

Words, *Words* and Words

Dr. Khalid Sohail & Sain Sucha

Words, *Words* and **Words**

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Dedication

To the ever rejuvenating memory of all those friends who started with us on the life train but stepped off it at various junctions;

and,

To all those co-travellers who aspire for a better world built upon human effort and understanding.

PREFACE

We write words to convey a message from one person to another!

The way sentences are constructed and arranged, and the content of the final product decides how we, in a literary sense, would call it a poem, a story, an essay or just some other means of communication. Then there is rhyme and rhythm, comedy and tragedy, fact or fiction – all that composed of words in one form or another.

Both, Khalid Sohail and I have used words over a very long period. Both of us are natural scientists who with the passage of time felt a greater attraction for sociological and philosophical topics than pure scientific work. We have tried to express in words what life has taught us, so far.

Both of us believe in Humanism as the ultimate solution for our co-existence with other people and all that exists on the planet Earth.

This joint venture caters our thoughts in three different forms. It is up to the readers to decide in which order they prefer to read the book. As long as there is some sort of response – positive or negative – we would cherish the opinion of our readers.

Toronto, Canada & Sollentuna, Sweden

Khalid Sohail & Sain Sucha

November, 2016.

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Poetry

Khalid Sohail

A Darvesh Is Born

*One Saturday morning
when he woke up
he felt so light
he could easily fly like a bird in the air
or
swim like a fish in the ocean
He had been experiencing
subtle but profound changes in himself
changes so subtle
nobody could observe them
but so profound
he could not ignore them anymore
When he got out of bed
he felt like
a cool breeze of the morning
When he looked into the mirror
he smiled
and spontaneously kissed himself
he had never done that ever before
That morning
he became acutely aware
his beard had turned grey
making him look wiser*

*When he went for a walk
and saw flowers in the park
rather than plucking them for his sweetheart
he let them smile
so that they could experience
their natural life*

*When he sat near the lake
he could
feel the cool breeze
and hear
the sound of the waves
He felt in tune with his environment
He had never realized
rocks and flowers and wind and water could communicate
He felt like a child
who played for hours
with leaves and rocks and sand on the beach
While walking on the lakeside
he saw
the sea-gulls and the geese
He went close to them
and was surprised
they did not fly away
He offered them seeds
and they ate*

*right from his palm
When he touched their wings
they looked at him
with friendly eyes
as if asking.
Do you want to borrow them?
When he looked around
he saw a little boy
standing quietly
watching him feed the birds
Although
there was no exchange of words
yet
there was perfect communication
between him, little boy and the birds
They were in harmony with each other
After a few minutes
when the little boy
saw his mother
he ran
and the birds flew away
and he came home
That evening
rather than reading ten stories
he read one story*

*but re-read it many times
until
he felt in touch
with the essence of the story
and the soul of the writer
That night
when he was in bed
with his sweetheart
he gently kissed her eyes
rather than
passionately kissing her lips,
“Don’t you want to make love to me?”
she asked in a tremulous voice
“No” he said
for the first time in his life
“Don’t you love me anymore?”
she had tears in her eyes
He kissed her tears affectionately
kept quiet
and after a few minutes
fell asleep in her arms.*

A Social Butterfly

*There was a time I felt free
like a bird
who could fly where-ever he wanted
like a fish
who could swim anywhere in the ocean
like a cool breeze
who could kiss any flower in the garden
and flowers I kissed for years
roses and tulips and bleeding hearts
I was a social butterfly
I used to go to parties and flirt
flirt with
young women, old women
single women, married women
white women, black women
I flirted with them all
I used to believe in free love
And then I met a woman
who had
smiling eyes
and
a heart of gold
She offered me*

*a gift of love
treasure of commitment
bounty of intimacy
and I started to dance with her in ecstasy
She showed me
loving one woman in a meaningful way
was better than
flirting with dozens of women
So I fell in love
and grew in love
and enjoyed the gift of intimacy
I learnt to love
the soul than the body
the essence rather than the surface
When I stopped flirting
and loved one woman compassionately
I had more time
for my art and music
I created more
stories and poems and songs
It was a blissful life
But gradually I lost interest in romance
and was enticed by wisdom
I started to love her
more as a person than a woman*

*more as a friend than a lover
and that made her
frustrated and angry and resentful
She tried to ignite the spark
the spark she had killed
Finally she got so disillusioned
she left me one night
And now
after all those
years and decades and centuries
I have become
more contented as an artist
more peaceful as a saint
and lead a celibate life
while she feels free
like a bird
who can fly where-ever she wants
like a fish
who can swim anywhere in the ocean
like a cool breeze
who can kiss any flower in the garden
and flowers she has been kissing
roses and tulips and bleeding hearts
She goes to parties and flirts
flirts with*

young men, old men

single men, married men

white men, black men

she flirts with them all

She has become a social butterfly.

A Very Special Connection

You and I

Have a connection

A special connection

A very special connection

It is not a sexual, romantic or physical connection

It is rather an emotional, spiritual and creative connection

Such a connection

Cannot be defined

It transcends all definitions

It brings out the best in both

of us

As two human beings

We are not only connected to each other

We are also connected to other human

beings

With passage of time

More and more people are becoming aware

Each human being is connected to the whole humanity

The way

Each tree is connected to the jungle

Each flower is connected to the garden

Each star is connected to the

galaxy

And
Each drop is connected to
the ocean
It is an intimate connection
A loving connection
A magical connection
A mystical connection
A sacred connection
A human connection
One day we will realize
We are all
Part of the same family
The human family.

Appreciating What You Are Not

It might be easy

To describe a glass half full

But very difficult

To talk about a glass half empty

Realizing that the glass is both

Half full and half empty

My buddy,

It might be easy

To describe what you are

But very difficult

To define what you are not

Knowing very well that you are both

My love,

You are wonderful

And

I adore what you are

And appreciate what you are not

I am aware

That what you are not

Is as significant as what you are

I cherish those parts of yourself

And even being a writer and a poet

I cannot describe them

Maybe there are times

You can see them in my smiling eyes

Feel them in my gentle touch

Experience them in my passionate kisses

Or...

Apprehension

I am afraid

The noise of the outside world

Will drown one day

The music inside

Mother Earth Is Calling

O my children !

O my dear children!

O my seven billion children !

You are hurting

Your are in pain

You are suffering

It breaks my heart to see you suffer

All of you are my children

Whether you are

from the North or the South

from the East or the West

Whether you are

Men or women

Black or white

Healthy or sick

Normal or abnormal

Ordinary or extra-ordinary

Over-privileged or underprivileged

Rich or poor

You are all my children

And a mother loves all her children

O my children !

Now you are entering the 21st century

*I feel concerned
I feel worried
You are well aware
A mother always worries about her children
Even when they are grown up
I am afraid
You might hurt yourself
You might kill yourself
You might commit collective suicide by civil wars
and nuclear weapons
I know you are intelligent and smart
But I am not sure whether you are wise enough yet
I know
Wisdom comes far later than knowledge
My children
You have divided yourself in
Nations and cultures, religions and sects
And you have been fighting wars, holy wars
Killing your enemies
Not knowing they are your brothers and sisters
You are all my children
Children of Mother Earth
I have been here for centuries and millennia
Far before you were born
O my children !*

*I want to tell you a story
You know
Mothers like telling stories to her children
You might be old
But you are still my children
So please listen to the story carefully
It might entertain you
It might even enlighten you
And bring you some peace
O my children !
There was a time on earth
A long time ago
A long long time ago
When you, my children
Had created
Matriarchal societies
When you were proud
Of being children of Mother Earth
When you were proud
Of your motherland and mother tongue
That is when you lived in love and peace and harmony
That was the time
You were young and naïve
You had not figured out
The mystery of birth*

*You did not know
How children were born
In every village
Some women had children
Others did not
When children were born
They called all women mothers
A child was raised by the whole village
Children were showered by love
By all women
And they grew up to be loving adults
But then some men
Some very smart men
Figured out the mystery of birth
They figured out they were the fathers of those children
So they wanted to give their names to their children
And wanted to own their mothers
They did not want other men to touch them
So they had duels
To keep other men away from those mothers
Even in their children
They liked boys more than girls
They wanted to give their property to their sons
That was the beginning of a patriarchal society
Those mothers*

*Who loved their children
Kept quiet
They did not want to argue or fight
They were peace loving women
They loved all their children equally
But men took advantage of them
They controlled them and abused them
They deprived them of their rights and privileges
They deprived them of their properties
They made laws to protect their own rights and privileges
and properties
They created governments
And became presidents and prime ministers
To protect their political rights
And if that was not enough
They became priests and pundits, maulanas and rabbis
And created Heavenly Father
To protect their religious rights
That Heavenly Father
Never talked to women
Only to men, Holy Men
And delivered divine revelations
In which
Women were second class citizens
Men created patriarchal systems*

*To protect
Their property rights and political rights and religious rights
But that Heavenly Father
With passage of time
Became powerful
Too powerful
And you know
Power corrupts people, even gods
That Heavenly Father
Became angry and revengeful
And made laws
That were unjust
He judged people
Declared them sinners
And sent them to Hell
And eternal damnation
And those men
Priests and pundits, maulanas and rabbis
Used Heavenly Father
And divine revelations
To start wars, holy wars
Killing people, spilling blood
Followers of each religion and sect, nation and culture
Insisted they were the chosen ones
Of that Heavenly Father*

O my children !
O my seven billion children !
I have been watching this for centuries
I have been watching it quietly
But my cup of patience is overflowing now
I cannot stay silent any longer
I cannot see my children suffer anymore
I came to tell you
That Heavenly Father is an illusion
Created by men
Created by priests and pundits, maulanans and rabbis
To justify their power
To rationalize their control
Time has come
For this drama to end
Before it is too late
This patriarchy has to end
O my children !
O my dear children !
You have to say good bye to Heavenly Father
And come back to your Mother Earth
You are my children
I gave birth to you
You were born from my womb
And I will accept you

*When you die
In my bosom
You will rest in peace
O my children !
You need to realize
Heavenly Father is a fantasy
Mother Earth is a reality
Now you are old enough
To separate
Fantasy from reality
O my children !
O my seven billion children !
Time has come
For you to choose
Between
Your Heavenly Father
Who pushed you to violence and war
And
Your Mother Earth
Who is calling you
To a life of love and harmony and peace
And you have to choose
Before it is too late.*

Sharing Dreams With You

Yes, it was me, my Love

visiting you in your dreams

to kiss and hug and make

love

Yes, it was me, my Love

sharing my dreams with you

dreams

that build bridges over

mountains and valleys

jungles and deserts

cities and villages

rivers and oceans

separations and

disappointments

sad evenings and cheerful

mornings

Yes, it was me, my Love

making you believe

we are so far, yet so close

we can extend our hands and touch each other

we can extend our minds and kiss each other

we can extend our souls and embrace each other

*we can extend our dreams and make love with each
other*

*We are so lucky, my Love, to be so well connected
while there are others*

who share their beds

but not their dreams

who share their past

but not their

future

Yes, it was me, my Love

sharing my dreams of future

making you believe

we are so far yet so close.

Unfinished Novel

*Each human being
is an unfinished novel
that starts at birth
and is left unfinished
at death.*

*When two human beings
get involved in an intimate relationship
they start
writing a new novel together.*

*When three novels
are being written and lived simultaneously
plots thicken.*

*Some novels are short, others long
Some are artistic, others philosophical
Some are boring, others exciting
Some are harmonious, others full of conflicts*

*There are times
when we all feel
we are incomplete chapters
of an unfinished novel
the novel
that human beings*

*have been writing for centuries
each one of us is introduced
as a new character
but we have to write, act and direct
our own roles
and get involved
in intimate relationships
to create suspense.
The irony is
we can't rehearse our roles
or re-write our scripts.*

Wind, My Companion

Wind, my companion,

Taps on my shoulder, and whispers softly:

Come along, my lifelong companion

Pack your bags, prepare yourself

It's time to set out again

Let's climb the mountains together;

Let's wander through valleys and discover towns;

Let's explore the next chapter of life.

I listened and replied fondly:

Oh wind, my friend and companion

Your invitation sends a shiver down my spine;

My dormant pains are brought to the surface again.

Do you remember, oh merciless wind,

the journey of last year?

We walked together

On the narrow, crowded streets of the East.

We explored the highways of the West.

*Together we pegged our tents in scanty towns,
spent nights in posh hotels.*

We met people and families;

*We were welcomed and refused;
We did it all in our journey together
Oh wind, do you recall
The children longing for fresh air,
Left alone in streets, in hovels, and in shabby schools;*

*The elderly so lonely and helpless
Whose eyes mocked their loneliness;
Young, strong men,
Marching bravely forward with death riding right behind,
Women, degraded and oppressed
forced to accept submission in silence;
The blacks tortured and tormented
in their constant struggle for justice
And many families, falling apart from lack of roots
Running for so many years
watching their lives crumble amidst the bounty of their longing
prayers.*

*Oh wind, my friend,
is that what we wanted to see;
is that happiness and progress?*

*The wind listened with smiling eyes and said;
My friend, you are so innocent, so naive.*

What a coward!

*One journey and you go whimpering,
dejected and depressed.*

Look at me

Do you see me surrendering to the realities of life?

I have traversed these very roads for centuries.

Yet, wherever I go,

I sing a melody of joy,

*For you must know that the quitters will be trampled upon while the
song lives on.*

I teach little children to smile;

I encourage the oppressed women to fight for their rights.

My sweet songs take the elderly

to a happy time in their past

and their wounded hearts are soothed.

I blow my cool breeze

To soothe those oppressed behind bars.

Wherever I go, I see all, I face all

and I try to bring some form of light and hope

to my weary friends.

There is no place, no person, no situation

that will run away from a song of wisdom and peace.

I listened to the wind,

I heard its message.

*My strength returned,
My wounds began to heal.
I did not understand the whole truth
But I wanted to learn more.
I packed my bags and strapped my boots
And began to fly again with the wind.*

Words

are arrows--that pierce our hearts

are hooks--that retrieve our memories

are mirrors--that increase our awareness

are friends--that console us

are therapists--that transform us

are teachers--that liberate us

are lovers--that seduce us

Have you ever taken them seriously?

Have you ever embraced words?

Sain Sucha

The Wordist

Every night

When he reached his workshop
He locked all the doors and windows
And then went straight to his word-bushes
-- *Lexicono secretum*

And there they were:

Soft words, hard words, edged and rugged words
Words that heal and words that harm
Sweet words, bitter words, sour and acrid words
sharp and noxious words

Then

He plucked a handful of those words
Picked away all the hard, edged and nasty words
From the soft and warm words
he shaped lullabies and chants

Afterwards

He took a handful from the middle
Chose mellow, pretty and fragrant words
Paired them and threaded them upon a love-string
and created sonnets

At times

Blew in painful memories and rancid thoughts
Then the sharp words formed the shaft

While he laid the toxic words on the tip
and produced laments and elegies

But

When the inner light came after dark spells
With happy, joyful and glowing words
Waltzing, jumping and dancing words
he fashioned hymns and ballads

And then

As the night opened its arms to the dawn
He put back all the remaining words
Hid his word-bushes and went to the Poem Square
with his night-fresh produce

Truth

What is truth?

Is it

A rosary of shining edicts

Each perfectly cut and shaped

Sometimes revealed to the elect

At times bestowed upon the so-called son

Or

Occasionally claimed by some self-proclaimed messenger

Then

Each blinded by its glitter

Considering his set of commandments

to be the only Set

His way as the only Way

Or

His book as the only Book

Narrowed down the boundless human experience

To certain verses envisaged by the individual minds -

However appropriate in their local framework

They remain inadequate in the universal context

Or

Is it

A scattered treasure of elusive facts

That we must separate and pick, bit by bit

From the bog of ignorance and false beliefs
And after cleansing and polishing them
Match them against the prevailing order
And if they pass scrutiny and acid test
Then append them to the string of human awareness

But the legitimacy of each discovered fact
valid only
Till it is proven false or insufficient
By newer experiences and discoveries

Or
Perhaps it is
Through
Moments of amazing inspiration
Along with
Ages of laborious research

When
Archimedes cried out "Eureka"
Kekulé dreamt of the Benzene molecule
Billie Holiday sang the Strange Fruit
Moses conceived the Semitic dictates

While
Darwin formulated his theory of Natural Selection
Einstein calculated his theory of Relativity
Marie Curie discovered radium and polonium
Buddha toiled for a blissful Nirvana
That we came closer to truth

But

However you look at it

Truth can not be a personal possession

of any alleged heavenly or earthly being!

It is the collective pursuit and compilation of

human knowledge

Its findings

open to all for inquiry and authentication

Its fruits

available to all for storage and utilization

After all

Any truth that is not yet accessible

Remains irrelevant to us

Until

It is apprehended and comprehended

By the human mind

In the Hall of Mirrors

Every child is born innocent
With a clean sheath in the head
There is no feeling of hate or fear
For any
Caste, colour, race or religion
Only a natural love and affection
 For the woman who gave the birth

No child is born evil!

It is after the birth
The indoctrination starts
Adults feeding their own ideas of
 Love and hate
 Likes and dislikes
 Pros and cons
 Profits and losses

Those who are progressive
Teach their children
To
 Learn hungrily
 Think independently
 Question fearlessly
 Conclude intelligently

And

Those who are conformists

Command their children

To

Learn obediently

Think conventionally

Question carefully

Conclude submissively

In the Hall of Mirrors

Children are our own reflections

Keep your own faces clean

And see refreshing images!

New Year's Cocktail

Take a spacious goblet of blissful hope
Empty some bottles of sweet, sparkling wishes in it
Add a few bits of optimism and vivacity
Slash some slices of reason and understanding
 lay them in the bottom
Make a light purée of compassion and care
 pour it lovingly on the top
Let it stand and draw for a while

Then

Over the filter of scrutiny
Gently decant and remove
 impurities of hate, animosity and sectarianism
Allow the feelings of alienation and imprudence to evaporate

Thereafter

Put some cubes of soothing thoughts in the cocktail
With sanguinity sparkling in your eyes
Serve it tenderly with a smile on your face

And

Wish everybody a happy New Year!

To New Year

You would come
The way you always do
Carrying in your bag –

Sometimes a turbulent sea and an angry earth
Sometimes stormy winds or thunderous clouds
And then
Children weeping with burning hunger
Mothers sobbing with overwhelming pain
A widow's face ashen with grief
A father from whose arms his child is missing

Why, why just so much suffering in life?

If you look at the other way
There is sweet water running in the rivers
Verdant fields dance on the breast of earth
Cool breeze at the dawns, gentle drizzle by the midday
And then
Children giggling while they play
Eyes of their mothers replete of love
Henna's red flowers on a bride's palm
A father who raises his child's swing

So, when you come to us this time
Bring us a bag full of these joys!

In Praise of Shit

No matter who you are -
What position in society you hold
How much riches may you boast about
Which gender you belong to
Whatever is the colour of your skin
Whichever food goes down you stomach

If you are religious, atheist or agnostic
 Capitalist, socialist, opportunist
 Xenophobic, philanthropist, humanist
 Pious, sinner, just plain
 Heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual

It does not really matter -
At the end of the day
When the pants are pulled down
You all find yourself
Sitting on the same shit

Thus
Whatever your starters
The final product is the same
So,
Praise the shit
That removes all differences
And make us aware

We are all equal
In our hour of need

Ecstasy

It was one of those random meeting

One

The labourer, toiler – the diligent
Always there to serve!

And the other –

The wanderer, visionary – the dreamer
Not *there* even when there!

In my house had they met

“Hello stranger! Long time no see.”

And the other just smiled and replied:

“What’s the point, you are always busy!”

“Well, I have to sustain you or everything stops.”

“And I have to maintain you otherwise nothing happens.”

Both of them burst into a wild laughter.

That is the way it had been for so long

Both residents in the same place

Yet, so far from each other!

That is how it is when there is

Lack of communication

Between the heart and the mind

So I took some time to

Sit, think, feel, and reflect

Keep the rhythm, speed and the beat

And,

When an accord was attained
They danced with each other
In a spell of blissful ecstasy

An Honest Request

Dear Buddha Ji:

How is it over there?

Are you still enjoying your Nirvana –

The state of everlasting bliss

No pain, no worry, no more to desire for?

And how about your other renowned friends –

Among them

The chosen one

The only son

The one who plays on the flute

And

The receiver of the final Book?

Do you all go around in the heavens

Marvelling at the plentiful bounties

Verdant gardens, rivers of milk and honey

Attendant damsels and obedient servants

No hunger, no thirst, no fatigue –

so stress free?

And

Do you sometimes look back at your old homes?

Where, because of some of those who claim

to be your most devoted followers, suffering abunds –

Dead bodies here, bleeding soldiers there

Orphaned children here, forsaken elders there
No nourishment for the stomach or the mind
It appears as if for them there is
no hope, no mercy, no tomorrow!

Dear Sirs,

Does your stomach holds on such occasions
Do you breathe normally, and your heart keeps its beat
You hold each other's hand and feel sublime?

Or

Do you at times feel nauseated and throw up
where you stand
Foul sweat breaks out of your pores and
your legs tremble
And then you look at each other and wonder:
Is that what we have reaped from what we had sown?

Dear Buddha Ji,

Once you saw a sick man and then a dead one
It bothered you so much you abandoned your palace
You toiled for decades, and found what *you* looked for
And then you reached *your* Nirvana

But now

How about a reincarnation for all of you
A sort of holy delegation of the enlightened ones
Visiting our little earth to restore peace and
tranquillity
To make them practically applicable which were once
your dreams?

But

Bring some divine protection with you on your
way here

Lest you get executed by your own ardent disciples
Take advice from Jesus, he knows all about it!

Looking forward to meeting you
And thanking you in anticipation
Your long abandoned friend

Sain Sucha

Elegy

They tell me you are gone
Gone forever –
This time the parting is final!

What do they know about parting!
You were gone before –
To the plains of Andalusia,
Or the domain called Britain,
Or just to Old Town.

When you stepped out
And the door was shut
Did I forget you?
Did we become separable?

And now
When you have taken a different journey –
Journey to the land of unknown,
Some call it Heaven,
To others it is a place across the horizon,
To some it's a blissful sleep,
For others it is Nirvana –
Then would I forget you?

No my dear!
No matter how we describe it
The fact remains:

From the bosom of mother Earth we all come,
And to the embrace of mother Earth we all return.

So, until the day I also set out for the same embrace
Let us not bid "Good bye"
Which sounds so final and absolute.
Let us be French for a while
And say "au revoir" —
Till we meet again!

Loneliness

Look,

My loneliness has abandoned me again!

The moment the bell rang at the door

She got annoyed

took her scarf

and gone she was

Silly!

Those who have come to my door

Are merely some passing drifters

They would stay for a while

Talk a little, sing a little

Then after midnight

Quietly Leave

Then the ocean of silence would rise with its full might

Where vicious whirls of memory swirl on its surface

Some dim picture of the dear ones are buried deep in its breast

Which come alive for a few moments and then gently fade

away

When the battle would set off between me and raging sighs

And the stream of salty water breaks out of my weeping eyes

Then come, you who shares all my pains!

Carrying some alighted lamps of hope in your hands

At the end of night after you leave me once more

I would pour some wine of yearning in the goblet of fleeting

time

And wait for some wanderer who might come this way
To raise a song of love at dawn, instead of a call for hate

The God in my house

There is a god in my house

Called **Pappa**

He was not there

 when I was alone

 nor when I married

But soon after

 my children were born

 He appeared

 first as a benign, helpful soul

 and then as a hard, punishing spirit

I have never known Him

But

 my wife and my children

 have lived with Him for years

Their daily life was coloured

 both bleak and bright

 by references to Him

My children felt elated and glad

 the day He was said to be kind

And they were worried and scared

 the day He was described as wrathful

My children have known me too

 aware that I would never apply those punishments

 that their Pappa was capable of inflicting

Yet,

Pappa has functioned so successfully as a controlling
factor

all the years my wife found Him convenient
-- He has been her best Friend!

He was my wife's creation

resident in my house

but

never a threat to me

So

Although a projection of an image of mine
a distortion huge and wide

We have co-existed all these years

- alien to each other but accommodating

And now I wonder

if all GODS are created that way?

Initially to help their creators

in times of joy and sorrow

But

with the passage of time

their images becoming

distorted, crude and manoeuvrable

And slowly

they become the puppets

in the hands

that created them, and control them

And eventually
the strings that make them move are
left to be manipulated
by the hands of cunning disciples

Hope

(Inspired by a painting of Dorina Mocan)

“Wake up... wake up!”

He turned his head
And there it sat,
Outside his window,
The black myna bird

“Why are you whispering,
And why are you so hoarse --?”
Asked Suez,
The old farmer.

“Stupid was I
Who flew over the city
Instead of flying around it;
And now I cannot sing!”

“What do you want?”
The old man heard the anxiety
In the bird’s voice
And enquired about it.

The myna replied:
“I have come the long way
Because you are a true son of the Earth;
I believe you would understand me!”

“Just tell me,
What’s in your heart?”

II

“Our Mother Earth feels sick!
Her children torment her
With gruesome games;
Her skin is torn asunder by tanks,
Dynamite inflicts burning sores on her body,
Toxic chemicals run through her veins,
And lethal gases fill her lungs --
She suffers from shivers, cough and fever.

Do you remember how last Christmas
She suffered from severe stomach-ache,
Her whole inner being shook with convulsions,
And she threw up a violent wave of her fluids --
A tsunami that drowned all far and near?

And do you recall how a few weeks later on
She got palpitation and breathed so heavily
Exhaling a wind storm that violently
Fell haughty pines and majestic firs?

And haven’t you heard either
About her rising fever
That is causing flood in the oceans

When the snow melts from her breasts?

The bird paused, and then added:
"Earth, our mother, needs us now!
We must hurry to help her.
We must stand by Mother Earth!"

III

"What can I do?

An old man am I
Far away from all,
Neither strong nor rich,
Without influence or authority.
I own a little land,
A flock of sheep, and my ram Sathi,
Imdad, my dear wife
And my daughter Arodnap;

Haven't you flown into the wrong direction?"

"No, it is you that I seek!
It is you who have the daring ram
And the golden girl.
One fears no hurdle
And the other knows no evil,
Together they make an invincible pair –
And it is for their sake I have come here!"

The old man shook his head:
"It's true that my ram is strong and brave,
And my daughter is chaste,
But what service could they perform
That Mother Earth would heal?"

"Unseen should they enter
The well-guarded citadel of gods,
On the other side of the rainbow,
And open the Pandora's Box."

"Open the Pandora's Box!"
Horrified, yelled the old man.
"Doesn't it suffice with all the misery that
already abounds,
Must you release more evil?"

"No, all the miseries are already running loose,
Only Hope had stayed behind,
But it did not stay there of her own accord –
It was confined there by hideous forces.

And we have lived for ages
In darkness, without hope.
And now Hope must be set free
If we are to regain a trustworthy belief."

But the farmer cried again:
"A belief? And what purpose a belief would serve?"

It is just the beliefs held by various people
That spread suffering and sorrow in the world!
In the name of religion ravage
One race members of another."

"Not that kind of belief, Dear Sir "
Said the bird,

"No, not that kind!

That kind of belief is borne by the people
Who are either blinded by their arrogant pride
Or suffer from grave destitution.

That kind of belief is devoid of knowledge,
And it merely leads to dark thoughts
And results in the execution of innocent people

By narrow minded tyrants;

Or, certain individual without any hope,
After being misled by others

Who use false divine references for their own purpose,
Are led to kill harmless people
By self-annihilation combined with murder. "

IV

"No, the belief that arises with Hope,
And in due time matures into knowledge,
Supported by facts and reason;
That belief shows us the path to enlightenment.

That's why we must liberate Hope!
With hope in every heart,
Sound beliefs in our mind

And knowledge as our goal
We would tame the wicked forces.

First, when no one mobs another
Because one is a man, woman, bird or fish;
White, pale, brown or black;
Jew, Christian, Muslim or Hindu;
Asian, African, European or American;
But accept all as our fellow-beings,
Then could we endeavour to retrieve
Mother Earth's lost honour and grace.

And together could we
Reclaim Her devastated gardens,
Cleanse her poisoned soil,
Get rid of the toxic gases;
Only then, when She feels restored,
Our Mother Earth perhaps anew
Open her arms and give us the sanctuary
And the love that we have lost
Because of our misdeeds!"

V

The old farmer objected:
"But the citadel of the gods
Lies beyond the rainbow!
How could Sathi and Arodnap
Reach those grounds?"

“Yes! I would be their guide,
And with my song I would plead their case;
With Sathi’s bold climb
And Arodnap’s innocence
Every place is within their reach.
When the gods hear about
The suffering of Mother Earth
Surely they would set Hope free!

The old farmer closed his eyes,
Inhaled deep and said:
“Go ahead and take my beloved daughter,
And take my wondrous ram,
Because I hear the truth in your voice!
May you reach the citadel you just named,
And Hope be your travelling companion
On your way home! Go now
Before it gets too late!”

VI

Thereupon slept the old farmer
A deep and tranquil sleep;
Not the sleep of a man
Who had sent away his daughter and his ram;
No, but the sleep of a Mother Earth’s child
Who had served his mother well!

VII

He was awoken from his deep sleep
When he heard his wife call:

“Wake up... wake up!”

“Why are you yelling,
And why are you so hoarse?”
Asked the old man.

He heard his wife speak anxiously:
“Barn’s gates are wide open
And Sathi is not there,
Arodnap’s window is also open
But she lies not in her bed!”

The old man smiled and said in a steady tone:
“Fear not, my dear Imdad,
I know where they have gone,
And before the night falls
They would come home with Hope.”

Even if his wife did not grasp anything
Of what he said, she heard the belief in his voice
And saw the lustre in his eyes.

She smiled too and looked out
Of the window -- filled with hope!

Short Stories

Khalid Sohail

*A SHORT DISTANCE
IN A
LONG TIME*

There were millions of us, but only a few hundred have survived to tell the story. “Are we lucky to be alive, or are we unlucky because we have to stay behind, grieving the loss of our friends?”

Our mothers laid millions of eggs only a few feet away from the ocean, in various locations all over the world. They hoped that we would be able to travel that short distance to reach our destination; but those few feet took us an eternity to conquer. We were back to our roots, back to the carefully chosen places our mothers had selected to conceal the eggs from human, animal, or birds’ threatening view. Only a handful of us have survived to return to the point where the story begins and the cycle starts all over again. We consider ourselves fortunate to be able to reminisce about the past and to have a hopeful expectation for our future.

Our mothers laboured painstakingly in an attempt to protect us. They dug holes in the sand so they could lay their eggs, hoping these eggs would be well hidden from our human neighbours; but they came to the beaches in search of us just the same. Relentlessly the men and women hunted, ravaging the sand until they discovered some of us. They filled their bags and their satchels, and took the eggs away, content that they had pursued and then captured us. If they had taken

the time to look back, they would have seen the tears in our mothers' eyes for they knew that some of us would be sold in the market, others would be given to children for the vitamin and protein value, and some would be eaten by men who hoped that it would enhance their sexual prowess; we were unsure whether this was a myth or a reality.

Alongside the human hands there were the birds that employed their sharp pointed beaks to discover us and then break our fragile outer coverings so they could drink our contents before we were even born. We were nothing more than appetizers to them.

Those of us who did hatch had but one goal in mind. We sought refuge in the water; all we had to do was to journey those few feet. But those few feet were full of hurdles, and they seemed too many to overcome. We had no idea which of us would make it and which would fall prey to circumstance.

We were so different from one another and yet collectively, we were members of the same group. Our sizes and forms differed, depending upon the part of the world in which we were conceived. Some of us were as tiny as a silver coin while others were as big as the wheel of a bicycle. Most of us had a helmet for protection; others did not. Under that hardened facade we were soft and tender, a vulnerability we chose not to disclose. When we awoke, and started to crawl towards the water we were an army of great magnitude, at least in number.

The first enemy that we encountered were the predatory birds. They were circling the area, or sitting on rocks, waiting for us to emerge. When we started to move they

screamed in excitement and swooped down to attack us. We were helpless because our size was too diminutive and we lacked strength.

The second of our foes were the lizards. They appeared out of nowhere, scooping us up with ravenous mouths. They were enormous in contrast to us, and we were unable to defend ourselves. In one big swoop, they ate us alive.

If we were fortunate enough to survive the first two enemies we were attacked by the third—the crabs. As fierce and dangerous as they appeared, we still fought back hoping that this time we had a chance because, at least, they were equal to us in size. They pulled us farther away from the ocean while we pushed back, hoping to get closer to the water. This dance of death would often go on for hours. Neither of us would give up. For a few minutes one side would succeed and then exhaustion took over and the other side would regain its strength. It would have been easier to succumb yet we were known for our stamina: the folk tale of the tortoise and the hare boasts of our endurance; we are marathon runners, slow but consistent. And so our battle with the crabs went on.

Some of our battles we won, while others we lost. Our only strength was in the size of our army; we were so many in number that a handful of birds, reptiles, or human beings could kill only so many of us.

Finally a few of us were able to come close enough to the water that we could feel and smell the tide; then a predator would attack with its claws. All there was left to do was to hope that our guardian angel would be watching over for us. We did the best we could, but still we could not

embrace the ocean. Those of us who were blessed with good luck were dropped from the mouths of the predators which placed us a few inches closer to the water's edge.

The most unfortunate of the deaths occurred when some of us were accidentally trampled under the heavy bodies of our mothers who sought refuge in the water as well.

Once we had reached the water we felt reasonably safe until a few of us were grasped by fish; it was then that we realized that we weren't safe even in the ocean, the one abode that we so desperately tried to reach. Those of us who grew and became strong enough to face our enemies and the harsh environment knew that we had to repeat the tradition. We had to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors and go back to the shore to dig our holes and lay our eggs. We had to repeat that comic yet tragic drama, generation after generation. We had to lay at least one hundred eggs for one egg to survive and reach adulthood; the few meagre feet reappeared hauntingly in our minds.

We are optimistic. Perhaps our human neighbours have become friendlier; perhaps they have become enlightened. We only hope that they begin to believe in co-existence, and that they will preserve our eggs so that we can safely hatch. Only then can we identify ourselves with our caring friends who share this earth so that we have only to produce one or two babies and feel confident that they will survive. It is the cynical ones we fear, who remind us that there is a distinction between the privileged and less fortunate; in the Western world the privileged can afford to have one or two children while others in the Third world still have to give birth to dozens of children to ensure that one will survive—

survive and travel a short distance from their birth place to school to the workplace. It is but a short distance that is covered over a long period of time, sometimes generations.

ROOTS - BRANCHES - FRUITS

“Families are like trees, you know. The way branches join the roots, the flowers and the fruits, families tie the past with the future.”

A long pause. It was way past midnight. Only the slow whining noise of the powerful jet engines filled the thoughtful silence of the speakers.

“What do you think is the difference between cactuses and apple trees?”

“One bears fruits and the other thorns.” There was muffled laughter, then another long pause.

“Migrations are difficult experiences. Immigrants are either lucky or very unlucky.

The children of immigrants are very unusual . . . either they become artists or they lose their minds.”

“Why?”

“Because they have to carry the burden of their traditions while facing the challenge of their environments. If they succeed they become artists...otherwise they become insane.”

My co-travellers, who were from a different time zone, were engaged in a long discussion. Half-awake after the six-hour wait for the connecting flight at Heathrow, I could hear only parts of their conversations. After a while their voices too faded away in the distance.

I was flying from England to Canada to meet my three younger brothers whom I hadn't seen for years. Time, I thought, is a strange medium. It flows without any regard for age, race,

colour or creed. Yet we seem to be able to take snapshots of it throughout our life. It seemed only yesterday that the four of us were growing up together in Peshawar. Today they are ten thousand miles away, living in Canada.

When I woke up, we were over Montreal, coming in to land at Mirabel Airport. After clearing Customs, I walked with my suitcase out through the doors into the main lobby. Mohammad was waiting for me. Wearing traditional Muslim dress and carrying prayer beads, he led the way to his car. During the long drive from the airport to his house we caught up on each other's news. When we reached the house, his wife Zubaida and their two teenage daughters, Zainab and Faiza were all waiting to greet me.

When I gave them the presents I had brought from Pakistan, my nieces became very excited. Faiza hugged me and said, "Thank you, Uncle."

"Shukrya TayaJan," Mohammad corrected her. He wanted her to speak in Urdu rather than in English. Faiza became silent, her face sullen.

It was supper time. After we finished our meal, we sat around the table talking. Then Mohammad, sitting at the head of the table, looked at his daughters and said, "It's time for evening prayers. Let's all pray together."

Zainab got up right away. Faiza on the other hand remained seated. In her mischievous tone she said, "Wait, Dad! I'm listening to Uncle. When we are finished talking, I will go for my prayers."

"You can come back after your prayers, Faiza," Mohammad was loud and firm.

Faiza, upset, left the room.

The next morning, Mohammad arose early. I heard him knocking at the girls' door. "Get up, girls. It's time for morning prayers." It was Sunday morning and far too early to get up so I went back to sleep.

I woke up some time later. When I went downstairs for breakfast, I found the family in the midst of another confrontation. Mohammad was interrogating Faiza. "Why didn't you pray this morning?"

"I fell asleep, Dad." She was apologetic but defiant.

"Go and pray right now."

"After breakfast, Dad," she pleaded.

"Don't argue. Get up and say your prayers," Mohammad ordered. Faiza started to sob. She glanced in my direction but I couldn't intervene. Zubaida opened her mouth to protest but thought better of it. Faiza got up and left for her bedroom.

That evening, we sat together watching television. Faiza looked at the TV guide, got up and changed the channel to "The Benny Hill Show". Mohammad looked upset. "What a pervert. He always tells dirty jokes," he said as he got up and changed the channel. A show called "The Best of Saturday Night Live" came on. A skimpily-dressed young woman was delivering a monologue on female hygiene. Mohammad quickly turned to another channel but it featured the gyrating dances of a group of musicians and barely dressed models, to the tune of loud rock music. Mohammad flipped through the channels until he found a CBC documentary on teenage suicide. Satisfied with that offering, he came back to his sofa. After a few minutes Faiza got up and left, soon followed by her sister.

I was a quiet observer. My role as a guest made me reserve my comments, but I was curious. With a careful note of diplomacy I asked Mohammad, "So, what do you think of the girls?"

"Well, they are cute. Zainab is older . . . so she is sensible. Faiza though, is naughty. She does not listen." He paused for a while. Then he continued in his serious tone, "Brother, it's been hard. We have been living in this country for ten years. It didn't take me too long to realize that this environment is dead set against Islam. That's why we have to be more careful than we were back home. My daughters worry me sometimes. But I'm doing my best to help them understand their traditions and values. I'm sure they will grow up with Islamic values and be proud of their Pakistani heritage."

Without acknowledging him, I asked his wife, "How about you? What do you think, Zubaida?"

"I agree with him in principle. But it's hard on the girls. They want to have fun, but he won't let them. They want to be with their friends, but he makes them stay at home. He forces them to pray and recite Quran all the time. They get frustrated and cry sometimes. I feel for them. I think we should be a bit easier on them."

"If they deviate from the right path once, it will be hard to bring them back," Mohammad interjected.

"Mohammad, you were saying that this environment is against Islam. What did you mean by that?" I was curious about the West.

"This nation has gone astray. They have forgotten their religions. Nobody cares any more. They have long

ago lost their respect for their elders and their love for youngsters. The children spend their childhood with baby sitters; the youth get into alcohol and drugs; adults struggle through their middle age with separations and divorces...and die of old age and loneliness in senior citizens' homes. That's no way to live. Even the animals in the zoo have a better life."

I was disturbed by the bleak picture he painted. But I wanted to know more. "Then why is this nation progressing so fast? Why are they so prosperous?"

He remained silent for a few moments. "God is just being lenient with them. He is playing with the kite. He has relaxed his hold on the bobbin. He is just watching how far it will go. One day soon, they will run out of string. That day they will feel God's sudden jerk and their kite will tumble down from the sky and crash on the ground. Brother, they are getting closer to Doomsday."

"Then why are you living here?"

"Living here and trying to follow Islam is a continual uphill struggle."

I remained quiet. Again, I was a guest and I did not want to be too critical of his lifestyle. After all, it was his life. He had every right to live as he saw fit.

The next day I wandered around downtown. I saw McGill University, museums, art galleries, cathedrals and a host of other beautiful places. I went inside brightly coloured stores selling everything from hair ornaments to shoelaces. I was very impressed by Montreal. The clean wide roads, fast exotic cars, elegant buildings and churches with green copper domes, the clear, clean river through its

heart, and the green parks with huge trees, all made me feel that I was in a different world. I must have walked for hours. I was lost in the corridors of the city. But I did not care. I followed my reflection glimmering from the shiny mirrored walls of the tall buildings along my aimless route. When I found my way again, I was on St. Catherine Street, moving along the sidewalk with crowds of bustling people. Men and women were walking hand in hand. Some were entering the stores while others were looking through the huge store windows, just window shopping. I found the French-Canadian women to be beautiful. They were well dressed and they seemed to look after their figures and appearances very well, unlike, I thought, the women of Pakistan. I remembered so many of them neglecting themselves after they got married or reached the age of thirty. I was exhausted when I got back to my brother's house.

I enjoyed being with Zainab and Faiza. They were very warm and affectionate.

They wanted to be open with me, but were afraid of their parents.

In the evening I was sitting in the family talking with Mohammad and Zubaida. Faiza came and sat down beside her mother. Then she looked at her father and asked hesitantly, "Daddy, our class is going on a camping trip. Can I go with them?"

"How many people are going?" Mohammad started the interrogation.

"Twenty students. Sixteen girls and four boys."

“You can’t go. I won’t let you go on a trip with boys. You will stay away from them.”

“Why?” She looked confused.

“It’s a sin to spend time with strange boys.”

“But, Daddy! All my friends are going,” she pleaded.

“I told you once and for all, you are not going,” Mohammad shouted. Faiza looked crushed. Tears welled up in her eyes. She looked at her mother but did not get any support. She got up and left the room.

I was disturbed by the incident, but I did not express my reservations. We talked for the rest of the evening on subjects ranging from the general well-being of our relatives to the status of the socio-political mood in Pakistan. I went to bed quite late but I could not fall in asleep for a long time. I thought it must be the time difference.

The next day I took my two nieces out for dinner. “Are you happy at home?” I asked them. My question was simple, but in return I received a flood of emotions, flames of rebellion.

“I’m fed up with Dad. I can’t take any more of his lectures on Islam and Pakistan. If I could, I would run away from home right now,” Faiza replied with a mixture of anger and despair.

“Why are you so angry?”

“We can’t go out of our house; we can’t take music classes in school; we can’t go camping; we can’t even talk freely on the phone, because Mom listens to our conversation on the extension; we can’t watch the TV programs all our friends do; we can’t go to our school

socials.” She took a breath and continued her tirade. “Dad orders me to pray and recite Quran every day. I don’t understand Arabic, nor does he. I hate mumbling some nonsense no one can understand. . .”

Zainab sat listening to her sister’s bitter tirade. “We are trapped here, Uncle. I’m so discouraged,” she said sadly, “Faiza rebels. I go along, but its all pretence. I’m just waiting for my eighteenth birthday.”

“What will happen on your eighteenth birthday?” I asked.

“I will leave home and never come back.” She seemed to have weighed her decision carefully.

“But why on your eighteenth?”

“That’s the legal age in Canada. Until then we are all minors. If we leave home before then, it will cause problems.”

“What sort of problems?”

“One of my friends had to go to court to disown her parents. She now lives with her aunt and uncle, appointed by the court as her legal guardians.”

“Disown parents?” I was shocked.

“Yes, Uncle! If parents can disown their children, why can’t the children do the same to their parents? God didn’t ask me to be born to my parents. If He did, I would have refused.”

“How can you say that? Your parents love you and care about you very much.”

“Maybe they do,” Zainab replied, “but the way they show it is disgusting. Even the animals in the zoo get better treatment. We are lucky that at least we have each other.”

She pointed to Faiza and continued. "If we were not helping each other, we would have committed suicide by now."

I was deeply disturbed by her comments. "Do you want me to discuss it with your parents?" I was genuinely concerned, as I had become quite fond of them in such a short time.

"It would be like stopping a runaway train by throwing yourself in front of it."

"More like flying an elephant on a kite string," Faiza interjected.

"Water on a duck's back...just runs off," Zainab shot back, laughing ruefully.

I felt somewhat reassured by their humour. I laughed and they joined in. Walking home from the restaurant, Zainab shared a secret. "You know, Uncle, We really like our Uncles Khalid and Sohail . . . but Daddy despises them. They are not even welcome at our house." I remained quiet. Although I was curious to know more, I did not want a confrontation with Mohammad who was waiting for us on the porch. Seeing him, the girls became quiet. I understood and changed the subject.

The next night, when the girls went to sleep, Mohammad took me out for a walk in his neighborhood. Not too far from his house there was a coffee and donut shop called Tim Horton's. We went in and pondered the long lists of offerings. Mohammad ordered tea and I opted for orange juice. We sat there sipping our drinks and chatting.

“I want to discuss something important with you,” he said, looking troubled.

“What’s that?”

“I’m worried about my daughters. Before they sink into the quicksand of sin, I want them married to some Muslim men of good family background. Listen, when you go back to Pakistan, keep your eyes open. If you find a couple of nice men, please let me know. I will bring them over here and arrange their weddings in accordance with Islamic traditions. We have a mosque here, so that won’t be a problem.”

“Have you discussed this with your daughters?”

“There is no need for that. We parents know best. They will appreciate our wisdom when they become older.”

“But still, you can let them know your intentions.”

“I’ll talk to them after I select the men.”

I tried to talk to him about his daughters’ feelings, but he was staring off into the distance, focused on his plans. I remembered Zainab’s remark, “Water on a duck’s back...just runs off.” I gave up, utterly frustrated. After a while we walked in silence back to his house.

The next morning I left for Newfoundland to meet my brother Khalid.

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Khalid was waiting for me at the St. John’s airport. Even at a distance I recognized him in his red shirt and black trousers. The two top buttons of his shirt were open, revealing a gold chain with a locket hanging on his hairy

chest. After a warm welcome, he took me to his apartment complex in his shiny red Porsche.

We took the elevator to the top floor. His apartment was like a *Playboy* penthouse. Romantic posters with seductive pictures covered the walls. On his bedroom door hung a poster of an open door leading to a mysteriously lit dark room. The elegantly scripted message read, "*Wanted – overnight meaningful relationship*". His living room was arranged tastefully with a big comfortable sofa set, a television and a stereo in one corner and a couple of oversized book shelves filled with colourful and interesting books.

When I commented on his place, he told me that women really loved his apartment. He said that they were willing to take off their clothes any time. I didn't believe him. I thought he was joking and I just laughed.

He had a large collection of albums. He turned his stereo on and played some nice music for me as I browsed through his collection of books. One of the titles interested me, so I started to leaf through it. Khalid smiled when he saw me with that book and said that he referred to it on a regular basis. He commented that he did not know that I had any interest in the subject. I ignored him. I was amazed by its descriptions of the variation and number of positions two persons can enjoy in bed. Newfoundland was already beginning to be an educational experience.

In the evening he took me to Signal Hill. From the top of the hill I could see a vast landscape. The rugged hills, the brilliant hues of dusk on the ocean and the fresh

cool air reminded me of the time I was living near the southern coast of Persia.

“The very first message across the Atlantic was sent from this hill. Now it’s a historical site.” Khalid gave me a brief history of the place.

“It’s beautiful from here. A bit chilly though,” I said to him as a sudden gust of wind blew in my face.

“It’s always windy here. Being a small island surrounded by a huge ocean makes it even worse.”

I looked around the hill for some time. I was completely taken by the exotic beauty of nature surrounding me. Some elegant trees nearby created a wonderfully lush effect. “What kind of trees are those?” I asked Khalid as I pointed toward some trees with silver-coloured bark.

“Those are silver birches. They look beautiful, especially in the fall.”

“They look frail. It’s amazing that they survive at all in this wind,” I commented.

We were there for a long time. We talked about the island, its geography, its weather and a host of other interesting historical and cultural tidbits. After some time, we started to talk about women. I jokingly asked him, “Why didn’t you ever get married, Khalid?”

He laughed, “Do you think I’m crazy? I don’t want to dig my own grave. If I put shackles around my legs, I would still have more freedom.”

“So you are saying that married people are all crazy?” I twisted his words.

He looked at me and smiled. "If they are not crazy, they are certainly naive. I can't see any reason why any man would ever want to get married in Canada."

"You mean there are good reasons for it in Pakistan?"

"You haven't got any choice there. If you can't have a woman without marrying her, then you are forced into it. That's your fate in a hypocritical society."

"Hypocritical – in what way?"

"It's a society where sex is considered dirty and masturbation a sin. Where meeting women is banned. Where as a rule, people marry perfect strangers in return for some tainted gold. Even after marriage, the wives spend months with their parents, and even when you are with your wife, you don't have any privacy, and you sleep with her in total darkness. There are millions of men who have been married for years but don't know what a naked body of a woman looks like. They are all waiting for the Day of Judgment when all of them will stand naked in front of God. He has promised them that only on that day they are going to have a revealing look at themselves and their women. Boy, are they ever suffering from delusions. But what can you expect but immaturity where there is no mutual respect?"

"Immature? You consider the whole nation to be immature?"

"And suffering from self deception. They are all exceptional cowards, and they feel proud of that. They have labeled their shortcomings as virtues. They get headaches from excessive masturbation but still won't

accept that their sexual appetite is like any other desire, the only difference being is that its satisfaction is voluntary.”

“What is the situation here?” I wanted to shift his focus.

Khalid smiled, “If you meet a beautiful woman and tell her how charming she looks, she thanks you for your compliments. If you invite her to a movie or a dinner she either accepts your offer or excuses herself with a smile. If she accepts your invitation, she might freely come to your apartment. She is very open in her conversation. She doesn’t lie about her age or demand wedding vows before she goes to bed with you. Sex is considered a private matter between two consenting adults, in which religion or law has very little say.”

“There must be some reason people get married here.”

“I don’t know. God knows better. The only thing I know is that marriage is not considered to be a life sentence. If relationships get too strained, then unhappy couples are not ashamed to separate. Divorces have become socially acceptable. Even their religions have accepted that, albeit grudgingly.”

“You don’t seem to think much of religion, do you?”

“Religions are all illusions. Mirages in the desert. Instead of digging in the ground for water, their followers run for miles in fantastic anticipation. Their thirst grows intense and their bodies weaken. They start to hallucinate and die in the sandstorms, clinging to hope, claiming they are loved by God. Whether you talk about Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, they all misguide the simple and the

poor. They are all ruthlessly destructive in their suppression of individual and social growth.”

“But surely Islam is different.” I felt defensive.

“Look at how Muslims live. Millions of them pray several times a day, but very few know the meaning of what they recite. When they fast, they eat more than usual afterwards and end up in hospital with peptic ulcers. Nobody gives Zakat. Those who do only pay a mere two and a half percent, of which there is no mention in Quran. They go for Haj when they are old and sick and hope that they die there. They slaughter millions of animals each year in the name of God after their pilgrimage to Mecca, only to let the carcasses rot in the desert. They mistreat their wives and find justification in Quran to beat them. They send children to the battlefronts to kill other Muslims in the name of Jihad, and so many other things . . .”

“But you are describing and criticizing Muslims, not Islam.”

“What is Islam? Is it not the lifestyle of Muslims? We are not talking about the fictitious Islam written in some books and present only in people’s imaginations.”

I became quiet. After a while, we left Signal Hill for his apartment.

In the evening he took me to a night club. He told me that I should experience the city with my own eyes. I became quite excited.

We went to a club called *Stanley Steamer*. It was around nine in the evening, but there were dozens of people standing in line outside the club. We joined them in the line; everybody seemed to be happy and euphoric. I

remembered long lines outside the cinema halls back home, where people fought each other for a pair of tickets.

“They don’t fight?” I asked Khalid.

“Once you join the lovers, you don’t fight,” he replied as he winked at the girl standing in front of him. “Some people hit it off standing in the line waiting. Then they go home rather than to the club.”

The line moved slowly. After about half an hour we were allowed in. There were hundreds of people inside, more women than men. The lights were turned low but the music was loud.

“There are five women for each man in this town!” Khalid had to shout to make himself heard.

“Muslims are allowed to have only four,” I tried to reply. But my voice was drowned by the loud music.

We moved away from the dance floor and sat down at a table. A beautiful waitress came to take our order. Khalid ordered a glass of beer for himself and Coke for me.

“Come on, have a drink with me, in the name of the Lord,” he teased me. “You might never get an opportunity like this. You don’t know whether you’re gonna go to heaven or hell. Even if you make it to heaven, you never know whether you will get any booze or not. We have the strongest drink in the country. Just one bottle of our Screech will raise the temperature of those rivers tenfold!”

I ignored him and kept quiet, waiting for my Coke.

I looked around, taking in the scene. There were beautiful women, fashionable clothes and a sense of excitement. I liked what I saw. Khalid spotted two women in the crowd. He whispered in my ear, “I know those two.

I'll invite them over. I will take one and you take the other. Their warmth will melt the ice of your inhibitions."

"How will you approach them?" I was curious and a little embarrassed by his straightforwardness. I was envious of my younger brother. He seemed to be very experienced.

"Oh, that's not difficult. I know them well. When they wanted to go out with me, I was interested in some other women. Now I am free and available."

A flower seller came our way. Khalid called her to our table, gave her a five-dollar bill and told her to give a couple of roses to those two women. In a few minutes, they came to our table.

Khalid introduced them to me as Sharon and Daniela. Then he took Sharon with him to the dance floor, leaving me alone with Daniela. She had beautiful eyes. I felt nervous around such an attractive woman.

"Tell me something about yourself," I hesitantly asked.

"Well, I'm thirty-five and work as an assistant manager in a bank. I live alone. I was married once, but I left my husband after nine years together." She was very open in her matter of fact tone.

"Why did you leave him?"

"A few years into the marriage, the relationship turned cold. I didn't enjoy his company any more, nor did I miss him when he was away. I felt empty and unfulfilled. We should have said good bye to each other a lot sooner, but I was insecure and financially dependent. I wanted to hold on to the marriage like a child trying to hold on to his

ice cube—the more he squeezes the more it melts. Finally, it turns into water, and so did my marriage. Finally last year I said ‘good bye.’”

“Weren’t you sad leaving home?”

“Relieved, rather. We now live separately and meet each other on and off as acquaintances. Other than a sexual relationship, which didn’t exist anyhow, our interactions have improved.”

I smiled to myself. The waitress came to our table once again. “What would you like to drink?” Daniela asked me.

“Coke, please,” I answered.

“Rum and coke?” she asked for clarification.

“No, just Coke. Thanks.”

“Don’t you drink at all?”

“No, I don’t.”

“But Khalid drinks.”

“Yes, he is far ahead of me,” I smiled.

“So you have one less vice.” She tried to make me feel better. Changing the subject she asked me, “Are you married?”

“No.”

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

“No.”

“Then how do you live your life?” she asked in astonishment.

It appeared that she was asking me this the same way she might inquire, if you do not cook at home or go to a restaurant, then how do you survive? I did not know what to say. How could I have told her that in Pakistan,

millions of people have forgotten about their sexual feelings the same way senile people forget their way home.

“I am shy,” was my excuse.

“You don’t look shy.” I blushed at her comment.

“Let’s dance,” she invited me.

“I have never danced in my life.”

“Don’t worry about it. Nobody really knows how to dance here. It’s just a romantic exercise.” She held my hand and proceeded toward the floor. I felt like a little boy holding someone’s finger on the first day of school.

We danced to a few songs. Her smile, her perfume, the warmth of her body were driving my forty-five year old body into a frenzied ecstasy. I felt like a sleeping volcano about to explode. We danced to a slow song as well. She held me close and kissed my neck. My naïveté was obvious. My face was flushed with excitement and confusion. I am a doctor and have seen hundreds of women naked delivering their babies. But this interaction with Daniela was very different. I was convinced that she was quite ahead of me in romantic experience. I could have learned a lot from her.

After the dance she suggested, “You are a nice person. Let’s go home.” I was shocked. In Pakistan I would have thought, “What a whore!” But it sounded so natural and innocent coming from her.

“But, but... I came with Khalid,” I stuttered.

“Oh, don’t worry about him. He is with my friend. I will drop you home later on.” I couldn’t say no. I was helpless. She called to Khalid and Sharon. “Khalid, I’m taking your brother home. He is an interesting man.”

Khalid smiled, winked at me and said, "Have fun, kids."

Daniela's apartment was comfortable and nicely decorated. She turned on the stereo. Kenny Rogers was singing. She poured a glass of wine for herself and asked me, "What would you like to drink?"

"What do you suggest?"

"Orange juice."

"That would be fine. Thanks."

She had already accepted my abstinence from alcohol. I felt at ease. We talked for the longest time. She came close, kissing my hands and then my cheeks. I was a block of ice, sitting there completely frozen in fear. My experience with women to say the least was limited. Beyond formal relationships with relatives, distant interactions with nurses and causal encounters with the prostitutes beside the Badshahi mosque in Lahore, my contact with women was nil. I did not know how to spend an intimate evening with a lovely woman. I felt severely handicapped. Daniela seemed to be aware of that and somehow understood. She did not make fun of me. In the end she said, "I enjoy your company. You are more than welcome to stay overnight."

I blushed and sat there speechless, held back by my past. "Thank you," I said sincerely, "but I cannot". She drove me home. As I opened the door of her car to leave, she gave me a piece of paper with her phone number and said, "Call me when you are free. I would like to spend more time with you. Life is short and the best part is to spend it with someone nice. I like you but I don't really

understand you." She kissed my cheek and said, "Good bye."

I stood in front of the apartment complex with that piece of paper in my hand.

I looked at it several times but the numbers were still there. Those few hours with her in her apartment were more precious than a lifetime in the libraries.

The elevator ride seemed to take forever. When I entered Khalid's apartment, he was not there. The next morning, the sound of his key in the door woke me up. Over breakfast, he said to me, "Daniela is a nice woman. Other women call her choosy. She was kind to you last night."

"How come?"

"God only knows. Women are like clouds you know. Sometimes it is dry for weeks, but once it starts raining, it rains for days. And it always rains on the rivers, never on the deserts," he smiled.

"I don't know much about women," I said, acknowledging my ignorance.

"If you stayed here for a while you would learn. This is a nice and sincere island. Women here are very kind and generous."

"Did you ever fall in love, Khalid?"

"Love is a mirage, a child's dream. It doesn't have much of a place in an adult's life."

"Do women ever fall in love with you?"

"Yes, but I try to explain to them in the very beginning. If they are looking for a bourgeois life style with a husband, two point eight kids and a dog named Muffin,

they are wasting their time with me. I don't want to put chains on them or on myself. If they don't like my way of thinking, they don't need to get involved with me. That's why quite a few women are my friends and not my lovers."

It was an interesting experience to be around Khalid. I learned much from him in those few days. But I had a confirmed ticket to Toronto.

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Sohail was anxiously pacing up and down in front of the luggage claims area at Pearson International airport. We had not seen each other for a long time. I ran toward him and hugged him. He hugged me back, a little hesitantly, I thought.

"Men don't hug men here," he whispered.

"Why not?"

"People may think that we are homosexuals."

"Why did you hug me then?"

"I don't care what other people think. I just wanted to let you know for your information."

When I arrived at their home, I met his wife Cathy, son Andrew and daughter Jennifer.

When I gave them their presents, Andrew said, "Thank you, Uncle", while Jennifer said, "Shukrya Tayajan."

Sohail smiled and said, "Andrew likes English while Jennifer prefers Urdu."

"That's great," I was pleased to find that both languages were used interchangeably at their home.

In the evening, Andrew suggested, "Dad, we should take uncle to Yonge Street."

The whole city seemed to be ablaze in light. Highway 401 was full of traffic but moving fast. The twelve lanes with their wide curves seemed to cut a vast swath through the city. When we reached Yonge Street, Sohail parked the car and we all got out and started to walk. It was a fascinating street. I saw people of all colours and races walking on the side walks. On one side, people from different churches were distributing leaflets while on the other side, punks with wild coloured hair were dancing to the beat of a blind musician. In one corner there was a black man selling buttons and on the other a few ladies of the night soliciting. It was a very colourful atmosphere.

"Uncle, Yonge Street is the longest street in the world," Andrew said to me.

"And the CN tower is the tallest building in the world," Jennifer interjected as she pointed toward a beautiful tower.

"Did you know, Uncle, that it gets so windy up there, the top of the tower actually moves," Andrew explained. They actually designed it that way to withstand the wind. And they have these lasers to measure exactly how much the tower moves in each second." I was learning from the children.

"Uncle, Yonge Street reminds Daddy of Qissa Khan Bazaar of Peshawar," said Jennifer. "And Anarkali Bazaar of Lahore, where he used to buy sweets."

"Do you have something like that here? Where they sell Eastern sweets and snacks," I asked the children.

“Yes, we do.”

They took me to Gerrard Street where I was surprised to see a small Lahore in the middle of Toronto. Indian sweets and clothes, kebabs, cinema halls and women walking in saris gave me the distinct impression that I had never left Pakistan. We went into a restaurant for dinner. Cathy ordered some rice and curry which she ate with her fingers. I had never seen a white woman eating like that.

“You don’t use a knife and fork?”

“Yes, but I learned a lot of Eastern customs from Sohail. This is one of them.”

“And I learned a few things from Cathy.” They were complementary to each other.

The next evening when I came home, Jennifer and Andrew were in a hurry, gulping down an early dinner so they could leave the house for the evening’s activities .

“Where are you going, Andrew?” I asked.

“To play hockey. What did you play, Uncle, when you were young?”

“Cricket.”

“I heard that England, West Indies and India are very good in that game.”

“New Zealand plays quite well too.”

“Nobody knows about cricket here. But they like baseball a lot.”

“Well, we inherited cricket from the British.”

“Don’t they play cricket in Europe?”

“Hitler had legally banned it in Germany.”

“Why?”

“He went to an opening ceremony and came back five days later to ask who won. When he heard that the match was still in a draw he became very angry and ordered, ‘No more cricket in Germany. Our time is too precious.’” Before Andrew left, I asked him, “How well do you play hockey?”

“Not too bad.”

“He’s on the school team. He plays well,” Sohail praised him. “Where are you going, Jennifer?”

“For my piano lesson.”

“She loves her music,” Cathy said.

“Do you play piano yourself?” I asked Cathy.

“I used to play in the church when I was young. Now I help Jennifer sometimes. She has a lot more talent than I ever had.”

After Jennifer left, I sat talking with Cathy and Sohail. I asked Cathy, “What do you think of religion?”

“I am not religious. But I’m not against religion either. Religions are our inheritance. If they can teach us to love and live happily, then we shouldn’t avoid them. I don’t believe in rituals though.”

“I feel the same way. I was born in a Muslim family and Cathy in a Christian home, but we still get along fine. We don’t have any fights or arguments about this,” Sohail explained.

That evening, Sohail took me to see the University of Toronto. We strolled along Philosopher’s Walk catching up on our lives. “All the intellectuals come here for a walk and to examine their lives,” he joked.

“Sohail! Do you like Toronto?” I abruptly asked him.

“Very much. I’m a Canadian citizen now.”

“Are you happy with your marriage?”

“Yes I am. Cathy is not only my wife, but a very good friend too.”

“What about the language? Isn’t that a problem?”

“It was in the beginning, but not any more. I learned French from Cathy and she is learning Urdu. English is our common language.”

“Have many Pakistanis married Canadian women?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“For a number of reasons. Most of them don’t respect women whole heartedly. They want to marry virgins but they want to sleep with every woman they meet.”

“That’s hypocrisy.”

“Yes. An ethical rather than a religious hypocrisy.”

“Do you see any long-term effect of this attitude?”

“Well I’m not a psychiatrist. But most of these marriages turn out to be boring.

After living an exciting life, when they marry these young, conservative, naive virgins they want to forget about their past. They hide a big chunk of their lives from their wives and families. But when their daughters become teenagers, their past comes back to haunt them. Then they want to impose the strict rules of Pakistan. They get angry when they realize that they are stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea. They become misfits in the East as well as in the West. They end up very unhappy, even mentally ill in some cases.”

“What do you think of your children?”

“They are darlings. Both are intelligent and well-behaved. Andrew is good in hockey while Jennifer is talented in music. They both know English, French and Urdu. They are happy and caring. I am very proud of them.”

“I found them charming too. Did you ever think about their future or their marriages?”

“I knew you were going to ask this question.” Sohail smiled and continued, “Look, Brother, marriage is a personal decision. When my children grow up, they will be on their own. If they can’t find partners in life, then they are not mature enough to marry, and if they can, then they don’t need any help.”

“Well said. My sentiments exactly.”

“We can not live in the past. The branch that is not flexible enough breaks in strong winds.”

When we came home, Cathy served us apple pie. Sohail had especially made some Halva for me—my favorite dessert.

I was going back home the next day. When I went upstairs to see the children, I overheard them talking.

“I’m writing this essay and I have a question.”

“What?”

“What’s the difference between a mosque and a church?”

“Music is a sin in one and a virtue in the other.”

I burst out laughing. They came out and joined me downstairs to finish off the pie.

The next day Cathy, Sohail and the children came to the airport to say goodbye to me. My eyes were wet as I bade them farewell.

Flying back to Pakistan I was looking at all the snapshots of my nephew and nieces that I had taken during my stay in Canada. I remembered the conversations on my way over.

“Immigrants’ children are extraordinary . . .”

“What’s the difference between cactuses and apple trees?”

I sat there thinking.....

(Translated by: Sohail and Raja.)

BIGAMY

The telegram was lying on the table. It read: "Susan! My brother died last Friday. Family suggested I marry my sister-in-law. I agreed. Date not decided. Hope you and Michael are well. Miss you. Saif."

"Bastard." I yelled. "How can he do this to me?"

I called my travel agent and booked the next flight to Pakistan. I found out that the minimum time I could spend there was a week because there were only weekly direct flights between Toronto and Lahore, Pakistan.

I sent a telegram to Saif informing him of my arrival. I had always wanted to visit India and Pakistan but I had never dreamt that I would be visiting Pakistan under these circumstances.

I consulted my lawyer who informed me that bigamy was illegal according to Canadian law. If Saif brought his second wife to Canada, he could be charged.

I arranged for two weeks' vacation from work and asked my sister to take care of Michael while I was gone. I told everybody that Saif's brother had died and I was going to Pakistan to offer him support. No one except my lawyer knew that Saif had decided to have a second wife. I did not know how to tell people. It was so bizarre, so absurd. It was craziness.

~ * ~

On the plane, I felt as if I was already in Pakistan. Everyone around me was speaking Urdu, Punjabi or Pashto. I could not understand a word they spoke. For the first time in my life I felt like a member of a minority and I could empathize with how new immigrants must feel when they don't understand the local language.

During the flight I was reminiscing about the past ten years of my life, spent with Saif. I remembered our get-togethers, our discussions, our ups and downs in the relationship and our dialogues about different aspects of life. Once he had said,

"Susan! I don't think you should marry me."

"Why not?"

"Because I know you more than you know me."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because I have lived in Canada for ten years and I know your culture, the culture you grew up in. But you never lived in Pakistan. You don't know my culture."

"But I am marrying you, not your culture."

"My culture is a very important part of me. I have left my culture but my culture has not left me. You are marrying someone you don't fully know."

"Those sound like lame excuses. I think you are afraid of commitment. You are nervous and apprehensive about marrying someone who has already been married and who has a son."

"No, that's not true. You, I and Michael have been living together for more than a year and we are happy. Why do you feel you need a marriage certificate?"

“So that our living together becomes socially and legally accepted. Michael adores you. He is so attached to you. He loves you more than his biological father. His father was always drinking. He abused me and Michael for many years. Finally, when we met you, there was a sense of hope in our lives. It was as if God sent you to us. I think Michael would like you to adopt him.”

“Okay. Then we will get married. You set the date, make the arrangements, and I will sign the papers. I love Michael and I love you and it does not matter to me whether we are legally married or not.”

So we got married and Saif adopted Michael and we lived happily as a family. I was so used to living with an abusive husband that I could not believe that Saif could be so nice to me. It was hard for me to accept his affection. Small things used to surprise me. He would bring presents, take Michael for long walks in the park and make Pakistani sweets for us. He gave me back rubs when I was tired. It was wonderful. I had never been treated so well. I felt like a princess. But I was always apprehensive. I always believed deep down inside that it would not last. My close friends reassured me that because I had been an abused woman, I had lost faith in men and intimate relationships. They encouraged me to trust Saif whole-heartedly. He was a sensitive and caring man. They told me that my doubts and insecurities could turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy which could undermine the relationship and destroy it.

And then the words of the telegram echoed through my mind like sharp daggers that pierced my soul. It rocked my entire existence; it was my worst nightmare. The

loving relationship we had built was crumbling to the ground as if struck suddenly by an earthquake.

~ * ~

Saif came to the airport to receive me. He looked sad. It seemed as if he had not slept for days. He had been crying. I told him I wanted to stay in a hotel. I did not want to be surrounded by dozens and dozens of people, members of an extended family who were mourning and grieving. Saif, respecting my wishes, put me up in a nice hotel.

After I recovered from the jet lag and got used to the overcrowded and dusty city, I met with Saif for dinner. I was angry and very hurt. I told him off.

“You bastard! How could you do this to me! You always told us that you loved us. You have been living with us for ten years and now you come home and decide to marry your sister-in-law just because your brother died. Have you always loved the woman? Did you have an affair with her? Have you always had fantasies of screwing her? You never had the courtesy or the decency to discuss it with me or ask my opinion. You just informed me as if I was your secretary or a neighbour. You’ve treated me like an acquaintance and not your wife.

Don’t you know I am your legally wedded wife and we live in a civilized society where we have only one spouse at a time? In Canada bigamy is illegal. If you ever brought your second wife to Canada then you would go to jail.”

I don’t remember what else I said in the heat of the moment. I was full of rage and I wanted to dump it all on

him. He sat there quietly without saying a word. Finally I pushed him. "Don't you have anything to say?"

"No, not at this time. I don't think you will listen to me. You are angry."

"Damn right I'm angry!" I shouted. "Tell me right now. I can't waste any time. I am not here to play games. I want to know the truth, the whole truth. Did you have an affair with your sister-in-law?"

"I will come back tomorrow" Saif said, "when you are calmer."

Saif left and I cried all night long. I could not believe that my worst fears were indeed coming true. I could imagine any husband leaving his wife but I could not believe Saif would take a second wife. I was also surprised that Saif was not perturbed by my anger. He even thought it was justifiable. As I thought about the situation I began to understand my husband's motivations. Saif was always a determined man. He always knew what he wanted in his life. He never wasted time in idle discussions. He had his own beliefs and he did what he believed was right.

Maybe I should listen to him and try to understand his point of view, I said to myself. I was calm when he came to see me the next evening.

"Why are you marrying your sister-in-law?" I asked him in a more gentle tone.

"Marrying Surriya is no different than when I married you. When I met you, you were suffering. You had a young son that you loved and you wanted only the best for him, but you were married to an alcoholic who was abusive to both of you. I felt sympathetic. I wanted to rescue both of you

from that hell. My love for you and Michael developed later on. You were dating me for a year and living with me for another year even when you were legally married to Jeff. At that time you were practicing bigamy.”

“But I was not sleeping with him when I moved in with you.”

“That was later on. For the first year that you were dating me you were sleeping with both of us.”

“But at that time I was not serious about you, and I was sleeping with him because I was scared of him.”

“Listen, Susan! I am not asking you to explain yourself to me. You are an adult and you are ultimately responsible for your choices and the decisions you make. I am just sharing with you my point of view. If you get angry again then I won’t be able to share my thoughts.”

“I am sorry. Go ahead.”

“My darling! You know that I love you and Michael dearly. I adore both of you. I was a lonely man when I met you and I am glad that you accepted me. Those ten years that I have spent with you and Michael have been the most fulfilling years of my life. But now I am at another junction. My brother Awais was killed. He was an honourable man. He was a school principal and one of the delinquent boys of his school belonged to a very rich family. He hardly studied but his family wanted him to pass his matriculation exam with distinction. His parents offered one lakh rupees to my brother as a bribe. Awais turned the offer down. He treated their son like all the other students in his class, and the boy failed. The following week, the results were announced and shortly thereafter my brother was killed.

“The whole school and the community have mourned his death. He was well-respected. The family were concerned for his wife and three young children. They wanted a guardian who could take care of the children. Susan! You have to realize that in third world countries there are no government and social agencies to help such families. To ensure the well-being and the education of the children, the elders of the family asked me to marry my sister-in-law, and I have agreed. This type of marriage is arranged primarily to adopt those three children the way you had asked me to adopt Michael.”

“Would you be sleeping with you sister-in-law?”

“Susan! You are missing the point. Why are you so preoccupied with sex?”

“I hate the thought of competition.”

“Anyhow the point is that I am marrying Surriya so that my nephew and nieces can have a half-decent life.”

“How much time would you spend with them?”

“I can live six months in Canada and six months in Pakistan for a few years until these children grow older. Perhaps I will spend winters in Pakistan and summers in Canada.”

“Saif, such an arrangement seems bizarre to me. Do you know any other man who has two wives?”

“Yes, my uncle has two wives.”

“Can I meet his first wife?”

“That’s no problem. But I thought you did not want to meet my family.”

“For that, I’ll make an exception.”

“Okay. I will arrange it for tomorrow.”

~ * ~

So I met Razia, Saif's uncle's first wife. She was a middle-aged lady with greying hair. She had a graceful look about her.

I spent the entire evening with her. She had a female servant, Nooran, who prepared dinner for us. During the dinner I asked her,

"You gave permission to your husband to have a second wife?"

"Yes, I did."

"Why was that?"

"I could not have any children and my husband loved children. He was the only son in his family. If I did not give him permission he would have divorced me and would have married the second wife. I could not have all of him without fulfilling his desire to have a family, so I had a choice. Either to lose him completely or let him marry again and be indebted to me for the rest of his life."

"Did he have children from his second marriage?"

"Yes, one son and one daughter."

"How do you feel about those children?"

"I have looked after them. I have baby-sat them. They were, after all, the children of my husband."

"What were your living arrangements?"

"We lived separately. He lived three days and nights with me and the same with his second wife. He alternated weekends. So we shared him equally."

"Did you feel jealous?"

"Once in a while. But I did not let jealousy rule my life. I could have left him but after twenty-five years I am glad I did not leave him. I still believe I was his first love."

“What kind of relationship have you had with his second wife?”

“We never get together. But if I get her on the phone while looking for my husband, we are civil to each other. We’ve never had any problem. She is glad that the children are fond of me. We share the husband and the children together.”

“This is all so new to me. I have been living in the West, and I could have never imagined this arrangement. It is so very foreign to me.”

“Susan! It all comes down to acceptance. If you care about someone you are willing to accept many things. And let me be honest. I have only a grade eight education. If I had left my husband I would have either been on the street prostituting myself or I would have starved to death. Instead, I am leading a respectable life. I have a roof over my head. The reality is that I am barren and in this society it is hard for a barren woman to live respectably. I have to share what I have. If I had had a university degree and I was financially independent like you, it might have been different.”

“Do you know any woman who has two husbands?”

“My servant Nooran, she had two husbands. Would you like to talk to her?”

“Sure.”

Surriya invited Nooran in and she had tea with us.

Nooran told me that she grew up in a tribe high up in the mountains. In those tribes there was a scarcity of women and to marry a woman one had to pay large amounts of money. Sometimes one man could not afford to marry, so

two men would put their money together to marry the same woman. Nooran was very beautiful when she was young, so she demanded 30,000 rupees for her wedding, while other women in her tribe were asking only 10,000 rupees. Since one person could not afford 30,000 rupees, two farmers put their life earnings together, 15,000 rupees each, to marry Nooran. She spent alternate weeks with each husband. She changed husbands after Friday prayers. Her husbands lived separately and had no direct connection with each other. Nooran lived like that for twenty years. She told me that in those tribes the children carried the mother's names rather than the father's.

Unfortunately there was an epidemic of cholera in that tribe. Hundreds of people died and both of Nooran's husbands fell prey to that epidemic. In her old age Nooran came to the city and started looking after Razia. Both older women were happy living in the same house.

I was intrigued, and amazed, listening to those stories.

~ * ~

When I was flying back to Toronto a week later on PIA I felt like a different woman. I had never thought that one week could affect someone so much.

On the day of Saif's wedding I sent him a telegram stating,

"Congratulations on your special day. My lawyer will be in touch with you soon."

.....

DEVTA

“Devta [1] has died.”

The news spread through the town like wildfire. The smoke of hopelessness and uncertainty settled over everyone.

The people still vividly remembered that time in the past when their days of ease felt short and their nights of misery had begun to seem unending.

When the fibre of the population, from children, to strong men, to wise elders, had started to crumble from the inside:

their hearts had saddened;
the fire in their spirits had lost its glow;
the ash on their bodies had turned them to ghosts;
the fragrance of their characters had dissipated;
and their eyes had lost their lustre.

The whole town was enveloped by a cloud of gloom.

When people looked into the depths of their souls they saw only ashes -

They had no yearning nor any dream,
And they nurtured no storm in their life's stream,
There were no sparks, nor burning fire
Just a coat of ashes covering body and soul.

Then one day a stranger told the people that far from that town, at the foot of a hill, lived a Devta whose presence would rekindle their torch of life.

The people travelled hundreds of miles until they reached the foot of the hill, where the dwellers from many

other towns had gathered to receive the gift of renaissance from the Devta.

The Devta was a tall, long-haired man whose face glowed with a zest for living and whose eyes radiated warmth. He wore a long gown and his speech was eloquent, with a rich timbre. Devta greeted each man, woman and child with a smile, shook their hands, talked to them, embraced them and sent them back home with his blessings.

That nearness to him induced new hope, courage, strength and excitement in the people.

When the people returned to their town the ashes which had smouldered in their souls changed to embers. Each person brought back with him a new desire, dream, or devotion.

In this way the ashen faces of the people slowly began to beam with joy.

In the life of the people of that town the joyful days became longer and the sorrowful nights shorter.

After that, whenever the warmth in their souls diminished, they would go to the hill and pay a visit to Devta.

Then one day came the news that Devta was dead.

Large crowds of people went rushing to the mountain in whose bosom Devta had spent his days. There was no Devta to greet them; only his body awaited them. But before his death Devta had left a message for the people, written with his finger in the wet ground. The message read: "Every person among you is a Devta."

(Translated by Sain Sucha)

[1] In Hindu/Urdu, Devta means God, a demigod, a holy man or a good man.

DIGNIFIED DEATH CLINIC

William entered the clinic on a stretcher. The orderlies placed the stretcher on an examination table and quietly left. William felt the same sensation as he had when he took a flight to see his grandchildren. The airplane seemed to have landed.

He looked around him. Looking to his right and then to his left, he peered at the walls. Everywhere there were posters. Each was coloured with the shadows of death.

One proclaimed: *DEATH IS LIFE.*

Another read: *DEATH – A NEW BEGINNING.*

On another there was a picture of a dried leaf suspended in mid-air, with bold lettering: *ONLY THOSE SHOULD LIVE WHO WANT TO LIVE. FOR A DEATH WITH DIGNITY, CONSULT YOUR LOCAL DDC--DIGNIFIED DEATH CLINIC.*

At the bottom of the posters there were phone numbers and addresses.

William was half an hour early for his appointment. His private duty nurse Sharon accompanied him, holding his hand. He looked at her and asked, "May I have my digoxin pills?"

"You had one half an hour ago," Sharon replied.

"What about my urine pill?"

"You only take them on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Today is Saturday."

"You are very kind, Sharon." His eyes were moist with gratitude.

She smiled. "Most nurses are kind." She stroked his hand. "Can you give me some water, please?" His throat was dry. Sharon brought a glass of water and helped him to drink. She then wiped his lips with a hand towel.

"Why am I getting so forgetful?" he asked sadly.

"A lot of people at this age have difficulties remembering things," Sharon murmured diplomatically.

"I can no longer read nor write. Even thinking has become difficult. Life is becoming a burden, for me and others too."

Sharon remained silent.

A nurse entered the waiting room. "Hi! My name is Anne. I'm a registered nurse in this clinic. What's your name?"

"William."

"Your date of birth?"

"I don't remember. I'm nearly seventy-five."

"Your address?"

"This city." He paused and then added, "And now this clinic." "Social insurance number?"

"It is in my briefcase."

"Have you already written your will?"

"Yes. My lawyer has it."

"Are you insured?"

"It has been taken care of."

"Do you wish to send any final letter or telegram to any of your friends or relatives?"

"No thanks."

"Do you wish to inform any church?"

"No thanks."

"How many pills do you take daily?"

“One for my heart . . . one for my kidneys. . . and one for my liver. At least I think so.”

“Do you receive any other form of treatment?”

“I get dialysis once every three months....is that right, Sharon?”

“How would you like to pay for the cost of your treatment?” “My insurance company will look after that. What’s your name, Nurse?”

“Anne.” She paused for a moment and then looked directly into his eyes. “William, there are three ways to die here—in three minutes, in three hours or in three days. Which one would you prefer?”

“Before I answer that, tell me, what will they do with my body?”

“Whatever you want. You can be buried or cremated, or you can donate your body for scientific research.”

“Can any part of my body be used for someone else?”

“Yes, your eyes.”

“My blood group is O negative. I have heard it is relatively rare. Can that be used as well?”

“Sure, if you donate it.”

“So after taking my eyes and blood, please cremate my body and throw the ashes into the Atlantic Ocean.” He looked at the nurse and added, almost as an afterthought, “Does it make any difference if I die in three minutes or in three hours?”

“Yes. If you die in three hours, then your donations will be more useful.”

“O.K. then I choose the three hour option.”

“Did you live alone in your home?”

“Yes. But I had five private duty nurses. They spent one week

each looking after me. These days I have Sharon with me.”

“Would you like to have Sharon with you when you are dying?”

“Of course.”

“O.K., William. You will have to excuse me for a few minutes. I will write all this information down, so you can sign it and make it all legal.”

“Very well.”

“When would you like to die?”

“Tomorrow evening.”

“That’s fine. William, there is a team of psychologists in this clinic, doing research on the subject of life and death. Would you mind if they asked you a few questions?”

“No, not at all. Send them in . . . and thanks. By the way, Nurse, what is your name?”

“Anne.

.....

“Hello! My name is Robert.” The young man then turned to in-troduce his companion. “And this is Angela.” He continued as both of them sat down in front of William. “We are students in the psychol-ogy department. I hope you won’t mind us asking you a few ques-tions.”

“Not at all. Please go ahead. You know, I taught philosophy for twenty years.”

“Why do you wish to die?”

“Well, I am tired now. There was a time, when I was very energetic, enthusiastic and productive. Now life is a burden for me and I am a burden for others.”

“Are you leaving an estate for your loved ones?”

“I wrote five books of philosophy over my lifetime. They are taught in several universities in Europe and North America. That is all I consider as my estate, my property.”

“What did you find to be the most difficult thing in life?”

“Saying goodbye.” William paused for a long time and then he continued. “But when I finally learned how to do it, it was time to say goodbye to life.”

“Do you have any complaints about your life?”

“No, not at all.”

“Thank-you for talking to us.”

“You are welcome.”

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“William, my name is Dr. Smith. Are you ready?”

“Yes. I am.”

“We use two types of gas here. One makes you laugh and the other one makes you cry. Which one would you prefer?”

“Laughing gas, please.” William smiled.

“We will take you to the other room for the anaesthesia. Sharon will be with you.”

“That is just fine.”

.....

“Sharon, I feel tired. I am falling asleep. Sharon, give me a kiss. Good bye.”

William’s ashes were scattered on the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Slowly they drifted down and settled into its depths.

A number of students were reading his books as they strolled along the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, unaware of the day’s event. They were completely oblivious to the fate of the ashes.

(Translated by: Sohail & Raja)

ISLAND

"Are your parents alive?"

"Yes."

"When was the last time you saw them?"

"Ten years ago."

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"Yes, I do."

"When was the last time you saw them?"

"Seven years ago."

"Where did you see them?"

"In a supermarket."

"Do you have any friends?"

"No."

"Do you have a home?"

"No."

"So where do you live?"

"On the street."

"Do you have any source of income?"

"Not at all."

"Then how do you live?"

"I just live."

"For how long have you been living like this?"

"For twelve years."

"What do you want in life?"

"Nothing."

"What's your aim in life?"

"I have none."

"Can I arrange welfare for you?"

"No thanks."

"How about a place to live?"

"Don't bother."

"You must need money for food."

"No. I am fine.

"How can we help you?"

"Don't worry. I will be O.K."

My social worker felt helpless. She did not know what to say.

The police brought him to the hospital. He had been wandering around on the streets for weeks. He had no food, no shelter. He looked like a bag man. The weather too was getting cold. The winter had brought its first snowfall. The police became worried when they found him one night sleeping in a bus shelter. He had looked pale and weak. They thought he might freeze to death.

"Admit him, Doctor, and look after him," one of the police officers had suggested.

"Do you want to be admitted?" I asked him.

"No thanks. I am not sick."

I too felt helpless. The social worker called his parents. They came and took him home to look after him.

A few days later the police brought him back. We were facing the same dilemma again. The social worker called his sister this time. She came and took him home but he took off after a week.

The police brought him to the hospital once again. They believed he was crazy, and should be locked up in a psychiatric hospital for a few months. I did not agree. I thought he was an eccentric and a nonconformist. Society and

the police could not tolerate him. The social worker this time sent him to a boarding home. The police threatened him that if he was found again loitering in the city streets, he would be put in jail. He smiled. He didn't care.

A few weeks later, on a Sunday morning, a young man was taking his son for a morning walk in the city park. The child saw something floating in the pond in the middle of the park. He asked his father, "What is that, Daddy?"

The young man recognized the object. It was a dead body floating upside down. He hurriedly called an ambulance from a nearby phone booth. The para-medics came and put the body in a body bag, placed it on a stretcher and took it away in their ambulance. The young man and his son accompanied them to the hospital's emergency department.

While I was examining the body, the child stood outside the room, bewildered. He looked at his father and squeezed his hand.

"Daddy," he asked softly.

"What is it, my son?"

"Our teacher told us that if something is surrounded by water, it is called an island."

"That's true."

"Was this man an island, Dad?"

The young father picked up the child, smiled and gently hugged him.

(Translated by: Sohail & Raja)

SACRED

As a part of her daily routine, Saima rose early to offer her morning prayers. After her prayers she went to the family room to recite the Holy Quran. When she reached up to take her Quran from the shelf, she was surprised to see that it was missing. She thought she might have left it in the basement but it was not there either. Then she went to her son's room and was shocked to discover that his Quran had also disappeared. Gradually it dawned on Saima that all the family's copies of the Quran had vanished.

For the previous few weeks Saima had been perturbed by the almost daily television coverage of a minister in America who had announced that on September 11th, he would distribute a few hundred copies of the Quran so that people could burn them publicly. Saima had told her brother Abid that if that happened, the whole nation would be cursed. In that frame of mind, Saima had started to include in her prayers a petition to God for forgiveness of the world's sins.

Perplexed over the disappearance of all of the Qurans, Saima called her neighbour Sabira asking to borrow one of hers. When Sabira went to get it, she was shocked to discover that her Quran was also missing. When the two women panicked and called all of their friends, they were informed that no copy of the Quran could be found anywhere.

"But why?" they wondered. Everybody offered opinions:

"God has taken back all the Qurans."

"Allah cannot see His holy book insulted."

“God has promised to safeguard the Quran”

“We are all going to be cursed.”

Suddenly Saima’s brother ran into the house, out of breath. He gasped, “Sister, something terrible has happened.”

“What’s wrong?” Saima asked fearfully.

“When I went to pray, I found the mosque destroyed. Nothing left but ruins.”

“What about other mosques?”

“They’ve all been demolished.”

“Abid, something terrible happened here too. Our Qurans are missing. I called all of my friends and theirs have disappeared as well.”

“I think the Day of Judgment is coming.”

“Abid, these are signs of a terrible curse.”

Saima and Abid watched the evening news and were horrified to learn that on the morning of September 11th, all the heavenly books including Quran, the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Geeta were missing, and all the houses of God including mosques, temples, churches and synagogues had been demolished. The entire world was plunged into a spiritual crisis. Religious leaders felt that perhaps all holy places had been cursed, as they had become the seats of violence and terror rather than peace and love.

For the next few weeks all the ordinary citizens of the world like Saima and Abid were anguished and lost. They felt emotionally and spiritually adrift without their holy books and places of worship. Such a situation forced the leaders of all nations and traditions to come together to seek a solution to this world crisis. They organized a conference with the goal of creating a new holy book. They asked people to offer their best

books of wisdom literature for consideration. Leaders submitted the writings of their foremost poets, writers and philosophers. Such literature included sayings of Confucius, poems of Kabir Das, Bullay Shah, William Blake and Walt Whitman, and speeches of Chief Seattle.

At the end of the conference it was decided that in the 21st century the world needed a new philosophy that would promote the idea of One God, One Religion, One World and One Humanity.

Following the conference, the media broadcast many programs covering the new and unified position on religion. In one program, a psychologist, a mystic and a humanist philosopher were invited to share their ideas.

The psychologist said that humans still need a God and a Holy Book as it fulfils a spiritual need.

The mystic stated that we no longer need a heavenly God. God is present inside all of us and speaks through our conscience.

The humanist philosopher shared that the future of humanity depends upon the development of self awareness, inner wisdom and social conscience in each individual.

It is possible that as humanity recovers it might transform this breakdown into a breakthrough and realize that all human beings are part of one human family as they are all children of Mother Earth.

Sain Sucha

Thirsty Lips

Mr. Adam was getting exhausted – physically and spiritually.

He had now been kneeling for some time, but words would not come to his lips. He knew they were there – they must be there in his mind as abstract ideas – still the ideas refused to take specific form and transform into identifiable, meaningful words.

He was not out to formulate something extraordinary – he just wanted to pray.

He had read in the newspapers and also seen on the television how the Allied Forces had conducted eight thousand sorties in the first seven days of the war, and thrown their explosive load on the city where the dictator had his headquarters and refuge.

He had never considered himself to be a wizard with numbers, but he was not slow either. A simple calculation with the help of a pencil and paper, and without the use of a calculator, had told him that the combined operation of about two thousand war-planes, over a period of one week and several raids a day simply meant a hell of a lot of bombs on the damned city which was the target of the wrath of the united nations of the world.

He would not call himself a non-believer. On the other hand he was not exactly a believer either. It just happened that in the half century that he had spent on the planet earth he never seemed to have seen a shade of the grace and magnanimity of the great Shepherd about whom he had heard in his youth,

nor had he witnessed any trust-worthy protection for His flock whenever misery struck them. Still, he could recall many distinguished sources who so vehemently talked about His eminence.

It wasn't so that he had not been searching. He did search, although he never was quite sure what he had searched for. He had read quite a number of books on the origin and the nature of the Absolute Being, who was said to be behind all happenings. And he had not been limited in his pursuit. He had read widely - scriptures from the East and West, even the sacred books of the *savage* Indians of the Americas and the *cannibals* of Africa.

And now when he had felt like praying, he felt awkward.

No! It was not the case that he felt short of compassion or eloquence. His problem was that he did not know who should be the receiver of his blessings. It couldn't have been the dictator himself - not a man who, if the information was correct, committed his first murder before he put the shaving blade to his face, and since then had continued to kill anyone who displeased him and also had the misfortune to come within his or his followers grasp. He definitely would not pray for his own President - another man who had reached his high office after being in charge of the biggest organised assassination agency of the world, and had dedicated his life in the tradition of his recent predecessors to the plunder and extortion of his fellow beings far and near. And obviously he had no sympathy for those awful petro-sheikhs who, by depleting the mother earth of its vital juices, lived in fabulous affluence, while the majority of their neighbours lacked the oil to keep a stove burning. Nor would he pray for their

neighbouring squatters who for the last forty-three years had been assaulting the natives and suddenly found themselves under fire.

Yet, he wanted to pray because he knew great atrocities were being committed. One could not bomb a city, with four and half million people, day and night for over a week without hurting a host of its dwellers – mostly innocent and sometimes not so innocent.

He wanted to pray for the innocents – those at home and abroad. People who were so stunningly plain that they accepted the noble causes given to them by their totally ignoble leaders on their face value, and wasted lives on both sides without ever really knowing the reasons which initiated the intrigue of their manipulators.

And he wanted to pray because he could feel the pain – the waves of pain.

He recalled the day when he had followed his uncle for a deer hunt. That was a long time ago, but he could even today see the moose standing under the tree. It was early dawn when they had sighted it. Through the binoculars he could see its eyes, the fine forehead bearing the horns, and how the hot breath condensed in the chilly morning wind when it left its nostrils. His uncle had lifted the gun, aimed and pulled the trigger. The bullet hit the beast on its breast, but before its collapse it kept on standing there for several long moments without any apparent distress. Only its eyes had changed. The way a stone thrown on the still water of a lake on a moon lit night makes an obscene noise when it hits its silvery chest and sends turbulent waves all around, he felt that the bullet did the same and the waves of pain emanated from the eyes of the

stag and enveloped everything. For a moment he had thought that he would drown in an ocean of passion. When the feeling was over he looked at the ugly, fat man standing beside him who had just robbed a magnificent animal of its life by a single squeeze of his finger. Tears had clouded his eyes and he had come home full of remorse.

Today again he had the same feeling of envelopment by pain; and he had the urgent need to do something to appease the pain – his own and that of others.

That is why he had knelt down to pray.

When no words came to him, he straightened up and took a couple of steps backwards. He stood there for a few moments, then slowly lowered himself to the floor, crossed his legs and sat in the lotus position. If he could not win over pain by saying words then he would do so by creating a void. He sat there for a while and waited for the emptiness to come. He waited and waited, but nothing happened. Suddenly he realised that the reason no emptiness came to him was that there was nothing in his mind that he could clear; except the data from his work, and the pulsating feeling of pain.

He knew he was a simple man, and he also believed he was a good man. Ever since he had finished his studies he had worked in the same establishment, designing the products manufactured by them. He was ingenious in finding solutions to the problems that arose as the time passed and new products were developed. He was regularly promoted for his good work and appreciated by his employers. He paid his taxes and always minded his own business. He could not remember ever hurting any-body; although he kept a gun in his drawer – a gun that he had inherited from his father. And

the old man had told him, "Son! Do not keep a gun in your house unless it is loaded, because that is the only time a gun is a gun." He had taken that advice all the way, and a step further – he never even put on the safety device ... just in case.

Tranquillity evaded him – neither concentration brought soothing words to his lips, nor did meditation erase the pain from his mind.

He was getting agitated. He had to do something – if he could not help the innocent passively by praying for them, then he must redeem them by actively working against the evil.

Calmly he raised himself from the floor, put on the long grey coat and went straight to the drawer. He took out the gun and put his hand with the gun held in it in the outer pocket. With a defiant look on his face he moved towards the main door of the apartment.

As he turned to switch off the light he was startled to see the man in the hall.

He knew that man. He had known him for years – middle aged, medium height, slim and with quite a bit of grey on his temples. He was a researcher in a nearby ordnance factory. He specialised in the development of the long distance missiles. He belonged to the batch of young people who in early sixties had joined the pioneers who had extracted the secrets from the captured German scientists after the Second World War; and employed the knowledge obtained from the Germans for the production of weapons in their country. There was no major ballistic missile in the national arsenal that did not owe some of its destructive potential to that man.

And now the rain of those missiles drowned the innocents in a flood of metal, stone and sand that gushed forth every time they hit their targets.

There was no doubt in his mind that the man in the hall mirror was profoundly evil.

With a steady hand he took the gun out of his pocket, put it in the mouth of the man in the mirror, squeezed the trigger and shot himself.

An instant before Mr. Adam's head jerked violently he remembered the moose, his uncle, one good man who had never hurt anyone and paid his taxes, and the evil one who had designed deadly weapons all his adult life.

Still no words came to his lips. As he sank downwards he made a final effort and got his feet into almost a lotus position, and then he passed into the big void.

Photo Finish

Peter cast a helpless look at Sandra, but there was not anything he could fetch. His suitcase, wide open and half-full, waited for the rest of its contents, but they had difficulty in finding their way to it. Suddenly little Tindra rushed in with protruding hands.

“I do not require all the three swimming trunks dear, but thanks anyhow!” said Peter.

“Dad would rather take your photograph with him, Tindra. Give him the school photo.”

Tindra turned towards her room. Sandra smiled and looked at Peter, who was shaking his head and said, “You know it very well, the spot I am off to I cannot have any photo with me!”

The taxi had already arrived at the front door. He closed his suitcase the way was it was, picked up his cameras and other photo equipment; he kissed Sandra, embraced Tindra and rushed towards the Taxi. Six crowns a minute waiting charge had enormous pull in it!

He needed a couple of minutes to feel comfortable in the cab. The journey from Östermalm to Airport normally took a little over thirty minutes. Peter felt glad that the taxi driver was a peaceful type who instead of terrorising his customers with dunka-dunk noise, played soft classical music from a cd, and concentrated upon the traffic.

Peter thought about Tindra who had offered him three swimming trunks. How could he tell her that he did not need any such trunks because the place he was going to had no

water he could swim into ... there flowed only blood; warm and thick to start with, but later on only cold and clotty.

And how many rivers of blood he had seen? It started in Vietnam; where, as a novice photographer, he had met Death, face to face, in her red dress. And it was not a mirthful meeting! Still, passion and feeling for adventure within him had overcome the terror that Death always invokes. Instead of hearing, smelling and seeing the misery that abounded around him he had put his ears, nose and eyes in the service of his cameras which, frame after frame and in the fraction of a second, arrested those ghastly happenings which a human brain might forget in the future if they were not, as black on white, saved as evidence that every war-photographer documents!

After Vietnam it was Cambodia; thereafter, Angola, Palestine, Bangladesh, Iraq and several more. Bosnia was a nightmare, followed by New York and Afghanistan. And now Iraq again.

If someone had asked him which of these places gave him sleepless nights, he had no direct answer to it. Each of these human tragedies had its own recipe for deprivation's stew where living beings were slaughtered and crumbled, and then broken down further and served as nutrition to the hungry mouths just under the outer crust of Mother Earth.

In an indescribable way his fever for adventure had given way to a chill that accompanied him on the later assignments. He was there, not as a person but as an extended lens to his cameras that merely looked at everything and transformed its impressions to a tiny plastic bit that had the ability to preserve all that he had seen.

He had accepted the assignment to Iraq rather unwillingly. He actually did not know what particular objective he had this time. According to the latest information a gang of evildoers would assault another bunch of evildoers at the end of March. Out of this misdeed, where evil should rape evil, would arise Goodness in her white costume of cotton bandages, bearing flagrant red and brown flowers of blood; she would have the sweet fragrance of burnt flesh and dynamite, and her merry laughter would remind us of thousand crying children who have just lost their parents. Peter always carried a great repulsion for murdering tyrants, but had no great attraction for murdering fools either! And now he felt that he was caught between the two. That is why he wanted to refrain from this undertaking. But Sandra had shown him a heap of unpaid bills; and that sufficed to mould his rejection into an affirmation.

It did not play any role which war he photographed; he always returned to Vietnam in his thoughts. Vietnam was his reference! And all other atrocities that were committed in various wars were graded against that he had seen as a neophyte. Even the war-pictures from all over the world were compared with the dreadful pictures from the Vietnam. The strongest memory from that Vietnam War that he carried was a photograph he had taken of a woman and a little girl. The girl ran in front of her mother with out-stretched hands. Her hands were protruded in the same manner as those of Tindra when she had come to him with his swimming trunks. The Vietnamese girl had nothing in her hands. What did she offer? Perhaps hands are not always stretched to give; but sometimes they are there to receive something ... mercy, compassion,

pity! Yet, that little girl got none of them. What she got was a shower of bullets and napalm. Seconds after he had taken that picture the mother and daughter were blown away in a blast. He wondered what their names were! Sandra and Tindra? No, no ... not them. But why not? They must have had names; then why not Sandra and Tindra!

Suddenly he saw how Sandra's hair was blown up by the wind when she tried to catch up with Tindra who ran ahead of her with Peter's swimming trunks in her hands. There was horrible noise of explosions and flames all around them. He ran after them, but they were too swift for him who also carried all of his cameras. Then they disappeared in the crowd. It was chaos all around. He searched for them several hours. Then he saw a police station. Peter went in there. It was packed with people who sought after their beloved ones. When his turn came he described his wife and daughter to the policeman.

"Do you have a photograph of them?" He had none.

"How do you expect us to find them out there?"

Peter did not say anything. He picked up his bags and went out into the square. Across the square he saw Sandra and Tindra again. A tank came in their direction. Peter saw that those two were the target.

"Stop!" he yelled.

"What?" exclaimed the taxi driver who was going full speed on the highway.

The two stared at each other.

"No, nothing," said Peter.

"Are you not feeling well?" inquired the driver.

Peter noticed how sweat dripped from his forehead. He looked out of the car window and saw that there were nearing an exit on the E4.

“Take the right lane,” he said to the chauffeur.

“What?”

“Take the right lane,” Peter commanded.

The driver changed to the right lane and looked at Peter enquiringly.

“I have forgotten an important paper at home. Could you drive me back to my home and then to the airport?”

The driver did as he was told. Probably Peter was not the first wretched soul he had driven!

“Did you forget your passport again?” asked Sandra when she opened the door.

“No,” said Peter and added, “Do you remember the picture I took of you and Tindra last Mid-summer Day?”

“Yes.”

“I would like to take it with me.”

“What?”

“I would like to carry your and Tindra’s photo with me,” replied Peter with tears in his eyes.

The Evil Eyes

It was a splendid evening – in Farakh¹ Sahib's home there was plenty of food, beverages and laughter, and from behind the wall of the sitting room the mirth of his ba-hijab² frivolous daughters sounded as if a damsel was on her way to meet her lover at the break of dawn wearing ghungroos³ on her ankles. On the way home despite the pitch-dark road and pervading silence my mind felt cheerful and happy by the memory of their glee.

That is why when my car, after such a delightful evening, first trembled like a malaria patient, then coughed as if suffering from tuberculosis and then ceased to breathe after plague hit her I sat there dumbfounded staring out of the windshield. I had bought this car only a few months ago. Although it was not new, still its succumbing to those three deadly sicknesses followed by its surrender on a desolate road did not appeal to me. I had now lived a long time in the West, yet my early youth in Mozang still provided me with a reservoir of those adjective that are never bestowed by one gentleman upon another; but, at that moment neither I felt like a gentleman nor did the seller of that car have any right to consider himself a

¹Farakh – open or spacious.

²Hijab or purdah – a cloth or any other physical object used to hide a woman's face or body from unfamiliar men. Ba-hijab = with hijab.

³Ghungroo – anklets with brass bells, worn by Indian dancers.

gentleman. Thus, relying upon my memory I showered upon him a load of profanities that he would have never dreamt of – but that made me feel much relieved. Thereafter, I called the agency that helps the needy in destitute situations. After about half hour arrived the truck from the Road Assistance and out of it came an extremely stout person. I handed over the keys to him, informed him about the repair centre near my home and looked at him with pleading eyes. He *was* a gentleman – he nodded to me to get into the truck, loaded my car on his vehicle and after leaving it at the repair centre drove me home. He deserved my blessings, and received a plenty of them too.

It was a strange day – I had gained my peace of mind by two different and opposite ways!

The night passed on. The morning might have arrived with new problems, but I took refuge in my extended sleep. When my body refused to burden the bed any longer I got up around ten. After going through the essential I reached the moment that I did not cherish. With a turbulent heart but hopeful mind, I called the Centre where my car was admitted as a patient. I feared its demise! The heart won over the mind. The mechanics after uttering some sympathetic words added that instead of try to wake up the dead I should contact my bank and ask for assistance in acquiring new life.

After consuming two extra cups of tea I was on my way to the bank. Luckily the railway station is very close to my house. The train showed up only seconds after my arrival. The first two compartments were fully packed, but in the third there was plenty of space. I parked myself on a seat by the window.

The same in and out took place on the next station. I had always wondered why people always prefer to board the first two compartments that are normally congested when there is often much space available in the remaining cabins. One reason could be that they think that in this way they would quickly leave the train and station. But what kind of hurry is this that one prefers to force one's way in a cabin where one can neither stand nor breathe. Then one day a friend of mine, who himself loved to board the crammed cabins, gave me an explanation that made some sense - according to him if one feels tense in the body then in that crowd a needy person gets that massage from the front and back that makes him feel good on leaving the train, with the accompanying expectation that if a day has started well then it would end well too.

That is why her arrival, her chosen direction of travel and a definite jerk to enter the second compartment seemed a bit odd. Although, in Sweden, there live several thousand compatriots from my abandoned home-land, yet to see a beautiful girl dressed in shalwar-kamiz⁴ was rather unusual in this area. Still, I thanked those moments that had imbued my eyes with dazzle and added some heat to my blood.

On reaching Sollentuna, I took time to leave my seat. The people in the first cabin were almost falling out because of the pressure from inside. To clear way for others I hurriedly moved a bit towards the left and collided with the person coming from behind. When I turned to apologise the woman

⁴An attire, consisting of trousers and long dress, which is worn by many South Asian women.

was looking at me quite irritated. Nevertheless, the moment our eyes met that irritation mellowed into a beautiful smile.

“Uncle, what are you doing on this train?”

She had addressed me in a very familiar manner, but her calling me uncle felt highly inappropriate. OK, I have a little bit of silver on my temples, but has the grey of hair ever faded the redness of anyone’s blood? My memory could not respond to her familiar attitude either. In order to facilitate further discourse I asked her, “What are you doing here?”

“There are swimming competitions in Sollentuna today. I am taking part there,” She said candidly.

She had already called me uncle, so a flaw in my memory did not feel awkward, “Excuse me, I do not remember your ...?”

She burst out in laughter.

I heard ghungroos jingle in my ears again.

“Oy, I forgot that you have never seen our faces. You visited us yesterday ... I am Farakh Sahib’s middle daughter.”

I knew Farakh had three daughters. But Farakh was a strict Muslim! Whenever we visited him, the women in the house never sat with us. We only heard them talk or laugh from the adjoining room. However, here this beautiful girl with fearless eyes claimed to participate in an international swimming gala. A very peculiar picture emerged in my mind – an empty swimming pool, hundreds of spectators on the side; five girls who would make you think that there is a dearth of clothes in the universe, and their three challengers who stood for the abundance of cloth in this world, and then all of them jumped together in the pool. What a scene it was when the

commentator sometimes mentioned a name and sometimes the colour of a Burqa⁵.

I was fully enjoying that spectacle in my mind when I heard, "Uncle, where are you?"

It was time to speak the truth.

"I was thinking that Farakh Sahib strictly believes in purdah⁶. How come he allowed you to swim?"

She giggled again, "Daddy is not only open-minded by his name but also in his thinking. He says that to make advance in this life we must engage in all healthy competitions. He told us that among Swede's and other white people we do not need to observe purdah, because these people are taught from the very beginning that other than physical attributes there is no difference between men and women. These people do not judge the other by their nakedness but by the state of their mind in determining if one is decent or indecent. People are assessed here by their actions and performance. Purdah is applicable among people who have the evil eye – people who consider woman's obedience to men as a merit for her, like to see subservient women with bowed heads and eyes, and after imprisoning them in four walls tell them that they should feel safe. Such bastards who would molest a young girl publicly and then boast about their manliness."

"Then you observe purdah only from your father's friend?"

⁵Burqa – an enveloping dress worn by the Muslims women among men, especially when in a public place.

⁶Purdah or hijab – a cloth or any other physical object used to hide a woman's face or body from unfamiliar men.

“Of course, only when daddy’s friends from his old country visit us that we hide ourselves. After all, every one ought to protect oneself from the evil eyes!”

The Sixth Sense

He parked the car near The Sollentuna Swimming Hall, slowly strolled through the lush green field on the way to the Edsberg Slott, circled the grand building and proceeded towards the promenade by the Edsviken. He needed tranquillity as well as time to think. Oblivious of the joggers who passed him every now and then he tried to concentrate on the problem that needed a quick but definite solution. He touched the paper in his pocket to ascertain himself that the task at hand, or rather in his hand, was real. Just opposite Vallen, the sports arena, he sat down on a large rock by the bank of the lake. Some ducks took him to be one of their benefactors who regularly fed them and hurriedly swam towards him, but then abandoned their hope as his hands remained in his lap. They could see that he wasn't *really* there.

And he wasn't!

He had glided into the realm of thoughts, expanded ten short seconds into a long stretch of time and was examining each milli-moment separately. He was looking at every instant, recalling every small whisper, recapturing incidents that had taken place in those short, but for him unforgettable, ten seconds -- a male voice, turning of his head, the black hole in the metal gazing at him, his abrupt burst into activity to confuse the aggressor, his intentional erratic car driving, a hit on his head from behind by a metallic object, how he had inhaled deeply and hit the man in the passenger seat with full force by his elbow just under his ear; thereafter, how he had

applied full breaks and leapt out of the car hitting his head against the road; and, finally, how darkness swallowed him!

All that and a lot more had happened in those second – three persons had become so deeply involved that they would never forget each other for the rest of their lives. If his aggressors had known how intimately he was acquainted with Death, then would they have tried that threat on him? Did they know how close to dying they had come? Two young idiots trying to make a quick earning had almost killed and nearly got killed themselves!

He took a deep breath and returned to the real world. Slowly he pulled the paper from the prison authority and read it again. It had warned him that Guntis Kajons had served his term and would be released from the jail on the ninth September.

Today it was ninth September and he remembered Guntis very well. He was the older of the two, and the experienced one – the one who had sat beside him and pulled the pistol on him. He was the one he had secretly named as the Snake Eyes, because of his stare. They had met in the court in Sollentuna. All during the court proceedings Guntis had stared at him without a single blink. Just before they vacated the court room and Guntis, accompanied by two guards, had gone out with a slight limp in his left leg their eyes met for a very brief but intense instant and he knew, there and then, that they would meet again.

The younger one was sentenced to six months imprisonment, while Snake Eyes got one year.

It was a fine day. The sun had just finished painting the Edsberg Slott golden yellow. The fountain in the lake bestowed a fine spray of brilliants to its surrounding water. Over the rocks of Falkenberg a sea gull screeched, suddenly breaking the spell of the afternoon's lull. A pair of majestic swans indignantly looked at the rude noisy bird and then continued their regal float on the silvery water chest.

Jason closed his eyes again and retreated to his reflective state of mind. He felt agitated. Anger bounced in his mind! He had been angry for over a year now. Actually he had been angry from the moment he had leapt out of his taxi and hit the ground. How could he, the hunter, become the prey? How could he miss the danger signals after all the elite training that he had received? How could his sixth sense, the one that had kept him alive in the jungles of Vietnam, abandon him when he needed it the most? Or had he discarded his sixth sense? No, that he couldn't have done. The sixth sense is not something that one acquires or discards; either one has it or does not possess it! And that he had the sixth sense, he was sure of. Because, without it he wouldn't be sitting there.

He was in his merely twenty when he was drafted by the American army. In only six months he was deprived of his humanity and turned into a killing machine that lacked all sense of morality or justice. He was brainwashed to kill on command ... kill anyone and anywhere. And he had felt good. He felt good to belong to the 'most efficient killing gang of the world'. Just the experience of holding the automatic gun in his hand and the knowledge that he had the potential to take life made him feel euphoric. According to his faith it was God that

gave and took life! And when one may do the half of what only God could do then wasn't that one a demigod? And that was what Americans had sent to the peasants of Vietnam ... thousands and thousands of demigods who did what God would do in his worst temper. They had killed, burnt, and destroyed all that had come in their way. Without asking themselves who did they kill and why? They actually relished that orgy of death.

And then he was ordered for a short rest of a month. He had hated leaving his pals in action but the field psychologist had insisted that he *needed* a break. And while he was on that break something broke within him. It happened when one of the newly arrived nurses at the hospital had asked him: "What do these gooks look like?" And he could not answer. He had seen no GOOK. He had killed them - men, women, children, dogs, cats and hens - but he could remember no faces, no voices. All he remembered was the burst of bullets, blast of bombs, smell of explosives, flash of bayonets, shrieks of pain, bodies in the mud, and the abundant purple red of blood staining the green foliage of the jungle.

All those months he was there they were sent on quick raids followed by a quicker retreat to his comrades-in-arms. He had never actually seen the enemy in his eyes at anytime. Then, how could he describe what did they look like!

When he did not utter any word the nurse had withdrawn herself believing him to suffer from the battle fatigue. But he had kept on thinking the whole night long about who were his real enemies. Then a torrent of salt water had burst out of his eyes. In the darkness of the night he had cursed all the Kennedys, Nixons, and Johnssons who had

robbed him and thousands of other youngsters of their boyhood and transformed then into murdering robots. He had killed people who had never hurt him; and he had killed for the people who profited more by selling lead than selling gold, by devising machines that turn lead into a precious metal as bullets that are meant for human bodies. The next morning when he got up he looked at the world by different eyes.

In the next few days he met some other boys who were also wondering what were they doing there, and why?

Thirty eight years ago he had landed in Sweden along with eleven other American deserters. It was the July of 1968, and the schools and the universities were closed for the summer vacation. As many students return to their parental homes in the summer there were plenty of temporarily vacant accommodations in Kungshamra, a student hostel on the periphery of Stockholm city. They were boarded there on their arrival. In the tavern of the student house he had met Ingrid who had held his hand and listened to his story. He never let go of her hand and after she had completed her studies they had moved to Törnaskogen in Sollentuna, in a villa that Ingrid had acquired from her retiring parents, who had moved on to an apartment in the nearby Häggvik.

From the moment Ingrid had met him she had known that he was a good but tormented soul, and after listening to his stories she knew why. But she was patient by nature, and kind at heart. That had helped.

After trying various jobs he had settled for driving taxi. To sit and work all day long in some room was claustrophobic for him, but he possessed no higher education to qualify for

some responsible field job. Taxi brought him relief. Meeting different people, talking to them, looking into their eyes, listening to their talk comforted him.

He had also managed to de-brainwash himself from the filth that was poured into his mind by the American army. He kept no weapon in his home and his three children were never encouraged to play with guns. The only relic he had left from the army was his hunting knife that he had held on to.

Years continued to pass by peacefully, and then came the day he met the two very special clients in Frihamnen in Stockholm. One had jumped onto the front seat and the other in the seat behind him. "To Åkersberga," the one in the front had said. And towards Åkersberga he had driven. It was a normal summer afternoon and the journey towards Österskär had gone smoothly. Despite the hard labour by the air conditioner the August heat remained invincible. The passenger in the front seat was a bit uncomfortable; otherwise, there was no other sign of trouble.

Then Jason heard him say something and point towards a forest path just before Stava.

That what followed was like a nightmare; the details of which overwhelmed his mind from time to time. How many times had he re-run that memory-film? Each time becoming angry at the ending! It was he who had to run to save his life; whereas in a well directed film it should have been those two hoodlums who should have begged for mercy!

However much he tried he could not change that ending.

And now the Snake Eyes was being released after the completion of his sentence. And Jason's sixth sense had come into play. Since he had received the letter he had felt that turbulence in his body that always preceded his storms. Sitting there in the picturesque surroundings of Edsviken his whole being knew that something awful was about to happen, and that it would happen today.

Yesterday he had sent Ingrid and the two young ones to her parent's summer house in the countryside. She had sensed his unrest but was astute enough to not to ask him any questions. "Call us when it is time for you to return to us," had she said after she kissed him to bid farewell.

Instead of parking the car in the porch he placed it outside on the street - he wanted to keep the path clear in front of his main door for all eventualities. It was still light outside; days are incredibly long in Sweden in the summer. He prepared himself a salad and toast with cheese and consumed it with mineral water. Anything that might dull his reactions was strictly kept at a distance. He pushed a collection of Mahler's discs in the player, settled down in the armchair in the hall facing the entrance and listened to the music. Mahler matched the turmoil within him. Time passed, very very slowly to begin with, but when his pulse abruptly quickened the time started rushing away. He had seen the lights of a car that had gone by his villa, but the sound of tires had died rather quickly. RED ALERT!. He got up from his chair, pulled the hunter's knife from its sheath and placed the shaft flatly in the palm of his right hand, took three sharp steps and about a meter from the main door sank on the floor on his knees.

Through the glass plate on the side of the door he saw a figure approach the door with a limp. Jason's right arm was stretched backwards, balancing the knife in his hand for a throw. Outside another hand was protruded, but before it touched the handle of the door Jason pushed the door outwards that startled the man standing there. Before the stranger could regain his wits and move the arm that hid behind his back Jason jerked his hand and released the sharp knife that hit the man on his breast, piercing his heart. A hissing sound escaped from the mouth of Snake Eyes as he fell backwards. Jason got up and cautiously went towards the fallen man. Then he bent down to take away the weapon from the hidden hand of Snake Eyes. He turned him on his side. The hand of the dying man held a bunch of roses.

"What have you done?" an anxious voice broke the spell.

Jason looked at the man in taxi uniform who stared at him.

"Why did you knife him?" asked his colleague as he lifted his eyes from Snake Eyes to Jason,

"He ... he ... he wanted to ..."

"He wanted to give you some roses!"

"R...o...s...es?" asked Jason.

"Yes, I helped him buy them for you. He was on his way to the airport, and he said to me in English that he had to apologise to someone before he leaves Sweden. He showed me an old paper from the court that had your address on it. So I drove him here."

"Why would he give me flowers?" asked Jason

"He told me that he had done an old man great harm. A year confronting himself was a long period! He had thought about the events in the jail and felt very bad. He said he had

changed; and as I said before, he just wanted to apologise to you!"

Jason thought about his sixth sense. Once again it had made him kill someone who was not really an enemy.

Rainbow

Outside it was so pitch dark that even cats must have been longing for some moonlight.

Lying there on the bed she brought her both palms near her face and tried to see them but she saw nothing; until they came so close to her that she could feel their warmth on her cheeks. Then she gently touched one arm with the fingers of the other and slowly moved them to and fro. Heat waves went right through her whole body, and then feeling shy she hid her face with both hands. "Would he touch me the same way?" Suddenly, quite embarrassed, she looked around in the room to see if someone was watching her. Then she burst into laughter on her own embarrassment. She was all by herself in that room, and even if someone else were there then what that person would see in that total darkness! Once again those waves enveloped her. And after that the very thought of his nearness induced an intoxication in her being; every fibre in her body was now aching tenderly.

In that state of inebriation she saw violets swaying by the riverside. How, whenever harsh wind would assail them, they laid themselves on the ground and after the wind had consumed her strength they lifted their heads, paused for a moment, as if to see if a new assault was on its way, and then resumed their dance. I would also be like them! She told herself. If he ever showed temper I would take the character of violets and let the storm pass over, and when his temper subsides I would, like these flowers, mellow his heart. Suddenly she had the urge to rush out and lay herself among the violets, when the lightning struck and she woke up from her dreaming. She started to count so that she would know the proximity of the lightning clouds by the sound of thunder.

When no thunder came she felt relieved that those clouds were not that dangerous.

In a short while it will be dawn, she thought. With that the blackbird's song and images of newly showered blueberries dancing to the puffs of playful wind arose in her mind. How she loved the indigo! And this indigo colour flashes only during these rainy months, and what kind of spectacle accompanies it – blackbird calls from here, while cuckoo replies her from there; if the pouring rain reminds of Malhar⁷, then water drops falling from the leaves imitate tabla drums; here one serves a glass of orange squash, there one sits and slowly sucks juice from a mango! Suddenly she realised that her mouth watered. Thinking of mangoes she had been sucking her own tongue, or was it *his* tongue! That very thought almost choked her. Very slowly she removed the cold sweat from her forehead with her palm, and then tried to catch her breath.

How deep blue is the sky during monsoons! It appears as if after it has been washed someone dipped it in an azure bath and just before spreading it for drying scattered millions of tiny twinkling pearls on it. But today neither one could see the blue sheet nor those tiny pearls; only a blanket of thick, dark clouds. Yet, if she were to go to the river later on she could watch the kingfisher diving for the fish. But how would she go out today? She heard her own laughter. Quickly she put her hand on her mouth. If mother heard me in the adjacent room what would she say? She asked herself. The same as always: "O' girlie, don't indulge in sweet-dreaming when awake, else you will have nightmares when you sleep." Then she had a good laugh at her mother, and afterwards whispered, "Mum, if I stopped day-dreaming then that explosion which pacifies

⁷Malhar: A musical composition, raga, associated with the rainy season in India.

me in the blue hour, followed by this sweet-ache in whole of my body, would never come!"

No, no! The reign of the blue hour is over. Soon her friends would come, and they would sit in the swing under the lush green mango and Jaman trees. How verdant is our courtyard; and all those chirping green parrots. She had never really made up her mind if she hated or loved those parrots. There was no doubt that she intensely disliked their nibbling at the fruits, and the wastage. And those monsters with their green plumage were totally invisible in those leafy trees. Only their non-stop *teen-teen* disclosed their presence. But if they were to disappear for a day or two for whatever reason, then the overwhelming silence also cast an unbearable stillness all around! She was still enjoying her imaginary swing rides when it occurred to her that she would not be able to go out to the courtyard. Forget about these swings, its time to bid farewell to the greenery of this house and join *him* in the open fields.

And immediately her eyes were filled with yellow sheets of rape opening in the green fields. This image had come with such intensity that she could smell the mustard flowers in her nostrils; then, she turned her head and looked at the thick curtain covering the window. In that darkness she saw no curtain, but she knew exactly where it was – three steps straight ahead from the right side of her bed and the curtain would have been in her hand. But what is the point in pulling it away now? She continued her soliloquy. The clouds must break and sun arise so that its yellow morning-rays would bathe all its worshipers. She had also been wearing yellow clothes since yesterday! I wonder what colour are his clothes today? Men do not dress in yellow, and those who do they never touch a virgin's hand! No, no! He mustn't wear yellow, it is enough that I do. On the other hand, a garland of marigolds would sure add to his attire. Her whole room now filled with the fragrance of marigolds. Am I going crazy? She asked herself. Sometimes I smell mustard flowers and now it is

marigolds! And the truth is that I am still enclosed in my room. Let us wash first, and then I would also use a flower-band in my hair.

Perhaps the rain had abated, because suddenly the water music from outside subsided a bit. Look, she addressed the clouds, this evening they are going to add sendur ⁸ to my hair, so be careful! If you do any mischief then I would have you so badly beaten by grandfather's stick that you would have to flee behind the mountains to shed your tears over there. On her head she found the partition of her hair with her finger and felt the bare skin underneath. After today it shall be no longer brown! As long as her husband lives she would wear orange-red powder in that partition. And how she had wished that she would wear it forever! She new that she wouldn't be able to see the henna's orange coloured flowers on her palms, that is why she let the palms embrace her face and the flowers kissed her. In a few moments only her hands turned burning hot, but she did not remove them. "These hands are not mine, but *his!*" How could she take them away?

She was certain that her smouldering cheeks were now red like tulips. She was breathing fast. Those burning puffs from her inside escaped her lips and began to over-whelm her whole being. She tried to wet her lips with her tongue; but how could a dry tongue add comfort to the parched flesh? She swept her tongue on her lips again. Her panting was also playing havoc with her chest. She felt as if she was wearing her younger sister's blouse and if she did not control that storm the buttons from that blouse would fly away. With great effort she lifted her hands and placed them on her stomach to pacify the storm inside her; but she felt as if someone had lifted glowing embers from her cheeks and placed them near

⁸ Sendur: Minium or red lead used by married Indian women in the partition of their hair.

her loins. All around her, in and outside her body, it was burning. Everywhere it was red!

Then she thought that her bed had started to swirl – slowly everything else also began to spin... violets left their stalks and fastened into the indigo plants ... the sky bent down and swept those plants in her blue sheet ... all at once green twigs and leaves broke through that blue and were laden with yellow flowers in no time. How quickly everything was happening! Her muscles were pulled hard and waves of some turbulent sea undulated inside her. Desperately she bit her under lip to turn the tide of emotions; but it was no longer in her power to the stem that flood. She thought she was falling off a mountain. At the feet of the mountain she saw a furious orange river. She held the bed with both hands to avoid drowning. She pressed her lips so hard that she believed crimson blood would spurt out of them. Everything was now spinning. Violets, hibiscus flowers, sweet peas, mustard flowers, sunflowers, roses, safflowers, tulips and only goodness knows what other kind of flowers and bushes were whirling around her ... whirls, and more whirls.

Then, a cry, almost a loud sob, broke out of her lips. Then more sobs ... first violent, then gentle ... turning into whispers ... and more whispers! She was completely wet now ... as if she had just taken a swim in the ocean of desire! Then all around her things quietened down, slowly coming to a stand still. The darkness in her was gone. It was bright everywhere... pure radiance... and how absolutely white it was!

The Cheating Heart

He came out of the pharmacy Vallmon in a violent rage and knew someone would die today!

The process had already started two days earlier -- he had awoken with one of those devastating migraine headaches. It felt as if a vibrating, long, red hot nail was hammered in his right frontal lobe; along with waves of undulating pain that started on his forehead and made their way, slowly but resolutely, to the back. Nausea lay deep in his stomach waiting for a chance to burst out of his mouth. He stayed in his bed and breathed slowly to appease different kind of assaults in progression in his body and mind. It would have helped had there not been those lamentations pouring in from the sitting room.

“What the hell is” he yelled as he came into the room, but was cut short by the waving hand of Ingrid who gleefully looked at those odd balls moving about ecstatically on the TV.

“Isn’t it amazing? What feeling, what grace!” she uttered as she stared at the screen and was not really interested to know what he thought of Pakistani Sufi music.

To Anders the concept music or song did not apply to those gangs of hand clapping and rhythmically chanting Sufis who crooned the same unintelligible verse again and again as if the phrase had gotten stuck in their throats, the way it used to happen with old vinyl records. He cursed the day he had decided to take Ingrid to two weeks holidays in Turkey. Her fervour for the Hard Rock was bad enough, but there in

Turkey she had fallen, heart before head, for the whirling dervishes and the chants of Sufi singers. On her return to Sollentuna she had made vigorous inquiries and one day had come home with a black box called Jadoo. Had Jadoo existed in times of Pandora she might have preferred it to her little box. The number of miseries that little box released in the form of most awesome distortion of human voice and instrumental noise far exceeded the knowledge of Anders Andersson about what torture human beings could inflict in their effort to appease their gods. He has been into soft jazz and ballads all his life. An occasional blast by Miles Davis was acceptable to him, but anything beyond that sound spectrum was decidedly noise!

For Ingrid the Sufis had a completely different message. Not only did she listen to them for hours, she had added their music to her exercise program -- and that meant sitting in the same place for hours and occasionally falling into fits of violent jerking of her body is a sort of trance.

"How come you listen to them for hours?" Anders asked her.

"What do you mean?"

"What do they say? You don't understand them, do you?" he enquired further.

"I don't have to understand their words. I understand them with my heart!" replied Ingrid with full conviction.

A wave of resentment went through Anders. Ingrid had never said the same for him.

"How come you listen to them the whole day long?"

"I don't!"

“Don’t you? You are here in front of the TV when I get up and still there when I go to bed.”

“Yes, but I listen to only those few performances that I like.”

“Then why sit here the whole day?”

“Because I do not know when they are shown here.”

“Don’t they give times for their broadcast?”

“Yes they do, but they are given according to the time in those countries.”

“But what it is that you like besides Sufi music. They are quarrelling and shouting in all their plays all the time?”

“They are not like us! They are very passionate people and behave accordingly,” replied Ingrid.

Passions were something Anders Andersson knew very little about. Brought up by a mother who belonged to the Pentecostal Church he, as a child, had a nerve shattering experience when one evening she, along with other members of the congregation in the church, in a fit of *glossolalia*, utterance of unintelligible languages, showed her rare passionate side. For the coming few weeks he had difficulty in sleeping in the same room with her. Otherwise, in general life her attitude towards passions had been – I tried it once and did not like it!

Needless to say that he was her only child!

He was brought back to reality by Ingrid’s reiteration “I said they were passionate people!”

“Yes, of course. But what pleasure do you get in seeing them yell at each other?”

“Oh, I don’t pay any attention to that.”

“What is it then you pay attention to?” asked a bewildered Anders.

“Their clothes and their make-up. Don’t you see that in all that misery how well dressed they are, and mascara never flows out of their eyes even when they weep?”

Anders closed his eyes and tried not to think, but that was not easy. Actually he felt like asking her when did she do her domestic tasks, but that was inviting trouble because their house was always neat and clean; and the food always on time and well prepared. Still, sitting in front of the TV looking at programs she did not wish to watch did not make sense to him, but for her it was fully logical. No, not logical – because logic or anything related to it was alien to her mind; but certain things always made sense to her that was completely illogical to him.

Another nail was pushed into his head a bit behind the first one. Quite involuntarily he put his hand on his head.

“Are you getting one of your severe attacks?” this time a trace of sympathy tinged her voice.

Anders nodded and went towards the kitchen to make himself a mug of black coffee.

“Perhaps you should go to the Emergency before it becomes as bad as the last time. You howled like a hoarse wolf!”

Anders took her advice and decided to go to Karolinska hospital. It was not so much to get some treatment, he knew that they would not do anything but to advise him to go home

and rest, as it was to get away from Ingrid and her Jadoo. The moans of some sick and wounded would be definitely at a much lower pitch than the howls of Ingrid's over-excited darlings, he had thought.

As he dressed he joyfully looked forward to several hours of relative tranquillity in the waiting room of the hospital.

The moment the receptionist saw him a smile appeared on her face.

"Are we hurting again today?"

"Not hurting again, it hurts all the time but today it is a horrible throbbing feeling. I feel my head would explode."

"It won't! Or better put, it hasn't for the last forty years, so it should hold today as well."

She took his free card, stamped it, added the necessary information in the computer and then pointed towards the waiting room.

After he had retired he has been a frequent visitor to the hospital. Both of the receptionists, who also lived in Sollentuna, knew him and were quite benign to him.

Anders found an empty chair in a far corner and settled down to have some prolonged peaceful moments. After a while the sharp needle-pain in his head turned into a dead weight of about a ton or so. It still hurt but it was no longer a pulsating pain. It felt more like as if a scarf of coarse cotton was wrapped around his head and then tightened hard. Rather exhausted, he was almost falling asleep when he became aware of the faint fragrance. He looked around and

saw the women sitting beside him – she looked worn out and fatigued.

He smiled as a sign of sympathy and was going to ask her what he could do for her, when she enquired: “How are you feeling now?”

“Not so bad, and how is it with you?” he asked her in return.

“Can’t say the same. I have not slept for eighteen hours. It is tough here at the Emergency ward!”

He scrutinised her carefully – about thirty or so, pale in the face, probably hungry and decidedly very tired.

“You been here for eighteen hours and no one has attended you?”

“It is me attending others,” she replied.

He looked at her inquisitively.

“Oh, sorry! My name is Kathrine, Doctor Kathrine!” she introduced herself and extended a hand.

Quite reluctantly Anders took her hand and pondered hurriedly if it was wise to be examined by a doctor who was hungry, exhausted and perhaps half sleepy.

“Perhaps I could come back some other day...”

“No, no! It’s alright. I am like this all the time. With the shortage in nurses we doctors have to double up for them.”

Anders had read about the shortage of nurses. They were on strike asking for higher wages. The hospital management had refused to increase their salaries; instead they had decided to pay overtime to the doctors, an amount five times more expensive than the wages of nurses, and forced them to work extended hours. Anders wondered if Ingrid could get a job in the management. She would blend in so nicely!

They went to a small cabin where Anders repeated his history with migraine a thousandth time.

“Have you tried acupuncture?”

“I have a phobia for needles,” he informed Kathrine.

“What about Yoga?”

“Look lady, I was brought up in a decent Christian home. These pagan practices are nothing for me.”

“Yoga is not a religion, it is a way of meditation and concentration that could lead to decrease in stress and consequently lessen your headaches.”

“My migraine is not stress related. I get my attacks by the sudden change in the weather; or better put, by the sudden change in the atmospheric pressure.”

“You are rather well informed about migraine,....”

“Well, I had forty years to read ‘All You Want To Know About Migraine’.”

A faint smile crept over her face. She had beautiful teeth.

“Then why are you here? You probably know more about your ailment than I do?”

“I need someone to write my prescription. My Anervan’s stock finished yesterday. That is why I am in this bad shape. Besides it is so very relaxing here!”

Kathrine looked around at all the people with broken bones, dislocated shoulders and other damages that surrounded them and was about to ask Anders about the relaxing part of his comment but thought better of it and instead said, “Alright then, I would write you a packet for thirty ...”

“No, please. I need the one with hundred, that would save me from bothering you for a whole year.” Anders said to her convincingly.

Dr. Kathrine wrote the prescription and asked, “Should I put it into the computer or do you want it now?”

“As I am here I might as well take it.”

Anders came out of the hospital and walked very carefully to his car. It had snowed heavily two days earlier, then rained and frozen again putting Stockholm under a thin sheath of black ice. That meant a large number of people with broken arms and legs on their way to the Emergency wards of various hospitals. He did not intend to be one of them.

He was feeling quite weary, so he went directly to his home. Not intending to disturb Ingrid and her companions Anders very softly tip-toed to the sleeping room, took two tablets of aspirin and joined his bed.

The following morning things were not any better. His head still ached violently and whole of his body ached. He forced himself to eat a sandwich and then took a mug of coffee. Thereafter, he drove to the chemist in Rotebro. The lady who attended him was nice and friendly. That bothered him. The staff at Vallmon was not renowned for its friendliness.

She looked at the prescription and then at the computer screen and said, “We do not have a package of hundred in the store, could you take thirty?”

“No, dear; I would prefer one with hundred because that lasts for a whole year for me. That would save me three visits to you.”

The woman nodded and said, “That is good. I would place an order with our suppliers and you could come back tomorrow in the afternoon to fetch it.”

The next day, today, he drove to the chemist, bought his medicine and rushed home. Anervan was actually a pre-emptive treatment for migraine – it was most useful when taken at the first signs of a migraine attack. But in the case of Anders it helped him even after an attack had started. He fetched a glass of water and was about to open the package when his eyes caught the expiry date information. It said 08/2012. It was already the end of March, 2012. That meant that the medicine that should have lasted him for a year would expire in five months. A wave of anger hit him hard. Anervan was not cheap, and a package of Anervan when it was less than half used and would become officially useless in five months was definitely very expensive!

By the time he reached the chemist his head was replete with fury and hurt. The lady who had attended him earlier was nowhere to be seen. He took a number from the machine and waited for his turn. The man who called his number in no way behaved friendly.

“What can I do for you?” he asked in an aggressive tone.

“I bought this medicine about an hour ago.”

“So?”

“It has an expiry date only after five months, while I need it for a year.”

“How could we know how long you would use a medicine? You place an order and we get you the prescribed medicine.”

“But I said to the lady who attended me that I would need it for a whole year.”

“She knows nothing about the expiry dates on various medicines that are sent to us by the suppliers. You placed an order and you got your medicine, and with that our responsibility is over.”

“I have not opened the package; can I return it to you?”

“Sorry, medicines once sold over the counter can not be returned.”

“Why not?”

“Such is the law.”

“What law?”

A strong look of resentment appeared on the face of the man behind the counter. He already looked repulsive but now he was undoubtedly obnoxious.

Anders picked up his half useful package of Anervan and came out of Vallmon. He had just discovered that his migraine was not weather related only. It was stress related as well, because now not only it hurt badly in his head, he also heard whining sounds in his ears and millions of brilliant particles shone before his eyes.

Somehow, he reached his car, opened the door and sat there for a while. He understood that a chemist, like every one else, was there to make money. He had no problem with that, but he had always difficulty in understanding those institutes who deal with people in need – doctors, lawyers, bankers,

chemists and several others in the service sector – and take advantage of such persons who trust them for their expertise in helping them resolve their problems. Here he expected a better code of ethics than other enterprisers did.

He also wondered about the expiry dates of all the medicine.

According to the available information a law, on the demand of its military, was passed in 1979 in USA about stamping the production as well as the expiry date on all the drugs that guaranteed the potency of the drug during that period. And that started one of the widest legal swindle in modern times.

As he had heard, in Sweden it was arbitrarily decided by a commission of advisers to restrict this period for two to five years from the production date. Why two to five years? Nobody knows why, because majority of the drugs manufactured in the world are fully useable even fifteen years or longer after their date of production. It just happened that after the elapse of forty minutes in a meeting which was scheduled to be held for forty-five minutes, when no pharmaceutical parameters could provide any logical solution, a lady uttered on the forty-first minute “What about two to five years?” They all had looked at each other and then nodded in affirmation. And two to five years it had become since then. If the members of that advisory committee put all their money into share of drug companies after that fixation no one knows; but had they done it they would have become millionaires by this time. That one single utterance had guaranteed the disposal and re-manufacturing of drugs worth multi-billions of dollars, which were completely useable if

only one could erase the expiry date from their containers, within a period of two to five years.

Anders started the car but did not go straight home. He drove to Edsberg Slott, parked the car and went for a slow stroll by the lake side. It was risky to walk on the slippery ice but he did not care. They had put gravel on the area between the two walking streaks. There were almost no enthusiasts out there walking in that cold wind that hit him hard on his cheeks. He felt miserable, angry and very, very agitated. After a while he made his way up to the wooden platform that protruded over the water. It was getting dark now. He bent over the frame and looked into the lake when he heard someone say, "It is not cold enough."

"Cold enough for what?" Anders asked without looking back.

"To jump into the water and do whatever you intend to do!"

He turned around and looked at the old lady who stood behind him.

"What did you think I intended to do?"

"Well, you don't look very well. You have gone to and fro on the same patch for the last fifteen minutes mumbling to yourself and at times waving wildly"

"Have you been watching me?"

"Yes, I sat there by the wall. Then I saw you going towards the platform very purposefully so I thought I ought to stop you."

"Stop me from doing what?"

"Committing suicide, what else," she replied confidently.

"I do not intend to kill *myself*, I wish to kill *someone* else."

"Who?"

"Anyone, just anyone to get rid of my aggression!"

A worried look wiped out the confidence from her face.

"I hope it is not me," she said now apprehensively.

Anders took a good look at her – about eighty, lean and fragile.

"Why not?" he asked her after a short while.

"What's the point? I have done you no harm. I just came here to walk my dog."

That alarmed Anders. He had seen no dog, and had never liked them either.

"Where is your dog?" he enquired.

"Oh, it died a month ago."

"You came here to walk a dog that died a month ago?"

"Well, you won't understand," she replied him hesitantly.

"Try it anyhow?"

"I had Jolly for many years, and everyday by this time I came here with him for a walk. He died a month ago, but I am so used to walking here at this hour that I come here anyhow assuming that jolly is with me." Sadness ruled her face.

They looked at each other for a while and then Anders asked her, "What about joining Jolly?"

"Not possible. It was not baptised so I presume it has not gone to where I would be going. Besides I must live at least another five months."

"Why must you live another five months?" he asked her.

"Well, that is sort of complicated. My grandmother died when she was eighty-four years and three months. Before she

passed away I had put a bet with her that I would live longer than her. I am now eighty-three and eleven months. So as you see I have to live five months more to win."

It has started to hammer in his head again. The cold wind had not been conducive to any relief; instead, he felt sweaty under his clothes and dry in his mouth.

"What about we meeting here in six months?" he asked her as she turned to leave.

"Well, yes; why not. That gives me the incentive I need."

"What incentive?" asked Anders.

"I have liver cancer and my doctor says I have only three months left to live. But if I make you a promise to meet you here in six months then perhaps I could keep myself ticking until then. In this way both of us would get what we want!" were her last words as she disappeared into the distance.

Anders Andersson very gently turned towards in the direction of his parked car. It was throbbing heavily in his head but then an explosion occurred in his chest, waves of scorching pain made their way to his left arm and an exit through his fingertips. He sat down on the floor of the platform, put his head on the wooden bench and tried to catch a last breath.

After a few seconds he had fallen fast asleep -
foram7b2eever.

The only time in Mr. Andersson's life when his heart took over command from his head it had failed him!

Wet

She looked at the remaining wine in her glass, and also realised she was wet.

“Another bastard!” she had thought. “How could he ... how could he do this to me?”

Cautiously she took a few steps to the rear of the room. Away from his sight; hopefully, out of his range. “Through the translucent wall of the cigarette smoke he would not be able to cast his net of charm over me,” she told herself. Some kind soul offered her freshly poured chilled wine. Oblivious of the philanthropist’s identity she took hold of the glass with the effervescent water from grapes. Condensation had thrown an opaque screen between her eyes and the sparkling drink. Before she put her lips to the glass she slowly protruded her tongue and felt its thin rim. Her nostrils caught the aroma of the bubbling Champagne. She wondered if his teeth would feel that way, or if his breath had the same fruity flavour. Gently she sucked in the fluid. “No, no! Nobody’s lips could have this salty, sweetish taste,” she told herself and, while dreaming, let a generous smile manifest itself on her face.

“You always this happy?”

She bid the smile to disappear from her face, pulled on a protective mask of instant intellectualism on it, narrowed her eyes a bit, and slanting her head a little, she almost growled, “What if I am?”

He studied her stance for a short while and observed, “No, you are not. You were.”

“What am I not, and what was I?” she asked.

“Happy!”

She closed her eyes to meditate upon his cryptic assertion.

“Listen mister!” without opening her eyes she addressed him, mellowing the growl to a softer tone, “What I feel is...”

“Are you feeling alright?” She heard a feminine voice ask her.

She opened her eyes. He wasn't there any longer. Instead, a somewhat amused Barbara was watching her intensely.

“Where did he go?”

“Who?”

“The character who was talking to me.”

“There wasn't anyone talking to you. You were talking to someone who wasn't here.” Barbara corrected her.

“Is it true?” she threw out a string of giggles, raised her shoulders and added, “Well! I better find out where he is then.” With that she moved away from Barbara.

“Real bastards!” She cursed them all. “Never there when it is time to be there.”

She looked in his direction. He had taken exactly the same pose and position which he had before he had spoken to her. “A real slippery type!” She warned herself. “Imagine, while conversing with four or five persons he slips away from there, disrupts my dream, and before anyone notices his absence he returns as if he never left the place.” But she knew he had. She had not only heard his voice but also felt the weight of his shadow upon her. And his musk.

The muscles inside her thighs had an involuntary contraction.

She swallowed a mouthful of the cold drink, and slowly let it trickle down her throat. "That bloody Newton probably knew all about apples and grapes in their natural form, but nothing about them after they got squashed. Must have been a teetotaler," she thought. "His law of gravity does not apply to the liquors, at least not those which come out of grapes, have tiny bubbles in them and spring out of iced bottles, all frothing and fum-ing. Instead of going down they always rush up to my head." She laughed audibly when she thought of another thing which defied not only gravitational pull but also Newton's Law of Inertia. "That little, anarchistic thing could abandon 'its state of rest', raise its head and, with-out any regard for some straight path, jump about wildly just by pure thought. No external force was required. A live instance of interplay between metaphysics and physio-dynamics." Still shaking with laughter she terminated her engagement with philosophical speculations.

Suddenly she saw the wine on her hand, which had spilt over from her glass by her convulsions of merriment. Without bothering to see if anyone took notice of her personal involvement in the metaphysical processes and its result on her body, she turned around and went to the kitchen to wash her hand.

She always avoided the bathrooms when she attended gatherings with those who, while standing on unsteady legs, could not shoot straight. "Filthy idiots! Why can't they sit down when they unload themselves? In this way at least they would know which one is the lavatory and which one is the washbasin."

In the kitchen sink she let the lukewarm water run over her hand for a while. It had a soothing effect. Slowly she raised the fingers of the other hand from the stem of the glass onto the bowl containing the champagne and felt the chill. She felt suspended between hot and cold, positive and negative, attraction and repulsion.

“No, not repulsion!” she reflected. “Weary! Yes, just weary of them,” she decided.

“And why shouldn’t I be weary of them?” She asked her-self.

Then quite abruptly she put the glass down, washed both hands, turned off the tap, dried her hands, picked up the glass and returned to the party.

Twelve long years she had spent with one Burden. Twelve years of subservience – intellectual, emotional, economical and social. She had looked after him, his parents, his house, his clothes, and books, and...but never a word of gratitude from him. All was expected of her, by him. They weren’t married, so she did not have to play his wife; but the rest of it was there – the cook, the cleaner, the charmer and the geisha. Both of them belonged to the tribe of ‘the people of the pen’; yet, while he produced freely; she, after attending to other important things in their lives, had so little spare time left to relax and compose her own thought. He wasn’t the first man in her life; and probably not the last; but surely he was the burden she had carried the longest. Yet, he was not a bad guy; no worse than any other she had known. So, she had reached a simple conclusion – they were all lousy.

Ever since she had made her break with him she had avoided the Burdens. “I don’t want any connection with them; definitely not a firm one,” she had decided; and regretted her

decision the second which followed. "If anything I like in them, then it is the *firmness* of their connection," she reminded herself. "Ah, we shall see!" She told her alter ego.

Then, for quite a while, she had kept herself aloof. She attended no large gatherings at the homes of others, or arranged any at her place. She had maintained the verbal channels of human relations through the telephone cord. For the satisfaction of her creative part, occasional slashes by the pen provided her the opportunities to erupt her emotions on the white sheet; and that brought some relief to her mind. It was taking longer time for her to regain her composure as an independent person than she had expected. She was not happy with the existing circum-stances; but she did not feel exploited. And that felt good. Good enough to keep her away from them.

And then Eva had called her one day. "No, no and no." She had said, "It is New Year's Eve, you have to come. No old faces, no Chewing gums to stick themselves upon you, and definitely no Burdens. Completely new set of people. All fresh and lively."

"Why the hell not!" She eventually said to Eva, "If worse comes to worse, I will knee the bastard and show him the fireworks long before midnight."

"Excellent! Just put on a long dress, and some soft padding on your knees." was Eva's advice.

She had let a long dress engulf her up to her neck, but the soft padding part she did not take seriously. She deliberately chose a dress that showed her cleavage; and then put on a long-chained necklace that had an implement which looked like a nutcracker hanging in it.

“Whoever tries to peek into the valley would see the damn thing first and keep the distance; unless he wants to be registered as a reserve contralto at the Opera.” She re-assured herself.

With that she had gone to her first-big-night-out in two years.

Eva was right. No ‘old relations’ were there. And rather crowded it was – almost forty persons in the living room. She recognised a few female faces but the members of the opposite gender were all new. “I wonder where she finds them?” she had asked herself. “Just as well! Probably saves her friends a lot of chasing.”

She had felt him soon after she had settled down in the smoky atmosphere. She did not like it. She had come there to kill the lingering year, not to embrace the coming one with feelings for anyone. She could only see his profile – nothing special. Ordinary face, and ordinary height. Yet he made his presence felt. Probably the way he moved his hands and kept his head slightly angled. She turned her head and studied the rest of the gathering. Lots of interesting prospects, if she were looking for one. She wasn’t. She momentarily caught his eyes in the windowpane, blinked and looked in another direction. “Was he looking at me?” she pondered. “Why not, every-one is looking at everyone.” Telling herself that she went for her second glass of Eva’s special cocktail. Taking into account of its spirit content Eva had baptised it as ‘Monk’s Delight’ – a concoction made of a mixture of soda water, sugar, essence of rum, and mint flavour, all well shaken and then used to dilute 95% alcohol, which Eva could borrow, permanently, from the chemical laboratory she was working for. By the time she

looked at the ceiling through the bottom of her glass she was starting to get a sense of liberation she hadn't had for a long time. To steady her legs and add something more filling to her belly she went to the table with sandwiches and salads, and made herself a nice plate.

A number of people said to her a number of things and she gave them a number of short replies. She did not remember much, because she was not listening to remember. Whenever a horde of sounds entered her ears she responded by releasing an army of words from her mouth. And that was that. No fore or after to any conversation. "I wonder if I am becoming an absolute instantionalist?" she thought. "An instantionalist - a person of the moment, just for that moment! Now this is nice new 'ist' I have found," she complimented herself.

"A few more drinks and I could lay out a new theory of existence!" she added to her inebriated self-esteem.

And so the evening had slowly crawled towards the instant when corks shoot out of the bottles, champagne gushes forth and finds its way to the empty glasses and waiting mouths. The instant when everyone wishes everyone else a happy new year, optimistically hoping that the good fortune would come to them the same night with a bang. Some enthusiasts kissed her on her cheeks, and she kissed them back with such a passionless affection that they must have immediately remembered their favourite grandmothers. After a short period of heightened activity the jubilation subsided, and people once again returned to the groups which they had formed earlier.

After she had come out of the kitchen she socialised a little by briefly attending different gatherings in the room. She was

not sure if she had moved towards him, or he towards her, or they towards each other. She could not see him but knew that he stood with his back to her back. His heat permeated through their fabrics and spread all over her being. She wished that instead of wine her glass were full of ice bits. She needed something more substantial to satisfy her need. Each of her breath was like a blast of desert wind that dried her tongue with every passing second. Around her stood five other persons, totally engrossed in some important discussion. He too was surrounded by a few who argued equally spiritedly. She tried to listen to the speaker in her group. Sounds entered her ears but would not change into comprehensible expressions. Just a lot of words which remained disjointed and incoherent. She tried to catch the conversation from his party, and very slowly crept backwards. Suddenly she felt the touch of his rump against hers; first very tenderly, but then more firmly as she continued to move backwards. Her heart beat like bongo drums. "Damn you! You must have felt me too. Why don't you move away?" She cursed him as she closed her eyes and tried to control her respiration. He must have straightened up a little because she felt his thigh touch hers; simultaneously his elbow brushed against her side. "Must you carry razors on your elbows?" She asked him silently. She received no answer. "Insensitive beast!" she thought as she gently swayed against him. He held his ground, while she sensed the muscular contraction again, and the volcanic pressure rising in her. Somebody put on the music. Rather unexpectedly he turned towards her and said, "Shall we dance?" She wanted to shake her head to say no, but the stupid thing wouldn't move horizontally. Instead it jerked

twice, vertically. They both moved towards each other. Their glasses collided and she saw the champagne from his glass run down her dress.

“I am sorry for my clumsiness,” he said apologetically and asked, “Did I make you wet?”

She nodded in affirmation.

He said in a friendly tone, “Let’s go to the kitchen and get some paper towels, I could help you dry yourself.”

“There is no need for you to come,” she answered, and added politely, “I prefer to do it on my own.”

Then, she left him standing there, and went to the bath-room.

Essays

Khalid Sohail

HUMAN PSYCHE...SOUL OR MIND

There was a time in history when human psyche was believed to be a soul. Religious people believed that soul was independent and existed prior to the existence of the body. It entered human fetus at a certain stage of development, stayed in the body throughout life and left at the time of death to go back to the world of souls, so that it could be judged on the Day of Judgment and enter hell or heaven depending on its good and bad deeds. Such a concept of soul was predominantly popular in Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities.

Alongside this Juda-o-Christian-o-Islamic belief in soul, there were many Hindus and Buddhists who followed the tradition of reincarnation and believed that human soul returned to earth again and again to purify itself and acquire a higher or lower level of existence depending upon the good and bad deeds, the *karma* of the previous incarnation. This cycle of existence and suffering continued until the soul acquired enlightenment and found *nirvana* and then transcended the cycle of suffering by joining the Ultimate Soul, God. After acquiring *nirvana* the soul found eternal life and did not have to return to earth for any more suffering.

In these models, religious as well as spiritual, there was a desire, a wish, a hope, and a dream for humans to have eternal life and live forever. Since human body was mortal human beings believed in immortal soul and connected that belief with the belief of immortal and eternal God.

In the last few centuries there has been a third model that is becoming more popular in the world. It is the secular model. Followers of such model call psyche, mind, not soul. In this model the mind is intimately connected with the body and does not exist independent of body. It is an extension of the body, related to the functioning of the brain and is connected with human personality that makes choices of human lifestyle.

Secular model, in which human psyche is called human mind has been developed because of the advances of
...biologists like Charles Darwin
...psychologists like Sigmund Freud
...sociologists like Karl Marx
and

...existentialist philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre

Since secular people do not believe in life after death, they try their best to make their lives more meaningful and create a paradise on earth.

Based on these secular models contemporary mental health disciplines of psychiatry, psychology, nursing and social work have adopted a model that we call a bio-psycho-social model. According to this model mental illness and emotional problems can be diagnosed and treated based on biological, psychological and social understanding of the problems.

People suffering from schizophrenia and manic depressive illness might have a strong biological component as they might have inherited mental illness from their parents that have transmitted the illness through genes and these patients might have biochemical abnormalities at birth that

were later on vulnerable to the psychological and social stresses. Similarly people with neurotic and personality disorders might have experience emotional abuse or trauma as children growing up in dysfunctional and unhealthy families. Similarly immigrants might have emotional and social problems because of their difficulties adjusting to a new culture and not being able to resolve social and cultural conflicts. Secular mental health professionals try to find different factors that contribute to the emotional conditions and then suggest a combination of

Medications for biochemical disorders

Psychotherapy for psychological problems

and

Family and group therapy to resolve social conflicts.

Such bio-psycho-social model has been very effective in helping people suffering from mental illnesses and emotional problems.

In the last few decades there has been an ongoing dialogue between professionals and lay people, mental health workers and patients about the similarities and differences in their belief systems. Different professionals have adopted different attitudes. I know some psychiatrists and nurses who refuse to discuss their religious, spiritual and secular beliefs with patients as they feel it is not important for their treatment plan. In my clinical practice if my patients ask my views directly I share with them that I am a secular humanist that respects people from all religious, spiritual and secular traditions and support people in searching their own truth. I believe that there are as many truths as human beings and as many realities as pairs of eyes in this world. Most of my

patients are believers but we have mutually respectful relationship with each other. I share with them that my role in their life is not to get in any academic discussion about their ideology or philosophy. I am there to help them in reducing their emotional suffering whether depression, or anxiety, paranoia or marital problems, and improving their quality of life.

While there are some atheist psychiatrists who discourage their patients to attend church and synagogue, mosque and temple gatherings, I never object to it as I believe that their attending religious and spiritual services offer them emotional and moral support as long as their religious relatives and friends do not object to the psychiatric treatment they are receiving.

I remember the time when my aunt in Pakistan suffered from schizophrenia. She was seen by a psychiatrist and was prescribed Modecate injection and supportive therapy. My uncle, who was a religious man, asked my opinion about taking her to see a spiritual healer because she had a lot of faith in him. I told my uncle that I did not object her going to see the spiritual healer if that is what they wished, as long as she took her Modecate injection and followed her psychiatric care plan regularly. When my aunt was emotionally stable my uncle believed it was the result of spiritual healing, while I, as a psychiatrist, felt strongly that it was the result of Modecate injection. It was interesting that a time came when Modecate injections were not available in Pakistan. My aunt started to regress and started having her psychotic symptoms and inappropriate behavior although she was still going to see her spiritual healer. My aunt's illness became a great concern for

the whole family. On my uncle's request I sent Modecate injections from Canada and when my aunt started taking the injections regularly she started to improve. After that experience my aunt and uncle agreed with me that the psychiatric treatment was the cake and the spiritual practices the icing.

If we see the contemporary world we see all the religious, spiritual and secular practices existing side by side.

Some people believe in a soul and the Day of Judgment

Some people believe in a soul and re-incarnation

And

Some believe in a mind that exists as an extension of body and brain that dies when the person dies. They do not believe in life after death and Day of Judgment.

Being a secular humanist and psychotherapist I belong to the third group but I have no hesitation in serving people from the first two groups. That is my way of serving humanity and people from all walks of life because as a physician I want to help people reduce their suffering and discover a healthy, happy and peaceful lifestyle. I am a psychotherapist, not a priest, and more concerned about caring for their minds than saving their souls.

MYSTIC POETRY

Nearly twenty five years ago, while I was developing a keen interest in mystic poetry, I came across a book titled *The Vision of Kabir*. In that book Kabir Das's mystic poetry was translated in English by a mystic philosopher Sehdev Kumar. In that scholarly book Sehdev Kumar had not only provided an in depth analysis of Kabir's vision and the essence of Kabir's philosophy, he had also shared his insights in the psyche of mystic poetry at large. I had no idea that one day I will have the honour of meeting and befriending the translator and philosopher Sehdev Kumar.

Looking back now I can say that mystic poet Kabir Das introduced me to mystic philosopher Sehdev Kumar and the philosopher introduced me to the poet and they both introduced me to the magic and mystery of mystic poetry. Such an introduction inspired me further in the exploration of the rich heritage of mystic poetry in the East as well as the West and my studies of different cultural and spiritual traditions. Let me share some of the highlights of my understanding of that magic and mystery.

Mystic poetry has a unique position in the family of world literature because it focuses on:

- internal rather than external realities,
- inner rather than outer truths,
- metaphysical rather than physical journeys, and
- spiritual rather than materialistic worlds.

Mystic poets accept the ultimate challenge of describing the indescribable, giving form to the formless. They ask themselves:

*How do we talk about a world
where sounds turn mute?
How do we write about a world
where words lose all their meanings?
How do we discuss a world
that transcends every logic?
How do we describe a world
that has no boundaries?
How do we conceptualize a world
that defies any form?*

*How do we understand a world
that is beyond words and sounds
and colours and space and time
and logic and.....?*

and answer it in the words of Tagore,

*"I dive down into the depths of the ocean of forms, hoping
to gain the perfect pearl of the formless." (Ref. 1)*

Mystic poets are those enlightened beings who have personal encounters with the spiritual world and have touched the borders of known with the unknown, human

with the divine, personal with the cosmic. They share with us that their experiences are intimate encounters with a world which is nameless, formless, timeless and pathless.

"No miseries befall on one who does not cling to name and form." ~ Buddha (Ref. 2)

"Sufiism is truth without form." ~ Ibn-e-Jalali (Ref. 3)

"Pass from time and place to timelessness and placelessness, to other worlds. There is our origin."

~ Samarqandi Amini (Ref. 3)

"Truth is a pathless land." ~ Krishnamurti (Ref. 4)

When mystic poets express themselves in poetry they are more concerned about sharing their spiritual experiences, mystical encounters and existential truths and less preoccupied with the technique, form and language of their presentation. They are quite aware that they are not trying to impress their readers with scholarship, they are trying to help them open their inner eyes which will get in touch with their own personal truths.

When we study mystic poetry created throughout the world over the centuries, we come across certain master symbols that have a universal value because they are created from the body of human experience.

The first master symbol we come across is water. Water is one of the most significant ingredients of human existence. It

not only gives birth to life, it also sustains it. Most of the human body is made of water. When water takes the form of an ocean, it becomes deep and mysterious and only the daring ones have the courage to descend into its depths. Mystics are the ones who risk going to the bottom of the ocean of life to come back with the pearls of wisdom and tranquillity.

Mystic poets see a human being, human self and human consciousness as a drop of water and the eternal truth and cosmic consciousness as an ocean. They claim that an ordinary man can see drops of water in an ocean but one needs special awareness and consciousness to see an ocean in a drop of water.

Kabir Das said,

*“A drop
is merged
into the ocean
that everyone
understands;
but how
the ocean
is contained
in the drop
that, O my friend
only a rare man
can comprehend.”* (Ref. 5)

The second master symbol we come across in mystic poetry is fire. Mystic poets feel that travelling on the spiritual path is like jumping into the fire of love. If one is honest and sincere,

fire transforms into a rose garden and the traveller embraces the ultimate truth; but if the traveller is an amateur and is just curious about the spiritual path then he can easily get burnt.

Rumi said,

*"Love is that flame that
when it is kindled
burns everything away
God only remains." (Ref. 6)*

Kabir Das shared,

*"This seeking
O friend
is a stupendous task,
a raging fire
it is.*

*Jump in
if you wish
to be baked
but if you are
merely curious
this fire
would destroy you." (Ref. 5)*

Playing with fire can be seen as adventure but also a dangerous phenomenon. Only those who have confidence in themselves and in their love can dare to go close to it. But once mystics embrace the flame then they are sure that they will be cleansed from all those impurities that are hindrances in their spiritual journey. Fire purifies things not only in our day-to-day lives but also our souls, in our spiritual lives.

William Blake wrote,
*“Unless the eye catch fire
the God will not be seen
unless the ear catch fire
the God will not be heard
unless the tongue catch fire
the God will not be named
unless the heart catch fire
the God will not be loved
unless the mind catch fire
the God will not be known.”* (Ref. 5)

The third master symbol we come across in mystic poetry is light. Mystic poets highlight that after travelling in the dark alleys of one’s soul and on convoluted paths of the spiritual labyrinth, human beings reach a stage where they discover their inner light.

Kabir Das,
*“I shall make
my body into
a clay-lamp,
my soul, its wick
and my blood oil
ah, the light
of this lamp
would reveal
the face
of my beloved
to me.”* (Ref. 5)

In this journey the traveller has to consume himself to discover light and be enlightened.

Baba Farid-ad-din Attar wrote,

*“The true lover finds the light only if,
like the candle
he is his own fuel
consuming himself.” (Ref. 7)*

Anonymous,

*“First you go toward the light
Next you are in the light
Then you are the light.” (Ref. 4)*

Alongside light being a guide in the darkest journeys of our inner self, it is also a synthesis of the colours of the rainbow. When different aspects of human life merge in people then they become enlightened beings and then their thoughts, words and actions become a source of light for others. They become torches that guide the lost souls.

After discovering the inner truth and light mystics tend to speak less and avoid arguments. They prefer to remain quiet. They realize that their genuine silence can communicate more than idle talk or meaningless debates. They become aware of the limitations of words.

Madhu Lal Hussain said,

*“Be never engaged at all
in arguments so long
but ponder over your end*

so says Hussain Faqir.” (Ref. 7)

Kabir Das wrote,
*“Anyone who had a taste
of his love
is so enchanted by it
that he is stricken
with silence.
O dear friend
when you have a gem
in your hand
you don’t go
on the street
announcing it.” (Ref. 5)*

While studying mystic poetry we are also struck by the simplicity of the expression. Mystic poets use simple language because they want to communicate with common people. They don’t want to impress literary scholars and critics. They are humble people and their humility is reflected in their poetry. They know the art of expressing the most profound experiences in the simplest ways. Rather, they are dissatisfied with those scholars and clergy who use difficult language that common people cannot understand. They feel it reflects their elitist attitude and arrogance. Mystics are critical of those pandits, maulvis, priests and rabbis who give sermons in a foreign language and offer prayers in Sanskrit, Latin, Hebrew or Arabic that the masses do not comprehend. Mystics feel dissatisfied with those rituals and dogmas that distance people from their own truths and establish the authority of religious institutions.

Mystics encourage people to communicate and pray in their mother tongues or meditate in silence. Many mystics feel that knowledge rather than helping to find enlightenment can often become a hindrance in one's spiritual growth. Aldous Huxley confessed to Krishnamurti that, "He would give everything for one direct perception of the truth, but his mind was incapable of it. It was too filled with knowledge." (Ref. 8)

When we study Kabir's poetry we find that being a weaver by profession, he like many other mystic poets, identified with working class people so much that his poetry is full of symbols and metaphors derived from the crafts— weaving, pottery, farming and other working class professions. He also weaves his verses with phenomena of nature so that common people can relate to his poetry.

When we study the life stories of mystic poets we become aware that many of them led simple lives. Because of their aptitude and personalities they did not fit into the formal education systems and traditional institutions of their times. They were the students of the university of life and learnt from their own experiences. They followed the trails of their own hearts and souls rather than the highways of tradition and convention. One such example is Walt Whitman, a mystic poet of nineteenth-century America who has influenced twentieth-century American literature more than any other poet. Although his poems from his collection *Leaves of Grass* are taught in colleges and universities all over the world, he himself did not do well in school. His teacher, Mr. Benjamin Halleck, was so disappointed in him that he told his

father, "This boy is so idle, I am sure he will never amount to anything."

Whitman's father, agreeing with the teacher, took him out of school at age thirteen and asked him to work in a printer's shop. Even at work he was so preoccupied with his soul-searching that his employer thought that he was devoting himself to "the fine art of doing nothing." (Ref. 9) Teacher, employer, and father as well as many other people, failed to realise that Walt Whitman was trying to contemplate and meditate upon the mysteries of life from a very early age.

Mystic poets and their poetry have been a mystery and a source of controversy for traditional literary critics. When we study the reviews of mystic poetry, on one hand we find those who evaluate such poetry as containing lack of form, style and literary beauty, while others consider mystic poetry a different genre and insist that it should not be considered a part of ordinary poetry because of the nature of poetry and personalities of the mystics. They consider saints, sufis and mystics more visionaries than poets.

Sehdev Kumar, a research scholar of the poetry of Kabir Das wrote, "...Kabir was first and foremost a visionary, his poetry is a mere 'by-product of his vision'...Kabir is a nirgunibhakta—a lover of the formless and infinite," and as such it should not be judged as poetry. The verses of the saints are of an entirely different genre than those of the poets. From the pen of William Kingland, we read:

"The mystic may not always be a master of language, but it is truth which he endeavours to express that we should do well to seize; and learn also to make proper allowance for the inadequacy of language to express the deepest truths. No one knows better than the greatest master of technique how inadequate are the materials with which he has to work, no one realizes more clearly than the greatest master of language, how little language can express of the living truth with which his innermost nature is on fire."

(Ref. 5)

Rumi said,

*"You see through each cloak I wear
know if I speak without mouth or language
the world is drunk on its desire for words
I am the slave of the Master of silence."* (Ref. 6)

July 2014

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SECULAR SPIRITUALITY

I just finished reading Dr Jill Taylor's book, *My Stroke of Insight*. (Ref. 1) .It is a wonderful, awesome and inspiring book. It is the story of a brain expert who experiences a brain injury. It is the journey of a neuroscientist who experiences a stroke and loses the faculties of the left side of her brain because of a haemorrhage. She lost her mental functions within a few hours but it took her a few years to regain them. It is a story from a breakdown to a breakthrough.

Being a psychiatrist and a practicing psycho-therapist, I have been curious about the functions of the brain and fascinated with the mysteries of the mind. One of the things that I found amazing about Jill's journey was that although she had lost the functions of her left brain and could not walk, talk, think logically and use words, she still retained the functions of her right brain. That is why her story provides wonderful insights into the right brain functions, the brain that deals with the mysteries of creativity as well as spirituality. I have read the descriptions of spiritual experiences in the religious and holy books but this is the first time I read a biological, neurological and secular description of spirituality. It is the description that can be accepted by a priest as well an atheist as it is based on human experiences and not on belief and blind faith. Jill describes what she saw, felt and experienced. Being a scientist she describes her illogical or supra-logical experiences in a logical way and provides profound secular insights into spirituality. She highlights how

the experiences of the right brain, that transcend traditional rationality, cannot be satisfactorily described by the logic and language of the left brain.

Jill Taylor, being a teacher, describes the functions of the left brain that appreciates the size and dimensions of human body and recognizes the separateness of the person from the environment. When that sense is lost the person with the functioning of the right brain feels one with the universe. It is like a drop feeling part of the ocean, some call it an oceanic feeling. It is a wonderful and peaceful experience. She writes, "By the end of that morning, my consciousness shifted into a perception that I was at *one* with the universe. Since that time, I have come to understand how it is that we are capable of having a 'mystical' or 'metaphysical' experience—relative to our brain anatomy...(Ref 1. p 3) "

"Ultimately, it's about my brain's journey into my right hemisphere's consciousness, where I became enveloped in a deep inner peace...As my consciousness slipped into a state of peaceful grace, I felt ethereal" (Ref 1. p 43)

Losing the functioning of the left brain also changes the experience of time. Left brain divides time into past, present and future, into yesterday, today and tomorrow and yesteryear, this year and next year. So the person with only the right brain experiences every moment and lives in the *now* without relating it to the flow of time. She writes, "To the right mind, no time exists other than the present moment, and each moment is vibrant with emotion...To our right mind, the moment of NOW is timeless and abundant." (Ref1. p 30)

"And here, deep within the absence of earthly temporality, the boundaries of my earthly body dissolved and I melted into the

universe...I'm no authority, but I think the Buddhists would say I entered the mode of existence they call Nirvana." (Ref1. p 49)

Although Jill Taylor experienced that peace, yet she was also completely dependent on her doctors, nurses and her mother to look after her for years. Because of the dysfunction of her left brain she had lost the balance of the right and left brain and could not survive on her own for years.

Losing the functioning of the left brain people also lose some of the social and cultural conditioning and the sense of judgment associated with it. People with the left brain judge themselves and others and sometimes quite harshly. By losing that function the person with the right brain finds it easier to accept oneself and others unconditionally. It paves the way for unconditional love. The right brain person feels good, wonderful and awesome and considers oneself beautiful. She wrote, "I perceived myself as perfect, whole, and beautiful just the way I was." (Ref1, p 71)

Jill Taylor brings to our attention that people who remain in touch with their right brain are:

...more peaceful

...more accepting of themselves and others

...less judgmental

...live in the moment

and

...feel a part of the universe.

These characteristics have been described in many holy books hundreds of years ago. Bhagawad Gita states,

"Meditation helps humans to find peace of mind

*It helps people to transcend the rewards of their actions
Such people do not hate anyone.
They are even kind to animals.
They are no longer arrogant and conceited and egotistical.
They can control their anger and become forgiving.
They are no longer anxious and sad and worried.
They can rise above their worldly desires and become caring and
compassionate”*

.....

*Be friendly and compassionate
Released from ego selfishness
Patient, hate not any being
The same in pain and happiness* (Ref 3. p 83)

It is obvious that Gita has described the characteristics of those people who are in touch with their right brain and lead peaceful and loving lives. Those are the characteristics that many saints and sufis, monks and mystics try to develop with meditation and other spiritual practices. Many followers of spiritual traditions, whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish or Hindu, not only acquire spiritual enlightenment themselves like Buddha, but also like to inspire others. One such 20th century mystic was J. Krishnamurti who was admired by Easterners as well as Westerners. Krishnamurti was chosen by Mrs. Besant of Theosophic Society of India who believed he had spiritual potential and was brought to England for his spiritual grooming.

In 1922, Krishnamurti was first invited to Sydney, Australia for a Theosophical convention, where he met his old teacher Leadbeater, and later on flew to Ojai, California, which

was the beginning of a new chapter of his life. After meditating regularly his mystical experiences became the beginning of his spiritual enlightenment. Some experiences were very painful, traumatic and bizarre. Most people around Krishnamurti were unable to fully understand those experiences but were very supportive of his mysterious mystical journey. They believed that he was experiencing the awakening of his spiritual self, generally known in the spiritual world as *kundalini* in which the person experiences transformation of consciousness not accessible to ordinary people. One such experience Krishnamurti described to Mrs Besant in a letter,

“The climax was reached on the 19th. I could not think, nor was I able to do anything, and I was forced by friends here to retire to bed. Then I became almost unconscious, though I was well aware of what was happening around me. I came to myself at about noon each day. On that first day while I was in that state and more conscious of the things around me, I had the first most extra-ordinary experience. There was a man mending the road; that man was myself, the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone which he was breaking was a part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being and the tree beside the man was myself. I almost could feel and think like the road-mender, and I could feel the wind passing through the tree and the little ant on the grass I could feel. The birds, the dust and the very noise were a part of me. Just then there was a car passing by at some distance; I was the driver, the engine and the tires; as the car went further away from me, I was going away from myself. I was in everything; or rather everything was in me, inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm and all breathing things. All day long I remained in this happy condition...I have seen the glorious and healing Light...I am God-intoxicated.” (Ref 2) .This is the

experience similar to what Jill Taylor shared as being ‘one with the universe’ after her stroke.

For the next few months Krishnamurti continued to have these mystical experiences and spiritual encounters. During a number of those episodes he became semi-conscious and his brother and friends had to look after him so that he did not hurt himself. Many times he would fall to the floor in a trance and experience seizure-like states. In 1929, he said, “*The vision is total. To me that is liberation*” After that liberation he resigned from the Theosophical Society and started his solitary journey as a mystic. He stated his philosophy in these words, “*I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect...Truth being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path.*” (Ref 2)

After resigning from the Theosophical Society, for the next half-century, Krishnamurti traveled around the world giving lectures, meeting people from all walks of life and sharing his knowledge, experience and wisdom. He inspired thousands of people to rise above religious institutions and follow the wisdom of their own hearts. People who consulted him were not only lay people but also three generations of the prime ministers of India: Jawarlal Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi and her son Rajev Gandhi. People who admired his knowledge and wisdom included the Dalai Lama, George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Henry Miller, R D Laing, Joseph Campbell and many more. He was one of the most respected mystics of 20th century.

In many cases it takes saints years of commitment and contemplation to develop mystic personalities and become loving and peaceful people. In the case of Jill Taylor she developed those features because of a neurological tragedy, a stroke. Her stroke became a mixed blessing as it transformed her into a spiritual person. As she recovered she had to choose to regain some of the functions of the left brain to function effectively in this world but decided not to develop those features that did not help her in leading a peaceful life. Recovering from her painful tragedy and a debilitating stroke she became wiser and developed a rare insight in life. No wonder she called her book, *My Stroke of Insight*.

I feel optimistic that Jill Taylor's book can develop a bridge between religious, spiritual and secular people so that they can develop insights into those practices and experiences that are traditionally discussed in religious and holy books and develop a language that can be used to share our experiences and insights. Developing a language and discipline of secular spirituality will help people from all over the world to learn from the wisdom of all traditions. It is the road of the 21st century and our collective future. It will help us rise above the culture of war, violence and judgment and pave the way for love, acceptance and peace in the world. I would like to congratulate Jill Taylor for sharing her story and profound insights. She will be an inspiration for many men and women all over the world.

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STORY TELLING AND STORY WRITING

PRESENTED AT WRITERS FORUM MEETING TORONTO

Dear Friends,

Canadian writers are ecstatic because Alice Munroe, one of the Canadian short story writers received the Nobel Prize of Literature this year. It is a great honor for Canada and Canadians. Since she is a short story writer who has been creating short stories for more than half of a century, many writers are reflecting on the art and craft of short story writing. And since Munir Saami invited me to say a few words in Writers' Forum Meeting, I would like to share some of my random thoughts about story telling and story writing.

There are short stories that one can finish reading in one sitting with one theme and one focus and there are long stories with multiple themes that need many sittings to finish. There are short short stories and there are long long stories. There are interesting stories and there are boring stories. There are inspiring stories and there are depressing stories. I have read hundreds of stories and written dozens of stories in my life time. The shortest story that I read was only two lines.

Khalil Gibran wrote

A woman was sitting between two men.

Her one cheek was pink, the other pale.

There was a time people enjoyed listening to stories more than reading stories. There were more story tellers than story writers. Those story tellers were a great source of entertainment and inspiration and enlightenment. I

grew up in Peshawar Pakistan where they had a Qissa Khani Bazaar [Story teller's bazaar] where story tellers used to sip *qahwa*, the green tea, and tell stories to travelers who traveled to different countries.

Let me share one of my poems highlighting the ambience of that tradition. It is titled,

A STORY TELLER

Dear Friends!

Every night

when it gets dark

and children go to sleep

birds hide in their nests

and

the sun travels to the other world

you people come here

and sit in a circle

in front of the fireplace

under a starry sky

sipping tea

smoking your sacred pipes

asking me to tell you a story

and I

being a storyteller

who loves to tell stories

share with you

stories that I read

when I was a young boy

stories that were told to me

when I traveled to distant lands

and

stories I heard from my grandmother

*stories that she had heard from her grandmother
stories that have been traveling
from one heart to another
from one generation to another
as sacred wisdom and folktales
those are the stories
created and shared by our ancestors
when there were no books and radios and televisions and
internets*

*I have been sharing with you
every night
stories within stories
stories born from the womb of life
stories of old and young
men and women
warriors and hunters
kings and slaves
gods and goddesses
saints and sinners
and you listen to them attentively
but when the moon hides behind the cloud
and the stars look tired
and the sacred pipes become cold
then we all go to sleep
knowing very well that
some of you will travel
the next day
to unknown destinations
and some will come back*

the next night

to listen to more stories

I was always fascinated with story tellers. Although in Europe and North America, after the availability of printing press, short story writing became more popular, there are still many communities and cultures in Asia and Africa where majority of the population cannot read or write and there are no newspapers and magazines, books and printing presses and people still rely on oral tradition, a tradition that passes on the wisdom of one generation to the next, by story telling rather than story writing.

In the tradition of Urdu short story writing in the first half of 20th century, some of the writers that rose to prominence were Prem Chand and Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai and Rajendar Singh Bedi. These Urdu writers were closer to the writers like Chekov in Russia and Maupassant in Europe and wrote stories with a hero, a plot, a beginning, middle and a sharp end with an unexpected powerful climax. Many of those stories were based on social realism. Progressive Writers Movement promoted such stories with a powerful message to change the society. But in the second half of the 20th century short story writing took a modernist approach. Writers like Rasheed Amjad, Muzhar ul Islam, Anwar Sajjad and Intezar Hussain were some of the leaders. They were influenced by writers like Kafka, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Many modern short story writers followed the stream of consciousness. Many of their stories did not have names of the characters, some did not even have human characters, some did not have a plot, some did not have a beginning, middle and an unexpected end. Those

stories were mysterious. Some looked more like prose poems than stories.

One of my favorite short story writers is Yiddish Nobel Prize Winner Isaac Singer. In one of his stories, *A Friend of Kafka*, someone criticizes Kafka for writing, *Metamorphosis* and breaking the rules of story writing. The friend says, "A master does not have to follow the rules." For the beginners to follow rules might be good but some writers reach a stage of confidence and maturity that the creative process guides them like love. Khalil Gibran said, 'Do not think you can guide love, if love finds you worthy she will guide you.' For them writing becomes love making. It is where art transcends craft. Kafka used to say that a good short story is the one that forces the reader to re-read the story.

Short story form evolved from social realism of Maupassant to magical realism of Garcia Marques. And then there are short story writers like Borges in which story and essay embrace each other. There were times I felt that South Asian Urdu short story writers might be closer to Latin American and South American writers in their essence than European writers. In Pakistan, writers like Sagheer Malal translated many Latin and South American writers in Urdu.

In the 20th century a number of immigrant writers became famous. Living in two cultures, two languages, two religions and two traditions opened their third eye and they created master pieces.

When I read short stories, I feel that those stories are connected with invisible threads to the tradition of short story writing, the evolution of language, the socio-cultural environment and the life struggles of the writer. There are

many writers who base their fiction on their biography and we call it bio-fiction.

There are full time writers who write novels and there are part time writers who write short stories. And there are short story writers who wished they were novelists but they could not afford to write novels as they did not have time and resources to dedicate extended periods of time to their art and craft. Alice Munroe writes,

Why do I like to write short stories? Well, I certainly didn't intend to. I was going to write a novel. And still ! I still come up with ideas for novels. And even I start novels. But something happens to them. They break up. I look at what I really want to do with the material, and it never turns out to be a novel. But when I was younger, it was simply a matter of expediency. I had small children, I didn't have any help. Some of this was before the days of automatic washing machines, if you can actually believe it. There was no way I could get that kind of time. I couldn't look ahead and say, this is going to take me a year, because I thought every moment something might happen that would take all time away from me. So I wrote in bits and pieces with a limited time expectation. Perhaps I got used to thinking of my material in terms of things that worked that way." Open Culture Internet Oct 10th, 2013....

Erica Jong used to say, 'Writing a poem is like having a one night stand, writing a short story is like having an affair and writing a novel is like getting married.'" Different people have different tastes and express their love for life and creativity in different ways.

These are some of my serious random thoughts about story telling and story writing. In the end, let me share a humorous dialogue between two writers.

'What are the essential ingredients of a good short story?'

'A good short story needs three elements: a little bit of sex, a little bit of religion and a little bit of suspense.'

'What will be the shortest short story you can imagine?'

'There was a nun, she got pregnant, God knows by whom.'

Thank you for your patient listening.

THE NEXT STAGE OF HUMAN EVOLUTION

When we study human beings from an evolutionary point of view, we realize that one of the fundamental differences between animals and human beings is that animals are aware but human beings are self-aware; animals have simple consciousness while human beings have self-consciousness; and animals know but human beings know that they know. Such self-awareness and evolution of consciousness has made it possible for humans to create language and culture, science and technology, as well as art and mythology. As human beings have evolved, they have become increasingly aware of their personal and collective unconscious.

In the last couple of centuries, scientists, psychologists and philosophers from all over the world have brought to our attention that the human unconscious is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

Charles Darwin and other biologists made us conscious of our biological unconscious. They proved to us that life started in the sea as unicellular organisms like the amoeba and after passing through many evolutionary stages over millions of years, transformed into fish, birds, animals and mammals, facilitated by the process of natural selection. The evolutionary process created human beings through the development of the human brain and mind. It is fascinating to see how human embryos pass through millions of years of evolutionary stages during the nine months in their mothers' wombs.

A human sperm and ovum unite to become a zygote and gradually grow to become a multi-million cell fetus. In the first few weeks, human embryos do not look much different than the embryos of many animals. When human babies are born, their instincts and genes become part of a biological unconscious that gradually unfolds. As children grow older and mature, they become more conscious.

Sigmund Freud and other psychologists made us conscious of our psychological unconscious. They highlighted that when human children interact with their parents and grandparents, siblings and teachers, they develop a unique personality and learn special defence mechanisms to deal with sexual and aggressive instincts, and coping mechanisms to face the dilemmas and challenges of life.

Freud analyzed the dreams and emotional problems of his patients and discovered a hierarchy of defence mechanisms that human beings use to deal with their emotional conflicts. People who have serious emotional problems and suffer from mental illnesses like schizophrenia and manic depressive illness use the most immature defence mechanisms like projection and denial, while people who are healthy and are able to work and love and play use the mature mechanisms like humour and sublimation. The more evolved the adult, the more mature the coping mechanisms.

Karl Marx and other sociologists and economists made us conscious of our social unconscious. They shared with us that many social, economic, political and cultural factors play a role in historical evolution. Marx discussed the concept of dialectical materialism and showed us how the means of production and the economic systems of feudalism, capitalism

and socialism affect the human psyche, and how industrialization can dehumanize humanity. He encouraged communities to become aware of historical processes so that they can consciously contribute to human progress. Trans-cultural psychiatrists brought to our attention how human emotions and emotional problems are shaped by the cultures in which human beings live.

Existentialist and humanist philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre, Eric Fromm and Victor Frankl made us aware that human beings are free to make choices in life and to give a unique meaning to their personal and social existence and to their life challenges. They encouraged humans to take responsibility to make their lives more meaningful. Frankl brought to our attention that human suffering becomes more bearable when it finds a meaning.

In the 20th century, because of advancements in science and technology, human beings have not only found cures for many serious illnesses but have also created bombs and nuclear weapons. As they learnt to cure, they also learnt to self-destruct. In the 21st century, humanity is at a crossroads and human beings have a choice to grow to the next stage of evolution or commit collective suicide.

Animals have changed through natural selection but humanity will evolve because of human selection and the choices human beings will make individually and collectively.

If we study the world's six billion human beings, we can see that they are on a broad spectrum, from the least evolved individuals, families, communities, countries and cultures to

the most evolved. The more evolved human beings have developed three characteristics, the 3Cs.

Critical Thinking

Highly evolved human beings have developed critical, logical and analytical thinking. Socrates and other Greek philosophers provided significant constructs by which human beings can think rationally and critically analyze their traditions. Such thinking is used in the evolution of science, philosophy and psychology; wherein human beings challenge the social conditioning they receive from their families, communities and cultures.

Creative Imagination

Highly evolved human beings have developed a creative imagination and an appreciation of fine arts. Some of them have creative personalities and produce poems, plays and paintings. They have a well developed aesthetic sense and are able to entertain and enlighten others in their communities and cultures. Where human beings have developed print and visual media and are using newspapers, television and internet to communicate, other communities and cultures in the world are able to receive their creations.

Compassionate Heart

Highly evolved human beings have also developed a compassionate heart and their empathy is not limited only to their own family and tribe but extends to other families and tribes. They focus more on similarities than differences. The most evolved human beings care for all of humanity. The scientists who discovered penicillin and insulin did not develop them just for their own families but for everyone.

Such human beings strive to decrease human suffering and improve the general quality of life. Many philosophers and reformers have worked to raise social consciousness so that human beings would develop compassion for the wider community.

Highly evolved human beings with creative personalities, whether scientists or artists, poets or philosophers, reformers or revolutionaries, have been trying to guide other human beings to the next stage of human evolution by helping them to think critically and logically, imagine creatively and interact compassionately. They want all of us to rise above the tribal mentality and social conditioning so that we can achieve wisdom and live meaningful and peaceful lives. We need to develop communities, cultures and countries where all citizens have equal rights and privileges and opportunities to grow to their fullest potential. We have to learn to resolve our personal, social and political conflicts peacefully. That is the only way for all of us, individually and collectively, to grow to the next stage of human evolution.

Sain Sucha

Why illiteracy continues to prevail in Pakistan?

Ever since human beings have accepted the nearness of each other for social existence they have needed some sort of language for mutual communication. It is difficult to say if it was coherent speech or primitive graphology which was used first by our fore-parents for the purpose of systematic communication – probably both evolved side by side, and complemented each other.

The process of speech is based upon our ability to reproduce certain sounds repeatedly in an orderly manner, and our capacity to receive these sound waves in our brain through auditory nerves and break down those chains of sounds into their component units, where each unit functions as a word have such meanings attached to them which are recognised and accepted by the producer and the receiver of those words.

The process of writing is based upon our ability to produce certain drawings repeatedly in such an orderly manner that the meanings attached to them by the producer of the drawing are also recognised and understood by the perceiver of that drawing.

The way drawn symbols, belonging to a language, convey their meanings to their perceivers may be classified into two separate groups:

1. Non-phonological systems, in which there is no relationship between the symbols and the sounds of the language. These systems are roughly composed of:

- a. Pictographs – pictures depicting things in universe as they are.
- b. Ideographs – abstractions or conventional meanings not directly linked with the object thus represented.
- c. Hieroglyphs – a combination of ideographs and phonetic symbols.
- d. Logographs – representation of whole words by symbols.

2. Phonological systems, in which the phonetic correspondence between each symbol and the specific sound it stands for is clearly marked.

These systems are divisible into two cases:

A. Syllabic – when each grapheme^[iii] corresponds to a spoken syllable, usually a consonant-vowel pair.

B. Alphabetic – when there is direct correspondence between graphemes and phonemes^[iv] of a language.

Of all these systems the alphabetic system is the most economical and adaptable for various written languages. It does not have the limitations of pictography, or require several thousand logographs or even dozens of syllables to provide a comprehensive set of symbols for human communication. With a rather limited number of units alphabetic systems cater for a wide range of phonetic reproductions in various languages. Most languages of the world today are based upon alphabetic system; although some important languages still employ the syllabic system.

The spoken language depends mainly upon our sense of hearing and our ability to reproduce those sounds accurately, though to a certain degree eye coordination for the correct use

of lips and placement of tongue plays a vital role. When we teach our children to talk we expect them to mimic the sounds which we feed them. Adults mimic most of the time as well, but they also coin new sounds and words through our faculty of abstraction, thus adding new words, expressions and meanings to the existing vocabulary of a language.

The alphabetic systems in the written language depend upon our ability to associate specific sounds to specific graphic symbols, which in combination with each other provide us compound utterances that resemble the spoken words of a language. As Leonard Bloomfield said: "Writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks."[\[iv\]](#) Reading, thus, would merely be an interpretation of visible marks into comprehensible words of a language. In other words, primarily, learning to write and read does not entail the learning of a new language[\[v\]](#) but simply how to inscribe and decipher specific symbols of a language which we already command.

Disregarding some more elaborate studies in the linguistic structure I shall attempt a much simplified explanation of the process of human communication.[\[vi\]](#)

For my purpose the linguistic communication is divisible into four constituents:

Vocabulary.

Grammar

Technical information.

Emotional content.

Vocabulary and grammar require no new explanation.

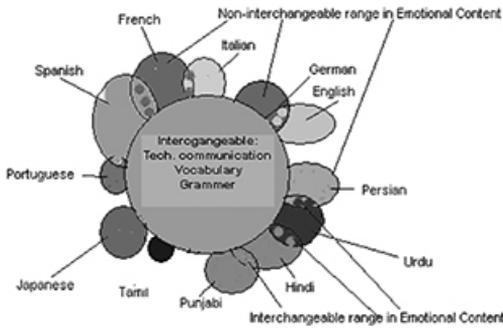
By Technical Communication I mean those words and sentences which are used to impart information which has no indirect meanings: "Give me a cup of tea.", "Shut the door.", "Churchill was an Englishman.", "The sun is shining." are a few examples of such communication.

Emotional Content is that part of a sentence where the meanings extend beyond the Technical Communication – often as accompanying nuances and overtones to be understood and felt above, and beyond, the direct meanings: "Give me a nicely made cup of Jasmine tea.", "Please, shut the door, gently!", "Churchill was a well known Englishman.", "The sun is up and shining beautifully." are examples of sentences containing emotional hues of simple order. A gifted mind can induce far more information through the emotional content in a sentence than the words in it may seem to stand for in their dictionary meanings.

The vocabulary, the grammar and the technical communication in a language is generally easily interchangeable with that of another language of a similarly developed structure; whereas the emotional content is peculiar to each language and accessible only to those people who reached it as a child; and in some very few case, and to a certain extent only, to those who might have migrated to the geographical area of a particular language and learnt the language there. Quite often even the same language spoken in different parts of the world, in spite of its common Grammar, similar Vocabulary and Technical Communication structure, may vary strongly in its Emotional Content, as is the case with English used in the British Isles, USA, Australia, and the West Indies, or with Arabic spoken in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and parts

of North Africa. Thus, the vocabulary, the grammar and the technical information contained in English, French, Arabic, and Urdu can be learnt quite easily by a person and used interchangeable; yet, each language maintains its emotional content mostly to its own sphere of use.

The following diagram gives my idea of interchangeable constituents of different languages and the peripheral contact of the emotional content:



A normal person, let us say an Englishman, may, through adult education, be quite proficient in French, German and Urdu, and wade through the normal daily stream of communication with the speakers of these languages without any apparent hindrance; nevertheless, when it comes down to expressing complex thoughts or a very accurate formulation of an idea then he must rely upon the symbolic language of logic, which lacks the emotional content, or revert to English. Only in the case of persons who are trained from their childhood in more than one language, under relevant geographical conditions, it is feasible that they, perhaps, command more

than one language with its emotional content for their understanding.

The fact is that the function of each language is to translate our observations and experience of the phenomena around us and our personal feelings in a written or verbal form to communicate with the others. I have not mentioned the symbolic language by gestures because it has a very limited application, as in the case of speech hindered persons, theatre, or where it is a representation of the spoken language as done by raising the middle finger or winking. The potential of each language to translate our mental impressions into linguistic form depends entirely upon the possibilities and variations available to study the range of similar and dissimilar experiences in a certain place. The larger the range in the field of observations the greater will be the number of words and expressions coined to register the study.

The geography plays a very important role in the development of a language. Even in the case of related experiences in different parts of the world the similarity of the words and expressions used can be very superficial:

Let us take an imaginary transportable garden filled with roses in full bloom on a sunny spring afternoon. A likely assumption is that a description in English of the said garden placed in London should apply adequately to the same garden if it was placed in Lahore. This assumption will hold if the description is used for only technical communication, but prove to be misleading in its emotional communication. To a visitor in mild London the roses in the garden infuse the wind with gentle sweet fragrance, while the soothing sunlight arises from the open petals to inspire the eyes with beautiful hues.

The experience is stimulating and exciting. In hotter Lahore the wind from the rose garden would overwhelm our visitor with arousing aromatic scent while burning sun rays bounce from the open petals and dazzle the eyes with glaring colours. The experience is exciting and orgasmic. When the visual effects are transformed to the local languages – English and Punjabi – each language would carry words and expressions, and the feelings ascribed to them, which correspond to the intensity of the impact felt by the visitors to the same garden but in two different places. The senses of the visitors were exposed to similar but not identical experiences. Thus if a Punjabi and an Englishman were given a colour photograph of the garden and asked to write their impressions, they should use very different emotional language. Even if they were asked to write in English and used identical words and grammar imparting same technical information, they would still be conveying a very different emotional content.

Thus, beside words, grammar and general idioms about universal truths every language contains expressions which are applicable to the observation of natural and emotional conditions within the geographical range of that particular language.

For a normal person the vocabulary, the grammar and the technical communication comes within the cognitive range of the mind, while the emotional content belongs to the non-cognitive.

This very emotional content is the ingredient which is denied to the majority of the Pakistanis when Urdu, Arabic or English is fed to them in over-doses in their schools, newspapers, radio, TV and other public communications,

without anyone of them personally identifying with these languages. It is not the knowledge of grammar, substantial vocabulary or the ability to report a certain information accurately which endear a language to its speaker, but the personal affinity and degree of intimacy which the speaker feels for a particular language. It takes continuous reinforcement of the learnt material to reach proficiency in any language. The children in Pakistan learn one language in their schools and then spend rest of their time at home with their relatives or friends speaking another. How could one expect them to be proficient in a language with which they have no emotional contact, and have the possibility of practising it with elders who are incapable of teaching them correct pronunciation, syntax or grammar?

For the most subtle thinking, I believe, one condition is that even the first three constituents of the language be transcended to the non-cognitive understanding and reproduction of ideas. A person must feel completely at home in a language so that his flow of comprehension of the vocabulary, the grammatical structure, the technical communication and the emotional content should proceed without conscious effort.

If by *literacy* we mean the ability of a person to read and write his language then, as discussed above, the process of reading and writing for that person does not mean mastering an alien language, but merely comprehending the association between the written symbols and their phonetic expression. Every person who can speak a language already has a storage of words, expressions and ideas in his mind. To make him literate all that is needed is to show him the systematic

relationship between the written symbols – letters of alphabet – and their phonetic reproduction. Teaching that person to write requires training him to inscribe the phonetic sounds in the form of letters. Now, greater the vocabulary and the range of phonetic utterances of that person in a language the easier it is for him to learn to inscribe maximum number of words and sentences in a minimum length of time. On the other hand the fewer the references in his mental storage the more difficult it will be for him to comprehend the relationship between written symbols, phonetic expressions and memorise the vocabulary of an unfamiliar language.

In Pakistan the authorities, by insisting upon the people to learn to read and write Urdu, English, or Arabic, have burdened the minds of their people not merely by the effort required to learn to read and write, but by forcing them to learn new languages – languages for which these people neither have vocabularies, nor any grammatical and emotional references in their mind. No wonder illiteracy continues to prevail in Pakistan, despite over four decades of labour by the teachers. Had the authorities tried to teach these people to read and write their own languages the situation would definitely be a different one! And once a person has learnt the art of converting written symbols and phonetic expressions of his language into each other, it becomes easier for him to do the same with other languages.

Therefore, if the people of Pakistan want to raise their literacy then they must start with learning their own native language before any other. As I understand the present Urdu alphabet is not comprehensive enough to give full coverage for the inscription of various languages in Pakistan, and serious

work is required to elaborate it or devise appropriate alternatives. Already some excellent suggestions are being made for the phonetic improvements in Punjabi^[viii], and I hope the same is true for other languages. It is never too late to take the right path, because in the long run it is always the most certain route to progress.

Here I do not intended to degrade Urdu, English or Arabic, because all of them are excellent systems of human communication for the people who command those languages. It is their blatant implementation in Pakistan at the cost of native languages – which are also equally developed systems of communication – that is objectionable. If the authorities are serious about their plans to raise literacy in Pakistan then Punjabi should be taught to the Punjabis, Pushto to the Pathans, Balochi to the Baloachs, Sindhi to the Sindhis, and of course Urdu to the people who consider it as their mother tongue. Quite preferably the languages of other provinces should be introduced in the primary schools of each province to facilitate intercommunication. Bilingualism or multilingualism are common phenomena in the modern world, and Pakistanis should also avail the fertility of the brains of their children, once their mental grounds have been properly prepared for the intellectual cultivation, and starting with the sowing of the seeds of native linguistic matter. Urdu and English could still function as mediums of national and international communication, but only as parallel complementary languages at the local level.

Pakistan has a current population of about 180 millions. That is a lot of people. As compared to that the Nordic countries^[viii] have a total population of about 23 millions, with

five fully developed and internationally respected languages – Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish. Of these five Finnish is completely non-related to the other four. Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish are related, but each has its own independent literature, style and identity. Their nature is complementary, not exclusive; and that enriches the whole of this area.

The linguistic diversity of the people in Pakistan should also be complementary to their mutual heritage. But that is only possible if each group could create the best they are capable of and share it with others, rather than constructs some meagre thoughts drawn out of limited vocabularies and composed by uncertain and confused minds. In the history of nations five decades do not mount to all that much; yet, human beings have only transitory existence and their resources ought to be used as profoundly as possible. The Pakistanis should also be given the chance to put their thoughts to paper in mediums which come most naturally to them – their mother tongues.

Books recommended for further reading:

Barber, C.L. 1964. *The Story of Language*. Pan Books, London, U.K.

Bloomfield, L. 1933. *Language*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York. USA.

Chomsky, A.N. 1957. *Syntactic Structures*. Mouton, The Hague.

Chomsky, A.N. 1986. *Knowledge of Language*. Praeger, New York, USA.

Crystal, D. 1987. *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language*. Cambridge University Press
Sucha, S. 1985. *The Roots of Misery*. Vudya Kitaban Förlag, Sollentuna, Sweden.

[\[ii\]](#) Here 'drawings' stands for graphics — system (s) of symbols which represent a language in written form.

[\[iii\]](#) Grapheme: the smallest unit in a writing system capable of producing a contrast in meanings.

[\[iiii\]](#) Phoneme: one of the set of speech sounds in any given language that serves to distinguish one word from another.

[\[iv\]](#) Bloomfield. L 1933, *Language*.

[\[v\]](#) Unless it is intended to learn a completely new language.

[\[vi\]](#) Part of the argument given here, with some minor alterations, is a reproduction from «*The Roots of Misery*». Sucha. S. 1985.

[\[vii\]](#) See monthly «*Maan Boli*», Lahore. October, 1991, issue.

[\[viii\]](#) Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Physical Laws, Human Beliefs and Natural Disasters

We have physical laws – postulates tested, scrutinised and accepted by human beings – that explain the happenings in the natural world and how things interact with each other. We accept these explanations as valid until they are proven wrong or need amendments for further accuracy. Considering these laws are tested over a long period they have a high degree of probability in their explanations.

We have human beliefs – postulates that are not verifiable by known methods – that also explain the happenings in the natural world and how things interact with each other. We accept these explanations as hypothesis that could be true or proved false someday when we possess improved ways and instruments at our disposal to test them. As human beings we do not have the knowledge about all the things happening around us, and in the absence of such knowledge beliefs provide us with the possibilities how such things may happen. They are very useful as our guides to perform various tasks in our routine life, but are applicable only till new facts prove or disapprove their validity. There is no way to calculate their probability accurately as they cannot be verified by us.

Thus, along with the physical laws our beliefs provide us with the infrastructure upon which the edifice of our daily life is built and we conduct our human affairs. As long as we keep in our mind that our beliefs are unverified chances, while the physical laws are verified probabilities there is little chance of

confusion. But the problem is that most people in the world treat their beliefs as if they were laws and show great emotional reaction when any one of these beliefs is challenged when new discoveries are made that reduce or even refute the older probability. This is especially true for our religious beliefs - they are often given to us as edicts prescribed by a deity or some super human being. Same applies to our traditions and rites that are treated almost sacred by many if any alterations are extended.

Natural disaster are events in the world that are totally dependent upon things happening in Earth's crust, soil erosion, wind and water fluctuations in and above the oceans, continental drift and forest depletion or plantation. To that we can add various cosmic activities that affect our planet and can have adverse results. Just like all other planets and stars there is continuous activity on and in our earth that is not rewarded or afflicted by any divinity. When one lives on top of volcanoes then earthquakes should be expected, by a river there are floods, on the side of a mountain landslides happen, during turbulent season tsunamis hit the islands and sea shores, when typhoons arise the house in their way collapse and when no rain falls the earth dries up. Similarly when lightning hits a building followed by a heavy crane hitting that building then the roof would collapse, and when over two million people are enclosed in a narrow space then under stress stampede could occur. No God either protects such a building nor does any Satan initiate a death rally. One could give whatever name to a building but a man made structure is effected by physical laws, not divine decrees. Again, a large gathering of people - Sadhoos in India, Muslims in Mecca or

an unruly crowd in a football match – would suffer a stampede if and when stress and confusion is infused among them. That is applicable to all herd animals, and human beings are one of them.

Therefore, the only way to avert or handle the natural disasters is to prepare oneself by studying the factors that cause them and then finding practical solutions achievable by human effort and management. Great tragedies have occurred because people, instead of helping themselves in time, depended upon divine intervention for their relief. If any such intervention was possible, then the question arises that why a God would first hit the people with a calamity and then come to help them? Unless it is a God that likes to play cat and mouse with us!

Human affairs must be built upon and resolved by human effort.

Male Dominance:

(Through strength for utility, but also under
fear and anxiety)

INTRODUCTION

There appears to be a general agreement among the social anthropologists that women are subjugated by men all over the world; although its degree, the means, causes and their justification (or repudiation) remain the topics of discord.

In this paper it is intended to present some recent theories which attempt to clarify the means and nature of this subjugation, and the criticism of these theories by the opposing researchers.

The major question asked here is that although the theories discuss and explain the subjugation of women as a class (category) by men as a class*, they fail to specify satisfactorily why this class of suppressed women was further divided into individuals and put into a one – one relationship in most cultures as the dominated females.

An explanation based upon the feelings of inadequacy felt by most men in their sexual performance and its subsequent effect, which probably resulted in the isolation of women from other men and women, is put forward for further discussion.

* Throughout this article the word 'class' is used in its logical (mathematical) context, and without any Marxist economical connotations, except when used with the Marxist views.

We can judge the existing patterns of economical, societal and sexual relationships between contemporary men and women under two dissimilar values systems; and the structure as well as the acceptance of these relationships according to these systems would be quite different. For such an analysis we could either assert that:

1. The human relationships are prescribed and ordained by some very able entity (entities) that has universal comprehension. Such entity (entities) created us in our present physical and mental form, and our mutual human relationships are based upon our belief and trust in this entity. The structure of our relationship is traceable in the myths, sagas and edicts that are related to such entity, and are given to us in written or oral form by our ancestors. The annulment of such edicts is not within human power.

or

2. The human relationships are the outcome of the results and inferences drawn by our ancestors during the course of their evolution, and the circumstances they have gone through, and passed on to us as in our biological and psychological inheritance. The structure of our relationship is traceable in the organisation of various cultures and societies and their past and present history, myths and sagas. It is through their analysis we can see how our ancestors in various periods of human life laid rules and regulations for male and female relationships that we received biologically and socially.

Bearing in mind that in this article I am looking at the human relationships at a scientific level, obviously there is no point in discussing such relationships which human beings can neither ordain nor nullify; thus, I would confine myself to discuss thoughts endorsed in the second section.

Recent commentators intending to explain the so called imbalance between the male and female relationships (Ortner 1974, Fox & Steinmann 1974, Leibowitz 1975, Rubin 1975, Jordanova 1980) may, roughly, be divided into biological determinists, evolutionists, cultural anthropologists, structuralists and Marxists.

Each of this group has projected their picture of the development of the human relations where men, for one suggested reason or another, subjugated women, mainly, for the purpose of her utility within the domestic and reproductive sphere; and if, and when, women were employed in the 'productive' work outside the domestic sphere the value of their labour measured in terms of material repayment was, and is, generally lower than that of the male's, even when assigned to identical tasks.

The biological determinists rely primarily upon the muscle strength, anatomical differences and female's vulnerability during menstruation, pregnancy and post-delivery; period:

"Originally it was hard to question the allocation of roles based on the obvious differences between the sexes. The men were larger, stronger, and had more endurance. The women were smaller, weaker, and were subjected to mysterious periodic attacks of bleeding. The women also bore children

and had to nurse them. There were long months when they were semi-restricted, both in the kind of work they could perform and in their mobility”

(Steinmann & Fox 1974/17)

While the later representatives of this group go a step further in ethology and draw heavily from the new research in genetics and declare:

“that the human organism is ‘wired’ in a certain way so that it can process and emit information about certain facts of social life such as language and rules about sex, and that, furthermore, it can process this information only at certain times and only in certain ways. The wiring is geared to the life cycle so that at any one moment in a population of Homo sapiens there will be individuals with a certain ‘store’ of behaviour giving out information at another stage to others who are wired to tract this information in a particular way”

(Tiger & Fox 1974/30)

Thus:

“In the same way the rest of human culture lies in the biology of the Species.”

(Tiger & Fox 1974/30)

And:

“In sum we behave culturally because it is our nature to behave culturally, because natural selection has produced an animal that has to behave culturally, that has to invent rules, make myths, speak languages, and form men’s clubs, in the same way that the hamadryas baboon has to form harems, adopt infants, and bite the wives on the neck.”

(Tiger & Fox 1974/38)

In other words the notion which human beings may have about having a mind and its personal use in the choice of action, con-scious planning, judgement of a specific situation at a specific time under specific conditions is merely an illusion for that mind. In reality all that we do and think is genetically wired (and determined) for generations and for each person.

There is of course active voicing against any such determinism:

“The evidence from primate studies and the examination of human infants, adult hormones, and the behaviour of hermaphrodites and others who have been called ‘sexual anomalies’ (Hutt, 1972: Money & Ehrharnett, 1972) all point to the conclusion that biology constrains but does not determine the behaviour of sexes, and the differences between human males and females reflect an interaction between our physical constitutions and pattern of social life.”

(Rosaldo & Lemphere, 1974/5)

Also:

“The sexual division of labour is established by rules stipulated within each social group. Such rules are sex related (and age related), although not necessarily determined by either sex or age. Instead social rules and tasks become associated with sex and age by an educational process of some kind, whether formal or informal. In preliterate societies the recitation of myth and the performance of ritual serve as educational processes.”

(Bamberger, 1974/277)

Thus, on one hand there are advocates who insist that whatever we do or think is predetermined over millions of years through a process of natural selection and has become a genetic part of human animal, making him a kind of robot which might have misconceptions about personal knowledge or of conscious development through a process of mutual learning and understanding during human discourses. Their opposites contend, just as solidly, that human action is a result of education and cultural activity within each social sphere, and a specific person would behave differently if exposed to different programmes during his life time.

According to the biological determinists and evolutionists the unbalance in the relationships between human males and females is a consequence of partly the bodily determined functions – male's physical strength, higher speed and stamina; female's weaker constitution, disability during menstruation and longer periods of time given to care taking during and after pregnancy – and partly the result of the extension of the dominant role which males achieve during these periods when women need care-taking:

“Enough specific experience would lead to the conclusion that the pregnant women, the menstruating woman, and nursing woman should stay home. Perhaps even the most primitive mind finally came to the general conclusion that all women should stay at home.”

(Steinmann & Fox, 1974/18)

A rather simplistic view about the domestication of the women! It appears that the authors of these lines never

thought that besides menstruating and nursing women, in those societies there must be a host of wounded and disabled men too – after all the men we are talking about were hunters, warriors and braves: men in a constant state of combative action against wild animals or other equally strong but unfriendly men. If the recent history is any guide then the number of wounded and disabled persons is empirically always a multiple of the dead in war-like activities at the local or larger scale. And such men need as much nursing and care, if not more, than any menstruation or pregnant women.

Nevertheless, there is a general consent that the male's muscle power, along with his mastery of weapon, while female's confine-ment to the domestic sphere and child-caring did play a definite role in the domination of women by men, at least in the early stages of human societies when our forefathers are said to be mainly hunters and gatherers.

Kathleen Gough puts this case as:

. .to the extent that men have power over women in hunting societies, this seems to spring from the male's monopoly of heavy weapons, from the particular division of labour between the sexes, or from both. Although men seldom use weapon against women, they possess them (or possess superior weapons) in addition to the physical strength.

(Gough, 1975/70)

Once women were domesticated and put under the men's control not only did their mode of physical existence change, but their status as a thinking being

also seem to have been relegated and its range was confined to the realm of home – this is a view which is propagated by most of the male anthropologists and some female anthropologists too who have declared the woman as the second sex (de Beauvoir.S. 1953, Ortner 1974). Sherry Ortner, who caused quite a stir among female anthro-pologists, declared that woman is a universal victim of male dominance:

“The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrange-ment and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicate to me that we are up against something very profound, very stubborn, something we cannot...”

(Ortner 1974/67)

What, on the other hand, Ortner dose not discuss in detail is that this alleged inferiority of women is recognised by *which* group – by men alone, by women or by men and women.

C.P.MacCormack comments:

“Ortner states that “everywhere, in every culture women are considered in some degree inferior to men”. But she does not say by whom they are considered to be so. By men? By women? By how many? In field work I have talked with women chiefs, women heads of descent-groups, heads of women secret societies, and women house-hold heads who would not agree with the sweeping thesis as it stands. They would say that women are inferior to men in some ways and men are

inferior to women in some ways, giving productive talks in the division of labour as examples.”

(MacCormack 1980/17,18)

Actually we have two concepts here which are easy to get mixed with each other - Subordination and Inferiority. That women are subordinated in most culture is a historically verifiable fact, that they are also always considered inferior within the same cultures is often a conjecture which may or may not be true. Not all subordinated beings are considered inferior by the dominants. And not all subordinated beings consider themselves inferior to those who dominate. The classical examples would be the old and current civilizations of China and India which despite their repeated subordination by the foreign ‘savages considered themselves as culturally superior to their suppressors, and regarded the conditions of domination as merely circumstantial.

Similarly, women may have been dominated by men in most cultures but this does not mean that they consider themselves as inferior to men. Not even all men who dominate women consider these women as inferior in all cultures – instead in many cultures men are actually afraid of women and have gone to extra-ordinary lengths to construct myths and legends to nullify two natural superiorities which each normal woman has against a normal man:

(1) Her ability to procreate.

(2) Her natural privilege, when she has a free choice, to decide the real line of descent, and consequently the distribution of property by inheritance.

“In other words the identity of a newborn’s mother is always certain, but that of the father is only expected. In the modern world the observance of the patrilineal system is merely a tranquiliser for the male’s vanity. In the natural world the only reliably traceable ancestry is matrilineal. It is either through mutual consent or sheer coercion that the male may decide the fatherhood; and not always successfully.”

(Sucha 1985/61)

Woman’s natural gift to reproduce the human race seems to have had a double negative effect – physical handicap and dependency on men on one hand, and on the other the exertion of a compulsion upon men to create things outside their bodies to give them also the status of ‘birth-givers’; if not human beings then at least human ideas and their visible manifestation in the form of material creations accomplished by male hands.

This ability to produce from ‘within’ the body and ‘outside’ the body is evaluated differently by opposing schools of thought. According to Ortner:

“In other words, woman’s body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, in contrast, lacking natural creative function, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, “artificially” through the medium of symbols and technology. In so doing, he creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings.”

(Ortner 1974/75)

While Weiner says:

“In the Trobriands, recognition is given to the perishability of human beings, but, rather than diminish the inherent value of human beings as a means of achieving immortality, this recognition, especially enacted in death rituals, stresses the value placed on the continuity of life. In this way, the perpetuation of life or human survival is given far more transcendental significance than is the kind of immortality found in objects or in “cultural” survival. Therefore women, innately tied to the continuity of life, remain the locus of the means by which human survival transcends itself”.

(Weiner 1976/234)

She adds:

“Thus, in the Trobriands, male power over others is limited and the male search for immortality can only be fully achieved through women’s control of dala identity. Men’s attempt to achieve individual immortality must always remain an imitation of women’s control over the re-gensis of human life. Men seek to imitate regeneration through control over property, which allows them to construct power hierarchies composed of women and men.”

(Weiner 1976/233)

Personally I support Weiner. One need to ask Ortner one simple question: If it is men who construct ‘lasting, eternal and transcendent objects, then for whom these objects are constructed? For men only? For other human beings? As long as women *construct* men and other

'human beings' then the primary honours must go to women because without their 'construction' there would be no one to appreciate these 'lasting, eternal and transcendent objects'.

Women's natural ability to reproduce ought not to have any negative connotations to it, and it is only through envy and fear that men have succeeded in producing such an inverse construction of reality.

Enormously fastidious explanations, throughout documented human history, by men in power have been put forward to show that it is the male who is the injector, the seed planter, the initiator of human life and the social creator, while women were merely a receptor of the male grace. Mary Warner adduces:

"In the Hellenistic world, the Stoics maintained that men's seed, divided into body and soul, joined with a part of the woman's pneuma, or soul, to form the embryo. In their view, the whole child entered the woman's womb, and she provided none of the matter, only a little bit of the soul."

(Warner.M 1976/40)

"And not only did this view of the male as the active and woman being the passive has influenced their relationship in the sexual field but it is argued that its extension in the long run also determined woman's secondary status as a social being:

"The physiological fact of women being the sexual receptor became confounded with the social or psychological qualities of passivity and submissiveness.

Similarly, the physiological fact of the male being the injector, became associated with activity and aggressiveness. It is not a very big step from passivity to dependence, and from dependence to inferiority. Thus women became to be seen as inferior, or at least secondary, while men, in contrast, were seen as primarily in their sexual and social role."

(Steinmann & Fox 1974/18)

There are many other examples which signify male's discriminations and fears directed against the female, and the attempted desecration of her on grounds of menstruation (MacCormack 1980/9), aesthetically repulsive associations of smell and form with her genitals (Gillison 1980/149) or legal proclamations describing her as legally only half reliable as the male (Quran). Through these channels men have availed themselves with outlets which allow them escape in the nature (Gillison 1980/146), practice sodomy, under a multitude of symbolic and/or explicit excuses for their own sexual release (Rubin 1975) or else have degraded her to a level of sub-cultural, almost sub-human, servile being whose main function in life is to attend when service is demanded (Paul.L 1974/ 290).

But why impose all this degradation, domination, subordination and misuse of a being which constitutes one half of Homo sapiens?

To some it is a genetic code which makes us behave the way we do (Tiger & Fox 1974), to others it is the exchange of women in marriage alliances which propagated men to subdue and utilize women (Levi-Strauss 1969), other structuralists say

that it is woman's closeness to nature and that of men's to culture which resulted in that those who developed culture could control those who were non- or semi-participants in the development of culture, societal rules and jurial regulations (Ortner 1974), while the Marxists or neo-Marxists contend that although the most primitive societies were sexually egalitarians, it was the growth of class society which, along with the concept of private property, gave rise to the subjugation of women for the purpose of domestic and reproductive labour, while men were used for the productive (economic and cultural) work (Engels 1891, Sacks 1975). While discussing 'The Origin of the Family' Kathleen Gough depends basically upon the Marxist theory and the new evidence which has become handy by the detailed study of the primates – our closest relatives in the animal kingdom. According to her, when the human societies changed from gathering and hunting bands, to semi-permanent agrarian groups, on to settled agriculturists with the appearance of villages and small towns, leading to the rise of state, and now through the industry the concentration of huge masses in crowded residential areas, there has been a gradual alteration in the male/female relations at all levels.

The band societies involved periodic intensive co-operative ventures, which were followed by the dispersal of the band into smaller units. This involved sexual intimacy at two levels concurrently: husband/ wife pairing as separate units, as well as male/female group relations if and when the occasion called for such mating. Probably no rigid code of behaviour existed between the two modes, and the members of the band societies could change from one mode to the other without

much fuss (Gough 1975/68). The semi-permanent agrarian groups required more stable relations between particular males and females, both in the societal discharge of rights and obligations and that of sexual availability. The appearance of the settled agriculturists was followed by primarily with the personal rights to the use of the land and secondarily with the private ownership of the specific pieces of land; along with the establishment of the patriarchy and the formulation of the rules of inheritance, in most societies.

She concludes:

“A distinct change occurred with the growth of individual and family property in herds, in durable craft objects and trade objects, and in stable, irrigated farm sites or other forms of heritable wealth. This crystallized in the rise of the state, about 4000 B.C. with the growth of class society and of male dominance in the ruling class of the state, women’s subordination increased, and eventually reached its depth in the patriarchal families of the great agrarian states.”

(Gough 1974/75)

Suddenly the men needed the women not only as the co-workers and the reproducers of the future co-workers, but also as the reproducers of the children of particular genitors to enable the children to qualify as the inheritors of those particular property owners.

In different cultures the rules of inheritance vary but the biological bond within the family between the members of the same gender is often a strong one, even in those societies where the sons do not inherit the biological fathers

(Weiner 1976/ 141).

These above given argumentations, if correct, give a reasonably consistent chain of events which depict that how and why men sub-ordinated women; but there is one important link missing – Why men subordinated and subjugated women as individuals in almost all cultures, rather than as groups? Women could have been used for the performance of all services - sexual, reproductive and domestic - as a class in groups of moderate sizes, as she is used in some isolated cases. Why men confined women into separate homes and restricted their physical and mental movement when, in fact, had they utilised them collectively it would have been easier to use them; just the same way dominant men have used other men as slaves and labourers for the productive work?

One explanation is the sound proposition forwarded by the Marxist analysts that it was the concept of private property inheritable to particular children fathered by certain individuals only.

But I believe that there is another reason too, which is little discussed in this context: it is the sexual inadequacy of the most men in giving sexual and sensual satisfaction to his female (Hite 1976), which causes deep anxiety among most men, every-where and In every culture, and which resulted in the restrictions imposed upon the female availability to other men.

The female body, because of its anatomy and physiology, requires a completely different handling, to put it mildly, than that of the male. Male's physical

satisfaction is the moment of orgasm (Masters & Johnson 1966). An easily observable empirical event, which is followed by immediate obvious changes in male's body and mood! A woman knows when a man is relieved. For most men the female orgasm is a mystery, and not an easily achievable end by straight forward copulatory intercourse (Hite 1976). In most case it requires the stimulation of the clitoris and other erogenous parts of the female before and during the sexual intercourse. Very few men know the technique to bring forth the apex of sexual satisfaction for most women. And this inadequacy causes an anxiety which runs deep in the psyche of the human male.

Discussing the sexual relationships among American men and women in 'The Male Dilemma' Steinmann & Fox write:

"But today women consider themselves as something more than sexual objects, and rightly so. They have learnt that their bodies are more sensitive to a variety of erogenous stimulations than a man's, and that they are capable of profound and prolonged orgasms the same and even different from men's. Thus the meaning of femininity has taken a different dimension, and a woman feels she is less than women if she is unable or is denied the opportunity to experience her total sexuality."

(Steinmann & Fox 1971/129)

Also:

"Thus the male finds himself in a double bind. He is not a man' in his own eyes if he does not assume the

dominant sexual role and gratify his own desires, but in his wife's eyes he is not a man if he can not satisfy her as well."

(Steinmann & Fox 1971/128)

This book is written in 1974 and considers human relationships in the late sixties in the USA. To me it appears that the same conclusion and understanding was reached by men and women elsewhere in the world thousands, if not millions, of years ago. They ought to have released Kama Sutra, The Perfumed Garden, Japanese Bridal Roll and Art of Love in USA much earlier.

It is only in the Western World (where most 'dominant' social anthropologists happen to be), just breaking out of the bondages set by the Christian view of sexuality and those Muslim countries where she is considered only *semi-human*, the female sensuality is considered as a new discovery.

One, of course, must differentiate between that which is naturally true of males and females from that which has become a part of the men and women's contemporary existent nature, or that which is assumed to be their nature but in reality is a behavioural pattern after years of coercive compliance. The practical possibilities for the physical and mental activities believed to be true within a specific society for its male and female members may not be true at all in their unadulterated form; yet, the members of that specific society may behave and practise their beliefs as if they were universally true – women in many Muslim countries may almost behave and function like half-intelligent beings

because they have been conditioned to behave so, or women in many cultures may, initially, act sexually passive because they have been taught to appear so, and this passivity may consequently become a part of their external attitude.

It is difficult to pin-point that at what level of social evolution the incest taboo was introduced upon most of the human society; because initially all small groups must have been incestuous and, or, consanguineal. The non-availability of the sexually mature females to a certain-kind and number of males because of the incest taboo was counter-balanced with the rules of exogamy, which ascertained a formal mode of peaceful exchange of nubile women between different groups, and which was, when needed, supplemented with the coercive recruitment of the females from other sources by abduction.

Whereas exogamy facilitated various societal groups to secure women, and men, for the purpose of biological intimacy it has one big drawback – it ensures no emotional intimacy between the intended husbands and wives. People put together by the common needs of the society may, as individuals, turn out to have quite uncommon likes and dislikes in their day to day intercourse; which also applies to the sexual satisfaction extended, and expected, by each gender to the other.

It is generally accepted that the incest taboo was imposed by the males for the protection and isolation of the female, so that she could be used for exchange during kinship alliances.

While discussing incest in 'Male Dominance and Female Autonomy' Alice Schlegel puts forward two alternative, and interesting, hypothesis about male/female relations, proposing that it was not the female but the male who was the principal object of protection. The two hypotheses are:

"1) A man who dominates a woman in other spheres of her domestic life is likely to dominate her sexually as well.

2) The 'subordinated female is not only more accessible to the dominant male but is more attracted to him as well. Besides she finds him the attractive object and is potentially seductive towards him.

"Thus, the relative strength of the incest taboo serves to protect the susceptible man, not the helpless woman."

(Schlegel 1972/128,129)

The female sexuality – generally referred to as 'wild; 'natural', 'unrestrained' but according to my judgement ought to be called as 'unsatisfied' or rather 'dissatisfied' – makes the male feel insecure, not only in psychological terms but also in physical context. Although the subordinating male has the sexual power over the subjugated female, the subjugated female has the sensual power over the dominant male – Sexuality : Sensuality :: Body : Mind.

In order to fight off this strong attraction between the few dominant males and the many dominated females in all societies the other men were forced to erect barriers, both material and legal, between the two attracted

parties if they were also to get their own women and children.

After a man has copulated with his woman couple of times, she can feel calm because her man is discharged; at least for the same occasion; often longer, the duration of this discharged state growing longer with the advancement of her man's age. After converting her mans *stiffness* to *softness* she knows that no further constrain is called for to curtail his movements. The reverse is not true. The professional, and some historical, ladies (Messalina, wife of Claudius), have been documented to accommodate 20+ men the same evening, in a succession of evenings, quite regularly.

And the professional and non-professional sisters of those professional ladies all over the world are gifted by nature that whenever instead of a clash between body and will there is wish for the union of body and mind then they have a greater capacity for it than their contending men.

According to natural system almost every healthy male can be sexually satisfied by a healthy female. But its reverse, as I have said earlier, often results in female's sexual dissatisfaction. Thus, if men and women lived in groups then only a few men would have been popular among women, whereas most men would have been deprived of female sexuality.

We see the same system among other animals which live in groups, where only few attractive males impregnate all the females; while most of the males

spend their time quarrelling and fighting with each other.

Among human beings we have evolved systems according to which most men's personal needs are satisfied, but these men cannot get rid of the feeling of female sexual dissatisfaction from their minds!

In various societies men have tried to find a remedy for their complex by curtailing the female sexuality by different means - in certain parts of Africa her clitoris is surgically removed; for a long time Christianity considered the sexual act as *dirty*, and women were told that their function was to procreate only; and according to the Muslim tradition the recommended position of sexual union is such that not only women get the minimum of clitoral stimulation during intercourse but the men also avoid looking into her eyes; lest!

A solid proof of men's fear of the female *heat* is the jokes and advertisements that we find all over the world in books, magazines and TV, where men are continuously reminded that they are victim of some sexual deficiency and the cure for *their* deficiency is available. Unfortunately the punishment for the so called sexual deficiency of men is inflicted upon those poor animals whose horns, tusks and other bones are said to be the cure of these ailments, and as its result these animals are becoming almost extinct.

Thus, if good moral societal rule, as defined, prescribed and enforced by men, are to be practised then unnatural, often called as cultural, boundaries must be

drawn to restrain the dissatisfied women; the men are restrained by the nature.

And women were and are, thus, not only subjugated by the dominant men for utility as a class, but that class was further broken into individuals by the less-dominant, and generally insecure, men to ascertain the availability of the women for their sexual and domestic needs, as well as for the reproduction of the future helping hands and inheritors.

There is much to be explored in the field of 'sex role', but I restrict this paper to the projection of three thoughts:

1) Not only elements of superiority but acute feelings of inferiority can also produce conditions of dominance, through desperation, with extremely adverse results for the dominated.

2) The male's obsession with the control of the female, both as a class and as an individual, is partly a product of male's superiority in strength and weaponry, coupled with laws associated with patriarchy and division of property, and partly the outcome of a deep anxiety which has its seat in the emotional insecurity of the male.

3) So long as women all over the world do not break the social chains that men have entangled them into, using devious concepts like feminine honour, shame and disgrace, and struggle to achieve the human equality and liberation from such stigmas they would remain subjugated.

An honourable and dignified human being must be able to look eyes to eye at another person, say candidly whatever is there on his or her mind and listen to the other party just as attentively. A creature coerced to follow all kind of right or wrong commands with averting eyes and a bowed head is not a librated person.

The basic identity of a conscientious human being is that as a person he, free from all prejudices associated with race, nationality, complexion, sex and gender, should be able to reflect and decide individually and collectively upon the steps for the progress of current and coming generations at various societal levels. Such person feels responsible for the suggestions and decisions that he has participated into and justly claims the benefits and fruit of his labour; and also according to the rules of the society that he lives in participates actively in the life of other members of that society.

Every human being who is wholly dependent upon the decision of another person for his own development is a subjugated person!

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Urdu – its survival and constancy

(This essay was read at **Jashan' Urdu**, Birmingham, 13 February 2004)

Time and again the discussion about Urdu's survival and its constancy flare up in the Indian periodicalsⁱⁱ as well as among the custodiansⁱⁱⁱ of Urdu elsewhere in the world.

Do the speakers of a language that is said to be understood and spoken by almost 700 millionsⁱⁱⁱⁱ people in the world need worry about its survival, and prosperity?

This question has arisen in my mind as often as I have picked up one of these periodicals or talked to one of its defenders. Related to this basic question the other questions are:

1. Are the claims about the number of Urdu-speakers inflated?
2. Are the fears of Urdu-speakers ungrounded?
3. Does Urdu have any intrinsic flaw that makes it frailer than other major languages?
4. Which conditions, besides its linguistic characteristics, makes a language durable and dominant in a certain area as compared to other existing languages within the same area?

I would deal with each of these questions to some length separately, and then summarise the whole discussion.

1. Two major current habitat of Urdu are India and Pakistan. India is its natal home and Pakistan it's naturalized one. Besides, along with Punjabi and Hindi, today it is widely spoken by the emigrants from South Asia in Britain; Central and Northern Europe; Parts of Canada and USA; Middle East, Eastern Africa and, oddly enough, certain countries in South America^[iv]. How many people may claim Urdu as their mother-tongue varies enormously depending upon who is putting up the claim, but the official estimate puts it to be about 25 millions in India^[v] and 10 millions in Pakistan^[vi]. However, if we remove the condition *mother-tongue* and just count the number of people who can easily converse in Urdu/Hindi and understand them then the figures leaps into great numbers i.e. 350 -700 millions. The basic difference between everyday Urdu and Hindi is the script^[vii], but that difference can be further exploited by the staunch supports of the disparity between them by the addition of Arabic and Persian words to Urdu, and Sanskrit to Hindi. In their main vocabulary, grammar, syntax and mood the two are fully compatible. Although the major homes of Urdu are reputed to be the area around Lukhnow-Dehli-Agra belt and Hyderabad in India; and Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad in Pakistan, none of them compete with Mumbai as the greatest propagator of Urdu. It is the film industry in Bollywood in India and, to some extent, Lollywood in Pakistan that has put Urdu/Hindi in millions of home within South Asia and far away from there in Asia, Africa, Europe and Americas. Whenever we mention the names like Anis, Mir, Ghalib, Hali, Iqbal, Majrooh, Faiz, Sahir, Faraz, Gulzar, Javeed Akhter, Fahmida Riaz, Parveen Shakir and^[viii] Kishwer Naheed as the elites who gave

lifeblood to Urdu poetry we must not forget to pay tribute to Sehgal, Farida Khanum, Lata Mangeshkar, Rafi, Talat, Makesh, Geeta Dutt, Asha, Mehdi Hassan, Ghulam Ali and Jagjeet Singh for taking the Urdu lyrics out from books and putting them in the ears and mouths of hundred of millions of people all over the world. Just as when we endorse Hali, Nazir Ahmad, Preem Chund, Sajjad Zaheer, Krishan Chunder; Munto, Bedi, Qurratul Ain Hyder, Ismat Chughtai, Meerza Adeeb, and Qasmi Sahib as mentors of Urdu prose, we must acknowledge with gratitude the pronunciation, enunciation and delivery of Urdu dialogues by Pirthvi Raj, Sehrab Modi, Daleep Kumar, Raj and Shashi Kapoor, Dev Anand, Amitab Bachan, Nasir Ud Din Shah, Nargis, Nautan, Meena Kumari, Mudho Bala, Waheeda Rehman, Rekha, Shaban Azmi, in India and Santoosh Kumar, Muhammed Ali, Waheed Murad, Nadeem, Sabeha, Shammem Ara and Nayyer Sultana in Pakistan. In both cases it is not the first batch who taught people to speak and pronounce the Urdu language, but the members of the second group who enhanced the accuracy in speech and its articulation. It is through their diction, songs and ghazals that Urdu has its greatest exposure for the people who do not have Urdu as their mother-tongue. And it is these people who form the bulk of Urdu speakers in the today's world.

Thus, we have a rather odd situation before us: only 35 million persons claim Urdu as their mother tongue, but it is used, loved and cherished by over 350 millions people all over the world. As a spoken language it is probably the third or fourth largest language in the world, but when it comes to reading and writing it the numbers fall rapidly into a few

million. With literacy rate of about 18% for India and Pakistan^[ix] the number of people who have Urdu as their mother tongue and may read and write is down to 6 millions^[ix]. And that puts it just above Finnish, Danish and Norwegian – each has about 5 million speakers.

2. The above section shows that the fears of Urdu custodians are not unfounded; although, at times, they are overdriven. Presently the onslaught of English all over the world, as the commanding medium of Anglo-American dominance in financial, military and IT fields, is a disturbing factor for the speakers of many small languages. If I were to use Scandinavia as an example then we have the following situation:

Language	Country	Mother-tongue of Population		Literacy	
		Millions	%	%	in millions
Swedish	Sweden	90	9	100%	8,1
Danish	Denmark	100	5,4	100%	5,4
Finnis	Finland	100	5,1	100%	5,1
Norwegian	Norway	100	4,5	100%	4,5
Icelandic	Iceland	100	0,28	100%	0,28
Urdu	India	2,4	1001	18%	4,3
Urdu	Pakistan	7,6	145	17%	1,7

How the Scandinavians have tackled this problem? By being multi-linguists! Nearly all children in Scandinavia now learn English from the very beginning in their schools; but, at the same time the Scandinavian educationist have made it

certain that all kind of knowledge that is available in other major languages of the world is also available to their children in their own languages. Thus, a Scandinavian child has a multiple choice to satisfy his hunger and curiosity in his pursuit for knowledge. The attitude of the Scandinavian scholars is to ascertain that the information given to the children, and other laymen, is in simple, straightforward and accurate language.

In other words their approach is not defensive but progressive and evolutionary.

If programmers in Microsoft and other computer companies can convert their programs in tiny languages like Swedish, Danish and Finnish then there is no reason to believe that they would be hesitant to offer their programs in Urdu once they know that there is a need and market for their products.

Currently In-page is the most widely used software in Urdu, and it is beneficial for all of us to help its producers standardise it by giving them financial as well as informative assistance.

3. One major tragedy that I may associate with Urdu is that it lacks a home, where it could dwell and develop in its local surrounding free from all external pressure. In India, it is treated as a step-child because Pakistan adopted it as its national language. In Pakistan, despite its status as the national language, it is consider as an instrument of oppression used by the immigrants from India against the indigenous people. I have discussed this issue elsewhere^[xii] in detail and would not take it up here.

In both cases injustice is done to Urdu. Urdu is a language meant to facilitate communication between people who comprehend it. Like any language it is a collection of words, with a grammar and syntax. As such it belongs to no religion or political system. If there are people who have deliberately taken steps to give Urdu religious or political colouring then the fault lies with these people not with the language which has no will or intention of its own but is merely a set of symbols in vocal or written form which, when appropriately used, brings people together.

As a matter of fact I would like to contend that as a language it is one of the most competent system to boost communication between people. It has benefited by the fusion of three great languages of the world: primarily Hindi, Arabic and Persian, and that merger was further augmented by the inclusion of several local languages and English. This provides an Urdu speaker, along with normal sounds that are produced by the use of mouth, lips and tongue, an enormous range of guttural, pharyngeal, aspirated and diphthongal sounds. Then, as a composite language its vocabulary freely borrowed words from the languages mentioned above, which means that it abounds with synonyms and has a very flexible syntax.

To elucidate my contention I would like to make certain comparisons by taking various linguistic groups:

The Latin languages - French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese - despite their popularity and mass as literary languages lack the hard palatal sound for D, R and T, along with the palatal and aspirated sounds (Bh, Ph, Th, Gh, Ch, Dh, Kh etc) of the Hindi group.

The Germanic group - English, Dutch, German - lacks the softer dental sounds for D and T, hard palatal R, along with the palatal and aspirated sounds (Bh , Ph, Th, Gh, Ch, Dh, Kh etc) of the Hindi group. Its speakers have further difficulty with the guttural and pharyngeal sounds of other languages.

The Semitic languages - Arabic, Hebrew etc - though they use many guttural and pharyngeal sounds, do not have the Hard D, R and T, soft P and other aspirated sounds of the Hindi group.

The Hindi group - Hindi, Punjabi, Gujrati etc - lack the sounds for Arabic Z (zal, zeer, zuay, zuad) Q, Gh (Ghain), Kh (khey), as well as the aspirated Th of Germanic languages.

Strangely enough an Urdu speaker learns to reproduce all these sounds because of the inclusion of words from most of the language groups; and, therefore, has it quite easy to learn any of these languages later on in life.

Urdu script, although it is based upon the nastaleeq style of the Persian, has also developed letters as well as additional signs to facilitate correct pronunciation of the written language.

I reiterate that when we look at the material written in Urdu there is no shortage of the so called elitist literature. It abounds with poetry and prose of high standard, but there is almost nothing in the non-fiction field. Somehow the promoters of Urdu ignored the normal everyday needs of the ordinary people and concentrated upon producing and composing for the educated. If we are talking about propagating Urdu, then propagation is done best through the coming generation. It is

not a gathering of some old souls reciting Ghalib or Iqbal that would promulgate Urdu. If Urdu provides information to children who wish to repair their toys or instructions to use the computer; tells ordinary people how to fix a broken items at home, guides craftsmen who wishes to further their knowledge in their professional fields then Urdu would prosper, flourish and proliferate. Else these people would learn and use the language that fulfils their need.

4. For any language to prosper it requires the love and effort of its ordinary speakers as well the protection and patronage of the ruling/dominant class within a certain area. The preference of any language among the elite has always play been important in its role at various courts: French was once spoken as a leading language among the elite of Britain, just as Persian was the official language in the Mughal court. Urdu, as compared to other imported languages, was actually a local product that evolved in Old India by the mixing of people of various origins and their languages. Unfortunately, because of traditional low literacy in India^[xiii] it primarily remained a spoken language. The gentry that could read and write Urdu did no menial jobs and, therefore, concentrated upon literary aspects of the language; while those who worked with handicrafts, agriculture or other menial jobs were illiterates. Then, the absence of copyright and patent rights resulted in the dearth of written material in subjects like medicine, chemistry and other technical fields. Extremely learned and capable persons did not write down their formulas and data; and knowledge was passed on, if and when it was passed on, at person to person basis. Therefore, while Urdu is a great

literary language it is extremely poor in the technical and other non-literary aspects. The artisans in various areas where Urdu was spoken used words from other local languages for different implements and tools, just as they used English word when the British took over India. When, subsequently, Urdu literacy was spread among street people dictionaries were composed to fill this huge gap. Even here the composers, instead of using or developing words ordinary Urdu or other local languages, chose to import words from Arabic and Persian making it even more difficult for the semi-educated working class to grasp the meaning of a given text. It appears as if the edifice of Urdu has a magnificent roof in which the brilliant names of Mir, Ghalib, Zoaq, Dagh, Iqbal, Faiz, Sahir, Minto and Qasmi are embedded, but its walls are left bare and its floor is still unpaved. For the survival of such a linguistic structure it is vital to immediately reinforce it with such knowledge that is not only supportive but also easily grasped.

The basic purpose of using a language is to facilitate communication between individuals. But a language can also be implemented to selectively retard communication between individuals of different groups. That is when a language, instead of bringing people together, becomes an instrument that divides people. This knowledge is not new and has been used in the past many time: Romans, in the conquered areas, deployed soldiers from various nations who could not communicate with the local people to suppress them. The Spaniards used Spanish as the official language in South America to hinder the Indians from freely communicating with each other and also competing with emigrants of European origin. Before the partition of India Urdu played a

prominent linguistic role in the offices of Northern British India. After 1947, when India was divided into Bharat and Pakistan, Urdu received an extremely odd treatment: it was declared secondary to Hindi in its home grounds in Bharat; while it was imposed as the primary language in Pakistan. Overnight millions of Bengalis, Punjabi, Sindhis, Pathans and Balochis were left speechless and told to learn and master Urdu if they were to receive official jobs in the future. The man who supposedly declared Urdu as the national language of Pakistan did not speak Urdu himself! Obviously the reasons for this double treatment for Urdu were political and not linguistic. Bharat, with a Hindu majority, filtered out the Urdu speakers and writers from the competition; whereas, in Pakistan, the immigrant Urdu speakers ensured their hegemony by filtering out the local languages. It did not go well for Urdu in both places – In Bharat it lost its strength and charm where Hindi became the necessary medium for the job seeker; while in Pakistan the domination of the Urdu speaker lead to the contempt for Urdu by the indigenous people, eventually leading to the break away of Bangla Desh and later on to the turmoil and communal riots in Karachi in the nineties.

Thus, as said above, the crucial reasons for the fall of Urdu in Bharat and resistance to it in Pakistan are social and political. The added religious dimension to Urdu, where it is at times claimed to be the language of Muslims, made things only worse in Bharat where the non-Muslim advocators of it were put into a very difficult position by the opponents of Urdu^[xiii].

Still, the fact remains that despite all the faults and follies of its supporters it continues to be the most widely spoken and

understood language in South Asia^[xiv]. It is a wonderful language that has benefited by the knowledge and skill of eastern as well as western scholars^[xv]. Today Urdu speakers are spread all over the world and its supporters have laboured hard to make it one of the languages that has adapted well to the computers technology -- today a must for a language if it were to survive in tomorrow's world! Only time will tell if Persian script is vital for Urdu; or, like Turkish, it could move on to the Roman script. Much has been written against such transformation; but unfortunately such opponents of the Roman script have mainly English as the comparative script. English, despite its popularity in the world, is not a very good written language when it comes to accuracy in articulation and enunciation. Other languages have developed better methods for the precision in pronunciation of various letters of the alphabet^[xvii].

Living in Sweden I do not believe that there is any danger for Urdu's demise. It is one of the major languages in today's world, and with adaptation to the computer language there is little chance that it would fall into disgrace. What is needed is that more attention should be paid to accommodate the needs of children and ordinary human being to make it a necessary source in their pursuit of knowledge and information. Obviously it would be a great leap forward if in areas where the interests clash its speakers learn to co-exist by teaching their language to other people and in return learning their languages. Multi-lingualism would be a vital asset in the future world, and it is never too late to start now!

References

[\[i\]](#) Insha, Calcutta; Shair, Mumbai and several other.

[\[ii\]](#) Urdu is fast losing in its homeland, Ikram Ali (Times News Network, December 14, 2003)

[\[iii\]](#) According to The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, David Crystal.

[\[iv\]](#) I have intentionally omitted Bangladesh, where quite a number of people command Urdu but refrain from its use because of political reasons.

[\[v\]](#) According to the census held in 1991. States with the highest % of Urdu Speakers were: Bihar 9,91%; Utter Perdesh 9,74%;Karnatka 9,54%, Andhra Perdesh 7,84%; Maharashtra 6,94% and Dehli 5,88%..

[\[vi\]](#) Although only 10 million people claim Urdu as their mother tongue (1982 census), being the national languages it is spoken, by most middle aged and young people today.

[\[vii\]](#) Urdu is written in a modified Persian script; whereas Hindi uses Devanagri, a script based upon Sanskrit. For further elucidation see The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language, David Crystal.

[\[viii\]](#) And of course many many more. I always feel extremely miser when it comes down to compiling such lists!

[\[ix\]](#) This literacy rate includes people who can just sign their name and read some elementary text.

[\[x\]](#) See the chart below. To these 6 millions we must add about 23 millions in Pakistan who do not have Urdu as their mother tongue but can read and write it. Besides, the literacy rate is

much higher in the urban Urdu speakers and that would further increase this number. Still, Urdu remains a minor literary language when judged in proportion to the masses who speak it.

[\[xi\]](#) The Roots of Misery. 1985.

[\[xii\]](#) Reading and writing was a privilege meant only for the upper castes in India, and although caste system officially does not exist in Islam it is fully practised in the daily life.

[\[xiii\]](#) This feeling was expressed in personal talks with Ram Lall , Om Parkash Arif Hoshiarpuri Sahib and several other writers from Bharat.

[\[xiv\]](#) South Asia: Bharat, Pakistan Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and, to a certain extent, in Afghanistan.

[\[xv\]](#) Fort Williams played a critical role in the development of Urdu.

[\[xvi\]](#) Like the zer, zaber and pesh in Urdu they use various dot, and strokes for the accuracy in pronunciation.

Words, Words and Words

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