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# Transcreation

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## Editorial

Art is something unique in the world. Life is more than art and art is more than life. The two have a strange relation where each complements and enriches the other. Where art subsists on life, the latter itself assumes more meaning with art. Art is a persistent human endeavour to search for meaning in an otherwise meaningless landscape.

The early human scribbling and doodling bear testimony to this fact that the urge for creative expression has existed since beginning. While art in essence is a simple aspiration for something delighting, its expressions and varieties have made the human civilization far richer than it would have been otherwise. That is why human evolution has seen monumental growth in artistic and creative accomplishments. In fact the artistic imagination has been the main antecedent of innovation, creativity and originality in more substantial aspects of life like architecture, costumery, lifestyle, cuisine, scientific achievements, extra-terrestrial explorations, etc.

To imagine life in general without humanity's creative feats renders it bare and barren, shorn of all colour, mirth and meaning.

Not only has art remained an eternal obsession with humanity, its celebration too has been a favourite activity with human race. Even when art seems meaningless, it still fascinates the creative sensibilities of human kind. Abstract art too is a sort of celebration of creative side of humanity which attracts even when it apparently conveys nothing substantial.

Poems, paintings, sculpture pieces and artefacts in varieties of creative realms have been flourishing throughout human history making it amply clear that art and celebration of art are one and same.

In our regional context too, there are creative forms that celebrate artistic pursuits. The need is to document such artefacts and creative pieces to inspire the contemporary and coming generations to continue the tradition.

(Dr Abid Ahmad)

## SACRED TEMPLE OF SHANKARACHARYA

**Samsar Chand Koul**

*Karpura Gauram Karunawataram*

*Samsara Saram Bujagendra Haram*

*Sada Ramanatam Hridayara Vinde*

*Bhavam Bhawani Shanitam Namami*

I bow to that Lord Shiva, along with his consort, Parvati who is as white as camphor, who is the essence of this world, who has a necklace of big serpents (illusions) who rambles into the hearts of his devotees and is the embodiment of compassion.

Geologists tell us that this planet was part of the sun, and in course of millions of years, it began to cool down. Several times its mean decent gas in volcanic eruptions heaved up and subsided. Sometimes continents came closer and sometimes got separated. The Deccan was then joined to Africa and Northern Asia joined to Northern America. At times the Northern India was run over by the waters of the Indian Ocean and the biggest mountain peaks appeared like an archipelago. The waters subsided, but the volcanic eruptions continued and the final setting of Kashmir was completed about four million



years ago. One of the results of this volcanic eruption is the *Shankaracharya* hill and its off shoot Rustom Ghari. It must have been bereft of flora and fauna. Rain and snowfall made its slopes moist and tiny blades of grass began to grow.

The commanding view from the top of the hill of the celestial valley ringed round by the mountains with snowy crests, enhanced its beauty.

### **Historical Reference**

The hill was called Jetha Larak and afterwards it was named Gopadri. Some writers are of the opinion that the temple at the top was originally built by King Sandhiman, (2629-2564 B.C.) and was called Jeshteshwar. There were 300 golden and other images of various deities in it. About 1360 B.C., King Gopaditiya, the founder of Gopkar, repaired the temple and gave Gupkar and Buchiwara villages to the Brahmans of the temple for expenses towards the upkeep of the Ashram. King Sandimati (43 B.C -13 A.D.) improved it and made some additions. When Adi Shankaracharya visited Kashmir in about tenth Century, he with his disciples, sat in the Ashram round the temple. Hence it was called “Shankaracharya Hill”.

The Kashmir King Zain-ul-abidin (1421-1472 A.D.) repaired the roof which had tumbled down in an earthquake. Shiekh Ghulam Mohi-ud-din, Sikh Governor (1841-1846 A.D.) of Kashmir also repaired its dome. Recently, the dome was repaired by Swami Shivratanand Saraswati at the request of Nepali Sadhu who helped him financially.

### **Srinagar and its Environs**

King Sandhiman who founded the Sandhimat Nagar at the foot of the Northern Mountains where the Wular Lake stands now, thought the peak of the 'Shankaracharya hill' the best place for worship and meditation. He ordered his engineers to build a temple on its top. The engineers consulted artisans and masons and went to the spot to examine. The place was levelled, stones chiselled and dressed. The foundation was laid on the hard rock and plinth raised stone by stone. The skilful masons placing one stone above the other with plumbline and skill, slowly and steadily began to erect the platform, a pedestal of more or less of 16 petal lotus was raised on which the temple was erected leaving around some space for circumambulation (Parikarama). This space was protected by a small wall.

The space inside the temple is very limited. There are four stone pillars inside which is a small platform on which is seated the image of Lord Shiva. This image is exactly like the first image of the Shiv Mandir of Jammu. There is no trace of the original Shiv Linga which was installed in the temple at the time of construction. The present one was installed by the great Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1829-1885 A.D.). It is most graceful and as high as a man's size. Its appearance sheds peace and perfection, satisfaction and consolation.

Hardly half a dozen people can go into the temple at a time. The door is towards the east and the pranali through which water or milk flows out, is towards the north. The staircase is beautifully built. The walls are raised with perfectly well-dressed stones which are most skilfully put together. In between the walls the steps are artistically laid down. The first flight consists of 18 steps. Then there is an arch and the door.

The next flight consists of 12 steps. We come to the open space round the temple.

A flight of six steps on either side of the wall in front of the door leads up to the door of the temple. After passing over again first 3 then 2 steps more, we enter into the precincts of the temple.

The pinnacle of the temple has several times fallen down on account of earthquakes and has many times been repaired during the time of several rulers.

Casting a look from outside, there appears to be the difference of handling of the temple. It is possible to have been built in different times.

### **Flora and Fauna**

The Government has recently constructed a motorable road which goes upto the T. V. Range tower. Tourists and people can go to the temple in their own transport if desired. Lower parts are more or less devoid of vegetation. It is all sandy and rocky suitable for the growth of almond trees. At several places there is fine rich soil.

To make the hill look graceful, on the eastern slope, Maharaja Gulab Singh (1792-1857 AD) got fir trees planted but they did not thrive much. During the rule of Maharaja Hari Singh (1895-1946 AD) the whole area of the hill was given over to the Forest Department to get the place afforested.

Many kinds of trees, acacia, almonds, mulberry, fir, pines, and other varieties have been planted. White and mauve iris flowers have been grown. There are also wild species found among trees and rocks. The southern aspect of the hill owing to

insulation is devoid of vegetation. There are beautiful bungalows at the foot of the hill from where the road goes to Gupkar. The gardens of these bungalows are well shaded with various kinds of trees and decorated with beautiful garden flowers.

The northern aspect of the hill is densely forested with planted trees, natural bushes and vegetation. Especially in the ravines where the moisture remains for longer time, a good number of almond and acacia trees have been planted and in them fir and pine saplings have been grown to enable them to thrive under their shade.

Walking over the pony track, there are number of flowers worthy of notice. A small flower *Geranium Kashmiriana* and *Chanapodium* (Wanpalak), *Vironca Stellaria* are common. Climbing higher up, looking right and left down the valley the onlooker gets filled with the charm of natural beauty which surrounds him. The thyme (Jawend) with the beautiful pink flowers is like an emerald mat struck to the ground especially to the Gagribal spur which is a wonderful place of pink blossom in May and June.

Moving up slowly we find two kinds of Tulips, one red and the other scarlet. *Artemisia* (Tethawan) is found everywhere. *Salvia moorcratina* with light pink flowers and *Mentha sylvestis* (wena) are found in the grass. There are several plants of *Plutranthus rugous* (madal) on sandy slopes. It is fragrant and is used in worship along with *Mentha* and roses. There is another shrub called *Daphare Cleadus* (Gandalun) with creamy white flowers found among the trees. *Dawelian* (maidan-hand) and *Chickory* (Wanhand) potherbs are also found here besides other species.

The bushchat in May sits on the top of the bushes and sings. Tits, sparrows and goldfinches love to chirp on low bushes, while Griffon vulture with large outstretched wings hovers about the mountain peaks and the white vulture with yellow beak is also observed basking in the sun sitting on a rock. In winter, we find here a songster, black-throated thrush and a little bird wall-creeper moving over rocks to eat worms. It is an ashy coloured bird with curved beak and red colour inside its wings. When snow is deep we see red-billed chough with red-curved beak, red and black body. There are partridges also in thick grass.

The last bit of the climb is plain walking. There is a Chinar tree of stunted growth just below the temple. Among the cluster of trees is a red berry tree which in Kashmiri is called Bara. It is said to be effective for blood pressure. Lizards are common on rocks. They come out and go. Sometimes adders are also found. Years ago, I saw one ashy coloured, with a broad head. It was killed and thrown on the Gagribal bank. Sometimes stags and hinds come over the Zabarwan Mountain and move in the forest.

### **Works of Public Utility**

Behind the temple, there is an old stone tank as a water reservoir. On the northern side, there is an old stone-walled small room which is called in Kashmiri (Parvati Hund Bana Kuth) the store room of Goddess Parvati. Lately, at the advice of Dr. Karan Singh, the Dharmarth Department has built two cosy small buildings, one on the south east of the temple and the other near the temple for the Mahant. A statue of Adi Shankaracharya is also just there. It is said that there existed a staircase from Shurahyar to the temple. It was made of stones.

Shurahyar is the current form of Shudishiyar. Sudashi is an aspect of Goddess Tripora Sundri. Her mantra consists of 16 letters. There was an old temple of Goddess where the new temple has been erected now.

The Boulevard road which runs round a part of the shores of the Dal Lake, touches the hill. This road was built by the order of Maharaja Hari Singh to enable the people and visitors to enjoy the beauty of the lake. About fifty years ago, the Gagribal point was heavily marked by big rocks on the shore and in water. Gaghar in Kashmiri means, "Rocks and Bal place." Hence, Gagribal means place of rocks.

Lately, one park has been laid on the opposite side of Gagribal, and is called Nehru Park, and the other at the foot of the hill on the eastern side. In summer, these two parks are crowded with people who with lunches and dinners relax themselves after day's hard work. The boatmen are busy in carrying people here and there.

### **Panoramic View**

The temple with the compound is one of the unique places of worship in the world. It is as attractive as the temple of Martand on the plateau which made Sir Francis Younghusband say, "The Martand temple is the best worshipping site in the world. It is in the Centre of Natural beauty." On the south and west, it is surrounded by the Pansal range with glaciers, glittering snowy peaks between (13000 and 15000 ft) above sea level. It is here that we find Joy Padshah (*Saussurea sacra*) and other high altitude flowers. At the foot of these ranges lie the alluvial plateaus and there are spread rice fields interspersed with shining waters of lakes and swamps and bordered by the sinuous course of the Vitasta. The shining pinnacles of temples,

churches, mosques and other worshipping places add more grace.

On the northern and the eastern side lies the glorious Dal Lake which made Sir Walter Lawrence say, “The Dal Lake is the most beautiful spot in the world.” It is a sheet of aquamarine rimmed with emerald green floating gardens and trees. The different portions of the Dal Lake i.e. Bod Dal, Nishat Dal, Lakut Dal, Gagribal Dal can be distinctly observed. The Nagin Lake behind the Naseem Bagh shines like Jupiter. A causeway runs in the middle of it. There are houseboats anchored on islets each with its own small flower garden. The sunrise and sunset scenes are superb. In fact, all beauty plays round the hill.

### **Durganag Temple and Spring**

There is a spring at the foot of the hill dedicated to Goddess Durga. There is an Ashram. This Ashram was improved and developed by the Late Shivratanand Saraswati who was a great man in real sense. He collected money and spent it on the welfare of the Ashram. The Sadhus and Mendicants came from the plains and lived here. He fed them and sometimes clothed them. There was a charitable kitchen running in his time to feed the weak and the poor. There is a good tract of land and ‘Durga Sar’ with willow orchard attached to the Ashram. He built a temple and installed the image of Goddess Durga there. When sitting on the dais in the balcony of his house, he shone like a great soul. During his time, he wielded the Charri Sahiba of Sacred Amar Nath Cave Pilgrimage, and the pilgrims received perfect comfort and care under him. He passed away to the eternal bliss and his monument (Samadhi) lies in the Ashram. The Ashram is now

under a trust. It is worth-while to get the Ashram improved, and kept under an experienced hand to ensure strict discipline. Buildings ought to be repaired, extended and kept well.

### **Sanctity**

On Arnavas (New Moon) and Purnamasi (Full Moon) people go to the temple to worship. But the annual fair is held on the Sawan Purnamashi (August) when hundreds go to worship. On this day, the whole path is lit with electric lamps. There is also a high power electric lamp on the top of the temple which can be seen from miles.

From evening, people pour in and climb and sit in the compound in groups. They sing, dance, chant the hymns in their own languages: Dogri, Punjabi, Hindi, Kashmiri, and Pahari and the place becomes the celestial orchestra.

At about 4 am, by turns in threes and fours under strict discipline, pilgrims begin to go up. Standing on the lowest wrung of the lowest door, a devotee would chant:

*Ullangya Vivida Daivata Sopana Karamam  
Upeya. Shiva Charman  
Ashritya Pkadwarataram Bhunim  
Nadyape Chitram Ujjwami*

I have crossed over the ladder wrungs of various deities and having taken the support of the feet of Shiva, it is strange, I do not even know Shun the lower status.

He begins to ascend the staircases. First flight of steps consists of 18, then there is an arch and 12 steps. Then we come out to the open space which goes round the temple guarded by a small stone wall. Towards the eastern side

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attached to wall on either side are six more steps. That makes  $18+12+6=36$ . According to the Shiva philosophy, there are thirty six elements of which the universe is made. They are from Shiva Tattva to Prithvi Tattva.

There are three and two steps more to be passed. These indicate:

Jgarat—Wakeful state

Sapuna –Dream state

Soshupti- Zero state (sleeping state)

The two final states to be entered are:

Turya—Effulgent bliss supreme and perfect

Turyateta—Transcendental state

Having crossed over the gross material elements and also the subtle state super cyclic centres, the devotee stands at the door of the temple, reciting.

*Bavad Aveshatab Pashyans*

*Bavam Bavam Bavanmayani*

*Vichrayam Nirakankshah*

*Prahaarsba: Paripuritah*

By a fit of thy Godhood, would that I seeing everything as thee may roam about desireless, filled with ecstasy.

He enters into the temple with milk, incense burning, camphor and candle of clarified butter lit, raisins, crystallised sugar, coconut, cernels to offer.

A part he takes for himself to be distributed among his relatives and friends.

He circumambulates half a round and does not cross the line through which milk or water flows out towards the north. Circumambulation means perfect resignation of body, mind and soul merging with the universal soul. Coming out he again sings:

*Jaya Deva Namohamostute*

*Sakalam vishvam idam Tavashritam*

*Jagatam Parameshworo Bhawan*

*Paramekab Sharnagatosmite*

Be thou victorious, bow down to Thee again and again. This whole world stands with Thy support. Thou are the only Lord of the universe, I am the only protegee of Thee.

The pilgrims in a line, one by one offer worship. The rush is great and patience of the people is little. Gradually, the crowd diminishes.

On the same day, fairs are held at Shri Amar Nath Ji, (12729 ft), Mahadev (13013 ft), Dyanishwar (Bandipore), Thajwara (Bijbehara) and in all places where Shiva temples are:

*Karbt Natha Vimalam Mukha Bembam*

*Tavakam Samavaloka Yitasmī*

*Yat Sravaty Amrita Puram Apurvam*

*Yonima jjayati Visham Ashesham*

When shall I see Thy fare and loving face from  
which a wonderful stream of water (nectar) flows,  
which would inundate the whole world under it.

*Janati Devahi Jayanta Deveyo*

*Nitya Prabhaha Gurve Jayante*

*Shadoddarshan Anamnaya Rathe Gayanta*

*Cheryavanto Veeravarajayantu*

Let Gods and Goddesses be victorious. Let our  
guides who are always vigilant, be victorious. Let our  
scholars, well-versed in six schools of Indian  
philosophy be victorious. Let our mendicants, the  
heroes of Saivism be victorious.

*Omkara Bindu samyuktam Nityam Dhyayanti Yoginah*

*Kamadam Mokshadam chaiva omkaram tam Namamyaham*

Yogies always meditate upon omkara alongwith  
Bindu. By this, their desires get fulfilled and they  
achieve salvation. So, I bow before that Omkara the  
main name of Almighty.

*Najato na mrito yashcha kshayo yasyo yasya na vidyata*

*Namanti Devatah Sarve Nakaram tam Namamyaham*

The letter 'Na' indicates that He was never born  
and He will never die and is never diminished. I bow  
before Him who is 'Na' and to whom all Gods bow.

*Mahadevam Mahavaktram Mahadyana-Parayanam*

*Maha papabar devam Makaram tam Namamyaham*

He is supreme of all Gods. His absorbing power is great. He is ever merged in the supreme meditation. He destroys our great sins. I bow before Him who is 'Ma'.

*Shivat Paratoro Nasti Shivashtreshu Nishchayah*

*Shamanti Sarva papani shikaram tam Namamyaham*

The science of Shaivism has well established the supremacy of Lord Shiva. He forgives us for our sins. I bow before him who is 'Shi'.

*Vahanam vrishabho yasya vasukih kantha bbushanam*

*Vame Shaktidharam Devam Vakaram tam Nomamyaham*

His famous vehicle is the (Nandi) bull. His necklace is the serpent Vasuki. He holds his Godly energy on his left lap. I bow before him who is 'va'.

*Yatra Yatra sthito devah sarvavyapi Maheshwara*

*You gurub Sarvadevanam Yakaram tam Namamyaham*

He is omnipresent and all pervading. He is the greatest Lord. He is the preceptor of all the Gods. I bow before him who is 'ya'.

(The paper, written and printed several decades ago, is reproduced for the information of the readers. However, details mentioned in the paper may need updates.)

## **RAFIQ RAAZ'S *NAI CCHAY NALAAAN***

### **A re-reading**

**Dr M Maroof Shah**

Rafiq Raaz's *Nai chhay nalaan* (*The Flute is Complaining*) is one of the most influential volumes of contemporary poetry in Kashmiri that helped shape Kashmiri ghazal written after it. With its publication, its poet has established himself as a master of younger generation of poets in lyricism through deep attention to form and metrical innovations. A treat to read for a number of reasons – deft deployment of a variety of tropes that both appropriate and build upon preceding mystical and modernist poetic tradition, great explosion of penetrating and refreshing images, deeply meditative and reflective content exploring the modern existential hermeneutic canvassing nostalgia, exile and love and use of a symbolism that was once – till quite recently – easily communicable in the world that hadn't severed integral connection with transcendence.

Raaz's language is neither elitist nor arcane, unlike some parts of his illustrious contemporary Rahi. It doesn't get needlessly ambiguous that constitutes dubious virtue of much of modernist poetry. He bridges the gap between passion and imagination. Raaz takes ample care to chisel words and sounds and part of his success lies in this superlative attention to the universe of rhyme and rhythm that constitutes the secret of

beauty of the palace of art to which artists have special access and take lesser mortals or more earthly people.

The poet generally speaks in first person and of first person's pain and exile somehow mitigated through turn to art. Words – the magic of words that poetry is – somehow allows the poet – Raaz says – to say yes to life and partake of immortality in what otherwise appears a world full of sound and fury not signifying anything. The poet gathers or summons “the shade of dew”, “green peace of the dawn,” “radiance of the sunny day”, “inflamed snowy night”, courtesy “bath of imagination”, (just a few examples of stunning and “unforgettable” images in a couple of couplets from one ghazal only showing the power of the poet) “love’s radiance” that illuminating “the forest of thoughts” and is able, in some blessed moments that poetry steals from heaven, to fly high over the Divine Throne where “angels are singing.”

What distinguishes Raaz is a conscious engagement with and brilliant appropriation of Sufi poetry – one can read many of his verses and some ghazals in their entirety as modern mystical ghazals. Raaz evokes the transcendent both through his craft as an artist who carves words in such a way as to let Being manifest its riches and by invoking, forcefully, Love and Beauty.

Oriental in sensibility, he has not given up individualism that modernity has bequeathed with all its legacy of grandeur and misery. He holds fast to the myth of authenticity or subjectivity that wants to have his own as if art isn't imitation or acting and witnessing or vision but something in service of the self.

A poet of passion and love and memory can't afford taking note of “discordant” notes in the strange raga in which the scripture of the cosmos and life is composed. His life's odyssey (travelled with twin treasures of *soz-i daroon* (inward passion) and *ishq-i laey* (tune of love) isn't untouched by the feeling of the

absurd even in the most metaphysical and mystical moments – again we see his modernity asserting. He remains oriental in his love for form, especially ghazal with all its traditional “paraphernalia.”

His great attention to form isn’t occasionally matched by attention to theme or content; he, here and there, overturns both traditional imagery and symbolism or meaning spaces and one wonders if this is consciously done by him or he is somewhat casual in his handling of the same. To quote an example:

*“Meon wajood sarbisar gardigubaar haertuk/rozi koutta amdar bider  
phaeriyi wav ta bi kaey.”*

(My being is wholly the dust of wonder/ How long will the  
wayward wind keep marching.)

The state of wonderment (*aalami hairat*) is, in traditional Sufi understanding, the greatest achievement but here it is a pejorative term.

For Raaz, art or creative process itself, not unlike many modern and most postmodern poets, is his refuge and salvation and forms chief subject and object of his work. However he is not ready to concede inherent limitations of the artistic and the necessarily tragic dimension of all aesthetic projects.

*“Chaeiztirabdaemageschaeintisharbusnes/maedilfaraebkalamespaninnaḡa  
kahraaen“*

*“Lafzenanderwaepkehhtikadikaadzindagi/sharenanderachehtilabekhdayi  
mihayat”*

Your mind restless, your beauty in chaos/my alluring words  
lost their elegance.)

(Fitting into the sanctuary of words, life will bloom/Drawn into  
the verses, life will be immortalized.)

Raaz is able to deploy striking images and irony to express life's little and great jokes. Somewhat hackneyed theme of existential alienation and stock images conveying it is handled with a freshness and conviction that compels attention:

*“Taaphchu shames taamdivaninsanesbraem/douri cha sekb tam basaansabzar”*

(Sunshine keeps man deluding till the dusk / From a distance, even sand appears as greenery.)

*“Kreabnyarzmanuktinwolumtoatinangeychus/daegichubadenyuutzimerne ymaekafenrouth”*

(My nakedness remains despite covering by the blackness of times/ So many scars on the body that coffin refuses to cover it.)

*“chaetikyapatahjinaziparenkersanamaelookh/maetikyapatabzikersanaaesichaemaenziraath”*

(You don't know when my funeral prayer is read/I don't know when your marriage night dawns.)

Raaz gives certain stunning and “unforgettable” images that could resonate across cultures. One may see profusion of splendid imagery in some ghazals. Who can forget such images as writing one's name in a windy night with flame of a lamp?

He chose to publish a collection wholly consisting of ghazals – a departure from usual practice he inherited from his predecessors and contemporaries. Steering clear of dominant ideological frames in both form and content, Raaz stamps his unique nostalgic vision in an environment that distrusts poets' claim to access the sacred or transcendent world in a language and idiom that is appealing on both sensuous and intellectual planes. The poet of the Spirit who struggles with the claims of centrifugal psyche that our technologized urbanite world



impinges on us with increasing and ruthless force, Raaz recalls the poet to his original vacation of which great German and English Romantics reminded the secularizing world.

Becket with all his horror and ghost of nihilism consequent to facing the absurd with trivial distractions is echoed in certain verses. Nostalgia for what is gone – Tradition symbolized by all kinds of rustic and primeval images including those of innocence or children – is what gives haunting pathos to Raaz. Raaz seems to avoid dualistic theological and occultist mystical flights.

Raaz is too reflexive, too self-conscious a modern subject – the first person speaker with all its psychological and self-oriented paraphernalia occasionally bordering on Faustian and Promethean streaks is evidenced on almost every page – to unqualifyingly court an oriental aesthetic and metaphysic that is otherwise so dear to him and this results in more or less discordant and heterogeneous work of art from perspective that upholds the sovereignty and relative autonomy of art in a hierarchical cosmos oriented towards the Good or moved by Love – the world of Tradition Raaz situates himself in. One could argue the case for a postmodern Rafiq Raaz who both participates in and gives voice to a world of experience that resists traditional frames. The individual who writes poetry, seeks consolation or meaning is always in the background while getting written off by the Other.

*“saekipaethleakhen peer cheytiumberbhar ‘rafiqraaz’  
zujandithmaewantivounbaeyikusshoguldimaey”*

(On the sands will be written on your tombstone “Rafiq Raaz).

(I gave you my soul and life, tell me now what hobby may interest you.)

*“Chukb chi faqmaeedmaaaoubursadatimuzmulla/toatimagr bi  
woendimaeybargivaenenqararker”*

(“You appear to me cloud, sound and lightning/nevertheless I  
will seek you in forests, stand by.)

Kashmir’s preeminent modern poet, Raaz sings songs that are no longer heard – he is late – and that explains power of his heart rending poetry at once romantic and thus tragic, mystical and thus eternally interrogating and radically open to rhythms of experience.

Raaz’s ghazal extricated great tribute from the greatest living poet of Kashmir, Rahman Rahi who wrote that it opened “charmed magic casements.” Besides introducing new rhythmical patterns and fresh expression that is at once romantic, mystical and modernist if not postmodernist as well, Raaz’s work deserves the wider attention than it has hitherto received in his native place and language. One may conclude with a couplet from Raaz that gives succinct expression to man’s attempt to avoid the gaze of Transcendence and worship idols of his own making.

*Mahtaebjabeenesmaekaedemkaltimagarbaef/seemaebaqedestipotilgarnilog  
usbije*

(Lunar forehead I lured but alas!/ Mercurial belief I  
started moulding into idols.)

(The author is a writer of note , based in Srinagar.)

## REVIEW

# FOR NOW, IT IS NIGHT

**Bilal Gani**

**Stories by Hari Krishna Kaul, translated from the Kashmiri by Kalpana Raina, Tanveer Ajsi, Gowhar Fazili, Gowhar Yaqoob, Harper Collins India, 2023**

In the somber pages of history, the Pandit exodus from the Kashmir Valley unfolds as more than a mere migration; it is a tale etched in the human spirit. As homes were left behind, each brick echoing with memories, families embarked on a journey not just across geographical borders but through the labyrinth of loss and resilience. The exodus, painted with the hues of personal narratives, becomes a story of tearful goodbyes to familiar landscapes, the scent of saffron fields, and the echoes of a culture deeply rooted in the valley's soil. It's a narrative woven with the threads of human connection, the laughter of children now scattered and the warmth of shared traditions severed.

### **Unraveling The Human Tapestry**

In the poignant exploration presented in a new book *For Now It is Night*, Hari Krishna Kaul skillfully delves into the heart-wrenching narrative of the Pandit exodus from the Kashmir Valley. The pages come alive with the stories of a community forced to confront the profound challenge of leaving behind

not just homes and landscapes, but a cultural and historical heritage deeply intertwined with the region.

The book brings together 17 short stories written between 1970 and 2000 by the prominent Kashmiri author and playwright Hari Krishna Kaul. It also contains a few previously translated stories that have appeared in various Kashmiri short story collections edited and translated by Neerja Mattoo such as *Kath: Stories from Kashmir* (2011), *The Greatest Kashmiri Stories Ever Told* (2022), and *In This Metropolis* (2011) translated by Ranjana Kaul and published by Sahitya Akademi. These stories, beyond the statistics and political complexities, are a human touchstone, reminding us that even in the face of displacement, the bonds of culture and community endure. In each untold story lies the heartbeat of a people, resilient in the face of adversity, forever tethered to a home left behind, yet carried within.

In “Sunshine”, the opening short story in *For Now It is Night*, Kaul questions the Kashmiri desire to escape the harsh winter of Kashmir through his character Poshkuj, who is unable to adjust to life in Delhi during just one winter away from Kashmir. The story was originally featured in the book *Pat Laraan Parbat (The Mountains Will Chase)* where Kaul wrote about homesickness and the attachment of Kashmiris to the valley. Published in the 1970s, this theme later became acutely painful and persistent in his and other Kashmiri writers’ and poets’ works after the 1990s.

Hari Krishna Kaul, one of the very best modern Kashmiri writers, published most of his work between 1972 and 2000.

His short stories, shaped by the social crisis and political instability in Kashmir, explore - with an impressive eye for detail, biting wit, and deep empathy - themes of isolation, individual and collective alienation, corruption and the social mores of a community that experienced the loss of homeland, culture and language.

Through a nuanced blend of personal testimonials and a meticulous examination of historical events, Hari Krishna Kaul weaves together a narrative that encapsulates the complex emotions and experiences of the Pandit community during this tumultuous period. The author doesn't merely recount the events; they immerse readers in the atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, and the painful decisions that shaped the destiny of a people. The book not only offers a historical account but also endeavors to capture the human aspect of the Pandit exodus. It invites readers to empathize with the individuals and families who faced unimaginable circumstances, leaving behind the familiar and venturing into an uncertain future.

### **The Nuanced Narratives**

The book explores the rich tapestry of cultural syncretism within Kashmiri society, weaving tales of harmony and blending traditions. However, as conflict arrives, this delicate balance begins to evaporate, revealing the fragility of cultural unity in the face of external pressures. Through its narratives the book reflects on the impact of violence on the intricate layers of shared values and practices, shedding light on the transformative power of external forces on a once harmonious cultural landscape.

In the realm of literary endeavors, the collaborative translation of this superb collection of short stories emerges as a testament to the synergy of talented writers who, collectively, have breathed new life into the essence of the original work. Translated from Kashmiri in a silver-tongued way by Kaul's niece and writer Kalpana Raina, Tanveer Ajsi, Gowhar Fazili and Gowhar Yaqoob, this fine translation goes beyond a rigid, formal use of the English language that creates a barrier between the way the story was intended to be told and its translated version.

Through this collaborative effort, the translators have not only conveyed the literal meaning of the text but have ventured into the realms of cultural intricacies and subtle nuances. The spirit, the emotions and the cultural context of the original work have been meticulously preserved, allowing readers to traverse the narrative landscape as envisioned by the author.

Brilliantly translated in a unique collaborative project, *For Now, It Is Night* brings a comprehensive selection of Kaul's stories to English readers for the very first time.

The violence in Kashmir affected both Pandit and Muslim communities, leading to displacement, loss and a shared sense of uncertainty. The pervasive impact of violence has left scars on the collective memory of all Kashmiris, irrespective of religious identity. The need is to recognize that violence and displacement have affected diverse communities.

(The author is a researcher and writer, based in Srinagar.)

## PLAY

### THIS HOME IS NO LONGER MINE

Shivdev 'Sushil'

Translated from Dogri by Suman K Sharma

#### *Translator's Note*

*Strictly speaking, it is neither a translation, nor a transcreation. It is somewhere in-between. I have deviated from the original text only where I felt the need. Yet, I have refrained from making any substantial alteration to the intent of the author.*

#### **Characters:**

1. Ramdas , retired teacher, aged 75
2. Sadesh Son of Ramdas
3. Saroj Sadesh's wife
4. Sumit Sadesh's son
5. Kartar Chand Sadesh's friend
6. Divan Chand Ramdas's friend
7. Kanta Saroj's friend

#### **Scene 1**

**(The curtain is raised. Dim light on the stage, which brightens up gradually. Music fades in. Leaning on a walking stick, Ramdas walks on the stage from one end to the other, till the song ends.)**

## Song<sup>1</sup>

This home is no longer mine  
O, it truly is no longer mine  
This home is no longer mine  
O, it truly is no longer mine  
I curbed my mind's wanton run  
All excesses did I try to shun  
No mirth I ever had, no fun  
I did all that had to be done  
Fruitless has been that strife  
In which I wasted all my life  
Shattered lie dreams of mine  
This home's no longer mine  
O, it truly is no longer mine

**(Ramdas stands in the middle of the stage on completion of the song.)**

**Ramdas :** The wise said it truly: Time is all powerful. Time says 'dance' and man dances. What man wishes, that doesn't happen. Frequently, what does happen couldn't have been thought of. But what can you do? Nothing. Just nothing. You have to live as you are fated to live. **(After a brief pause)** I too am living like that. No, I am forced to live that. That is my compulsion – I have no option at all. Whatever path Time leads me on, my feet go by that path. Yes, I will have to go on like that.

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<sup>1</sup>Translator's Note: During the performance, a recording of the original Dogri song may be played in the background, while the translation is displayed on a screen conveniently hung on the stage.



**Leaning on his stick, Ramdas resumes walking from one side of the stage to the other. The sound of the song emerges again.)**

Tears am I given to treasure  
And rags from the past I sew  
Pain is what my own give me  
That is all I am going through  
Joy once gave my home a shine  
This home's no longer mine  
O, it truly is no longer mine

**(The song gradually fades out as Ramdas's voice grows stronger.)**

**Ramdas:** To her last day, Sadash's mother never uttered a harsh word to anyone. Not a frown did I ever see on her forehead. She never spoke to me of the little and big squabbles in the house. If someone was harsh to her, she kept it to herself. Badmouthing was not for her. Often enough, she took on herself to counsel me. She knew how to pacify me if I got angry over something. I really couldn't counter her arguments. Which made me hold my tongue. In raising this house, she gave me big support. She scrimped and she saved. She filled the house with things that make a house a home. I was too busy teaching children all the time. It was she who took responsibility for running the household. What provisions to be bought for the kitchen. What weddings would befall during the month. How much in cash and kind did we have to gift to the families – it was for her to decide.

**(After a brief pause)** Me? I would just hand her my salary at the beginning of the month. The rest was for her to deal with. Even so, it was not that she did things her own way. She took my opinion in every matter. I too never went against her decision. This had happened at the time of Sadesh's marriage, too.

**(Ramdas goes to one side of the stage while speaking. Saroj enters from the other side.)**

**Saroj :** **(In an angry tone)** To be stuck with a house like this is hard luck. Nobody likes what I do. Anything I do here turns wrong. Fault-finding is what I get, nothing else. Like father, like son. They are cast in the same mould. They will kill me by their frowns. But I too am not the one to take all that lying down...

**(Giving her head a defiant twist, she leaves the stage. Sadesh enters.)**

**(In an irritated tone)** How many times have I told this woman. But she won't listen. She does what she comes to her mind. From where she has got such bitterness! I keep telling her, he is ageing. What if he shouts once in a while? We should bear with it. It does not make any difference. He is the elder of the family. But would she heed me! Such a dumb creature. I have been caught between the two. Whose side I should be and whose' not. It's beyond me. Who should I talk to and who should I

ignore. Who should I fight with and who should I leave aside. If it goes on like this, I will go mad.

**(Sadesh exits the stage in his irritation. Entry of Kartar Chand.)**

**Kartar Chand :**

Yes, I too have a bonding with this family. I have broken bread with them. Sadesh is a dear friend – a very close friend. We studied together since our childhood. Master-ji has always been kind to me. He made no difference between Sadesh and me. Both of us got his love equally. Many were the occasions that I stayed here overnight. Master-ji went on teaching us till midnight. I would feel bad if anything happens to this house. I spoke to Sadesh several times. But I don't know what is wrong with him. He keeps his counsel. Or changes the topic. I get no response from him. He has changed so much. It makes me sad. And Bhabhi! What can I say about her. The man who can advise her has locked his mouth.

**(Walking briskly, he leaves the stage. Sumit's entry.)**

**Sumit :** My Dadu is very fond of me. I too like him. The stories he tells are so nice. But Mummy does not allow me to sit with him. The moment I go to him, she pulls me away to do my homework. How long can I study? Every time it is 'study', 'study', 'study' from her. I don't like it. Dadu gives me a

chocolate every day. He is nice to me. **(Leaves the stage.)**

## Scene 2

**(On one side of the stage, a charpoy lies beside a chair and an almirah. A teapoy is placed before the chair. Ramdas enters with a glass of water in his hand. He looks for medicines in a paper bag kept on the teapoy.)**

**Ramdas: (Putting on his palm three or four tablets of different colours.)**

I am late today for medicines. I had asked the doctor whether I should take them on empty stomach. He said no. Medicines should not be taken on empty stomach. First put something in your belly and then take medicine. Well, sir. Whatever you say. No day passes without medicines now. What can be done? One has to live as one's condition demands. It bothers me no longer. I have to live this life and so I will. Be it easy, or be it tough.

**(Ramdas pats his bed and sits on it. He glances through the pages of a newspaper that lie on the teapoy. His grandson enters).**

**Sumit :** Dadu, Dadu, what are you doing?

**Ramdas :** Nothing, son. Do sit down.

**(Sumit sits down on a corner of the charpoy.)**

**Sumit :** Dadu, tell me a tale.

**Ramdas :** O, you have come for a tale?

**Sumit :** Yes, yes...let me have it quickly. **(He shows urgency.)**

**Ramdas :** Well, dear. Give me a moment.

**Sumit :** No, Dadu. I can't wait. Tell me a tale without delay.

**Ramdas :** Give me some time to read the paper.

**Sumit :** **(Courteously)** *Nayeen*, Dadu. You can read your paper some other time.

**Ramdas :** **(In an undertone)** What's the matter, child? Where is your mother?

**Sumit :** She must be around. Now please begin your tale.  
**(He pulls at his grandfather's shoulder childishly.)**

**Ramdas :** I will. But let go of my shoulder. Come, sit in front of me properly.

**Sumit :** **(Following the direction)** Okay.

**Ramdas :** That is fine.

**Sumit :** Now let me hear.

**Ramdas :** Once there was a monkey...

**Saroj :** **(Saroj enters, calling Sumit from outside)**  
**Sumit,O,**

**Sumit.** I have been looking for you so long. You are hiding here.

**Ramdas :** He will be with you in a moment.

**Saroj :** I know since when he came here. He wastes his time. I turn my eyes and he slips away. This boy is not bothered about his studies.

**Ramdas :** I see him busy with his books. For how long little children like him can study?

**Saroj :** **(With irritation)** You are the one who spoils him. When I ask him to open his books, you call him over. You will make him illiterate in this manner.

**Ramdas :** Make him illiterate! Me! What do you mean?  
Think before you speak, my child.

**Saroj :** Oh yes. It is only me who has to think how he behaves. No one else has a need to think in this house. Bad is my luck that I am stuck with this house. **(She exits in rage)**

**Ramdas :** **(Sotto voce.)** My house has never been that bad.Ever. But, what one can do. The circumstances are changing now by the day.  
**(Calling Sumit)** Don't spend much time with me, my child. You on't have to be scolded by your mom.

**Sumit :** **(With much indifference)** Let mom scold me.

**Ramdas :** You should follow what your mom says, son.

**Sumit :** Mom says I should be studying all the time. I can't do that.

**Ramdas :** Study is very important in life, son.

**Sumit :** Dadu, how can I be studying all the time? I want to play. And I want to listen to the tales you tell me.

**Ramdas :** You are welcome always, son. But you must leave now. You mom is annoyed.

**Sumit :** What about the story?

**Ramdas :** You will have it tomorrow.

**Sumit :** It is okay then.

**(Sumit leaves the place)**

**Ramdas :** **(Talking to himself)** I have fobbed off the child. And gave him a piece of advice too. It is correct that the education these days is tough. Come from the school and be ready for the tuition. Return from there and start doing homework you got from the

school. Where is then the time for the children like him to play and listen to the tales? These too are important for the growth of a child. I have spent my whole life in teaching the young. But the circumstances have changed. And then to have a mother like that! She does not show an iota of pity. How will the child grow up in this manner? If I advise her, she responds in a silly manner. Well, let them live their lives. They will do what comes to their mind. It doesn't matter to me. I will live on whether it is easy or hard.

### Scene 3

**(Evening time. The screen shows birds returning to their nests. Some people are taking a walk on the road by the riverside. Music emerges in sync with the bird songs. It fades out as Ramdas's voice becomes audible.)**

**Ramdas:** **(Talking to himself)** Aha! What a fine weather it is. A walk on this road is so refreshing. It seems as if we were roaming in the hills. It brings to the city the feel of a village. The sight of clear water flowing in the river and across the river the jungle with its bushes and trees of all sizes and shapes. In the background is the row of tall mountains. And the sweet breeze. Thankfully, there is hardly any traffic on this road. Aha! It's so pleasant.

**(Pauses for a few moments)**

Even so, I can't stand it for long. I like to be here, but my legs don't oblige. This too is a phase of life. Time drives man as it pleases, and man has to comply. He has no option.

(Taking a sigh)

I think I should rest for a while.

**(Divanchand, seated on the culvert.)**

**Divanchand :** Ramdas ji, you seem to be busy in thoughts.

Come, take some rest.

**Ramdas :** You are ahead of me today.

**Divanchand:** I left home a bit early. Actually, I was feeling.

**(Leaving a space for Ramdas to sit upon)**

Come, sit here with me on the culvert. So, as I was telling you, I did not have much sleep this afternoon.

Passed the day somehow. I came out as soon as it was evening.

**Ramdas :** How long can a man sleep? My sides begin to ache lying on the bed all the time.

**Divanchand:** You are right. What is there to do during the day? Eat and lie down. Or else, read newspaper. That's all, Newspaper doesn't take long, even if you read it line by line.

**Ramdas :** Papers carry just one type of news these days. Bomb explosions. Grenade attacks. No day passes in which ten or twenty people do not die. I am sick of such ews.



**Divanchand:** There is hardly a day when we do not have news of blood and gore.

**Ramdas :** How good were our times!

**Divanchand :** Oh, yes. Those times are gone by, never to return.

**Ramdas:** Our sun too is setting. No one knows what the next day might bring.

**Divanchand:** What do we gain with knowledge of tomorrow? We will see when it comes.

### **(The sound of a powerful gust of wind)**

Wonderful! I feel so happy.

**Ramdas:** We come out only for such gusts of wind. Let us hope we continue to have fresh air to breathe till we live.

**Divanchand:** Fresh air only if there are trees around! The way they are being cut down, I don't hope these trees would support life for long.

**Ramdas :** You are right. Look across the river. How thin has the forest become. Till recent it was lush with greenery. It has become so dismal. What a pity!

**Divanchand:** Count yourself lucky even if the forest remains in its present form. No doubt it has grown thinner, yet it is not deserted. What is required is to save it. But who will save it?

**Ramdas:** That is the big question. Who will save the diminishing greenery?

**Divanchand :** Man today has become an enemy to nature. How long can he survive trading on the precious plants?

**Ramdas :** Destruction of woods has to be stopped.

**Divanchand:** But who will stop it? Who is there to make the reckless men understand? Who will argue with them?

**Ramdas :** You are right. It is not easy to make the new generation see reason.

**Divanchand:** The likes of us are left only to worry about such things. There is nothing in our hands. What can we do?

**Ramdas :** I agree with you. But why should not they understand such a simple thing? The whole society should think about it.

**Divanchand :** We daily read in newspaper that the government is doing this or that to conserve the environment. But nothing is seen in on the ground.

**Ramdas:** Those are just statements...hollow announcements. Nothing more.

**Divanchand:** If the action on the ground matches the zeal with which government announces its programme, there would be lush greenery everywhere. But it does not happen.

**Ramdas:** That is the tragedy. It has not been possible after all these years of independence.

**Divanchand:** If the government programmes do not show results, of what use they are? The results should be there to be seen. But no, there is nothing like that.

**Ramdas :** We people too are responsible for the destruction of greenery. What care do we take of it? We never utter a word even if a wrong is committed before our eyes.

**Divanchand:** Yes. That is true, indeed. Whole forests are gone. The greenery too is gone. Those who lived in huts,

own palaces now. But the streams have dried up.  
Plants are lost.

**Ramdas:** This happened because of the involvement of those whose duty it was to protect forests.

**Divanchand:** They all have forgotten their responsibilities, sir. If everyone had been mindful of their duties, things would not have turned bad to this extent. The green cover would have been there.

**Ramdas:** But then the guards couldn't have their palaces, like you said. Those thieves have gone on to raise mansions for themselves, while the common man remains where he was.

**Divanchand:** Who is bothered about common man, my friend? Everyone looks for himself.

**Ramdas:** We are in such times! Whom do we advise and whom forbid! Even those in the family do not heed. If you tell them something, they try to advise you on the contrary. What can one do?

**Divanchand:** Nothing. What can one do, really? **(After a short pause)** It is time to go home.

**Ramdas:** Yes, we should leave now. Everyone is leaving.

**Divanchand:** Well, see you tomorrow.

**(Both of them start walking slowly)**

## Scene 4

**(Night-time. Lying on his bed, Ramdas is deep in thoughts. Sadesh enters.)**

**Sadesh:** Bapuji, are you asleep?

**Ramdas:** **(Getting up)** No, not till now.

**Sadesh:** Please don't get up. You take rest.  
**Ramdas:** It does not matter. Come, sit with me.  
**Sadesh:** Shall I bring you meal?  
**Ramdas:** I am not particularly hungry.  
**Sadesh:** Even then you must have something.  
**Ramdas:** Then bring it, son.  
**Sadesh:** Alright. I am bringing it. **(He goes towards the kitchen.)**  
**Ramdas:** These days I just don't feel like eating anything. Even then I have to eat a bit. If I don't, how will I walk on my legs? And if I stop walking, it would be difficult to pass my days in this old age.

**(Sadesh enters and leaves behind a glass and a lota.)**

**Ramdas:** **(To himself)** Food is such a blessing, man spends his whole life earning it. Everyone reaches out for it. For some people it is easy to get; for others it is altogether difficult. A matter of luck, I would say.

**(Sadesh enters with a platter of food and places it on the teapoy.)**

**Sadesh:** Bapuji, your meal.  
**Ramdas:** Well, I will take it.  
**(Sadesh exits)**  
**Ramdas:** Let me eat what little I can.  
**(Ramdas pours water into the glass, washes his hands while sitting on his bed, dries up his hands with the *parna* and pulls the platter to himself.)**

**Ramdas:** I wonder what has been cooked today. Black dal? What is there in the other bowl? **(Glancing over)** *Badiyan?* That too, burnt! Neither I eat black dal, nor badiyan, they know. Then why do they repeatedly make such dishes that I don't like? Yesterday it was black dal and the day before as well. Don't they get anything else to cook? They don't get any vegetable. They do it deliberately. They know well that I would be unhappy. What does it mean? That is what it is. My luck. What can be done about it! It did not happen like this when Sadesh's mother was alive. She never gave me a reason to complain. But those times are gone. She has gone far, far away from me. I must go on living alone here.

**Sadesh :** **(In a disinterested manner)** Do you need anything, Bapuji?

**Ramdas :** No, nothing.

**Sadesh:** **(Drawing closer)** But what is this? You have not taken anything!

**Ramdas:** I was not particularly hungry. I thought why I should eat when I don't have the need.

**Sadesh :** **(Loses his calm on having a look at the platter)** Oh, I see. Now I get what the matter is.

**Ramdas:** There is nothing to it, son.

**Sadesh:** You tell me what you want to eat. I will cook it and bring it to you. You don't have to bother.

**Ramdas:** Leave it, son. I want to eat nothing now.

**Sadesh:** You just tell me. It is not too late.

**Ramdas:** I am telling you the truth. I don't feel hungry.

**Sadesh:** Bapuji, I know why you did not eat. You eat neither black dal, nor badiyan. Saroj has made both these dishes today.

**Ramdas:** Don't you worry...

**(Sadesh exits with the platter. Saroj is in the other room. He goes there.)**

**Saroj :** **(Seeing Sadesh's angry face)** What happened?

**Sadesh:** What have you cooked today...?

**Saroj:** **(Turning her face)** Hm...

**Sadesh:** I am asking you what you have made today?

**Saroj:** What do you see?

**Sadesh:** I am seeing what is there to see.

**Saroj:** **Then?**

**Sadesh:** **Then it looks you have lost your mind.**

**Saroj:** What is wrong with my mind?

**Sadesh:** You know well he does not eat black dal, nor does he like badiyan.

**Saroj:** Then?

**Sadesh:** You have made those very things. And that dal I feel is stale.

**Saroj:** So how does it matter?

**Sadesh:** You see nothing wrong with it?

**Saroj:** This much dal was left over. Should I have thrown it away?

**Sadesh:** You should have cooked some vegetable which he likes. Why did you give him a stale dal?

**Saroj:** **(Worked up)** I cannot be making dishes to match everyone's liking.

**Sadesh:** That has to be done....

**Saroj:** (Interrupting him) He who likes to eat is welcome to eat; he who doesn't, may not eat.

**Sadesh:** That doesn't make sense.

**Saroj:** What sense, I cannot be making choice dishes day in and day out.

**Sadesh:** Listen, no one is asking you to make choice dishes. You know he is aged. If taking stale dal harms him, what then?

**Saroj:** (Grimacing, showing indifference) You have him admitted to a hospital.

**Sadesh:** (Shouting in anger) Saroj!

**(Moves to strike her, then controls himself)**

**Saroj:** Go ahead! Strike me. Why did you stop – the only useless person in this house – that's me. Of what use I am? I work like a machine. But no one likes what I do. It's always me that is bad.

**Sadesh:** It is not a question of being good or bad. You know certain things are not done. Why are they done?

**Saroj:** You have only me to blame. So go on, blame me to your heart's content. (Crying) This is the house I am fated to endure! I am cursed even though I meet everybody's demands.

**Sadesh:** How many of us are there in the family, after all? Someone in the family has to cook. Others won't come here to cook for us. Then why throw such tantrum? I too work along with you. I have a job too. Everyone in the house works. But I never made it a point at issue.

**Saroj:** Once or twice you washed clothes and now you have a reason to grumble.

**Sadesh:** And who irons the clothes?

**Saroj:** I never asked you. You do that on your own.

**Sadesh:** You used to put aside Bapuji's clothes. Then it fell on me to iron them.

**Saroj:** No, I never did that. It's only you who does everything for him. Well, what can be done about that? If I don't get credit, I don't. It is just my bad luck, no one is to be blamed.

**Sadesh:** Your luck indeed is bad. Does your luck tell you not to take care of Bapuji?

**Saroj:** I never cared about him.

**Sadesh:** Why do you criticise what he says.

**Saroj:** I don't like his narrowminded ways.

**Sadesh:** That is your fault. He is respected by everyone in the city and you call him narrow-minded. People hold him in great honour.

**Saroj:** Let them. I don't like him, that's all.

**Sadesh:** **(In anger)** You have gone mad.

**Saroj:** Let me be. Don't expect any change in me. I will do what I like. What appears okay to me, that shall I do. Just that. I don't want to change myself for anyone's sake. Everyone in the house is bent upon advising me. I am the one person left to listen to all. It makes me sick. I don't want to be lectured anymore.

**(Saroj goes out of the room in anger)**



**Sadesh:** (To himself) This woman is highly obstinate. She does what comes to her mind. She remains unaffected whether you ask her to do, or not to do something. I have told her several times that she should not be harsh to Bapuji. He is hurt. But she never lets go any chance of doing precisely that. I am tired of making her behave. Now I am myself trying to attend to Bapuji's needs so that he does not feel constrained in any manner. If he takes to his heart anything, it becomes very difficult for him to let it go. That makes my life miserable. (Taking a deep sigh) Well, let us see. This too has to be endured in one way or the other.  
(Sadesh exits)

## Scene 5

(Ramdas is seated on his charpoy and reading a book. In a moment, he puts the book away.)

**Ramdas:** Enough! I don't want to read anymore. Frequently,  
I get bored in the midst of reading, I don't know why. It never happened to me earlier. But now it happens too often. I get tired after reading a few pages. A feeling of heaviness takes over me and I am compelled to close the book. There was a time when I spent the whole day teaching in the school. Then, coming home, I would pick up a book and begin reading it. I gave tuitions as well. My reading went on till midnight. (A brief pause. He chuckles and gets up from his bed.) Hm...Sadesh's mother

would get irritated most of the times. There is much else in life besides books, she said. But I never paid heed to her. She attended to all the domestic chores. Then what was left for me to do? Either reading or teaching, that was all. But now it is not like that. My eye-glasses have got much thicker. I begin to have heaviness in head or headache in no time. After all, I have crossed eighty. How can I keep doing what I did thirty-five or forty years ago? But there is something inside man that makes him not to accept the harsh truth. It is wise to be one's age, or else you suffer. At this age it is difficult to keep away from troubles for long.

**Sumit:** (He comes out of the other room and stands efore Ramdas in a confused state.)

**Ramdas:** What happened, son?

**Sumit:** Nothing.

**Ramdas:** There is something wrong indeed. You are not the one to be so quiet.

**Sumit:** (Keeps silent)

**Ramdas:** Tell me, son, what happened?

**Sumit:** (Maintains his silence)

**Ramdas:** Has anyone thrashed you?

**Sumit:** No.

**Ramdas:** Then what?

**Sumit:** I am not going to study at Dalhousie.

**Ramdas:** Dalhousie? Who is sending you there?

**Sumit:** Mummy.

**Ramdas:** What did she say?

**Sumit:** That I don't study much here and spend my time listening to your stories.

**Ramdas:** Is it? That is why they are sending you away?

**Sumit:** But I won't go, Dadaji.

**Ramdas:** That's fine. You don't worry.

**Sumit:** Daddy went there to make enquiries. He told mummy that he has deposited even fee there.

**Ramdas:** I will ask him myself.

**Sumit:** Dadaji, you must stop them. I want to study only at this place. All my friends are here. Who shall I play with in that place? (**Sadesh enters**)

**Sadesh:** You and your games! Your idle friends don't let you study.

**Sumit:** No, Dadaji. They are not idle. They are my friends.

**Sadesh:** Their company is spoiling you. Playing with them is what you want.

**Sumit:** Yes, but I study as well.

**Sadesh:** But not as much as you should.

**Ramdas:** Why are you arguing with the little one?

**Sadesh:** No, Bapuji, I don't. But this boy does not understand.

**Ramdas:** What does he have to understand, son? You let me understand first.

**Sadesh:** Fine, Bapuji.

**Ramdas:** Is the boy telling the truth?

**Sadesh:** Yes.

**Ramdas:** What is the need that you have felt.

**Sadesh:** He doesn't study much at home.

**Ramdas:** Who says he studies less at home? I have been teaching children all my life. I know how long it is necessary for the children to study. He does it in

full measure. Study does not mean that the child should not be doing anything else.

**Sadesh:** In fact, it is Saroj's desire that he should study at a better school.

**Ramdas:** O, I see. You are then under her pressure.

**Sadesh:** No one is under pressure here.

**Ramdas:** Then there are many good schools here itself.

**Sadesh:** Studying at Dalhousie has its own importance.

**Ramdas:** Sadesh, a place with a name does not always mean that it can educate a child better. Children who study here may also go far. I don't understand what has gone wrong with your brain.

**Sadesh:** Bapu ji, you also try to understand. It is a question of Sumit's career.

**Ramdas:** I have said nothing which may spoil the boy's career.

**Sadesh:** What I mean is that you should be happy that we are sending him to study at a better school.

**Ramdas:** **(Irritated)** You are not trying to understand what I mean.

**Sadesh:** You too should try to understand us.

**Sumit:** Why don't you agree to what Dada ji says, Papa.

**Sadesh:** **(Rebuking him)** Keep quiet!

**Ramdas:** You should listen to what he says. Pay heed to him.

**Sadesh:** As if it matters.

**Ramdas:** We are talking of what is good for him. He must also be asked.

**Sadesh:** He is too young for that.

**Sumit:** But Dadaji, I am not going anywhere.

**Sadesh:** Would you keep quiet or not?

**(Entry of Saroj)**

- Saroj:** Are you talking about Sumit?  
**Sadesh:** Yes.  
**Saroj:** What does he say?  
**Sadesh:** That he won't go to Dalhousie.  
**Saroj:** Why would he go to Dalhousie! He has no desire to study.  
**Sumit:** Now, I will study here seriously, mummy. I won't go out to play. I won't even come to Dada ji to listen to his stories.

**(Ramdas looks at Sumit with helplessness)**

- Saroj:** It is these stories that have spoiled him.  
**Sumit:** No more stories after today. I promise. But I won't go there.  
**Sadesh:** Son, there are so many children studying there. You won't be alone.  
**Sumit:** Others may or may not study there, but I am not going there. I don't want to leave home.  
**Sadesh:** You have gone mad. You have taken to talking much these days.  
**Ramdas:** Why are you two being adamant with the child? If he has no desire to go there, why do you want to send him?  
**Saroj:** You incite him to be disobedient. You have spoiled our only child.  
**Ramdas:** I, and spoil him?  
**Saroj:** Who else? He is stuck with you any time I see. You are leading him astray.

**Ramdas:** (Stunned) Him I lead astray...? Think of what you are saying. You feel bad that he comes to me and we talk.

**Saroj:** I know everything. Don't let me open my mouth. We want to give the child good education and even that galls you.

**Ramdas:** I am not against providing good education. I want that the child should get the best education. But who said that a child would be better off only if he goes to a boarding school?

**Saroj:** You will cast an evil spell before we get started. I knew it well.

**Ramdas:** (Frustrated) How should I respond to your blame, it's beyond me.

**Sadesh:** Bapuji, let us put an end to this argument. Saroj, you also move from here.  
(Sadesh, Saroj and Sumit make an exit. Ramdas looks at them with despondence.)

## Scene 6

(Sadesh goes to the bazar. There he meets Kartar Chand)

**Kartar Chand:** (On his sudden appearance) Sadesh!

**Sadesh:** (Walking, he takes a pause) Yes...Kartar, how are you doing?

**Kartar Chand:** Why do you walk in such a confused manner?

**Sadesh:** Nothing special, yar. I am out shopping to buy a few things.

**Kartar Chand:** It has been long since I saw you last. Where do you happen to be these days?.

**Sadesh:** Where else could I be, my friend? Household keeps me busy. **(Even though he responds to Kartar Chand, his mind seems elsewhere)**

**Kartar Chand:(Reading his face)** What is the matter? You look worried.

**Sadesh:** Nothing. There is no such thing.

**Kartar Chand:**Sadesh, I know you since childhood. I can read your face.

**Sadesh:** **(Loosens up)** Small and big things keep happening in life.

**Kartar Chand:**You did not have a tiff with Bhabhi? Did you?

**Sadesh:** Nothing of the sort.

**Kartar Chand:**Then?

**Sadesh:** The fact is that we have decided to send Sumit to Dalhousie to study.

**Kartar Chand:** That is fine.

**Sadesh:** But Bapuji does not agree.

**Kartar Chand:**What does he say?

**Sadesh:** Only that Sumit is not to be sent to Dalhousie.

**Kartar Chand:** Oh, that is the matter!

**Sadesh:** Yes. It has spoilt the atmosphere at home.

**Kartar Chand:** Reason with him.

**Sadesh:** I have tried to the best I could.

**Kartar Chand:** is not easy to convince him. Anyway, Dalhousie's education is only in name. I have seen many children returning frustrated from there. Then they are not fit even for the schools here. Uncle must have thought about such things.

**Sadesh:** I agree. But on the other side is your Bhabhi. She won't change her mind.

**Kartar Chand:** Indeed, she keeps a mind of her own.

**Sadesh:** You know it well. It is not an easy task to

convince her. She won't let go of any idea that enters her mind.

**Kartar Chand:** But you will have to find a way out now.

**Sadesh:** I just can't think of anything.

**Kartar Chand:** One of you will have to surrender.

**Sadesh:** You know everything.

**Kartar Chand:** Try, at least.

**Sadesh:** Yes, we will have to do something about it.

**Kartar Chand:(After a thought)** By the way, shall I tell you something?

**Sadesh:** What is that?

**Kartar Chand:** Children study well under the care of their parents. Parents are watchful. Who will keep an eye on the children in a boarding house? Those people care only for the money they make.

**Sadesh:** You are right, my friend.

**Kartar Chand:** Then think about it.

**Sadesh:** But Saroj won't budge, I know.

**Kartar Chand:** I find you too are in two minds. First, you must have a firm opinion.

**Sadesh:** It is something difficult to achieve.

**Kartar Chand:** Nothing is difficult. One has to take a decision and then stick to it.

**Sadesh:** But –

**Kartar Chand:** This 'but' creates problems. I am telling you to take a decision on what your mind tells you to do. If you want to send him, do send him away. And if you don't, you must convince others in the family.

**Sadesh:** Let me see, then.



**Kartar Chand:** I have told you what came to my mind. **(He looks at Sadesh's face and then speaks)** Okay then, I have to attend to something urgent.

**Sadash:** Please, do pay us a visit. Have a talk with Bapuji. He likes you.

**Kartar Chand:** I will, surely.

**(Kartar Chand walks away slowly. Sadash keeps watching him depart)**

## Scene 7

**(Saroj is busy in household chores. Her face wears expressions of anger and anxiety. Kanta enters)**

**Kanta:** What is the matter with you? I have entered your home and you don't notice.

**Saroj:** **(Looking backwards)** Oh, is it Kanta? Come, sit here **(pointing to a chair)**. Do be seated.

**Kanta:** **(Sitting down on the chair)** Yes, surely. When I have come to you, I must sit here for a while.

**Saroj:** **(Taking the other chair)** I was so busy in the house; I didn't notice you.

**Kanta:** I had not seen you for many days. It came to my mind to see if all is well with you.

**Saroj:** What to do, dear. This house keeps me awfully busy. I too want to go out. But where is the time?

**Kanta:** One has to find time for self. The household allows no rest.

**Saroj:** The whole day is gone in doing small tasks. I don't know what to do about it. You deal with one problem and another stands before you.

**Kanta:** **(Thoughtfully)** These very problems take away peace of one's mind. But what can one do about them.

**Saroj:** What's wrong with you, dear? You look a little sad.

**Kanta:** Nothing in particular, dear.

**Saroj:** Don't tell me, if you feel like it. Sharing one's problems lightens the burden on mind.

**Kanta:** Have I ever kept any secret from you?

**Saroj:** I didn't mean that.

**Kanta:** Little and big things keep happening in a home.

**Saroj:** Did you have a tiff with Jijaji?

**Kanta:** I don't know what to do. He does not listen to me. He does what comes to his mind.

**Saroj:** I see –

**Kanta:** That it is.

**Saroj:** You should have reasoned with him amicably.

**Kanta:** Does he understand? I talk to him and he picks a fight with me.

**Saroj:** He does not look like that to me, dear.

**Kanta:** Don't go by his looks. He has squandered all our savings. If I tell him anything, he does the opposite of it.

**Saroj:** How have your savings been squandered?

**Kanta:** Some two years ago, his eldest brother must have needed money. Bhaiya asks, he gives away three lakh rupees to him! He did not even ask me. When I got the wind of it, I told him to get back our money. But he did not heed me **(begins to whimper)**.

**Saroj:** Please calm down. Don't cry.

**Kanta:** What else would I do if not cry. We have just nothing left. He cares not the least for his own family. But at one call of his brother, he goes running to offer help.

**Saroj:** I am amazed!

**Kanta:** If his own family asks for anything, he turns a deaf ear. The shop has to be replenished. We are under huge debt. I told him it has been long since we loaned money to Bhaiya; tell him to return the money as we are in need ourselves.

**Saroj:** That was correct.

**Kanta:** At first, he was reluctant to go to Bhaiya. With great difficulty I persuaded him to go. Then the same thing happened as I had feared.

**Saroj:** What happened? Did he refuse to pay?

**Kanta:** Bhaiya said neither yes, nor no. He said he did not have money at the moment. Whenever he has it, he would pay.

**Saroj:** That is not the way to behave. He has been owing you the money for such a long time. He should have repaid it without asking. But if Jijaji was constrained to ask him, he should have cleared the debt on the spot, like a gentleman.

**Kanta:** **(In anxiety)** You tell me what I should do. Our business is going down. Then there is this huge burden of debt. I find him worried most of the time. Children are growing up. Their expenses are rising by the day.

**Saroj:** Gather all his brothers and hold a meeting. Put the eldest brother to shame. May be he pays up then.

**Kanta:** I feel he has turned dishonest. He is doing pretty well. The amount that he has to pay is not too big for him.

**Saroj:** No one can tell when a person turns dishonest.

**Kanta:** You are correct. That is what perturbs me.

**Saroj:** Then do what I have told you.

**Kanta:** I will tell my husband and see how he reacts.

**Saroj:** Don't just tell him, do it!

**Kanta:** But he has to agree first.

**Saroj:** Make him agree. If you fail, then think of your money as gone. Better forget about the whole matter.

**Kanta:** Can one forget such a big amount?

**Saroj:** Then take courage. If he does not agree to pay up before his brothers, then take the matter before the Panchayat. If the issue still unresolved, you will have to take him to court. Except that, there is no way out.

**Kanta:** I don't know what to do. It's all our own fault.

**(Sumit's entry)**

**Sumit:** Mummy, Mummy, Dadaji is asking for tea.

**Saroj:** He is the one I can't cope with! Now he asks for one thing, and then for another. He keeps making demands all the day. How am I to attend to other tasks?

**Kanta:** That is the problem with the aged. We face the same problem at our house too. He has just to utter a word and expects the thing to be done the same moment.

**Saroj:** We intend to send Sumit to Dalhousie for studies.  
But he is creating obstacles.

**Kanta:** What does he say?

**Saroj:** He says Sumit is not to be sent to Dalhousie for studies.

**Kanta:** But what difference does it make to him?

**Saroj:** Nothing. It is his nature to create problems, interfere in everything. To see his wishes are carried out.

**Kanta:** It is good that the boy is sent to a better school. He will make his life there. Your father-in-law should understand.

**Saroj:** Understand he does not. How can we reason with him? He has made our lives miserable.

**Kanta:** My sister has also sent her son to Dalhousie for studies.

**Saroj:** Is it?

**Kanta:** We also want to send our younger son there. It will be good for his career. As for us, we have passed our lives the way we did. **(Leaving)** I must leave now, dear.

**Saroj:** Sit with me for a while longer, please.

**Kanta:** No, I can't. I have to attend to many things. **(Turning back)** You do send away your child. Don't change your mind. **(She exits while speaking)**

## Scene 8

**(Evening time. Ramdas on his walk on a lonely road. Divan Chand comes behind him)**

**Ramdas:** (Hearing Divan Chand's footfall, he looks back) O, it is you! (He pauses)

**Divan Chand:** I was delayed a bit. Had to walk faster to be with you.

**Ramdas:** We are here almost at the same time. I too have arrived just now.

**Divan Chand:** Walking fast at this age creates problems. I get out of breath; my legs begin to tremble.

**Ramdas:** Divan Chand ji, what else would happen at this age? The same breathlessness, the same trembling of legs.

**Divan Chand:** You are right. Nothing except this. In youth I had much fun. What was there I did not do. You have been a witness all along.

**Ramdas:** I know everything, Bhai ji. You did have your flings.

**Divan Chand:** Ha HaHaHa You are right. Youth is like that. No thinking, just doing. That was it. Doing without a thought. We used to go the Canal-side every day to have our quota of the desi. After gulping down a couple of drinks with Luddru's chana snacks, we came home.

**Ramdas:** They say Laddru made delicious chana snacks.

**Divan Chand:** Master ji, did you ever taste his chana?

**Ramdas:** No, I never went there. But I have heard his fame.

**Divan Chand:** It was not in your luck, and you didn't. That too is a matter of destiny, Master ji.

**Ramdas:** You are right. Man gets nothing beyond his destiny. I feel bad about my destiny. Anyway, it is not like that. What I strove for, I got. Yet there have been things that remain buried in my heart. It does not matter now.

**Divan Chand:** You have become serious. I was only joking. What is the matter? Is everything okay with you?

**Ramdas:** There is nothing like that. Little and big things keep happening. Let us talk of something else.

**Divan Chand:** Please don't burden yourself with secrets. Share your problems with me. It will ease your heart.

**Ramdas:** You are right in what you say. But mind has its own way to work. Sometimes things come out of their own, and there are times when one can't say a word, even if one wants to.

**Divan Chand:** Even then –

**Ramdas:** The things about the family. How much one should share with others and how much should be kept with oneself.

**Divan Chand:** Whatever you can share, do share. As for me, I keep nothing to burden my mind.

**Ramdas:** Is that so?

**Divan Chand:** What else? How many domestic affairs do I share with you!

**Ramdas:** Yes, you do, occasionally.

**Divan Chand:** An open-minded person, that is me. Neither I let myself be bound in constraints, nor do I try to bind anyone else.

**Ramdas:** Well, that sounds good.

**Divan Chand:** I allow my children to do what comes to their mind. Never have I imposed my will on them.

**Ramdas:** Still, one has to speak out when one sees something is going wrong.

**Divan Chand:** Yes, certainly, you must speak out. But don't bother yourself too much about it. You don't have to worry. When your children grow up, they understand what is right or wrong for them.

**Ramdas:** Everyone has his own way of thinking, Divan Chand ji.

**Divan Chand:** Master ji, ever since I married off two of my sons, I stopped questioning them or asking them for anything. Both of them have their own businesses. They are content and so am I. But if ever they ask, I happily give them my suggestions.

**Ramdas:** You are very lucky.

**Divan Chand:** God's mercy, sir. In fact, I don't like anyone interfering with my way of life. That is why I refrain from interfering with others.

**Ramdas: (Pausing at a spot)** It is evening. Time we should leave.

**Divan Chand:** How time flies. It is getting dark, really. I have to go somewhere else too. I will be reaching home rather late. It does not matter.

**Ramdas:** Well, then. See you again.

**Divan Chand:** Tomorrow. Precisely at this time.

**(He walks ahead)**

**Ramdas:** Who has seen tomorrow. Who knows what will happen the next moment. What man thinks does not happen, and what does happen he cannot think of. That is the truth. One must abide by it. Time to go home.

**(Ramdas slowly walks towards his home.  
Darkness begins to spread faintly)**



## Scene 9

**(Morning time. Ramdas is ready for the day. His face shows anxiety. Sadesh enters with a cup of tea)**

- Sadesh:** Bapu ji, have tea. **(He puts the teacup on the teapoy)**
- Sadesh:** Why were you late last night?
- Ramdas:** My walk took some time. I spent some more time sitting there.
- Sadesh:** It should not have taken that long.
- Ramdas:** What is there for me if I come home early? I get bored sitting here all through the day.
- Sadesh:** Oh, that is the problem. Still, you should try to be home on time. We get worried.
- Ramdas:** I will think about that.
- Sadesh:** You did not have meals last night.
- Ramdas:** I did not feel like it. I cannot digest even the mid-day meal.
- Sadesh:** Please do have tea. I will bring you some breakfast.
- Ramdas:** I don't feel like eating just now.
- Sadesh:** Why don't you feel like eating? You did not eat even at night.
- Ramdas:** I will eat later.
- Sadesh:** Eat less, but you must eat.  
**(exit Sadesh)**
- Ramdas:** **(Picks up the teacup, then leaves it)** I don't want to have anything in this house now. I have eaten much – but no more eating, nor shall I stay here. I will look for a shelter somewhere else.

**(The sound of the song emerges gradually. Ramdas takes rounds of the room at a slow pace)**

I took hold of my mind's run  
All excesses did I try to shun  
No mirth I ever had, no fun  
I did all that had to be done  
Fruitless has been that strife  
In which I wasted all my life  
Shattered lie dreams of mine  
This home's no longer mine  
O, it truly is no longer mine

**Ramdas:** **(Standing)** Home! Whose home? This home is now for those who are to live here. I am only a guest. How long have I to live? I have lived my life the way I lived. Only those who live here know about this home. But when shall I be free from the worldly ties? Who can tell? Perhaps no one. I feel suffocated here. I want to go away and be free from this place.

**(Kartar Chand enters the room)**

**Kartar Chand:** Master ji, namaste!

**Ramdas:** Who is there? O, this is Kartar Chand. **(Points towards the chair)**

**Kartar Chand:****(Keeps standing)** Master ji, it is all right. I am fine.

**Ramdas:** Be seated, my friend. I am straightening up my stiff legs.

**Kartar Chand:** I will better speak to you standing.

**Ramdas:** You are here after a long time. What are you doing these days?

**Kartar Chand:**I have been thinking of seeing you. But I did not get time.

**Ramdas:** Yes, one hardly finds time these days. No one is free.

**Kartar Chand:**Office work has increased. We have a new boss. He is strict a bit.

**Ramdas:** If he is strict about work, that is fine.

**Kartar Chand:**Master ji, he rebukes the employees even on matters not concerning office. Everybody in the office is tired of him.

**Ramdas:** There are officers who are harsh by nature.

**Kartar Chand:**But this man is the limit. He spares no one.

**Ramdas:** We have to adjust ourselves to the nature of the officer.

**Kartar Chand:**You are right. **(After a pause)** Mater ji, I have come today to speak to you.

**Ramdas:** **(Showing anxiety)** Yes, yes, what is it about?

**Kartar Chand:**Sadesh was saying you seem to be annoyed.

**Ramdas:** Annoyed? Me? Why should I get annoyed with him?

**Kartar Chand:**Sadesh and his wife want to send Sumit to Dalhousi for schooling.

**(Sadesh enters the room and stands in a corner)**

**Ramdas:** That is good. Whether he studies in Dalhousie or in Mussoorie, he is their child. It is for them to decide. Who am I to interfere?

**Kartar Chand:** You have every right. You are the elder of the family. They cannot do anything without consulting you.

**Ramdas:** There was a time when such things happened. But no longer. Times have changed.

**Kartar Chand:** They will not take any decision without asking you. If they want to send the child there, you should give your blessings. It is good that the child should get better education.

**Ramdas:** Kartar Chand ji, why should I be annoyed? Whether education is good or bad at some place is not the question. It is not necessary that I should agree with your opinion. In the same manner, others may not agree with me as well.

**(Kartar Chand looks at Sadesh. Sadesh goes away)**

**Kartar Chand:** You are angry inside.

**Ramdas:** You are repeating yourself.

**Kartar Chand:** I have known you since long.

**Ramdas:** Then listen.

**Kartar Chand:** I am listening.

**Ramdas:** Most of the things happening now in this house are not to my liking. I raised this house with much hard work. There is nothing more that I wish to say. The end of the matter is that I don't want to live in this house anymore. I have been thinking of it for quite some time. But what held me was a sense of shame.

**Kartar Chand:** What do you mean?

**Ramdas:** I mean what I have said. I have tolerated much in this house. But not anymore. I can bear it no more.

**Kartar Chand:** Master ji, please don't do any such thing. I am going to Sadesh and will speak to you when I am back.

**(He walks hurriedly towards the interior of the house. There are signs of anxiety on his face)**

## Scene 10

**(Sadesh and Saroj are busy talking in their room)**

**Sadesh:** Have you assembled Sumit's luggage?

**Saroj:** Yes, I have gathered everything that came to my mind. Still, I will have a second look.

**Sadesh:** Yes, have a look. See that all the warm clothing is there.

**Saroj:** I have already done that.

**Sadesh:** I know you well. Half the things are left behind any time we go out.

**Saroj:** Refrain from your fault-finding at least once. You have spent your life criticising me.

**Sadesh:** Seeing the way you work half-heartedly, what else one can do?

**Saroj:** If it is not in my luck to get credit, I won't get it, whatever I do.

**Sadesh:** This is no time for idle argument. Go, check the luggage a second time.

**Saroj:** You spoil my mood. What can be done! That is the routine in this house. **(She checks the luggage).**

He has to pick up some minor issue and won't let it go.

**Sadesh:** Now keep quiet. Will you?

**(Kartar Chand enters the room. He senses the tension on overhearing some words of the couple)**

**Kartar Chand:**(Eyeing all sides of the room) What is going on?

**Sadesh:** It is you, Kartar Chand?

**Kartar Chand:**Yes, it is me. Why do you look surprised? Is everything well with you?

**Sadesh:** Yes, I am quite well. **(Pointing to a chair)** Be seated.

**Kartar Chand:** No, I won't.

**Saroj:** Why won't you sit down, Bhaiya?

**Kartar Chand:**There is no need. I feel comfortable standing.

**Sadesh:** Okay...what does he say?

**Kartar Chand:**He is in great rage.

**Sadesh:** Is he?

**Kartar Chand:**Yes.

**Sadesh:** Is there a way we may calm him down?

**Kartar Chand:**You will have to find a way.

**Sadesh:** What should we do?

**Kartar Chand:**Convince him. Persuade him.

**Sadesh:** What if he does not agree?

**Kartar Chand:**In that case you will have to delay your move for some time.

**Saroj:** No, Bhaiya! That won't be possible. We have taken a decision and we stand by it.

**Kartar Chand:**I think you should speak to him again.

**Saroj:** How many times shall we speak to him! He refuses to listen.

**Kartar Chand:**I feel he will agree this time.

**Saroj:** I don't see any hope.  
**Sadesh:** You never think positively. That is the problem with you.  
**Karchar Chand:** If you listen to me, please don't send away the child for the time being.  
**Sadesh:** Saroj won't budge. That is the problem. On the one side is he, and on the other is she. I am upset.  
**Kartar Chand:** Come with me. We will speak to him again.

**(Kartar Chand leaves with Sadesh by his side. Saroj watches them leaving)**

## Scene 11

**(Ramdas strolling in his room in deep thought. Music, which fades out. Then Ramdas talking to himself)**

**Ramdas:** I won't stay here anymore. I have had enough of it. It is just not possible for me to put up with them. My ties with this house have come to an end. I got along with them as long as I could. I did it with all my heart. But these young people cannot stand an old man like me. They would hardly show any sympathy even if I were bed-ridden. Being young, they don't like the old. They don't like what I like. They don't like the way I talk. If I speak out my mind as the elder of the house, they feel bad. It never comes to their mind to take my opinion when I am available in the house. Now, if they do not like anything about me, why should I go on staying with them? I must go away. My station is

with the people who are old like me. **(He takes out his clothes from the cupboard and put them on the teapoy. Then he looks at them for some time. Music fades in as he puts his clothes in a bag)** I must carry a towel. Four changes of dress would be enough. Yes, they would suffice. What do I need more clothes for? I can wash them as the need arises. I have to pass time this way or that. And so shall I. **(He notices his bank passbook and picks it up)** Yes, the passbook I must keep with me. I will need it. **(Ramdas dangles the bag on his shoulder and then fondly looks around the room. His eyes are tearful, which he wipes with his handkerchief. Then he begins to walk outwards.)** The strains of the song emerge: This home's no longer mine/O, it truly is no longer mine/This home's no longer mine/O, it truly is no longer mine...

**( Sadesh and Kartar Chand enter the room. They show anxiety on disappearance of Ramdas. Looking at the open cupboard, they realize that he has left. They look at each other. The song fades out.)**

## **CURTAIN**



## POET IN FOCUS

### SHABNAM ASHAI

Translation by Iftikhar Imran

A well-known broadcaster and author of several books including *Akeli*, *Mai Sochti Hoon*, *Manbani*, *Catharsis*, *Manbavath* and *Man Mein Jami Barf*, Shabnam Ashai is an important feministic poetic voice from Kashmir. Her renditions of the condition of women in our society speak directly to the heart of her audience and she enjoys a broad readership in and outside Jammu and Kashmir. Her path-breaking work draws from the experience of women in the contemporary era and her grounding in existentialism. She has a PhD in philosophy and has extensively worked on alienation and angst, concepts closely related to the feminist philosophy of the past few decades.

Most of Ashai's poems are reflections rather than traditionally rendered verses which lends a fresh appeal to them. Her images and meanings are a culmination of an artistic journey not within the poet's mind and soul but a canvas of her feelings, thoughts and emotions as her persona is tossed by the waves of relationships. In this Ashai has attempted to break away from the canon and infuse a new life in her language while expressing intricate feelings and confronting the dilemmas and questions faced by a woman in personal and social life.

**1**

Who knows  
Where they lie buried?  
In the search for man  
My face  
Turned to stone.  
In the savage welter  
Of horrid animal shrieks  
I lost my voice.  
Do you even know  
The horror stones face  
And stifled self beget?  
And if you do,  
What are you waiting for?  
Aren't you God?

**2**

If your love  
Plaited my soul,  
Wouldn't I knead  
My loneliness with ink?  
Kneading loneliness  
I have passed over  
Making bread.

Isn't it unlike a woman?  
How do I get over  
The shock of disbelief?  
I pull myself together,  
My journey is no fancy.  
The door to my home  
Has long stayed barred.

**3**

Should I shed tears  
Or write my lay?  
Tears will rummage my soul,  
And the lay my heart.  
Should I wash up  
Or cheer up?  
Otherwise despair  
Will break my anklet  
And set my feet on some  
Other arduous journey.

**4**

The dark dawn cracks  
Again.  
Again I will stumble  
And shatter into pieces.

If death tied its noose  
Around my neck,  
I would be blessed...

**5**

You know,  
One of your creations  
No thought,  
No mind,  
No home  
Could hold?  
Aimlessly and destitute,  
It wandered  
Through this passing world.  
You know,  
One of your creations,  
Not a wily buck on it  
To care for bread  
Or love –  
This creation of yours –  
Is suffering loneliness  
Just like you?

**6**

Imagination,

Experience,  
Grief,  
Joy.  
All fall silent  
When  
Alien faces appear  
In kindred visages.

7

In this world of yours  
Where no one allays pain,  
Who will alleviate  
The hurt that words cause?  
In my afflicted heart  
The word's sting  
Festers  
And woe –  
Most beloved to me.  
Dreams thrive here  
Before they too fester.  
How long does it take  
Your universe,  
Your undreamt dreams come true,  
To light up its wound?  
Is there a niche

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In your universe  
Where the wound itself numbs?

**8**

You had your way.  
And in my arms  
I clasped death.  
Ever since I  
Haven't been in your palace,  
I live in death's balm.  
If you and I  
Were we  
And we,  
The sad symphony of us,  
Life wouldn't have  
Disposed of you and me.  
Nor would you and I  
Be lost as we are  
In this deep gloom  
Of unknown graves.

**9**

Darkness and I –  
No path in sight,  
No destination,

No way,  
No dream,  
No knock at the door,  
No longing,  
No word,  
No song,  
No music,  
No voice.  
Nothing, O Lord,  
But You.

**10**

This sopping blotting paper  
That my life is,  
No fibre of my being  
Can absorb any more.  
Fate in all its hues  
Have slurred me with blots,  
Each blot an open eye,  
Every view  
Covered with webs.  
Where are the spiders?

**11**

Living to humour

One and all,  
I was divorced from me.  
Anyone can now  
Redden my forehead  
With the sindoor  
Of folly or flippancy.  
No matter whether he  
Be a barbarian  
Or the devil himself.  
Stripped of my self  
I am but a void.

**12**

Storm,  
Lightning,  
Hail –  
All your divine will.  
Why should I shelter me  
From their calamity?  
Why not collapse?  
All are possessed  
By pomp and pageantry.  
If the elements  
Don't fix their whims,  
How will we figure

79



What to wear and when?  
Your Lordship beyond my ken,  
Humankind baffles me.

**13**

You in me  
Could have taken seed,  
Blossomed,  
Flourished,  
And blended.  
I am fecund earth  
Not a casino table  
That  
With your bet on me,  
You can win  
Or go bust.

**14**

It is iffy who  
Was duped – I or you.  
Living with betrayal  
Is beyond the pale,  
For you  
As for me.  
The stars are too distant,

For me  
As for you.  
The pith of life is death,  
For you  
As for me.  
Then why don't you  
Or, for that matter, I  
Call betrayal fate  
And unburden life.

**15**

I never withheld you  
From living your life,  
Your passion,  
Your resentment.  
Even then you grudge  
Me my daily bread?  
You have no scruples  
About your lies,  
Pomp and ire.  
I only need air  
And a crumb of bread  
To hang on to life.  
Seeing you around  
Is my spur for life.

When before your eyes  
I bite the dust,  
How do you justify  
And see it fit to live?

**16**

I guess it was only you  
Whose rib I rose from  
To step on this earth.  
Yes!  
I came from your left rib  
To ease your loneliness.  
I guess it was only you  
Who pulled out  
My forty-year old roots,  
To sow me in your garden.  
I guess it was only you  
With whom I spent  
My life's fleeting days.  
I guess it was only you,  
When you were my attire,  
Befitted me second to none.  
I guess it was only you  
Who disrobed me  
And took me unclad to court.

I guess it was only you  
Who snatched  
The roof from my head  
And made me  
A derelict of the streets.  
I guess it was only you  
Whose jugular vein  
I was.  
And it is you  
For whose sake  
I was severed  
From your neck.

**17**

Toxic words,  
Like vicious nights,  
Plunder peace of mind  
And shape our destiny too.  
The venom in the tongue  
Stops not at the ear,  
It passes into the blood.  
When it stings  
Body and soul at once,  
Where to find love?  
A single drop of you

**83**

Can still save me.  
You are the only one  
Who can give  
Life to being  
And drain out life's poison –  
You, God...  
You are the only one  
Who can string  
Breath with breath,  
Steer the boat of life –  
You, pilot...

**18**

Fugitive shoes  
Slipped me on,  
Conjured up a journey.  
With me is my silence,  
A tastelessness.  
The rest –  
Dreams, love, fidelity,  
Sleep –  
All lie abandoned  
In some feudal corner!  
Loyalty is more  
Munificent than silence,

It gains real value  
When the feet get blisters.  
Like the peacock  
I look at my feet  
And cry.  
Return to me my steps.  
Before I die,  
I want to sow my heart  
Somewhere.

**19**

He quarrels nonetheless  
Though I keep mum.  
I don't even tell him  
That I have enjoyed  
The affectionate shade  
Of all those books that dazzled  
With a world of beautiful thoughts,  
And answers too –  
Now arrayed on my shelves.  
My honey-wonted tongue  
Without demur to taste  
Gulps down insults.  
He quarrels nonetheless.  
I don't even tell him

I have travelled distances  
That would make for roads  
Stretching acres of land.  
Never do I tell him  
That many in the world  
Offer better shade  
That thousands of trees  
Will fail to provide.  
He quarrels nonetheless.

**20**

Never did I ask him  
To fix my problems.  
I knew  
I was no dream of his,  
Nor principle.  
He would live on with  
His dreams and principles,  
Remiss in family duty.  
He sure opened my door  
And left saying,  
'Why are you blackening the sheets?'  
He never stays...  
Or he would hear my voice.  
'To keep you unsullied

By not killing myself,  
I blacken these sheets.’  
He wanted to rest assured  
That I did not think.  
Thinking, still I kept  
His house in perfect order  
And adorned his space.  
For my crime –  
My sadness, my silence –  
He reviled me  
For not being human  
And left.  
He never stays...  
Would that he knew sadness  
Was the sunshine in my yard  
And silence my words’ shade  
And in this sun and shade  
I have grown up.  
He knows not even this.  
He never stays...

\*\*\*



## POETRY

### PRAMODE JAIN

#### I WAIT FOR A PEACOCK

All mornings, slow and unending  
I spend breathing the air's freshness,  
    Feeling the roses' aroma  
    Talking to grass green  
And listening to fruit trees.  
    Thanks to the lockdown.

    Lazy afternoons  
I spend under a *loquat* tree:  
Eying the fruit's youthfulness,  
Wondering when they ripen  
    And fall into my lap.  
    Thanks to the lockdown.

There is now a *koel* in my neighbourhood,

A squirrel in my lawn and  
A lizard in my kitchen garden.  
Shrikes and pigeons fly through the day.  
I now wait for a peacock in my backyard.  
Thanks to the lockdown.

\*\*\*

### **ALL LIFE**

All life is inter-connected,  
Inter-dependant,  
Joined by time, space and eternity,  
So spoke the ancient sages.  
So is all death and disease  
Not separated by artificial bounds.  
  
O ye, wise men and women of gravitas,  
Would you survive death and disease?  
And vote for health and life-  
Not just yours, ours,  
But of all snakes, rats, dogs, cockroaches and eels,  
We ate so gleefully?

Nay, of all species,  
Big or small,  
All of Nature's creations  
From elephant to moss  
Whale to grass  
All living cells, actually.  
And seek their forgiveness, pray for their life and peace,  
Save their souls,  
In future, forever.  
In true spirit of truce and armistice,  
For your survival, my survival,  
To prevent the Armageddon and delay the doomsday.

\*\*\*

## **DREAM**

I dream...  
I dream of you,  
And dream that you dream of me,  
Your company, comfort and solace:  
The unspoken words, the soothing embrace,  
The nectar of togetherness,  
And feeling truly blessed.  
I dream of you,  
Playing in my heart,  
At the back of my memory lane  
Spoilt only by time  
And fading memory...  
I dream of you,  
And the missed chance  
And all that followed...  
Memories still fresh.  
And dream still real...

\*\*\*

## VENGEANCE

I live a life of vengeance.

I spoil my mood, daily.

I lose my peace,

Like the loss of virginity.

A soul is singed,

A scar refuses to heal.

I seek healing

And the soul is constipated by an overdose.

Neither vengeance is done

Nor my virginity restored.

Two worlds lose.

Catharsis takes over.

My today is gone,

Tomorrow is still-born,

Prematurely.

A veritable tragicomedy.

\*\*\*

## THE BEGGAR ON SATURDAY

Every Saturday I plan a leisurely breakfast-

Relaxed, slow, lavish.

But alas!

A few drops of oil spoil the sport! Always.

And then there is the beggar

The weekly one,

Saturday Walla.

Shani Walla, to be more accurate.

He looks forward to a bucket full of mustard oil

And promises good luck

In return.

After all, who wants Saturn's wrath?

Not a beggar, actually.

He is half a step above

In the famed Sanskritization ladder.

He invokes Saturn,

And presses the doorbell

The moment I put the first morsel in my mouth.  
Invariably.

Ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong.  
And a thunderous knocks too.  
Hurried and frantic,  
Punctual and steadfast.

He is always in a hurry, yes,  
Tearing hurry.  
Always. Without fail. Every Saturday.  
That's his brand image.

He hopes for a bowl of mustard oil  
And promises good luck in return.  
After all, who wants Shani's wrath?  
Some bad karma catching up.  
Perhaps.

\*\*\*

## SAQLAIN MUSHTAQ

### HEART BEAT

In the morning of a fine day in July  
an ambulance disappeared  
with the heartbeats of my mother  
and in the sunny afternoon, same day  
I carried the corpse of my mother  
upon my shoulders—

my mother used to see my manly shoulders  
as weak and childish, though I wasn't,  
she must have abhorred the idea of  
her weight on my shoulders,  
she must have cried,  
'No my baby boy, let me be carried by other shoulders,  
yours must be hurt by now!'

And in the late afternoon, when the grave



yawned  
and swallowed the corpse of my mother  
I couldn't help it, no one can  
and I thought and thought and thought—  
  
heartbeats are important  
at least they prevent you,  
from being an orphan!

\*\*\*

