

# NEPALESE LITERATURE

THE ROYAL NEPAL ACADEMY



# NEPALESE LITERATURE

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Academy is shortly exerting itself to determine long-term plans and programs, acquire resources from various levels, and design effective implementation procedures in order to facilitate the creative, research-based, and developmental activities related to the major academic disciplines like the state language as well as other national languages and their literary heritage, music and theater, art and crafts, culture and the social sciences. The Academy accords high recognition to the goodwill of the greater Nepali community and their constructive suggestions and cooperation in the development of the creative and intellectual culture of the Nepali genius.

According to the records, Royal Nepal Academy has in the last forty-seven years of its existence published more than six hundred and fifty books. These creative and research oriented Academy publications mostly relate to literature, grammar, dictionary, art, history, religion, culture, tantra, astronomy, and the sciences. The Academy has also been publishing magazines and journals like **Kavita, Prajna, Samakalin Sahitya, Sayapatri, Akriti, Journal of Nepalese Literature, Art and Culture, and Prajnagatibidhi**. We ardently trust that the Nepali society will lovingly make room for these and forthcoming publications in their institutional and personal libraries and so support the cause of the Nepali book culture and the Academy's publishing plans and publications.

**Nepalese Literature** attempts to present a glimpse of the richness of the different genres of Nepali literature through a period of over two centuries. It is almost an impossible task to contain in one slim volume the full expression of some of the most sensitive creative artists of Nepal. However, I hope it will give some taste of Nepali culture and literature and stimulate the readers to ask for more. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deeply felt sense of gratitude to the chief editor, Mr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya, other members of the editorial board, and the learned translators for their labor of love in bringing this book to its present form.



Prof. Dr. Bashudev Tripathi  
Vice Chancellor  
Royal Nepal Academy

## **From the Publisher**

Nepal lies in the lap of the pretty, peaceful and cool Himalayas. It is as much a center of Himalayan civilisation and culture as a multilingual and multiracial nation. While the different peoples who live here have different languages, arts, songs, music, dances and cultural traits as well as religious and philosophical concepts, there is also a strand in an unbroken rope that stretches far ahead safeguarding the different traditions in an atmosphere of harmonious coexistence. For this very reason, Nepal has been able to show to the entire world an unique example of an ideal pluralistic society.

The Royal Nepal Academy in pursuing this idealism of unity in diversity has made efforts to present Nepal as a whole by undertaking studies and research and publishing original or other invaluable works in Nepali and other languages of Nepal on different subjects, such as art and architecture, music, dance, drama, culture and social study, so that these works would be a source of inspiration and encouragement to researchers, thinkers and other creative workers. The aim, as is known to all, is to develop and enrich the languages and literatures of Nepal.

In fulfilment of one of its multifarious objectives, the Language and Literature (Translation and Research) Division has brought out this volume of Nepalese Literature.

It contains, rendered into English, 13 poems, 8 short stories, 5 extracts from different novels, 4 one-act plays and 5 essays. This compilation indeed is a sample of Nepalese literature dating from (1814–1869) to the present time. We hope that it will help the people from the English speaking world have an idea about the traits and trends of the Nepalese literature.

We are grateful to all those persons who helped in the preparation of this volume, specially the translators as well as those who gave their permission to include their works in it.

**Royal Nepal Academy**



# **A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO NEPALI LITERATURE**

– Madhav Lal Karmacharya

Nepal is a home to many ethnic groups with different languages, literature and culture. When we speak of Nepalese literature, we, therefore, speak of the literature – oral or written in languages of all these groups. However, for the purpose of this volume we speak only of the literature written in Nepali, the national language.

Writing in the Nepali language, as a matter of fact, began, albeit in a small way, as early as the tenth century but its use was limited to inscriptions in stone, copper, bronze, silver and even gold, as well as wills and royal edicts. It did not become a part of literature for a long time to come. However here inscriptions provided an important clue as a specimen of the language of the time in the history of the language.

As early as the fifteenth century a work on astrology entitled *Bhaswati*, was translated into Nepali. This marked the beginning of the age of translations when a number of works from Sanskrit were translated into Nepali. This trend continued until the middle of the eighteenth century when the country was unified under the leadership of the Great King Prithvi Narayan Shaha (1723 – 74). The foremost poet of that time was Subananda Das whose first known literary work was inspired by the heroic exploits of the Great King.

Thereafter, the age of devotional pursuits set in. The prominent poet of this period was Bhanubhakta Acharya (1812 – 63) whose devotional work, the Ramayana, ushered in a new age in the Nepali poetry with the use of simple and chaste Nepali combined with easy and graceful Sanskrit metres.

Sometime after 1883 a new phase appeared with the introduction of the elements of love and beauty so that the period came to be known as the period of '*sringar sahitya*', meaning the literature marked with the traits of love and beauty. The pioneer poet of this period was Motiram Bhatta (1866 – 96), thanks to whose zeal and enthusiasm, a number of dramas, novels, lyrics, *gazals*, folk-songs, literary criticisms etc. were published.

Shortly afterwards, an age of social consciousness dawned bringing reforms in the people's ways of thinking and style of life. Papers and journals appeared; efforts were made to standardise the language; and literary works were attempted in various genres; and lastly but not in the least, the problems of social life were openly discussed and the psyche of individuals was brought to the foreground for proper scrutiny and inspection.

This trend continued until the mid-nineteenth century when the political change in the country in 1951 brought about a democratic atmosphere conducive to freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of organization. In the congenial atmosphere, the language and literature have made headlong progress in almost all genres and disciplines. In this period we have witnessed different literary trends and movements opposed to this traditional and conventional work. Efforts are also underway to make new experiments and set up new styles and systems in literature, non-novels, non-fiction, abstract thinking and drawing portrait etc.

Thus, Nepali literature has taken a long stride since the century old translations to present day original creation.

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All the major genres of Nepali literature are incorporated in the present anthology. These are the representative pieces by some modern writers of Nepal. Except the first two poems by poets representing an older generation, whereas in case of other genres — short stories, essays, novels and dramas - the creations are by the first trend setters in the history of modern Nepali writing.

Constrained by limited space, the compilers had to be very selective; so many other equally interesting works could not be included here. This is merely a glimpse, a bird's eye view of modern Nepali writing. This volume, it is hoped, will help the reader to have a view of the literature in the Nepali language in its historical perspective, although a sample as it is.



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\* We are thankful to M.S. Devkota, C.K. Upadhyaya and M.S. Thakur for translation.

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# POEMS



## **BHANU BHAKTA ACHARYA**

*Bhanu Bhakta Acharya (1814-1869) had to his credit a number of poetical works including the acclaimed Bhanu Bhakta Ramayana as an adapted form of the Balmiki Ramayana. The lyrical poem included here has depicted impression of the capital city of Kathmandu when he first arrived from his native village of Tanahun in the hills.*

### **THE CITY OF KANTIPUR<sup>1</sup>**

Where damsels, lively and fair,  
With narcissus in their hair,  
Wander about in pairs,  
Kantipur is an Amaravati<sup>2</sup> in itself.

How can one count the rich here?  
Glad indeed are those who here dwell,  
Alkapuri it is, happily for all who breathe,  
Kantipur is Alkapuri<sup>3</sup> in itself.

Somewhere as in Tibet, China or in London,  
Or as in Delhi with dark lanes abounding,  
Lucknow, Patna and Madras,  
Kantipur is a city like Alkapuri itself.

Where the brave and the bold walk the streets  
With swords and daggers, scimitars and *khukri* knives  
And pistols and guns with them,  
Is there another city like Kantipur elsewhere?

---

1 More formal name for the city of Kathmandu

2 Heaven; the city of Indra, the king of the gods

3 The city of Kubera, the god of riches and the guardian of the north, who resides at the foot of the sacred Kailas mountain in Tibet.

Where no malice is seen nor cunning lies  
Where only the good prevails in abundance,  
Where the Lord of all of us, Shiva keeps watch,  
This is Kantipur, Shiva's own place.

*(Tr. Keshar Lal)*



## **LEKHNATH PAUDYAL**

*Lekhnath Paudyal (1884-1965) had to his credit 13 original works, including the epic Tarun Tapasi (The Young Ascetic) extracts from which are included here. He was sometime a member of the Royal Nepal Academy and was bestowed the title of Kavi Shiromani, poet laureate by the late King Tribhuvan in 1971. The prestigious Academy Award Tribhuvan Pragya Puraskar was given to him posthumously in 1969. In the following extract he has expressed the innate nature of the human beings.*

### **THE YOUNG ASCETIC**

Smearing itself with white clay on the head the root  
laughed

Reflecting as it were the stupidity of those avaricious  
To enjoy many great pleasures being very stout and  
strong

By getting rid of malevolent stars, adversities and  
ailments with money.

The funeral pyre roared with laughter without any fear and fret  
Amused at the foolishness of the rogues always whetting desire  
To monopolise eating, dressing, outing and enjoying all  
pleasures  
Saying, "Who cares if the weak and feeble die! I'll live and  
enjoy alone."

The same power and pelf of which the owner always felt proud  
Previously during his life time thinking they all belonged to him  
Now started giggling at the final state of his body transient  
Saying with derision, "Now, look how much of these  
belong to thee!"

The blazing flame of the funeral pyre, throwing out a  
brilliant light,  
Giggled loudly saying, "This is what all have to succumb  
to in the end."  
The smokes rushed out laughing, and laughed the Milky  
Way of the heavens  
While the ashes laughed all the more, bedimming the face  
of the wind.

Laughed the tears which, like the many pearls in a broken string,  
Fell off incessantly swayed by the pitiable wailings around  
the pyre,  
While the bereavement of the relatives also laughed  
simultaneously  
In tune with the lamentations of the attachment which  
laughed in the same way.

When the body lying on the back on the funeral pyre  
burned black,  
Burning completely the attachment, the sense of equality  
laughed in ecstasy  
The dark extinction law of destiny laughed with  
pleasurable excitement,  
Holding simply a small flickering lamp burning unsteadily  
in memory.

When the ill-fated left, the natural happy state or state of  
security laughed;  
When the fortunate left, laughed the excessively harsh  
obstruction of remorse  
The self-same is the extinction of both, but difference is  
there only in the nature of laughing  
The same laugh for somebody is blissful as of heavens,  
while that for others is hellish as of the hell.

The way I laugh is full of laughter, so is the birth and  
death of all

Nothing could I find anywhere that did not give out  
laughter of one or other sort  
The laughter went on extending enveloping the whole  
world unabated,  
While the ocean of eternal bliss smiled pervading the globe.

Oh! At that time both of us the teacher and the pupil were  
staying together  
Later in course of laughing both of us got separated as  
destiny would have it  
And I came back to this very place while my teacher went  
back to that very perfect one  
And remained laughing intoxicated with incomparable  
supreme bliss.

After telling me all about the long way of misery already destined  
And all about that consequence of pleasure-loving vision  
and perceiving  
The great, reverent sage stopped abruptly his discourse  
Casting a glance momentarily at my face, full of love and  
affection.

*(Tr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya)*

## LAXMI PRASAD DEVKOTA

*Laxmi Prasad Devkota (1909-1959) had to his credit 42 works including the long narrative poem Muna Madan for which he is best known. The lyrical poem included here is regarded to have been written as a reaction to remark that he suffered from mental illness. He was some time a member of the Royal Nepal Academy. The prestigious Academy Award, Tribhuvan Pragya Puraskar was given to him posthumously in 1966.*

### THE LUNATIC

1. Surely, my friend, insane am I  
Such is my plight.
  
2. I visualize sound.  
I hear the visible.  
And fragrance I taste.  
And the ethereal is palpable to me.  
Those things I touch –  
Whose existence the world denies,  
Of whose shape the world is unaware.  
I see a flower in the stone –  
When wavelet-softened pebbles on the water's edge,  
In the moonlight,  
While the enchantress of heaven is smiling unto me.  
They exfoliating, mollifying,  
Glistening and palpitating,  
Rise before my eyes like tongueless things insane.  
Like flowers,  
A variety of moonbirds,  
I commune with them as they do with me,  
In such a language, friend,  
As is never written, nor ever printed, nor ever spoken,

Unintelligible, ineffable all.  
Their language laps the moonlit Ganges shore,  
Ripple by ripple,  
Surely, my friend, am I insane,  
Such is my plight.

3. Clever and eloquent you are!  
Your formulas are ever running correct.  
But in my calculations one minus one is always one.  
You work with your senses five,  
With the sixth I operate.  
Brains you have, my friend,  
But the heart is mine.  
To you a rose is but a rose,  
It embodies Helen and Padmini for me.  
You are solid prose,  
But I am liquid poetry.  
You freeze, I melt,  
You decant when I go muddy.  
When I am muddled, you are clear.  
And just the other way about.  
You have a world of solids,  
Mine is one of vapour  
Yours is thick and mine is thin.  
You take a stone for the real thing,  
I seek to catch a dream,  
Just as you try to grab that cold sweet, minted coin's  
round reality.
- Mine is a badge of thorns,  
But yours is one of gold and diamond.  
You call the mountains mute,  
But orators do I call them.  
Surely, my friend, a vein is loose in my brain.  
I am insane,  
Such is my plight.

4. In the frigid winter month,  
I basked in the first white heat of the astral light.  
They called me crazy.  
Back from the burning-ghat,

Blank-eyed I sat for seven days,  
They cast their eyes on me and called me one possessed.  
Shocked by the first streaks of frost on a fair lady's tresses,  
For a length of three days my sockets filled and rolled.  
For the Buddha, the enlightened one, touched me in  
the depths,

And they called me one distraught.  
When I danced to the bursting notes of the harbinger of  
the spring,

They called me one gone crazy.  
One moonless night, all dead and still,  
Annihilation choked my soul,  
And up I jumped upon my feet.  
And the fools of the world put me in the stocks.  
I sang with the tempest one day,  
And the wiseacres of the world dispatched me down to  
Ranchi.

And once when at full stretch I lay upon my bed,  
As one but dead,  
A friend of mine pinched me so sharp.  
And said, "Oh mad man,  
Is thy flesh now dead?"  
Year by year such things did occur,  
And still, my friend, I am insane,  
Such is my plight.

5. I've called the Nawab's wine all blood.  
And the courtesans all corpses.  
And the king a pauper.  
I have denounced Alexander the Great.  
And I have deprecated the so-called high-souled ones.  
And the insignificant individual I have raised,  
Up an ascending arch of praises,  
Into the seventh heaven.  
Your highly learned men are my big fools.  
Your heaven is my hell.  
Your gold, my iron.  
Friend, your piety, my sin.  
Where you feel yourself clever,  
There, there,

I find you a stupid ignoramus.  
Your progression is regression to me.  
Such is the upsetting of values, friend,  
Your universe to me is but a hair.  
Surely, my friend,  
I am absolutely moonstruck,  
Moonstruck indeed,  
Such is my plight.

6. I find the blind the peoples' pioneers.

To me penance in the cave is a runaway, the deserter  
of humanity.  
And those who climb the platform of lies do I declare to  
be but dancers dark.  
And I declare the defeated ones the splendid laurelled  
victors.

Advancement is retreat.  
May be I am a squint  
Or that I am a crack, friends,  
Just but a crack.

7. Look at the strumpet-tongues of shameless leadership  
dancing!

At the breaking of the backbones of the people's rights!  
When the sparrow-headed bold prints of black lies on  
the papers,

Challenge the hero in me called Reason,  
With conspiracy false,  
Then redden hot my cheeks, my friend,  
Like flaming coal.

When the unsophisticated folk quaff off black poison  
with their ears

Taking it for ambrosia,  
And that before my eyes, my friend,  
Then every hair rises on end,  
Like the serpent-tresses of the Gorgons,  
Every one so irritated!

When I see the tiger pouncing upon the innocent deer,  
Or the big fish after the smaller ones,  
Then even into my corroded bones, my friend,

The terrible strength of the soul of Dadhichi – the sage,  
Enters and seeks utterance.  
Like a clouded day crashing down to earth in thunderbolt,  
When man regards a man as no man,  
Then my teeth gnash and my jaws, set with the two  
and thirty teeth grind,  
Like Bhimsen, the terror-striking hero's, teeth.  
And then,  
Rolling round my fury-reddened eyeballs,  
With an inscrutable sweep,  
I look at this inhuman human world  
Like a tongue of fire.  
The machine parts of my frame jump out of their places,  
Disordered and disturbed!  
My breath swells into a storm,  
Distorted is my face,  
My brain is in a blaze,  
Like a wild, wild conflagration.  
I am infuriated like a forest fire,  
Frenzied my friend,  
As one who would devour the world immense,  
Surely, my friend,  
I am the moonbird of the beautiful,  
The iconoclast of ugliness!  
The tenderly cruel!  
The bird that steals the celestial fire!  
The child of the tempest!  
I am the wild eruption of a volcano insane!  
Terror personified!  
Surely, my friend,  
I am a whirl-brain, whirl-brain,  
And sure, such is my plight!

*(Courtesy: Contemporary Nepali Poems, published by Royal Nepal Academy, 1970)*



## **SIDDHICHARAN SHRESTHA**

*Siddhicharan Shrestha (1912-1992) had to his credit more than a dozen poetical works, including the best known long poem Urvasi. The lyrical poem included herein is on Okhaldhunga, a village in the eastern hilly district where he was born. He was some time a member of the Royal Nepal Academy. He was awarded the prestigious Academy Award, Prithivi Pragya Puraskar in 1988.*

### **OKHALDHUNGA**

It was on your lap so green  
On your breast so cool  
This poet passed his boyhood days,  
Laughing, sporting in your groves.  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

Whene'er I board the boat of feelings  
And sail down memories sweet,  
A fine rainfall of happy recollections  
Falls to cool me from the sky of dreams.  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

Clutching spring's shawl, it may be,  
Nature is looking for me:  
Fawns hopping, skipping,  
Trees and creepers tossing, waving.  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

Those ceaselessly toiling dry leaves  
Flow throughout the woods  
Wantonly, like swift waterfalls,  
Looking perhaps for footprints of mine  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

A black cuckoo in a trunk hole –  
Sprouting veiled and lovely –  
How soft a lament she intones,  
It may be, for the dear bard who's left her.  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

The boulders, the streams, the trees, the woods,  
The creepers and the lasting joys –  
All cause flashes in my mind  
Of an affection so sweet.  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

The Tamakoshi, the Sunakoshi,  
The Roshi erupting from the hills,  
Do always form a picture pure  
Embedded in my heart.  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

I wonder how by way of fate  
I happened upon this land so dry;  
I have no cause for worry, though –  
I have you written on my heart.  
O my beloved Okhaldhunga!

*(Tr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya)*

## **MADHAV PRASAD GHIMIRE**

*Madhav Prasad Ghimire (1919) has to his credit more than a dozen original works including Malati Mangale, considered one of the best ballets by Nepalese poets. The short poem included here shows his deep insight into natural beauty and powerful force of his diction. He was sometime the Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. He was awarded the prestigious Academy Award, Tribhuvan Pragya Puraskar in 1983.*

### **BAISAKH\***

1

The hills and the plains look green with new buds;  
The wind carries the sweet smell of *bakula* groves;  
The hill-sides are buzzing with bees out feasting on the  
  ripening *guheli* fruits;  
The light-footed shepherd boy is whistling from woods to woods.

2

The Gurung girl plucked the gurans flower to wear on her ears;  
The Newar girl wove the muswan flower into her plaited locks;  
The Bhotia girl tied the *buki* flower with her apron strings;  
The cuckoo sang the memories of new love in the woods.

3

Ten myriads of blossom covered the hills, the glens and  
  the plains;  
Who will tell me the sweet names of the flowers that will bloom;  
Yet I have not been able to climb my Dhaulagiri;  
Yet I have not been able to touch the heart of the Nepali people.

---

\* The first month of the year that falls between April 15 – May 15.

4

There is a fragrance in the breeze today;  
Somewhere in the forest many a flower must be smiling;  
The cuckoo is singing with the refrain: 'Who is he?' 'Who is he?'  
Behold! there comes a stranger walking along the rose-path.

5

I will plant a new *peepal* tree in the wayside resting-place;  
And sitting under the shade of that tree I will sing a song:  
'Endless are the happy returns of my March and April  
And my love will not exhaust even after one million shares'.

6

Under the sun in May these flowers will wither away,  
Even the cuckoo will leave her mother's home like a  
newly-wed bride for an unknown destination;  
Where goes this life of two days, sporting and laughing?  
Who will carry the youth of these flowers to the Eternal City?

7

Time will cast off her slough and heal all old wounds;  
Again the bees will come trailing the soft breezes and  
feast on orange-buds;  
The musk-deer will cross the hills and the woods,  
searching its own sweet scent.  
The deities of love will never cease in the flower-groves.

*(Courtesy: Modern Nepali Poems, published by Royal Nepal Academy, First Edition 1972)*

## **KEDAR MAN VYATHIT**

*Kedar Man Vyathit (1914-1998) had to his credit about two dozen poetical works including those in Nepal Bhasa, his mother tongue, and Hindi. In the lyrical poem included here he has compared the early morning sun to a fried egg with the sunny side up. He was the first Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, to be nominated from among the public. He was awarded the prestigious Academy Award, Prithvi Pragya Puraskar in 1993.*

### **THE EGG**

Arranging a fried egg with the sunny side up  
On the cloud-laden plate in the east,  
Who's it that's moving to the west,  
Singing a song in welcome?  
Is it that virgin, Dawn, who has sent  
The egg fried just like this?  
Warm vapours arising from the plate  
Are reaching down here.  
In a moment the bowl of earth is filled up  
With rising golden-foams:  
How merry the flirting damsel is  
Like wine filling with brilliance!  
This great function  
Has as the Guest of Honour my soul.

*(Tr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya and Ayodhya Prasad Pradhan)*

## **BHUPI SHERCHAN**

*Bhupi Sherchan (1935-1989) had to his credit four poetical works including Ghumne Mechmathi Andho Manchhe (A Blind Man on a Revolving Chair). Widely popular for his curt and taunting remarks on the prevailing ways of life, he compares in the short poem included here the dignified looking Ghantaghar, the clock tower besides the sombre looking Ranipokhari pond in Kathmandu with a retired soldier old army man brooding over his past. He was awarded the Sajha Puraskar in 1969.*

### **GHANTAGHAR**

The clock-tower  
Standing motionless on the bank  
Is brooding  
Angling in the Ranipokhari, the pond  
Just like an old, pensioned soldier  
Who under the pretext of fishing  
Passes the long and dreary days of old age,  
With the two favourite relics of his army life—  
Preserved with great care—  
A big round antique pocket watch  
Swinging on his chest,  
And an old hat on his head,  
With all the military jerseys gone—  
One after another—  
Some being worn out,  
Some being rat-eaten,  
And some being given away to friends,  
Sons and grandsons.

*(Courtesy: Modern Nepali Poems, published by Royal Nepal Academy, First Edition 1972)*

## MOHAN KOIRALA

*Mohan Koirala (1926) has to his credit more than half a dozen poetical works including Nadi Kinarka Majhi, (Fishermen of the River-Bank) for which he was awarded the Madan Puraskar, the most coveted prize in Nepal. Best known as the pioneer modern poet in Nepal, in the poem included here he broods over the ancient stringed musical instrument called sarangi playing upon the chords of the modern life. He is currently the Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy.*

### THE SARANGI<sup>4</sup>

*Gaine*<sup>5</sup> Saila is feeling cold deep inside  
Nor did he get a chance to play on his *sarangi*  
So his hands are benumbed.

Without any one around to abuse him  
He is lonely so that his body is heated  
His ears become warm as if tied with a scarf  
The bow is shrunk just like his veins.

His *sarangi* is empty just like his cerebral bones  
The cerebrum being very smooth and oily  
His limbs have ached the reason  
Nobody has hit him with stones  
Sometimes he remains singing for the reason  
Why nobody regards him insane.

So, he does not beg lest it be said that he cries being hungry  
With an earthen pot when he walks, those who know call him  
*Gaine*  
Even when with a *sarangi* he walks, he is called a beggar

---

4 A stringed musical instrument played with a bow

5 A roving Sarangi playing musician

Layers of songs filling his heart to the brim are burnt like  
layers of black clay  
His hands have plucked all the accustomed strings as his  
*sarangi*.

Now his lips are twitching on the tar of the road  
Becoming the broken pieces of record-discs  
Thrown through our ears and by our hands  
In this neither hot nor cold wind blast Gaine Sainla  
Is feeling cold deep inside.

His songs, the famous ones, are thundering like the  
laughter of Chandra Shamsheer<sup>6</sup>  
His songs are also like the youthful lovely girls at the  
Hotel Royal  
His songs are also intoxicating and jealous like the Kirat  
girl who misses her beer  
His songs are also hunch-backed like the *adaini's*<sup>7</sup> bidding  
her time with fortitude  
Songs written without pencil on paper  
Songs stored and kept unlocked in the breast  
But succumbing one day to these undigested songs  
Definitely will he die at this very place in the same  
condition  
Like a helpless criminal.

At that time like an old record-player in front of the  
mechanic  
Will he lie one day.  
Even if he lives he will live like a canister soldered by an  
amateur blacksmith  
So Gaine Sainla is feeling cold deep inside  
Perhaps feeling cold will he pass his days till he dies.

Back home Gaine Sainla  
Tries to sleep alone till midnight  
Because in sleep

---

6 Prime Minister of Nepal (1901-1929)

7 The chief female servant in a nobleman's household.



His dead wife comes to meet him  
With her long dead child  
Just to have a moment's hopeless look  
As if throwing a glance at the coins counted at the  
quadrangle of Indrachowk  
The small child comes to his father's lap bawling  
For a time his hut lit with lovely light becomes a palace.

Sainla has always the same trouble  
To separate illusions from reality  
As if he had to identify himself as sane or mad  
By plucking the strings of the heart's *sarangi* alone  
Which is known as songs to those who hear it  
But Gaine Sainla never called them songs  
He simply brooded remembering  
The fat in his heart fried in the oil of his tears  
That song he never sings for money's sake  
That song is crammed deep inside the layers of his heart.

Simply crammed inside it is—  
If purpose is wanted, he is mad  
If knowledge is wanted, he is an ascetic  
If power is wanted, he is the song of creation  
If intellect is wanted, Gaine Sainla  
Is only the wooden-vessel of ordinary men  
Thus also can a man live without purpose  
Surrounded by sliding cliffs on all sides  
As a man he has become a metaphor.

Suddenly I'm awake, leaving foot-prints behind on the  
road he moves  
Either forward or backward  
Foot-prints that are naked and cold  
Heels innocent of a dip inside the depths of shoes  
From the very maternal womb  
From the bright sun through the evening, on this road  
Which has no end  
Has he moved leaving foot-prints behind  
Why should the blind one sing  
When he sees the world only as burnt out meadows

I say— and he asks me where are the trees here.  
Where the shrubs which may be the green reading matter  
for travellers on foot  
He asks me— where is the high and low land which may  
be used by the spade interest free –  
Streams, rivulets and rivers for thirst and a glass of water  
for my troubles  
Where are those imbeciles who say, 'May everybody be  
happy'  
Where are those who say 'Truth alone, not falsehood'  
triumphs.

*(Courtesy: Modern Nepali Poems, published by Royal Nepal Academy, First  
Edition 1972)*

## **BAIRAGI KAINLA**

*Bairagi Kainla (1939) has to his credit three poetical works including Bairagi Kainlaka Kavitaru, a collection of poems by Bairagi Kainla. One of the trio propounders of the three dimensional theory of poetry in Nepali literature, in the poem included here he has given vent to his feelings over the oft-used sweet coated words of power hungry persons. He was sometime a Member of the Royal Nepal Academy.*

### **A TIPSY MAN'S ADDRESS TO THE ROAD AFTER MIDNIGHT**

1

When after midnight  
I come out of the liquor shop,  
The roosters  
From every cage and every roost call their welcome to me,  
Flapping their rebel wings!  
For the atmosphere here  
For the inertness here  
And for the system here  
Even my breath drenched in alcohol fumes  
Sounds like a storm now;  
These mighty mansions flanking both sides of the road,  
Bury your weaknesses with the foundations underground,  
Now, yes, now, they are all ready to fall down.  
Today earthquake follows my every footstep,  
Today a volcano is ready to explode in my every  
impression,  
I wonder  
How could I live till this age  
In these crumbling narrow houses  
That may hardly contain even one footstep?  
I feel sorry:

Even now all entangled like earthworms  
The self-defeated men sleep  
In the unhealthy houses of this earth,  
And, till so late?

2

Today my vastness is not contained above the earth,  
The breath is choked in the country above this road.  
And when stuffing my footsteps I manage to walk  
The people say – I am drunk.  
I should walk taking to the side – the left side –  
Yes, we should walk taking to the side.  
Many men should walk containing on the road.  
Pointing at everyone  
Walking on the side, the policemen say –  
This one is drunk ! That one is drunk !

3

In the sky-scraping mansions and towers,  
Inside the bed-head rooms,  
Blue bulbs are seen lit all through the night,  
The eyes of the owls –  
Here the owls see all through the night.  
Here the owls wait in ambush for whom I do not know.

4

Heads full of letters of official documents,  
Breasts full of needles of office wall-clocks,  
Life like a mechanism about to be replaced,  
Walk on this road dropping low their heads above the shoulders,  
Dragging them along, walk –  
The faceless men, with the legs of darkness  
All through the night, on this road.  
In consequence, the road is reduced these days.  
Who steals the sides and corners of the road?  
Who tears the life in chunks from the sides?  
Why does this road reduce with every night's arrival?  
Tear up this road and make it wide again.....  
When I say so, the witless constable standing on the side  
Becomes ready to arrest me because I am drunk.

And when wine brims over the breast  
I also become aware of such vastness in me  
That I feel too huge for the narrow road to contain.

5

Let the engineers hear it.  
Let the leaders, lecturers and laureates hear it,  
Let every movement in history hear it.  
So, from the pavement of the post-office  
I make this announcement:  
Roads!  
A man is walking on you.  
I was too big for your expanse  
So I command –  
Rend and crack and expand yourselves further.  
These pavements of tall buildings  
The trespassers on the limit of your expanse  
In collusion with the moments that become history every  
moment,  
These pavements like the naked history leaves  
Inscribed with eulogies and chronologies  
Of the victors in the Kot massacre alone,  
Of the ruling family alone  
You should crack and rend  
Straight from the brains down to the heart,  
One should be allowed to walk  
With the footstep of Columbus on this road.  
A revolt should be allowed to walk here with head erect.  
So, I order:  
Roads!  
Rend and crack yourselves further.  
All the pitfalls that form  
I'll saturate with my goodwill  
Soaking wet in liquid liquor,  
I will cover up with my vastness.  
Else I am not to be contained here.  
Else how will I and the mother be able  
To take the small boy to his school  
At 9 o'clock in the morning  
From here where even one sole's expanse is not contained.



## **ISWAR BALLABH**

*Iswar Ballabh (1937) has to his credit more than half a dozen poetical works including Agoka Phoolharu Hun Agoka Phoolharu Hoinan meaning that they are the blooming flowers of fire, they are not the blooming flowers of fire, for which he was awarded the Madan Puraskar in 1972. One of the trio-propounders of the third dimensional theory of poetry in Nepali literature, in the prose poem included here he exhibits surrealistic approach to life on earth when human values are at a loss at the arithmetical calculations of profit and gain. He is a Life Member of the Royal Nepal Academy.*

### **IN THIS SETTLEMENT OF FLOWERS**

The morning sun  
Sleepy and dreamy  
Having awakened and travelled  
All the time till the evening  
Must have also been tired  
So he lost some rays and sunshine;  
Somewhere, they say,  
So a little bit sad  
A little bit depressed and desperate  
The day of today has become.

Just like a shrewd merchant  
Buy and sell the darkness and dens?  
- being indifferent  
- being resolute

Just like a wily settlement and village  
Just like a city,  
He makes a bungling of life,  
He trades, sells and buys and calculates  
He looks out for selling the rays and sunshine lost  
somewhere,

Just as trading on borders and boundaries.  
He trades on soil.

He calculates

He calculates the trees and branches or leaves,  
Travels and footsteps from morning to evening

- he calculates,

The matter of course is of the sun and the sun's rays

The matter is of the sunshine and the evening.

The matter of course is of life itself.

On our part we listened

- seated on a platform under a tree or around a fireplace

The story of the prince and the golden-haired princesses  
of once upon a time,

The story of an illustrious and final and extreme end,

The story of a land lost by a land

The story of the soil lost by a country,

How ...

How does indeed a trader look like?

How is indeed a bargaining done?

Somebody had asked

Somebody had answered

It looks like a dark heavy cloud on the  
top of the horizon

Or like the tender but difficult sunset.

Anyway, let us now talk of the tiresomeness and travelling

Let us talk a little bit of sadness and

Depression

Passing as if through a warm touch of a certain unknown  
circumstance

A certain blue time just from here

- has also disappeared

In front of a Devadutta<sup>8</sup>

It is true an injured duck has also dropped from the sky.

In the cross only the day before yesterday a man

- was stringed by man himself.

But in this settlement of flowers,

---

8 Allusion to a story of a duck shot by Devadutta and saved by Siddhartha.



In the time – in the season of rhododendrons  
A man also today struck by a poisoned arrow  
- it is true, has also dropped down.

*(Tr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya)*

## **BANIRA GIRI**

*Banira Giri (1948) has to her credit more than half a dozen original works including three anthologies of poems. The poem excerpted here reveals her poetic skill in expressing the beauty of nature in the totality of human life. She received the Sajha Puraskar in 2002.*

## **UNION**

The sky –  
Having just finished washing  
Strongly the body of the sea  
With showers from vessels after vessels  
The sea  
Is yawning ready for sleep  
Covering herself completely  
With a shawl tinged with the colour of ash.

+

The sea heaves heavily  
Greatly tired  
Of walking constantly  
For days and nights  
And pulling over the bed-sheet  
Of scaly waves  
The sky –  
Loses patience  
In waiting  
Burning a lamp of the moon  
And with a set of fine bristled stars  
Cautiously tickles the sea  
The sea  
Feeling ashamed  
Looks backward and forward

Right and left  
While the wavelets make noise  
Skipping and springing

+

What a shameless impudent  
The sky

+

The sea sinks utterly in shame  
While the sky keeps speaking  
In a soft low voice  
Throughout the night  
Close to her ears

+

All through the night  
The two swirl  
Stirring up and down  
Reaching shore to shore  
Turning this side  
And turning that side  
Playing *naumati*<sup>9</sup> music forever.

+

Intent on reaching in and out  
The bewitching sound waves  
Suddenly—  
Puts out the lamp of the moon  
And the two spring into an embrace, closely bound

+

In early dawn—  
After the emotions and commotions  
Throughout the night  
The sea dead tired  
Has fallen flat asleep  
While the sky gone blue after complete emission

---

9 Music specially played during a wedding ceremony

Joyfully looks on  
At the peaceful eternal beauty of hers  
Sunk in deep sleep  
The sea relaxing under the cool blue shade  
Seems completely unaware of the commotions of the past night

*(Tr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya)*

## **TOYA GURUNG**

*Toya Gurung (1948) is a poet of human value in the context of social life in the present day world of the twentieth century as is also evident from the poem excerpted in the present collection. She has to her credit two collections of poem, namely, Suryadaha the Sun-lake (1985) and Deval Ghumepachhi, the Impressions of walking around the temple (1995) and a long reflective poem Dhoopee, the Juniper tree (1995). She has been honored with Pratibha Puraskar, Vyathit Kavya Puraskar, Ratna Shree Gold Medal for her contributions in the literary field. Currently, she is a member of the Royal Nepal Academy.*

### **THE OPEN MARKET**

Deep  
Terraces down the hill,  
A couple of shapely damsels  
From Bhirbote  
Diverting water into the canal  
Turn by turn in a mutual exchange of labour  
With the boys of Kotedanda  
Of almost the same age  
Running across quickly  
The damp levelled ground  
Hi! Who wins?  
You or me?  
In a cultured language to mean  
This is a race competitive  
Between young boys and girls of marriageable age  
In the market.  
At the height of their civilization  
They sing in chorus  
Vying with the voice of the cuckoo  
The words meaning,

"Whereto I'm heading  
Clouds happen to be."

Thatched huts are all over  
The damp ground  
Built of bamboo strips  
Resound with the flattering calls  
Of traders, seeking profuse gain.  
Shoulder upon shoulder move  
Freely in the market  
With amulets over the chests  
Gold ornaments on heads  
Silver rings round anklets  
Rings and plates hanging  
From the nose  
The *murchunga*<sup>10</sup> and bitter-leaf tips  
Hanging from bodice strings  
Fittingly, tied  
To the apron – like a covering  
A little below the neck  
In an the orderly way  
The market is agog  
With atmosphere all warm.

Bread is there in the bamboo basket  
And wine in the wooden flask  
All excited and frolicsome  
The market is all lively  
Throwing a spell on us all.

With heaps of cotton-bedding in front  
Of two-fold and four-fold varieties  
There the Gurung ladies sell  
Haggling over the price.  
Smiling, showing their golden teeth,  
While the Bhotes from Solukhumbu  
Drawing attention to their horses and artistic cushions  
Make a brisk sale

---

10 A small mouth organ held between the teeth and played with the fore finger.

This – the market being held  
Once in the whole year  
The *madal* drum is sounding  
All through the night  
The music resounding  
And the market getting more exciting.

This is an opera  
Or an annual market  
That comes every year  
Spacious enough for people  
Many more than in a *rodi* house  
Set apart for the harvest festival  
Where dancing and singing take place  
With greater license  
Allowing men to choose their life partners.

This indeed is a grand market  
Patterned in the latest plan  
That evolves and develops  
In every age  
Making history  
Most unforgettable  
And creating a world  
For centuries long  
Original in its way  
Casting aside  
Modernity.

(Tr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya)

## **KRISHNA BHUSAN BAL**

*Krishna Bhushan Bal (1947) has to his credit three poetical works. In the poem included here he shows his talent as a modern poet, drawing a vivid pen picture of April.*

### **THE WIND OF CHAITRA<sup>11</sup>**

Chaitra has come to in these plains  
Having stripped the trees of them leaves, the wind  
has become an elephant gone mad  
Carrying away the fragrance of flowers  
Sweeping off the dust of ages  
And overturning trees that have lived for ages

A Wind like this has changed many history that we have read  
And shaped many history that we have written.  
I have also erected a house of confidence  
though this wind blows down not only the shaky ones  
though this wind uproots not only the frail voices

A winds like this can vaporize the ocean into the sky  
And can avert even the cloudburst of the sky  
how can't I foresay then that this very wind  
can sweep away the clouds covering this land!  
how can't I predict now that this very wind  
can tear out the odd pages of the history of this land!

Like a bugle is blowing the wind a revolution into a  
bamboo *chonge*<sup>12</sup> today  
driving old leaves towards the whirlwinds in the sky today  
it seems the houses built by contractor with much profit  
will no longer stand now

---

11 Chaitra- Corresponds to mid March to mid April when dusty storms blow

12 Chonge- A whole bamboo with holes, when wind blows it sounds like a whistle







# **SHORT STORIES**



## **GURU PRASAD MAINALI**

*Guru Prasad Mainali (1900-1971) had the credit of introducing modern short stories in Nepali literature. His most popular story, Naso is included here. His stories depicted the life of the common people.*

### **THE WARD**

1

Although there was wealth in his house, Deviraman had no children. He made every effort for the birth of a child. He built a *chautaro* or resting-place under a tree, built a path and lit the great lamp at Pashup ati. Last year, he organized the reading of the *Harivamsha purana*. Even then Subhadra's womb could not be fruitful. Deviraman would win in a competition with this jealous neighbour on all counts – wealth, strength, and wisdom -- but his pride turned into dust as soon as he heard someone calling him 'childless' and he suffered much. He was an old-fashioned man; without a child, he considered his wealth was trivial.

Poor Subhadra was also sad. Seeing the women in neighborhood playing with their children, she used to be excited. Because of her simple woman's nature, she wore herbs and amulets from shamans in the hope of having a child. She made promises to gods and goddesses. She also went on pilgrimages, made vows, worshipped, and recited the hymns. But, if the Fate does not listen, what can one do?

Astrologers advised Deviraman to marry a second time. But without Subhadra's permission, he could not do so. Subhadra was very faithful to her husband. Until today, she had never hurt Deviraman's feelings. She served him always keeping uppermost in her husband's

mind. The dreadful hardship at the time when Subhadra came as a bride was always before Deviraman's eyes. Remembering the times, tears filled his eyes. A companion friend through joy and sorrow, Subhadra had made poor Deviraman wealthy. Now, how could he be so ungrateful, as to impose a co-wife on her for the sake of child?

2

The cold morning wind of Phagun (February- March) blew as if it will pierce the heart. Deviraman was seated at the marriage pavilion with his new bride. The Brahmans, were reading Vedic hymns and putting offerings into the fire. Destiny made him a bridegroom again at this late age. Once, he had married Subhadra in the same manner. Today he was repeating the very previous act whether with or without the consent of Subhadra. He did not have any idea about it – whether good or evil would result from this. Having brought a girl of twelve years, he wanted to build an imaginary castle in his mind. Perhaps, the Brahmavadi (vedanta) philosophers call it the snare of hope or mirage, I guess.

Anyway, he completed the wedding rituals, whether it was a compulsion, or his own internal inspiration. At the time the bride was given away her folks cried, and put her in the litter. Inside the litter she also began to cry. At that time, Deviraman felt very bad. On the way the people taking part in the wedding procession joked and laughed, but in Deviraman's mind a battle of thoughts had begun. He said to himself, 'Was Subhadra sincere, when she gave her consent? Why did she turn to one side when she said, 'It's all right'? Is it not true that she said alright seeing my great insistence? Oh, how people forcibly get other to consent to fulfil their own wishes! Fie! Is this the reward for Subhadra's life-long service? What can I do? What is my fault? The Hindu religion, which says that the way to heaven is barred to one if he does not have children, must

know about it. I have married according religion, not for sensual gratification.

The wedding procession arrived near Deviraman's house. The neighbors in the village *chautara* had been watching. Deviraman looked at the crowd scrutinizing one by one. He did not see Subhadra in that crowd. Finally, the rock was removed from his heart. Today, Deviraman's situation was like that of a little boy who arrives late at the class forgetting the lesson of the previous day; or, it was like that of that criminal who wants to hide from an acquaintance.

He lagged behind, he excused to have a conversation with a neighbour. When he arrived, Subhadra had already welcomed the bride into the house, and begun to pay the musicians and litter-carriers. Deviraman was very delighted; he said to himself, "Subhadra is a goddess from this heaven; Why did I doubt her? How people are frightened by of their own acts!"

After conversations with the guests, Deviraman entered his room late. A mustard-seed-oil lamp was burning in a brass lamp. The new bride had already slept in a mattress below the bed. He did not see Subhadra's mattress at the usual place beside his bed. And the room where he had slept for scores of years seemed strange to Deviraman. After a moment, having finished her chores, Subhadra entered the room; and she began to massage Deviraman. This was her daily duty. Subhadra would not make mistake in her duty. Deviraman said to her, "Where is your mattress?"

"It is in the next room."

"Why have you moved it to the next room?"

"Tomorrow is the eleventh day of lunar calendar, I will go early to bathe in the Gandaki river."

"I will also sleep there."

"Oh, it is alright if you sleep here."

Deviraman, was tired and fell asleep soon. Subhadra overlaid own quilt over that of her co-wife, and went into the next room, where Nauli, the slave, was making plates joining the leaves with bamboo splinters in the dim light of a lamp. Nauli was an old maid almost of Subhadra's age. Nauli had been freed from a slave's life by the compassion of the Late Prime Minister Chandrashamsher Jangabhadur Rana in the year 1925. Deviraman did not take his compensation for Nauli because she had been long in his home. She stayed on within voluntarily. Nauli had been Subhadra's friend of weal and woes since her childhood. In the form of Nauli, god had given Subhadra into which to pour her sorrows. Both had deep love for each other. Nauli, joining the leaves, said, "Bajai, it must have been very unpleasant for you today."

"Why Nauli, why did you say so? What is the matter to be unpleasant about for me?"

"Even then, a co-wife is a pain in the heart. Today you had to leave the bed; you may have to leave the house itself. Who knows?"

"I will leave, if I must leave. What wealth have I enjoyed? I have been suffering the hardship of a daughter-in-law day and night, eating a stomachful of rough food. If I clean the dirty kitchen, anyone gives a mouthful of food to eat. But she is apparently simple; she greeted me as soon as she entered the house." Nauli replied, "she had probably been taught to do so, Bajai. You will say some day, 'Nauli had said this.' It does not take long for something straight to be crooked. In a few days, she will be leading the old man around by his *tupi*<sup>14</sup>."

"Whatever it may be; may God give her a long life. May we see her flourish. If a boy is born to him by compulsion make the ritual offering of water (at the

---

14 A tuft of hair on the head left unshaved by Hindus



memorial service). May I pass away in their presence. This is the greatest satisfaction of all, Nauli."

3

Three or four years later, Subhadra was sitting in the sun, feeding Sushil, who tried to catch the pigeons moving about in the courtyard. Taking a handful of rice Subhadra said, "Who will eat? Who will eat?" Sushil came running with his mouth open. Subhadra put the rice into his mouth. The child ran away there toward the pigeons again. Those mute birds were also playing happily with the child. Sushil tried to catch the pigeons and they went a little further and stopped. Sushil arrived among them. The pigeons flew a little further away and began to feed again. Hearing Subhadra's words, Sushil again went back every now and then and took one or two mouthfuls of rice.

Sitting at the porch Deviraman watched the child at play – a very pleasant scene indeed. It seemed to him that even his ancestors in Heaven were probably watching child on whom lay the hope of the family's future. Deviraman saw a great strong power hidden within this progeny of his. Desirous of an offspring, he had lived to see this happy day. The way of the ever-changing world is peculiar indeed. The Supreme Lord makes those who laugh weep and those who weep smile.

One day Sushil was playing near the mound of the Tulsi plant. From one end of the porch, Laksmi, and Subhadra, from the other end, stretched their hands, and shouted "Baby, Which way? Which way, Which way?" Sushil, after a moment, ran towards Subhadra and clung to her. Subhadra's heart was filled with the pure love of the son. She kissed him saying 'My *Raja* (king)'. Laksmi gave birth to Sushil but it was Subhadra who has raised him. He did not leave Subhadra even for a moment. He called Subhadra "Mother." He called his own mother 'Dulahi' (the bride) because everybody in the house called her 'Dulahi Bajai.'

It was the month of Magh (Jan-Feb). The farmers, having stored their crops, were preoccupied with a pilgrimage. Deviraman also desired to go on a pilgrimage. He said to himself: "When shall I make it if I do not make the pilgrimage while I still can walk? People become blind while they gain wealth. Putting aside wisdom and good sense in a dark niche, they keep making an outcry for the sake of money day and night. The property of these boors will be only for the fire or thieves. I had probably done some good in the past, so I have the satisfaction of a square meal. The roots of my family tree will be nourished if I can do so again and my next life too will be good." With such thoughts in his mind, Deviraman prepared to go alone on the pilgrimage, but many old people and their widows in the village also wanted to go. Deviraman's courtyard was filled with a crowd of pilgrims, with their baggage. Seeing many village women among the pilgrims, Laksmi also insisted, saying "I will also go". Sushil, on his part, began to cry holding on to Deviraman's shirt. Deviraman could not disregard his child's persistence. In the end, he let Laksmi and Sushil also accompany from the swarm of pilgrims, like bees following their queen, started off behind Deviraman. But none asked Subhadra, "Do you also want to go?"

Subhadra said to herself, "He should have rather taken me on the pilgrimage. Who do I have? – No son, nor daughter! Laksmi is still young age; she could have gone later. She is a wife, who has given birth to a son. He could not reject her words. I am helpless, not having anything to standby on or hold onto. Who thinks of me? (Not one). People warm themselves only by a burning fire. People have contempt for him whom God has deceived. Oh! how selfish is the world!"

Thinking like this, Subhadra cried alone for a long time. She had been cleaning Deviraman's doorway to bring for good luck since the age of twelve. For Subhadra this house was dearest of all things in the world. The

animals had grown up under her care. This house, these animals and these trees were all companions to the childless woman. Subhadra could not endure separation from them even for a moment.

As for her actually going on the pilgrimage, Subhadra may go or not. But she would not have to shed tears if she were just asked. If just a word was said at the right moment it would have been a great comfort. It was not that Deviraman knew no psychology.

There needs to be but a small seed of ill-feeling; it assumes a terrible form of its own, in time. Likewise, the pilgrimage happened to be a seed of ill feeling in the life of Laksmi and Subhadra. Since they returned from the pilgrimage, quarrels began to take place frequently between the two. When Subhadra asked anything, Laksmi answered her with sarcasm. This went on to the point that spats developed into quarrels when they spoke to each other. Deviraman kept listening silently. If he rebuked Laksmi, she was the wife with a son! If he rebuked Subhadra it would be a violation of religious duty and conscience! What could he do? He was experiencing the bitterness of one's desire for worldly pleasure. His strong power of persuasion was gone with the wind. A man's wisdom is useful in advising others, but not when it comes to herself. Because of daily household quarrels, Subhadra's tender heart was completely withered. Like a suffering prisoner, she began to look for an opportunity to escape.

5

The night appeared more dreadful when the melancholic and intermittent hooting cry of the owl was added to it. A dog was barking in the next village. In the wide sky, stars were seemingly weeping, seeing the miserable lot of mankind on earth. Subhadra looked upwards coming out into the courtyard. After a moment, a shooting star, gliding swiftly, dropped unable to fall onto the earth, it was lost in space. She had seen a similar sight once before in her childhood. Then she had asked

her mother, and she had answered saying: "These are gods up the sky. Because their merit has come to an end, they have fallen from Heaven." Today she remembered her mother's word. She said to herself: "Yes, today I had also glided swiftly like the gods after living in the sky, and enjoying the fruits of my merits for some days. After their merit has been used up they fall slipping from Heaven. We hungry and thirsty people, being pale and weak because of pain and suffering, fall from the earth onto the earth itself. Others remain hungry, thirsty and suffering, see our terrible form after we have already fallen. Because they enjoy their merits, gods disappear in mid space rather than fall down this sinful earth. This is the only difference between gods and men. Subhadra held a bundle under her arm. She had covered it with the shawl even in such a dark night so that no one may see it. At this juncture, that very little bundle became her support in life. Oh, how such great hopes ever remain confined to a small place! O Lord, why do you keep people on suspension on such hope? O Lord, how close to happiness these humans would be if you had given them satisfaction instead of hope! Poor Subhadra disappeared into the pitch-black darkness. After a while, her tearful eyes bade a final *Namaskar* (goodbye) to her dear house. None save the guardians of the world, who being wise and ever vigilant, saw this pathetic scene.

## 6

Around the temple of Pashupatinath there was not enough room even for a sesame seed. There was an impenetrable crowd of pilgrims scattering the *sadbiu*<sup>2</sup>. Suddenly seeing Subhadra near the western gate, Nauli said with her eyes full of tears, "Oh Bajai! Look, how thin you have become, almost beyond recognition. For a moment, I could not recognize you at all. Where are you staying now?"

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2 A festival in which people mix-up one hundred kinds of seeds around the temple on the fourteenth day of the lunar night usually during January-December every year.

"I am staying here at Gaurighat with my aunt."

"You left in the middle of the night without taking any money or food."

"I did not even know what I did."

"How did you sustain yourself for so many days?"

"The king has given a pension to my aunt. The two of us keep alive that. What is the news back home, Nauli?"

"Bajai, what shall I say about the news from home?"

"Tears come to my eyes even when I remember it. For the last six months, Dulahi Bajai has been ill."

"What has happened?" Subhadra asked in great curiosity.

"She has a mild fever. She says her chest hurts. She coughs all night. When we summoned the military doctor from Gorkha, he said it was something like called "phthisis", I could not remember exactly. It is very bad disease, they say. She has been reduced to skin and bone. She has become so thin that she has to be carried in and out."

"And, how is the little boy?"

"How could he be? He has boils all over and we cannot massage him with oil. He says, 'When will mother come? He remembers you frequently'".

"And who cooks the meal?"

"Sometimes Baje (Deviraman) cooks it himself. Sometimes he goes to bed eating only a few snacks. One day, he was seen crying alone, sitting at the balcony. He said, 'The sinner herself has destroyed the home of her own making and went away.' What should I say, Bajai! The animals have also been reduced to skin and bone. The fields and gardens have been let out on a share cropping basis. Not even one penny of the loan is

returned. The servants do not stay even for four days. Everything is in disarray."

Hearing Nauli's words, Subhadra's heart was grieved. She said to herself, "Fie! This is like cutting one's husband's nose because of anger at the co-wife. Lakshmi is still young. It is time for her to speak of good food to eat; nice clothes to wear." It was not proper for me to be upset, thinking that she ate good food and wore pretty clothes. He went on the pilgrimage, taking her along with him. But what did it do? I could have gone, taking this a companion after his return. Sometimes, she spoke slightly in anger. She has a somewhat irritable nature. Her nature itself is like that. Sometimes a quarrel can take place even between a mother and daughter if they live at one place. I could have lived putting up in a hut for myself if I could not live in the same house. I did a very foolish thing. What would the neighbours be possibly saying? I am living here, on just one meal a day leaving my own great wealth. If anything happens to her, what will become of the little boy? What the deceased ancestors will be saying? Even if my feelings were hurt, it was the mother who did it. What wrong did the little boy do? He used to be vexed when he had to cook a meal or two. How could he cook daily these days?" Subhadra's heart ached with pain. Shedding tears, she said, "Nauli, you too have come at such a time, leaving them."

"Bajai, I have to live, being a slave to someone else, all my life."

"Asking Bajai for only twenty days' leave, I came so that I may scatter some sacred grains and then go back."

"With whom did you come?"

"I came with the family of the Ratamate Bhandari."

"When will you go?"

"I will go tomorrow morning. Bajai, I pray to you to return home with me. Bajai's ship will sink, if you are not there."

Laksmi, lying on a filthy bed, counted the remaining hours of her life. Deviraman, sitting at the head of the bed, gave her water to drink from time to time. The little boy Sushil, sitting near his mother, was watching his mother dying. Laksmi sometimes poured tears looking at Sushil. In the dim light of the lamp the sick room looked like a crematorium. Just then, Nauli opened the door and bowed to Deviraman. Seeing Nauli, Deviraman's sorrow was somewhat abated. He said, "When did you arrive from Nepal, Nauli?"

"Baje, I have just come. How is Dulahi Bajai?"

"The oil is finished long ago; now it only remains for the lamp to go out."

"Baje, everything would be taken care of if Thuli Bajai were here now. What can I do? I said, Let us go, but she would not come."

"Did you really meet her?"

"I had met her near the temple of Pashupatinath."

"How was she?"

"Very thin, wearing dirty clothes, and pitiful."

"Where is she staying?"

"She said, 'I am staying at Gaurighat at my aunt's. The government has given a pension to my aunt. Both of us have managed on that.'"

Tears flowed from both eyes of Deviraman. He said to himself, "Being an owner of so much wealth, Subhadra lives on only one meal. On top of that, she is emaciated, wearing dirty clothes, and pitiful! O Lord, I am a sinner. A thousand curses on my life. Subhadra is the goddess of my house. Since she went away, misfortune has been surrounding me. Even if she has no feeling for us; she ought to remember the boy. She forgot everyone completely." Then he said with tears, in his eyes, "Nauli,

you have come now. Look after the house. I will go to Nepal tomorrow morning."

Just at that moment, Subhadra entered the house. She looked very thin, and tired in her dirty, torn clothes. But great compassion was to be seen shining on her tranquil face. Seeing Subhadra's physical state, Deviraman's heart was crushed. He began to cry, covering his face with his hands.

Greeting her husband by prostrating in front of him, Subhadra sat at the head of Laksmi's bed. Nauli said, "Oh! Bajai, you have arrived!" Hearing Nauli's voice, Laksmi opened her eyes.

Seeing Subhadra seated at the head of her bed, she said in a faint and unsteady voice, "Sister, I have been hanging onto life just to have a glimpse of you."

Hearing Laksmi, Subhadra forgot all her grievances. She said, "My little one, I have forgotten my duty."

Laksmi said, pointing Subhadra's breast, "There is a great wound there."

Subhadra said, shedding tears, "It has healed up, my dear baby. Indeed, it had healed up long ago. There is not even a mark as big as a sesame seed."

Then Laksmi put Sushil's hand in Subhadra's lap, and said, "Sister, this is your ward."

Taking the boy in her lap, Subhadra began to cry. For Subhadra, it was a moment to be remembered for the rest of her life.

Like the flame of dying lamp, Laksmi's face became bright for a moment. And then, it was dark! Leaving this sorrowful, hollow world, Laksmi arrived at the infinite. Deviraman, Nauli and others began to cry.

*(Tr. Jaya Raj Acharya)*



## **PUSKAR SHAMSHER**

*Pushkar Shamsheer (1901-1961) was popular for his stories about the life of the common people. He had to his credit a collection of short stories. The story included here shows how a simple, innocent person falls a victim to circumstances.*

### **CIRCUMSTANCES**

Rane and his wife Seti had visited their relatives in the afternoon. They had eaten there and so, when they returned home they didn't have to worry about cooking. That was why they whiled away their time outdoors in the farm till it was dark. Soon after they entered the house it was time to go to bed. Rane was sullen and so, Seti was, by all means, trying to draw a few words from him.

"We call it daddy-long-legs. What do you call it?"

"I don't know."

"They say it steals hair; is that so?"

Rane picked up a shoe lying near by and raised it to kill the insect. Without heeding to his wife's 'Don't kill! Don't kill!' he killed it at one blow.

"Oh God! May it go to heaven! What a stubborn fellow you are! You have committed a sin, you know!"

"O Damn care!"

"I hear a murmur in the other room. He has a friend, I think."

"Maybe he has brought a girl, to spite me!"

\* \* \*

Rane woke up from his sleep by a thud from the next room as if a heavy object had fallen on the floor. Seti

was already awakened by low thudding sounds from the other room. She had nudged Rane two or three times in vain. Now, she told her husband in a subdued voice. Astonished, they turned their ears to the other room, but no sound was heard any more. There was a space between the two rooms and so, slight sounds could not be easily heard. Rane lighted a lamp and picked up his dress from the peg; tying the strings of his shirt and at the same time exclaiming, "What after all is this bloody *Lahure*<sup>1</sup> doing?" He was about to go out but his wife stopped him.

"Weren't you satisfied with the fight you had with him then? Do you want to fight again? Forget it, don't go."

"Leave me. I'll just peep in through the hole in the door. Whenever in this house . . . Hey! Who's that?"

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. I couldn't distinctly see him. A person just slipped out of the room and ran away."

"Was it a woman?"

"No, a man. I saw only his cap. I suspect there's something wrong."

Both husband and wife came out into the yard and went towards the *Lahure's* room. Although it was not very dark, they could see the door wide open only when they reached quite near it. Inside, it was pitch dark. In spite of straining their ears they could not hear any sound for a long time, not even a breath. Rane then felt certain that *Lahure* was not in. He hastened back to his room and brought the lamp. He now saw a large blood stain near the pillow; *Lahure's* corpulent body, enlarged in the dim light of the lamp, was stretched out on the floor near the bed. In spite of several deep cuts in the chin, throat and neck, the windpipe was not severed; the fixed eyes were staring in the void; and the head was throbbing. *Seti* now

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1 Nepali youths enlisted to the British army especially *Lahore* (Pakistan) of British India. Today every army is addressed by that term.

remembered that she had heard a few strokes, but then she had not, in the least, suspected that the sounds came from the strokes of a *khukuri*<sup>2</sup>. Rane picked up a water-pot that was lying near and put some water into Lahure's mouth. In a very short time Lahure breathed his last. In order to make it easier for Lahure to swallow the water, Rane had tried to hold his head in position, and in doing so, he did not know that his clothes and body were stained with blood.

Rane had not spoken a word yet; but his wife had been chattering all the time as she held the lamp. "Dear me! which sinner did it? I can't even look at it! How could he do it! Oh, my God!"

When Rane was definite that Lahure was dead, he got up from the squatting position and drew a long breath.

"Why should I have quarrelled with this bastard if I had known he was going to die now! What should I do now?"

"The house next to ours ..."

"No. However, I'll inform the village headman."

"I can't stay here alone."

"You can go to Bhojraj Baje's house. They haven't gone to bed yet, I think."

Rana Bahadur Gurung – that was his full name – went into his room and put on the jacket and the cap; he picked up his *khukuri* and was about to tuck it when something came to his mind and he left the *khukuri* where it was. Telling Seti to go away after closing the doors of both rooms, he went straight towards the headman's house.

The moonlight was obstructed by the clouds; however, there was enough light for one to walk about. There were different sounds usually heard at nighttime,

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2 A Nepali bush knife

but Rane's ears were deaf to them. There were many things around to see for one who delighted in the realm of Night, but Rane's eyes were blind to them all. His mind was engaged in figuring out what the man who had left Lahure's room looked like. But all his efforts proved fruitless. On the one hand, one's vision is not usually clear immediately up from sleep, and on the other hand, when one comes out into the dark after looking at a burning matchstick and a lamp, one sees for some time a yellowish bright spot that blurs the vision. In such a state it was really difficult for Rane to recognize a fleeing person of whom he had only a glimpse. When Rane reached near the headman's house he suddenly stopped. His thought took a new turn.

If the headman arrested him on suspicion that he was the murderer! Would the headman believe him that the murderer had run away? Why didn't Rane run after the man shouting as soon as he had come to know of the murder? It would be impossible for a tall young man like Rane to catch him. Rane should be able to identify the person either by name or by description.

There were only the mute God and his wife who could bear witness that Rane had not murdered Lahure. But who would listen to his wife's testimony? A cat standing witness for lost milk! What was most was that during his fight with Lahure about Seti that very day he had, in a fit of anger, bragged before the mediators that he would kill Lahure and he was not afraid of risking his own life in doing so. How could one foresee that incidents would take such a turn? The people would not forget to mention this point at the time of the on-the-spot inquiry. Oh God! Why didn't he think of catching the man? Would he be able to find the man if he followed him now?

Rane turned back; walked a few steps briskly as before; stopped again; shook his head slowly. He had not yet passed the adolescent age of twenty-five; was just twenty-two years old. He decided that the only way open for him was to run away to India. He recalled Seti's face

for a moment, he felt a choking sensation; but love could not stand against the fear of being arrested. There was now a difference of heaven and hell between the Rane of a short time ago and the Rane of the present moment. A few minutes ago he had considered himself a government agent assisting in this capture of the murderer, but now he looked at himself from the other point of view and considered himself a murderer. He was surrounded by the ghosts of fear. Rane considered as a man without fear, was now frightened even by the hooting of an owl. he began to run, looking about him suspiciously at the same time. The farther he went the deeper did he dig his own grave.

\* \* \*

Padmanidhi Lamichhane, an old senior clerk in Section III of the High Court, used to pick up even the minute points of a case and analyzed them. He had a habit of speaking softly and sweetly with the litigants.

"Lal Bahadur, bring the prisoner in. Rane, sit down, young man! I see you are smart and handsome to look at."

"Maybe so, sir. But what is physical beauty good for if one's luck is bad?"

"Your case, you see, will be presented to the chief today. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. But what's your opinion about my case, sir?" asked Rane innocently.

"I'm afraid, Rane, your case has no strong points.." Lamichhane pursed his lip and shook his head.

"But, sir, poison would affect only those who have taken it. How would it affect others?" Rane's voice was cold.

"That's right. But what can be done? There are so many witnesses, you see, who had heard you saying that you would kill Lahure when you had a fight with him at daytime. Even your wife – what's her name? ... oh, yes, Seti – she also has attested to it. But you denied it. Again ..."

"But that ..."

"Wait! Again, the night the murder was committed, a man – what's his name?... yes, Kalcha Newar – happened to be passing by your house. You see he heard your wife cry out 'Don't kill! Don't kill' and later he also heard her say 'May it go to heaven! Seti, you see had confessed that she had said so because you were going to kill an insect. Now, who will believe you? And, you, on your part, deny that incident."

"But that, sir; at first I denied out of fear, but later..."

"First listen to me. Later you confessed. What was the result? The judges you see could easily make it a point against you. It became easier for them to construe that if this man could tell a lie about such an incident then he could easily deny the murder he had committed. Besides, because of his misbehaviour with Seti, you were really angry with the deceased. Nobody in the village had enmity with or spite against Lahure. Moreover, he had not lived there for long. It is true that Lahure looked rich, and there were bundles of bank notes and a lot of Indian coins in his box. A point can be raised – somebody else might have murdered Lahure for the purpose of stealing, but this point does not stand, because nothing had been stolen. If you had gone straight to the headman and reported, that would have been a point in your favour. On the contrary, you ran away and ruined everything. Anybody who hears about the case could ask if this fellow hadn't done anything wrong, why did he run away? I say so; the man over there says so; everybody says so; who won't say so?"

"I've nothing to say, sir. It's due to my immaturity; I made a mistake in running away. When I saw Lahure dragging my wife, I became blind with fury and rushed at him. I don't know what I said in a fit of rage. Sir, that is all I have done, wittingly or unwittingly. I have done no other wrong. If a person is hanged simply because he ran away out of fear, then ..."

"Look here, young man. Circumstance is really something to wonder at." A man, who had studied English, was an apprentice in that office. Lamichhane, in order to make an impression on this apprentice, began to speak in a voice of over confidence. "Circumstance, you see, can make a saint of a thief and a thief of a saint. Let me tell this man a few things until the chief comes," he thought and continued, "It is difficult to find an eye -witness in murder and rape cases. Even where witnesses are available, most of them are not reliable. Circumstance, you see, may provide evidence in a different colour. It is the circumstance on which judges mostly base their judgment in such cases. Circumstance you see, young man, is what makes an imprint on the conscience of the judge who hears the case. That imprint you see may be true or false, but if we do not take it as true, we won't be able to work. If the circumstance buries an accused it becomes really difficult for others to acquit such a person. Now, let us take your case as an example. Suppose you did not commit the murder; this is just an example, don't take it as true. Suppose one of the persons who had come to mediate in your quarrel with Lahure had an evil intention. It is not improbable for him to have heard that Lahure had brought some money with him. He also heard your threat to kill him. A sinful thunder rose in his mind; he would have thought that if Lahure was killed, the blame would be on your head, and he could slip away unsuspected with the money. When you returned from your relatives and went into your room this rogue went to Lahure and requested for a night's stay with him. He might also have mentioned, 'No one can say what will happen when you sleep alone in the house of the person

you have quarreled with and who has said that he will kill you. Therefore, it is wise to have a friend beside you.' Lahure was convinced and permitted the rogue to stay with him. You see, you two heard them talking before you went to bed. When in that rogue's mind ... No, here I missed a point. But never mind. Let us accept for a moment your wife really meant an insect when she said 'Don't kill, don't kill'. Now, when the rogue was certain that you had gone to sleep and that Lahure also had fallen asleep, he quietly got up and struck Lahure. But he could not give a hard blow because he feared that the sound of the blow might awaken you. So, he had to hit a number of times. When Lahure became still, he did not bother much to sever the head. His mind was bent on opening the box anyhow, laying his hands on whatever was there and running away as fast as he could. But when he was trying the key in the lock, the wounded Lahure tossed and fell off the bed on the floor. It produced a loud sound and the rogue got nervous; besides, when he heard voices from your side, he was perplexed. He at once pushed the bunch of keys under Lahure's pillow and took to his heels without taking any money. You, a simple Gurung, on your part got blood on your hands and clothes while you were attempting to make him drink water. If you had known about the blood stain you would have washed it off but you didn't know about it. You were going to report the case but instead of reporting you began to reflect. You thought, 'No; they will arrest me. Better run away, and you took to your heels; you didn't think of the result. On top of that, when you were arrested, out of fear your heart began to beat like a drum, and without thinking at all you denied everything. If you are innocent in any way this must have been the fact. But what can you do? The circumstance had already buried you; and your hiding facts and telling lies in the beginning, and later confession of everything except the murder had undone you. What else was left there? If you had not run away, and if the court at the initial hearing – the District Court West No 2 – had suspected some of the people who had come to see and mediate in your quarrel and had proceeded likewise,



some points in your favour might have come up. Now if any question is raised on this aspect, it will be considered as irrelevant suspicion."

Rane was staring at the senior clerk without saying a word – neither 'yes' nor 'no'. His face did not reflect the impact the clerk's talk had made on his mind. Rane's brow was covered with sweat; perhaps he was trying hard to understand what the clerk had said; or maybe, every word had made its way into his heart and the tears had not found their way through his dry eyes. Later, his lips moved three or four times. Perhaps he was repeating the word 'circumstance'.

After the clerk had finished his analysis, Rane drew a long sigh and said, "Cholera took everybody!" He changed his sitting posture, looked intently at the floor – as if the polished bricks were pictures of his past life – and added, "Ours was a large family; all except me had died. I was wondering why I was only left. Now I understand. It was because I am unlucky one, had to be involved in such a case."

*(Tr. Rameshwar Prasad Adhikari)*

## **BHAWANI BHIKSHU**

*Bhawani Bhikshu (1914-1981) had to his credit eight original works including three collections of short stories. He was sometime a Member of the Royal Nepal Academy. His dexterity in bringing out the complexities of the human mind is revealed in the story included herein. He was awarded Madan Puraskar in 1975 and the Academy Award, Tribhuvan Pragma Puraskar in 1979.*

## **MAIYA SAHEB**

A vague and disjointed account spanning the past fifteen years has occupied my mind. The vagueness now seems to resolve itself into an intriguing story. During these years the Rana regime has come to an end and a democratic system has emerged.

There was a lady belonging to a distinguished family connected with the ruling elite fifteen years back. Everybody called her Maharani, the great *rani*, that is the queen. She had two daughters and two sons. There was also a stepdaughter in the family, born out of wedlock to a concubine. In order to make the other woman in the life of her husband miserable as an object of intense hatred and keep her in her proper place, the Maharani treated the stepdaughter more or less like her own daughters. The purpose was to make the woman feel that her daughter was a notch higher than herself in the social hierarchy and naturally the notion rankled her constantly. In this manner, the concubine felt an unspeakable sadness when she saw her daughter – a sorrow that she could not share with anyone, even with her own child. It underscored her lowly station within the family. She could never aspire to rise to the status of her own child, who was still a minor, and she found herself very much apart

and alone in the mansion. Surely, it was a mental torture the poor woman had to endure for all time.

The child's psychology too developed in a singular manner. She found herself in a slightly lower rung than that of the Maharani's other children but she did not become arrogant and pompous. At the same time, enjoying a slightly elevated position than that of her own mother and others, the child developed self-respect and a dignity of her own. She found herself in a special situation, different from others, including her own mother, in the family. Although she was not called by the informal but exalted title of Maharani, as was common in the elite families in those days, like the two other girls and their mother, she answered to the second or third rank title of Maiya Saheb. In the peculiar situation, the child developed a balanced state of mind; she had neither the arrogance of those above her nor an inferiority complex that made her humble. As a matter of fact, she grew up with a natural self-confidence. Maiya Saheb was in a special niche in the social set-up of the family.

There was a man who worked for the family. He was in the Maharani's good grace and being a truly sincere well-wisher of the family, he was respected and authorized to work on his own for and on behalf of the distinguished family. Among his sons, there was one named Ajaya, who was of the same age as Maiya Saheb. As children, they grew up together and became fast playmates, unconscious yet a mutual attraction between them. In course of time, as they approached adulthood, an unspoken bond developed between Maiya Saheb and Ajaya.

One day, at the age of fifteen, Maiya Saheb was trying to learn to ride a bicycle within the compound of the mansion. Ajaya was coming from the opposite direction. As she careened close to him, she lost her balance and would have fallen off the bicycle had Ajaya not caught hold of her in an embrace. Incidentally, whether to show his sympathy to her or having some satisfaction in saving

her from being hurt, or for whatever other reason, on an impulse Ajaya planted a kiss on Maiya Saheb's cheek. Instantly they looked about them in alarm. There was no one around. At the same instant, that very note of caution gave rise to something else within both of them – an unspoken desire to move in a direction that ended in happiness. But there was a stumbling block – the wide gap between them of the high born and the low, social disapproval and public scandal. The barrier to their passage was strong, sharp and cruel. There was nothing but ultimate ruin at the end. Yet, this awareness did not last for more than a day and night. They were helplessly caught in a maelstrom of powerful feelings. They were worried but the temptation was irresistible. Their happy prospect was overshadowed by an untold dread, to avoid which they made efforts to distance themselves from each other. Having decided that it was improper even to engage in conversation, their speech became constrained, words did not come as easily as before. Yet, for all their efforts to remain apart, an irresistible force kept them together.

Many days later, at about eight o'clock in the morning, Maiya Saheb, having made herself neat and pretty in keeping with the fashion of the times, was coming down the staircase when Ajaya happened to come up. They came face to face in the middle of the staircase. Struck by Maiya Saheb's beauty, Ajaya stood still. She had become really very attractive. The big, expressive eyes, thin lips and shapely nose had enhanced her beautiful face. She was a picture of gentleness and innocence. Pure, pretty and simple, she resembled rose at that moment. Involuntarily, Ajaya stretched his hand and lifted Maiya Saheb's chin slightly for a better look and for a moment he was completely lost in her beauty. He wondered whether this gift of God would ever be bestowed upon him. Meanwhile, Maiya Saheb just stood quite still, without any sign of hesitation or resistance to him. The next moment, when, Having gazed at her to his satisfaction, Ajaya raised his foot to go up the

flight of stairs, he saw Sagari Maharani, the older daughter of the Maharani, about to come down. Nonplussed, Ajaya asked himself, "Has Sagari Maharani seen what he has done? Even if she did, she was unlikely to mention it." Convinced that she was no telltale, Ajaya regained his composure and went up the stairs. Sagari Maharani didn't betray him.

Returning home, during the day and until bedtime, Ajaya was in a state of euphoria but not without a tinge of fear. "What would happen now?" he asked and told himself, "Nothing." His mind moved like a pendulum and he could not come to any definite conclusion.

As a matter of fact, nothing untoward happened. Maiya Saheb responded to Ajaya's love, for, like himself, she was losing control of herself. At the same time, Ajaya could not get rid of a feeling that their love would come to a sorrowful end.

The love between Ajaya and Maiya Saheb continued to grow. However, under the very bond that kept them together, they were unaware of the development of a very delicate situation until, one day, they stumbled upon it.

All the members of the family had to visit the temple of Vajrajogini, but Maiya Saheb was indisposed. Everybody went for the whole day, except for Maiya Saheb, a middle aged woman who was her personal servant, the guards and a few inconsequential servants. Maiya Saheb spent the day, laying in her own room. Ajaya did not know of the pilgrimage and he came around at noon to pay his respects to the Maharani. Told that everyone had gone out except for Maiya Saheb, who was ill, he went to her room. He asked, as he took his seat "*Yahalai sanco chaina? Ke bhayo? (Aren't you well? What's wrong?)*")

Maiya Saheb looked at Ajaya with glazed eyes and smiled wryly. "Ajaya, this is wrong," she said, "After all your contacts with court manners, you should have said,

*'Hajurlai aram chaina ki? (Madam, aren't you well?)'* Both Ajaya and Maiya Saheb shot a glance at the old maid servant, who was busy with something in the oblong room. Ajaya sat with his head low, thinking. The next moment the servant stepped out of the room with a pot in her hand. Ajaya then said, "*Malai maf garnuhos. Hajur sanga dherai helmel bhayera darbari kaidama cuken. Tara...*(Please pardon me. I've failed in court manners because of my closeness with you. But ...)."

"You have done it again," Maiya Saheb interrupted him, "The proper court language would be, '*Malai maf garidibaksiyos.*' With these words, Maiya Saheb smiled again.

Ajaya knew that he had made a mistake and kept quite. Somehow, his approach to her was incorrect. He thought at once of his background, his humble home and an ordinary family. He looked at his dress and then around the well-decorated room in a grand mansion with the beautiful girl in her pretty dress and jewels resting on the bed. He then realized the 'inequality' between her and himself. But was it his fault? Was it a crime to love her? Hasn't he loved her for so long? Love and inequality! Inequality and love!! "May I question whether we don't love each other?" Ajaya spoke with frankness, "Haven't we come close in our love? Wouldn't the court language between us appear contrived? Didn't our embrace and kiss express love for each other?"

"Hold your breath, Ajaya," Maiya Saheb said somewhat in irritation. "Let me see whether you belong to a much lower station than I thought. You spoke of an embrace and a kiss as evidence of love between us. But you have no understanding of real love. I am so sorry. I had hoped that you would want to live only for love and not make a living out of love. No, you are not what I had expected you to be. I had thought that we have come to an understanding. I thought that with your education you would come up to my expectation. Alas! education does not seem enough for that kind of life. Education could

have helped you to understand, but you have failed to do so. Ah! a wrong notion has been exposed."

Both were silent for a while. Distress and regrets were clearly seen in Maiya Saheb's face. Ajaya then knew that something has gone grievously wrong. He has failed to understand something very important in life. He must be lacking in his knowledge and wrong in his attitude. He was thinking hard when Maiya Saheb interrupted the train of his thoughts. "Ajaya, I don't want to commit another mistake today by denying that I am in love with you," she confessed, "I have loved you and I shall keep on loving you. It could be a mistake but I don't know why I have always wanted to love you. At the same time I have kept reminding myself it was wrong of me to fall in love with you. But I did not want to fail in my love nor do I want to fail now. I have not considered you, Ajaya, as you are apparently to be seen from the outside or inside. I have loved you solely as a human being and I have given you my affection, my love and everything else. I have kept you on a pedestal in my heart. I am still going to do it. Apart from such love, I cannot live, nor do I want to. The notion of loving you appeals to me and I have treasured you. I love to look at you. I love to keep thinking of you. I love to give something to you to eat. I love to give something to keep with you. Also I would love to have something from you. I love to hold you in respect to the best of my ability, directly or indirectly. In other words, I would keep my love for you pure and simple by employing all the means available to me. You may call it my avarice. Can you be content with my kind of love, with the love and devotion of a woman's heart? Can you be satisfied with the concept of love as something beautiful to have and to hold on. I believe that there can be no greater achievement for a man than to be loved in this sense, whatever he may think of his own standing in the society. There can be no greater ideal, no love better than this for a man."

After a short silence, Ajaya made his defence, "This definition of love is the product of class consciousness, social rank and order and abundance of riches. This is not

love in reality. Isn't this an attempt to save the prestige of the great and high by placing me in my proper and lower place in society?"

"Tut, tut, Ajaya," Maiya Saheb retorted, "As a simple woman, I have scaled down love in words and sentences to its true level, but you have failed to reach up and gauge it. You say that it is not true love that I speak of. But why don't you see in it love in the best sense of the word. Ajaya, you must know that excellence is to be found in every truth. Whatever is the best in the real sense is the truth. Even if you admit that whatever is said to be "as it is," it cannot, in the real sense, be the truth as long as you can manuevere it into another condition or state, or raised up to a higher level. Isn't reality the ultimate thing?"

The servant brought some liquid diet for Maiya Saheb, and she moved from the bed down to a mattress before continuing, "Ajaya, you won't appreciate my diet. But have a cup of tea before you go."

"No, I would like to go now," Ajaya said.

Maiya Saheb got up quickly and poured water from a pot into the electric kettle and plugged it on the main line. "I haven't so far had a chance to prepare something with my own hands for you. I am not well today. But, at least drink the tea I am making for you."

Until the tea was ready, Maiya Saheb refrained from drinking the soup brought for her by the servant. When the water came to a boil, she strained the tea into a cup and let Ajaya drink it. Then she picked up her own bowl and enjoyed every sip of the soup as much as the tea Ajaya was drinking in silence under her watchful eyes. It seemed to her that all the bitterness that had welled up in the course of the conversation was being washed away. The beautiful woman was very happy indeed as she gazed intently and with great satisfaction at Ajaya drinking the tea.



Some time later, naturally in keeping with the tradition of his family Ajaya got married. According to custom, Ajaya and his bride came to pay their respects to the Maharani and the other masters and mistresses in the family. They visited Maiya Saheb too in her room. After an exchange of greetings, Maiya Saheb asked the bride to sit alongside her on her bed and took hold of her chin in an affectionate manner. "What a pretty bride!" she exclaimed. "So, you are Ajaya's bride! He would love you dearly. You have to take care of him too." Then she turned towards Ajaya, who was all smiles. "She is an object of your affection," she told him, "Someone for you to take great care. Love her well. Love is boundless and it can grow on and on, if you can only keep on loving her. I am also going to love your bride, as much as you love her. She is going to be my alter ego." Maiya Saheb then opened a chest and picked out a sari and a pretty tablecloth with embroidery by herself. She presented these to the bride. "This is my first gift to you," she said, "A token of my affection. When you get home, put on the sari, spread out the tablecloth and serve tea to Ajaya on it."

A week after his wedding, Ajaya managed to meet Maiya Saheb alone. "My parents," he said, "after all, got me married. But..."

Maiya Saheb blushed and interrupted him. "Ajaya, please don't downgrade love. I am telling you openly that I do love you much. Now that you have married, my love for you will be twice as much. Your wife should be the object upon whom you are to pour all the love I have given you. Love is a very strong sentiment. Why do you forget it? I have made the tablecloth that I gave you the other day since a long time with the ardent desire that some day I would spread it out and put the tea things upon it and then serve tea to you in a nice atmosphere. At least that desire is going to be fulfilled now through the medium of your wife. Now that you have married, you should understand it well that you do not 'belong' to me.

This I knew from the very beginning. That was why I have adored and loved you and I shall continue to love you."

Ajaya could bear it no longer. He said, "Is love to be defined from an exalted position in society? Is there any difference in love?"

Maiya Saheb smiled as she spoke with sympathy towards Ajaya: "You have just said that there is no difference in love but you have no ability to admit it yourself. I had known it very early. I did not want to deceive myself about the love that grew within me and so I respected it and shall keep on doing so. You asked, 'Is there any difference in love?' That's right. But when I was ill recently and the words you used, *tapai* and *garnus* were nice and despite my desire to hear those words from your lips, I had stopped you. Even now I would say, do you think you can speak these middle class words in the presence of our family members? Would you dare to do so? It is quite evident that you cannot do it. Never. Whatever the difference in love, as you have just mentioned, why do you have a difference in your attitude, or if you must say, your compulsion? Here lies a real difference, Ajaya. I keep love in a pedestal, with due respect and with complete faith in it. But you wish to taste love, even without paying the respect due to it, without your capability and without faith. I knew it all. I have no respect for what you are inside or where you are outside, but love is something else. It is a product of my heart. It is my own love. I cannot live without respecting it. I have affection for you, I love you and because of my love for you I respect you."

Both were silent for some time. They knew now that there was no further need of elucidating their love for each other. Somewhere, in the innermost part of his heart, Ajaya saw a ray of light that illuminated his true self. Then he knew his own worth. There was also a realisation within him of the greatness of the woman in front of him, how mature she was and how highly respectful. It was a moment of revelation for both of them.

Ajaya was compelled to admit to himself that love was indeed a great gift and a taste of it so superb.

Ajaya could not make his wife the object of love in the true sense. He began to take interest in a secret political movement against the Rana regime and it created tension within the family. There were half muted protests, reactions and arguments among the members. The tension centered sometime on his wife and at other times on his political activities. When Maiya Saheb learnt of it, she wrote to him, as follows: " ... I have come to know that you are indifferent to your wife. She is not getting what was her due. Indeed, don't you really have the seeds of love in you and you know nothing beyond the superficial taste of love? You had come to me claiming to be in love. No, Ajaya, that was not smart, nor are you being natural. Your reaction must be against something, not for love. You took possession of your wife physically but you failed to give her love. Don't you feel ashamed? If you think you are reacting in love, then you are deceiving yourself. I have also heard that you are engaged in some secret political conspiracies. I have no opposition to your opinion or action, but tell me, were you truly inspired by patriotism or was it also a reaction to something else? If you are reacting to something, then there must be some temptation you are after..."

Soon there were a great many changes in the country. Maiya Saheb also got married to a member of the Rana family of her own rank in the hierarchy but much older than herself. Ajaya found himself in jail for his political activities. Within a couple of years, a revolution ended the Rana rule and a democratic form of government was established in the country. The political prisoners were freed and some of them got administrative jobs while others became involved in politics. Ajaya too became an active and important member of the ruling Nepali Congress party. Bereft of government support financially and deprived of the security provided to its members, the feudal class collapsed soon. Those on government service or allowance lost their source of

income. Their indulgence in luxury they were used to worsened their condition. The members in Maiya Saheb's family were not spared by the deteriorating situation and they found themselves in great straits.

After the turmoil brought by the changes had settled down and the situation had improved under the newly-formed people's government, one day Ajaya chanced to meet Maiya Saheb at the cinema hall. Maiya Saheb introduced her husband to Ajaya and then asked about his health and for news about his wife and children and his parents. When the picture began, their attention was diverted to the screen. However, Ajaya could not concentrate his mind on the story. He sensed there was still the great distance between Maiya Saheb and himself. Although she had shed the old pride of the Rana regime, she had not either fallen down from her elevation, as he had imagined she would. He knew now that whatever had remained in her female being was something of which she was made. She would never lose it. It was something that would remain unexpressed within Ajaya himself.

Returning from the cinema that evening, Ajaya was restless. He tossed about in bed, unable to sleep. A vague notion tormented him. He had not been able to influence Maiya Saheb at all, although her standard of life had come down to that of common folks like him. Both of them were in their respective places as before. He was full of sorrow and anger; the latter soon turned into an unexplained pride in himself. But he could not trace his sorrow to its origin and he did not know against whom his anger was directed nor who was to be blamed for hurting his pride. The very next day he wrote a long letter to Maiya Saheb and sent it secretly to her. Within a couple of days, he got his reply. She wrote: "Ajaya, love does not give you the license to go beyond limits. You have power these days, although in an indirect way, but try not to disgrace love. I know for sure that you are not in politics for yourself, but you may be a pawn in it. Although forced to be a pawn, you must not lower yourself to this level in the game of love. I am sad because even now I am in

love with you as intensely as ever. My love for you remains unvanquished, Ajaya. It will not be defeated by you. Our social order and class have begun to go down but it was not totally unexpected and I have taken it easily in my stride. I have no need of your pity. I am returning your kind sentiment back to you and you can keep it with yourself. But for the sake of good manners, I am thanking you for it. I have a request to make to you. I shall be glad if you do not try to create a situation that will oblige your Maiya Saheb to thank you. I do hope that you will have at least this much humanity in you ... you are even today an object of my love and you shall remain so the rest of my life. As a fully mature adult and with the experience gained so far, I can say with certainty that I have no alternative but to keep on loving you. I do not want to get rid of my love for you. Because I am capable of this much love even in these days of ill fortune and that I can still hold on to it gives me great pride. But what can I say if you are unable to understand it even now? You have also not failed to point out to me your borrowed position, although you made efforts to hide it. Of course, it is not your fault, you are only showing your true self. I am asking you but I don't need your answer Ajaya, have you given a higher rating to your acquired status than to the love of your Maiya Saheb? If you have done so, I must conclude in great sorrow in my innermost heart that I have placed my love in a most undeserving place. But, from the very beginning, as I gradually became aware, I have loved you (I could not but love) and today I have no way out of it either, despite the dreariness of it. I shall not try to free myself from the situation I have found myself in. If it is possible for you, Ajaya, rejoice, and give my love a place of pride in your heart for you are my love, an enduring love..."

With the letter in his hand, Ajaya was compelled to confess to himself in his sub-consciousness that all his efforts in life have been in vain. All that he had suffered have been for nothing – in politics, his imprisonment, and his leadership. Finally, he understood how his recent past

years had been spent in great suffering for no purpose at all. The extent of his despair included the revolution and the changes that followed it. He had nothing to do with it, he had gained nothing from it. On the contrary, he had lost everything because of it. The path he had taken in politics was not his own, nor did he gain any satisfaction from the sale of his soul. He found himself in a great vacuum, with no children, no family, no kinsmen, not even his politics. But there was nothing else he could do to remedy the situation. So, he just kept himself involved in political work.

Gradually in course of time, the economic situation got worse for the feudal class, including that of Maiya Saheb. One by one their valuable treasures found its way into the markets of Kathmandu. Within three years, the middle class among the feudal lords were reduced to poverty. One day Ajaya learnt that Maiya Saheb's husband was going to sell even his house and leave the country. He wanted to try his hand in some business with what had remained of his inherited wealth.

One day Ajaya unexpectedly called at Maiya Saheb's house. The poverty was plainly visible in the drawing room, in her personal appearance – her clothes and ornaments – as well as among her retainers. The woman, who had been very important and still had retained her proper place at the cinema, stood before him now as a feeble, down-beaten sad female. Seeing Ajaya, she smiled faintly and said, "So, you have come. Come in and sit down. I am pleased to see you, Ajaya. We are going away from our country; We are not going to meet again. Or, would we? It is difficult even to guess. I can say it with certainty that although I am not completely incapable of entertaining you, I no longer wish to give you something to eat or to hold you in some respect. But you must also think that there is no need for that now. You have already received the welcome and the respect due to you plenty from me. There is nothing new in this between you and me. But..."

Interrupting her, Ajaya asked, "But why are you going abroad? You could stay on and find some way of making a living right here."

She smiled wryly as she struggled to suppress feelings bottled deep within her. "Ajaya, making a living is not everything," she said, "There is nothing special about life and death either. But if I have my life to live on, I shall live somewhere else and bear the burden of our class and suffer for our sins. One has to bear it anyway. But, let us drop this matter today. I have something to ask you at this very last moment of our separation. Give me your reply from your heart, not from the head. If I do not have your answer today, my death in a foreign country too would be an unsuccessful end. Ajaya, I have borne much. Now I don't have the strength to bear it any longer. So, I am asking you, did you really love me?"

The question took Ajaya completely by surprise. He was speechless and just stared ahead. It was a question that demolished everything before him. Perhaps, it was to prove beyond any doubt that all that had happened between them in the past had been but an illusion. Unable to contain himself any longer, Ajaya's words came out feebly, "What a question to ask? Tell me kindly, I pray, what kind of a question is this? Where is it going to take me?"

Maiya Saheb moved closer to Ajaya. She took hold of his hand and said, "You need not be sorry nor take it too unkindly, Ajaya. Just tell me, had you loved me?"

That was another blow to Ajaya. He said, "It is not necessary to declare that there had been love between us. Was it the real reason for all that had happened to turn out to be in vain? Did it mean that my birth itself was in vain?"

"Oh, if yours was a true love, why didn't you get me?" asked Maiya Saheb, "Why didn't you take possession of me? Being a man, why did you become so timid as not to claim me for yours? Why did you leave me? Why didn't you snatch me up by force as a matter of your right?"

What a dreadful question was it? A question that killed life itself or whatever was left of it! ... Ajaya was stunned. He just kept staring. Maiya Saheb looked tired and lost. In a very feeble voice, she said, "You mean that you had loved me, but dared not come out openly and assert yourself? How many times did I try to encourage you to be bold enough? But you lacked the seed itself and so there was no fruit. I had lost all hope and until today I kept thinking so. It has become clear today. Well, such is my fate! Otherwise, this Maiya Saheb should have no reason to turn into a useless thing! Well, if you could not get your love in life, there is nothing you can do but to consider it as of little use the rest of your life."

For a moment, an atmosphere of dreadful silence prevailed. Then, drawing a long breath, Maiya Saheb resumed, "Ajaya, now you may go. I have many things to take care of before our departure for a foreign land. You have come in a car. Go on now. I'll see you out."

Just outside the gateway, Maiya Saheb stopped momentarily. She removed a costly diamond ring from her finger. Seeing her trying to slip it into his own finger, Ajaya protested, "What are you doing? It could be of some help in a foreign place. Oh, why must you go so empty-handed? Is there time today for this ... This...?"

Maiya Saheb interrupted Ajaya. "Certainly, Ajaya, this can be of some help in a foreign land," she said, "And I may suffer because I don't have it, but give me no reason to think that I should have given it to Ajaya as a keepsake, the very last one. Let me be what I am and where I am, Ajaya."

Speechless and almost senseless, Ajaya only stared at Maiya Saheb. He could no longer bear to have her look at him but tears rolled down uncontrollably from his eyes. There was an atmosphere of total silence. The silence was only deepened as Ajaya and Maiya Saheb stood, betwixt and between their outer and inner selves, lost in the deep love that had bound them together.

*(Tr. Kesar Lall)*



## **GOVINDA BAHADUR MALLA 'GOTHALE'**

*Govinda Bahadur Malla 'Gothale' (1922) has to his credit more than half a dozen literary works including three collections of short stories. As a story writer he is adept in exposing human mind in work as revealed in the story included here. He was awarded the prestigious Academy Award, Tribhuvan Pragya Puraskar in 1985. He is an honorary member of the Royal Nepal Academy.*

### **WEDDING**

Bhunti's marriage was about to be settled. Just this morning a woman-related to the prospective bridegroom visited her parents to discuss the matter. Bhunti kept entering the room on various pretexts, to bring the hookah to her father or enquire her mother something or other – pretending she knew nothing about the matter. In spite of her restraint, however, her true feeling was clearly evident. Her face would get red and then drained of blood, that made her feel as if she was going to be buried deeper and deeper down in the ground through shame. Snatches of the conversation about the marriage would, without doubt enter her ears as she moved back and forth. The long bushy moustache of her father, Singh Bire, would move slowly when she entered the room and he smiled, setting his teeth together, at his wife. Bhunti's mother, however, would keep listening to the visitor, staring at her round plump face, pretending she neither cared for her daughter nor understood what was being said, nor noticed his smiles.

The visitor concluded, "We will settle it tomorrow. I will first send a message there and see what their reaction will be. Or else I myself will go there and come back day after tomorrow and then talk the matter over again. Won't it be alright? So far as I believe, my nephew, Lala, will

certainly marry your daughter. Please be assured about it. Whom else will he marry if he rejects such a charming, good-natured girl, born of a noble family?"

With this, she went away.

Singh Bire said to his wife, "What do you think! After all she has to be given away."

The old woman said, somewhat sadly, "She has to be!" Once again with some indifference she continued, "We cannot but give her away."

Singh Bire said, "If we do not avail ourselves of this opportunity, where shall we again find a suitor"?

"Where we shall find indeed!"

"I wonder, what has become of you. As we cannot keep but give her away to someone, one day, is there any use feeling depressed from now on?"

The old woman felt ashamed and said, "Who says that I am depressed?" But, becoming serious again, she added, "The point, however, is that we have brought her up to such an age!"

Meanwhile, Bhunti came in and said, "Shall I let out the chicken, mama?"

The old woman, by then, had controlled herself. She said, "Go and let them out, dear! You could have done it without asking. Usually you did it yourself ..."

Singh Bire burst out into a laughter and the room resounded with it. The old woman became cheerful. Bhunti turned her back bashfully and hurried out with her head held low.

Singh Bire called out, "Bhunti, Bhunti!" There was no response. Then he raised his voice, "Bhunti!"

This time there was a response, "Yes, dad!"

The old woman smiled and said as if she was in anger, "What is it – always – Bhunti, Bhunti! Is this the

proper way of addressing a girl of marriageable age? Couldn't you have called her by her proper name?"

"Ah, yes, you are right!"

Bhunti came slowly, her face grave as if she was dejected. Singh Bire picked up the *chilim* (tobacco-pot) and said, looking at her face for a while with a mixture of sorrow and excitement in his eyes, "Please go, my dear Bhunti! and bring this pot filled ready for smoking."

The old woman broke in between and said, "Again the same – Bhunti, Bhunti! Don't you hear me – she has come of age?"

"Oh! I am sorry. Go, my dear Durga!"

Bhunti felt hurt, "Oh, you too!" And then went away.

Singh Bire followed her with his eyes and said, "The suitor is reported to be forty years old. How old is your daughter? Will they make a suitable pair?"

Bhunti stopped for a while and then disappeared from their sight.

The old woman said, "Did you have to say so as to be heard by her? How can a forty-years old man make a suitable match for a girl of sixteen years?"

Singh Bire laughed and said, "You see I have attained the age of fifty years. Do you think I am old?"

"No, sir! you are a young man of sixteen years!"

Singh Bire laughed again and said, "I suppose you remember me always talking of marrying a young girl? In case I did, I am sure you will not give me a single drop of water to drink."

"He who cannot afford to perform the marriage of an only daughter speaks of marrying a young girl himself!"

Singh Bire instantly became grave and said, "Don't worry for the expenses. I will arrange by all means. Isn't it,

firstly, a matter only of a few hundred rupees? Secondly, there are still many days left."

The old woman said, "Why don't you ask your son, your grown-up son, who already has a wife?"

Singh Bire interrupted, "We should not in any way miss this opportunity. The suitor, you see, is a rich ... a really rich man. He sows every year as much as one *muri* of paddy. Not an ordinary thing! Imagine what else such a person will not have. They say there is no counting of how many cattle he possesses. What more do you want for your daughter? Do you hear she will be almost like a queen? He is said to have a little son twelve or thirteen years old, who has already lost his mother. There is, however, no need to worry about that too. The boy will, in course of time, become just like her own son."

"He will," the old woman said coolly.

The old man said, "Anyway we have to give her away. Or else, being a fully grown-up daughter, she will be a stain on our nose..."

The old woman did not like the matter. She broke in between, "Nonsense! A child so innocent..."

When the meal was over, the old woman said affectionately to her daughter, "Daughter, fetch a basketful of grass today."

Her mother's fond words made Bhunti shrink within herself but at the same time was greatly flattered. Just then her elder brother entered and joked, "Really wonderful you are, mama! Is it proper to send a girl, just about to be married to a wealthy person, to mow grass? What a pity!"

Delighted, the old woman said, "What is there to be ashamed of? Don't you see the parents are poor? And then, do you think she will not have to gather grass there too? How can you expect her to pass her days idly even in a house as wealthy as that?"

The brother rolled his eyes and said laughing loudly and looking at his sister, "Will you then, not really care for us poor people?"

The old woman said, "Believe me, you will miss her when she will go away, because you will have nobody then to mow the grass or look after the cattle. To speak of your wife ..."

The brother was perplexed.

Bhunti took the basket on her back, put on headband and walked down the hill with a sickle in her hand. There were maize plants on all sides and the sun was shining brightly. The hills and mountains were all bright and green down to the base. The atmosphere was nice, mild and enchanting. The wind swept through the maize, moving the stalks by a surging wave. Bhunti looked back at her house above, standing in the midst of hills, wrapped, as it were, in green apron, showing only the top painted with red clay. there was a gentle excitement all over her body, and a tender feeling squeezed out in her heart. She stood motionless for a while.

She said to herself, "Oh! this mowing business!"

Then she slowly, walked down to the dale. As the complete expression of her desires and the happy state of her mind a strange feeling welled up within her, trying to force out through her throat in a melodious outburst. However, she restrained herself, "Why should I be happy, as if I would leave right now?"

Yes, after a while, the melody did break out all of a sudden, "Nana-nana –" and then:

"To-day's my turn to gather the grass;

From woods the guard did turn me back."

She became all the more excited, "No, not this way -

"To-day's my turn to gather the grass;

From woods the husband turned me back."

She eyed all around, biting her tongue – "If anybody hears me?"

"What then? Am I really going to be married!" She thought, "Why should I be sorry? What is the use of crying from to-day? The marriage is yet to be settled? But who can escape from marriage?"

Again, proceeding further she thought, "Why is my sister-in-law so proud? She boasts, perhaps, of her rich parents. If she has come from a rich family, let her. Having come to live with us, she should live as we do. Why should I care for her? I too ..."

A moment later she said again, "I too will, in no way, be inferior to her."

In spite of her repeated restraint, the feelings kept rising, inciting her to go back right away, challenge her sister-in-law and swell her cheek also in pride.

"As for my sister-in-law, she has come to live with a poor man!" she said to herself.

Immediately, however, she thought, "Fie on this nature of mine! Are not my parents also poor?" Whether because of her mean thought or because of her poor state of mind she felt somewhat depressed.

Tears welled up in her eyes. She saw her father's helpless and pitiable face with the bushy moustache. She saw her mother's harsh but affectionate face, and said to herself, "Father seated in a serious mood, smoking the hookah and Mother was saying, with her cheeks resting on her palm, 'What is the use of bringing up a girl? She will not be here to assist me when she is grown up. The daughter-in-law is of no use as she is from a rich family, and the son being hen-pecked, why should she bother about us?' Father's reply was 'Where has he spent so much money? Had he given it to me, I would have got back the land mortgage. It goes, after all, to him afterwards.'"

Her imagination soared still higher. She had different visions one after another. She walked on with a tilt beyond the field of maize and crossed over the stream, leaving behind her the bushes and bowers. Her mind worked again, "I will have beautiful dresses to put on. In what respects am I inferior to my sister-in-law? To me also love ..."

"Bhunti, O Bhunti, where are you bound for?" Jetho Khatri from the other village called, in an artificial soft voice.

Bhunti looked to the left. Jetho Khatri was smiling, exposing all his teeth. Bhunti twisted her mouth likewise and said tongue in cheek, "Why should anybody care where I am going?"

"Please be not serious, Bhunti! I was just asking."

"Why should I be serious?" Bhunti said, as if she was really angry. "It is none of your business to ask wherever I am going. Is it?"

"Bhunti dear, wait a minute please. I have something to tell you."

"Don't tease me much, I tell you. Or else, with this ..." she said pouting and resumed her walk, laughing. Jetho followed her. "If you so desire, you may kill me and strike me. No complaint would I ever make? Why should I be unhappy, if Bhunti herself slays me?"

Bhunti proceeded, feeling delighted and thinking, "In what respects is he inferior? Will anybody be inferior only because of his forty years? Sani's husband is also that age. She has no worry whatever. Her husband had already given an ornament for her. How much he loves her! Does he look old? How close are they two of them!"

Bhunti fancied, her husband coming and catch hold of her hands. She rested her head on his breast and said, "You have no love for me!"

Meanwhile, a song resounded in the atmosphere – "Day and night I keep on remembering –" Bhunti heard

somebody down the dale, singing, "Forget me not, O please!" With jubilation in her eyes she shot a glance – that was Kanchhi singing, as she was breaking the clods. Rolling her eye over and over again, she called out, teasingly. "Kanchhi, O Kanchhi! How will you dare to go home? Your husband is waiting there to thrash you."

Twisting her torso and heaving her breast, Kanchhi replied "Right O, my husband does habitually beat me. But are you sure what of sort husband yours will be! Now you know only to speak of others."

"Tell me then where mine is?" She walked further laughing.

"You will find out in a day or two. So said your mother the day before yesterday ..."

"It's none of my mother's business!"

"If you did not look for one by yourself!"

"I'll neither look for one nor marry. Need I become a slave like you?"

"Let me then see you become a mistress. You will come to your sense only when you will be dragged down by your hair."

Bhunti almost wanted to say, "Not your sort of a husband for me!" Checking herself, however, she said, "Don't think that everybody will be like yours."

"What an immodest girl!" Kanchhi said in jest.

Bhunti cast a sidelong glance and tittered. Once again she looked back and saw Kanchhi looking at her with great envious eyes. Bhunti controlled herself and burst out into a laugh after she had walked some distance.

She began to think again, "Why is it that my brother alone does not beat his wife? Why could he not do so? She must know how to bind one with spell and charms." All of a sudden, hatred and anguish arose in her mind,



"Adultery with as many as ten persons! She cannot but make herself pretty always painting her eyes. What else can my brother do but suppress his feelings bound as he is by a spell?"

She arrived at the open place adjoining the woods where a few cattle were grazing. She put down the basket, with a sigh, intending to mow the grass, "In what respects would my husband be inferior? In no way can he be inferior at least to my brother. The way my sister-in-law behaves!"

She began to mow the grass and put that into her basket. A little later, words came out of her throat and these became a song. Her sweet rhythmic melody swelled and faded in turn. Pathos and disappointment in love using hills, dales and streams as a medium found a vent in her song.

Later she heard a man singing to her.

"Walking along so far from home.

Bhunti! to win your love. I have come"

Bhunti instantly turned her eyes. The person waiting for her, likewise as full of desire and thirsty for love, was Bire Khatri. He was seated, comfortably at a little distance. A shy smile appeared on her face and her heart began to beat fast. Pretending she had nothing to do with him, she went on mowing the grass. Bire raised his voice to a pitch resting his cheek on his palm –

"An instrument to play, why should I feel shame

to come and meet you!

Amidst these hills, dales and woods

to come and meet you!"

Thereupon, Bhunti rolled her eyes and sang in a shrill voice, as she pressed the grass down into the basket:

"A stem of maize and a trifle like me,  
would you ever care a bit!  
By troth the rice fried dry would  
ever be liked by you to eat!"

In reply to this, Bire coughed and sang again, raising his voice still higher. For some time there was an exchange of questions and answers. The song was full of passion and desire – a desire to go far beyond the mountains, streams and green woods to a fanciful place where they could, forgetting themselves, freely dance and play. In the pretext of love they wanted something else as well.

Bhunti said completely forgetting herself,  
"Trembling leaves, disturb not, please,  
My mind in any way like that!  
The seed of paddy, my life, my property,  
Steal not in any way like that!  
This hope of mine, whose to feel the sign,  
On this side of the drift ..."

Bire called out in a quavering voice, "Bhunti!"

"Yes?" Bhunti replied,

"Bhunti, won't you smoke?" Bire sprang up and made a move.

"Why not, if you give me one?"

Bire advanced scanning all around him as Bhunti stood both legs trembling. It seemed to her the woods, the fields and the mountains were all whirling. The nearer he came, the more she became nervous and felt herself shrinking within herself, but not without titillation. The heart kept on shrinking.

Bire came closer scanning the whole horizon when he held out a cigarette, and Bhunti stretched her hand to take it, he caught hold of her. Bhunti looked upwards and downwards, and implored her eyes pale as she looked at him helplessly. "Leave me alone, please. People may come."

Bire struggled to pull her closer and said, "Not even a worm will turn out not to speak of people!"

The wind was blowing, but now it made startling sounds. Both of them were startled and looked above. There was a kite flying up all alone. A calf lowed. Some by a flutter of sound came from afar but no human being was to be seen.

Bhunti pleaded in a quavering voice, "Leave me, please. I pray." Bire, only drew her closer and said, "My darling Bhunti!"

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The sun was about to set, when Bhunti left for home. The warmth had gone, and the sun was behind clouds. The wind was colder than before, and the trees were shaking violently. A few persons were on their way going back home with baskets on their backs. Bhunti moved on with measured steps as before with the load of grass on her back. No excitement was left in her heart. Mute was the mind and the imagination had taken no shape. Her thoughts were inconsistent. She was relaxed in body but her mind was full of remorse. She moved on with her head low. She was feeling as if something she had lost. She wished, she could sit down and cry or even laugh.

At the same time desire arose within her to take her sister-in-law tightly in embrace and then fly far away becoming light and weightless, or slip together all at once down a slope. She kept climbing slowly. Reaching a little higher up, she turned her eyes towards the house. She

saw the house wrapped in the green apron, and showing its haughty top exactly as before, but with a stern look at Bhunti.

*(Tr. Madhav Lal Karmacharya)*

## **BISHWESHWAR PRASAD KOIRALA**

*Bisweswar Prasad Koirala (1914-1982) had to his credit nine literary works including two collections of short stories. He was known for his work on sex psychology, as the story included here. It was first published in "Nepal Today."*

### **PABITRA**

Her name was Pabitra. She was squint-eyed, because of a goitre her neck was distorted and as her left leg was slightly shorter than the right, she limped as she walked. To the beautiful creations of God, Pabitra happened to be a living antithesis.

She was primarily the cook of Pandit Keshavdeo, and her duty as a cook apart, she had to sweep Keshavdeo's room, make his bed and clean the pots and pans. Keshavdeo had offered her a room on the top floor just below the tiled sloping roof. (The kitchen was by its side. Here was an open verandah which was used as a washing as well as Keshavdeo's bathing place.) Once or twice when he happened to look in the direction of her room, he saw a mat, a big but cheap woollen rug which served the dual purpose of bed and cover. A comb discarded by him and a wooden oil pot were on the shelf of a small opening made through the wall in order to allow air to flow into the room.

He was single. How Pabitra came to his household he had forgotten. But whenever he thought of employing a more presentable cook in her place, he felt sorry for her and could not dismiss her.

Keshavdeo was in service. The whole day he used to be in office. This Brahmin woman did all the chores. She would rise early, take her bath on the road side tap, carry water for his bath on the verandah by the side of the

kitchen and then arrange for him the articles for the daily worship of the deity. She would then sweep his room and start kitchen work. She could sense when Keshavdeo woke up. As he stood on the floor a creaking sound would be produced which she could recognize. Keshavdeo used to rise at a fixed hour which Pabitra fully knew. Quickly she would arrange for his morning toilet. As she would meet Keshavdeo the first time in the morning, she would enquire if he slept well. She would add, "Why do you study so late in the night? The whole day you work in office and if you keep late hours you will shatter your health." She felt uneasy about his health and kept on repeating the warning. Keshavdeo would reply, "The night was hot, I could not sleep soon."

"I had never known such heat in Nepal (meaning Kathmandu)", agreed Pabitra. "Why this heat?" she mused. "Kathmandu is experiencing heat as in the plains. They say that during Kaliyuga the whole world gets hotter...".

While taking his meals, Keshavdeo complained, "There is no salt in the *dal* (lentil)."

Pabitra made a sound that resembled a camel's cry and bit her tongue. She looked at the stone slab where salt was powdered. She had forgotten to add salt to *dal*. Instantly she took some salt from the slab and put it on one side of Keshavdeo's plate.

"To-day you could not take your meal. How forgetful I am! I mess up my work like this..."

While Keshavdeo was putting on his clothes for office Pabitra brought him some *dhakane*<sup>1</sup> "You could not take your meal to-day. You could not possibly go hungry, so I prepared these."

As Keshavdeo left for office, she closed his room, went upstairs and began to clean the utensils. Crows collected there to pick up grains of rice. Only when they

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1 A delicacy made of milk, butter and rice.

tried to peck right from her hand she drove them away. But the crows returned soon for the grains. Then the anger of Pabitra knew no bounds. Instead of scaring them away, she would abuse them, "Rotten swine ... " From the verandah of the neighbouring house, Tataju would say, "Look, how shameless these crows are. Finding her alone, they are troubling this Bajai (Brahmin woman). Baje (Brahmin, meaning Keshavdeo) is also away." Hearing these sympathetic words, Pabitra would say, "Master has gone to office. After working the whole day in the office, he returns home tired. Due to heat, he cannot get sleep in the night. He alone has to do all the work in office. The other assistants and the clerks are useless. If he is not there, work comes to a standstill. His is the hardest job of all in the government office. The customs office has to maintain records of all the articles imported into and exported out of Nepal. If there is a slight mistake, the blame is on him... He eats so little. If the food preparation is not up to the mark, he cannot even take a morsel ... Our master has studied a lot. He knows a lot and has mastered all subjects. It is very difficult to study English. It shatters one's health..."

When she went to the roadside tap to fetch water for evening meal, she found servants of other houses filling their pitchers. She had to wait for her turn. She sat on a stone slab close by and said, "These days Nepal is as hot as the terai. The whole night sweltered."

Carrying the pitcher, as she was going up the stairs, a number of gentlemen asked her, "Is Keshavdeo upstairs?" They seemed to be his office colleagues. She looked at them reproachfully and said, "No! No! He is not there." And she went upstairs, murmuring, "Where have these good-for nothing fellows come from to waste my master's time."

Keshavdeo was in his room. After his return from office he was smoking his hookah. Pabitra did not like visitors. She put the pitcher in the kitchen and went to Keshavdeo's room and said, "Some gentlemen had come just now. But I sent them back, saying that you were not at home. They do not allow you even to have a little rest."

Keshavdeo did not speak a word for a while. But after a few moments he said softly, "You should not turn away men who come to the house. This is not done."

Pabitra admitted to herself, "I should not turn away visitors who come to the house. This is really very bad of me to have done so. This brings ill luck."

Thereafter whenever she heard knocks at the door she would go down as fast as her weak legs could take her, and she would say panting, "Master is not at home now. Please go upstairs and wait. It is time for his return from office."

One day she heard that Keshavdeo had approved the photograph of a girl and had decided to marry her. She felt a pain all of a sudden. The whole day she did not speak to anybody and did her chores without a word. At night she was feverish and had pain all over the body.

The next morning as usual, she went to the roadside tap for water. There she told her friends, "My master will soon be married. The girl has been selected from so many photographs. She has a rose - like face."

While cleaning utensils on the verandah, she said to Tataju, who was cleaning her utensils on the verandah of her own house, "Do you hear! My master is going to get married. The bride is said to be very pretty."

Tataju joked, "So you are getting a rival."

Pabitra uttered a cry of fear and then laughed. "Hush", she said and went into hysterics, "Ha, ha..."

When the master came home, Pabitra softly said, "For many many years I have not taken any pay."

Keshavdeo said, "Well! I have deposited all your dues in the bank. Do you need any money now?"

With due modesty she replied, "We would like to spend it".



The sound of 'w' in 'we' came straight from her throat. Since she had turned her face the other side, Keshavdeo could see only the goitre.

The next day, with all her money she went to a goldsmith and said, "Brother! Make me four golden bangles. They should be as are used these days by modern girls. Please make them really very nice." So saying she poured out the money from the folds of her *sari*, and with the balance she went to a clothes-dealer and said, "Give me a beautiful *pharia* (sari) – a real silk one – and a matching blouse also – real Dacca stuff. Please give me the best you have in your shop." So saying, she offered him the balance of the money.

On the wedding day she was here, there and everywhere, attending to some work or other. She could not stay still on a place for a moment. At night she invited the maid-servants in the neighbourhood, fed them well and played *rateuli* (a sort of fancy-dress dance of the womenfolk when all males of the house are away to the bride's house). One of them put on a male dress *mayalposh* and *suruwal* and posed as the groom, and running her fingers as if nursing the moustache said, "I am the groom. Who wants to marry me?"

There was great amusement and everybody laughed. Even Pabitra's peculiar quack was audible. She immediately got up, went to her room and came back with the silken *sari* and the Dacca blouse on and said, "I will marry you."

Again there were peals of laughter when the one posing as the groom went towards Pabitra the bride to give her an affectionate embrace. Pabitra suddenly fell up upon the bridegroom's feet and started weeping. Everyone was amazed. Pabitra wept bitterly for some time and slowly went to her room and bolted the door from inside.

The next day when the bride was to be received at the house, Pabitra was as gay as usual. She put on her best clothes, combed her hair nicely, placed a pitcherful of

water by the door and in order to welcome the newly weds, she stood at the gate. Keshavdeo was the first to alight from the *dandi* and then the bride alighted. Keshavdeo was followed by the bride. As they entered the house Pabitra, standing by the door, laughed her usual laughter.

Keshavdeo was standing in his room and the bride sat by his side. In her bashfulness, she looked a bundle in her marriage apparel. Pabitra stealthily entered the room and addressed Keshavdeo, "These – I have brought my presents to her."

So saying she left the room limping. The bride was looking at the golden bangles left by Pabitra. Keshavdeo took them and whirling one around his finger suddenly turned thoughtful.

After the marriage festivities the wife took her place as the mistress of the house. She cooked the meals herself. Pabitra was relieved of the work of the cook. Her work now was to dust the rooms, fetch water and clean the utensils. But, then, she would watch the cooking done by the wife and would often say, "Master does not like that preparation – you should not put so much spices and oil. He hates taking okra vegetables if water is added to it. That should be simply fried. Please do not put more salt. He likes his food a little undersalted... Milk should be boiled once only ... just a little sugar..."

When the wife happened to make some mistake, Pabitra would thrust a part of her sari into her mouth, turn to the other side and giggle.

While cleaning the utensils she used to say to Tataju "I have started growing old, I get tired soon. I feel out of breath when I carry the water pitcher and the body aches in the night. Now, it seems I have to retire."

(Tr. T. P. Koirala)

## **RAMESH BIKAL**

*Ramesh Bikal (1928), sometime a Member of the Royal Nepal Academy has to his credit more than one and a half dozen literary works including seven collections of short stories. He is interested in depicting life in the village where the common people are sympathetic enough to think over the plight of their fellowmen. He was awarded the Madan Puraskar in 1961 for his story collection Naya Sadakko Geet (The Songs of the New Road) and the prestigious Academy Award Mahendra Pragma Puraskar.*

## **BIRE'S MOTHER**

"Bire's mother died early this evening," announced my wife, "Have you heard about it?" I have had but some mouthfuls when she conveyed the news. I had come to the kitchen only moments earlier, my mind very much preoccupied with a new story. I was not particularly fond of my wife's gossipy nature. Who would relish ill tidings at dinner time? A writer would hardly appreciate an interruption while he was busy spinning a plot for his story. All the way from Chabahil I had been thinking of an outline for a story, but my wife's unwarranted words not only brought the train of my thoughts to an abrupt end but all the sequences I had in mind went astray and I could not put them back together again.

Ah, what a great tale she had to tell, as if she had been out hunting tigers! I muttered to myself, to recount the death of Bire's mother, who had scarcely any standing in the local community. A creature of little consequence, who made her living by doing all sorts of menial services to every family in the locality, a virtual slave!! A bitterness welled up within me and I made a conscious effort to erase that feeling by turning my mind once more to my story.

As a matter of fact, I wanted a story that would stir up the literary world. I had given much thought to pick up the right theme. My story should create an abiding interest. It should be charged with emotion and yet flow smoothly. I wanted the story to have a contemporary setting and imbued with national feelings. I had therefore chosen for my hero a young Lahure<sup>15</sup> recently back home and for the heroine a pretty village girl. They meet accidentally and almost romantically in a forest, where the heroine had gone with a basket on her back and a sickle in her hand to gather fodder for the cattle. The forest resounds with her songs. Enters the young man and enthralled, he listens to her melodies until a leopard suddenly pounces upon her. In a moment the hero jumps to save the girl. Well, then...

Thus, it would be an extraordinary story of adventure and romance with a touch of comedy. Indeed, I did not leave any stone unturned to make my story very, very interesting. A blooming young woman and a young man, both born in the hills, are transformed. Within a few days, the hero discards his army uniform, in which he had proved his own heroism in keeping with the tradition of his race, for the national jacket and trousers. The heroine too no longer parrots movie tunes but sings the songs of her own folk. Can there be a better "portrayal" than this of life in the hills of Nepal and an "expression" of the nationalism of the people? However, my wife's foolish words threw my mind off balance at a critical time when I had almost got the outline of the story. "The poor woman had gone to work for the Ghales," she stated, "She had diarrhea since the afternoon break and the whole night yesterday and throughout today. By evening, she was dead. She didn't get a penny worth of medicine, not even a herb, to cure her."

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15 Lahure, derived from Lahore (now in Pakistan) that was the capital of the Sikh kingdom in the 18th century, where young Nepalese went to enlist in the army of King Ranajit Singh. Since then the Nepalese nationals enlisted in the erstwhile while British Indian army were called Lahure. It is still true for those enlisted in the Indian and British armies.

My wife kept jawing, disturbing my concentration on the story. I damned her in my mind, but apparently it had no effect at all on her. Her monologue went on and on like a monsoon torrent, sweeping away whatever lay before it.

"She was just like us until yesterday," she said, "All flesh and bones, speech and laughter. But where she may have gone today?"

At this juncture I realized that my wife's voice was getting gradually soft. With her sympathy for the dead old woman, I also sensed that my own irritation was going away. My wife has touched a chord in my heart. However, I tried to reassert myself by rousing my bitter feelings once more rather than let that shadowy sympathy overcome me for I was familiar enough with her nature. She wouldn't lift a finger to help somebody, but was always ready to tell tales with tears in her eyes.

So, this is her philosophy and her lecture is of little worth. Without being conscious of it, I let the plate fall on the ground with a bang. The lecture stopped abruptly and in some confusion, she glanced at me with her big eyes. I felt ashamed of my temper. Damn it!

I failed to concentrate on my story however much I tried. My thoughts ran in another direction. Instead of a noble, patriotic story based on a modern theme, I got a glimpse of an aimless movie. In the place of the pretty, robust heroine from the hills with her sharp eyes and sensitive disposition, a totally different person seemed to emerge. She didn't have any quality that a heroine is supposed to possess. She is neither like Kalidas's Shakuntala nor Wordsworth's simple Lucy. No intoxicating smile on her lips nor the captivating innocence in her eyes. She has no rosy cheeks like the apple of Kashmir nor the taste of the juicy orange from Kaski in her lips. Her nature did not show the simplicity of a new-born calf nor the restlessness of a grown-up one. Her heart did not resound with a song of hope nor her voice is a song of despair. On the contrary, her whole personality presented a combination of pitiful poverty, dirt and ugliness beyond

words. Instead of lips moist with orange juice, they were covered with scabs. Instead of a long, beautiful serpentine hair reaching down to the hips, her head was covered with dirty, matted and smelly hair. Her eyes reflected an unknown revolt within her, the result of an unspoken hatred, bitterness and dissatisfaction bottled for long. From her mouth came not a sentimental sad song but bitter words of hatred laced with curses. Instead of covering the hideous ugliness of her body, the rags that she wore – tattered, dirty with dust and sweat -exposed to public gaze the degeneration of her physical condition. The blouse, full of holes, and her *dhoti* in the last stage of disintegration, hardly concealed the arms, the breast and limbs covered with blotches. Fie, fie, a hundred times! Can this creature take the place of my beautiful heroine? I became giddy. A great conflict rose within me. I looked at my wife with all the bitterness in my eyes. It was her mention of that godforsaken Bire's mother that had undone me. My contemporary story of a beautiful young woman has vanished because of this gossipy wife of mine. All the irritation and hatred within me made no difference to her. She kept her monologue going. "Let none - not even an enemy- dwell in this cursed place!" she cried, "There is not a single healer nor a dose of medicine to be found in this place whenever there is a need."

The detestable image that peeped from behind the "heroine" of my story became distinct slowly while the one I had in mind receded in the distance. Finally, in desperation I thought of making a heroine of this weird creature, for she is also a woman albeit the personification of ugliness. She may be sunk too deep in poverty but after all she is a Nepali too. But the next moment I laughed heartily at the absurdity of my own idea. What am I thinking of? On what special feature of that wretch am I to build up my story?

"She was poor alright, but she did not owe a single grain to anyone. On the contrary, everybody in the village was indebted to her. There was none who had not made

her sweat on his or her behalf. Even I am indebted to her. I have not given her one and half pounds of rice as wages for dehusking the paddy," continued my wife endlessly. She didn't care whether I was listening to her or not. All that a singer needed to launch on a classical song was a nod from the audience, after that there was no need to keep on the track.

However, gradually and unconsciously I have begun to get involved with her emotional outburst. After all, my wife also owed something to that miserable old woman! Without a conscious effort, I have begun to think about the life of Bire's mother. The contradictions in her personality, her varied nature and status in the village have begun to project automatically as in a movie screen. Bire's mother was extremely poor and totally helpless, but let anybody fail to satisfy her in any trifle matter, she would flare up at once and rain a torrent of curses. In this way, she took her revenge. "Oh! God, let me see the end of that creature," she would scream, "That blood -sucking *katho*<sup>16</sup>, that bag of sin and wickedness."

The harsh, strident music would soon spread all over the village. All the housewives - the wife of the soldier in the Rajdal regiment, the Subedar's second wife, the Bichari's daughter-in-law - would at once emerge from the kitchen, drop the water-pot at the doorway or leave whatever they were doing at that moment, and lean against the wall around the courtyard, and listen to the music with the greatest interest. Of all these women, the soldier's wife's crafty face would light up with delight. She would draw a long breath of satisfaction, raise her furred eyebrows and seek to pour oil into the burning fire. It was in her nature to take a deep interest in whatever happened in the village, tell one against another and bring a conflict and then watch the resulting quarrel with the greatest pleasure. As Bire's mother comes near her house, she pulls herself against the wall and asks in a

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16 Katho - a derogatory word applied to the Brahmins in the hills.

very smooth manner, "Ah, Naikeni, what has happened to you that you have become so mad?"

"Oh, it was that Mailo *katho*, the bane of the poor," the woman would shout at once in reply. Bire's mother was also known by the name of Naikeni, for her husband was said to have served as the chief of the camp followers in the army during the days of Bhim Shumsher<sup>17</sup>. It was for that reason that she was bestowed the title of Naikeni, the wife of the Naik.

"What has happened? What did Maila *baje*<sup>18</sup> do?," the soldier's wife strokes the fire skillfully.

"Ah, it must be because of his riches that the wretch would not die and that he would treat me like this. Last night, I had pain in my stomach and I had fever too," she said raising the pitch of her voice, "He forced me, despite my inability, to go and dehusk his paddy this morning. He gave me as wages half a pound of rice full of broken bits and grits. Why doesn't that *katho* just drop dead!!"

"What sort of a fellow is he then?," the soldier's wife further inflames Bire's mother, "Shouldn't he pay the proper wage since he has employed you?"

Somewhat hard of hearing, Bire's mother responds in a different way to what she has heard, "That's right. I don't even have a handful of flour at the moment. I have got to boil this broken rice and grits. There was a pound of flour in a pot. But that rogue Bire stole it and sold it for his cigarettes. Or, what he did with it I don't know."

Then, her face that had been flush with revolt fed on her dissatisfaction in life at once becomes wrinkled due to her inferiority complex. A very faint smile appears on her lips in a most pitiable manner and underlines the poverty she had known for ages. With her right hand she pushes her dirty, matted hair covering half the face aside and cringes against the wall like a bitch to give a wide berth to

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17 Bhim Shumshere, Maharaja and Prime Minister of Nepal from 1929 to 1932.

18 *baje* - meaning grandfather, a word of respect applied to a Brahmin.



the great men of the village. And these people, with their head held high and the chest swollen with pride, walked away totally disregarding her. I had also done that, unwillingly thinking of her.

But what have I thought about her? When I scrutinize it now, I find that I have not given much thought at all to her life. Was there anything worth giving consideration to her? There is nothing special, nothing extraordinary about her. So, what should I think? A story-writer looks everything from the point of view of a story. Did she have a story to make me think of her? She lived in a tiny little hut, the size of a chicken coop, in which she could barely breathe her son Bire; a calf; two kids and four chicken. That's all she had in the whole world. Her bare arms were her weapons in the struggle for life. Whenever anyone in the entire village needed something done, she was called in. Whenever Bichari *baje* had to send someone to the mill, or Mahila *baje's* wife was in bed with child; or there was a memorial service in the pandit's family, Bire's mother found herself very, very busy, with no time left for anything else for herself. She visited every family in the village, because she was the only one in the community who had nothing else to do. Other people had their household, their own way of life and their family. None of them had any extra time nor the energy for anything else. It was only Bire's mother who had the time and energy for such activities. The simple reason was that she was of no other use for she was nobody. She had no home to speak of and no family. Whatever she had was of no use at all. It looked as if the villagers lived for her, but in reality it was she who lived for the entire community. She kept the village alive by keeping herself alive.

Yet, in the eyes of the rich and the great of the village she was not even a human being but a machine that had no need of maintenance from time to time. They do not want to acknowledge that even a scythe left for days in the sun and rain gets rusted. But what was the use of thinking either? None would know of hunger himself because Bire's mother's stomach was only half

full, nor anyone felt shame at looking at her ugly body wrapped in rags. No one need be like her, the stomach empty and the body half naked.

Perhaps, rankled by the villagers' mistreatment, she flared up sometimes. With both hands raised to cut the air, she screamed so as to be heard all over the village, cursing and crying against Mahila *baje* or Ghimire or the Bichari's daughter-in-law or some other worthies of the community.

"Let her burn down to ashes! May she not see any of her children at the deathbed!! That bag of sin. She made me wash a mountain heap of clothes, my hands are still painful. She didn't give me anything to eat during the day. Yet, when I picked up a gourd to eat with my *dhindo*<sup>19</sup> in the evening, she accused me of being a thief. That female who just cannot die! If I had worked for Dulai *bajai*;<sup>20</sup> she would have given me a pound of rice and salt and lentils and everything else. When I heated water for the bath the other day and told her that I have no turmeric powder, she gave me so much. I made my soup all yellow with it. But this Ghimre *katho*, there is none so mean as him."

However, what is most surprising is that she would be singing a paean of the same Ghimire she had been cursing a day before.

"Ghimire *bajai* is very good," Bire's mother would declare in reply to Sahili *bajai*'s question, "What have you brought, Naikini?" She would take off the leaf covering the bowl in her hand and grin, exposing all her thirty-two teeth. There was nothing in her hand but some bones that had been gnawed through and discarded and some rice, that too messed up and left by the children.

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19 dhindo – a corn pudding, rated the poorest of foods.

20 bajai – meaning, grandmother, a word of respect applied to a Brahmin woman.

"Where did you get that much, that is neither meat nor rice?" Sahili *bajai* would ask in jest and in some surprise.

"Oh, yes, Ghimire *baje* had three goats slaughtered for the *dewali*<sup>21</sup>. *Bajai* told me to take the children's leftovers. Oh, yes, I also ate to my heart's content. She is so good, there is none like her," said the Naikini.

"Truly, Ghimire *bajai* has been very kind to you. We are not like her, are we?" Sahili *bajai* would add still jesting. She was that type, always finding something to laugh at in all situations. Even her rebuke sounded nice. "That's very good," she added, "You are going to have a *Dasain*<sup>22</sup> feast this evening.

"Well, that scoundrel Bire isn't going to see it. He has not come home since yesterday. I am going to put it in a pot and shove it under the rafters. He will eat it when he comes late today. He went away quarrelling with me." Notwithstanding the comment by Kahili *bajai*, Bire's mother walks away muttering to herself, "Oh, yes the Subedar's wife gave me a pound of soyabean as wages for dehusking the paddy. I had kept it in a pot, saving it to sow on the ridges and around the garbage pit. But Bire's cursed eyes fell on the pot. And he stole it and sold it at Lachuman's shop. He got himself sweets, sugar candy and what not, but did not bring even a penny worth of garlic home."

From the next courtyard, Mahili *bajai* poured her sympathy for Bire's mother. "What sort of a thief was he then? He should have brought something for mother too."

"Well, I beat him up with the bolt hard on his back," Bire's mother said, "He did not return to take his meal."

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21 dewali – an annual ritual in honour of the clan deity.

22 Dasain – the most important festival in the year that falls during September or October.

"Why do you have to pamper that ungrateful son of yours, then?" Sahili *bajai's* jesting tone turns sympathetic, "Why don't you eat it all by yourself?"

But Bire's mother walked on, whether she did not hear what was being said to her or for whatever other reason, muttering to herself.

"Oh, yes, when will he see it? Mahili *bajai* gives me at *Dasain*. The Bichari's daughter-in-law also gives a bowlful. Last year I was told to clean up the pot in which the meat was cooked. I got a bowlful of scrapings from it. Then, she gave me a share of the meat. Who else in the village gives like that? He will come later in the evening and eat it."

Bire's mother keeps on muttering as she walks. Perhaps, in her imagination, she was seeing Bire eating the meat with great gusto. Even when she had gone out of sight, her voice comes loud from the distance.

Then, I too...

The outline of the patriotic and romantic story that I had been thinking about was lost in the fog of my own thoughts about Bire's mother. I was caught up by the ups and downs in the life of Bire's mother. How helpless she was! What a pitiful existence was hers! Although she had lived in the society and under the system from her birth until now, she had failed to understand the world. She was a victim of a cruel system and a plaything for the society but she remained ignorant of it all her life. She was just like a lifeless china doll in a child's hands, lovingly held close to her bosom for days and then broken by her own soft hands. A plaything that sees not the child's face. Bire's mother just could not think of any other way of life than her pitiable existence. All she knew was she was born to work for everybody and in return she expected a bellyful of food. That was the range of her duty and the limit of her rights. The rice and meat left by the children at Ghimire's *dewali* and the scrapings from the cooking pot given to her by the Bichari's daughter-in-law

at *Dasain* were the great expectations in her life – the society's award for her services!

For this very reason, when she found herself pushed even beyond the narrow confines of her inconsequential rights and duties, there naturally came from within her a revolt in bad words and curses that moved the entire village. Otherwise, she craved for nothing else in the world. She was neither jealous of the big bins of rice in the house of the Bichari's daughter-in-law nor her heart burnt because of the Mahili *bajai's* alpaca sari. Her only natural concern in life was a mere pittance in return for her drudgery.

While my thoughts ran fast, preoccupied with the life of Bire's mother, my wife continued her lecture, competing with the wind in swiftness.

"Look at the poor creature's plight now. There is no knowing where her son is. No one knows whether he is in Tibet or in the Terai. How long is her body going to rot in that place? The high caste people must not touch it. What to do? If she had but some property, there would be people from all directions to claim kinship with her."

Now I found my wife's voice mournful indeed. It is quite strange. She is dead, after suffering horribly and therefore she has none. As long as she was strong and her arms and limbs were useful, the community as a whole asserted its right on her. If she did something for someone, another would even raise her wages to get her to work for him. But as soon as her body was no longer hers, everybody became alien for her.

I know this much – it was Bire's mother who had contributed much to make men of these lads, who go about today with heavy moustaches and swollen chests. It was her who had lifted them out of the blood bath as they emerged from a dark corner to the light in the world. It was her who oiled their arms and limbs and promoted their growth and made them strong by all possible means.

So many of them have even suckled her, one of them being myself.

She is dead today. She had nothing; no honour, no prestige, no property. Therefore, in the eyes of the high and the rich, she had no caste of her own. She was beyond the pale of the human race. She had made men of everyone else, but all of them happened to belong to a higher caste and she was of a lower caste. She was not a human being but merely an outcaste.

It seemed to me that a thick, dark fog has surrounded me. Enfeebled and blank in my mind, I left the kitchen. I rinsed my mouth in the surrounding darkness and entered my dark room. But there too my mind continued to dwell on the life of Bire's mother. The poor creature had helped other people to run their households all her life. Irrespective of thanks and rebukes, she served everyone equally well. But the very rice that she had dehusked cannot be used for the last rites for her, nor had she the right to the three cubits of land she had dug up and cleared. The house she had lived in is no longer hers.

But what else I, a helpless pen-pusher, can do for her? I cannot find even a single element in her life to prepare an outline for a story based on her life. What was there in the life she led? No romance, nothing. Her life was an empty, dreary river bank during winter. Or, a naked eucalyptus tree without a leaf. Where can I find a support for her story? Well, well, well. I feel dizzy again. What can I do? I flung myself down on my bed. What really can I do? All right, I give up....

"Well, then the hero and the heroine are bound together in love. That's it."

## **PARASHU PRADHAN**

*Parashu Pradhan (1943) has to his credit more than 18 works including three collections of short stories. He says, "The subjects of my stories are the moments, the feelings of disharmony, aimlessness, dissolution etc.. lying latent in us." According to him, his characters do not speak for themselves, but their mental disposition and nature speak. This is what he has striven to do in the story included here in The Dalle River.*

### **THE DALLE RIVER**

Today the Dalle River was flowing in the same way as before, creating a frightful situation. When Rana Bahadur was returning from the district headquarters to his village today, he crossed the Dalle River with great difficulty. Water surged up to his waistband, but a strong walking stick gave him support; otherwise he would have been carried away, as Tikute the year before. His dead body would have reappeared only at the river Sapsu. The Dalle River, which can be crossed in winter, become mad during the rainy season, as if it were declaring war on all the surrounding villages: "Construct a bridge over me, distribute me into channels and convey me to the fields, bring me quickly under control." But each time a bridge is constructed over the Dalle River, it appears only on paper, and disappears on the same.

The time had come to marry off Rane's eldest daughter. Marriage proposals had been offered from all sides. He, too, had already accepted this, drinking spirits and eating a rooster. But as the wedding day began to draw near, Rane lost his senses. He had neither the money to buy a big pig for the feast nor the courage to buy a simple outfit. And one morning he dreamt about the very Dalle River. The Dalle seemed to be saying, "You can forget everybody, Rana Bahadur, but don't forget me.

I'm your friend in happiness and in misfortune. Because of me, you all are able to carry on with your lives."

Rana Bahadur girded himself up and went to the district headquarters. He had found new courage and spirit. He went up to the table of the chief district officer and shouted, "We need a good bridge over the Dalle River. We can't go on risking our lives all the time to cross the river. We need only twenty thousand rupees for it. As for the rest, we'll collect donations and labour from all people in the village and complete the bridge.

The officer didn't listen to a single word. He was busy with his other affairs. He explained there was no fund; the budgeted amount had not yet arrived.

But Rana Bahadur was not a person to simply return with empty hands. He gave a long speech: To develop the nation was a common responsibility. Down to their last moment, they shouldn't retreat from development works. They should feel patriotic. They needed new modes of thinking and working. The bridge over the Dalle River was their greatest need at present. It was necessary for them to save hundreds of lives swept away during the monsoon. These, their brothers and sisters, hadn't been born to die untimely deaths in the Dalle River - definitely not. He used some words he had learnt in Malaya when he was a soldier there. What development was going on in Malaya! There were roads everywhere and everywhere the splendour of electric lights. Bridges, large and small, had been constructed everywhere. But as for their country... there was not even one small bridge over an important river like the Dalle. They had to cross the river at the risk of losing their life - the same old dreadful situation.

The chief understood only some parts of his speech. But his speech worked like magic on him. Within days a budget estimate for constructing the bridge had been prepared, and one, if not two thousand rupees was disbursed. Rana Bahadur received the amount himself and was freed from great distress. The wedding



ceremony was celebrated magnificently in his house. The dinner party lasted for seven days. One boar was slaughtered every day. All the people in the village praised Rana Bahadur, and he was called a dashing fellow.

A few planks were placed over the Dalle River. Passers-by leaved a sigh of relief - the bridge would be constructed now. Even in the rainy season people would be able to go to the district headquarters easily. Now life would be secure. But except for these planks, nothing more was done. And the next rainy season, the flood swept away these planks, too. The Dalle River became as it once had been. It has fulfilled Rana Bahadur's needs. It flowed on in its own way. An estimate had been made on the bridge of his dreams; for the bridge of his dreams a sum had been disbursed. It had been spent on something or other. The Dalle River felt that it was being ridiculed once more, that once again it stood naked to be mocked.

Another spring came and went. It was another autumn and it was cold. It too passed away. The Dalle River flowed on and on. It again pleaded with outstretched hands: "I've already become stiff. It is already cold. Quickly take me down the hillside. I'll take a bath in the soil there. I'll play there. Meet me among the stubble of paddy. Receive me in the pulp of oranges. Let me not flow straight. Control me. Confine me."

Now it was Shiva Bahadur's turn to listen to the Dalle River. One day he dreamed that the Dalle River was saying to him, "This year you lost a lot in gambling, but you didn't worry about it. You still have three or four plots of paddy and a small hut left. Once again channel me off and distribute me. I'll stand with you there, I'll join you."

Shiva Bahadur went to the district headquarters. Now it was his turn to give a speech to the chief district officer at his table, "Sir, the amount disbursed for constructing the bridge over the Dalle River was misused. There is no sign of a bridge there. Serious action should be taken about it. Now it's necessary to construct a dam at the Dalle River for channels. Our sloping lands are

going waste for lack of channels. The land need irrigation. Paddy should be grown there. How long do we suffer from scarcity of grain? All the villagers will contribute labour. Sir, the channel will be completed in three months. Ten thousand rupees will be enough."

The chief this year, too, understood only some part, of the speech. A small budget estimate was again made, and a sum of ten thousand rupees was disbursed. Shiva Bahadur was glad that he would be constructing a good channel and bring happiness to the village people. An atmosphere of enthusiasm suffused the village: now channels would be constructed along the Dalle River, many terraces would become green and the paddy would droop heavy with grain. Famine would flee the village forever.

Channels began to be dug. At the beginning, people showed great enthusiasm. Within a few days, however there remained only some traces of the channels, there was no water. Overseers from higher up came to survey and supervise. The channels were fine, the water seem to be flowing. But the overseers didn't know whether the water was from the Dalle or from some other river. The Dalle River remained as it was before. There was no sign of either the bridge or the channel. The Dalle River became indifferent. "What matter if the bridge wasn't built? Somebody's wedding was nicely celebrated. What matter if the channels weren't built? Somebody didn't have to shift his house."

And now, in the middle of the rainy season, anyone crossing the Dalle River had a great difficulty. He thought somebody was saying, "During the rainy season, build at least two bridges over me. Distribute me by at least two channels to farm fields during summer. I will awake on pieces of paper. I will arise in dreams. I love whatever you do - a very pure love, because you exist as villagers, and I as river. This relation of ours is eternal and true."

Having crossed the Dalle River, he looked back once more. The Dalle River seemed the same as before. It was flowing the same way.

*(Tr. Niranjan Bajracharya)*

## **MANU BRAZAKI**

*Manu Brazaki (1942) has to his credit three collections of short stories. In the story included here he has presented the reformist argument in a convincing and interesting manner. He is in favour of working for the benefit of oneself and the country, making the best use of opportunities and resources available within the country itself. He has won several awards including Mainali Katha Puraskar, Sajha Puraskar and Ganga Laxmi Puraskar.*

### **A FEUDAL ESTATE**

The Mahendra jeep came from Amlekhgunj. It passed through the Chure Hills and had arrived at Hetauda. It had to be refueled. While the jeep was being refueled – eight or ten litres, they had a light breakfast. Within half an hour, by eight thirty, the refueling and breakfast were over. The sun had lighted the top stories of the buildings in the town. And they resumed their journey towards Kathmandu.

One of them was the driver – a scrawny fellow with an intelligent look. They had just crossed the bridge out of Hetuada when a black dog scurried across the road. The driver braked deftly, changed the gear and kept the vehicle from veering to left. Then he picked up speed again.

"A black dog! Thanks, it was not a black cat," exclaimed the driver with some satisfaction.

"Well, I don't believe in such things," he observed with a smile.

He was in the seat next to the driver. His was a broad face in a well-built body. But he had a slightly

bulging belly. He wore a shirt and trousers in the fashion of the Terai. He had put on a black Bhadgaon cap.

"But ... Sir, in our driving profession, we can't help but believe in such superstitions," explained the driver almost apologetically for, the person next to him happened to be his employers' friend.

"Look, my friend," he replied, "of course, accidents do happen all of a sudden, but it's because of carelessness and thoughtlessness. Tell me yourself, will an old shoe hanging from the truck prevent a disaster when a drunk driver picks up a pretty young woman and drives with her by his side, joking and talking with her all the while? One must make use of one's own skill and deft hands rather than depend upon a silly superstition to say that one has done wisely. The number fourths of accidents would decrease by three fourths if drivers take precaution. Are your feelings hurt by my words?"

The driver was rather flattered that his master's friend had called him a "friend" and used the word *tapai*, the polite form of "you," as between equals. What he had said was also correct and reasonable. So, he couldn't think of a proper response at once. After a moment's silence, as he felt a reply was in order, he said hesitatingly and softly, "But, Sir, it is a traditional practice and one has to follow it willy-nilly."

"Well," he began gently with a smile, "there are many traditional practices – both good and bad, in keeping with the times and out of times. But we have to choose the good and reject the bad ones. That's what we call discrimination. But it's just the opposite in our country. We are giving up our good practices and taking up bad ones. Nor do we adopt the good practices from foreign countries. On the contrary, we pick up their bad habits to wreck our country and our society. That's what is happening in every aspect of our life – in politics, religion, trade, education, art, literature, fashion and in everything else."

The tirade provided the driver with an insight into his passenger's mind and he responded with a faint smile, "That's very true, Sir. If one were to imitate the great and the affluent, one must consider one's own capacity, suitability and compatibility."

The driver's commonsense pleased him. "That's what I'm saying, my friend," he said, "What do we get by imitating the rich countries? To seek to live their life of ease and comfort? Putting on a fool's cap, as the saying has it, the world laughs at us, and like fools, we are pleased. ... Do you smoke?"

With that he produced a packet of Yak cigarettes from his pocket.

"I don't smoke, Sir," said the driver, as he overtook a truck, and added, "I used to, but not anymore. It was costly and it made me cough. Besides, we have to work in an atmosphere of dust and smoke. So, I started *khaini*, tobacco in powder form."

Having said this, the driver felt the urge for tobacco. He spun the steering wheel with one hand and fished out a packet of tobacco dust from his pocket with the other hand, while the passenger smoked his cigarette. For a while, both of them indulged in their respective habit. He didn't talk much until they came to Narayanghat, except occasionally to indicate to the driver to drive slowly. Arriving in the town square the driver, without asking him, stopped the vehicle.

He removed his cap and looked towards the Narayani bridge in a gesture of respect to the river. Replacing the cap, he asked, "What now?"

"It's ten o'clock. Would you care to have your meal?" asked the driver, putting a pinch of tobacco meaningfully into his mouth. "My master always has his meal at nine, before leaving for his office."

"Just now, at Hetauda, we had a full meal. Your master is a *hakim*, a big officer. He had to reach his office

in time. Besides, he has to look after his business interests. So, he had to eat at nine punctually. But I am a farmer, used to eating around eight thirty or nine, followed by lunch around noon. That's the habit among us farmers. But are you hungry?"

The driver was not ready with a response. He thought that his master's friend must be a big landlord, who in keeping with these days of democracy, had modestly called himself a farmer. With a sly glance at his well-fed look and big belly, the driver said, as if guiltily, "No, Sir, no, I am not hungry. We drivers are used to all situations. We eat wherever and whenever we can."

"Well, then, we won't eat at Mugling either. How dirty the eating places at the bus stops are you will find out when you step inside. I don't even want to think of it. It makes me sick. We won't stop in the resorts beyond Mugling either. A sheer waste of money. We'll stop at a small place on the wayside. The food is fresh and pure in these little places. I've also brought with me some food from home. I had come to Birgunj to travel by bus. But I met my friend and he said his vehicle was going to Kathmandu on the following day and I could go in it. So, he kept me with him. Your master and I were together at the S. L. C. class in school. He comes from an old, well-to-do family. He became an officer and founded his own industry. But I kept to my ancestral job – farming."

In the belief that the mild manners of his master's friend were that of a great man, the driver listened to him respectfully, and agreed with him with alacrity, "That's very true, Sir. Farming is the best choice, trade the second ..." Without quoting the saying in full, he asked, "Sir, shall we go now?"

"Wait... since we have stopped, we might chew on some *pan* (betel leaf). As you take *khaini*<sup>23</sup>, get two with

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23 khaini - tobacco leaf powder

*jarda*<sup>24</sup>, for yourself and two plain ones for me." With that, he gave him a twenty-rupee note.

With the *pan* in their mouths, the jeep resumed the journey towards Mugling.

The jeep sped on past Devghat, Mugling and Nepal's first cable car station at Kurintar. The time too went fast with the vehicle. Small teashops and eating places began to appear near little villages along the Prithvi Highway. These little rural hotels and tea shops boasted of no impressive, decorated fronts but you could get tea with pure milk and fruits and vegetables fresh from kitchen gardens. You could also see tasty food being cooked before your own eyes. The jeep passed some of the so-called resorts. He didn't look at these places, but he glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes to twelve o'clock. He began to get hungry. He eyed the driver, who was minding his business of taking the vehicle at a fast pace.

"Have we passed Chitwan?"

"Sir, we are in Dhading district now."

"Well, then, let us halt, my friend."

The jeep came to a screeching halt. Both the driver and he made a sudden lurch. After a moment, he pointed a finger towards an only eating place among some shops on the side of the highway. He took counsel with the driver, "Now, you must be hungry. What about that hotel? It looks clean enough. The hotel keeper is a bright and pleasant woman. A pure, fresh meal with a bright faced cook gives much satisfaction. Look, rice and *dal* soup and vegetables are steaming hot over the hearth. There is a stream of clean and pure water from a bamboo pipe. Let's get down here."

With a quick look at the pleasant-faced woman, the driver brought the engine to a stop. He emerged from the

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24 *jarda* - scented tobacco leaf used in betel leaf



vehicle and as he approached he had a closer and appreciative look at the hotel. It was a small rural hotel with a big hearth with three holes built right in the front. A pot of rice was cooking over one hole and a pot of *dal* was boiling over the second hole. There was a pot of milk over the third hole. Pots of vegetables were arranged around the hearth. The hotel-keeper kept stirring the milk with a large spoon and transferring it into another pot. The man cutting onions nearby was probably the husband. A piece of canvas was stretched over two old roughly made wooden tables and four chairs on the right hand side of the hotel. At a little distance from the front, half a dozen young fellows occupied a large roughly made four-poster bed, intent upon their game of cards.

He placed a big, five-tiered tiffin carrier he had picked up from the vehicle with a loud thud on a table, and went to wash himself at the stream of water issuing from the bamboo. Hearing the heavy thud upon the table, the young men turned at once towards the big tiffin carrier. One of them, about twenty-three years old, who was dealing the cards, said jokingly to the hotel keeper, "Look, Kainla baje, here is a vehicle with rich customers. But they have brought their own food. You don't seem to be lucky today."

The pleasant woman made a retort in the same vein, "Well, my boy, life is like that. Sometimes it rains, at other times it is all hail."

He heard the banter as he returned after his wash. He approached the table and knowing that the woman was a Brahmin, he addressed her with due respect as "bajai," and added, "We surely won't go away without having something from your hotel. Please let the two of us have rice."

The woman glanced at the big tiffin carrier and advanced with two plates of rice. Placing the plates on the table, she asked,

"Shall I give meat too?"

"Of what?"

"Local chicken, Sir."

"No, thanks," he replied, indicating the big tiffin carrier, "We have brought meat from our home."

The driver was going away with his plate to another table. But he stopped him quickly, "Where are you going to sit? Come to my table, my friend. It will be easy for me to share with you the food I've brought with me. Is there any taste in the food when you eat it alone?"

The driver took his seat at the table rather uncomfortably. He removed the hinge from the tiffin carrier and took out the topmost container. It was full of big pieces of fried fish. He put two pieces of the fish for himself and two for the driver. He took out the second container. It revealed big pieces of spiced chicken, which too, he shared equally with the driver. He removed the third container full of duck meat. He put two pieces of fried duck into his own plate and two into the driver's. The fourth container had fried *bagedi*, small quail like birds. He shared it with the driver in equal measure.

All this time the driver was eyeing the sumptuous fare without batting an eye. At last, he couldn't help crying, "But, Sir, so much!"

"Why are you nervous, my friend? Don't you know that the man who works hard must eat a great deal? Now, let me wait until we have finished the meal to open the last container. It has home-made curd and the milk comes from a Jersey cow. Well, let us begin then with an offering to the gods."

Having overheard their conversation, one of the fellows watching the game of cards made his way to the table. He looked closely at the delicious food on the table and commented sarcastically, "You have truly observed that those who work hard ought to eat such good food. But, Sir, in Nepal those who work hard can scarcely

manage to eat millet and nettles. They have to beg even for a cob of corn. Where can your home be, Sir?"

The youth was already drunk early in the day. He exuded a strong smell. "Just wait a moment, my brother," came the response with great restraint, "I'll talk with you after I've finished my meal."

When the driver glanced at the fellow, he gave a hint to keep quiet. As he joined the other fellows at their cards, he spoke to them loudly so as to let the visitors hear him, "What a lordly feast indeed! Fit for those who labour hard!!"

"Yes, it 's wonderful fare. But who can he be?"

"Probably a landlord in the Terai."

"We can't manage to have such food even during the festivals of *Dashain* and *Tihar*."

"Well, if I could go and work abroad but once, I know what I would do."

"But, in spite of my schooling, I'm unemployed. And that bastard of an employment agent cheated me of a hundred thousand rupees I'd managed to get by mortgaging my property. And I couldn't go abroad."

"Who would go abroad if one had such rich fare here itself?"

The young fellows left their game and made their own sarcastic comments. After the meal, he made his way to the four-poster, wiping his hands on a towel. "Greetings, my brothers," he said as he took his seat in a corner. "I've heard your comments and I'm eager to tell you something."

None of the fellows responded to his greeting. They just kept staring at him arrogantly. He began, "Yes, it is true that I look strong and healthy because of the good, nutritious food I eat. But the question is, should such food be available only for a feudal lord?"

The fellows did not respond to this question too. They remained silent with a sneering look. Then, he began again, "Where did the good food come from? Let me tell you, my friends."

Having said this, he smoked a cigarette. Next, he offered the packet of cigarettes to the young fellows, drunk and playing cards during the daytime. None of them took his cigarette. They only kept staring at him. Finally, the fellow who had approached the table to jeer earlier opened his mouth, "Where did such feudal fare come from then? From Japan!"

Not ruffled in the least by the young man's taunt, he spoke kindly, "Look, my brother, the food came from Nepal itself, the fruit of my own labour. Now, listen, I've a pond in which I rear fish. I've planted *sisau* trees in a row, in addition to alfafa on the outer rim of the embankment of the pond. I've planted banana on one side of the embankment. On the eastern and southern corners of the pond, there are two clumps of bamboos. In a corner of the pond, and over it, I've twenty pigs and their excretions make food for the fish. As I've nearly sixty alfafa plants, I've also kept nearly two dozen goats. There are also two hundred ducks in the pond. Then I've about one hundred chicken. I've two buffaloes and this year, I got a Jersey cow. The cow has to be milked three times a day. All the droppings and wastage produced by these animals and birds have been put to use in a *gobar* gas plant. So, I've enough fertiliser for all kinds of improved varieties of out-of-season vegetables from the kitchen garden. Nor do I've to find firewood for cooking purposes. I'm spared also the expense of kerosene oil for lights. So, my brothers, the good, fresh and nutritious food have come from within Nepal, from my own home grounds and not from Japan."

The young fellow could not refrain from making a fresh sarcastic assault, "Oh, what a vast productive estate! Sir, if you have such an estate we have ours in Japan."

The other fellows burst into laughter sarcastically.

He did not lose his composure and he resumed gravely, "Look, my brothers, all of you look literate, gentle folks to me. I had also only passed the S. L. C. examination in the third division. I could not continue schooling because my parents could not afford it. Like you, I too had once thought of going abroad to make my living. Then I read in a magazine about the agricultural practices in Israel and that changed my mind. I made up my mind not to leave the country. I reasoned with myself that if they can by professional agricultural practices turn a desert like Israel into a garden in the desert, why can't we make our rich, black fertile soil productive too? Then I devoted myself whole-heartedly to cultivation in a scientific way. All the land I owned measured not more than two and half *bigha*. In the Terai, anyone with that much land was called a poor, lower class farmer. As irrigation was of prime importance for agriculture, the first thing I did was to get a deep well in my land. Then I dug a pond and I went on acquiring other facilities gradually. The pond covers one *bigha* of land. In one *bigha* of land I grow vegetables and in half a *bigha* I plant three crops annually. I did it all within a decade with a loan from the Agricultural Development Bank for which I mortgaged my property. Now I've almost paid back the loan. I earn about four to five hundred thousand rupees annually. I've two sons in boarding school in Kathmandu, and I'm on my way to meet them."

The young man who had been so sarcastic until now was so impressed that a sudden change came over him. He brought his hands together in supplication and said, "I am really sorry, Sir. We misunderstood you completely. I've become a pauper because I've lost one hundred thousand rupees I had obtained by mortgaging my land to pay an agent who promised to send me abroad. Will you have pity upon me and take me along with you? I'll work for you to make my living."

He broke into a smile with much feeling and placed a hand on the young man's back, as he said, "Look, my brother, there is no need to go abroad if you make a

proper use of what you already have. Only you should not be lazy nor feel shame. We Nepalese and our Nepal have become poor because of our tendency to live like parasites depending upon loans and aid. He who takes loans and spends his time doing nothing will never be rich. You must stand on your own legs. Remember the saying, only he who rides the horse falls. Don't be disheartened. Your property is with the moneylender on mortgage. You've not sold it yet."

With that, he added jestingly, "After all, I'm a feudal landlord with an estate of two and half *bighas* of land. Well then, good-bye, brothers."

The Mahendra jeep coughed and continued on its journey towards Kathmandu.

(Tr. Kesar Lall)

# **NOVELS**





## **RUDRA RAJ PANDEY**

*Rudra Raj Pandey (1900-1986) had to his credit four novels including Rupamati, the first chapter of which is included here. He was second in line of the novelists who introduced original novels in the Nepali language. He was interested in writing about the life of the common people which he felt needed reform in its moral and spiritual demeanour. He was sweet and fluid in his language and lucid in style.*

### **RUPAMATI**

"Hey, Chameli! Oh, Chameli, Chameli! Is that daughter-in-law of ours still sleeping? Hasn't that daughter-in-law of ours woken up? She must be still all sprawled out. The sun's rays have already reached Babulal's roof. Disgusting! Modern girls have no shame. Go and tell her a crow will come and prick her." The sound of such grumbling entered Rupamati's ears during that enjoyable time when sleep had left her but drowsiness was telling her, Wait a moment, wait a moment.

Her morning saw her get up before sunrise, sweep the house from top to bottom, smear the entrance with a mixture of cow dung and red clay, clean all pots and pans, prepare for worship and sort out the vegetables. If towards midday, after the first meal, she managed to lull her mother-in-law to sleep by massaging her legs, she might win one or two hours of free time. Then she would at least be spared the nagging, even if she still had to twist wicks into shape. The rest of the time there was a steady stream of nit-picking. She plunged into a day of do this and do that. Come evening, darkness set in as she was performing worship or twisting more wicks.

Her father-in-law, who was the priest of the colonel of Battisputali, never came home before nine. Everyone in the family called for their rice and then fell into the lap of the goddess of sleep. But Rupamati had to help Chameli do the dishes. Her mother-in-law had allowed the latter to take things into her head, and the result was that she didn't care a fig for anyone else's opinion. This was how the days passed.

The previous day had been the Teej<sup>25</sup> day of fasting. What was poor Rupamati to do? While the thirteen-year-old was telling herself to get up, the shouting of a flower seller – "Swā mala<sup>26</sup>?" – awakened her mother-in-law.

Rupamati sprang out of bed and began sweeping up the refuse. Her mother-in-law's mouth did not cease to give forth, but since her grumbling was a daily occurrence, it had come to seem as ordinary as a dish of rice and grams. In the meantime Pandit Chavilal woke up. Chameli filled the hookah with tobacco and brought it to him – a must as soon as he arose. He set the hookah gurgling, and then his wife entered the room, spouting off about how the late rise of their daughter-in-law by half an hour was an unpardonable crime. She began telling the whole story to her husband. "How shameless the women of this kali-yuga<sup>27</sup> are! I've been shouting since the cock crowed, and she still doesn't get up! If we had behaved that way, what would our mothers-in-law have done to us? Working day and night didn't satisfy them."

The Pandit had no interest in her story at all, having his own worries to ponder. He was much given to thinking things over while smoking. This was his time to commune with himself. His failure to utter a sound plunged his wife into despair. Her shouting became even louder.

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25 A day in August-September when women fast, bathe and pray for the long life of their husbands.

26 A Newari expression meaning "Do you need flowers?"

27 The fourth of four ages of the world, and the one in which we are now living – a period of calamities and disasters when virtue has ceased to hold sway.

"It's because her father-in-law is spoiling her, isn't it? Would she be off in a world of her own for no reason at all? Chameli. Hey, Chameli, come, come! Let Rupamati do what she likes. It's out of my hands." She went babbling out of the room.

Pandit Chavilal broke out into a profuse sweat. At every little irritation his wife let out her anger; what trifle was behind today's outburst? He thought it over a bit and arrived at the conclusion that the main reason for her rise in temper had been the fasting the previous night to celebrate Teej. Just then his young son Ravilal woke up and began crying, "Mother, Mother!" A hero emerged to save the Pandit from the plague that that day brought. Hearing her son's call, Chavilal's wife stopped her descent one floor down and returned. As it was, she was slightly hesitant to storm out of the house so, for fear of what her neighbours might say.

The Pandit seized his chance and bellowed out an abuse at his daughter-in-law. His wife's feelings were assuaged. She had gained a victory. Now who would be unmoved by her lion roar? The innocent daughter-in-law had no recourse but to grind her teeth and suppress the anger that arose from the gratuitous reproof. The Mahabharata war had come to an end after eighteen days. There was a Mahabharata war now going on in Pandit Chavilal's house, but nobody knew how long it would last.

Every day something came between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Everyone was amazed by the latter's powers of endurance. It would have been difficult to admit that she knew no faults at her age, but the mistakes she committed were minor. The Pandit's wife, though, didn't even consider that they might be of human origin. It was her custom to make a buffalo out of a flea, a mountain out of a molehill. She had no feel for appearances – the need to keep domestic affairs domestic. Her instinct was to sound the drum. The senior women among her neighbours would come, and hours passed in discussion.

When the topic of daughters-in-law came up, they began reciting their lore. All the other women criticized their own daughters-in-law. Madam Pandit, however, was in a league of her own. Everyone truckled to her; everyone came out with a "Well, I declare!" for the old lady. It is the nature of humans to join in the uproar, and she was pleasantly surprised.

Another gathering of mothers-in-law took place three or four days later. Madam Pandit took the chair. The main subject of discussion was "Modern Daughters-in-law – Useless, Naughty, Coquettish." Narahari's aunt from next door got things rolling by telling what had happened to her. "Just consider the outrage! During the Teej festival I had to fast and keep the oil lamp burning the whole night. I felt so sleepy I dozed right off. 'Take care of things,' I told my daughter-in-law. The next day, when we returned from bathing in the Bagmati, she went to bed claiming to have a fever. No consideration at all for my having fasted! That she should pick that of all days to have a fever, the sinful creature! The doctor hasn't allowed her to eat anything these past three or four days – a fitting punishment for having staged her little show!" Other ladies chimed in. Narahari's aunt was delighted. No sympathy was expressed for the daughter-in-law "on her deathbed."

Now it was the turn of the captain's wife. Her anger over her daughter-in-law was even greater. She said, "All of you tell me if it wasn't utterly shameless of her to say, just a day before Teej, that she was having her period. Would our mothers-in-law have tolerated it if we had done something like that? I had to do everything the day of fasting: prepare the articles of worship, soak the wicks, visit Pashupati,<sup>28</sup> perform the worship and tend the oil lamp – utterly exhausting!" Each added her "Hear! Hear!" to the next. The captain's wife was pleased.

Rame's mother came forward and said, "None of you can ever have seen such a despicable daughter -in-law as

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28 Nepal's national shrine on the outskirts of Kathmandu, dedicated to Lord Shiva.

my Rame's wife. My husband brought four barphis, eight jilebis, ten swaris<sup>29</sup> and four mangoes from Rani Saheb for me to enjoy on the day before Teej. I set aside two of everything to eat at bedtime, thinking I'd be hungry the next day, and distributed all the rest to the children. Then I go and what do I see but just one left, the other gone. I knew she'd be ravenous, so I'd already treated her to some rotis<sup>30</sup> and molasses. I gave her braid a few nice tugs before I finished with her." There was a peal of laughter at this declamation. All approved of her form of chastisement.

The colonel's wife came forward. "If you all had to put up with how my daughter-in-law performs her duties, I don't know what you'd do. On the day before Teej she started in to clarify some butter for the sel.<sup>31</sup> When she transferred it to the pot, she spilled about a pint of it. Go take a look and find she's burnt her hands and what not, and the ghee all over the floor. I couldn't control myself. I grabbed her and said, "You witch, what wealth did you bring from your father? Come on now, out with your purse! I didn't let the little lynx eat a thing that day."

"Bravo! Well done!" – thus the warm reception accorded by the circle of mothers-in-law.

The chairwoman's turn had come. She, too, gave a spicy description of her own daughter-in-law's "deeds of valour." Many supported the notion that the punishment given to daughters-in-law was not what it should be. The resolution that modern-day daughters-in-law were good for nothing was passed unanimously.

Rupamati was all ears during this discussion. She uttered a prayer to herself: "O Lord, why did you send me to this world to become a daughter-in-law? If the fate

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29 Typical Nepalese sweets.

30 Flat, circular unleavened bread, prepared from wheat and heated over a flame.

31 A donut-like pastry.

written on my forehead<sup>32</sup> had been to become a mother-in-law, I would not have to perform all these chores today." Few in number are those in this world who can be a mother-in-law without first being a daughter-in-law. Such lucky ones would have to come within the coils of a widower – another state of distress! Moreover, they would not be accorded many days of control over their step-daughters-in-law. Thus the strange rule was ordained by the creator that without participating in household affairs as a daughter-in-law, no woman would ever become a mother-in-law.

(Tr. Shanti Mishra)

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32 The god Chitragupta is said to write a child's destiny on its forehead on the sixth day after birth. Oil lamps are ritually burned, and a bracelet is given to the baby.

## LAIN SINGH BANGDEL

*Lain Singh Bangdel (1924-2002) has served two terms as the Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. He had to his credit four novels. Minute details like these ones drawn by an artist, as in fact he was, were the salient features of his novels as is evident from the chapter included here, an extract from *Muluk Bahira (Out of the Country)* depicting the life of poor Nepalese who go aboard to make their living. He was awarded the prestigious Academy Award, Prithvi Pragya Puruskar in 2000.*

### OUT OF THE COUNTRY

It was winter once more. People from the hills intent upon seeking employment had again begun to arrive in Indian territory since long called Muglan. Young men and women, the middle-aged and the old came in droves, carrying their *ghum*, umbrella made of bamboo and *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) leaves, and *pakhi*, thick woolen rug. Some of them found employment in Darjeeling, sawing and transporting timber, while others drifted on towards Assam to work in the coal mines.

The year was 1914 A. D.

The war had just begun. There was a great agitation all over the world; the hot winds of war blew in all directions. There were not a few of our people who went to the 1914 war. Many Gurkhas flocked to the recruitment depot and enlisted themselves in the Gurkha regiment.

At the depot, they mentioned names, got themselves weighed and measured and they became soldiers, with the *khukuri* knife in the belt. Then they went away enthusiastically, singing "*Janu paryo jarman kai dhawama (We've got to attack Germany.)*"

Every brave Nepali was imbued with the spirit of war. Many wished either to earn fame for their family or else to die in the battlefield. There were a great many people from our hills who arrived in Muglan and enlisted during the 1914 war. Everybody wanted to join the army to see the world.

At this juncture there was a group of men who got enlisted to go to the war. Among them was a young fellow who was an extrovert and became popular from the very first day of his recruitment. When his comrades asked his name, he said it was Ranabahadur. His home, he said, was beyond the Arun River. He had come to Muglan with his wife to make a living, but while working in the Teesta area, his wife had died suddenly after a severe heart attack. He said he had presented himself at the depot, hearing that recruits were being enlisted.

After their enlistment, these Gurkha soldiers left in the train from the railway station at Ghum, waving their hands.

Many Gurkhas earned fame in the 1914 war. The Gurkha regiment also fought in France, it was said. Then, in Baghdad, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, Afghanistan and elsewhere they fought the enemy without the least care for their own life. Two brave soldiers, Karnabahadur Rana and Kulbir Thapa, won the Victoria Cross. A brave race fought a defensive war and proved their worth, thereby making the name Gurkha immortal in the world.

Four years later the war was finally over. The disturbance, the havoc and the terror of war quickly came to an end. The soldiers began to return from war fronts in the different countries. The world was able to breathe in peace after four years of a most destructive war. Now the soldiers were very eager to return home. All of them recalled their home and families. After enduring great hardship, they yearned to return home. They had become wearied of life in foreign lands.



Uppermost in the mind of many of these men were their desires to join their family – some wanted to see their parents while others their "Kanchhi," – the loved one. All of them wished to tell of their adventures, about the battlefield, life in the cantonment, in short, the life of a soldier.

All Gurkha regiments began to return from foreign countries. But a great many of the soldiers were never to know the happiness they were looking forward to. They proved their worth in the battlefield and had died.

It was an early hour in winter. The railway station at Siliguri was covered with mist, but the sun's rays were beginning to filter through it. The train from Calcutta had just arrived and the passengers were getting out, with the coolies carrying their suitcases and luggage. The mist was thick and it was very cold.

There were also two Gurkha soldiers back from the war. One had a muffler around his neck and it also served as a sling for his left hand. His face was pale and he looked somewhat gloomy. The other, in army boots and leg bands, wore a khaki uniform and a wide-brimmed hat. He seemed quite happy. His eyes sparkled, reflecting a restless spirit. The young man was none other than Ranabahadur.

He had kept his hat in place with the strap under his chin. He carried a khaki army bag on his back as well as a water bottle and a *khukuri*. He walked about the station with quick, firm steps. He was full of enthusiasm as he arranged his luggage and seat in the tiny train to Darjeeling.

Dalbahadur was the name of the other soldier. Ranabahadur helped his wounded comrade into the wagon and made him comfortable in a seat.

After four years they were returning home from the war. Having taken his seat, the wounded Dalbahadur seemed to have at last found some relief. At long last, he

was going home at Darjeeling, having escaped from the jaws of death.

The two had first met in the cantonment at Quetta. Ranabahadur was quite an extrovert and friendly with all. Very soon he became acquainted with everyone. During their stay in the cantonment they shared each other's sorrows and happiness. Ranabahadur used to speak about the hills, of how he went to the forests to graze the cattle, of the great fun he had had with the girls who also brought their cattle, and of the times he had gone fishing, and then how he had gone to Tibet for salt. Dalbahadur listened with great interest to his comrade's accounts and then he began his own story, how his father had died when he was but ten years old, of his plight as an orphan and how he became a servant and went about the villages selling milk. At times his eyes became moist when he spoke. "*Dai* (older brother), I have suffered much," he said, "I have had great hardship. After my father's death, I worked as a cooly and as a servant. If he had been alive, I would not have to suffer so much now. My friends in the village who went to school are now employed as clerks. I am very unfortunate. When I look back upon my past I cannot but think that man's life is worse than that of a dog."

As they talked about their past, Ranabahadur sometimes got lost in dark clouds and became restless. There was something that troubled him. He listened to his friend and recalled his own past and he smiled a wry smile. Bound together by mutual sympathy, friendship between the two men became deep.

They were together for some months in the cantonment at Quetta. However, before being sent to the front, the 7<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Regiment was split and unfortunately Dalbahadur was sent to Baghdad while Ranabahadur was dispatched to Afghanistan.

In the course of a battle, Dalbahadur was wounded in his arm. But he destined to live, and he returned from the front. After a few days in a resting camp, he was taken

to an army hospital in the Punjab. For many days, he lay senseless and didn't know where he was taken nor what happened to him. Finally, arriving in the hospital in the Punjab, he recollected the action in the battlefield. And then came the news of the ceasefire. It spread like wild fire throughout the world. The war actually came to an end and all the Gurkha troops returned from the front.

Dalbahadur was still in the hospital when the news came. But he faced a problem in a foreign land. What was he to do? How could he go home? The war was over and all his comrades happily went home. None of the men he had befriended cared a fig about him. He was going to be discharged in two weeks from the hospital. And he had not recovered completely. Consequently, he was very weak. Dalbahadur was very worried.

But, luckily, Ranabahadur came one day looking for Dalbahadur. Seeing his friend in a time of great distress, Dalbahadur was very happy indeed. He held his friend's arms, and rubbing it gently, he said, overflowing with happiness, "*Dai*, how did you arrive here now? Look at my plight ..." Showing his bandaged arm, he said again, "I am in such dire straits. It is always the same for the unfortunate wherever he goes. Isn't it so? Really, *dai*, I am so glad to see you after so many days..."

Dalbahadur placed his friend's hand upon his chest. He took a deep breath of relief and looked at him with great gratitude. Just as a person about to sink in a boundless sea would feel when rescue was at hand, Dalbahadur felt a sense of great relief. He found a great support at a time of distress in a foreign country. He was filled with great happiness.

Ranabahadur's eyes also became moist to find his friend such a pitiable condition. His entreaty was heart-rending. For a while, he just kept looking at his friend with great compassion.

Then Dalbahadur told his friend the saga of his sorrows. Ranabahadur listened silently without

interrupting him. He then made up his mind to look after his friend in his need and to take him back to his home. He didn't care much for himself. After Dalbahadur's discharge from the hospital, Ranabahadur got his wounded friend into the train and took care of him during the journey. He forgot his own comforts and troubles while taking care of a friend in distress in a foreign land.

Thus, they had arrived at Siliguri.

The two friends were on their way to Darjeeling in the train from Silguri station.

On the way, Ranabahadur was jolly and pleased his co-passengers with his bantering remarks that kept them in good humour. He spoke to strangers, asked their names and about their home. He called and waved his hands to people walking along the railway line. Whenever young women came in sight, he waved his handkerchief and winked at them.

Ranabahadur was full of happiness to find himself going back along the way he had come four years back as an enlisted man going to war. He had visions of the house, the room, the village, hills, streams and waterfalls he had left then. The same train was now puffing smoke as it returned to Darjeeling. Ranabahadur recalled the chorus they had sung then as they left the recruitment depot. There were so many comrades that left for the war. Many had died in the battlefields and the fate of many were unknown. How one can be swept away by time and tide! There was no certainty in man's life; here today, somewhere tomorrow and somewhere else on the next day. Question marks all along the way. Ranabahadur was in a reflective mood and dwelt on the philosophy of life as his eyes sought the world through the window in the train.

*(Tr. Kesar Lall)*

## **PARIJAT**

*Parijat (1937-1993) had to her credit more than half a dozen novels the most noted of them being the Sirisko Phool, (The Blue Mimosa), an extract from the first two pages of which is included here. Her philosophy of life is distinctly seen in this short extract. She won Madan Puraskar in 1965, and Best Manuscript Prize and Basundhara Puraskar in 1992.*

## **BLUE MIMOSA**

After our third meeting in the bar, he invited me to his place in Bishalnagar. His house was situated in an area surrounded by mimosa trees. We reached there at noon and it was the season when the trees would present themselves in blue blossoms. There was an old model private motor car kept in a sort of garage to the right of the house. A little beyond grew, multicolored flowers, blossoming in rows, and at the centre lay a patch of green grass almost covered with blue mimosa flowers. Right at the centre I saw a woman of twenty-six. Before my friend noticed it, I found out everything – her stature, dress, height, weight, the way she would look and walk. She was in a white *sari*, white sleeveless blouse, long loose hair; she could not be called an ugly woman. She looked at us with her forehead wrinkled and without expressing any curiosity she moved towards the well. I too was not a sort of person that keeps on glancing with curiosity. There is nothing special about me. My friend was telling me, "The house is in an isolated place, however nothing is inconvenient." While talking in this way, we reached the main door. The blue flowers and the woman had vanished from my sight. He was saying, "This ground floor is also livable, but nobody stays here, it is vacant." We had started climbing the staircase. Near the window of the entrance-hall of the second floor, I came across another

woman of sixteen. Guessing females' age correctly is not any problem for me. She was in a slightly dark, yet an attractive pair of tight *kurta-suruwal*. In a hurry she descended the stairs and went out. Turning my eyes I kept on glancing at her attractive hips. But before I could follow her properly, we crossed the entrance-hall of the second floor and reached the third one. The window and the attractive hips vanished from my sight. Opening a door nearby we entered a large, well-furnished room. There were a few large couches and some large pictures; at the centre a bunch of mimosa flowers was arranged in a vase on a large, round marble table. As soon as I saw the flower vase, I suddenly remembered the pair of legs walking on the patch of green lawn; this flower vase must have been certainly decorated by those hands. The room had a pleasant atmosphere. He was speaking, "We are a small family. Please have a cigarette. I have my mother, my father passed away long ago. My mother too has gone to the plains, at present we are four at home apart from the servants." I guessed, of those four, one is the mimosa flower, next is the window of the entrance-hall, the third himself, and the fourth? Who is the fourth one? He is unmarried. Curiosity was making circles in the cigarette smoke around me and him. The blue mimosa flowers planted close to the window along the wall were swaying in the air. Maybe under the trees there was someone else. He continued, "Besides my mother I have three sisters". Then a wave of curiosity ended there, and I kept my ears sharp.

"You must have noticed, the girl moving about in the garden is my younger sister, her name is 'Mujura'." I repeated the word 'Mujura' in my mind, so sweet a name like the person herself. "She is literate. She stays home, and is unmarried." I had an experience of pleasure. He was speaking, "My second younger sister!" "My name is Sakambari." With the sound of a bullet being fired, another woman of twenty four appeared at the door. Startled, I looked at the door. She was about five feet three inches tall, white in complexion and, with unnaturally

developed breasts in a body that was extremely emaciated. She wore gold-rimmed glasses. Her eyes were sunk deep, shining, like that of old Hebrew soldier, and her hair was trimmed short. She had put on black stone studs on her small white ears. She came in and at once the atmosphere froze. I wanted to laugh at her name, behavior, colour and everything else – but laughter also froze. I could not do anything. I could do nothing. I clearly saw that my friend had begun to feel embarrassed. My friend blushed and trying to conceal the embarrassment, he said, "She is my younger sister; she secured first division in I. A. and since then because of her poor health, she is staying home." He didn't mention her name again and I had already forgotten it. When I lifted my head and looked at her I found her greeting me with her slender, white fingers held together. And like a cat she was looking at me with her mocking eyes. Out of the box on the marble table she took out two Capstan cigarettes and moved towards the door. The situation did not return to normal. Perhaps, in order to hide the uncomfortable situation, my friend called after her when she reached the door, "Bari! Bring some tea for us." I didn't know what was 'Bari'. What kind of Bari, was it that in the context of series of introductions she went away precipitating a landslide. Another time was required to remember her, the time I spent with my friend here was not sufficient. A room was required, an isolation was required. The mimosa flowers were scattered in my memory, now there was no need for asking about the hallway door, there was no need for asking for or giving her introduction. She must surely be his youngest sister, and so she had such an unlikely name. Her identity too remained in darkness that day like the dark colour of her skin.

My friend went on speaking but he looked as if he were confused. He tried to ease the situation yet he could not. He took quick puffs of cigarettes; sometimes he glanced towards the door. Pretending to cough, I stood up and reached the window. Neither Bari nor anyone else

came. A servant brought the tea. We kept on talking about household affairs, and jobs for a long time. When we took leave and left, there was nobody from the drawing room to the main gate in the compound. There was a great silence.

*(Tr. Govinda Raj Bhattarai)*



## **DHRUBA CHANDRA GAUTAM**

*Dhruba Chandra Gautam (1944) has to his credit more than half a dozen novels, including the Phoolko Atanka, (Terror of Flowers). Apparently disconnected episodes entwined together this in the long run takes the shape of a novel in an undercurrent manner. It is novel experiment in modern Nepali literature. He has won the Madan Puraskar (1983) and Narayani Bangmaya Puraskar (1988). He was some time a Member-Secretary of the Royal Nepal Academy. Five out of hundred episodes, from Phoolko Atanka included here show how this novel begins.*

## **TERROR OF FLOWERS**

### **1. Family Relations**

So fond of flowers was he that he regularly committed the crime, in his dreams, of treading upon gardens belonging to various well-to-do persons and looking at the flowers in them. He had no garden of his own. Consequently a good deal of his activities he engaged in his dream. He was poor, and so fit well into the modern age. To match the modern age's expectations, he lived in the quarter of town where those who practiced corruption lived. In this quarter, his house was the only one that could be seen to be roofed with clay tiles – a fact he was somewhat proud of. The sun shone on clay roof tiles differently than it did on the roofs of all other houses. The tiled roof too had been raised by his father before he fell into the long sleep. He had not had to do anything for the house during his own life. For this he was grateful to his father. To keep his son from having to exert himself, his father had himself done a fine job of going hungry. To have hunger as one's inheritance seemed to him a feat second to none. Thus he had kept him fully protected, like a forest animal. In this way, genealogically he was poor in

the country. The earthen walls, clay tiles and scraps of food in starvation had an *antique value* for him. He waited for the day when his name would appear in an official list of persons who had preserved some cultural wealth, from which day forward he would be talked about as the richest person on the block.

Therefore he made no attempt to uproot the various weeds that grew in the niches of his rooftop. Because this had added to the cultural importance of the house. It was free of cost. In the second place, it would cost money to uproot them, whereas their growth cost nothing, thanks to nature's munificence.

## **2. Matter**

This was the reason he began to grow fond of flowers. Looking at flowers in order to drive away hunger struck him as a colourful solution. This was the single reason why his life, no matter how torn and frazzled, had become many-hued. From the plethora of colour, his face at times seemed like that of some great leader, or of some comic who had returned home from a show without having removed his make-up. His highest goal in life was not to become someone surrounded by flowers after death but to live for death to come from seeing flowers blooming all around.

Circumstances had turned him into such an extoller of flowers. But one quality of flowers had impressed him beyond all others, and this was: How is personal reasoning? In that way in this world, even human hearts have ceased being tender, owing to cholesterol or some other obstruction to the ventricles – other reasons aside.

Flower, on the other hand, was thing that was tender in its own natural way, and for as long as it bloomed there was all expectation that it would remain so.

It was only such a matter that, even though it was object, did not appear to be matter to him.

### **3. Voice**

He listened to the voice of his soul. He immediately promised himself that from that day on he would never be afraid. His whole life he had lived in fear. Sometimes in fear of the house, sometimes in fear of the neighbours and sometimes in fear of the dreams. In order to get over his fear of dreams, he had begun to put in overtime on the graveyard shift.

There were two other fears, too. He made a promise in their regard: that from that day on he would never fear two things, the police and polished shoes.

Both seemed to him, in his life, to be elements that called more for expulsion than accommodation.

### **4. Connection**

"A girl is lying there, in the hospital bed."

"Where did she come from?"

"Hospital to hospital."

"Hospital to hospital?"

"From one hospital to another hospital."

"Who is she?"

"A nurse."

"What happened to her?"

"Raped."

"I wonder who did it."

"A patient and doctor in cahoots, they say. That's all I know."

## 5. Rogue

He had never seen a rogue, only heard about them. He had one friend who regularly told him stories about rogues. He described many villainous, rowdy acts by people, naming names. His friend, it may be deduced, regarded him as a good friend. He was a real friend. He seemed real. Once what he did was, he decided to prove his friend false and have done with him. A change had come over him. He altered his activities and came together with those his friend considered rogues. After this his life started running smoothly. But his friend was shaken. For this friend was not a rogue. He began spending his time proving that a friend who was not a rogue was a rogue. Finally what happened was that his life went to pot, along with that of his friend.

In the end it was discovered that some rogues had bought him. To keep the friend from telling stories about rogues ever again.

*(Tr. Philip H. Pierce)*

## **DAULAT BIKRAM BISTA**

*Daulat Bikram Bista (1926-2002) has to his credit eight novels including Jyoti Jyoti Mahajyoti (Light, Light Great Light or The Light of Lights) an extract covering the first seven pages of the chapter called Sadyojata (Early Riser, Newly Born, etc) is included here. The author gives here a vivid account of the morning scene on the way to the temple of Lord Shiva at Pashupati in Kathmandu. He was bestowed the Academy Award, Mahendra Pragya Puraskar in 1978 and Madan Puraskar in 1988.*

### **THE LIGHT OF LIGHTS**

I am deeply moved whenever Kaviraj Dinanath Nepal's granddaughter Prajambi sings it, her mellifluous voice regularly accompanied by the lilting music of the gold-streaked red glass bangles on her plump, white wrists. I love the sound of her bangles as much as I love the melody in her voice. So, I should have forsaken the utter stillness of the dark hour for the light of the approaching dawn, just as Prajambi has done. Although Prajambi's voice and the sound of her bangles prod me, I failed to stir myself during that early hour. In late December and early January, it is intensely cold. I had come to Kathmandu from Varanasi but a few months before and I could not just give up the warmth of my bed. Even if I gather courage to leave the bed, it would take me fifteen to twenty minutes to catch up with her. By that time her voice as well as the music of her bangles would have taken a break. In the meantime, the utter silence prevailing in the Pashupati area helps the sound waves created by her singing to reach my ears.

The hymn was not composed by her nor by her grandfather Dinanath Nepal. It was sung centuries ago by *Padmapuranacarya* in the course of his devotions to

Pashupatinath. I have been hearing the hymn almost daily at the same time punctually from Prajambi's mouth since I have taken up my lodgings in this locality. But during her monthly period, her own voice asserts itself, for she believes that it is a sin then to utter the sacred words. Otherwise the hymn is heard without cease – an indication of an overflow of her joy – even as the bliss experienced in drawing an eight-petalled lotus with such ingredients as saffron, *kumkum* and sandalwood. Neither the dew in December and January nor the torrential rains of the monsoon have stopped her from her pursuit.

The first ears to catch the strains from her throat are those at Jayabagishwari and its neighbourhood. Then other ears, one after another, along the narrow alleys from Devpatan to Gaurighat hear her. As soon as the hymn is heard, some people would mention Pashupatinath in Nepali and say that it's time to get up while others would call various names of Lord Shiva in Nepalbhasa (the language of the Newars) and repeat the same warning. Sometimes in some places, the hint is taken up in different Indian languages – Hindi, Bengali, Maithili, Gujrati, Marathi and Telegu. But most often the warnings are in Nepalbhasa and in Nepali. In all the houses from Jayabagishwari to Gaurighat, those who are already up would say in Nepalbhasa, " *So so, guli denau, Prajambi wae dhunkala,*" (Look, how long must you sleep, Prajambi has come.) In another house, it would be the same expression in Nepali language, "*Lau hera, kati suteko, Prajambi aisaki.*" (Now look, how long would you sleep, Prajambi is already here.) There then comes an awakening and enthusiasm in these dwellings, mostly prompted by the need to find means of subsistence. As a matter of fact for most of these people Pashupatinath has become a means of employment – their farm, trade and service. However, for a very few, Pashupatinath is a looking glass to look at themselves.

As soon as they hear Prajambi, Jetha Pundit, Chandra Prasad Kafle and Maya Prasad Neupane wake up their wives and bid them to blow the fire in the brazier.

The men, upon waking up, do not fully come alive until they have smoked the hookah. After some noisy puffs, the men make their way to the *dhunge dhara*, the stone water spout, of Jayabagishwari for their bath. There is a folk belief that the water from that particular *dhara* keeps the throat healthy and helps in singing and recitation. Besides, the water is almost hot at that hour in winter. It is no wonder then that the three Brahmin pundits have chosen that *dhara* for their bath during the cold months. Returning from their bath, the three men have another good smoke. Then, wrapping himself in a *dolai*, a padded cotton quilt, and with his two professional texts – Shivapuran and Rudrakshyamahima - held between his upper arm and body, and with a brazier full of live charcoal in his hand, Jetha Pundit makes his way to Muktimandal to take his place appointed for retelling the Puran. In the same way Chandra Prasad Kafle and Maya Prasad Neupane arrive at the plinth around the temple of Unmantabhairab with their texts – Bhagwat and Upanishad. Also awakened by Prajambi's hymn, those Brahmin pundits who have taken up the profession of reciting the *rudri* hurry with towel and *dhoti* over their shoulder towards Aryaghat. They also carry in their hands a small bundle of straw which they burn after a dip in the Bagmati River. They dry their body in the flames of the straw. Along with these Brahmins troop out those sellers of flowers, *prasad* (offerings) and leaves of the *bael* tree (Aegle marmelos) – Mayabati, Rammaya, Shyamdevi, Phulmati, Maincha, Maili Jaisini, Seti Khatrini and others, with their baskets and trays. Then come Saraswati and Gangi Sanyashini the sellers of different kinds of *tika* – red and black spots – and *netra*, beauty ointment for the eye. The confectioners, Bekhacha and Uddabcha, alerted by Prajambi, wake up their servants from the highlands in words peculiar to them. Then rise the beggars after nights spent wrapped up in rags on the plinths of the temples and public rest houses. They go in haste to take their place around the temple and along the road. Some of them spread before their seat a piece of dirty cloth while others place a battered enamel ware or tin. Then wake up

the old men and women who have taken lodgings at Devpatan waiting for the day they would take their last breath at Aryaghat. But Prajambi has nothing to do with what is happening around her. She is just herself, like the Bagmati River flowing on and on forever.

However, fifteen to twenty minutes before her arrival at Gaurighat, she stops briefly when *mairam*, a woman who has devoted herself to a life of religion, greets her, "Aipugnu bhayo Prajambi nani? (So, you have come, Prajambi?)" A middle-aged woman deserted by her husband, *mairam* habitually exposes her teeth when she speaks and her eyes look artificial. She has lived in a *kuti*, a small hut, in a nook at Gaurighat since she became a *mairam*. The hut had been built for her by her devotees. Although I am not one of them, I visited her sometimes. There is always a *kalas*, a holy pot, full of water, with some flowers in it and smeared with red powder. There lies a broom besides the *kalas*. From seven o'clock to ten in the morning there is always a crowd in the hut – young men and women as well as the middle-aged, who complain of nervous or wasting diseases. Some of the women have an urge to kill any male they see while some men say they would love to throttle any woman they come upon. The *mairam* uttered different names of Shiva and Shakti, his spouse, and waved her broom over the patient's head, after which she gave a drink from the *kalas*. Although the broom-and-water treatment has become a kind of joke to many people, the number of visitors is on the increase day by day. There is a rumour that despite the hilarity of her call upon the gods, goddesses and preternatural beings, such as Shiva, Shakti, Shakini, Dakini, Yogini, Bhutpret, Pisach and so on and so forth to come to her aid and the use of the broom, unhappy couples have been reconciled and desperate lovers united. It is also rumoured that those looking for partners too have succeeded after her treatment. Prajambi too had lost her husband since long, and she should have lowered her head before the middle-aged *mairam*. But she is completely silent in the matter.



All the fine words of the *mairam* have no effect on Prajambi. Deaf to broom-wielding *mairam*, Prajambi goes her own way, repeating the hymn "*Enamaskritohipi bisayasvapi sattabhava ...*" until she reaches Umakunda. It is just possible that Prajambi's single-minded devotion to the hymn to Pashupati pricks the conscience of the middle-aged *mairam*. Or, it is possible the *mairam* cares not at all for Prajambi's single-minded devotion. But she would just love to spite her and that makes her more attentive to Prajambi. However, it is not in Prajambi's nature to be troubled by doubts and suspicions.

Having made a circuit of Gaurighat, Kirateshwar and Mrigasthali, Pramjambi arrives at the western door of the Pashupati temple sharp at five o'clock. She would be the first among the women standing in front of the door. After their ablution, the *bhandari*, the temple attendants, whose turn it was that day, opens the door at about quarter past five. The doors to the north, south and east open only at about nine o'clock. The western face of Pashupatinath is regarded by some as Dwarikanath while others take it as that of Barun, another form of Shiva, the Lord of the West and God of Water. The western face is actually a form of *Sadyojata*, the spontaneous manifestation of Shiva, in which a devotee sees his or her own reflection. According to Atharva Veda, the spontaneous manifestation of Shiva is Pashupati. For this reason, perhaps, the western door is kept open from about five fifteen in the morning until the *nityabhog*, daily rituals, during the day. Although it is closed for about half an hour or an hour after the rituals of mahabhog, the *bhandari* keeps the door open again from five o'clock in the afternoon until *arati*, the offering of light, at night. As soon as the door is opened, Prajambi confronts the face of Pashupati, that is *Sadyojata*, with a third eye, wearing a crown and earrings shaped like the lotus flower. As her eyes rest on that face, she becomes conscious of an emanation of a cool light, like that of the moon, from the face and being overcome by it. Then she sees the lips open gradually in a gentle smile. She is so completely

absorbed in the vision that she sees Lord Shanker's face assuming the complexion and shape of her lost spouse. She is so lost in her contemplation of the *Sadyojata* form that she forgets herself and all the women standing impatiently behind her for a glimpse of the western face of Lord Shiva. On occasions some of the strong willed women would shout at her, "Do you intend to gather all the merit at once?" That brings her to her sense and she feels very much ashamed indeed.

When Prajambi leaves for Gaurighat at about three-thirty in the morning with the hymn on her lips, "*..bhavanti tam sankaram pasupatim saranam brajami*" her grandfather Kaviraj Dinanath Nepal suddenly feels a tug in his heart. Having spent overnights with him, I have experienced the naked truth exposed many times. However, I have not tried to probe into his troubled mind. Even if I tried, nothing would come out of it, for he is an introvert. He does not like to share his troubles and dissatisfaction with anyone; he would rather keep them bottled up within himself. I am quite sensitive to his predicament. I know that Dinanath Nepal is alarmed by his beloved granddaughter's habit of going out so early in the morning. But it was none other than himself who has got her into the habit. Until she was about ten or twelve, he used to teach Prajambi to sing the hymn and take her out with him when he went for his bath at Gaurighat. After his bath, accompanied by Prajambi, he made his way up the Indrakil Hill to worship Kirateshwar Mahadev, from where he reached Guheshwari. Prajambi would be with him when he climbed the stone steps to Mrigasthali to worship Gorakhnath and Vishwarup. Then down the steps to worship Ramchandra, he would keep her with him. When he arrives at Kirtimukh Bhairab, Basuki and finally before Pashupatinath, Prajambi would be with her grandfather. Sometimes, he sang *bhajan*, religious songs, at Muktimandal, with Prajambi sitting by him. But then, although she was fair, she was a thin girl and there was nothing attractive about her. The thin girl has since changed so much that even the long coils of her

serpentine hair scared Dinanath Nepal. He had sensed a change in her growing body before his leg was amputated at Bir Hospital two years back. The change did not disturb his peace of mind nor worried him unduly. However, since the amputation, Prajambi's magnetic physical development really scared him without respite. He was also worried by her habit of going out in the stillness of the predawn hour, singing the hymn. Many a time he had thought of telling her, "My child, do not go out so early." Yet, he was never able to articulate these words; they got stuck in his throat. He felt that if he did that, he would lose his self-esteem, belittle himself and look like a maggot. Hence, he has not been able to speak to Prajambi, and he lost his peace of mind whenever Prajambi went out early in the morning. He is tormented by the thought that something evil would happen. Lying on his bed, he quickly repeats Sankatmochan, a formulae for the prevention of disasters, that he had learnt by heart when he was a boy.

*(Tr. Kesar Lall)*



**DRAMA**



## **BALAKRISHNA SAMA**

*Balakrishna Sama (1902–1981) was a dramatist without equal in stature and number of creations in Nepali literature. He had to his credit poems, short stories, epic poems, dramas, biographical and philosophical works to his credit. He covered the broad canvas of human life, touching upon every walk and every problem related to society. The one-act play included here is an example of his talent as a playwright. He was some time the Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. He was conferred two Academy Awards, one Tribhuvan Pragya Puraskar in 1972 and the other Prithvi Pragya Puraskar (1978). He had also received an honorary doctorate from Tribhuvan University.*

## **Ranadullabh**

### **(Poetic Play)**

#### **Characters**

*His Majesty Prithvipati Shaha – The King of Gorkha*

*Birbhadra Shah – The eldest son of Prithvipati Shaha (Crown Prince)*

*Mallika Devi – Wife of Birbhadra, (Crown Princess)*

*Ranadullabh Shaha – Second son of Prithvipati Shaha.*

*Chandrarup Shaha – Sixth son of Prithvipati Shaha*

*Bir Kumar Shaha – Tenth son of Prithvipati Shaha*

*Mishra Gurujyu*

*and Biraj Thapa Magar – Kaji*

*Pandit Gaureshwar Panta*

*Other courtiers*

*Chakre – a servant*

#### **Those seen in the stage are:**

*Six queens of His Majesty King Prithvipati Shaha*

*The twelve sons 1. Birbhadra Shaha 2. Ranadullabh Shaha 3. Dala*

*Shaha 4. Bhupendra Shaha 5. Udyat Shaha 6. Chandrarup Shaha 7.*

*Sangram Shaha 8. Harasing Shaha 9. Surtan Shaha 10. Bir Kumar*

*Shaha 11. Bir Bahadur Shaha 12. Santarup Shaha*

*Two daughters Bhakta Kumari Shaha,*

*Chautariya – Atibal Shaha, Kaji Jayaanta Shaha*

*Chautariya Shah – Prithvipati Shah's brother*

*Haricharan Panta – Gaureshwar Panta's brother*

*Sardar (Makwani Pande)*  
*Bhimraj Pande*  
*Bireshwar Pande*  
*Laxmipati Panta*  
*Balipadhya Kadariya*

*Place: Gorkha*

*Scene: The palace. The throne hall.*

*The hall is adorned with Nepalese art. Servants standing on stools and decorate walls and the door with banners and garlands. Prithvipati Shah is sitting on the throne. He has his hands on the shoulders of his tenth son, Bir Kumar Shaha aged ten, standing next to him. His sixth son, Chandrarup Shaha, is standing nearby. Mishra Gurujyu and Gaureshwar Panta are seated on cotton mattresses on either side. Biraj Thapa Magar is standing. There are others as well. A panchai baja<sup>1</sup> is heard off stage.*

**Prithvipati** – My special affection ought to have gone to the ne'er-do-wells, but it's Ranadullabh who by his courage has endeared himself and snatched all my love from my heart. My fourteen children are like twin rainbows revealing different hues. I know he is the second one, but for me he is tender still a child. He's always fighting like a boy, so I'm alert in case he might get hurt. I worry that he may fall down never to stand again – I can't rid this idea from my mind. The eldest is the heir to the throne, but actually the father of this kingdom is Ranadullabh, I have nothing to give him except the overflow of my love. He shall be welcomed today.

**Mishra** – My lord, please wait for till they are grown up. All of their Highnesses are equally promising. (*Pointing to the prince*) His Royal Highness will be the foremost among them. I make this humble submission. He is brilliant in his studies, and brave, befitting his name, Bir Kumar.

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1 Panchai baja – A group of five musicians that perform especially on the occasion of marriage, victory and the like



Prithvipati – Tell me, Biraj, who else among my sons can match Ranadullabh?

Biraj – In this earth, my lord, maybe great figures take birth once in a century, and someone like Ranadullabh maybe once in a millennium. Time itself will tell. Time itself will tell.

Prithvipati – Gaureshwar, what do you say?

Gaureshwar – My lord, when I find the beauty of a flower the sacrifices of an ascetic, the strength of steel and the profound wisdom of a scholar concentrated in one man. I am afraid that this foul world may fail to recognize the prince for the pearl that he is.

Chandrarup – Yes, I fear the same thing.

Prithvipati – Chandrarup, why do you fear, son?

Chandrarup – I don't know, father!

Prithvipati – Why?

Chandrarup – Fear does not know the root cause of fear. If it did, the root could be pulled out, and there would be nothing to fear.

*[Mallikadevi and others appear at the door.]*

Prithvipati – Come here, my daughter-in-law. Are all the garlands ready?

Mallika – I've done all very nicely.

Prithvipati – Come closer. I have found you have been keeping the house well since your mother-in-law's death, although you only the second wife of my eldest son and the daughter-in-law to five stepmothers. I trust you. So if I assign you to do something, don't take it otherwise.

Biraj – My lord, Her Highness considers herself fortunate to be able to do such service.

- Prithvipati – I know everything, Biraj. This I know. (*To Mallikadevi*) Your mothers-in-laws may take it amiss. Truth is bitter, you know. Let that be the bedroom for Ranadullabh. Have it cleaned, and tell them to put in a bed. Have fruits and other food put in it when he comes. There was no need to say this. You have probably arranged for these things already. Ranadullabh has no mother; be a mother to him. He respects his elder brother as much as he does his father. You may go now.
- Mishra – My lord, permit me to leave. (*Mallikadevi and others leave.*) I'll go downstairs and see if the water jars have been set out or not.
- Prithvipati – Yes, the music is now heard coming nearer. All right. I shall join you later.
- Mishra – Panta, come on, let's go.  
[*Mishra and Gaureshawr Panta exit*]
- Prithvipati – Speak, Biraj!
- Biraj – I wonder how our enemies are taking the news of the celebration of Ranadullabh's victory. Nepal is in for a rain in spots. Today Gorkha is in the sun; the rain clouds are set to flee to Lamjung obviously result of disregarding. Both sons should have kept to the boundary set by their mother at the time of Drabya Shaha with the milk from her breast. Both sons should have remained in harmony. Gorkha of course never intended otherwise. It's Lamjung that overstepped first. In the beginning Gorkha put up with it, but then they pressed Liglig holding it by its throat, and made us fight in self-defense. (*Turning to the prince*). Prince, are you aware how many times your father had fought wars in nine years? Eleven times. All those beyond twelve and below eighty years

of age were gathered and so we won. Our enemies went back across the River and dared not look at Gorkha not for six years. But in the seventh year the enemies returned, united with the twenty-two and twenty-four confederations, Pyuthan, Tanahu and Palpa and defeated us. But we won in the end, within one year, thanks to the astuteness of your brother Ranadullabh and your father's blessing. We have regained all the territories of Liglig. And all the Kings - whether Hindupati of Makawanpur or the rulers of forty-six principalities - have sought friendship with Gorkha. Having made treaties with altogether fifty ruler and with Lamjung subdued this year, your second brother is returning here. The public is holding a victory parade. Let us go to watch. You too should offer a garland to him.

Bir Kumar– Where is it?

Biraj – Let's go to your sister-in-law's.

Prithvipati– Are you happy, Bir Kumar?

Bir Kumar– Yes, father.

Prithvipati– Did you understand everything?

Bir Kumar– Yes.

Prithvipati– Tell me what you have understood.

Bir Kumar– My brother is returning after doing something that has pleased you and everyone.

Prithvipati– (*Smiling*) Yes.

(*Biraj Thapa Magar leaves with Bir Kumar.*)

How about you, Chandrarup? How joyful are you?

Chandrarup— Father, my heart tends to tear apart in joy and in sorrow. With one eye I laugh but with the other I weep.

Prithvipati— What are you talking about? Such talk at such a time? A moment before you said you are afraid.

Chandrarup – I don't know what to do. One part of me tells me not to speak, but the truth will come out, even if I don't speak. The sun rises in the morning even if my eyes are closed. Things may take a turn for the worse, and what would you say then? I'm eager to speak out hoping something may be done in time.

Prithvipati— [*Pause*] Be quick. Never will this boy have a single night of peaceful sleep. What bad news do you have?

Chandrarup – Father, my eldest brother's heart is full of jealousy, hatred, suspicion and enmity towards my second brother.

Prithvipati— What? Impossible! But maybe... maybe... I also have my suspicions. He has given hints in that direction a few times. But do you think that Ranadullabh has any bad feelings towards his elder brother?

Chandrarup – No, I do not.

Prithvipati— It is rather him who must have many ill thoughts in his heart. Whatsoever, keep quiet. He's coming.  
[*Birhadra Shaha enters.*] You also have arrived!

Birhadra – Yes, father.

Prithvipati— Your brother is also about to arrive.

Birhadra— Yes, he is.

Prithvipati – Doesn't this news make you happy?

Birbhadra – I am not his enemy. Even if he comes as a king, I will welcome him, no matter what others may say.

Prithvipati – Look there, he has arrived.  
[*The music gets louder. All persons except Birbhadra exit*]

Birbhadra – Chakre, come down quick. [*Chakre comes down.*] Did you hear what Chandrarup has said to my father?

Chakre – Yes, my lord, I did. He was talking behind your back.

Birbhadra – What did he say?

Chakre – He accused you, my lord, of being needlessly jealous of Ranadullabh.

Birbhadra – What did father say the other day?

Chakre – He said you are a sinner.

Birbhadra – Did they talk of anything else?

Chakre – Yes, they did.

Birbhadra – What did they say? Were they talking of offering him something?

Chakre – I have the notion that he will be made the king of some region, something of that sort. I was at a distance, hanging up banners.

Birbhadra – Go!  
[*Chakre exits. The music gets louder, Mallikadevi and others enter with garlands.*]

Mallika – My lord, why are you alone here? Please come down.

Birbhadra – Shall I rush down to receive your brother-in-law like everyone else? Tell me, shall I go to touch his feet or carry him on my back?

Mallika – But they say father, too, has gone down to receive him.

Birbhadra – [*Speaking in fragments*] You better go down; I'll remain seated here. Go! [*All persons except Birbhadra exit. Auspicious music is playing. Birbhadra paces around the throne with an expression of terror. Prithvipati, Ranadullabh, Chandrarup, Bir Kumar, Mishra Gurujyu, Gaureshwor Panta, Biraj Thapa, Mallikadevi and others enter. Ranadullabh is adorned with a garland and sindur<sup>2</sup>. He bows down to the feet of Birbhadra. Mallika hands a garland to Birbhadra and he mechanically puts it on Ranadullabh.*]

Prithvipati – [*Waiting a while and finding Birbhadra silent*] Let's go; let these brothers talk. I'm old and worn out. Let them share their experiences. Ranadullabh, tell your brother all about your experiences. They'll be useful to him.

[*All except Ranadullabh and Birbhadra exit.*]

Birbhadra – Feeling well? Are you happy and at peace now?

Ranadullabh – Thanks for the blessings.

Birbhadra – Of our father?

Ranadullabh – And yours too. I am perfectly well and peaceful in my mind.

Birbhadra – Your peace must have increased as others went to their eternal peace. How many were killed this time in the battle?

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2 sindur – a vermilion powder is used at a time of joy or celebration

Ranadullabh – Hundreds must have been wounded; twenty-seven were slain.

Birbhadra – You're Death itself. Your hand is a weapon. How many did your hand cut down right and left?

Ranadullabh – I must have slain around eight.

Birbhadra – Who do you have your sights set on after number eight. Anyone that gets in front of you, right?

[*Making a move to sit on the throne*] May I sit here?

Ranadullabh – [*Nervously*] Father is alive still. How can you sit on the throne?

Birbhadra – Will you kill me if I do?

Ranadullabh – I will surely consider you disloyal.

Birbhadra – So what will you do?

Ranadullabh – Let him have a gift since he covets. I will request father. I'll make you king here, and will take father to another country. I'll fight with this sword and make father the king of that county or succumb to the wound there. I'll send a letter begging for your blessing. That will be the punishment for the crime of my elder brother, the king of Gorkha.

Birbhadra – [*Immediately getting angry*] I do not like vain speeches. Have you become king today? Who are you to hand out gifts and punishment? Which of us is a criminal? Who has trespassed, you or I? Did you not pledge fealty to the king when you went to Lamjung? Didn't you enter into a lifetime friendship with the prince of Lamjung? Didn't you betray them to their face? Didn't you cover your sharp teeth with smiling lips – hiding the fact that they were chewing bloody

flesh? Balipadhya Kadariya and Gaureshawar Panta however, didn't make any solemn promises. It was you who kept swearing oaths, and for the sake of a rice field signed a treaty with your sinful hand. Your mouth was all watery for some rice and you abandoned your caste and sullied the name of your family. Afterwards, who was it who struck blow in the night? Who is the criminal, you or me?

Ranadullabh – I may have slain people by playing false, but if religion has to be damned for the sake of the country, father and brother, let it be. I'm ready to go to hell for the sake of peace in this country, even if it means committing sin. The satisfaction of having offered myself for all of you is enough for me.

Birbhadra – You acquired a great merit by a human sacrifice for the sake of father. Won't you do the same for him now by sacrificing his son? The goddess Kali will be overjoyed at the sacrifice of a human being to her. How can father not be pleased with your offering of me? You'll have your boon and bliss: the right to this throne!

Ranadullabh – Brother, even these harsh words do not make me angry. Where have you heard this fresh slander? Were there pure *mahatmas* (holy men) or base sinners trying to create discord among brothers? Didn't they avoid looking you in the face when they took money for the slander they were selling? If you think that your own brother can deceive you, what else you can from hirelings? Take heed. Rama had the same doubts about Bharat, but afterwards he was sorry for it. Laksman left the country, and again he felt sorry. Lakshman committed suicide, and



Ram had to follow suit. These were step-brothers, but I come from the same womb as you. It's not a question here of country but of family – the question of a younger brother's duty to his elder brothers. If you would only mention I will renounce the woman I love – not to mention religion and offer myself for sacrifice for your sake. If we fall out, the country will fall apart; we children will lose their spirit burst open, the enemy will snatch the weapons from the hands of all youths. And the desire of the old people to live on will desert them. The women's honor will be gone and the country's dignity too. Pray, grant me leave. Please be free any doubt about me. I will depart this country for some other holy place in the Himalayas. Long live the Kingdom! Long live the King, the prince and people of this country! I'll go now. You stay on!

*[He bows to his brother's feet and tries to leave.]*

Birbhadra – *[Grabbing hold of Ranadullabh]* Brother, understand my pain too. Will your leaving the country solve the problem? Every step you take will take the country forward; if you leave, it will fall behind. This is what I am jealous of. You are so bright that you brighten the place with your shining face wherever you go. Night will fall on Gorkha if you leave it. If this country progresses, the glory is yours. The pettiness I scatter wherever I walk to you in your wisdom trample underfoot. I may be the king occupying the throne firmly but you rule people's heart. Brother, I can never forget what the Khan Bichari from Dhor had said. Seeing your knowledge, wisdom and courage, he had said in front of everyone

that you are the very incarnation of Narayana. And me? What shall I say of myself? Why, the rocks will echo the response: "It were better you had died... better you died." What am I to do? That's why you're now an object of jealousy. I don't believe in the slander by base persons. Even while I curse what do I see with my own eyes, my conscience tells me. That's how you should live - look at your youngest brother's spirit. Why do you live so basely? Die! Relinquish your life! You are dearer to me, brother, than myself. But I'm beginning to become ashamed of my life.

Ranadullabh – What?

Birbhadra – I feel humiliation.

Ranadullabh – [*Clasping Birbhadra's knee*] I am ashamed of myself. Isn't there any way out? No?

Birbhadra – Let me remain always jealous of you, and you always look on laughingly. Everyone would laugh. Let the sky snicker at me. Let the lightning flash. Let the caves in all mountains laugh. I'll pine away, listening. Let the Saptakoshi, Karnali and Gandaki laugh. Let a flood of tears overcome me!

[*Mallika re-enters in high spirits. She places the baskets of fruits between the two brothers, who look on somberly. She sees tears in Birbhadra's eyes.*]

Mallika – Why, what's wrong? [*Pause*] Is it something I can do for you?  
Why has the cloud halted while drawing the thundering bowstring?  
It will catch fire by itself if it does not let loose.

Ranadullabh – Sister, clouds swallow lightning sometimes.

And halt their thunder to pour out rain.

Birbhadra – Eyes are cut open with streams of tears from time to time.  
And instead of water blood flows out.

Ranadullabh – The time will come, when the blood will stop flowing,  
When the sun will pierce red clouds with its light  
And peace will prevail.  
All conflicts resolved.

Mallika – Let it remain red; I need no white.  
For all the sunshine white as widow's dress,  
I need no peace, no graveyard calm.  
Words I need to hear, even if of strife. [*She exits.*]  
[*Birbhadra hears something and leaves. Prithvipati enters from the other direction.*]

Prithvipati – What's wrong? Why did my eldest son flee like a deer? It seems he fears the arrow of my words? Ranadullabh, what has happened on the very day you arrived? [*Fondling him*] How can this root dry up at the moment it becomes a bud? What has happened?

Ranadullabh – What has actually happened? I have no idea.

Prithvipati – Things can happen without your knowing what they are. Or, the fault may lie in existence itself.

Prithvipati – [*Feeling Ranadullabh's forehead*] It's not fever. Your body is cool, but it must be burning inside. You are like a red moon. Tell me what you are up to. You seem to have no ambrosia. Whose poison is spreading within you? Why don't you speak? Why do you stare ached with growing uncertainty, like the

mouth of a volcano? Why? I know, Birbhadra has dreadfully hurt your feelings.

Ranadullabh – No, father, my feelings can get hurt by themselves. My brother has nothing to do with it.

Prithvipati – I understand. You're doing yourself injustice for the sake of your brother. You're like a mountain that lets others enjoy themselves by digging deep caves as much as they like. He doesn't see anything. Like a blind man who keeps his ears open! Gold falls into his hand and he throws it away without looking at it, thinking it an iron blade. He's about to turn me into a yogi.

Ranadullabh – Don't speak like that, father. As long as I'm alive...

Prithvipati – Enough! Don't mind him. I'll have it out with him.

Ranadullabh – Have it out? The burning fire will burn all the more in hot butter! How will it ever go out?

Prithvipati – How? Pour out all the butter and let it turn into a flood, and stamp on it and root out the fire. How will it then burn they?

Ranadullabh – Please let there not be strife in this palace. Or else, let me leave for somewhere else.

Prithvipati – If you go I'll go with you. This kingdom, too, will seek out an enemy, with an invitation in hand. In Gorkha the banners will fly and raise only dust into the sky. The moon and the sun will not be emblazoned on them, just two speckled spots of darkness. Instead there'll be calumny, jealousy and hatred. Whatever happens after I die is something else, but now that I'm still around, do you

think he can make problems? You're expanding the kingdom the way a tree expands. You're providing shade and shelter. And yet he's trying to cut you down, fool that he is! Just wait, and I'll talk some sense into him. I'll tell him he's throwing away diamonds and collecting maggots. The state of mine today is like the statue of Rudra over which two liquids flow: the Ganges on his head, while there is a strong poison in his throat. Will he remain silent? That's more unbearable than death. I'll expose deceit. I won't let it fester. They say you have to kill the wicked with virtue, but don't be afraid it's not the wicked but wickedness you must kill.

Ranadullabh – Father!

Prithvipati – You just keep quiet and watch!

Ranadullabh – Father!

*[Prithvipati strides out of the door through which Birbhadra had made his exit; his eyes fixed on Ranadullabh.]*

Your hope is vain. When a man's heart becomes hard he becomes a million times harder. Concrete may melt but not a cruel heart.

*[Music plays. Ranadullabh is seen to be struggling with his feelings.]* What an unsubstantial void! Make an end of your existence! How can you bear the allegation that you coveted what you have hated? Let others lick this world; you go to your peace. Though you could not achieve anything in this short life, you threw religion overboard and accepted sin in your devotion to your country. For the sake of this same country, add to your sin by taking your life. Stimulate all your country's brothers by means of

incense and candles, then set yourself on fire and turn to ashes! The land of your birth will cradle you in its lap. Your father will cover you with a shroud to protect you from the dust that horsemen and foot soldiers stir up inside the kingdom. Your brothers will sing victory songs as you lie alone. Let a valued branch be lopped off today! Death will do what life was never able to. This flame of worldly desire will surely extinguish! I need to pluck this flower with my nail; how else can I make an offering; how else will the beauty of my beloved's hair do enhance? How else will it become a garland to solemnize our wedding.

*[He tears the garland and crushes the flowers.]* Flowers don't smell if they're not crushed. You, fragrance, keep on! Relinquish your life for the sake of the sweet smell! This is a whisper in my ears, "Relinquish your life." May my life be done away. May ours only remain! There shall be no division of property between two sons, splitting our father's breast into two! May the wound on the other hand heal even if a little blood flows!

*[Drawing his khukuri]*

This is the khukuri, father, that you had worn at your waist. You gave it to me out of joy when I gave answers to other kings. Today it will solve the whole problem. I bow down. May I receive your blessing when I cut my throat. Then may I feel then the joy that I felt when you embraced me at the door! The air is patting my back for tomorrow the Himalayan region must become undivided. If even strangers must remain as brother, I must wash away jealousy with my blood and

fill my helpless brother's breast today with power.

*[Quickly eating a bit]*

So, my sister, I eat these fruits of love. You are like a mother to me. There is a child in your womb. When, during some strife, his spirit falters and he droops his head, may he recall this my firm resolve and raise it up.

*[He pulls at his collars of these upper garment and tears out the string. He runs to the inner chamber and closes the door forcefully his shriek mingling with the loud music of cymbals. The curtain falls.]*

*(Tr. Shiva Ram Rijal and Philip H. Pierce)*

## **GOPAL PRASAD RIMAL**

*Gopal Prasad Rimal (1917-1973) had to his credit two plays including Masan (The Graveyard) highly acclaimed as masterpiece as well as a milestone in the history of Nepali play writing. Woven dexterously in the pattern of a play for bringing about an awakening among womenfolk of the time, this work reminded educated Nepalese of Doll's House by Ibsen as earlier the plays by Balakrishna Sama and William Shakespeare had done. He was awarded the Madan Puraskar in 1962 and Tribhuvan Pragya Puraskar in 1963. The first part of his one-act play Maya (the name of a character), included in this volume gives an example of his use of every day language and approach to social problems in a simple way quite different from that in vogue in literary genres then.*

### **MAYA**

*(The eastern outskirts of Kathmandu. About 11 A.M. The room as well as the chota (a passage which also serves as a sitting room) attest a wealthy family. Murari, a sharp and somewhat obstinate-looking young man of about 25 years, is combing his hair in front of a looking glass. Except for his coat and waist coat lying in a chair, he has already put on his clothes. His face reflects anxious moments from time to time. He has barely done his hair when his younger sister Leela (a girl of about 14 or 15 with a smile but already a widow) enters the room and is seen in the looking-glass behind her brother. Murari smiles).*

Leela – (jesting) Well, at last you look like Mahadev ready to go to bring home his bride. And that smile!

Murari – (smiling) Oh, I am so handsome now! But wait, let me complete. I haven't put on my waist coat (*He puts it on*) I haven't put on my shoes (*puts on the shoes too*). I haven't put on my cap (*puts on the cap*). (*Looking at the*



*looking glass he gives a finishing touch).*  
Now?

Leela – Now, you are really fit to be called my elder brother. (*Murari pulls the chair before the looking glass and sits down on it. Leela stands before him*).

Murari – Haven't I worked magic? How soon have I made myself elegant? Right? Just now you said that I looked like Mahadev ready to go to bring his bride home. (*Leela laughs*). Well, why don't you now say that's very good?

Leela – (*in a strange tone*) That's very good!

Murari – (*imitating her*) That's very good!

Leela – (*abruptly*) That's not only good but now you need a really good girl. (*making signs with her hand*) A girl with a white complexion, gentle manners, a shapely nose, thin lips and laughing eyes. Marry her and bring her home.

Murari – What? So nice and easy!

Leela – Why not? What's so nice and easy? Do you think you can evade the point? I won't agree. Mother won't either. Our elder sisters won't agree. Do you think you could escape so easily?

*(Murari looks at his sister from tip to top). Why do you stare at me like that? Just say 'yes'. A nail has to be driven into her heart! (Murari looks at her again in the same way.)*

Murari – My dear sister, do you know what you are saying?

Leela – No, I don't know anything! Just go and look at her. She is said to be very beautiful. Everybody says so. Then it's done. This is all I know.

*(There is noise outside the room. Both of them look in that direction.)* Look, sisters have also come. Sisters, brother is in here.

*(The noise subsides.)*

Ah! they have gone upstairs. They must have seen that everything is ready there and come to fetch you. Shall I go and ask them? *(Murari is silent)* Oh, I understand it. To send you out of the house is going to be as difficult as taking a bride out to the wedding rituals! Shall I bring you a veil? *(Murari keeps silent. Leela tries to laugh, but Murari's grave face makes her frown instead.)* All right then, I shall go and tell mother that you are not going. Shall I? *(Murari says nothing. Leela takes a few steps, then looks back at her brother. Thinking that he is not going to say anything, she goes out of the room. Murari is lost in his thoughts.)*

*(Maya, an attractive young woman of about 18 or 19 years, with a grave demeanour, trying hard unsuccessfully to suppress her personality, enters with a garland of jasmin in her hand. Murari is unaware of her presence. She walks softly and garlands him from behind. Murari is startled, and seeing her, attempts to smile. Their lips quiver but no words come for a moment from their mouths.)*

Maya – I have gone through the book. It is quite good. Any other ...?

Murari – Pick out what you like. They were all bought for you.  
*(Points to the bookcase)* You know it.  
*(Maya proceeds towards the bookcase)*  
Maya, *(picking up a book, Maya returns)* you are standing still ... Oh, yes, the book is quite good.

- Maya – You got me into the reading habit just in time. This is a gratitude ...
- Murari – Maya! (*The tone in which Murari mentioned the name brings a change in Maya's looks and words.*)
- Maya – What else can I do now besides putting a garland on you with a frown on my face? Everything else, quarrels, complaints, insolence ... have been gone through with mother-in-law. Now... (*there is noise outside*) Oh, yes, the book is good. Isn't it? It is good for me to be out. I am going.
- Murari – (*Maya has reached far*) No, just one thing! (*Maya returns*) You have to get Leela into the habit of reading. She has become somewhat restless. People have begun to speak. (*Maya gives a mock smile.*) You are not angry with her. Are you? (*still mockingly*) A mere child, speaks whatever comes to her mind, not knowing what her words mean. (*Bunu, Murari's eldest sister, about 30 years old, darkish and somewhat lacking in spirit; Mithu, about three years younger than Bunu, stoutish, somewhat irascible but manipulative; and Leela arrive one by one from outside. Maya gets out of their way. The three sisters, particularly Leela, look at her with their noses wrinkled as if smelling her, and then surround Murari. Maya has a last glance at Murari and exits.*)
- Mithu – Now, what's the delay for? Shouldn't we move? They must be waiting. Oh, how the garland suits you!
- Murari – Maya did it.  
(*They look at each other. Murari smiles*) Why do I have to go myself? Why don't you and

mother go? If you are satisfied, it is good enough.

- Mithu – Oh, what are you saying? You have to see for yourself.
- Leela – Didn't you say only the other day – 'The boy has to see the girl? What's the use of parents looking at the girl? It is the boy and the girl who are getting married, not others'. How double-tongued you are! Didn't you say so the other day?
- Bunu – Yes, indeed!
- Murari – No, sister. I had said that on condition that there was no need to bring in a second wife. If another wife was to be brought in, there was no need for me to go and have a look at the girl. You can just decide the marriage with the eyes closed. If she is not to your liking, there can be another marriage, and a third if the second one is not liked.
- Mithu – Now, who would bring another wife after her?
- Murari – How can one say so? If this one too is not to your and mother's liking?
- Leela – No, it wouldn't be.  
*(Murari smiles.)*
- Murari – Don't come in the middle. I am speaking with your elder sisters. Well, yes, sisters!  
*(Leela turns her back.)*
- Mithu – See, Leela has already said, this one would be all right.
- Murari – Then you got me married with Maya with the intention of bringing another wife?
- Mithu – No, not that, but what can you do when she has such habit?

- Murari** – What about the other one's habit? Has mother checked it out? Do you know everything about her? Don't children speak?
- Mithu** – *(The others were about to open their mouths, but seeing her speak, keep silent, smiling.)* For a woman to have to live with another wife is ordained by Fate. None could avoid that. Where can you get a girl about whom everything is known? Again, how can we know about the other girl? How can we know what the future holds for her? Speak with some sense. How could you speak with your own sisters in such a demanding manner as if we were others? Your wife was not liked by anyone, mother and sisters. So, you have got to marry again. How can you avoid it? It would be all right only if you don't want your mother and sisters. You can keep the same wife but no one will come to you. *(She makes as if she is going away while speaking.)*
- Leela** – *(very pleased)* That's good. You have to drive a nail on her heart! Oh, you consider that Maya is so beautiful! A throw away stone! Narrow, slit eyes! I could beat her to death! She has to read books!! Before long she would be just doing that, reading the Sukhasagar (*Ocean of Happiness*) in a public shelter and begging. Sister *(to Mithu)*, isn't she like the beggar woman with her basket on the bank of the river at Gaurighat?  
*(All of them laugh and sit down. Leela is satisfied with what she has just said.)*
- Bunu** – That's very true. Why does she look so terror-stricken now-a-days?
- Murari** – *(turning the chair and facing his sisters)* Listen to me too, won't you?
- Leela** – What about us?

- Mithu – So you are going to speak in favour of that same Maya? No?
- Bunu – What about mother?
- Murari – Oh, I have got to obey your commands!
- Mithu – Why do you have to make it a joke and speak of it as our command?
- Murari – *(turning aside)* Just listen to me. Your idea is I have to marry. Now, what I want to say is...
- Leela – You mean you are not going to remarry. You are going to wrap up yourself in your wife's gown. You don't care your own mother and sisters! Isn't that what you want to say?
- Murari – *(to Bunu and Mithu)* Would you be happy if your husbands bring other women? Do you like the idea?
- Mithu and Bunu – *(both at once)* What can we do if our husbands dared to have another woman?
- Leela – Why don't you just say, 'Yes.'
- Murari – *(wholly disregarding Leela; to Bunu and Mithu)* Speak out, do you like it? *(Bunu and Mithu face one another.)*
- Leela – *(to Bunu and Mithu)* How weak-kneed you are! Why don't you say 'yes', a second wife is neither a tiger nor a bear?  
*(No one listens to her; she turns towards the looking glass. She plays with the comb and then also combs her hair)*
- Mithu – *(softening)* I understand what you mean, but what will mother say? Mother has to be satisfied too. Won't an old mother bring curses on you? Would you bear the sight of mother wiping tears with one hand and taking her meal with the other hand? How would you like that?

- Murari – Yes, that's true, but Maya isn't like that at present. She does not hurt anyone. She was but a child in the past. How can we speak of the past now? We are concerned with her habit, no? It is now changed for the better. She is no more her former self. We shall see if she misbehaves again!
- Leela – (*combing her hair*) Wasn't it only the other day that she was cutting the air at mother? Only the other day?
- Murari – Oh, don't rake up the past, so many years back, at the time of the marriage.
- Bunu – Well, brother is right too. What do you say, Mithu?
- Mithu – If mother agrees!
- Murari – My sister Mithu, shouldn't you be speaking to mother instead of speaking to me? I have said I shall remarry if she misbehaves again. Don't I love mother? Mother? Look, it is better not to remarry. It is so difficult to keep a woman under control. If there are two, there will be conflicts day and night. Both will get out of control. It will be very difficult. For a husband (*Murari smiles, so do Bunu and Mithu*), with two wives, I would have much to worry about. It will be a sin as well ...
- Leela – You are no man! Would a man talk like that? A real man keeps a thousand wives, what of only two? Ah, you speak of sin too. What is a sin? If it is a sin, all those with two wives are sinners, all of them. As for making them behave, it will be easier as they will compete with one another in their jealousy.
- Murari – (*smiling*) Leela, are you jealous of your sister-in-law?

- Leela – (*fearlessly*) Yes, indeed.
- Murari – If that is so, tell me what you have done in your jealousy?
- Leela – Oh, brother, how do you speak? Is she the other woman in my life? (*Everybody laughs.*)
- Murari – Well, then go to mother, speak with her and try to convince her. Why should we make someone's life miserable?
- Bunu – Yes, that's right. Let's go, Mithu.

(Tr. Kesar Lal)



## **VIJAYA MALLA**

*Vijaya Malla (1925-1999) had more than half a dozen plays to his credit, including Bahula Kajiko Sapana, (Dreams of a Mad Man). The play included here reveals the treacherous traits in human nature as evinced by the confessions made by the ghosts risen out of the burial grounds. He was sometime the Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. He received the Sajha Puraskar in 1977 and Basundhara Puraskar in 1992.*

### **A STORY OF THE STONE**

*(A remote, lonely place; some dim forms of human beings that look as if they were made of stone are seen.*

*As it becomes bright, some of these beings seem to move, giving the impression that after all these were not images. But for a while, except for movements of arms and limbs, there seems to be nothing more. Suddenly someone shouts and the silence is broken. The other images too seem to wake up and some of them move about. In great surprise, they feel their bodies with their hands. They also begin to touch one another.*

*(The first person to shout from one corner gets up and comes close.)*

**The same person – What has happened today? It seems I am seeing something with my eyes! Are you alive?**

**Another person – I have touched myself. My arms and limbs move. Sound comes out of my mouth. Am I alive then? (A woman comes running.) Who are you?**

**The woman – Me? Who am I? I have woken up after many days. Where am I? Can you tell me? Tell me truly who are you? I am getting scared. Someone is chasing me. I am also beginning to recollect something.**

First person – Recollection! Well, I also seem to recollect something. What am I recollecting? Somehow the wires in my brain have become live suddenly and woke me up. There is no form, no shape of anything. Except for a sense of fear, there is nothing else. It is all void. I remembered a house with an elephant tied close to it. I see it now. Am I alive?

The woman – A big house? What type of big house? Now, I also remember a big house with big windows, arches, verandah. It is all covered with creepers of jasmine flowers. I was there.

Second person – You mean you were there, in that house! I was also in a house just like that. You must surely know me. What's your name?

The woman – My name? No, I don't recall it. Who am I? (Another person, who was just staring ahead, suddenly comes close.) Who's this?

Third person – Me? Someone like you, nameless. What's the use of the name? But what has happened to all of us today? This one began to speak, the other shouted. I am also beginning to speak; everyone began to walk. Everyone seems to know everyone else, and yet forget at the same time. Now, I recall my name. Oh, my name happens to be Raghubirsingh.

All the three – Raghubirsingh! (They get up, huddled together)

Raghubirsingh – Why are you startled?

First person – Now I remember your name. You are the same Raghubirsingh. Your voice is just the same. You sound just like the Raghubirsingh I knew. The features are identical. You

should know me too. I was perhaps the school master, Shrikanta.

The woman – You are Shrikanta? Shrikanta, the school master?

Raghubirsingh – So you are Shrikanta?

Second person – Then, I am ...

The woman – I am Jwala. I have just remembered it now. Sure I am Jwala. Yes, I am Jwala. Now I remember. Why am I scared? Raghubir, you are a murderer!

Shrikanta – Raghubir, how long have you been here?

Raghubirsingh – I don't know. I know this much – I came back after killing a man - servant in the same house, Satrughna. Then I went to bed. Something cold like a bullet entered my head. Then I forgot everything. And I am seeing you today.

Shrikanta – Then you have also been killed?

Jwala – Raghubir, do you remember how you had stuffed a handkerchief into my mouth, lifted me bodily and taken away? Then you hit me on the head with an axe. How I had wailed piteously to let me at least see my children! You did not let me see my tender little children. Mere babies! Oh, you are so cruel.

Second person – I am Satrughna, Raghubir. Now, I remember. You killed me for nothing. What was my fault? Yet you killed me, just a poor servant, a domestic help? Jwala Mainya's servant.

Jwala – So, you are Satrughna! You have also been killed! I know it now only.

Raghubirsingh – Yes, I have killed all of you.

**Jwala** – You are not even to be looked at! But, Master Saheb, who has brought him amongst us and why?

**Shrikanta** – I seem to recollect something that happened before waking up today. Something must have happened. Some great incident in that house ...

**Raghubirsingh** – I think so too. The master is coming.

**Jwala** – What master?

**Raghubirsingh** – Bipin Babusaheb.

**Jwala** – That Bipin, who had courted me and taken me into his house! And then, oh, after I became a mother of two children! Raghubir, don't mention his name. The marks left by his beating are still all over my body. My body becomes hot whenever I recall his face. If he comes here again, where shall I escape to?

**Raghubirsingh** – If he comes, I am also going to have my revenge. I know it – he made me murder you, promising an amount of money. There was another woman whom he liked. If you wish to know it ... when that woman came, he had to get rid of you. And you were killed. Both of your children were also killed. The children must be around here.

**Jwala** – What did you say? Ravi and Sama were also killed? What am I hearing?

**Raghubirsingh** – This is the hand that killed them. Who else were not put to death by this very hand? But what can a servant do, except to obey his master? Master Saheb, you lost your life because you had incited the peasants and told them the truth. I plunged a dagger on your body. I killed you. You were reading a

book at night in the light of a lamp. I hit you from behind and you died at once. Oh, what a sight it was! A stream of blood came out of your back. I picked you up immediately and buried you. Do you know that the peasants who were on your side were arrested? A case was framed against them. These peasants must be rotting in prison even now. I was one of the witnesses who spoke against them.

**Jwala** – Both of my children were slain! How pretty was Sama! She was just beginning to talk. How sweetly she used to come and kiss me on my cheeks! She used to say, 'Mummy, Mummy.' But they are dead now. Oh, what am I hearing!

**Shrikanta** – It is no use being sorry now. Please keep quiet.

**Jwala** – How can I forget it? How can I, a mother, listen to an account of their death and not cry?

**Shrikanta** – Now we are beginning to recollect and it is hurting us. Before that we had no discomfort nor pain. We will not experience it in the future too. This recollection is the main cause of our agony. What is our agony here? Our tears touch no one here nor on earth. Therefore, there is no need to feel anguished.

**Satrughna**– Sinners, what was the crime of these little children to kill them? Oh, Ravibabu never left my lap. Sama used to climb upon my shoulders. Both of them were so tender. I used to carry them upon my shoulders.

**Jwala** – Yes, they used to follow you all the time. I know it.

Raghubirsingh – Oh, the crimes committed by this hand! I have burned down the village because they didn't do what the master wanted. How the men begged to allow them to take out their goods! Standing with a gun in my hand, I didn't let them touch their houses. How many children were burnt to death! How many old people were burnt to cinders! How many became homeless! How many were reduced to poverty! I did all that. This hand has committed sins and atrocities. There is a foul smell in this hand of mine!

Shrikanta – Didn't you know then you were committing a crime?

Jwala – Stop. Don't speak of this wicked fellow. He killed me but did he have to kill the children? Couldn't he just say he has killed them and given them away to someone? He is a wicked fellow, a great sinner. It is even sinful to have a look at him. How could I bear to hear about the fate of my children!

Raghubirsingh – Yes, I admit, I am a great sinner and a great criminal. But did I commit these crimes of my own wish? Did I ever have a desire to commit these enormous crimes? Didn't I feel pity? How would I dare even to touch you, Jwalarani, my gentle mistress? I didn't dare even to raise my eyes to look at you and I never did. But that night I was ordered to kill you. I was very surprised at first. I could not believe it. How could I believe an order to kill you, such a beautiful, gentle and faithful wife? But my master's gun was pointed at my chest. I would have met my end then and there. That made me bold enough to do it. I went to your bedroom. I stuffed a piece of cloth into your mouth. The master was watching from one corner. What a cruel face

was his then? There was an axe, kept for cutting wood. My eyes fell on it. I closed my eyes and hit you with it. I didn't believe I could kill you. Oh, how terrified you looked! How pitiful were your eyes! What courage had to be summoned to hit you? This hand, my hand! Why didn't it fall off? Why?

Shrikanta – Stop it. You are not a killer. You got the order to kill and you obeyed. You were a loyal servant.

Raghubirsingh – I am indeed a sinner. Please don't cry, Jwalarani, because I murdered your children that night. They were saying 'Mummy, Mummy,' and calling 'Papa, Papa.' What kind of a heart was that that didn't melt then? I struggled hard. My hands faltered. Tears streamed down from my eyes. I cried, Jwalarani, I did cry. I cried but what sort of a father was he who could just keep on looking at them. He didn't hold them when they cried, 'Papa, Papa.' Not a streak of love was seen in his eyes!

Jwala – Don't go on. I cannot hear it. I cannot bear it.

Raghubirsingh – Would I raise my arms? Would my conscience allow me to see the children killed by my own hands? I didn't have a grudge against these tender children. How piteously they cried! How I had to suppress my soul! I had to drink my own tears and become a butcher. I should have died then and there before my arms were raised. My hands should have rotten before I had strangled them. I closed my eyes to murder them. I came home and sobbed. I fell down weeping. From that day I became mad. I was no longer a man. Then it became easy for me to carry out the orders to kill. I was like a

mad man. I murdered you, Master Saheb, without remorse.

Shrikanta – You were ordered to kill and you killed me. I am not sorry for it. But I did not incite the peasants against Bipinbabu, as you have mentioned nor did I have any relation with Bipinbabu. It is true I used to say in the classroom that one should not tolerate injustice. One should not get used to injustice. And I used to give medicine to the ordinary peasants. I taught them and helped them.

Raghubirsingh – That's what he did not like. You did not look upon him as his slaves did. You walked about with your head held high. He had named you the 'cobra'. He was ever prepared to crush whoever raised his head ever so high. Was he pleased with the school in the village? He was not. Was he happy that anyone become literate? No. That, for him, was your crime. That was the reason I was deputed to act. I knew you were very good. But if I had not killed you, he would have me implicated in my previous crimes. He would have got me arrested or killed.

Satrughna– But why were you killed, Raghubir?

Raghubirsingh – Oh, this fool does not know that much.

Jwala – Raghubir, oh! How my little children, tender like flowers, must have died!! My brain does not work at all.

Shrikanta – Don't dwell on it. The story has come to an end on earth itself. We are no more on earth. We don't have any identity now. But it is strange that we are awake today and



behaving as if we are alive. Why did we return to our former state?

**Jwala** – Just to grin and bear the sorrow. To hear how my two children were done to death! Oh, if only the children were alive!!

**Raghubirsingh** – I shouldn't have told it. But what could I do? My heart was burning because of it. There is remorse within me. I keep thinking of it time and again. I am going to take revenge.

**Shrikanta** – What revenge are you speaking of? Can you return to earth? We are compelled to stay here in this manner. If we had not awakened, we would have remained as before, with no recollection, form and feeling, dissolved into nothingness. Someone is coming on a run this way. (A woman comes running.) Who are you?

**The woman**– Why do you need to know about me? Let me be what I am. Rather, tell me, is there no hotel here?

**Shrikanta** – Hotel?

**The woman** – Yes, a hotel. Why are you staring at me? Oh, Sister, tell me, is there no hotel here?

**Jwala** – Have you come just now?

**The woman** – Yes, yes. I have just come. I am in a hurry.

**Raghubirsingh** – That's why she does not know anything. Tell her, Master Saheb, that there is no hotel here.

**The woman** – What? There is no hotel. What sort of a city is this then without even a hotel?

**Shrikanta** – How did you come here? On foot?

**The woman** – Why do you jest? I came in a car.

Jwala – In a car?

Raghubirsingh – Got into a car! Then it rolled on. You do not know that we are all dead persons. We are all corpses.

The woman – Dead bodies? You are joking with me? I am telling you I don't like jokes. Sister, please tell me where I can stay. I am in a big hurry. He is coming after me.

Shrikanta – Who is coming after you?

The woman – Why do you want to know who he is? Sister, look, if he gets hold of me, he is sure to kill me. He will kill me. If you cannot tell me, don't. I'll go myself to look for a hotel.

Shrikanta – Wait, you didn't say who is going to kill you. You didn't mention the man's name. Now, listen to the truth. You are already dead – in an accident or by being murdered. You are not on earth now. This is the place of the dead. Now, you must understand why there is no hotel here.

The woman – What did you say? I am already dead? I am alive. How can I die? I cannot be dead. He cannot kill me. I have escaped from the house to save myself, without anyone's knowledge. Yes, if I were living in the house, I would have been killed. He was prepared to poison me. Or, he would have strangled me. He was terribly cruel. He often said that he would have me trampled to death by the elephant.

Jwala – An elephant!

Raghubirsingh – Was there an elephant in your house?

The woman – Won't there be an elephant in the house of a *jamindar* (landlord)? What a silly question?

Raghubirsingh – If it's so, you are the same woman. I know it now. I recall your face, your name and your voice as well. I remember. Aren't you Krishnarani? Bipinbabu's wife.

The woman – Yes, so what?

Raghubirsingh – You don't recognize me? I am the same Raghubirsingh.

Krishnarani – So, you are Raghubirsingh! You had died of snakebite. I had seen your dead body being burnt.

Raghubirsingh – The same one. This is Jwalarani, Bipinbabu's wife before you came in.

Krishnarani – Yes, I recognize her now from a picture. Really! ...

Shrikanta – You are no longer on the earth.

Krishnarani – I cannot accept it. I am not dead. I am alive, just like anyone else. I can speak and I can walk about. He could not kill me. I made my escape in a car. I do not eat anything that he gave. I did not eat. How can I die?

Raghubirsingh – Did you know the driver of your car? You didn't. If an arrangement had been made with the driver in advance? Didn't the car stop somewhere?

Krishna – Yes, it had stopped.

Raghubirsingh – What happened afterwards? Do you know, You were not conscious. He must have killed you and then thrown you into a river or somewhere else. Then you came here. I know Bipinbabu's tricks.

Krishna – No, I cannot believe it at all. How could I die? How could he ...?

- Jwala** – You could have been killed in the same way I was killed by that ogre. You could have been killed in the same manner that he killed my children. That wicked sinner could have killed. My Sister, he has indeed killed you.
- Krishna** – Then I am dead, and I have not come here in a car?
- Raghubirsingh** – You became unconscious. You got the impression that you have come in a car.
- Krishna** – So, I am dead! Am I? No, I cannot be dead. I won't die by his hands.
- Shrikanta** – Don't panic.
- Krishna** – I came to know how he had killed you. And I learnt that he was also planning to get rid of me. From that moment I became alert. Within a few months, I learnt that his love for me was false. He loved me until he found another woman. He treated me well until then. But when there was another woman, he began to scold and beat me. He killed and threw away my small child on the pretence that he had died of snakebite. From that day I became greatly alarmed. I found that poison had been procured to do away with me. An old servant woman advised me to escape. Otherwise, I would have been killed then. I didn't touch any food from that day. I lived on almost without food. It was his habit of bringing new women. He killed one and brought another in her place. Oh, I had made my escape without anyone's knowledge! Quite cleverly. How could I die then? I cannot be dead. No ...!
- Jwala** – I was his first victim. You were the next. There must be a third one.

Raghubirsingh – I am going to take revenge for all these deaths. Do you know, Krishnarani, that he made me kill all of them? I killed all of you and in the end I was myself killed. I know what I would do to him if he is here before me.

Shrikanta – Krishnarani, you didn't want to die. Who likes to anyway? Who would want to leave the warm sunshine on earth? You have been tricked to death.

Krishna – So, I am really dead? I can't help it. But tell me whether I am dead indeed.

Shrikanta – That old elephant is still alive. We are all dead here, but the old elephant is alive!

Krishna – Yes, the elephant is alive.

Shrikanta – He won't die until the elephant is dead. His atrocities will go on until then. Someone is coming this way again.

Krishna – Who's that? It looks like him. If it's him, how can I stay here?

Raghubirsingh – What did you say? Oh, yes, it's him, coming this way. My intention is going to be fulfilled.

Jwala – Whom do you mean?

Raghubirsingh – Bipinbabu!

Jwala – Bipinbabu! How can I remain here? I cannot stay before such a cruel person. I cannot look at him. (*She tries to go, but fails.*) What has happened to my feet? I have tried to walk, but what is this?

Raghubirsingh – He has arrived. Let him come here.

Shrikanta – Well, he has come. (*Bipinbabu enters.*)

- Raghubirsingh – Please come, Bipinbabu. I am seeing you after so many days. Come, you're welcome.
- Shrikanta – It is Bipinbabu indeed.
- Bipin (*looking around*) – Me, here? Where did I come here from?
- Raghubirsingh – Don't you recognize us? She is Jwalarani and then, that's Krishnarani. This is Satrughna, your servant, and Shrikanta the teacher. Don't you know me either? I am Raghubir, your most loyal servant.
- Bipin – (*startled*) Raghubir! And you, Krishna, how did you come here?
- Shrikanta – Just as you had come.
- Bipin – But Krishna had been killed.
- Krishna – Yes, Krishna has been killed. Right, I am dead. Who told you to come here? Don't you want us to live in peace even here? Do you have to come after us here too?
- Jwala – Why do you want to speak with him, Sister? Leave him alone. I don't want to see his face. An ogre, who killed even my children!
- Bipin – What, Jwala! Aren't you ashamed to speak of me as an ogre? I am your husband.
- Krishna – What a fine husband! (*looking at his face*) You didn't spare even your children. You got them all killed. Now you claim to call yourself a husband! Aren't you ashamed to be called a husband?
- Bipin – Raghubir, What are you listening for to such as these...?
- Raghubirsingh – Your old habit is still clinging to you. You cannot rule here. None of your orders would

work here. Do you hear? You are also a corpse like us.

**Bipin** – Me, a corpse? Then, did I really drink the poison? I just had a suspicion. Didn't that old woman bring me the bottle of poison by mistake?

**Shrikanta** – Then you died by mistake. Some die by mistake, others are murdered. You got all of us killed and you died by mistake. After all, there is no difference. The end is all the same, death.

**Raghubirsingh** – How can it be the same and one? He has to answer here for all his sins, crimes and injustice.

**Bipin** – Then, I am already dead? Dead? Oh, how I came to commit such a mistake? I should have examined that bottle. A big mistake! A big mistake!! What could Chanchala be doing at this moment?

**Krishna** – Of course, she would be crying for you. Suffering on account of you. Beating her breast in grief! Do you know?

**Bipin** – Don't you speak, Krishna. I can still do whatever I wish to you here. Do you understand?

**Jwala** – What can you do here? You are not satisfied with all the killing? Where are my children? Your hunger has not appeased even after eating their hearts?

**Bipin** – How she talks! Jwala, no one is speaking to you. I had quite forgotten you long ago.

**Raghubirsingh** – What order are you going to give me here? Satrughna is also here.

- Bipin – Shrikanta, did I arrive here after death? It is strange. What shall I do now?
- Raghubirsingh – Look, Bipinbabu, you can have a quite rest here. The only difference is that you cannot have a big building here as you had on earth. Nor would you find people over whom you can rule. There are only us, who know you, and your sins, all the atrocities and murders you have committed. We can relate that to you and make you look like a hero. All the people you have killed will be before your eyes. They can go on spitting at your face.
- Bipin – Shrikanta, do you hear him? Being my servant, he is not afraid of saying so to me!
- Raghubirsingh – Bipinbabu, you made me kill all of them. I obeyed your order. Then, you murdered me. That too I kept up with. Now, you come here and try to frighten me?
- Shrikanta – Well, let it go.
- Jwala – Do you know, Raghubir, we should be ashamed even to be seen spitting on his face?
- Krishna – He tries to show off his old pride even here.
- Raghubirsingh – Let it go, Shrikantababu, I am going to have my revenge today.
- Bipin – Oh, you little fellow, what revenge are you speaking of?
- Raghubirsingh – Revenge for killing them! I have killed so many of them, all innocent people. Do you know what you will get in return? Come on, I am going to fight with you. If I can, I'll kill you.
- Shrikanta – Raghubir, what are you saying? We are already dead. How can you kill him again?



Don't pick up a quarrel. Let us have nothing to do with such a hateful beast. Let us not speak with him. Let us go.

Raghubirsingh – Even then I am not going to let him alone.

Bipin – Raghubir, come on. (*Bipin tries to lift his hand, he couldn't. Next, he tries to move his legs but fails.*) What has happened to me, Shrikanta? My limbs do not move.

Shrikanta – Now your mouth too will be silent. You are turning into a stone.

Raghubirsingh – Yes, you have become a stone. Now we can spit on your face. (*Raghubir spits.*)

Bipin – Now, but spit..., (*Turns into a stone completely.*)

Krishna – Yes, he has become a stone. We are also likewise. I am scared.

Shrikanta – We shall all turn into stone. We become a part of the rock, with no consciousness, no sign of life at all and of no importance.

Krishna – Sister!

Jwala – Me ... and my children. (*She has turned into a stone.*)

Raghubirsingh – I have spat on his face. Now I don't care even if I am turned into a stone.

Krishna – Shrikanta, speak, am I going to be a stone? (*Shrikanta has turned into a stone and does not speak.*) Oh, I shall also become a stone. Everyone has turned into stone. What shall I do now? (*She tries to flee. She runs, stumbles, drags herself, turns down and becomes a stone.*)

(Tr. Kesar Lall)

## **SARUBHAKTA SHRESTHA**

*Sarubhakta Shrestha (1956) has to his credit two plays and one collection of one-act plays, apart from a number of novels, short stories and poems. The one-act play included here reveals his nature of approach to problems as a 'citizen' of the world and the traditional society. He is better known for scientific fictions and has won several prizes and certificates for his writings.*

## **PSEUDO – HOMO SAPIENS**

*Men holding a carnival of animals. Some individuals enter the stage playing music, laughing and making noise. These are all young men and women. They carry masks of animals in their hands and around their necks. None are wearing the masks. The masks are as follows:*

- a. The mask of the tiger;*
- b. The mask of the bear;*
- c. The mask of the wolf;*
- d. The mask of the rhinoceros;*
- e. The mask of the elephant;*
- f. The mask of the jackal;*
- g. The mask of the monkey;*
- h. The mask of the deer;*
- i. The mask of the hare.*

*Children enter the stage. They are very delighted at the colourful masks. Enter older men and women. They stand on the sidelines, amused, and watch. The individuals have no names; they have only numbers.*

- 1. The tiger (looking at the mask of the tiger), what is the tiger?*
- 2. The killer!*
- 3. Power!*
- 4. Barbarity!*

1. Don't forget that the tiger is also an object of beauty! It is not only a symbol of the killer but also the symbol of beauty!
2. The bear! What is the bear? (*looks at the mask of the bear*)
3. A shaggy animal! A very nasty one! I don't like it at all.
2. Is it human rights to dislike one for no reason at all? What in truth is the bear?
4. Haven't you seen the 'bear dance'? The bear is an animal that dances at someone's directions.
5. It scratches and claws when it hunts. It is in fact a symbol of meanness, scratching and clawing.
3. The wolf! (*looking at the mask*) What is the wolf?
6. Unquestionably it is a symbol of greed; greed and cruelty!
4. The rhinoceros then? (*looks at the mask*)
7. Brawn without brain. A symbol of foolish strength.
5. Then what would you call this elephant? (*looks at the mask*)
8. The elephant stands for simplicity, hugeness and gluttony!
6. The jackal then? (*looks at the mask*) What is your opinion about this animal?
9. There is a consensus in the world that the jackal is called Jammu Mantri. It is a symbol of cunningness.
1. When someone is rebuked as a jackal, it means he is condemned and considered insignificant. Therefore, the jackal is a symbol of these sentiments.
2. What is your opinion about this kind of monkey? (*looks at the mask*)

3. What do you call someone who does not build his house nor let others build theirs? The monkey represents such attitude.
4. That attitude is described as ... (*thinks*). It comes to my mind but I can't say it now.
5. Once you understand it, there is no need of words. Give up your efforts to find the word. (*looks at the mask.*) Speak up your mind about this deer.
7. The deer spends his entire life escaping from the beasts of prey. It is a symbol of escapism.
8. The hare? (*looking at the mask*) What do you say?
2. A symbol of helplessness.
1. What other masks are left now?
3. These are all the masks of our traditional dance. Altogether nine in number.
4. There are nine planets in our solar system. Isn't that right?
5. Right if you haven't forgotten. Not right if you have forgotten.
6. Nine planets, nine masks. What is the mystery behind it?
7. Let the mystery remain a mystery.
8. Why?
7. There are many traditions that have no current interpretation.
9. That's being unscientific. Truth that has no meaning can neither be traditional nor modern.
2. Let us not engage in arguments and destroy the spirit of the carnival. I urge all of you.
3. Right. This is an occasion of the Carnival of Animals. Let's enjoy it.

4. That's right. Let us enjoy it. Life itself is a carnival. It's not for brain wracking arguments.
5. As a matter of fact, why do we have such carnivals?
1. Because it is a tradition.
5. But what it is the reason behind the tradition?
4. Arguments again!
5. Pardon me, friends. This is not an argument but just curiosity.
2. Let me give you an answer to your curiosity. (*thinking for a while*) There are many kinds of suffering, trouble and problem in life. Men seek deliverance from bondage and bondage in deliverance. In this vicious circle in life, men in their ego have never found satisfaction. There is suffering from prehistoric times to the modern age. Men enjoy festivals occasionally in order to forget this common and self-evident suffering.
5. Does it mean people like to forget troubles by celebrating on some occasions?
2. Of course, festivals are meant to be a break, not a continuation of the tedium in life. We have to take rests.
6. But why do we do it by wearing the masks of animals?
7. There must be some reason for it...
6. What can it be?
7. Perhaps, we didn't take the trouble to ask, and our ancestors didn't take the trouble to explain it.
8. My guess is ...
9. What?
8. The reason behind the Animal Carnival?

4. *(impatiently)* Brothers, whatever the reason, let's begin it.
8. Look, why should we observe the carnival with our eyes closed?
4. *(in anger)* My eyes are open.
8. I am speaking of the third eye.
4. Oh, my God! I am going mad with the artificial assumptions of the society. *(shakes his head vigorously, shows the tiger's mask to the children who crowd around in order to frighten them)* Hutututu! Hutututu! The tiger is going to eat the children ... *(the children run away, laughing)*
9. Oh, what are you doing? The children will be frightened out of their wits.
4. I am frightened out of my wits just listening to you. *(holds his head and sits down; plugs the ears)* Now, carry on.
6. What a strange guy! Just cannot stomach any intellectual talk!
5. Never mind those who cannot, we can. *(to No. 8)* What do you say?
8. Let me say. Why did we have the ancient tradition of dancing with the masks of animals? ... When we think deeply about it, we see a psychological reason for it. In my notion, we were animals at the very beginning and we want to keep reminding ourselves of that ancient state.
6. In a civilized manner?
8. Yes, in a highly civilized manner. This is a proof that along with our development with the passage of time we are becoming more cultured and civilised. We keep alive our ancient animal state in an honourable way.

9. What you mean is, if we were an uncivilised race, we would forget the ancient uncivilised state?
8. True. The uncivilised are hypocritic, only pretending to be civilized.
1. You are right. I agree with you one hundred percent.
2. But brothers! What is the use of recollecting our ancient uncivilised state? I have not been able to comprehend it.
3. Shall I explain it?
2. If you do understand it! ...
3. Thanks. I understand it. (*pausing for a while*) As I understand it, we want to climb up the ladder of civilization by recollecting our ancient uncivilised state of being animals. Inspiration is inherent in memory.
2. What you say could be true but it could also be otherwise.
1. But what?
2. Our ancestors could have celebrated their liberation from being animals rather than honouring the ancient uncivilised state.
1. As a mark of victory?
2. Yes.
6. What's the difference? Isn't it just the same thing somehow?
2. You are speaking from your heart. Please make use of your brain.
6. Well!
2. I am telling you the truth. It's not a joke. (*No. 4 shows the mask of the tiger and chases away the children. Some laugh.*)

9. Tell me one thing, please. Why do some people wear the mask of the deities as they wear that of the animals?
1. Maybe we were mistaken that we were not animals in the past.
5. Or, maybe because we wish to be gods and goddesses from mankind, as we became men from being animals.
2. I do not agree with that.
1. Why?
2. The spirit of the animals is also to be found in the dance of the deities. The deities are nothing but animals with pretty masks.
4. Let it be whatever it is. Let us dance, sing and enjoy according to our tradition. Let's begin the carnival of animals. (*Puts on the mask of the tiger. Walks about on four feet like a tiger. Seeing it, other individuals also put on the tiger masks, walk about, spring and roar.*)
5. (*removing the mask*) Well, if everyone is to be the tiger, who's going to be the deer?
2. (*removing the tiger's mask*) Well, let me be the bear. (*puts on the mask of the bear*)
3. (*removing the tiger's mask*) And I am going to be the wolf. (*puts on the mask of the wolf*)
4. (*removing the tiger's mask*) Well, let me be the rhinoceros. (*puts on the mask of the rhinoceros*)
5. (*removing the tiger's mask*) I've never been able to be the tiger. Then, let me be the elephant. (*puts on the mask of the elephant*)
6. (*removing the tiger's mask*) I am fated to be a jackal all the time. Well, if I am not the king of the forest, I am his minister. (*puts on the mask of the jackal*)



7. *(removing the tiger's mask) How long am I going to be the monkey? I am tired of it. (puts on the mask of the monkey)*
8. *(removing the tiger's mask) Well, it is my fate to be the deer. What can I do? (puts on the mask of the deer)*
9. *(removing the tiger's mask) Always a hare but what can I do? (puts on the mask of the hare. All the individuals wearing the various animal masks stand in a circle in the stage. They move their arms in preparation for the animal dance. Some other persons (10, 11, 12) take up the musical instruments – drum, cymbals and horn, etc. and stand in the front part of the stage, facing the dancers.)*
10. *(standing, taking a big conch shell in his hand, makes a sign to the dancers) Let's begin the dance. ( The dancers nod their heads in agreement. He blows the conch. The sound of the conch is loud and long. Immediately after the conch ceases, the drum, cymbals and horn are heard. All the actors wearing different masks begin the dance following the lead of the man with the mask of the tiger. The dancers keep true to the nature of the animals whose masks they are wearing. Both the music and dance have a classical base. The first tal (beating time in music) ends. With the beginning of the second tal, the musicians raise their voice and sing loudly in keeping with the music. The rag (musical mode) is classical. The dancers divide into three groups as they dance) rag – Pasujit (The Victory of the Animals)*

*jaya jaya mahajit / mahakala mahajit / garagara mahajit*

*namo namo pashujit / pashujit pashujit*

**Victory, Victory, A Great Victory, A Great Victory to the Great Destroyer. Let it be a great victory!**

**Victory to the Animals! Victory to the Animals!!**

*(Midnight. The dance reaches climax. The audience yawn and overcome with sleep, go home. Finally, there remain only the dancers and musicians. When the last tal ends, No. 10 blows the conch and declares the conclusion of the dance. The dancers remove their masks, wipe the sweat and sit down to rest. Some of them even nod.)*

1. What's the time?
9. Three o'clock at night.
2. It is never three at night. It is always in the morning and in the daytime.
9. Don't sleep then. Keep awake. *(looks at the watch)*  
For me, it is three at night. I am going to sleep. *(exits)*
3. There was no pleasure at all in the dance.
1. Why?
3. The audience starts leaving in the middle of the dance. It's no fun.
4. That's a tradition.
3. Are we only to keep true to the tradition? Not the audience? Have we taken the sole duty of saving the tradition? If that's so, there will be no dance from next year.
5. You are right. People watch traditional dances these days as something to be looked upon with pity, not with love.
6. It's easier to watch the t. v. at home than to watch such dance.
2. There is something else too.
1. What's that?
2. The dance is long. It is difficult to watch the dance throughout the whole night without blinking.

4. But in old days people did watch.
3. The old days and ways are gone. There is no future for this dance. (*throws the masks in anger.*)
4. Why are you getting mad?
3. Thinking that it is better than dying. Oh! (*holds up his head and sits down. Others stare in amazement. Silence.*)
2. Let's go. (*yawns.*)
6. Just one moment ...
5. I am thinking of something.
2. About tradition?
3. Don't think about it. I hate tradition. I spit upon it. (*spits, silence again*)
4. Friend, your hate and spit are not against tradition. ... I am pleased.
3. What?
4. I am pleased.
3. Why?
4. Because by expressing your hatred and by spitting you are actually hating this senseless modernity. He who hates our great tradition does so.
2. Is that so, brother?
3. I don't know. (*exits in anger. Nos. 4 and 2 smile.*)
1. (*to No. 5*) What were you saying just now?
5. Well, that's nothing in particular. Let's go.
1. No. You must not go away without telling it. Do you know what happens if you don't speak it out?
5. (*smiling*) What will happen?

1. We shall lose our freedom of listening. (*everybody laughs heartily.*)
5. I am not Ravan. I'll tell you.
2. Tell me then. If you are too longwinded, we shall consider it also as a loss of our freedom.
5. All right. I agree with you without precondition. (*laughs and wipes face*) Brothers, I was thinking of something. It is thousands of years since we became men from animals. No?
1. Yes, that's a fact.
5. Then, why are we not celebrating it as "The Day of Great Transformation." or "Humanity Day?"
2. Yes, that's true. Why not?
4. Who knows?
5. We celebrate "Animals' Day" because we were animals in the past, but we are not celebrating a "Humanity Day." Why?
6. Well, that's very strange question indeed.
1. The question is not strange. It is fundamental one. It seems to me that we are being unjust.
2. Unjust to whom?
1. To ourselves. We should have been celebrating this. Why didn't our ancestors leave the tradition of celebrating "Humanity Day"?
4. Perhaps, it was considered proper to celebrate the past as animals.
5. Your guess could be correct. Now. ... let us do something else, brothers.
2. What else?

5. Our ancestors gave us the tradition of "Animals' Day." Let us give our descendants the tradition of observing "Humanity Day."
1. Agreed!
2. Agreed!
4. Agreed!
6. Agreed!
5. Agreed? (*everybody cries unanimously happily, 'Agreed' ! ! ! Those who were asleep get up hurriedly.*)
7. What has happened?
8. What's that?
1. The sky has not fallen.
2. The volcano has not erupted.
6. There is no flood.
4. No earthquake.
5. There is no storm.
7. Then, what has happened?
5. A great discussion has taken place. Now we are going to celebrate "Humanity Day," not "Animals' Day."
8. But why?
5. To prove the fact that we have become human beings.
7. To prove?
5. Yes, brother. Where do we have the certificate of our being human so far?
2. When are we going to have the new celebration?

1. As soon as possible. At an auspicious time! No?
5. Yes. Now, aren't we leaving?
8. Where are we going?
5. Home. Or do you intend to stay in the woods? *(everybody laughs. The drum, cymbals and horn sound discordantly in one part of the stage instead of heading away from the stage. In this instant, some people enter with multicoloured curtains and props in which many houses are drawn. The curtains and props cover and encircle from the front part of the stage, and when everybody are hidden within, the circle narrows. The discordant music ceases. The bearers are lost within the props. There is no door in the props with many houses. The multicoloured curtains and props serve as doorways. They are also walls. The utmost silence of the night is over. There is light, No. 7 exits from the doorway in the props and wanders about aimlessly. Yawns and scratches his head. No. 6 comes out through another door.)*
6. What's wrong, brother? Got lice in your head?
7. Well, I don't know. *(scratches diligently.)*
6. It must be lice, since you are a man who wore the monkey's mask.
7. Don't you think there are lice in the jackal's head too? *(both laugh.)* Danced the whole night. Not slept long enough.
6. I am tired rather than sleepy. *(raises arms and stretches himself)* Oh, how tiring! Can't sleep when I am too tired.
7. So sad ...
6. What are you sad for? Have you read my mind?
7. No, but what was that?

6. I am worried to whom to give the reins of the society this time?
7. But why do you have to worry?
6. Well, shouldn't one worry because one is intelligent? Social contract is a way of picking the brains of the strong by the weak. Don't you know it? We have got to live. No?
7. Yes, we have got to live.
6. What's it for the strong? They rule one way or another. We should not become the grist in their mill while they ruled. That is my worry. Now, let's go.
7. Where?
6. To seek the support of the strong. There is going to be a democratic election.
7. Well, let it go. This is not only my problem.
6. That's why I said let's go.
7. Should we go?
6. Yet, let's go.
7. Should we?
6. Go, go. The wise look after their own interest. Let's not forget it. (*howls like a jackal and walks away. No. 7 chatters like a monkey and follows reluctantly.*)
7. Where are we going?
6. To take part in the democratic exercise.
7. How long?
6. As long as it lasts.
7. Oh! I am so tired.
6. Don't lose your heart.
7. It is so tedious.

6. Don't be lazybones. (*circles the house-like prop and arrives at the same spot.*)
7. Now, where are we to go? (*pointing off the stage*)  
That way?
6. There is a dense forest in that direction. We've come from there, to live together in harmony. (*No. 4 opens the door in the prop and emerges, walks about slowly. Holding a plate full of sweets, he keeps munching*) Oh, really!
7. What did you say?
6. (*pointing towards No. 4*) It seems that we should take advantage of his strength.
7. What's the use of that thick hide. Not good enough even for a scratch.
6. You are really dumb.
7. How?
6. If you only know how to make use of it, a thick hide can be turned into a shield. Don't you know it? (*walks away, No. 7 follows*) Greetings, Sir (*suavely*).
7. Greetings, Sir (*gruffly*).
4. Who's that?
6. (*springs forward*) Me, Sir.
4. Oh, that's you. Henceforth, don't greet me from behind.
6. Why, Sir?
4. I cannot see behind my back. It takes a long time to turn the body backwards. That's because of my large body.
6. But in that thickness of yours there is immense strength.



4. (*flattered*) That's right in a way. ... But what brings you here?
6. I have to plead something.
4. What's that?
6. If you take hold of the reins of the society this time, we could live well and good.
4. That's not possible.
6. Why, Sir? (*No. 7 also comes and stands alongside*)
4. I have no time for such a tedious job. What do I care about the society?
6. Still ... Sir.
4. I am a simple fellow. Although endowed with strength, I see no reason to pick up a quarrel with anybody. ... If anyone challenges me then, of course I won't let him go scot free. I eat well and I live well. That's what my strength is for! I don't care for anything else.
6. It would be very difficult for us even to live then.
4. If you find it difficult to exist, eat and get strong. And that's that. (*goes away mindlessly*)
6. Then, farewell, Sir. (*lowers his head, walks away. No. 7 follows without saying 'farewell'. In his dissatisfaction, he chatters like a monkey*) .Don't scream.
7. Didn't I say that thick hide has no use. A waste of time!
6. Don't be so intolerant. A stone is wasted. That's all.
7. Where shall we find another stone?
6. Come with me. I see it.
7. Where?

6. Just follow me. We'll find it. We shall seek someone stronger than him and with a greater appetite.
7. Will that be a help?
6. There's a strong possibility.
7. What is the reason for your optimism?
6. We shall go to someone who is very foolish although he is very strong. He is peaceful by nature and grave. *(walks away, No. 7 follows)*
7. Tell me something.
6. What's that?
7. Will someone with a greater appetite let us also eat?
6. We shall live on even if he does not let us eat.
7. How come?
6. Whatever he excretes is more nutritious than what others eat. *(No. 5 opens the door and enters. In one hand he carries a stool. In another hand, he has a large plate full of sweets and fruits. He sits on the stool and begins to eat.)*
7. *(pointing towards No. 5)* Him?
6. Yes, that's him. How did you know?
7. Don't you see him eating? A man's character is known by how

5. *(without looking)* Oh, I am well.
6. You are busy right now!
5. *(without a glance)* Yes, I am rather busy. *(Nos. 6 and 7 look at one another. Signs of displeasure in No. 7's face)*
6. I have something to say to you, Sir.
5. *(without a glance)* Speak.
6. It's time for the exercise in democracy.
5. *(without a glance)* Oh, yes.
6. We have come to pray to you to take the reins of the society in your hand for the sake of the likes of us, the helpless and hopefuls. Please pardon us, we have intruded at a busy time.
5. *(without a glance)* Never mind, go on.
6. Sir, this is what we want... a chance to live. You have unlimited power. Your body is huge and you have an enormous appetite. If we could but live under your leadership none could terrorise us nor we would have to bow down to their prestige and pomp. We simple and helpless people would find a god in you.
5. *(looking up for the first time)* I would like to express my gratitude for your faith and expression of trust in me.
6. Sir.
5. *(eating and looking sideways)* But I would like to say honestly that I am unwilling to take hold of the reins of the society.
6. But why, Sir?
5. There are two good reasons.
6. What are these?

5. The first reason is I have to keep on eating all the time for the sake of my huge body. I don't have the time to do anything else. This is not my eating habit. It is a natural necessity.
6. That we know, Sir.
5. That's it. You know it. What shall I say? Some are born generals, some are soldiers. What am I to do? It is something that begins at birth itself.
6. Sir.
5. Another reason is that the killers have the ambition to hold the reins of the society. That is the job of the killers. I happen to be a pure vegetarian and a lover of peace. Now, you tell me, how can I do something against my own nature?
6. Ah, you must not say that, Sir. We shall all die.
5. You have not died so far. How will you die now? You will live on. There is no doubt it. Please excuse me now. *(gets busy eating. No. 7 Walks away without a word of farewell. No. 6 waits for a while, but in vain)*
6. Sir, we shall go then. *(holds up his hands together and bows out)*
5. *(without a glance)* All right. Please don't take it too much to heart.
6. No, Sir. You make us ashamed. *(smiles ingratiatingly and walks away, meets No. 7.)*
7. So, you were given the contents of his bowels and entrails to eat?
6. Why would you leave in haste if you were given that?
7. I mean no offence. I am just joking.
6. You call that a joke? *(draws a long breath)* Joking at a time of great distress!
7. What great distress has visited you?

6. Oh, you have to have social sensitivity to experience that.
7. Where?
6. *(pointing to his heart)* Here.
7. *(biting his lips)* I believe it!
6. Believe it if you can. Don't believe if you cannot. *(walks away, No. 7 follows reluctantly)*
7. Where are we going now?
6. Don't know.
7. Whom are we going to look for?
6. To look for the greatest killer among the leaders.
7. Why?
6. To save us from other killers.

*(They circle the props. Nos. 4 and 5 walk back and forth between the props, eating. Nos. 1 and 2 exit from the opposite doors and walk haughtily. A young woman enters the stage. Seeing her, No. 1 roars like a tiger. The young woman flees in terror. No. 1 runs after her, seizes and lifts her. The woman struggles and screams in terror, No. 1 roars with satisfaction. Seeing what is happening, No. 2 in jealousy grunts like a bear. No. 1 roars and goes behind the prop. The tiger's roar and the woman's screams are heard. No. 2 grunts in desperation like a bear. Then he leans on one side and keeps quiet. Deep silence. Footsteps of Nos. 6 and 7 are heard. They appear and stand near the door to No. 1)*

7. Here?
6. Yes.
7. Then call him.
6. You may also call.

7. No, please call yourself.
6. You call.
7. You call.
6. You call.
7. You call.
6. Weakling!
7. Chicken-hearted!
6. Coward!
7. Cry-baby!
1. (*roars from within*) Who's that?
6. Sir.
7. Sir... (*steps back, trembling, No. 1 emerges*)
9. What's happened?
6. Yes, Sir...
7. Sir.
1. What?
6. I've come to pay you my respects, Sir. Greetings (*bows lowly, with hands together*)
7. Greetings! (*bows in a similar way*)
1. All right. All right. (*lights a cigar*)
6. The time has come, O Lord!
1. What time?
6. Yes, Sir. The time to take part in the exercise... the time to take the reins of the society in your hand.
1. Don't you think the reins of the society are in my hand? (*roars. No. 7 trembles like a monkey and takes*

*a few steps back. No. 6 takes two steps backwards in terror)*

6. Lord, my lord, that's not what I mean.

1. Then, what?

6. Our intention was to say that the time has come for your lordship to formally resume the exercise of taking the reins again in your hand. This is what we want to say... Please!

1. That's all right then. I will fulfil the formality of democratic exercise. I have got to show the people. Isn't that so?

6. *(goes nearer enthusiastically)* Yes, my lord. That's the main concern. You are our lord throughout our lifetime.

1. Is there anyone else?

6. What, my lord?

1. Anyone wanting to compete with me?

6. No, Sir. There is none among us to court death by competing with your lordship.

1. Yet... there are a few upstarts in the society who are jealous of my hunting.

6. Don't say that my mouth is big. If there is anyone like that we shall take care of him ourselves. *(with seeming enthusiasm)*

1. All right, take care of these elements. If you can't do it, let me know. *(goes behind the prop. No. 6 pays his respects, barking loudly. No. 7 stares in amazement)*

6. *(going near No. 7)* What else can we do? We have got to save our skin. Let's go now. *(walks away)* Why were you so scared?

7. As if you aren't...

6. Well, I am just acting. I have to appear terrified when his lordship roars. (*laughs without shame*)
7. Where now?
6. Now we can go anywhere without a care. What do we have to fear since we are his lordship's followers. No need to worry any more.
7. I am nobody's follower. I don't like the idea of being a follower.
6. Why?
7. Self-respect.
6. Your self-respect is of little consequence. It can take you towards death rather than safeguard your life. (*enter No. and 9*)
7. Oh, friends, how far are you going?
8. Just for a walk.
9. And you?
6. We have just come from his lordship's place. (*with some pride*)
8. What for?
6. It's time for the exercise. Just to remind his lordship. He is always busy hunting. (*with pride again*) What to do, being his trusted lieutenants?
8. Oh, just a little...
7. What's that?
8. Isn't it an authoritarian democracy?
6. How?
8. The rule of one all the time! We are always being hunted. We are fed up having to run all the time.
6. Quiet! Don't speak like that in this society. (*angrily*)



8. But why?
6. You may lose your life.
9. We've lost our life so many times. There is no counting.
8. It would be better if we could elect anyone who does not make the weak and the innocent the objects of his hunt.
6. Such people keep their eyes closed. They say it is not their job. What can we do?
9. Yet if you clever fellows can convince them.
6. They won't be convinced. There is no need to talk to them. *(No. 1 is heard roaring)*
8. Let's run.
9. Let's run. *(runs away)*
6. Cowards! Tut! *(spits)*
7. Don't do that. You might be spitting on your own face. *(No. 6 becomes very angry and walks away. No. 7 follows)* Are you angry?
- (No. 6 keeps mum. Both go towards another corner of the prop, silently. Suddenly No. 2 gets up, grunting like a bear and stops them midway. In desperation they make the sounds of the jackal and the monkey. They could not escape)*
2. You stooges! Come this way.
6. Yes, Sir.
7. Yes, Sir.
2. Come this way. *(They advance towards him in terror)* Now, it is my turn to take the reins of the society in my hand. Not your lord's. This is not his father's domain. He cannot rule all the time.

6. Yes, Sir. That's what I was saying, 'In a democracy, you cannot rule all the time. You have to give up the reins!' But...
2. But what?
6. He won't heed. He won't give up. He even hinted that...
2. What did he say?
6. He said that he would kill him who seeks to take his place.
2. He would kill me, would he? (*grunts in anger like a bear*)
6. If you don't believe me, ask him. (*pointing towards No. 7*) He is a stooge. No. 1 stooge. (*No 7 becomes speechless with surprise; later, in anger seeks to refute. No. 2 in a great anger, falls upon No. 7., scratches, claws, throws him on the ground, and pulls up. No. 7 cries pitifully like a monkey and tries to escape, fails. No. 7 howls like a jackal and races away, reaches No. 1's gate*) Help, my lord! Help! Help! (*No. 1 emerges, roaring*)
1. What's wrong?
6. Our agent was killed, my lord.
2. Who did that?
6. That way, my lord. There, in that direction.
- (*pointing towards the place where the incident has taken place, No. 1 looks around. No. 2, grunting like a bear, pulls the dead body of No. 7. Seeing it, No. 1 roars loudly. No. 2 gives up his prey and grunts loudly, angrily. In the end, both roar and grunt, advancing towards each other, seeking an excuse to strike*)
1. Why did you kill my follower?

2. It's not only your right to hunt. It is also our birthright. Know it!

1. You talk too much!

2. Quiet!!! (*both spring at once at each other. They meet fiercely in mid air and fall down on the ground. They rise again, spring at each other, fight in the air, fling down on the ground, getting angrier all the time. The tiger roars and the bear grunts. No. 6 howls like a jackal and runs about in the sidelines while the great war goes on. Eventually, he gets caught between the two contestants and is killed. The fighters shift ground, scratching, clawing, rolling over and over and reach near Nos. 4 and 5. No. 4 moves aside and grunts like a rhinoceros. No. 5 does not move but trumpets like an elephant. As the warriors move away, Nos. 4 and 5 resume eating, without worrying any more. The fighters reach the rear section of the prop as they keep on fighting. Nos. 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 3 make their escape and reach the front*)

10. Now, where do we go?

8. Here and there!

3. There, there!

9. That side, that side!

(*They run away in three directions. As they run, Nos. 9 and 3 come together. While the others exit from the stage, No. 3 grunts like a wolf and attacks No. 9*)

9. (*yelping like a helpless hare*) Oh, oh, I have done nothing wrong. Don't kill me.

3. I shall go hungry if I don't kill the likes of you. (*The cruel wolf cries, forcibly removes the watch, purse, jacket and other valuable things. As the noise of the battle between the tiger and the bear comes nearer from behind the prop, he runs off the stage, pulling the body of No. 9. Nos. 1 and 2 reach the front, still fighting, both are covered in blood, but they continue*

*to fight. The prop is shaken by the fight. Nos. 4 and 5 hold in one hand a plate containing sweets, and eating with the other hand. They reach the mid part of the battleground. The rhinoceros and the elephants shout.)*

4. No concern of ours, right?
5. No concern. Let them fight and die! I would go on eating and living happily.
4. That is also my life and my philosophy.

*(They face different directions and keep eating. Behind them the warriors keep on their endless war. The prop with many houses shakes. That's about it.)*

(Tr. Kesar Lall)

# **ESSAYS**



## **HRIDAYACHANDRA SINGH PRADHAN**

*Hridayachandra Singh Pradhan (1915-1959) had to his credit six collections of essays, two collections of short stories, two novels and four collections of play. Known for his critical approach to the prevailing social life, here is an essay of great satire and wit.*

### **LET ME BE A DWARF IN MY NEXT LIFE TOO**

I wonder why most tall men mentally measure their stature and strut about with a nose as long as the elephant's trunk, swollen with pride. Perhaps, they take it as a great fortune, the sweet fruit of their virtue.

But what shall I say? My eyes begin to fill with tears when I look at them. In an age when despite many lights there is darkness everywhere, it is unfortunate to be born at all. To be tall and heavy is to cross the bounds of misfortune.

I am surprised and amused as well. All the hairs on my body – on my arms and limbs, all over the head, on the cheeks that the barber's sharp razor has trouble with, the beard, and the moustache that is shaved repeatedly – are amused at the vainglory of my tall brethren. I have often heard them deride their short kinsmen in these words, "We can easily look over the heads in a crowd, be it at a festival of the gods or at other gatherings. It is a sin to be short in stature."

I am also a dwarf. I became aware of my short stature since I was about twelve years old. During the next decade and half, i. e., until I was about twenty-seven years old, I was very self-conscious and dejected because of it. Now I am fully thirty years old. At long last I have come to understand the beauty of being a dwarf. It was

like a poem, in short, grave and mysterious. Perhaps, I had presented a Parker Vacumatic fountain-pen to the Creator(?). Anyway, I must have pleased Him in one way or another. Therefore, even in this *Kali Yuga*, the Iron age, when the presence of too many sinners has made a hell of the world, I was born a dwarf and consequently that is some comfort to me.

The present age is considered the *Kali Yuga*, the definition of which, according to an old scholarly treatise, is "an epoch of sin or despotism of all sorts." It may be interpreted as a period of time when the human society degenerates to such depths that there is little discrimination between generations, with parents rejecting their children and vice versa, with neither love nor faithfulness between couples, when there is no sense of decency among relatives even in the fulfillment of carnal desires, when everyone seeks to enjoy indiscriminately, when plunder goes unchecked and murders are committed for the fulfillment of selfish ends.

I have read in the Purana, the sacred scripture, of such tyrannical behaviour even in the great golden ages of the past, the *Satya*, *Treta* and *Dwapar Yugas*. Brahma had fallen for his own daughter Saraswati and pursued her. Indra and Chandra did not spare even the wives of their teachers. There are many such instances in the history of these days. As a matter of fact, the foundation for the current Dark Age was laid early on in the previous ages. In other words, the seeds had been sown since the earliest times.

Actually tyranny was prevalent in all the four ages. Still the present age is regarded as the age of tyranny. A closer look at the different periods of *Kali Yuga* reveals that this century, particularly this decade, may be called after a famine in food grains and textiles. I have learnt from newspapers that millions had died of hunger during this decade. I have heard of suicide by many women who were ashamed to have to live in the nude. The scarcity of clothing is such that when a doctor had to see a patient,



he had to give notice of his arrival a few hours in advance. In the obtaining situation, this may well be called the ultimate *Kali Yuga*.

Plots and counter plots among the world's powerful tyrants are increasing. Intoxicated with power and beastliness, they are becoming insane. I guess that their devil dance would continue for some decades yet. In other words, in my opinion, this is only the beginning of or an introduction to *Kali Yuga*. It will go on gaining momentum as time goes on.

Even as an initial phase of *Kali Yuga*, the devil dance and despotism have gone so far that it has played a havoc among the common men. Compared to those elements with power and animal instinct, the common men have been degraded below the drawers of water and hewers of wood. There is no value nor personality of the common men in this age. The only way an ordinary person can have some value is to acquire the skill of licking boots or to surrender himself to someone who claims that blindness is better than the ability to see. If he did so, he would eventually emerge as a hero in the domain of despotism. A simple or ordinary person would end up as a victim's victim.

The ordinary person has become a prey these days to yet another innovation called the "black market." In our own words, it is nothing else than the "thief's market" and in effect, gladly joining the crowd to the slaughter-house in utter darkness and allowing the butcher to cut the flesh off one's body with his nice sharp knife in exchange for the wherewithal for a couple of days' existence.

Many of those people who have become capitalists these days either by sucking blood or on the strength of their own sweat, in their greed, have turned into butchers by feeding upon the germs bred by the beastly black market war zone. The black market germs have become so widespread now that they have almost driven out the cholera germs. Of course, the black market germs have to be thanked for getting rid of cholera germs. But it is to be

regretted that due to its infectious nature, the entire civilisation has come to a dead end. It may not take long for the butchers, fattened on the black market germs, to fight among themselves when they find nothing more substantial to prey upon. How dreadful is the black market germ is evident from the fact that he who consumes it becomes a butcher and he who does not is finished by it!

Actually, there are two kinds of black market. One kind creates a situation in which people find themselves in difficulties in the pursuit of their habitual livelihood. They are then led into the darkness and taken advantage of by selling them their necessities at arbitrary prices. The other kind exploits the situation in such a way that people are compelled to sell their products at low prices or to work at low wages in order to appease their hunger.

The black market has become so widespread now that almost everybody in the world would love to become a part of it. Because of it, humanity itself has turned into a "blind market." It does not behove man to take pride in the true definition of the word "humanity". Peace and fulfillment are to be found in the animal world now than within human society.

Now, in the situation obtaining under the black market, it is well and good for our survival to keep our consumption at a minimum. In other words, our basic needs, such as food, clothing and other essentials, should be the very minimum, despite the fact that geographically and population and production wise such essentials are not inadequate. The peoples of the *Satya*, *Dwapar* and *Treta Yugas* were said to be very tall indeed. Oh! the people these days, who are no taller than four cubits, need one pound of rice, six yards of cotton and the space of four or five cubits in height and width in each story of their house. Even then they are facing great difficulties. The ancients would require at least two pounds of rice, a dozen yards of cotton and each storey in their house would be eight or nine cubits in height and width. If such tall people were to be born these days, they would have to die at once.

The people in *Kali Yuga* had better be shorter than those of the three previous *Yugas*, the *Satya*, *Treta* and *Dwapar*, for the simple reason that they have to suffer much due to widespread black market. It was great kindness on the part of God to make the people short since they have to keep themselves alive with great difficulty in these bad *Kali Yuga* days. It would be very ungrateful not to thank God for this kindness. Since I am only three cubits tall, I express my gratitude to God in every conceivable manner.

I would like to mention to God that most people I see these days are yet taller by one cubit. If they were as short as I am, they would have lived with some ease since their needs would be proportionately less. Of course, God is also just. Perhaps, those who are four or five and half cubits tall even during the *Kali Yuga* had committed some sin (?) in their previous life, because in this age of the black market, the height of a man is a cause for misery. The fulfillment of basic needs these days is very difficult. Therefore, I pray to God that even if they had sinned in their previous life or are blameworthy, please from now on make them dwarfs.

Probably I had earned some merit in my previous life. A pound of rice fully satisfies my hunger during the day. Six yards of cotton provided to me under the quota system is not only adequate for a suit of clothes but also for an under vest. As a size three and half or four shoe would do for me, I could get a pair at a cheaper price by claiming that it is boy's footwear. The shoes also last at least six months longer because I am lighter than a tall, heavy fellow. If it was only for myself, the height in each storey of the house would be adequate even if it was three cubits and half in height and width. But what to do? It is sad to say. Although I am fortunately a dwarf, I have to dwell with taller people and the height of each storey has to be four and half or five cubits. So, although I am lucky enough, I have to go sometimes to the butcher's place in the black market. I become faint even if I have to give but a few drops of my blood to the black market

germs. Oh, how the poor tall fellows would have to lie still and sigh for hours after their visits to the butcher's slaughter house!

It is always better to survive on minimum needs. Hence, with all due respect, because of my relationship with God as a great devotee, I must mention that it was not right on His part to have made people tall during the three previous ages – the *Satya*, *Treta* and *Dwapar*. To be able to make men somewhat short is to show efficiency in the creation of mankind.

The short person is also particularly robust and looks younger. I am thinking of keeping my children short by treating them with musk and other remedies so that they can lead a happy life.

God, I thank you for making me short so that I could somehow be happy even in the black market slaughter house. May you prosper for ever! May you ever be successful and victorious!! If I have to be reborn as a human being, I pray that you make me a dwarf again!

(Tr. Kesar Lall)

## SHANKAR LAMICHHANE

*Shankar Lamichhane (1927-1975) had to his credit two collections of essays. He was bestowed Madan Puraskar in 1967 for the collection which included, Abstract Chintan Ra Pyaj (Abstract Thinking and Onion) presented here. The beauty of his work lies in the novelty of presenting ideas in a very informal way.*

### ABSTRACT THINKING AND ONION

I came across Mr. Bangdel<sup>33</sup> last evening in New Road. He said, "I've gone through your article that, you know, '*In the View of Shankar Lamichhane.*'"

"How do you like it?"

"Very interesting, a bit realistic though. Why don't you now attempt an abstract subject too."

"It is your field to do abstract painting! Why should I intrude into it?"

"No, not that, you may just try a bit of an abstract style pen-picture."

I simply smiled (Smile is also a great art. Along with the advancement in age, a great many difference appears in the art of smiling.) I bade goodbye to Mr. Bangdel with a smile, and put a stop to the matter.

Then I chanced upon Mr. Vyathit<sup>34</sup> had a design for a jacket for the *Himani*<sup>35</sup> in his hand. One could detect

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33 Lain Singh Bangdel - A famous Nepali painter known for his abstract painting. Also known for his contributions to Nepali literature. A chapter for his novel "Out of the county" appears in this issue.

34 A Nepali poet and sometime Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. One of his poems appears in this volume.

35 A Nepalese literary journal.

immediately that it was the work of Mr. Bangdel's in the same way as the *Himani* reminded a poetic creation of Mr. Vyathit. He too said "An expert as you are in writing stories, why don't you write one and give it to me in a couple of days. I am going abroad to get it printed: I intend to bring it out on Vijaya Dashami<sup>36</sup>."

I simply resorted to smile. (If one does not know how to smile before a particular person, one is sure to suffer so much as to bring tears to the eyes.) I bade goodbye to Mr. Vyathit, and also tried to put a stop to the matter then and there.

But neither Vyathit nor Bangdel, the *Himani* nor the subject of abstract writing went out of my mind. Mind is indeed a wonderful thing – once an idea grips it, it's really a problem to drive it out. The moment you try, a conflict starts between your personality and the personality of the idea itself. Besides, the idea in no case goes out in the same form as it had come. You will find it to have already left its impression. I started probing my mind. I wanted to see how many aspects of the original idea stay put. Dear Mr. Vyathit! Lord Krishna had exhibited the whole universe to his mother within his mouth. You may please see my universal form today: you will see what is in my mind? But let me first tell you something about me. I am an intellectual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD; from a middle class family; married and father of children; young; healthy; full of constructive ideas, a sincere citizen, and full of worries, with myriads of problems.

The foremost of the problems is that I stand in a no-man's land. On one side of the border, there is a connection of my ancestors and on the other of my progeny. I feel happy at the launching of the Sputnik as if Mr. Khrushchev had begged the very Hammer and Sickle from my house to carry to the moon. At the same time, I feel uneasy lest a pregnant woman touch her belly – I beg for charity also for the untouchables as if the Maharaja is

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36 The great festival of the Hindus.

related as the grandfather of my Lamichhane family. I read the newspapers ranging from the *Gorkhapatra*<sup>37</sup> to the *Times* and also from the *Newsweekly* to the *Filmfare* and romantic materials as well. The questions of suicide and fresh romantic affair of Elizabeth Taylor also haunt my mind as problems. Dag Hammersold's death and the problems of the UN operation, U Thant, Cold War between the US and USSR, Laos, Suez Cannel, The Galvan Valley, Kashmir, Malaysia, India, Ceylon are also in my mind. I have read *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller, but where to find the *Capricorn* now? Sir Winston Churchill had broken his thigh; I wonder will it be restored? What will Nepal say at the meeting of UN assembly, this year? Which side in Congo will draw more votes? My son has recovered from typhoid. Will meat be available today? *Ekadashi*,<sup>38</sup> they say, covers today and tomorrow. A certain scientist achieved success in his experiment of producing milk out of grass; an anti-national element crossed into the border and shot a particular person dead, and an attempt was made to assassinate the President of the Republic of France. How will the problems of Algeria be solved? Albert Camus has also been too Algeria; these days, I am reading his work *Myth of Sisyphus*. The telstar has made tele view possible in Europe. One Jyapu<sup>39</sup> living across the field has died – he used to greet me always, "Ja Naya Dhun Ala Bajya"<sup>40</sup>, he has no children. Mr. Bangdel also has no children; he suggests me to draw an abstract pen-picture just like the one with cover of the *Himani*, just like the speech of Mr. Vyathit.

In the midst of the border of all such incoherent ideas, I have set up a no-man's land of my personality. Take it for granted O Vyathits and Bangdels, my life itself is an abstract picture. As a matter of fact, I keep away myself from everyday. Everyday my morning starts with a

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37 A daily newspaper.

38 The eleventh day of the lunar fortnights, Hindus do not eat meal on this day

39 A peasant class of the Kathmandu valley.

40 Have you taken food? a kind of phatic communication.

catch-phrase: 'I need money for buying green vegetables', my afternoon is spent in search of a source of income, and every evening ends with the words 'I am a bit tired today.' Everyday some of my acquaintances die somewhere, a short time is spent in forgetting their death. Everyday I go a little bit into past history, everyday I draw a short outline of the future. Everyday I do a little bit of evaluation. Everyday I bargain, sell, purchase, mortgage, my convictions, faith, wishes and ambitions. 'The meat bought today is all bones – the seller has cheated our servant'; 'the milk brought in today is all water'; 'how wet is the fuel wood, how dear...'. These are the limits, that the housewives, children and cook pour right into my mind by the way of making comments. Besides, there are other comments which myself press down to my mind – at the parliament session today Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru said so and so, how much truth would be there in it? What will be the impact on the world of this new step taken by Mr. Khrushchev regarding the city of Berlin? If World War really starts from where will it begin? One does not know how many children are destined to live a dark life because of thalidomide? Ah! Alfred Noyes has ended in such a place! He is said to have wished to die in the mountains.

My dear Bangdel! Which human being's life is not abstract? Which human being's life is not hateful? – at least till the time he remains silent. Which person's feelings are not hateful – till the time, at least, he buries it in waves of smiles. Which person has no avarice in his heart till the time he wipes it at least, with his slogans? Mr. Vyathit, gone are the days of the seers of the Golden Age. Now, the brain of every conscious man is not smaller than the world manifested by Lord Krishna. Every person today is a God who builds his own world by deceptions, intrigues, frauds, butcheries, and by laws, irresponsibility, superstitions, devotions, truths and follies. The god of today, in reality, is not bounded by any religion – he finds his rival even in Christ, Buddha and Mohammed. Also the God of today is a bit of a diplomat, like a priest ..... just as....



"Can't we do this way Mr. Priest?"

"Yes, you can."

Man controls God just as birth is controlled. The moment you need him, he appears; the moment you do not need, he will disappear. He will appear as much as is needed. The moment he is needed for help in composing a poem he will appear bound by the laws of meter and rhyme. The moment he is needed for help in use singing an eulogy, he will appear in the form of a lexicon. The moment he is needed for help to be of some use he will appear in the form of an encyclopedia: *garibparvar* (supporter of the poor in the Urdu language), *karunanidhi* (gracious and compassionate being in the Sanskrit), *khwamit* (my lord in the pure Nepali of poet Bhanubhakta).

Well, I was saying that the man today has become a god himself. All the attributions of god abound in him – except an attribution the attribute of a real human being – the real human who simply is, and remains human until his death. |

My dear Mr. Vyathit and Mr. Bangdel, if you are interested in a search for a human being who is no longer human but has not yet become a God, please come to my place. You will not find any non-human being greater than me, and others will not introduce themselves just like me. What shall I do Mr. Vyathit! I have not described myself as a non-human being though you may see I am a Hindu. Yet I cannot help liking the Buddha, Christ, and Mohammed. I also like all kinds of faiths and all kinds of atrocious committal undertaken in their names. If the atrocities, the crusades, and Shankaracharya's onslaught had not been undertaken, how could Vyathits be Hindus, Bangdel be Christians and Shankars be Muslims now? I would have become a man who would believe in all, but cherish no faith in anyone. How could I say then, "I am the universe." I would have no faith at all!

I am not a man of this age, Mr. Vyathit. I am yet to be born, a millennium in the future. When I would be re-born, there will no longer be any boundary between nations, nor any belief, religion and politics – none of them will exist. Now I will tell you why I stand today in the no-man's land! And I do not like to dip into your hue. After crossing the boundary I must obtain citizenship. So I am a non-citizen. I myself am a boundary that has separated the present from the past, and the past from the future.

You must have seen the boundary – a *panchamukhi*<sup>41</sup> icon built unknowingly in the middle of nowhere – to which nobody needs to bring offerings, and flowers, but if it needs to be removed blood should be offered as sawing by committing murders. What is the colour of this boundary, Mr. Bangdel? – White? (as in a boundary pillar). Gray? (just as soil). Red? (just as man). Liquid? (tending to flow). Invisible? (imperceptible just as the mountain peak). If you could make an abstract painting of this boundary Mr. Bangdel, I shall, on my part, be able to figure out in my mind in an abstract way.

So long as you do not or cannot do so, I also like to remain silent. If I do an abstract painting of myself today, you will again have to breathe in the atmosphere of Paris. In order to understand my abstract painting, you will again have to learn by heart Mr. Vyathit's work entitled *One Day*.

So there are diversities in my smile – one for Vyathit, one for Bangdel and one for my son.

So I give in to smiling.

So there are diversities in my smile one for Vyathit, one for my son.

So I am still alive. The reason is that, I have been portraying myself and others realistically.

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41 An icon having five faces.

In my realistic painting, I am an onion – devoid of reason but arranged in many layers, with depth and eternal stench.

The world manifestation of Lord Krishna of today is also an onion. So Mr. Bangdel, please, paint a still life of the onion. So Mr. Vyathit, please, write an epic on the onion. Those works of yours will remain historical because of the stench of the person and the society of today will be preserved in numberless layers for an indefinite time to come. And in that painting and in that poetic work I will also remain alive for indefinite time to come.

If these painting and poetic works do not get done today, the future will miss the history of today with the death of the *Himani*, of Bangdel, and of Shankar Lamichane. ...just all boundaries will be missed after one thousand years.

*(Tr. Shiva Ram Rijal)*

## **BHAIRAV ARYAL**

*Bhairab Aryal (1936-1976) had to his credit five collections of essays full of satire and humour. The essay included here Asanko Dabali (The Market of Asan) gives a graphic discription by the Babel of tongues overheard one fine morning.*

### **THE ASAN MARKET**

"Ten rupees a *pathi*<sup>1</sup> of husked rice! Ten rupees a pathi? Can we afford to eat rice any longer? Scarcity of grains in an agricultural country like this!"

"Well, I have come for holy sight of the goddess Annapurna<sup>2</sup>. I had made a pledge. I have more faith in this goddess than in any other. A real goddess."

"You talk of goddesses! The image of the goddess Tundaldevi<sup>3</sup> is reported to have been almost stolen. What a time! We pray to the gods 'let nothing be stolen' but their own idols are stolen. Do you see...!"

"I have seen. You mean the girl is bell-bottoms on? She is a real flirt."

"It is her time as much as her youth. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, Sir I do! Okay one rupee for five bundles. Please take. The leaves are fresh. If you find decaying leave, this foolish girl is sure to die any moment. How would you know, Sir, how difficult it is to pick so many leaves..."

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1 A measure of about 4 kilos

2 The Goddess of Food

3 One of the numerous goddesses in Kathmandu

"I know everything – where he has his links these days. In the past they used to say that when favoured by the *siddha star*<sup>4</sup> a *Sudama*<sup>5</sup> of today becomes a *Kubera*<sup>6</sup> of tomorrow. These days one could own three cars tomorrow, no matter how good -for-nothing a fellow one is, if one could only become a *cid* (spy)."

"Don't you know the traffic rules? Government cars have the right of way. A lousy fellow puffed with pride for having a chance to drive a Toyota car for a couple of days! Lucky, the kid has only one of his legs run over. What if he had lost his life?"

"Is life to be considered significant or insignificant? On the one hand, an almost dead life is saved by heart-transplant and on the other hand, thousands of lives are done away with in a mass grave dropping bombs."

"No matter how much you talk, the age revolves in a circle 'Yes Sir' and 'No Sir'. What sort of business is this – like drawing *Mohar*<sup>7</sup> coins by a clerical staff about to retire? I have decided to go for Honkong business, a sum of forty or fifty thousands is after all not a great amount...!"

"For us, Sir, two paisas also do have the value equal to that of a lakh of rupees. The load is also no less heavy. Any sort of porter will not go these days. As of ourselves, we are the outstanding ones of this locality. As many as thirty two years have passed since I worked as a porter for gentleman like you, but I have never cheated even thirty two *dams*."<sup>9</sup>

"Don't know where does the line of demarcation between honesty and stupidity lie? I was in the state service for twenty long years, but not an amount of 20 paisas I had accepted as bribe. Everybody now calls me

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4 A star that brings good luck

5 Sudama, a poor person, an honest friend of Lord Krishna

6 Kuvera, the God of Wealth

7 A half rupee coin

9 The smallest coin long gone out of use. Four hundred *dams* made one rupee

stupid for not being able to manage even a meal of rice-gruel. Please tell me. What am I?"

"I, in fact is the soul, the self. Without knowing the self, there is no possibility for anyone to have a direct link with God, the supreme soul. This afternoon, at four o'clock, a religious discourse is going to be delivered at this very place, Ladies and Gentlemen..."

"... By women accepting pills or loops, and by men using condom or undergoing vasectomy. Family planning is the demand of this age."

"Indeed this is also an age of begging. You go somewhere begging for work, somewhere for donations, somewhere for arms and armies, somewhere for food and money, somewhere for freedom and rights, and somewhere for routes and check posts – demands and demands everywhere."

"We have planned to go on strike if our demands are not fulfilled."

"Your plan, as it is, is not bad in itself; no plan ushers in long lasting peace. For the sake of peace, lots of money have been spent and, many lives and ideas have been used up. But where is the return for these all?"

"You can see it a cure-all oil. Put in two drops if you have an ear-infection. Apply it as a collyrium if you have an eye-infection. In case of syphilis, use it as an ointment – it will do a miracle within four days!"

"Journey to the moon is indeed a miracle of science. But what will be its role in maintaining human dignity and establishing peace in the world?"

"For the sake of peace and prosperity, I have come to buy materials perform a ceremony, but what about you? Fine, let's move a side, the road roller is coming."

"Ugh ... these machines.... These days..."

"Fire engine, fire engine! ... No, not that, it is simply a bell-ringer. It runs with a bundle of vegetables in its mouth. Look there's also a bull..."

"Why are these people running in such a hurry as if the war has started?"

"Look, look there, the bull has mounted. What a shameless bull!"

"This place is ever crowded like this, Mr. Tourist. This is, after all, the heart of Kathmandu City – the Asan market. Look at the artistic wooden window there. How do you like it?"

"I do not like this powder. What woeful smell! Every lane stinks so badly! Please give me two lipsticks, no, not that rosy out, but the grey ..."

"These grey hippies have come here in search of bliss. Do you think the satisfaction you get from intoxicants like alcohol bring real bliss known as *ananda*!"

"Wait a bit, Mr. Anand. I too am going. Aren't you going by the *Ranipokhari*<sup>9</sup> tank?"

"What, you mean 'sank'? Throw himself into the Ranipokhari tank?"

"Who could have thrown this album here? Look, what sort of photos. Who may be its owner, a boy or girl? Let's check if there is any *paisa* also!"

"Ten *paisa*, for a stick of ice cream!..."

"Hello, mister! Why are you standing here in the market looking bewildered?"

(Tr. Shiva Ram Rijal)

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9 an old pond in Kathmandu city

## **KRISHNACHANDRA SINGH PRADHAN**

*Krishnachandra Singh Pradhan (1925) has to his credit four collections of essays, all in a personal vein. Known for a wide coverage in his discourse he speaks in the essay included here of the teachings of Lord Buddha in their true perspective against the work of Emperor Ashoka of India. He has won a number of prizes including the Madan Puraskar prize. He is a life member of the Royal Nepal Academy.*

### **A LETTER FROM GAUTAM BUDDHA TO ASHOKA**

The attack was made in the right place, how fierce it was! The encounter had been very severe, how sharp it had been! The step was taken at a war footing. How grave had it been! In this new technique of solution we shall reach an acceptable condition before the battle of arms becomes intense.

Those who worry be comforted! Those who are afraid be fearless! The crisis that gives you *salvation* is warmer than this life of uncertainty.

For those Nepali braves who pounce upon the canons and guns just by tucking up a *khukuri*, a weaponless war is not a war at all, so why should we regard it necessary to fight? O Nepalis! or weaponless army are beyond the border. Right now only the war of words is being waged. At present a deceptive battle is being planned. At present only a cold war of mere obstruction, an injunction of charge and counter-charge is being waged. Kurukshetra<sup>1</sup> is neither here nor there, the border itself is under preparation for Kurukshetra and

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1 Kurukshetra – the battle field where the Pandavas and Kauravas fought (according to the epic Mahabharata)



beyond it lies the fort of prohibition; on this side another Khalanga<sup>2</sup> fort is to be made. They are trying to disconnect the very source of water supplying the fort, thereby trying the limits of their self-respect.

Great India of the Asian continent! You are Ashoka.<sup>3</sup> You are Mahavir.<sup>4</sup> You are Mahatma Gandhi. You are no more the colony of Elizabeth. Even though the British have quit India, India could not abandon the Britishers; maybe, because of this, isn't another Britisher going to be born there?

Peaceful Nepal of the Himalayan region! You are the land of the Buddha. You are the glory of Amshubarma.<sup>5</sup> You are the legacy of Prithvi Narayan Shaha.<sup>6</sup> Isn't the storm going to rage on the way that you are leaving behind?

Gautam Buddha was born here in Nepal 2552 years ago. Ashoka, the *priyadarshi*<sup>7</sup> was born about 2300 years ago in India.

Both of them are yours. Both of them are also mine. The border does not read their height, The citizenship of a particular country does not limit their expansion. Again I feel that, I must measure them against with my own stature. Again I feel that you must measure them against your own stature. Again I feel that you are trying to contain them within your border. Again I feel that I am trying to contain them within my boundary. Thus I don't allow the Buddha to cross the rivers Mechi and the Mahakali, you don't allow Ashoka to cross *Kanyakumari*.<sup>8</sup>

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2 Khalanga – a fort where the brave Nepalese fought the British army

3 Ashoka – a great emperor of India (269-231 B.C.); after the Kalinga war, he became Buddhist, and spread Buddhism, He had built pillars even in Nepal.

4 Mahavir – (6th cent. B. C.) an ascetic who founded Jainism and preached *ahimsa* (non-violence), and the three jewels (right belief, right knowledge and right conduct).

5 Amshubarma – a great ancient king of Nepal.

6 Prithivi Narayan Shaha – founder of modern Nepal, a great king of the present ruling dynasty.

7 Priyadarshi – Looking kindly upon anything.

8 Kanyakumari – southernmost end of India

The Buddha is speaking to *dharmaraj* Ashoka and I listen to it. Ashokas are taking birth in the Buddha – you are failing to see it. But I speak the truth, O Ashoka! Had you not been there, perhaps, you can believe that my Buddha might have been wandering around Lumbini and Saranath. But Lord Buddha! Had you not been born, believe it, Ashoka even dear to the gods, would never have been born.

Therefore, O Prince, you were worried to see who was old age, death and sorrow, It was my sorrow; and it was my death that made you the Buddha. How you were shaken and deeply engrossed in emancipating all being from trouble and sorrow!

Therefore, O Emperor Ashoka, who was agitated to see the killing, destruction, and slavery, it was your own war and killing that made you the *priyadarshi*. How you were touched and secured a place in my heart to prevent us from engaging in other wars!

So shall I ask you: Shall I keep on dying like this for the descent of another Buddha? Shall I go on sufferings?

So can you say that in order to produce another *priyadarshi* Ashoka, we should keep on planning a nother battle of Kalinga and killing millions of innocent people?

If it is so, O *priyadarshi* India! You don't need my Buddha; if it is so, O my *shantadarshi*<sup>9</sup> Nepal! You don't want any Ashoka to convey the message of Buddha.

O, my friend, keeping an Aurangajeb<sup>10</sup> in your mind, and O my country, keeping a Junga Bahadur<sup>11</sup> in my blood, how do we survive and how do we recognize and how do we embrace each other?

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9 Shantadarshi - peace loving

10 Aurangjeb – Mughal Emperor of India (1659 – 1707), who imprisoned his father Shaha Jahan and killed his brothers. Hindus and Rajputs were in revolt against his account of his illiberal policy.

11 Jung Bahadur –(1817 – 1877), Prime Minister of Nepal and a despot who visited Great Britain during the 19th century.

Politics has borders but not friendship. Friendship rests in trust – not in conspiracy. It is an individual not a country that has meanness. We are not the pigeons that fly into the limitless horizon of friendship. Perhaps, we are the Berlin Walls raised by politics. We are perhaps deceitful built up by the ego of superiority. Maybe we are the North and South Poles giving vent to our own pride. There is politics even in salt, and in medicine. Salt has become the border, even medicine has become so separating the Buddha from Ashoka. If it is so, can anyone say that the wind will not need a passport to move to and fro because men do not need any passport today?

Those who speak of our faith and those who test out our belief! To see the tussle on a war footing without any war and to see the blockade, I feel like asking, who are you fighting against and making these preparations and having this rehearsal! My friend, are you exporting salt only because one should be loyal to the salt? Are you too importing salt because you must be loyal to the salt giver to my country! Ah! I will never take your salt at the cost of my existence. If so, dear sir, I can eat even without salt. You have experienced a 'Salt Movement';<sup>12</sup> you must know that you started the salt movement when they increased the tax on the salt and you had maintained the dignity of Indian salt. You have moved one step forward, and by banning salt you advise me to be loyal to the salt? How did this politics of salt come about here – the politics of ego and of misunderstanding?

I don't know either what different elements are aligned with the non-alignment. I don't know within the alignment too what different elements are non-aligned! The nations, having become aligned are trying to remain non-aligned; the nations, despite non-aligned, are interested in involvement. Where am I? I don't know. In which one? I don't know. You don't know where and to which you belong. Having become aligned, I don't see

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<sup>12</sup> Salt Movement – A movement in which Indians rejected the salt provided by the British rulers.

people surviving merely because of the alignment. Having become non-aligned I don't see people moving along because of being non-alignment. What has become of it? Which is the *mantra* that makes the complexity more, complex and this world, will have on its head the hand of Bhasmasur<sup>13</sup> any time. Are we tired, frightened, and terrified?

As your country is dear to you, so is my country for me. For you, your nation seems great and for me mine. That is why, I like my poverty and I love my ignorance. I love my suffering. I know you too might do the same. Maybe, even more than this. This good quality (or, is it a demerit?) is found among all countrymen and many nations are in favour of its simplification. How trustworthy are we people that we overcome every problem not with proclamations but by giving it honour? Are we wining with some respect?

Where does your wound give me pain? Where does my wound give you this? If I don't see my pyre in someone's else death, if I don't see my happiness in some one's happiness, O Buddhas, Ashokas, Mahavirs and Gandhis, fie on my stature which has not reached higher to touch yours statue! Down with your height! Perhaps, you are a person of the same stature so am I perhaps we are the men of such stature and the nation too might be so.

How high are we compared to the country of Liliput and the Liliputians? How much has our stature grown? But, O Gautam, I try to reach your stature and Ashoka! I try to measure your, Gandhi! I try to feel with your heart. Ah! even thousands of years later we find ourselves shorter than we were yesterday. How have we shrunk! O Buddhas! Ashokas! and Gandhis! In the context of our failure to develop from the primitive stage of human nature, we are not prepared to accept you as our forefathers and we as your descendants.

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13 Bhasmasur - a legendary demon in Hindu mythology.

Therefore here we simply keep the Buddha in the *chaityas*<sup>14</sup> and simply light the *dewa*, or lamp, or offer him *akshata*<sup>15</sup> with the *mantra* of *om mani padme hum* and keep on gazing at him.

There, the Ashoka symbolized in the flag converses with the wind and we are trying to translate the sorrow following the victory into peace through cannons and missiles.

India, you are not Alexander the Great, you are not Mihirgul, you are not Mohammad Ghajnavi. You are a nation that has suffered from the assault of Alexander the Great, and the charge of the Huns, you have experienced the terror of Taimurlume, and the wounds inflicted by Shahabuddin, Alauddin, and again the English people. You have experience of what dependence was like. Now you are free.

Nepal, you have never attacked but you offered your lap to those who pounced on you. But you do know the suffering of the prisoner's '*Kotparva*, following the *Bhandarkahal parva*.<sup>16</sup> You have borne the pain long within you and you know how sad it is. Despite this, you have remained free.

Shall I feel glorious or sad? How can I measure the long span of time when, though we were free, we could not enjoy freedom and failed to achieve social, and material progress. How can I appreciate it? India, you have removed from us our illusion of considering ourselves fortunate? You have exposed it clearly.

I speak the truth, my friend, I had never believed that you would be so brave. I had never believed you would commit such a treachery. I had never imagined, you could stoop so low because I try to see your face

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14 chaitya – a small structure or shrine for Buddha's worship.

15 akshata – rice washed with water and used as an article of worship in all sacred ceremonies.

16 Kotparva (1846 Sept.) and Bhandarkhalparva (1946 Oct.) – two great of massacre Nepalese courtiers and officials

reflected in Ashoka. I try to see your face reflected in Mahavir. I look for you in Gandhi. How can I become so disrespectful merely by blaming them? Gandhi still strolls in the air there. Mahavir still speaks to the people there. Ashoka is still found in the hearts of people there. But to find you lock the border with the big padlock of *Aligarh*<sup>17</sup> and take steps in jackboots, I could not believe that it is the footsteps of *Priyadarshi* Ashoka! I take this as a good sign heralding an indication of a new turn in the future. Friend, I wish for you fresh blessing of the freedom fighters of your country.

Maybe, because of the difficult situation, you had to be harsh to create a situation favorable for solving the difficulty. But how bad road you have chosen, my friend! Is my pride so unbearable that you become fire and you forget the tolerance of Gandhi? Is my behaviour so low that you become so mad and forget even the message of Mahavir? Am I so deeply untrustworthy that you are frightened and for your protection, you push aside Ashoka?

Believe me, Nepal has washed away her scimitar clean during the Treaty of *Sugauli*.<sup>18</sup> Trust me, in my hand lies not a gun but the *gulapa*, or the alms bowl of Gautam Buddha and the twigs of the *bodhibriksya*,<sup>19</sup> the wisdom tree. It is a country that is busy digging the arid land and blasting the cliffs to make roads in a hurry or bringing canals to their fields, a country that has sacrificed its life in trying to make its both ends meet with a square meal, a country working hard for a pinch of salt and a piece of cloth. If this country too pinches someone, you can believe that there is touch of the feudal air in its tenderness. If in his thirst there is hunger for the Himalayan shade, not the heat it is fine. If anyone wields a *khukuri* against us and aims a gun, he should rather look for our breasts, but he can't touch the border.

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17 Aligarh – a town in India famous for the manufacture of locks

18 Sugauli – a place in India where India-Nepal treaty was signed

19 Bodhibriksya – the bo or peepal tree under which Gautam Buddha had gained wisdom.

Shall I mention something in passing by? How long lasting were solutions of the problems decided with the help of guns and cannons and how long people keep would quiet and not rise in revolt? If the fact that even if missiles and atomic weapons are failing, is not untrue you can see what has happened in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon and Afghanistan. We know that a small atom bomb is enough for these countries. But when we see Russia and the America on the retreat, we are sure that ultimately man is only invincible because of his beliefs, self-respect, faiths, existences and sacrifices! Where is a lack of patriots who can shed rivers of blood for a small piece of land? Why should I yield before weapons? Why should I yield to the blockade?

Even then, congratulations to you, Ashoka! And also to your India.

One needs the earth to stand. How ridiculous would it sound if someone says that he has risen by his feet on the sky. I too was stepping up in the sky, speaking in the air and burping in the void. I had thought of Sagarmatha the Phulchoki hill. What I had called my earning was just a castle in the air. I thought I had completed a fifteen hundred meter marathon race, but it was not even fifteen yards long! Maybe, I was at the point where my journey had begun. Maybe I have become what I was yesterday, and day-before-yesterday. My roads of which I am proud! O barrages that gave me pleasure! O, my enterprises that I appreciated! My achievements that I regarded as my games. I don't say that you are not my roads, you are not my barrages, you are not my enterprises, you are not my achievements! You are at least something, like the consolation prize, or as the saying go, 'it is better to sing than cry', and the prayers for the peace of the deceased souls. Oh to take pride depending upon someone else is to cheat oneself. I thought I could walk on my own, but it was not so. Why did you become so helpless? My achievements! See how dry and emaciated you have become!

Somebody gave birth to me and I was born. Someone made me stand up and I stood; someone made me walk and I walked. Isn't this the essence of 'I', and 'we' and the substance of all? Therefore, if someone hates me, do not think that I am hating them. When have I scolded someone and haven't respected them? Even then if there is some difference in practice, who can say that this is not linked with the question of prestige? Who can say that men won't be intolerant and nobody challenges anyone? In the air polluted by bad feelings even small things become big like mountains. Who can say that the steps taken there won't be risky for each other? Maybe, that is what had happened to you. Maybe, this is what has happened to me. Maybe, therefore even medicine caught the disease of politics and we are going down in doubts and the border becomes quite risky.

My friend, just as Siddhartha's eyes were opened by old age and death and Ashoka returned his Wisdom after the war and destruction of Kalinga, your blockade has perhaps awakened me, my eyes open and consciousness dawns on me. All over my exhausted body goose pimples grow, and I realise the depth of our being. And on the two litres of kerosene that I get after standing the whole day in queue, I begin to munch the hybrid radish and relax, pouring a life-giving juice down on my throat!

Surely, I don't claim that your steps are free from trouble. But I see a warm future there. I see the clean path of life and I see the destination rising in me. Isn't the sun going to rise? Mere facility alone doesn't mean the progress of a nation. Who has progressed merely with others' help? How shall I talk about the future? Perhaps the development which considers sympathies and donations as achievements could not take root, even a whiff of air is enough to terrorize it. The speed is indeed low, it is just a push. What a distant dream did I happen to dream constructing a fragile house!

My Nepal! You have lived happily, you have survived on flattery, you have lived forever without any



hard work, you have lived forever without taking any risk. Do you still wish to live with flattery in this way?

A country that never had to face challenges in life! A country that never had to undergo any crisis in history! A country which never had to tolerate calamity! Why shouldn't I appreciate your luck because there is no greater luck than this elsewhere? Maybe, this has become a curse, neither do you fall down nor rise up. A man or a country becomes weak if it never has to bear any suffering. Maybe, because of this you could not become anything. Therefore, even small tremors are fatal for you. How can such a weak body bear such big shocks? You are surviving even on the *bhyakur*, you have managed to live even on *gittha*,<sup>21</sup> you have lived on *satu*,<sup>22</sup> you have also lived on *bhyatal*<sup>23</sup>. You neither died for the lack of food; nor did you live the life of a man with enough food to eat. You have remained ever a proud nation. When will you be free from this state? Won't you rise higher? If so, this blockade is no such a thunderbolt after all. Why do you keep on trembling considering this is a nightmare?

Crisis uplifts man. Which nation has progressed without going through a crisis. Why should we always try to escape from the immanent danger? Can we solve problems by running away from the crisis? Will the crisis leave us alone merely because we are scared of it. Can we be free from the crisis that falls on the brave? Crisis befalls a proud nation. Crisis befalls their lives who rise higher up. He who can't fight will face thousands of crises. He who wants to rise higher, fights the crisis bravely.

Our enemy is poverty, let us fight this. Our enemy is our dependency on others, let us rise against this. Our enemy is our own inactivity, let us defeat this. Our enemy is our own slavery, let us rise against this. Our enemy is our own ego, let us disarm this. And our enemy is our own

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21 *bhyakur* and *gittha* - wild roots, eaten during famines when no food is available

22 *satu* - powdered, gram considered cheapest food

23 *bhyatal* - very cheap soup or gruel made of green vegetables

narrowness – moral slavery, personal interest, and servile attitude. Let us fight these. He who cannot take risks cannot build the nation either. He who cannot undertake troubles is not blessed with happiness either. If our suffering is the most anti-national prize or award that we have created ourselves, the blockade is a lesson. We need courage and manliness to fight against yet another misfortune for the alleviation of one misfortune.

I am not an abuses, I am not an applause, I am not a drainage, I am just myself – a man as well as a nation endeavouring to protect what little pride I have mine. India, don't be humiliated by hurting me. You know you need not conspire to kill. You know an existence, a nation and a pride is mightier than thousands of tanks, canons, and armies. You know that there is no need for any pretext to torture someone. You know – in friendship we ignore thousands of wrongs too. Greatest of all things is man's cordiality, human trust and broadmindedness where all borders blur; colour, religion and, principle disappear. That is only where Buddha lives, where Ashoka lives.

Just as Bhadrabahu came to Nepal Ashoka had sent his own son Mahendra to Sri Lanka; and he had sent his own daughter Sanghamitra with flags of Boddhibrikshya in each hands. I am recounting this history of the Ashoka period, a history of former times. I had believed that today too another Bhadrabahu will arrive here, another Mahendra will come and another Sanghamitra will also come. But instead, there was an order: 'a blockade!' Instead of the *bodhibriskshya*, India, you are exporting death to us just by denying medicine!

You might know, there is a town here established by Charumati, Ashoka's own daughter, there are her offsprings too. There are a few *Takshyasila*, a few *Nalanda*<sup>25</sup> of today. I had thought that under the shadow of the Ashoka wheel imprinted in your national flag, many

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25 Takshyasila and Nalanda – ancient Buddhist universities found as ruins in Bihar, India.

a *bodhibrikshyas* have become lush green. But instead, many missiles are mushrooming; some of them, earmarked for me by my friend! Have the *bodhibrikshyas* been uprooted now? And wherever Sanghamitra and Mahendra used to go waving twigs in their hands, will there be cannon balls and missiles instead?

O, my benefactor and friend, if you don't have the *bodhibrikshya*, forget about it. If there are no Sanghamitra, Mahendra and Bhadrabahu to come from your place, forget about them too, since Ashoka no longer survives perhaps. They do not mean anything now. Your Ashoka is still alive in my Lumbini. In my Dev Patan, Ashoka's daughter Charumati is still alive. I will send you the tree and branches of the bodhi tree from Lumbini itself. You need not send me salt. You need not send me medicine, you need not send me petroleum. But let me tell you one thing, if in one corner of your heart, you preserve a little love for me, that will be enough. If in your heart you preserve a little bit of human blood, that will be enough!

Our New Year has just started. My best wishes to you!

(Tr. Govinda Raj Bhattarai)

## TARANATH SHARMA

*Taranath Sharma (1934) has to his credit more than two dozen works including three collections of essays. Written in a reminiscent mood, the essay included here presents an interesting discussion on the varied uses of bamboo against the backdrop of the Chite Isles, Taiwan, during a visit with some foreign friends. Known as a campaigner for the uncorrupt Nepali language, the author has won the Madan Puraskar in 1969 and the Sajha Puraskar in 1972.*

### THE BAMBOO-HOUSE

Having circumambulated a tree that had taken root a century or two before the birth of Siddhartha Gautam and now become old, I was just coming down the slope with a beautiful young French woman named Fabian.

Fabian had exclaimed in great surprise, "The bole is quite big, but how did a bigger rock get inside it, Dr. Sharma?"

Seng, who was born in Nanking but living now in Shanghai, had hazarded a guess: "The huge rock was there or it must have been there for thousands of years. The tree grew up before the Buddha and it grew up around the rock. It had to spread around the rock."

"Yes, it had to spread around the rock. Otherwise, how would the rock get inside the bole? But my friend in China, would a tree also grow with a hollow trunk to enclose a rock? This huge tree must have begun as a small plant too. No?" I had argued.

Dr. Tom Grunfield's American accent had come out loud and clear: "Dr. Sharma, the Chinese soil itself is extraordinary. Strange trees take root here. They grow up in a strange way and as they do so they swallow up giant

rocks and keep them in their stomach. Although I am a professor of Chinese history I have failed to understand China. Everything is very, very strange here. What do you think, Dereck?"

As Derick Waller was in the midst of his explanation of the religion of Tibet to the professor from Peking, he asked: "What did you say, Tom? I did not understand what is extraordinary about the rock. I don't see the link." And then to me, "Tell me, Dr. Sharma, what was Tom saying?" When the question came in the British accent, instead of engaging myself in the discussion among the learned intellectuals from different countries about the ancient tree, the Buddha and the rock in the hollow tree, Fabian and I had taken the black, serpentine track through the thickly growing trees to see the 'Bamboo House'.

"This beautiful place would be called the 'Queen's Forest' in Nepal," I had observed.

"The Queen's Forest?" Fabian had smiled, revealing a dimple on her white cheeks and a perfect row of white teeth, "The Nepalese are the true children of Nature and born poets. So, they would call a beautiful forest the queen's forest."

"Aren't the French living in the lap of the Alps also the true children of Nature? They dance with the waves of the sea and look tantalisingly soft as butter, and white and bright. One could just keep on looking at them, talking with them and touching them." I had said, hinting at Fabian's clean, shapely and beautiful body.

"Well, Dr. Sharma, here is the 'Bamboo House'," Fabian had said, pirouetting with joy and gracefully moving her fingers.

And Taranath from Nepal and Fabian from France had arrived to caress the 'Bamboo House' built in the Chito forests in the middle of the island shaped like a tobacco leaf. Well, the house was not made entirely of

bamboo. It was built with cement, bricks, timber, and iron and nicely covered with tall bamboos on the outside.

All at once I was reminded of Phidim in Panchthar. An earthquake with murderous intent had swallowed up Phidim. Houses were not only destroyed and the land split open and sunk but that sinful earthquake had not in the least cared for the innocent children, the honourable old men and women and the young people in full bloom. I saw the people sitting by the ruins, after the last rites for their kith and kin, who were crushed to death or buried under the debris. However, there sat Kul Bahadur Nembang splitting bamboo and turning it into sheets. He was building a two-storied house with pillars, beams and walls of bamboo. That house located at a greater height than the school house of Phidim was an example of Nepalese strength, enthusiasm and skill and a challenge to the world. The house covered with tall bamboos that Fabian and I had come to look at looked like a child's toy before the bamboo house at Panchthar.

"Your mind seems to have reached Mt. Everest again." The warmth of Fabian's touch had turned me back towards reality.

"This 'Bamboo House' has reminded me of Nepalese bamboo houses."

"Are houses made of bamboo in Nepal too?" I was astounded by the soft, sweet words of French curiosity.

"Look, houses are made of bamboo all over Nepal. There are very big bamboos that make pillars. There are medium bamboos that are soft and pliable and make strips. Then there are other kinds of bamboos that are not big but strong, tough and durable. Again there is a variety that grows in the Terai that makes excellent stakes and fencing. The *kathbans* is famous all over the world because of this quality. The *nigale* and *malingo* also belong to the same species. They are to be found all over the hills and open spaces and fields just as *banso*, *babiya* and *bet* or cane are found. Just as the cane is bent and

twisted for different uses, the bamboo is bent or made into strips to make baskets of all sizes and kinds, as well as mats and bins for storing grains. This is a daily work for the Nepalese. Actually we live on the bamboo whether in the house or with a fence outside or by using it for containers of all kinds. The cattle are also tied to bamboo stakes; they are kept in bamboo huts and fed with bamboo leaves. This has become a feature of our life."

The 'Bamboo House' stood in silence, blending with Nature in the thick forest. Fabian floated about like a flower but I was engrossed in the varied uses of the bamboo. I had grown up swinging high in a swing made of four tall bamboos planted apart on four corners. My childhood was spent watching the maize kept in a bamboo bin on the porch and playing with the straw hidden behind a pile on a bamboo frame beneath the house. I had also watched water brought from a distant spring to the garden through a pipe made of bamboos joined together. Whether it was the bin on the upper storey in which rice was stored safely or the seive in which mustard oil was filtered, whether it was the pail in which Patali fetched water or Maila Damai's flute that gave people much pleasure to listen to – all these things were gifts of the bamboo. Everything came from the bamboo – from the teacher's ferule to the pen that wrote a beautiful script to grandfather's stick to the catapult to shoot at the sparrows. I was so carried away by the thought of the bamboo that my mouth watered at the memory of the tender bamboo shoots and sprouts I had tasted.

So, I had said with a smile: "There are many kinds of bamboo in Nepal. Bamboo is extensively used in building houses. It is true that modern houses are built of cement, timber, stone, bricks and iron rods but the common people have to dwell in houses made of bamboo. Fabian, it is a way of life with us to have walls of bamboo, plastered with mud to make the house look pretty."

Having looked at the beautiful "Bamboo House" without disturbing those living in it, we had just come down when we saw two men approaching and they asked us to show them the house.

"Look, it is over there just above the ridge, the so-called 'Bamboo House!' I said, "But where have you come from to look for it?"

"From Israel," one of them replied tersely and mysteriously. Then the other man asked, "But you?"

"My friend is from France and I am from Nepal."

"You are from Nepal? What are you here for? Why have you come to this wilderness leaving your own place full of natural beauty?" the first Israeli asked in surprise.

"My friend from Israel," I said, "the special attraction of the bamboo has brought me here. You may ask whether there is no bamboo in Nepal. Of course, there is; many kinds of it but not this kind." I took a respite and then continued, "You think of Nepal as a naturally beautiful place by hearsay or by reading a book. But, if you think so, why didn't you go to that pretty place and come here instead? Nepal is but half the distance from your country."

"We do not go to Nepal. My wife and children are going there in six months. It is all right for them to go there. But we are businessmen. Why should we go there? What can Nepal buy from us? What can Nepal sell us that we take all the trouble of going there?" These words coming from the second Israeli man hit me like a shot gun.

"You have never been to my country," I countered him, "We too must have something to buy and to sell. How can you say so without even a visit?"

But the Israeli had not spoken the untruth. Although his sharp and bitter words had pierced my heart,



shattered my pride in my own country and made the Mt. Everest of my self-esteem look hollow, the trees in the Chito forest kept smiling while the Israeli businessmen proceeded towards the 'Bamboo House' with a smug, sneering sidelong glance and Fabian, the French beauty, kept praising the art treasures of Paris.

I could not remove the nail stuck in my heart by any means.

My thoughts reached back to the days when the toadies and sycophants reigned supreme. These puppets beat drums and blew trumpets, claiming that they were going to take the country's commerce to the greatest possible height and their masters removed priceless images from temples all over the country and took them abroad to sell. Under their patronage hemp and cannabis were imported and exported in huge quantities. Old men sang about gold and old women danced to the golden tune. The whole country turned yellow. Business under blind blessings prospered to such an extent that even the nationalistic policy of Prithvi Narayan Shah was frowned upon as unpatriotic and out of date. Notwithstanding the geographical compulsion that required maintenance of friendship on a basis of equality between the two big stones to the north and south was disregarded and war cries against India that sounded like the croaks of a frog began to be heard. The natural flow of trade from the south came to a stop and all the common people felt themselves being strangled. All commercial centers were put under lock and key and suffocating atmosphere prevailed throughout the country. In such a situation the ministers' henchmen drummed up jingoism and filled up their stomachs. A long line of porters wearing golden necklaces, each weighing 36 grams, around their necks, ten watches on their wrist, half a dozen socks on their feet, dozens of trousers and fifteen socks on their feet came from Bangkok, Hongkong and Singapore and landed at Gauchar airport encumbered and bent under their burden. They sent imports into the country skyrocketing, while the common people suffered for want

of salt, oil, cloths, bangles, beads, incense, *dhoti* and yarn. The business of the nobodies under the patronage of the corrupt and cruel smugglers continued to evade the normal channels of national commerce throughout the long dark nights.

We came to a bend in the road. A big, round looking-glass fixed to a stake was found at every turn of the road, so that the driver knew whether a car was coming from the other direction. Yellow strips marked the center of the road.

I turned towards Fabian and indicating the pretty road I spoke with great joy, "How neat and pretty! It's so tantalising. I would just love to kneel down and kiss it." "You mean you would love to kiss the road itself, Dr. Sharma?" Fabian was much surprised.

"Why not? How pretty is this road! How pleasant is this forest and how nice are these hills!! There are hills and mountains and peaks in Nepal too. But are they covered with trees and green and clean? All the trees have been cut down, the hills have been denuded and the bushes have gone. It is an ugly scene. Nepal is a naturally beautiful place only in name. All the beauty has gone from the country. Landslides scar the hills and desertification has set in. Just as that unknown Israeli has thought, Nepal is no longer a beautiful place but sunk in poverty, reeking with foul smell and overtaken by a great misfortune. It has broken my heart. But this island is getting more pretty with the passage of every day. The ridges by the sea reach great heights and become mere points in their eagerness to kiss the sky, but there is no landslide nor scars anywhere. Nor is there anything anywhere that looks unnatural and become eyesore. Shaped like a tobacco leaf, thus island lying in a north-south direction welcomes visitor providing an example of its people's labour, skills and invention as well as civilized manners, gentleness, beauty, progress, development and prosperity.

Stretching from the north towards the south, the island is somewhat inclined from the east towards the west. Taipei, the capital, lies in a corner on one side to the north-west and it spreads out in a valley amidst pretty hills. There are numerous tunnels in these hills. Cars and trains enter and emerge from these tunnels. Tall electric towers are also seen in these hills. Huge and tall buildings are sometimes seen among the trees. The entire region is green with trees, giving the impression of a heaven on earth.

The day before our arrival at Chito, we had reached the "Buddha Light Hill" for a overnight stay. At the highest point in the hill, there stood a 120-foot high golden image of Amitabha Buddha, giving his blessings. There were museums and different universities for Buddhist studies, where monks and nuns taught under the guidance of a learned nun, who subsisted only on a vegetarian diet. I was very excited to find that it was a real center of Buddhism. For four days I had played with the sea waves, made my way across the sea to reach small islets, travelled in a train through dozens of tunnels, took pictures against the tall column that marked the point where the Tropic of Cancer was crossed and had arrived with a group of intellectuals from different countries in the marble city called Kwelin. While the closely-packed hills in the east competed with the sea, in the west a veritable network of roads, factories and cities across valleys and plains had impressed me much. Then, when the kind nun came into the dining hall and with her palms held together and asked each guest if the food was all right, I was very touched indeed. It was because of the respect for civilised manners, religious zeal and humanity that Taiwan has been able today to challenge the per capita income of America.

Having reached the peak in industry, commerce and science, this island has begun to take the world by surprise by developing malta, guava and apple through tissue culture. The apple should not have grown in a very hot place, but Chinese scientists by applying various

methods of tissue culture have not only grown it in their island but produced much bigger and tastier apples. In the same manner, having tasted the sweet developed guava, I was very surprised indeed upon seeing the colour of the bamboo when I arrived at the Chito forest.

The sight of the bamboo made me forget my travel for the past five days across the island of Taiwan that I had enjoyed so much. I was at once reminded of my boyhood days and I found myself in the big parade ground beyond the town of Ilam. The beautiful world of bamboo there has now become as barren as a desert. It must be because of the application of scientific techniques that a different kind of bamboo has come to adorn the Chito forest. With its yellowish, small leaves, the bamboo grew singly and apart instead of growing closely together in clumps as in our country. The clean, nice and slender bamboo were so pretty that I could go on looking at them for ever and forget even the clumps of bamboo in Ilam.

However the wound inflicted by the barbed words of the Israeli businessman was not healed even by Fabian's fascinating smile, sweet words and soft touch. Leaving aside the very presence of Fabian as well as the enchanting road worthy of a kiss, the serene atmosphere, sweet smells and healthy beauty of Chito forest, where people came to spend their vacation, I recalled the Lutheran World Service that some six or seven years back had begun to teach how to make pots and decorative flowers of bamboo for interior decoration at Ilam. Our Nepal could also make such bamboo objects for decorative purposes and we could have sold these in large quantities to our foreign friends who were obliged to sneer at us. But what can be done? Instead of expanding the training facilities, the *pancamans*, the so-called representatives and administrators, sucked my motherland like sugarcane, licked it as a mango and threw it out, stripped it like the bark in a tree and skinned it like a dead animal and dug it out like yam embedded in embers to cook it. If those who succeeded the

*pancamans* had shown any inclination in planting and cultivating the bamboo, those who built bamboo houses and made use of the bamboo for decorative purposes would have been encouraged and no Nep ali need be hurt by barbed words hurled at him in a friendly, foreign country.

Seeing me lost in thoughts at the economic plight of the country, Fabian, who had been chatting merrily with me, led me out of my daydream, "Dr. Sharma, Oh! Dr. Sharma, where have you strayed again?"

"Oh, yes," I was startled, "How beautiful is the clump of bamboos and how pretty is this road!"

"Oh, you would love to kneel down and kiss it! No? Dr. Sharma." With that Fabian swirled around along with me right in the middle of the road.

*(Tr. Kesar Lall)*