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**TRANSLATION OF SOME DALIT
SHORT STORIES
FROM HINDI TO ENGLISH**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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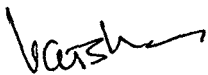
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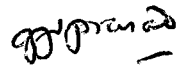
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
"TRANSLATION OF SOME DALIT SHORT STORIES FROM
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fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this university, is to the best of
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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation entitled "**TRANSLATION OF SOME DALIT SHORT STORIES FROM HINDI TO ENGLISH**" submitted by Me for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.

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I dedicate this work to all those millions who have suffered or are suffering in this world because of various social prejudices.

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Introduction

I'm burning with a feeling of revolt and I call out to you
I will write the poem of revolt on your sword
Today I have become a storm-come with me!
I reach out to you - give me your hand!
I have become the sun, my friend-- sing with me!
I have become the fire, today I am afire with fire -
Give voice to the volcano within you!¹

This clarion call by Yeshwant Manohar reverberates in different kind of writings by Dalits today and many more Dalit writers are giving voice to the volcano within themselves. Dalit literature has, in fact, come of age now. In the following paragraphs I shall discuss, Dalits, a historical perspective of their status in society, the concept of untouchability, their literature, its scope and utility and their literature in the Hindi belt.

Literature has always played a double role in the social upliftment of the subjugated classes. Every marginalized community seeking space in the society has used literature as a means of protest and as a means of creating awareness. This is because society and literature are closely related. It will not be erroneous to say that revolutions do not begin in the streets, they rather begin in the classrooms, libraries and literary circles. Literature is a potent medium for bringing about change. It is literature, which spreads the values of life. Literature can create a revolution along with the necessary philosophy and a plan of action and a group to implement them. It is this role of literature, which gave birth to Dalit writings. Dalit Literature is not simply literature. It is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and aspirations of a new society and new people.

¹Anand, Mukraj and Zelliott Eleanor. *An Anthology Of Dalit Literature* Gyan Publishing House, Delhi. 1992. P113

Literature has been assigned various metaphors by the scholars. Two most important metaphors associated with it are the lamp/illuminator and mirror. In both the cases the role of literature has to be portraying what actually is rather than what seems aesthetically pleasant. If the literature depicts everything hunky-dory in this trouble torn 'chaosmos' it works merely as a curtain that hides reality.

The stories of few aristocrats can not depict the reality of the world. This, mostly, is something the mainstream Indian literary figures have engaged themselves in. The suffering millions have been kept out of the precincts of the literature. It becomes essential, then, that those avoided by the vanguards of aesthetic expression create a literature of their own, literature that tells the truth, literature that does not try to cover up the atrocities perpetrated against those people relegated to the margins of the villages and literature. These so called outcaste people, now called Dalits, who were considered to be inferior even to the animals have now started to write their experiences in their own language, without caring too much about the essentializing aesthetic parameters. Although the mainstream writers have their reservations in accepting the compositions of Dalits as literary texts, there is no doubt that socially Dalit literature is more honest than mainstream literature. Since imagination has no place in Dalit writing and experience only is the basis of their literature, it is closer to reality. Only such writings, which depict the social reality, should be considered true and meaningful literature. This can be clarified by the following example. A resident of Delhi, who goes to a village to seek some solace from the maddening city, might compose a poem describing how peaceful or beautiful the village life is. This is his individual reality, the only use of which can be to take the readers away from the facts. The day to day problems of the villagers are left out in such works.

Such representations pander to the bourgeois taste and the common man has nothing to achieve from them. Omprakash Valmiki in his autobiographical novel has described the hardships he had to go through in his village life. After depicting a poignant situation he writes: "My mind was filled with a deep revulsion.... It remains there still." The poem by Sumitranandan Pant that we had been taught at school, 'Ah,

how wonderful is this village life'.., each word of the poem had proved to be artificial and a lie."²

Dalits now struggle against various injustices through political as well as cultural means. Dalit literature is one of the major sites of their resistance and creativity. The Dalit writers portray a slice of life that had seldom been recorded in Indian literatures until the advent of Dalit literature in Marathi in the fifties and its subsequent spread to many other languages- notably Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and English. Until then, literature had been the domain of high castes. Untouchables were either mostly absent from literary representations or shown as victims in need of saviours, as objects without voice and agency.

Although the mainstream writers have been quite apathetic to the sufferings of Dalits, there are few exceptions. It will be worth mentioning some mainstream writers who felt that the sufferings of Dalits must not be ignored and their pain must be encoded in literature. Rabindranath Tagore, for example, in his famous Gitanjali, exhorts the castist people in the following lines:

Proud castemen of my unfortunate country I
Throw aside your pride of Caste--
Lest on your own unwilling head
Should be heaped the burning insults
That you now shower on others.
You have deprived the outcasts
Of the common rights of man,
With your very eyes
You have beheld their misery,
And yet you have refused to take them to your heart--
But remember, please do remember
--Some day you shall have to be
The equal of them all in ignominy.

² Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan* trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee. Samya, Kolkata. 2003. P39

Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali

(Tr. Basanta Kumar Roy. Harijan, 5 August 1933)³

Amongst Hindi writers, Nirala and Premchand are the important names who portrayed the miseries of Dalits. However, Dalit scholars believe that such a depiction is of no use unless the very roots of the problems are not attacked. Although these writers won sympathies for their outcaste characters, they did not question the Varna system. Some of the leaders of the Bhakti movements like Rai Das, Kabir, etc. themselves came from the untouchable background. But even they did not openly violate the caste rules or oppose the system, this task had to be undertaken later on by Dalit writers themselves.

This literature gathered momentum after the formation of Dalit Panthers, on the model of Black Panthers. Dalit movement followed the footprints of Black Americans not only in the realm of the politics but also in the domain of literature. Although the sufferings of Dalits at the hands of the higher caste Hindus goes way back in the history of mankind, it were the Black Americans, who were the first, not only to understand the discriminatory attitudes of whites against them but also to decide to fight against it. "The white folks ain never gimme a chance! They ain never give no black man a chance! There ain nothing in yo whole life yuh kin keep from em! ... Ahm gonna be hard like they is! So hep me Gawd, Ahm gonna be hard! When they come for me Ahm gonna be here!"⁴

Before going in to the literature of the outcaste, in the Hindi belt, however, it would be worth to know about the Dalits. How they have been discriminated against for ages and how they struggled to gain their rights denied by the self-styled 'masters' of the learning.

³Mukherjee, Prabhati. *Beyond the Four Varnas, The Life of Untouchables in India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, (in association with) Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1988. P11

⁴ See "Black Literature", Nathan A. Scott, in *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*, Ed. Daniel Hoffman. P289

Who are Dalits

The word Dalit traditionally connotes wretchedness, poverty and humiliation. The root word of the word Dalit is Dal. Dalit is the adjective of 'dal'. This word can be found on page 471 of the prestigious Oxford Sanskrit English Dictionary, new edition, 1964, edited by the world - famous Sanskrit scholar, Sir Monier Williams. "Dalit" is found in many Indian languages and even a Dravidian language. The meaning given to 'Dalit' in the dictionary is: burst, split, scattered, dispersed, broken, torn as under, destroyed, crushed. All these English words sum up the exact position of the Indian Untouchables and also tribes who have been crushed for many centuries now.

Jotirao Phule and B. R. Ambedkar, two towering figures in the pantheon of Dalit history, were the first to appropriate the word, as a noun and an adjective, in the early decades of the twentieth century to describe the extreme oppression of untouchables. The term 'Dalit literature' was however first used in 1958, at the first ever Dalit literature conference held in Bombay. However, as an identity marker, the term 'Dalit' came into prominence in 1972, when a group of young Marathi writers-activists, who regarded themselves as Ambedkar's legatees, founded an organization called Dalit Panthers. The name expressed their feelings of solidarity and kinship with Black Panthers who were engaged in a militant struggle for African-Americans' rights in the United States of America.

The name found a ready acceptance among untouchable communities all over India. This was the first time they had been able to name themselves, as a collectivity, rather than be named by others. The names given by others, whether they be ancient names describing their untouchable status, such as Achut, Panchamas, Atishudras, Avarnas, Antyajas, Asparshyas and Pariahs, or government-assigned designations such as Depressed Castes and Scheduled Castes, or the name bestowed by Gandhi with apparent goodwill, namely, Harijan, evoked pain and conflict. Many of these continue to be used today by anti-Dalits as jibes and pejorative.

For many scholars, however, the word covers an expanded semantic field, including a wider spectrum of population. In their view all those who have suffered at the hands of the society are Dalits. For instance, the definition of the term "Dalits" according to the manifesto of the Dalit Panther Movement of the Indian State of Maharashtra, published in Bombay in 1973, encompasses the following groups of people: "members of scheduled castes and tribes, neoBuddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion."⁵ Dalit, for such scholars, is a political identity, as opposed to a caste one. It expresses Dalits' knowledge of themselves as oppressed people and signifies their resolve to demand liberation through a revolutionary transformation of the system that oppresses them.

There is no reason to object, as some scholars do, to the use of such a homogenizing term as Dalits. No doubt, the term Dalit is an all encompassing nomenclature which homogenizes the otherwise heterogeneous identities of the various oppressed caste communities which inhabit almost every region of India. Yet it is equally true that the perception of a significant number of these castes, by the end of the twentieth century, that they are indeed Dalits, records a growing sense of shared commitments, and conscious solidarity on their part on issues involving their subordination.

Bishop A. C. Lal glorified the word in his address to the first Dalit Solidarity Conference, meeting in 1992 in Nagpur, a place of immense significance since it was there that Dr. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism on 14 October 1956, in the following words:

"The word 'Dalit' is a beautiful word, because it transcends narrow national and sectarian frontiers. It is a beautiful word because it embraces the sufferings, frustrations, expectations and groanings of the entire cosmos."⁶

⁵ Massey, James. *Downtrodden*, WCC Publications. Geneva. 1997. p.1.

⁶ Lal, A. C., Bishop. 'Foreword' In *Dalit Solidarity*, ed. Bhagwan Das and James Massey, pp12-16. Delhi: ISPCK. 1995. P13

Nonetheless, in practice, the word is used only for the former untouchables or people belonging to castes scheduled in the constitution of India; the people established at the lowest rung of the Caste hierarchy established by the Aryas. These communities, outside the Varna system, were considered impure and therefore, untouchable, so much so, even their shadows were considered pollutant. The living conditions of these people were shameful. They had no land of their own to till nor could they follow any profession of their own choosing. They performed menial jobs ordered by the high caste. In return for their endless toil they had to accept the leftovers from the upper caste people. Even for their basic necessities like water they had to depend on the goodwill of a higher caste. They were compelled to tie an earthen pot around their neck in order that their sputum should not fall to the earth and pollute it. They also had to tie a broom behind them so that their footprints should be erased before some high caste person sees them.

In spite of various studies conducted for the purpose, it is not easy to ascertain the reason behind the stigma of untouchability attached to them. Some scholars have explained it by the concept of ritual impurity. They suggest that because of the unclean nature of their occupation, which used to be related to excretion or the hide of dead animals, they were considered infectious. However this theory has been contested by some other scholars. They ask why those who are engaged in such occupations as basket-making, weaving, oil-pressing, etc. should be considered untouchables? Branding of some communities as untouchable seems, quite arbitrary. Prabhati Mukherjee offers a more plausible explanation for the practice of untouchability. The relation between Aryans and natives was never amicable. Confrontations between them were quite frequent. As the Aryans realized the fact that they could not do without the help of the autochthonous groups, the process of negotiations started and a new social system came into existence with the approval of some autochthonous groups. The latter considered it more beneficial to concede a superior status to the stronger Aryans, than to be destroyed some day by them. Some groups however, did not accept the Aryan supremacy. When the Aryans became so dominant that they became the determiners of social system, they decided to teach a lesson to the hostile groups of autochthonous. To make any kind of contact impossible between the people included in Varna system and such hostile groups the latter must have been declared impure. The theory of impurity must have been very handy for

securing a permanent alienation of the noncompliant. Anyone who touched any impure person, himself became impure and remained so, unless he performed the prescribed ritual.⁷

Meillasox opines that the exploitation as expressed through the caste system was a process based on violence. "For example, among the rules imposed by the high caste on the groups lower in the hierarchy, were that adult men and women be condemned to work in the service of the landlord for a pittance, all access to land and education for their children be forbidden and the latter forced to look after livestock. If they did not comply, their homes, goods and granaries were burnt and their livestock looted."⁸

Further, the pure have to constantly resort to persecution, and when that is not enough, to violence to keep the lower orders in their impurities. In reality then, impurity was one more weapon in the repressive ideological arsenal (in which monopoly over knowledge was another, as Phule argued), it was used in one direction only arbitrarily and opportunistically, as a means of discrimination.

With the adoption of the new constitution, drafted by Ambedkar, by the independent India on 26 November 1949, it was assumed that the gulf between Dalits and nonDalits will vanish. The supposition was obviously based on the fact that the constitution makes many special provisions for Dalits in the name of protective or positive discrimination. They have been given reservation in the employment under Article 16, 335, etc. There are provisions for their smooth education under Article 1514. But most importantly untouchability has been legally abolished under Article 17 of the Constitution, which says "'untouchability' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden."⁹ The enforcement of any disability arising of 'untouchability' is deemed a punishable offence. On the basis of such provisions some people argue that now the evil of caste system is over. Dalits are now at par with nondalits. But the fact

⁷ For a detailed study on the subject, see Mukherjee, Prabhati. *Beyond the Four Varnas, The Life of Untouchables in India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, (in association with) Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1988.

⁸ See, Meillasox, Claude. *Are There Castes in India?* Economy and Society, 2. Feb. 1973, pp89-111

⁹ Basu, D.D.. *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, New Delhi, Prentice Hall, 1995, p93.

is that the disparity is still there even after more than five decades have passed. Dalits are still considered untouchable at most of the places.

In rural areas, Dalits continue to face physical violence, including mass killings and rapes by vigilante groups owned and operated by high caste landowners, when they ask for fair wages and freedom from molestation. It is not often that the perpetrators of such violence are apprehended and punished. The situation in the cities is not very different. In this context it would be worth mentioning Bhagwandas, a Dalit scholar. He provides a comprehensive snapshot of how the evil of castism affects the day-to-day lives of Dalits today: "Land-holding upper caste people in villages do not allow the Dalits to wear decent clothes, cast votes freely, ride on a horse in marriage procession, draw water from a public well, sit on a cot while the upper caste man is standing. In cities a student belonging to Scheduled Castes is purposely given low marks, an officer is prejudged as incompetent and inefficient just because of his birth in an untouchable caste. A professor, a lawyer, a doctor, an architect, born in an untouchable family is considered inefficient and inferior without even seeing his performance. A patient refuses to be treated by a Scheduled Caste doctor and a house owner refuses to let a vacant house to him for the fear of pollution. A superior gives bad reports to a Dalit subordinate in order to obstruct his promotion. In everyday talk in the canteens, buses, trains and airplanes, offices and establishments, aspersions are cast on the men and women of untouchable origin and derogatory remarks are passed. Universities and colleges abusing the power and authority given to 'autonomous bodies' dose the doors of progress to students, teachers and employees to protect 'merit'-- merit earned with fake certificates, unfair practices in examination, nepotism and corruption." (Das 1995:58).¹⁰

This account might appear bit exaggerated but no one can deny the existence of racial discrimination despite the legal provisions against it. The problems caused by the evil of caste system are still so pressing that now some Dalits have started concealing their caste in order to avoid them, at least in those places where they can manage to do it. In his autobiography Omprakash Valmiki narrates how his own niece disclaimed any

¹⁰ Das, Bhagwan, 'Socio-Economic Problems of Dalits.' In *Dalit Solidarity*, edited Bhagwan Das and James Massey, pp34-93. Delhi: ISPCK, 1995, p58

kind of relationship with him, a famous writer, when her teacher asked if she knew him.

“The next day, when Dr. Chaturvedi went to the class, she asked Seema, 'Do you know Omprakash Valmiki?' Seema looked around the class and denied that she knew me. In the evening she told me the whole story and tried to justify herself. 'If I had acknowledged in front of everybody that you are my uncle, then my classmates would know that I am a "Valmiki". You may be able to face it, I can't.’”¹¹

The caste system, hence, is attacking and destroying the identity of Dalits. Nothing can be more dangerous than this for Dalit movement. In many cases Dalits who have established themselves well in the society deliberately do away with their Dalit identity. Such people, who have a potential to contribute to the movement, unfortunately forget their fellow sufferers. Having had the benefits made possible by Ambedkar’s movement, they think that with their individual prosperity the society has also prospered. Unlike Valmiki’s niece Seema, who hides her identity for the fear of discrimination, these ‘Dalit Brahmins’ conceal their caste because of their arrogance. Whatever the cause might be the fact is that such a slavish mentality does not conform to the ideology of Dalitism and jeopardizes the cause of Dalits.

In this context it will be appropriate to explain the word ‘Dalitism’ which is gaining currency these days. Explaining the phenomenon, V.T.Rajshekhar, editor of fortnightly, *Dalit Voice*, says, “Dalitism is both the ideology and ‘nationalism of India's persecuted, suppressed masses’. It is rooted in Ambedkarism. Dalitism or Dalit philosophy is developed to pave the way for a liberal tradition against casteism and untouchability. The new revolutionary philosophy of Dalitism also stipulates that Dalits alone can liberate Dalits from the Ruling Class.”¹² Dalitism has influenced millions even in such a short time and a plethora of books are being written concerning Dalit-related issues. Rajshekhar considers it “the living spiritual principle of India's Untouchables”. The object of Dalitism, he says, “is to attract the youth all over India and make them understand the culture and history of India's submerged masses. The ruling class historians and writers have given little or no attention to the

¹¹ Valmiki, Omprakash; *Joothan*; trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Samya, Kolkata, 2003, p128

¹² Rajshekhar, V.T. “Dalit and Dalitism” in *Dalit Voice*, (fortnightly), on 1- 15, June, 1983.

history of our life and culture. Historical evidences are either destroyed or simply neglected for lack of interest. Dalits were simply marked under slavery and serfdom in India. The only meritorious scheme now on the anvil is the all- round flowering of 'Ambedkarism'. Ambedkarism or Dalitism demands a scientific, rational and unflinching approach to ward off the caste-based discrimination by finding alternatives to the dominant social, political and cultural structures.

Contrary to the Dalit Brahmins who contribute to demoralizing of Dalitism by giving up their separate identity, there are a number of Dalit writers who have clung to theirs tenaciously. In spite of several detractors they categorically reveal that they are Dalits. They are not ashamed of being Dalits, they rather are proud of their Dalit origin. This attitude of theirs is in total conformity with the ideology of Dalitism. To quote Rajshekhar once more, "Be proud to be a Dalit, the original inhabitants of this ancient land. Let us walk with our head high. Let us be proud of our Dalit culture."¹³

Dalit writers have rendered a valuable service to Dalitism. Omprakash Valmiki is one such champion of the ideology. We get to know through his autobiography "*Joothan*" that not only his niece Seema, but also his dear wife and many good friends were vehemently opposed to Valmiki's resolve of not concealing his caste. Arunprabha Mukherji in her introduction to her translation of "*Joothan*" highlights this point and explains the underlying motive of revealing of caste by writers like Valmiki. "By identifying themselves as Dalits, writers like Valmiki are embracing an identity that is born in a historic struggle to dismantle the caste system, responsible for their untouchable status, and to rebuild society on the principles of human dignity, equality and respect."¹⁴

The ideology of such writers gets expression in their writings, collectively called Dalit literature. The goal of Dalit literature is, then, to advance the cause of Dalitism. There is no denying it has gained significant success. A brief estimate of such literature is essential for this study and therefore, the following few paragraphs are devoted to it.

¹³ Ibid., p.25.

¹⁴ Valmiki, Omprakash; *Joothan*; trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Samya, Kolkata, 2003, p13

Dalit literature

Although there is no consensus amongst the ideologues as to what Dalit literature is, it can be roughly defined as literature of the Dalits, by the Dalits, for the Dalits. Because it primarily and majorly depicts the experiences, the joys and sorrows underwent by Dalits, it is of Dalits. It is for Dalits since it gives voice to the suppressed community and demands an equal status for them. Dalit literature has to be by them as, only a Dalit knows the pain of discrimination and injustices perpetrated against Dalits. Only literature by Dalits can be of them and for them. Almost all Dalit scholars have defined and judged the merits of Dalit writings using “of them, for them, by them” formula.

Whether non-Dalits writing about the problems and sufferings of Dalits can be considered a part of Dalit literature has been a moot point. The first conference of Dalit writers accepts such writings as Dalit literature. However, later writers, especially in the Hindi belt have their reservations. Many Dalit scholars consider only a Dalit can write about the sufferings of Dalits. Only the wearer of the shoe knows how severely it bites. Arun Prabha Mukherjee discusses the controversy in the introduction of “*Joothan*”.

“Dalit writers and critics have contested attempts by mainstream critics to include these high caste writers' portrayals of Dalit's under the rubric of Dalit literature. They claim that Dalit literature can be written only by Dalits : 'Dragging and cutting dead animals--how will non-Dalits write about this experience of Dalits with the power of their imagination? In a similar vein, Valmiki ridicules the Hindi writer Kashinath Singh who said that 'One does not have to be a horse in order to write on one': 'Only the horse, tethered to its stall after a whole day's exhausting labor knows how it feels, and not its owner'. Limbale too suggests that only Dalits can represent Dalits in an authentic manner. In making such claims, Dalit writers are not alone; aboriginal writers in the United States and Canada have made similar declarations.”

Answering the question ‘what is Dalit literature, Limbale, in his *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundarya Shastra*, (*The Aesthetics of Dalit Literature*), says, that Dalit literature is the artistic portrayal of the anguish, adversity, enslavement, degradation, mockery and

penury of Dalits. Every human being should get dignity, freedom and security Dalit literature tends to highlight this assertion. In the centre of this literature is the common man. This literature leads that man towards a revolution.¹⁵

According to Sharat Chandra Muktibodh, Dalit literature is produced by the Dalit consciousness. The 'implied value' of this literature, he further says, is human freedom, which is the main inspiration behind it. "The nature of this literature consists in a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by Dalits in the past and even in present in the framework of Varna system."

The key word, which needs explanation, in this definition is 'dalit consciousness'. Nemishary explains this term. He starts by classifying subjugation in to two categories, direct and indirect. The autocratic tyrants indulge in direct subjugation. Indirect subjugation means using religious beliefs, conventions, mythology etc. to implant in the subconscious of a community that they have been divinely ordained for servitude. That they have been made to serve and they are inferior to other castes, is a part of their subconscious. The subjugation of generations renders them incapable of noticing and questioning the injustices committed against them. Their domination seems the most natural thing to them. Dalit consciousness purges their subconscious from the hidden fear of religion, conventions and so on, and leads them towards a rational and scientific approach.¹⁶

Dangle says "Dalit literature acquaints people with caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation." He maintains that Dalit literature is related to the "experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of the society." It matures with the sociological point of view and is related with the "principle of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus ending as revolutionary."¹⁷

¹⁵ see Limbale, Sharan Kumar, *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundaryashastra*, trans. to Hindi, Ramnika Gupta, Vani Prakashan, 2000 p14

¹⁶ see Nemishrai, Mohandas. "Dalit Sahitya ke lie Samvad", in *Dalit Sahitya ki Avadharna aur Premchand*, ed. Sadanand Shahi, Premchand Sahitya Sangsthan, Gorakhpur, 2000,

¹⁷ "Dalit Literature, Past, Present and Future," trans. Avinash S• Pandit and Daya Agarwal. In *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, ed. by Arjun Dangle. Bombay: Orient Longman, pp• 234-36.

The principle of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, is the essential part of Dalit consciousness. Dalit literature, a consequence of Dalit consciousness, negates the unjustifiable social system and demands a new system based on human dignity, equality and freedom. It rebels against those impervious persons who, and norms which, are directly or indirectly averse to any change in status quo. 'Loyalty to science' conforms with Ambedkar's, and before that Buddha's, point of view according to which something that can not be proved or verified by reason cannot be accepted.

Dalit literature is a portrayal of the sufferings of collectivity through individual experiences. In other words, as Muktibodh says, the nature of Dalit consciousness is not subjective. Pain and pleasures are truly subjectively experienced but in the case of the Dalits sufferings of Dalits are common and attributed to the common reasons.

Dalits have been treated unfairly not only in the society but also in literature. The Dalit in non-Dalit literature is a sinner, a criminal, uncouth, and immoral. He is against progress. Dalits and Dalit literature cannot accept this reality of mainstream writers as the reality of the Dalits. In order to prove it as fake and misleading, Dalit literature deconstructs this reality as portrayed in the mainstream literature. Since it cannot express its liberation politics in an established way of writing, its very language is different from the established one. It breaks all the established manners of expression. For example Anuradha Gaurav in her poem, "Request", holds the pusillanimity of the community, in present and in past, responsible for the problems of the community and says:

We make our daughters lie beneath men!
We mother-fuckers like dumb beasts¹⁸

Keshav Mishram gives vent to his anger on almighty God in his poem:

¹⁸ Anand, Mulkraj and Zelliott Eleanor. *An Anthology of Dalit Literature*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi. 1992. P5

One day I cursed that mother-fucker God.

He just laughed shamelessly¹⁹

Arun Kamble, comparing the financial state of Dalits and non-Dalits, in his "The Life We Live", says:

You: its sole repository, descendants of the sage

We: never have a paisa to scratch our arse²⁰

Many other such words, which do not find any place in the mainstream literature, for whatever reason, are used by Dalit writers. Mulkraj Anand, for his "Untouchable", considered a part of Dalit literature by some, had to coin the words like "brother-in-law, rape sister" etc to represent the language of his chief protagonist. This deliberate violation of the established manner has given a shock to the mainstream writers and they are reluctant to accept this new school of literature.

The antecedents of Dalit literature have been variously dated back to, Buddha (6th century B.C.), to the saint poet Chokhamela (14th century A.D.) and Jotiba Phule (1822-90).²¹ Although the term Dalit literature was not thought of in their time, these historically significant figures are undoubtedly the pioneers of Dalit literature. They had been, as they still are, a very inspiring force for anti caste movements of India.

Because of his outlook towards Dalit life, his ideas and his struggle, Dr. BR Ambedkar is considered to be the enabling factor for this literature. Generally speaking the credit for a new stream of literature is given to an author of imaginative literature. But literature is not merely fictional accounts. Ambedkar did not produce any creative work but through his writings he liberated many Dalits off their mental slavery and abject wretchedness. Now Dalit literature has reached almost all parts of India and is being composed in a number of languages but its prominence is still in Maharashtra, obviously because of the impact created by Ambedkar. "Dr. Ambedkar

¹⁹ Ibid. p114

²⁰ Ibid., p87

²¹ Dangle, Arjun. "Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future", *Poison Bread Translation from Modern Dalit Literature*. Orient Longman, Bombay. 1992. P238

shaped the tradition of revolutionary thinking of almost of a generation of Dalits who can today hold their heads high... The literary manifestation of this awareness is Dalit literature.”

The question raised by many scholars that if Ambedkar was the father of Dalit literature why did it not flourish during his lifetime, as it did after his death, needs answer here. Dalits had no literary legacy they had been woken up from their slumber of nescience by Ambedkar. Made conscious of the injustices committed against them by Ambedkar they wholeheartedly took part in the struggle lead by Baba Sahab. But to expect any literary writing from them, who hardly got enough to eat and who were never allowed to gain knowledge, would be quite unreasonable. However, during Ambedkar’s time some of them did participate by composing songs or participating in the folk dramatic performances like tamashas, jalsas etc. Even before him a few Marathi Dalit writers has started writing but those writings did not have much social impact. The conditions of Dalits were such that they could not read these compositions or know about them. Even if they had known they would not have understood the utility of such literary efforts. Social change for their betterment was more than unimagivable till that time.

Even before Ambedkar some writers had started considering the problems of Dalits for their writings. Sisir Kumar Das discussses such writers in one of his essays. “One of the first novels that concentrated on the problem of the low caste or the Harijans in India is probably the Telugu novel Himavati (1913) by T Suryanarayana. It reflects the middle class sympathy and concern for the upliftment of the Harijans. Malayalam poet Kuttamath (1880-1943), a member of the prestigious Nair community, composed inspiring verses claiming the rights of all to enter the temples. Paliath Kunjunni Achan (1880-1942), a poet who writes about toleration and reverence for all religions, sings for the unity of the country; Maraimalai Adigal's Tamil novel Kokilampal Katitankal (1921) presents Yogananda Jha's novel Bhalamanus (1944) written in Maithili. Mulkraj Anand wrote such a novel in English entitled The Untouchable,

(1935), in this powerful novel, he exposes the dehumanizing role of caste narrativised through a fine analysis of a day's activity of a sweeper boy; Bakha.²²

However, some writers from the lower castes, exceptions though they were, did raise their voices against caste atrocities. Tapan Basu discusses such writings in his article "Narratives of Suffering: Dalit Perspectives". "Among the earliest writers in this category", says Basu, "was the Telegu poet Joshua Garran (1863-1971), a Christian coming from among the "untouchables." He learned Sanskrit, worked as a school master, and later occupied high public positions as a member of the legislative council of Andhra Pradesh. Another poet, a Malayali, who is not even mentioned in many literary histories, is Mooloor Padmanabha Pannikar, the first major poet in his language to come from a low caste, the Ezhava. Mooloor Pannikar (1869-1931) was a disciple of Narayana Guru (1856-1929), an enlightened social reformer who wrote in three languages, Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit, and inspired the exploited Ezhava community towards social regeneration. Narayana Guru was also the mentor of another poet from among the Ezhavas, namely Kumaran Asan, who turned out to be one of the greatest poets of Malayalam for all times. Kumaran Asan articulated the agony of the Ezhavas as a consequence of caste distinctions in society. He also exhorted them, as in his poem "Simhanandam" (The Lion's Roar, 1919), to "speed up where the caste demon rears its ugly face." This note of confrontation in a lower caste writer's negotiation of casteism in society had a different impact from the note of compassion in an upper caste writer's negotiation of casteism in society. Another Malayali poet of considerable merit, K P Karuppan (1884-1957) belonged to a family of fisher folk. Two more early twentieth century writers from Kerala, hailing from lower castes, who have achieved eminence, are V K Kalath (dates not certain) and Tokoco Vaduthala (dates not certain). Among the pioneering lower caste writers was also Vindan (dates not certain), the Tamil writer, writing in the 1940s and the 1950s, who eventually started his own journal Manithan (Man), entirely devoted to the cause of the working class. Unfortunately, for many of this early generation of lower caste writers, even though they were mostly located in culturally advanced pockets of the southern states of India, where literacy estimates and educational levels were much

²² For a detailed account of some of the early texts concerning Dalits see Das, Sisir Kumar. "The Narrative of Suffering: Caste and the Underprivileged", in *Translating Caste..* Ed. Tapan Basu. Katha, New Delhi. 2002. Pp150-180

higher than in the northern states, their achievements were very often downplayed by a conservative establishment in the world of learning and letters.”²³

Dr Ambedkar's prolific production as a writer was primarily political. From 1920 on, he published newspapers, at times including a poem or a story. But the newspapers were chiefly intended to be a channel their substance spreading somehow among a people whose reading writing members were less than three percent. The newspapers were themselves signifiers of literary success within the Dalit liberation enterprise, and while Ambedkar's flourished, many others quested. It is significant that when in 1962 A. S. Rampise published a list of newspapers started by depressed caste persons of India, these numbered one hundred and twenty, the great majority of them in Marathi.

Nevertheless, The term "Dalit literature" did not come in to existence in his lifetime. The origin of this term, as mentioned earlier, can be traced to the first Dalit literary conference in 1958, organized by the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha. "Bandhumadav," a Dalit intellectual, in his article in the Prabuddha Bharat of 15th February 1958, explains the necessity of such a conference and its aim.

Just as the Russian writers helped the revolution by the spreading of Lenin's revolutionary ideology through their works, our writers should spread Dr Ambedkar's philosophy to the villages... Politics is just one way of attacking opposition. Unless we attack from all sides we cannot defeat those who have inflicted injustice on us for the last thousands of years.²⁴

The Resolution No 5, passed at the end of the conference, declared that "the literature written by the Dalits and that written by others about the Dalits in Marathi be accepted as a separate entity known as Dalit literature, and realizing its cultural importance, the universities and literary organizations should give it its proper place."

The first conference of Dalit writers did not create much of an impact, either outside the Dalit community, due to social bias against the Dalits, or inside it, due to fractions

²³ Basu, Tapan. "Narratives of Suffering: Dalit Perspectives". In *Translating Caste*. P183

²⁴ Quoted in *Translating Caste*". Katha, New Delhi p184

and frictions within, Dr Ambedkar's death and the subsequent schisms within the Republican Party of India, which he initiated, proved to be setbacks for Dalit literary as much as for Dalit political activity. Thus, till the 1960s no Dalit writer of note from the post-Ambedkar generation rose to prominence in Maharashtra or elsewhere.

In the later 1960s, some of these writers got together at a conference in Bombay held under the aegis of Maharashtra Baudha Sahitya Sabha. This meet brought on a common platform, Dalit writers from all over Maharashtra. The first representative collection of poems by Dalits, *Akar*, was published in this conference. *Akar* included poems by Baburao Bagul, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Yadavrao Gangurde, Chokha Kamble, et cetera, but not all of them wrote from a Dalit perspective about Dalit problems. Yet it comprised, in essence, an expression of an evolving Dalit identity at least in Maharashtra.

Dalit literature was still a new literary phenomenon. Hence it was not spontaneously accepted as "great literature" by many upper caste critics and even a few lower caste critics. The former usually dismissed this literature as "propagandist" while the latter berated it for its "retrograde" representation of the Dalit community.

The existing Dalit organizations such as the Republican Party of India did nothing to combat the injustices in society. The predicament of the Dalits cried out for deeds (political action) rather than words (political rhetoric). The result was that writers such as Namdeo Dhasal, J V Pawar, and Arjun Dangle took the initiative and established the Dalit Panthers in Bombay on the model of the Black Panthers of Oakland, a militant army of youths fighting for Black American liberation in the United States of America. The Dalit Panthers was established on 9th July 1972. Its agenda was to fight for the liberation of the Indian Dalits through "a complete revolution." As the Dalit Panthers Manifesto of 1973 put it, the Dalits were not to be satisfied easily now. "We do not want a little place in the Brahman Alley We want the rule of the whole lane." The Dalit Panthers observed Independence Day that year, which incidentally was the silver jubilee of Indian Independence, as Black Day and black flag demonstrations were held at different points in Bombay. The most striking thing about the Dalit Panthers movement was that it typified a political upheaval

instigated by a literary upheaval. Dalit literature, at least in Maharashtra, had finally come of age.

Between 1972 and 1978, under the direct influence of the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra, writers drawn from the Dalit communities of Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Tamil Nadu began to write about caste and caste related themes. As a result of this literary ignition in recent decades there has been a plethora of publications in the most parts of India, on caste and caste related issues, specifically in the realm of literature.

Dalits in Hindi Belt

Dalit literature did not pick up in the same way in Hindi belt as it did in Maharashtra. The difference was largely because of the nature of Dalit movement. Swami Dayananda, who was born in Maharashtra, carried out the major social reform movement directed towards the upliftment of the Dalits in some parts of Hindi belt. He was the founder of Arya Samaj. His main focus was on some areas of west Uttar Pradesh and Punjab for his reform movement. It is notable that because of the prominence of Sikh religion the Hindus were not too fanatic in Punjab and the untouchables were treated equally in the Gurudwaras. However, this relationship of equality was limited to Gurudwaras only. A significant fact is that many untouchables embraced Sikhism in order to gain equal status in the society. After converting to Sikhism they were no more considered untouchable. The devotees were served food by these former untouchables and they generally lead the religious processions.

Arya Samajists were alarmed by the conversion of large numbers of outcaste communities to Christianity and Sikhism in the 1920s and the 1930s. They started emulating the Christian missionaries by opening schools and hospitals for the untouchables and performing shuddhi, a ceremony to reconvert the Christian converts. Significant attempts were made to show the untouchables that they were an integral part of Hindu culture. For instance Arya Samajists told Chuhras, the lowest community among the outcaste, that they were the descendants of Valmiki, the creator of the Sanskrit Ramayana

In Uttar Pradesh the protest against castism had already started. Swami Achootanand initiated the Aadi Hindu movement in 19th century little before Ambedkar came in to picture. As a result of this movement there started a wave of oral literature. Songs were composed in the style of Kabir, the main aim of which was to attack the irrational ordinances of Manu. Kamal Bharti discusses about this moment in his "Dalit Sahitya ki Avadharana" (The concept of Dalit Literature). The grievances of the Dalits against social discrimination can be heard in the following translation of a song composed by Shankaranand towards the end of 19th century.

Manuji you made four Varanas
The day you made these Varanas
Why didn't you make them in different colors?

Why didn't you make fair Brahmins, red Kshitriyas and yellow Vaishyas?
Why didn't you engrave something on them
So that their cast could be identified?

In all of them five elements can be seen
Why didn't you give them extra elements?

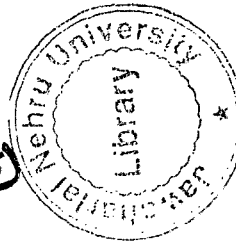
That Omniscient pervades everyone
Why didn't you bereave them of Him?

They all have five elements and three Gunas
Why didn't you give them extra elements?

Such a gross blunder you committed
Why didn't you make a separate nation for them?

The water belonging to an iron vessel
You have poured in to the golden vessel
Manuji you made four Varanas.²⁵

²⁵ Quoted in Gupta, Ramnika. Introduction to *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundaryashastra*, Vani Prakashan, 2000 (Translation mine)



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Swami Achootananda met Baba Ambedkar in November 1928 and accepted him not only as a superior leader but also as sole representative of all the Dalits of India. Swami Achootananda had declared in 1927 that the Dalits require absolute freedom. He wrote several books to make his point but due to the opposition from some influential and extremist Hindus they could not gain currency.

The movement spearheaded by Dayananda in the Hindi belt area was basically reformist. It raised its voice against social discrimination but did not attack the Varna system propounded by Manu. For them Brahmins were superior and Shudras were of the lowest rank. On the other hand Ambedkar attacked the very root of this social discrimination, the law of Manu. His movement gained momentum with the burning of Manusmriti. Dayananda's movement was based on a religious approach whereas Ambedkar's thinking was scientific with the help of which he wanted to bring radical transformation in the social system. Instead of religion his weapons were education, unity and struggle. As a result of this variant approach a glaring difference can be seen in the origin, evolution and approach of the literature of Maharashtra and that of Hindi belt. Mohan Nemishraay proclaims in one of his essays "Hindi men Dalit Sahitya Ki Upasthiti: ek Partaal", (The Presence of Dalit Literature in Hindi: an Investigation). "In the north Kabir came, Naanak came and Rai Das came, but no one came like Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar. We still had accepted both of them as our own. We could hear their call for struggle."

In a region predominated by feudal mentality it was difficult for any revolutionary person to find acceptance, hence the reformist movement could not get very popular and remained restricted to very few pockets of the Hindi belt. In such regions some Hindi Dalit writers picked up their pens to disseminate awareness about Dalit consciousness.

Mohandas Nemish Raay, further in the essay mentioned above, informs that Ramchandra Banodha of Allahabad had written Dr. Ambedkar's biography even before Dhananjay Kir. Ambedkar's ideology also influenced Agra district. Some prominent activists who contributed to the movement through their social or literary endeavors are: Bhagwandas Yadvendu, Dr. Khem Chand Bode, Gopi Chand Pippal,

Babu Karan Singh Ken and Chatrapati Anivesh. *Achut ka Beta* (The Son of an Untouchable) by Bhagwandas Yadvendu and Devi Dayal Sen's *Manav ki Parakh* were the novels composed between 1950 and 1960, published by Atmaram and Sons, Delhi. The latter also wrote some short stories, which were published in the magazines like *Dharma Yuga*. "Putrahanta Vishvamitra aur Shankaracharya ka Antardvandva" (The Dillema of Filicidal Visvamitra and Shankaracharya) by Sitaram Khodaval became popular and was published in the magazine called *Aaj Kal*. Khodaval published an article entitled "Uttar Pradesh men Jati Vaimanasya" (Bitterness of Castism in Uttar Pradesh) was published in weekly *Hindustan*. He received almost 100 threatening letters from caste Hindus, some of which bore the threats of his murder. In those very days a collection of his short stories, *Man changa to Kathauti men Ganga* (All's well if the Mind is fit) was also published. Poet Bihari Lal Harit's "Daliton ka Pistaul" (The Pistol of Dalits), "Phool aur Shool" (Flowers and Thornes) and "Guru Dakshina" (The Teacher's Offering) compositions are prominent. Some other worth mentioning figures in the same generation who gave their literary contribution to the cause are Sohan Lal Shastri, Dr. Shakaranand Shastri, Nanak Chand Rattu and Dr. B.P. Varun, Chedi Lal Saarthi, Gaya Prasad Prashant. Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu helped in popularizing Dr. Ambedkar's writings in the Hindi belt. These writings became the real source of inspiration for Dalit consciousness in the region.

However, the mainstream critics did not have much to do with such writings. They did not consider these writers of any literary merit. Dalits of Hindi belt were not united as they were in Maharashtra and therefore they could not organize any significant protest movement against the social evil of castism and therefore, failed to attract the attention of the mainstream writers and critics.

In 1914 Hira Dom's poem "Achut ki Shikayat" (The Complaint of the Untouchable) was published in *Saraswati*. This poem can be said to be the first composition of Dalit consciousness in Hindi because it not only records the complaint or grievance of Dalits but also registers their protest and anger against discrimination. The poem for the first time questions the concept of divine composition of the society, which keeps Dalits out of bounds of humanity, propounded by the religio-legal texts. The poet complains against his penury, whereas the caste persons enjoy special privileges. He

questions the discriminatory attitude of God, who, in order to protect Prahlad bursts out of a pillar, but for an untouchable doesn't do anything. He asks God if He is also afraid of getting polluted. He attacks the double standards of castism when he says, whereas the landlords sleep peacefully in their houses Dalits have to toil in the fields. Although it is their labour, which produces grain, they get a very miniscule amount of it. He further complains that they are not even allowed to drink water from the village well. If he tries to drink water from the well on his own he is severely beaten by the caste hindus.

In the same way the Telugu poet Joshuba had challenged God in his poem and had expressed his right to ask questions.

“Progenitor You are, your creation I am
I have the right to ask you this question,
For what sin of mine I was made untouchable?”²⁶

Both poems express what Dr. Ambedkar propounded later on. Hence poets from different regions had put, what may be called as the foundation stone of Dalit literature very early in the twentieth century. But the Dalits in the Hindi belt could not capitalize on that. There being no common platform on which to assemble and organize some movement was responsible for the dearth of any major achievement. The political parties used them for their self-serving purposes and more often than not different groups of Dalits were brought face to face for confrontation.

Things, however, started taking different shape in the decade of 80's. There was a significant wave of anti-Dalit movements throughout India. The caste Hindus were against extension of reservation policy for Dalits in jobs. Their campaign against Dalits resulted in many massacres of the beneficiaries of the reservation policy. In response to such a polarization the Dalits started uniting and fighting back. Along with the weapons they picked up their pens too. With the anti-Mandal movement Dalit unity strengthened. With the advent of Kashi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party Dalits

²⁶ Ibid. (Translation mine)

started finding space for themselves in the political sphere. The struggle is still on, at the level of society, politics and very importantly literature.

In the decade of 80's the activism on the organizational level increased. Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya Academy, in the leadership of Sohanpal Sumanakshar, decided to organize national level conference annually. The academy brought together the supporters of Dalit consciousness, Dalit and non-Dalit intellectuals, on the common platform. In 1990 CADM, Centre for Alternative Dalit Media came into existence in Delhi. It launched its own newspaper, *Abhimukh Nayak*. It also helped publicize Dalit literature. Dr. Kusum Viyogi initiated Dalit Lekhak Manch. It became the forum on which Dalit writers could discuss their experiences they had and problems they faced while writing. Ms. Kumud Panvaray organized the first conference of Dalit women writers, on October 2, 1995, in Nagpur, under the aegis of All India Progressive Women Organization. The idea of a separate organization for Dalit Women writers, Dalit Lekhika Sangh, was conceived in Nagpur itself. Its first conference was held in Delhi on the initiative of Rajni Tilak on January 3 1996. Many other organizations were formed to bring the Dalit writers together.

As a result of the awareness created by such numerous organizations some journals started giving space to Hindi Dalit writers. Magazines like *Hans* and *Yudhrat Aam Aadami* started publishing them at a significant level. The latter published the first Dalit short story, "Latki Hui Shart", (The Hanging Condition), written by Prahlad Chand Das. Then there came four special editions of the magazine on Dalit consciousness, poetry, short stories, literature and Dalit ideology. Based on these special editions many books were published for which around 100 Dalit writers contributed. It was only after these special editions that some other non-Dalit magazines came up with their special Dalit editions. It helped demolish the misnomer that Dalit writing does not exist in Hindi or that only those who have caste can produce literary composition. Many other magazines contributed to the evolution of Hindi Dalit literature. Some notable ones are: *Ambedkar Mission*, *Shambuk*, *Patna*, *Dhamm Darpan*, *Ham Dalit Himayatei*, *Abhimukh Nayak*, *Dalit Prakriya*, *Sajag Prahari*, *Ashvaghosh*, *Nirnayak Bhim*, *Loksoochak*, *Kanpur*, *Parishad Sandesh*, *Madhya Pradesh*, *Pragyan*, *Lucknow*, etc.

Hindi Dalit Literature reached a significant height with the help of these magazines. Jaiprakash Kardam wrote his first novel, *Chappar* Mohandas Nemishraay gave the first book in the genre of autobiography his book is entitled, *Apne Apne Pinjare* (Individual Cages). Omprakash Valmiki also wrote his autobiography *Joothan*, (The leftovers) in which he has described the pan-Indian problem of castism. Recently Kaushalya Beshantri has published her autobiography called *Dohara Abhishap*, (the double Curse). The book has enriched the women Dalit writing significantly. This is a story of a woman with indomitable fortitude, who undergoes difficulties at two levels- first because she is a Dalit and secondly a woman. Some other Dalit autobiographies are: *Mera Safar Meri Manzil*, D.R. Jatav, *Main Bhangi hoon*, by Bhagwandas, *Tiraskrit*, by Surajpal Chauhan, etc.

Apart from these writers, Kusum Viyogi, Jayprakash Kardam, T.P. Sihgh, Malkhan Singh, Prem Kapadia, B.L. Naiyar, Prahlad Chand Das, Dayanand Batohi, Lal Chnd Rahi, Jialal Arya, Ramashankar Ary, Rajani Tilak, Karmsheel Bharati, Ajay Yateesh, etc. numerous other writers are enriching various genres of literature such as, poetry, short stories, novel, drama, essay, autobiography etc.

This is not surprising that Autobiography has been a favourite genre of Dalit writers. This can be explained in light of the emphasis placed by them on authenticity of experience. Here again, Dalit writers have faced criticism from mainstream critics who say that autobiography is not a literary genre. They have questioned the literariness of the Dalit autobiographical narrative, claiming that Dalit autobiographies are unstructured, artless outpourings of Dalit writers' unmediated experience and have become repetitive and stereotypical. Valmiki says that even some Dalit writers have internalized this negative view of autobiography. Valmiki quotes Das's defence of the genre: "Dalit writers should write autobiographies so that not only our history will stay alive, but also our true portrayals of wrongdoers. Dalit autobiographies will provide inspiration to our future generations."

Dalit writers in Maharashtra started precedence of autobiography. As Tapan Basu informs us, "From 1978 to 1986 there had been a spate of Dalit autobiographies in Marathi. These autobiographies emerged in a milieu in which there was increasing

acknowledgement of the value of Dalit writing within the literary mainstream. A number of Dalit writers had received literary awards, Dalit literature came to be included within school as well as university syllabi. It was being translated into Indian as well as foreign languages. Most of the Dalit autobiographies were not restricted to life histories of the individual writers. They were life histories of the Dalit community in Maharashtra. Books by male authors such as Daya Pawar (Baluta), P E Sonkamble (Athvaninche Pakshi), Laxman Mane (Upara) and female authors such as Shantabai Kamble, Kumud Pawade, Mukta Sarvagod and Babytai Kamble

Are good examples of Dalit autobiography.

Now that a whole generation is ready of those Dalit writers who write in Hindi Dalit literature is a reality in Hindi today. "For the first time," as Ram Narayan, scholar on Dalit society at the University of Delhi, says, "a new literature is emerging in North India which aims to speak and interpret [Dalit problems] for itself." It seems that Dalits no longer wish to be spoken for by others, however sympathetic to their cause these others might be.

Sheoraj Singh Bechain, author of pioneering research on Ambedkar and also the convener of the Dalit Writers' Forum, observes:

"Knowledge has never been democratic in this country. In intellectual life ... the arts or in academics there is no presence of Dalit traditions of learning. This is a loss for the whole country, because we need more traditions of knowledge, not the repetition of the same history."²⁷

There is now a concerted endeavour on the part of Dalit scholars of the Hindi heartland to develop and disseminate a Dalit tradition of thought. Many monographs have been recently produced by them, all with the intention of making the Dalit people aware of their rights and duties. Some instances are - Suresh Chandra Kushwaha's *Arakshan ke Hatyare*, Buddhshran Hans *Kash Hum Hindu Na How* and Mata Prasad's *Achhut rangana Nautanki*. The *Achhut rangana Nautanki* dramatizes the story of a lower caste heroine who struggles severely with Brahminical prejudices,

²⁷ Basu, Tapan. *Translating Caste*. Katha, New Delhi

enters a temple and marries a man of her choice without the assistance of any priest. The play is enframed within the form of *nautanki*. It is the chronicle of a female protagonist who, according to her creator, defies Hindu orthodoxy. Folk forms like *kawali*, *doha*, *chaubola*, *daud* and *lavni* are also used in this story.

It is worth putting on record that the rise of Dalit literature in North India has followed the success of Dalit organizations such as the DS4, the BAMCEF and the Bahujan Samaj Party in the realm of politics. While in South India, perhaps, the success of Dalits in the realm of politics was prepared for by a Cultural Revolution by Dalits. Not surprisingly, in the north, Dalit literature has flourished most in states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar in which the political mobilization of the Dalits has been the strongest.

In spite of all these endeavours of Dalit scholars Dalits of Hindi belt are still victims of untouchability. They have not been able to come out of the stigma of being untouchable because of their fatalism, their belief in the concept of divine retribution. The feudal system still existing in this part in some form or the other has also stopped the progress of Dalits. Hence the progressive Dalit writers, who as it is are few and far between, have to fight on two fronts. In addition to the struggle against the high caste oppression, and discrimination, they have to deal with the pressures from within. Along with expressing their anger and bitterness against the mainstream society through their writings these writers have started the process of self-introspection. Ramanika Gupta opines that Dalit literature of Hindi belt needs to confront the barbarity for which mere defense is not enough, but strategic attack is also required. Dalit literature is heading towards that direction. It might be accused of being retaliatory literature the fact is that it is only a campaign for equality. This is the way of Dalit assertion. The only way to achieve equality without bitterness and hostility, Ramanika says, depends on the initiative of the caste Hindus non-Dalits, who have caste and arrogance based on it, must renounce both. They should come down from their pedestal, embrace Dalits, hand over the political power to them and apologize for the injustices committed by their forefathers. The example of a Hindi poet is notable in this context. Rajesh Joshi said in one of his poems,

After my death if it is written somewhere

That I was Hindu,
It must categorically be written
That I was ashamed of it

(Valmiki: 20).

The mainstream critics and reviewers in India have responded to Dalit writers' stark portrayals of caste discrimination with a sense of disbelief and accusations of exaggeration. They have claimed that caste is no longer relevant, either because it has already disappeared or is in the process of disappearing. In their view, therefore, Dalit writers are flogging a dead horse. These critics and reviewers have also leveled various allegations against this literature.

With the spate of writings by Dalits the criticism of this literature is multiplying. Many have commented adversely on Dalit literature. Some remark that the politics of castism has also come in to Literature. Some others ask, "Dalit is fine but where is literature"?

Critics have raised several such objections. Limbale enlists the following allegation on Dalit literature:

Dalit literature is propagandistic.

Dalit literature is monotonous.

The individual does not get any representation in the Dalit literature

Dalit literature is full of resentment

The approach of this literature is negative.

Many Dalit writers have put forth their arguments to defend their literature against these charges, or more correctly, facts. They contend that Dalit literature appears propagandistic because it has emerged as a part of the movement for Dalit liberation and the writers of this literature feel a commitment to this movement. Dalit writers follow a common literary agenda and their experiences that find expression through their pens are similar. This is the reason that the same note of harsh realities echoes across the writings by Dalits. The repulsive experiences faced by Dalits for several

generations are the reason behind the resentment, negativity and bitterness found very commonly in Dalit literature.

In his book on Dalit aesthetics, Valmiki writes: “Dalit literary movement is not just a literary movement. It is also a cultural and social movement. Dalit society has been imprisoned for a thousand years in the dark mist of ignorance, deprived of knowledge. Dalit literature is the portrayal of the wishes and aspirations of these oppressed and tormented Dalits.”

Limbale reiterates this sentiment by saying that Dalit literature is not neutral because Dalit writers cannot “sever their relationship with their pain: Because Dalit writers have presented their anguish and their questions in their literature, their literature has acquired a propagandistic character.”

Dalit literature owes its origin to a revolutionary struggle for social and economic change. Its purpose is not merely aesthetic. Studying Dalit literature from only literary or academic point of view fails to present a complete perspective.

Moreover, every piece of literature can be called propaganda. Dalit writing is alleged to be propagandistic since Dalit writers have an ideology and a goal to achieve through their writings, they respond to the scorching social reality in an aggressive and bitter manner. In other words the writer who writes with a purpose of social change is a propagandist. But those who pass such a judgement on Dalit writers also limit themselves by a particular philosophy therefore they too must be called propagandistic.

One more allegation leveled against Dalit literature is about its language. The language used in this literature is neither literary nor standard. Obscenities find an easy access to Dalit literature.

In response it will not be wrong to say that, the language is different from that used in non-Dalit literature as the worldview portrayed in Dalit literature is different from the worldview depicted elsewhere. This lit shows a new world, a new society and a new person altogether. The reality expressed there in is different. As a result the language

used for expression is obviously different. The language used in this literature is rustic, crude and unrefined.

These writers have denied the status enjoyed by the standard language. Moreover, as Nimbale says, the standard language does not contain all the words and expressions which exist in the language of Dalits. The standard language is not their mother tongue and putting efforts to express your thoughts in a language that you are not used to, hampers the naturalness of expression.

Translator's Note

Although Dalit literature has not reached its ne plus ultra yet, it has started making a significant impact on the literary world. Through the writings of Dalit litterateur the non-Dalits can now, on one hand, experience the hardships faced by Dalits in their lives, on the other it inspires Dalit readers to educate, unite and struggle in order to eradicate prejudices prevalent in the society. As an agency striving to make our society more equitable, this literature must be promoted so that the reach of this literature may become wider. Many protest movements of the world have influenced this literature. Now it is in a position to influence many movements itself.

The scope and influence of Dalit literature, as discussed in the Introduction, is immense. Dalit writers, in their respective languages, have gained significant ground through their works. The impact of this literature can increase manifold if these writings in different languages could be made available to as many readers as possible, no matter what language they read or speak in. My attempt at translating some Dalit short stories is motivated by a desire to contribute to this literary movement by liberating them from the bondage of a particular language and taking it to a wider readership.

English, as a world language, has potential enough to, not only, take this literature in every corner of India, but also, throughout the world. I am not making any tall claims about the power of my translation. To expect any significant result from the attempts of a debutante like me will be unreasonable, but even if my translation is read by only one non-Hindi speaking person, I would consider my attempt has not gone waste.

I am aware that the path of a translator is beset by numerous and diverse problems. Dalit literature in Hindi, is still in its infancy, if I may say so, and transporting these stories in to English will be as difficult as going on a long journey carrying a child along. In addition to the special care that a child deserves, he might demand something that is impossible to give. One may take liberties if the child is one's own but if he is someone else's kid it might become hundred times more difficult.

However, for a cause, such journeys become a necessity. I have embarked upon the journey of translation to carry along with me six short stories from Hindi. All these stories have been chosen from *Charchit Dalit Kahaniyaan* (Popular Dalit Short Stories) edited by Kusum Viyogi.

Before the actual translation, however, it will be worth devoting some paragraphs to the theory of translation since although every translated text has a potential to add up to the theory of translation, the practitioner has a lot to learn from the theory before he starts translating.

Translation can be roughly defined as transference of one (source) language text into another (target) language text. It will be useful to see how the stalwarts of translation theory define this process. In the words of Catford, translation is "the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)."²⁸ According to Nida & Taber, "translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style."²⁹

Susan Bassnett says, "Translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text, into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted."³⁰

The translator begins with a text, (source text). Through certain processes the translator produces its translated version (target text). The text thus produced has its individual identity. However, since it is a translated version of the original it is also dependent on its source. There is a relationship between two texts. What that relationship is, or, rather, what it should be, is a question that the practitioners of translation are often confronted with. Among the theoreticians, too, this question has generated a comprehensive debate, in past as well as in present. This is one of many problems in the process of translation.

²⁸ Catford, J. C.. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford University Press, London. 1965.

²⁹ Nida, Eugene and Charles Taber. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Brill, Leiden. 1974

³⁰ Bassnett, Susan. *Translation Studies*. Routledge, London. 1988.

The term that is often used for answering this question is, ‘Equivalence’, that is, the target text should be equivalent to the original. The term in itself is problematic. The translator may interpret this term in many ways. His interpretation of the term directs the translator. ‘Equivalence’ in the source and the target text may mean equal, identical, similar, same, approximate, more or less same and so on. While choosing from amongst such options, the translator finds himself in a kind of dilemma.

This dilemma of the translator is as old as the practice of translation itself. Cicero and Horace were amongst the first theorists of translation. Cicero’s sensitivity to the problems of translation can be understood from one of his remarks: “If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter in the order of wording I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator.” Horace, too, is aware of a similar dilemma when he advises a would-be translator to avert being a slave to the original text.³¹

Later on, George Chapman also expresses a similar view. In his “Epistle to the reader” of his translation of the Illiad, he states, “A translator must reach the ‘spirit’ of the original, and in renderings must avoid ‘word for word’ translation, and can avoid mistranslations by investigating other versions and glosses of the original text.”

Theorists, hence, mostly prefer ‘sense for sense’ rather than ‘word for word’ translation. Nida classifies the two in to two different categories of ‘equivalence’. While discussing, the problem of equivalence he distinguishes between two types of correspondence, which he terms, ‘formal equivalence’ and ‘dynamic equivalence’. Formal equivalence refers to the “quality of a translation in which the format features of the source language text have been mechanically reproduced in the target language text.” Dynamic equivalence refers to the “quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors. Frequently the form of the original text is changed but as long as the change follows the rule of back

³¹ Bassnett, Susan. Et. Al., eds.. *Translation, History and Culture*. Printer Publishers, London. 1991: pp43-44

transformation in the source language, of contextual consistency in the transfer, and of transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful."³²

As far as the translation of the content of the source text is concerned these opinions might be very helpful. For the theorists, it seems translation of what the source text has to say has been more important. However, form is also an essential component of a text. A poem cannot be enjoyed in the same manner if it is translated as prose. There can not be any equivalence between a Hindi poem and its translated version in prose form. Equivalence should not only be maintained in terms of the content of the text but the form of the original must also be retained.

The merits of a target text are measured by the criteria of readability and acceptability. The readability criterion requires that the reader who receives the translated text is able to read and enjoy it as a text in his own language (the receptor language). On the other hand, the acceptability criterion requires that this translated text meet the reader's expectations from the particular type of writing or genre to which it belongs, such as, a poem, a play or a novel.

Having overcome the dilemma of 'equivalence', as the translator starts his job, he very soon faces another problem, that of 'translatibility'. It is one of the most persistent problems of translation theory.

The languages concerning the translator, like any other language, consist of three important elements. They are, its phonological system, its grammatical structure and its vocabulary or stock of words. As far as phonological system and grammatical structure are concerned the translator may not have many problems. But when it comes to the vocabulary or stock of words, that would create problems in the equivalent words in the target language. This is true because the history of language shows that only when certain phenomena appear in society does language find words to express them. The problem of translatibility arises when the translator does not get exact equivalent words in the target language. In that situation he/she has to look for

³² Nida, Eugene and Charles Taber. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Brill, Leiden. 1974

near equivalents. However, at the same time the translator has to maintain the cultural grain of the source language too. For example it will not be appropriate to translate pizza as 'paratha'.

This brings us to another area of difficulties concerning translation, namely, the cultural difficulties, which, according to Catford, is one of the two factors causing 'untranslatability' (the former being linguistic). He says, "Translation fails—or untranslatability occurs – when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation in to contextual meaning of the TL text. Broadly speaking, the cases where this happens fall in to two categories. Those where the difficulty is linguistic and those where it is cultural."³³

Theorists opine that the translation of the literary texts falls into the later category because of the fact that all creative literature besides being expressed in a specific language is also rooted in a particular culture and carries significant information about its socio-cultural milieu. The problems of the translator of a literary text are, therefore, in direct proportion to the cultural 'distance' between the languages involved in the translation. For that reason, translation from Hindi to Punjabi is easier than, say, in to Italian.

While translating these stories from Hindi to English, I faced difficulties at both, linguistic and cultural, levels. The language used in the original stories mostly alternates between standard Hindi and local dialect. At some places in the stories the dialects are so different from the standard that they sound completely different languages. Such glaring difference in the parlance of the characters have not been brought out in the translation as in order to achieve that I needed a dialect of English that does not sound like English. Any attempt to force a dialect on the translation would have disturbed the flow of the target text. In order to avoid any complications on the readers caused by these dialects I resorted to double translation, first into standard Hindi and from that to English. It has been indicated in the target text if the character used his/her dialect.

³³ Catford, J. C.. *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford University Press, London. 1965

Hindi has many expressions, which do not exist in English. On some occasions it was next to impossible to find even a near equivalent of some expressions. In some cases I had to resort to transliterating the original expression with a footnote by way of explanation. Kinship terms are the best examples of such transliteration. The word 'uncle' for instance, is not sufficient for brother of father, brother of mother, (elder or younger). Hindi has different names for these different kinds of 'uncles', it is more specific in kinship terms.

The problems in translation of the specific stories and how they were resolved will be discussed in detail in the note on each individual story that follows.

"Amma", as Valmiki himself, declares, is not the story of any particular woman. The main protagonist sums up the vicissitudes borne by Dalit women in India. Her real name is not important because Dalit woman has no individual identity. She is twice marginalized, first on the basis of caste and then on the basis of her gender. The depiction of double downtroddenness of Dalit women can be found in many Dalit writings. The multiple weakness, however, does not give them any respite from physical labour. In fact, without their contribution the subsistence of the family is unimaginable.

As Amma arrives in the new city-dwelling family from a rural background after her marriage, she is trained to clean toilets by her mother-in-law. After the latter gets bed-ridden her workload increases tremendously. Whereas Amma becomes a hard working dedicated member of the family, the male members cannot do away with their inherent flaws. Her father-in-law, for some unspecified reason, never leaves his bed, her husband occasionally drinks, her brother-in-law does nothing but fiddle with his musical instruments and therefore is dependent on his elder brother, her son demands kick backs for using his influence to get some work done from the needy people and her grand son has an illicit affair with a mother of two children.

In “Amma” Valmiki juxtaposes modern and traditional values. She can not accept a married woman having an affair with some other man. She wants her daughter Kiranlata to learn reading and writing; therefore, never asks her to perform domestic chores like other women in the society. She fights resolutely and courageously against the wolf of promiscuity, the extramarital romance of Mrs. Chopra, and not only teaches him a lesson but also unravels her disgust for the latter by alluding that she is nothing more than a concubine.

She questions the attitude of the high caste people that considers fellow human beings untouchable. She wants to educate her children so that they make their own mark in the society and come out of the stigma of untouchability. A life, in which they are treated as if suffering from a contagious disease, is not acceptable to her, at least for her children.

The story ends on a tragic note as her sons adopt a contemptuous attitude towards Amma’s tools, the broom and canister. She had never expected that her tools, which helped the family to survive, would some day become the cause for embarrassment to her sons. Valmiki seems to be questioning the utility of education, as all of Amma’s offenders are educated. She, a Dalit uneducated woman, attains emancipation, as she declares that she through sheer dedication and physical labor will not remain dependent on others even for a little money she wants to give to her grandsons.

The language used by Valmiki in the story is for the most part standard Khari boli, today’s standard Hindi. The language drifts to the dialect of West Uttar Pradesh whenever a woman protagonist utters something. Retaining that difference of the languages, as has already been mentioned, would have unnecessarily complicated the translated version. To avoid too many repetitions of some words their synonyms have been used in English. For instance the synonyms of ‘latrine’, privy, outhouse, toilet, etc.

Among the culturally loaded few problematic terms, used by Valmiki is *khasam*. This word has no equivalent in English. The word refers to ‘husband’ in an impolite and indecent manner. This word is also used to refer to a woman’s partner in premarital or

extramarital sexual intercourse. 'Husband' would be too polite a word as a substitute of *khasam* therefore, its nearest equivalent 'bedmate' has been chosen.

Another problematic word that Valmiki has used in the story is "*Joothan*" in context of the woman, Amma's grandson, Mukesh, has an illicit affair with. The word *joothan* literally means food left on an eater's plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle class, urban home. However, such food would only be characterized *joothan* if someone else besides the original eater were to eat it. The word carries the connotations of ritual purity and pollution. My translation of the word as 'leftovers' although not conveying exact sense is sufficiently close.

As far as the title of the translated story is concerned I decided to retain the original Amma. This word generally means mother. Sometimes even grandmothers are addressed as Amma. It can also be used for addressing elderly ladies, even if unacquainted, by one who considers them of the same age as one's mother. In the story, however, this word has been used as a proper, as well as, common noun. A proper noun can not be translated, it can only be transliterated, hence the translated version of the story is entitled "Amma".

"The Ultimate Statement" is another story that revolves around a courageous woman. Whereas "Amma" is the story of a bold Dalit woman after her marriage, "The Ultimate Statement" is that of an unmarried woman. It will not be wrong to say that "Amma" is the story of Ataro, the main protagonist of "The Ultimate Statement" after her marriage. Both Amma and Ataro are geared to fight against their molesters. Both of them know the power of their work-tools and how to use them as weapons. Whereas, Amma uses her broom to punish 'the wolf of promiscuity', Ataro uses her ax to castrate the 'well-fed bull'.

Some readers of the story may contend that "The Ultimate Statement" is not a Dalit story, as Dr. Viyogi does not refer to Ataro as an untouchable or a Dalit. However, as it has been mentioned in the first part of the introduction, the word 'Dalit' was

originally conceived as inclusive of all groups who have been discriminated against. Ataro is a Dalit in that sense and her story is, by corollary, a Dalit story.

After reading the incident of higher caste men trying to molest Dalit women, in "Amma" and "The Ultimate Statement", one cannot help recalling a pragmatic statement in the Kamasutra, that celebrated manual on sex, written from the standpoint of the upper caste male. It states that masters can avail of opportunities to seduce bonded women when they bring in the grain to be stored in the houses of the masters, a chilling reminder of how little things may have changed for those at the bottom end of the hierarchy.

Coming back to "The Ultimate Statement", the language employed by Dr. Viyogi in the story is standard Hindi without any intermittent local dialect, as in the case of "Amma". Since the story is located in a village, every character speaks the same language. The language is lucid and, for the most part, easy to translate.

Some ambiguities of the original text have been left unaltered, such as the narrator says, thanks to Bhullan, the headman's son, Rajendra was born. The statement can be interpreted in more than one ways. Similar is the case when the narrator observes, 'How ironical it was!' that all those present covered their noses with handkerchiefs when Rajendra's body was pulled out of the well. Any attempt to clarify such nebulous statements would be going beyond the limits of a translator.

The title is not the same as the original, as in the case of "Amma" The word to word translation of the original has by no means marred the effect and intensity of the story. The title gets materialized at the end of the story as Ataro brings out the amputated organ as her statement.

Like "The Ultimate Statement" "Saang" is also set in a village. Like "Amma" and "The Ultimate Statement", the chief protagonist of this story is a woman, who is formidable in her fortitude. The story is a part of Dalit writing in the same way as "The Ultimate Statement". Champa and her husband, Bhullan, who are suffering from

exploitation at the hands of bourgeois headman, have a proletarian status. Her husband gets beaten up severely for not being able to perform the job ordered by village headman, because of the former's illness. However, when the headman tries to treat Champa the same way, eight years later, she takes her revenge for the atrocities of several years, for once and for all, by beheading him with her ax. One is immediately reminded of Amma and Ataro. It seems there is some sort of realization among Dalit women that their work-tools have immense potential to liberate them of any kind of bondage.

The events in the story take place in the backdrop of a folk dramatic performance of north India, *saang*. Tired of every day humdrum of their life, Dalits seek comfort and enjoyment in few and far between *saang* performances. The stories, on which these *saang* performances are based, are not unknown to the viewers. These oft-repeated didactic stories are enjoyed for the way they are presented and for the accompaniment of folk music.

Notably, the day Champa takes revenge for her husband's drubbing follows the presentation of the legend of Satyavan-Savitri. The latter, through her love and dedication, brings her husband, the former, back from death. Champa does not have enough power to bring her husband back from death, which is apparently caused by the merciless drubbing by the headman. However, she does away with her husband's assailant. Although she is not as powerful as Savitri, she is more powerful than her husband, who dared not strike back.

There are some skeins left unraveled by author, Jaiprakash Kardam. For instance, it is not clear whether Bhullan, Champa's husband, died of the headman's assault. The translation leaves the question unanswered to remain with in the limits.

The author has quoted *ragini* sung during *saang* performance. It has been rewritten in the roman script and the meaning of the same has been given in the footnote.

Some words have been transliterated into English, having no suitable equivalent in the target language, for example abusive word *sala*. Mulkraj Anand, in his *Untouchable* used its English translation 'brother-in-law, which was quite unsuitable in the context.

Another word *orani* has been retained. It refers to a cloth that works as a veil, in addition to other things. The word, *lathaits* could have been translated as, 'vigilante group', and some equivalent could be found for 'masur pulse' but such attempts would have taken the text beyond the culture it has been located in. A translation absolutely bereaved off the source culture cannot be called a good work.

"And She got Educated" is the story of a young Dalit girl who in spite of lack of support from her family, gets educated with encouragement from the narrator of the story. In spite of the adverse conditions in her locality, she gets first class in her B.A. The impediments on her way are not the atrocities committed by non-Dalits, her tormentors are the lifestyle and superstitions of Dalits in her locality. Chetana despises her neighbors' filthy life style.

Reformers, including Ambedkar and Gandhi, have opined that in order for their physical and social wellbeing, Dalits must keep away from squalor. Chetana proves to be a true follower of Ambedkar not only by following the instruction of Ambedkar for Dalits to educate, agitate and organize, but also by throwing the statues of all gods and goddesses out of her house. She always greets the narrator by 'jai bhim'. Her revolutionary nature is revealed very early in the story, as she defies her mother by refusing to follow the hereditary profession of cleaning latrines and expressing her desire to study. As she falls ill she is subjected to the cruelty of the exorcists. She does not have any faith in such superstitions.

Most difficult for a translator is the translation of abusive words used. Different abusive words, in the same sense, have been used. English equivalent have been used for the translation and repetitions have been avoided otherwise the text might have got tedious.

Some inherent flaws of the original have not been modified in the name of fidelity. For example Dr. Viyogi compares Shamo's striking of her daughter with her broom to the playing of a violin. The comparison, although incongruous, has been left unchanged. Chetana is not only the name of the main protagonist the word has also

been used in the sense of consciousness. Such puns obviously get lost in the translation.

The title of the original comes from the last sentence of the story which has been translated hence the title is of the translated story is English equivalent of the original title.

“Polluted” is also the story of a Dalit overcoming the social problems and getting educated. Unlike “And She Educated”, the main protagonist here is a man. He has not only got educated; he also has reached a significant position of an officer in Indian Administrative Service. The village headman wants to take a political mileage from the narrator by honouring him on the stage of Ramleela performance. The move would help him to get Dalit voters in the coming elections. In spite of his becoming an IAS officer the stigma of untouchability remains unobliterated. The Dalit community of the village gets agitated severely as the person in the role of Ram insults Biharilal. The story ends as the hypocritical headman get interrogated by Dalits, causing him embarrassment.

This story is located in a village. In spite of their living in a common village the language spoken by Dalits is different from that spoken by non-Dalits. Communication amongst non-Dalits and between them and Dalits takes place in standard Hindi. However, when headman, along with Ramleela committee members, visits Biharilal to take some financial assistance from him, the latter speaks to his mother in a different language. That utterance has been translated in to English, with no variation, however, the fact that he speaks in a different dialect has been mentioned. Words such as, ‘Ramleela’, ‘jaikara’, ‘aarti’ etc being culturally exclusive have no equivalent in English, hence they have been just transliterated.

The title is a direct translation of the source text. Behind the title there is the traditional concept that if an untouchable touches a person of a higher caste the latter gets polluted and is considered untouchable unless he expiates by performing prescribed rituals.

“The Tunnel” is the story of another educated Dalit youth. The author shows how some people in significant positions might be obstacles on the way of higher education for Dalits. The narrator has to struggle very hard to get himself enrolled for research, as the head of the department, Dr. Vishnu refuses him permission for it. Although author’s portrayal of professors as villains seems a bit exaggerated, he does not hide the fact that his fellow students, mostly non-Dalits, put pressure on the authorities to secure justice for the narrator.

The structure of the language used in the original story is very problematic as far as translating is concerned. Dr. Batohi keeps shifting back and forth between present and past tenses. He doesn’t use the standard written form of Hindi the structures he has used are used in the oral form of it. Many syntactic and grammatical errors can be found in the story. Retaining such errors in English would be impossible and if they were forced on it they would have rendered the translation uninteresting. Some expressions used by the author were very challenging. Such as in context of the head of the department, expression, ‘*dahi ka rakhvala vilad*’ has been used. It literally means ‘a cat as guardian of curd’. Curd, like any other milk product, is to be protected from cats. Employing a cat to guard curd would be quite ironical and futile. Higher authorities, such as the Head of the Department, have responsibility to ensure the fulfillment of reservation policy for backward sections of the society, in various institutions. But if the responsible person is imperviously prejudiced and makes up his mind not to accept candidates from the backward communities, as is displayed by the Head of the Department by declaring that as long as he is there in the department he is not going to let Dalits enroll for research, the situation would be like employing a cat to guard curd.

The word ‘gherao’, used in the source text, has been retained in the translation as it has been lately accepted in English.

The title of the target text, "Tunnel", is the direct translation of the title of the original story. The word signifies a darkness that is expected to end as one reaches the end of the tunnel. Despite numerous impediments created by some professors, the narrator completes his research. The title suggests Dr. Batohi's optimism that there will be a time when there will be no discrimination against any human beings.

Before concluding it will be worth acknowledging that Dalit writers of Hindi are still not at ease when it comes to creative writing. However, they must write so that their grievances against an unjust system of the society may reach others. Omprakash Valmiki juxtaposes the atrocities committed on Dalits and their compulsion, for, as well as difficulty in writing to reveal the injustices in his novel *Joothan*, recently translated in to English by Arunprabha Mukherjee, probably to suggest that it is really difficult for any Dalit to pick up a pen and use the words as weapons. For those who have lived in severely inhuman conditions for generations, being creative must require serious efforts. Valmiki says:

"Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman and compassionless towards Dalits. I have harboured the desire to put the narrative of my pain into writing for a long time. But even though I tried many times, I didn't manage to succeed. Umpteen times did I start to write but ended up ripping the written pages apart."³⁴

³⁴ Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan*. trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Samya, Kolkata, 2003, p2

Amma

Omprakash Valmiki

This story belongs to “*amma*” - you may say so, however, not to any particular amma. Early in the morning, in your locality you may find many such *ammias*, with their broom and canister, whose time-torn dilapidated bodies remain unrhythmically active, still look like halted water. Every moment leads them to an unknown and unforeseeable future, in face of which every intellectual jugglery, all predictions, all concepts are either futile or faulty.

I don't know the name of the Amma that I am talking about. She herself might have forgotten her real name by now, since when she came to her husband's house from her mother's, her in-laws called her *bahu*,³⁵ her husband's younger brother and sister named her *bhabhi*,³⁶ the elderly ladies of the neighbourhood unconsciously labeled her, after her bedmate's name, 'Sukaru's wife'. Sukaru did not call her at all. All through the day she would be busy with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Late night Sukaru would reach her bed stealthily, on tiptoe. Only for a short while, always afraid, lest his mother or sister should wake up. The tin-roofed little abode, built by joining some wooden boards, was barely capable of housing the inmates.

In that little while where was the leisure for them to talk? In those days she used to be different from today's *amma*, who slowly drags her feet while walking, whose soiled sari remains tucked in from the front close to her belly, who has dry hair, puckered face, sunken eyes, whose one eye has shrunk due to the assault of time, whose front teeth are broken. Even the one or two remaining shake wildly like the grains of corn being fried in the broiler pan.

She used to be really different those days. Along with long and dense hair, deep dark eyes, she had a blooming body. Its fragrance had mesmerized him. His heart would aspire for those few moments of that blissful union of the night, throughout the day.

³⁵ Daughter-in-law

³⁶ sister-in-law

Till today those few moments remain the most cherished in his life. It used to be a spirited, although a short, rendezvous.

When their first child was born there were many deliberations before naming him Shiv Charan. Sukaru felt that now he needed a name to call his wife. One day he chose to call her 'Shibbu's *amma*'. Shibbu's *amma* of those days is now addressed with only *amma*. Sukaru, however, still calls her by the former name.

Her family is now blessed with many grandsons. In her seventy's *amma*'s body is hardly supporting her. She remains frequently indisposed. Although troubled by rheumatism she returns to her dwelling after finishing her job at 10-15 outhouses.

White outfit has been *amma*'s weakness. Even today when she leaves her house with her broom and broken canister for work, she is clad in white sari. However, with the passing of time, this white sari has sheer illusion of white. Who knows when that white colour changed into pale or earthen. She could not understand. She could not even understand how time changed so rapidly. Having come to a city from a village in those days she would look at everything with surprise, like an alert doe.

Many years have elapsed since her mother-in-law and father-in-law died. But she remembers very well the day when her mother-in-law took her to her workhouses for the first ceremonial greetings. She had never thought that she too would have to go from door to door with a broom and a canister.

Her mother-in-law had given her a proper training. How she should call on reaching the gate of the house, how to enter the privy, how to flush the shit pot with water, how many times she should move the broom from left to right. For how long or what kind of conversation to engage in at any particular house. Till how far to go in the courtyard. Not to touch anything lying in the courtyard. If someone offers water or tea where to place the cup back. In every house there used to be a cup or two cup on a shelf or on a branch of a tree in the courtyard. Which would be useful for the purpose.

Numerous such other things her mother-in-law had taught her. She would listen to her with great astonishment. The ways of the villagers were different from those of the

city dwellers. Men as well as women used to go out of the village to defecate. Most of the jobs in the village were related to agriculture. This calling of cleaning the latrines was absolutely new for her. She used to feel a kind of dizziness due to the foul stench as she opened the door of the latrines. Following the English custom people had built toilets in their houses. This phenomenon was very strange for her.

In the initial days her mother-in-law used to take her along to the houses. *Amma* would do all the work. The mother-in-law would instruct her. The time had started flying. The mother-in-law was happy with her work. By every means she would try to keep *amma* happy, always accompanying her like her shadow.

One day the mother-in-law suddenly fell ill. She took such a bed rest that she was never able to leave the bed again. Now the responsibility for work inside, as well as outside the house fell upon Shibbu's *amma*.

Bishen and Kiran followed Shiv Charan. With these three offsprings Shibbu's *amma* had become *amma*. The sister-in-law had shifted to her husband's house after her marriage. The house was left with ten creatures, father-in-law, and mother-in-law, brother-in-law with his wife and a daughter, Sukaru and their three children. The father-in-law had no other business but to lie on the cot whole day and cough. The brother-in-law, it can be said, was employed as a piper in a band-party but most of the time he was jobless, barring a short marriage-season. Otherwise he would spend his days loitering around. Sukaru was an employee in municipality. The income was meager. It was the sole responsibility of Sukaru to earn for the whole family. In addition to that was the debt of Sardar Pritam Singh for which the interest had to be paid every month.

The mother-in-law's training had brought some relief for the wretched family. In place of 10 *amma* had started working at 15 outhouses. 5 she had bought from Biramdei with a promise of payment on small installments every month.

The most lucrative outhouse that *amma* had was that of Mrs. Chopra. The Chopra's ran a cloth-shop in the market. They earned significant profit. Mr. Chopra used to

leave for the shop early in the morning. And would return late at night. The kids used to go to school and Mrs. Chopra used to be alone in the house.

Amma frequently saw a man in Mrs. Chopra's home. To begin with she took him to be a man belonging to Chopra family. Soon she got to know the reality. The circumstance she saw both in once, left *amma* dumbfounded. Mrs. Chopra seemed to be good and innocent. As a result of whatever *amma* saw that day she had started having a feeling of repulsion against her.

After that particular day her wages were increased by Rs5. Whereas she got Rs5 from working at other outhouses Mrs. Chopra had started giving her 10. Mrs. Chopra was a jovial and talkative lady. She would talk to *amma*, every kind of talks; *amma* would listen with gaped mouth. Whenever she was alone she would stop *amma* for a cup of tea. On the guava-tree in the courtyard there used to be a cup for *amma*. While having her tea *amma* would think Mrs. Chopra is such a nice lady, still with a strange man! Chi chi!³⁷ It is shameless, even talking about it.

The other day when *amma* reached her home Mrs. Chopra was in the bathroom. That man was sitting in the bedroom. *Amma* called out, "*Bahan ji*³⁸ I have done the cleaning." Mrs. Chopra shouted from inside the bathroom, "Vinod please give one bucket full of water to the *jamadarini*³⁹. It is kept under the tap." The man picked up the bucket and kept it close to *amma* and looked at her smilingly. She motioned with her hands to pour the water. Rather than pouring water in to commode he placed his hand on *amma's* waist and pulled her towards himself. Quite baffled by such mischief she shouted, "What are you doing?" She tried to escape from his grasp.

Vinod increased the pressure and hugged her tightly. *Amma* felt as if she was in the clutches of a cannibal. She was striving hard to come out of his embrace. As soon as his hold loosened she pushed him and released herself. Tightening her grip on the broom in her hand she struck on his head as hard as she could. Dazed, he started

³⁷ Expression to communicate repulsion

³⁸ Sister. Generally used to signify informal relation with a lady or to address a lady higher in social status.

³⁹ A female latrine-cleaner

running towards the bedroom. *Amma* followed him, still issuing blows with her broom. He collapsed on the floor. *Amma's* broom was thumping at his body repeatedly along with the abuse emitting from *amma's* mouth.

Sensing the chaos, Mrs. Chopra came out of the bathroom in her semi naked state. The scene of the bedroom left her bewildered. She ran in order to rescue Vinod.

“Stop. What are you doing? Stop. Don't beat him.” She tried to snatch the broom from *amma's* hands. *Amma* pushed her back too. After two or three more blows she said, “*Bahanji*, tell this pug of a bastard that every woman is not a concubine.” Her eyes were blazing with anger. Her body was panting. *Amma's* dark complexion had become even darker.

With the beating that he received Vinod's lust had cooled down. One of the blows of *amma's* broom had struck one of his eyes and close to it a yellow protuberance had emanated. Pressing it with his palms he lay prostrate on the floor. *Amma* picked up her canister and dashed out of the house. Next day she sold off Chopra's outhouse to Hardei. She also narrated to Hardei the whole incident.

Hardei was a foul-mouthed woman, very fluent in calling names. It was impossible for her to issue any statement without swearing. After listening to the whole incident she said, “You are stupid. You should have pulled him in side the latrine. Then you should have told him to remove his clothes ‘let us enjoy.’ After that you should have brought that dog out in to the street beating him with the broom. Then he would have realised. Would have forgotten his passion and the Chopri too. I know how to deal with such women. Take the lote (note) from tomorrow onwards Chopri will be mine. The mother of two kids and in love!”

Amma heaved a sigh of relief after selling Chopra's out house for twenty rupees. The news, when it reached the ears of *amma's* mother-in-law, created chaos in the house. The mother-in-law started shouting at *amma*. “You destroyer of the house you should have waited till my death. We are so much obliged to this Chopri. Whenever we required she has been of a great helped to us. I had been working for them for so many days. They are people of high morals. People like us remain in their pockets.

You the daughter of a lord, thought you have got so rich that you sold her house! And that too to that bastard Hardei! I know her very well. She must have taught something nasty to you. She had been trying to acquire that house for such a long time.” The mother-in-law had cried her heart out. *Amma* kept listening silently the wailing. She did not utter a single word about the incident at Chopra’s house.

The mother-in-law relented after wailing for two or three days, but Sukaru broached the issue again one day. It was the payday at the municipality. Sukaru had had a quarter of liquor before reaching the house. Having put his salary on *amma*’s palm he said, “Listen carefully Shibbu’s *amma*. It is not good that you grieved the heart of mother. Mother had painstakingly managed these out houses. The whole functioning of the house was dependent on these. Father did not do anything. Mother had supported us through very bad times. We got food and clothes because of these houses. The Chopri had been of a great help when my sister was married. You have sold her this was not good Shibbu’s *amma*. Go and apologise to mother. Give 20 rupees to Hardei and... It is impossible to find a woman like Chopri. As good of complexion so good of heart.” Seeing *amma* not reacting Sukaru shouted “Are you listening to me?”

Amma was obviously listening to Sukaru’s monologue. She could not ignore the strange disquiet growing within her. She did not want to throw the house in to a state of pandemonium by disclosing the incident of Mrs. Chopara’s house.

Very often she felt the agitation in her heart but always remained quite. By now she had got over with many traumatic experiences of her life. Her whole body quivered whenever she remembered her past experiences. Just like her memories she had hidden her ambitions in the tin trunk that had come along with her from her mother’s house at the time of marriage. She dedicated her time to the bringing up of her children, without any complains or cribbing. Shiv Charan had been admitted to a school in the locality. After a year Bisen and then Kiran followed Shiv. Emulating Brahmins⁴⁰ and Baniyas⁴¹ she had named her daughter Kiran Lata. She preferred Kiran Lata to shorter name Kiran that other family members used.

⁴⁰ Supreme in the caste hierarchy

As the kids grew up, their expenses also increased. Their stationery and textbooks were adding to the problems of the already impoverished family. Shiv Charan would come up with a new demand every other day. Bishen had a lot in common with his uncle. Similar features similar habits, singing film songs and decking up, standing hours in front of a mirror. Occasionally he would play at the musical instruments of his uncle. *Amma's* blood would boil with anger whenever she saw him singing or playing harmonium.

"I am tired of telling you. You are not going to become a dancer like your uncle. You are not going to dance with any band party. Have you seen the plight of your uncle? No life in his lungs is left. He hardly can breathe properly. Study and become a man. If you become a *clarak* (clerk) or peon in some office your life will become better. At least you will be away from this hell where we don't get one proper meal in the day and Sardar Pritam Singh keeps knocking at the door. What kind of life is this where no one lets you sit close by as if we are suffering from some contagious disease?"

Saying this she broke down. Shiv Charan had taken out books from his bag. Kiran Lata had entered the kitchen in order to prepare tea for *amma*. Bishen, left with no support to save him from *amma's* anger, had started reading.

Amma never upbraided Kiran Lata like this. She always used to say, "She will have to go to a strange house. Who knows for how long we will be together? Why to scold her? If she learns to read and write she will be able to inform us about her how abouts. Otherwise one has to beg from others for writing a letter. Moreover, a girl is nothing less than Lakshami."⁴²

Amma kept her children away from her calling. Even if she was indisposed she would never send them to work at the outhouses. If her mother-in-law and father-in-law or other members of her society questioned about this she would say, "I will never push

⁴¹Traders and merchants. Their place in the caste hierarchy is after Brahmins (priests) and Kshatriyas (warriors) They are significantly respected in the society as a result of their wealth

⁴² Being the goddess of wealth Lakshami commands more respect than other gods and goddesses

my offsprings in to that filth. Any other menial job is fine but I will never hand over a broom to them.”

As soon as Shiv Charan cleared his 10th standard examinations he started working in the municipality as a substitute for a clerk. He had got this job through an influential contractor. Whatever salary he got 20% of it had to be given to that contractor. The remaining he would put on his mother’s palm. *Amma* had started believing that the days would change for better.

Shiv Charan was now making his own place in the municipality. He had certain leadership skills in him. He had found a prominent leader of the town to escort. Shiv Charan would be overactively engaged in his meetings and processions. Slogan shouting, pamphlet distribution, adjustment of the flagstaff, all these were done by him. He even had learned a little bit of the art of delivering a public speech. As a result he had entered the political system of the municipality. He had successfully managed to make contacts with certain important officers and bureaucrats. His income soared significantly thanks to this development.

When a man turns in to a man-eater he cannot differentiate between his own and that of the others’. What he needs is simply blood. The case was same with Shiv Charan. Whether they were his own relatives or others belonging to his community he had started charging money in the name of commission for getting some work done. People used to say that he is naturally incorrigible. No matter what you do, he can’t be reformed.

Inspite of his soaring income *amma* had failed to realise this fact. Although Sukaru was an employee in the municipality he never mentioned Shiv charan’s mischievous work to *amma*. One fine morning Herdei’s daughter-in-law, while coming back after completing her job at Chopra’s outhouse, stopped to see *amma* coming. Showing a lot of deference she said, “*Amma*, you still work? What do you lack now? Your son is earning a lot. He charged 3000 for getting Ramkishan a job. Everyone knows that.”

“Who are you talking about bahu⁴³ that of Shiv Charan? Took 3000 where did you hear that?” *Amma* asked surprisingly.

“Don’t pretend that you don’t know *ammaji*. Even the neighbours know when a house receives stack of notes and then you are his mother. We have heard that ⁴⁴*jethji* keeps all the money in your hand. It is the same as: rob the world and remain innocent.”

After igniting this fire Herdei’s daughter-in-law went her way. *Amma*’s had turned pale. She could not manage to speak anything at the time of revelation.

She had told Shiv Charan, as soon as he returned home in the evening, “Shibbu whatever you do these days is not good. I wouldn’t even have touched your money if I knew you are earning in such a bad manner. I got you educated, got you married, but could not make you a good person. It is my failure. From tomorrow onwards separate your kitchen from us. I can’t eat of this earning. Live separately, and then rob someone or kill I don’t want to be involved in that.”

Shiv Charan was listening to *Amma*’s exhortations with his gaped mouth. What *amma* was saying was beyond his comprehension. What has happened to her suddenly. Ultimately he did ask, “What’s wrong *amma*? Am I stealing money? Even if I am, what is wrong in that? That contractor was doing the same thing for so many years. With such money he has built a huge mansion. If I started doing this what is wrong? I work for them and they pay me happily. It is not evil to charge them for my service.”

“You are talking about evil? Even cutting someone’s throat is not evil. Not even stealing money is evil. But my son, think of those who have to snatch the grub off the mouths of their children in order to pay you. Have you thought of their plight how they are living?” Her throat was getting choked.

⁴³ Belonging to the same community Herdei and *amma* are considered to be sisters. As a corollary Herdei’s daughter-in-law has the same relationship with *amma*. Hence ‘*bahu*’

⁴⁴ elder brother of one’s husband

“Amma, they themselves are responsible for their plight. Rather than taking their meager income to their house they would rather drink and gamble,” reasoned Shiv Charan.

“You are right my son. If you had not been sent to the school you would be exactly like them. As far as drinking is concerned you also drink. Today you get it free of cost tomorrow if you don’t get it free you will buy it. After getting addicted one can’t see whether one’s children are hungry or sick. Do whatever you think is right, I don’t want your money.” Saying this *amma* got up and engaged herself in the housework. She was continuously troubled by the pain of having given birth to a man-eater.

It took a while for Bishen to get a job. He had done his inter-mediate. He had tried various occupations. Sometime he worked as a conductor, sometime he sold tickets in the cinema hall. Worked as a helper to a contractor. Having got tired of all this he had become a clerk in an office. The income was not much still it gave him satisfaction. The day he got that job *amma* had believed that hard work had brought her success.

Soon after Bishen’s employment he and Kiran Lata both were married. A loan had to be taken for both the weddings from Sardar Pritam Singh. Kiran’s husband was employed in army. Not much educated still good looking. Bishen’s wife had studied till eighth standard.

If *amma* looks back, from where she stands now, everything looks very hazy. She has seen many ups and downs in her life.

But the wound given to her heart by Bishen’s son Mukesh is perhaps the deepest. Mukesh had done his M.A. but there were not even remote chances discernible of any employment. All hardwork for securing a job proved futile. The atmosphere of the house was tensed concerning Mukesh, because which of he would not return home for days. It increased the troubles of Bishen. After investigations it was revealed hat he used to linger at a schoolteacher’s house. This schoolteacher used to live separately from her husband along with her two small kids. She was attractive and young. She had met Mukesh somewhere and that meeting turned in to intimacy. Such a relationship had developed between them, which they were unable to give any name

to. Escaping the everyday tension of the house he used to reach the schoolteacher's house in order to find some solace. To beginning with she was drawn by the attractive personality of Mukesh. After coming out of her solitude she had ended up in Mukesh's arms. After very few meetings this attraction had turned in to a necessity. There has to be someone in the house to take care of the children. The teacher would leave her house at 8 in the morning and Mukesh would take care of the kids. He did not return his own house before 10 or 10.30. One night when he reached his house late Bishen asked him scoldingly, "Where do you stay these days to come so late at night after leaving so early in the morning?"

Mukesh tried to evade the question but when Bishen forced him all his excuses started staggering. Bishen had already got to know about the relationship between Mukesh and the schoolteacher.

Bishen growled, "What is this business of school teacher?" The mention of school teacher caused embarrassment to Mukesh. *Amma* had also come out after hearing Bishen's voice. Mukesh was standing with his head bowed. He had not answered any of Bishen's questions. Having lost his temper Bishen screamed, "if you have any sense of shame get out of this house at this very moment." Saying this he slapped Mukesh twice or thrice. *Amma* mediated and took Mukesh away. Bishen was still shouting. *Amma* inquired from Mukesh about the affair. He divulged everything to her. *Amma* felt as if instead of her grand son in front of her it was Vinod sitting in the bedroom of Mrs. Chopra. Her eyes were filled with a strange kind of disgust. She did not say anything. Heaving a deep sigh she lay down in her bed.

She could not notice when did Mukesh leave. Shiv Charan's daughter-in-law came to her and said, "*Ammaji* get Mukesh married. The strayed one will return to the right path." *Amma* took a deep breath and said, "No, I will not tie any innocent girl with this bull. Someone, who starts relishing stale meat, will never touch the fresh. I will not knowingly push any poor girl in to a ditch." *Amma* took deep breaths as if she was trying to come out of some pain. The light of morning had descended on the roof. She picked her broom and canister and left for her outhouses. That day she stayed out throughout the day. Mukesh's departure from the family had given her a severe shock. As she returned home in the evening she was extremely exhausted. Her breathing was

irregular. Everyone was worried to see her situation. Bishen asked her helping her lie down, "*Amma*, where were you since morning? We searched for you everywhere. All of us were so worried."

Amma did not answer. Not getting any response from her he said, "*Amma* leave this business of outhouses now. You don't have sufficient strength in you. Why do you need to take so much trouble? Doesn't look good that you go scavenging. It is embarrassing for us when people see."

"Yes my son Bishen. I had educated you so that you feel embarrassed. I got you all rid of the broom and canister. No woman belonging to our family went to outhouses after me so that you may learn to live with dignity. Still something was missing. Your son went to taste the leftovers that too like a servant, in order to take care of her children. If he had brought her home in a dignified manner I would accept her even if she is the mother of two children. I would have kept her happily as my own daughter-in-law. What he did is by no means acceptable." She started crying. When the tears stopped she said again, "Whatever money we got after your father's retirement we repaid Sardar Pritam Singh. Now the life is dependent on you. When Kiran Lata comes with her children I should have something to keep on her empty palm. Till when shall I take money from you? No my son. If I will have to work for that happiness I will work till my last breath but I won't be dependent on anyone."

Amma's eyes had turned in to a deep-water lake in which small waves were surfing. All her old wounds had opened up once more. Her dilapidated canister and broom, leaning against the wall, were gibing at her.

The Ultimate Statement

Dr. Kusum Viyogi

The plough men had left for their fields even before the first ray of the sun dawned. As soon as it dawned the womenfolk of the village started for the well with their empty utensils. The early morning scene of women drawing water made the environment more fascinating. The labourers had also left for their work places.

In order to get fodder for their cows and buffalos, Kamala, Ataro and Bhartri too crossed the four-walls of their house and set off towards their fields. Four five women had formed a group to get the fodder.

Ataro was a beautiful young girl. Kamala and Bhartari were mothers of three four children. Ataro being a sister-in-law to all, they used to indulge in kidding with her whenever they were in a teasing mood.

It had got warmer as the sun had risen higher.

The son of the village-headman had been doting on Ataro lately. Kamala and Bhartari had inferred his designs by his actions. However, they could not say anything to Ataro. Rajendra would quench his thirst by a mere glimpse of Ataro but his lips would remain as dry as before.

He would be found sitting like Majnu⁴⁵ on the parapet of the village on their way to the fields. His fields were near by. But those fields were by no means his paternal property. His father would charge exorbitant interest on a poultry amount loaned to poor villagers and on not being repaid on time he would misappropriate their fields.

As these women passed by him Rajendra would say, "Hey bhabhi ⁴⁶ you are late today? It was a strange village practice. The wife of a poor person would be *bhaujai*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ A legendary lover whose name is used to denote a lover who has lost his self

⁴⁶ The wife of one's brother

⁴⁷ same as bhabhi. A man is culturally allowed to tease his brother's wife

for the whole village. An old person in his sixty's would not hesitate to call a twenty year old woman 'bhabhi'. Even though it would burn the heart of the woman with anger but who could dare to oppose?

Rajendra was the only son of the village headman. It was thanks to Bhullan that after a wait of twenty years his wife gave birth to Rajendra. Otherwise she had stopped leaving the threshold of her house for the fear of being called barren.

The parents had left Rajendra unfettered, like a well-fed bull. But this bull had now given his heart to Buddhan's daughter Ataro. He would quiver like a featherless bird at the sight of her.

Just like other days the three women were on their way to get fodder. Today Rajendra could not contain himself. As they passed by his field he said, "Bhabhi won't you take something for fodder from my field?"

The son of the headman called Bhartari *bhabhi*. She had read his intention through his eyes. Ataro could not tolerate this kind of stuff. But Kamala said, "If he is offering let us cut the grass from his field."

For Bhartari and Ataro it was difficult to endure the naiveté of Kamala. The flame in Rajendra's evil eyes would scorch both with anger.

The cutting of grass by these women went on. Rajendra, who had estimated the value of their existence to be even less than that of hay and grass, kept showing up on their way.

One day when they were about to leave for their house after cutting grass from Rajendra's field, he said, "Bhabhi, you go with Kamala. I have something important to talk to Ataro." The utterance obviously baffled Bhartari and Kamala.

"Today we are in hurry, some other time."

Before Rajendra could make sense of Ataro's articulation they were on their way to their home.

On their way, as they walked with their bundled grass on their heads; they were discussing the incident. Suddenly Ataro said, hissing like a female serpent, "Bhabhi, if he does anything to me I will pierce him like a sugar-cane with my ax. The village people will not be able to do anything to me."

"Ataro!" Kamala was stunned to hear this from Ataro, "what are you saying if something happens the whole village will have a tough time."

"So what. I can not endure such nonsense. You rather undress before that bastard." Now Ataro's eyes were blood-red.

Bhartari suggested, "We'll take a different route for the fields from now on."

"Why?" Ataro asked.

Kamala retorted, "Bhabhi is right Ataro."

"What rubbish! You need not worry I shall handle it. He doesn't have four hands and four legs."

As they went for the routine job towards the fields next time, Rajendra saw them, as usual. He flushed like an incipient flower at the sight of Ataro. Three women went in different directions in order to cut grass. Rajendra's vulture like gaze remained glued to Ataro. When they returned with their bundles on their heads, they saw Rajendra sitting with a *katta* (an indigenous pistol) in his hands. Sometime he would unscrew it and sometime remove and replace the cartridges. Bhartari had grasped his state of mind. But remembering previous day's assertion of Ataro she was feeling proud at Ataro's masculine disposition.

"Hey bhabhi, have you cut the grass?"

Bhartari immediately nodded.

“Are you only concerned with the thirst of cows and buffaloes Ataro, or ...?” Asked Rajendra.

Ataro boiled like acid and started moving her ax between her fingers. Kamala, standing there, kept listening and watching all this.

Rajendra said, “Bhabhi you go with Kamala Ataro will come after some time.”

Ataro, too, was now desperate to prey upon the wolf of promiscuity. As both stated moving towards home Rajendra lifted his pistol to his lips and kissed it.

“Ataro, how about unloading that bundle from your head? You will get tired standing with it.” As Ataro was about to take the bundle off her head, Rajendra lent his hands for help and, not only her bundle, his hands brought Ataro also down to the ground and he fell in the field with her.

The feet of Kamala and Bhartari were hardly moving towards the village. Who knows...

The mind of both of them was burdened with the fear of an impending disaster.

Rajendra was trying to seduce Ataro with his words.

As he removed his clothes, his male organ was erect.

After sometime...

Ataro started moving towards her home with her bundle of grass on her head.

On her way she found Kamala and Bhartari waiting for her.

“Ataro!” As they uttered her name both of them started perspiring.

after seeing her red eyes, like those of a lioness, they dared not ask Ataro any thing at all.

“Hey bhabhi why are you sitting here? Let us go home.”

“Our feet are not moving *jiji*.”

“Come on. Why are you so worried? Everything is all right.”

But today the bundles of grass were feeling unusually heavy.

After reaching their home all three of them got busy in their respective chores.

There was no sleep in Kamala's eyes at night. On the other hand, Bhartari was ecstatic because of Ataro's virile courage.

The next day they went to the fields and returned, everything was okay. For 2-3 days they did not see Rajendra.

One day Kamala finally asked, "Bhabhi Rajendra is not being seen for some days?"

"Must have gone somewhere. He won't die that easily."

Ataro was diving in the bottomless ocean.

When Rajendra did not return for some days, there was commotion in the village. Where did Rajendra go? Everyone had the same question to ask.

The village headman lodged a complaint to this effect in the village police station.

Every limb of Kamala and Bhartari was nervous but they could not say anything to each other.

On the fourth day, when, even the first ray of sun had not dawned, the news of a corpse in the well had reached everyone in the village.

The whole village was reverberating with the sound of the police vans sirens.

The villagers had thronged in the vicinity of the well like trees in a jungle. The headman reached the well with the police. The news had already reached the police thanks to the sweeper.

As he saw the corpse of his son, the headman collapsed on to the ground, unconscious.

On the other side the police were busy in clubbing the crowd gathered in curiosity.

Soon the jaw of the headman's wife had become dysfunctional, someone was pouring water and someone was fanning her with a cloth.

How devastating it was! Bhartari and Kamala were stone still. Ataro, on the other hand, was enjoying her daily chores.

As the police pulled out the deadbody, the air around started stinking. Everyone covered his face with the loose end of his clothes. How ironic it was.

When the constable moved on to register the incidence, the crowd followed him. The constable waved his stick in the air. The crowd retreated. The clock had stopped ticking at that moment.

The croaking of the crows perched on the neem tree close to the well made the environment harsher.

Three four policemen threw the dead body in to the jeep. The whole village watched with astonishment.

When the jeep started moving there was dust and smoke all around. The villagers followed in their own conveyances towards the civil hospital.

The hospital was at a distance of around a mile. There was a sizable gathering in the hospital very soon.

The elders were smoking bidis and discussing about the affair. Some would say it was a suicide case. The other would claim murder. As many mouths so many opinions. To the villagers the matter was very serious.

For what reason Rajendra...

Everyone was extremely hungry by now. One by one people went stealthily to enjoy the available edibles close to the hospital and rejoin the group, smoking bidis again.

The hospital was full of the stubs of Bidis. The roadside vendors had a great time. As the whole village had gathered in the civil hospital, the number of their customers had risen dramatically.

The corpse was returned after postmortem.

The postmortem report left the constable transfixed. Suddenly he called for the sarpanch.⁴⁸ Sarpanch staggered forth and met him. The constable scolded the gathered persons, "What is happening here? Why have you thronged this place? Go and remain seated there."

One man brought the shroud and other relevant things. The dead body was taken to the village on a buffalo cart.

The whole crowd followed. People from neighbouring villages had arrived at the sight to console the headman after hearing the news.

The women folk were whispering among themselves. What a calamity for the headman! The eyes of village headman's wife had become like stones because of excessive crying.

When the dead body was undressed to be bathed, the people close by gazed at it with bewilderment. It was again dark before the headman's eyes and he fell down once more. Two-three persons rushed to get some water and splashed few drops on his face. The headman remained lying there, as if unconscious. The policemen started their investigation in civil uniform. New faces emerged in the crowd; after all, the incident was of such a magnitude!

Everyone of the crowd went for the funeral. There was no verbal reaction whatsoever from anyone at the sight of the naked corpse. It was soon offered to the fire.

⁴⁸traditionally the eldes/wisest man in a village whose opinion is important for any event and whose decision prevails in the case of conflict in the village.

The police were now in action. They had seen the postmortem report. They were busy solving whether it was a murder or a suicide case.

The police can sniff better than any dog; if they decide to sniff around. Otherwise who cares for the report. This was a serious case and then it had to do with the village headman. The police had better come in to action.

Every villager was a suspect. People were trembling in fear like leaves. Their tongues did not move, as if paralyzed.

In the process of investigation, the police reached Ataro. She was to be taken in to custody. She was told to record her statement in the police station.

Seeing a girl being taken to the police station the villagers had united. The gathering of villagers said in unison, "Whatever statement you want to take, take it here itself. As her family has been living here for seven generations, she is the daughter of the whole village."

The constable retorted, "Don't worry. After recording her statement we will leave her. If some of you want to come along with us you can come."

"But it had never happened in the history of the village that a girl went to a police station or court to give her statement. She is a sister or daughter to everyone."

But then Ataro exploded, "You want my statement constable?" This sentence by Ataro made the villagers motionless as if effigies. The lahanga⁴⁹ of Bhartari and Kamala had got wet.

And then Ataro roared, "Listen all you Villagers with attention. You too listen constable, you want a statement? You will definitely get it. Just wait."

As Ataro rushed towards her home the police followed her. Who knows....

⁴⁹ A long skirt

The village sarpanch stopped him. "Don't run behind her, constable."

The constable immediately stopped mulishly.

The return of Ataro , after a short while, with a paper bundle in her hands, gladdened the constable.

Coming in the middle of a dense forest like crowd she said, "Listen you villagers. If the constable wants a statement, here is my statement." And then Ataro waved the amputated male organ of Rajendra in the air.

Saang⁵⁰

Jaiprakash Kardam

The day was almost over. The dusk pervaded the area all around. The environment was filled with a kind of music produced by the chirping of the birds, returning to their nests after the hard work of the whole day, and the sound of the bells round the necks of the oxen, returning after ploughing the fields. The peasants could be seen dragging themselves behind their oxen.

Some oxen, already tied to the wooden pegs by their owners, ravenously fell on the fodder. The rest of them were in a hurry to reach their homes before darkness fell. Naked seminaked kids were playing, running after each other, kicking the dust, shouting, producing a clamorous din. Inside the houses the sounds of bangles of the women was echoing all around, managing the utensils, grinding the spices, cooking food, preparing dough. Throughout Sonpur the atmosphere was full of zestful enthusiasm. No matter who, women, men, children, elderly and young, all were enthused. Why wouldn't it be so when the team performing Saang had come to the village?

Three days had passed since the Saang team reached Sonpur. On the first day the story of 'Rupvasant' was performed, the next day was devoted to the legend of 'Puranmal', that day the tale of 'Satyavaan Savitri' was to be played. A host of people, were gathering in order to see this performance. The women were planning to be free from their domestic duties of cooking etc. before it got dark so that they could enjoy the performance. The kids had already made their arrangement stealthily under the neem tree planted outside the house of the headman. As soon as the harmonium started playing and the beat on the drum was heard, the elders too started gathering on the chaupal.⁵¹

⁵⁰ A kind of folk drama, interspersed with songs, depicting various legends

⁵¹ A structure in villages, with ceiling, open from four sides used for public gatherings

The Saang was going on. The chaupal was jam-packed. There was not enough space even for breathing. Along with the Saang performance, the raginis,⁵² being sung in between the show, were also mesmerizing. People were sitting enchanted by the performances. No one was budging from one's place.

The beat could be now heard on the tom-tom. The drummer also started swinging his hands now. Two artists started singing ragini.

Ragini :

“Ho gaya gaat sukh kai mada’ piya de manhai kulhada
Oa mai bhi chalungi tere saath me.
O gori, sajai na kulhada tere hath mei.”⁵³

What a perfection of the notes and how sweet the voice, the sounds of ‘wah, wah’ signified the admiration of the audience.

Champa had just put the pan for baking chapatis on the choolah after removing the cooking pot of curry when Sheela came and asked, “Champa, won’t you come?”

“Where?” asked Champa.

“To watch Saang,” Sheela replied.

“No. I have too much of work to finish.” Having said that Champa started rolling the dough in to the shape of a ball.

“This household work is an everyday affair, but we don’t have such occasions of Saang performances very often. Such occasions are very rare. Just come with me and

⁵² A kind of didactic song traditionally sung in Hariyana and some parts of Uttar Pradesh it also works as musical interlude in the *saang* performances

⁵³ In this musical interlude the wife is asking her husband to give her too an ax so that she can accompany him to the woods and avoid the pain of separation. But in the last line husband doesn't allow her, saying, “The ax does not suit your hands”

watch how well they perform. Today, they are playing Satyavan Savitri.” She tried to induce Champa.

“Must be good but not better than work.” Champa put the chapati on the pan.

“It is not so Champa, everything in its place is good as well as bad. Just come with me, you will definitely like it. Men folk keep watching such shows. They don’t mind traversing long distances for it. All this is not allowed for us women. For us such occasions come very rarely and still you...” This time Sheela had showed some annoyance. But this annoyance of her was ineffectual in the face of Champa and she said, “My question is what is the use of watching Saang, entertainment of the heart for a short while, isn’t it?” She fixed her gaze at Sheela’s face. “Yes!” Looking at Champa’s face in amazement Sheela nodded in affirmation. “Whereas we know that throughout our life we have to suffer the same anguish, same pain, same distress, poverty and wailing, all this is the truth of our life. Why then, such a craze for a momentary pleasure? Isn’t this pleasure a delusion? Why then, should we be misled by such illusion and deception? Why shouldn’t we accept the truth?” Her suppressed pain had come out with the words.

“But we are not going to be alone there, everyone goes to watch the show. All villagers are going.” Sheela had no other answer but this to Champa’s arguments.

Champa felt like saying, ‘I don’t care who goes, if you want to go you are also welcome, I won’t go’. However, seeing Sheela already disappointed, she stopped herself and tried to convince her. “I would have certainly come but I am not feeling well. You know I couldn’t even go for work. I am feeling dizzy. I am cooking only because that can’t be avoided.” As she said this, Champa reversed the chapati on the pan with her tongs.

Sheela returned, having failed to convince Champa, but the sudden thought of the headman’s fields now started tormenting the heart of the latter. Some needle started pricking at the long forgotten wound and the eight-year-old incident started moving in front of her like a motion picture.

Her husband Bhullan had been down with fever for a week. Such a fever, which would subside for a while but soon afflict him again. Healthy body keeps the heart also healthy, but in a sick body the heart also remains indisposed. Her husband did not feel like eating anything. His condition was very critical. Whole earth and the objects around would appear to him to be moving. He would feel as if soon he would collapse.

The saang performers were there in the village at that time too and Bhullan had a deep interest to watch such shows. Even if it was being performed a distance of miles he wouldn't miss it. But the week long fever had put him in such a plight that he was unable to watch it although it was being performed in his own village. Lying on his cot he would listen to the sounds of drums and tom-toms but could do nothing but console his heart. One of the fields of the headman needed watering at that very time. The headman had instructed Bhullan to do the job but watering the fields is not an easy thing. Obstructing the water here, channeling it there, stopping it here and releasing there, the person almost dances while in the process of irrigation. Indeed, irrigating the fields is an arduous job. Even the hardworking persons lose their balance, whereas for Bhullan, indisposed for a week it was impossible. As he was helpless, he had urged the headman, "I can never say no to your work, my master, if I had been well I would have definitely gone to your fields. But I can't even stand properly. I won't be able to do your work. Let me recover a bit, tell me anything to do, I shall work for you even till midnight."

He had borrowed money that day from someone in order to buy some medicine from the physician. The fever had subsided a bit as a result of that medication and he was feeling a little better. With the masoor pulse he had two chapatis that day. The meal had given him enough energy to sit and move around for a while. As he felt slightly rejuvenated he felt like leaving the threshold of his house, go for a stroll, meet other villagers, in order to get rid of the weeklong ennui. With the support of a cane, he had gone to sit and watch the saang.

But the next day when he had not even woken up from his sleep, the headman was at his threshold accompanied by his lathaits⁵⁴. The headman shouted as he reached Bhullan's house, "Abay heap of flesh where are you?"

The appearance of Headman on his door step, that too in such an angry mood, startled Bhullan. He rose from his cot awkwardly and came out of his hut. "You here, so early in the morning? What's wrong my master? If you had sent the word I would have presented myself in your service."

"You would have presented yourself in my service! Trying to fool us you born of..." Red were the eyes of the headman and his nostrils were fluttering. Bhullan was not seeing the headman in such a mood for the first time. In fear his knickers were drenched and his whole body started trembling. He was unable to understand why the headman was so angry with him. Mustering all his courage he dared to ask, still trembling, "What mistake did I make master?"

"You ask about your mistake sala!⁵⁵ When you are told to water the fields you suffer with fever. You feel dizzy. can't stand. Life comes back for the Saang? You liar, you corrupt!" With these words holding Bhullan by his collar the headman gave him another sound slap. He fell prostrate on the ground with his face downwards. And before Bhullan could stand this time he was kicked on his back and he collapsed again.

"Without watering my fields you will go to watch Saang. I will show you the Saang." And the headman started showering the blows and kicks on Bhullan's body.

Bhullan kept imploring, kept bleating, kept shivering and kept begging for mercy in the name of his wife and children. But the headman's blows and kicks did not stop. Bhullan's mouth started bleeding, only darkness was visible to his eyes and he fell on the ground unconscious. But the headman was still not satisfied. He kept using his mouth, hands and legs continuously, alluding to his sexual relationship with Bhullan's mother, sister, and even his two year old daughter.

⁵⁴ Vigilante group of men adept at using wooden sticks for the purpose of hitting

⁵⁵ Brother of one's wife; also used for abusing

Champa had gone to the fields to relieve herself at that time. As soon as she heard the news of the headman's thrashing of her husband, she rushed towards her home. The headman was still engaged in beating Bhullan brutally and the latter was fluttering here and there, just like a fish on the hot sand, in order to save life. Many people had thronged the place but no one tried to rescue Bhullan from the headman. Champa came forward to protect her helpless husband. She folded her hands before the headman and begged for mercy. As it proved ineffectual she even fell on her feet but the headman did not stop. Holding Champa by her braid he threw her aside. But she did not give in. In order to save Bhullan she covered him with her own body. With her too the headman conversed through his blows and kicks. He stopped only when he was exhausted.

The weakness caused by his sickness, on one hand, and the merciless drubbing on the other, every bone of Bhullan's frame had, as if, cracked. The headman had made minced meat of his bones. He could not regain consciousness for three days. Champa nursed his wounds night and day with complete devotion but Bhullan did not regain consciousness.

As this film proceeded, a flame kept getting intense in her heart. As her memories took her to the last scene of the film, this flame transformed in to a conflagration. Champa, who was quite disinterested in going to watch saang a little while ago, took a firm decision and reached the venue of the saang performance. She did not watch the Saang just like that, she even donated two rupees to the organizers. Lifeless a short time back, Champa was now looking invigorated. And as it was expected, the headman was at her door step early next morning.

"Come out you witch." The headman was seething in anger.

Covering herself with a tattered *orani*,⁵⁶ she came out. "Speak you bastard, why didn't you go to water my fields?" The headman asked in an angry tone.

⁵⁶ A kind of shawl

“I was not well.” Said Champa.

“You were not well? You tell a plain lie, bitch. How did you go to watch Saang then? Ay speak...” As he said this the headman reached his hand towards Champa.

But before the headman’s hand could reach her, Champa’s hands came out of the *orani* with an ax in them. And the very next moment the headman’s head had split in to two halves.

And She Got Educated

Kusum Viyogi

It was a day off at the bank. Just like any other day I was busy reading the newspaper in my drawing room. Suddenly my little daughter dashed in. Panting she said, "Daddy, the *jamadarini*⁵⁷ is beating her daughter with her broom."

This is how she disturbed my concentration. Taking my hand she said, "Come and see." Perhaps the incident had deeply hurt her and therefore, she was getting sensitive to the issue.

As I came out with her I found that a host of neighbouring women and children had gathered to enjoy the moment. Their castist self was not letting them disentangle the two. The mother was engaged in striking her daughter like violin.⁵⁸ The daughter kept receiving the thrashing silently.

Shamo had come to our street, with her tools, just like other days, to do her job of scavenging. Generally she used to come alone but today she had brought her elder daughter along to share the load of work. It was the Christmas vacation time at schools. She had supposed the job would be done faster that way.

The girl's gaze alternated between her mother and her school uniform.

Her mother's mouth was full of drool produced by the beetle, tobacco-laden 300 number beetle. Spitting it out, which gave a picch sound, she screamed, "Bitch... I have been shouting for so long do some cleaning. Bastard."

"You yourself do it ma," the girl mustered courage to say.

⁵⁷ A female scavenger

⁵⁸ The beating with a broom can not be compared with violin playing but remaining loyal to the original I have decided not to change this

Her mother restarted inflicting punishment on her daughter with her broom. The shattered consciousness of the latter was getting scattered amongst the spectators of the incident, as if a rocket had fallen from the sky and hit the earth.

“Hay Shamo,” I interrupted, “What are you beating her for?”

“Babuji, she is always reluctant to clean the latrines,” she complained as if she was telling her daughter to do some dignified job.

After all she was a school-going girl.

Sensing the mentality of the child I asked, “What is the matter girl? Come close to me.”

Shyly she obeyed. I took the girl and her mother to my house.

I motioned her to sit on the chair but a sense of shame overwhelmed her. Moreover, there was the knowledge of being casteless.

I repeatedly requested her to sit but she kept standing. Hesitant ultimately she sat.

Her mother kept standing with her broom like an inspector as if she was encountering a criminal.

“What is your name child?” I asked the girl.

“Chetana”.

“Which class do you study in?”

“In tenth sir.”

“So old and still you don’t obey your mother?”

“Uncle. For this work...” The pent-up anger had surfaced on her face. “I don’t like this hereditary work. Let these people consume themselves in this kind of occupation.”

“What will you do then?”

“I shall study.”

And then she stood upright like a Devdar tree.

“Very good.”

Now the consciousness of Chetana⁵⁹ started returning.

Her mother taunted, “Oh! You will become a *collecterine*,⁶⁰ witch!”

Immediately I said, “Beware. Don’t utter a word after this. Aren’t you ashamed of yourself for bringing a school-going girl for such a work?”

Now Shamo was standing like a convict before a judge. “If she doesn’t like it why do you bring her along?”

“But if she will not do this how will she eat sir?” Lethargy had descended in her voice.

I asked her, “What does her father do?”

“Boozes indiscriminately, morning and evening. What else can that pimp do? cares neither for home nor for any other thing.”

Chetana’s eyes had reddened with sobbing. By now even Shamo had a choked throat.

⁵⁹ The name, Chetana, itself means ‘consciousness’

⁶⁰ The term in popular language, means a female collector

I asked the girl to go and wash her face.

As she started moving, her mother followed with her broom. I called her back and suggested, "If she wants to study let her do it. You spent your life doing this but don't bequeath this dirty job to your daughter. Even the government is helping the scavengers get rid of their occupation and you do with the child..."

I could see the effect of my words on Shamo.

In the meanwhile her daughter returned, after washing her face, and sat in a chair.

Shamo went out with her tools and resumed his work.

I think only I could understand Chetana's feelings.

Sitting close to me she started having a feeling of comfort. She even started talking to me in a complaining tone at regular intervals, cursing her father on some occasions and her mother on others.

I said, "If you want to study go ahead. But your aim shouldn't be 10th or 12th standard. Study as much as possible. Be independent otherwise you will have to waste your life in such filthy profession."

Now her gaze was fixed at the image of Baba Bhim Rao Ambedkar hanging in my room.

"Do you know who this great person is?" I asked her.

"Yes. He is Dr. Ambedkar."

"And this decorated portrait in the corner?"

"He is Lord Budha."

“Good.” Now she was progressing on the way of commonality of thought. I asked her again, “How do you know Dr. Ambedkar?”

“I saw a telefilm on television. “He only gave the crucial mantra of educate! Agitate!! Organize!!!”

“Do you know something else about him?”

“Not much.”

I gave her a book called “*Ambedkar Jivan Darshak* and said, “You must read it as soon as you get time.”

“There is no one to guide me uncle. Our locality is inhabited by drunkards and gamblers. Grabbing a pig from legs and stabbing, noisy scenes everyday, my ears are tired of such clamorous din. The people have got addicted to it. How strange it is, uncle, to roast a pig in the middle of the street on fire made of straw and twigs!” She stopped for awhile as if she suddenly remembered something. “Yes. It stinks so much you can’t even come out of it with your nose covered. Wasting whole day in the smoke of hookah by men, how weird their routine is! I can’t even die. I do want to study. Dedication does make a difference.” By now her face had become fiery red.

“Let me know if you have any problem in your studies.”

“Yes uncle. She heaved a sigh of relief. She kept nodding at my words.

In the meanwhile Shamo called out her name. “Chetana. Hey, don’t want to go home?”

“I think the work is over.”

She rose from the chair with her book in her hand.

“OK uncle namaste.”

“Namaste.”

Gradually, year after year, the time went on. At times I would ask about Chetana from her mother, who used to come for scavenging everyday. One day her mother said, “God knows what you have told her Babuji. ⁶¹ She does nothing but reading. No work, nothing at all. That much is fine but she has removed the statues of all gods and goddesses, even the statues of Ganesh ⁶² and Lakshmi⁶³ are no more in the house. She is got so obsessed.”

Many days since then once Shamo came to me with her son. I remembered that she was absent from her work for about twenty days.

She said confusedly, “Babuji, Chetna is seriously ill.”

“What is there to worry about in that? Go to a good doctor for her treatment.”

“We went to many doctors but it was futile. It is all in the hands of God now. She remembers you and only you.”

“Don’t worry. Don’t lose patience. Everything will be fine.”

“We went to all experienced persons but it did not work. In the middle of the night she gets up from her cot and murmurs ‘My studies, my studies. What will happen to my studies?’”

My wife suggested to me to go and see what was wrong.

Along with Shamo and her son I went to their house to see Chetana.

⁶¹ an equivalent of ‘sir’

⁶² the god who, supposedly, gives perfection and who is worshipped at the outset of any auspicious ceremony

⁶³ The goddess of wealth

As soon as we entered the Valmiki colony we saw a drunkard who just managed to avoid his fall in to a gutter. Pigs coming out of their hovel and feeding on the filth, it was so repulsive to see. I wondered where I had come. How could Chetana study in such polluted place?

A group of children was busy in making the dogs fight. How much the growling of dogs pleases the children!

“How far is your house Shamo?” I ultimately asked.

“We are almost there babuji.” Another turn in to a lane and we reached the house. A rooster flew from his position on the ground and perched on a tree, and started calling out.

In the dark, full-of-seepage suffocating cottage I saw Chetana lying on a cot. The books kept on a table in a corner of the room gave semblences of her study. All this was visible to me in a bleak light of a lantern. Because of load shedding better light was not possible.

Her mother said, “See, Chetana, Babuji has come.” She had to make some effort to open her eyes. a glow could be perceived in them as she saw me. “Rescue me uncle. These people will kill me. I am indisposed and the sounds of the enchanter, magicians and witch doctors are getting on my nerves. I have got fed up of the sorcery of everyday. Someone says it is the influence of a witch and some say it is a ghost making me sick. See uncle, these so called experts have torn off my hair.”

The doings of uneducation! In what hell Chetana has got stuck in!

I advised her to come with me to a hospital. “Take me anywhere uncle. There is no treatment possible here. These people will rather kill me with their witchery.

I took her straight to a government hospital and got her admitted.

As I was about to come back to my house from the hospital, hands-clasped she said, “Uncle...” I gently patted her forehead and made my exit.

Chetana recuperated and was soon discharged from the hospital.

Shamo started coming for her routine work again. I advised her once, “Shamo take good care of your daughter, she is very talented.”

Few days later Chetana and her mother visited me. The former had a box of sweets in her hands. “Jai bhim uncle.”⁶⁴

I too greeted her with the same salutation.

“Please accept it uncle.”

“What is it?”

“A box of sweets. I have got first class in my under-grad results.”

“Good.” That broom beating and that blue and white school uniform of hers had suddenly become fresh in my memory.

I said, “I will treat you to sweets today, crazy girl!” the tears of joy burst forth from my eyes. Living in such a locality, and she got educated!

⁶⁴ An improvised version of the traditional hindu salutation, “Jai Ram ji ki”, (hailing the victory of God. This marks the deification of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar by the Dalits

POLLUTED

Surajpal Chauhan

We had met after a gap of almost 25 years. It won't be correct to say that he was my bosom friend, however, the dividing line of the society had, perhaps, brought us very close to each other.... Biharilal Cane, IAS...⁶⁵ Whenever I see him, I have a feeling of pride for Bihari. His father Tikaram had studied till eighth standard in the age of British rule. It was a result of his association with Christian missionaries and the hard work of Charda based Babulal Masih⁶⁶, that Bihari was an IAS officer today. Only God knows how many times Babulal Masih endured the caning inflicted by thakurs and Brahmins,⁶⁷ but he had taken a vow to spread literacy amongst Dalits. He would go from village to village in order to tell them the significance of education. It was because of his indefatigable efforts that the children from Dalit community of Charda town and adjoining villages had got educated and were now working at significant positions. Whenever Babulal Masih visited Bihari's house he would surely meet my father. His words influenced my father too, as a result, I started going to the village school. The memory of those days, still fill my heart with hatred for the caste teachers. Bihari and myself would sit under a Peepal tree, far from the other children. If any teacher did remember us he would draw some letters on our smeared wooden slate and depart. Both of us would rub the paste made of clay on the drawn letters. For many months going to school and studying meant merely that exercise to us.

After my mother's death, my father brought me to Delhi. Bihari was also taken to his father in Bombay by his chacha⁶⁸. His father was posted as a clerk in Railway division in that city. I happened to visit the village many times in these 25 years but I got no news of Bihari. And when I finally met him this time... all Dalits of the village were swelling with pride at his sight, as if it was a festival time in their locality. Bihari was being talked about all around.

⁶⁵ Indian Administrative Service, the word 'officer' that should ideally follow, is conventionally omitted

⁶⁶ One converted in to Christianity

⁶⁷ Highest classes in the Hindu social hierarchy

⁶⁸ Father's younger brother

The news flew to the village headman, Lala Gulabchand, at lightening speed. Now he was desperate to meet Bihari. But the same old ego! Caught in a dilemma whether to go to meet Bihari he would sometime deliberate – “Why should I go to meet him? So what if he is an IAS, after all he belongs to chamars⁶⁹. Won’t it be degrading for me, the village headman, to go to call on him?” On the other hand he would convince himself – “What is the harm in meeting him? The votes of these bhangi-chamars will help me to win the election. They will be very happy if I myself walk down to him.” The headman was entangled in this confusion when the problem itself got resolved. It was time for Ramleela⁷⁰ performance in the village. Like other years the members of ramleela committee were going from house to house for collecting the contribution. The headman talked to them about Bihari –

“Brothers, Bihari, the son of Tika chamar has become a big officer. He draws fat salary in the city. We can ask for a big amount from him at least.”

Sitting in the courtyard of his house, Bihari and I were busy chatting. As we were lost in the sweet/sour memories of our childhood, Gulabchand entered the courtyard with the committee members. Calling out for Bihari he said –

“Hey my child Bihari, when did you come! I got to know only yesterday evening. I thought, I should come and meet you....”

Bihari, greeted them and said – “I am in the village for the last five days.”

“But child I... If I had little knowledge of your arrival wouldn’t I come to meet you!”
The headman clarified –

“These men with me are the members of Ramleela committee child. When I told these people about you they expressed their desire to see you. Bihari, by becoming an IAS you have not only made your parents proud but the whole village takes pride in your achievement. We all are proud of you.”

⁶⁹ Derogatory term for a person of Dalit community, the word *bhangi* also means the same

⁷⁰ The enactment of various incidents pertaining to lord Rama’s life especially on the religious occasion of Dashara

After some irrelevant talking Gulabchand came to the actual point. With a feign smile on his lips, he said – “Child, the members of the committee want your financial assistance for the performance of Ramleela. If possible, help them.”

“Yes pradhanji⁷¹, sure...” he said taking out his purse from his pocket, and handed over Rupees Five Hundred One to Gulabchand. The faces of everyone beamed with happiness seeing such a big amount.

Calling his mother Bihari said in his dialect, “Amma put some water for tea on the choolha.⁷² Pradhanji has walked down to our house today.”

The word tea brought such an expression on their faces as if he was talking about offering them human excretion. Trying to save the situation the headman said –

“No child. We will have tea some other day. We have to go to many other places now. Moreover eating and drinking is not essential for enhancement of love.” Now every moment weighed heavily on them, hence with the false promise of having tea some other day the headman and the members of the committee left the house.

The villagers would work laboriously in the daytime and enjoy Ramleela during the night. As soon as Rama appeared on the stage the harmonium player would shout the jaikara⁷³ “Bolo Siyapati Ramchandra ki jai⁷⁴.” Before the dialogue between Rama and Parshurama⁷⁵ took place, he warned once more –

“No one will remain on this earth to call others, everyone will perish, as clad in saffron clothes, with his ax in hands, Parshurama has come.”

⁷¹ Respectful exclamation for the headman

⁷² Earthen oven used in the villages

⁷³ A kind of slogan hailing the victory of a person on the side of good

⁷⁴ The slogan means “All of you say that the victory is going to be that of Sita’s husband Rama

⁷⁵ The angry character in Ramayana who gets his name from his ax (*parashu*) that he carries around

On the day of 'Lakshman Shakti'⁷⁶ the scene of Rama's wailing was in progress. Everyone's eyes were wet. – "Where will I get such a brother; one like my real one"⁷⁷; one who proved his prowess in the battle such a brother like Lakshman."

The atmosphere had got very grim. The curtain fell and there appeared Hanuman on the stage⁷⁸. Seeing him running and jumping, all the children and the adults alike started clapping and laughing.

The headman Gulabchand wanted to welcome Bihari on the stage. He discussed this with the members of the committee, but the members were not at all willing. Gulabchand coaxed them in a low tone –

"Bihari's warm reception on the stage will please all the Dalits of the village. They will appreciate that an educated Dalit youth has been honored by the village headman and the committee members. Such a gesture will secure the post of village headman for me once more."

The content of the discussion reached the ears of Bihari. He also got to know that some members of the committee were averse to the idea of Gulabchand. He stood up at that very moment and announced in a loud voice – "I want to donate one thousand one hundred and one rupees to the committee from my side."

As soon as Bihari announced this, even those who were opposing the ceremonial welcome of him, fell in line. Amongst themselves the members decided that the welcome ceremony be performed by Gulabchand. After all of them agreed, Gulabchand came on the stage. He said –

"Brothers, all of you know that Biharilal Kain, who belongs to our own village, is among us today. With his education he has reached the post of an IAS. He has not only made a name for his parents he has made the whole village famous. The whole

⁷⁶The scene in which Rama's brother Lakshman loses consciousness as a result of Meghnaad's arrow, called *Shakti*.

⁷⁷ As they were not borne by the same mother, Rama and Lakshman were not real brothers.

⁷⁸ Also known as monkey-god for his divine powers and his body of monkey, he offers very useful support to lord Rama

village is proud of him. On behalf of the whole village I want to welcome Bihariji. I request him to come on the stage.”

Biharilal reached the stage. Gulabchand said some more words in praise of him and put a flower garland round his neck. The audience welcomed him with loud applause. Before Bihari could say few words of gratitude, the headman said –

“Brothers, now I request Biharilalji to smear the forehead of lord Rama with holy paste and receive his blessings.”

This utterance by the headman shocked the committee members and the other caste villagers in to silence. Everyone was dumbfounded. But... what could be done now. The arrow shot from the bow and words uttered from the mouth can not come back. The headman modified his statement and said –

“Brothers, I meant that Biharilal ji is requested to receive the blessings on the aarti⁷⁹ of lord Rama.”

But...

The person enacting the role of Rama was not at all ready to come on to the stage. After much persuasion by the members of the committee, he did concede but very reluctantly. Bihari performed aarti by moving the platter with burning incense in circle. As he was about to smear the forehead of the actor in the role of Rama, the latter retreated and shouted –

“You son of a chamar, do you want to pollute me!”⁸⁰

Bihari could not feel the ground under his feet anymore. He was unable to trust his ears. His face reddened with anger. His hand, which was about to smear the forehead of the actor playing Rama, had now, transformed in to a fist. Bihari offered the blow on his face with full force. Instantly the actor playing Rama was prostrate on the

⁷⁹ A platter with incense burning on it, used on auspicious occasions

⁸⁰ Traditionally the touch of a Dalit makes the caste Hindu untouchable unless the latter performs the necessary rituals.

stage, there was a commotion in the Ramleela performance. Those belonging to Dalit and other backward classes went to their houses and came back with sticks and canes. All of them warned the caste villagers in unison –

“If anyone touches Biharilalji, every villager shall be battered.”

Feeling the delicacy of the moment, the members of the committee and so-called caste Hindus started leaving the place one by one. Cursing the headman, the Dalits asked –

“Pradhan, didn’t you and the members of the committee feel ashamed of accepting money from Bihariji? The same hands were used to offer that money. Didn’t you get polluted at that time?”

The headman Gulabchand, with his bent head, could do nothing but scrape the ground with the thumb of his foot.

The Tunnel

Dr. Dayanand Batohi

I know that people have been censuring me for being some other creature rather than a human being. I have not accepted my defeat yet, I am not accepting it now, as I don't want to put in insufficient efforts. I will have to struggle a lot furthermore. I am not at all sorry that I was not allowed to enroll as a research fellow that I had to clash with many for the problem of castism. In a way it is good – till the time people don't know you properly they might indulge in every kind of talking but as they sniff out your caste people start snouting their faces like boars. They get the smell of your caste by the surname. In the absence of it, they gather it from your color or outfit. Whenever the champions of castism ask me about my caste a spate of poison starts running through my body.

At this moment I am feeling isolated but I am not giving in. How can I? When Dr. Vishnu asked, how did I fare in my M A, without any hesitation I replied untruly - I don't have good marks. I can see no change emerging in his face. His gaze remained fixed on me. The interview is on since 7 in the morning. It is 20 minutes past 10 right now. Many girls and boys have been interviewed before me. He asks me another question - Do you write something?

Rather than putting myself in to the dilemma by saying, yes I do write, I fix my gaze at the picture of Premchand, Muktibodh, Dr. Ambedkar, Gandhi, and Buddha.

All right. Dr. Pasvan asked Dr. Vishnu, "Have you read or seen any of his writings? He writes well in some small magazines." Dr. Vishnu had put so much of salt and pepper in my ears that I almost lost my sense of hearing.

So what even if he writes? Ultimately he is nothing more than a Harijan. Worms of pain start wrangling in my veins. Skewing his cap Dr. Sukhdev says—So you are Harijan?

Yes - I say —What do you feel I am. I resorted to repartee even though I am sitting in front of the interview board.

Dr. Pasvan says pointing his finger-- No matter Harijan or durjan, they have been very deceitful. Dr. Vishnu, nodding his head, says - So what if the government has enacted laws for them the reins of the horse is in our hands. You won't be accepted for research. He stares at me. I felt as if he wanted to burn me alive. The pain lurking in my heart started melting. One tends to lose balance due to the restlessness caused by pain. I thought it appropriate to answer in a tit for tat manner. "Dr. Sahib, forget that because I am a Harijan, therefore, I am a slave. The tyrants like you have kept us in dark till today. I want to ask you why will you not allow me?"

He starts panting. Gulping in he says, "You don't have enough marks in M A. You have got only a second division."

"Why did you restrict me to second division?"

"I did not."

"If not you then people like you have done that."

The matter is obviously going to be aggravated. A brinjal is being put in to a boiling cauldron. I have the same feeling in my conscious. Thumping the table with my hand I say, "Dr. sahib, forget that you people can ingest us using the cover of darkness created by people like you, any longer. Now you will not be able to digest it."

"Shut up", shouts Dr. Vishnu. He removes his goggles and then adjusts his tie. His face is quivering it has gone red.

I ask him very confidently, "*Why? Please you don't give me hurt...*"

The drops of perspiration are visible on his face. I feel now his heart is melting. But suddenly breaking his silence Sukhdev also joins in, "You rather go to the Vice Chancellor."

“Why should I go?”

“Since you’ve M A second division. As you don’t have the required marks you cannot do research.”

“Just me or others also? In all departments like chemistry, physics, history, economics, etc. the third divisioners are conducting research, I at least have second division.”

Vishnu is panting. I feel that he is also losing his temper. He says, “Yes. Even though Dr. Rupendra Saksena, Dr. Gajendra, Dr. Fagun Singh are third division MSc but they belong to high class families.” Now he realized that saying anything further would divulge his secrets. He is panting. I thought it better to emit blood boiling in side me, before going to the Vice chancellor. I struck a violent blow on the table. He is panting.

“Dr. Sahib.⁸¹ Don’t think that I am begging you for mercy. I ask you why do people show off in the name of Harijan welfare? What about the reservation policy? If we ourselves are doing well what weifare can you do? Why do you talk about ’14 % reserved quota? You are cheating not only the government but also the humanity. Whether you take me for research or not, you will have to complete the quota.” My blood pressure has gone up. The head of the department is yawning. He produces some sound by twitching his fingers one after another and says, “Not me, ask the vice chancellor.” “Fine.” I pushed the chair and come out.

The door of Vice chancellor’s office is closed. The shining brass plate reads, “out.” The word “out” enflames my interior. Bearing the burden of all my tensions of the university in my mind I return to my hostel, exhausted. As I contemplate about 90 % people who are suppressed like this, the cook comes and hand-clasped he asks in his dialect, “Will you have dinner in the evening master? How about my payment?”

⁸¹ sir

I get wet of perspiration. I had exhausted all my money the day before yesterday. Father is fighting with his disease. Even mother keeps falling. Wife keeps taunting that in spite of being father of two kids I am studying. I start thinking again till when we will have to live in this dark tunnel. Our efforts are like trying to pass an elephant along with his trunk, through the hole of a needle.

People talk about the facilities being given for twenty years. But it is only after many centuries of darkness that we have got them. They want us to transform immediately. Even they must have taken time to change themselves. These people were also untouchable at some point of time.⁸² How bright they are today! Many become I C S. Today he equates Harijan with durjan. When I don't say anything to the Brahmin cook he understands. I tell him categorically - Bhai I have no money. Won't have dinner tonight. He clasps his hands again, You'll remain hungry master! One can't do without food.

I go to bed at night without having anything. All the worries are making their presence felt. Even sleeping doesn't give me peace.

In the morning as I was coming out of Harvard Hall with Jaishankar, Nagendra Sharma met us coincidentally. He had a pamphlet for election campaign. We comprehended that he had come for convincing. Just get one work done whole Harvard Hall shall vote for you. Considering it better to be familiar with the Jaishankar's problem, he asked, What work? He is a Harijan. He has been debarred from conducting research because he has got second division in M A. We people from so called civilized families are allowed to conduct research even with third division. The sister of the union president Raghunath has got third division in M A, she has been allowed or researches in Hindi. He is a Harijan and got second division. People read his stories, poems, and literary articles in almost all-Hindi magazines. After all how many first divisioners are there in the department? How many students get good marks? Dr. Vishnu does not know the criteria for research. He has been regularly bypassing the reservation policy of the government.

⁸² allusion is to the Paswan's

He tried to evade the issue considering me a Harijan. But Jaishankar said clearly, "Your victory or defeat depends on this job. No one is Harijan by birth. We make them so."

All three of us are in the open porch of the university. Vice chancellor's car is parked there. Vice chancellor is writing something.

"Can we come in?"

"Yes, come in."

"In fact, we have come here to know whether the facilities to the Harijans is only on papers or also in the practice?" Vice chancellor gives attention, "What do you want. Say clearly."

"He is from a Harijan caste. He got his M A with second division. The head of the department is not allowing him enrollment for research. There are others who have third division in science and they are conducting research."

Mishra asks, "Are there some third divisioners in Hindi too?"

"Yes. Bhina, Narottam Singh is third class. He is doing research. There are many second class holders who have obtained less marks than him."

Vice Chancellor Mishra unwillingly writes, "Head, please consider the case." The head is bewildered as I present the paper to him. There is a strange fear on his face. A pin drop silence is permeating the room. After some time he says, "What shall I consider?" Still his evil heart is not ready to give in. Eight days later, after many arguments, he calls me and allows me for library membership. I get to know from the secretary of the student union about Vishnu's problem. "We will take him for research but why does he talk about the rights? In spite of being a Harijan he talks like an educated person. He is tattling about not getting reservation."

Brooding over how long the tradition of Dronacharya will be kept alive, I go back to my hostel.

There awaits a letter from home saying, - "the condition is very bad due to the famine. All the bonded labourers are fleeing towards the cities. No one lends money now. Where should I send you money from? Everyone says I have got you so much education in spite of being a Harijan." I come back home.

Back to the university in the month of January I asked the head to enroll me. Poison ran through his body and he remarks, "Come in July." Considering any dilly-dallying worthless, I asked, "You too want to pour led in to my ears like manu? Like Dronacharya want me to offer my thumb? But remember by overcoming this flood of darkness we shall take our rights. The cunning people like you have contributed to the distinction of Harijan-Durjan. We will gherao you."

He replied arrogantly, "Do whatever you like. As long as I am there I won't allow Harijans to do research."

Convinced that this person was really sly I decided to go to the student union. Now that the president and secretary had been elected they were free from. When the union tried to backtrack, Ganga Jha on my behalf, "That is injustice in the name of castism. So what if he is a Harijan, we too are Harijan. He should get the chance right now. Since we were given the opportunity we have become wise and civilized. All of us are aware of how civilized we were earlier." "All right Jha ji. Prepare the other students for gherao. This action of the protector of his prey (dahi ka rakhvala vilarh) Vishnu is against humanity, against law, against rules. Third classes are there in research in Hindi and other departments also. Only a willing guide is required and for him Dr. Avasthi is ready."

Soon a significant number of students started gathering in the compound of the University. The whole campus was reverberating with the noise. Dr. Vishnu shut himself in the bathroom, on the pretext of defecation such that he emerged out of it only at seven in the evening. Baring his teeth he apologized and said, "Why are you

people gheraoing me? All of you are not Harijans? Why are you involving yourself into this?"

All of them responded in chorus, "All of us are humanitarians. Your old hypocrisy will not be allowed any more. All of us are united," roared the students, "on the issue of protector of the prey. It is not a crime to be Harijan. In fact, you are committing a crime against whole humanity."

Another voice emerged, "You are letting students with third class conduct research in your department and a second class Harijan is not acceptable to you? What division Suresh's wife, Ramnagina's sister has got in M A?"

Now the noise was floating in the air, "Death on Vishnu, Long live humanity. We are united."

He felt that if he doesn't give in now the students would devour his flesh with bones. He had not realized that Eklavya has come to know the reality today, and after some thinking demonstrated his teeth wherein tobacco and beetle leaf was showing its presence by its smell, "I want to implement the reservation policy of the government. In fact, no Harijan students is conducting research till now. I want people from all castes to rise. You know I am a Gandhian, have stayed at his ashram for some days." Raghunath's voice was heard, "Just leave aside your philosophy. You are permitting or should I come and..."

He realized that the students are aware of everything and anything might happen if he delayed any further. He spoke softly, "Okay I allow him to conduct research in the department. Give me your application." With in seconds the gathering started dispersing.

The very next day I was permitted for enrollment in research. The topic I had chosen for research was "The Contribution of equitable writers in Hindi Literature." Dr. Vishnu created some obstacles during the research. He was subsequently caught with a girl for which he was punished. I think how black he was in spite of his white skin. But he used to suggest others to stay clean. My book "Surang" was sent to him for

review. He has reviewed it very impartially. It seems he doesn't know that I am the author. Now I am a lecturer having got my Ph D degree. I have come to the college for the purpose of an interview. I have been questioned on literature for 45 minutes. It appears that Dr. Sukhdev, although annoyed, is satisfied.

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Biographical Notes

Dayanand Batohi was born on 1st of October 1942 in Chandrapur, Bihar. He has shown his merit in prose as well as poetry. His collection of short stories *Surang* has brought him admiration from various quarters. His poetry collection *Matha Dard* is equally regarded. His other works include *Yatana ki Aakheen* and *Yatanaon ke jungle*.

Jayprakash Kardam, currently the editor of *Dalit Sahitya Warshiki*, was born in Indergarhi, Ghaziabad, U.P. on 5th of July, 1958. With a Masters and Doctorate degree in Hindi, he has also done MA in History and Philosophy. He is a recipient of several awards for his literary merits. For his autobiography *Chappar*, Kardam has been rewarded by the Madhya Pradesh Dalit Sahitya Academy. His translation of Brick's *Chamar* has won him Dr. Ambedkar National Award given by the Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Academy. Asmita Darsi Sahitya Academy awarded him the prestigious Kabir Samman for his work *Goonga naheen hoon mein*. In addition, he has been awarded several fellowships by the government of India as well as some state governments.

Kusum Viyogi was born in Hatharas, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, on October 9th, 1955. With a Masters in law to his credit, he is a brilliant singer and a lyricist. His chief claim to fame is his short story collection *Vo Parh Gai*. His other works include *Vyvastha Ke Vishdhar*. *Charchit Dalit Kahaniyan*, is a collection of short stories by well known Dalit writers that has been edited by Viyogi. The collection is also the source the stories in this dissertation.

Omprakash Valmiki, now posted in Electronic Factory, Dehra Dun, was born in Warala, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh on June 30, 1950. M.A. in Hindi literature, he has authored famous books like *Bas Bahut Ho Chuka*, *Sadiyon Ka Santap*, *Joothan*, (autobiography), *Salam*, (collection of short stories), and his critique on Dalit literature, *Dalit Sahitya Ka Saundarya Shastra*. For his contribution to Dalit literature he has been conferred upon Parivesh Samman and Ambedkar Rashtriya Samman 1993.

Surajpal Chauhan, working for STC India Ltd., was born on April 20th 1955, at Usawali, Aligarh, U.P. He hails from a Valmiki family and is well known for his poetry collection, *Fariyad*, published in 1995. Among his prose works are a collection of short stories, *Hari Kab Aaega* a book for children, *Bacche Sacche Kisse* and his recently published autobiography entitled *Tiraskrit*. He has been awarded a silver medal for his literary achievements by Hindi Sahitya Parishad, Ahmedabad in 1996.

Appendix
(Original Stories)

अम्मा

ओमप्रकाश वाल्मीकि

यह कहानी अम्मा की है—आप कह सकते हैं, लेकिन किसी एक अम्मा की नहीं। न जाने कितनी अम्मा सुबह-सवेरे, हाथ में झाड़ू-कनस्तर थामे गली-मुहल्लों में मिल जाएंगी, जिनका जर्जर शरीर वक्त के थपेड़े खाकर धीमे-धीमे लयहीन तरीके से गतिमान है, फिर भी ठहरे हुए जल को तरह दिखायी पड़ता है। उनका हर एक पल एक अनजाने, अदृश्य भविष्य की ओर जा रहा है, जिसके बारे में तमाम भविष्यवाणियां, बौद्धिक कलाबाजियां और संकल्पनायें बिखर जाती हैं या झूठी साबित होती हैं।

मैं जिस अम्मा की बात कर रहा हूँ—उसका नाम क्या है, मैं नहीं जानता। शायद वह स्वयं भी अभी तक अपना नाम भूल चुकी होगी, क्योंकि जब वह मायके से ससुराल आयी तो सास-ससुर ने उसे 'बहू' कहकर पुकारा, देवर और ननद ने भाभी या भावज, पास-पड़ोस की बड़ी-जूढ़ियों ने उसके खसम के नाम पर 'सुकड़ की बहू' नामकरण अनजाने में ही कर दिया था। शुरू के दिनों में सुकड़ उसका नाम नहीं लेता था। दिन भर तो वह मां-बहन के साथे में घिरी रहती थी। देर रात सुकड़ चुपके-चुपके उसकी चारपाई पर पहुंचता था, वह भी चोर की तरह दबे पांव। कुछ ही देर के लिए, उसमें भी डर लगा रहता था, कहीं बहन या मां जाग न जाये। एक छोटे से आंगन में टिन की छत और लकड़ी के फट्टों को-जोड़ कर रहने भर की जगह थी।

इस थोड़े से वक्त में बात करने की फुरसत ही कहां होती थी। उन दिनों आज की यह अम्मा तो वह थी नहीं, जो घिसट-घिसट कर धीमे-धीमे कदमों से चलती है। जिसकी गंदी साड़ी सामने से पेट के पास टुंसी रहती है। सण जैसे रूखे बाल, झुर्रियों से भरा चेहरा, मिचमिची आंखों वाली अम्मा, वक्त की मार ने जिसकी एक आंख को छोटा कर दिया है, और जिसके सामने के दांत टूटे हुए हैं। जो एक-आध बचा है, वह भी भड़भूजे की कड़ाही में उछलते मकई के दानों की तरह हिलता है।

उस समय की बात ही कुछ और थी। लम्बे-घने बाल, चंचल-गहरी काली आंखें, सांवला-सलौना रूप। भरा-पूरा शरीर, जिसकी मोहक गंध ने सुकड़ू को सम्मोहित कर लिया था। उन थोड़े-से पलों को पाने के लिए वह दिनभर कुलांचें मारता था। आज भी उसकी स्मृति में वे थोड़े से दिन ही सबसे अच्छे दिन हैं, भले ही वह थोड़ी देर का साथ होता था। फिर भी भरपूर जीये गये क्षण थे वे।

जब पहला बेटा हुआ तो उसका नाम बड़े जतन से शिवचरण रखा गया था। सुकड़ू को भी अब जरूरत महसूस होने लगी थी, दुल्हन को किसी नाम से पुकारने की और उसने एक दिन उसे 'शिवु की अम्मा' कहकर पुकार लिया था। 'शिवु की अम्मा' अब सिर्फ अम्मा भर रह गयी है। सुकड़ू तो अभी भी 'शिवु की अम्मा' ही कहकर बुलाता है।

नाती-पोतीं से भरा-पूरा परिवार है अम्मा का। उसके सातवें दशक में पहुंचकर शरीर साथ छोड़ने लगा है। अक्सर बीमार रहने लगी है। जोड़ों के दर्द से परेशान है। फिर भी दस-पन्द्रह घंटों का काम निपटा कर ही घर लौटती है।

सफेद कपड़े अम्मा की कमजोरी थे। आज भी जब झाड़ू और टूटा-फूटा बदरंग कनस्तर लेकर अम्मा काम पर निकलती है तो सफेद साड़ी ही उसके तन पर लिपटी रहती है। यह समय की मार है कि अब ये सफेद साड़ी सफेद होने का एहसास भर है। सफेद रंग न जाने कब के साथ कब पीले-मटमैले रंगों में बदल गया। वह समझ भी नहीं पायी। समझ तो वह यह भी नहीं पायी थी कि समय इतनी तेजी से कैसे बदल गया। गांव-देहात की लड़की शहर में आकर चौकन्नी हिरनी की तरह हर चीज को अचरज से देखती थी उन दिनों।

आज सास-ससुर दोनों का देहांत हुए कई बरस हो गये हैं, लेकिन उसे अच्छी तरह याद है, जब पहली बार सास उसे 'ठिकानों' में 'सलाम' की रस्म पूरी करने ला गई थी तो उसने कभी सोचा भी नहीं था कि एक दिन वह भी सास की तरह झाड़ू और कनस्तर हाथ में लेकर दरवाजे-दरवाजे घूमेगी।

सास ने बाकायदा ट्रेनिंग दी थी उसे कैसे दरवाजे पर पहुंचकर आवाज देना है। कैसे टट्टी में घुसना है, कैसे पानी डालना है फिर झाड़ू के कितने हाथ दायें, कितने बायें चलाने हैं। किस घर में किससे कैसे और कितनी बात करनी है। घर-आंगन में कितनी दूर तक जाना है। आंगन में पड़ी किसी चीज को नहीं छूना है। कोई चाय-पानी दे तो कप या गिलास वापिस कहां रखना है। हरेक ठिकाने में आंगन के किसी कोने, आले या छोटे-मोटे पेड़ की किसी टहनी पर एक-आध कप या गिलास सास ने संभालकर रखे थे। जो क्वत-जरूरत पर काम आते थे।

और भी न जाने कितनी बातें सास ने उसे समझायी थीं। वह अचरज से सास को कही बातें सुनती थी। गांव के तौर-तरीके अलग थे। गांव में तो हाजत-फरागत के लिए औरत-मर्द सब गांव से बाहर ही जाते हैं। वैसे भी गांव में ज्यादातर काम खेत-खलिहान के ही होते थे। यह काम उसके लिए एकदम नया था। टट्टियों के

दरवाजे खोलते ही उसका सिर भिन्ना जाता था दुर्गन्ध से। अंग्रेजों की देखा-देखी हिन्दुस्तानियों ने भी घरों में पाखाने बना लिए थे। उसे यह सब अजीब लगता था।

शुरू-शुरू में सास उसे साथ लेकर ठिकानों में जाती थी। काम वह करती थी। सास पास खड़ी होकर हिदायतें देती थी। समय पंख लगाकर उड़ने लगा था। सास उसके काम से खुश थी। हर तरह से उसका ख्याल रखती थी। हर समय साये की तरह उसके साथ रहती थी।

एक दिन अचानक सास की तबियत बिगड़ गयी। सास ने ऐसा विस्तर पकड़ा कि फिर उठ नहीं पायी। घर-बाहर के काम की सारी जिम्मेदारी शिबु की अम्मा के ऊपर ही आन पड़ी थी।

शिवचरण के बाद बिसन और उसके बाद किरण। तीन बच्चों की मां अब 'शिबु की अम्मा' से 'अम्मा' बन गयी थी। ननद ससुराल जा चुकी थी। घर में रह गये थे कुल दस प्राणी। सास-ससुर, देवर-देवरानी, उनकी एक लड़की, सुकड़ू और तीन बच्चे। ससुर दिनभर घर में पड़ा खांसता रहता था, देवर कहने को तो एक बैंड पार्टी में बाजा बजाता था। लेकिन शादी-ब्याह के दिनों को छोड़कर बाकी समय खाली ही रहता था। इधर-उधर घूमकर सारा दिन गुजार देता था। सुकड़ू नगरपालिका में सफाई कर्मचारी था। मामूली तनख्वाह थी। पूरे परिवार का भार सुकड़ू के कन्धों पर था। ऊपर से सरदार प्रीतम सिंह का कर्जा, जिसका सूद हर महीने चुकाना पड़ता था।

सास ने जो ट्रेनिंग उसे दी थी, उसके सहारे डूबते परिवार को भरोसा मिला था। दस की जगह पन्द्रह ठिकानों का काम पकड़ लिया था अम्मा ने। पांच उसने बिरमदेई से खरीदे थे। किशतों पर हर महीने थोड़े-थोड़े पैसे देने का वादा कर लिया था उसने।

अम्मा के पास सबसे ज्यादा आमदनी का ठिकाना था चोपड़ा का। चोपड़ा की बड़े बाजार में कपड़े की दुकान थी। अच्छी-खासी आमदनी थी। चोपड़ा सुबह घर से निकलता तो रात दस बजे ही घर लौटता था। बच्चे भी स्कूल चले जाते थे। मिसेज चोपड़ा दिन भर घर में अकेले रहती थी।

अम्मा अक्सर मिसेज चोपड़ा के घर में एक आदमी को देखती थी। शुरू-शुरू में वह यही समझती रही कि घर-परिवार का ही कोई होगा। लेकिन भेद जल्दी ही खुल गया। एक दिन दोनों को जिस स्थिति में देखा, अम्मा का दिल धक्क से रह गया। मिसेज चोपड़ा उसे भोली और अच्छी लगती थी। उस दिन जो कुछ देखा, उसके बाद से उसके प्रति अम्मा के मन में एक अजीब-सी नफरत पनपने लगी थी।

मिसेज चोपड़ा ने उसकी तनख्वाह में पांच रुपये बढ़ा दिये थे उस रोज के बाद। बाकी ठिकानों से उसे सिर्फ पांच-पांच रुपये ही मिलते थे। मिसेज चोपड़ा दस रुपये देने लगी थी। वैसे मिसेज चोपड़ा थीं खुशमिजाज। खूब बातें करती थी।

दुनिया-जहान की बातें। अम्मा मुंह बाये सुनती थी। जिस रोज़ मिसेज चोपड़ा अकेली होती थी, अम्मा को चाय पीने के लिए रोक लेती थी। आंगन में खड़े अमरूद के पेड़ पर अम्मा का एक कप रखा रहता था। चाय पीते-पीते अम्मा सोचती कि चोपड़ा बहनजी इतनी अच्छी हैं फिर भी एक पराये मर्द के साथ....छीः, छीः... कहते हुए भी शर्म आती है।

एक रोज़ जब अम्मा उसके घर पहुंची तो मिसेज चोपड़ा बाथरूम में थी। वह आदमी बैडरूम में बैठा हुआ था। अम्मा ने आवाज देकर कहा, "भैणजी, पाणी डाल दो....सफाई हो गयी है।"

मिसेज चोपड़ा ने बाथरूम से ही आवाज देकर कहा, "विनोद प्लीज एक बाल्टी पानी जमादारनी को दे दो....मैं सिर धो रही हूँ....देर लागेगी बाथरूम से निकलने में। बाल्टी नल के नीचे लगी है।"

वह उठा और पानी की बाल्टी अम्मा के सामने लेकर रख दी। मुस्कराकर अम्मा को देखा। अम्मा ने पानी डालने के लिए हाथ का इशारा किया। विनोद ने टट्टों में पानी डालने के बजाय अम्मा की कमर में हाथ डालकर उसे अपनी आंर खींचा। अम्मा इस हरकत से हड़बड़ा गयी। चीखकर बोली, "क्या करते हो यह....? छोड़ो...." छूटने के लिए कसमसाने लगी।

विनोद ने दबाव बढ़ा दिया और कसकर अपने सीने से भींच लिया। अम्मा को लगा जैसे आदमखोर ने उसे दबोच लिया है। वह बंधन ढीला करने के लिए जोर लगा रही थी। जैसे ही पकड़ कुछ कम हुई, झटका देकर उतने खुद को मुक्त कर लिया। हाथ में थमी झाड़ू की मूठ पर हथेली कस गयी। पूरी ताकत से झाड़ू का वार सीधा उसकी कनपटी पर किया। चोट लगत ही वह हड़बड़ा गया और बैडरूम की तरफ भागा। अम्मा लगातार उसे पीटते हुए बैडरूम में घुस गयी। वह नीचे फर्श पर गिर पड़ा था। अम्मा की झाड़ू सड़ाक-सड़ाक उस पर पड़ रही थी। मुंह से गालियां फूट रही थीं।

चीख-पुकार सुनकर मिसेज चोपड़ा अर्द्धनग्न अवस्था में बाथरूम से बाहर आ गयी। बैडरूम का दृश्य देखकर भींचक रह गयी। विनोद को बचाने के लिए दौड़ी।

"रुको....यह क्या कर रही हो?....रुको....मत मारो उसे...." मिसेज चोपड़ा ने उसके हाथ से झाड़ू छीनने की कोशिश की। अम्मा ने उसे भी धक्का देकर पीछे धकेल दिया। दो-तीन वार और किये। रुककर बोली, "भैण जी, इस हरामी के पिल्ले से कह देणा....हर एक औरत छिनाल ना होवे है।" अम्मा की आंखों में लाल सुर्ख डोरे अंगारों की तरह दहक रहे थे। गुस्से में शरीर कांप रहा था। अम्मा का सांवला रंग और गहरा हो गया था।

विनोद की वहशीयत ठंडी पड़ी चुकी थी। झाड़ू की मूठ का एक तगड़ा हाथ उसकी आंख पर पड़ा था। आंख के आस-पास नीले रंग का बड़ा-सा गूमड़ उभर

आया था। जिसे हथेली से दबाये वह फर्श पर औंधा पड़ा था।

अम्मा ने कनस्तर उठाया और दनदनाते हुए बाहर निकल गयी।

अगले दिन उसने चोपड़ा का ठिकाना सस्ते दामों हरदेई को बेच दिया। साथ में पूरी घटना भी उसने हरदेई को विस्तार से सुना दी।

हरदेई बदजबान औरत थी। गालियां तो उसके मुंह से धारा-प्रवाह फूटती थीं। गाली के बगैर उसका कोई वाक्य ही नहीं बनता था। पूरा किस्सा सुनकर अम्मा से बोली, "तू तो मूरख है नासपिट्टी अपनी मां के यार कू टट्टी में घसीट लेती। पहले उतरवाती उसके कपड़े कि आ तुझे करवा दूं मसूरी की सैर। फिर करवाती उससे भिगनी का नाचा। झाड़ू से पीट-पीट कर साले कुत्ते कू सड़क पे लियाती। जुलूस लिकड़ (निकल) जाता चौट्टे (गाली) का जब गणपति का हिलाता, सड़क पे दौड़ता। भूल जाता सारा इश्क और वह चोपड़ी....ऐसी लुगाइयों का इलाज मैं जाणूं हूं...ये ले थाम लोट (नोट)....इब कल से चोपड़ी मेरी। साली....दो-दो बच्चों की मां होके इश्क करे है....।"

अम्मा ने बीस रुपये में चोपड़ा का ठिकाना बेचकर राहत की सांस ली।

चोपड़ी को बीस रुपये में बेच देने की खबर जब अम्मा की सास को मिली तो घर में कुहराम मच गया। सास ने चीख-चीखकर पूरा मोहल्ला सिर पर उठा लिया, "अरी नासपिट्टी, करमजली, मेरे मरने के बाद ही कर लेती। इस चोपड़ी के बात (बहुत) एहसान हैं म्हारे ऊप्पर। बखत-कुबखत जब बी जरूरत पड़े थी, मदत करी है उन्ने, इबते नहीं बरसों ते मैं व्हां जाती थी....वो खानदानी लोग हैं, म्हारे जैसे तो उनकी जेब में पड़े हैं और तू...लाटसाहबनी....इतनी बड़ी हो गयी कि उसे ही बेच के आ गयी। वो बी उस हरामजादी हरदेई कू। मैं अच्छी तरियों पिछाणूं...उसे....उन्ने ही कोई पट्टी पढ़ाई होगी तनै। वो तो बात दिनों से उस ठिकाने कू कब जाणे की फिराक में थी। अरी एक बार मन्ने तो पूछ लिया होता।...." सास ने रो-रोकर जी हलकान कर लिया था। अम्मा चुप्पी सीधे सास का रोना-कलपना सुनती रही। लेकिन चोपड़ी के घर हुए हादसे की कोई चर्चा न की।

दो-चार दिन रो-धोकर सास तो चुप हो गयी। लेकिन एक दिन सुकड़ू ने भी चर्चा छोड़ दी। उस रोज नगरपालिका में तनख्वाह बंटी थी। सुकड़ू बहुत दिन बाद ऐसी दारू का पव्वा चढ़ाकर आया था। तनख्वाह अम्मा के हाथ पर रखते हुए बोला, "ये ले रुपये....पर एक बात कान खोलके सुण ले....शिबु की अम्मा....तूने यो अच्छा नी करा....जी मां का जी दुखाया....ये ठिकाने मां ने कितने जोड़-तोड़ करके घेरे थे। घर का सारा टीम-टब्वर इन्हीं ते चला करे था। बापू तो कुछ करे ना था। मां ने बहुत बुरा टेम निभाया इन ठिकानों के भरोसे; रोट्टी-पाणी, कपड़ा-लत्ता सब कुछ आवे था। बाहण (बहन) का जब ब्याह हुआ था तो इस चोपड़ी बड़ी मदत करी थी, उसी को तू बेच के आ गयी। तूने अच्छा नी किया शिबु की अम्मा....जा मां से माफी मांग ले और बीस रुपये देके हरदेई

से....चोपड़ी जैसी बीरबानी (स्त्री) दूँडे से भी ना मिलेगी। जितनी सूरत से खूबसूरत वैसी ही सीरत से भली।" शिबु की अम्मा को चुप देखकर सुकडू ने जोर से कहा, "तू चुपचाप धोधोमाई बणके बैठी है....मेरी बात सुन रही है?"

अम्मा खामोशी से सुकडू का वार्तालाप सुन रही थी। उसके मन में अजीब-सा शोर उठ रहा था, जिसे वह अनुसना नहीं कर पा रही थी। वह नहीं चाहती थी, उस हादसे के कारण घर में क्लेश हो।

अनेकों बार उसने अपने भीतर उठते शोर को सुना लेकिन हमेशा खामोश रही। अब तो भीतर न जाने कितने जखम भर गये थे। पुरानी यादों को जब अम्मा कुरेदने बैठती है तो उसका रोम-रोम कांप उठता है। अपनी यादों की तरह ही उसने मन की तमाम इच्छाओं को भी मायके से साथ आये. मटमैले टिन के ट्रंक में बंद कर दिया था। बस बच्चों की परवरिश में लगी रही बिना किसी शिकवे-शिकायत के।

शिवचरण को उसने मोहल्ले के स्कूल में ही डाल दिया था। उसके एक साल बाद बिसन को और फिर किरण को स्कूल भेजने लगी थी। बनिये-बामनों की नकल पर उसने बेटी का नाम किरणलता रखा था। घर में सभी उसे किरण कहते थे, लेकिन अम्मा हमेशा किरणलता कहकर बुलाती थी।

जैसे-जैसे बच्चे बड़े हो रहे थे उनके खर्चे भी बढ़ रहे थे। घर तो वैसे ही खींच-तानकर चलता था। ऊपर से उनकी किताबें, कापियों का और खर्च बढ़ गया था। शिवचरण हर दूसरे-तीसरे दिन कोई न कोई फरमाइश ले आता था। बिसन अपने चाचा पर गया था। वैसा ही नैन-नक्श, वैसी ही आदतें, दिनभर फिल्मी गाने और शीशे के सामने खड़े होकर बनना-संवारना, कभी ढोलक लेकर बैठ जाता, कभी हारमोनियम। अम्मा जब भी उसे गाना गाते या हारमोनियम बजाते देखती तो उसका खून खौल उठता।

"मैं कितनी दफे तैन्ने समझा-समझा के हार गयी....तैने जचणिया नहीं बणना है। अपने चाच्चा की तरियों सड़कों पे बैंड बाज्जेवालों की गैल पें-पें करता घूमेगा। उसकी हालत देखी है....फेफड़ों में जान ना है उसके। सांस धोंकनी की तरियों चले है....और तू उसकी लैन पे चल रहा है....पढ़-लिख के आदमी बणजा....किसी दफ्तर में किलारक (क्लर्क) नहीं तो चपराशी ही लग जावेगा। इस गन्दगी से तो दूर जागा। जहां न दो टेक की रोटी ढंग से मिले हैं, सरदार प्रीतम सिंह आके पहले खड़ा हो जावे। घर-बाहर कहीं भी दो-घड़ी का चैन ना है। रोज-रांज की किटकिट...बस यो ही जिन्दगानी है कि कोई धोरे भी न बैठावे। जैसे छूत की बीमारी लग जावेगी।"

अम्मा का गला भर्रा आया था। शिवचरण किताबों का बस्ता खोल के बैठ गया था। किरणलता अम्मा के लिए चाय बनाने लगी थी। बिसन ने इधर-उधर देखा, कहीं कोई सहारा न था जो अम्मा के गुस्से से बचा सके। चुपचाप जाकर पढ़ने बैठ गया।

किरणलता को अम्मा ने कभी डांटा नहीं। हमेशा कहती थी, "पराये घर जाएगी। पता नहीं कितने दिन का साथ है। इसे क्या डांटना, दो आखर सीख लेगी तो कम से कम अपने सुख-दुख की खबर तो दे दिया करेगी। चिट्ठी के दो हरफ लिखवाणें के लिए भी दूसरों का मुंह ताकना पड़े है, और बैट्टी तो वैसे भी लछमी होवे।"

अम्मा ने बच्चों को हमेशा झाड़ू के काम से दूर रखा। यहां तक कि हारी-बीमारी में भी बच्चों को ठिकानों पर नहीं भेजा। यह अम्मा की ही जिद्द थी। सास-ससुर या जात-बिरादरी के लोग टोकते तो कह देती, "ना....मैं....अपने जातकों (बच्चों) को इस गन्दगी में ना धकेलूंगी। मिहनत-मजूरी करा लूंगी, पर उनके हाथ में झाड़ू ना दूंगी।"

शिवचरण दसवीं पास करते ही नगर पालिका में क्लर्क की जगह एक एवजी का काम करने लगा था। यह काम उसे एक ठेकेदार के जरिये से मिला था। जो भी वेतन मिलता था, उसमें से बीस प्रतिशत ठेकेदार को देने पड़ते थे। ठेकेदार को देने के बाद जो भी बचता था। वह अम्मा के हाथ में थमा देता था। अम्मा को विश्वास होने लगा था कि दिन पलटेंगे।

नगर पालिका में शिवचरण ने अपनी जगह बना ली थी। थोड़ी-बहुत नेतागिरी भी वह करने लगा था। उन दिनों शहर में एक मजदूर नेता का बड़ा रौब-दाब था। शिवचरण उसी के पीछे लग गया था। जब भी उसकी मीटिंग होती या जुलूस होता, शिवचरण उसमें बढ़-चढ़कर सक्रिय हो जाता था। झंडे लगाना, पर्चे बांटना, नारे लगाना, ये सारे काम शिवचरण करता था। थोड़ा-बहुत भाषण देना भी उसने सीख लिया था। उसका फायदा शिवचरण को यह हुआ कि नगरपालिका के तंत्र में उसकी घुसपैठ होने लगी थी। कई अफसरों, बाबुओं से संपर्क बनाने में उसे सफलता मिल गयी थी। जिसके फलस्वरूप जो काम ठेकेदार कराता था, वे अब शिवचरण कराने लगा था। जिससे उसकी आमदनी बढ़ गयी थी।

आदमी जब आदमखोर हो जाता है तो फिर अपना-पराया नहीं देखता। बस उसे खून चाहिए। शिवचरण के साथ भी ऐसा ही हुआ था। सगे-संबंधी हो या जात-बिरादरी के अन्य लोग, सभी से काम कराने के बहाने कमीशन लेने लगा था। अपने-पराये का कोई भेद उसमें नहीं था। लोग कहते थे कि उसकी आंख में सुअर का बाल है।

उसकी बढ़ती आमदनी देखकर भी अम्मा समझ नहीं पायी थी। सुकड़ू नगरपालिका में ही काम करता था। फिर भी उसने शिवचरण के काम के बारे में कभी अम्मा से चर्चा नहीं की थी, एक दिन हरदेई की बहू चोपड़ा के ठिकाने का काम निबटाकर जैसे ही गली में आयी, सामने से अम्मा को आते देखकर ठिठक गयी। बहुत आदर-भाव दिखाते हुए बोली, "अम्मा जी, तम अभी भी काम करो हो। इब तम्हें कै कमी है। जेटजी तो भतेरा (बहुत) कमावे हैं। रामकिशन को नौकरी

दिलवाने के तीन हजार लिये थे। सभी जाणे हैं।”

“बहू, तू किसकी बात करे है...शिवचरण की? उन्ने तीन हजार लिए...तैन्ने कहां से सुण लिया?” अम्मा ने अचरज से कहा।

“अम्मा जी, अनजान ना बणौ। जिनब घर में गड्डी लोट (नोट) आवें हैं तो पड़ौसियों को भी पता हो जावे...-फेर तम तो मां हो...-घर की मालकिन। हमने तो सुणा है जेठजी सारे पैसे थारे ही हाथ में लाके धरे हैं। इब तो वही कहावत हो गयी दुनिया को लुटो भी और भाले भी बणे रहं।” हरदेई की बहू चिंगारी लगाकर आगे बढ़ गयी।

अम्मा का चेहरा फक्क पड़ गया था। उस वक्त वह कुछ बोल नहीं पायी थी।

शाम को शिवचरण के आते ही अम्मा ने साफ-साफ कह दिया था, “शिबु, आजकल तू जो करे है ठीक ना है...-जो मैंने पता होता कि तू इस तरियों का पैसा कमावे है तो मैं तेरे पैसे कू हाथ भी ना लगाती। तैन्ने पढ़ा-लिखा दिया। तेरी शादी (शादी) कर दी...मेरा काम खतम...अच्छा इन्सान न बणा सकी यों मेरा कसूर। कल से तू अपना चौका-चूल्हा अलग कर ले...मैंने ना खाणी इस कमाई की रोटी। अलग रह के चाहे किसी ने लूट या मार...मेरे से कोई मतलब नहीं।”

शिवचरण मुंह बाये अम्मा की बात सुन रहा था। उसकी समझ में नहीं आ रहा था कि अम्मा कह क्या रही है। अचानक अम्मा को हुआ क्या है? उसने पूछ ही लिया, “अम्मा बात क्या है? मैं कोई चोरी करके पैसा लाता हूं। वह ठेकेदार इतने सालों से यही काम कर रहा था। इतनी बड़ी कोठी उसने बना ली है...मैं करने लगा तो इसमें बुराई क्या है? मैं मेहनत करता हूं तो लोग खुशी से देते हैं। मैं किसी को नाजायज दबाकर तो कुछ नहीं लेता।”

“बुराई की बात करे है शिबु...बुराई तो किसी का गला काटने में भी ना है। बुराई तो डाका डालने में भी ना है। सूद पे रुपया चलाने में भी ना है। पर बेटे...करेक (जरा) उनकी भी तो सोच...जो अपने जातकों के मुंह का कौर छीन के अपनी मिहनत की कमाई तेरे हाथ पे धर देवे है। ना बेटे...ना...कभी सोच्या है उनकी दुर्दशा पे...कैसे जीवे हैं वे लोग?” अम्मा का गला भर आया था।

“अम्मा ! दुर्दशा तो ये लोग अपने आप करें हैं। दो पैसे भर ले जाने के बजाय दारू पीवै हैं। सट्टा खेलै हैं।” शिवचरण ने तर्क दिया।

“ठीक कहता है बेटे...जो तैन्ने स्कूल ना भेज्जा होता तो तू भी उनकी तरियों होता...रही दारू की बात...दारू तो तू भी पीवै। आज तैन्ने मुफ्त की मिले तो पीवै। कल जिनब ना मिलेगी तो खरीद के पीवैगा। जिनब लत पड़ जा ना फेर ना दिक्खे कि बच्चे भुक्खे हैं या बीमार पड़े हैं...समझ में जो आवे...तू कर, मैंने ना चाहिए तेरी यो कमाई।” कहते हुए अम्मा उठकर घर के काम में लग गयी। उसे लगातार यह दर्द सता रहा था कि उसकी कोख से एक आदमखोर ने जन्म ले लिया है,

जो अपनों को ही खा रहा है।

बिसन की नौकरी कुछ देर से लगी थी। इन्टर पास कर लिया था उसने। नौकरी के लिए कहां-कहां नहीं भटका था वह। कभी कन्डक्टरी की, तो कभी सिनेमाघर में टिकिट बेचे। कभी ठेकेदार के साथ सुपरवाइजरी की। काफी थक-हारकर एक दफ्तर में क्लर्क हो गया था। वेतन कम था, फिर भी तसल्ली थी। उस रोज अम्मा को लगा था कि उसकी मेहनत सफल हो गई है।

बिसन की नौकरी लगते ही उसने किरण और बिसन दोनों ही के हाथ पीले कर दिये थे। दोनों शादियों में सरदार प्रीतमसिंह से और कर्ज लेना पड़ा था। किरण का दुल्हा फौज में था। ज्यादा पढ़ा-लिखा तो नहीं था, फिर भी शकल-सूरत से ठीक था। बिसन की दुल्हन आठवीं पास थी।

आज जहां अम्मा खड़ी है, वहां से जब मुड़कर देखती है तो पीछे सब धुंधला-धुंधला दिखायी देता है। न जाने कितने उतार-चढ़ाव देख चुकी है अम्मा।

बिसन के लड़के मुकेश ने उसके सीने में जो फफोला दिया है वह शायद सबसे गहरा है। जिसने अम्मा को सदमा पहुंचाया है।

मुकेश ने एम.ए. कर लिया था। लेकिन नौकरी का कहीं दूर-दूर तक अता-पता नहीं था। काफी भाग-दौड़ जोड़-तोड़ के बाद भी नौकरी नहीं मिली थी। मुकेश को लेकर घर में तनाव रहने लगा था। जिसके कारण वह कई-कई दिन घर ही नहीं आता था। बिसन की परेशानी बढ़ने लगी थी। खोज-बीन करने पर पता चला, वह एक स्कूल टीचर के घर पड़ा रहता है।

स्कूल टीचर अपने दो छोटे-छोटे बच्चों के साथ पति से अलग रहती थी। देखने में आकर्षक एवं जवान थी। मुकेश से कहीं मुलाकात हुई थी। वही मुलाकात घनिष्टता में बदल गयी थी। एक ऐसा रिश्ता दोनों के बीच बन गया था जिसे वे कोई नाम नहीं दे पाये थे। रोज-रोज के तनाव से भागकर वह टीचर के पास पहुंच जाता था, सुकून ढूंढने। शुरू-शुरू में मुकेश के आकर्षक व्यक्तित्व ने टीचर को खींचा था। अकेलेपन से ऊबकर वह मुकेश के बाहुपाश में सिमट गयी थी। कुछ ही मुलाकातों के बाद यह आकर्षण जरूरत में बदल गया था। दो-दो बच्चों को दिन भर संभालने के लिए कोई तो घर में होना ही चाहिए। टीचर सुबह आठ बजे स्कूल चली जाती थी और मुकेश दिनभर बच्चों को संभालता था।

रात में वह दस-साढ़े दस से पहले घर नहीं लौटता था। एक दिन जब वह रात में देर से लौटा तो बिसन ने मुकेश को डांटकर पूछा, "आनकल इतनी देर कहां रहते हो? सुबह मुंह-अंधेरे घर से निकलते हो, रात में लौटते हो?"

मुकेश ने टालने का प्रयास किया, लेकिन जब बिसन ने सख्ती दिखायी तो मुकेश के तमाम बहाने लड़खड़ांने लगे। बिसन को उसके और टीचर के बीच चल रहे रिश्तों की भनक पहले ही लग चुकी थी।

बिसन ने गुर्गाकर तीखी आवाज में कहा, "ये स्कूल टीचर का क्या चक्कर

है?"

स्कूल टीचर का नाम सुनते ही मुकेश सकपका गया। बिसन की आवाज सुनकर अम्मा भी आ गयी थी। मुकेश सिर नीचे किये चुपचाप खड़ा था। बिसन के किसी सवाल का उत्तर उसने नहीं दिया था। बिसन का पारा चढ़ गया। गुस्से में चीखकर बोला, "कुछ लाज-शर्म हो तो इसी वक्त निकल जा यहां से।" तड़-तड़ करके दो-तीन थप्पड़ मुकेश को जड़ दिये। अम्मा बाँच-बचाव करके मुकेश को अलग ले गयी। बिसन अभी भी चिल्ला रहा था। अम्मा ने मुकेश को अपने पास बैठाकर पूछताछ की। अम्मा के सामने उसने सब कुछ उगल दिया।

अम्मा को लगा, सामने उसका पोता नहीं मिसेज चोपड़ा के बैडरूम में विनोद बैठा है। उसकी आंखों में अजीब-सी वितृष्णा भर गयी। वह कुछ नहीं बोली। गहरी सांस ली और लेट गयी।

मुकेश कब उठकर गया, पता ही नहीं चला। सुबह शिवचरण की बहू ने आकर कहा, "अम्मा जी, मुकेश का ब्याह कर दो, सुबह का भूला घर लौट आवेगा।"

अम्मा ने लंबी सांस लेते हुए कहा, "ना बहू...किसी निरदोस बच्ची कू इस सांड के गले में ना बांधूंगी। जिब्र आदमी कू बासी गोशत का चस्का लग जावे है तो ताजी गोशत कू हाथ भी ना लगावे...मैं जीते जी किसी गरीब की बेटी को जान-बूझके गड्डे में ना धकेलूंगी...." अम्मा ने लंबे-लंबे सांस लिये। जैसे पीड़ा से उबरने का प्रयास कर रही हो।

सुबह की रोशनी छत पर उतर आयी थी। अम्मा ने झाड़ू और कनस्तर उठाया और ठिकानों की तरफ चल दी।

उस रोज वह शाम तक घर नहीं लौटी। दिनभर बाहर ही रही। मुकेश के चले जाने से उसे गहरा सदमा लगा था।

शाम को जब लौटी तो शरीर थककर चूर हो चुका था। सांस उखड़ी हुई थी। उसकी हालत देखकर सभी घबड़ा गये। बिसन ने उसे चारपाई पर लिटाते हुए पूछा, "अम्मा, सुबह से कहां थी? सब जगह ढूँढ लिया। यहां सब परेशान थे।" अम्मा ने कोई उत्तर दिया।

उसे चुप देखकर बिसन ने कहा, "अम्मा ये ठिकानों का काम छोड़ो, अब आपके शरीर में ताकत कहां है? और वैसे भी अब आपको इतनी तकलीफ उठाने की जरूरत क्या है? घर तो चल रहा है। अच्छा नहीं लगता अम्मा...आप गन्दगी ढोने जाती हैं...लोग देखते हैं तो शर्म आती है....।"

"बेटे बिसन...तैने और तेरे जातकों (बच्चे) ने सरम आवै...इसीलिए तो पढ़ाया-लिखाया, थारै सबके हाथ से झाड़ू-टोकरा छुड़ाया...मेरे बाद इस घर की कोई बहू-बेटी ठिकानों में नहीं गयी...सिरफ इसलिए कि तम लोग इज्जत से जीना सीक्खो...ऐसा कोई काम ना करो जिससे सिर नीच्चा हो...कहीं कमी रह गयी है बेटे जो तेरा मुकेश जूठन पर मुंह मारने गया वह भी नौकर की तरह,

उसके बच्चों को संभालने, इज्जत से ब्याह के घर ले आता....-भले ही दो जातकों की मां है। मेरा दिल खुस हो जाता। अपनी बहू बणा के रखती...पर यो तो ठीक ना है, अच्छा नी करा उन्ने...." अम्मा का गला भरा गया, वह रोनी लगी।

जब आंसू रुके तो फिर बोली, "तेरे बापू रिटायर हुए तो जो पैसे मिले थे, उनसे सरदार का कर्जा उतार दिया, इब तो जिंदगानी थारै ही भरोसे है...जिब किरणलता अपने जातकों कू लेके आवे है तो उसके खाली हाथ पे कुछ रखने के लिए तो मेरे पास कुछ होना चाहिए। कब तक तेरे से मांगूगी....ना बेटे....उस सुख की खातिर मुझे काम करना पड़ रहा है तो आखिरी सांस तक करूंगी। पर किसी के आसरित (आश्रित) ना रहूंगी।"

अम्मा की आंखों में गहरे पानी की झील उग आयी थी। जिसमें छोटी-छोटी लहरें उठ रही थीं। जैसे तमाम जखम फिर से हरे हो गये हों।

अम्मा का टूटा-फूटा कनस्तर और झाड़ू दीवार के सहारे टिके मुंह चिढ़ा रहे थे।

अन्तिम बयान

डॉ० कुसुम 'वियोगी'

सूरज की किरण छिटकने से पहले हलकारे अपने-अपने बैलों को ले खेतों पर जा चुके थे। जैसे ही सूरज की किरण फूटी गांव-वस्ती की बहू-बेटियां खाली बर्तन ले कुएं की ओर चल पड़ीं। सुबह-सुबह पनघट पर पनहारियों द्वारा पानी भरने का दृश्य गांव के वातावरण को और मनमोहक बना जाता।

मजदूरी करने वाले, अपने-अपने घरों से निकल काम को चल पड़े थे।

गाय-भैंस के न्यार फूस को रोजाना की तरह अतरो, कमला, और भरतरी भी घर की चार-दीवारी लांघ खेतों की ओर निकल पड़ी थीं। चारों-पांचों की टोली बन चुकी थी न्यार लाने को।

अतरो अपनी न्यार-टोली में खूबसूरत कुंवारी जवान लड़की थी, कमला और भरतरी दो-दो चार-चार बच्चों की मां, लेकिन अतरो रिश्ते में ननद लगती चारों की, जब भी मसखरी सूझती तो तीनों-चारों मजाक कर लेती अतरो से।

सूरज कुछ ऊपर चढ़ने के कारण, गर्मी अधिक बढ़ चली थी।

गांव के प्रधान का लड़का अतरो पर मिट चला था। उसकी आँखें दिन की हरकतों को देख कमला और भरतरी उसकी मंशा भांप चली थीं, लेकिन अतरो से कुछ न कहतीं। राजेन्द्र अतरो को देख दूर से ही प्यास बुझा लेता परन्तु ओंठ सूखे के सूखे रह जाते।

जब भी ये टोली न्यार काटने जाती तो राजेन्द्र गांव के टीले पर मजनूं-सा बैठा मिलता, रास्ते में जो पड़ता था और पास ही उसके खेत। खेत क्या राजेन्द्र के बाप के थे? छोटी-मोटी रकम की ऊनी-दूनी ब्याज लेकर और न देने पर बेनामा प्रधान अपने नाम करा लेता।

जैसे ही न्यार-टोली टीले की तरफ से गुजरती तो राजेन्द्र कहता :

"अरी भाभी ! आज बड़ी देर कर दी !" गांव की प्रथा ही कुछ अलग है ! गरीब की लुगाई गांव भर की भौजाई जो लगती, साठ साला बूढ़ा भी बीस साल की औरत को भाभी कहने में न शरमाता परन्तु बीस साला औरत के दिल

में आग-सी ज़रूर लग जाती, किसमें साहस जो विरोध के स्वर उठा पाती !

राजेन्द्र गांव के प्रधान का इकलौता बेटा था। भला हो भुल्लन का, जो बीस साल बाद प्रधान की घरवाली की कोख हरी-भरी हो गई वरना तो बांझ कहलाने के डर से घर से बाहर ही न निकलती थी।

राजेन्द्र चरा-चरा कर बिजार-सा छुट्टा छोड़ रखा था प्रधान ने, लेकिन बुद्धन की लौंडिया अतरो को दिल दे बैठा था। अतरो को देखकर वह कटे पंख के पखेरू-सा तड़प उठता !

प्रतिदिन की तरह तीनों आज भी न्यार काटने गईं खेत पे तो राजेन्द्र से न रहा गया जैसे ही वह उसके खेत के आगे से गुजरीं तो राजेन्द्र ने कह ही दिया—

“अरी भाभी ! न्यार आज मेरे खेत से नहीं काटेगी क्या?”

भाभी भरतरी को जो कहता था प्रधान का लौंडा !

भरतरी उसकी निगाहें भांप चली थी। यह सब देख अतरो से न रहा जाता तभी कमला बोली—“जब कह रहे हैं तो काट लेते हैं न्यार।”

कमला का भोलापन भरतरी और अतरो से न सहा जाता !

राजेन्द्र की आंखों से निकलती आग दोनों को झुलसा जाती।

न्यार काटने का क्रम लगातार चलता रहा ! राजेन्द्र तीनों की अस्मिता को न्यार-फूस के आगे बौनी समझ बैठा था।

एक दिन राजेन्द्र के खेत से न्यार काट कर तीनों घर को जाने लगीं तभी राजेन्द्र बोला—“भाभी तू और कमला जाओ, अतरो से कुछ खास बात करनी है।” राजेन्द्र की बात सुनकर भरतरी और कमला सकपका गईं।

“आज जल्दी है फिर कभी !”

लेकिन, वह उसकी बात न समझ सका और तीनों झांसा दे बचकर निकल आईं !

न्यार की गठरी उठाये रास्ते भर तीनों चर्चा करती जा रही थीं तभी अतरो नागिन-सी फूफकार कर बोली—“भाभी ! अगर उसने मुझे कुछ कह दिया तो फिर देख दरांती से गन्ने-सा कतर कर रख दूंगी हरामखोर को ! गांव वाले देखते रह जाएंगे !”

“अतरो !” कमला हकबका गई थी उसकी बात को सुनकर—“हाय ! तू क्या कह रही है ! गांव में गाज गिर पड़ेगी कुछ हो गया तो !”

“तो फिर !”

“तू खोलकर रख देना हरामखोर के आगे....”

अब तो अतरो की आंख में खून उतर चला था !

भरतरी ने कहा—“अतरो कल से हम तीनों किसी और रास्ते से चलेंगे न्यार काटने।”

अतरो बोली—“क्यों?”

कमला ने तपाक से कहा—“अतरो ! भाभी ठीक ही तो कह रही है।”

“क्या खाक ठीक कह रही हैं? डरो मत ! मैं सब देख लूंगी ! कोई चार-हाथ पैर नहीं हैं ठकुरा के !”

रोजाना की तरह जैसे ही तीनों न्यार काटने गईं, अतरों को देख राजेन्द्र कली-सा खिल गया ! और तीनों अलग अलग दिशाओं में न्यार काटने चली गईं। राजेन्द्र की निगाह अतरो पर गिद्ध-सी गड़ी रहीं। ज्योंही तीनों अपनी-अपनी गठरी सिर पर लाद कर निकलीं तो देखा राजेन्द्र हाथों में कट्टा (देशी पिस्तौल) लिए बैठा है ! कभी उसकी नाल खोलता तो कभी कारतूस डालकर निकालता !

भरतरी उसकी मनोस्थिति भांप चली थी ! लेकिन कल की बातों से अतरो की मर्दानगी पर नाज हो चला था !

“अरी भाभी काट लिया न्यार?”

भरतरी ने झट हां कर दी !

“गाय-भैंस को ही न्यार फूस-डाल, प्यास बुझा देगी अतरो? या....!” राजेन्द्र ने कहा !

अतरो अन्दर-ही-अन्दर तेजाब-सा उफन पड़ी और उंगलियों में दरांती घुमाने लगी !

कमला खड़ी-खड़ी यह सब देखती-सुनती रही !

तभी राजेन्द्र ने कहा—“भाभी—तू कमला के साथ जा। अतरो अभी आएगी थोड़ी देर में !”

अतरो भी कामुकता के भेड़िये के शिकार को आतुर हो चली थी जैसे ही दोनों घर की ओर चलीं, राजेन्द्र ने हाथ में लगे तमंचे को चूम लिया !

“अतरो SSS !”

“हां !”

“गठरी उतार दे न सिर से, खड़ी-खड़ी थक जाएगी !”

जैसे ही अतरों ने गठरी सिर से उतारनी चाही, राजेन्द्र ने लपक कर गठरी उतारने को हाथ बढ़ाया तो वह अतरो को ले खेत में जा गिरा !

कमला और भरतरी के पैर गांव की ओर नहीं पड़ रहे थे कहीं कुछ...।

दोनों अनर्थ के बोझ तले दब चली थीं।

राजेन्द्र अतरो को बातों-बातों में बहलाने-फुसलाने लगा !

जैसे ही राजेन्द्र ने कपड़े उतार...! तो ! उसका पुरुष तन चला था !...

थोड़ी देर बाद....

अतरो सिर पर न्यार की गठरी उठाये घर की ओर चल पड़ी !

रास्ते के बीचों-बीच कमला और भरतरी उसका इंतजार कर रही थीं !

"अतरो !"

इतना कहते ही भाभी और कमला पसीने-पसीने हो चलीं।

अतरो की शेरनी-सी लाल आंखें देख कुछ पूछने का साहस न बटोर सकीं !

"अतरो SSS !"

"अरी भाभी क्यों बैठी है यहां? घर चलो।"

"पांव ही नहीं पड़ते जिज्जी !"

"अरी चलो न ! क्यों घबरा रही हो सब ठीक-ठाक है !"

लेकिन आज तो न्यार की गठरी का बोझ कहीं ज्यादा लग रहा था !

और तीनों अपने-अपने घर जा काम-काज में व्यस्त हो चलीं।

कमला रात भर छप्पर की तीलियां गिनती रही। आंखों से नींद उचाट चली थी !

और भरतरी अतरो की मर्दानगी पर फूली न समा पा रही थी।

फिर भी दोनों के सम्बन्धों को लेकर हां-ना के हिंडोले में रात भर झूलती रही !

दूसरे दिन भी तीनों क्रमशः न्यार काटने गईं सब कुछ शान्त ! और न्यार काट कर घर वापस आ गईं। दो-तीन दिन तक राजेन्द्र उन्हें रास्ते में नहीं मिला। एक दिन कमला ने पूछ ही लिया—"भाभी राजेन्द्र नहीं दिख रहा कई दिनों में!"

"गया होगा कहीं वरना कहां जाकर मरता है !"

अतरो समुद्र के अतल तल में गोते लगा रही थी !

राजेन्द्र जब दो-तीन दिन तक घर न आया तो गांव में हलचल मच गई, कहां गया राजेन्द्र !...कहां गया?

तभी गांव के थाने में प्रधान ने गुमशुदी की रपट दर्ज करायी !

भरतरी और कमला का रोम-रोम सिहर चला था लेकिन एक-दूसरे से कुछ कह न सकीं !

चौथे दिन सूरज की किरण फूटी भी न थी कि कुए में पड़ी लाश की खबर गांव भर में फैल चुकी थी।

पुलिस की साईरन बजाती गाड़ियों की सीं-SSS सांय की आवांज ने गांव को डक-सा लिया था।

गांव के लोग कुए के पास जंगल के पेड़ से उग चले थे ! प्रधान और गांव का सरपंच पुलिस को लेकर कुए के पास पहुंचे। जिसकी सूचना गांव का जमादार पुलिस को पहले ही दे चुका था !

कुए में पड़ी बेटे की लाश देखकर प्रधान बेहोश होकर गिर पड़ा !

दूसरी तरफ पुलिस जंगल-सी उगी भीड़ पर लाठियां भांजने में मशगूल थी !

इतने में प्रधान की घरवाली का जबड़ा भिंच चला था।

कोई मुंह में पानी डाल रहा था तो कोई पंखा-सा बनाकर कपड़े से झूला रहा था !

कैसा कहर बरपा था !

लेकिन भरतरी और कमला यह सब सुन पत्थर हो चली थीं। अतरो रोजाना की तरह अपने काम-काज में मस्त थी।

जैसे ही पुलिस ने कुए में कांटा डाला तो लाश कांटे में मछली-सी फंस ऊपर उठ चली थीं जैसे ही फूली लाश पानी से बाहर निकाली, लाश की बदबू से सारा वातावरण गन्धिया चला था।

सबने अपने-अपने मुंह कपड़े से ढांप लिए कैसी बिडम्बना थी !

लाश के पंचनामे को जैसे ही दरोगा आगे बढ़ा, भीड़ उसके पीछे-पीछे हो चली तभी सिपईया ने लाठी हवा में तैराई और भीड़ पीछे को हट चली। लाश को देख घड़ी की सुई थम-सी गई थी !

कुए की मुंडेर पर लगे नीम के पेड़ के ऊपर बैठे कऊओं की कांव-कांव की आवाज वातावरण को और कर्कश बनाए जा रही थी।

तीन-चार सिपाहियों ने लाश की टांग-हाथ पकड़ कर बौरे-सी जीप में पटक दी !

सारा-का-सारा गांव स्तब्ध हो चला था। जीप में लाश को डलवा कर दरोगा सिविल अस्पताल की ओर बढ़ा तो धुंआ और गर्द-गुबार से पगडण्डी धुंधला चली। पीछे-पीछे गांव के लोग अपनी-अपनी सवारी से सिविल अस्पताल की ओर दौड़ चले !

सिविल अस्पताल गांव से एक मील की दूरी पर ही सटा था ! धीरे-धीरे अस्पताल के आंगन में मजमा-सा जुड़ चला था !

बड़े-बूढ़े बीड़ी सुटिया-सुटिया कर घटना पर चर्चा कर रहे थे। कोई आत्महत्या बताता तो कोई हत्या जितने मुंह उतनी बात। सब अपना-अपना आकलन प्रस्तुत कर रहे थे !

सरपंच प्रधान को ढांडस बंधा रहा था तो कोई कुछ कह रहा था गांव वालों को मामला कुछ अधिक गम्भीर नजर आ रहा था !

राजेन्द्र को ऐसा क्या हुआ जो कुएं में....

सारे दिन के थके-हारे लोगों की भूख से आंते मरोड़ चली थीं ! चोरी-छुपके एक-एक कर चांट-पत्ते चाटने चले जाते और आकर टोली में बैठ बीड़ी सुटियाने लग पड़ते।

सिविल अस्पताल में बीड़ी के टूटों का ढेर लग चला था। दोने-खोमचों वालों की मौज हो चली थी, पूरा गांव जो उमड़ चला था सिविल अस्पताल में !

पोस्ट मार्टम करवा कर लाश गांव के लोगों का थमा दी !

पोस्ट मार्टम की रिपोर्ट देखकर दरोगा की सांसें एक पल को रुक गई !

अचानक ! एक कोने में जाकर दरोगा ने सरपंच को आवाज दी ! सरपंच लड़खड़ाता-हुआ दरोगा की ओर बढ़ा और प्रधान के खैरख्वाह भी। तभी दरोगा ने डपट कर कहा—

“यहां क्या है? क्यों भीड़ लगा ली। जाओ वहीं बैठो।”

इतने में एक आदमी दौड़कर काठी-कफन ले आया। लाश को भैंसा बुग्गी में डालकर गांव की ओर लौट चले।

सारी की सारी भीड़ पीछे-पीछे उलट चली। हादसे की खबर सुनकर आस-पास के लोग भी प्रधान को सांत्वना देने पहुंच चुके थे !

मगर गांव की जनानियों में कानाफूसी चल रही थी। कैसा कहर बरपा है, प्रधान के ऊपर ! घरवाली की आंख रो-रोकर पथरा चली थी !

ज्योंही लाश को नहलाने-धुलाने के लिये कपड़े उतारे तो लाश के आस-पास खड़े लोग विस्मय भाव से देखने लगे। प्रधान की आंखों के आगे पुनः अंधेरा छा गया ! एकाएक बेहोश होकर गिर पड़ा ! तभी दो-तीन आदमी दौड़े-दौड़े गए और एक लोटा पानी लाकर मुंह पर पानी की छींटा देने लगे। प्रधान अचेत-सा पड़ा रहा ! पुलिस वाले सिविल ड्रेस में तफतीश में जुट पड़े। भीड़ में नए-नए चेहरे आन खड़े थे ! घटना जो ऐसी हो चली थी !

श्मशान में लाश फूंकने सभी चल दिए। नंगी लाश देखने वालों के मुख से उफ तक न निकल सकी ! और लाश गांव के श्मशान में फूंक दी गई।

परन्तु पुलिस हरकत में आ गई थी, पोस्ट मार्टम की रिपोर्ट देखकर !

मामला हत्या का है या आत्महत्या का? इसी को सुलझाने में जुटी थी !

पुलिस की सूघ कुत्ते की सूघ से ज्यादा होती है। अगर सूघने पर आ जाए तो !

वरना तो रिपोर्ट होने पर कौन परवाह करता है।

मामला भी तो संगीन था उस पर गांव का प्रधान। पुलिस हरकत में तो आनी ही थी !

शक की सुई सारे गांव पर जा टिकी थी। गांव के लोग पत्ते-सा धर-धर कांपने लगे थे ! मानो जुबान को लकवा मार गया हो !

तफतीश करते-करते पुलिस की गाज अतरो पर जा गिरी !

तभी पुलिस ने अतरो को हिरासत में ले लिया !

अतरो को थाने में चलकर बयान देने को कहा। गांव की लड़की को थाने में जाता देख गांव के लोग एक हो चले थे।

गांव के एकत्रित लोगों ने समवेत स्वर में कहा—“दरोगा जी जो बयान लेना है, यहीं गांव के सामने लो। सातों जमात की बेटी गांव की धी-बेटी होती है।”

तभी दरोगा तुनक कर बोला—“चिन्ता मत करो। बयान लेकर इसे छोड़ देंगे। दो-चार आदमी चलना चाहो तो चलो !”

“परन्तु गांव में आज तक ऐसा न हुआ था ! जो गांव की लड़की बयान देने थाने-कचहरी जाए !”

“बहन बेटा तो सबके है।”

तभी अतरो तिड़क कर बोली—“दरोगा जी बयान चाहिए !” अतरों की बात सुन गांव वाले पत्थर के बुत हो चले थे। भरतरी और कमला का तो लहंगा ही गीला हो चला था।

तभी अतरो दहाड़ कर बोली—“गांव वालों....! और सिपईया तू भी सुन ! बयान चाहिए, जरूर दूंगी ! जरा रुक !”

ज्योंही अतरो अपने घर की ओर दौड़ी तो पुलिस पीछे-पीछे दौड़ चली। कहीं....!

तभी गांव के सरपंच ने कहा—“दरोगा जी पीछे मत दौड़ो।”

और दरोगा वही टट्टू सरीखे ठिठक कर रह गया।

जैसे ही अतरो कागज का बंडल लेकर आई दरोगा की बांहें खिल गई !

अतरो जंगल सी उगी भीड़ के बीच आकर बोली—“गांव वालों सुनो ! दरोगा को बयान चाहिए तो सुनो ! मेरा बयान !”

अतरो ने कागज के बंडल में से निकाल कर राजेन्द्र का कटा हुआ पुरुषत्व लहरा दिया !

सांग

जयप्रकाश कर्दम

दिन-लगभग ढल चुका था। संध्या की सुरमई चादर चारों ओर फैलने लगी थी। दिन भर की दौड़-धूप के बाद अपने नीड़ को लौटते पक्षियों के कलरव और खेत जोतकर घर लौटते बैलों के गले में बजती घंटियों की आवाज से वातावरण में मधुर संगीत-सा घुल रहा था। अहा-अहा, पुच-पुच करते और कंधों पर हल-जुआ लादे कमरे, अपनी खोर तक पहुंचने की जल्दी में भागते-दौड़ते बैलों को थामते उनके पीछे घिसटते जा रहे थे।

कुछ कमरों ने बैलों को उनके खूंटों पर लाकर बांध दिया था, जो भूसे की सानी और चरी पर टूटे पड़ रहे थे। बाकी कमरे अंधेरा होने से पहले-पहले अपने घरों तक पहुंचने की जल्दी में थे। नंगे-अधनंगे बच्चे रेत-मिट्टी उड़ाते, किलकारी मारते और छुआ-छुई करते, हो-हल्ला मचाते एक दूसरे के पीछे दौड़ रहे थे। घरों के भीतर बर्तनों की खटर-पटर और पत्थरों के सिल-बट्टों पर मसाला पीसती, हॉडिया छोंकती, चून मांडती या बर्तनों को इधर-उधर रखती औरतों की चूड़ियों की खनक चारों ओर गूंज रही थी। इस छोर से लेकर उस छोर तक पूरे सोनपुर में उत्साह और उमंग का सा माहौल था। क्या औरतें क्या आदमी, क्या बच्चे, क्या बूढ़े और जवान, सबके अन्दर एक उमंग थी। होती भी क्यों नहीं जब मेहनत-मजदूरी के एक निश्चित ढर्रे पर चलने वाली जिन्दगी में मनोरंजन के लिए गांव में सांग की टोली जमी हो।

तीन दिन हो गए थे सांग की टोली को सोनपुर में जमे। पहले दिन 'रूप-वसंत' का सांग खेला गया था और दूसरे दिन 'पूरनमल' का आज 'सत्यवान-सावित्री' का सांग खेला जाना था जिसे देखने के लिए लोगों का कुम्भ-सा ठमढ़ रहा था। औरतें अंधेरा होने से पहले-पहले हॉडिया-रोटी से निफराम हो जाने की धुन में थीं ताकि सांग का पूरा आनन्द लिया जा सके। धमा-चौकड़ी मचाते बच्चे तो दिन छिपते-छिपते ही मुखिया की चौपाल के बाहर खड़े नीम के पेड़ के नीचे अपने-अपने घरों से लाए हुए टाट-पट्टी के टुकड़े बिछाकर पहले ही जम गए

थे, लेकिन जैसे ही हारमोनियम बजना शुरू हुआ तथा ढोलक और नगाड़े पर चोट पड़ी कि बड़े लोग भी घरों से निकल-निकल कर चौपाल पर जमा होना शुरू हो गए थे।

सांग खेला जा रहा था। चौपाल ठसाठस भरी थी। तिल रखने तक के लिए जगह नहीं थी। सांग के साथ बीच-बीच में रागनियों के रंग ने समां बांध रखा था। लोग मंत्रमुग्ध से बैठे थे। कोई अपनी जगह से हिल तक नहीं रहा था।

नगाड़े पर चोट पड़ने लगी। दुलकिया ने भी झूमकर हाथ चलाने शुरू किए। दो कलाकारों ने रागनी गानी शुरू की।

'हो गया गात सूख कै माड़ा' पिया दे मनै कुल्हाड़ा

ओए मैं भी चलूंगी तेरे साथ में।

ओ गोरी, सजै ना कुल्हाड़ा तेरे हाथ में॥'

क्या सधे हुए स्वर थे और कितने मधुर कण्ठ, वाह-वाह कर उठे लोग।

चम्पा ने सांग की हॉडिया उतारकर रोटी सेंकने के लिए चूल्हे पर तवा चढ़ाया ही था कि शीला ने आ टोका, "चम्पा, तू नहीं चलेगी?"

"कहां?" पूछा चम्पा ने।

"सांग देखने।" बोली शीला।

"नहीं मेरे पास बहुत काम है।" और कहकर आटे की लोई बनानी शुरू कर दी चम्पा ने।

"काम तो रोज ही रहता है, ये सांग-तमारे के मौके तो रोज नहीं आते। कभी-कभी ही आते हैं ये मौके, तू देख तो चलकर कितना बढ़िया सांग है। आज, उसका है सत्यवान-सावित्री का।" चम्पा को उत्साहित करने की कोशिश की शीला ने।

"होगा पर काम से ज्यादा तो अच्छा नहीं होगा।" कहते हुए रोटी तवे पर डाली चम्पा ने।

"ऐसी बात नहीं है चम्पा, हर चीज अपनी जगह पर अच्छी-बुरी होती है। तू देख तो चलकर अच्छा न लगे तो कहना और फिर मर्द-मानस तो देखते ही रहते हैं। वे तो दो-चार कोस दूर जाकर भी देख आते हैं। हम औरतों के जीवन में तो नहीं है यह सब। हमारे लिए तो कभी-कभार ही आते हैं ऐसे मौके और उस पर भी तू...।" इस बार थोड़ी नाराजगी जताई थी शीला ने। लेकिन चम्पा पर उसकी इस नाराजगी का कोई असर नहीं हुआ और कहा उसने, "मैं पूछती हूँ क्या मिल जाएगा सांग देखने से, थोड़ी-देर के लिए मन का बहलाव ही न?" और शीला के चेहरे पर नजरें टिका दीं। "हां!" विस्मय से चम्पा के चेहरे की ओर ताकती शीला ने सहमति में सिर हिलाया। "जबकि हम यह जानते हैं कि पूरी जिंदगी फिर वही पीड़ा, वही दर्द, वही दुःख, अभाव और रौना-झीकना है, यही हमारे जीवन का सच है। फिर इस क्षणिक सुख के लिए इतना पागलपन क्यों?"

क्या क्षण भर का यह सुख भुलावा नहीं है। फिर हम अपने आपको भ्रम और धोखे में क्यों रखें? क्यों न सच को ही स्वीकार करें हम।" अंतर की घनीभूत पीड़ा शब्दों के सहारे बाहर निकल आयी थी।

"लेकिन अकेले हम ही तो नहीं हैं, सभी लोग तो देखते हैं सांग-तमाशे। सभी जा रहे हैं।" शीला के पास इसके अलावा कोई उत्तर नहीं था चम्पा की बातों का।

मन हुआ चम्पा का कि कह दे, 'जाएं सब मेरी बला से, तुझे जाना हो तू भी जा, मैं नहीं जाऊंगी' लेकिन उसने देखा कि शीला निराश सी हो गयी थी। इसलिए रोके लिया उसने अपने आपको और समझाने की कोशिश की शीला को, "मैं जरूर चलती शीला, लेकिन मेरी तबीयत ठीक नहीं है। तू तो जानती है मैं आज काम पर भी नहीं गयी। हॉडिया-रोटी भी मजबूरी में बनानी पड़ रही हैं, नहीं तो अभी भी चक्कर आ रहा है मुझे।" और कहने के साथ पलटने के बजाय चिमटे से ही रोटी पचाने लगी चम्पा।

शीला लौट गयी लेकिन मुखिया के खेत में काम का ध्यान आते ही उसके मन में हलचल-सी होने लगी। रह-रहकर कोई सूई उसके मन में ढके-दबे पड़े जख्म को कुरेदने लगी और आठ बरस पहले की घटना एक फिल्म की भांति उसके मानस-पटल पर घूमने लगी।

एक हफ्ते से उसका पति भुल्लन बुखार से पीड़ित था। बुखार भी ऐसा कि थोड़ी-बहुत देर के लिए उतरता और फिर चढ़ जाता। तन ठीक हो तो मन भी ठीक रहता है लेकिन यदि तन ठीक न हो तो मन भी ठीक नहीं रहता है। खाने-पीने को भी उसका मन नहीं होता था और कमजोरी के कारण उसकी यह हालत हो गयी थी। सारी धरती और आसपास की सभी चीजें उसको घूमती-सी दिखाई पड़तीं और उसे लगता कि वह तुरन्त गिर पड़ेगा।

उन दिनों भी गांव में सांग की टोली जमी थी और भुल्लन को सांग देखने का बहुत शौक था। अपने गांव में तो क्या दो-चार कोस पर भी कहीं सांग हो रहा होता तो भी वह नहीं छोड़ता था। लेकिन हफ्ते भर के बुखार ने उसकी यह गत बना दी थी कि अपने गांव में सांग हो रहा था और वह सांग नहीं देख पा रहा था। खाट पर पड़ा-पड़ा वह ढोलक और नगाड़े की आवाज सुनता और अपनी विवशता पर मन मारकर रह जाता था। उन्हीं दिनों मुखिया के एक खेत में पानी लगाना था। पानी बलाने (लगाने) के लिए मुखिया ने भुल्लन को कहा था लेकिन पानी बलाने में तो आदमी की टांग तराजू रहती है। यहां बंध लगाना, वहां काटना, यहां मुहाला खोलना, वहां क्यारी बदलना इतनी भाग-दौड़ रहती है इस काम में कि आदमी इधर से उधर नाचता सा फिरता है। सचमुच बड़ी मेहनत का काम होता है पानी बलाना। अच्छे-भले आदमी के भी होश गादले हो जाते हैं। फिर भुल्लन तो एक हफ्ते से बुखार का मारा था, उसके बस का नहीं था पानी बलाना। वह लाचार था इसलिए मुखिया से विनती की थी उसने, 'आपके काम को कभी न

नहीं है मालिक, ठीक होता तो जरूर जाता पानी बलाने। लेकिन ठीक से खड़ा तक नहीं हुआ जाता है। पानी बलाने का काम मुझसे नहीं हो सकेगा। ठीक हो जाऊं, फिर चाहे जो काम करवा लेना, आधी रात आपको ताबेदारी में रहूंगा।"

उस दिन किसी से उधार पैसे लेकर वैद्यजी से दवाई ली थी उसने। उन दवाइयों से उसका बुखार कम हुआ था और उसने कुछ अच्छा महसूस किया था। मसूर की दाल के साथ दो फुलकियां भी उसने उस दिन खायी थीं। इससे उसके शरीर में इतनी जान पड़ गयी थी कि वह बैठ सकता था और थोड़ी देर चल-फिर सकता था। जैसे ही वह थोड़ा सांवटा-सा हुआ उसका मन इस बात के लिए बेचैन होने लगा था कि वह घर से बाहर निकले, थोड़ी देर घूमे-फिरे और लोगों से मिले-जुले, और हफ्ते भर की इस ऊब से उबरने के लिए उस दिन लाठी के सहारे चलकर थोड़ी देर के लिए वह सांग में जा बैठा था।

लेकिन अगले दिन वह सोकर नहीं उठा था कि अपने लठैतों को साथ लिए मुखिया उसके घर पर था। आते ही उसने पुकारा, "अबे ओ भुल्लन, अबे कहाँ है डेड़ा।"

सुबह-सुबह मुखिया को अपने दरवाजे पर और गुस्से भरा देख चौंका भुल्लन। हड़बड़ा कर खाट से उठा वह और सहमता हुआ सा झोपड़ी से बाहर निकलता। "इतने सवेरे आप यहां, क्या हुआ मालिक? आप खबर भिजवा देते मैं खुद ही सेवा में हाजिर हो जाता।"

"तू सेवा में हाजिर हो जाता, ऐं ! हमको बेवकूफ बनाता है....के।" क्रोध से आंखें लाल थीं मुखिया की और नथुने फड़फड़ा रहे थे। ऐसी मुद्रा में पहली बार नहीं देखा था भुल्लन ने मुखिया को। भय से उसकी नेकर गौली हो गयी और शरीर थर-थर कांपने लगा। वह समझ नहीं पा रहा था कि मुखिया को उस पर इतना गुस्सा क्यों है। बड़ी हिम्मत करके कांपते हुए पूछा उसने, "क्या कसूर हो गया मुझसे मालिक?"

"कसूर पूछता है साला ! पानी बलाने के नाम पर बुखार होता है। खड़े नहीं हुआ जाता, चक्कर आते हैं। और सांग देखने के लिए जान आ जाती है। झूठे, हरामखोर !" कहने के साथ भुल्लन को गर्दन से पकड़ मुखिया ने और एक जोर का दचका दिया। औंधे मुंह जमीन पर जाकर पड़ा वह। और इससे पहले कि भुल्लन खड़ा हो पाता इस बार लात का प्रहार हुआ उसकी पीठ पर और वह जमीन पर जा पड़ा।

"मेरे खेत में पानी नहीं लगेगा और तू सांग देखेगा। मैं दिखलाऊंगा सांग तुझे।" और लात और घूंसों की बौछार सी कर दी मुखिया ने।

भुल्लन गिड़गिड़ाया-मिमियाता रहा। तड़पता रहा, अपने बीवी-बच्चों की दुहाई दे-देकर दया की भीख मांगता रहा, लेकिन मुखिया के लात और घूंसे नहीं रुके। उसके मुंह से खून बहने लगा, आंखों के आगे अंधेरा छा गया और वह बेहोश होकर ढेर हो गया। लेकिन मुखिया ने अभी भी वरु नहीं की। उसका मुंह, हाथ

और पैर बराबर चलते रहे। भुल्लन की मां-बहन से लेकर उसकी दो बरस की बेटों तक के साथ अपने लैंगिक संबंध जोड़ता हुआ वह बेतहाशा लात और घूंसे बरसाता रहा।

चम्पा उस समय जंगल होने लगी हुई थी। मुखिया के हाथों भुल्लन के पिटने की खबर सुनते ही वह दौड़ी-दौड़ी चर पहुंची। मुखिया निर्ममता से भुल्लन को मार जा रहा था और भुल्लन गर्म रेत पर पड़ी मछली की मानिंद प्राण-रक्षा में इधर से उधर फड़फड़ा रहा था। लोगों की भीड़ लगी थी लेकिन मुखिया के हाथों से भुल्लन को किसी ने नहीं बचाया। असहाय पति की रक्षा में चम्पा आगे आयी। उसने मुखिया के आगे हाथ जोड़े, मिन्नतें कीं। पैर भी पकड़े लेकिन मुखिया नहीं रुका। उसने चम्पा को भी चोटी से पकड़कर एक ओर फेंक दिया। वह फिर भी नहीं मानी और भुल्लन को बचाने के लिए उसके ऊपर जा पड़ी। तो मुखिया ने उससे भी लात-घूंसों से बात की। खुद थकने पर ही वह रुका था।

एक तो बीमारी से जर्जर, ऊपर से बेरहमी से बेहिसाब पिटाई, बोटी-बोटी जैसे कंद गयी थी उसकी। हड्डियों का भुरता बन गया था। तीन दिन तक बेहोश पड़ा रहा। चम्पा दिन-रात उसकी सेवा में लगी रही, उसके जख्मों पर लेप लगाती रही लेकिन भुल्लन को होश नहीं आ सका।

जैसे-जैसे यह फिल्म आगे बढ़ती गयी, एक आग चम्पा के अंतर में सुलगती गयी। अंतिम दृश्य तक आते-आते यह आग एक ज्वाला में परिवर्तित हो गयी और थोड़ी देर पहले तक सांग के प्रति अरुचि दिखाने वाली चम्पा तुरंत सांग देखने का निश्चय कर सांग देखने जा पहुंची। और सांग भी चुपचाप नहीं देखा, दो रुपये देकर अपने नाम की छाप भी लगवायी उसने। थोड़ी देर पहले निष्प्राण-सी चम्पा उस समय बड़ी हंसी-खुशी दिखाई दे रही थी और जैसी उम्मीद थी, दिन निकलते ही मुखिया चम्पा के दरवाजे पर था।

“बाहर निकल चुड़ैल।” मुखिया उबल रहा था।

फटे-पुराने ओढ़ने से खुद को ढकती-दुबकाती, सहमी-सिमटी सी चम्पा झोपड़ी से बाहर आयी, “बोल हरामजादी, कल खेत में नलाई करने क्यों नहीं गयी थी?” क्रोध से पूछा मुखिया ने।

“मेरी तबियत ठीक नहीं थी।” बोली चम्पा।

“तबियत ठीक नहीं थी, झूठ बोलती है कुतिया ! फिर सांग देखने कैसे चली गयी तू? ऐं, बोल....।” और कहने के साथ चम्पा की ओर हाथ बढ़ाया मुखिया ने।

लेकिन इससे पहले कि मुखिया का हाथ चम्पा तक पहुंचता, ओढ़ने में से गंडासा पकड़े चम्पा के हाथ बाहर निकले और अगले ही क्षण मुखिया का सिर दो फांक हो गया।

और वह पढ़ गई....

डा० कुसुम वियोगी

आज बैंक का अवकाश था। रोजाना की तरह अपने ड्राईंग रूम में बैठा अखबार पढ़ने में व्यस्त था। अचानक मेरी छोटी बिटिया हांफती-सी दौड़कर आयी और बोली, "डैडी-डैडी ! जमादारिन अपनी लड़की को झाड़ू से पीट रही है।"

तभी मेरी एकाग्रता भंग हुई और वह मेरा हाथ पकड़ कर बोली, "डैडी उठो ! उठकर, बाहर देखो तो सही।" शायद उसकी मार-पीट से मेरी बेटी को कहीं गहरे तक आघात पहुंचा, संवेदनशील बना रही थी।

ज्योंही मैं उसके साथ बाहर निकल कर आया तो गली में देखा कि आस-पड़ोस की महिलाएं एवं बच्चों की भीड़ तमाशा देख रही है परन्तु उनका जाति अहम् उन दोनों को छुड़ाने में आड़े आ रहा था, दूसरी तरफ उसकी मां दनादन झाड़ू से वायलन-सा उसकी देह पर बजा रही थी। लड़की मूक बनी मार खाती रही।

रोजाना की तरह आज भी श्यामो झाड़ू-पंजर और सिर-पर टोकरा लिए, मोहल्ला कमाने आयी और दिन तो वह अकेले ही कमाने आती थी, आज अपने साथ बड़ी लड़की को भी कमाने लायी थी, बड़े दिन की स्कूल की छुट्टियां जो पड़ गई थीं। उसकी मां ने सोचा होगा कि काम शायद जल्दी निबट जाएगा।

कभी वह अपनी मां की ओर देखती तो कभी स्कूल की अकेली ड्रेस को।

श्यामो का मुंह पान की पीक से भर आया, तंबाकू का 320 नं० का पान जो था पिच्च....और पिच्च से थूक, चिल्लायी—

"कुतिया को कित्ती देर से चिल्ला रही हूं, कुछ घर कमा ले, हरामजादी कहीं को।"

"मां तू कर ले ना।" साहस बटोरकर लड़की ने कहा।

श्यामो बाधिन-सी पुनः झाड़ू से तड़ातड़ खबर लेने टूट पड़ी। उसकी बेटी को चेतना चूर-चूर होकर तमाशीबीनों के बीच बिखरने लगी। मानो आकाश से रॉकेट जमीन पर आ पड़ा हो।

"अरी श्यामो....!" मैंने उसे टोका, "क्यों मार रही है इसे?"

"बाबूजी ! कमाने में आना-कानी करती है।" मानो कोई सम्मानित कार्य उससे कराना चाहती हो।

आखिर ! पढ़ने वाली बच्ची जो ठहरी।

उस बच्ची की मानसिकता को भांप, मैंने पूछा—

"क्या बात है। इधर आ बेटा !"

सकुचाती, शरमाती-सी वह पास आ गई। मैंने उसे अपने घर में बुला लिया। और उसकी मां को भी।

मैंने उस लड़की को, कुर्सी पर बैठने को कहा।

परंतु !

वह तो शर्म...से गड़ी जा रही थी।

उस पर जाति-हीनता का बोध।

मैंने उसे बार-बार बैठने का आग्रह किया परन्तु वह खड़ी रही। वह थोड़ा झिझक, ठिठक कर कुर्सी पर बैठी।

उसकी मां दरोगाइन-सी हाथ में झाड़ू लिए खड़ी रही। मानो उसने कोई गम्भीर अपराध-सा कर दिया हो।

"क्या नाम है बेटा तेरा?" मैंने पूछा

"जी चेतना।"

"कौन-सी कक्षा में पढ़ती हो?"

"जी टेन्थ में।"

"इतनी बड़ी होकर मां का कहना नहीं मानती!"

"अंकल....! इस काम के लिए !" कहीं अंतर में समाया आक्रोश खौल-सा गया था—"मुझे नहीं पसंद ये पुरतैनी धंधा। ये ही मरे-खपे इस धंधे में।" टक्का-सा जवाब दिया उसने।

"फिर क्या करेगी?"

"पढ़ूंगी।"

और वह देवदार के वृक्ष-सी तन कर खड़ी हो गयी।

"शाबाश !"

अब तो चेतना की 'चेतना' वापिस लौटने लगी और उसकी मां ने एकदम लट्ट-सा ताना मारा।

"हां, तू तो जरूर कलट्टरनी बनेगी चुड़ैल।"

तभी मैंने कहा, "खबरदार ! जो आगे बोली। तुझे शर्म नहीं आती, स्कूल में पढ़ने वाली लड़की को मौहल्ला कमाने लाती है।"

श्यामो अब तो, मुजरिम-सी कटघरे में खड़ी थी।

"नहीं करना चाहती तो क्यों साथ लेकर आयी है, मौहल्ला कमवाने।"

“मौहल्ला नहीं कमाएंगे, तो खाएंगे क्या बाबूजी?”

श्यामो की आवाज में अजीब सी थकन उतर आई थी।

तभी मैंने उससे पूछा, “क्या करता है इसका बाप?”

“सुबह-शाम कच्ची-पक्की दारू पीता है और क्या भाड़ झोंकेगा भडुआ कहीं का, न घर की फिकर न वर की।”

सुबक-सुबक कर चेतना की आंखें लाल हो चलीं। अब तो श्यामो का गला भी रुंध चला था।

तभी मैंने चेतना से कहा, “चल उठकर मुंह-हाथ धोकर आ।”

जैसे ही वह जाने लगी, तो उसकी मां हाथ में झाड़ू लिए पीछे-पीछे जाने लगी।

“अरी श्यामो इधर आ, जब बच्ची पढ़ना चाहती है तो उसे पढ़ा।” मैंने कहा—“अरी ! तुम्हारी तो कट गई, लेकिन विरासत में इसे तो मत दे ये धंधा पगली ! अब तो सरकार भी सिर पर मैला ढोने वालों की विमुक्ति की योजनाएं चला रही है। और एक तू है, जो बच्ची से....।”

अब तो श्यामो भी नजरें नीचे झुकाने लगी।

इतने में, उसकी लड़की हाथ-मुंह धो कुर्सी पर आकर बैठ गई।

श्यामो पुनः झाड़ू-पंजर ले मौहल्ला कमाने में जुट गई।

चेतना की भावना को शायद मैं ही समझ सका।

मेरे पास बैठ, उसे सुखद अहसास की अनुभूति होने लगी। अब तो वह शिकायती लहजे में बतियाने लगी।

कभी बाप पर बरसती, तो कभी मां पर गरजती और दांत किटकिटाने लगती।
खैर !

मैंने कहा—“पढ़ना चाहती है तो पढ़। दसवीं, बारहवीं नहीं ज्यादा-से-ज्यादा शिक्षित हो, स्वावलंबी बन। वरना तो इसी धंधे में खटना होगा।”

तभी उसकी नजर मेरे ड्राइंगरूम में टंगे बाबा साहब डॉ॰ अम्बेडकर के चित्र पर जा टिकी।

मैंने कहा, “जानती हो ये चित्र किस महापुरुष का है।”

“जी हां ! डॉ॰ अम्बेडकर का।”

“और ये कोने में संर्जा-संवरी प्रतिमा?”

“जी भगवान बुद्ध की।”

“गुड !” अब तो वह धीरे-धीरे वैचारिक एकता के पथ पर बढ़ रही थी। फिर पुनः पूछा, “डॉ॰ अम्बेडकर को कैसे जानती हो?”

“जी, टेलिविजन पर टेलीफिल्म देखी थी। इन्होंने ही तो दिया था यह मंत्र-शिक्षित बनो ! संगठित रहो !! संघर्ष करो ! ! ! !”

“और कुछ जानती हो इनके बारे में।”

“जी ज्यादा नहीं।”

मैंने उसे ‘अम्बेडकर जीवन दर्शन’ नामक पुस्तक लाकर दी और कहा, “समय मिलते ही इसे अवश्य पढ़ना।”

“कोई सलाह देने वाला नहीं है, अंकल ! हमारी बस्ती तो दारूबाजों की, जुआरियों की बस्ती है। आये दिन सुअरों की टांगें पकड़ पेट में छुरी घुच्च....रोज-रोज की चीं-चीं, चिल्ल-पों सुन-सुन मेरे कान पक से गये हैं। कौम की दाढ़ में खून जो लग गया है मांस-मट्टी का, झाड़-फूस जलाकर गली के बीचों-बीच सुअरों को भूनना, कितना अजीब-सा लगता है अंकल !” फिर कुछ रुकी जैसे उसे कुछ एकाएक याद आ गया हो—“और हां, तुम तो नाक पर हाथ रखकर निकल भी नहीं सकते, मोहल्ले में घुसना तो दूर। मर्दों की टोली द्वारा हुक्के की गुड़गुड़ाहट, सारा दिन चिलम के धुंए में फूंक देना, कैसी अजीब-सी दिनचर्या है। मर भी तो नहीं सकती। मैं तो पढ़ना चाहती हूं। लगन तो आखिर लगन ही होती है।” चेतना का चेहरा लाल-भभूका हो उठा था।

“पढ़ने में कोई समस्या हो तो मुझे बताना।”

“जी !” और उसने राहत की गहरी सांस ली। मेरी बातों पर वह अपनी गरदन हिलाती रही। इतने में श्यामो ने आवाज लगाई--

“चेतना....!”

“हां !” चेतना अब तक सहज हो आई थी।

“अरी क्या है। घर नहीं चलना या यहीं बैठी रहेगी।”

“शायद काम निबट गया लगता है।”

और वह, कुर्सी से, हाथ में किताब लिए उठ खड़ी हुई।

“अच्छा अंकल नमस्ते !”

“नमस्ते !”

धीरे-धीरे साल-दर-साल गुजरते गए। यदा-कदा उसके बारे में उसकी मां से हाल-चाल पूछ लेता। मोहल्ला कमाने जो आती थी प्रतिदिन। एक दिन उसकी मां बोली, “बाबूजी तुमने उसे न जाने कौन-सी घुट्टी पिला दी है, पढ़ना ही पढ़ना लगा रखा है उसने, न कोई घर का काम, न धाम। चलो इससे तो निपट लें, मगर उसने तो सारे देवी-देवताओं के चित्र, यहां तक कि लक्ष्मी-गणेश की मूर्तियां तक, घर से बाहर निकाल फेंकी। ऐसा भूत चढ़ा है।”

काफी दिन गुजरने के बाद, एक दिन श्यामो अपने लड़के को साथ लेकर आयी और हां श्यामो भी तो पंद्रह-बीस दिन से मोहल्ला कमाने नहीं आ रही थी।

इतने में श्यामो घबरा कर कहने लगी, “बाबूजी....चेतना बहुत बीमार है।”

“अरे तो घबराने की क्या बात है, इत्ताज कराओ, किसी अच्छे डॉक्टर से।”

“बहुत कराया ! कहीं कोई फायदा नहीं हुआ। अब तो भगवान के हाथ है। तुम्हें याद करती है बस....तुम्हें।”

“अरी घबरा मत, धैर्य रख सब ठीक हो जाएगा।”

“स्याने-सिमाने सबसे दिखवा लिया कोई फायदा नहीं हो रहा है। रात में खाट से उचट-उचट पड़ती है बड़बड़ाती है—मेरी पढ़ाई। मेरी पढ़ाई का क्या होगा।”

मेरी पत्नी ने कहा, “जाओ, देखकर तो आओ क्या बात है।”

मैं उन दोनों के साथ उसे देखने उसके घर पर गया।

ज्योंही हम वाल्मीकि बस्ती में घुसे, सामने से आता नशेड़ी नाली में गिरते-गिरते बचा। सुअरों का बाड़ों से निकलकर गलियों में थूथ से गंद सिपोंड़ना अजीब-सा दृश्य लग रहा था। कहां आ गया मैं ! अकस्मात् मन-ही-मन सोचने लगा। कैसे पढ़ती होगी चेतना इस दूषित वातावरण में।

एक तरफ बच्चों की टोली आपस में पिल्ले लड़ाने में मस्त थी। पिल्लों का घुराणा बच्चों को कितना भाता है, बचपन में।

तभी मैंने पूछा, “श्यामो कितनी दूर है तुम्हारा घर?”

“बस बाबूजी पास ही है।” एक गली मुड़ने पर उसका घर आ गया, मोड़ पर बैठा मुर्गा फुर्र से नीम पर चढ़ बांग लगाने लगा कुकड़-कूं...-SSS।

सीलन से भरी, घुटन/घुप्प अंधेरी कोठरी में एक खाट पर पड़ी चेतना को देखा। एक कोने में उसकी मेज पर रखी पुस्तकें शायद उसके पढ़ने के कमरे का अहसास करा रही थीं। बिजली चले जाने के कारण लालटेन की मद्धिम रोशनी में यह सब नजर आ रहा था !

तभी उसकी मां ने कहा, “चेतना देख तो बाबूजी आये हैं।” थोड़ा हां-हूं कर उसने आंखें खोलीं और मुझे देखते ही उसकी आंखों में एक चमक-सी आ गई। “अंकल मुझे बचाओ। ये लोग मुझे मार देंगे। मैं बीमार हूं, कभी झाड़-फूंक, कभी टोटका, तो कभी ढोल-डमरूओं की आवाजें सुन-सुनकर माथा फट-फट पड़ता है। उकता गई हूं, रोज-रोज की झाड़-फूंक से, कोई 'भूतनी', कोई 'चुड़ैल' का साया बताता है मेरे ऊपर अंकल ! मेरे बाल नोंच-नोंच डाले हैं। इन कमीने स्याने जादूगरों ने, देखो तो सही।”

वाह री ! अविद्या, कहां नरक में फंसी पड़ी है चेतना !

मैंने उसे अस्पताल चलने को कहा, “अंकल कहीं भी ले चलो। मैं यहां ठीक नहीं हो पाऊंगी, ये तो मुझे मार ही देंगे स्यानों की झाड़-फूंक से।”

उसे देखकर मैंने उसे सरकारी अस्पताल में दाखिल करवा दिया।

उसकी देखभाल की कह, अपने घर वापिस आने लगा तो वह हाथ जोड़ कर बोली—

“अंकल....!”

मैंने उसका माथा प्यार से सहलाया और अस्पताल से बाहर आ गया।

कुछ दिनों बाद स्वस्थ होकर, वह घर वापिस आ गई।

अब तो उसकी मां भी काम पर आने लगी।

"अरी श्यामो बिटिया का ध्यान रखना। बहुत लायक है री।"
चेतना दो-तीन माह के बाद एक दिन मिठाई का डिब्बा लेकर अपनी मां के साथ घर आई।

"अंकल जय भीमा।"

मैंने भी उसे अभिवादन स्वरूप कहा, "जय भीमा।"

"अंकल लीजिए।"

"क्या है?"

"मिठाई का डिब्बा।"

"किसलिए।"

"प्रथम श्रेणी से बी० ए० जो किया है।"

"गुड !"

अचानक मेरी आंखों के सामने वह झाड़ू वाली पिटाई, और स्कूल की नीली कुर्ती, सफेद पाजामी वाली ड्रेस तैरने लगीं।

मैंने कहा, "चेतना मिठाई तो आज मैं खिलाऊंगा तुझे पगली !" इतना कह मेरी आंखों में खुशी के आंसू छल-छला आए। ऐसे माहौल में भी, 'और वह पढ़ गई....!'

छूत कर दिया

सूरजपाल चौहान

लगभग पच्चीस वर्ष बाद मिले थे हम दोनों। मैं उसे लंगोटिया यार तो नहीं कह सकता पर शायद समाज की विभाजन रेखा ने हमें बहुत समीप कर दिया था। ...बिहारीलाल केन, आई० ए० एस०....। जब उसे देखता हूँ सिर फख्र सं ऊंचा हो जाता है। बिहारी के पिता टीकाराम अंग्रेजों के जमाने में आठवीं पास थे। यह सब उनके ईसाई मिशनरियों से जुड़ने के कारण ही हो पाया था, और छर्चा वाले बाबूलाल मसीह की तपस्या का ही सुफल है कि बिहारी आज आई० ए० एस० बना। बाबूलाल मसीह ने गांव के ठाकुर-बामनों की लाठियों की मार न जाने कितनी बार सही, पर उन्होंने तो प्रण कर लिया था दलितों में शिक्षा प्रसार का ! वह गांव-गांव जाकर दलितों को शिक्षा का महत्व समझाया करते थे। आज उनके ही अथक प्रयासों की वजह से छर्चा कस्बे के आसपास के गांवों के दलित बच्चे पढ़-लिखकर ऊंचे-ऊंचे पदों तक पहुंच पाए हैं। बाबूलाल मसीह जब भी बिहारी के घर आते तो मेरे पिता से अवश्य मिलते। उनकी बातों का प्रभाव मेरे पिता पर भी पड़ा, फलतः मेरा गांव की पाठशाला में जाना शुरू हो गया। उन दिनों की याद कर आज भी सवर्ण अध्यापकों के प्रति मन घृणा से भर जाता है। मैं और बिहारी सब बच्चों से दूर, पीपल के नीचे बैठे रहते। कभी किसी मास्टर को ध्यान आ जाता तो हमारी घोंटा, लगी तख्तियों पर कुछ हरफ खींच कर चला जाता। हम दोनों अपनी-अपनी तख्तियों पर खींचे हरफों पर खड़िया पोत लिया करते थे। कई माह तक तो हम दोनों इसे ही स्कूल जाना और पढ़ना समझते रहे।

मां के देहांत के बाद पिताजी मुझे अपने साथ दिल्ली ले आये। उधर बिहारी भी अपने चाचा के साथ बम्बई अपने पिता के पास पहुंच गया। उसके पिता टीकाराम बम्बई में रेलवे विभाग में मुकद्दम के पद पर कार्यरत थे। इन पच्चीस वर्षों में कई बार गांव जाना हुआ पर बिहारी की कोई खबर न मिली। और जब इस बार मिला तो....। गांव के सभी दलित उसे देखकर फूले नहीं समा

रहे थे। उनके मोहल्लों में तो त्यौहार उतर आया था मानो। चारों ओर बिहारी के नाम की चर्चा थी।

बात उड़ते-उड़ते ग्राम-प्रधान लाला गुलाबचंद तक पहुंची। वह बिहारी से मिलने को लालायित हो उठा। पर वही कमबख्त अहम। दो छोरों के बीच भटकता उसका मन कभी सोचता—“भला मैं क्यों जाऊं उससे मिलने? आई. ए. एस. है तो क्या हुआ, है तो चमार का ही। मैं ग्राम-प्रधान होकर उसके यहां हाजिरी मारने जाऊंगा तो क्या मेरी नीची न होगी।” कभी वह सोचता—“मिलने में बुराई ही क्या है? और फिर चुनाव भी तो इन्हीं भंगी-चमारों के वोट से जीतना है। मैं खुद चलकर जाऊंगा तो खुश हो जायेंगे।” प्रधान इसी ऊहापोह में उलझा हुआ था कि समस्या स्वतः सुलझ गई। गांव में रामलीला होने जा रही थी। हर वर्ष की भांति रामलीला कमेटी के सदस्य घर-घर जाकर चंदा एकत्र कर रहे थे। ग्राम-प्रधान ने उनसे बिहारी के विषय में बात की—

“भाइयो, टीका चमार का लड़का बिहारी बड़ा अफसर बन गया है। शहर में मोटी तनख्वाह पाता है। उससे तो मोटी रकम झटक सकते हैं।”

मैं और बिहारी आंगन में बैठे-बतिया रहे थे। अपने बचपन की खट्टी-मीठी यादों में खेये हुए थे। तभी गुलाबचंद ने कमेटी-सदस्यों के साथ आंगन में प्रवेश किया और बिहारी को आवाज लगाते हुए बोले—

“अरे बेटा बिहारी, कब आये तुन ! मुझे तो कल शाम ही पता चला। सोचा, चलो मिल आऊं...।”

बिहारी ने उनका स्वागत करते हुए कहा—“मुझे तो आज गांव आये पांच दिन हो गये।”

“लेकिन बेटा मुझे तो...। यदि मुझे तनिक भी पता चल जाता तो भला क्या मैं तुमसे मिलने न आता !” प्रधान ने सफाई देते हुए कहा—

“बेटा, ये रामलीला कमेटी के सदस्य हैं। जब मैंने इन लोगों को तुम्हारे विषय में बताया तो इन्होंने मिलने की इच्छा जाहिर की। बिहारी तुमने आई. ए. एस. बनकर अपने माता-पिता का ही नहीं, पूरे गांव का नाम रोशन किया है। वाकई, हम सभी को तुम पर नाज है।”

कुछ देर इधर-उधर की हांकने के बाद गुलाबचंद अपने स्वार्थ की बात पर आया और नकली मुस्कान बिखेरते हुए बोला—“बेटा, रामलीला कमेटी के सदस्य तुमसे रामलीला हेतु कुछ आर्थिक सहयोग चाहते हैं। हो सके तो इन्हें सहयोग प्रदान करो।”

“हां-हां प्रधानजी, जरूर...।”

बिहारी ने अपनी जेब से बटुआ निकालते हुए कहा और तुरंत पांच सौ एक रुपये निकालकर बट्टा दिये। ऐसी मोटी रकम पाकर सभी के चेहरे पर खुशी छा गई।

बिहारी ने अपनी मां को आवाज लगाते हुए कहा, “अम्मा चूल्हे पे घाय

बनाबे कूँ धर दे। प्रधान साहब आज चलिके हमारे घर आये हैं।”

चाय का नाम सुनकर कमेटी सदस्यों के मुंह ऐसे बिचक गये मानो चाय की जगह पाखाने की बात की हो। गुलाबचंद ने स्थिति संभालते हुए कहा—

“बिहारी बेटा चाय फिर किसी और दिन पियेंगे। अभी हमने बहुत जगह जाना है। और फिर कोई खाने-पीने से ही प्यार थोड़े बढ़ता है।” अब तो एक-एक पल भारी पड़ रहा था सो ग्राम-प्रधान और कमेटी के सदस्य और किसी दिन का बहाना बनाकर वहां से चलते बने।

गांव के लोग दिनभर कठिन परिश्रम करते और रात को रामलीला का आनंद उठाते। राम के मंच पर आते ही हारमोनियम मास्टर चिल्लाकर जयकारा लगाता—“बोलो सियापति रामचंद की जै।” राम-परशुराम संवाद से पहले उसने फिर चेतावनी दी—

‘अब न बचेगो जा धत्ती पै काऊ को नाम लिब्वईया। आ गये फस्साधारी भगवाधारी पस्सुराम।’

‘लक्ष्मण शक्ति’ वाले दिन राम विलाप चल रहा था। सभी की आंखें नम थी। राम द्वारा रुदन—‘ऐसो भइया मोह कबहू न मिलेगो, मेरी मां को जायो बीर भइया लक्ष्मन सो, रणबीर भइया लक्ष्मन सो।’

वातावरण बहुत गंभीर हो गया था। पर्दा गिरा और आगमन हुआ हनुमान का। उसकी उछल-कूद देख बच्चे-बूढ़े सभी तालियां वजाकर हंसने लगे।

ग्राम-प्रधान गुलाबचंद बिहारी का मंच पर बुलाकर स्वागत करना चाहता था। उसने रामलीला कमेटी के सदस्यों से इस विषय पर बात की, लेकिन कमेटी सदस्य ऐसा करने को कतई तैयार न थे। गुलाबचंद ने उनसे धीमे स्वर में कहा—

“बिहारी को मंच पर बुलाकर स्वागत करने से गांव भर के दलित प्रसन्न हो जायेंगे। वे समझेंगे कि एक पढ़े-लिखे दलित युवा का स्वयं ग्राम-प्रधान व कमेटी सदस्यों ने बहुत बड़ा सम्मान किया। ऐसा करने से मुझे अगले चुनाव में ग्राम-प्रधान का पद फिर बड़ी आसानी से मिल जायेगा।”

बात बिहारी के कानों तक पहुंची। उसे यह भी पता चला कि रामलीला कमेटी के कुछ सदस्य गुलाबचंद का विरोध कर रहे हैं। उसी समय बिहारी ने खड़े होकर ऊंचे स्वर में कहा—“मैं अपनी ओर से रामलीला कमेटी को ग्यारह सौ एक रुपये दान स्वरूप भेंट करना चाहता हूं।”

बिहारी का इतना कहना था कि कमेटी के उन लोगों के मुंह भी बंद हो गये जो बिहारी के स्वागत का विरोध कर रहे थे। कमेटी के सदस्यों ने आपस में तय किया कि स्वागत गुलाबचंद के हाथों ही कराया जाये। सभी सदस्यों की सहमति के बाद गुलाबचंद मंच पर आया। उसने कहा—

“भाइयो आप सबको पता है कि हमारे गांव के श्री बिहारीलाल केन आज हमारे बीच हैं। वह पढ़े-लिखकर आई० ए० एस० के पद तक पहुंचे हैं। इन्होंने

अपने माता-पिता के नाम के साथ-साथ हमारे गांव का नाम भी रोशन किया है। पूरा गांव इन पर नाज करता है। मैं सभी गांव वालों की ओर से बिहारीजी का स्वागत करना चाहता हूं। मैं बिहारीलाल जी से अनुरोध करता हूं कि वह मंच पर पधारें।”

बिहारीलाल मंच पर पहुंचे। गुलाबचंद ने उनकी प्रशंसा में कुछ शब्द कहे और फूलों का हार बिहारी के गले में डाल दिया। वहां पर उपस्थित जन-समूह ने तालियां बजाकर स्वागत किया। बिहारी अपनी तरफ से धन्यवाद के दो शब्द कहते कि उससे पहले ही ग्राम-प्रधान बोला—

“भाइयो, अब मैं बिहारीलालजी से अनुरोध करता हूं कि वह भगवान राम का तिलक कर उनसे आशीर्वाद प्राप्त करें।”

प्रधान का इतना कहना था कि रामलीला कमेटी और गांव के दूसरे सवर्ण जाति के लोगों को मानों सांप सूंघ गया हो। पूरी रामलीला में सन्नाटा छा गया। लेकिन...अब हो भी क्या सकता था। कमान से छूटा तीर और मुंह से निकली बात तो वापिस नहीं आ सकते। प्रधान ने अपनी बात को घुमाते हुए दोबारा कहा—

“भाइयो मैं कह रहा था कि बिहारीलाल जी भगवान राम की आरती पर आशीर्वाद प्राप्त करें।”

लेकिन...।

राम बना पात्र मंच पर आने को कतई तैयार नहीं था। रामलीला कमेटी के सदस्यों के मनाने के बाद वह बड़ी ठसक से आया। बिहारी ने आरती का थाल उसके मुंह के सम्मुख घुमाकर उसकी आरती उतारी और थाली से रोली लेकर राम बने पात्र को तिलक करने के लिए अपना हाथ बढ़ाया कि तभी राम बना पात्र पीछे की ओर हटकर चिल्लाया—

“अरे चमार के क्या छूत करेगा?”

बिहारी के पैरों तले से जैसे जमीन खिसक गई हो। उसे अपने कानों पर विश्वास ही नहीं हो रहा था। गुस्से से बिहारी का चेहरा लाल हो गया। उसका हाथ जो राम बने पात्र का तिलक करने के लिए आगे बढ़ा था, अब मुक्के का रूप ले चुका था। बिहारी ने पूरी ताकत से मुक्का उसके मुंह पर दे मारा। राम बना पात्र मुक्का पड़ते ही चारों खाने चित्त जा गिरा, पूरी रामलीला में अफरा-तफरी मच गई। गांव के सभी दलित व पिछड़े दौड़कर अपने-अपने घरों से बल्लम व लाठियां उठा लाये। उन्होंने एक स्वर में गांव के सवर्णों को ललकारते हुए कहा—

“यदि बिहारीलाल जी को छू भर भी दिया तो पूरे गांव की ईंट से ईंट बजा दी जायेगी।”

समय की नाजुकता को देख, रामलीला कमेटी व तथाकथित सवर्ण एक-

एक कर वहां से खिसकने लगे। दलितों ने ग्राम प्रधान को धिक्कारते हुए कहा—

“क्यों ग्राम-प्रधान, तुम्हें या रामलीला कमेटी के सदस्यों को बिहारी जी से रुपया लेते लाज न आई? रुपया भी तो बिहारी ने अपनी जेब से निकालकर अपने हाथों से ही दिया था। तब तुम्हें छूत नहीं लगी?”

ग्राम-प्रधान गुलाबचंद नौची गर्दन किये पैर के अंगूठे से जमीन कुरेदे जा रहा था।

सुरंग

डा० दयानन्द बटोही

मैं जानता हूँ मुझे बराबर उलाहना लोग देते रहें गोया कि आदमी न होकर अन्य जीव हूँ। फिर भी मैंने हार नहीं मानी है, न ही मान रहा हूँ क्योंकि मुझे तनिक सा परिश्रम अभी नहीं करना है। अभी तो ढेर सारे संघर्ष मुझे करने हैं। मुझे कतई दुःख नहीं कि रिसर्च मुझे करने नहीं दिया गया मुझे बराबर जाति-पाति के पचड़े के कारण टकराना पड़ा है। अच्छा भी है—एक-दूसरे को जब तक हम नहीं जानते तब तक खूब गोल-गोल बातें होती हैं लेकिन ज्योंही जाति की गंध लोगों को मिलती है लोग सुअर जैसा मुंह निपोरने लगते हैं। जाति की गंध टाइटिल से मिलते हैं यदि टाइटिल नहीं है तो रंग, पहनावा पर धावा बोलते हैं। मेरे शरीर में जहर फैल जाता है जाति-ठेकेदारों से जाति पूछने पर।

इस समय मैं अपने को अकेला समझ रहा हूँ फिर भी दम नहीं तोड़ रहा हूँ। तोड़ूँ भी कैसे? डा० विष्णु ने जब पूछा, आपका एम० ए० का नम्बर कैसा है? तब बिना झिझक के झूठ कह दिया—नम्बर तो अच्छा नहीं है। उनके नाक-भों में कोई बदलाव नहीं आ रहा है—देख रहा हूँ। सिर्फ लिज-लिज ताक रहे हैं। साक्षात्कार सात बजे सुबह से चल रहा है। इस समय दस बजकर बीस मिनट हुए हैं। मुझसे पहले कई लड़के-लड़कियों का इंटरव्यू हो चुका है। मुझसे दूसरा प्रश्न पूछते हैं—आप कुछ लिखते भी हैं?

लिखता तो हूँ मैं, कहकर ऊहापोह में न पड़कर प्रेमचन्द, मुक्तिबोध, डा० अम्बेडकर, गांधी, बुद्ध के चित्र पर आंखें गड़ा देता हूँ।

ठीक है। डा० पासवान ने कहा—इनकी कोई रचनाएं पढ़ी हैं, देखी हैं। छोटी-बड़ी पत्रिकाओं में अच्छा लिखते हैं। डा० विष्णु ने इतना अधिक नमक-मिर्च मेरे कान में डाल दिया कि मैं बहरा-सा हो गया।

लिखते हैं तो क्या हुआ आखिर हरिजन ही तो हैं? मेरी नसीं में दर्द के कीड़े कुलबुलाने लगे। डा० सुखदेव अपनी टोपी टेढ़ी करते हुए कहते हैं—हरिजन हैं आप? जी हां—मैं कह देता हूँ—आप लोगों को क्या लग रहा है। चुटकी ली मैंने।

हालांकि रिसर्च के लिए इंटरव्यू बोर्ड के सामने बैठा हूं।

डॉ० पासवान ने अंगुली दिखाते हुए कहा—हरिजन रहें या दुर्जन, समाज के लोगों ने बहुत धोखा दिया है आज तक। डॉ० विष्णु सर हिलाते हुए कहते हैं—कोई हो, सरकार ने भले कानून बना दिया हो, घोड़े की रस्सी तो हम सभी के हाथ में है। आपका रिसर्च में नहीं होगा। मेरी ओर देखकर कहा। लगा मुझे जिंदा जला देना चाहते हैं। मेरा सोया हुआ दर्द पिघलने लगा है और दर्द की बेचैनी में संतुलित रहना बस की बात नहीं। मैंने भी ईंट का जवाब पत्थर से देना मुनासिब समझा। डॉ० साहब आप भूल जायें कि मैं हरिजन हूं, गुलाम हूं। आज तक आप जैसे तानाशाह ने अंधेरे में हम लोगों को रखा है। अब मैं पूछता हूं—आप क्यों रिसर्च करने नहीं देंगे?

उन्होंने हांफना शुरू किया। बगैर थूक फेंके घांट लिये और कहा—क्योंकि आपका एम० ए० का नम्बर अच्छा नहीं है। क्लास द्वितीय है।

‘द्वितीय क्लास आप लोगों ने रखा ही क्यों है?’

‘मैंने थोड़े ही रखा है।’

‘ठीक है आप नहीं, आप जैसे लोगों ने तो रखा है।’

बात बढ़नी स्वाभाविक है क्योंकि खौलते कड़ाह में एक बैगन को डाला जा रहा है। मैं अंतरमन में महसूस कर रहा हूं, टेबुल पर हाथ पटकते हुए कहता हूं—‘डॉ० साहब आप भूल जायें कि आप लोग अंधेरे के बीच कुतर-कुतर कर हम दलितों को खाते डकारते रहे हैं, अब पचेगा ही नहीं आपको।’

‘शट अप !’ विष्णु चिल्लाते हुए चश्मा उतारने लगे हैं। टाई ठीक कर रहे हैं, चेहरा कांप रहा है, सुर्ख हो गया है।

‘मैं इत्मीनान होकर पूछता हूं—‘व्हाई? प्लीज यू डॉट गिव मी हर्ट...।’

चेहरा पर पसीने की बूंदें पपड़िया रही हैं। मुझे लगता है अब इनका दिल पसीज रहा है, लेकिन तुरन्त खामोशी को तोड़ते हुए सुखदेव भी हां में हां मिला रहे हैं—‘आप वाइस चांसलर के पास जाइये।’

‘क्यों जाऊं?’

‘क्योंकि आप सेकेण्ड क्लास एम० ए० हैं। मार्क्स कम है रिसर्च नहीं कर सकते।’

‘केवल मैं या और कोई। सभी डिपार्टमेंट में थर्ड क्लास रिसर्च कर रहे हैं मेरा तो सेकेण्ड क्लास है, कोमिस्ट्री, फिजिक्स, हिस्ट्री, इकनाभिक्स में।’

विष्णु हांफ रहे हैं—ऐसा मैं महसूस कर रहा हूं। वह भी भावावेश में आ गये हैं, कहते हैं ‘हां-हां वैसे तो डॉ० रूपेन सक्सेना, डॉ० गजेन्द्र, डॉ० फगुनी सिंह, थर्ड क्लास एम० एस-सी० हैं, एम० ए० हैं किन्तु वे तो ऊंचे परिवार के हैं।’ अब उन्हें लगा अधिक कुछ कहना उनका भंडा-फोड़ करना है। वह हांफ रहे हैं।

मुझे लगा वाइस चांसलर के पास जाने से पहले अपने अन्दर खौलते खून

को उगल दूँ तब ठीक होगा। मैंने टेबुल पर जोर से मुक्का मारा। वह हाँफ रहे हैं।

'डॉ० साहब यह भूल जाइये कि आपसे दया की भीख मांग रहा हूँ। मैं पूछता हूँ आप लोग हरिजन कल्याण का ढिंढोरा क्यों पीटते हैं? आरक्षण कहां दे रहे हैं। जब लोग अच्छा कर रहे हैं तो आप कल्याण क्या करेंगे? चौदह प्रतिशत सुरक्षित का फतवा क्यों देते हैं। सरकार की तथा मानवता की आंख में धूल झाँक रहे हैं। मुझे आप रिसर्च नहीं करने दें कोई बात नहीं। लेकिन कोटा आपको पूरा करना है।' मेरा जहन में खून तेज हो गया है। विभागाध्यक्ष जम्हाई ले रहे हैं। पट-पट अंगुलियों को तोड़ते हैं और कहते हैं, 'मुझसे नहीं वाइस चांसलर से पूछिये।' 'ठीक है'—मैं कहकर कुर्सी को धकेलता चला आया।

वाइस चांसलर का दरवाजा बन्द है। और मैं पीतल के चमकते प्लेट पर पढ़ रहा हूँ—'आऊट'। आऊट शब्द से मेरे अन्दर चिनगारी फैल रही है, विश्वविद्यालय से तमाम तनावों को झेलता हुआ छात्रावास थका-थका आ गया हूँ। मैं सोचता हूँ नब्बे प्रतिशत लोग इसी तरह दबाये जाते रहे हैं कि तभी रसोइया अयोध्या पण्डित आकर हाथ जोड़ देता है—'बाऊजी ! खाना संझा में खाईब कि नाही, पैसा कुछ देब।'

मैं पसीना में भींग जाता हूँ। पैसे तो परसों ही समाप्त हो गये थे। घर में पिताजी भी बीमारी से लड़ रहे हैं। मां भी आजकल गिर रही है। पत्नी उलाहना देती है कि दो बच्चे के बाप होकर भी पढ़ रहे हो। मैं पुनः सोचने लगता हूँ आखिर अंधेरी सुरंग में हम लोग कब तक रहेंगे। हाथी और हाथी के सूंड दोनों को सूई के छिद्र से निकालना चाहते हैं।

लोग कहते हैं बीस वर्षों से सुविधा दी जा रही है जब कई सौ वर्षों तक अंधेरे में रखा गया है। चाहते हैं लोग तुरन्त दौड़ने लगे। संस्कार तो धीरे-धीरे ही बदला होगा इन लोगों का भी। ये लोग भी तो कभी अच्छूत थे। आज बड़े तेज हैं कितने आई० सी० एस० होते थे। हुंहा। आज हरिजन दुर्जन। मुझे लगा अन्दर जहर फैल रहा है। मैंने रसोइया पण्डित से कुछ नहीं कहा तो भी वह भांप जाता है। मैंने साफ कहा—भाई पैसे नहीं है। खाना नहीं खाऊंगा। पैसे नहीं है? वह हाथ जोड़ दिया, सरकार भूखे रहिहौ खाना तो खाई के पड़ी?

मैं बिना खाये रात को यों ही सो जाता हूँ। तमाम चिंताएं हां-हूँ कर रही हैं। सोने में भी शांति कहां सिर्फ दुश्चिंताएं।

सुबह हावर्ड हॉल से मैं जयशंकर के साथ गेट के बाहर आ गया था कि इत्तफाक से नागेन्द्र वर्मा मिला। हाथ में चुनाव का पम्फलेट लिये था। हम लोग ताड़ गये कन्वेंसिंग करने आया है। मेरे साथ नहीं के बराबर हुई। ठीक ! जीत होगी। आपकी, पहले एक काम कराइये तब तो पूरा हावर्ड हाल आपको वोट देगा। जयशंकर की बातों से वह वाकिफ होना लाजिमी समझ उसने पूछा, कौन सा काम है? ये

हरिजन हैं इन्हें हिन्दी में रिसर्च करने नहीं दिया जा रहा है। थर्ड क्लास हम सभ्य कहलाने वालों के परिवार के लड़के-लड़कियों को रिसर्च करने दिया जा रहा है। यूनियन के अध्यक्ष रघुनाथ की बहन एम० ए० में थर्ड क्लास लायी है। हिन्दी में रिसर्च करने दिया गया है, जबकि ये हरिजन सेकेण्ड क्लास के हैं तथा हिन्दी की प्रायः सभी पत्र-पत्रिकाओं में कहानियां, कविताएं साहित्यिक निबन्ध चाव से लोग पढ़ते हैं। आखिर प्रथम श्रेणी कितने हैं? और कितने को अच्छा अंक आता है? मापदण्ड क्या है विष्णुजी को पता नहीं चलता। भाई ! सरकार के तो आरक्षण नीति को वे बराबर टालते रहे हैं।

उसने भी हरिजन जानकर कतराना चाहा। मगर जयशंकर ने साफ कहा, 'भाई काम पर ही जीत हार है। हरिजन जन्म से कोई नहीं, हमीं बनाते हैं उसे।'

हम तीनों विश्वविद्यालय के अहाते में हैं और वाइस चांसलर की गाड़ी लगी है। वाइस चांसलर मिश्रा कुछ लिख रहे हैं।

'क्या हम लोग आ सकते हैं?' हम लोगों ने कहा।

'हां-हां आइये, कहिये?'

'बात है हम लोग जानने आए हैं हरिजनों को सुविधा सिर्फ कागज पर है या व्यवहार में।' मिश्रा जी गौर फरमाते हुए कहते हैं—'साफ-साफ कहिए।'

'सर, ये गरीब हरिजन जाति के हैं। हिन्दी में सेकेण्ड क्लास एम० ए० पास हैं, विभागाध्यक्ष रिसर्च करने नहीं दे रहे जबकि अन्य लोग (हरिजन छोड़कर) हिन्दी के अलावे विज्ञान में जो थर्ड क्लास हैं रिसर्च कर रहे हैं।'

मिश्रा ने कहा—'क्या इसमें भी थर्ड क्लास रिसर्च कर रहे हैं।'

'जी हां लीना, नरोत्तम सिंह थर्ड क्लास हैं, रिसर्च कर रहे हैं। सेकेण्ड क्लास तो कई हैं इनसे कम अंक वाले।'

वाइस चांसलर मिश्रा ने न चाहते हुए भी लिखा—'हेड प्लीज ! कंसीडर द केस !' विभागाध्यक्ष के सामने जब मैंने कागज पेश किया तब उनकी नानी मरने लगी। उनके चेहरे पर अजीब दहशत छा गई! पढ़ने के बाद पूरा सन्नाटा छाया रहा। फिर कहां क्या कंसीडर करें। अभी भी उनका राक्षस हृदय नहीं पिघल रहा था। बहुत कहा-सुनी के बाद मुझे बुलाया और आठ दिन के बाद मुझे लाइब्रेरी कार्ड के लिए अनुमति दिया। मैंने ज्यादा हो हां नहीं किया ऐसी बात नहीं। मुझसे जब विश्वविद्यालय यूनियन का सेक्रेटरी मिला तो उसने कहा—रिसर्च में कर देंगे लेकिन विष्णु कहते हैं—अधिकार की मांग क्यों करता है? वह तो हरिजन होकर पढ़े-लिखे जैसी बातें करता है, भंडाफोड़ कर रहा है आरक्षण नहीं करने का।

मुझे इस बात से दुःख होता है कि द्रोणाचार्य की परम्परा कब तक रखेंगे और मैं छात्रावास चला आता हूँ।

घर से चिट्ठी आयी है—अकाल में हालत खराब है। सभी बन्धुआ मजदूर गांव छोड़कर शहर भाग रहे हैं। मैं खर्च कहां से भेजूं कोई कर्ज नहीं देता। सभी

कहते हैं हरिजन होकर इतना पढ़ा दिया। मैं अपने गांव वापस आ जाता हूँ।

पुनः जब जनवरी में गया और मैंने कहा, 'अब इनरोल्ड कर दिया जाये तो उन्हें जहर फैलने लगा और झट कह दिया, जुलाई में आइये। मैंने अधिक टालमटोल को बेकार समझा और कहा, 'आप भी मनु जैसा कान में शीशा उड़ेलना चाहते हैं, द्रोणाचार्य जैसा अंगूठा का दान चाहते हैं। मगर याद रखिये। अंधेरे का सैलाब फाड़कर अपना अधिकार लेंगे। आप जैसे कुटिल लोगों ने ही तो हरिजन-दुर्जन का भेद बनाने में सहयोग दिया है। आपका हम घेराव करेंगे।'

उन्होंने ताव में कहा—'जो चाहे करो। जब तक हूँ, हरिजनों को रिसर्च करने नहीं दूंगा।'

मुझे लगा यह शख्स बहुत काईयां है और मैंने तुरन्त यूनियन में आकर बातचीत करना मुनासिब समझा क्योंकि अब तो प्रेसीडेंट, सेक्रेटरी बन गये थे और उस संस्कार से मुक्त थे। लेकिन उन लोगों ने भी मुकरना चाहा तभी गंगा झा ने कहा, 'नहीं यह तो हम लोग जात-पात के नाम पर अन्याय कर रहे हैं, साहब यह हरिजन है तो क्या हुआ, हम भी तो हरिजन हैं। इन्हें अभी मौका मिलना चाहिए। लोगों ने हमें मौका दिया तभी तो आज हम तेज भी हैं सभ्य भी, पहले कितने तेज सभ्य थे सबको मालूम है। ठीक है भाई झा जी लड़कों से घेराव के लिए कहिए यह मानवता के खिलाफ, नियम के खिलाफ, कानून के खिलाफ, दही का रखवाला विलाड़ विष्णु कर रहे हैं। हिन्दी क्या सभी विभागों में तो कई क्लास रिसर्च कर रहे हैं सिर्फ गाइड तैयार हो और फिर गाइड तो उनके लिए डॉ॰ अवस्थी तैयार ही हैं।

देखते-देखते भीड़ उमड़ने लगी। पूरा विश्वविद्यालय शोरगुल से गुंजने लगा। डॉ॰ विष्णु पैखाना के बहाने कमरे में बन्द हुए सो सात बजे निकले और माफी मांगते हुए दांत निपोरते हुए कहने लगे—'आप लोग घेराव क्यों कर रहे हैं? आखिर आप सब हरिजन तो नहीं हैं? आप इनका साथ क्यों दे रहे हैं।'

सबों की आवाज गुंज गई। हम सब मानवतावादी हैं। अब पुराना ढोंग नहीं चलेंगा। हम सब एक हैं। छात्र ने गरजते हुए कहा—'दही का रखवाला विलाड़। हरिजन होना गुनाह नहीं है गुनाह तो आप कर रहे हैं, पूरी मानवता के साथ।'

दूसरा स्वर उभरा—'आप अपने विभाग में थर्ड क्लास रिसर्च करा रहे हैं, हरिजन सेकेण्ड क्लास भी रास नहीं आया। रामनगीना की पत्नी सुरेश की बहन कौन क्लास एम॰ ए॰ में लायी हैं।

अब पूरा शोर तैरने लगा—'मुर्दाबाद ! मानवता जिन्दाबाद। हम सब एक हैं।'

उन्हें लगा कि यदि वे अब नहीं झुकते हैं तो पूरी मांस हड्डियां ये लोग चपर-चपर चबा जायेंगे। उन्होंने नहीं सोचा था कि आज एकलव्य पूरी बात को जान गया है और मन ही मन कुछ सोचा फिर बतीसी जिसमें खैनी और पान का मिश्रित टुकड़ा अपनी गंध तथा उपस्थिति दे रहा था—भाई, मैं सरकार की आरक्षण नीति

को लागू करना चाहता हूँ अभी तक तो वास्तव में एक भी हरिजन छात्र रिसर्च नहीं कर सका है। मैं तो चाहता हूँ सभी जातियों के लागू तरक्की करें। आप तो जानते ही हैं गांधीवादी हूँ उनके आश्रम में कुछ दिन रह चुका हूँ।' तभी दूसरे स्वर रघुनाथ सिंह का उभरा—'बस-बस रहने दीजिये अपनी फिलासफी, अनुमति देते हैं या आऊं।'

उन्हें लगा अब लोग पूरा वाकिफ हो गये हैं और फिर टालने पर कुछ भी हो सकता है। धीरे से कहा—'ठीक है इन्हें रिसर्च करने की अनुमति देता हूँ, लाइये अप्लीकेशन।' और कुछ ही क्षणों में भीड़ इधर से उधर होने लगी।

दूसरे रोज मुझे रिसर्च के लिए इन्वोल्ड की अनुमति मिल गयी। रिसर्च के लिये जो विषय मैंने चुना था—'हिन्दी साहित्य में उचित साहित्यकारों का योगदान।' बीच-बीच में कई बाधाएं आयीं और अंत में उन्हें एक लड़की के साथ पकड़ा गया और उन्हें सजा हो गयी। मैं सोचता हूँ वह सफेद होकर भी कितना काला था। लेकिन दूसरों को साफ रहने की सीख देता था। मेरी पुस्तक 'सुरंग' उनके यहां समीक्षार्थ गई थी। उन्होंने काफी साफगोई के साथ समीक्षा की है—ऐसा लगता है वे मुझे नहीं पहचानते, नहीं जानते। पी-एच-डी की डिग्री लेकर अब मैं व्यख्याता हूँ। साक्षात्कार के लिए विश्वविद्यालय में आया हूँ। मुझसे पैतालिस मिनट तक साहित्य के विभिन्न विषयों पर पूछा गया है। डॉ॰ सुखदेव झेंपकर भी सन्तुष्ट हैं ऐसा लग रहा है।

NS

