

*"Translation is not a matter of words only: it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture."*

–Anthony Burgess

*"Good translations are one of the vital necessities of our time."*

–F.C. Lucas



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**Short Stories and Memoirs of Women Writers of Uttarakhand**

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**Translated from Hindi**

*Edited by :*

**Jaiwanti Dimri**

**Madhu D. Singh**



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## *Message*



It is a matter of great pleasure that Women's Studies Centre of SGRR (PG) College is publishing the stories and memoirs of women writers of Uttarakhand which have been translated from Hindi to English.

It is true that all human beings have an innate urge to hear and tell stories. It would be no exaggeration to say that story telling is as old as mankind itself. Superb stories have been written in different languages but mostly they remain confined to the language in which they were originally written. That's the reason they need to be translated into other languages also, so that they are enjoyed and appreciated by a much larger number of readers.

Undoubtedly, translation is a kind of linguistic bridge-building between two languages and cultures. In our times it has assumed ever greater significance, as in a multi-linguistic country like India, different regional literatures can reach all the people of India only through translation. By undertaking to translate the regional literature of Uttarakhand into English, the Women's Studies Centre has fulfilled a very important requirement of our times.

It is indeed a commendable effort, as it would enable a far greater number of readers to relish and appreciate, through the medium of translation, the rich panorama of literature produced by these authors.

My blessings to the Women's Studies Centre for this endeavour.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Devendra Dass'.

(Shri Mahant Devendra Dass)  
Sajjada Nashin, Jhanda Sahib  
Shri Guru Ram Rai Darbar, Dehradun

## *From the Principal's Desk*

In a multi-linguistic and multi-cultural country like India, translation helps us step beyond our narrow domestic walls and discover the literatures of other states and regions. It is only through translations that immortal works such as *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gitanjali etc.* have reached not only all the regions of India but also different countries of the world.



Literatures of different regions are the repository of their cultural mores and values. In them lies the innate wisdom of their people. By translating these literatures into other languages, this innate wisdom is disseminated to other regions also, thereby enriching the entire society. This is a very important contribution of translation.

Translation is both an artistic process and a craft. The task of translation demands not only thorough command of both the languages - the source language (SL) as well as the target language (TL) — but also intuition and creativity on the part of translator. He needs to have a grasp over the nuances of both the languages. He is also required to bring empathy and understanding to the work, he is translating, only then full justice can be done to the source text when its original essence and flavor is maintained in translation.

By undertaking to translate the stories and memoirs of women writers of Uttarakhand from Hindi into English, the Women's Studies Centre (WSC) of our college has made a significant contribution in expanding the reach of these stories and memoirs. I am sure that while these stories would not only entertain the readers but also unfold before them a fresh perspective of life as envisioned by their authors, the Memoirs too – experiences as they are of pioneer women of Uttarakhand—would inspire and motivate everyone.

I congratulate the entire team of WSC for this initiative.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "V.A. Bourai".

(Prof. V.A. Bourai)  
Principal

## Preface

One of the core areas identified by the Women's Studies Centre of our college is translation. As per the UGC Approach Paper, the Women's Studies Centres across the country are mandated to translate the writings of regional women writers into other languages, notably into Hindi and English, so as to reach a wider readership.

Accordingly our Centre also undertook the task of translating the works of women writers of Uttarakhand. We started with the genre of poetry, under which poems of women writers—originally composed in Garhwali and Kumauni- were translated into Hindi as well as English. These translations were published under the title 'Triveni' which contained poems of Veenapani Joshi, Geeta Nautiyal, Beena Benjwal, Neeta Kukreti, Diwa Bhatt, Bharti Pandey, Uma Joshi, and Beena Kandari. When the process of translating the poems was still on, we had decided that our next step would be to translate short stories/ memoirs of women writers of Uttarakhand. The present anthology consists of short stories and memoirs penned by these women writers which have been translated from Hindi into English. Undoubtedly the process of selecting the stories and memoirs and then translating them into English was quite strenuous and challenging but it was also creative and stimulating at the same time.

Preliminary work in this direction was started in November 2015 when those writers were identified whose stories/ memoirs were to be taken up for translation. In this process the valuable help rendered by Prof Jaiwanti Dimri (former Professor Dept. of English H P University Shimla) is really noteworthy. I am so grateful to Prof Dimri that she has taken time from her busy schedule to sit with me for long hours to select the stories and

memoirs to be translated. Out of a large number of stories and memoirs, nine stories and five memoirs were finalized by us . She also helped us during the later stage of the project to fine tune the translations, besides translating some stories and memoirs herself. I am also very grateful to Prof. Uma Bhat (former Professor Kumaun University, Dept. of Hindi) who not only mailed me the contact numbers and addresses of many writers included in this book but also provided me glossary of some words mentioned in Gangotri Gabryal's memoir.

There is no doubt that the act of translation is virtually a tight- rope walking between two languages which by its very nature is fraught with potential pitfalls. All translators since the time of Cicero have faced the same dilemma: whether to translate word for word and retain fidelity to the source text or to take creative liberty with the text for the sake of conveying the essence of SLT (source language text) into TLT (target language text) through translation.

The problems of translation from Hindi to English or for that matter from any Indian language to English are of a different kind. They are basically those of different socio-cultural backgrounds and different syntactical structure. We all know that English is an SVO ( subject verb object) based language, while Hindi is an SOV (subject object verb ) language. This difference in syntactical structure poses a peculiar challenge to the translator.

There are other types of challenges also in a Hindi to English translation . For example, to translate Hindi words for food items such as Raita, Poori, Laddu etc. poses a challenge. Similarly it is no less problematic to translate some words or expressions which are rooted in one particular cultural context- such as 'Haath peele karna'. Tehravi, Mundan, Namkaran, so on and so forth. Another challenge is to translate some Hindi words denoting family relationships such as Dada Dadi, Nana Nani, Chacha

Chachi, Nanad Bhabhi, Mama Mami, Bua Fufa, etc. In English we do not have as many corresponding words for them. Likewise in Hindi, there are two words 'tum', and 'aap' for which there is only one word in English that is 'You', Similar is the case with some idioms for which corresponding idiom is not available in English.

In view of the above mentioned constraints and problems encountered during the process of translation, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the task of translation is really a challenging one. The fact of the matter is that no translation can ever be wholly perfect. Still there is no denying the fact that there is no means other than translation, if we wish to savour the literatures of different languages. Isn't it only through translations that some of the greatest classics have been unfolded before us? The only thing is that the translator needs to have a thorough command of both the languages- the source language as well as the target language. He should also have a deep grasp of the cultural sensibilities which form the warp and woof of the original work which has been taken up for translation. In the present book also, we have taken recourse to various devices such as literal translation, transference, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, deletion, addition, reduction and synonymy etc as suggested by eminent translators, so that the exact sense as intended by the writer in the original text is conveyed in translation. Wherever exact equivalence was not at all possible, the original word/ phrase has been retained in English translation and its meaning explained in Glossary.

As is natural in any such project involving a number of writers and translators, it has been a very enriching experience for me personally also, as I interacted with many scholars steeped in the cultural ethos of Uttarakhand. Once again I reiterate that though we have tried our best to remain faithful to the source text, still

whenever there was a choice between fidelity to the source text and conveying the essence of the text, we preferred — to use the famous phrase of Edward Fitzgerald— ‘a live sparrow to a stuffed nightingale’.

The nine stories selected for translation, based as they are on a rich variety of themes, reflect a rainbow of perspectives on life as envisioned by their authors. The story *Mundan* while graphically capturing the ambience of a typical tonsure ceremony in a traditional Hindu household, also poignantly highlights the sad irony underlying such rituals. The story *Ladki Aur Cigarette* depicts the inner conflict going on in the mind of a young educated girl who despite the so called freedom given to her by her parents is not allowed to decide the vital issues of her life on her own. The rigid control exercised by parents over their children especially in matters of marriage is poignantly captured in *Jyotirekha*. The story *Kanti* is about the trials and travails faced by a typical young bride in a non – descript village of Uttarakhand, who toils day and night for her family but who with her sheer grit and determination eventually carves a better future for herself and for her son. *Satto ki Bhuri* reflects not only the dependence of village women like Satto on their cattle but also at a deeper level an integral bond which binds these women to their cattle. The story *What More Do You Want?* beautifully captures the feeling of helplessness of the protagonist who despite leading an apparently satisfactory life is really trapped in a life in which she has to accept whatever is handed to her by her relatives as she has no other alternative. *Bojyu* is a soul stirring story of a young bride who spends the golden years of her life waiting for her husband's return. The story *Footprints of River* captures two young village girls' innocent exploration of nature and their subsequent ugly face off with reality. The story *A Pitchful of Water* poignantly brings out the sense of guilt of a mother whose only daughter dies while she was away to fetch a pitcher of water.

In Memoirs section, five memoirs penned by women who have distinguished themselves in different fields have been included. *Those Days of Childhood* is an excerpt from the book *Yaadein* penned by Gangotri Gabryal, a pioneer in the field of women education in Uttarakhand . In the next memoir titled *Down the Memory Lane* Sumitra Dhulia , a veteran educationist, takes a walk down memory lane , recollecting the cherished family values which were the backbone of family in those days . Uma Bhatt, a well known feminist thinker and editor of *Uttara Mahila Patrika*, vividly brings before our eyes in her travelogue the tough challenging terrain of Kumaun which she traversed. *The Ink Tablet* is taken from Geeta Gairola's autobiography *Malyon Ki Daar* in which she revisits her childhood and through the medium of ink tablet reveals the ambience of family relationships. In her memoir, *Mountains Calling* Harshwanti Bisht presents a captivating account of her passion for mountaineering which has made her a distinguished name in the field of mountaineering.

For our translation work , a team of scholars was involved which consisted of university and college Professors. It is my pleasure to thank them all, namely Prof Jaiwanti Dimri, Prof. D.S. Kaintura, Dr. Jyoti Pandey, Dr. Manjulika Gogoi and Ms. Seema Kaintura who have translated stories / memoirs. I also sincerely thank all the writers, namely Veenapani Joshi, Sumitra Dhulia, Uma Bhatt, Diwa Bhatt, Suneeti Rawat, Jaiwanti Dimri, Kusum Bhatt, Vidya Singh, Sujata Singh, Swati Melkani, Geeta Gairola, Madhu Joshi and Harshwanti Bist for providing us the stories and memoirs— originally penned in Hindi— for translation. During the process of translation, we frequently interacted with the authors so as to grasp the nuance of a particular word used in the text.

I also thank Dr V S Rawat, Dr. Anupam Sanny, Ms Madhu Mishra, all other colleagues and non teaching staff for their constant support. Special mention of thanks to Ms Yachna

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Suryavanshi, (alumna of our college and Gold Medalist of HNB University MA English 2013-15 batch ) who did the bulk of typing work, ably assisted by Kalpa Bhardwaj, Amrit Sufi and Priyanka Tariyal— all M A English students of our college.

I am immensely thankful to our Principal Prof V A Bourai who has not only evinced keen interest in this project but also given very valuable inputs for this work. Despite his extremely hectic schedule he has spared his precious time for discussing some words and references used in some of the memoirs, specially in the memoir penned by Gangotri Gabryal. Lastly, I bow my head in reverence to Pujya Shri Mahant Devendra Dass Ji Maharaj for kindly blessing our endeavor. His benedictions always motivate us to strive for excellence.

**Madhu D. Singh**

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## A Pitcherful of Water

Jaiwanti Dimri

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I entered the bed room with Rahul's bottle of milk only to find that Rahul's bed was empty. Dropping down the bottle on the bed I peeped under the bed, he must've tumbled down from the bed. The bump on his forehead caused by the fall from the cot only two days ago had still not subsided. I made a brisk survey of the room peeping under the bed and all over the room but Rahul was nowhere to be found. I rushed out of the room to behold my prince charming enjoying a joy ride on Shubha's shoulders. The moment our eyes met, he quickly turned his face backwards. He knows very well once he was in his mother's charge, he would be imprisoned in the room. There was his house with two small eight by four cubicles with tight and specified boundaries and out there was the vast expanse of the blue sky and the sunshine that offered to him myriads of varieties and novelties where he could have his fist full of clay, stones and pebbles and fill his mouth with any of these delicacies. No difference between clay, stones, pebbles and the delicacies prepared by his mother.

'When did he come here?' I asked Shubha.

"He was rushing out of the room. You should keep the front door bolted."

I had opened the front door on hearing the sweeper's footsteps. This was already the fifth of the month and I had not paid him. Lowering down the gas burner I rushed out to catch up Ramdeen, paid him quickly and rushed back to the kitchen to take care of the milk on the gas stove. How was I to feed Rahul if the milk was spilled. In such a state of utter confusion I forgot to bolt the front door. Once the doors are open, the prisoner

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is free. I wonder how he woke up so early today without taking his morning feed.

He was whimpering now at her approaching steps towards him directing his full strength in the opposite direction. Since the time he has learnt to trot on his feet he does not remain at one place for a second. All the tit bits– big or small on the floor have been removed one by one to be stocked in the cupboards and shelves. You never know when he might make a dash for a fancy item and get hurt in the process. The decoration of the sitting room and the setting of the rooms will have to wait for another two or three years at least until this naughty soul attains some sense. Try as best as I could to keep a vigil on him and be careful I can't escape from such occasional lapses that put me to shame. People might say that I do not have a job and there are just the two of us for a family and I cannot manage a one and half hand length of a child. When I look at other young mothers of my age I can't help being envious. I marvel with what ease and efficiency they cope on twin fronts – their homes and jobs.

*“Kag chestha bakodhyanam, shwan nidra, alphari, brahmachari”* – such as the movements of a crow, the concentration of a heron, the sleep of a dog, a moderate eater and a celibate are said to be the specificities of an ideal disciple. These qualifying markers of a disciple are compatible with the mother of a tiny toddler. Vikram, my husband had to be transferred at such a crucial time. All his letters are full of cautionary remarks– “Take care of Rahul. Be very careful with him and don't leave him to himself while you are busy in household chores. Make sure that you finish off the chores while he is asleep.” “The mother of a tiny toddler wakes at the dawn,’ so goes the saying and rightly so. All good-intentioned people try to instruct me on rearing up a child but with a naughty Krishna Kanhiya like mine all caution licks the ground. How desperately I crave for someone who could be in charge of Rahul for only a few hours when I could perform my household chores with a calm and cool mind. Every moment

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my mind is preoccupied with his thoughts. Quite often I get fidgety in sleep. I am panicky if he whimpers and even if he doesn't. His silence portends of his involvement in some of his childish pranks, from boot polish to nail polish all items have gone off to beautify his face

My hands were ice cold after washing Rahul's nappies. He was asleep. It was a bright sunny day. In a hilly place a clear, cloudless sky on a wintery morning is a rare sight and if it is not windy, the sun is warm. I could not restrain myself from having my fill of this rare pageant and leaving the door ajar I positioned myself in the sunlit corner of the courtyard from where I could keep a constant vigil on Rahul.

In the adjoining courtyard on the right hand side, my neighbour Nisha's mother-in-law- a distant relative of her husband to be precise, who had recently come from her village to stay with them was lazing out in the sun. This distant relative of Nisha has been with them for the last three or four months. This is her daily routine. She comes out with the rising sun along with her faded, crumbled cushion. The direction of her cushion concurrently goes on shifting with the movement of the sun. She is partially blind. She had cataracts in both her eyes. For want of a timely operation she lost her eyesight. Still she had managed to survive on her own in her village but as it had to be, one day she slipped down in her backyard and fractured her leg. No longer able to move in and out of her house the villagers grew apprehensive as she could be a liability on them. Some elderly villager wrote to Nisha's husband and the contents of the letter had been made famous by Nisha in the entire neighbourhood.

"Whatever may be the case," the letter said," this one-eyed creature is after all your corpse. It is your duty to consign her ashes in due course of time. Heaven forbid but if any untoward happens the blame will be entirely yours".

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“Just watch the language.” Nisha grimaced, ‘The one-eyed creature is your corpse.’ ‘How ruthlessly these folks can declare a living creature a corpse!’”

Strangely though, as a social entity a person is forced to undertake many unwelcome and unwarranted tasks not on his or her own volition but purely for fear of social censure. In some ways this is not an undesirable situation after all. The entry of this distant, unknown relative in Nisha’s house confirms the merit of such social forces. This childless woman turned a widow in the prime of her life. So long she was strong in body and her limbs in fine shape, she was self-dependent on the yield of her farms and herds. Only if her eyes were operated in time she could have escaped the fracture and could perhaps spend the rest of her life amidst her own folks and familiar surroundings. Nisha was apparently averse to the uncanny use of ‘corpse’ for this woman but this old woman’s position in Nisha’s house was analogous with this epithet. She hardly ever conversed with any person in that house and her entire day was spent lazing out in the open courtyard. God might have been very stingy towards her in bestowing conjugal bliss but He had been quite charitable to offer her the leisure to bask in the glory of the winter sun.

Many a time I made a futile and vain attempt to befriend this old woman not for sympathy, love or affection but for purely selfish gains. Only if I could leave Rahul for some time in the company of this woman leisurely basking in the sun and tend to my household chores. With this selfish end in mind I approached her once or twice with the usual preliminaries about her health and so on but to no avail. No doubt she was partially blind but heavens forbid! Such a morbid Soul! She completely bypassed not only mine but Rahul’s presence as well. It goes without saying that children have a gravitational pull and they draw young and old alike towards them. Every mother considers her child to be exceptional and very especial but the prattling and childish pranks of Rahul attract even the passers-by. But this pile of a woman sat

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there expressionless like a mound of stone! No wonder God had strewn her path with bricks and boulders. As she sat outdoors in leisure what were she to lose if the child also joined her and regaled her with his prattling and pranks offering her company and minimizing my plight.

The day Rahul upturned his pram on him, this one-eyed, insensitive 'mound of stone' was the first one to drag him out of the pram.

It happened a fortnight ago. The memory of that ominous day is inked in my mind. Rahul was fidgeting for a joyride in the pram. I needed to change. Usually I make him stand by the front handle of the pram. Sometimes he toys with the hanging balls on the bonnet or would try the steering or the wheels. I don't know how come the pram was upturned on him. I was changing when Shubha's loud shriek of 'bhabhi' pierced my ears. I missed my heart beat. The melee of people in the verandah sent me cold waves and before I was to fall flat on the ground my eyes caught sight of Rahul sitting in her lap while she sobbed inconsolably.

Everything was back to normal in no time. Physically Rahul wasn't much hurt but terribly shaken. I took him in. Limping and sagging she too went back to occupy her usual place.

Greatly alarmed and unnerved by this incident Rahul dozed off half way through his feed. Watching my darling in repose and caressing the scratches on his forehead I shuddered to think of the unthinkable. She saved my child well in time. What if his limbs were caught under the tram? I was gripped with a sense of guilt and remorse. Most bewildering were the torrent of tears that sprang from those impaired eyes of this 'insensitive' woman. The memory of that face besmeared with tears is imprinted on my mind. The whole night that distraught and dishevelled face kept on haunting me.

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The next day she was posted at her familiar spot. Unlike the past, her very sight sent me waves of joy and gratitude and I persuaded her to come to my house.

Quietly, she sat on the foot of the bed immersed in her own groove of thoughts. Neither did she make any outward show of affection to Rahul, accepted the *halwa* that I had prepared especially for her, finished it off responding to my queries in monosyllables and nods in an absentminded way. I was about to see her off when suddenly she blurted out, "I too had a daughter."

This was news indeed. As per Nisha's information she was childless. Frankly speaking Nisha hardly knew anything about this woman nor desired to know.

"I killed my daughter."

'Don't say so grandma,' I intervened. "What mother on earth will kill her own child, her own flesh and blood. Birth and death are at the hands of the Almighty."

"My daughter was destined to meet her end at my hands. I was busy filling water in the pitcher, she died wailing and whining."

'I don't understand what do you mean?' I was taken aback.

"I only narrate the truth. My own accursed deed! Just after three years of marriage the nose pin of this 'auspicious' woman was taken off. At the time of her father's death she was seven months old. She was fifteen months old then. Such a beauty! Those partridge like eyes!"

For the first time I minutely surveyed the wrinkled face of this old woman. There was no denying the fact she too might have been a beauty in her hey- day.

"This wretched woman, most stupid and foolish of all on this earth did not know her worth. I took it for granted that if

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she was born, she would survive. She had to. Early morning before day break I would feed her, look around for someone I could dump her with and head off to the fields. This damned stomach mattered most to me. On my return home, I was reprimanded by the elderly women for being out for so long”.

“You have been out the whole day and here is your daughter starving to death. I have been holding her on water. Now go quickly, wash your hands and feet and give her the feed.”

“Once I had fed her I bundled her down on the cot and got back to my precious household chores. I had to fill up this worm-eaten belly of mine. I never fondled and caressed her in leisure. To me my work was my priority. Nothing more or less than work. I was cocksure if she had seen the light of the day she would live.”

The monologue was directed not to me in particular but to herself.

“Sometimes while she was asleep I would bolt the door from outside and go to the waterfall to fetch water. As if the waterfall was near! Not less than ten kilometres. By the time I reached home either she was asleep or would be howling, whining or weeping. So what? Her howling never unnerved my heart. Children weep and whine. She would whine and weep and then be reconciled. The household chores and farming came to me first. The Almighty said, “You can fill as much water as you like for the rest of your life. Take as much time as you wish to in your fields and the granary. No need for you to bolt the door from inside or outside.”

She was speechless for a while. Her eyes were dry and tearless.

“That day when I came back from the spring with my pitcher full of water I did not hear her usual wailing or weeping. It did not ring any alarming bells in my mind. Only when I opened the door, lifted down the pitcher on the ground and lighted the

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lamp....Since then I've wept and wailed and whined but to no avail. I lost my eyesight but my Rukma did not come back to me. If she were alive, she would be your age. The whole village gathered in no time, they shook her off, sprinkled water on her face, sent for the village apothecary, I prostrated on her cold feet.

“My Rukma. My darling. Please weep at least for once. I shall never, never budge out an inch from your side, forgive me for once. But once she had closed her eye lids.... She refused to oblige”.

She got up from the bed and moved out of the room limping and sagging. She did not part with the homily, “My daughter, the household chores can wait, the first and foremost duty of a mother is to keep a constant guard on her child. You keep a vigil on her today, she would do the same tomorrow.”

A vanquished soldier in the battlefield has no trophies to parade to the world.

I tightly squeezed Rahul to my bosom. Pressing him hard to my heart I let the tears quietly and silently slide down.

*Hindi original* “Gagar Bhar Pani ”

*Translated by Jaiwanti Dimri*



## Mundan

Veenapani Joshi

---

The unparalleled natural beauty of Mussoorie, the Queen of hills; thick forest of green oak trees; beautiful red, yellow, pink, purple and white flowers of dahlia and cosmos blooming in the resplendent light of autumn : surrounded by such a captivating sight, the two storeyed house of Seth Ram Ratan Singh wore a festive look. A big crowd of colorfully clad men and women, young as well as old, had gathered in the spacious courtyard of the house. In one corner, the traditional auspicious musical instruments *dhol* and *damau* were being played, while in the other, the noisy music of cheap Hindi films was also on. At the backyard, billowing smoke was curling up from the furnace set under a tarpauline ; servants were running around— all this indicated that Seth Ram Ratan's third grandson's *mundan* ceremony was being celebrated with great fanfare. Seated on the ground , rows and rows of villagers were relishing delicious food. On one side of the canopy, women were busy talking while eating.

Loudly spoke Hari's aunt: "Aye! the one with blue shirt! serve some *raita* this side also, my throat is dry since morning. At least some spoonfuls of curd will clear my throat. What to do? Those serving food are all young: they will serve food only where there are young girls! Why would they bother to serve us!" Chandan's grandma chipped in, "Oh God! These *pooris!* Are they prepared from ration-flour or from stones, they are so hard to chew! If you hit them on head, a big bump would pop up there! O Sooraj, my son! Give me some *halwa*. Now that we have sat here in the row for partaking food, we cant get up without tasting sweets : these *pooris* are beyond our might to chew. Just see this *boondi ka raita*, looks as if some mosquitoes

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are afloat in a pool of water, so few boondis are there in the curd.” Nathu’s grandma added in a tone of insinuation, “I had reached here early in the morning. Sethani ji was instructing the sweetsmaker, “ Look Halwai ji ! Add some water in the curd and dilute it. Also mix salt and pepper in it in good quantity, otherwise the children gulp it all down in the beginning of the feast itself: later on it is so hard to manage with insufficient food.” Chandan’s grandma added in a tone of agreement, “Yes, here always such bland type of food is cooked that one loses one’s appetite the moment one starts eating. Do we have so much time to waste that first we climb such a height and then go back with an empty stomach? Wouldn’t it be much better, had they distributed some *laddus*?”. Hari’s aunt intervened, “O yes, yes, you eat sweets sitting at your home! And what about the gifts and rupees that the guests will give here? Have you ever thought about that?”

Now was the turn of Chandan’s grandma to remark, “Yes, you are right. The real issue is this only”. Hari’s aunt commented again, “Yes, she is right and moreover, one feels ashamed to give petty gifts in such rich persons’ functions. It creates a big problem for poor folks like us”. Chandan’s grandma now diverted the focus of conversation, “ For our function we had arranged the sweetsmaker from outside”. All nodded. Hari’s aunt said, “Chandan’s grandma! Leave aside your case. What a feast it was! Till today we haven’t forgotten the delicious taste.”

Chandan’s grandma asked Shanti Devi, “O Shanti! Your grandson is now four years old. When are you performing his mundan ceremony? How eagerly all of us have been waiting for the feast at your home ? Today itself I’ll ask the priest to find an auspicious time for the ceremony. Would you also invite the same priest?” Chandan’s grandma said, “Yes, this Pandit Sarvanand Acharayaji is a great scholar, he performs all rituals as

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per Vedic injunctions, he has in-depth knowledge of scriptures.” Shanti said, “It is after such a long wait that we have been blessed with a grandson- we’ll host such a feast at a mundan ceremony that you people will remember for long.”

Nandini, who was listening to this conversation very attentively, asked Shanti, “Aunty, please tell us how is our Raghunath uncle?”

“He is alright.”

“Aunty, is he still in the village or he has come to live with you here in Mussoorie? He hasn’t got married yet, has he?”

“O my daughter! We got him married last year in the month of *Chaitra*.”

Surprised, Nandini exclaimed, “Is uncle really married? I have come here from Lucknow after one year . I know nothing about the village. Whenever there is a cultural program in the University, I fondly remember Raghunath uncle. How beautifully our fair complexioned and tall Raghunath uncle used to play the role of Lakshman! Had Lakshman himself seen him enacting his (Lakshman’s) role, he would perhaps hide himself behind stage. O! How marvelously would Raghunath uncle recite the verses of Ramayana! Those melodious renditions! Even the voice of a renowned singer like Mohd. Rafi would pale in comparison! Had our Raghunath uncle got a chance, he could have become a very famous musician.” All the women present there heartily supported Nandini. Nandini continued, “Last year my father had also gone to the village, he was telling us that Raghu uncle had grown very weak, he kept on coughing. Didn’t you take him to doctor?” Shanti replied, “Why not? We have a family physician who was treating your uncle. But Raghu has such a slim physique that he would never gain weight. Being the youngest in the family, he was brought up with a lot of

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pampering. The moment he catches even a slight cold, he starts coughing. His cough was cured with the physician's medicine. When we went to our ancestral village we had worshipped our family deity: the deity had 'possessed' our father in law. He told about each one of us, how our misfortunes would be driven away. As for our family, he told us that we had forgotten our tutelary deity, we should do special pooja during *Navratra* and offer sacrificial lamb for the conveyance of the goddess.

"Nandini! Do you know? we all went to our village during Chaitra month, performed pooja and oblations , even offered a lamb as sacrifice to the goddess, only then had we Raghu married. Now he is quite alright : he has recovered well".

"But, aunty, Raghu uncle is still so young!"

"Young? He is already twenty three years old!"

"But aunty, what was the hurry to get him married so early? You should rather have called him here and got him treated by some good doctor. With a little medical care, his cough too would have been cured and he would have regained complete health. Only then you should have got him married."

These words were enough to provoke Shanti. Getting edgy, she asked "Did we leave out anything in his treatment? Was he afflicted with some contagious disease? He is well enough to take care of all household chores ! Were he so ill, he could not even have got up on his own. Even then we are thinking that we'd have a repeated chanting of the sacred mantra of *Om Namah Shivaya* this year during *Shrawan* month. It would allay our misgivings and everything would be fine."

Nandini asked again, "But, aunty, faith in such rituals is one thing , medical treatment is a different thing . What connection is there between rituals and medical advice? Doesn't sometimes

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even a slight abrasion turn into a festering wound? I don't know why the people of my village would neither pay heed to their health nor to their education, nor would they ever think of progress! Only obsessed with engagement and marriage, rites and rituals! In today's materialistic society, how long can we rely only on these religious ceremonies, rites and rituals?"

How could Chandan's grandma remain mum! She instantly added, "Look at these modern girls! Flush with the arrogance of their education, they have no regard for us elders. So eager they are to get into arguments at the slightest pretext. But they are only girls after all! Little do they know how the affairs of the family are run. Just look at Shanti! No sooner did her son start earning than she got him married and now she is enjoying the bliss of fondling her grandson! What a great satisfaction for her that her family name is being carried forward".

Shanti tried to bring home her point to Nandini, "Look Nandini, you are very well aware of the condition of our family. When we could not earn a living in the village, we started a grocery shop here; even the space for setting up this shop could be arranged with great difficulty. The earnings from shop are meagre. So Raju, my son, started working as a driver on Mussoorie-Chamba route. It is only with some extra money earned on the route that we are able save some money, otherwise his salary is not sufficient even for his own family. We have contrived to set up a small hut here for ourselves anyhow. So far as our village home is concerned, since the time my father-in-law left for his heavenly abode, my old mother-in-law was left alone. Who would have taken care of the household and the farm land? That's why we had Raghu married, at least we are not worried about our village home now. My mother-in-law now has some support and my brother-in-law Raghu too would get at least well cooked food on time. His wife would take care of the fields, cows and oxen also. After

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all, one has to consider all these things. Moreover, Raghu had to be married, sooner or later, so why delay such auspicious ceremony? Had we not decided to get Raghu married, our home in the village - the legacy of our ancestors- would have turned into a waste land.”

“What is the age of our young aunt, Raghu’s wife?” asked Nandini.

“O! She is very young, a girl of fifteen years, very stoutly built” replied Shanti.

“Aunty, how would such a young girl be able to do so much work all by herself? To look after her old mother-in-law and her husband– even this was work enough for her.”

Now Hari’s aunt intervened , “So what! We too did so much hard work in our young age– we fetched water and green fodder from the forest for cows and oxen, fetched wood for fuel and prepared meals for a large family. Now a days there are electric grinders for grinding wheat and rice; everything is available readymade but we had to get up as early as 3 a.m. When the stars were still twinkling in the sky , we started grinding in those wee hours. Due to exhaustion, when we dozed off in a state of half sleep, sometimes our head collided with the handle of the grinder which injured our foreheads.” Saying this Hari’s aunt showed a mark of injury on her forehead. By now, the guests had finished their food. Going away, Shanti once again invited Nandini to her grandson’s mundan ceremony.

Nandini, the worthy, sensible daughter of Dr. Swaroop Negi, was a student of MBBS, studying in Lucknow Medical College. Her father currently being posted in Mussoorie, she used to come to Mussoorie during her vacations. She had spent her childhood with her grandparents in village and every now and then she used to visit her village also. She liked the environment of her village

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very much. After spending her *Dussehra* holidays in Mussoorie, Nandini had come to her native village for a week. She felt an indescribable joy whenever she was amid the natural beauty of her village which was situated on a lovely mountain. During these days she visited each and every household, surveyed the whole of village and saw the result of the hard work of her villagers : the lush green crops, the trees laden with fruits. It was such a pure and serene rural environment, not only free from air pollution and water pollution but also free from the guiles of city life. She took keen interest in the daily lives of her village folk who, totally oblivious of the so called progress of their nation, were passing their lives in abject poverty.

The young girls of the village, being married very early, are saddled with so much strenuous work that their backs are bent, they slip from teenage straight into old age. Tied by family traditions and values, they go on fulfilling their obligations, never ever having experienced the bliss of youthful dreams. Similarly the simple innocent young men of this village bravely volunteered to enlist in army whenever any adversity befell their dear country. Braving bullets, they laid down their lives but never ever showed their back to the enemy. But there is also the other side of this story. Facing so many adversities, the parents brought up their sons and sent them to cities for education. These worthy sons are now occupying high posts. How often they come back to their villages and do something for the upliftment for their native village? It is realised only by those poor villagers who are still waiting for these worthy sons.

Nandini's vacations were about to end. She thought, why not meet Raghu uncle? And off she went to Raghu uncle's home the very next day. Seeing Nandini, Raghu called out to his wife, "Manorama! Look, doctor sahiba has come, bring some thing to eat for her." Within no time Manorama returned with a crisp

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*Mandua* chapati, freshly cooked spinach curry, a fragrant ball of fresh butter and a cup of milk. Raghu exhorted Nandini, “First have this meal, only then tell us about how you are.” Nandini touched Manorama’s feet : the latter pulled herself back in hesitation. Raghu prompted her, “Give her your blessings, you are Nandini’s aunt”! Eating the delicious breakfast, Nandini exclaimed, “Aunty, how much sweetness is there in this chapati, how tasty is the fresh butter! The wheat grown on the hills with so much labour.. can any one ever come across such a taste in cities? What a tasty milk! Is it so because the cows here munch fresh leaves and grass?” Manorama smiled shyly: the natural redness coming over her delicate cheeks enhanced her beauty further.

Nandini chatted on leisurely with Raghu uncle , Manorama too was entertained by the engaging tit bits of conversation with Nandini. Nandini asked Raghu, “Uncle! do you still take part in *Ramlila*?”

“No , I don’t. I am unable to stretch my voice, neither can I deliver lengthy dialogues.”

“Uncle, you are getting weaker day by day. Please come to Mussoorie once. There my father would do your check up, proper facilities of treatment are also available there. You must come out of this chronic weakness,” implored Nandini.

“This won’t be possible just now. I have to get the fields ready for sowing wheat. How much can poor Manorama do single handedly? Let this entire sowing etc. be over. Then I’ll definitely come to Mussoorie around *Basant Panchami*. when the mundan ceremony of Yadu Bhai saheb’s grandson would be celebrated,” Raghu said.

Nandini continued, “I was telling Yadu uncle and Shanti aunty that if they spent money on your treatment and not on

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mundan ceremony, could any one dare do any harm to them ? If at all they wanted to do something, they ought to have arranged for your proper medical treatment, grandson's mundan ceremony only after that. How angry both of them were! Shanti aunty even said that since everything had been finalized, nothing could be changed. Auspicious functions should never be delayed: it is considered an ill omen. "If we celebrate this ceremony miserly, what would the people of our village say ! We have left no stone unturned for Raghu's treatment. How much money we've already spent on performing all types of rituals and worship! All this has definitely done some good to him. After all, whatever is to be done, will be done by us only, who else would?" she had asked.

Taking leave of Raghu uncle and Manorama aunty, Nandini went back to Lucknow, with a firm resolve in her heart that God willing, if she ever got a Doctor's degree, she would first of all come back to her native village and treat the poor village folks here.

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The road coming down from Landour Bazar which is situated at a considerable height in Mussoorie, turns right in the middle from where a kutch road takes one towards an old 'basti' known as 'Khachchar Khana'. Here on a patch of level plain can be seen some clusters of houses. Further down, there is only continuous slope and thick forests all around. Beside a big walnut tree is Yadunath ji's house, part concrete part mud, which is built upon an embankment. The nearby fields- some green, some yellow- do remind one of Basant Panchami. On a small level field, there is a tent, decorated with buntings and banana stems where guests are pouring in. Low musical sounds of dhol and damau welcome guests. Shanti Devi, incarnation of spontaneous joy and zeal, looks obviously busy, what with

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welcoming the guests, providing materials for sacrificial fire, giving raw materials to the sweets maker, finalising a proper place for keeping sweets, with a full eye on hygiene, getting the earthen pots properly washed and neatly arranging them in rows, lest there be something lacking. Shanti Devi has also made arrangements for betel leaves, betel nuts, dry coconuts and sugar candy to be served to guests after the meals.

Co incidentally due to students' strike, Lucknow Medical College was closed sine die. Hence last night Nandini too had arrived at Mussoorie, her home town. Today she has come to meet Shanti Devi and lend her helping hand in the function. Upon learning that Raghu uncle had also arrived from village , she instantly went to meet him and enquire about his well-being.

As she stepped into Raghunath's room, Nandini was stupefied by what she saw there. A small dingy room ,its walls and floor coated with clay, with only a small window in west. The window, however was at such a height that through it the rays of sun could have hardly ever touched the floor. In a small niche in the wall, there was an earthenware lamp filled with mustard oil. Hanging on a peg on one wall was a soiled coat a black muffler and a cap. On another wall two calendars- one of *Bajrang Bali Hanuman* and the other of Goddess *Saraswati*- fluttered occasionally with the gusts of wind.

In the middle of the room was a tripod on which three vials of medicine, some injections and a tumbler of water were kept. On an old worn out bed, covered with an oily sticky blanket lay Raghunath uncle, breathing so heavily that the blanket moved up and down with his breath. One could also see a towel kept on the head of bed and a white metal spittoon under the cot. A small piece of mat was also lying nearby.

Slowly, in a hesitant voice Nandini said, "*Namaste*, Raghu uncle !" Hearing Nandini's voice, startled Raghu tried to get up.

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A faint ray of smile crossed his pale, wan face. "When did you come from Lucknow?" he asked. Though intensely agonized by Raghu uncle's condition, Nandini tried to put up a brave face. She said, "Our University was suddenly closed due to students' strike: I reached here yesterday only. Co-incidentally it has given me a chance to meet you and also to participate in mundan ceremony. Uncle, how is your health? Are you well, aren't you?"

"Yes Nandini! My health is ok but somehow, for the past few days I've been feeling a bit weaker. Today I am having difficulty in breathing. It seems my cough problem has aggravated. Perhaps it is all due to being exposed to cold winds last night while travelling in bus. Anyway, every thing would be alright in a day or two, after I take proper rest." Saying this, Raghu again lay down on the cot, panting heavily.

Nandini was lost in thoughts, deeply worried. Her father Dr. Saroop Negi, had administered a morphine injection in view of Raghu's deteriorating condition, so that he could sleep properly. Dr. Negi had also advised Raghu's elder brother Yadunath to take Raghu, if possible, to AIIMS hospital in New Delhi; the responsibilities of mundan function could be left to other family members. It was urgent to take Raghu to AIIMS immediately: delay could be fatal. Hearing this, Yadunath and his wife were in a fix. With so much difficulty they had made preparations for celebrating their grandson's mundan ceremony. They thought that with it, they'd be able to take off the heavy burden of their friends and relatives' feasts which they were obliged to repay. With so much difficulty they had arranged a sum of five thousand rupees for meeting the expenses of mundan. Not only this, they had to also repay the loan they had taken for Raghu's marriage last year, as they had invited the entire village for marriage feast. It would cost a lot to go to Delhi. Anyway, as soon as the mundan function is over, we'll start for Delhi, they thought. By then, some money would also

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be hopefully arranged. For the time being Dr. Negi has given medicines.

On the other hand, Nandini's thoughts also were moving very fast. "Our Raghu uncle has been so ill for past so many months, still he was married to an underage, poor village girl, despite uncle's extreme unwillingness for marriage. The innocent village lass was saddled with a heavy burden. Why couldn't these elders think of providing young Raghu medical aid, instead of getting him married? How wrong they were when they mistakenly thought that Raghu was being treated by their religious rites and rituals. On top of that, they feel obliged to perform mundan ceremony. Such ceremonies can be performed much more simply. What is the need for such a show off in today's times when prices are spiralling? Why don't these people set their priorities right? Why don't they hesitate in spending so much on these social rituals, much beyond their means?" Finding her engrossed in thoughts, Raghu uncle said, "Nandini, why don't you come out and join the guests here?"

The mundan ceremony had begun. The priest called out Rangtu barber, "Come Rangtu, tonsure the child's head: now is the auspicious time. The barber tonsured the child's hair into a bronze tray. To the beats of Dhol Damau, with the priest reciting sacred verses and the auspicious songs sung by the women, the tonsure ceremony was performed. A group of women applied fragrant paste on the child's limbs, bathed him, made him wear new dress, garlanded him and performed *aarati*. The priest now asked Shanti to bring golden threads so that ear piercing ceremony could be performed. Nandini asked Chandan's grandma, "*Dadi!* Boys don't wear ear rings, then why are their ears pierced?" Chandan's grandma replied, "Shri Aparnanand Bhashakacharya was a great scholar who used to give special emphasis on piercing ears, which according to him affected a

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particular vein in the throat which prevented tonsils. Don't you see, now a days also, ear nose and throat are treated together?"

The ceremony was over. The guests congratulated the family members. Toys, dresses and gifts for the child piled up. Filling his pockets with notes and eating sweets, the child was happily accepting the blessings of all guests. Shanti was busy attending the guests. Chandan's grandma ordered Shanti, "Go, give some sweets to your brother-in-law Raghu also, let him also eat sweets. You haven't cooked '*khichri*' for him today, have you? It is inauspicious to cook *khichri* on such occasions." Shanti took a plate of sweets to Raghu's room and implored him to taste some. No sooner did Raghu put a piece of sweet in his mouth than a sudden fit of cough overtook him, he couldn't even breathe. Gasping hard, he lay down on the cot, almost unconscious. Yadunath was called. Shanti said, "Please call Dr Negi for the time being. In the evening we are leaving for Delhi anyway. Dr. Negi would give some injection, poor Raghu would at least have some relief during journey."

The sweets maker called out loudly from outside, "Please make our payments quickly, we have to go to some other function also." Paying him, Yadunath had just entered the room when the tentwallah too started pestering Yadunath, "Babuji, the guests have all departed, we are also winding up our paraphernalia. Please relieve us also quickly."

After Yadunath was free from all this, he started waiting for Dr. Negi. Shanti had almost finished packing. It started getting dark. Raghunath lay silently, coughing intermittently. Yadunath's son had gone to arrange for stretcher and taxi. Since it was a narrow hilly pathway, the patient needed to be taken on a stretcher to get to the taxi.

Shanti entered Raghu's room and lit the candle. The room was dimly lit. She said to Yadunath, "I firmly believed that with

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the worship of goddess *Durga*, my brother in law would be fully cured. I don't know what was lacking in our worship that has angered our tutelary gods? Once again we'll show his birth chart to the priest." Yadunath ji burst out in anger, "Stop wasting money on all these non-sense rituals! Dr. Negi was so angry with us, asking why didn't we take Raghu to Delhi, instead of just wasting time here?"

Raghu asked for water. He could gulp a sip with great difficulty. He implored Yadunath, "Bhaisaheb, I am feeling nervous. Please call mother and Manorama from village." In a tremulous voice Shanti tried to console her brother-in-law, "Please don't lose heart, Dr Negi is about to arrive, The taxi has been arranged. Very shortly shall we all leave for Delhi, there we'll have your check-up done once again, we'll give you medicines prescribed by the doctors there, then we'll bring Manorama and mother-in-law here." Comforting Raghu with these words and putting a pillow against his back, Shanti stepped outside to see whether Dr. Negi had arrived and also to see where was the taxi parked. Shanti had just stepped out when Raghu once again had a sudden fit of cough. Yadunath took Raghu in his arms. Shanti came back running, she pulled out the spittoon from underneath the cot. The fit of coughing abated somewhat. Suddenly a spurt of blood started oozing, the spittoon was filled, vomiting of blood now stopped. In panic Yadunath tried to lay Raghu down. In the meanwhile Dr. Negi also arrived. He promptly opened his briefcase, put the stethoscope on Raghu. No heartbeat, no pulse, no voice. Raghu's neck drooped on one side. Perhaps he had fallen in a deep sleep, never to wake up again. Dr. Negi nodded silently.

Wails of lamentation filled the house. Shanti sent the young children away to some neighbour's place, so that they couldn't hear the loud weeping and crying. By next morning a big crowd had assembled in Yadunath's house. With his head tonsured,

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Yadunath returned home after performing the last rites of his younger brother. The young grandson, oblivious of the catastrophe, came running to Yadunath and started asking, “Dadaji! Did you also have ‘Mundan’? Would Panditji come again? Would there be a feast once again in our house? Please, Dadaji, why don’t you speak?”

Tears were trickling from Yadunath’s eyes. He sat down with a thud. With his head bent he could only murmur, “Yes”. Thinking all this while. “Pandit ji would come, a feast would be hosted after thirteen days...!”

*Hindi original* “Mundan”

*Translated by* Madhu D. Singh



## The Girl and the Cigarette

Swati Melkani

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The jeep bound for the village was ready. “Have your seat madam. Just two passengers more and then we leave. At least the cost of petrol should be recovered. Please give me your luggage,” said the driver, spitting pan masala filled saliva. Handing him her bag, she went away. By now, she could catch hold of the ogling eyes of other shopkeepers and jeep drivers. Some of them were staring at her and some at her blue jeans. “Let them stare, I don’t care! Let them go to hell! What if it is a village, can’t I even wear jeans? I am covered from head to toe. Had I worn a transparent sari revealing my belly, would their eyes be less sharp then?” Irritated, she moved ahead quickly.

The street had shops on either side. The last shop had a shutter whose extended net had blocked the view of a corner of it. The girl found the shop convenient. With steady steps, she moved towards the shop. The shopkeeper was a middle-aged man whose face looked like as if someone had beaten him up throughout the previous night. The girl thought to herself that she would not give any explanation to anyone and that she would straightaway ask for what she wanted. “Uncle...do...do you have a cigarette?” she started stammering and ended up saying those very words she had sworn to herself throughout the way not to say, “actually... someone in my neighborhood has asked for it.”

The shopkeeper did not pass any crooked smile as she had expected. “Which one should I give?” he asked yawning. The question put the girl in a dilemma. She did not know the variety of cigarettes. Her eyes fell on the well-stacked packs of cigarette boxes and looking at a shiny pack she said, “Gold Flake.”

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She stammered once again, "Yes.... he.... has asked for this only." The shopkeeper handed her a packet of cigarettes.

"Don't you sell loose? I mean.... he had asked for only two.... that's it." The girl spoke in such a way as if she was frightened to see the whole packet of cigarettes. "Accha, only two! which one do you want? One is for three and one is for five." The shopkeeper enquired.

"Very strange! Could buying cigarettes be this troublesome?" The girl murmured. "I have a ten rupee note. Give me two for five rupees each, otherwise I might again have problem of change."

The shopkeeper began to give her two loose cigarettes from the packet. "Arre, wrap them with a paper. This way they might break." By now, the girl's voice had turned to an entreating tone.

It was for the first time in her life that she held cigarettes in her hand. "They will break if kept in the jeans' pocket. Do I have to keep holding them in my hand now?" The girl became anxious again. "Let me quickly put them in the bag." Holding the cigarettes between her palms she went to the jeep driver, to whom she had handed over her luggage. He was sitting near the jeep and was puffing cigarette. In order to avoid the smoke, she stood at a distance but suddenly with some thoughts, smelling the smoke she moved towards the jeep driver and said, "*Bhaiya*, where is my bag? I need to keep something in it."

"I kept it on the roof, madam." The jeep driver answered carelessly.

"Arre, why did you put it on the roof? It was a small bag. It could have been adjusted under the seat." The girl restrained herself from saying anything further. It is no use getting into needless arguments. Anyway, this was the last jeep to the village.

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The girl felt her left palm was getting too hot as if the pressed cigarettes were burning. She shifted the cigarettes to her right hand. Then she looked at her left palm. It was red. She started thinking that if the wrapped pack accidentally fell from her hands then the cigarettes would be revealed. She wondered what would the shopkeepers and the jeep driver think about her when they saw the fallen cigarettes right in the middle of the road? She suddenly clutched the cigarettes tightly in her right palm. However, the thought of the cigarettes getting broken made her loosen her grip. She bought a packet of biscuits from another shop. She then put the wrapped cigarettes in the poly bag that she received with the biscuit packet.

She once again looked into the poly bag to make sure that there were no holes in it. There were no holes in it but somehow she felt that the bag was not that strong as it should have been.

She went and sat inside the jeep. There were four passengers in all. "The jeep wouldn't move until it had at least six passengers," thought the girl, looking at the driver who smoked, reclining against the bonnet of the jeep. She rested her head on the seat and closed her eyes.

Strange images of the boy's face began to swirl in her eyes. He must surely be thirty-five, if not forty. She wondered why her father was so eager to get her married. She has just completed twenty-six. She is in a government job. Just because of this job, she has been staying in a village. Had her family not insisted on a government job, she too dared to realize her dreams struggling in some metropolitan city. She never wanted to remain stuck in Nainital like a frog in a well. The boy was such a snob! He kept talking repeatedly only about his high profile job. "I have my duties in night shifts too. Presently my salary package is fifteen lakhs. So I don't think my wife needs to go to work at all. I can give her a luxurious life. I mean....I hope you understand. I have

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lots of offers in hand to go abroad. I might plan to move abroad any time ....”

The jeep suddenly stopped with a jolt due to brakes. The girl opened her eyes. The jeep driver was abusing some shepherd. One of the goats had narrowly escaped being crushed under the jeep. The girl once again checked the poly bag she carried. Everything was fine. More than half of the journey still remained to be covered. She closed her eyes once again resting her head on the seat.

Already she was reluctant for marriage. Just because her family insisted, she decided to meet the boy. What if her family members wanted to decide everything on their own? She would meet the boy. If she liked the boy, only then she would go in front of his family members but little did she know that agreeing to meet the boy meant her saying ‘yes’ to the proposal. What needless questions was the boy asking! “I mostly have my meals in hotels. I don’t know to make chapatis. By the way, which special dishes can you prepare?”

“I cook enough not to remain starved” she had answered irritated. The girl was expecting the boy to ask her about her future plans and her dreams; about her interest in classical music and paintings. But that boy kept asking only about food and rotis. Yes, one more thing he had asked arrogantly, “Which car do you like?”

Which car could she have named and that too after understanding it clearly that the question was just to show off his ability to keep cars. Still she replied, “I don’t know much about the names of cars. The roads of the village where I am posted in , are kutchra roads and so narrow that one can only walk on them, for which a pair of legs is good enough.”

“Oh, then you must be facing a big problem. How do you manage?” The boy asked shrugging his shoulders. “Problem is

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not such that it cannot be managed. After getting off from the vehicle I too enjoy being a part of the entire surrounding while walking through it.” As she was speaking, she somehow felt that the boy was not able to relate to and understand what she was saying. She herself could not understand the meaning of what she was saying. In the evening, she told her parents that she found the boy to be quite old and that she won't marry. This was enough to annoy Mummy Papa and they burst out. “Arre, he is not yet forty. He is an engineer and he must have worked hard for his studies. Poring one's eyes over books day and night will definitely leave some signs on the face.” Papa tried to make her understand.

“But Papa, he doesn't want a girl like me. I think he is looking for a completely homely type of girl and I am not that type. He wants me to leave my job and settle down with him in Bangalore.” The girl said anxiously.

“Arre, this is good enough for you. You too wanted to go to a big city. You had always been complaining that out of greed for a government job we made you leave your Ph.D and sent you to a village,” Mummy stressed.

“But when I wanted to go out and explore life , you stopped me saying that I should be independent and stand on my own feet. Now by offering me a shimmering crutch you are asking me to fold my legs. I wont do this,” the girl said. “You have lost your wits. It was our fault that we gave you so much of freedom. Had we got you married off when you were eighteen, we would not have had to face it now. It was I who had lost wits and decided to provide complete education even to a girl. Arre, at least think of us also, how long will we keep shouldering your responsibility . All our future plans are blocked on account of your marriage.” Papa said in a fit of rage.

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“So, when did I ever stop you? You are free from my end. I am self reliant now. Leave me on my own.” Suppressing her anger, she answered.

“Yes, yes, you have grown wings now. All this is the consequence of the limitless freedom you got. Aren't there other girls? Are you the only extraordinary one? It is entirely my fault. It is I who gave you so much freedom. I had been so insane.” Her father shouted furiously.

In order to pacify father , mother implored me , “See, don't be so selfish. What would we answer to the world? We are getting lots of offers now but once you begin to age these offers too will stop coming. You don't even take care of yourself. You already have started having dark circles under your eyes. Relatives pass taunting remarks. They think that since you have a good job, we are therefore not getting you married off due to our own greediness to live on your earnings. Now, you tell, are we such parents to live on our daughter's earnings?”

“Why? Is it a sin for parents to live on their daughter's earnings? Doesn't the world have anything else to do other than calculating the age of others' daughters and eyeing the growing dark circles under their eyes? I don't give a damn to such people and relatives who don't allow others to live their lives in their own way,” she said.

“But we care. We have to live in this society only. If you already have some boy in your mind, tell us straight. But keep in mind that the boy must be from the same caste and creed to which we belong .” Her mother sternly said.

“I haven't found any boy Mummy. I haven't ever thought anything regarding this. By the way, when did you people ever allow me to think of such things? Then how can I suddenly get

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someone now? And that too someone who can understand me, my dreams, someone who....”

She took her bag and came out. She could still hear the screaming voice of her father coming from the house.

The woman wrapped in shawl sitting by the window seat was vomiting. Journeys on hilly roads are quite troublesome. The girl was having severe headache. About half an hour still remained to reach the destination. She remembered how in her childhood she used to secure first position in the class and how her father used to hold her in his lap after seeing her report card. Despite getting education from an ordinary government school, she had always tried to learn the various things she could. She wondered as to when she ever had that unlimited freedom about which her father mentioned. Moreover, if she ever received that unlimited freedom, why didn't she recognize it? She was always aware of the boundaries of her sky. Anyway, whatever happened has happened. Now she would certainly unleash the shackles of her sky and she has already started doing so. She once again peeped into the poly bag she held and closed her eyes.

It was already half past seven when she reached her room. Her head was throbbing with pain. The room was in great disorder. She remembered how she had run out in haste when she got a call from home. “It will take four hours to organize the room”, she thought. At this moment, she had the strength only to make her bed. Once she was on to the bed, she kept lying there. It was neither the time to sleep nor had she any intention to sleep. Quarter past nine, she switched off the light with the intention of giving the landlord the impression that she had dozed off. Very carefully, she opened the wrapped cigarettes. Both were in good condition. Lying in her bed and holding the cigarettes with utmost care, she kept staring at them for a long time. The moon rays crept in through the window and illuminated the

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golden butt of the cigarette. The shine of the golden butt once again reminded her of the thought of freedom about which her father had mentioned cursing her and himself.

The girl looked at the time on her mobile. It was ten. “The landlord must have slept by now.” She moved to the corner of the table where she had made a small space for prayer. A matchbox was kept near the packet of incense sticks. She took the matchbox. She could see her hands trembling in the light of the matchstick. . . .

It is raining heavily. The potholes are filled with water. The bus is lurching from Haldwani to Nainital. A little girl of about six years, all drenched in rain boards the bus with her father. The bus is full of passengers. The little girl stands by the side of her father. Tiny droplets of water run down from her wet hair onto her face. The wet frock is stuck between her legs. Her teeth clatter because of the cold. She stands closer to her father. In the adjacent seat is an imposing man with a thick cigarette in his hand and twirls of smoke are emitting from his mouth and nose.

“Papa, what is this that appears so thick but looks like a cigarette?” The girl asks her father curiously.

“*Beta*, this is not a cigarette but a cigar.” The girl’s father answers. The girl keeps watching the lighted end of the cigar and the smoke emitting from it. She feels that the person smoking the thick cigarette must be some king. She had heard a story from her grandma about such an impressive man. The king used to do whatever he wished. The girl noticed that he was the only man who was smoking in the entire bus without being the least bothered about the rest and the only one who could make beautiful twirls of smoke by puffing at the cigarette. The twirls of the smoke seemed to the girl as if some strong wind has forced the young chicks of a hen to float in the air and she wanted to hold them softly in her hands caressing them with love. The girl

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was sure that having a cigarette or cigar, with whatever name one calls it, must be an awesome feeling and very enjoyable.

After twenty years, the girl has a lighted cigarette in her hand. She slowly put the cigarette between her lips but could not take a puff. She found the golden butt of the cigarette to be too hot. She felt as if it had burnt her lips. After sometime, she again put the cigarette between her lips and tried to draw in a puff. A violent fit of cough seized her. She put her face under the quilt and tried to control the cough. She tried again but ended up inhaling the hot smoke. It was impossible to suppress the cough now. Tears started rolling down as she was coughing. She began to gasp. In the darkness of the room, the lighted part of the cigarette seemed even brighter. The girl began to think that if the lit cigarette were visible from outside through the window, then everyone in the neighborhood would come to know that this girl smokes cigarette. She stays alone and on top of that, she lives in a village. A place that could neither become a town nor remain a village in the proper sense. "But why is she thinking all this? She knows well what to do. Let others think what they wish to. She is not going to explain anything to anyone."

The girl took a long puff at one go and throwing the cigarette on the floor covered herself with the quilt. This time the intensity of the cough increased and she felt like vomiting. By the moment, she fancied that the sound of her cough might have awakened the landlord and so she covered herself from both the ends of the quilt. A weak sound of coughing could still be heard from the stirring quilt.

The girl's younger brother had told her that whenever she met a boy for marriage she should notice his eyes, lips and teeth carefully. Boys with red eyes are usually drunkards. Those who smoke cigarette have thick upper lip and yellow teeth. The boy whom she met also had thick upper lip. The boy kept staring at

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her for the entire duration of time they sat together. She felt very uneasy and so could not notice whether he had yellow teeth or not. However, the girl remembered that she had certainly met some boy with yellow teeth....She was then in seventh standard. In order to color her brother on the day of *Holi* she had run after him and reached the stairs of Verma aunty's house. At that moment, a boy alighting from the stairs caught hold of her. His face was smeared with colors. She began to look here and there but could not see her brother. The boy began to laugh and it was then that she saw the boy's teeth were yellow. The boy put colour on her but she was unable to understand as to why the boy had sniggled his hands inside her dress when colors are to be put on cheeks, so that it could be seen who has the darkest colors and also because the color smeared faces look funny and make people laugh at one another. There was a kind of sliminess in the way the boy tried to color her. The girl felt suffocated. She pushed the boy with both her hands. The boy fell down the stairs. She ran back to her house and straightaway went to the bathroom. Holi singers were singing aloud. She closed the door and stood by its side. The water for bathing was not yet ready. Mummy called from outside, "Arre, why have you gone inside so soon? Everyone will be coming now for Holi Milan. Even the water is not hot. Will you bathe with cold water?"

The girl was quiet. She showered three to four mugs of water over herself. She began to shiver with cold. Colored water running down her hair spread onto the floor. The girl took the bucket of water and threw it on the floor to drain out the colored water. Continuous Holi songs could be heard coming from outside. Since then, the girl never ever played Holi....

"What if by tomorrow morning my teeth turned yellow?" The girl suddenly felt frightened. However, the very next moment she thought how the mere puffing of a cigarette could make her

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teeth turn yellow and even if it is stained why should she be afraid? Who is there to see her?

After the bad experience of puffing the first cigarette, she gave up the thought of taking in the second one. But, where will she keep the second cigarette? It would be a trouble if someone sees it. She lit the second one. Same as the last time she put the cigarette into her lips and removed it. As she took the first puff disinterestedly, she started coughing once again. Now under any condition she cannot take in anymore. She was irritated at her weakness. Isn't she strong enough to smoke a cigarette? Papa told her that her wings have grown due to the excess freedom she received. After all, why is she not able to enjoy her freedom? Whatever might be, she will finish the second cigarette by any means. With all her might, she took in one long puff and filled her mouth with smoke. The smoke began to hit her head. She began to have blurred visions. As she opened her mouth, the smoke filled the room. She could feel that the smell of the cigarette leaked through the cracks in the window and the landlord sleeping in the adjacent room was about to come. She opened the window and peeped out. It was dark outside. The cigarette was over. She put the ash and the remains of the cigarette properly in a piece of paper and threw it in the dustbin. Then she opened the other window to let the fresh air in.

*Hindi original* "Ladki aur Cigarette"

*Translated by Manjulika Gogoi*



## Fingerprints of River

Kusum Bhatt

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Fingerprints of the river were on our backs. Running behind us was a crocodile, with his jaws wide open, eager to devour us! On either side of the earth were we two small girls! How many faces death has! we had experienced in that moment! Run! Run faster, run! we were saying to ourselves. How so ever fast one might run, the earth is round and one ultimately does reach the same place! Anything could happen! The crocodile, bent upon piercing the fingers of the river... we small girls can't fight with it ... we have to save ourselves somehow from it : we could understand this much only... from that silent cry... which was fluttering helplessly in that choked throat of Bhuwan *chacha*.

A flicker of flame ignited with a matchstick... our desires, our dreams burning in this flame ! And our liberation? It was like that fish for which the crafty crane lay in ambush in the river.

Only a match stick was lighted up and in it started burning the 'manliness' of Bhuwan chacha, so painstakingly acquired in the fifteen years of his life! His bravado, so vociferously displayed in the morning, now disappeared in just a few seconds. In its place, there was now the futile helpless fluttering of a bird's wings. The same Bhuwan chacha who had assured my mother very confidently in the morning, as if applying a balm of trust on her doubting heart, "What are you afraid of *bhabhi*? Am not I there with the girls? They aren't going alone...." And now the trembling hand of the same Bhuwan chacha, "Run! girls, run!" Looking at his trembling frame and helpless face, we had understood only too well that death was staring us in the face. Despite that, try we must till our last breath.

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We had never thought that the situation would change in just a moment. But did we really have the time to think? As soon as we saw the beautiful sand by the riverside, we had started building sand castles... such precious moments are hard to come by, when we had our 'own' time, which we could enjoy as we wished. Mother had tried hard to stop us, "The girls are too young to go there." How many times I had implored mother, "O mother, I want to see the river, the fish, I wish to see the *gharat*." Just at the mention of river, mother had started trembling, "No, no, I won't let you go to the river at all, if you wish to see the fish there. Do you know many people were drowned in the river! During summer, with the melting of snow in the upper reaches, the water level suddenly increases in the river, it takes everyone by surprise."

At this, Bhuwan chacha had intervened, "Who would allow these girls to go to the river?... O bhabhi ! Isn't there crocodile also in the river?" Saying this, Bhuwan chacha had winked towards mother.

There was no flour left in Bhuwan's home. His grandmother was ill. Groaning in pain, she had reminded Bhuwan, "Grains would have to be taken to *gharat* for grinding, if you wish meals to be cooked." Bhuwan was now the eldest in the family, his elder sister having been married off. His younger sister Madhuri was my friend; she too didn't want to go to *gharat* without me. She told me how the fish are swept away to the bank of the river, carrying the swirls of waves along. Standing on the slope of her field, she showed me the river, above the river was the *gharat*, its stones shining brilliantly in sunlight. Mother said that she had canisters full of flour in the kitchen, still she put some packets of maize and barley corns in my bag for grinding. Last night I had dreamed also of the river.... Its sparkling blue stream slowly humming musical tunes and a host of fish jumping merrily with them as if dancing with the waves.... The river was saying, "Shivani

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! Come! Touch my fish.” I touched the river.....and I started sailing with its current.... I touched the fish and wings emerged on my body. I started flying high in the air... I didn't see the crocodile, I saw only water, flowing water... and lots of fish swimming along. Giving me wings, my dream was eager to fly me to the moon! The moon was smiling, “Only this much of happiness you want?” I replied, “Yes, only this much of happiness!”

I told Madhuri and Bhuwan chacha about my dream. Bhuwan chacha gently slapped me on my head. “Such a small girl and such big dreams that she has talked to moon!” As if in a tone of rebuff, he said, “Aye girl! See only small dreams, not such big ones!” Poor Bhuwan chacha! He doesn't know, one has no control over one's dreams. Sleep brings them in, as waves bring the fish....

Crossing the long forest of pine trees and walking down the slopes of the mountain, we had reached the spot in the valley where above the river was this gharat, surrounded by trees on all sides, from where flowed a small current. There was no one inside the gharat : only piles upon piles of grain sacks, from behind the sacks one could see the cap of *ghatwari*. Taking off the heavy bag from his shoulders, Bhuwan chacha asked the ghatwari, “Bhaiji, we have come from afar, would our grains be grinded?”

“Yes, yes, why not? By noon, it would be grinded,” the ghatwari said.

Bhuwan chacha sat on the pile of grain sacks. We peeped out, trying to see how the gharat worked. Its water flowed very swiftly, making a lot of noise. The noise of water coupled with the ‘tick-tick’ sound of gharat started terrifying us ; we stepped outside. Madhuri urged me on, “Shivani, let's go to see the river... you please ask my brother...”

Bhuwan chacha stared hard, “People get drowned in the river... What did your mother say.... don't you remember?”

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Hoping for a positive response, Madhuri had also come inside by now. She pleaded, "We would play in the sand only, brother... we won't go further!" Bhuwan stared again and said, "Noooooo....." Ghatwari, however, didn't like our sad faces: he too became sad with us. Though his face was coated with flour, sadness was clearly visible in his eyes. I started thinking... there are still a few good people left on this earth who can't see small girls feeling sad. Just as the garden does not like the butterflies sitting still: it makes the flowers bloom so that the butterflies keep fluttering over them, only then the real beauty of nature is visible. I said to myself, "O God! Please create a world of good people... who understand the value of small girls ...dont make them jailers like our family members who, as soon as we ask for a bit of sky..." I started feeling the pressure of a close fist round my neck...

"Let them go, son!... Nothing to be afraid of... water is shallow near the river's banks..." Ghatwari was pleading with Bhuwan chacha.

A butterfly of sunlight perched atop Bhuwan's cheek, Madhuri started gliding in air. Catching hold of her wings, I too started flying.

In that vision, there we were two small girls, ascending the ninth- tenth step of the ladder of our life, overwhelmed by the grandeur of nature! Flapping its wings in sand, a crimson coloured bird was trying to pick up the pearl of water droplet. Our feet were submerged in water. Seated on stones, we were quietly watching the river flow. Only the sound of the river flowing and no one else till the farthest end of the horizon. Madhuri said, "Listen! The river is saying something." I tried to listen intently. The river was saying, "Come, enter into my stream like fish...."

In the transparent waters of the river, the swimming fish could be seen. But we didn't have another set of frocks. The river said,

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“Take off your frocks.... jump into the flow of water.” Water was shallow near the bank. Madhuri said, “Shivani! Let us lie down on the sand first!”

I said, “No, let us first swim with the fish.” Beckoned by the river, we took off our frocks and started swimming. We continued swimming like fish for quite a long time. The fish kept wiggling on our bodies. When it started getting cold, we lay down in the sand. The warm sunshine spread its cozy blanket over our bodies. Perched on a stone, two birds started staring at us, “Are you enjoying?” “Very much!” we said. Rubbing sand on each other’s bare bodies, we laughed ecstatically . Tickling each other, we kept running on the sandy banks of the river. We just forgot that some one’s gaze could be fixed on us... we forgot that a crocodile somewhere was only too eager to eat our delicate bodies raw....

We two girls lay on the sandy bed of the river , our bodies still bare; the sun put his blanket of sunlight over us and asked with a smile, “How are you feeling?”

“Good! Very good!”

For the first time, the sun saw our bare bodies, for the first time, the river saw our bare bodies, for the first time, the birds saw us and they started flying high in air. The fish saw us. Jumping out of the river, they started wiggling on our feet. Snails, crabs, insects, ants— all joined us in our celebration.

We kept playing with warm sand for quite long, making sand castles, rubbing sand and mud on each other. Then we remembered with a startle, “The time is over. We must go back.” We looked at our bodies : all besmirched with mud and sand. Once again it was necessary to take bath in the river. Then we wore our frocks. Giggling and humming, we started returning towards gharat. Shivering with cold, we sat once again on stones to dry up our wet bodies.

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It was Madhuri who now spoke, "Shivani! What a great fun it was! Wasn't it?"

"Yes, yes" I said, "but what if someone came to know of it?"

"Why would we speak about it to anyone?" She made me swear. I swore, "I swear by my mother! I swear by *Vidyamata!*"

Madhuri brushed off the sand from my clothes. Sand particles were glistening in my hair. Picking the strands of my hair with her fingers one by one, she brushed them, "You have become mature, Shivani!" she said, "we'd keep on secretly enjoying like this in future also... without telling any other girl in the village."

I nodded, "Mother gets unnecessarily afraid. Did anything happen? Not even a monkey was to be seen here!" Our spontaneous giggling resonated in the vast sky: it seemed as if all were laughing with us...the trees, the mountains, the forests-the whole of nature! I asked Madhuri, "Come on! Recite a poem!" She started reciting.

"Water of the river, slowly flowing/ How cool! How pure!"

She said, "Now you also recite something."

I started humming a lyric, "Stepping out of the lap of clouds, as soon as the drop of water moved forward...."

Humming the song, and walking briskly in a joyful mood, we reached the spot from where one path led towards gharat while the other led towards the market. Above this spot was a grove of pine trees. As we were about to turn towards the gharat, a goonda type boy jumped from above with a thud before us. Slightly older than our Bhuwan chacha, he appeared to be a veritable incarnation of death. In a gruff voice he asked, "Were you the ones who were bathing in the river....?" Our breaths stopped, we couldn't utter a word. He asked again, "From which village have you come?" I pointed my finger towards the top of

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the hill, where our village was situated. Two friends of this ruffian stood a little distance away. With a weird glance, he started staring at me and Madhuri, “You both are very beautiful... I was watching how your naked bodies glistened in the transparent waters of the river... You were restlessly swimming like fish!” His ravenous eyes seemed to devour our bodies raw.

He stood right in the middle of the path. We tried to sneak past him. He stopped us again, “Aye, girls!”

Our feet were stuck in the ground.

“Look this side!” he ordered. We turned back our faces. There he was, with the zip of his pant open. Madhuri caught hold of my hand, “Run! Shivani, run....” We started running... one of my slippers got stuck in mud on the way but we dared not look back. Running in panic, we reached near Bhuwan chacha, feeling relieved that now we were secure. As soon as we stepped inside the gharat, we saw that those two chaps had caught Bhuwan chacha from both sides and that ruffian had put a burning matchstick on Bhuwan’s cheek. The ghatwari was nowhere to be seen.....

We two girls started running .....

We are still running !!!

*Hindi original* “Nadi Ki Unglion ke Nishan”

*Translated by* **Madhu D. Singh**



## Jyotirekha

Vidya Singh

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It is nearly 11 o'clock. My daughter had messaged through Whatsapp that she would be online between eleven- eleven thirty on Skype. I switch on my laptop and open Skype. Before she pings me, I make a cup of tea for myself. She usually talks to me on Skype on every Sunday. Therefore as on other weekdays, I finish my daily chores quite early on Sunday also. She is able to visit India only once or twice in a year. On top of that, her shopping! It appears as if she is living not in Holland but in some remote village. Every day she leaves for market, either to buy clothes or to give measurement to the tailor or to buy spices and so on. This leaves hardly any scope for us when we can sit together and have a leisurely talk. She can't even sit patiently while she is on Skype. "Mummy! let me just do this....Mummy let me do that...." she keeps flitting here and there. Earlier she wouldn't budge even after being prodded several times. But she has metamorphosed into such a responsible person after marriage that Jayant, her husband, is never tired of praising her.

When she got married with Jayant, he had gone to Holland for two years on behalf of his company. But later on he grew so fond of that country that he resigned from his Indian company and joined a company of Holland. My daughter also got a job in the same company. All was fine till now but for some time they have started feeling quite worried since their daughter has reached the school going age. God knows how she would be impacted by the open society of Holland? Moreover, she wouldn't wish to return to India at all once she grows up.

My daughter seeks my opinion on every problem of hers. These days she is in a big dilemma. She doesn't want to bring

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up her daughter in Europe. That's why they now want to settle here for good but she is so scared at the news of the atrocities being committed on young girls in India that she dares not bring her here. Her husband too has not been able to take a final decision.

I try to reason with her. "This is not happening with everyone here. Here too people are raising their children side by side with their jobs." But her heart, a mother's heart, is not satisfied.

Daughter pings me. I promptly click "Answer" button. "Did you notice something?" She asks excitedly. "The upper portion of your face is not visible. Just adjust your camera a bit, yes yes, now I can see you. Your hair is really looking beautiful. When did you get it trimmed?" I ask. With her back turned, my daughter started showing her hair. Her shoulder cut hair, dexterously trimmed, was looking perfectly even –not even a single tress was shorter or longer.

"O Yes! I had this haircut yesterday only. Today Imran and Pooja are hosting a party to celebrate their marriage - I have to go there at 2 pm. I'll go there in a western outfit only. Earlier I thought I'd wear a sari but who is going to take all this trouble!" While talking, she was removing nail polish from her nails with nail polish remover.

"Have Pooja's parents agreed to her marriage with Imran?" I asked.

"They were pestering her for last many years to marry someone else but the adamant girl did not budge. Willy nilly they had to agree. She is going to be thirty-four. If not now, when else would she marry?"

"But, would they be able to pull off this marriage?"

"Mom, they are in live-in relationship for last five years. They have been able to pull off, that's why... ok, leave them. Tell me about yourself. What have you done since morning?"

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“Oh yes! I have enjoyed my holiday, sipping tea and reading newspaper. sitting in my globalised garden.”

“Globalised garden!” Daughter is startled at my answer.

“O my dear! Your exotic flowers like tulip etc alongwith our desi flowers ! Hasn't it become a globalised garden?” Last time when she came, she had brought bulbs of many varieties of flowers. The flowers did not survive long but all of them did bloom.

“Ha ha ha ha !” Daughter started giggling... In her laughter, last portion of my answer was drowned.

“Ok mummy. I will switch off my call early today. I just wanted to show you my trimmed hair, otherwise I have a lot of work on my hands today. Love you mom!” And she disconnected the call.

Long after my daughter had disconnected the call, the matter of Pooja and Imran's relationship kept haunting my mind. She had told me about them earlier also. Both of them were pursuing B.Tech from Poona : it was there only that their friendship started. Coincidentally both received scholarship for MBA, so together they went to Germany and from thence they went to Holland for job. It was during this period that they decided to get married. In order to live together Imarn and Pooja had hired a flat in my daughter's neighborhood. Gradually they came closer to my daughter and started sharing everything with her.

Imran's family had no objection to this marriage since the very beginning but Pooja's parents were not at all willing to put their stamp of approval on this relation. Finally Pooja did manage to convince her parents.

“It was good that Pooja's parents agreed, after all. Otherwise they would have lost their daughter too!” I thought.

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Shutting down my laptop. I once again came out and sat down reading newspaper.

Pushing back the front news to background, a very old news item suddenly cropped up before my mind's eye.

“I Mrs. Maya Saxena , declare that henceforth I have no connection whatsoever with my daughter Jyotirekha . She has no share either in my movable or immovable property.”

I was stupefied as I read this news .Maya Saxena and Jyotirekha — mother and daughter – I knew both of them so well. Jyotirekha was not merely Maya Saxena's daughter – she was her soul- how can one disconnect oneself from one's soul as long as one is alive?

You too must be getting eager to know about Jyotirekha. I shall tell you about her in detail.

In those days the second largest Drug Company of Asia had just been set up in Uttar Pradesh, in Uttarakhand of today. Young men from virtually all states of India had joined this company. Some girls too had joined this company but their number was negligible. Some of them were newly married, some were still unmarried. Those of a slightly older age were only those who had left their jobs elsewhere and joined this company. Only a very few had their parents with them, hence in most cases, there was no one to keep a tab on them. It was quite normal for them to stay out till eleven- twelve at night. The residential colony was far away from the main city, hence visiting friends, playing cards with them and indulging in gossip were the cheapest and easiest means of entertainment.

Saxenas were no exception to this. Their evenings also passed in this manner. So far as interpersonal relationship is concerned the Saxrenas were always one up on their friends. They wouldn't let anyone leave their house without having dinner. But all this

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became a thing of past as soon as they were blessed with a daughter. Jyotirekha was the only daughter of the Saxenas.

It was after a long wait of full twelve years that the Saxena couple could experience the bliss of hearing the cries of their new born baby. How they passed these twelve years is known to everyone in the colony, partly because they would talk to each of their acquaintances regarding their peculiar problem- in the hope that someone might suggest a remedy which might help Maya conceive. Which remedy didn't they try at their friends' suggestions? Right from local temples to Mata Vaishno Devi shrine— they went bare foot everywhere. They also visited the holy dargahs of Aligarh and Ajmer Sharif but the result was zero. From quacks to renowned doctors, they tried everything but poor Maya couldn't conceive. This was the most bewildering thing, as everything was normal according to the doctors. Mr. Saxena also got himself medically examined but no problem was detected in him either.

Once Mr.Saxena heard about a midwife who treated infertility patients at her home. For the treatment, the patient had to get a medicine inserted in her system regularly for five days. Mr. Saxena changed his duty hours and specially opted for night shift, so that his wife could go for this treatment regularly.

The Saxenas were quite adamant on one thing: they would not adopt a child. If they could have one of their own, fine, otherwise they would prefer to remain childless rather than adopt one. Perhaps there was still a ray of hope somewhere in their hearts. Maya's sister also had given birth to a son after full ten years of marriage. "These are 'late crop' sisters," Saxena used to joke. At long last their hopes were answered when everyone else had given up hopes.

For the entire period of nine months Maya remained under doctor's observation. Saxena would not let her do even the smallest of household chores.

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Their perseverance finally paid off and Maya was blessed with a very beautiful daughter. On the day of her naming ceremony, Mr. Saxena had hosted such a lavish feast that the entire colony talked about it for years. As per astrological calculation, her name ought to start with letter 'J', Panditji had observed. After much deliberation, the little girl was named 'Jyotirekha'. The Saxenas could have called their daughter 'Jyoti' or 'Rekha' only if they so wished. But no, they would call her full name only. Their friends also had got used to this. Even if by mistake if someone called her half name only- either Jyoti or Rekha- the other person would immediately correct the mistake, "Never ever call her half name in Saxena's presence!"

The world of Saxenas now revolved around their daughter only. Their evening visits stopped completely. Their friends also visited them rarely now. Their friends' wives would visit them during day time only.

It had been a long time since I went to Saxena's home with my husband. My husband wanted to see Jyotirekha, hence we decided to visit them one evening. As was his wont, my husband kept the door bell pressed for quite sometime, just in a jocular mood. When Mrs. Saxena did open the door, displeasure was writ large on her face.

It did not take long for my husband to understand the entire matter. As soon as he was about to give an explanation, Mrs. Saxena gestured to him to keep quiet. We were quite in a dilemma when she whispered to us, "It was with much difficulty that I have put her to sleep, she would wake up". We sat with them for some time. Then we took their leave. Mr. Saxena came to us only for a few seconds, with little Jyotirekha asleep on his shoulder. He politely excused himself and went back to his bedroom.

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In those days the Saxena couple was a hot topic of discussion in friends' circle. One day some friends were busy playing cards in Tanya's house. A group of four was playing 'Twenty Nine', the other group of three was playing 'Rummy'. In the course of conversation, Saxena's matter again cropped up.

That day several people narrated many anecdotes. Mrs. Taneja shared this one, "As I picked up Jyotirekha in my arms, taking her round here and there I went near the wash basin and jokingly said, "Come on Jyotirekha! Let me give you a bath." Immediately, Maya came running towards me and snatching the child from me, asked, "What are you doing, Bhabhi ji?" I couldn't even clarify that I did not at all intend to bathe the baby!"

Mrs. Dubey also shared her experience, "One day when I went to their home, I saw that Maya looked greatly disturbed. On being asked, she said, 'Bhabhi ji, Jyotirekha has had loose motions three four times since morning. I tossed her just for play. Is her loose motion due to that?' At this the room was filled with peals of laughter. The most interesting anecdote was narrated by Mrs. Tahim. Her style of narration was so interesting that every one burst into laughter. I will try to narrate it in her words only.

According to Mrs. Tahim, "Though Mr. Saxena dotes on his daughter like anything, still he misses no opportunity to tease his wife. He told us "One day when Mrs. Saxena was sweeping the floor, she put the broom aside and started weeping all of a sudden. I immediately went upto her. Uptil now everything was ok, what has happened to her all of a sudden! 'What happened?' I asked her. She started weeping even more loudly. It was only with great difficulty she was able to regain composure. Do you know what she said? 'I won't marry off Jyotirekha'. 'What happened?' I asked again "who is coming to marry Jyotirekha?" She confided to me "Someday Jyotirekha would get married,

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then she would go far away from us- as this thought struck my mind, I started crying”.

Whenever Jyotirekha was talked about among us, Sharma's daughter Shivani too would be discussed, just for the sake of stimulating our emotions.

The Sharmas had not even celebrated their first marriage anniversary when Shivani was born. Despite trying many things to get the foetus aborted, no harm was done to Shivani. The Sharmas were still in honeymoon mood and were not at all ready to shoulder this responsibility. They were willy nilly raising the girl like an albatross hung around their neck. As often as they could, they would put her to sleep, lock the door from outside and leave for their walks. If someone ever happened to ask about her, they would silence their query saying, “She has slept after taking milk. She isn't going to get up before two hours”. Even while at home, they kept playing cards. If the baby started crying, they would prod each other saying, “Why don't you pick her up? She has been crying for so long!”

It was the first winter of both Jyotirekha and Shivani. Shivani would at the most have slight cold but the Saxenas were seen visiting the hospital almost daily with their daughter. When her cough and cold would deteriorate into pneumonia, they were at a loss to understand.

Later on my husband was transferred to Gurugram branch of the company. We lost touch with Saxenas. We would get some tit bits of information about Jyotirekha once in a while from our friends. She proved to be a brilliant student : her name figured in the Merit List of Intermediate exam. We also heard that Mr Saxena wished her to be a doctor.

One day suddenly some one informed my husband that Mr Saxena had committed suicide by hanging himself from ceiling fan. Jyotirekha had fallen in love with some Muslim boy and

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wanted to marry him. Mr Saxena was against this relationship, hence Jyotirekha eloped with that boy. To avoid infamy, Saxena had taken this extreme step. Saxena's face kept haunting me for days together.

Through Mrs Taneja's letter I came to know that Mrs Saxena stayed mostly at her in laws' place after her husband's death. She had stopped meeting people altogether. The Govt flat too had to be vacated. Now she went to her her husband's native village for good. There either under her in laws' pressure or of her own volition, she got this declaration published in the newspaper. Mrs Taneja had sent the cutting of newspaper also with her letter, each and every word of which is flashing before my mind's eye.

In my heart of hearts I thank Pooja's parents that though a bit late , at least they have approved their daughter's decision.

*Hindi original "Jyotirekha"*

*Translated by D.S. Kaintura*



## What More Do You Want ?

**Madhu Joshi**

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I had to remain standing in queue for more than an hour to pay electricity bill. It was bright sunshine when I had gone inside to pay the bill, not a speck of cloud was visible in the sky but one can't say anything about the weather of this city with any kind of certainty. As I stepped out of municipality building after paying the bill, there was no sign of sunshine anywhere. Clouds were rumbling in the sky. It appeared the rains would start any moment. When I started from home, weather was so pleasant that the thought of carrying an umbrella didn't even occur to me. I have to make a lot of purchases still, for which a long list of items to be purchased is lying in my jacket's pocket. Taking out the list, I quickly passed my glance through it. Except Aunty's medicines, there was nothing in it that was urgently required at home. Although I know it only too well that if I return without purchasing even a single item mentioned in this list, I'll have to hear God knows how many 'lectures' of Uncle and Aunty. Still I thought it would be much better to listen to a few lectures rather than getting totally drenched in rains. Otherwise too, I have to perforce listen to their lectures on this issue or that, at least three to four times daily . Hence I decided that I would return home as quickly as I could, after buying just medicines for Aunty.

I was swiftly proceeding towards the market when it started drizzling. I quickened my pace. I was thinking that I must reach the medical store anyhow, so that I could buy the medicines and also wait for the rains to stop. By the time I reached the market , the rains had intensified. I thought I would be wet from head to foot by the time I managed to reach the other end of the market . Now I had no other option but to seek shelter in the nearest shop. On my left side, there was a bank and a shoe shop in front of that bank. Thinking that the rains would stop in a

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short while, I stepped inside the shoe shop and stood beside the threshold “Come, Didi ! come inside and please be seated,” the shopkeeper said courteously. “I am so sorry but may I take shelter in your shop for a while? It has suddenly started raining so heavily. I don’t have an umbrella either, If you don’t mind, then may I for sometime ...” Stopping my sentence midway , the shopkeeper said , “Arre Didi , what is there to mind in it? Didi, it is your own shop . You can stay here as long as you wish. Why are you standing there? Come inside, sit and relax. Come, please be seated.” And thus I went in and sat inside the shop.

But the rains wouldn’t just seem to stop. Although it was rather a big relief for me that not even a single customer was present there in the shop at that time, hence I was not at least pricked by this consciousness that the shopkeeper’s business was getting affected due to my presence there. The shopkeeper too, after talking a bit about weather, rains and spiralling prices— got busy with his accounting. I was looking at the wall clock again and again. It was about one and half hour already and still no sign was there that the rains were going to stop . The shopkeeper’s accounting was also perhaps over. Looking at the wall clock in front of him , he remarked, “It started raining at 11 O’clock , it has been raining for so long.”

I wondered if he said this because I had been sitting there for so long! As this idea crossed my mind, I started thinking that I was really being unfair. Just going inside some shop and to remain sitting there for so long, isn’t it too much?

The rains , on the other hand , wouldn’t just seem to stop. Since I had started thinking that I had already sat in the shop for too long, now each passing minute was weighing heavily on me. I remained uneasy for some time, then suddenly an idea crossed my mind that if I bought something from the shop, I wouldn’t feel so embarrassed. Co-incidentally my slippers I wore at home had become quite old and worn out. So without wasting even a

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single moment I said to the shopkeeper , “I need slippers for wearing at home. But rubber slippers cause allergy in my feet. If you have something else to show...”. “O yes, yes, Didi, only yesterday I have received this lot of slippers . They will suit you perfectly”. Saying this , the shopkeeper started shuffling the piles of boxes kept in a corner. Covering their heads with big polythene bags, the two boys who worked in the shop had already left for lunch a short while ago. Hence the elderly shopkeeper , unable to even breathe properly due to asthma, had to show the slippers himself. After searching for a while , at long last the shopkeeper was able to find the box he was looking for. So far as I am concerned, I was thoroughly embarrassed by that time. I wouldn't have perhaps felt so ashamed, even if I were thoroughly drenched while returning home. Instead of taking shelter in the shop, I thought, it would have been better, had I waited quietly outside for the rains to stop. Just for nothing have I bothered this elderly man. Moreover, I have no urgent requirement for slippers. If I had decided to sit in the shop for so long, either I should have waited quietly till the rains stopped, or I should have asked for slippers only when the boys in charge of the daily business of the shop returned after having their lunch.

To tell you the truth , when that elderly shopkeeper slowly came trudging towards me with the box of slippers in his hands, my condition was such that had he asked me to wear two buckets in my feet instead of two slippers. I would have meekly worn them too! Coming towards me, the shopkeeper was saying “I think , slippers of number four size would fit you perfectly. These are quite durable also. You'd surely like them .” And he put before me a pair of dazzling red and blue colour slippers. Nowadays although quite dazzling colours are in vogue but in those slippers such gaudy colours had been used that I instantly thought those colours didn't at all suit either my personality or my age. Dusting off the slippers, the shopkeeper put them in front of me , “Didi, just try these. You will nowhere find such comfortable slippers.

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It is my '*bohni*' I won't show you any wrong thing." The moment he said this, I was speechless...I couldn't even tell him that I wore number three size, not number four .I just put on the slippers, put them off and quickly got them packed . The rains also had stopped by this time and I stepped out of the shop.

I haven't had a moment's rest since I returned. It was already evening by the time I finished purchasing all the items mentioned in the list. Though Aunty did not say anything in this regard but it was clear from her looks that she was unhappy with me. After serving tea to Uncle and Aunty, I got busy with supervising preparations for dinner. Winding up other odd jobs of the day and serving meals to Uncle and Aunty considerable time passed away. Just now I have returned to my room to sleep.

As soon as I switched on the light, I caught sight of the purse and the box of slippers lying on bed. I took out the new slippers from the box, of gaudy red and blue colour which can't be called aesthetic or tasteful from any angle, which I don't like at all, a pair of slippers which are one number bigger than my size and which I have to wear for a long time.

I kept holding these two slippers in my hand and soon my eyes welled up with tears .These tears are not on account of those colorful gaudy, ugly, misfit slippers , they are for my drab, misfit and to a large extent ugly life. As I looked at them, I seemed to feel just as I have brought them half heartedly, willy nilly ,I have lived my life almost in the same way— mutely, almost helplessly.

Not much is there to be said about my life. I was married at eighteen, I lost my husband while I was barely twenty. Though I put up with the ill –treatment of my in-laws for two years, one fine day they sent me back to my parents' home after maligning my character in so many ways. I had thought I would spend the rest of my life under the protective care of my parents and I did stay with them for nearly a decade quite comfortably but perhaps

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this wasn't liked by my destiny .Within a span of one year , my mother and father both passed away. My brothers and their wives decided that since the jobs of both of them were transferable jobs , it would be quite inconvenient for me to lead a nomadic life ,hence it would be better for me if I stayed with Uncle and Aunty only.

Uncle, a cousin of my father, is a well known advocate of town. Uncle and Aunty have no children.They move in the circle of the wealthy and the high ups of society.Both are greatly influenced by western culture— so much so that they don't even like that I should call them 'Chacha Chachi'. I am so much obliged to both of them. I've been living with them for the past twenty two years. There are lots of servants in the house. Only what is required is a housekeeper who can supervise them and have control over their activities. I couldn't even realize when I was transferred to this post of 'housekeeper'. Years ago when my Uncle and Aunty used to introduce me they would say "She is a distant relative of ours. Poor soul, she is a widow". But by and by, from a 'poor widow' I became 'she is Anu' only. By the way,now I am rarely introduced to the guests. Afterall, like driver, washerman, maid etc, housekeeper is not normally introduced to guests. I am not exactly happy with my life, still I am not able to say anything.What can I say afterall? So many obligations of uncle and Aunty are on me!

Why only Uncle and Aunty's obligations? I am equally beholden to life also. Uncle and Aunty often tell me that I should be happy because whatever may be the case, destiny has always favoured me. Whenever Aunty finds any sign of unhappiness on my face, she starts asking me in a tone of irritation, "What do you want after all ? Is there anything you don't have?"

Hardly once a while in a year, I do receive a letter from either of my brothers. They also write the same thing that it is my good fortune there are so many people who care for me. Though

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I can't say that I agree totally with my brothers or Uncle and Aunty but I can't say either that there isn't it even an iota of truth in what they say. I have a roof over my head, I have no dearth of good food, the servants of the house obey my commands. In the words of Aunty." The entire house hold is at my beck and call." Still I don't know why it seems to me that life has handed me a pair of slippers which not only I don't like but they are oversize too.

I look around myself , read in stories, see in movies how people from various strata of society are bravely trying to change the course of their lives, facing adverse circumstances. Many a time I have also thought that perhaps I too should try to do this. But it is not easy to shrug off in just a jiffy the relationship maintained for five long decades — whether it is a relation with one's own relatives or with life itself. Besides this, whenever I wish to do something new, it seems to me as if I have been sitting under the same roof for such a long time, or I have bothered an asthma patient unnecessarily or it is the 'bohni' time of a shopkeeper. And then life hands me something which I don't like at all and which doesn't fit me either, and I quietly accept that thing , very much like these slippers which I have been holding in my hands for so long, sitting mutely.

*Hindi original* "Kis Cheez ki Kami Hai Tumhein"  
*Translated by Madhu D.Singh*

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## Bojyu

Diwa Bhatt

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I was ready to step out of the house with sickle in my hand when I saw the postman approaching. A letter and a money order were together delivered. A ten rupee money order and an envelope containing a letter written upon borrowed sheets of some school notebook—both were sent by *Bojyu*. Others left for the fields while I sat reading the letter:

Siddhi Sri Sarvopama Yogya Sri 3

Dearest *Lalli*, may you accept the humble regards of your sister-in-law. All is well here and I pray to Sri 108 Jagdamba Mata for your well being.

Further, wheat harvest is in full swing these days. Crops have not been too bad this year and so has been the livelihood— but who is there to care. Days evaporate in the smoldering heat of the summer upon the fields but the evenings engulf me with sorrow. *Lalli*, you are not ignorant of my plight— I weep when I am overwhelmed. What else can I? *Lalli*, are your replies to my letters do not reach me soon enough? Please do respond sooner this time.

Further, I send you the offerings of *Chait*. Had your brother been around, you would surely have gotten much more, even clothes. Poor and wretched as I am, I have little to offer to you. Do forgive me for my pitiable offering. Consider this the best your unfortunate and poor sister-in-law could offer to you. Do not worry about me and look after your own family well. Do convey my blessings to *Joshiji* and *Munna*.

Reply soon. Rest you are wise.

Yours sister-in-law

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Reading the letter, I could not help my tears which fell upon and blurred the written words on it. While crying, my heart was transported at once to the far and distant village of my birth– Kirauli– situated in the valley of Pingalnaag Mountain. Bojyu would be seen busy amidst the ripe crop of wheat in the fields reaping under the scorching sun. She would be busy in her work as she would not yet have received a letter. Unlike me she has no child tugging at her sari or a husband working beside her at the fields. Alone she would devote all her attention to her crop of wheat. Her thoughts would sometime drift away to some distant land– unseen yet inhabited by *Dadda*. Distant thoughts would hover over distant land across distant memory.

By evening she would have reaped lots of wheat and would then swiftly gather some hay to be fed to the cows at home. Once at home, she would husk and prepare rice and make bed for everyone. Only after everyone had eaten, would she eat and thereafter would do the dishes. Other members of the family having long slept already, she would slip into her bed and fall dead asleep. Her body would be dead in fatigue induced sleep but her core still wide awake and in active dialogue with her husband's image before finally succumbing to deep slumber. Getting up early at day break next morning she would resume her arduous routine.

She moves forever in this stiff twenty-four-hour routine. As the Sun rises so she wakes up, she sleeps with the sunset. The time has come to a standstill for her– it has frozen her existence. It does not progress : it has been moving cyclically in Bojyu life for the past fifteen years. Details may change seasonally but her work remains the same.

I do not know when the word bhabhi was first used to denote one's brother's wife, and when suffixed with the word 'ji' it became bhabhiji or bhowji and when did people of Kumaon make it bojyu or boji. The word, nonetheless, even today for me, evokes

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a persona lofty and pious much like that of a goddess. When first she came as Bojyu to my life and our home, I was eight years old. She was accompanied by much fanfare and still this word enlivens that vivid memory. “Come o people, move *baratis* for we have to travel to a place afar; our groom has to travel far to his destination.” Women gaily singing had moved around the groom yet again in a ceremonial circular movement. Thereafter, my brother ready as a groom, went out with the wedding procession amidst much fanfare and music from the drums and pipes. Next day, when my brother returned on a horse with his bride in a palanquin, the women had sung— “Lord Rama returns home today with Janaki after marrying her.” The sight of the bride’s palanquin attracted hordes of women desirous of taking a first look at her. Almost trampled over by the zealous crowd, I had barely managed to escape when I was summoned to welcome Bhabhi through the ceremonial offering of a coconut. I greeted her and placed the coconut in her lap. She in turn, touched my feet and presented me another coconut. Thereafter, I was stationed at the doorstep with a pitcher of curds. After the outer ceremonies, when my brother tried entering the house, I stopped him. It was only after he had dropped some money into my pitcher did I let him in. As soon as they had gone inside, I took out the coins and started counting them.

When the crowd had dispersed I went across to Bojyu. Someone introduced me to her— “She’s your sister-in-law.” She sat me on her lap and I remained with her till evening. Even when she was being ushered to Dadda’s room, I had stubbornly insisted upon sleeping with her till mother scolded me to silence.

Exactly ten years after I was married myself. Yet I could never forget the details of the marriage I had witnessed so intimately. My heart trembled when I was being whisked away to my groom’s room. I was petrified. Bojyu’s sad face had sprung up before my eyes. One moment she would be a blushing bride, another

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moment reduced to a visage shriveled with grief and gazing listlessly. Bojyu was allowed only one night of marital bliss—she did not know it then. Had she known better, she would have lived the dream of all nights in that one night.

My husband's household is better-off than mother's—this was at least so when Bojyu at first had made latter her home. Dadda used to refer to our house as a shack despite its concrete walls since it was tiny in size with a temporary roof. This roof leaked during rains and had to be redone every three years. The house held a single huge room, its four corners divided in four parts. A wooden partition ran in the middle and a corridor was fashioned the other side with the help of trunks stacked one atop another. On one side was the kitchenette, on the other some place to sleep upon. The third corner was utilized as sitting place while the fourth was reserved as granary and for stone-mill. These corners doubled up as extra sleeping spaces during nights. The remaining one and a half feet space from the door to the end wall acted as a corridor across the room. Our cows lived below.

My sister-in-law had spent her wedding-night in one such corner. Whenever Dadda stayed with us, the said corner became his and we called it Dadda's room. On the day of the wedding, the open fourth side of his room was draped with a bedsheet for the sake of privacy.

Thinking about them, spending their night in a corner saddened me on my own wedding night when I finally realized and understood the import of a couple's relationship. We had the luxury of our own room. We could talk, laugh together free from any fear of intrusion or anxiety of being overheard. But Bojyu? She would have kept a bashful silence and what could have poor Dadda spoken then? Now sometimes, she confides how she was afraid even to breathe despite a racing heartbeat. Besides, the armful of glass bangles which she was made to wear had been responding to every little movement of her hand.

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Sometimes she laughingly admits— “Lalli now that you stand wiser than me in the ways of the world, I need not hide anything from you. I swear it by your head that nothing had happened that night—I did not even speak to your Dadda.” Then the laughter in her eyes would drift away only to be replaced by the damp shadow of her grief. “I had not known then, Lalli, that my very first night of wedding would be our last night as a couple.” I protest— “Bojyu, why do you say so? There shall be many more such nights, for I firmly believe that Dadda would return one day.” “Lalli, if he were to return, wouldn’t he have come by now?” Overwhelmed with emotions, she starts letting me with every detail overlooking the fact that I was the sister to the very person whose intimacy she was so describing. “I was terrified Lalli! He took my hand gently and pulled me to himself. He caressed my cheeks, back; and then holding my hands in his grip, took them to lips. I sat bewitched and my spirits soared high. Suddenly I was hurled back to reality when my hands found his face soaked with tears—how it saddened me! I could not even bring myself to ask him the reason for his crying since it was the very first time that we had even seen each other. Besides I feared that someone might surely overhear us. Why was he crying? Did he not like me? Had I done something wrong? Or something else bothered him? Instead of asking anything, I myself fell crying. Thereafter, the whole night was spent by him wiping off my tears.”

This is the sole happy memory for Bojyu which has kept her alive for the last fifteen years—the only night of marital bliss and that too drenched in tears.

Dadda had left the very next day, crying. I had never seen him weep before and so I was moved with fear and grief. Bojyu’s face was hidden beneath her veil. Our house was packed with the wedding guests. There was no chance of a solitary moment for the new couple to share and abate their mutual agony. How much would have they longed for each other’s company! They were

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hardly allowed another glimpse of each other. Bojyu could still see Dadda from the recess of her veil but Dadda was deprived of her sight, save for the occasional shifting of her veil. Despite their briefest incidence of intimacy, they had definitely formed some deeper quiet dialogue which had cemented Bojyu's bond with Dadda for eternity.

After a fortnight from his departure, Dadda had sent two letters—one addressed to father and the other to Bojyu. Father's letter spoke of blessings for us. I was happy to be even mentioned in Dadda's letters. But today when I await letters from my own husband, I remember Bojyu. For her, those letters were penned in the ink of Dadda's grief and love. Even today those letters are preserved in Bojyu's jewellery-chest. Sometimes, she shows them to me—"Lalli, what is there to hide now? This is all that I have."

Each letter of Dadda is replete with grief and agony. His delicate sentiments posed a question to his ability to survive the hardships of military life. How would he who loved his wife dearer than his own life fight a gruesome war? He had wished for her heavenly bliss but due to his poverty, could not even provide her with a decent shelter. He had forced a goddess into hardship but in the coming holidays he resolved to fix up the house, adding more rooms with the money that he had saved and some more as loan. He shall then provide his dreamgirl a home befitting a queen. Each letter of his bore the same message. It was clear that he ached to come home. Bojyu used to reply that her happiness lay in his well being and that he should not worry so much about her.

Now the house stands rebuilt—Dineshda had planned for its renovation the day he got employed and finally one day the pucca house was ready. (Although Dineshda is two years my elder, I call him Dineshda for there is but only one Dadda for everyone.) Even today Bojyu fondly recalls our old house as the house of

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her dreams. Looking at the new house with its four rooms and a veranda, she remarks—“What would I do with this? How he wished to see this house rebuilt! Today the house is ready but its hopeful is gone. Sometimes I feel as if somebody has blown off my very own roof.”

How do I console this goddess, who had never burdened us with her sorrow while standing by us always in our hour of need? Her uncle had once come to take her along her and had offered her to stay with his family while waiting for her husband’s return. But Bojyu was adamant, she said—“It was he who had left me here. Now till the time he returns I cannot leave this house.” Throughout the day she toils at home and in the fields, without betraying her inner turmoil. She is gentle and cordial to everyone. Each night before going to bed, she religiously recollects her lone marital night, savouring every moment as if reading some sacred text. She then falls asleep, resting upon her thoughts. Getting up in the morning, she gathers the twenty-four pages in her heart and mounts her routine.

She had never confided her grief in me. Now whenever I arrive from my husband’s place, our intimacy deepens. A slight gesture on my end unleashes the innermost renderings of her heart. Still much remains untold. The things she had wanted to tell Dadda can never be told to me. My sister-in-law is of pure gold. When talks of Dadda’s wedding were doing the rounds he used to bluff that he shall bring himself a bride that would put all other brides in the village to shame. The village belles would then make faces at his claim and would be individually challenged by him.

He truly was blessed, in the end, with such a bride. In looks and health Bojyu was considered prized. She was remarkable in her presence of mind and also in the swiftness at work. Her

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friendly and amicable nature is a true exception to the usual querulous relations in the village. I had never seen Bojyu quarreling with anyone. At home, *Ija* mother and father often had conflicts. Despite being two temperamental women ourselves, Mother and I could never manage to pick up a row with Bojyu.

It amazes me whenever I come to think of it. Was there ever such a remarkable woman in the whole village as our Bojyu? Dadda had no opportunity to see her conduct. Her adaptability and tolerance would have floored him. I pity Dadda for he had to leave behind this gem almost upon getting it. From the onset, Bojyu had faith in worship and fasting, latter was a routine with her. When the telegram and the letter from the Army had put the household under some dark spell, Bojyu had increased her days of fasting. The telegram had enquired whether Shivdutt had come home. The letter had explained that he had gone missing since nineteenth October—he had not been heard of ever since, nor could his body be traced. Should he reach home, the same should be immediately reported.

How could we have reported him? It was the time for his letter to come but there was no hope. This news engulfed the house in darkness, the broad daylight of the afternoon, notwithstanding. After a year Dadda would return— Bojyu had pitted her life on this hope and not even six months had passed when this news had come. I could never forget the day when father had forgotten to breathe awhile upon reading the telegram. Mother had created a ruckus. Bojyu had gone over to her mother's place for the festival of *Bhai Dooj*. She had returned the same day upon hearing about the letter. No one could courage to talk to her. It was evening when she had returned accompanied by her younger brother. She moved quietly to her room—a corner of the house. The whole household had fallen silent, and the hearth lay unkindled whereby Bojyu sat and sobbed. Then mother went up to her and tried to console— “Do not cry, *Dulaihni*. Nothing

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has happened to him. He would come in a few days. There is no bad news. Pray to God for his speedier and safe return to us. Crying is of little help.” Saying so, she dabbed her eyes with her saree while wiping tears from Bojyu’s eyes. Whether she so consoled herself or Bojyu—it was hard to tell.

However the question had loomed large—where had he really gone? During the war, either soldiers’ bodies are recovered or their badges, belt, ribbons or number as proof of their life or death. No such evidence was found in case of Dadda. His regiment had searched for him intensely. After ceasefire, the enemy had released prisoners of war, but Dadda wasn’t among them.

So crawled a few more days and on *bari ekadashi*, few earthen lamps were lighted for rituals’ sake. Dadda was deeply missed and talked about often by all. Mother had cried repetitively remembering Dadda’s nature and qualities. Father had written to all relations near and far, just in case Dadda had been hiding with any one of them. Our ears were forever alert for any ay piece of news—who knows there could be one any moment. Dadda himself could have come any moment. Whenever Bojyu left for the fields, her eyes would often wander away from work to gaze at the crossroads. Even a slight sound at night would compel her to look out.

This alertness slowly became her habit but no sound was of any use and neither did her expectant glances get what they searched for. The war having ended, the soldiers had started returning home. Daily someone was reunited with one’s family. Whoever came visiting us had the same enquiry—”Is there any news of Shivdutt?” Instead of replying father would flare back—Why don’t you tell? It is you who are coming from outside? Did you not come across anyone among the missing soldiers? Where could have Shivdutt absconded to?” It simply fuelled further speculation and fabulous accounts of Dadda’s whereabouts did the rounds—such-and-such person from such-and-such village

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has come from Mumbai where he had spotted Shivdutt; or Shivdutt lives incognito, having grown himself a beard; or Shivdutt has escaped to Burma where he was captured and held; or that he was captured by the Chinese and so was not allowed to return, having been put under some spell by some Chinese woman; Shivdutt has gone away to Assam and resides there; Shivdutt has gone away with monks; or that he is simply no more. Such beliefs in the guise of truthful possibilities were frequently set afloat and people used it further as a fodder for their imagination. No one, however, had brought the news of his return. Which of the stories were to be believed? What was to be made of such conjecture? No bad news was ever felt to be true enough despite the figment of truth it held. Talks about Dadda were futile and so were given up.

Despite the passage of time and so much development, Dadda's not returning is a sure sign of his demise. The Army had put Dadda's name in the list of martyrs and our family was accorded the due financial assistance. Bojyu too was awarded a pension. People of the village had started hinting that she should give up wearing glass bangles and *charaeyu* 'the beads of matrimony.'

One day, Lokmaniji told Babuji—"Shivdutt is never to return—so many years have passed. Had he been alive, he would have come home by now."

Getting very upset, father had retorted—"Are you implying that my son is dead! This can never happen."

"This should not have happened but do you really believe that he would not have written to you all these years despite being alive somewhere? He could have returned in secret. Why, an affectionate person like him could never have thought of settling elsewhere apart from his village. You know dadda, he could have given up his life for your sake. If he is alive somewhere

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won't he know how you suffer in his absence? For your sake, he would have at least conveyed his well being even without letting in his whereabouts."

"I cannot answer you Lokika but my subconscious simply refuses to believe that he is no more. Even the authorities lack any proof of his death."

"Even I too find it unacceptable dada but when I think about it, I find no hope for him to be alive. How many people have perished during the war? In the dense forests of Assam, who'd know if someone had accidentally fallen in some deep ravine. No one notices the other while fighting, so it is quite possible that he could have gone unnoticed."

"That's enough, Lokika, speak no further, I've got it."

Lokika adds further, slowly—"I pity our poor dulaihni. How would she spend her entire life in widow's weeds?"

"She shan't dress in widow's weeds."

"But what would people say? It's our community's custom."

"She is unwilling to do this, I daren't ask her anything."

Lokika tried repeating this argument with mother. She too was unable to believe in Dadda's death, so how could she have asked Bojyu to renounce her *suhaag*. Lokika tried persuading, "You do not understand, bojyu! the entire village is talking about this issue. It simply doesn't feel appropriate. If you do not wish to speak to her on the matter, I can talk to her myself."

I was livid when I heard him talk so. Despite my young age, I had confronted him— "No, there is no need. Who are you to take off my Bojyu's suhaag? Who says Dadda is no more? Who has seen his dead body? Bring him to me! My intuition says that he would surely return. Let the village talk. If anyone takes off my Bojyu's bangles and beads I shall make her wear them again.

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What do you think?" So I wept in anger and grief and Lokika went away. I might have been fourteen or fifteen then and even without understanding the gravity of widowhood I had detested it. I had held a deep fear of it. Seeing bhabhi dressed as a widow would've meant that my brother is no more. It would also mean an end to my expectations of receiving my brother's *bhitaula*.'

Bojyu had also endorsed my feelings—"These bangles and beads give me hope that he is alive and that he should return some day. If I ever take them off, I shall be doomed forever."

After all, she too is a woman in need of love and affection. I myself have witnessed women succumbing to the passion of other men. Many women from our village were infamous for it. We had even witnessed the suicide of a couple of pregnant widows who had hanged or drowned themselves. Women, weakened by their grief, often fell easy prey to the greed of men. Bojyu was also bothered immensely by their lecherous behaviour. The village-head's son could be frequently seen looking out for such opportunities. As soon as he spotted Bojyu alone, he would shoot a flippant remark or two, each time meaning remained the same—"In absence of the reaper the ripe crop would go awaste. We have waited long for a signal." Khimanand reasons—"How long will you wait for him?" Bhairavdutt advises—"You are a fool. You waste your youth away, serving your husband's old folks. Youth is meant for enjoying and not for suffering so."

The festival of *Holi* gives these tongues a license to wag beyond decency. Filthiest remarks are then hurled across to her in the guise of casual festive banter. Licentiousness at its worst, they would even propose going to bed with her. Bojyu's ears catch the drift of such talks about her. She simply doesn't bother addressing them—it would fan them further. Bojyu's face is forever hidden away in her veil, still people know her to be a real beauty because no veil could have hidden away her firm curvaceous body .

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“Don’t you ever feel scared, Bojyu?” “Yes, I do, Lalli but then I always pray to the god for my honour and his speedier return. He who had protected me so far would continue to do so.” One day Rebda’s bride had teased her—“What if you turn old like this?” Bojyu had then sanguinely replied— “It would be better if I die like this. I shall wait for him till my own death. I’d rather hear no news from him. I’d like to believe till the end that he would come back to me. My life would be fulfilled even if I get to see him at the end of it.”

Often I recall her face beaming with unflinching devotion and at that time it seems to me as if Dadda stands right behind her and shall appear this very moment.

When shifting to the new house, among many things to be discarded were Dadda’s military boots. Dineshda was about to throw them away when Bojyu resisted— “Let them be. They would lie in some corner.” Dineshda had protested— “Why show such attachment to these rotten shoes? They are a useless trash.” Bojyu had really felt bad but she said nothing. She had left the shoes then and there. One day, when in new house Bojyu opened up her trunk to take out something, I saw Dadda’s empty cigarette carton at its bottom. My throat had choked—the woman who prizes even an empty cigarette pack as a precious relic of her love, can never forget her beloved. Everything in the old house had reminded of Dadda. The new house has many new things but military plate and mug are still being used despite their worn out polish. On my last visit, however, I could not find them and when I enquired, no one knew. When I asked Bojyu she replied in a low voice— “Those utensils were old. They were meant to be thrown so I have kept them in the wooden box of old utensils.” Watching me quiet, she continued, “It seems true that these old utensils are worthless. Also, they sometimes remind us of the Army due to which I face such a life. But still I could never bring myself to part from his personal belongings.” Mother would

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constantly miss Dadda at meal times— “Today there is brinjal, a favourite of Shibu...today we have pumpkin, had it been for Shibu, another vegetable would have to be rustled up or else he would not have eaten at all.”

Like this something or the other daily reminded us of his likes and dislikes. One day cucumber raita, a favourite of Bojyu was made. She had made it herself. Mother had remarked that day too, “My Shibu loved cucumber *raita* so much! Whenever I see this, something tugs at my heart.” Since that day, Bojyu has not tasted or made raita herself. She sows cucumber annually, waters it and tends its tendrils but never eats it. She says, “When they slice cucumber, it seems someone cuts through my heart.” Strange beliefs had surfaced. It may appear foolishly sentimental but not when someone actually hears or sees my Bojyu in this manner. When talks of my marriage were taking place, I requested one day to Dineshda, “Do send me two bhिताला— one from you, another from Dadda.” He boasted, “Why? If I send you a single present that is worth twice as much, would you still object?”

“Even if you do not send me anything, I would not mind. It’s just that ever since my childhood I had been lured by Dadda for it. He used to say that every year he shall come to me laden with gifts, sarees if I do certain work of his. At times he used to ask me for a glass of water promising me gifts of velvet and silk for bhिताली—this and so forth. How many such promises were made to me by him, now it is my misfortune that I shan’t ever receive his bhिताली,” I remarked tearfully.

Dineshda’s eyes moistened and he had implored, “I shall provide you everything, just don’t make me miserable by talking so.” Wiping off tears from her eyes, Bojyu suddenly intervened, “No Lalla, you give yours bhिताला, I shall give the other. Even if I could only afford to send her as much a rupee-and-a-quarter, I would take over your Dadda’s share.” Every year since then I have received two bhिताला: sometimes money, even clothes of other

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times. I rejoice receiving one, sadden receiving another. What is it with this bhिताला? Although a mere token, still everything in the world pales in its comparison. Bojyu sends me a ten rupee-note and for me it is enough even if she sends me a quarter or a rose petal. Same would have been for Dadda. When would that day come when I shall receive bhिताला sent by him? Bhिताला or no bhिताला, O God, please do send my Dadda for once— I pray thus each time, irrespective of people believing otherwise. I often imagine his homecoming— what a day it would be, how would he look, who would inform me, and how would I react? When I could still dream about him, could Bojyu have given up her hopes? The hope of Dadda's return is the fine thread by which her existence is held together. On its basis, she considers herself a married wife-in-waiting. She often resolves, "I shall die a suhagan." She often requests Dineshda, "Lalla, even if your Dadda doesn't return after my death, do send me off in my bridal finery and if someone gives you some bad news about him, do not believe it."

How many such things can one recall? They are endless. Whenever I remember my mother's home, I miss Bojyu the most. Mother had already explained, "Dulaihni, Dinesh sends bhिताली. One bhिताला from one household is adequate." Nonetheless, Bojyu keeps sending them. I often protest, "Bojyu, please do not send so much cash. A quarter for ritual's sake would do just fine." She replies, "Had your Dadda been around, you yourself would have asked for more. You must not feel deprived of his bhिताली." So deeply concerned about my bhिताला, one can imagine how much concerned would she be then for her husband.

Fifteen years is a long enough time. The girls who were born when Dadda had left are today themselves on the threshold of motherhood. Nine years younger than Bojyu, even I am a mother while she struggles for her marriage and motherhood. It was in Dineshda's wedding that I had first grasped the intensity of her pain. Last year, when the house had resonated with the wedding

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fanfare, Bojyu had assumed the burden of responsibilities. Like previous wedding, here too a bridegroom was decked up and sent accompanied with a baraat from our courtyard. Second day, the baraat had returned with the bride. Every detail was common but there still remained a huge difference– Dadda was not there. Everyone was acutely aware of this gap. Every moment, every place had reminded of Dadda but no one dared broaching the painful topic. Women had sung when the groom mounted the horse: With you stand my brother– making a pair; This pair I hold dear to my heart. Our eyes could not contain our tears. Dineshda was frozen in his tracks. When he bent over to touch the feet of mother and Bojyu during *akshat parikrama*, he broke into tears. My uncle had to help him to the horse. The horse moved, so did the baraat and an empty place by the horse. Bojyu quickly wiped off her tears but her eyes had reddened. She remained quiet– work was enormous and had kept her engaged. Some village women could not control themselves and set out to stage their laments, “Shibu, poor Shibu! Whatever has happened to him! His baraat had also left in exactly the same fashion.” Amidst the fanfare of wedding, a vacant spot was clearly visible. Dadda and Dineshda had been like two eyes on a face– we missed Dadda so. But for Bojyu, it was like going blind in both eyes. How she’d pine for some spark of vision! For fifteen years she had borne this pain like her offspring. She could never have imagined it to have outgrown to such an extreme. Dineshda’s wedding day had made her acutely aware of her advancing age. Dormant cravings of youth resurged and struggled to be freed. However celibate and contented, she is, after all, a human being.

The home was packed with guests, so Bojyu and I got to sleep in the same bed. It was only long after we had sent the newlyweds to the adjacent room, did we go to bed ourselves. I fell asleep the moment I hit the bed but Boju’s eyes were sleepless. She tossed and turned. Her discomfiture woke me up. All along

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the day, at every step Dadda's memory would have affected her but now coupled with that memory, the proximity of a newlywed had heightened her bodily desires as well. They did not have the luxury of this solitude. Whatever she had got was like a lavish buffet being served only to be taken away. When I wake up, I asked, "Bojyu are you not able to sleep?"

"No," she replied bleakly. At the same time she caught me in a firm grip, suddenly shaking herself. I thought that she must be weeping but when I felt her eyes, they were tearlessly sealed. I caressed her back. Her body shook even more. She hugged me tight. "Bojyu!" I had retorted and she broke into tears. My inner self identified with her plight but externally I could have done little besides consoling her. Her sobs had woken up Munna. With one hand I stroked Bojyu and with the other I patted Munna but probably he was terrified of something. He cried even louder. He was impossible to pacify. Bojyu freed me like a stroke of lightning, got up and scooping Munna in her arms, started showering him with love. What a love it was— I just watched spellbound. Generally, she loves Munna very much— whenever I go to my mother, Munna becomes her baby. This moment, however, she was furiously kissing him: his hands, cheeks and feet. Nestling him in her bosom, she is rocking him in her hands. Sometimes she is patting him to sleep on her lap and the very next moment— hoisting him back in her arms, kisses him again. Munna had fallen quiet, so had the sobs of Bojyu but her tears had not yet subsided. Just then *Kaki* was heard calling out, "The morning star has risen!" and the morning chores were resumed.

*Hindi original* "Bojyu"

*Translated by Seema Kaintura Sethi*



## Satto's Bhuri

Suneeti Rawat

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The star of the dawn had appeared in the sky. All around a pleasing peace prevailed. Gradually dim light peeped towards the sky. Some birds began to chirp. The slow morning breeze sang lullaby and slowly the village seemed to come alive with a yawn.

Coppery light spread upon the hill after some time and the cow tied to the peg bellowed...baa. On hearing his mother's bellowing the calf tied to the nearby peg too grew restless. He too bellowed in his small voice... baa. In his hurry to reach to his mother he forgot that the rope was looped around his neck. He began to drag the rope helter-skelter in a vain attempt to run. The cow tied to the iron girdle too started encircling around the peg.

Satto too had woken up by now. She spread the sheaf of grass in front of Bhuri in the cowshed and then caressed her forehead lightly moving on to the calf. "... You are hungry. So you want milk." She said patting the calf's back. The calf hit his head hard on the knee of Satto. "Oh! You are so restless early in the morning!" Saying so, she untied the rope of the calf. He leaped to his mother in one go and clinging to her teats began to suck milk noisily.

Satto hurried towards the tap on the side of the courtyard and cleaning the upturned steel bucket she ran fast with some water in it. She separated the calf from his mother forcibly and tied his feet to the rope on the peg near Bhuri. She began to lick the calf fondly.

Dragging the wooden stool under the cow Satto settled under

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the cow fixing the bucket between both her knees. She washed the teats of Bhuri and mumbled to herself while milking the cow. "You little wretch, you have sucked all the milk in such a short time. Bhuri, oh Bhuri! Don't I too need milk?" Bhuri was stamping her feet time and again as her teats were pulled. Sitting in the same position Satto took off a lump of jaggery from the pallu of her dhoti and caressed Bhuri, "Wasn't all this fuss for this only? Take this jaggery." Making the sound 'phuu... phuu...' Bhuri dragged jaggery with her tongue and was calmed down. Satto also began to milk her peacefully. She had milked only half the bucket when Bhuri thumped her feet on the ground, sometimes the right and sometimes the left one. "Bhuri, can't you see it is only just half or three fourth bucketful of milk?" Satto spoke to Bhuri dotingly but she banged her foot on the ground with full force. "Chha.. chha... Are you going to spill milk? I get you. You intend to save milk for the calf. Alright. Let it be so then." Satto kept aside the bucket fixed between her knees and got up. Holding the bucket in one hand she went to the calf and laughed while untying the knot. "Go." The calf hurriedly made way to the teats of his mother. Bhuri smoothed him with her tongue.

Satto went inside with the bucket. Measuring the milk with one litre can she poured down the milk in four pots and pouring down the remaining milk in a pan she said, "Today not even one and a half litre of milk is left." Putting the pan on the stove she went inside the room. She shook off her sleeping daughter. "Nimmo! Get up daughter. Take a bath before day break. Now is the time to make way to school."

"Umm." Rubbing her eyes Nimmo got up. Satto caressed her. "You are a big girl now. Will you take a bath in sunlight?"

"Mother!" Nimmo got up yawning. She drank water from the jug and came out in the open. Coming back she took a

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bucketful of water and spreading a sheet on the cloth line tied high began to take bath in its shade. Satto was preparing breakfast in the kitchen. While she was preparing *paratha* she got up and peeping out of the window was utterly bewildered. Someone was peeping inside from the parapet of the courtyard. "Who is there?" The moment Satto called out he disappeared. Satto could not see anything except the head, neither could she know whether it was a man or a woman. Man... The very thought brought on her face an expression of fear and anger concomitantly. "Such a kind of prying and snooping!" She was chilled to the bones. How could she be so careless towards adolescent Nimmo? Annoyed and piqued at her own self she looked around taking down the paratha from the griddle. Meanwhile Nimmo came up to her. On her two braids near her ears the two ribbon flowers were gleaming. Wearing blue shirt and white trousers she said fixing carefully her stole, "Mother."

"Yes." Mother surveyed her intensely from head to toe as if she was watching her for the first time. Then she said, "There is paratha for you along with a glass of milk. Have it, your lunchbox is also there, take it with you." With these words Satto rushed out to the courtyard. Nimmo was taken aback. Today mother did not wait for her to finish her breakfast. "Eat this, finish your milk." So long as she was not finished with her breakfast mother would not budge from there. What could be the matter today? Nimmo could not figure it out but drank milk timidly afraid of her mother's rebuke, picked up the lunchbox and making a roll of the paratha rushed out. To see her running mother mumbled to herself, "Has grown up but there is no end to her gamboling."

Nimmo overheard her, she smiled and crossed the courtyard hurriedly. Satto too waited for a while and then made way to the lane behind the wall. She saw there were two big boulders stacked closely by the side of the wall. She was benumbed. Throwing off

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the boulders far away she hurried in one direction. On reaching the courtyard of Genda mason she called out, "Genda Das... Genda son, please come out quickly."

'Yes aunt, what's the matter? Today so early in the morning...'

Yes. There is that ... tree near my kitchen garden. You go there and chop off a few branches of that tree right now."

'Oh aunt I'll do it. Have some patience.'

"Patience... you get fast and bring the axe. Split one wide log and get sleepers out of it and select some small pieces of wood from the branches. Do you hear me?" With these words she left the place.

Genda Das stood there for a short while and then made a move with the axe and saw. Satto reached the walnut field. On the hillside, some stone slates were still piled there. While touching them she remembered Raghu. Last year when Raghu had got the big room constructed, the extra stone slates had been stacked on the side of the field. She felt some relief, these stone slates will be sufficient for the time being. Wiping her teary eyes she lifted up two stone slates on her head and moved towards her house.

Reaching her house she looked around. Genda had chopped off the solid branches and selected some of them and was about to split them. When he saw Satto he said, 'Aunt, do you intend to construct a room?'

"No dear. You only lay the roof from this end of the wall up to the rope, extend these sleepers up to the wall fixing them with Bhuri's thatched roof which is already there. That is all."

"But aunt, there is the tap on that side...the place for washing and cleaning. What would you do covering it up?"

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“You keep quiet, Do as I bid you.”

In the meanwhile Genda Das's son Chaman too reached there. Both of them got into work, Satto too brought some stone slates from the walnut field in four and five rounds. By noon a small bathroom was ready by the side of the courtyard. The curtain was also hung on the rope. Satto was happy now.

When Nimmo returned from school, seeing the roof overhead she said, Mother, you have done a good job, I don't know why the open sky disturbed me while taking bath.”

“Why didn't you tell me? Was there someone peeping in from the wall?”

‘I don't know mother but the suspicion always lurked in my mind.’

“Yes. You have to be careful about these things, you are growing up now....”Satto said.

Next morning Nimmo woke up and headed towards the bathroom quite at ease. Now there was no danger from the open wall by the side of the lane, neither the need for her to bathe hurriedly huddled in a corner. Nimmo took bath quite relaxed. When she came out after the bath, halting in front of the kitchen, she said to her mother . “Mother, today you comb my hair, I like the tight plaits made by you.”

“o.k. You go to the room, I follow you.” She kept the tumbler full of milk and vegetable and paratha on the plate and reached Nimmo's room. When Nimmo took her breakfast Satto disentangled her long, thick hair and braiding her hair double folded them decorating them with the ribbon flowers. After the breakfast when Nimmo put kohl in her eyes, Satoo placed a kohl mark on the back of Nimmo's ear and said, “How pretty is my Nimmo. May no evil eye fall on her.”

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“Every mother must be finding her daughter beautiful, isn’t it mother?” Saying so Nimmo smiled.

“Could be, but no one as pretty as my daughter...” Mother too reciprocated the smile.

Picking up her satchel, Nimmo stood standstill, “ Mother please give me some money, I have to buy two-three books that are necessary.”

“It is time for exams, what to do with books now?”

“Mother, the ten years question papers of Mathematics have come. Along with them everybody is buying science papers as well, so...”

“Alright dear.” Satto produced the hundred rupee note tied to her pallu. “Spend only that much which is necessary Nimmo.”

“Yes mother. I will have to deposit the fee for Board examination this month...”

“You make a move, why should you worry, something will be done.” Assured with mother’s words, Nimmo came out happily.

“Exam fees!” Satto repeated to herself—“Year before last year when Nimmo appeared for High school exams, all the expenses had approximated to one thousand rupees. This year is class twelve examination. The fee would be higher for the senior class. Satto opened the box and took out the zinc box, this was her total saved capital. Some jewellery kept for Nimmo, and some rupees earned from selling Bhuri’s milk. Keeping back the cash after counting it Satto bemused, the deficit would be compensated with the money earned from the milk to be sold this month. She heaved a sigh of relief and closed the box.

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Nimmo passed with good marks and insisted to go for primary teachers' training. Mother grew anxious. "How will we manage Nimmo? I have somehow managed so far to provide for your education. The school was near the village but you will have to go to town for training."

"So what? Isn't maternal uncle there in town? I shall stay with him. Just think of it mother. I shall become a teacher after the training, We shall not be so helpless for money as now. I could continue my studies privately."

I shall manage for myself my daughter. But your future will be bright once you become a teacher. Today itself I shall go to Bhairo village and talk to your maternal uncle and aunt. Today is Sunday, your uncle must have come home."

Nimmo was delighted. Mother gathered some walnuts in a bag and was ready to depart. How far was Bhairo village after all, hardly two and half an hour walk. Deciding to return by evening Satto set on the journey.

To see Satto unexpectedly, Chandan was both happy and surprised. "Sister, all of a sudden...."

"Why? Chandan, can't I visit my brother's home all of a sudden?"

"Why not sister? I am so delighted. I am your only brother. If our parents are not alive that does not mean you don't have your natal home."

"Of course Chandan. You are my own...."

Meanwhile her sister-in-law also came there. Greeting her she said, "Sister, I am also your own. Am I not?"

"Yes, sister-in-law."

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“Sister-in-law, please be comfortably seated. You must be tired, I shall make tea.” Shanti soon came back with tea. While sipping tea Chandan said, “Sister, you should have brought Nimmo too with you. How is she? I have heard our Nimmo has got first position in the district.”

“Yes Chandan. My Nimmo has always excelled in her studies. She has passed class twelve. Now she wishes to undergo teacher training but...”

“Why this ‘but’ sister, Nimmo is right. I am there in town, she can stay with me and undergo her training. It is a matter of one year only.”

“Yes sister. He too would also comfortably get his meals. There is his government quarter though with only a single room.”

“Not a single room sister. I have covered the balcony. There is kitchen in one corner, my cot will be accommodated in one corner. Nimmo will have access to the room. Don’t you worry sister, I am the maternal uncle, her maternal uncle.”

“Now I am relaxed Chandan. What is there to worry when you are there?”

The three of them chatted for quite a length of time. By noon Satto left for home.

Nimmo was waiting for her mother. Once she knew about her uncle’s consent, she got busy packing her clothes etc happily. Satto knew she will have to bear the expenses of her stay in town and training. Apart from the monthly expenses she will have to arrange money for her travel and fee. What should Satto do? Since Raghu left, Bhuri has been her friend in sorrow and joy. Immersed in these thoughts she sat on the stool near Bhuri in the cowshed. When Bhuri put forward her head, Satto said to Bhuri

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caressing her, “Do you listen to me Bhuri, Nimmo wishes to go to town for teacher training. Her uncle will take care of her boarding and lodging. But the expenses regarding fee, clothing and studies etc. have to be met with. I could afford her education in the village up to inter class with your support, what should I do now? I need wholesome amount to send her off, isn't it?”

Baaa... Bhuri bellowed to Satto who was caressing her neck as if to say, “Why do you worry Satto. There is my Kalu ... Just see how hefty is he.”

“What? Shall I sell him?” With the very thought, tears of Raghu's memories poured down from her eyes. One year had not passed since Raghu left for town, his job was still temporary when some truck took away his life. Raghu used to say, “We won't sell Bhuri's calves. There is this Lulu, three years old smarty and the other one is this small Kalu. I shall pair them both, we shall prepare them for farming. This is when we say—man proposes, God disposes.

Satto had to sell off the calf. She could feed the priest and neighbours for Raghu's last rites with that money and today there was no way out except for selling Kalu.

With that money the expenses for admission fee, books and copies and other preliminary expenses were met with and Nimmo left for town.

Satto remembered Nimmo, her house now appeared desolate. Many a time she did not wish to make even two chapatis, most of the time she would cook meals once a day and take it twice a day. She began to sell one and half litre milk that she used to spare for Nimmo. Satto was relieved that Bhuri had four or five months old Gabru and she was yielding sufficient milk. Most often she would be making laddus mixing jaggery with barley, then she would dotingly feed Bhuri and Gabru alternately with

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these laddus, caressed them and nonstop babbled with Bhuri. Sometimes she would be lost in such thoughts— Bhuri also will deliver once or twice at the most, poor soul! She is getting old. Sometimes she stroked Gabru. I won't sell you, you are going to stay with me....

Days passed by and the year was near an end. Nimmo will come home, soon she will bring new bed sheets for her bed from the village market, bring pillow covers too. Now she will be a teacher, people will call her Nirmala sister. Lost in her reverie, Satto waited for her.

Everything was fine when suddenly Bhuri stopped yielding milk. She would be annoyed when Gabru touched her teats. Sometimes she would stamp her feet, sometimes shake her head. Gradually her milk dried. Satto knew that every year Bhuri stops yielding milk for three or four months, then she revives hope afresh. This time too when Bhuri showed signs for mating and the udders rounded up, Satto's heart was full of joy. She went near Bhuri and said, " You are not one of the human species who would be proud to beget a male. I want a heifer. My courtyard will prosper only if a heifer is born." What could Bhuri make of it but she settled her neck in Satto's lap as usual, Satto stroked her.

Satto was sure that Nimmo's training will be complete with her total savings. Even if Bhuri did not yield milk for a few months, she would earn some money making dung cakes.

Finally came the day when Nimmo began to teach in the nearby school after completing her training.

In due course of time Bhuri gave birth to a heifer, a bouncing one. She had taken after her mother. Brown colour, a white moonlike speck on her forehead. On seeing her Satto chuckled, " Look at it, teacher. Isn't she the copy of her mother, the exact

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'Naksha' (map) of her mother? I am going to call her Nakshi."

"Yes mother. You have given her a beautiful name. I too would call her Nakshi." Nimmo ran after the heifer.

Satto fondled Bhuri, "Bhuri! If you were not there, how could I have sailed through?"

*Hindi original* "Satto Ki Bhuri"

*Translated by Jaiwanti Dimri*



## Kanti

Sujata Singh

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**K**anti was only kanti for namesake, neither did she have any glow on her face nor was she revolutionary in her thoughts. Precisely eighteen years ago she had been married and from Kanesar village of district Chakrata had come to the village of Gauthan. The distance between both the villages was such that there was no change in language, food habits and clothes. When Kanti's youngest sister-in-law Durga was married, that year the ceiling of the house started leaking even more. The only thing that would divert the attention of Kanti and her mother-in-law from their daily chores was her father-in-law's cough bouts. Otherwise both of them were confined within the limits of their household work like the needles of a watch. They noticed no season, no sorrow or discomfort. When the waiting was prolonged the clock too stopped. That is what Kanti felt when her husband Jagatram was about to come to the village from Delhi. Otherwise the same old water, grass, also the same screaming and shouting wherein her mother-in-law was an equal partaker. And then again grass, wood, water.....

Kanti's parents had thought the family was small, therefore there would not be much of responsibility or work. In her natal home she was the only sister of her four brothers. At times she would feel the absence of people in her husband's house especially during her mother-in-law's mood swings. Otherwise where was the time? Sometimes she couldn't help laughing when she remembered her mother's advice just before marriage, "Don't you indulge in quarrels with your mother-in-law. Stay there amicably." In her natal family Kanti's brothers did get married but they kept moving away from their home and village. Her craving for a sister-in-law remained unfulfilled. Her eldest brother had declared even before he got married that he would not be following

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obsolete traditions. “All brothers should earn on their own, and settle down in separate houses. Like other village folk we won’t be getting one wife.....”

All the three brothers were perhaps set to leave the village and desperate to part with the old ways of living. The daughters-in-law would come home and not bear to stay back even for two days. They would offer prayers to gods and take leave. Someone settled in Vikasnagar, others in Dehradun and Yamuna Nagar. The youngest one settled permanently in his wife’s hometown Tyuni. The only living members left in the house were Kanti’s parents and herself. The only contribution of Kanti’s brothers was to educate her till the time they stayed there. She had cleared class VIII before she got married which is why she got such a lucrative match. He was well placed as a clerk in the Agriculture Dept in Delhi. It was the talk in the nearby village. Her father too would say, “I have worked towards the education of my daughter, no wonder she got such a good match. Karam Singh’s daughters got married to labourers only because they are uneducated. They will spend the rest of their lives in the village, only my Kanti will go to Delhi”.

Kanti would hold her neck in pride and at times in fear. She kept thinking to herself. “How would be Delhi? Full of cars...” Her brother told her that there would be hundreds such cars in Delhi as one in the village. “Oh Goodness! How would she be able to meet her parents from such a far off place?”

Kanti had reached Gauthan full of dreams. On the very first day her husband Jagaturam had told her. “See. Let Durga be married. Meanwhile your parents-in-law’s desire for the company of their daughter-in-law will also be fulfilled. You can also continue your studies, appear for tenth class examination. Only the educated ones can go to Delhi.”

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Kanti agreed with her husband. He was right. Then Durga got married, she also passed tenth class. Back home in Kanesar Kanti's parents too yearned for her company. Her brothers their wives and children all became city folks. But Kanti was the only one person who was transfixed at one place. Initially, Jagaturam would send a fixed amount of money to her but now for six months there was no sign of any money. The hold on money thus became very tight. One day her father had a severe attack of cough. Her mother-in-law shut her eyes. It was Kanti who shrieked and screamed. The Vice Headman of the village had come to the village the night before. He came running with a few more people, rubbed the old man's chest and applied mustard oil to the soles of his feet. It was a narrow escape for her father-in-law. The vice Headman advised Kanti "Girl! You will have to consult the doctor for an allopathic treatment. Do you have the money? Jagatu must be sending money?" What could Kanti say? She could only shed tears. The Vice Headman said, "You are literate; you have passed tenth class. Tomorrow itself, get ready and go to the Block. Anganbari is recruiting employees and there are enough vacancies in our village too."

No suggestions or advice from anyone. Who was there? The Vice Headman and her neighbor Ghumni *Tai*. A huge crowd in the Block. Asking them to be seated by the road side, the Vice Headman left for his office. Kanti began sweating in anxiety. Ghumni Tai commented, "How is it possible, daughter? Too much money is demanded. This is government work. But you must give the right answers. After all you are an educated girl."

After a long wait of three hours the Vice Headman came back running. "You have been called inside. They will ask you certain things, you must answer them."

Before she could ask anything Kanti was almost thrown inside the room. Three men and two women were sitting there. She

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felt her breath was stuck. On hearing the words, “Be Seated” Kanti sat down mechanically. She wouldn’t just stop sweating.

The female official said, “Don’t be nervous, drink some water. Will you work for Anganbari? You are required to spend three hours with the children and teach them. You will have to teach the women of the village, get them vaccinated. Will you be able to do it?”

“Yes.” Kanti replied promptly.

“What does your husband do?”

“He is in Delhi.”

“Oh! Then it is difficult.” With these words the female official started turning over the pages of her file. “Sir, we employ them. Then they leave the job and go back to their families. We are looking for a girl who is needy and can stay in the village.” The other male official nodded his head in consent.

Kanti became apprehensive. She replied promptly. “No, sister. I will never go to Delhi. It has been five years since I got married. I need this job. My father-in-law is very ill. You just give me work. I will work hard. Give me a chance to prove myself.” Kanti was literally crying.

“ok ok,” said the lady official. “Sir, she is the only one educated in Gothan. This is a quite a big village. We have lot of people their of the reserved category, should we keep her?”

“Oh Yes! Keep her.” Sir had burst out laughing. “Her husband will never take her along with him to Delhi. By now he might have remarried.”

All of them burst into a laugh.

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Kanti sobbed. No! This can never happen! As she wanted this job she kept listening to them quietly. Meanwhile her appointment letter was handed to her. "You have been appointed in Anganbari. Your job is temporary; it can be terminated any moment. Your honorarium will be Rs 210/- only".

Kanti forgot about her hunger and thirst which was overpowering her since morning and her face lit up. Rupees 210 was everything for her. She came out of the interview room and clasped Ghumni Tai tightly. "I got the job, Tai!"

"Really....?" Ghumni Tai asked in surprise. The Vice Headman must have given some money. But he had already left. Therefore there could be no inquiry. Kanti only wished to thank him but she couldn't.

Now at least Kanti's life had come somewhat on track. After finishing all the household work she was to spend three hours with the children. Some would sleep while some would run or quarrel but Kanti would manage all of them. Each day she would sing, a song to them. The first day her mother-in-law heard her sing she remarked, "You haven't ever sung to us." Kanti just laughed looking at the children and said, "They have also never come before." Like innocent little lambs the children would be running after her. They had to be forced to leave for their homes after three hours. Also it was time to go for grass.

*Bissu Mela* was approaching. The village was full of activity. All the relatives were heading towards home. Kanti along with her old in-laws was watching the jubilant village. Kanti delighted in meeting everybody at Bissu, making merry and singing and dancing the whole night. Almost every year by this time even Jagatu would come home. He will come this year too. What troubled Kanti was the fact when the village women who met her last year on Bissu will ask her, "Have you not conceived as yet? When are you going to Delhi?" These two were the questions

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that pinched Kanti and she felt the pain for months together. Earlier she would reply to such questions –‘I will have a baby. Why wouldn’t I? I will travel to Delhi soon.’ But now she would just laugh in an embarrassed manner. Perhaps to avoid it.

At the Anganbari Kanti had just sent the children back to their homes and had just begun assembling their mats and slates when she heard a distant voice. “Kanti! Jagatu is here.” Her hands began moving faster. While complaining to his parents about his financial problems in the city, Jagaturam said, “ Kanti, Your parents are also living alone in their village. I met someone from your village in the bus. He told me about their illness. Why don’t you bring them here? All of you will stay here together.”

Kanti felt her in-laws would now burst into a scream but just the opposite happened. Her mother-in-law was thrilled, “I was thinking of it since long, you only go and bring them.”

Tears of joy filled Kanti’s eyes. How ill she used to think about her family? They are like God. Now gone were her worries related to her parents. The next day Jagatu and Kanti went to Kanesar and brought the old couple to their home. Not a word came from their mouth, neither of approval nor of disapproval. They just wiped off their eyes while leaving their village. A faint sobbing was also audible. The village folk also advised them “How does it matter? The daughter is also yours. Your sons have not come since a long time. Then you have also educated your daughter.”

Bissu passed off with a lot of merry making. Kanti was overjoyed as all of them were together. At night without hesitation she sang and danced a lot. When the time for Jagatu’s departure approached, the house turned gloomy. Closing his suitcase he said ,”I am happy that you are working in Anganbari. You are getting money and it keeps you involved also. Delhi is very

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expensive. My visits become difficult. Then taking care of a family there.....”

“What family...?” Kanti interrupted.

“Family.....My wife and two children. You are asking as if something new has occurred. You haven't been to Delhi. Would I be cooking food there? What don't you have here? Land, house, our village folk and now even your parents. Think of me, it is a matter of a far away city. If one falls, ill there by chance; there is no one to take care, his dead body is found out days after by the neighbours. It was my landlord who observed my behaviour and married off his sister to me. Soma has never inquired. You are educated.” Jagtu's voice was becoming stern and loud.

Outside the room all the four elders were swallowing these words. Kanti could hear the echo of the peals of laughter by Sir and other people at the Block office. Kanti just sat down with a thud. Jagatu had gone. For some days Kanti couldn't face anyone in the house nor in the village as though she had committed a crime. She had not even cried. She would justify to herself “This only happens. In which house are there not Kantis like me?” But then a sense of guilt would overtake her.

Gradually time filled the wounds. This time she found an answer to at least one question at Bissu Mela. Why wont a child be born? The mother-in-law started dancing. Even her parents were happy, Kanti would not be alone once they were not there. The elders would gather around and enjoy with the guests who came home.

Kanti gave birth to a son. Munna, this was the name that everybody had on their lips. As though the maternal and paternal grandparents had discovered a new life. A letter was also sent for Jagatu. No reply came. Winters had begun. Her father-in-law's

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breath could not endure the cold. He left behind the three other elders. There was a lot of hue and cry. The son came from Delhi. All rites and rituals were carried out pompously. Amidst these traditions, neither did Kanti meet him nor did she desire for it. Yes! Once or twice Munna was seen in his father's lap.

Then everything seemed as rough and tough as the hill, tied up like time. Responsibility of three ailing old people, nursing them, raising Munna. Anganbari's work which meant running to and fro to the Block. Kanti was used to it. Munna turned five years.

The clerk at the Block asked, "Kanti how many years has it been since you are working here?"

"Twelve."

"You did your B.A. last year."

"Yes". Kanti replied

"Your name might be recommended for the job of Head Social Worker. A permanent job and five thousand rupees as salary." The clerk informed her.

"What are you saying?" Kanti laughed. "Where do I stand? I couldn't imagine it even in my dreams."

All through the way she kept on pondering. "What if it happens?" Then she brushed her head aside "How can it be?" One day she did receive a letter. With curiosity she ran to her room and opened the letter. Kanti was astounded. She had been appointed for the post of the Head Social Worker. A permanent job, five thousand rupees. She got startled by her mother-in-law's voice, "Is the letter from Jagatu?"

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Kanti shouted, "Has it ever come? I have got a permanent job. Bigger than your son's job. Now I will educate my son in one of the good schools of the city." And like a wild hen she ran around the village telling everyone about it. The news left all amazed. From where did she give money? On whose recommendation? Kanti has become so great! A government employee!"

She went to the Block and enquired. She will have to immediately leave for Lucknow. She came home and started making arrangements to go. Her parents and mother-in-law's eyes were consistently following her. They wished to say something. Kanti perhaps knew. That is why she was just avoiding them. But till when? The three of them surrounded her. "Kanti are you actually going? Leaving us old people behind? What is lacking in this place? Now we have enough money to educate Munna. You are the only support we have. Daughter! Everybody has already left us and gone." Kanti noticed that all three of them were squatting on the floor weeping and pleading. She was deeply shaken. How could she have forgotten about them? Has she become so self centered? She could not sleep the entire night. The very next day she would meet the officials and inform them that she was unable to take up the job. Till now she hasn't seen a single city. Then working all by herself, going to Lucknow, No! No! This was not her cup of tea. She doesn't know of any world beyond Kanesar Gothan and Chakrata.

Without eating or drinking anything she set off for the Block. As soon as she reached she burst into tears in front of the officer. She cried a lot that day. She kept on repeating, "I won't be able to do this job."

After hearing everything the official said, "Kanti. Did you know that you will come to Anganbari? Then? Did you know that you would become Head Social Worker? No! Did you know

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that after marrying you won't be able to go to Delhi and that your husband will marry a second time? We all don't know what life has in store for us nor are we ready for it but when we suffer we acquire the power to endure it. Till now you were living for the sake of others. You have fulfilled all your duties. Now you have your son's future in front of you. Prospect of a respectable life for you. Without uttering a word you can reply back to your people for their behavior. You can set an example for your village people. You will have to go and you will go tomorrow." Kanti was listening to everything.

Slowly descending the narrow path Kanti led her child by the hand. Her parents and mother-in-law and her uncle — all came to see her off up to the road where she had to board the bus for Dehradun. Silence engulfed everybody. Kanti raised her head. The sky at Gothan was crystal clear and wide open. How would Lucknow's be?

*Hindi original "Kanti"*

*Translated by Jyoti Pandey*



# **MEMOIRS**





## Those Days of Childhood

Gangotri Gabryal

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I was born in Dharchula on December 9, 1918. As per my horoscope this is my date of birth. However, in my primary school records, July 25, 1918 was registered as my date of birth by my teacher ; this date of birth continued up to my retirement.

My father was Shri Uttam Singh and my mother was Shrimati Govindi Devi. My grandfather was Shri Jeevan Singh who had a daughter and six sons, including my father. The daughter named Heena was the eldest among siblings. The sons were named as Kashi Ram, Nandram, Uttam Singh, Kalyan Singh, Nain Singh and Daleep Singh. My aunt Heena was married to Shri Kheem Singh (Khembu) of a well to do and reputed family of Nabi. His son was Nandan Singh. Nandan Singh's son Ajay Singh Nabyal is at present a senior bureaucrat in Uttarakhand Secretariat.

My father and his brothers were all merchants. During winter they used to come down to Dharchula valley from Gabryal village and during summer they would go upto Taklakot in Tibet for doing business. By the grace of God all of them had many horses, mules and goats. There being no other means of transport in the hilly region in those days, these very mules and sheep came handy for transporting goods : they still do.

My father, the third among brothers, used to go very often to Jumla-Humla in Nepal for merchandizing. From there, he often brought along with him Jumli servants, Jumli horses and cows. He knew many languages. He used to share with us many tit-bits of this particular region of Nepal.

We are known as Bura Raath— Bura Raath Gabryal. Shauka community has been socialistic in its leanings from the very

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beginning. Along with one family, several other families were also brought up and nourished. Some of these families reared sheep, some tended mules while some other took care of oxen and cows. All of them received their salaries, clothes, etc. from one master. A familial bond being forged with these workers, we used to address them as *kaka, mama, or dada*. A very remarkable thing in such relationships was that the master and the servants took their meals together, sitting in the same row and the mistress of the house had no hesitation whatsoever in cleaning the utensils of her workers.

My elder uncle Shri Nandram Gabryal was a well-known businessman. His contribution in the progress of women's education in this region was great. Under his inspiration, Ramda Devi and Yoga Devi were the first girls to travel to Almora from Dharchula on foot in 1914 for getting education. My uncle himself accompanied them to Almora.

My other uncles Nandram ji and Kalyan Singh ji were also respected figures in society. All brothers lived amicably together. Their families were growing. All lived in a joint family at that time. Later on they were divided into two families. Uttam Singh, Kalyan Singh and Daleep Singh's families constituted one joint family. The eldest uncle Kashi Ram babu had already separated. Hence, Nandram ji and Nain Singh ji's families became the other joint family. In the course of time, all started living separately. Business was also done separately.

Nain Singh uncle was a very good physician also. He breathed his last in Kathmandu, Nepal where he had gone for business. My youngest uncle was a *Patwari*. In those days Patwaris were quite influential figures in villages. My uncle was a devotee of Lord Shiva. He used to perform pooja daily.

In the course of time all brothers departed for their heavenly abode. Four widows were left in the family: two aunts had already

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died . Five of my uncles had children but my Patwari uncle was childless. Now, only one elderly aunt Roopmati Devi (wife of Patwari ji) is alive. For the last six years, she has been living with us. She is more than ninety years now and has become very weak. Still she performs her daily worship, counting beads regularly.

Childhood memories are very sweet. Our small school building consisting of only two rooms was situated in a corner of the village. We used to call our teacher 'Pandiji', not 'Panditji'. Pandiji had inculcated high moral values in us. We would touch his feet daily with a lot of reverence. He used to teach us with great dedication and if there was the slightest mistake on our part in grasping the lesson, he would beat us with canes. We too had passion for knowledge and hence we were not scared of such corporal punishment.

Once it so happened that I took a small piece of sugarcane to my school. At that time I was in class IV. My other teacher had prepared a clay model of Almora district in which the names of rivers, mountains and main roads had been etched. We students were highly captivated by that model, so much so that we remained sitting there only. We simply forgot to attend our other class. From inside the other classroom, our senior teacher loudly called out our names, "Gangotri! Matsyodari! Paan Singh! Mohan Singh! Daleep Singh!". Trembling with fear, all of us entered the classroom. Due to my temptation for sugarcane. I tried to break it into smaller pieces and hide them in the pocket of my long frock. The sugarcane however could not be broken into pieces , instead my small legs were pounded with a volley of cane beating.

Despite such heavy punishment, we were not deterred from studies. I consider my teacher's corporal punishment as a blessing in disguise. We used to take by turns 'backer' rice, flour, etc. for our teacher. During recess, we would bring firewood also for our teacher, Otherwise what would he eat! In those days, teachers' salaries were not paid for months.

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After school hours, putting aside our school bags and with a *Doka* in our hands, my sister Matsu and I would go to cut soft green grass for cows. The tender stem and leaves of this grass are filled with a milk-like substance. It is said that if the cow eats this grass, it yields more milk.

Our village Gabryang is situated at a height of ten thousand feet. At this height *Jumus* are reared. *Jumu* looks beautiful with her fluffy, coiled tail and yields milk in good quantity. We had three *Jumus* at home. Buttermilk was prepared daily; sufficient butter was available. Ghee was also prepared. Mother often put a piece of charcoal in milk-pan in order to 'protect' it from evil eye, otherwise *Jumu's* yield would decrease. With a milk can in her hand, she would go to Khagchimrath Kheda and distribute buttermilk among my maternal aunts, once in a while she gave it to other relatives as well.

Right in the middle of the room, there was a fire stove. Meals were cooked on this stove only and it also came handy for warming our hands. Salt tea which was prepared with salt and special type of tea leaves was brewed daily. In local dialect it is known as 'Marajya' - 'Mar' means ghee and 'Jya' means tea which means 'tea prepared with ghee'. That's why they say 'one's dialect, other's abuse'.

Marajya leaf is different from normal tea leaves; it is called 'jyara'. Earlier it was brought from Tibet but after the Chinese invasion, our Nepali friends give us Jyara. A kind of sticky substance is exuded from oak tree which is known as 'Simirati'. From this also, tea is prepared. For patients of cold and rheumatism, it works as medicine.

The wooden pot *Dongbu* in which marajya is brewed, is about three and a half feet high and about one and a half feet in circumference. Brass strips are inlaid all around it in order to make it more durable and to give it an aesthetic look. The round

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shaped blender with which the brew is stirred is also made of wood. On one side of blender a round wooden piece is attached. The blender is higher in size than Dongbu and marajya is churned by pushing the blender up and down. With only a slight stirring, marajya is ready. It stays hot for quite a long time and it is very nutritious. People sip many cups of this brew at one go. They also eat 'Napal', a kind of sattu prepared from Chuma. Napal and Chuma are slightly different from wheat. Mixing ghee, sattu and jaggery, a delicious laddu is prepared.

Apart from sattu, chapati made from fafar, is the staple meal of this region. Silee, fafar and palti chapati is prepared daily. Palti is sown in abundance in Darma valley; it has good demand in the plains also. Silee batter is vigorously beaten in gulokosy, a utensil with a wooden handle. It is then spread upon a heated griddle and with the help of a spatula, it is given the shape of a chapati. When bubbles start forming in the batter it is turned upside down with the help of a turner. In this way silikato (bread made from fafar) is prepared. Dum dugancha (Dum means garlic, dugancha means crushed chilly) is prepared by pounding garlic chilli and salt together. It is made tastier by mixing the juice of chook fruit in it. Silikato chapati is eaten dipping it in dum dugancha. Silikato is the staple diet in Byans valley : easy to cook and delicious to eat.

Silee is slightly golden in color . It is said that Sage Byas used to live in Byas valley and this region is named after him. When Arjun came from Kurukshetra to meet Sage Byas, he saw that the sage was ploughing the field. Byas gave Arjun a Silikato. Arjun could not understand from which dough the chapati was prepared. Without speaking a word, he brought this chapati to Kurukshetra. It was then that he noticed that the bread was golden.

Before the Chinese invasion of 1962, the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra route was open. People could travel to Kailash via this route. With only a bag on their shoulders, saints and sadhus of India

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would start on their pilgrimage. They found that route easier which goes through Leepulekh pass after crossing the Byans-Choundas valley. In village after village the devotees used to offer them silee chapatis and sattu as alms. Late Shri Narayan Swami, founder of Narayan Ashram, had made arrangements in Gabryang village under which a blanket, a big piece of jaggery and one *seir* of sattu was provided to each of the sadhus going on a pilgrimage to Kailash.

Wild fruits tasted very delicious in childhood. One such fruit is chook, which is slightly bigger than black pepper; its thorny branches are laden with fruits. We children used to pluck its branches and eat its fruits. People boil its juice in a copper pot, till its water dries up. When thick black juice remains, it is collected in a wooden utensil or glass vial. It is used as medicine for stomach pain, nausea etc. It is used daily for preparing chutney also.

A girl of my age- Nanda Laati- and her mother stayed in our neighborhood. They lived in a single storey house. The roof of this house was made of pounded earth. In high altitude areas, walls of houses are built with stone while the roof is built with earth. White earth is repeatedly pounded to make its level, so that the roof doesn't leak. Nanda had thrust two branches laden with chook fruit in the ceiling of the open verandah of her house. After she went out for work with her mother, Dashrathi Kutyal and I spotted those branches and we stole them. When Nanda returned from work, she noticed the theft. She kept on abusing us for long.

Another wild fruit is 'Syapale'- which exactly resembles coral stone in shape and color. It looks so beautiful that it appears as if nature herself has adorned the thick thorny branches of bushes with coral stone. The skin of Syapale is quite sweet; we used to pluck Syapale and eat its sweet rind and make garlands from the fruit. There are some other sweet-sour fruits like katolay, gultum,

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bambaalay, ritpalay, etc. Ritpalay is considered a good medicine for dysentery. Another fruit is 'chibee' : its stalk is eaten; its dried root is beneficial for cough and indigestion.

While ploughing, a type of root is found in earth. It is called 'ya' in Rang dialect. It is dug from forests also. 'Ya' is vigorously crushed in doke until its skin comes off. After washing it, it is cooked in a pot. While still hot, it is grinded on a grindstone. Grinding it is a special art. After grinding, it is given the shape of a 'pitu' -a long round shape- and then it is swallowed with chook and dum dugancha. It is not crushed under teeth. It is said that 'pitu' prevents loose motion. Eating 'pitu' is a hobby for the rich. They do it for fun but for poor it is a means to satiate their hunger.

During the months of September and October it is a lovely sight to see the beautiful pink 'Palti' flowers swaying gently. The clusters of fafar also present a captivating sight. The waving shoots of napal and chuma look like undulating waves of the sea in their youthful glory. A cool breeze blows daily, making a rustling sound and the low sound of a whistle. In such a climate people plough their fields, sow seeds, take out weeds, reap the harvest, collect it at one place and after thrashing it, get grains like fafar, palti, napal and chuma etc.

There is no dearth of vegetables here, especially during rainy season. Cabbage, pumpkin, bitter sweet karela, radish, turnip and potato are produced in plenty. It is said that once a cabbage weighing 35 kg was produced. Inhabitants of Byans valley come down to warm valleys during winter and in summer they again move with their cattle to the cooler villages situated at higher altitudes. These villages and valleys are situated between altitude of three thousand to thirteen thousand feet. The residents of villages such as Maarcha, Boan, Tind, Nagling, Dugtu, Daantu, etc. move to the valleys of Galaati, Balvakot, Gothi Joljeevee etc. The inhabitants of villages Jabtee Gaaala, Swamkhola, Shirkha,

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Sidaang, Kureela, Roong, Tijya, Sosa, Pangu, Paangala, Pasti, Jaykot, etc. stay put in their villages only throughout the year. Rabi and Kharif crops are grown there.

The village primary school remains open till August - September; it is closed in October, as temporary schools are opened at various places keeping in mind the itinerary of the villagers . The schools situated in the valleys are open between November to April.

After Chinese invasion of 1962 and the subsequent closing down of Indo-Tibet trade, people have dispersed to different places. I am specially highlighting the circumstances and the milieu of pre-1962 period.

In those days the grains were stocked only at home in big containers. There were separate rooms for keeping stocks of salt. While returning to Tibet the merchants of Tibet used to bring salt and suhaga to Gabryal on their sheep and goats in exchange for fafar, rice, barley and wheat.

The merchants from Nepal known as Duvaal, coming from villages like Hooti, Danhooti, Basedi, Khaati, Badgaon, Pantoli, Tigrim, Simlee, Chinchiree etc. came with their goats and sheep laden with rice, wheat, barley, urad, masoor pulses and took back salt and suhaga in exchange.

The Gabryang market was very famous. Business was transacted through barter system. The Dokpas and Shaukas of Duvaal were especially good friends. Trading used to be among friends. The Marchhas of of Byans, Choundas, Darma, Johar and Garhwal had their separate markets in Tibet.

The Shaukas of Byans, Choundas had their markets in Taklakot. The Shaukas of Darma went to the markets of Gyanima, Thooker, Shivchilam. The Shaukas of Johar did trade

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in Gyanima, Darchayen, Gartok market. The Maarcha, Tolcha, Gyanima, Thooker etc. of Garhwal went to these markets.

The life of Shauka traders was full of courage, hard work and adversities. They had to grapple with piercing cold weather. From Tibet they brought wool in large quantities. Sheep, goats and mules were the means of transport. The big traders were able to return to India from Tibet in December only. Well known merchant Shri Nandram Gabryal, Shri Kalyan Singh Gabryal and his accountant Muneem Shri Boro Singh Garbyal were trapped in snow at Leepulekh. With much difficulty they were brought at Kalapani. Their fingers were badly impacted by snow. All three of them remained bed ridden for five months.

After the traders returned from Tibet, preparations for *Kuncha*– going to and fro– were made. The *Kuncha* started by November end or early December; it took days and days of preparation. Grains such as farar, wheat, napal, etc. were put in big pits dug in the courtyard. These pits were constructed very aesthetically; their depth ranging between 6 to 7 ft. and circumference of 5-6 feet. The insides of the pits were fortified with stones and plastered with mud. The top of pits were covered with big stones and bhoj leaves and again plastered with white clay. All this made these pits so secure that after six seven months when the traders come back, the grains were found to be in good condition.

*Hindi original* “Bachpan Ke Vo Din”

*Translated by Madhu D. Singh*



## Down the Memory Lane

Sumitra Dhulia

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**M**y father late Pandit Rudri Dutt ji Nautiyal was a follower of Arya Samaj. He was always engaged in spreading the tenets of Arya Samaj. It was in the year 1948 when our father shifted his family to Lahore. We are two sisters. I remember those childhood days vaguely: we lived in Mati Chowk area of Lahore. I started studying in Arya Kanya Pathshala there. We stayed in Lahore for two years. Then our *chacha ji* came and took us - my mother, sister and myself - back to our native village, while our father stayed back in Lahore itself. No sooner did we reach our village than the catastrophe of partition befell our nation. My father was stranded in Lahore. We were extremely worried about his safety. My grandmother wanted to send our chacha ji there, so that the whereabouts of our father could be traced. But everyone in the village dissuaded us from sending our uncle to Lahore, as the situation there was very critical; it was fraught with danger.

In the meanwhile, I was sent for admission in Lwali village primary school. After our return from Lahore to our village, a big change had come over in our lives. Hopes of father's return gradually grew fainter, as time passed by. But as luck would have it, one day some people of our village saw someone trudging on the kutchra road towards our village. My grandma and the villagers present there started guessing who was that fellow coming to their village. After some time, as that figure drew closer, my grandma's eyes were suddenly lit up with joy. She exclaimed, "*Yu te meru Rudri sa lagan che*". (He appears to be my son Rudri). As it turned out, it was my father only. This sudden return of my father gladdened the entire family. He had come back safe from Lahore after two years. During these two years I had been through

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so many types of experiences. I used to cut grass, I would fetch wood from the forests, while also learning cooking and other household chores. I used to take cows to the forest for grazing; I also used to sweep my courtyard with cow dung. After my father returned from Lahore, he brought all of us to Dehradun. We started living in Lakshman Chowk locality of Dehradun. I continued my studies, taking admission in Ram Pyari school. Afterwards I studied in MKP college and then in DAV college.

While pursuing BT training from DAV college, a big turning point came in my life, so to say. It so happened that one evening when it was raining very heavily, my cousin— son of my maternal uncle— came to the college and told me that I was required to go to my *mama ji's* house. He gave me no inkling whatsoever as to why I was so suddenly called by mama ji. When I reached mama ji's house, my sister Prabha (mama ji's daughter) told me that a young man had come to see me. Since my clothes were all wet due to rain, Prabha lent me her dress which I wore. I was told that the young man I was about to meet was of a communist bent of mind. When I learnt that this meeting was being arranged for a possible marriage match, I was quite hesitant. Both my mamaji and Prabha tried to convince me, saying that the young man hailed from a good family and was practising law. Still, if I didn't like him, I was free to say 'no' to the match. This young man was KC (Keshav Chandra) whom I eventually married. It was then that I met KC, my husband, for the first time. During our first meeting, neither of us spoke much — only exchange of a few words. Since it was still raining when our meeting ended, my sister Prabha, , offered an umbrella to KC, impressing upon him at the same time not to forget to return it. Later Prabha confided to me that if the young man came to return the umbrella, it meant he had given his consent for marriage.

As mentioned earlier, my family lived in Lakshman Chowk. Next day while going to my college, on the way at Mansa Ram

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Chowk, I saw KC standing there, with the umbrella in his hand. When he asked me to stop for a few seconds, I felt very nervous. I thought what would the people say about us : we were talking there standing on a thoroughfare! When KC offered to return my umbrella, I blurted out in nervousness, “Give it back to whosoever has given it to you.” KC went to my maternal uncle’s house to return the umbrella. Things thus moved further.

Those were the times when letter writing was in vogue. One day I received a letter from KC. I was feeling extremely shy. My restlessness knew no bounds when I saw that the letter was written in English. How should I reply? Myself and Prabha shared everything with each other: we were like very close friends. So, straight we went to the market and bought a blue letter pad. With Prabha’s help, I drafted the reply of this letter in English, requesting KC not to write in English again. Although despite my request KC did write the next few letters in English but after some time, he switched over to Hindi and started writing letters in Hindi only.

On 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1957, I was married to KC. In those days the *barats* (marriage parties) travelled by bus, so we had to stay overnight at Nazibabad. Next day we reached Lansdowne. In Lansdowne my father-in-law late Shri Bhairav Dutt Dhulia had a press from where ‘*Karambhoomi*’ newspaper used to be published. My father-in-law was whole heartedly dedicated to social service. KC was practicing law in the district court of Lansdowne. Ours was a large prosperous family. Dolly *fufu* sister of my father-in-law kept the entire family connected to each other. Ours being a well to do and large family, such a large number of relatives, friends and guests visited our house that the tea was always being brewed: a tea kettle was always kept on the stove.

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Time flew so quickly that one year seemed to have gone by in a jiffy and I was blessed with a son . We named him Himanshu, though we lovingly called him Ashu. One night it so happened that Ashu started crying loudly. I was dead tired and KC too was unable to placate the baby who just wouldn't stop crying. Today when I remember that night I realize what a saintly person my father-in-law was! Hearing Ashu's incessant cries, he came to the lobby and said to us, "Give Ashu to me." I handed over Ashu along with his milk bottle to my father-in-law. On the eve of my marriage my mother had taught me that a good daughter-in-law should wake up quite early in the morning. So I used to get up daily at dawn before everyone else in the family did. But that night after I gave Ashu to my father-in-law, I fell into such a deep sleep that I couldn't wake up early next morning. By the time I did, it was broad daylight. I asked KC to bring Ashu from father-in-law's room but he hesitated. When I went to father-in-law's room and what I saw there is still imprinted on my memory. Covering little Ashu with blankets from three sides, my father-in-law was asleep, clasping the little child to his heart. How effortlessly children are brought up in a joint family — we seldom realize.

Time went by and I was blessed with one more son — Sudhanshu. In the meanwhile I had also got the job of a teacher in a government school. The school Principal had come to our home when she learnt that I had done BTC. She told my father-in-law that a teacher was required in the school. He in turn asked KC to talk to me in this regard whether I was interested in taking up this job. When asked, I instantly said yes. More than getting a job, what appealed to me was that the job would give me the freedom of going to and coming back from school on my own.

In Lansdowne , when the beautiful moon appears in clear skies on a full moon night , the scenic beauty is indescribable. KC and I used to go on long walks during night. I started noticing

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during these walks that for the past few days KC was not his usual cheerful self: he seemed to be a bit out of sorts. I was extremely worried as to why KC looked so worried. He didn't look happy even when everything around seemed to be perfectly alright. God had blessed us with two sons; there were all types of material comforts in the family. One night as we started for our walk, I decided I would definitely ask KC what was the reason of his restlessness. When I asked, he confided to me that he wanted to start practice in Allahabad: he didn't want to stagnate. He wanted to make a name for himself in legal field which wouldn't be possible in a small town like Lansdowne. Hearing those words, I at once decided that I wouldn't be an obstacle to his career. I told him that he would be able to practise in Allahabad, if I was transferred to Dehradun . He agreed. I immediately applied for transfer to Dehradun. We started preparing to move to Dehradun and I was transferred to GGIC, Rajpur Road, Dehradun. All these are the ways of destiny.

As luck would have it, my father-in-law also shifted his Press and Paper from Lansdowne to Kotdwar. I came to Dehradun with my two children and started staying with my parents. KC left for Allahabad with a suitcase and a holdall. Leaving Lansdowne was like leaving Ayodhya for us: that poignant scene of departure still brings tears in my eyes.

Two years had passed since I came to Dehradun. Both the sons were studying in St. Joseph's school . KC used to come to Dehradun in between, whenever the courts were closed in Allahabad. Time flew by and I was pregnant once again . By now I had made up my mind to go to Allahabad and live with KC. Although my father was against my travelling during such an advanced stage of pregnancy—I was seven months pregnant then—, I persisted in my resolve. Ultimately father had to give in and we got our train reservation done. In those days the train did not go up to Allahabad, one had to get down at Pratapgarh

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itself. Along with my two young sons, I boarded the train. It was 23 May, 1967. When we stepped down from the train at Pratapgarh, we were greeted by scorching heat, the like of which we had never seen before. KC was there at the station to receive us. He had specially brought a thermos of mango *panna* for us, which was supposed to protect us from the onslaught of heat wave. From Pratapgarh we took a taxi for Allahabad.

Reaching Allahabad, I saw that KC had taken on rent a big spacious house. In that house only a few conveniences were available. As I started living there, I realized that in Dehradun all sorts of material comforts were there but no real happiness. Here in Allahabad though there were not many comforts, still we were happy. It is a truth of life that if one has real happiness, dearth of material comforts rarely matters. I still remember when we reached Allahabad, there were three cots fitted with mosquito nets in the courtyard. For the first time in my life I slept on a cot with a mosquito net over it. In the meanwhile I again applied for transfer from Dehradun to Allahabad. And I was transferred from Dehradun to BTC College, Allahabad.

I was in my advanced stage of pregnancy when I reached Allahabad. One day, all of a sudden labor pains started and I had to get admitted in hospital. The nurse there gave me some injection and I fell asleep. Next morning when I woke up, I asked her, "Where is my baby?" At this query she laughed aloud and said, "It is with you only." Some minutes later, Dr. Joshi came there and told me that it happens sometimes. In some cases the would-be-mothers feel false labor pains. Mine was also the case of false labor pains. From hospital I returned home.

Some repair work was going on in the house in those days. It was 6 July, 1967. KC asked the masons to finish the repair work under all circumstances that day itself. Giving instructions to the mason, he went to court. Though I was experiencing mild labor

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pains but due to that episode of false labor pain, I was hesitant to say anything about it: lest this time also, it should be a case of false alarm. At 4 'O' clock in the evening, KC came back from court and made payments to the masons. It was only then that I told KC about my condition. KC brought a lady doctor from a nearby clinic. The doctor said to me, "Tell me honestly, since when have you been feeling pain?" I replied, "Since morning." KC wanted to take me and admit me to some hospital but the lady doctor — after hearing that I was in pain since morning— told my husband that she didn't want to take any risk and would rather prefer delivery at home . She was shown two rooms for conducting delivery but found neither of them suitable. There was one more room which was full of books and which was used by KC as his chamber. The doctor chose this room . At 5:30 in the evening, Trishu (Tigmanshu, my youngest son) was born. I had come across the name 'Tigmanshu' in some book long way back. When my third son was born, I resolved that I would name this son Tigmanshu only. Tigmanshu is such a rare name, I didn't think any other person in the world had been named Tigmanshu and I had decided beforehand that I would name my son Tigmanshu only.

When Trishu (Tigmanshu) was born, my father-in-law came to Allahabad to see him. At that time he was an MLA. Seeing Trishu, he remarked, "Akbar is born in our family." Why he said so, I still haven't been able to understand. Akbar, the famous emperor, was born to Humayun on the way when he was fleeing from Shershah Suri . Trishu proved to be a very lucky child for the family. He was cynosure of all: his father specially doted on him. We never looked back after Trishu's birth: KC's law practice flourished day by day.

I was now a mother of three kids, I was a teacher and I was a housewife also. All these three roles I was supposed to perform

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efficiently. I taught students in school, did household chores and then taught my own children. I had to shoulder many other responsibilities also. Good moral values had to be inculcated among children; their careers had to be shaped. Both myself and KC were taking all pains to shape the future of our children. As time passed, my eldest son Ashu joined Navy as an officer. KC was appointed Judge in Allahabad high court. We were now allotted a very spacious bungalow. My second son Sudhanshu was preparing for IAS. But very shortly afterwards, there came such a cruel night in my life which robbed all my happiness. It was as if some evil eye had snatched all our happiness.

That night my husband KC asked me to put all his files in the bed room, which I did. Then I told him that I wanted to watch SitaraDevi's program on Doordarshan as I liked Sitara Devi very much. I went to watch the program but don't know why that night even that my favorite program failed to keep me bound. I switched off the TV and went to sleep. After some time Judge Saheb (KC) went to bathroom. I thought perhaps he was suffering from indigestion. After ten minutes he again went to bathroom. When I asked him, he said he was feeling restless. His face had turned white. I was extremely worried. I loudly called Sudhanshu . Hearing my voice, my father—who was with us in Allahabad at that time— too came to my room. My father rarely came to our room. Seeing him, KC was also surprised. He told my father that he was alright, he just wanted to sleep, that was all. Saying this KC pulled the blanket over his face: his breathing grew rather heavy and loud. We called the civil surgeon but by then it was very late. KC had suffered a massive silent heart attack.

Judge Saheb was given a 21 gun salute on his last journey. Family responsibilities now suddenly fell on the young shoulders of my son Sudhanshu who was preparing for IAS at that time. He eventually pursued LLB and later on was selected as a Judge.

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Today all my three sons are well settled and pursuing their respective careers.

When I look at today's times and society, I find that a feeling of alienation, a feeling of loneliness has slowly started engulfing families, specially the younger generation . As the ambit of family relationships is gradually shrinking, there is a disappointing lack of 'ideals' for the young generation. Due to this, the young generation is sliding into some sort of aimlessness. The reason for this sorry state of affairs is that we, the elders, could not become their ideals. In earlier days, joint families used to be there in which relatives like *chacha, tau, dada dadi, nana nani* exercised moral authority over the younger generation. The young dared not smoke in public places, lest some one elder should see them smoking. Nowadays we have no such restraint. Confined to our narrow individual selves, we are no more afraid of public censure. Under these circumstances, aimlessness and disorientation is bound to creep in. We are all responsible for it. My husband late Justice Keshav Chandra used to say , "we had no 'opportunity' to turn into pampered or wayward young men, as the image of our father was always before our eyes." Such were the values one acquired from one's family. Just as a dam checks the flow of water, certain values keep the family members closely bound together. These values are like the light house which shows the young members of family the right path and prevents them from going astray.

*Hindi original* "Smriti Ki Veethiyon Mein"

*Translated by Madhu D. Singh*



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## Travelling to Meelam-Malari across Untadhura

Uma Bhatt

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**T**hat should we call this journey on foot—Meelam Malari or Jauljeevi- Joshimath? There never was any township in between Meelam- Malari, there certainly was a travel route. The people of Meelam used to go to Garhwal via this route and reached Tibet crossing over Untaghura, and passing through Kingri Bingri and Lha. The Nitwals of Niti reached Johar via this route only and the ancestors of Nain Singh too came to Garhwal from Johar. This route was in constant use for travelling to and fro to Tibet till 1960 but after the war of 1962 the doors to Tibet were absolutely closed and subsequently the population of Malla Johar valley too became sparse. However, the check posts of S.P.F., I.T.B.P. and Indian army were opened at many places for security reasons so that travel to and fro to the border area remained open to some extent. The inhabitants of Johar began to stay permanently in their winter settlements and spread across different parts of the country as professionals in lieu of erstwhile traders. The elderly folks who had spent their entire youth in trading with Tibet nostalgically remember the sweet memories of those bygone days. The past always appears to be endearing otherwise the dangerous route from lower Johar to upper Johar that opened every summer and the travel from there to Tibet which was possible only after negotiating the height of 14-15 thousand feet to 19-20 thousand feet could not by any means be in any way less hazardous and arduous. In those days the life of Shauka traders who travelled unhindered from the big markets of Jyanima-Taklakot up to Tarai Bhabhar was one of constant mobility and harmonious vivacious saga of give and take among different communities. Devoid of it, the life style is now changing.

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And the travel from Jauljeevi-Joshimath i.e. from the confluence of Gori-Dhauri to the confluence of Dhauri-Vishnuganga! Covering the populated region from Jauljeevi till Meelam by the riverside of Gori, above Meelam passing through the banks of the rivers Gunkha, Bamras, Kiyu, Girthi, and then from Malari till Joshimath by the riverside of Dhauri that becomes Alaknanda near Joshimath mingling with Vishnuganga near Vishnuprayag. These rivers are similar to our culture. Many a river shape into a big river forsaking their own names and shape. Dhauri river comes from Niti valley. Niti is the last village in Niti valley inhabited by Khatis and Ranas. After Meelam we encountered the first rains in Malari and Malari onwards the region was densely populated till we reached Joshimath.

We had started our journey on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1989 from Nainital. Col. Joshi, Shri Anoop Shah, Lalit Pant, Shekhar Pathak, Vij ji, Dr Saxena and myself. Since the travel was sponsored by S.P.F. we were saved from many hassles and were obliged to senior police officer Shri Giriraj Shah. Passing through Bageshwar and Askot we journeyed on a truck Jauljeevi onwards up to Bhateli on 6<sup>th</sup>. From Jaulgiri to Leelam by the riverside of Gori the road is under construction. It has been completed up to Bhateli. Buses ply up to Madkot only. There is the old route for reaching Munsyari passing through 9000feet high Kalamuni hill but the road is not in use in the rainy and winter season. This time we are heading towards Leelam down below Munsyari by the riverside instead of going to Munsyari. There is the confluence of Gori and Kali in Jauljeevi- not only the confluence of rivers but of cultures as well; the culture of Johar, Nepali and down below Johar the culture of Kumayun. Each river brings with it not only the soil and water but the entire culture of its region as well. More than religious, Jauljeevi is significant from mercantile viewpoint. Every year in the month of November the people from Johar, Darma-Vyas- Chaundas, Nepal and the lower regions

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assemble here in the one week long fair and goods are sold and bought. The Kali river coming from Kalapani mingles with the water of Dhauri, Tinker, Gori, Saryu, Ramganga, Ladhya etc refiguring into Sharda river near Tanakpur. Gori comes from Meelam glacier and offers her existence to Kali in Jauljeevi. Both Gori and Kali appear to be mythical names but it is Gori, not Gauri. Gori and Kali have other connotations too related to colour. However, both the rivers have almost similar colour—dusty. Rivers, mountains and places have two types of names in entire Uttarakhand. Big names have Sanskrit impact on them. Nandadevi, Trishul, Panchchuli, Saryu, Ramganga, Alaknanda etc. and smaller and less famous names of mountains and rivers such as Rauntisgaar, Baramgaar, Lhaspagaar, Bhujani etc are names from local languages or *tadbhav* words. There is more water in river Kali than Gori. Shering has shown Gori originating from Gori glacier near Untadhar but this is in fact Bamraas glacier and the river Bamraas originates from it. Later it becomes Gunkha and mingles with the river Gori near Meelam. In Askot we had the first glimpse of river Kali lying flat in the valley. Glancing at her turns I thought—this is the border line drawn in the map of India. Across Kali— the Nepalese area and the paddy fields of Ukku Baku were visible—nothing new, the same kind of fields, hills and pathways. The people crossing over Kali from both sides on pedestrian bridge in Jauljeevi. These people have been staying together for centuries, there is an exchange of language, culture, they have interpersonal relationships. There are many villages where people have got the citizenship of both the countries.

Ahead of Jauljeevi there is a bridge on Gori near Garjia. The pedestrian pathway leading from Askot reaches here. Going farther on this way there is Balmara on the right side. On its upper side is Rautur where the Vanrawats reside. Rautur means the village of Rawats. They have their habitations in Chifaltara too. From Askot we had seen the dense forests on this side of the slopes of Chipla-Kadar peak where the Vanrawats reside. In July Jaat yatra

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proceeds from Darma valley for the puja of Chipla Kedar. On the northern slopes of Chipla Kedar are expansive grass lands. Lalit Da informs—these plains are ideal for skiing. The eight kms long green ground has been perceived in an aerial survey but these places are still unexplored. Passing through Ghattabaggar, Baram, Beribaggar, Devbaggar, Bangapaani and Matkot we reached Bhadeli. Near Matkot, Madkanya flowing down from Pancchuli glacier conflates with Gori.

Our journey on foot commenced on 6<sup>th</sup> September at 4 O'clock in the evening when we headed toward Leelam from Bhadeli. The valley from Jaulgiri to Leelam is habited. There are no slopes. The sound of Gori too is subdued but its consistent echoing sound makes its presence felt. Passing through Kalkutti and Darkot we reached Suringaar. The small power house is non-operational due to debris collected in the tunnel. Consequently there is no electricity in Munsyari and the nearby area. There is again a bridge on Gori in Jamighaat. Now we are walking on the right side of Gori. There is a way for Raalam glacier from Jamighaat and Bhuipato village as well. We reached Leelam around 8 o'clock. We met many people near the shop. On 8<sup>th</sup> is Nanda Ashtami. The people from nearby villages of Munsyari are going to their native village for the puja of Nanda Devi. Some people are staying here in the shop. We have to stay up there in the camp of S.P.F. It is dusk and nothing is visible around. There was a landslide here in 1978. Till then one house has been hanging in the air, the path for climbing up and down is still in bad shape.

We started from Leelam at 7.30 a.m. We do not come across any habitation up to Baguryaar but the names of places are available everywhere. The valley is narrow, the village settlements are on top. In the rocky areas of the river banks there is no sign of human habitation. Gori expands in a pose of repose at the slightest opportunity, the rocks are eager to clasp her all the time in their grip and like someone imprisoned in fist, the river makes a roaring sound attempting to break the shackles. This interplay of rocks

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and water can be noticed at the origin of all the rivers. The same river tends to be absolutely quiet in the lower region. At every second place the cascading waterfalls from a height of 40-45 feet! From Leelam to Bagudiyar on the left of Gori can be viewed the mountain tops of Hasling— Hasling, Harling or Haling— Ling is all pervasive in the entire Himalaya in one form or the other. There are Nagling and Baling villages in Darma.

From Lelam to Rilkot Gori is like a whirlwind and the road is sometimes near the river and at times it goes 1000 feet above it. Covered with snow, these roads are blocked in October and open again in May. This is a very old practice, at places the roads are in fine shape, at other places the roads are broken down and are repaired. In old days the Shauka merchants repaired the roads on their own as a result the names of these places are Biljvan village, Panchpal Odyar and Birsingh Gaun. Now the responsibility of constructing the roads falls on the Public Works Department. The next place we reached from Haniya Bhel is called Sarkari Bhel (government Bhel) since the government had first got it constructed. There is open space in Hargari or Rilgari on the banks of the river. Under a cave a seasonal shop made of hay is run till October. Side by side the rocks a stone wall is erected where the labourers of P.W.D. are staying. Here the people going up and down can get tea etc. The loading of goods of S.P.F., I.T.B.P. etc is ongoing these days. Anwals, tourists and local people as well come here. The traffic is on the rise due to Nandashtmi. So the shop is doing good business. We too had our breakfast of cucumber, grams and tea. Many people are sitting here at the shop. In 1983 when we visited Leelam, this shop was not there though that time too we had halted here and the contractor Hayat Singh Brijwal had offered us cucumber.

We reached Bagudiyar around one o'clock. Bagudiyar means the den of leopard. Leopard must be occupying the nearby caves sometime back. But now Bagudiyar is relatively a lively place. Be it Baguabasa on the way to Roopkund or Bagua Bhel on the way

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to Nandikund, such places turn into shelters on arduous tracks. The valley is slightly expanded at Bagudiyar. The permanent camps of I.T.B.P. and S.P.F. are here. A two- room rest house of P.W.D. is also there. There is a permanent shop where breakfast and food is also made available on request. Last January thirteen soldiers had lost their life in a landslide. Now a memorial for them is ready. The Sector Commander of S.P.F. Shri Mahavir Singh told us that with great difficulty they could reach here in January when all the roads were covered with snow. Their slippers, cells of torch were still there in the bunker where these soldiers were buried.

Today there is a sizable crowd in Bagudyar. These are the people coming and going for Nandashtmi. Shri Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, Girish Sharma and other people are also going to Meelam from Pithoragarh. The mules and their owners are also here in large numbers. It started drizzling in the evening. Next day we plan to reach Meelam via Martoli so we intend to start very early.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September we moved towards Rilkot at quarter to five in torchlight. It dawned after we had tracked 2-3 kilometres. There is a 4 km slope from Bagudyar to Rilkot. The track is very tough. Gori descends from quite a height as if climbing down the stairs. At some places it suddenly jumps from a height of 40-50 feet as if falling down straight on our head! The narrow valley and the constant echoing of Gori. The waterfalls flowing down from a height of 400-500 feet, the gurgling of the waterfalls and that of the river can distinctly be made out. The din of the waterfall is such as if the water was battering the boulders. The track again comes close to the river near Nahar Devi. It is quite broad here. Could be that the river might have stopped here and a pond could have been created in due course of time. It is here say about Nahar Devi that a canal might have sprung from one side or might have been dug. There is also a small temple of the goddess where colourful pieces of clothes are hanging down. It is

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but natural for man to install nature in the form of a goddess in order to appease her dreadful fury. It is only the string of faith that enjoins life in the midst of fear. On our track ahead near Mapang Siri we could see the speared holes in the rocks . It is said that at the time of Mani Kampasi when Gori had washed away the road, holes were pierced in the rocks with spears and fixing logs in them make do pathways were made, only then the convoy could proceed further. To wage a perennial fight with nature, and concomitantly to have also faith in her, an unshakable love for those hills!

At some distance in Chirkani the glacier has come down. The track is enveloped with snow. On Gori a lovely snowy bridge of the shape of a gate is erected but it cannot be crossed. A tiny waterfall too was flowing down. Bumping Gori was sprinkling over the snowy bridge, presumably it was named Chirkani (sprinkling) or Cheerpani ( sprinkling water) for this reason.

It is September and the herds of sheep and goats are descending from the meadows. We come across many such herds. One goat was herded with a rope tied around her neck. On inquiry we came to know that she was blind. A ten days old goat kid was carried in lap. Everybody carried something on his back. Local people have with them the army kits or they would be wrapping a woolen blanket on their back. On the way to the pilgrimage of Gomukh, Yamunotri there is a mutual exchange of “Jai Ganga Maiya” and ‘Jai Jamuna Maiya”, that practice is not in vogue here.

We reached Rilkot around half past eleven. The place where there is now a shop is called New Rilkot. Old Rilkot was located at a place ahead on the hill top in a pose of Kot. The dilapidated walls narrated the story of erstwhile human habitation here. The river flows here evenly. The valley is open from Rilkot up to Meelam. Many villages are situated on the right and left of Gori. The snow covered ground tends to be fertile in the spring season.

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It is farmed for six months only. One person stays as caretaker. People do not stay here permanently. The shopkeeper has also gone to Martoli to the fair. The thoroughfare from Meelam to Rilkot is easy. The tough conditions in-between Rilkot and Bagudyaar do not prevail here. Probably this area was populated in the past. Contact with the lower reaches was established at a later stage. People also say that long time back people stayed in the upper region throughout the year.

Today Col. Joshi led the party on the track and we all followed his pace. As he explained to us, this is the rule of trekking that one should walk with a normal pace so that one is not tired and all the trekkers reach the destination simultaneously. We learnt that trekking has to be done in a scientific way. One should go to a region fully equipped with all information about that region and one should have the knowledge of its geographical and human space. A journey undertaken in over-enthusiasm and without preparation can be painful and result in a negative attitude towards trekking. Every evening Col. Joshi would sit down with the topo sheet and inform all of us about the track for the next day. After lunch at Rilkot we proceeded towards Martoli village. We had been hearing the praise of the natural beauty of this village. Located on an open ground at the height of twelve thousand feet, this village is in indubitably eye-catching. But the joy that we experienced watching it from a distance turned into desolation once we neared the village enveloped with the bushes of the stinging nettle and the sad, closed houses while we passed through the lanes. Mahendra Singh Martolia is also with us, this is his native village but he does not recognize his house. He could identify his house only when he told the name of his grandfather. The village is big but now only 2-4 families come here in summers. I.T.B.P. has expanded its work in only a few houses. On top of the village is a temple and above the temple is Bhujani pata which means the forest of bhoj leaves. This time all the

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people are in the temple. We too headed towards it hastily. The sound of cymbals and drums could be heard once we neared the temple. The men folk were moving towards the main door towards Nanda with musical instruments dancing and circumambulating the temple. Women and children were sitting at the front. Around 60-70 people were assembled there. On the left side of the temple food was being cooked on an open space. The small procession stopped in the courtyard of the temple. The priest was possessed by the deity and corn, cucumber, flowers were distributed among the crowd as *prasad*. Then all of them were fed with pooree, halwa, potatoes and jaggery sweets. All the people sitting in the row were offered the *bramakamal*- the lotus flower as blessing. Brahmakamal is a flower that grows in height and it has especial significance during ritual worship and festivals. Before one or two days of Nandashtmi the village folk go up to Shatang glacier fasting. They spend the night there and the next morning they bring basketful of brahma kamal- the lotus flowers. Keeping them with you is considered auspicious. Women tell us that previously goats were sacrificed in the temple but a few years ago this practice was discontinued with the intervention of a sage. Chandra didi also sang two songs. Elderly women were dressed in traditional attire— ghagra, kamla, ariya and khopi. It was very cold that day. With the people hailing from Burphu we reached Bhurphu from Martoli bridge to Lwa Gaar crossing Gori from Burphu bridge. At night Dr. Khetwal and two of his research scholars reached in connection of their research work. Tomorrow they too have to go to Meelam.

On 9<sup>th</sup> December we started at quarter to five so that we could see Nanda devi mountain peaks from Bilju going through Gulachi. But we started late. Shekhar and Anupda speeded up while Lalit da and I took up the steep climb catching hold of the grass on the way as we were not able to find the right track. Up there was a small ground. Both the peaks of Nanda devi

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were sparkling in the sun. Down below the current of river Gori, mingling with it a thin current flowing from the side of Nanda Devi, on both sides of it the villages Pachu and Ganghar, on the upper side Madee glacier, then the snow and the peaks at the height touching the distinct blueness. There was also greenery around Pachu and Ganghar. Longstaff Coal on the left of Nanda Devi and the upper snowy part of Meelam glacier in the north seem to be testifying the word Himnad- i.e. snowy river . Right now we are at the height of approximately 14,000 feet. We have lighted firewood to protect from cold. The entire scene is thrilling. In the south-west is Martoli peak. This was not a situation but an emotion, a feeling from which we did not wish to withdraw. However we descended towards Bilju. Our destination was ahead of it.

There are around 60-70 houses in Bilju but only two of them are inhabited, those of Shyam Singh and Durga Singh. These people come in the summers with their goats and also do farming here. They stay in the village Dammar near Munsyari. We recognized Leela didi and Himmati didi. We had met them in 1983. They complained that we didn't write to them. That time they had fed us with potato gutkas and had sung the song— 'Julo maa hun desh raj'—there would be the rule of our country in Julo. Pushkar and Uttam took us to village. Long grass has grown inside the houses, peeping through the courtyard, doors and windows. Somehow we make way to pass by looking at the carved doors. In some fields potato and mustard plants are growing. On top of the village is a temple where many goats were sacrificed yesterday. Uttam Singh is drying small pieces of meat in the sun. Juniper bushes growing at the back of the village are burnt. We thought that the villagers must have burnt them for firewood but they informed us sadly that when the Anwals of goats and other families leave the place people of Darma come here to hunt *Kastura* and *Barar*—a type of deer. The green Juniper bushes catch fire due to their negligence. We also met contractor

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Hayat Singh Brijwal. During our last expedition we had been together at Burphu and he had sung a song regarding the beauty of Laspa village. Since then he too has come today only with his wife and children. His wife had insisted to see the galashar. Perhaps this is the local pronunciation of glacier. This is his wife's first visit to this place. Yesterday we met Vimla Jangpani. She too had come here for the first time. Among these people who now do not stay here is great affinity for their Johar, they are proud of their soil. We met many people coming back after visiting the glacier. They met us as if we had been bosom friends for centuries. Simple, affectionate faces, how could it be? In our cities nobody meets you with such affection. Durga Singh and Shyam Singh of Bilju have gone farther from Meelam many times. They inform that the track is tough. We had tea in the shop. Mean while many people have come here. Dr Saxena has reached from Rilkot, many people from the intelligence and telephone departments too are here. For the time being there is quite hustle and bustle in the courtyard of that house in Bilju. The atmosphere is such that no one can remain unfamiliar with anyone. All are gossiping most intimately.

We reached Meelam in the afternoon. We had lunch after being refreshed. The weather is absolutely clear. Sun and wind can be utilized here as sources of energy but such is not the case. In the evening we started towards the village. At one point of time Meelam was the biggest village of Almora district and now only 10-12 houses are inhabited. There was a saying—' Meelam bazar, ghun ghun kachyaar.' But now stinging nettle has grown up in the lanes and by lanes, courtyards, and inside the dilapidated houses. Only in one corner the members of Johar Cooperative Society have undertaken the business of growing up medicinal roots and herbs. We met Uttam Singh Sayana in the village. He is assiduously engaged in his efforts to revive Johar. Every year he comes here to stay. This time we could see some trees otherwise this region is devoid of trees and is above tree line. People have

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cultivated the vegetables like radish, spinach, cabbage, chilly and beans that grow in the lower regions. The traditional crops comprise potatoes, masur dal, *jambu* and *phaphar*. We go up to the house of Nain Singh Rawat. There is post office and forest panchayat in Meelam. There are camps of ITBP and SPF. ITBP people stay here in winters as well. They have got generators and bhukhari that are lighted with kerosene oil. On Sundays people from down below Burphu and Dung above Johar come to watch Mahabharat serial. The task of accumulating ration is completed by September. On top of the village is a temple. Here too is Nandabhimukhi— that means that Nanda's face is towards the peak. New flags are offered in the temple. Yesterday there had been many animal sacrifices. Similar to the villagers, goats are offered on behalf of S.P.F. and I.T.B.P. too. After all, they too need security. There should also be human habitation here on the pattern of Laddakh, then only our borders can be safe and it is good for the soldiers too that there are people around them. Aerial service should be available to the locals and the army. If the mobility of people is there in these regions and human habitation in large numbers, the life of the soldiers of army and border security forces posted in far off places will not be like that of the exiled. Restrictions and inapproachability have rendered our own area mysterious for us.

Next day on 10<sup>th</sup> September we started towards Dung filling our eyes with the falling rays on the snow peaks. We all are heading towards the novel track. The area up till Meelam was familiar to all of us. Gunkha, the tributary of Gori which commingles with Gori before Meelam village, leaving the direction of Meelam glacier on its right side we moved on toward north-east. There is a slight slope. The greenery is now on the decline. Juniper bushes are disappearing. The scenes in front of us are new. Dry, naked, rocky. Vegetation is almost nonexistent. Somewhere grass is visible. This too would disappear on greater heights. There is only snow on the peaks, wherever you turn your glance, there is

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a new snow peak, a new glacier. Down below the current of Gunkha is flowing not very fast but is moving ahead beating boulders. Sometimes speedily, sometimes slowly we are climbing up and sometimes down near the river bank. In fact the river only finds way amid these inapproachable mountains. Man also follows suit. But it delights in washing away the man-made pathways. Every year it cuts the way and then while climbing up, a new path is made. This time we are moving ahead of the Himalayan range. Panchchuli is left behind. Nanda devi, Nandakot- all are visible on turning back. Col. Joshi is leading us. Slow but consistent pace. Wherever the track is in bad shape, it is repaired by Mohan Singh Dhapwal in advance. Mohan Singh has been in the service of PWD for ten years at daily wage of twenty four rupees, his services are from May to October. Twenty laborers are with him. Neither a full time job, nor any provision for pension and the job is full of dangers.

Approximately 7-8 kms ahead of Meelam at a place called Samgau, Kol Ganga, coming from the glacier in the east commingles with Gunkha. Crossing Gunkha we walked in its left direction. Up there in Talla Shilaur we came across ITBP camp. Here only must have been the tavern built by Dhani Devi. There is some open space here. A water canal is brought here. The soldiers have grown vegetables. Right now they are playing volleyball. Climbing up the slope above the camp, my pace was slackened, I could feel heaviness in breathing. After negotiating a climb of 3 kms we reached SPF camp. This place is called Suntpani. Dung is above it. There might have been human habitation here but now the camp is shifted down below as the place is windy. But the name Dung continues. From here right in front of it towards the west are the peaks of Haldua and Pinglua and the snow river flowing down. This area is called Khola of Haldua Pinglua. At the back on the eastern side is Suntpani glacier from where comes Lassar *gaar*. From the northern side flows Bamraas gaar from Bamraas glacier, both of them commingle

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into Gunkha in Dung. The water on this side of Untadhar is carried to Gori by Gunkha. Beyond Untaghura is the water region of Alaknanda. Though there is no scarcity of water in these rivers but they are called gaar- rivulets, unlike Gori, Ganga or Pinder they are not called rivers.

Located at the height of 14074 feet there are snow peaks around Dung. In between 12 to 5 O'clock in the evening the wind blows very fast. Twenty five soldiers of SPF stay here from May to October. There is shortage of firewood. Kerosene oil is brought from down below. Food is cooked in oil cooker. Today the number of food eaters has gone up to 40. Umed Singh of Garur serves very delicious food. We are not sure but Shri Mahavir Rawanlta's first posting was then in Dung. Col Joshi has instructed all of us to wash our feet in salty water in the evening and apply vaseline afterwards on them. All of us must have sun glasses, cap and windcheater for tomorrow. We have to start at 4 O'clock in the morning. The tough terrain of our journey is ahead. It was drizzling in the evening. Our companions climbed up quite at length in the direction of Suntpani gal.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, at 3.30 a.m. in the dark we all started under the leadership of Col. Joshi. Climbing up and down continuously we headed toward the slope, as if we were heading up to compete with the snow sliding down from the snowy rivers. Crossing over the confluence of Bamraas and Lassar we moved on the banks of Bamraas. Right in front is Shikalhani mountain. From here the ascent of Moren starts. Down below expands the snowy territory of Nandadevi and Nandakot. Though there were clouds, it was slightly dark but this was the first and unique chance to view Nandadevi from north. We were treading on Moren slowly. On the left lied flat Bamraas gal. From under it the tiny Bamraas sprang up. There was sunshine on hill tops. Bamraas gal and the nearby area was black. Presumably that is why the name of this area is also Kalmatia I.e.' the black soil. Reaching up the height of Bamraas gal and then leaving it

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we made way towards north-east. I had problem in breathing on the steep slope. All the trekkers walked ahead or behind me. I could not walk. Trekking on we reached Paritaal around 10 O'clock. This is also called Jimtaal. As if the small pond was not made of the main stream springing from the mouth of the glacier but was made after slicing the snowy rocks. The colour of the water is black. From here where we are sitting, all around is nothing but snow. We had tea sitting on the boulders and had breakfast of poori and potatoes.

After resting for half an hour we ascended further. There was fog and clouds on the snow peaks. The breeze was calm. Climbing up slowly and thumping down our feet in snow till knee length we walked diagonally. The track was tough, down below in the direction of Paritaal was direct slope therefore all of us walked quietly but fast. Mohan Singh mate was also with us. After negotiating the diagonal path there was the slope. Now right in front is Untadhura. Anupda and the party moved ahead. The destination beckoned them. But I was lagging behind. The distance was not much in appearance but quite a distance to walk. Up there the breeze was very brisk. From down below three human forms were perceptible. These were three long stones. At the height of 17590 feet, behind the edge where we stood was the water territory of Gori and ahead of it, that of Alaknanda. Topidhunga, where we had to reach today was enveloped in snow. Loka sprang up from under the snow which becomes Girthi gaar in Somna below Topidhunga mingling with another river. Somna signifies confluence. The names Somna, Sumana, Sangau are used for confluence. Down below was snow. Plunging our feet quite at ease we moved on fast. Thach.. thach... Snow flakes showered on us from above. Sitting on the snowy slope we slid down and reached Gangpaani. There is the way from Gangpaani for Jayanti Dhura and Kingri Vingri Lha. In olden days the Shauka traders reached directly to Tibet from Dung crossing the three mountain passes, Unta Dhura, Jayanti Ghura and Kingri Vingri in one day. Around 3 O'clock we reached Topidhunga located at

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the height of 14000 feet. Today we saw Hiwaal birds. Grass has grown in Topidhunga, flowers are blooming at some places but there are no bushes.

On 12<sup>th</sup> September we woke up at 3 O'clock in the morning but we could start at 5.55.a.m. I had poured kerosene oil in the water pan by mistake so everything turned upside down. Yesterday while coming back from Untadhura we had seen pathway in between the narrow rocks. While treading on it today it appeared to be really very dangerous. We moved ahead along with the rivulet coming from the direction of Kingri Vingri Lha. One km onwards the stream flowing from Untaghura mingles with it. Near Kholi Gadyaar that our friends described as the gateway of Bharat mata, the river grows very narrow and flows in the midst of rocks as well as under the snow mass. And then the winding slope begins. I had problem even in climbing up slowly. Headache, breathlessness and loss of energy. Virat Moren could be viewed at the next turn. On turning back the peaks of Untadhura and Hardeval with which Meelam glacier is enjoined, were visible. The mountain that we trekked on at the moment is a striking rocky mountain covered with thin snow. At a far off distance Khingru pass seemed to be linked with the sky.

The height of Khingru is 17000 feet. There is relatively not much snow. The this line of Chitmu river is visible. Khingru gaar springs up from Khingru pass. Both of them mingle with Chudang down below. Our next destination was Lapthal a glimpse of which we could perceive yesterday while climbing down from Khingru. There are two Lapthals. *Malla* and *Talla*. Talla is now barren. After crossing the river we encountered some slope. After negotiating the slope we walked on an even ground. Moving ahead we came across Kio gaar originating from Kio pass. But prior to that I had to lie down on the stretcher. Dr Saxena had already sent Mahender to bring stretcher seeing my condition. I lie down quietly with my eyes closed. GP of SPF had shouldered the responsibility to reach me up to the destination.

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We departed from Lapthal on September 14<sup>th</sup>. I was again on stretcher. The track was so arduous that I was tied to the stretcher.

By the evening we reached Malari. Black coloured houses. A very small market. Approximately 200 families are here. Cultivation and goat rearing are their main occupation. Some people have gone out for jobs. There is also the traditional occupation of weaving carpets but they are not as developed as in Munsyari. There is the confluence of Girthi and Dhauri in Malari. Immediately after descending from Malari the deodar trees can be seen. Ahead of Malari passing through Bankosa, Maap, Kund, Jalam, Khuma, Bargaon and Raini finally we reached Joshimath on the evening of September 25<sup>th</sup>. By the time we reached Joshimath from Malari human habitation grew dense. Watching the river flowing down through mountains and narrow rocks forming the angles between 100 degree to 110 degree one wonders how man can settle down in hills. But as we walked down, the doors of the hill opened up and the valleys broadened. The bounty of vegetation was on the ascent and the whirlwind like river calmed down and we could perceive the big and small villages, our own familiar world. Our mindset is changing. Now I can notice that the clothes are dirty, face is sun tanned, newspaper, transistor, the news— what is happening in our world? And Dr Saxena says to me, “This is your rebirth”. I look up at him gratefully. This has been possible because of him.

*Hindi original* “Untadhura Ke Aar Paar  
Urf Yatra Meelam Malaari ki”

*Translated by Jaiwanti Dimri*



## The Ink Tablet

Geeta Gairola

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**H**anging my satchel on my shoulder and filling water in the bottle in my hand, I said to my mother in a hurry, "Mother, Please give me quickly an ink tablet." Mother poured down water in my bottle and poured into it a little bit of ink from the ink bottle kept inside the room. "Only this much of ink?" Thumping my foot on the floor and demanding for more ink I put forward my bottle in front of mother. "Go ahead lass," mother admonished me stamping a solid slap on my head. "This much is enough. Every day you spill ink. I'll give you some more tomorrow. Make a fast move, all the children have left for school." Mother passed on the ink bottle in my hand tightening its lid and pushing me towards school.

Prior to heading towards school, this was a daily ritual. I always asked mother for the ink tablet. Mother would break the tablet into four pieces and drop one tiny piece of it into my bottle and sometimes pour some ink in my bottle from one big ink bottle. The day I filled my bottle with more water the shade of the ink got lighter and I would create a great hue and cry. Masterji scolded us if we wrote with a lighter shade of ink.

In Temporary class One and Permanent class One we went to school with *paati*- a big wooden slate in diagonal shape, one holder and a pot full of wet clay. Every morning we would paint our *paati* with a wet cloth smeared in the soot of the griddle. When the soot of the *paati* dried up, we would shine our *paati* with the bottom of an empty glass bottle.

Once the *paati* got the shine, we drew a straight line on it with a thread dipped in clay holding it from one end to another

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to write the alphabets 'Aa' and 'Aaa'. On the other side of the paati we drew columns with squares for writing numbers and tables. Once we reached school, Masterji would let us sit in the class only after checking our paati with the desired lines drawn on it. In our school there was no mat available for the small children to sit upon. Therefore we also carried a rug sack along with the paati and clay pot. Once we reached school, all of us sang the prayer in chorus standing in a row. 'O God! Grant us the bounty of devotion and compassion, grant us purity of soul.'

After the prayer was over, two children would fetch water in a bucket from the nearby spring. Two children would sweep all the classrooms. Rest of the children cleaned the school ground picking up pieces of paper and pebbles strewn here and there. A girl student of class Five prepared tea for Masterji. The children were assigned duties for each and every task.

All the children were taught Hindi and Mathematics before the interval. There were two teachers in our school. The Headmaster taught the children from class One to class Three. Holding the hand of each child Masterji taught us to write alphabets, syllabary, numbers and tables. The first thing he did on entering the class was to write numbers, tables, alphabets and syllabary in beautiful calligraphy on the blackboard which served as the syllabus to be taught for the entire day.

In the next class we were taught to write on the copy with ink. From the time I entered the class till I left school— my bag, books, copies, hands, face, teeth— everything was smeared with ink. The ink marks on my thumb, index finger and ring finger would not fade off despite being washed off umpteen times.

Grandpa would daily make pens from the stem of bamboo offshoots. He would tidy up the covers of our copies and books, still I was prone to upset something or the other every day. I was

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quizzed at the fact when all the studies-related items were kept in the custody of grandpa and he was the one who taught us daily, how come the ink bottle and ink tablets were assigned in the custody of mother though grandpa only purchased them? Grinding quite a few of ink tablets Mother would drop and dilute them in a water bottle. She would conceal this bottle, from the sight of her children. If we ever could lay our hands on the ink bottle, we filched ink from it into our bottles in great measure and in our hurry would often spill ink. Many times we had been spanked by mother with the rolling pin for this offence.

One ink bottle was also fixed in grandpa's pen stand and once in a while I would also filch ink from his pen stand and fill up the bottle with water.

The people from all households came to grandpa to get their letters written by him. Grandpa would dip the nib of the pen in the ink bottle and the day he noticed the ink of a lighter shade, my theft was found out. Sometimes I would quietly take away grandpa's holder to school and when the nib of the folder was broken, I stealthily fixed it back on the pen stand.

I was the only person to indulge in such kind of filching. *Didi*, - my elder sister didn't need to indulge in such kind of petty filching. She did not write with a make-do pen of bamboo offshoot or a holder. Father and uncle always brought for her colourful fountain pens from *des*. Opening up the back part of the pen or the frontal part of the nib she filled the pen with lots of ink that lasted the whole day. She did not need to carry an extra ink bottle. She also owned a colour box, paint brush, colourful pencils and erasers.

Father had also brought for didi a red pencil, a pen box and a school bag that could be hung back on both shoulders. Poor me! I went to school with a make-do hand bag. Only when didi got

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a new item, the second hand goods were passed on to me. I was enticed by didi's suits, shoes, coat and *dupattas*. Whenever I got the chance, I would stealthily touch her belongings or wear them. It was fine if she did not come to know about it. I wonder how she got an air of it and then I was given a thorough bashing up. Still I would not shy away from such misdemeanor and when consequently I was bashed up, I hurled back abuses at her in retaliation. Colourful goods concealed by her always tempted me.

She took a great delight in tempting her younger siblings with her attractive belongings. She equally delighted in bashing us up. Taking it as her right she asserted it as and when she so desired.

The secret as to why mother concealed the ink bottle from our sight was revealed to me shortly after a few days only. One of our paternal aunts in the village was recently married. Her groom worked in Delhi. Taking me for a literate, this aunt of mine secretly invited me to her house with a paper, pen and ink and started narrating letter for her brand new groom.

Till then Masterji had taught us in school to write application for leave apart from letter to one's father. On aunt's invitation I proceeded to her house no doubt as a proud literate but I was at a loss how to begin the letter for aunt's groom on her behalf. When Masterji taught us to write letter to one's father, he had instructed us to begin the letter with 'Respected father, Respectful greetings.'

I enquired the aunt, "Aunt, what do I write?" She replied a bit coyly, "You write - 'Respected Soul Mate. Touching your feet respectfully.'" The aunt went on dictating and I penned down accordingly. At the end of the letter, the aunt especially dictated, "I remember you a lot. I miss you very much. Please do come at your earliest and take me too to Delhi along with you."

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For the first time in my life I had penned down a love letter for the paternal aunt. How could I withhold my patience? The aunt had warned me not to disclose this matter to anyone. But the first ever letter written by me in my life was my achievement. Concomitantly the contents of the letter dictated by the aunt reached from one mouth to another in no time to all the womenfolk, — young and old in the village. Poor aunt was so embarrassed that never again could she dare dictate her letter to me. Not only the paternal aunt, no one in the village had the courage to let me read or write their letters after this incident. The catchy point of discussion was – “I remember you a lot. I miss you very much. Come soon and take me to Delhi with you.”

Paternal aunt was after all the daughter of the village, so everybody reconciled with, ‘take me to Delhi’ without much ado. The real issue pertained to the daughters-in-law of the village. The mothers of young sons grew apprehensive. What if their daughters-in-law too were to mislead their sons in the letters being dictated by them? This fear gripped the heart of every son and mother-in-law.

In those days my mother was the only educated woman in the entire village capable of reading stories and novels. Such an educated daughter-in-law cuts and brings home twenty piles of grass. She was the one to cut the biggest bundle of firewood. This was a hot topic of discussion in the nearby villages apart from our own village. Grandpa and grandma took great pride in such praises of mother.

Father used to write letters to mother separately. Grandpa would hand over all the letters addressed to mother unopened. In those days there used to be one postman for distributing letters in several villages. That postman would discuss this fact at great

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length that letters came in the name of police inspector's daughter-in-law, my grandfather being in police service.

Mother would read out the contents of maternal grandfather's letter to grandma. It was a matter of immense satisfaction for grandma that her daughter-in-law read out the entire letter of her father to her. Father also wrote letters to mother, she read out that letter also to grandma but selectively reading out only those portions that were meant for grandma.

Many a time grandma would say to us—'Baba, your mother narrated to me only a little bit but the letter was full. What else could be penned down there? Who knows if grandma bemoaned her illiterate status! She was always reprimanded by grandpa on this account. 'Keep quiet, you stupid. Wouldn't the daughter-in-law read out only that much which is meant for you? Don't you have the sense that there are grown up children around?' Heaving a cool sigh grandma would say in a singsong voice, "Doon't know these new facts of modern times." May be grandma was apprehensive of what the daughter-in-law must be writing in her letters, she must not mislead her son.

Grandpa very well fathomed the meaning of 'doon't know' uttered with a deep sigh. He always sided with my mother. Grandma did not very much appreciate mother's reading of stories and novels but mother could not go to sleep without reading. Despite toiling hard in the fields the whole day she would read at night without fail. Grandma often said to mother, "Daughter-in-law, don't you read so much in the light of the lamp, your eyesight is likely to be spoiled." The dexterous, workaholic daughter-in-law never gave an opportunity to anyone to find fault with her. How could grandma admit that she didn't like her reading? Sometimes mother read out to grandma the story read by her. I still remember the story "Death of the Moon"

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published in *Sarita* that mother had read out to grandma. Shivani's story "Toap" published in the magazine *Maya* too I had heard from mother while she was reading it out to grandma.

All the daughters-in-law of our neighbourhood came to mother to get their letters written for their migrant husbands. I have a feeling that the love letters of many of mother's young as well as old sisters-in-law also came in her name. Poor newly married husbands could not write letters for their beloveds for fear of their families and the village folk. How could the beloveds read these love letters seeped in deep feeling of love? There was no justification for posting letters in their name.

My mother was everyone's bosom friend. That is why all the daughters-in-law returning from their natal home brought separate *kalyo*- gift of eatables for mother. Wrapped in the leaves of *Malu* and bound with the thread of *bhimal*, the pooris, cutlets of urad dal and the sweet pancakes made of grinded rice.

In Garhwal there is a unique way of expressing love and affection. Whenever any of mother's friends left for town with her husband, all of her friends would escort her half way. There is no farm work in the hills from October to March. Most of the newlywed daughters-in-law head on to their natal home during these days. The parents-in-law of certain fortunate daughters-in-law would send them to their sons in town during this time. Most of the daughters-in-law would return to their village by the end of March. Only these five or six months' period amounted to their honeymoon.

The ongoing act of getting their letters penned down by mother was thoroughly disliked by the mothers-in-law. Every time the suspicion lurked in their mind, — who knows what the daughter-in-law must be dictating in her letter against them. These mothers-in-law who were grandma's elder or younger sisters-in-

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law would express their grudge to her about it. Siding with them Grandma too lessened her apprehensions. Receiving letters in mother's name was rumoured to be a matter of defame. People dare not say so openly due to grandpa's reputation but behind mother's back she must have been called shameless and brazen. Who would be dispatching letters in women's name in those days? Neither the women could read letters nor any man dare post a letter in his wife's name.

Letters were received but addressed only to the elderly and aged male members of the family. How could the elders in the family reconcile with the fact that letters were addressed to their daughters-in-law? Since there was no need for their name they would tend to forget even their names. Either they were the daughters-in-law of the village or the mothers of so and so.

The only trustworthy friend of one and all was my mother. She was the one to send the amorous messages of all to their paramours wrapped in a bundle of words. The messages of their paramours came back safely to her. Burdened with the load of numerous hill tasks and exhausted, putting up with the taunts and teasing of the elderly folks, these newlywed beloveds surely must be grumbling in their letters. They must also be imploring their husbands to take them along with them to des. To whom could they complain against their sisters-in-law and mother-in-law? Where and to whom they could possibly plead for soap, oil, dhoti and blouse? One person who could share their pain and agony of the nine months old workload of hill farming and the fatigue carrying on their heads the bundles of grass and firewood cut from far off jungles had left for des. The one and the only medium of sending the melodies of their nostalgic songs sung during the foggy and wintry days of *chaumasa* was a 'letter'.

Verily, my mother was an ink tablet for her friends who would string their pain and love, their entreaties, cravings and fantasies

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in a blue pearl made from the solution of ink tablets and transport them to a destination where the dream birds of mother's friends obtained wings and these butterflies perched on the uneven branches of life hummed love songs.

*Hindi original* "Syahee ki Tikki"

*Translated by* **Jaiwanti Dimri**



## Mountains Calling

Harshwanti Bisht

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Whenever I remember my childhood, memories of my pre-school in Jhansi come vividly before my mind's eye. I remember how in this school there were many types of activities for children such as singing, dancing, playing etc. which we enjoyed a lot. We were given biscuits, cakes, fruits and milk. Besides this, there was a special period for sleeping also! Our pillows etc were deposited in the school itself and in this special period we were asked to sleep. The curtains were pulled down and we did go to sleep really: But I also remember distinctly that the milk which was served to us in the school was never to my liking. I would always request my parents that they should ask the school authorities not to pressurize me to drink milk, otherwise I would stop going to school. Later on I learnt that the milk which we were made to drink was prepared from milk powder. Even today I'm not able to drink powdered milk, nor can I eat sweets made from milk powder. Perhaps some experiences, some tastes of childhood are imprinted so indelibly on our minds that they are hard to erase.

From Jhansi, my father was transferred to Sikandarabad where I studied in a Central School. In those days families used to be large. Ours too was a big family. We were four sisters and three brothers : some were in school, while others were in college or university. All the three brothers were elder to the sisters: I was second among sisters. There are many advantages in a joint family. In a joint family, children automatically imbibe the values of sharing and caring, the values of co-operation etc. After my father's retirement from army, our family settled in Kotdwar. I completed the rest of my education from Kotdwar only. I had always seen my parents working very hard and

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leading a life of honesty. It motivated me also to always work hard.

Though my father was a retired army officer, he always took pride in doing his work himself. He also inspired me to do hard work. Kotdwar is a small town of Pauri district of Garhwal region : I always liked the cordial and friendly environment existing in Kotdwar at that time. I remember how on the last day of every month when the school closed early, I used to climb the nearby hill alongwith my friends. We would pluck amla fruits from amla tree. Once in a while we would also go for a picnic either on the banks of Kho river or amid small hillocks. It was such a fun! Even today I remember my childhood friends and playmates : Neema, Kamla, Manju and Kulwant Kaur. I am in touch with some of them.

I did my post graduation from Kotdwar. After that I decided to pursue Ph D from Agra University. Shortly after I reached Agra , I received a letter from home that I was selected as a degree college lecturer. The decision whether I should join service as a lecturer of Economics in Pauri Degree College or to pursue my Ph D studies was left to me. Without wasting a moment, I decided that I would join service as a lecturer. I packed my things and from Agra College hostel, I returned to Kotdwar. I went to Pauri with my father and joined duty as Lecturer of Economics in Govt. Degree College, Pauri on 8-3-1977. In less than a year of joining, the college was made a constituent college of Garhwal University and I was transferred to Govt. PG College Rishikesh. I joined duty in Govt. PG College, Rishikesh.

During those early days of lectureship in Pauri and Rishikesh, it was quite a formidable task for me to prepare lectures , staying awake during nights for long hours and then to teach students, some of whom were older than me, but gradually I adapted myself to my new role. Not only this, I soon

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acquired mastery in it. In Pauri, my residence was near Garhwal Sweet house: I stayed in Thakur Parmendra Singh Rawat's house. The college building was situated on a mountain slope and it was quite challenging to reach there, especially when I went to the college clad in a starched cotton saree. However, as it was the initial period of my service, in my youthful enthusiasm I liked all this exercise. Even today the memories of those days rev me up. We were only two female teachers in the college but overall the male colleagues and the students were all very good. Within a short span of eleven months, I was transferred from Pauri to Rishikesh and then to Kotdwar.

As mentioned earlier, Kotdwar is my hometown also. After my transfer, I got a chance to live with my parents and sisters once again. While in Kotdwar, I worked really hard to further polish my teaching and for further advancement of my knowledge. I realized that for teaching in a degree college, one must necessarily pursue research and it is very important for a teacher to obtain a Ph D degree. I wanted to pursue research on the topic, "Tourism in Garhwal Himalayas." I was of the view that to get a Ph D degree on this topic simply by perusing some books on Garhwal tourism would be unfair. For obtaining a Ph D degree, I myself must scale the heights of Garhwal mountains; I must 'experience' those heights by ascending them. When this matter was discussed with my family members, their consensus was that I had passed my post graduation and hence I was mature enough to decide on all these matters related to my research. I must do it all by myself whether undertaking field visits, tours and surveys etc. At that time I was reminded of Col. L.P. Sharma, Principal of NIM (Nehru Institute of Mountaineering) who had addressed us while we were students of MA. In his address, he had told us in detail about the NIM training which was going to take place in Uttarkashi. I knew it too well that no one from my family was going to escort me for my research related explorations in the Himalayas. Therefore,

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why shouldn't I join the training course at Uttarkashi so that I'm able to see the higher reaches of this Himalayan region, I thought. This would help me immensely in my research on adventure tourism.

I decided to pursue basic course from NIM in June 1978; I filled up the form for the same. I reached Uttarkashi IMA for doing this course. Next day all the candidates were made to undergo medical fitness test. The words of senior instructor NIM Uttarkashi Shri Harbans Singh still ring in my ears: "This girl is underweight. We would send her back from the course." I didn't like these words at all. They were like bolt from the blue for me; I was depressed. I asked my trainers not to give undue consideration to my low weight. I convinced them that I was physically very strong. I would prove my fitness by lifting heavy luggage and walking swiftly. At the end of our medical test, except for being underweight, I was found to be completely fit. I was not asked to go back home again. I passed my basic training of 28 days with 'A' grade. It motivated me to go for advanced training course. Though I couldn't do this training in 1979 due to some personal reasons, I did do it in 1980 with 'A' grade. When I look back, I think what a time it was! Hardly eight- ten girls were able to enroll for an advanced course and it was considered such a big deal. Look at today's times! Bookings for such trainings are made years in advance. Perhaps one of the reasons for low enrolment in those days was insufficient awareness about such mountaineering courses. Besides this, girls were particularly discouraged from taking up such trainings. Hardly did eight- ten girls come up for registration. During my training there were girls from different states of India. All of us used to sit and discuss together the various aspects of mountaineering. It was done in a disciplined way. Girls of a group co-operated with each other. Someone excelled in technique while some other was good at weight lifting. There was still another who had a flair for cultural activities, but

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overall, the entire group worked on the principle of co-operation and co-ordination.

The process of training was still going on, when I received an invitation from NIM for participating in alpine style climbing camp which I promptly accepted. I participated in this camp. For the first time I came to know that mountaineering is done in small groups also where one does climbing with the help of a very few porters and one also has to cook one's food etc. This type of climbing is no less interesting and one enjoys it also a lot. The same year, i.e. in 1981, when I received a letter of selection from National Institute of Mountaineering Delhi for participating in Nanda Devi Mountaineering Expedition, I just couldn't believe it! I made my preparations and reported at NIM Delhi in 1981. While in Delhi I made the necessary purchases and finalized all other arrangements. After this, myself and Shri Ratan Singh Chauhan ( Senior Instructor NIM) started off for Joshimath as Advance Party. At Joshimath we arranged for porters before the expedition group reached there. We also collected detailed information regarding the routes as well as the condition of camps. We arranged load-carrying sheep also.

As soon as the other members of the expedition group arrived there, we boarded a vehicle and reached the road head. From there our caravan of foot travelers started traversing through villages such as Lata-Raini. We crossed various halts. After setting up the fourth Camps, we started making preparations for climbing the Nanda Devi peak on 19<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1981. A group of three women and three men started climbing the peak. We started at 4 a.m. and were able to reach the top at 5:30 in the evening. At that time, none of us had even the slightest idea that we were creating history not only in India but in the entire world, so far as women climbing the Nanda Devi peak are concerned. Even today only three women (including myself) have successfully climbed the "killer mountain" on

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Nanda Devi in the whole world. After staying at the top for some time, our group started climbing down. I was with Ratan Singh and Chandra didi was with Paljor. When we saw that instead of climbing down in a pair of two each, it would be much better if all four of us tied ourselves in rope and descended together, we did accordingly and started climbing down. It started getting darker. On a moonlit night and with the help of headlights, we were climbing down. But all of a sudden, due to a mistake of Chandra didi and Paljor, all four of us started falling down. Had Ratan Singh not resorted to self-arrest in those few crucial moments, all of us would have fallen to our deaths on that fateful day on 20<sup>th</sup> September. Our expedition group somehow reached the camp. There we rested for a while and refreshed our tired bodies with tea and water. Then we started climbing further down . When we reached the base camp, we found that due to not wearing gloves - we had misplaced them somewhere during our journey- our fingers were inflicted with chilblain. We took medicines to cure it. After our expedition, a member of our group Nand Lal successfully undertook one man expedition, by climbing the Nanda Devi peak alone. We closed the base camp now and started preparing for further climbing down. The entire group finally reached Delhi via Joshimath and Dehradun.

As a lecturer, my focus should have been on my research work but as I did these mountaineering courses , they served as field studies for my Ph.D. work. In fact I got so much joy from these courses that I continued doing mountaineering alongwith my teaching. Sometimes it seemed as if I was focusing more on mountaineering than on my teaching. After '81, pre-Everest camps began to be organized every year by NIM Delhi. All of us started undergoing training for such camps at least once a year. In '84, there was a very long expedition, an Indian Mountaineering Expedition which lasted for a few months. In this Expedition, Bachhendri Pal, Latu, Fu Dorji and Sonam

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Paljor scaled the peak. A wave of joy ran through the group. It was a successful expedition and every one celebrated at base camp. During the course of this expedition, I was highly impressed by the environment conservation work done by the great mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary in Solu-Khumbu district. Sir Hillary had also contributed greatly to preserve the socio-cultural ethos of this region. He had helped in setting up hospitals and schools in this area. Under his inspiration, several eco-conservation projects were also carried out.

After our expedition group reached Delhi, I also returned to Kotdwar and got busy with my teaching and studies once again. I thought that during the period '78 - to '84, I had already climbed several peaks such as Baby Shivaling, Thailu, Kala Naag, Gangotri 1 and Nanda Devi. Not only this, I had also been a part of Everest Expedition. Now I should do something else. As a teacher, I should now aim for research and this research work, instead of focusing on general tourism, must focus on 'Adventure Tourism'. I drafted a new synopsis for my Ph.D. and applied for fresh registration in Garhwal University. After I was registered, I starting working on the topic "Tourism in Uttarkashi and Chamoli Districts of Garhwal" (with Special Reference to Trekking and Mountaineering). I also included the case study of Nanda Devi Expedition in my Ph.D. thesis. My research work was appreciated a lot. Though I had been participating in seminars and conferences since the beginning, now I stated focusing more on adventure tourism. As a result, I acquired a lot of expertise in it. I also got my Ph.D. thesis published. Besides, this, several of my research papers were also published. After my study, I realized that adventure tourism has started negatively impacting our eco system in the upper reaches of Himalayan region, as our tourism activity was unplanned. With a lot of tourists visiting these beautiful tourist spots, the region was getting polluted due to waste material left behind by the tourists. As a result, the flora and fauna of this region

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were slowly getting extinguished. In view of all this, I started firmly believing that only planned tourism activity should be carried out in these higher reaches. I focused on the Gangotri Gomukh region as my area of work at a time when people were branding Adventure Tourism as 'Smokeless Tourism', identifying it with development of the hill region. I on my part emphasized that Adventure Tourism should be developed in a well thought out, well planned manner, which takes into account the environmental and ecological aspects also. I submitted a research proposal entitled, "Tourism in Uttarkashi & Chamoli District of Garhwal" with Special Reference to Trekking and Mountaineering to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. The proposal was accepted. I wrote in my suggestions that there are immense possibilities of tourism in the Gangotri-Gomukh region but we would have to carry out these activities in a well planned way. No doubt, we are reaping economic benefits from these pilgrimages and tourism activities but they have also started negatively impacting our environment and eco system. Hence we should start conserving our fragile eco system before it is too late.

To implement these suggestions, we prepared a nursery of birch, *Salix babilonia*, *Populus ciliate* and *Juniper* (bhoj, bhangil, pahadi peepal and thelu) in '95 at a place called Cheerbasa which is nine kms from Gangotri on Gomukh route. In '96 with the permission of Forest Dept, we planted 1500 saplings of *bhoj*, *bhangil*, *pahadi peepal* and *thelu* in an area of 2.5 hectare at Bhojbasa which is five kms away from Cheerbasa on Gomukh route. Those tiny saplings are now 10-15 ft high trees. Again in '97, one km away from Bhojbasa, nearly ten thousand Bhoj and Bhangil saplings were planted by us in an area of 5.5 hectare which are now 8-10 ft high trees. It is really a joyous experience to sit under the shade of these trees. When I look at the bugyal grass growing under them, my heart is filled with great happiness. I experience a feeling of self- fulfillment. This feeling can't really

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be expressed in words. These beautiful trees, the long slopes of green velvety grass: all these are like my kith and kin. I enjoy lying quietly under the thick shade of these trees: it seems there is no pain, no problem in my life. The sun blazing in its full glory, the cool shade of a Bhoj tree, the rocky mountains all around and the snow- clad mountain peaks: all this provides eternal joy. I have only one wish: to lose myself forever in these lovely mountains.

*Hindi original* "Parvaton Ka Aakarshan"

*Translated by Madhu D. Singh*





## CONTRIBUTORS

**Diwa Bhat:** Diwa Bhatt is Professor of Hindi in Kumaun University, Almora. She pursued her early education from Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani, Almora. She completed the rest of her education from Bhav Nagar Gujarat and obtained Ph.D degree from Gujarat Vidyapeeth Ahmedabad. Among her notable works are- *Mere Desh Ki Chandni* (Story collection), *Aniket* (Novel), *Aksharon Ka Pul* (Poetry collection), *Kshanana Bhara Sahiyara* (Collection of Gujarati Poems), *Himalayi lok Jeevan* (Shodh Samiksha), *Uttarakhand Ki Lok Sahitya Parampara* (Shodh Samiksha), *Sahitya Ki Pratidhvaniyan* (Shodh Samiksha). She has edited many books. Her works have been published in Hindi and Gujarati magazines and newspapers. They have been translated into Gujarati, Malayali, Punjabi, Oriya and English. She has been honoured with Uttar Pradesh Hindi Academy Puraskar, Sarika Puraskar, Sanjeevani Samman, Bhagini Nivedita Puraskar of Gujarat Sahitya Parishad.

**Gangotri Gabryal** is one of the pioneers of women education in Uttarakhand. Born in Gabryal village of Pithoragarh district in 1918, she studied in her village school till class IV. She did her matriculation from Almora and later on pursued education upto M A as a private student. In fact she was the first woman in Gabryang patti to obtain an M A degree. As a social activist also, she contributed greatly to the cause of women upliftment in general. In 1948 she was elected unopposed in District Board elections. She was the first woman to hold the post of deputy chairperson of District Board Almora till 1952. She worked as a teacher and later on as a Principal in different govt girls schools of Garhwal and Kumaun region as well as those of Bareilly. A member of various social organizations, she undertook padyatra for the cause of Liquor Prohibition. Honoured by different organizations for her work, she received the Best Teacher award

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from the then President of India Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan in 1964. She also successfully handled the managerial responsibilities of Swami Narayan Ashram Pithoragarh. Her reminiscences were initially published serially in Uttara Mahila Patrika which were later published in a book form under the title *Yaadein* by Uttara Prakashan. A chapter titled *Bachpan ke Wo Din* from the book *Yaadein* has been translated in the present book.

**Geeta Gairola:** Born in Bhatti village of Pauri Garhwal, Geeta Gairola has carved a niche for herself due to her involvement in social work, specially for the upliftment of women. As Director of Mahila Samakhya, Uttarakhand, she has reached out to more than sixty thousand women and empowered them. She was inspired to take up social work by Sarvodaya Karyakarta Shri Bhawani Bhai and Shri Bihari Lal Ji. She has also been working for gender equality for past three decades. Her articles, poems and stories have been published in Saptahik Hindustan, Hans, Aadharshila, Katha, Desh, Uttara Mahila Patrika, Yugvani and Lok Ganga. Her works published so far include – *Nupeelan ki Maayaro Paabi* ( Collection of Hindi poems ) *Na Main Birwa Na Main Chiriya* (collection of Autobiographies of women writers), *Bol ki lab azad hain tere* (based on the struggle of women) and *Malyon Ki Daar* (An Autobiography). Geeta Gairola has undertaken Padyatras such as Belak Yatra, Mahasartal Yatra and Nanda Devi Raj jat Yatra. Honored by different Newspaperes and organizations such as Amar Ujala, Hindustan, and Divya Jyoti Jagriti Sansthan, Geeta Gairola has been regularly invited by various colleges, universities and other organizations for lectures on women empowerment.

**Harshwanti Bisht:** Principal of Doiwala Degree College, Dehradun, Dr Harshwanti Bisht is a well known sports person who has been conferred many awards such as Arjuna Award (1981) by Dept of Sports Govt of India; Uttarakhand Gaurav

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(2006) by Uttarakhand Club, Delhi; Himgiri Gaurav (2006) by Himgiri Society Dehradun; Environment Award (2005) by Himalayan Environment Trust, New Delhi; Garh Vibhuti Samman (2004) by Akhil Garhwal Sabha Dehradun; Gold Medal (1985) by Directorate of Higher Education U P; CII North Zone Annual Green Award (2010) and Hind Prabha Samman (2010) by Mahila Manch, Meerut. Dr Bisht is Life Member of Himalayan Club, Mumbai. She was on the Steering Committee of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Uttarakhand in 2001 and 2002, she is Honorary Life Warden of Uttarkashi District 2004-2005, Life Member of PAHAR, Nainital and Life Member of Indian Mountaineering Foundation, New Delhi. Author of the book *Tourism in Garhwal Himalaya*, she has also edited the book *Tourism and Himalayan Biodiversity*. Dr Bisht has visited California, Japan, Nepal and Switzerland to participate in seminars on mountaineering and conservation of bio diversity.

**Jaiwanti Dimri** is a bilingual writer, critic and translator. She retired from H P University Shimla as Prof of English in 2010. A recipient of Arya Smriti Samman (2002) in the genre of Hindi short story, her short stories have been published in national journals , anthologies and translated into English , Telugu and Marathi. A former Fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Studies Shimla, she has held various positions in India and abroad. She taught in Nigeria (1982-83) and Bhutan under Colombo plan ( 1997-99). Since her retirement she has been a Visiting Faculty in Doon University , Dehradun (2012-13) and International Visiting Professor ( IVP) in Portland State University, US, ( 2013). She has lectured extensively in the universities of India and abroad in seminars , conferences and Refresher Courses . Her area of specialization is Postcolonial, Subaltern, Culture Studies and Translation Studies. She worked on a major UGC Project *The Image of the Tribal in Indian*

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*Fiction and Films* (2005-2006) and was editor for Summerhill, IAS Shimla ( Vol. XIII, No 1 and 2,2007). She has eight books in English and Hindi to her credit, besides numerous research papers in national and international journals. Some of her publications are: *The Images and representations of the Rural Woman* (IIAS, 2012), *A Critical Study of Ernest Heminway's Stories and Non-fiction*, (Anmol,1994), *The Drupka Mystique: Bhutan in Twenty First Century*( Authorspress, 2004), two novellas in Hindi *Surju Ke Naam* (Jnanpith, 2006), *Pinddaan* (Vaani, 2012), two story collections *Gagar Bhar Paani* (Sanmarg, 2004) and *Dusra Narak Kund* (2004) and *Sahastra Netradhari Nayak* ( Rajkamal, 2009) a translated work.

**Kusum Bhatt:** Born in Pauri Garhwal in1960 ,Kusum Bhatt is a well known writer of Uttarakhand. An M A in Hindi Literature, her stories, articles and poems have been published in various magazines and news papers such as Hans, Vaagarth, Kadambini, Jansatta, Outlook, India Today, Dainik Jagaran and Amar Ujala . Some of her main works are *James Watt ki Ketli* (Saamayik Prakashan), *Khilta Hai Buraansh*— Story Collection ( Jyoti Prakashan), *Laut Aao Shishir* ( Aru Prakashan), *Bacha Lo Uski Aankh Ka Paani* - Anthology of Poems. Besides these, *Meri Priya Kathayein* and one more story collection is to be published shortly. Some of her stories have been translated into Kannad, Urdu and Oriya. Her story *Nadi Tum Bahati Kyun Ho* has been enacted as a play by Manthan drama troupe of Mumbai. Her stories , talks etc have been telecast by Doordarshan and Aakaashvani Nazibabad, Shimla, Delhi, Jaipur and Pauri. She has participated in many national Kavi Sammelan. A free lance writer, Kusum Bhatt takes keen interest in social work also.

**Madhu Joshi :** Having taught English Literature for three decades, Prof. Madhu Joshi took voluntary retirement from Kumaun.University Nainital in 2015. She now does freelance writing and editorial work. A versatile writer, she writes in

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Hindi as well as English. She has five books to her credit , namely *The Crossroads*, *Trayodashpadi*, *Khamosh Lamhe*, *Makaan*, *Manuj aur Moksha* and *A Perfectly Useless Life* –all published by Power Publishers Kolkata. Besides these she has also translated eleven short stories from Hindi into English, published in *Milestones*, *Almora*.

More than fifty articles/translations/stories of Madhu Joshi have been published in *Uttara Mahila Patrika*, Nainital. She has also edited, with Shekhar Pathak, *Says Gumani*, *Charu Chandra Pande*, published by Pahar: Nainital. She has translated an article on George William Trail from English into Hindi, published in *Kumaun*. She has translated a poem from Kumaoni into English which was published in *Uplabdh*, Nainital. Two poems of Madhu Joshi in English were published in *Sharad Nanda*, Nainital Sharadotsav Samiti, Nainital. Her article on Pandita Ramabai Saraswati was published in *Antarang Sangini*, Mumbai.

**Sujata Singh:** Born in Himachal Pradesh, Sujata Singh's childhood years were spent in Himachal Pradesh, a state with lots of natural beauty. In the words of author herself 'It has also shaped her creative expression'. After her schooling from Himachal Pradesh, Sujata Singh did her post graduation in Food Science and Nutrition. Thereafter, she joined ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 1992. After serving for about a decade in U.P., she joined the newly born Uttaranchal (Uttarakhand) in the year 2000. Since then, she has been serving the state in various capacities. Besides story writing, Sujata Singh takes keen interest in gardening and reading. Ms. Sujata is presently working as Deputy Director in the Department of Women Empowerment and Child Development of Uttarakhand Dehradun. The interaction with the women of cross-sections of society has enriched the author with different facets of Himalayan women. The interactive process has motivated her to pen down their despair, hopes,

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struggle and social position etc. in the form of stories. She has written most of the stories based on real incidents.

**Sumitra Dhulia:** A former Professor of Kendriya Adhyapan Vigyam Sansthan (CPI) Allahabad, Sumitra Dhulia is a veteran writer of Uttarakhand. Daughter-in-law of renowned freedom fighter and editor of *Karma Bhoomi* news paper, late Bhairav Dutt Dhulia, Sumitra Dhulia's articles have been published in various magazines and newspapers. She conducted many workshops organized by CPI Allahabad. Her talks have been broadcast by Akashvani Allahabad and Nazibabad. She has also been the editor of 'Vasudhara' published by Parvatiya Jan Parishad Allahabad. She has co-edited Pt. Bhairav Dutt Dhulia Smriti Granth. Mother of famous film director Tigmanshu Dhulia, Sumitra Dhulia is a member of various social and literary organizations.

**Suneeti Rawat** is a veteran author who has to her credit several novels, short stories and poetry collections. Some of her well known novels are *Seema Rekha* and *Laung*. Her short story collections include *Rangshala*, *Anoother Anubandh* and *Teer Tarkash Ke*. Among her well known poetry collections are *Geet Nikunj*, *Chhupe Makarand*, *Sun Mitali*, *Sab Rang Palas*, *Dolte Aksh*, *Varam Bruhi*, and *Daandi Kanthi*. She has also rendered verse translation of Srimadbhagwad Gita in Hindi. Guwahati Doordarshan has telecast her stories and poems. She has also edited *Pragyan Varshiki Gyan Kosh*, *Ek Hazar Shishu Naam Vyom Bala*, a monthly magazine and daily news paper *Press Sangharsh*. She was honoured for her story collection *Gharonda* by Hindi Akademy Delhi. She was awarded Parwat Gaurav Samman by Uttarayani Sahitya Manch Delhi. She is also recipient of Mahadevi Smruti Samman, conferred by Akhil Bhartiya Rashtra Bhasha Trust Ghaziabad. She has also received Bharat Nepal Sahitya Samman. Her book *Desh Hamara* has won national award. Associated with several literary organizations currently she is engaged in free lance writing.

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**Swati Melkani:** Born in 1984 in Nainital, Swati Melkani has done her Post Graduation in Physics and Education . She is an M Ed and has qualified NET. Her stories and articles have been published in various magazines and papers such as Uttara, Paakhi, Hans, Naya Gyanodaya, Vaagarth, Aadhar Shila etc. poetry collection *Jab Main Zinda Hoti Hoon* has been published in Bhartiya Jnanpeeth Navlekhan. She is also on the panel of Hindi Text book writers of SCERT Uttarakhand. Presently she is working as Assistant Professor, Dept of Education Swami Vivekanand Govt. PG College Lohaghat, Distt Champawat, Uttarakhand.

**Uma Bhatt** is former Professor of Hindi, Kumaun University Nainital. She did her Post Graduation from Agra University Agra in 1973 . In 1982 she obtained Ph D on the topic ‘Brij Bhasha Mein Krishna Katha Ka Vikas’ from Kumaun University, Nainital. She also holds a Diploma in ‘Apbhransha Bhasha’ from Apabhransha Academy Jaipur. Her publications include *Krishnakatha : Ek Adhyayan*, published by Granthayan Aligarh, *Kahe Gumaani* , published by Pahad, Nainital, *Swayambhu Shabdakosh*, published by Apbhransha Academy Jaipur, *Asia Ki Peeth Par* published by PAHAD Nainital. Besides these Uma Bhatt has also edited reminiscences of Gangotri Gabryal published in book form under the title *Yaadein*. On panel of editorial board of PAHAD, she is also editor of *Uttara Mahila Patrika* since 1990. Her research articles have been published in various magazines and journals. Among other books edited by her are— *Virasaton Ke Saayey se Nilalkar* , Uttara Prakashan Nainital and *Uttarakhand Ki Bhashayein* published by Orient Blackswan. Two more books edited by her— *Kavivar Gumaani* and *Uttarakhand Ki Bhashaon Ka Shabdkosh*— are under publication. A indefatigable traveler, Uma Bhatt has participated in many study tours of Himalayan region.

**Veenapani Joshi:** A versatile writer, Veenapani Joshi was born in 1937. She studied in M.K.P (P.G) College, Dehradun. Her

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stories, poems and articles have been published in different magazines and newspapers such as Parvat Vani, Uttarayani, Vasudhara, Uttaranchal Patrika, Bugyal, Prayas, Nutan Sawera, Dandi-Kanthi, Himshail and Navbharat Times. Among her several research papers those focusing on Shri Chandra Kunwar Bartwal are noteworthy. A polyglot, Veenapani Joshi knows Hindi, Braj bhasha, Garhwali, Kumauni, Punjabi, Avadhi, Sanskrit and English. She has been honored by various organization such as Akhil Bhartiya Garhwal Sabha, Pragatisheel Club, Chetna, Sanskar Bharati, Uttaranchal Shodh Sansthan, Kedarkhand Sanskritik Sansthan etc. Three poetry collections of Veenapani Joshi *Pithain Puralo Burans*, *Durva Se Akshaya Vat Tak*, and *Shyam Bhanwar Kuch Bol Gaya* have been published so far.

**Vidya Singh:** Vidya Singh is Associate Prof. and Head, Dept. of Hindi in MKP ( PG) College, Dehradun. She holds a Post Graduate degree in English also. She has participated in many national and international seminars. Her stories, poems and talks have been telecast on Doordarshan. Some of the magazines in which her poems, stories and articles have been published are— Vargarth, Aadharshila, Lokganga, Abhinav Meemansa, Sanchetna, Aksharam and Sanghosthi. Her story 'Samroopa' has been translated into Oriya. An enthusiastic traveller, she has travelled to different countries of the world namely Kambodia, Nepal, Vietnam, Thailand, Mauritius, Switzerland, Belzium, Holland, France and USA. One story collection of hers is under publication.



## TRANSLATORS

**D S Kaintura:** Born in 1965 in Malli Regoli village of Tehri Garhwal, Prof Kaintura is an alumnus of HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar. He completed his Post Graduation in English Literature in 1986. He was appointed as a faculty in the Department of English in 1990 and was awarded Ph. D in the year 1998 on the topic *Theory of Impersonality and Autobiographical Elements in the plays of T S Eliot* . His areas of specialization are Modern Literary Theories and Diaspora Writings. He has supervised seven research scholars so far and his papers have been published in reputed National and International Journals. He received the Inter University Associateship of UGC and was an Associate at Institute of Advanced Studies Shimla from 2001 to 2003 , where he contributed significantly by writing extensively on literary criticism. Actively engaged in administrative work also, Prof Kaintura was Campus Director of Badshahi Thaul Tehri Campus of the University for a period of two years from July 2011 to 2013. Presently he is teaching English Literature at HNB Garhwal University Campus , Badshahi Thaul , Tehri.

**Jaiwanti Dimri** is a bilingual writer , critic and translator. She retired from H P University Shimla as Prof of English in 2010. A recipient of Arya Smriti Samman (2002) in the genre of Hindi short story, her short stories have been published in national journals , anthologies and translated into English , Telugu and Marathi. A former Fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Studies Shimla, she has held various positions in India and abroad. She taught in Nigeria (1982-83) and Bhutan under Colombo plan ( 1997-99). Since her retirement she has been a Visiting Faculty in Doon University , Dehradun (2012-13) and International Visiting Professor ( IVP) in Portland State University, US, ( 2013). She has lectured extensively in the universities of India and abroad in seminars , conferences and

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Refresher Courses . Her area of specialization is Postcolonial, Subaltern, Culture Studies and Translation Studies. She worked on a major UGC Project *The Image of the Tribal in Indian Fiction and Films* (2005-2006) and was editor for Summerhill, IAS Shimla ( Vol. XIII, No 1 and 2,2007). She has eight books in English and Hindi to her credit, besides numerous research papers in national and international journals. Some of her publications are: *The Images and representations of the Rural Woman* ( IAS ,2012), *A Critical Study of Ernest Heminway's Stories and Non-fiction*, ( Anmol,1994), *The Drupka Mystique: Bhutan in Twenty First Century*( Authorspress, 2004), two novellas in Hindi *Surju Ke Naam* (Jnanpith, 2006), *Pinddaan* (Vaani, 2012), two story collections *Gagar Bhar Paani* (Sanmarg, 2004) and *Dusra Narak Kund*(2004) and *Sahastra Netradhari Nayak* ( Rajkamal ,2009) a translated work.

**Jyoti Pandey** is Asstt.Professor, Department of English,SGRR (PG) College, Dehradun. Completing her school deucation from Welham Girls' High School,Dehradun, she did Graduation from from Kumaun University and Post Graduation in English from HNB Garhwal University. She was awarded Ph D on the topic "The Dilemma of a South African White in the novels of Nadine Gordimer" by HNB Garhwal University in the year 2004. She has worked with a Holland based company Larive International with its branch office at New Delhi as Proof Reader and English Translator from 2000-2004 and taught German language at AHA(Air Hostess Academy) from 2004-2005

She has presented several papers such on in National and International Conferences on topics such as- *The Image of a New Woman in the Poetry of Kamala Das*, *Projecting Human Rights through Literature*, *Voicing Human Rights through Literature: A study of Vijay Tendulkar's Kanyadaan* and *Female Subaltern Voices in Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi*.

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**Madhu D Singh** is Associate Professor and Head Dept of English, SGRR PG College Dehradun. As Co ordinator of Women's Studies Centre ( A UGC Sponsored Project)of the college,she has organized several Conferences,Workshops and Seminars related to women empowerment and sensitization programs. She has edited four books published by SGRR Women's Studies Centre : *Women in 21st Century : Challenges and Opportunities, Triveni* (An anthology of Garhwali and Kumauni poems of women writers of Uttarakhand translated into Hindi and English), *Uttarakhand ke Sahityik Paridrushya mein Mahila Sahityakar*, and *Short Stories and Memoirs of Women Writers of Uttarakhand*. ( A collection of short stories and memoirs translated from Hindi into English). Besides this, nine issues of the biannual newsletter of SGRR Women's Studies Centre *Shaktiroopa* have also been edited by her. Six research scholars have been awarded Ph D under her supervision. Her areas of specialization are Victorian Literature, Feminism, Indian Writing in English and Translation Studies. She has attended several conferences and workshops and has more than fifteen research publications to her credit.

**Manjulika Gogoi** is Assistant Professor & Head, Faculty of Arts & Humanities in GRD Girls Degree College, Dehradun . Her area of Specialization is Comparative Literature, Gender Studies, Women's Writing, and Indo- Anglian Literature. She was awarded Ph D on the topic *Conflicts and Dilemmas of the Doubly Marginalized 'Other' in the Works of Indira Goswami* by HNB University Srinagar Garhwal She has attended International Workshop on Creative Writing " Saraswati Muses" organized by Department of English, HNB Garhwal University and National Workshop on "General Semantics as a Human Science" organized by Balwant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences and HNB Garhwal University. Her publications are: "Conflicts of Purity and Pollution Within Castes: An Appraisal of *The Offspring* by Indira Goswami." Published in

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*Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)* and “Images and Representation of Assamese Brahmin Widows in Indira Goswami’s *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*.” Co authored with Surekha Dangwal, published in *The Atlantic Review of Feminist Studies*. She is Member of Anti Ragging Cell and Women Cell of her college.

**Seema Kaintura Sethi:** Born in Dehradun, Seema Kaintura did her schooling from Secunderabad and Darjeeling . She did her B A as well as M A as a private student from HNB University Srinagar. A voracious reader, she had a penchant for writing since the beginning . She was a regular contributor to The Times of India local supplement in Bareilly and her English essay on Indian Art and Culture won a recommendation from Royal Commonwealth Society, London. She has completed Basic German language course from Goethe Institute New Delhi. She obtained M Phil Degree on the topic “A Green Reading of I. Allen Sealy’s *The Everest Hotel*.” Having cleared NET in 2013, she is currently pursuing her Ph D from HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar on the topic “Echoes of Feminism in the writings from the Hills : A Critical Study based on the Works of Shivani, Namita Gokhale, Jaiwanti Dimri and Diwa Bhatt.



## GLOSSARY

### A

Aarti	a ceremony performed in the worship of gods by moving a lighted lamp circularly round the idol.
Akshat Parikrama	to circumambulate some object or person scattering rice.

### B

Badi ekadashi	the eleventh night of moon.
Baggar	river beds
Bajrang Bali Hanuman	a famous Hindu god, devotee of Lord Rama
Bakhara	a big wooden box with separate portion for containing grains
Baratis	members of wedding procession
Basant Panchami	spring festival
Beta	son, as term of endearment, used for daughter also
Beti	daughter
Bhabhi	brother's wife
Bhaidooj	a Hindu festival celebrated two days after Deepawali when the brothers visit their sisters
Bhaiya	to address some stranger as brother
Bhemal	a kind of tree
Bhitauli	to meet a famous cultural practice of Kumaon region in which the parents/brothers of married women visit them in chaitra month

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	with home made sweets and other gifts as token of blessings
Bissu Mela	a festival of Jaunsari tribe celebrated during harvest season.
Bohni	a shopkeeper's first sale of the day.
Bojyu	elder brother's wife
Boondi Ka Raita	spiced curd with fried granules of gram flour.
Brahma Kamal	a special kind of lotus flower which grows at great heights. This is the state Flower of Uttarakhand, its petals are offered in worship of Lord Kedarnath

## C

Chacha	paternal uncle, father's younger brother
Chaitra	the first month of the Hindu Year
Chaumasa	period of four months
Chifla	slippery

## D

Dada	paternal grand father, father's father
Dadda	elder brother
Dadi	paternal grand mother, father's mother
Dhol and Damau	drums,traditionallypopular in Uttarakhand
Doka	a big basket for carrying grass, hung on back
Dulhaini	bride
Durga	a Hindu goddess signifying valour
Dusshera	a famous festival also known as Vijay Dashmi. Lord Rama killed Ravan on this day

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**G**

Gaar	rivulet, small river
Gauri	consort of lord Shiva
Gharat	water mill. Water mills have been playing a big role in villages of Uttarakhand. They are used for grinding wheat, rice and maize etc. and also to extract oil.
Ghatwari	the person in charge of the water mill
Gori	fair
Gulokasi	a type of wooden pot

**H**

Halwa	a kind of sweet pudding
Holi	a famous festival of colours celebrated on full moon day Falgun. Falgun is the last month of Hindu Calender

**J**

Jambu	used for seasoning, grows in upper hills only
Jhabbu Bail	an ox, a crossbreed of Tibetan Yak and Indian Cow
Jumu	a cow, a cross breed of of Tibetan Yak and Indian cow

**K**

Kaka	paternal uncle, father's younger brother
Kaki	paternal aunt, wife of father's younger brother
Kali	black
Kand Mool	roots

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Khichri	a dish prepared from rice and pulse boiled together
Kuncha	the Shaukas move upto villages at higher altitudes alongwith their families, cattle and other paraphernalia during summer and again move down to villages situated at less height during winter. This movement to and fro is called Kuncha in local dialect.

## L

Laddu	a ball shaped sweet
Lalli	husband's younger sister
Linga	phallus. a form in which Lord Shiva is worshipped

## M

Malla	upper
Mallu	a kind of tree
Mama	meternal uncle, mother's brother
Mandua	a kind of grain
Mango Panna	a kind of drink prepared from raw mango during summer
Mundan	tonsure: a ceremany in which a child's hair is shaved off for the first time

## N

Namaste	a form of salutation
Nana	maternal grand father, mother's father
Nani	maternal grand mother, mother's mother

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Navratra an auspicious period of nine days in Chaitra and Aswin months of Hindu calendar during which goddess Durga/Shakti is worshipped

**O**

Om Namah Shivaya salutation to lord Shiva

**P**

Patwari land record keeper/revenue official in villages

Poori a small round shaped chapati fried in oil or ghee.

Prasad any thing, typically an edible food which is first offered to God and then distributed in His name to the devotees

Puja ritual worship

**R**

Raita curd mixed with spices and vegetables like cucumber etc.

Ram leela enactment of scenes from Lord Rama's life

**S**

Saraswati goddess of learning

Seir a unit of weight, slightly less than 1 kg

Sharawan month fifth month of Hindu Calendar, co-incides with rainy season

Shukra tara venus star

Suhaag a sign or mark such as bindi, mangal sutra etc. denoting that one's husband is alive

## T

Tadbhav	a word which has evolved organically from an Indo-Aryan form as distinct from a borrowing made at a later stage
Tai	paternal aunt, wife of father's elder brother
Talla	lower
Tau	paternal uncle, father's elder brother

## V

Vidyamata	goddess of knowledge
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