I came to this room. Yes, I came here...the keys were in my hand then....then? I picked up the towel from here and went to put it in the sun. And the keys vanished.....

(The older girl resumes her search. The younger girl leaves the stage and returns with a bunch of keys in her hand.) Where can it be?

Younger girl: Are you looking for these? Here...take...

(The older girl turns around to look and extending her hand takes the key.)

It was on the parapet outside.

Older girl: (*unexpectedly*) Who put it there?

Younger girl: What a strange question! It was in your hand so you must have kept it there. Or am I responsible for this too?

(*Handing over the keys to the older girl the younger one is leaving the stage when the older one calls out to her.*)

Older girl: (*affectionately*) Chhoti..
(*The younger girl stops and turns around. The older girl goes near her and puts a hand on her shoulder.*) Why do you do these things?

Younger girl: (*drily*) Why? You mean I should have let your keys remain on the parapet?

Older girl: No, I mean...you...why did you tear Papa's books?

Younger girl: You take care of your keys!

Older girl: Look....look...this is not right ...I'm your sister....and so....

Younger girl: If you're my sister then listen to me.....go back to where you came from....stay at Nani's place....that's your home....forget about the keys of this place.

Older girl: What's wrong with you? Always up to something or the other...and anyway...why should I go back? This is my Papa's house!

Younger girl: (*wryly*) Papa!
(*Nibbling at her apple she exits.*)

Older girl: Chhoti...listen...listen....
(*The older girl follows her, calling out to her. The light is back on Sudhanshu, Irfan, and Dheeraj.*)

Irfan: The situation is becoming complicated....this play is becoming Interesting...it'll work...but why did Chhoti ask Badi to return to Nani's house?

Sudhanshu: This only she would know!

Dheeraj: Sudhanshu, you were saying there is some history behind it.

Irfan: History!

Dheeraj: Yes, of Chhoti's behaviour.

Sudhanshu: Yes, there is a history.... (*hesitating*) these things had happened earlier also.

Dheeraj: Of books being torn?

Sudhanshu: No....the same sort of weird things..

Dheeraj: Oh!

Sudhanshu: Those days Chhoti was alone in the house.

Irfan: Where was Badi?

Sudhanshu: Actually she never used to live here. She was brought up at her Nani's house. She's been moved in here only recently...when the mother suffered a paralytic stroke. After the eldest, that is— Didi, got married and went away.

Irfan: Just a minute....which means there are three daughters? Number one...Didi. Number two..Badi. Number three...Chhoti.

Sudhanshu: Yeah, but now there are only two girls in the house. Didi has got married.

Irfan: Oh no, this is very confusing. Let's give a name to Didi.

Sudhanshu: Shilpa just called her Didi.

Irfan: But we will call her something else.

Sudhanshu: Something else!

Dheeraj: Anu didi.

Irfan: Correct...we'll call Didi, Anu didi. So Sudhanshu you were telling us that Didi – that is Anu didi – has got married.

Sudhanshu: *(a little lost)* Yes, she has got married. *(Suddenly he is quiet.)*

Dheeraj: *(after a while)* What history were you talking about?

Sudhanshu: History?

Dheeraj: The history because of which Chhoti became the prime suspect when the books were torn.

Sudhanshu: Yes, yes, that history.

(Sudhanshu looks lost in thought.)

Irfan: Sudhanshu, you were saying something...I mean you were going to say something....

Sudhanshu: *(after remaining quiet for a while)* All these events would have got buried in the past but for Chhoti's diary which has given each incident a fresh dimension.... one can view each one of them from a new angle.

Irfan: Chhoti maintained a diary?

Dheeraj: Oho! Hasn't he already told us that the play is based on this diary?

Sudhanshu: She'd been writing for the last couple of years now. It was less of a diary. ..more the story of her life.

Dheeraj: Did the father find the diary?

Sudhanshu: No.

Irfan: Then who?

Sudhanshu: Actually Badi was upset by the book-cutting incident and Chhoti's behaviour bothered her. She wanted to get to the bottom of things. And so, knowing fully well that what she was doing was unethical she started going

through Chhoti's books and exercise-books.

Irfan: In Chhoti's presence?

Sudhanshu: No, at night. When Chhoti would be asleep. That's how she found a homework copy which turned out to be Chhoti's personal diary.

Dheeraj: And she gave the same to our Shilpa.

Sudhanshu: Yes.

Irfan: What was written in the diary?

Sudhanshu: A lot...on the very first day something caught Badi's eye and she read it.

(The light illuminates another part of the stage where Shilpa playing the part of Badi walks in holding an exercise-book. Sudhanshu walks through the lit area and going towards backstage soon returns holding a shaving brush with lather on it. He stands in a corner with his back to the audience.)

Older girl: *(to herself)* I can't read this in the room...it's better outside. *(reading from the diary)* This morning when I was taking a shower in the bathroom I...*(to herself)* This light is not enough. Let me put on the light on the

staircase and read...maybe it'll be easier to read then...

(Goes and sits at a little distance and tries to read once again.)

Yes, this is better...*(looking at the exercise-book)* Now...where was I? Here...yes... This morning when I was taking a shower in the bathroom I heard Papa's irritated voice.....

(Now Sudhanshu turns around to face the audience. He is playing the part of Papa. He has a shaving brush in his hand and shaving cream on his face. He is pacing up and down angrily.)

Papa: *(addressing an imaginary Ma)* You just lie there with this pain in your side...how about devoting some time to the house?.... here I am going around like a mad-man all over the house with soap on my face ...where the hell is my shaving razor? Where has it disappeared? *(looking inside)* Now is your mouth also paining? Or did the cat get your tongue? *(then shouting angrily)* You didn't produce a son who could have taken my razor away. Then where did the razor vanish?

(Papa exits. The older girl continues to read the diary.)

Older girl: (reading the younger girl's diary) I froze when I heard this. It was me who had taken that razor last night. The next day in school we had a dress rehearsal of the annual play in which I had to wear a sleeveless blouse. So I had quietly taken Papa's razor the night before but had forgotten to put it back. It was lying on the table in my room. I quickly put on some clothes and coming out of the bathroom ran to my room. I saw Papa was standing there. The razor was in his hand. I stopped at the door. He looked at my arms exposed in the sleeveless blouse. It was a long leisurely look. Then he smiled. Showing me the razor he said, 'Did you get this?' Then walking past me he gently tapped the razor on my arm. (The older girl stops to touch her own arm. Then reads again.) And smiling, he left. A million lizards started crawling first on my arm and then my entire body. That smile just ripped me apart. It felt as though I had forgotten to shut the door while changing my

clothes. As if I was without any clothes and Papa was standing at the door. Smiling in that same way!

(The older girl's voice seems to drown.) Oh my God! (She shuts the diary and getting up with a heavy heart and leaden steps leaves the stage. The light now moves to the three male characters. Dheeraj and Irfan are quiet. They seem to have lost their voice. Then Sudhanshu breaks the silence.)

Sudhanshu: Want to hear more?

(Dheeraj and Irfan raise their heads to look at Sudhanshu but are still silent.)

After that for several months a series of strange things continued to happen. The commode in the toilet would often get blocked. When the plumber was called to fix it he would find Papa's razor or his shaving brush stuck in it. Not once.....but many times...soon Papa's personal things were never found in their usual place. The shoe polish would be in the book rack or his spectacles in the freezer of the fridge.

Dheeraj: How old would Chhoti have been then?

Sudhanshu: I don't know her age...but she was in class eight.

Irfan: Class eight....that would be about 14-15 years. To experience all this at such a young age....poor child!

Dheeraj: And this way the balance of relationships must have gone topsy-turvy. Parents of growing children occasionally go through their children's books etc. to keep track of which way the kids are heading....but here a young irritated....humiliated child started getting back at the father in whatever ways she could. And finally the older sister discovered all that was going on by fishing out the truth from a school-bag!

Sudhanshu: Other books were torn or cut later. She first saw The Throbbing Fire....followed by the pornographic books hidden behind other books in the rack.

Irfan: Seeing The Throbbing Fire and porno stuff amongst her father's books had a truly devastating effect!

Dheeraj: It was probably a cumulative effect of a lot of other things but all her fury got targeted at books.

Sudhanshu: Her anger was so harsh that

she didn't spare any book in her father's rack...not even the dictionaries...

Dheeraj: It's not a question of one book or many books – it's a question of breach of faith...once that happens everything appears to be a falsehood.

Sudhanshu: The image of her father that Chhoti had nurtured in her mind was losing its sheen. It was as though she was trapped in a long tunnel which was opening from the back. Everything that Papa had ever said now came back to her with a new meaning. In a single stroke the razor had grazed the surface of the past...and that is how she now remembered her childhood...memories of which were hazy till now...and now came back with a new meaning...

(The other end of the stage lights up where the older girl enters with the diary in her hand. She is followed by the younger girl clutching a big doll. The younger girl is living her childhood now and is about five years old. The older girl reaches centre-stage and reads the diary. The younger girl sits at a distance playing with

her doll. The male characters slowly exit. Now only the younger and the older are on the stage.)

Older girl: (*reading the younger girl's diary*) I must have been about five years old. Yes, I was five because I was in class one then and Anu didi was in class twelve. We had just got the news that Bua ji was unwell. Ma had gone to stay with her in the hospital. Only Anu didi, Papa and I were in the house. After having dinner I left Anu didi in the room and had come to the drawing-room with my doll. I remember I was playing there by myself for a long time.

(*The older girl turns around to look and the light moves to the younger girl who is playing with her doll.*)

Younger

girl: (*to the doll*) You've again messed up your clothes today. How many times am I going to change them? (*explaining*) You're a big girl now. When you go to school who's going to change your clothes again and again? And what have you done to your hair...? Hmmm?... Come here, let me brush it for you.

One plait or two? Sit properly...don't cry...is it hurting you? Okay, I'll tell Anu didi...she'll do your hair...when she brushes it doesn't hurt at all...(The younger girl gets up with the doll and the light moves back to the older girl who is reading the diary.)

Older girl: (*reading the diary*) I picked up my doll and walked up to the door of Anu didi's room. I saw Anu didi sort of lying on her bed and (*After 'and' she reads a few lines more in a sort of a whisper. Then, lost in thought, puts the diary on a side.*)

Anu Didi...sort of lying...on her bed....

(*Tries to lie down like Anu didi*)

Anu didi was lying down like this perhaps....yes....and Papa? How was he.....? (*The older girl stops and starts imagining. The younger girl now puts the doll aside and speaks.*)

Younger
girl:

Papa was lying on top of her.

(*Then, to actualise the older girl's imagination, the*

younger girl moves close to her. She lies down on the older girl playing Anu didi. Anu didi tries to get up but the younger girl, now playing Papa, doesn't let her. Anu didi is struggling. After sometime the younger girl, as Papa, gets up and picking up her doll goes and stands at a distance, watching Anu didi. Once again, the younger girl is five years old. In the meanwhile, Anu didi tries to free herself of an imaginary Papa.)

Older girl: (still lying there engrossed in the diary) Chhoti had called out to Anu didi from the door...

Younger girl: (completing the older girl's dialogue) Anu didi....Anu didi....(after a while) What I saw, frightened me....Papa got up with a start...and stumbled out of the room. Then Anu didi also got up. (The older girl, playing the part of Anu didi is visibly frustrated by her own helplessness. Angrily, she runs towards the door like someone gone berserk. Holding back angry tears, she walks a few steps in the direction that Papa had

gone and spits loudly. Then crying, she returns and flops down on the floor sobbing hysterically. The younger girl, who is now five years old watches her uncomprehendingly. Scared, she is clutching the doll tightly to herself. Then slowly, she goes close to Anu didi. Buttoning her shirt, Anu didi is still crying. The younger girl wipes her tears.)

Anu didi, why are you crying?

(Anu didi quietly wipes her tears.)

Did you get crushed?

Anu didi: (Looks at the younger girl with surprise, then putting a finger on her lips) Shh....shhh...shhh.....

Younger girl: Why was Papa lying on top of you?

(Holding the younger girl close to her, Anu didi weeps silently.)

Anu didi, don't cry....don't cry....or I'll also start crying....

(And the younger girl also starts crying. Anu didi comforts her.)

Anu didi: Quiet...shhh....look...I'm fine now. Papa...Papa was.....I had a terrible cough....and I was coughing a lot...so Papa was putting Vicks on me. Don't cry...shhh...just forget about this whole thing....you haven't seen anythingdon't say anything to anyone...okay? To no one at all....nothing ...not at all...if you do....if you do....you'll grow horns like a buffalo...horns...two horns....

(Confused and perplexed, the younger girl gives her doll to Anu didi. Now from being five years old she has again reverted to being fifteen years old. Crying bitterly, Anu didi hugs the doll and leaves.)

Younger

girl: *(coming to the center of the stage)* And ever since that day...when Anu didi had asked me not to tell anything to anyone or else I will grow horns like a buffalo.... whenever I see a buffalo I see my own face between its horns. At times it's my body with a buffalo's head.... and sometimes it is a buffalo's body with my head with horns on it. I have never breathed a word to anyonenot a word...not a single word....never....then why

does this buffalo's head with horns haunt me day and night? Why? *(pausing a little)* I was really shaken. After that incident I had almost completely stopped meeting my friends. After school I would just go home.

(The older girl enters as Badi.)

If ever a girl or a teacher stopped to look at me I would feel horns slowly growing on my head. They must be looking at them. I would want to hide myself somewhere. But where? Maybe that huge trunk which has quilts in it...or in the water tank on the terrace...I don't know... but far away from this world! *(looking at the older girl)*

But why did Anu didi do this? Why did she stick this buffalo's head on me? I was afraid....of telling someone all this. And so I even started avoiding Ma. I was convinced that the minute any of this came to my lips my face would turn into a buffalo's. A buffalo with horns!

(The older girl picks up the younger girl's diary. The younger girl is looking anxious. Her apprehension is visible. The older girl looks at her flustered)

Buffalo... buffalo... buffalo...
No, I'm not a buffalo...no...
I didn't say anythingto
anyone at all....a buffalo with
horns....buffalo...with two
horns...no... no...buffalo...
buffalo... buffalo... no.

(Flustered, the younger girl leaves.)

Older girl: *(reading from the diary)* Now I started staying close to Anu didi always. Anu didi also never let me out of sight. If I was here and there she would immediately call out for me...*(calling)* Chhoti... Chhoti...where are you?

(A child's voice is heard from the background – "I'm coming, Anu didi.")

(The older girl reads from the diary) But after completing her B.A. Anu didi was married off. *(sadly)* And she went away...forever. I became even more lonely...utterly alone. Badi was at Nani's place. When she would visit us in the vacations I could never really feel close to her. I would sit by myself thinking strange thoughts. *(to herself)* Yes, when I visited in the holidays I did find Chhoti a little weird. And distant. I wondered what was on Chhoti's mind?

(The younger girl enters and sits in a corner almost in a cramped posture. The light falls on her and she shies away as though wanting to stay away from the world and remain invisible.)

Younger girl:

I didn't want to meet anyone. No one at all. I wish I could put away my body somewhere....save myself from everyone's eyes ...and lock myself up in a cupboard or in the fridge....or maybe in the dark space below the stairs...where no one ever goes...where no one ever looks...darkness...only darkness...talk to the dark...bathe in the dark...dress in the dark...and then cover myself in darkness and go and sleep somewhere...

(The light goes back on the older girl who is reading the diary.)

Older girl: I can't concentrate on my studies at all....I failed in the ninth...somehow managed to clear the exam and then failed in the tenth.

(The younger girl stands up. She is no longer scared. She looks fearless. Her voice is bold too. When she speaks the older girl looks at her.)

Younger
girl:

It's the same result for the second time. Failed again in the tenth. Last time when I had failed I had cried a lot. But this time...I didn't cry at all...not a single tear. *(in a voice that's past caring)* It all seems pointless now. Absolutely pointless. Anu didi has gone away. Mother is bed-ridden and will always be so. Badi – I don't feel close to her...not at all...and Papa? Yes, Saxena uncle had come to visit Papa this evening. To mourn over my result...by opening a bottle...by getting drunk... *(laughs)* ha...ha...ha...*(when the younger girl breaks into a painful laugh the older girl gets a little worried)*

Older girl: Chhoti....Chhoti...

(Laughing, the younger girl is leaving the stage. The older girl follows her. From the other side Sudhanshu enters in the role of Papa, holding two glasses.)

Younger
girl:

Look, look, Papa is coming... with Saxena uncle...to mourn over my result ha... ha... ha...to mourn over me...me...

Older girl: Chhoti...Chhoti...

(Both leave. Papa puts one

glass on the table and talks to an imaginary Mr. Saxena sitting across.)

Papa:

(sounding drunk) Don't hesitate, Saxena sahib...what all are you going to mourn over in this house...carry on...*(angrily taking a sip)* this house itself is inauspicious. After giving birth to not one, nor two but three girls, the bloody paralytic bitch is herself lying in bed for years now. *(takes another sip)* I'm a university professor. And my daughter fails every year. The school has now expelled her. They say go look for another school. Huh...go crawling in front of these third-rate school principals! Like hell I will! Enough of studies now *(in a soft voice)* Arre...have some more... have another drink...come on...I know you don't take any snacks...good you don't...you don't take soda either...really nothing like having a drink neat. What's the point of all this extra foreplay. Women love it though. Where do we men have the time for all this! *(Picks up his glass and takes another sip. Now sounding resolute.)*

My whole life has been ruined by these girls. ...Now I'm going to teach this one myself. Enough of school. Now she'll only appear in the open school. I'll teach her now. Saxena yaar, take out the lighter...(looks for a cigarette in his pocket) Oh wait, I must be having one in my pocket. (takes out the lighter and lights a cigarette) What a lousy life we have yaar...sow the seed, take care of them for long years...bring them up...and when they are ripe and ready to be taken...present them to someone else! You're suffering it yourself. What a beauty your daughter is...and to take her away that bastard...your prospective son-in-law has quoted a price. And no mean amount...ten lakhs. Bastard... We spend our lives nurturing them and others reap the fruits. Oh! I feel so suffocated. even this whiskey has no effect... come...come on let's go up on the terrace...in the open air...

(Picks up the glass and leaves the stage. The older girl enters, reading the diary. She is followed by Irfan, Dheeraj and Sudhanshu who

take their old places as if listening to the older girl's diary. The light is focused on the older girl.)

Older girl: Both of them had gone upstairs. I had switched off the lights...(suddenly turning the page and talking to herself) this is the last page of the diary...(reading the diary) I had switched off the lights and sitting in the dark room was wondering...what kind of caretakers are these people! I can now see only darkness all around me. Its pitch dark....darker than Papa's dyed black moustache. Now school was also lost to me. Papa is going to teach me now! Oh! this slimy thing all over my body – what is it? Like earthworms creeping and crawling all over the place after a spell of rain... no... no... no... no... never! I will never let it happen...it will not happen...

(Hiding her face in the pages of the diary and crying bitterly) Chhoti... Chhoti... how much have you suffered all by yourself. And kept it all to yourself...all this time...

(Shuts the diary and holding it against her chest continues to cry)

Chhoti...Chhoti...my dear sister Chhoti...*(The older girl leaves the stage clutching the diary. The light moves to Irfan, Dheeraj and Sudhanshu who have been sitting in silence. The silence seems to be there to stay.)*

Irfan: Why are you quiet? What happened in the end?

Sudhanshu: End? That has not been written yet.

Dheeraj: But the question is what will be the end?
(Roli and Shilpa enter, in all seriousness. As soon as they enter Roli talks with an artificial casualness.)

Roli: Sorry guys we are late.
(There is no response. The eyes of all the three male characters are fixed on Shilpa.)
Come on now, let's start work today without a samosa break.
(No response.)
Hello...hello...I'm talking to you people...

Dheeraj: It's almost evening now...where were the two of you?

Roli: Dheeraj da, actually I had to go and pick up Shilpa but she called in the morning and asked me not to come to her house...she said she'd come herself.

Sudhanshu: So both of you are coming from the university?

Roli: Yeah.

Irfan: You should have told me...all of us could have come together.

Roli: The girlie gang needs some space once in a while.

Irfan: Of course, of course...you should walk around with a placard – 'For women only'.

Dheeraj: *(butting in)* Irfan! *(to Shilpa)* Shilpa...why are you standing?

Shilpa: No...I...just...*(sits down)*

Roli: Dheeraj da, we would have come earlier...but when we were sitting in the hostel Shilpa narrated her entire play to me.

Sudhanshu: *(to Shilpa)* So you have completed the play?

Shilpa: No, not yet.

Roli: Whatever be the end, but the play really shook me. Look at the problem that Shilpa has raised. For a girl...

Dheeraj: *(gesturing her to be quiet)* We know the plot.

Shilpa: *(surprised)* Really? But we haven't talked about it.
(A little hurt, Shilpa looks at Sudhanshu questioningly)

Sudhanshu: (*hesitatingly*) Err...Shilpa...it was rather heavy...Then I thought that ultimately all of us have to get together and do it...so why not discuss it now.

Roli: Yeah, yeah. The two of us also discussed the same thing today.

Irfan: So is it decided then that this is the play we're doing? A play without an ending!

Dheeraj: We're all here...let's think of an end.

Roli: I really can't see why these simple ideas don't strike you.

Irfan: What idea? The ending of the play?

Roli: No my dear...that's beyond you anyway...but surely it could have struck you that in the month of June two people who have been out in the sun have just walked inperhaps you should offer them a glass of water?

Irfan: Oh sorry! But since you are standing why don't you take it yourself?

Roli: How mean...(*goes inside*)

Dheeraj: Shilpa...your...I mean our heroine's, that is Chhoti's diary has revealed the extent to which the plot has progressed....I mean how upset Chhoti was. Have you thought any further about it?

Shilpa: (*lost in her own thoughts*) I can't think any further. (*Roli enters carrying two glasses of water. She quietly puts one glass in front of Shilpa and drinks from the other herself. To compose herself, Shilpa drinks water from the other glass.*)

Sudhanshu: With so much tension in the family and in a situation as strange as thiswhat would a girl do?

Irfan: Dial 100 and call the police.

Roli: Don't forget that this is the story of a school girl.

Irfan: Then the older sister can call. (*Shilpa again picks up the glass and drinks the remaining water.*)

Dheeraj: What are you talking about? Is this America that at the mere mention of child abuse the police will come running.

Irfan: Forget the police then....what if the media is approached?

Dheeraj: Then the sisters will appear on the screen with their faces blurred ...and they'll be asked weird questions...How did you feel then? How do you feel now? My foot!

Sudhanshu: That's true...the channel that gets the scoop will hit the jackpot but the problem will remain unsolved. After washing dirty linen in public where will the girls go? Ultimately they have to go back to their father. Will the channel rehabilitate them?

Roli: What if they approach the women's commission?

Irfan: It's still the same thing. After taking this step where will they go later? What will they eat?

(Shilpa's face is losing colour. She picks up the empty glass and puts it down.)

Sudhanshu: All this is not going to be that simple.

Irfan: Oh dear, I feel you have picked on a plot that is far too scandalous. Our Shilpa is just harping on an exceptional case.

Sudhanshu: That's the problem with you language guys. Once in a while please read some real stuff also....do you ever read the newspaper? Should I tell you the latest figures of cases like this?

Dheeraj: Let it be Sudhanshu...we don't need the figures. Hardly a day goes by when these kind of incidents are not there

in the news. It can be any member of the family.... father, brother, uncle...what difference does that make...it's the same thing. It happens all the time.

Roli: Dheeraj da, you're right. Shilpa and I were discussing exactly this in the hostel today...in our society using abusive language for mother, sister or daughter is considered macho. Why?

Shilpa: They are not abuses...it is camouflaged truth.

Irfan: Then think of a truthful end too.

Shilpa: I don't know...I've merely brought out some bitter truths of life.

Irfan: So now where is your ...feminism and progressive thinking?

Shilpa: When did I say that....

Sudhanshu: Shilpa, why are you on the defensive? *(to Irfan)* What are you implying? That concepts of feminism and progressive thinking are merely tools used in slogan shouting?

Shilpa: I think thattaking courage in both hands... exposing the truth...in all its uglinesswith all your heart....is the biggest slogan of all. Its only

when these silent slogans get internalised that an answer can be found...

Roli: Looks like we're going to go back empty-handed today as well....perhaps the solution to Chhoti's problem...

(The sound of a speeding motor-cycle screeching to a halt comes from the background. A young man rushes onto the stage.)

Young man: *(calling out)* Shilpa... Shilpa... *(enters and addresses Shilpa)* Badi...

Shilpa: Avinash bhai...you...?

Young man: *(anxiously)* I went to the university first. Someone in the hostel told me you are here....come on Badi...hurry up...

Shilpa: What is it, Avinash bhai?

Young man: Chhoti...Chhoti has committed suicide...hung herself from the fan.

(Shilpa is struck dumb.)

Roli: Chhoti! Who is Chhoti?

Young man: Shilpa's younger sister, Tanu.

(Shilpa collapses with shock. Roli quickly holds her.)

Dheeraj: Chhoti...Shilpa's sister!!

Irfan: What! Shilpa's sister.

Roli: Shilpa....Shilpa...

Shilpa: *(crying)* Chhoti...Chhoti...

Sudhanshu: So that diary didn't belong to a neighbourhood friend...it was Shilpa's sister's! Oh no!

Roli: *(with intense grief and sorrow)* We were looking for the end...no...this is not the end...

Sudhanshu: What kind of an end is this!

Dheeraj: Will it always happen like this?

Irfan: We don't want an end like this.

Roli: *(standing up resolutely)* This end is not acceptable to us.

Audience: No...this end is not acceptable to us. Not at all. This cannot be the end.

(Shilpa stands up as if in a trance, she walks ahead as if looking for something.)

Shilpa: End...end...

(Everyone turns around to look at Shilpa.)

Sudhanshu: *(sounding helpless)* How will we find the end?

Irfan: *(moving up to Sudhanshu and putting a hand on his shoulder)* We will find it...we will definitely find it. We shall look for the end.

Dheeraj: Let's look for it together...all of us...me...*(pointing at others on stage)* and you

(pointing towards the audience)...and you...and you...and the end will itself walk up to us.

Shilpa: (calls out) Summon the end!
(All the characters come

All together: (calling out) Summon the end... Summon the end! (in a courtroom voice) Ant Haazir Ho...! Ant Haazir Ho...!

close to Shilpa and stand around her.)

Meerakant, born 1958 Kashmir, is a contemporary playwright, short story author and a novelist. Has written a number of plays that have been staged in Delhi, Jammu and other places. She is recipient of Mohan Rakesh Samman and Seth Govinddas Samman. Meerakant has written novels– 'tatah kim and 'urf Hitler'. She is editor at NCERT and lives in New Delhi.

Vandana R. Singh, born 1960 has taught English in India and abroad and writes books on communication and study skills. She has translated Hindi short stories published by NBT India. She is also working on Asian women's writings. She is consultant editor at NCERT and lives in New Delhi.

JUHI KI KALI

Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala'

Translated by
Mangal Murty

Indolent, on a lonesome woodland bine
Lay lapped in leafy bowers— in wedded bliss—
lost in dreams of love—
A snow-fresh, soft, sweet maid— the Joohi bud:
Its eyelids sealed.

'Twas vernal night time.
Loitering in some land remote
Was the lonely breeze, love-lorn, forlorn
—the breeze they call the Malaya.
Memories surged up,
Of that sweet murmur in reunion,
Of the moon-laved midnight,
Of the tremulous, lovely limbs of his love.

And lo, the breeze— over lakes and groves and brooks
And sylvan mounts and tangles of vines and bushes,
—He came bouncing, and made love to the blossomed bud.
And she lay slumbering, unaware, naturally, of her lover's breath.

He pressed a kiss on her cheek
And the whole bine-curl swung and quivered,
Still she awoke not nor sought excuse
Nor oped her sleep-flushed eyes.
An air of indolence and languor...!
Drugged– was she? –with the wine of youth.

Wantonly unkind, he was hard, oh, too hard on her–
Shook up again with fitful gusts
The dainty petite frame,
Pinched, too, her plump cheeks.

Startled, the maid rolled her bewildered eyes
And espying her spouse in bed (or hard by)
She chuckled, her chin dipped and nestled,
And bloomed afresh in hue of love.

Nirala (1899-1961) is perhaps the greatest among modern Hindi poets, the leading light of the 'Chhayavad school' of modern Hindi poetry. 'Juhi Ki Kali', written in 1918, is his earlier poem, embodying the true romantic spirit of the resurgent poetic mode. It was published in his second volume of poems 'Parimal' (1929). His other collections are 'anamika', 'apara', 'kukurmutta', 'naye patte', 'anima' etc. He also wrote novels and short stories, prominent among which are 'billehsur bakaria' and 'chaturi chamar'.

FOUR POEMS

Nagarjun

Translated by
Shobha Narain

Famine and After

For several days
the oven cried,
and the grinding stone sighed along,
the one-eyed bitch
lay nestled nearby
while lizards on the vacant wall
aimlessly crawled,
and the field mouse
for several days hopelessly strolled.

And then,
after many-a-day
The grain arrived
After many-a-day
The smoke rose up in the courtyard
the household bristled bright eyed,
and after many-a-day
the crow itched to fly.

After a long long while

After a long long while
did I behold
to my heart's content
the ripened golden grains smile.
After a long, long while,
I smelt to my heart's content
oh, such a heap of flowers fresh.

After a long long while
did I hear to my heart's content
sweet ditties of the beautiful belles
winnowing the milky paddy

This time,
after a long long while
could I touch
the fragrant sandal coloured dust
of my village lanes.

This time,
after a long long while
I chewed on sugar canes
to my heart's content
and savoured the lotus stems.

After a long long while,
my heart brimming with delight,
I revelled in
the pleasures

of touch and taste,
of sound and smell,
of beauty and form,
all combined
on this very earth
I enjoyed
Ah, after a long, long while.

Kalidas

Kalidas,
tell me truly
was it Aj or you
who shed copious tears of sorrow
on Indumati's death?
Kalidas,
tell me the truth.

When,
Shiva's third eye
spouting fearsome fire
burnt the love-god Kamdev
to ashes,
as would to cinders burn
dry twigs of sacrificial fire
soaked in ghee,
Rati's heartrending cries
when you heard
were not your eyes
awash with tears!
Kalidas,

tell me truly
was it Rati or you
that wailed?

In the wet season of rain
and the first day of Aashadh
when the black clouds abound
in the sky above
the lonely yaksh on the chitrakoot mountain top,
in an agony of pain
pleaded with the 'pushkarawart' clouds,
grieving with the yaksh
sorrowful like him
sharing in his separation pangs
were you not grief soaked
in body and soul?
Bone-weary, tired in all your pores
dear Kalidas,
for how long
did you make,
those pure, mountain peaks
your sleeping abode
giving yaksh company?

Kalidas,
who in anguish moaned
tell me true
the yaksha or you?

'Chandu, I Had a Dream'

Chandu,
I had a dream,
you like a roe,
jump, jumping, jump a-round
Badri Babu could not find you.
I returned to Patna from Bhabhua.
I can see you playing, playing around,
merry, merry, merry go round.
Chandu what a dream,
did I dream.

Coming, coming out of jail
today, tomorrow very soon
robbing, robbing, flying kites
bringing honey sweet.
Chandu did I dream, you found
a new almanac oh, you found a brand new almanac.
Chandu what a dream,
did I dream.

Chandu,
I had a dream
your fame is spreading
far and wide
All the Bharat knows you quite.
Chandu verily is a big doctor
intent on his duty right.
Chandu, a dream did I dream

Chandu

I had a dream.

Chandu, you were taking your exam.

Chandu, you were in a police-van.

Chandu, a dream did I dream,

you are out, so am I

(out of prison walls)

Chandu, a new alamanc

did you bring

Chandu it was all but a dream.

Nagarjun (1911-1998), one of the foremost poets of twentieth century, Nagarjun was born in village Tarauni, Darbhanga, Bihar. He wrote in Maithili and Hindi and was equally renowned. Honoured with Sahitya Akademi Samman for Maithili poetry collection 'patrahin nagna gachch'. Has seventeen collections of Hindi poems. Known for his highly political, radical expression and straight forward ideology. Rooted in rural background and reaching out urban limits, the variety, verasatility and vitality of his prose and poetic expression makes him a passionate chronicler of our times. Some of his famous volumes are: 'yugdhara', 'khichri viplab dekha hamne', 'hazar hazar bahon wali', 'akhir aisa kya keh diya maine'. His novels are: 'varun ke bete', 'ratinath ki chachi', 'balchanma', 'dukhmochan' and 'garibdas'. He travelled far and wide, in fact up to the Himalayas. He spent his later years in Delhi.

Shobha Narain, born 1955, teaches English at a college in Delhi University. She writes short stories and translates from Hindi to English. She lives in New Delhi.

SEADUSK

Nalin Vilochan Sharma

Translated by
Mangal Murty

Dunes of sand like cats curled asleep,
The waves lapping-playing on their paws.
Cloudlambs grazing sun's greensward
Dauntless, unamazed.

I, walking in an infinite void—
A vagrant point on the yellow sands—
Across the eternal triangle
Of sky, earth, and the shoreless sea.

As the backwash of my voyage
Are visible only : cigarette-smoke
Trailing on the wind; on the sands,
A number of footprints
To be full when the waves will sweep them over.

Nalin Vilochan Sharma (1916-1961) was Professor of Hindi at Patna University and a renowned Hindi poet and critic. He led a small group of poets, during the 1960s, who professed a manifesto of a new strain of experimental poetry called 'Nakenvad' formed from the initial letters of their names: Nalin, Kesari and Naresh. This poem is a typical example of that school of poetry.

FOUR POEMS

Pankaj Singh

Translated by
Sukrita Paul Kumar

For My Hindi

Those who have abundant resources
And dazzling nights and days
Luxurious solitude, sufficient boredom
And also abilities to offer life and death to others

They show occasional interest in poetry etcetera..

Even if it is in Hindi

Bearing imprints of the defeated ones, often head bent
Ravished past youthfulness
Discolored in worn out sari
However useless might be Hindi
Hailing has to be done in this language only

While performing their royal duties
When the rulers turn towards poetry
Poets pick out their safe poems
Exhibiting glories of lives enslaved
In a variety of fogginess

Looking for shadows and safe haven
Of moist romanticism, of sad riverbanks
Pushing aside issues of morality and ethics
Dream aspiring change
The fire-filled veins of emotions

Hanging arty curtains between the language and suffering
Spreading flattering smiles in place of negation

Poems etcetera of many of this kind
Beholding their strange Hindis
I spoke out in my own tongue
My lingua
About my bizarre time that enrages me
Saddens me simultaneously
And I was thrown out

Indeed interesting are several descriptions
Of what happened afterwards
That makes the poet interesting

Not his poetry
In this dusty democracy

To make sure none of those Hindi lovers
gets flowers and condolences sent to the cremation ground after me

I should strive

For the sake of my Hindi

Reality

What was much apparent to all, how much to me?
The problem arose when savi asked me about it and I said, wait a bit

I shall observe and tell

Within many a curtain of light and obscurity
Within many a mystery reality remains shrouded, and
One has to observe in several ways before speaking out
It is quite visible, look intently; some part of it stays hidden
Until the end
In smoke, in dust, in lament
In the deception of language, in hailing salutations
In the squabble of the market

Some fluttering of wings I hear
When the sun is about to set, Savi
Trembling fingers stirring sugar in the tea
Is it some dream in you before the flight or within me
Or some wounded bird in the solitude of its pain

To be able to see with clear eyes to remain humane
Now the habit of being difficult is essential
No narrative would be possible without risk
To talk about shrewd moves of abstraction shall be imperative
And the timid woman heading towards the block next door
Is oblivious of them
She who suddenly reaches the moon

And resurrects the touches of a half forgotten love
Within her trampled body
Leans over her own self like a verdant branch
In some moments she is her own earth and sky
Some unannounced thought of hers echoes in space
I hear her with elation, she the beautiful but disappeared one

I see many a spectacle, many phenomena
Within which the melting naturally forms
Unwittingly my complex reality
In this cruel time

In this cruel time faced with barbarism
I have resolved, Savi
I will not just complain

Saga

Stopping me someone shows me things found
"Could these be yours?"

Erasure of identity
Time has carried away even the description of the loss
Inklings gently touching my shoulder would turn to the past
Warnings were no help, not even a wee bit

Nothing in control, with many a year gone by
Nothing at all neither home nor the nation
Nor agony nor pain

Slowly do the stitches rip off, the cloak wears off
In the decaying body, welcome invitations
Experiences transferred
As if swimming through battles
Gathering under waters amid a great war
Small remains of fire
Rolled in ashes

Much more apparent now than before,
Are its uses

Night Poem

The silence and the scream of the night
Appear to be the same
Slowly a branch grows flowers and leaves
Understanding their mystery

The fruit acquires its form freely

What remains in the breaths of the season
Makes the light of the night denser
Or the darkness being
Woven into the winds somewhat

The moon creating bayonets in the nights
Passions getting intense
Filling with pangs of desire.

Pankaj Singh, is a radical poet with left leanings. Has been a journalist in Europe and India and has written on international politics. His three volumes of poetry are: 'aahaten aas paas-1981', 'jaise pawan paani-2001' and 'nahin-2009'. His poems have been translated into English and other European languages besides Urdu and Bengali. He lives in Delhi.

Sukrita Paul Kumar, born and brought up in Kenya, is a poet, critic and editor. Formerly a fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, she now teaches English at a college in Delhi University. Some of her published volumes are: 'folds of silence', 'without margins', 'narrating partition' and 'rowing together'. She lives in Delhi.

HINDI RENAISSANCE AND MODERNISM

Karmendu Shishir

Translated by
Ramjay Pratap

Renaissance and modernism need, to my mind, to be seen together as we can not precisely make a critical analysis of the former without the latter. Renaissance to be sure, takes place with modernism and society, as a matter of fact, never happens to be a numb unit because history, in its dynamism, provides an opportunity to every society that causes a point of period to emerge where the numbness gets broken up inviting a sudden tumult inside the society that is yet backward and ceased to develop owing to its long slavery, and it takes new turns; awareness begins to prevail everywhere, a modern thought, perception and treatment that happen to evolve there and it brings about changes. That is the event what we say 'renaissance' for the said society. Hence modernism is a vital and significant part of renaissance. It is not necessary for the renaissance to be present in every sphere in an even manner, we can remain rather backward in one sphere or more. How our cultural status would be, even if we were the other-ruled, so high at the time of people's consciousness during the 'Bhaktikal' (Age of devotion)? Ups and downs, in fact, depend on social, economical, political and cultural conditions of the society and furthermore the cult, conduct and conception of the society too, play their own role in it. As such, one must see the relation between renaissance and modernism with the spectacles of these attachments unlike many thinkers who, by not doing so, criticise severely the said age and its master-hands, raising altogether the demands of strong opposition to the Britishers, full female-independence, total social equality and developed

secularism.

The question is what kind of modernism do we expect from the renaissance? Modernism is, in itself, not an indifferent hypothesis. In Hindi an imported modernism is also spread over that has no roots in the local space and time. If this attachment is taken into account, the backwardness and division of modernism in Hindi produces grotesque equations. Endeavours were made throughout to make such a modernism grow, by establishing the whole racial tradition of Hindi as a backward one, which in the end resulted in exaggerated sexuality and spirituality, and in this way it makes us experience the idleness, if we come across the tradition of renaissance linked-up with such modernism, but those who examine modernism after going through the literature of renaissance, can get signs of a firm tradition of a simply-developed modernism that stands built up on only the responsible concerns of its space and time, in conformity with all expectations thereof. Hence, one can exactly find out the concerns, expectations and roots of modernism of our time, if we examine the same in an appropriate manner. A perception of modernism based on the grounds of requirements and expectations of the space and time, may enable us to determine which of the modernism is suitably expected for our society and which of the modernism is imported or imposed one; which modernism is backward and which one deserves to lead our society forward, which one is genuine and which one is hollow and spurious.

For the purpose, as is manifest, we will have to take notice of the presence of renaissance, its acting elements and order of evolution, and in this context, we find in a closed condition the whole period from people's consciousness of **Bhaktikal** to the inception of the modern age. The numbness of that very period gets broken up much later in 19th century when our society happens to face a little turmoil caused by the regional agitations of Adivasis and the religious reformatory movements. The turmoil would acquire a full momentum and splendour during the freedom movement in 1857 that can not be explained in view of a rough conclusion of its success and failure. One can ascertain the reality of that particular period only when one makes an analysis of the effects it had on society, as thereafter, the desire of salvation being fostered inside, continued to develop and find expression at different levels and ultimately resulted in the independence in 1947. Now let us see the struggles held at different fronts in different fields during this period of about one hundred years. The struggle was not anyway smooth and single-layered. The modernism of renaissance we can perceive after identifying, in its detail and diversity, the developed shape of the struggle. The constituent parts of renaissance, if identified, include Hindu-Muslim Unity, religious tolerance, social reform, opposition to customs and hypocrisies, upliftment of Indian languages, commitment to peasants-labourers and indigenous industries, opposition to British-Imperialist system of extortion and exploitation, raising up continuously the issues of dalits and women, selection of modern thoughts,

welcome to science and new technology, re-establishment of Indian history, expansion of comprehensive education, evolution and review of Indian perception and continuous opposition to colonial culture. Of course, the modernism emerging from these constituent parts of renaissance, made altogether a sudden appearance, rather it evolved through a process and convention owing to our ceaseless struggles and endeavours. No single individual factor can be attributed to, the modernism prevailed over. Hence, one who makes endeavour to tarnish the whole of renaissance by highlighting its inner-contradictions around its leaders, he, as is manifest, creates wittingly or unwittingly such a fatal viciousness that confuses the whole perception of renaissance.

In these contexts, the unavailability of renaissance-literature makes things too difficult as renaissance-literature has not come out till date. But ample material is lying scattered behind the screen, out of which the unseen ones need to be produced in a systematic manner and further, edited well after making a deep and thorough examination thereof, We can not analyse precisely without doing so, the reality of renaissance. As for example, we may take into consideration the **dalit-Vimarsh**, in which dalit thought is being highlighted by a class in Hindi in such a manner as if no one had pondered over it earlier, but it never happens to be the reality. The relevant material shows that during the period of renaissance this issue had been raised upto the mark in a sharp and logical manner. But the people associated with **dalit-Vimarsh** seem to be in a hot haste. They rather involve themselves

in only making criticism of the work done or being done by the other people, enhancing the degree of sharpness in criticism that, in turn, bears fruits in terms of material achievements in their lives. The main object of theirs is never to bring about equality in human society but to make the secession continue so that they can prove themselves to be the commandar-in-chief of Dalit favouritism and it all enables them to avail of some strategic advantages.

But, those who have made a deep study of renaissance-literature are well aware of the fact that the sources of **dalit vimarsh** lie in renaissance, as such, the need is to look for the very literature that will strengthen also the ground of the present **dalit vimarsh** causing a strong convention of thoughtful discussion to emerge. To make it possible, a few things are required : things like in-depth conception, hard work and inner appeal which are fully lacking in the present atmosphere. Such work will never attract the attention of those earning regularly a huge amount from the ministry of human resources. Hence, unless it is carried out, the reality of renaissance and its modernism can not be perceived well. Similarly, there lie the contexts of feminism and communalism. Under circumstances, it requires us to be active to understand some basic work.

In this context, it need not be recurringly mentioned what Bhartendu thought of and referred to, as he finds mention over and again in the treatises, authored so far, on the topic of renaissance, but a number of new evidences may be underlined in his

writings in favour of modernism, from different corners at different levels, as being separate from all kinds of narrowness. He was put under the weather to arm the Indians with western knowledge and science. Let us pay our attention to a long statement made in respect of India's destiny in the sixth last issue of **Bharat Durdasha** that reads as:- "Alas, awake up Bharat Bhaiya! Look at the sun of knowledge coming on after rising in the west and now, it is not a time to remain asleep. When will you wake up, if not awake in the reign of Britishers? The absolute governance of the fools gone off, now the king recognized the people's self-existence. A discussion on knowledge going on, All got the right to expression, New knowledge and technology appeared from abroad. But you are still adhered to those rustic manners; the very sphere of hemp, child-marriage, worship of ghosts, method of horoscope! satisfaction with little, friendly gossips and destructive schemes! Alas, India's is such plight even now! Will you be alert on pyre? Bharat Bhai! wake up, now the grief becomes unbearable, how long will you remain senseless! Wake up and see, your kith and kin are destroyed! Having dispersed asunder, all sustain the agony of hell; Despite it you do not care, alas! Now I am not in a position to continue seeing it! My dear, wake up!" (Bhartendu-Samagra, Page 470)

The sun of knowledge as emancipated from the backwardness of believing in ghosts, horoscopes and intoxication is rising from the side of west. Behind this voice of renaissance you can easily feel the grief, longing and perplexity. The thought of one Radha Charan Goswami,

another writer of repute in Bhartendu Era, hailing from a fanatic Vaishnav family, may be taken into consideration, Goswami ji writes:- "I am a conservative Vaishnav, a conservative Hindu but never opposed to the people of other religion or society. I have many a true friend among the Aryasamajis, Brhamsamajis, Muslims and Christians, and I, more often, attend their gatherings".

Goswamiji was fully acquainted with India's diversity and had a full respect and regard for it. He launched a fierce movement for the widow re-marriage and always laid stress on a new convention hammering out the fanatic one, as he had acquired an in-depth knowledge about the numbness of tradition. He writes:- "Tradition is of two kinds— one being a fanatic tradition and the other, a civil tradition. In a fanatic tradition the people follow those paths that are being followed since ages— without taking account there of if they bear advantages or damages like the adage of ten blind people following a single blind, and such kind of tradition is best suited to uncivilised men. On the contrary, in a civil tradition only the rational being exists and everything is done rationally. In fact both traditions are basically grounded in thinking, conception and time-factor, and the matter gets prevailed over, if it is expedient and after sometime it turns to be called **tradition**. (Vidhawa Vivah Vivaran). In this context he writes further— "No such rule is there that precludes the tradition to change. In a tradition, a change can be brought about anytime. But once we take up to go against the tradition in worldly and religious affairs, it gets changed."

It makes us underscore here the breaking of customs and progressiveness and modernism of change in thoughts that is, to follow the tradition that leads us forward and give up the old and obsolete. Goswamiji holds responsible for this the religious hypocrisies and pundit's greed and he in the context of widow-marriage, highlights the economical and social reasons— "Today, if the king takes a decision to solemnize the second marriage of his widow-daughter, the pundits would give the authority in favour of it and hold the same to be a legal act." It is the pundits who wield knives on the poor widows. Goswamiji comes to hammer it and writes in a furious and injured tone— "whether these sixty lac child-widows belong to your caste or not? If yes, what remedy do you have to remove their anguish? If not, they be made to queue up and be shot at with cannons or, be made to board a ship and be immersed in the sea or, be poisoned to death."

The words containing furor do express his sorrow. Mahatma Jyotiba Phoolé when being aggrieved by this problem, established the **Jachaki Ashram** for the widows, the pundits were fiercely opposed to it. Radha Charan Goswami was highly injured by the protest made on the part of pundits and he made a severe attack on it in these words. "Dear, Brahmin Pundit Sirs; now the cruelty being committed on your part has reached the climax but the time has taken a turn. Now the lives of the king and his dependents are equally valued as precious ones. Your rigidity has no longer to last, why do you attract the curse of the poor widows?"

Goswamiji raised, as a matter of fact, the question of women's equality, independence and right to self-decision in a violent manner and, he was sure that a day would come when the light of knowledge will spread and women would themselves struggle for their rights. He writes, "Dear objectors to the widow-marriage! Dear patrons of injustice! The darkness is bound to disappear shortly, the sun of knowledge is rising and the graph of independence in India is going high." Further he writes, "Time is not far off when, having been independent, women will get the widows remarried?"

He admits the fact that pundits are responsible for the backwardness of society. The actual enemies of modernism were the pundits, with regard to whom he makes a severe comment, "If they lose their lives by these words, or their off-springs get ruined, he will never cease to follow up what their teacher Ghonga Pundit says with his sharp tobacco filled mouth or think in a filthy snuff stuffed mind. Why India happened to face such a misfortune? It was only due to the majesty of the feet of those Mahatma Pundits. All kinds of evils the country faces, are the consequences of the conduct and thinking of those mean-minded Pundits," Further he raises the question, "who plundered the public wealth of this world by making us tempted to the other world? who cleaned and arranged our kitchen and put us into the oven igniting the chulha and creating untouchability? Who implicated us in the trouble of tantra, mantra and astrology and made us fanatic, egoist and wild. Flaying out Brahminism he makes a call in these words— "We shall neither abide by any advice the

shrewd, hypocrite and prejudiced Brahmins give, nor shall fear their mischievous taunt and monkey like prance, because it is the progress of the country and society that becomes a religious vow of our lives," Also in the context of today's modernism his thoughts stand relevant and inducing.

An important note of Hindi renaissance was regarded as anti-communalism. The scholars who came across the elements of sharp communalism in the literature of Bhartendu era are suggested to mindfully peruse the quotation of Badri Narayan Chaudhary Premghan, they will find there the basic identity of the very era. Premghan writes, "Hindus and Muslims are the tenants of a kind believing in a third different faith. Things the country wishes, get consolidated in terms of the call as made by all citizens of the country. That is why the educated well-wishers of the tenants do not appear to be hopeful of the plight of the country to be removed in absence of Hindi-Muslim Unity."

The plight of the country will never change unless the intellectuals bring about a Hindu-Muslim Unity. Long ago, this thought was the axis of renaissance. Premghanji has made an elaborate discussion on it saying that a brotherhood was rampant between the communities of Hindus and Muslims before the Britishers landed. He writes, "Muslims were of this thinking that now the country is theirs and a mutual brotherhood maintained among all inhabitants living unitedly, can only bring happiness and help, and opposition will bear only bad consequences and also that within these two communities everything is identical

beyond only the religious differences, Besides Europeans, Indians look always downwards from the sovereign gate. But after the British Empire came to power, Muslims had no occasion to dispute with Hindus except the issue of religious festivities. By this, the mutual affection got increased between these communities as if they were belonging to the same faith, both had mixed up as milk and water mixes up in their constant casual behaviour."

Premghanji tells how both communities used to share their merriments on the occasions of Holi and Eid and attend each other's marriage ceremonies. To his mind, Hindus and Muslims are similar to Buddhists, Jainies, Vaishnavas and Shakts. The real force obstructing them is the British rule. He writes— "But the diplomatic head and employees of the foreign king, a suddenly appeared third different believer, perhaps, experienced some impediments in ruling smoothly over the dependents. A maxim is there in English, i.e, divide and rule,"

No contemporary politician or English intellectual would have had a better acquaintance than the British in whose contemporary thoughts did underlie such a modernism.

In Hindi renaissance the materials striking the caste system, undoubtedly, came out at a later stage, but its tone-signal had been started by Radha Charan Goswami. It was the early decades of 20th century when treatises on this subject started to come out that continued further in a regular manner. One Radha Mohan Gokul edited the **Satya Sanatan Dharm** in and around 1908

that contained a number of articles based on social problems. **Satyug** and **Navyug** too, published discussions being made on social and religious issues, Some essays were published also in **Saraswati**. Gokulji, a man to violently strike the priestly-system, had raised also the problems of shudras reacting sharply to the traditional presumption. In an article 'Utthapana-Mulak-Sudhar' that came out in **Navyug** (year-1, No.3) Gokulji writes— "We are the successors of God Ramchandraji, being proud of his personality, we pay him honour for his virtues and, are grateful to him for his obligations, but in my view it can never be worth appreciating to kill out a hermit shudra and get the innocent parents ousted from the house. Goswami Tulsidas, even if he was an eminent poet, deserves no favour for the way he strengthens the priestly-fraudulence and superstition in Ramayan. rather he requires to be vehemently opposed. Gokulji was a man of this view— "The sweepers and plunderers were inducted in the Zenith. Such kind of foolishness has resulted in the face of the people when more than three-fourth of the

population is on the verge of starvation and bound to sustain the unbearable pain of slavery.

Gokulji viewed the social misdeeds as the root cause of injustice, repression and slavery, holding responsible for this the priest class and raised his voice against them by writing revolutionary articles like **Ishwar ka Bahishkar**. The movement acquired momentum by the end of the fourth decade in course of which, an organisation **Varna Vyavastha Vidhwansak Sangh** was set up in Kanpur that did many a revolutionary work and its sharpness one can realize even today to peruse the **Varna Vyavastha Ka Bhandaphor**, **Varna Vyavastha Urf jat-pat** and **Vedic Varna Vyavastha** published by it. A volume would take shape if the matter is enlarged by incorporating citations therefrom, But the need is to make at first a thorough examination of the literature related with dalit-discussions as made during the period of renaissance and thereafter edit and publish them to precisely perceive its modern features.

Karmendu Shishir, born 1953, is a leftist critic and novelist. He has seven published books to his credit. Some of these are: 'navjagaran aur sanskriti', '1857 ki rajyakraanti', 'jatiya gadya aur Hindi navjagaran'. He lives in Patna.

Ramjay Pratap is an advocate by profession and an intellectual by passion. He translates whenever he likes what he reads. He lives in Champaran, Bihar.

NARRATIVE OF THE MARGINAL

[Some notes on women's writing in Indian and Korean Literature]

Devendra Choubey

Translated by
Khushi Pattanayak

In the last six decades, literature constructed on marginality has played an important role to create new context in the world of literature. Though it is not a new idea to consider the role and position of marginal people in the society, yet in recent decades whatever women have written is about their own society, has affected the world of thoughts at a conceptual level. Intervention of women in the world of thoughts has brought out the fact that the image of 'devi' (goddess) or 'shraddha' (respect) that the patriarchy had constructed was only a conspiracy to keep women on the margins of society. The modern women and feminists have broken this illusionary construction. In Hindi, the portrayal of women, for example, in **Tulsidas's** *Ramacharitmanas* (1574) and **Jaishankar Prasad's** *Kamayani* (1937), has been challenged by **Meerabai** in her poetry in the Middle Ages and **Mahadevi Verma** in her *Shrinkhala Ki Kadiyan* (1942) in the modern times and they have tried to portray women in a new light. Women novelists like **Krishna Sobti** in *Mitro Marjani* (1966), **Mannu Bhandari** in *Aapka Bunty* (1971), **Mridula Garg** in *Chitkobra* (1979) and *Kathgulab* (1996), **Mamta Kalia** in *Beghar*, **Manjul Bhagat** in *Anaro* (1977) and *Ladies Club* (1976), **Nasira Sharma** in *Shalmali*, **Chitra Mudgal** in *Ek Zamin Apni* (1990) and *Aawan*, **Prabha Khaitan** in *Chhinnmasta*, **Gitanjali Shri** in *Mai* et al. have presented the struggling life of contemporary women in Indian society through their works.

It was also the time during which Korean women authors in their new writings were elaborating about the plight of women in the traditional and modern society and related it to the process of development. **Kang Sôk Kyông** (*Day and Night*, 1983), **Kim Chi-Won** (*A Certain Beginning*, 1974) and **O Chong-Hui** (*Evening Game*, 1979 and *Words of Farewell*, 1981), brought into light the dilemma of those ignored and marginalised women of the economically developing society where they were not even addressed by their own names! These writers have highlighted that today the same women, having struggled against the patriarchal society, have created a separate entity for themselves. Though prior to these women writers, men like **Kim Sang Hon** (*Dalphai*, 1957), **Yu Ju Han** (*Jang Si Ilma*, 1959), and **E Bam San** (*O Bal than*, 1959) have documented the sufferings of women and even in the writings of some women¹ like **Kim Mal Bong** (1900-1951), **Pak Heva Sang** (1904-1986), **Cho Chong Hui** (1912-), **San So Hui** (1917-1987), **Kang Shin Jai** (1924-), **Han Mal Shuk** (1931) we can see the authentic portrayal of women in traditional Korean society. But the new literature is different because it portrays the modern woman, one who is emancipated in society and is liberated in her thought process as well. Prior to Korea's attainment of political freedom women were mostly confined to their traditional roles (daughter, sister, wife, mother etc.), but after independence they came out of their confinement and tried

to create a new image for themselves by defying the codes and conducts (like marriage, traditional wear, rituals etc.) laid down by the patriarchal institutions. They managed to break out of the conventional notions set by the male dominated society that considered women as weak, non-argumentative, inferior in intelligence and believed that they (men) controlled their every action-reaction. If we take a closer look at the short stories *Kafan* by **Premchand** and *Soubhagya ka ek din*² by **Hyen Jin Gan**, then we realize that being at the bottom line of the social ladder women become easy victims of death especially if they belong to the economically backward strata. They keep fighting for their existence till their death but the insensitive attitude of the patriarchal society refuses to pay any heed towards them³.

It is important to mention here that both Indian and Korean societies are traditional societies where since the beginning men have played a significant role in deciding the social yardsticks, which they conveniently transgress as and when required, yet, making sure that women are confined within the codes of conduct. To legitimize the masculine perspective conduct books (like *Manusmriti* in Indian society) were composed. Though these books were composed by men they were projected as divine will by relating it to the religious texts (*smriti*)... The relationship of man and woman is based on traditional

culture and woman should be dependent on man for every aspect of her life. It believes that the body of woman should be controlled and determined by its social utility. In these matters woman has no role to play and she is not given any authority either. During the 70s feminists (**Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva** et al.) started challenging these ideas of institutions and presented an alternative where women could decide their own present and future. From then on literature composed by women started creating a niche for itself in the literary world. Their writings started to break and reject those existing conventions and concepts referring to which **Betty Freidan** writes, that women since their childhood are made to believe that their paradise is confined to the four walls of their house and it extends to kitchen only. They marry, they love, bear children and live in a world of ignorance⁴.

Apart from an example or two in Hindi and Korean literature (like **Krishna Sobti** in Hindi and **Kang Sok Kayong** in Korean) one cannot find a complete rejection of family values of traditional society in women writers. But at the same time within the family system they (women) want that both men and women should be given same rights and both must be treated equally. **Mannu Bhandari's** novel *Apka Bunti* (1971) in Hindi and **Kim Chi Wong's** Korean story *A Certain Beginning* (1974) can be seen as writings where the women characters after their divorce from their

respective husbands lead their lives on their own terms which in many ways do not subscribe to the rules imposed by male-dominated society. Another interesting point that needs attention is the way patriarchy manifests itself in controlling the life of a widow by voicing itself through the elderly women of the family or of the neighborhood. They also try to control and regulate her means of livelihood. For example, when **Mannu Bhandari's** female protagonist Gulabi in the story *Rani Maa Ka Chabutra* works as a laborer till late in the evening for supporting her children, the neighborhood women (whose ideas are controlled by the patriarchy) gossip about her. One day seeing Gulabi return from her work the women folk indulge in the following conversation:

When all the women gathered there then Radha said, "Oh God, today Gulabi has brought a lot of money with her. Trust me she is not going to return."

"Brought money with her?"

"Yes, Yes I saw it with my own eyes. I think behind her pretension of domestic work some other game is going on."

"Who will fall for her," she asked.

"Men cannot be trusted they can fall for anybody."

Rani smiled.⁵

This piece of conversation just confirms the convention that in a patriarchal society it is customary to

learn to live without your mother. Are you a girl that you are always stuck to your mother?"⁶

"This time you have grown very big." Papa was staring at him. Bunty feels shy. Papa is constantly asking one question after another.

"Cards, ludo, carrom...."

Nonsense! Are they games, girly stuff. Play cricket, play hockey, play kabbadi, play games that boys play. Outdoor games where you leap and run."

"If mummy goes then I will go"

"Shame-shame, despite being so old you can't live without your mother. This is a base habit, son. Now you should

pious and clean, serve the husband, make food and look after other needs of the family."

Since it is directed in the sacred books that they should be deprived of social knowledge system and education women do not possess any knowledge, and they do not have knowledge because: "ukfLr L=h.kā fØ; k eu=ſjfr /keſ 0; ofLFkr%A" AA 9-18AA that is, if she gains knowledge then God only knows what will happen! Actually these kinds of rules are created so that women can never gain knowledge and thus deprive her to be at par with men.

If we take a closer look at the father-son conversation from *Aapka Bunty* then we realize that the father makes fun of Bunty because being a boy he indulges in the games meant for girls. He behaves like them (girls), cannot live without his mother and thus he is growing up like a girl. From the father's perspective since these activities are related to girls that is why Bunty, who is a boy, should not indulge in these effeminate activities.

Through writings like *Aapka Bunty* and *Yahi Sach Hai Mannu Bhandari* is highlighting the difference between men and women in post-independence era. She tries to resolve the complication of the relationship.

The question is what are these reasons and who decides them? The clash of 'egos' or something else? Or the presence of some other lady? These are certain issues that women writers underlined

regularly. Though at the centre of *Aapka Bunty* we have the problem of divorce between husband and wife and how a child like Bunty copes with this change, yet somewhere this novel also voices many questions regarding the relationship between man and woman.

The relationship between man and woman (husband and wife) and its integrities are seen as an important issue in post independence Korean literature. There is not much difference in Korean or Indian society with regard to the position of woman because both the societies are basically ruled and regulated by patriarchy. This can be understood from the fact that till now in both the countries the father decides the daughter's marriage. Though after feminist movement the kind of changes that are reflected in Indian society and literature almost similar changes are reflected in Korean society and literature, especially in the writings of those three Korean fiction writers whom we have discussed in the beginning of our paper, their literature speaks about the 'new woman' who takes her own decisions. For e.g., **Kang Sok Kayong** (1951) considers the identity crisis of Korean woman in modern times as a major concern. She gives freedom in her writings (*Day and Night*) to her female protagonists to take decisions on issues like sex. The central issue in **Kim Chi-Won's** (1943) writings like *A Certain Beginning* is the relationship between man and woman. She also portrays

powerful female protagonists in her works. **O Chong Hui** (1947) describes the difficulties of cultural and economic life of Korea (like *The Game of the Evening*, *The Words of Farewell* etc.) and shows the complicated construction of society and tries to hegemonise it.

The growth of women's writing in Korean literature can be attributed to two factors –the influence of the opinion of Confucius and the hegemony of men writers. Though the writings of women describe the various facets of life yet they basically try to portray those pains and sufferings of woman which are created by male hegemonic society in the process of development. For eg. in **Kang Sok Kayong's** story *Day and Night* (1983) two women are shown discussing the reasons as to why one of them unwillingly has to spend time with a stranger:

"Even if I went along with that, I still couldn't live with her," said Sunny. "Oh, sometime we say we don't like men, or we hate them. Still, women are supposed to live with them."⁷

In the above quoted passage the last line hints at women's hatred for men that exists in the mainstream social life because of the suffocating patriarchal system. It is indicated in the story that women go out with other men due to financial constraints yet many a time woman despite her unwillingness bows down to the wishes of men due to fear or pressure. The male- centric society wishes women to agree on whatever they

say. Why? Because they (men) control them. The important thing is that these women stay with their so called husbands and they also know that their husbands are least bothered about their physical exploitations:

"But if two women see eye to eye, there's no law that says they can't live together", Said Toma. "So what if they're Lesbians ? People live the way they want to. And so what if we're whores? Except for worrying about money, it's great living around the base. No husband to treat us rough, no kids to worry us, no one interfering with us."

"That's right," Said Sunny.⁸

These conversations take place between those Korean women who are settled near and around an American army basement of North Korea and prostitution has become a profession for them. **Vijay's** story in Hindi, *Kasai* (The Butcher), also narrates about a village in Nadia district in West Bengal where the whole economic transaction is controlled by women and the economic base of the village is prostitution:

"Many houses have been constructed from the income of women... Concrete houses, radio, servants and men possessing motor cycles. Big deals are made. Rich men invited from Palampur, Mehasana, Disha and Sabarkatha."⁹

It is apparent that the men in the village do not have any objection to their wives getting into prostitution; rather they seem to encourage it.¹³ But

in both the stories there are some basic differences where as in *Day and Night* women use their body to establish their existence and gain a sense of power.¹⁰ In *Kasai* women do so in order to compensate for the inefficiency of men. On the other hand **Kang Sok Kyong's** story through the reference of army camps tries to show the ugly aspect of American imperialism whose worst victims are the women of the captured nations. Needless to say, at times, women use their 'bodies' to challenge the stereotypes of patriarchal society.¹¹

This is the philosophy of life that any social group can earn through struggle and experience. When various social aspects clash with each other, then there is a special kind of antithetical relationship between personal hopes and aspirations. During the last moments man creates a protective circle to save his existence. Sometimes this circle is so weak that the person or society realises it only towards the end. This is reflected in **Mirza Hadi Ruswa's** popular novel *Umrao Jaan Ada* or in **Chitra Mudgal's** story *Fatimabai Kothe Par Hi Nahi Rahati*. Especially, Umrao, who never considers men as her biggest supporter as they have ditched her or have left her in the time of crisis. Umrao always recites gazal: **fdl dka l uk;s gkys fnystkj]] , vnk@vlokjxh ea geus tekus dh l j dh**¹²

Meaning whom shall I narrate the feelings of my broken heart, I have experienced my world through interaction with people.

Kang Sok Kyong's Sunny and Tamar (the protagonists of the story) are different from the traditional women because they are making their 'bodies' the protective circle and reject the protection of men. They also claim that their 'body' is their 'capital'¹⁷ with whose support they have to 'make their roads' ahead.¹⁸ Simultaneously this attacks that power play of men whose foundation is based on morality and monogamy. When Dalit writer **Sushila Takbhaure's** main character in her story *Celia* decides "I will not marry..."¹³ or the character of Prabha Khaitan's novel *Chhinnamasta* (The Headless tells "*within my heart I had decided not to become woman but remain a girl*"¹⁴ then somewhere these writers are challenging the institution of marriage which is a big cause for the exploitation, domination and inferior status of women. They think that 'marriage' is such a weapon by using which man can easily make his wife a slave or a servant. Even if the man does not do so then at least he wishes that his wife should treat him like a master. He (man/husband) should be considered as the 'Lord' otherwise, he treats her like an animal as Dalit writer **Kaushalya Basantri** in her *Dohara Abhishap* writes while describing the husband's behaviour to his wife:

She and Devendra Kumar could not get along. Devendra Kumar is a man who always stays in his own world. Hot tempered and eccentric. He never cared for my wishes, desires and happiness.

Scolded me for everything, that too in abusive language and beat me. Also harassed me in brutal way.¹⁵

Clearly, in a society where the husband behaves so cruelly with his wife, who will like to stay there? If the ceremony of marriage scares a wife (girl) then why would she like to marry a man? Or become a daughter-in-law like **Baby Kamble's** autobiography *Hamara Jeevan* and be ill-treated by the in-laws for not being traditional and not knowing the etiquettes:

"Are your parents from some lower caste? Don't they have the custom of showing regards to elders? Arre, as if your father is the head of the village? Does not that bastard know his religion? Arre, Raand, those cultured people are our fathers and brothers. Your mother is absolutely a donkey, a donkey. Did not teach etiquettes to the daughters. Your father-in-law moves among various people and you tarnished his reputation."¹⁶

Clearly, dalit women writers like **Kaushalya Basantri** and **Baby Kamble** are focusing on the subordinate state of women that has been created by the patriarchal society or family oriented notions. Moreover the daughter-in-law of *Hamara Jeevan* faces hurdles because she is unable to carry out properly the customs and regulations set up by the patriarchal society.

There are times when we cannot understand what does a man want from

a woman. Or apprehend what happens that suddenly life changes its course and man and woman end up being on the cross roads of life. In **Mannu Bhandari's** *Aapka Bunty* the husband and wife get separated because 'ego' emerges as a big challenge in their lives. But the protagonist of *Dohara Abhishap* gets separated from her husband because he ill-treats her. We cannot understand why certain men behave like that. For example, in the above said story of **Kim Chi Won** the husband one day suddenly says that they should get separated. Reason? None.

"Let's get a divorce; you can have the house," He had said one day.

Yun-ja was terribly shocked.

"But why ?.... Is there another woman?"

"No, it's not that. I just don't think I'm cut out for marriage."

In desperation Yun-ja suggested a trial separation. But her husband had insisted on the divorce, and one day he left, taking only a toilet kit and some clothes. Yun-ja wept for days afterward. She was convinced that another woman had come on the scene.¹⁷

Clearly in this male-centric world women are treated as 'clothes' that can be used or left away as and when required. In **Mannu Bhandari's** *Aapka Bunty* the aunty says: "Those who don't have the ability to carry on a relationship they express their masculinity in this way. Who do not quarrel? So can't we

live like the happily married couple?"¹⁸.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* while discussing the position of women (wives) in a patriarchal society writes. *"All traditions tell about the fact that wives should know the art of keeping their husbands in their control."* She interrogates why should the wife know this art? She is a woman, that's why? Why does not the man learn this art? Man is "male" that's why? The question is if the woman does not know this art, then will the man leave her? Is it that only woman should "love"? Feminists argue that by declaring women as 'goddess' or 'the epitome of love' the patriarchal society has kept them under an illusion. They (men) can do anything they like, and because woman is 'goddess' and 'epitome of love' that is why she should ignore all his faults and accept him as he is. **Kim Chi Won's** character is not the one who could be kept under any illusion. She later comes to know that her husband has fallen in love with another woman. One day the wife leaves her husband. Later he comes back to Yun-ja again, and sitting in the drawing room sees his box still lying there. He thinks Yun-ja still has a soft corner for him. He imagines something positive can still happen:

"What would you say if I ... proposed to you?" Finally he blurted out.

Yun-ja sprang up from the table. "What did he say?" Her body pricked, as if she were yielding to a long suppressed urge to urinate, "I don't believe in

marriage."¹⁹

This story reflects that notion of a capitalist world, which has been adopted by the patriarchal society that views woman as a 'commodity'. The important thing is now women refuse to accept themselves as 'commodity'. It is not as if they do not believe in the institution of marriage. Yun-ja believes in marriage, that is why she also respects her husband. She shed tears for him when he left. But she realises that her man (husband) considers her to be a mere commodity and takes a stern decision. So much so that she feels that life can be lead without a 'man.' She can lead a stable and regular life even without a husband. That's why at the end of the story she says, *"It is time to make a stand."*²⁰. Meaning, it's time that she should clear matters and take a decision. It means that she should begin her life in a new way. This is a great blow to the male dominated society, and the feminists have made this their greatest weapon i.e. women can live without men. In other words, this is that image of the new woman which is created in contrast to her traditional image (daughter, sister, wife and mother). A woman is a 'woman' and should be seen only in that way. It is needless to say that feminist writers challenge the brutal and cruel attitude of patriarchy and try to create a new image for themselves. They regard it as a new beginning.

Actually, the literature composed in India and Korea about women has various

dimensions to it— from joint families to nuclear families but women have now come out of the family confinements and have proved that they can play pivotal roles in social, political and economic sphere. Though the image of 'woman' has to be fully exploited even in full-fledged women's writings yet the new literature focusing on women is

trying to cope with multiple issues of their existence. In this process of development, literature is struggling towards new social reality.

This is a new situation for literature that is better in a way because the new society that will be formed from this, at least, will be free from any exploitation based on '**gender**' and '**caste**'.

References:

1. Lee Jung Ho, *Swantantrayottar Hindi Aur Koriyai Kahani* (New Delhi, Abhiruchi Prakashan, First Edition, 1997).
2. Translated by Son San Kyang in Hindi; *Vishwa Sahitya : Chuninda Rachnayen*, 2007, ed. by Devendra Choubey, Prakashan Sansthan, Delhi.
3. In this context we may look into the following excerpt of the concerned writer: Madhav, 'But dada, she suffered a lot of pain during her lifetime. How she died after undergoing so much pain!'
Covering his eyes with both his hands, he started crying loudly.
Ghisu tried to console him, ' Why are you crying, son? Be happy that daughter-in-law is now liberated from this worldly life! She was very fortunate that she broke her relation from this deep illusive world'.
And both stood up and started singing—
'Thagini, kyon naina jhamkaway! Thagini!'
(why are we caught up in this materialistic world, it is all illusion.)
Premchand, *Pratinidhi Kahaniyan*, 1990, Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi, p-139.

And:

Screaming, he threw away the money. The noise of money beating the wall was heard. It seemed as if money was taking its own punishment. kim in his drunken state of happiness suddenly started crying in front of Chhi-Sam.

'What happened? Why are you crying?'

'My wife has died.'

'Is your wife dead? When?'

'When? Today.'

'Damn, have you gone mad? What are you babbling about?'

'am babbling? She died. Really! ...She is lying dead in my house, and I am drinking here. kill me also, me also....'

-Hyen Jin Gan's *Soubhagya ka ek Din*, Translated by Son San Kyang, in **Devendra Chaubey's** ed., *Vishwa Sahitya:Chuninda Rachnayan*, 2007, Prakashan Sansthan, Delhi, 203-204

4. Betty Freidan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963, p.367.
5. Manu Bhandari, *Shresth Kahaniyaan* (Delhi, Akshar Prakashan, 1975).
6. Mannu Bhandari, *Aapka Bunty*; p.49 and 51.
7. Korean Women Writers by Kang Sok-Kyong, Kim chi-Won and O Chong-Hui, Translated by Bruce and Ju-chan Fulton, *Words of Farewell* (Washington, Seal Press, 1989, p.11).
8. Ibid.
9. Vijay : *Kasai* Kamleswar, ed., *Ganga monthly* (Delhi, March 1988, p.55).
10. Kang Sok Kyong's *Day and Night*, *Words of Farewell*, p.11.
11. Ibid.
12. Mirza Hadi Ruswa : *Umaro Jaan Ada* , (Delhi, Rajkamal Paperback, First edition: 1988, p.7).
13. Sushila Takbhaure, *Tutta Vaham* (Story collection), (Nagpur, Shaad Prakashan, 1997; p.66).
14. Prabha Khaitan : *Chhinnmasta*, p.69.
15. Kaushalya Basantri : *Dohra Abhishaap*, (Delhi, Parameshwar Prakashan, 1st edition: 1999, p.104).
16. Baby Kamble: *Jivan Hamara*, (Delhi, Kitabghar, first edition, 1995, p.6).
17. *Words of Farewell*, pp. 154-155.
18. *Aapka Bunty*, p.60.
19. *Words of Farewell*, p.164.
20. *ibid.*, p.165.

Devendra Chaube, Associate Professor at JNU and author of several books of prose. He lives in New Delhi.

Khushi Pattanayak is a research scholar in English at JNU, New Delhi. She has a few publications to her credit.

HINDI IN FIJI : STATUS AND FUTURE

Vimalesh Kanti Varma

Translated by
Anil Sud

A tiny dot on the world map, which is called an exotic island by Indians, where Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas is revered as 'Ramayana Maharani', where more than half the population speaks Hindi and almost all understand it, where Indians are well placed and respected socially, a land of natural beauty, is thousands of miles away from India. Landing after a long flight, you will be spellbound by the land. You know the name of that country. It is Fiji. A picturesque island in the Pacific Ocean. High waves rising from a vast stretch of sea, the lush greenery of bluish green hills nestling hundreds of flowers— red, blue, yellow, the ever changing weather like the moods of a teenager, alternating spells of strong sunshine and gentle rain, these are the special attractions of Fiji.

The first arrival of Indians as 'indentured' labour for sugarcane farms in Fiji goes back to 1879 when the British agents, on a directive from the government, lured the guileless and gullible residents of western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh with promises of a golden future and shipped them to Fiji in the vessel 'Lavnidar'. This practice continued till 1916 when it was stopped. In these 38 years, almost 61000 Indians had arrived in Fiji. They were called *girmitia* or indentured labour, another name for 'agreement labour'. They landed as farm workers but with hard work and dedication, they brought orderly fulfilment, progress and prosperity to the country. Today the third generation of these indentured

farm workers is educated, well placed and highly respected in society.

Fiji is a multiracial country where Indians, *kaibeetis* (original inhabitants), British, Australians, New Zealanders, Tongans, Rotumas and many other races live together. The diverse traditions and cultures of different countries has made Fiji a very colourful and attractive country. Every race, religion and language is respected in Fiji.

The initial Indian immigrant farm workers spoke Bhojpuri and Avadhi. In course of time, people from Gujarat, Punjab, Madras and other provinces came and they spoke different languages. However, they also spoke Hindi since most of the early immigrant indentured labour in sugarcane farms was from UP or Bihar. That is why Hindi occupied a predominant position as the day to day spoken language. The indentured workers were instrumental in the development of Hindi in Fiji. These workers would, after a day's hard toil, relax under starlight to the recitation of Ramcharitmanas and sang Bhajans of Kabir, Surdas and Meera to the accompaniment of a harmonium, drums and other instruments. They would in an indirect way, read, speak and practice Hindi by singing Bhajans. Gradually, Hindi became the focal point of contact and communication amongst all workers. The sapling of Hindi, planted in 1871 has grown into a banyan tree and is steadily growing stronger. The spoken Hindi in Fiji is different from the structured form

used on formal occasions. The conversational Hindi was the language of farm workers and labourers, influenced by many other dialects and languages. Indian Fijis perceive their day to day Hindi as a corrupted, semi finished form of Hindi and are proud of using a more refined and rich vocabulary form on formal occasions. If they meet an Indian, they try to speak in Sanskritised Hindi. The appeal and fondness of purity and adornment has been passed on to the Fiji Indians by pundits coming from India. Thus two parallel forms of Hindi are taking shape in Fiji. The first is the conversational form which is called 'Fiji Baat' or 'Fiji Hindi'. The second is the Sanskrit vocabulary dominant Hindi. This form of Hindi is essentially for dissemination and education, used in schools, radio stations, newspapers, speeches on formal occasions and cultural festivals. This is the structured form of *khadi boli* (unlike the Avadhi dominant 'Fiji Baat') which the Fiji Indian wants to use in literary works because he believes it to be the only medium to get literary acceptance and recognition.

The history of development of Hindi in Fiji is an account of the devotion of Fiji Indians to the cause of Hindi. Numerous authors, journalists, professionals and social and religious institutions have made this development possible with their positive contribution. The Fiji government's education department, other government organizations and Fiji radio have all along

extended support and have, through well thought out and organized initiatives, played a significant role in promoting Hindi. India also has contributed handsomely to the cause of Hindi promotion through its High Commission in Fiji.

Among non-official institutions, Arya Pratinidhi Sabha ranks foremost in the task of promoting Hindi. The role of its members in raising the standards in schools and facilitating a respectable status for Hindi in society, is praiseworthy indeed.

The task of structuring the curriculum for primary, middle and higher levels in schools is overseen by the education department of Fiji Government. There is a curriculum development unit in the Department of Education headed by Senior Officer (Hindi).

Fiji Radio has played a commendable part in helping Hindi to reach the masses. Hindi programmes are transmitted throughout the day and the High Commission provides tape recordings of All India Radio for news, film songs and other features.

Even today the Indian community wishes to articulate its thoughts and emotions in Hindi and short stories, poems etc. are written in Hindi only. These writings are published in local newspapers. Publishing costs are very high. Despite a large Hindi speaking population, the buyers are few because Hindi is not the language of professionals

and does not have the desired status. Consequently works in Hindi are either published in newspapers or through radio programmes. Overall, therefore, it is a life of struggle for a writer.

Hindi writers have formed Hindi Centres and Committees who organize conferences, seminars and competitions under the guidance of reputed authors. Poets and writers present their works in these sessions. In Fiji, Indians have a special attachment for Hindi. They perceive Hindi as their link to their heritage and strongly believe that they can preserve their cultural roots through the prestige enjoyed by their language.

Today Hindi writers are engaged in writing poetry, stories, articles, memoirs, travelogues, plays etc. Their works are either published in Hindi magazines or transmitted through radio programmes. Most of these are in verse. Fiji has problems of its own when it comes to publication. The number of big publishers is small and printing and distribution is not adequately organized. Some writers with links with India managed to get their works published in India but this was not possible for most of the writers.

The list of prominent Hindi literary figures of Hindi in Fiji include poets like Kamlaprasad Mishra, Mahaveer Mitra, Kashiram Kumud, Ramnarayan, Gyani Singh, Hazrat Adam, Joginder Singh Kanwal, Salim Bakhsh, Anubhav Anand, Ishwarprasad Chaudhri. Prose writers who have made waves with their works,

include Mahendrachandra Sharma, 'Vinod' Subramani, Brijvilas Lal, Raymond Pillay, Gurudayal Sharma, Joginder Singh Kanwal and Bharat V. Morris. Prof Subramani was even honoured with the International Hindi Award by the Indian Government at the World Hindi Convention for his novel 'Daooka Purana'.

There was hardly any publication of books in Fiji because costs of publication were steep and the distribution channels were inadequate to reach the masses. Books which are published in periodicals in an abridged form or broadcast on the radio cannot be accessible to the masses. Books that got published also stayed out of the reach of masses because a proper distribution set up did not exist. Consequently, one has to rely on periodicals and old archives for books that are in demand. The need of the hour is to obtain international works in Hindi for a high level study and research through reputed universities so that the international profile of Hindi can be projected widely.

Officially, teaching of Hindi in Fiji could be started only in the first decade of the 20th century when schools were opened for people of Indian origin. Wairuku School in Rakiraki was the first Indian school. The demand for books grew with the increase in immigrants of Indian origin. The start of the second world war put an end to the import of books from India which posed the problem of paucity of text books. At about this time, the Director of Gurukul

Kangri, Pandit Aminchand Vidyalankar, happened to visit Fiji to promote Arya Samaj. Keeping in view the shortage of text books, he launched a project for preparing text books and he was able to complete five volumes but died while still working on the sixth volume and the work remained unfinished. An English scholar, A.W. McMillan, bearing in mind the importance of study and teaching, revived the volumes prepared by Pt. Aminchand. Adyu Gayaprasad, Jairam Sharma, Shiv Prasad and Ram Harakh Ji also extended full cooperation to McMillan and helped in the compilation of text books.

Today the Hindi teaching is well organized and the education department of the Fiji government has accorded full recognition to it. Hindi is taught in schools from class I to the 13th class of the Higher Secondary schools. According to a former senior officer of the curriculum unit of the education department, Mr Netram Sharma, all *Kaibeeti* children learn Hindi set to a structured curriculum from class 1 to 10. For all examinations conducted by the education department, Hindi is taught as a subject. For the intermediate exam of class VI, the eighth year exam of class VIII, the junior certificate exam for class X, the school leaving certificate for class XII, the Fiji seventh year exam for class XIII (also form 7), Hindi is taught as a subject. In the only university in the Southern Province of Fiji, Hindi was started as a hobby course under the direction of

Dr Vimlesh Kanti Varma, posted in the Indian Counsellate as a first Secretary (Education and Hindi) in the years 1985-86. The course was discontinued after his return to India. In 1915, Hindi was restarted as a minor subject and Dr Net Ram Sharma worked there for two and a half years. Now Hindi is taught there at the diploma (not degree) level and the Hindi courses are being run under the direction of Mr Indu Chandra in Fiji's University of South Pacific. He is also making every effort to start post graduate courses in the University.

What is now required is that for students graduating from higher Hindi classes and interested in further studies/research, there should be facilities available in the Universities. There is a special respect for Hindi in Fiji. Every Indian in Fiji cherishes Hindi as a symbol of his heritage. Not only Indians but most of the educated *kaibeetis* understand, speak and use Hindi in their day to day activities. To arouse greater interest in them, it is imperative that an International Hindi Institute is set up with the help of non residents and the local government. Such an Institute should provide facilities for a high level of study and research on Hindi literature with a well equipped library. *Kaibeeti* as a dialect should be encouraged along with Hindi drama and poetry sessions to satisfy the cultural appetite of people and plans implemented for using Hindi as a platform for a crossover development of *Kaibeeti* and Hindi. A *Kaibeeti-Hindi-*

Kaibeeti lexicon could be the first impact-making step in this direction.

Historically, Hindi journalism in Fiji goes back a long time. Dr Mani Lal, himself an indentured farm worker, started an English newspaper called 'The Settler' in 1913. It was very popular amongst Indians. Its cyclostyled version in Hindi was circulated for the benefit of farm workers under the supervision of Pandit Shiv Ram Sharma. This edition of 'the Settler' takes the pride of place as the first Hindi newspaper in Fiji.

Many more newspapers followed in the second decade. Fiji Samachar, Bharatputra, Vridhi and Vridhi Vani etc appeared in quick succession. However, only Fiji Samachar survived and the rest closed down very soon. Fiji Samachar, launched in 1923, continued till 1957. It was published by the Indian Printing and Publishing Company and its first editor was Babu Ram Singh and the last was Pandit Chandradev Singh from Nausori.

Two more newspapers were published in the next decade of 1930-1940. The first was a Hindi monthly 'Vedic Sandesh', managed by the Arya Samaj office bearer, Pandit Shrikrishna Sharma. The second monthly, 'Sanatan Dharma', was launched in 1937 under the aegis of Sanatan Dharma Sabha. Due to intense rivalry and mutual jealousy, both went into oblivion soon. However, the weekly, 'Shanti Doot' is a shining example of how Hindi can be the foremost instrument in facilitating

a feeling of unity and togetherness among Indians all over the world. Shanti Doot is the solitary newspaper of the Southern Province which is published in Suva, the capital of Fiji. Apart from Fiji, it is read regularly by readers in Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific islands where readers eagerly await its weekly publication. This newspaper has had an uninterrupted run for the last 63 years, carrying news on national, international and Indian affairs and topics to its readers. The Shanti Doot faced several hazards and political, economic and cultural turbulence, but has withstood all the troubled times and is steadfastly engaged in keeping the Hindi flag flying high. Undoubtedly, 'Shantidoot' is a

glorious landmark in Hindi newspaper journalism.

Today the Fiji Islands are a Hindi speaking country in which the Indian settlers and the original *kaibeeti* inhabitants converse in Hindi. For the Fiji Indians, Hindi is a symbol of their heritage. They have also constantly striven to safeguard Hindi and its prestige. If a well orchestrated development can be continued in Fiji, curricula for graduate and post graduate students structured, the writers encouraged by the publication of their books, and plans implemented on the lines of what has been done in Mauritius, the foundations of Hindi will become stronger and its prestige receive a big boost internationally.

Dr. Vimallesh Kanti Verma is professor of Hindi at Delhi University and an author of several books on language. Highly regarded as a man of letters. 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.

THE TRADITION OF STUDY AND RESEARCH OF HINDI IN CHINA

Chang Ching Khuey (China)

Translated by
Anil Sud

If one were to look for the beginnings of a systematic study and teaching of Hindi in China it can be traced back to 1942 when the Hindi Department was set up in Yunan's College of Oriental Languages and Literature. This was the time when the world was enveloped by the second world war and war clouds were hanging menacingly over China also. In such a situation, the Hindi Department had to look for another safer haven. Three years later, in 1945, the Hindi Department moved from Yunan to Chongching and in a year's time was established firmly in the Foreign Languages Institute at Peking University and since then that is where it has blossomed and flourished. Interestingly, the study and teaching at the Peking University's Foreign Languages Institute is not restricted to Hindi alone; it includes Sanskrit, Pali and Urdu literature also.

The decade of 1949 to 1959 was a glorious period of development of Hindi in China. and this was the decade in which India and China in the backdrop of the panchsheel doctrine, were moving forward, shoulder to shoulder,echoing loud slogans of *Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai*. After this decade however, the intensity and the passionate interest of policy makers, teachers and students waned significantly.

During this phase, the number of Hindi students was considerable. Studying Hindi was a symbol of pride. Outstanding students came forward on their own, to opt for study of Hindi. It was not the age of computers, information technology or business management.

It was the time of building, falling apart and rebuilding of ideals. Students had the facility of enrolling for Hindi courses twice a year. We will discuss later the contribution of the students in keeping alight the torch of Hindi. During this decade, the role of students was foremost in the translation of the epic Ramcharit Manas, the arduous task of compiling a dictionary, the structuring of a grammar and in reaching similar significant milestones.

1960 to 1979 were very difficult times for the Chinese people and society which had to go through several trial by fire phases. The Cultural Revolution had a profound impact on the study-teaching scenario. The University education system went through a process of reservations and questions for some time. As a result of these situations and events, the Hindi department shrank in size and the number of Hindi students dwindled sharply.

The period of 1980 to 1999 marked the beginning of change in China. Openness was the keynote of this phase which impacted on education and Hindi also. The dialysis ridden Hindi was revived by a surge of fresh blood infusion. Through these years, even in the most trying times, the dedicated and committed segment shielded Hindi, one must emphasise. However, Hindi did not benefit as much as it should have from this open policy. Perhaps the frozen relations between the two countries were one of the reasons. Unless there is an easy

access to contemporary and popular Hindi literature, magazines and free interaction with Hindi speaking people, the growth and development of a language would remain stunted. Still, it is a matter of some comfort that during this period, Hindi study-teaching process continued uninterrupted.

2000 to 2003 was the start of the new millennium as well as the thawing of the icy relations between the two countries. The warming up of relations between the two countries would inevitably affect the study/teaching of Hindi and this is already visible. These years have seen the pace quicken. During these years our cooperative efforts have resulted in the setting up of an Indian Study Centre in the Beijing University. Now students seeking to learn Hindi can enroll once in two years instead of once in four years. Also, Hindi has been classified in the category of languages open to all students. It means that any student can opt for the Hindi curriculum besides the main subject for study.

Today we have a fair number of students enrolled for BA, MA and Phd level courses who, while learning Hindi, also undertake a deep study of Indian subjects - Cultural, Historical, Literary, Sociological, Religious etc.

The Teacher and the Student

a) **Teacher**-I can say with confidence that if the tradition of Hindi study/teaching established in the period 1949 to 1959 had been sustained, a group

of high calibre academics would have emerged in China by this time, capable of taking on their Indian counterparts in the intellectual arena. I would like to mention three scholars who were students of that foundational period and who have kept the Hindi flag flying. These three names are seasoned veterans and role models of dedication and idealism for posterity. They are: Prof Yin Huewen, Prof Leo Anboo and Prof Chin Tinghyan.

Language specialist Prof Yin retired from the Hindi department after 43 years of service. He prepared a lexicon which is widely used even today. This was a monumental task and its contribution to translation of works from Hindi to Chinese was unquestionably of great significance. Even at the age of 78, Prof Yin is preoccupied with the compilation of Hindi - Chinese vocabulary. It is our wish and hope too that this anthology will be in print by next year. He has also prepared a text book of Hindi grammar. Apart from this Prof Yin has presented to readers, translations of novels of Vrindavan Lal Varma and Ila Chandra Joshi.

Prof Leo Anboo retired from the Hindi department after working for 50 years. He chose Hindi literature as his area of specialisation and obtained a history of Hindi literature for the readers. He wrote two books on Prem Chand. His books on Ramayana and Mahabharata introduced the two great epics to Chinese readers. He also translated several novels and stories of Prem Chand. He is pretty

old but is busy writing books on Rabindranath Tagore and on a comparative study of Hindi and Chinese literature. He has not limited the scope of his study to Hindi literature but has extended it to the entire Indian literature.

Prof Chin Tinghyan also retired after working for 45 years in the Hindi department. He translated Ramcharit Manas in verse for which he was awarded by the Indian President in Delhi in 2000. He has also prepared a text book and compiled a book on Hindi-Chinese idioms. He has crossed the age of 73 but has an intense desire to work on Kabir and is busy gathering material for that project.

All three of these scholars have, with their dedication, hard work and ideals, made contributions for the propagation of Hindi in China that are inspirational.

At present, there are four Hindi teachers in the Beijing University. One is pursuing a PhD and almost all the others are also PhDs. Now that students can enrol once every two years, it is expected that along with the increase in the number of students, the number of teachers will also go up.

b) **Students**-Apart from the three scholars of the 1949 -1959 era I have mentioned, all the students during these fifty years are well placed in their jobs and are doing good work. Out of these, persons in Radio services or education are in constant touch with us. The improvement in Indo-Chinese relations has accelerated and that would surely

and favourably affect the study-teaching tradition of Hindi. The search for Hindi knowing people has begun in China. This is an age of commerce. Trade and Markets have become the indispensable tools of cultural exchange and getting to know each other. Thus the development of language is inextricably linked with the development of commerce and markets.

Study of Hindi in China

Three types of Text resources are used for study of Hindi in the Beijing University. One in which the language and related resources are included like essays, plays, stories etc. Every lesson is based on extensive practice. It is compulsory for students to follow up each lesson with a lot of practice. At the end of each lesson, practice material for translating Hindi to Chinese and Chinese to Hindi is provided. Apart from

text materials, Hindi newspapers are also used so that the students are aware of the changing language and its practical application. Apart from language, the examination papers include adaptations to changing situations. The examination papers include a study of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Philosophical works, Religions etc.

The second type of resource is the media. Students listen to the language in a studio to comprehend the right pronunciation, tone, rhythm etc.

The third type of resource is audio visual in which the students watch videos made on their course curriculum. Undoubtedly, this is a very powerful medium.

Briefly, this is how our students learn and study Hindi.

Prof. Chang Ching Khuey has done his Ph.D. in Hindi from Peking University and teaches Hindi to Chinese students. He participated in the first international Hindi conference held in Japan in 2006 and presented this paper.

CREATIVITY WITH CRITICAL VISION: PRABHAKAR SHROTRIYA'S BOOKS

Ramesh Dave

The realm of Hindi literary criticism is ironically fraught with various complexes and cynicism. A creative talent surviving on his own universal vision, often falls prey to those, whose only literary merit is how to defy and deny a genuine writer by their value judgments loaded with their polemical pride and prejudices. Dr. Prabhakar Shrotriya has passionately been devoted to his work without being committed to any right or left ideologies. His strong passion for his work, whether it is creative, critical or editorial, has made him very choosy and unbiased because he believes that it is not the person who matters but it is the quality of work which makes a person significant and noticeable in the field of literature. The rise of his literary persona is not by any accidental magic touch, and even in the absence of any literary god-father, he has always been enviable for those who are the master-minds of literary game-plans. Dr. Shrotriya has always believed that the reward of good work is more work and with this conviction and work-commitment he has successfully traversed the long strife ridden path of more than seventy years of his age overcoming umpteen odds and adversities. He never becomes satisfied with any kind of literary work unless it is qualitatively accomplished whether it is his own or of any writer of any stature. Despite this very strong critical attitude, he has never endeavoured to obfuscate or obliterate any person or work on the basis of prejudices or personal good or bad relationships. A writer in him has emerged by awakening his own creative and imaginative faculties through consistent pursuit of literary studies. By now he has produced more than sixty books of which, besides his literary criticism,

there are poems, plays, anthologies of essays, and topical articles pertaining to various social issues and literary genres. Here are his three selected books which not only deserve notice but also need to be critically reviewed and appreciated.

First Play-IIa: Mythology Made Human

Indian mythology is not a child of either any black-magic or of any sentimental superstitions of some romantic moments. The deep meaning which our myths carry, provides metaphorical strength to a creative work establishing very strong human ties resulting in cultural richness with their ever resonant vibrations of our ancestral voices. Myths lead to invest better creative forces of life-situations and relations so that a writer can invent newer energy channels for innovations and linguistically deviational meanings.

Shrotriya, as a playwright made his debut with ILA, the play of classical nature based on mythology: Shrotriya attempts this play not as a simple mythological story but as a cultural and intellectual identity of Indian tradition with scientific vision and psychological logistics. A plot drawn from tradition as a continuum of our cultural contexts also tries to merge the tradition in the dynamic process of scientific thinking which he also attempts to justify through sacred rituals i.e. yajnas.

Written play is not merely a readable stock of texts but it is worth a play when it accepts the challenges of its

en-actability and stage-ability and it is the performance that decides the character of the play with all those elements which a play is supposed to have. Shrotriya has very skillfully and imaginatively woven the entire fabric of the play with conscious effort in order to meet the challenges of its performance. The acts, scenes, characters, dialogues and the stage properties have been indicated suiting the demand and need of the actors, directors, choreographer, music-masters and light-organisers. All these aspects do not create any problem for any director or actor, but the major challenge lies in the transformation of a male character into a female one and vice versa. This kind of physical transformation of two sexes in one particular individual at different time-spans is not a very easy task for a director on the stage in the absence of video interventions through trick photography. It was the imagination of the playwright that he created such a space for the director's own acumen and the directors have done the play in such a manner that the viewing audience could not guess how and when the transformation actually took place. They could know only when a male figure turns into a female as a whole and the female a man, with all his manliness. In spite of this, the episode of transformation seems to be more film oriented than a stage material, as films can do this kind of scene very comfortably without loudly making viewers conscious of the process of change.

Shrotriya's play is mainly inspired by a mythological story, the theme of which belongs to different aspects of the human desire & one is the desire of malechild with the blessings of gods by performing a putra-kameshtiyajna (a ritual) and the other one is the fructification of the Yajna contrary to the desire of the Emperor Manu.

Here a strange paradox has been created by the imagination of the playwright. The nature's verdict was a female-child which the queen Shradha had also desired but the royal desire was for a male-child as an heir-apparent of his throne. Therefore, the king's desire defying his own queen's desire prevailed upon the royal teacher Vashishtha and despite all his reluctance, Vashishtha had to surrender himself before the royal wishes. This ultimately led to a process of sex change through pouring of chemicals on a new-born female infant which is neither scientifically approvable nor humanly justifiable. This so called scientific process claiming the increase of male-sperms in an already born child seems to be pseudo-scientific and therefore it does not seem to be very convincing. A play richly adorned with mytho-metaphors could present the scene symbolically without showing the cruel chemical treatment because on the stage the performance of such scenes do not please the audience. Shrotriya could give it a dramatic turn by creating fantasy emerging from the mythology itself and the viewers could enjoy the

scene. Shrotriya's approach here seems to show the fact how predominantly patriarchal was the Indian community even at the most creative time of our scriptures. Emperor Manu was not an exception even though he was supposed to be the code-maker and norm-setter of our society. This is very sarcastically shown by the writer as the cultural past of India where such a discrimination persisted so indiscriminately for which even the intellectual giants like Rishi Vashishtha had to be humbled. The rishi Vashishtha cannot be absolved from the sin he had committed by surrendering before the whimsical verdict of a dictatorial despot, though Shrotriya has spared him in the play.

Another significant construct of the theatrical story is the pathetic ordeal of Manu-Shradha's Man-woman son Sudyumna. Sudyumna is on his hunting adventure in a forest-valley named SHARVAN. There is a myth about the valley. The valley is a land of romance for Lord Shiva and Parvati. Once a rishi entered the valley and saw Parvati sitting nude in the lap of Lord Shiva. Angered with the rishi's uniformed and unauthorized entry into the valley, Lord Shiva cursed the entire male-community. with the result of the curse if any male individual or a group entered the valley, it would turn into female ones. The ill-fated Sudyumna had to face the curse because unmindful of the curse, he entered the valley and got turned into a woman. From Sudyumna he became Ila-the

woman. To absolve Sudyumna from the curse, rishi Vashishtha had to pray and please Lord Shiva and Lord Shiva relaxed the curse saying that Sudyumna would be man for one month and woman for another month and thus he would live like both man and woman.

The Emperor was not happy at this state of Sudyumna as he was more a woman than a man, who could not be an able, valiant and authoritative successor to the throne. He, therefore, wanted Shradha to conceive again and produce a natural male child but Shradha already dejected and wounded by the previous decision rejected the King's appeal and became ascetic. Sudyumna as a man was married to Sumati from whom he was blessed with three sons. Sumati was a woman of self-pride and wanted her husband to behave like a potent and gallant hero. When Sudyumna was turned into woman Ila, she fell in love with Budha the son of Chandra who had kidnapped Brihaspati's wife Tara. Thus the long mythological story becomes the prime source of the play. Before penning down the theatrical construct of the mythical plot, Shrotriya has done a lot of research work to investigate the sources on which he had to develop the entire theme.

Ila, as a reading text and written play is very powerful for readers as it provides rich dramatic and linguistic material to enjoy reading both in the tradition of the past and the challenges of the present. Besides its theatrical

innovation, Shrotriya's basic intent has been the male-chauvinism of the then rulers over-ruling the matriarchical existence but within this psyche of male chauvinism, Shrotriya does not extinguish woman's own moral authority through which Shradha categorically rejects the awe-aspiring desire of another male child for Manu. Thus the central force of the play is not only one woman but other woman also e.g. Ila, Sumati and so on. The proof of woman's authority is the inclusion of five main woman-characters as against four male ones. This also proves that Shrotriya not only wanted to create a drama of male-syndrome suppressing the other human half but even in the tradition, he also wanted to establish the fact that the tradition is still not over and the custom-ridden community of even our modern time is also the victim of the same male syndrome.

Leaving aside the mythological story part of the play, other aspects also invite attention. There is an allegation on the linguistic texture of the play and it has been observed that the dialogues are lengthy in Sanskritised Hindi loaded with 'tatsam' forms of words. This kind of impeccable language impedes the smooth use of the dialogues on the stage performance and at times prompting inter references disturb the unity and harmony of the play. The prose of the dialogues may be very poetic, rhythmic and effective but it is enjoyable only in reading and not in actual performance. This allegation can be negated because the

same was the charge against Jai Shankar Prasad's play, and it was B.V. Karant who proved the charge null and void by staging 'Skandgupta' with a glorious success. It leads to think that it is not the play in itself so complete, but it is the director's vision and imagination which can turn the play into a good script without distorting the main spirit and linguistic fibres of the play. Inside a linguistically conscious play, the playwright has to consider director's space and actor's changing panorama of events and voices. Shrotriya has attempted to control the vocal delivery by his linguistic perceptions and even though many dialogues are lengthy their entire gamut is in rhythmic harmony with musical precision. In this kind of approach, before the director's interventions the writer has to have in mind some psycholinguistic aspects also such as breathing phonetics, resonance, pitch-quality and lastly the diction of the theatrical text and its sub-text. These elements are unavoidable because, the acting assumes its powerful effect both in vocal-delivery with stress, intonation and rhythm as well as the space of silence, if required.

Brecht in his performances always tried to avoid catharsis as it sometimes makes a play melodramatic and farcical. Shrotriya too has tried to avoid catharsis as a theory but the tragi-comic situations provide ample slots for a feeling like catharsis as Shrotriya has caught and conceived the story and plot in an inspired moment. The play is staged with

a conflict between emotion and reasoning, between desire and defiance. Sudyumna around whom the entire story revolves is a cold, frigid and womanly character but on the contrary his spouse is full of stormy zeal and zest. As the play has classical elements in it, the conflict should have been resolved with human psychology rather than by authority, anxiety and anomalies. A play becomes more audience oriented when the playwright makes use of symbols and gestures also, but in this play the over use of language dims the other symbolic possibilities. The play is overall a very confident march of a classical and traditional reciprocation without showing any resilience or becoming reticent against the so called modernity of loud cheer mongers and hypocrites.

The play demands more stage-performances to register better audience response in order to enable Dr. Shrotriya to recreate such mytho-memories as plays of our rich classical tradition so that India's literary legacy is unfolded before the world. Such plays also orient the audience in theatrical education and prepares them as better theatre-viewers replacing their interests as film and TV watchers. Though Lia is just a debut drama yet as famous poet late Naresh Mehta said, Shrotriya has scored a century in his very first inning on the pitch of Hindi theatre.

2. Meghdoot: Ek Antaryatra (A Journey Within)

Prabhakar Shrotriya is basically and

essentially a literary critic. With an enormous knowledge of Indian poetics and Hindi literature, whatever Dr. Shrotriya chooses for his creative criticism must be worth it in form content, language, diction and other human aspects of life whether it is physical or spiritual or natural. After his two monumental works in Hindi criticism entitled 'Kavita Ki Teesri Aankh' and 'Samvad', Meghdoot's critique is another feat which examines the entire lyric poetry in epic form not in a traditional critical mode, but transgressing all previous models and modes, he rebuilds a new vision confronting with the deep past as well as the so called intellectual present. A great poetry in lyrical form with epic quality was conceived by Kalidas as a love-lament and the same lament still arouses the human sensibilities, which means the poetic strength of the work has been unsurpassable so far and the entire gamut of such poetry still remains a love passion beyond time and space.

Writing a critique on an established critic of Hindi Literature is like those five balls of which three are always in the air and two are in hands. Kalidas deviated in the story construct of Meghdoot from other contemporaries by making it a love-lament of a male character who is Yaksha and not of the woman who generally happens to be a sufferer of love by tragic exile, expulsion or bereavement. Here the grief is of a different nature and character and all

pains, pathos and griefs are addressed to a love-lady who is at a distant place. Both the lover and the beloved suffer isolation and it is this isolation of the lover which makes him sensitive, emotional and passionate for his beloved. The fantasy is not in the human story and if it were there, Meghdoot would become an ordinary poem written and forgotten in its own time but the fantasy is envisioned by Kalidas through a non-human entity of nature who plays the role of a messenger and that messenger is a 'cloud' or 'Megh' a non-human message courier.

If somebody questions what is new in this critical assessment of Meghdoot, the answer will be the writer's approach to Meghdoot is not panegyric as most traditional Sanskrit and Hindi critical works are. Shrotriya's critical venture lies not in the justification of the love-fantasy, nor in the structure of poetry but in the brave and candid confrontation with Kalidas. Kuber's curse on Yaksha and Yaksha's expulsion from the heavenly empire of Kuber resulting in Yaksha's transmigration to Ramtek-an imaginary place created by the poet are the physical entities with certain human realities but the way Kalidas chooses Yaksha as messenger, is new for Shrotriya's novel intervention as a critic. Most love-poems or messengering poems choose either a parrot, or a pigeon or a swan or a human being as the secret love messenger for the royal-damsels falling in love but Kalidas does not do this. Shrotriya

considers it a big deviation from the tradition because Kalidas chooses Megh or cloud as a messenger whereas cloud is neither a courtier, nor a subject of any kingdom but cloud is nature's cosmic representative and as nature is meant for all, so is the cloud, the best proletariat. As cloud and air are such symbols who belong to none politically but are always available to everybody with no discrimination of right or left, rich or poor and high or low. Kalidas considers it the most befitting messenger.

Another intervention this critical approach makes is about the cloud's journey and its fateful time of the monsoon season when in the month of Ashadha, the clouds roam in the heaven like elephants. Who could be a better messenger than the roaming cloud whose high way is the high heaven uninterrupted by any earthly traffic or other hurdles and who can go from one end to another with no physical threat or mental tension? If such a messenger occurs in the poet's imagination, Shrotriya thinks that Kalidas has shattered all shackles of traditional messenger poetry and this choice of Kalidas has not been interpreted in a cosmic sense with an image of a proletariat by any Hindi or Sanskrit critic so far.

Now is the actual journey part of the cloud. Here the Yaksha who has been in exile for more than eight months, sends the cloud as a messenger to Alkapuri where Yaksha's lady of love resides with the same passion of love and during

monsoon the passion increases so much that in the absence of her love-lord, her patience fails, her tolerance ceases, her pathos increases and sorrow, sadness and the sulky fate surround her due to such bereavement by a curse resulting in her lean and thin physical existence. Yaksha imagines all those painful conditions of his beloved and asks the cloud to go and report to the love lady about Yaksha in order to soothe her. This part is just an ordinary part of the journey but the magically bewitching part of the poetry is Kalidas' description of the entire path with tremendous and amazing knowledge of the geography of that particular region, place or town from where the cloud passes. This journey is of three kinds, one is the physical journey with the exuberance of metaphors, similes and other alankar's (figures of speech). Kalidas is held with great respect by Sanskrit scholars for the use of very rich metaphors and similes which provide supreme beauty to the poetic diction and in which Kalidas has been unsurpassable so far.

About Kalidas as a Jan-Kavi or a poet of people, Kuber is like a feudal lord who in his power-pelf-ego cursed a proletariat Yaksha with no big reason. How authorities become autocratic and how power over-powers the faculty of reason, have been very minutely observed and exposed by Dr. Shrotriya. Thus the first journey that Shrotriya has perceived is geographical, the second one is literary with all its poetic beauty

and rich imagery and the third one is that of thought relating to ideological nuances relevant to our modern time and space with common people-oriented approach.

It has been the traditional practice of the erudite Sanskrit critics and reviewers of the text that they usually write 'tikas' or interpretative commentaries. Shrotriya has honestly accepted the major contribution of Sanskrit scholars who have already investigated almost all aspects relating to Meghdoot, with its lyrical beauty, word music, story-elements, love-lament, figures of speech, diction and other linguistic structures and their poetic rhythm but Shrotriya's focus is different in the sense that he dvelvs deep into the psychological human behaviour in the state of separation and bereavement with its literary motif in a mot-juste manner. As Kalidas cjoes not waste a single image or expression by becoming wordy and alliterative and as Kalidas also uses Sanskit in its chisled form with ease and with its musical quality, Shtrotriya two does the same by becoming very precise and unsentimental.

Another Aspect of this critical work is that it has been distributed in eight chapters with a take off as its introduction. Beyond time and space, the-text of the poetic-story, revolutionaly vision, love, nature, messenger's attitude and behaviour, poetic elements and its universal appeal have been dealt by Dr. Shrotriya with critical dispassion and

despite great opinion of literary giants like Anand Vardhan and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Shrotriya has performed his internal journey by exploring and exposing all secrets of the story and elements relating to modern thought as well as the structure and style of the epic form with lyrical and cosmic beauty. If Kalidas is an all time poet with memorable past and intellectual present of the modern and post-modern .milieu, then Shrotriya's this detailed critical outfit of Meghdoot's text must be seen as a step ahead to create a better critical corridor for the future generation of literature lovers and critics.

3. Kavi Parampara– Tulsi To Trilochan

'Kavi Parampara– Tulsi to Trilochan' is the latest work of Dr. Prabhakar Shrotriya in the field of creative and applied criticism on the representative poets of Hindi in different ages. The work envisages to examine, interpret and analyse these poets both in rich Indian tradition as well as in the contexts of progressive, national, Chhayavadi and New poetry in modern times of various thoughts, ideologies and other linguistic interventions, the twenty one poets included in this collection were examined from time to time either by the university research-scholars or by literary critics, and their research findings and critical judgments also provided ample evidence of the creative work done by these poets. Shrotriya is not the follower of the academic tradition of research studies

but his attempt has been to view and review the poets on three counts—linguistic, ideological and literary. A poet, whether it is Tulsi or Trilochan appears before a critic, first of all does one thing and that is how to impress the critic, interpreter or a commentator through her /his creative talent exhibited in the poetry.

Out of these twenty one essays, four are devoted to Bhakti Era—with Tulsi, Kabir, Sur and Meera. Here the author has not maintained the chronological order of the poets with their dated-seniority but has invented a new device by defying the chronology because the dated seniority establishes only the prior or later birth of poets and not the quality and strength of the work. A great poet is great not by date of birth but by her/his talent or creative genius and literary appeal to both-the literature readers and critics, and the masses.

Other poets included in this anthology are Maithili Sharan Gupta, Makhn Lal Chaturvedi and Shiv Mangal Singh 'Suman' whose poetry is either national, progressive or romantic. In the Chhayavadi era- which is also named by some literary historians as romantic era of Hindi poetry, Shrotriya has evaluated the works of Prasad, Nirala, Pant and Mahadevi— the main pillars of the era and whose poetry has been held as the best after the poetry of Bhakti-era. Then comes another group of new poetry, branded with ideological commitments as against non-ideological

alleged rightist group whose prime concern has been the creation of poetry as an art-work with their complete poetic autonomy and freedom. Though some poets in this group follow certain art movements like existentialism, cubism, Dadaism, impressionism, symbolism and imagist school of Ezra Pound, yet their commitment to creation has not been considered as great as that of those poets whose concern has been art alone. Muktibodh, Nagarjun, Shamsheer, Ramvilas Sharma and Trilochan are the poets who until the end of their time remained committed with Marxist belief but the quality of their poetry had been untouched by the shallow ideological commitments. Agyeya, Virendra Kumar Jain, Bhavani Prasad Mishra, Naresh Mehta and Dharmaveer Bharti are such poets who have been quite independent in their thought and action. They are the poets of our cultural consciousness, some with national patriotic impulse and some with deep spiritual leanings. Shrotriya has judged both the groups without any prejudice and with a balanced approach of an honest critic.

When Shrotriya deals with Bhakti era, he begins with Tulsi and keeps Kabir after him. It does not mean that Shrotriya has under-mined the contribution of Kabir and his creative genius. Shrotriya, through a number of literary evidences and opinions of a great Urdu poet Firaq Gorakhpuri has tried to establish that in the entire galaxy of Bhakti era of Nirguna and Sufi poets Tulsi reigns

supreme because of his supreme creative genius and his Ram Charit Manas has been accepted by the Indian masses as a religious book like Gita, Bible and Quran and has become a worshipable and adorable book of Hindu faith. Besides this mass appeal, it is also a great work of literary merit for intellectuals and literature lovers. It is said that in Europe maximum literary criticism has been written on Shakespeare and about ten thousand books have "been devoted to one simple philosophical dialogue, 'to be or not to be'. Shrotriya also tries to prove that Manas is such poetry on which maximum critical work has been done not only in Hindi but in other Indian and foreign languages. Shrotriya has also proved that Tulsi even in our modern time is unforgettable and he is the first Hindi poet who used a dialect as a medium of his expression and proved that language is never a barrier for great creation and even dialect in its creativity can surpass time and space and the supreme kind of work done in it, becomes universal and cosmic.

Kabir is another poet of the same era, who also chose dialect as his medium of free and fearless expression and whose language was branded as 'Sadhukkadi' meaning thereby the raw, rough and rugged language. Shrotriya's Kabir is more progressive than any other so called progressive poets, leftists and also so called secular activists of our time. His poetry is on the one hand reform-oriented for the ritual ridden community of both

Hindus and Muslims and on the other hand it is spiritually so deep and high which nullifies the thesis that Kabir was an illiterate poet and saint.

Another poet of this era was Meera whom Shrotriya has adored as a 'young poet' of five hundred years. The writer has witnessed the element of revolution in Meera, who though completely surrendered before her lord i.e. Krishna or Giridhar Gopal yet she was a revolutionary because she had shattered all shackles of the feudal family and instead of physical love and luxury, chose to be spiritual, deeply engrossed in the Bhakti or passion for her lord of love. Shrotriya has lifted Mira's image as poet of marvellous calibre whose poetry, perhaps after Tulsi's Manas has been popular among the Indian masses for more than five hundred years keeping Meera as young and youthful as she had been in her own era of Bhakti Movement.

Surdas is another great poet whom Shrotriya calls a poet of internal light with which he could see the entire cosmos and could create a world of his own enlightenment in the emotional outbursts for his lord who is a child at one time, an adolescent at another and a mature royal and intellectual entity or a Yogeshwar in another phase of adult life. Surdas is known for his great poetry devoted to child lord Krishna and as the famous critic Ram Chandra Shukla said - Surdas had visited with a great passion each and every corner of

childhood through his internal vision. But Shrotriya is more comprehensive when he describes Sur's poetry not only of child-devotion but of love in 'Bhramar geet' with Sanyog and Viyog shringars and in his Drishtikoots which carry deep philosophical and spiritual meaning.

Shrotriya has left other schools of Bhakti movement in which also great poetry was written by Nirgun poets like Jayasi, Raidas, Sahjo, Pipa and Sufi poets. Shrotriya has perhaps done it deliberately because he was not writing this book in the strict historical sense in which entire poetic tradition could be necessary but he has done it with his own choice in order to show the best of that particular time.

While discussing national- patriotic, progressive and chhayavadi poetry, Shrotriya has again left a number of poets and the entire group of postchhayavadis like Narendra Sharma, Ram Kumar Verma etc. Despite this, poets of national stream like Guptji and Makhanlal Chaturvedi have been elaborately discussed by the critic as the precursors of Chhayavadi and modern poetry with national instinct. Shrotriya has underlined their contribution for Hindi as a 'Khadi Boli' and as a creative language of poetry.

In the Chhayavadi era the writer though is enamoured of Prasad, yet his main focus is on Mahadevi whom he calls the poet 'not of tears but of fire'. In this particular period Shrotriya has

logically and aptly answered the eye-brow-raising and questioning critics who tried to throw Pant and Mahadevi in the dustbin.

These two poets have been so well discussed by Shrotriya that the image distorting critics will have to think twice whether they had really done critical justice to these poets or in the fits of their ideologically fastening threads they had proclaimed the judgment of inferiority for these poets.

Muktibodh a poet warring with himself, Agyeya a poet tied to person and people both, Nagarjun a poet of popular appeal, Shamsheer a poet of internal sensibilities, Virendra Kumar Jain a poet of internal and spiritual enlightenment, Bhawani Prasad Mishra- a poet who is created by poetry, Naresh Mehta different from others, Dharmaveer Bharti - a poet of dreams, struggle and achievements, Ram Vilas Sharma a human size poet of nature and Trilochan a sonnet-master who is always with us and with himself- all are discussed, judged and analysed by Shrotriya in such a manner that his criticism seems to be attached on the one hand for these poets and detached for their quality of work. If all these poets and their criticism is dealt here, this review will assume the shape of another voluminous book. Therefore, it is imperative for a reviewer to restrict himself to a particular boundary- line otherwise precision will collapse and emotional or sentimental description will take over.

Though Shrotriya's collection is purely critical and not academic in the strict sense, yet it can serve as good critical text for academic studies. The book opens some new vistas of critical approaches not being impressed either by the colossal past of our theorists. nor of the modern ones from different poetic movements to the post modern

deconstructive approaches to the texts. Shrotriya's venture needs to be seen quite independently without being jaundiced by any kind of ideological pros and cons. The work done by the author can be a head-start for those who love to read literature with a critical attitude and creative vision.

Books Reviewed

1. Ila from Teen Natak, Bhawna Prakashan Delhi, Rs. 300/-
2. Meghdoot – Ek Antaryatra, Radhakrishna Prakashan, New Delhi Rs. 115/-
3. Kavi Parampara – Tulsi se Trilochan, Bhartiya Jnanpeeth, New Delhi Rs. 210/-

Dr. Ramesh Dave, born 1935, has been professor of English in Madhya Pradesh. He is a literary critic and editor of the journal Samavartan. He lives in Bhopal.

CONTRIBUTORS' ADDRESSES

1. **Dr. Mangal Murty** : D64/94, A/6 Grace Residency II floor,
Chandrikanagar Sagra, Varanasi-10
2. **Chitra Mudgal** : B 105 Vardhman Apartments, Mayur Vihar I, Delhi-91
3. **Dr. Brij Kishore Prasad** : South of Church, Mithan pura,
Muzaffarpur-842002
4. **Deepak Sharma** : B-35, Sector-C, Aliganj, Lucknow-24
5. **Dhiraj Singh** : 117-D, Block C III floor, Expressview Apartments
HIG Flats, Expressway Road, Sector 105, Noida-201 304
6. **Arun Prakash** : B-23 , I.F.F. Apartments, Mayur Vihar I, Delhi-91
7. **Mr. Jai Ratan** : C-12/14, DLF City, Phase I Gurgaon-122 002
8. **Dr. Meerakant** : B-95, Gulmohar Park, New Delhi-110 049
9. **Vandana R. Singh** : Editor, NCERT, Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi
10. **Shobhakant (Nagarjun's heir)** : New Khajasarai, Laheriasarai,
Darbhanga-846 001 (Bihar)
11. **Shobha Narain** : 33, Siddhartha Enclave, New Delhi – 14
12. **Susham Bedi** : sb12@columbia.edu
13. **J.A. Kasturi** : jkasturi@columbia.edu
14. **Pankaj Singh** : 604 Block 28, Eastend Apartments, Mayur Vihar I
Extension, Delhi
15. **Sukrita Paul Kumar** : Deptt. of English, Zakir Husain College, Delhi
16. **Karmendu Shishir** : 38/9, II floor, New Punaichak, Shastri Nagar,
Patna – 800 023.
17. **Ramjay Pratap** : Advocate, village and post – Chaita, Distt. East
Champaran, Bihar – 845414.
18. **Dr. Devendra Choube** : Centre of Indian Languages, SLL& CS, J.N.U.
New Delhi – 110 067
19. **Khushi Pattanayak** : 231, Sabarmati Hostel, JNU, New Delhi – 67
20. **Dr. Vimallesh Kanti Verma** : Snehkanchan, 73 Vaishali, Pitampura,
Delhi – 34
21. **Anil Sud** : A-23/6, DLF I, Gurgaon 122 002
22. **Dr. Ramesh Dave** : HIG 19, Block B, Sahyadri Complex, Bhadbhada
Road, Bhopal – 462 003

proof Reading

	Words	Rs.
Editorial Note	649	26
Kahani Ka Plot	2928	117
Kunji	1404	56
Lapatein	3712	148
Ma ka dama	1384	55
The Bhaiyya Express	6290	252
The Rhythm of the Road	5078	203
Summon the End	16218	649
Juhi Ki Kali	441	18
Four Poems	721	29
Seadusk	441	18
Four Poems	804	32
Hindi Renaissance And Modernism	3335	133
Narrative of the Marginal	4630	185
Hindi in Fiji: Status and Future	2391	96
The Tradition of Study and Research in Hindi in China	1502	60
Creativity with Critical Vision	5231	209
Total=	57159	=2286