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(A Bi-annual, Bi-lingual, Peer reviewed academic e-journal)

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Editor's Note

It is with a sense of pride and achievement that we bring to you the First Edition of Poornadrishti; Journal of Literary Studies,(PJLS) a bi-lingual bi annual, peer reviewed edition from Prasaranga (Publication Division) Kuvempu University. The journal aims at promoting research among both University teachers and the students. In this endeavour, it proposes to publish critical articles as well as creative pieces. Creativity is what keeps one engrossed in an otherwise uneventful academic life, if one may say so. The first edition of this journal has both critical and creative pieces as well as translations. The launch of this journal has had the active participation and encouragement of the administration as well as other University staff and faculty from diverse backgrounds. We are particularly indebted to the various scholars who have contributed to this edition and helped in its launch. We are deeply indebted to our editorial team who consented to be a part of the journal. We hope to glean wisdom through interaction with them. We thank the team and we hope to keep this going for a long time to come.

We are grateful to our Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Prof B P Veerabhadrappe, and the Registrar, Smt. Anuradha G, for their support, commitment and encouragement in bringing out the journal.

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The Exigency of Cultural Transformation through the Eyes of Deepa Narayan

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Gender differences are a phenomenon around the world actively researched by social scientists. Culture influences thinking, language and human behavior. The social environment, in which individuals are born and live, shapes their attitudinal, emotional and behavioral reactions and the perceptions about what is happening around. The same applies in the case of assigned/assumed roles in society based on gender. Cultural dimensions that reflect differences in gender roles, but also elements related to the ethics of sexual difference were highlighted by many researchers. The presentation of these issues from the perspective of the social scientist and author Deepa Narayan is the subject of this article. Briefly, the article refers to the discussions about whether and how norms can be reset. *Chup: Breaking the Silence about Indian Women* should be the springboard for Indian women to retrospect and break the silence around gender inequality.

One sheds one's sickness in books - repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be master of them (D.H. Lawrence)

Culture can be defined as the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. Gender aspects are relevant both in relation to the broad definition of culture as a 'social construction' and to the way in which cultural policy is designed and implemented. Cultures vary in their definition of gender roles and show varying degrees of tolerance for atypical gender behaviors and gender change. An understanding of cultural context is important in the assessment of a typical gender development and challenges current models of sex and gender. Deepa Narayan observes that as she spoke to urban Indian women in many different settings, in India and abroad, a disturbing pattern emerged. To put it in her own words from an interview, "yet another smartly dressed woman, an artist, a business manager, a financial analyst, a professor, a dentist, an engineer, a lawyer, a researcher, a scientist, a teacher, an educated stay-at-home mom, was so unsure of herself. Or that she sounded, after the obligatory gender equality claims and sometimes

passionate lecture, like her mother would have sounded thirty or forty years ago.” The author made modifications to her research methodology and ended up with 8000 pages of notes from interviews with highly educated women in the cities, and discovered that there was still a huge gap between intellectual beliefs and actual behavior.

From this the author builds her central arguments that gender equality is not born from the intellect, but from ingrained culture; and that this culture, which currently favors inequality, and explains both sexual violence and everyday sexism, can be changed; and that this change is not possible without the active participation of men, and so the focus should not be on blaming “patriarchy” but on finding ways to educate men and to include them in finding solutions.

Our culture, according to the author, trains women to not exist either by literally killing them (foeticides, female infanticides, violence) or by training them to “disappear” via seven habits, making feminists with bad habits:

Drawing on the details of the lives of women and men I interviewed, each over several hours, I found that girls are trained in seven cultural habits of non-existence. These are deny the body; be quiet; please others; deny your sexuality; isolate yourself; have no individual identity; and be dependent. It is deep training in these habits that makes so many women feminists in belief but not in behavior. Feminists with bad habits. (9)

Chup: Breaking the Silence about India's Women solidifies and lays out specific changes for cultural modification in a structured manner. The author throughout discusses, using actual quotes, examples, and anecdotes from the lives of the women she interviewed, how the habits she mentioned are developed in women, its consequences and finally offers reflections and suggestions for how these habits can be broken. *Chup*, is based on 600 detailed interviews with women and some men across India's metros, wherein she identifies seven key habits that may dominate women's everyday lives, despite their education, success, financial status and family background.

Excerpts from an interview reveals that it was after the Nirbhaya rape that she asked herself what she could contribute and eventually it became clear that she needed to explore culture. Indeed the incident shook the collective conscience of the nation. She added that the public debate was focused on law and the police and everyone would say it was also

because of our culture, and the conversation would stop at that. She said that Culture was a big word that was difficult to grab. So she decided to explore culture by asking what it meant to be a good woman or good man. She started looking at the culture that allows men to think and do whatever they pleased with a woman to her body, mind, thought or psyche. Even when the laws were made more stringent in India, it did nothing to deter crimes against women. It made her want to dig into culture to get a grasp of men's thinking process. She couldn't believe the answers of highly educated students from India's best colleges. Her motivation of writing the book is to break the silence about the lives of women in modern middle and upper class India and about what is happening in our families:

In my book I take apart women's everyday behaviors that do not always make women look good. My reason is simple. Unless we cannot change despite our intellectual beliefs our world will not change.

This book is about us. It is about women in the middle and upper classes. We need to talk about ourselves and not just 'them', those poor, uneducated and unfortunate women out there. We need to break our silence about our own lives. But silence too has cultural meaning. (10-11)

The running theme across the narratives of the women in the book is the feeling of being singled out which leads to women bottling up everything in silence. Many women shared stories of their battling shame, embarrassment, frustration, humiliation and confusion.

Is Silence a virtue or is silence betrayal? I was taught that silence is a virtue. Silence is polite. Silence is good. Silence is spiritual. But there comes a time in one's life and in the life of a society when silence becomes betrayal. A betrayal of goodness. A betrayal of decency. It is time to end this silent betrayal now. (11)

The book aims at a target audience. It is not specifically for women. It is for men who care for and respect the women in their lives. A man's perspective might change for his woman in his life as he goes through the narratives, the real life incidents and expressions of which the author shares in *Chup*. The women's rights movement in India needs a revolution, and there can be no successful women's revolution without a men's

revolution. *Chup: Breaking the Silence about India's Women* explores the ways in which Indian society reinforces the negative views women harbour about themselves.

Women are taught not to exist by stifling their voice and identity. It is a metaphorical non-existence that limits them to roles and responsibilities (daughter, sister, mother, and wife) and murders their individuality. *Chup* is a voice that battles this push towards non-existence. An unequal culture between men and women survives on hundreds of ordinary, everyday behaviors, proverbs and punishments. We are all involved. It is time for us to change. A five-year research project, the book *Chup* establishes that educated women and men must come together to change seven everyday habits that perpetuate gender inequality. It develops a framework of seven 'cultural habits of non-existence' that women are trained to adhere to but ignores the role of patriarchy.

Deepa Narayan presents us with seven "cultural habits of non-existence" that all Indian women are trained to adhere to as they grow from girlhood to womanhood. None of them should really jolt us since they are so normalized in our everyday cultural landscape. But when viewed collectively, they hold up a mirror to our deeply troubled society.

Deny the body: Women are told not to talk about their bodies and the worst consequence of this is the silence and shame built around sexual violence and abuse. They are taught to diminish their bodies by disguising it in every possible way including hanging their heads and hunching their bodies. According to Narayan, women learn to distance themselves from their bodies by being discouraged from movement and sporty activity.

Be quiet: Girls are constantly reprimanded to speak softly and less, be "sober", shun loudness, only listen, not be opinionated or argumentative. The result is persistent self-doubt and low confidence that Narayan says silences women from voicing their opinions and asking for their due in the workplace.

Please others: Girls are regularly badgered into pleasing and adjusting to the needs of others, feeling guilty about saying no, and disguising their own hurts or feelings: smiling but not over-smiling; definitely not laughing loudly. This takes a toll on their mental and emotional health and on their ability to make decisions, initiate action and to take on leadership positions.

Deny your sexuality: Narayan lays out story after story where women talk about how at puberty and after, all aspects of their sexuality including their developing breasts, hips,

body hair, menstruation and sexual desire are buried in denial and shame. The consequence of this is not that women don't indulge in sexual exploration – on the contrary, casual sex is on the rise across the country – but that due to lack of training in healthy sexuality (based on consent, equality, respect and trust), women are left vulnerable to sexual violations and abuse within homes, in offices and public spaces.

Have no individual identity: Many women interviewed in the book express anger at society viewing them only as mothers, daughters and wives but buy into that rhetoric themselves, speaking incessantly in the language of duty and sacrifice to describe their role as women.

Be dependent: According to Narayan, women's systematic training in physical, material and psychological dependence on men and fear of being alone makes women unable to trust themselves.

Isolate yourself: Narayan argues that since we carefully groom our girls in fear, insecurity, and distrust, women don't build enough communities of caring female groups. Instead women doubt each other and backbite.

The author explores women's learned habits, pleasing behaviours and deference to men, which feed a vicious cycle of silence. She encourages women to make themselves heard, even in the face of a society that constantly yells 'Chup!' It is suggested how this culture can be transformed. The narrative aims at not a list of 'do's' and 'don'ts' but are general guidelines for action. The author's metaphor of gender bias as "dirt" which must be cleaned every day pricks the minds of every Indian woman and man. She makes interesting observations in the latter chapters about co-opting men as integral to the fight against the cultural systems, about facilitating collective action and ensuring solidarity, and the importance of redefining "power," before concluding on a hopeful note by asserting that change is possible and offers her suggestions for how this culture can be transformed. It is the need of the hour for proper gender sensitization which aims at specific changes for cultural modification in a structured manner.

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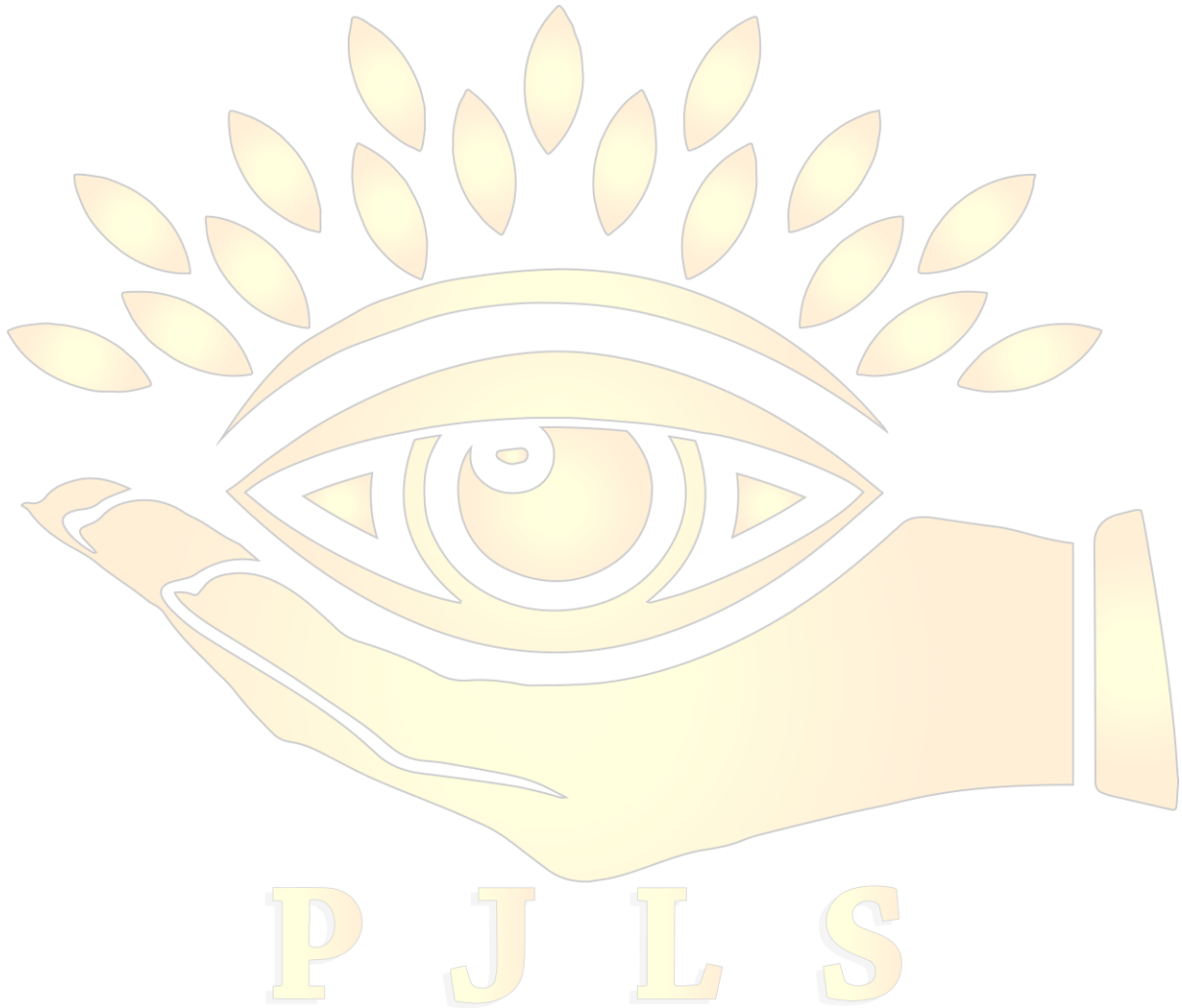
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Aspects with Different Expressive Meaning: A Study of Translated Arab Short Stories

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Abstract

The existence of some elements in a target language which have the same propositional meaning of the source language, but it may have a different expressive meaning poses a controversial issue in the area of translation. This point which is classified by Mona Baker as a case of non-equivalence in translation needs to be considered deeply by translators and translation theorists. This paper, mainly, aims at analysing the translations of four Arab elements that imply different expressive meanings as those in the target texts. These elements are extracted from select Arab short stories that have been translated into English by different translators whose cultures might not be the same as the writers' cultures. It is also very important to imply here what Thakur included in his book *Linguistic Simplified Semantics* that a word may mean the same thing as the referent of that word which is referred to as the denotation of that word. On the other hand, a word can have an incidental meaning that we associate with it from time to time that is referred to as the connotation of that word. He also added that "the connotation of a word is unstable and, compared to its denotation, peripheral to its meaning" (1999, p.14-15). The study comes to the conclusion that translating such element, really, represents a problematic issue in the area of translation. Moreover, the translator's superficial background of one of the texts he deals with may create a misleading and an inappropriate translation of those aspects with different expressive meaning.

Keywords: Different expressive meaning, Equivalence, target language, Source language

Introduction

The process of translation involves a sound and a deep background in lexical, linguistic and cultural understanding of both the source language and the target language that the translator deals with. Concerning this point, it is very important to imply here what

Thakur included in his book *Linguistic Simplified Semantics* that a word may mean the same thing as the referent of that word which is referred to as the denotation of that word. On the other hand, a word can have an incidental meaning that we associate with it from time to time that is referred to as the connotation of that word. He also added that "the connotation of a word is unstable and compared to its denotation, peripheral to its meaning" (1999, 14-15). Baker points out that "there may be a target language word which has the same propositional meaning as the source language word, but it may have a different expressive meaning." (1992, 23). She also claimed that this feature can be more noticeable in some fields more than others "This is often the case with items which relate to ... religion, politics and sex". As pointed out by some linguists, lexical differences make translation extremely difficult. In English some words are more specific in their meaning whereas in Arabic the meaning of a word may be more broadly construed and vice versa.

This paper will mainly discuss the issue of translating aspects that imply a different expressive meaning as it is clearly noticeable in Arabic language. Based on that, I directly selected the short story as the point to be discussed in this paper since literary writings will, undoubtedly, be rich of such aspects. These terms and expressions may be considered as a case of non-equivalence based on Mona Bakers divisions of non-equivalence i.e. they may not have exact matching expressions in the target language to convey their exact intended meaning. Therefore, their translation needs not only to find their dictionary equivalents, but to find at least an approximate equivalence for them to give their message that the source text writer intends to convey.

A lot of Arab short stories were translated into English by translators who sometimes might not be of the members of the Arab culture. Generally speaking, the Arab short stories genre became clear to the none-Arab reader though there might be a kind of loss of some aspects of the translated text. This is the point that will be discussed here.

Statement of the problem

The process of translation is extremely problematic since it is a mere transference of words, but a rendering of the essence of the text to be translated. This requires a deep

understanding from the translator of the linguistic, lexical, syntactical and cultural sides of the two languages he is dealing with. Differences in expressive meaning is an issue that poses a translation problem since some aspects may express more than one meaning in the source language that are not exactly expressed in the target language. In this case the translator needs to know about the hidden features of the languages he is mediating. In addition, appropriate strategies of translation should be used to convey at least approximate meaning of the source text.

Discussion and Analysis

Here, four aspects that bear different expressive meaning will be selected from different Arab short stories which are translated by different translators (Arab and non-Arab). Those aspects will be analyzed referring to various Arabic dictionaries and interpretations so as to get their exact meaning in the source text. The translations of these aspects will be investigated, so that it can be clarified that the translation is appropriate or not and what translation methods might be most appropriate in conveying their approximant hidden meaning intended by the source text writer. The source text, its transliteration and its translation will be given in addition to providing a clarifying discussion and analysis.

Source Text (1): ربت سعدان على رأس حماره.

Transliteration: Rabbata Sa'adan Ala' Ra'si Himarihi

Translation: Sa'adan touched its head gently.

The above text is taken from an Arab short story entitled “The Harvest of the Bad Times” which was written by the Yemeni short story writer Ahmed Ali Al Hamadani and translated by Shirin Yassin Yar Mohammed who was born in Aden, Yemen but originally belongs to an Indian family. In this story, Al Hamadani discusses the unstable social situation at that time.

In the source text above, the writer used the term “rabbata” which is explained in most of the Arabic Arabic dictionaries as “to hit a person or an animal but very gently”. This is what Al Ma'ani Al Jame' Dictionary stated concerning the word “rabbata”. According to Mona Baker, aspects that have different expressive meanings in the source and the target languages are considered non-equivalents. She also points out that "There may be a target

language word which has the same propositional meaning as the source language word, but it may have a different expressive meaning." (1992: 23). The translator in her translation above used "touched gently" for the word (ربت) *rabbata* which may not give the exact meaning intended by the original text writer. It would be appropriate if the translator used the word "pat" instead of "touch gently" since it would much more closer to the target language reader's understanding and the register is very important in such cases. It can be inferred here that "literal translation" can do well in translating the above Arabic text.

Source Text (2): أي أستاذ قدير يعرف كيف يشغل حصته دون كتب.

Transliteration: ayyu ostathun qadeer.

Translation: A qualified teacher knows how to conduct his class.

The Arabic text above is taken from Ghassan Kanafani's story which is entitled "The Slope". Ghassan is a Palestinian writer who discusses the Palestinian-related issues in his writings. 'The Slope' is translated by Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley.

The word 'qadeer' قدير in the Arabic text above denotes a different expressive meaning in Arabic than that of the word 'qualified' that the translator used in his translation. This is counted classified as one of the non-equivalent types as stated by Mona Baker. The word 'qadeer' as most of the Arabic Arabic dictionaries state means someone who has unlimited power or someone who is efficient and appreciated by others. In the Arab societies, it is used to say that someone is respected and appreciated among others. On the other hand, and in accordance to most English English dictionaries the word 'qualified' which is used by the translator refers to someone having suitable knowledge, experience, or skills especially for a particular job. On the basis of the above discussion, the translator here might not provide the proper translation for the word قدير 'qadeer' since the target language reader will capture a different meaning than that intended by the source language writer.

To conclude, it is very important to point out that translation equivalence is a very hard matter to achieve since it depends on the text, the translator and the receptors. Whoever the translator is, the translation might lose or distort the meaning related to the original text.

Source Text (3): اسرائيل ناوية على نية كبيرة.

Transliteration: Israeel nawiyatun 'ala neatun kapeeratun

Translation: Israel has great plans

The underlined Arabic text above has been extracted from a short story written by the Yemeni writer Ahmed Al-Saeed and has been translated by Shirin. The Arabic text above which is mainly used colloquially among Yemeni people usually gives a negative indication which is completely absent in the translation above that only shows something great is going to take place ignoring the point of negativity of the original text. The indication of this Arabic text which can only be comprehended by people living in a specific area. In this sense, as Ghazala (2008) indicates that translation is mere transferring words from language to another, but in reality, it is a transference of one culture into another including the political, social and other conditions (p.193).

The translation of the source text above 'great plans' may denote a meaning which bears a different expressive denotation in the source language. It denotatively shows that great plans, good procedures might be carried out by Israel whereas the Arabic text implies a connotative meaning. In Arabic societies, this expression shows that some harmful procedures might be carried out by Israel. Accordingly, translators need to deeply know about the situations of using particular expressions. Rendering the meanings of such expressions requires some notes or clarification to give an appropriate conveyance of the intended meaning of the source text so that the target receptor understands what is exactly meant by the original text.

Source Text (4): كان الوقت عصرا

Transliteration: kan alwaqtu asran

Translation: It was afternoon.

The underlined word in the Arabic text above is taken from Gassan Kanafani's short story 'The Shore'. Differences in expressive meaning as stated by Mona Baker (1992) may be clearly noticeable or it may be confusing. It is an important issue to pose a problem in the process of translation in some given contexts. Adding expressive meaning for a specific word or expression is usually easier than to being left out (p.23). Based on that, it is more difficult to deal with differences in expressive meaning especially when the item in the target language is more specified than that in the source language. This issue often is more salient in the some contexts than others such as religion and politics.

According to that, the word *عصرا* in the source text above which indicates a definite period of time related to Asr prayer which is considered to be a religious term. This term as shown in most of Arabic Arabic dictionaries denotes ‘the time of performing Asr prayer’ which is known in the religious scope as a part of the afternoon period. Based on this analysis, we can find out that the translation of the word *عصرا* as *the afternoon* may confuse the reader since it does not exactly convey the meaning of the source text. Looking up the word ‘afternoon’ in the various English English dictionaries, it is found out that ‘afternoon’ is ‘the period which starts at about twelve o’clock or after the meal in the middle of the day and ends at about six o’clock or when the sun goes down’. In some other dictionaries it is stated that the word ‘afternoon’ indicates ‘the part of each day which begins at lunchtime and ends at about six o’clock’. Accordingly, It can be stated that the translator needs to add some explaining notes to produce an approximately accurate translation of such words.

Conclusion

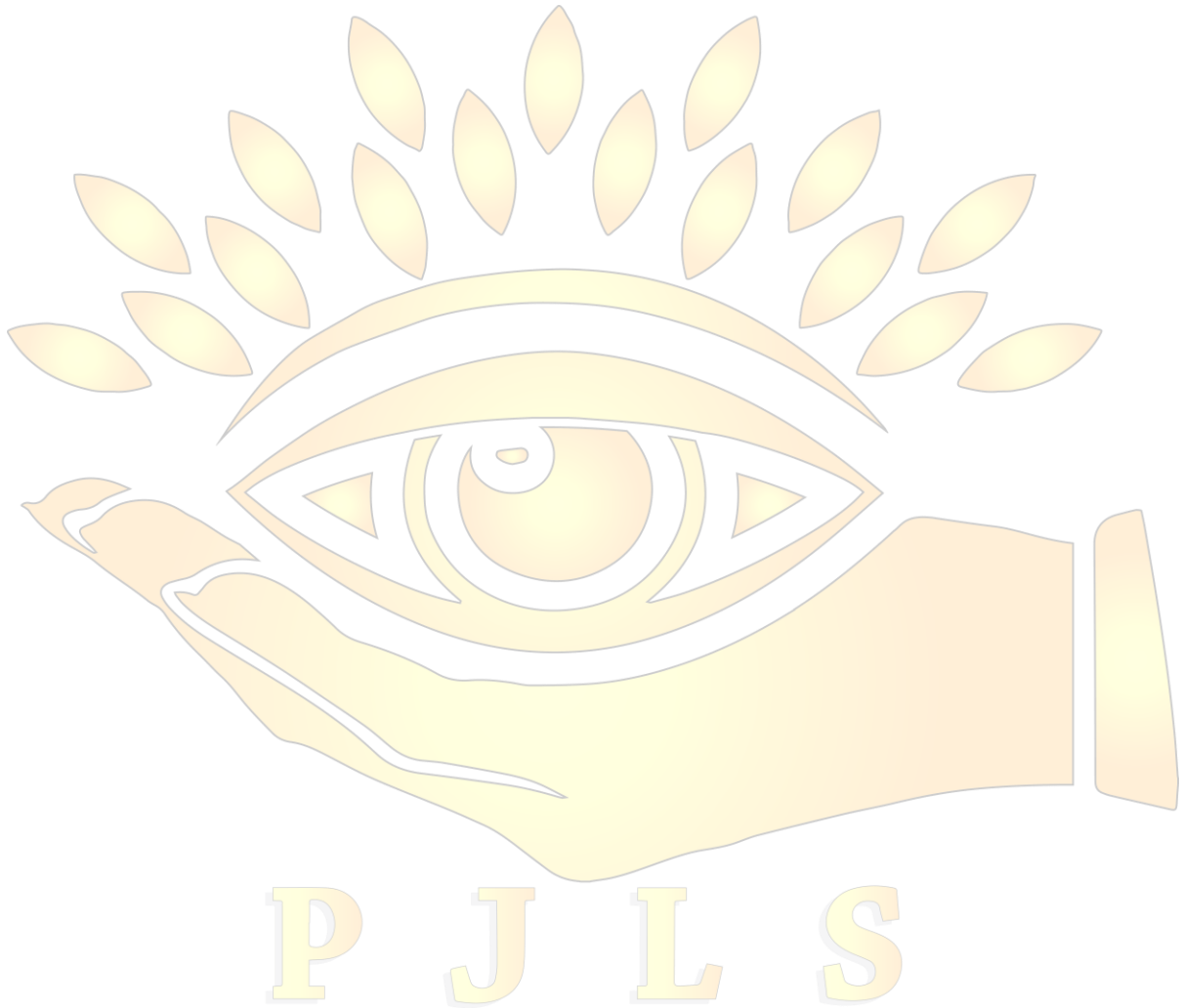
To conclude, differences in expressive meaning is considered to be one of the problematic issues that face translators. It is a type of non-equivalence that needs from the translator to master all the hidden features that characterize languages he needs to transfer. Producing an accurate rendering of the source text is what the translator has to achieve by using the most appropriate strategy in translating such aspects.

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Research post Covid-19 lockdown

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What I say here pertains to South Asian Studies and that is a very broad genre. Since I belong to the area of English Lit, coupled with the fact that we like to tell stories, let me begin with my own. But before I narrate, let me give you my methodology.

What I intend to do is to re imagine.

What I presume to do is re emerge.

What I hope to achieve is re member.

I would like all of us to go back to March 24th 2020 when we woke up to a very disturbing reality of the Virus finally arriving in our respective towns and cities. I remember vividly browsing on the Facebook and coming upon a publisher advertising a 21 day literary activity for those first 21 days. I eagerly applied and did my first piece of writing on that day. As days passed, I wrote and moved away from the Covid to just creativity and not address the issue at hand. The 21 day programme over, the lockdown extended, there were many more literary activities which emerged. **The Covid anthology was one among many.**

As I was writing, my mind was trying to comprehend things around me and the way in which we reacted to it. Things began to fall into place. What immediately came into focus was the **environment** with the disturbing colliding thought of what would happen to the small vegetable vendors? That, as a woman, because I needed my small greens. Women have always been the first crusaders for the environment, because we live off the environment. Take a moment to go back to eco feminism and you will know. And if you remember your social media, I am sure you will remember the countless posts that have come out about how animals have ventured out into cities, flamingoes back in Mumbai, whales swimming with ships, and the Himalayan ranges visible in Punjab and people in Delhi happy because they could finally see the sky! Roads cleared up, accidents went down, dust settled, sound pollution came down and people were scared! We sat inside. Gods were sent on a

vacation and they decided to stay away. I hope you can see where I am going. The relationship **between man, environment, faith and science was in a dizzying dance**. As and when this dance began, the equations between the **state and its citizens** also merged into the picture. The canvas started taking on different hues. Not that we did not know the equations, but now we were able to experience the effects of this dubious connection.

So from my everyday experience, I was able to look at this in two ways.

- Creativity
- Applicability – Theoretical perspective

As an instance, let me cite the Covid anthology, since it was almost the first to come up with a creative response to this pandemic. Comprised of poets from all around the world, they have penned their thoughts about the Covid and believe me, not all are about despair and helplessness. Masks and sanitisers with even loved ones become the new normal and there is a sense of hope and a resoluteness to fight. Cutting across race, gender, region, religion, language etc people there was uniformity in responding to this pandemic. Differences melted and geography was a mere shadow line, to borrow from Amitav Ghosh.

But there were others who responded with dystopian stories like *The Daughter that Bleeds* (shwetha Taneja) where women become infertile in a post-apocalyptic India ravaged by bio wars or Manjula Padmanabhan's novel *Escape* which imagines a future India where women are no longer needed because technology has provided an alternative route to reproduction.

We need to redefine what we know as literature today. It can no longer be canonical and has to be all inclusive. I am talking about the media, the social media, the arts etc. The social media, whether the FB, Instagram or twitter had pictures and posts of hospital settings, masks and one could literally smell sanitizers through these posts. The social media was filled with poems and stories of social and personal battles and artists and photographers depicting pain, hope, strength and resilience. There were women who shared recipes and groups who took refuge in gardening. Literature needs to step down from its ivory tower. The act of looking has to change. The **Ocular** has to redefine itself.

On the other side are stories of **misogyny** where cases of **domestic violence** were on the increase and children were very vulnerable at home. The concept of **family and bonding time** turned into something bitter where the law of diminishing marginal utility reared its ugly head, making us question the very founding principles of family, whether nuclear or joint. The **sanctity of marriage** as an institution and human relationship needs to be reworked and re-questioned, all with the state as an important player. Feminist studies have always questioned this, but now with the situation at hand, the community as a whole needs to rework on this. Urban dynamics has changed. The role of woman remained the same, she was doubly burdened. Education did not emancipate her from the vicious circle of domestic chores. I for one should not be biased here for men have contributed, but by and large women have suffered. There was no difference between the mistress and the maid! This was also a time when motherhood was put to test and again one needs to look at the concept of divine motherhood handed down to us over generations! They never had Covid to contend with!

Mental health is a serious issue. The spate in suicides recently has left us vulnerable. There is very little awareness about the issue of mental health even to this day. Helplines were set up late. We thought that the family space was safe, the Covid deconstructed that. Children were more vulnerable and we had to have the state intervening to say that online classes should not be conducted for those until the 7th standard. Seriously?

A look at the education scenario today would tell us about the unpreparedness and the impracticality of the situation. The first issue is that of online classes, online exams and then re-opening of schools/colleges. Whatever decision the state or the institutions take, the fact remains that we do all that only if our children are safe. And this is a fact that we cannot contend with. The mindset is that, exams are important. Isn't physical and mental health important? Again the state versus the people. For those involved in Education and psychology, this is a priority area. One needs to question institutions and the state on solutions and options and contingency plans, which right now, we are pathetically low on. Education, I am sorry to say is being marketed, and we lack in innovation.

Dwelling on creativity also brought in the issue of developing a critical debate about it and with it the various ways in which the Covid was worked out. There were issues from various sides. We heard that the Covid was not really dangerous, we had whatsapp messages

which cited the statistics of death ranging from mosquito bites, flu and poverty and accidents and covid death rates being the lowest. We heard the media and the social media. We heard doctors and politicians. We were confused. The national issues of CAA took a backseat. Pakistan, Kashmir the anti CAA protests, the terrorists, the reeling economy, all were forgotten. Did we really forget all this or were we made to forget? Public memory is short. We forgot.

The rise of authoritarianism is a serious issue. The increase in powers of surveillance state which has been described as coronopticon is dangerous. What about our own Arogya setu? Can we enter into a debate over here?

What comes to my mind when I embark to speak on this day is a picture of the long long line of migrants, children on their shoulders, women behind, clad in tattered clothes, meager belongings either on their heads, or a bundle on their heads and the long walk, yes long walk to what they call and believe to be home. Or migrants on the bus tops, standing in queues to board a bus or a train, crowded train stations and what pops up is the promise made to them of acche din against a mirage of home.

While taking a class for the post graduate students on south Asian women writers, I talk to them about home and space. Now I ponder. What home and what space do I imagine now? Or has my mind-set even begun to fathom the concept of a home at all? What happens to all those theories which we have been teaching in the hallowed halls of the so called centres of learning? The migrants, the diaspora? Where is the literature of our migrants?

The idea of South Asia as we now know is in disarray. India's policy of Neighbours First seems to be another political gimmick in these times. We did not visualize the issue of migrants, we did not have a common policy to learn from neighbours and we seem, even now to be more interested in borders and boundaries. A nation is not just a political or a geographical boundary, there's more to it. South Asia has common concerns and this was one opportunity for us to unite and humanize our approach. We could have developed cross border compassion. We did not think it proper or appropriate to address the migrants' problems. They are contributors to the remittance economy but became migrants without a home. The international diaspora had special flights arranged but the internal migrant diaspora were sprayed with disinfectants.

You might feel that I am not addressing any literary concerns here. But listen carefully and you will have strong threads of South Asian concerns unravelling and what we need is perhaps to rethink on these lines. Since I teach South Asia, I thought it fit to bring to you the concerns and avenues there. We need to think about compiling the oral testimonies of the migrants or what we can now see as the migrant diaspora. A massive field work on recording the oral stories of the migrants is the need of the hour. And it is here that the overwhelming odds are seen which needs to be questioned: that of the State versus the people. The lack of preparedness of the state in tackling this problem and the failure in visualizing the emergencies which would crop up.

I mentioned authoritarianism. Remember how the pandemic was islamized? Or the case of George Floyd in the US. Authoritarianism playing on the nationalistic sentiments of the people, inciting a different kind of fundamentalism. Doesn't it remind us of the colonizing mind-set in a different guise? We have on-going work on Partition and now we have linkages to the islamophobia gripping not only our country but the world.

Is now the time to throw away theories we already know and have and confront people/situations with new reading? Are those theories which emerged in a different world order sufficient now? Isn't it time we reinvent and re configure what we know about the state and people, democracy, religion, fundamentalism, etc.? With all the ranting against the social media, do we garner anything from it? So what are we insinuating? Post-Covid theories? **Pedagogy and methodology** need to undergo a drastic makeover. We can no longer rely on armchair research. Our sources are out there and also in here, in our experiences and the stories we hear. It is in what we read, see and what we do not read and see.

Post covid, our imagination has to undergo a transformation. The need today is to re-read theories handed down to us and to re imagine, one has to transgress boundaries of known disciplines. The interdisciplinary today has to break its borders to fluidly move between boundaries. How else does one understand the migrant and orality if not for sociology, psychology, language and literature? We need to integrate and synthesize or can we coin a new word: synthegrate?

A series of questions cross my mind as I dwell on this day's topic. Let me mention a few.
For starters

How have we encountered the COVID?

What is the relationship between science and religion?

What if belief? Do we need it? We survived for so long.. did gods go on a holiday?'

Rationality? What is our take on it today?

How has creative writing responded to it?

Whither environmental study?

Whither historical writing? Are we moving towards neo -oral-historicism?

Role of literature in life?

Haven't reached post at all, so what are we really asking?

Post COVID? Human relationships?

Responsibility towards environment?

Does literature have the capacity to document and change?

Documentation can take any form. It can be through letters, art, sketch, poetry, dance , theatre etc. What we need now is a change in the way we look at things and people, which includes pedagogy and methodology. It is still not post-covid, so perhaps we still are in the process of devising methods and methodologies for research.

The Old Quilt

Veena Verma (1960 -)

Translated from Punjabi into English by Ishmeet Kaur, Asst Professor, CLL&CS, Center for English Studies, Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, Gujarat

An Introduction

Short story writing in Punjabi has established itself as a very important form particularly while depicting the social reality of the land and its people. The consistency of the Punjabi writers speaks volumes about the self-imposed responsibility the writer takes on him/herself for the love of Punjab.

It would not be wrong to say that Punjabi diaspora has also, in a way, been able to connect with the land more profoundly and objectively. More importantly, the tradition of the people finds space amongst these writers, who from a distance, seem to be more nostalgic about the traditional nuances from which they are cut off. Immigration has been an important formula that has governed the land, be it dislocation during partition or immigrations to other countries. Post-partition Punjab witnessed an obsession amongst people concerning immigration to other countries. The diaspora writer connects not to the land alone but also formulates a critic of the social realities once positioned in a foreign land and from amongst the alien society. Some major writers of Punjabi diaspora such as Ajaib Kamal, Rupinderpal Singh Dhillon, Sadhu Binning, Harjit Atwal, Ajmer Rhode, Amarjit Chandan and Veena Verma have highlighted the nuances of Punjabi cultural, traditional practices without ignoring the stereotypes and narrow-mindedness that has been transported into the ghettos which have originated in the foreign lands.

Brought up in Punjab, in Budhlada village in Bathinda district of Punjab, Veena Verma was educated in England (1984 onwards) and has been in London since then. Born in 1960, she is one of the contemporary women writers, who has opened up space for writing by women and about women in literature by Punjabi diaspora. Veena Verma's poems and stories give voice to women who have been exploited and victimized in the overwhelming desire for migrating to foreign countries. She pictures the maddening urge and rush amongst the Punjabi society for relocating to London, Canada and U.S.A, a phase witnessed in Punjab mostly around 1980s onwards. Her stories capture the experience of women either married to an N.R.I and left behind, or about the exploitation of woman in the new land by her husband or by the

white men, or even about the struggle of a single Asian woman often depicted through the clash of value system of the West and the East. She has written three volumes of short stories Mull Di Teeveen, Firangian Di Nooh (2002), Jogian Di Dhee (2009), and a collection of poetry JeeKarde.

The story “Razai” translated as “The Old Quilt” depicts a state of confusion and conflict in the life of an Indian woman who is left behind in India by her husband after marriage. The husband migrates to England and marries a White woman. The wife in India travels to England and manages to reach him with her small children. He refuses to accept her and abandons her to meet her fate in the cold flat of a friend. The woman meets an old Sikh man who had retired from the Indian Army and was now settled in England. He gives her a shelter in his home. They begin sharing the only quilt the old man has. As time moves on, the children grow up. While her daughter leaves after her marriage, the son marries a White woman. Harbans Kaur now an old lady faces language challenges and cultural conflicts with her daughter-in-law. The two women have a rift around the quilt. An old quilt, now a rag, metaphorically, forms a connection between the past and present.

Veena Verma is being widely recognized in the Punjabi literary circles and her stories have been enacted as plays in Chandigarh. It would not be wrong to call her the only woman writer in Punjabi diaspora, who is evolving with such sensibility and sensitivity towards women

The Old Quilt

She was still lying in bed, covered completely, face and head immersed in the quilt. It was already eleven. Her daughter-in-law, Kathy, had uncovered her face several times to check if the old woman was not already dead. Seeing her breathing, she covered her face again and returned. She had offered her tea around nine in the morning, but every time Harbans Kaur turned sides and shook her head in denial.

Kathy avoided much interaction with her primarily due to the language barrier. Every time, Kathy meant to say something, Harbans Kaur misunderstood it as something else. Though, it was twenty years since Harbans Kaur came to England, she was not able to

understand English at all. Her son and daughter-in-law would converse throughout the day in English, but she could not understand a word of what they spoke. Whenever Kathy spoke to her, she replied in ‘Yes, yes-no, no’ several times, without understanding...this ‘yes-no’ was the cause of the frequent quarrels they began having at home.

Kathy had recently married Harbans Kaur’s son Satbir. One day, while cleaning the house, she entered Harbans Kaur’s room when she had gone to the Gurudwara. Kathy cleaned the room and replaced the bedding of her mother-in-law with a new one. She put her old, tattered and worn-out quilt in a black garbage bag and left it outside the house. On her return, Harbans Kaur was shocked to see the changed appearance of her room.

“Me no *razai*ⁱ...?” she asked her daughter-in-law.

“Yes Mum, you don’t need that rag anymore. That is too old. I’ve brought this new blanket for you....” Kathy held the new blanket in her hands and showed it to her mother-in-law.

“No *blanket*...Me *quilt* ...” She started weeping like a child.

“What happened...? Why are you crying...?” asked Kathy, perturbed.

“No, No me *quilt*...” weeping, she went out. Kathy anxiously ran behind her. Harbans Kaur searched the garbage bags kept outside the house and brought her quilt back. She picked up the blanket from the bed and put it on the carpet. Kathy, snatched the blanket from Harbans Kaur’s hands in anger.

“This is very dirty...not good for your health....” she shouted.

“No, No...Satbir...Satbir...oh... Satte?” bellowedⁱⁱ Harbans Kaur.

“What happened Mum...?” Satbir came running from the other room. Harbans Kaur had spread herself on the quilt and Kathy was trying to pull it out.

“O son! My *quilt*...” Satbir could not see tears in Harbans Kaur’s eyes.

“How dare you...?” He pulled Kathy’s golden hair like dry grass and slapped her pitilessly.

“What’s wrong with you...?” Kathy was shocked.

“Don’t treat my mother like shit. You bitch....” he looked at her with hatred while picking up his mother from the floor.

“I was just cleaning her room....” Kathy’s brown eyes were hazy.

“Don’t touch her things. Let her live as she likes....” He was very angry with Kathy.

“How can she live in such a dirty room....? And how can we live with her...?” she hadn’t yet completed her sentence when Satbir pulled her hair again.

“Then go to hell....I am going to live with my mother in this dirty place. You get lost....” he lifted his hand to slap her again but Harbans Kaur held his arm with her meek hands.

“No son, don’t fight in English. I don’t understand anything. Don’t say anything to daughter-in-law.” She said in Punjabi and tried drawing Satbir away from the room.

“I am not saying anything to her, Mum. I am only telling her that if she has to stay in this house then she has to respect my mother.” He clarified in Punjabi.

“I don’t need respect. Just don’t fiddle with things in my room... son...with my things....Explain to her in English that she should not throw out anything from my room.... Apart from that, I don’t ask for anything from you....” she was standing with folded hands.

“From today, she will enter your room only after knocking at the door.... after asking you.... I’ll teach her how to behave....” he replied in rage.

“No son don’t fight. Don’t beat the daughter-in-law. How is it her fault, ... poor creature? She doesn’t understand my language, what I say ...” she explained

Kathy went back to her room quietly. After that day, she never entered her mother-in-law’s room without asking her. She would enter only with her permission, clean her room, wash her clothes, help her bathe and wash, cook her favorite food, but she would never touch anything in her room without her consent.

Kathy was very wise. It was a love marriage. She was a clerk in the firm where Satbir was an engineer. Kathy and Satbir’s friendship had resulted in love, both decided to get married.

“I’ll first talk to my mother....” Satbir said.

“Who is marrying? You or your mother...?” Kathy laughed.

“Shut-up. Kathy, I believe you are amature girl. You will not spoil our relationship because of these small and petty things. I have loved only one person in the world, and that is my mother. And if you ever try to interfere in this, that day will be the last day of our relationship.... and trust me,I am not joking.” he said looking into Kathy’s eyes very seriously.

“If your mother doesn’t like me then ...?” Kathy’s pink lips trembled.

“You don’t worry. My mother knows every bit of me. She will not turn you away” Satbir patted her cheeks.

When Harbans Kaur saw Kathy, she was reminded of Kuldeep Singh’s second wife, her co-wife. Not just Kathy, in fact, every white woman, appeared to her as her co-wife, someone who had snatched her husband from her, had not been touched with her pleas and consequently had forced her children to wander around the streets. Harbans Kaur was scared of every white woman. Seeing Satbir with Kathy her heart had sunk. But she didn’t want to wipe out the sparkling happiness on her son’s face. It was for this that she resigned and accepted her.

“I like the girl, son, but just tell her not to swear at me in English. Whatever she wants to say she should say in Punjabi.”. This was the condition she laid down.

“But she doesn’t know Punjabi, Mum....” Satbir smiled.

“If she doesn’t know it, then teach her. Otherwise, when she talks to you, you can translate it for me, like your *Bapuji* did...But let there be no scuffle at home.”Harbans Kaur was lost in her thoughts while speaking to him.

Kathy was married to Satbir. Kathy came and decorated the house. Old paper, carpets, sofas, bed and even the utensils in the kitchen were changed. What did not change was Harbans Kaur’s room.

The room was Harbans Kaur’s world. Whenever she lay on her bed in the room, her life’s story revolved around her like a film. She had come into this house twenty years back. Without invitation, without any invite! Not just the house, actually she had come to this

country without an invitation, with two little children. With a boy, seven years old, and a girl of five. Her husband Kuldeep Singh had moved to this place about five years before her arrival. Her younger daughter was still in her womb then and Kuldeep had not seen his daughter's face.

“As soon as I reach, I'll send you the passport. You will bring the children with you...” saying this, he had left for England on a ship.

But after leaving, neither did he send the documents, nor did he send for them. Initially, he kept writing to his parents but that also stopped gradually with time.

Till Harbans Kaur's parents were alive, she spent a few months with them and some time with her in-laws. After their death her brothers and sisters-in-law shut their doors on her. Both her older and younger brothers-in-law taunted her. Hopelessly, her father-in-law sold off Kuldeep's share of land and bought tickets for her with her children and sent them off to England. He wrote a letter to his friend who had been living in England for several years asking him to pick her up from the airport and drop her at Kuldeep Singh's house. The old man had thought that on seeing his wife and children, he would take up their responsibility. The father-in-law's friend picked Harbans Kaur and her children from the airport and dropped them at Kuldeep's house. But the story was entirely different there. Kuldeep Singh had married a 'mem' ⁱⁱⁱ[an English woman]. Seeing Harbans Kaur, he lost his head.

“For what have you come here?” He was baffled.

“Where else should I go...?” she asked.

“You can't stay here...go back...” ordered Kuldeep Singh.

“Whom should I go back to? My parents are already dead. Your brothers are not ready to see my face. Then, where should I take my children...? Bapuji said that you will take care of your family once you see them...” she narrated her story in a few words.

“But I have another family here.... I got married after moving into this foreign land. What would become of a lonely man in this cold country....? My wife is a white woman, and we have two children...” He said it as if he was turning out an ascetic from the doorstep, telling him that the food is over.

Harbans Kaur couldn't understand what she should do. She had never expected that things would reach this stage-

Kuldeep was quiet.

In the evening, his second wife returned from work. She was surprised to see these new guests. Kuldeep Singh tried convincing her tactfully, saying that this is his first family and that his father had forcibly sent them after him. He would soon send them back to India. But, it seemed that the his wife, the white woman was outraged . She threw the entire family's luggage, including Kuldeep Singh's, out of the house.

"Either she stays or I..." She announced.

"I'll do your domestic chores—washing, cleaning and cooking...everything." Harbans Kaur knelt down and touched the white woman's feet.

The white woman continued to blast her in English, but she hardly understood anything she said.

"Tell her I'll be her servant. I don't ask for any right of equality as a wife...." Harbans Kaur begged her husband.

"She doesn't even want to hear your name. She is throwing me out with you...." He answered with hatred.

Then for some time Kuldeep kept on discussing something with the white woman in English. Finally, it was decided that Kuldeep would send his wife and children back to India in a couple of days.

He took Harbans Kaur with him and left her at a friend's vacant house, promising to return the next day to talk to her. Harbans Kaur didn't find it appropriate to pressurize him. If he had made a mistake in his youth, she was ready to accept him as it is. Anyway, if he arranges a separate house for her and visits her occasionally, that would be enough for her.

But Kuldeep did not show up the next day, or even...on the third day, never. There was no electricity, water or fire in the house. The children were freezing in the cold. Hungry and starved, they kept holding onto their mother for the next two days. There was neither a cloth

nor a piece of rag to cover them at night. Taking both the kids in her wrap, shivering, they spent the freezing nights.

It started snowing. Harbans Kaur was tired of waiting for Kuldeep Singh. She didn't even know where she was living, or where her husband was. On the third night when the cold was unbearable and extreme, she rose and knocked at the door of the neighbour's house. A middle-aged Punjabi Sikh man opened the door.

"What's up...? Who's that...?" He was taken by surprise with the appearance of a strange woman at his door.

"I...ji... I came to live in the house next to yours two days ago. My husband left me there.... But it is two days now, he hasn't returned. There are two little children with me. They are unable to sleep the whole night in cold. Could you please spare a quilt and lend it to me for two days, Waheguru^{iv} will bless you...?" She spoke with folded hands.

"That house...? In that house, even a bird has not flapped her wings for the last ten years; where did you come from...?" He was surprised.

"I don't know ji, their father left us here..." she shook her head helplessly.

"And never returned...! Hmmm...!" sighed, the house owner.

The snow was falling on the children's heads; with blowing noses they clung to their mother's legs.

"Come, come inside." he said, making way.

Harbans Kaur, a bit hesitant, entered the house with her children. The neighbour's house was as warm as a kiln. The moment they entered they felt warm.

"Come sit..." he brought them into the sitting room, where a gas heater was scorching like a burner. The children sat next to the heater and warmed their hands. Harbans Kaur kept standing at the door.

"Come in, you can also sit down..." The neighbour pointed towards the old sofa lying next to them. She collected herself and sat down composed on the chair.

The neighbour went into the kitchen and brought two packets of biscuits and handed them to the children. The children looked at their mother for the approval but immediately grabbed the biscuits. Who knows for how long had they been starving? He went into the kitchen again and brought a kettle full of tea. Harbans Kaur couldn't refuse. She got up and poured the tea into the cups and served it to the children.

"You may also drink..." the man said.

"No, I am fine. The children are hungry..." she said, but she was feeling very hungry and felt desperate at the sight of tea.

"It is okay, you may also take some tea. We can prepare more." The man poured the tea for her in a cup. As the first sip poured down, she felt as if life was returning into her. She finished the remaining tea.

"I'll see if there is something for you inside. I may not have a spare quilt. Yes, there is an old blanket from the days of my job, if that is fine with you..." He entered the room inside and returned with a blanket in his hands.

"Is there a heater at your house?" he asked

"What heater?" She did not understand.

"This kind of fireplace ...?" He pointed towards the gas heater.

"No... there is neither water in the kitchen, nor electricity in that house." She said holding the blanket.

"Then do you want to kill your children there?" the neighbour said assertively.

"What should I do now?" She said looking at the children who had, in the warmth of the heater, fallen asleep on the floor itself. "Ah! They have fallen asleep..."

"Really...? Fallen asleep? Poor kids were hungry...no sooner did they feel the warmth of the heater than they fell asleep." He took the blanket from Harbans' hand and spread it over the children.

"Should I carry them to...?" Harbans Kaur muttered to herself.

“Why pick them up, let them lie here. They have just fallen asleep, poor things. They may fall sick there... in the cold.” The neighbour stroked the head of the children with his hands.

Harbans Kaur also sat next to the children. The neighbour went into the other room and brought his quilt and put it on the floor.

“Here, take this and cover your legs with it....” he told Harbans Kaur.

“But you just have one quilt ji....” She said standing up.

“It doesn’t matter. I’ll also spend the night here....we will manage together.” Having said this, he threw the pillow on the ground.

Harbans Kaur sat covering her feet with half the quilt and in the other half were the neighbour’s feet.

“My name is Fauji^v (soldier) Karnail Singh....I live alone here. I am from Faridkot....” The neighbour introduced himself.

Harbans Kaur wept as she narrated her story to the Fauji.

“Even if you hadn’t told me, I had understood your situation” Fauji took a deep breath. “That man who deserted his young wife with her two innocent children, in the dark night, and ran away..., you... must abandon the hope that he will return. Take care of yourself.”

Harbans Kaur, like a statue, kept listening to him. It was past midnight. She was tired for many days and just didn’t realise when she fell asleep while still sitting. She woke up after daybreak. Feeling embarrassed, her yellow face turned red, when she found that she was resting her head on Fauji’s arm. They were lying entangled with each other in the same quilt, and the children were sleeping as carefree as if they were tired having fought a war. She got up slowly being careful not to wake up Fauji. Perhaps he was already awake.

“I was waiting for you to wake up Banso.... I thought you had just slept, so why wake you up.” He said half asleep.

Harbans’ body was shivering. She had slept in the arms of a stranger the whole night. She wasn’t looking into Fauji’s eyes. When she stood up her legs were shaking. She covered her head with a scarf and began waking her children.

“Let them sleep, Banso. They’ll wake up themselves.... Come I’ll take you into the kitchen and teach you how to light the English burner....” He said, getting up.

Both of them went into the kitchen. Fauji taught her how to use the utilities in the kitchen and both of them started preparing tea together.

“I had just come to ask for quilt ji....” She stood bowing her head low.

“It doesn’t matter. There are two innocent children with you. Where will you carry them and wander in this cold. Till something comes up for you, you should stay here....” having said this, Fauji went and sat next to the children.

Fauji Karnail Singh searched all the documents with Harbans Kaur and found Kuldeep Singh’s address in them. Leaving Harbans Kaur and the children at home, he went alone to talk to Kuldeep Singh. Harbans Kaur kept looking at the door till late evening waiting for Kuldeep Singh to return with Fauji. But Fauji came back at night, all alone.

“They have left the house and gone away” Fauji said in a low voice “Somewhere else...?” Harbans’s voice sank.

“Don’t know anything...I kept wandering around puzzled on the roads the whole day but couldn’t find a single trace.” He sat on the sofa with folded legs.

“Now what will happen to us...?” Harbans Kaur banged her head with a hand.

Fauji kept quiet.

“Oh God...for what sins am I paying now ...?” She started banging her head with her hands. And the children also started crying with her.

“Why didn’t I die the moment I was born, Oh my God....Haaye, you should have strangled me the moment I was born, O my mother....” She cried inconsolably.

“Don’t cry, don’t..., my heart sinks....” Fauji, who used guns, canons, and played with bombs and ammunition throughout his life, could not bear two sad words from a woman. He carried the children in his arms.

“Get up and give the children something to eat. What is their fault?” He got up and entered the kitchen.

Harbans Kaur went on crying for a long time. Fauji fed the children and they, like the previous day, went and slept near the heater.

“If these children were not with me, I would have jumped into a well. Men take freedom for themselves but knot their women to children, just like shackles in animal’s feet so that they can’t go anywhere....” She was sitting alone talking to herself.

“Listen to me...come I’ll show you something.” Fauji took her by the arm.

She followed him. Opening the door that led into the backyard of the house, he switched on the light. A big bird was sitting in the dark.

“This bird comes here every year, Banso. Whenever it is expecting it comes here to my garden. I fill up a bowl of water and keep some grains for it. It gives birth to about ten to fifteen chicks. The whole night it keeps protecting them under its feathers. It doesn’t move from here because it’s a mother. Once the children learn to fly, they disappear. A few days after that, it is ready to become a mother once again.” Fauji told her about the bird as if he was narrating a story; but Banso didn’t respond.

“I mean to say that even though this bird is not married to anybody it still keeps delivering babies, one after the other. Motherhood is natural for the female. The female gives birth to the entire world. God has sent her as His messenger on this earth. If the female starts taking revenge on her children for the male’s betrayal and stops giving birth, the entire cycle of nature will stop. Banso.” Fauji went and stood near that bird, who was sitting hiding its chicks under its feathers and watching Fauji – it kept closing and opening its eyes.

“For a woman, children are never like chains tied to the feet of an animal; they are completion for her, a matter of pride that like God, she, too, is a creator. That is why a mother has been given the place next to God in the scriptures. Mother is a masterpiece of God; after creating a mother; God could not create any other thing like her.” Fauji was now caressing the feathers of the bird with his hands.

“But isn’t it said that woman is worth only a shoe in the foot of a man...as written in the scriptures?” Harbans Kaur shot a question like a bullet.

“In which scripture has this been written? Burn such a scripture in which woman is called a shoe. A woman should restrain the entry of such scriptures, not just in her house, but also in

her city....Have you read any such scripture or have just heard about these things...?" Fauji came and stood next to her again.

"Where could I have read? This is what people say...." Harbans told him honestly.

"This is very bad. Actually, you women, since birth, are taught that your husband is your God. Even if the person is not worthy enough to be a human being, even if he is like a donkey, you don't stop worshipping him. Keep consecrating a donkey with sandal powder." Fauji laughed.

"What else is a woman? Is she a man's maid...?a servant?You read English books. What do you know about scriptures...?" Harbans Kaur couldn't understand the extent of Fauji's knowledge of the scriptures.

"In Punjabi scriptures, in the Guru Granth Sahib, it is written "Why call her [a woman] bad, the one who gives birth to kings.^{vi} I am not talking of any English book. But people don't practice what is written in the scriptures." Fauji nodded his head in disappointment.

"What am I to do with the scriptures? I can't even understand what you are talking about...." She spoke like a lost soldier.

"You must understand that there is no need to jump into the well. You are a mother and there is a very big responsibility on your shoulders. Take care of your children." Fauji patted her on the back.

"But with whose support...?" asked Harbans.

"With whose support does this bird look after its chicks?" Fauji countered. "You give them the grains." said Harbans, as if she was complaining.

"I'll provide your children also with grains till they are able to fly.... You be strong to protect them under your feathers." Fauji gave her the strength and they entered the house walking slowly.

Time moved on. Fauji managed to get Harbans Kaur and her children benefits from social security. He got some work for her from a factory and she'd assemble electric plugs sitting at home, earning some 20-30 pounds a week. The children started going to school. She couldn't overcome her grief but for the sake of her children, she took charge of her life. She hardly left

home. She was not at all aware of what happened outside the house. One day, the children were at school and even Fauji had gone out somewhere. Suddenly, the milk was over, and she went to a corner shop to get milk. There was a very thin man sitting at the shop.

Having bought a bottle of milk, when she paid money to the shopkeeper, he held her hand. The bottle dropped from Harbans' hands and fell on the ground.

“You shameless man, don't you have a mother or a sister at home?” She curtly rebuked him in Punjabi.

“What do you seek from an old Fauji? You need someone hot... matching you, of your age. Just give an order and we'll install a milk stall in front of your house.” He replied shamelessly.

Harbans Kaur threw the money she had carried for milk and ran towards her house. After reaching home, she kept weeping.

“So, people talk like this? Along with me, Fauji is also being defamed?” She kept asking herself.

When Fauji returned home in the evening, she wept and narrated the entire episode to him.

“Which shopkeeper...? That weakling....The one who sells the newspapers...?” He inquired.

“Yes...” Banso nodded.

Fauji chuckled.

“Do you find this amusing...?” She was irritated.

“No, this is not amusing. You have never gone out and that is why you don't know how people talk. I hear this every day.” Fauji spoke casually.

“They say that to you too...?” she was anxious.

“Yes, they say that I have kept another's wife at my house. I am a wrong person for the world Banso, but sometimes the worst person in eyes of the world is the best person for someone.....” He dropped his head while speaking.

“Oh...it is disgusting.... What do we do then...?” Banso was worried.

But Fauji didn't reply. Both of them were silent for a long time.

"If you allow me, can I say something?" Banso's tone was serious.

"Yes, tell me." Fauji raised his head.

"You marry me...." She looked directly into his eyes for the first time.

"Anyway, we sleep together in one quilt even though we remain chaste." Fauji was surprised how Banso had crossed all limits today. He looked at Banso carefully, wheatish, like the shine on gold, hefty body and fire-emitting eyes.

Fauji felt that Banso was flooded with youthfulness.

He kept looking at Banso with hollow eyes for a long time. "Banso ...I would have married you that very night when you had slept like an infant in my arms, but I am not capable" Fauji's face was stiff like a stone, emotionless.

"Why what happened to you?" Banso looked at him with questioning eyes.

When I went to the Burma war, an enemy's bullet hit my groin. Though the doctors had the bullet removed through an operation, I become impotent. I was engaged before the war but when I didn't return, they got their daughter married elsewhere. What could I have done, having returned? My brothers-in-law sent me messages threatening that the day I enter India, they'd kill me, 'you have betrayed our sister', they said. I thought 'How will you kill a man who is already dead.... who was killed by destiny...? That's it Banso, after that I never returned.... the government of England gave me permission to stay here.... Since then, I have lived all alone here...." Karnail Singh sighed.

Harbans Kaur kept listening to him with her head bowed.

"You say that I should marry you. When you slept with me the first night, I didn't abstain because I am an angel. In scriptures, it is stated, that a woman is like fire, she can burn acknowledged saints and ascetics and reduce them to ash...that day this was proved. The whole night I kept lying down...with fire in my arms, my body too was hot, but I didn't have the strength to extinguish this fire. The age difference between us and my weakness kept me away from you, and that which could have happened didn't. Well, you see, I am not an angel...." Harbans noticed that Fauji was getting out of breath.

“You are a young woman, Banso. A young woman is like the wind, where it blows, fragrance accompanies it, and people tend to blame the young woman. If people, seeing you, start pointing fingers, it is not a new thing. Even a great woman like Sita has been defamed here, who despite accompanying her husband to exile, was thrown out of the house. Man, from the beginning has used woman and finally abandoned her. You are not the only one; this is nothing new” Fauji was consoling her.

“But.... but....” Banso wanted to say something.

“I know, at your age, every woman seeks the company of a man. I will get you married Banso, after finding a nice man.... But first you need to get divorced.... Your husband’s whereabouts are not even known....” he said looking in her eyes.

“I don’t need a divorce^{vii}. Such men are worse than the dead. A woman may grieve the death of her husband for her entire life, but for such bastards she finishes the rituals related to mourning in two days....” there was immense hatred in Banso’s heart for her husband.

“If that is what you think, I can find a match for you” Fauji said, lifting himself from the sofa.

“But, I meant, you?” she, once again, stood in front of him like a question mark.

Fauji kept quiet.

“I don’t need anyone else. Nor is the bodily union called love. The way you have taken care of my children and me, I feel like devoting myself completely to you...I don’t need any other man, I need warmth, which you have, and only you have it. I had come to ask for a quilt. Often, I wonder, is it your warmth or that of the quilt? Even earlier, I have been sleeping in quilts for thirty years....” Banso’s tone had softened. “Actually, I asked you to marry me so that the children are able to call you father and people stop defaming us....”

“Banso, why do we have such double standards in our lives? Tell your children about our relationship. Look at the English people, they only call their father as father; they call all others by their names. Our people uselessly indulge in churning out relationships. The relationship would evolve overnight and fade out before the dawn. I have seen relationships wearing out, scrapping off, burning away, breaking down and dying out. Why can’t we live without relationships...? If someone’s brother is wayward, she’d make someone else her

brother. Her children will also call him ‘mama, mama’^{viii}, further, that uncle may as well be the mother’s boyfriend! But for the world he’d still be a brother. Useless hypocrites! Why not straightaway say he is a friend...my close friend? is it an insult to say this?” Fauji thought differently.

“No, I think about people; what will they say?” Banso put forth her logic, very softly.

“See Banso, what will people say? To know this, is not your concern. Until you gain so much strength as to be able to face the crows and the dogs outside, you will be attacked continuously Darwin spoke about the survival of the fittest in the jungle.... A woman needs to learn to protect herself.” Darwin’s theory flew over her head, though.

“With God’s grace, may you, my prosector^{ix}, have a long life.... Haven’t you already prosecuted me enough....?” Banso pronounced protector as prosector.

“How have I protected you? You have taken support of an old tree beside a river Banso, no one knows when this tree may fall, and you shall drown in the storm....” Fauji was anxious.

“I won’t drown in storms now ji. I will learn to swim... and learning from me many more women shall swim across.... You must give me a little support.” she offered her hand to him.

“If this is your desire Banso, then ‘Render your support to them, lay your head for them and never betray.’ I am the son of a Sikh; I’d lay my head to keep faith....” Fauji never expected that Banso could speak so sensibly.

After that day they never spoke about this again. When children addressed Fauji as Uncle ji once or twice, Banso scolded them.

“No, don’t say Uncle ji, call him Bapuji.”

Whatever people gossiped outside, Banso had plugged cotton wool in her ears; it was as if these people never existed for her. Fauji taught her to read Gurmukhi. She started living her life, wore the best clothes, and turned Fauji’s brick and stone house into a home.

Fauji would say:

“What is life for a loner? If there is no woman with him, a man cannot survive. God has sent woman to be the nurturer of a man; one who looks after him throughout his life, sometimes as

a mother, sometimes as a sister, sometimes as a wife;but man is thankless, he exploits this voiceless creature....”

Many new things were brought in everyday, shopping was done for the household after this, but Banso and Fauji’s quilt remained the same.

“The children have grown up Banso, buy another quilt for yourself.” One night,Fauji told her casually.

“It is okay...everybody knows... why spend unnecessarily....” When Banso said that, Fauji understood.

Banso’s elder daughter was seventeen, when Fauji got her married to his friend’s son. The daughter lived happily at her house. She came occasionally to see her mother; her son Satbir studied at the university. He went out to read booksonly;Fauji was teaching him the ways of life. Satbir worshiped his mother. He remembered how his mother had suffered in the past. He knew that Fauji was not his real father, but he never complained to his mother; rather he was proud about how bravely his mother had faced the world and society.

One day, while on the morning walk, Fauji suffered a massive heart attack and could not rise after that. He was on life-support system for several days in the hospital until he passed away. The world turned dark for Banso. The calamity repeated itself once again. She had only one support and that too, was lost. The spiritual and emotional bonding she had with him was missing even with her own mother. She lost herself in grief and kept wailing, sitting at home.

One day Fauji’s lawyer came and handed over some papers to her. In the evening when Satbir came home she showed him the papers. This was a will. Fauji had willed the house as well as the entire money in his bank account to Banso.

“I couldn’t do anything for all that you did for me while you were alive.... Now after death, too, you have obliged us with your blessings. I am very grateful to you. How will I be able to repay you...? I had just come to ask for a quilt to cover my children, you gave us your house and your money Haaye.... the bird that came to collect grains for her children, you built a nest for her! How will I repay you ...? May you get your place in the heaven! O the writer of the will, may God bless you with a position in heaven too, to use your pen to write for a good

cause..... my soul mate.... you should have taken me along with you, ji I am nothing without you...Haaye...” covering her face with her scarf, she wailed.

Satbir was choking with pain. Mother sang her tragic story to her young son He took his mother in his arms. He wept bitterly, and then replied, keeping a strong heart.

“Stop it, Mum... Bapuji’s soul shall be hurt....”

Banso moaned, hugging her son, her head resting on his chest. She felt that Satbir’s and her grief were the same. The difference was that she was crying out loud and he was weeping silently.

Many days passed; what to say of days, an age passed by, but Banso’s sorrow did not lessen. Satbir tried consoling his mother but there was no panacea for her grief. Slowly she detached herself from the world. She had no desire to live and she took to her bed. For her, life was meaningless without Fauji.

She had stopped entering the kitchen and had lost appetite. Satbir cooked English food for himself and abstained from troubling his mother.

“He is an obedient son as *Shravan*, just like his father.” In her mind, she often compared Satbir to Fauji, forgetting that Satbir’s biological father was Kuldeep. After Satbir’s marriage some the house became lively, but for Banso her room was her heaven. She would cover her head with her quilt and keep thinking about Fauji.

This quilt was like a bridge between Fauji and her. She felt as if she still slept in his arms. The fragrance of Fauji’s body and his touch was imbued in every part of her body.

Today, when Banso didn’t wake up till 12 noon, Kathy got worried. She removed the quilt from Banso’s face.

Banso opened her eyes. Kathy was standing a bit away from the bed and smiling.

“Jaas (Yes)...?” getting disturbed, Banso asked her.

Kathy lifted the quilt and made place to sit on the bed, caressing her forehead, she said, “I know Mum, your boyfriend gave you this quilt...Satbir told me that he loved you so much and so did you....” Kathy thought that this was the only way to enter the heart of her mother-in-law.

Banso kept quiet for some time. Kathy repeated her words again.

“If I could speak English, my daughter, I would have told you that, for you, he may be my boyfriend; but for me, he is God himself. This quilt which seems to be garbage for you, is an embrace of that God. And when someone experiences the grace of God’s embrace, then, for him, all other relationships become cold and meaningless” Banso raised her finger like a lawyer and reprimanded her daughter-in-law in Punjabi. However, Kathy could not understand what Banso said, but for Banso, she had now taken a revenge from all English-speaking people in her own language.



Notes

ⁱIn Punjabi quilt is called *rajai*. Harbans Kaur asked her daughter-in-law about the missing quilt.

ⁱⁱIn Punjabi *KawanRauli* is a proverb meaning to clamour like the crows.

ⁱⁱⁱMem an English woman is called “Mem” in Punjabi.

^{iv}Waheguru means Praise the Guru. A term used in Punjabi widely for God.

^vFauji in Punjabi is used for an ex-Army man.

^{vi}Translation Guru Granth Sahib p.g. 473¹

^{vii}Harbans Kaur could not pronounce divorce correctly she said “diborce”

^{ix}In Punjabi Mamaji is mother’s brother

^xShe means to say protector

Brother Boatman's Ballad

[Translation of Chandrasekhar Kambar's "Ambigarannana Lavani," from the collection *BelliMeenu* (Fish of Silver) first published in 1989]

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1.

In the limpid water of the river, the Moon
Swims like a fish of silver, he said
To cast his net and catch the Moon,
The young boatman set off then.

"All over the skies, storm clouds are gathering
Thunder clouds roar and roam above
Waters of deluge, water, water, everywhere
Don't go to the river, young lad!"

Something beyond words beckons me, waves its arms
Come, mount this peak of pleasure
So, I must storm the palace of light
And the Moon will surely be mine.

2

It was always bluer than blue,
Why did the sky do this today?
The grinning horizon moved away in horror
What lurks in the corners of the world now?
The shining stars have turned to coal
Ah, the burnt smells of scorched dreams!

What shouldn't have happened had happened already
The same water, the same wind—they let you down

Pushed you into the depths of the river
The bronze hands of gods raised to bless
Had simply turned cold

3

Brother Boatman,
When your boat filled with dreams
Plunged into the river,
You made the treasures of the depths
Rise to the surface, brother!
Brother Poet, you sang the songs
Of the sparkly swimming fishes
To fill the desolate waters, brother!
Into those flashy waves like burnished weapons,
You thrust your boat, chased the storm with the rainbow,
Went hunting the Moon, Brother Hunter!
You rowed as if you were fighting the last battle with an unseen enemy
What happened to that strong will now?
You who tamed the waters,
You who sowed dreams in those waters
Brother Boatman,
We never thought you would drown
Even the gods weren't on our side
The river did not know what it had done.

You looked like someone
Laughing at yourself
For having failed to mock
A consummate actor
Who could mime the Eternity!
But the river flows without a care
Choking the neck of the narrow

Path between the hills

4

This is not death but thirst
To flow like lightening.
The thirst to glow and scratch an unforgettable mark
On the heart of Time, before you disappear forever.
Not death, but the thirst
Of those immortal dreams!

5

Whether or not you found
What you set off to find
Your fame isn't like tamarind
Washed and wasted in water—
You gave the rusty idols of gods
Eyes filled with light
You gave us ears to listen to this ballad of yours.
Gave a heart to envy
Gave joy to the God of Water
You gave this river the stamp of epic dignity
To the drowned boat,
To the drifting oar,
To the bones scattered on the riverbed,
To the first rain drops,
To the kiss of the spray
And to the sighs of the smoky clouds,
You gave them all a place in this great epic story.

The river flows without a care,
Your dreams have grown big, and they come floating by.
You rest now, my captain!

1. A POEM LOST

Translation of Subraya Chokkady's poem *Kaledu Hoda Kavite*

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Getting off and on a bus, getting off again,
running through crowds, crossing the road,
jumping on to the footpath, searching for a path,
like an aimless journey...

As I walked on,
a poem that I had with me for long
was lost. As if it were picked from my pocket
or due to my own haste.

The journey started again, amidst mounting anxiety,
looking for my lost poem.
Scanning all around with my eyes,
walking on the footpath and stumbling,
I felt I saw the face of my poem on a passing bus.
As I got on to the bus, I felt it flashed from the footpath,
that face, the same face

When I got off,
at the distant crossroads,
among the crowds,
somewhere far off,
at the topmost floor of some building,
with someone in a dark corner of a bar,
that face, the same face flashed.
The face that would flash like lightning
and disappear.

Time passed on as I searched on,
never again would I see the
face of that lost poem.

2. SOMETHING ELSE PERHAPS

(Translation of Rakesh K. Mishra's poem *Koi aur Kaam*)

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At the least you shouldn't have
taken up writing ...

You should have done something else perhaps
like

Teaching little children

Selling flowers

Guiding wandering stars on to their paths

Narrating stories to fish

Infusing colours into dreams

Building houses on clouds

Salvaging a crumbling bridge

Learning the language of butterflies

Writing love-letters in vanishing tongues

Reading out a book to the girl who cannot see

Befriending the old postman down the lane

Composing dirges to frequently perishing birds

You could have chosen any of these things to do

But you chose to do the world's saddest job ...

P J L S

1. Desert

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I keep digging
The unceasing desert
With pickaxe.
Without shoes
And a cloth
On my body,
For I get a drop
of love.
The sun rains fire
On my head and
I kept hitting
The pickaxe into the sand
of the desert,
Futilely.
I get fainted with
The driest lips.
Again, dew drops of
The next morning
Will stimulate a new hope.
I again with pickaxe
Begin Striking
The endless sand
of the desert,
Futilely.



P J L S

2. A Bowlful Venom

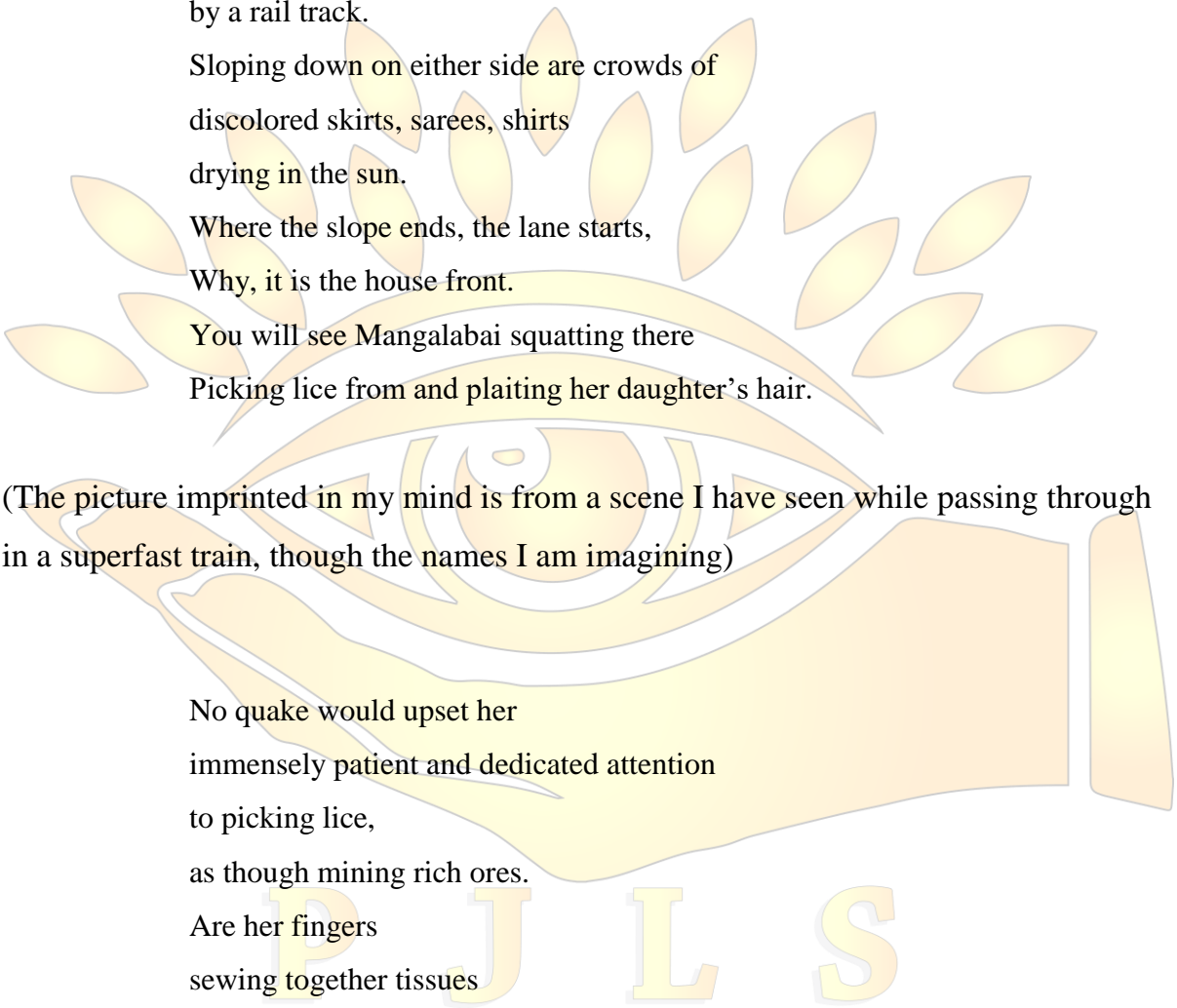
I twist my bones while toiling for you
I squeeze my veins and ooze blood from glands,
My throat gets as dry as dust storm,
Swirling thirst makes me dizzy.
I now see darkness embracing me,
I mumble water, water, water.
A dusty, damaged, dented and detrimental bowl is served in disgust.
A man with pigtail pours water from
The distance,
Can you even imagine its bitterness?
Far more bitter and venomous than
Of Shiva would've experienced.
Each sip is so corrosive that gets
My thirst ablaze.
Water douses fire but your holy
Water flares up when touches
A Dalit.

1. Imagining her and her Love

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The Rajiv Gandhi Colony is split
by a rail track.
Sloping down on either side are crowds of
discolored skirts, sarees, shirts
drying in the sun.
Where the slope ends, the lane starts,
Why, it is the house front.
You will see Mangalabai squatting there
Picking lice from and plaiting her daughter's hair.

(The picture imprinted in my mind is from a scene I have seen while passing through
in a superfast train, though the names I am imagining)

No quake would upset her
immensely patient and dedicated attention
to picking lice,
as though mining rich ores.
Are her fingers
sewing together tissues
in a brain surgery?

(I have reached the station by now, been picked up by the company sedan, and
cruising toward the office on Dole Patil road... the mother's fierce lice-picking
concentration spurs my imagination... the child's name could be Meena)

They are framed by
Their slum-dwellings
Their furious strategies to survive the day
the pitiless horizon of the city
hearts ravaged by the anxieties of existence

(My vision is being fully absorbed by this picture)

City's bazaars, ponds, bewitching malls
grand villas, grave highways...
the hills, mountain peaks, deserts,
and the oceans beyond them
and the cloud, and the sun further beyond
and the star-studded sky enveloping all these

Aren't as large as
The rapt eyes
intent upon lice-freeing her daughter's hair
and... and...

her love.

**

P J L S

2. Breaking bloody news

The road this noon is a hot arena
Where small riches are scattered:
A purse with one handle,
A sandals ansthethumbloop
an abandoned cloth bag
stuffed with brinjals and green chilli,
a walking stick with a curved grip,
and a corpse
streaming blood.

Some of the wounded
sink
in solitude into coma
with no sign of help on the way.

Police, rifles, sloganeering organisers
--all
Have fled leaving this road to bear
The sin of bloodshed
All alone.

Present here with the fresh corpses
Are the media
Diligent and busy
With the live
Coverage of the
gore.

And...

This poem.

BOOK REVIEW**The 'Island' of *Hoovina Kolli*; *Hoovina Kolli* by Abdul Rasheed.
Publisher: Kannada Sahitya Parishattu 2014****Review by Prof Ramprasad B V,**Department of Post graduate Studies and Research in English, Jnanasahyadri, Kuvempu
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Hoovina Kolli, the first novel by the well-known Kannada short story writer, poet and translator Abdul Rasheed, who coincidentally is now settled in the island of Lakshadweep, is set in a coffee estate called Hoovina Kolli, which is like an island in the sense that it seems to be a place unconcerned with anything outside it. The novel was first serialized in the online journal 'Kendasampige' and was published in 2011 in the book form by Kendasampige Prakashana. One of the lines in the very beginning of the novel can be roughly translated as 'why is everything so beautiful today'. In fact 'Beautiful' is the word that often comes to mind when one reads the novel.

To this self-contained ostensibly idyllic coffee estate, things do come from outside. We have the Persian cat in the calendar in the house of the 'writer' Usman, but that calendar has remained unchanged for seven or eight years. Even the calendar seems to have remained unaffected by the changes in time as it just anachronistically hangs on the wall. Most of the characters of the novel come from different places, some even from Assam and some nostalgically remember their roots in Syria. But they make this their home and live and die in this estate.

The novel seems not to be interested in giving any kind of 'exposition' to the place and time. Whatever specifics we derive about the setting have to be gleaned by the incidental references in the novel. There are references to Bangla war, references to Indira Gandhi, and references to communism. But the way the characters react to these events is interesting. When a pamphlet by communists is given to Nambiar, he merely takes it and talks about the eternal sufferings of life. Moid, who is known as 'samstha Moid' is against congress not because he likes the 'samstha congress', but because his car which was obstructing the road during Indira Gandhi's travel is thrown into the gutter by the police. Usman 'writer' does talk about the war with Pakistan related to Bangladesh liberation, but only to give mundane information to others. When Yahya Khan's effigy is being burnt, (not in Hoovina Kolli, but in a town nearby), children watch it laughing and talking among themselves, and the Sahukar Khan smiles to his acquaintance and just watches it. The people of Hoovina Kolli are more worried about 'whether the rice has boiled and the meet cooked' than about global events.

The novel itself hardly seems too bother about these events taking place in the world that are of immense consequence to histories of nations. During the burning of Yahya Khan's effigy, the novel draws our attention to the beauty of the oiled hair of the girls shining in the sun when they are watching the burning effigy. When the May Day procession comes to the gate of the estate Hoovina Kolli, the watchman says, taking the pamphlets distributed by the

communists, 'You have no permission to step inside the gates of the estate'. Probably the writer has denied permission to anything not directly connected with the immense suffering and the small everyday pleasures of the people to step inside the gates of his fictional world.

And suffering there is a plenty. Nambiar's son, a communist, has been murdered, after which Nambiar has come and settled in this estate. Mariamma's husband, a car driver, has died in an accident. Usman 'writer's first wife has gone missing. There are deaths, separations, diseases and loneliness. Characters do comment on this, if not on communism and Bangladesh liberation. Nambiar keeps asking his goddess (rhetorically) how long suffering will continue. Hajamma asks the creator about why people have to wander away from their places of birth for jobs. Moosa Kaka wants to ask the religious scholar why the creator inflicts suffering in this world on the believers. Usman 'writer' seems to have an answer to this when he says that there is no reason for anything here, we live we die, and we will go crazy if we try to find causes to these things. And immediately afterwards he advises Moosa Kaka, who is mourning the death of his second wife, to marry again. Then we have Patumma who is complaining to the 'creator' about jaggery that has not yet dissolved in her boiling coffee!

I am well aware that this short review has not done justice to the complex beauty of the novel. I will end my review with two very hesitant questions. One is about the connection of this novel with other Kannada novels. As no man is an island, perhaps, no novel is an island. The novel reminds us of Kuvempu, Tejaswi and Devanuru Mahadeva's Kusumabale. But are these influences merely the occasional boats lost in the ocean that inadvertently visit this island of *Hoovina Kolli* or are they like trading ships whose visits have a regularity, purpose and a pattern? This is an issue which needs to be explored. The second question is more general. How can something that has so much suffering- as this novel (or this our life) - be so beautiful? Perhaps the answer is to be found in the notes of the flute that Mudara's son Sanna plays.

Chinatown Days: A Review.

Author: Rita Chowdhury. Genre: Historical Novel. Publisher: Macmillan,
Year of Publication: 2018

**Review By, Bhagirath Boruah,
Research Scholar, Department of PG Studies and Research in English,
Kuvempu University, Shankaraghatta.**

The event of the publication of Dr. Rita Chowdhury's novel *Makam* in 2010 truly becomes "an event" in Indian Social Historiography. It set a new record in the publication history of Assamese novel. Ten editions of Assamese version were completely sold out in the first year. Chowdhury herself translated this novel into English with the title *Chinatown Days* and Macmillan has released it this year (2018) for the world. The book is rapidly achieving wide critical acclaim from its readers and its critics and the gallop of the Golden horse seems unstoppable. This novel is actually a moving historical saga which presents an untold tale, a tale of terrible injustice done on a tiny minor group of innocent people which can be termed as a subaltern group. But, to say precisely at the outset, it is a moving saga where these subaltern people question and abrogate the received ideology and identity that the Centre or the State India is constructing as the real "Indian Identity" and legitimizing. Hence, it is a daring and an exceptional discourse. Heart touching depiction of the life history and the spirit of those people mark a deep impact on the reader's heart. When a reader reads this novel, s/he undoubtedly realizes the power of voice. Reader has to ponder once again about what life is, what the meaning of life is and what humanity is. Wordsworth's poem will echo once again in readers mind with the thundering voice and dismay –"What man has made of man".

This compelling historical novel recounts the life story of a group of people whose ancestors were Chinese, but they become Assamese whole heartedly after many years of settlement in Assam. Therefore, they were Indians. The history is unfolded from the early nineteenth century to the present. British discovered Tea in Assam and planned to overthrow the Chinese singular supremacy in the world Tea Market. Visionary and the businessman Robert Bruce saw a dream of green gold with his open eyes and started to work hard towards fulfilling this dream. And these Chinese people were the soldiers of this green war. British East India Company brought these Chinese people to India as indentured labour and forced them to work in the newly planned Tea Gardens of Assam. Later, people from Orissa (Odisha) were also brought for the same purpose. But, these poor people were brought to

Assam by treachery and by false promise. Gradually, amidst untold sufferings, hardships and broken dreams they learnt to find contentment. These were very painful histories and worthy of reading to get insights about these forgotten people, about Tea and about Teagardens, about the remoulding of Assamese Society and Assamese Culture and above all to get insights about the human nature. This is a true social history. The exuberant narrative of those incidents and experiences and mastery of storytelling will never fail to touch the heart of the reader and will give a vivid picture of that time, of Assam's geography, politics and of common people.

Gradually, after many years of service in these Gardens, these people spread out from the tea gardens and made their permanent residence in nearby villages and towns and they began to earn a livelihood through carpentry and shoe-making. Later on, after noticing their prosperity, some relatives of these people living in the poor South China side also came to settle down there. Thus, in Makum, a small town in upper part of Assam, formed a Chinatown which was complete with its restaurants and a club house. These Chinese people were the first people brought by British to teach the local people how to cultivate tea and how to make boxes to cart tea. Their progeny become moderately prosperous and also become integral part of the ethnic mosaic of Assam. Their roots slowly deeply rooted in the soil of Assam. But, the journey to that point was not a rollercoaster ride. Reader will be mesmerized by the epic like story of them. After 1947, they regarded themselves as citizens of independent India. But, in 1962, India-China War took place which ushered in a maelstrom of anti-Chinese prejudice and changed everything. This anti-Chinese prejudice constitutes the third part of the novel. This part is an unbearable account of this entire community which make reader's eyes wet. Indian officers came there and arrested them. Many were even not Chinese. They were sent to Nagaon jail. Later on, these people were bundled into goods trains to Deoli, a refugee camp in Rajasthan. The journey was seven days long torturous journey; some died in the train for extreme heat, some gave birth in the train. Many wasted their life in Nagaon Jail. Regarding this, Chowdhury shares a shocking and a real pathetic incident of a nine-year-old girl, Yu Yu. "She fainted due to extreme heat in Deoli and was taken to be dead by the authorities and buried alive. By the time her screams were heard from down below, she died" (Pisharoty). In the tremendous heat of Rajasthan their conditions worsened and they suffered unbearable hardships. Their sufferings did not end there. Families were divided forever. The ruling elites directed all the frustration, anger and

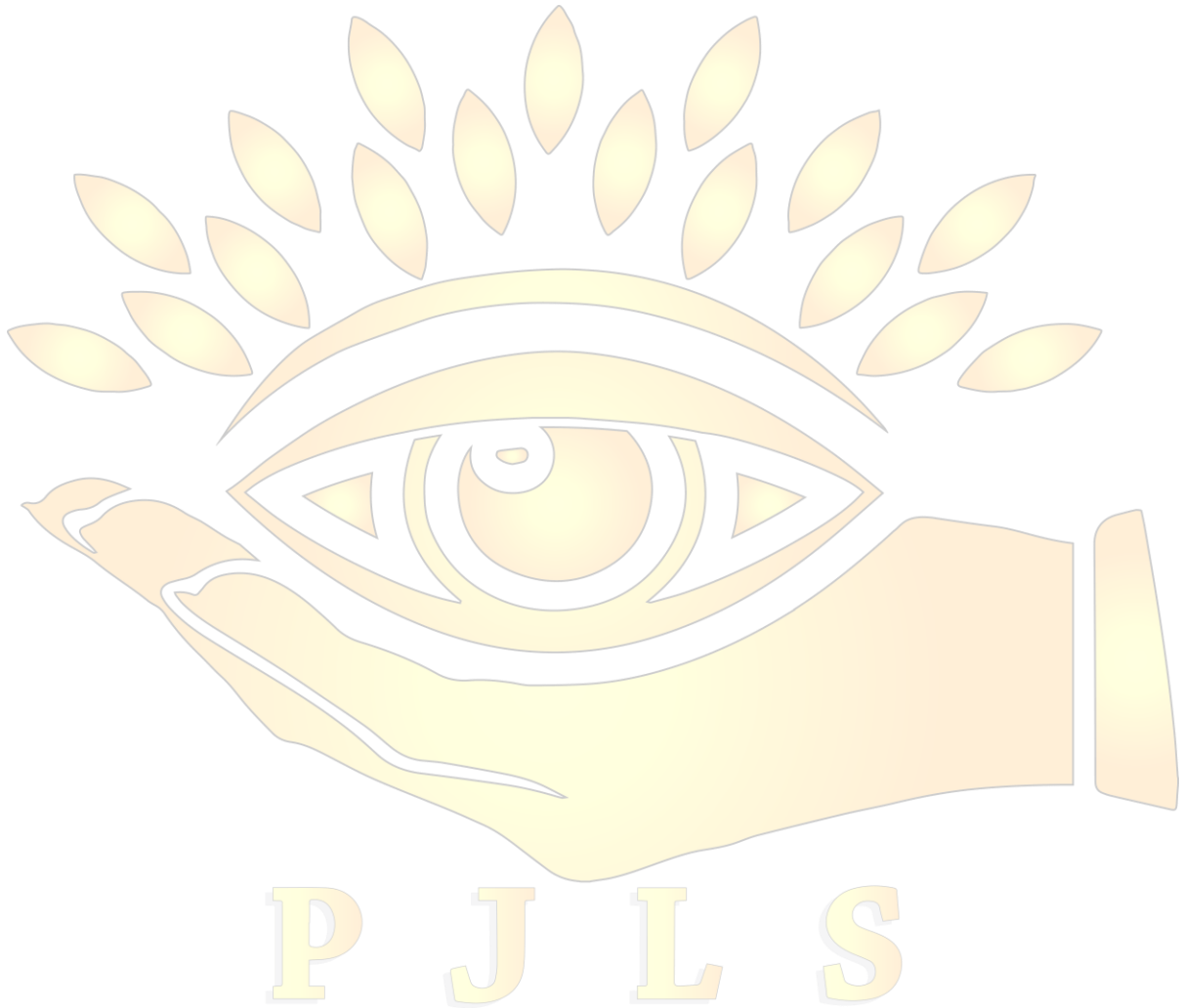
suspicion against these innocent Sino-Assamese people in 1962 and placed them in front of their own people and country as “spies” and at the end deported them to China and others were left in this world to find an identity for themselves. Reader will wonder where humanity was at that time. 1500 hundred people in total were deported to China. But, the pathetic predicament for them was that though China was their original homeland, it did not recognise them as one of their own and these people had also forgotten their Chinese origin.

In short, looking through the eyes of Mei Lin, a descended from the slave Ho Han, reader sees and feels how the state India betrayed these blameless and innocent people. Reader will experience what can happen when an entire community is banished. Geeta Doctor aptly remarks in *The Hindu* that “It’s a tale filled with the distant sounds of a war that ended in a rout so extreme that it signalled the end of India’s innocence in its self-determined role as the leader of a newly enfranchised democratic republic”

Till Dr. Rita Chowdhury’s initiation to enlighten this dark chapter of India’s history, they were even not recognized as a subject of our current and dominant discourse. Official documents and histories were rare. Chowdhury spent four years researching on these people to bring out this dark chapter and for that purpose she went to China to interview them. Former historians, who worked under the scrutiny of Indian hegemony, did not assign a place to them in Indian historiography and thus relegated them to oblivion. Their very identity was erased. They discarded not only “an event” of our history but also deleted those people from the very idea or theory of “Indian”. They were those people who did not act; rather, they were those upon whom the state acted. As their position in society as well as in the structure of State was in lower rank, their voice was kept muted, never heard and when heard they were punished by the authority every time and at other times ignored.

This novelistic discourse questions the hegemony of the State India and showing its defects and thereby forcing the people of India and the ruling Elites to review their own self-fashioned identity. Reader will be mesmerized by the exuberant and vivid narration of the history of the discovery of Tea in Assam, establishment of the Teagardens in Assam and slavery, Tea making procedure and its evolution, social condition of Assam, British East India Company, Ahom Kingdom and its history, Singpho kingdom, Politics of British, Politics of India, 1962 wartime condition of Assam, Assamese society, culture etc. Many historically important figures also populate this novel. Though this is not the greatest novel

by an Assamese writer, it is one of the best historical novels that a reader can have from Assamese writers.



KANNADA

ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ನಾಗರಾಜ್ ಅವರ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನಗಳು ಮತ್ತು ಹೃನ್ಮನ ಪರಿವರ್ತನೆ

ಡಾ. ನೆಲ್ಲಿಕಟ್ಟೆ ಎಸ್.ಸಿದ್ದೇಶ್, ಎಂ.ಎ. ಎಂ.ಇಡಿ., ಪಿಜಿಡಿಜಿ.,ಪಿಎಚ್.ಡಿ.
ಸಹಾಯಕ ಪ್ರಾಧ್ಯಾಪಕರು, ಕನ್ನಡಭಾರತಿ, ಕುವೆಂಪು ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾನಿಲಯ
ಜ್ಞಾನಸಹ್ಯಾದ್ರಿ, ಶಂಕರಘಟ್ಟ-577451

ಕನ್ನಡ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಕಲ್ಪನಾ ಲೋಕವನ್ನು ಮತ್ತು ವಾಸ್ತವಲೋಕವನ್ನು ಕಣ್ಣಿಂದ ನಿಲ್ಲಿಸಿ, ಓದುಗ ಸಂಭ್ರಮ ಮತ್ತು ಸಂಕಟಗಳನ್ನು ಏಕಕಾಲದಲ್ಲಿ ಅನುಭವಿಸುವಂತೆ ಮಾಡುವುದು. ಅಧ್ಯಯನದ ಅನುಕೂಲಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಪ್ರಾಚೀನ, ಮಧ್ಯಕಾಲೀನ ಮತ್ತು ಆಧುನಿಕ ಕಾಲಘಟ್ಟದ ಕನ್ನಡ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಎಂದು ವಿಭಜಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಬಹು ನದಿಗಳು, ಬಹು ಹಳ್ಳಕೊಳ್ಳಗಳು, ಬಹು ಕೆರೆಬಾವಿಗಳು ಅಸ್ತಿತ್ವದ ಅಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ನೆಲೆ ಕಂಡುಕೊಂಡಿರುವುದು ಆಧುನಿಕ ಕನ್ನಡ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ. ಈ ಕಾಲಘಟ್ಟದ ದಲಿತ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ದಮನಿತರ ಬದುಕಿನ ಬವಣೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಸ್ಪಂದಿಸಿ, ಮಾನವ ಪ್ರೀತಿಯನ್ನು ಮತ್ತು ಮನುಷ್ಯತ್ವದ ನೀತಿಯನ್ನು ಬಿತ್ತಿದೆ. ಅವಮಾನ, ಅಗೌರವಗಳಿಗೊಳಪಡಿಸಿ, ಮಾನಸಿಕ ಮತ್ತು ದೈಹಿಕ ಹಿಂಸೆಗಳನ್ನು ನೀಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ಶೋಷಕ ಸಮೂಹದ ವಿಕೃತ ನರ್ತನಗಳನ್ನು ಹಸಿಹಸಿಯಾಗಿ ದಾಖಲಿಸಿರುವ ಕನ್ನಡ ದಲಿತಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಈ ನೆಲದ ನೈಜ ಚರಿತ್ರೆಯನ್ನು ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಟ್ಟಿದೆ. 'ಬಾಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬೆಣ್ಣೆ ಬಗ್ಗಲಲ್ಲಿ ದೊಣ್ಣೆ' ಎಂಬಂತೆ ನಟಿಸುವವರ ನಡುವೆ ನಾಳಿನ ದಿನಗಳನ್ನು ಕಾಣುವುದು ಬಹು ಪ್ರಯಾಸದ ಕೆಲಸ. ಅಂತಹ ಆಯಾಸ- ಪ್ರಯಾಸಗಳನ್ನು ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಡುವ ದಲಿತ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಕಥೆ, ಕವಿತೆ, ನಾಟಕ, ಕಾದಂಬರಿ, ಜೀವನ ಚರಿತ್ರೆ, ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆ ಮೊದಲಾದ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಪ್ರಕಾರಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ರಚನೆಗೊಂಡಿದೆ. ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಸಂರಚನೆಗೆ ಸನ್ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶನ ಮಾಡಿದೆ.

ಬದುಕು ಹತ್ತು ಹಲವು ತೊಡಕುಗಳ ಸರಮಾಲೆ. ಇದರಲ್ಲಿ ಸೋಲುವುದೆಷ್ಟು, ಗೆಲ್ಲುವುದೆಷ್ಟು ಎಂದು ತೂಗಿ ನೋಡುವುದು ಕಷ್ಟಸಾಧ್ಯ. ಸಹಸ್ರ ಸಮಸ್ಯೆಗಳ ನಡುವೆ ಸಾಧನೆ ಮಾಡುವುದು ಅಷ್ಟು ಸುಲಭವಾದುದಲ್ಲ. ಸಾವಿರಾರು ಸಂಕಟಗಳು ಬಂದರೂ ಕೂಡ ಅದಕ್ಕೆ ಹೆದರಿ ಚಿಂತೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬೆಂದು ಹೋಗದೆ, ಕೆಚ್ಚಿದೆಯಿಂದ ಎದುರಿಸಿ ಬಾಳುವುದು ನಿಜಜೀವನ. ಹಾಗಾಗಿ ಅಂಥ ನಿಜಜೀವನ ನಿರ್ವಹಿಸಿದವರು ಕ್ಷಣ ಕ್ಷಣಗಳಲ್ಲಿನ ಘಟನೆಗಳನ್ನು ದಾಖಲಿಸುವ ಮೂಲಕ ಓದುಗರಲ್ಲಿ ಸಹನೆಯನ್ನು, ಕಷ್ಟಸಹಿಷ್ಣುತೆಯ ಮನೋಧರ್ಮವನ್ನು ಬೆಳೆಸುವುದರ ಮೂಲಕ ಸಾಧನೆಯ ಹಾದಿಗೆ ಸ್ಫೂರ್ತಿಯ ಚಿಲುಮೆಯಾಗುವರು.

ಕನ್ನಡ ದಲಿತ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ ಮತ್ತು ದಲಿತ ಕನ್ನಡಿಗರ ಏಳಿಗೆಗೆ ಅಪೂರ್ವ ಕಾಣ್ಕೆ ನೀಡಿದವರಲ್ಲಿ ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ನಾಗರಾಜ್ ಅವರು ಒಬ್ಬರು. ಪ್ರತಿ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿ ಬರೀ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯಾಗಿಯೇ ಉಳಿಯದೇ, ಆತನು ಅಥವಾ ಆಕೆಯು ಶಕ್ತಿಯಾದಾಗ ಆದರ್ಶ ಮತ್ತು ಅನುಕರಣೆಗೆ ಯೋಗ್ಯರಾಗುತ್ತಾರೆ. ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿ, ಶಕ್ತಿಯಾಗಲು ಪಟ್ಟಪಾಡುಗಳು, ತಿಂದೆಟುಗಳು, ಉತ್ತೇಕ್ಷೆಯಾಗದೆ, ನಿರಪೇಕ್ಷೆಯೂ ಆಗದೆ ಸಮತೂಕದಲ್ಲಿ, ಸತ್ಯ ನೆಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ, ವಾಸ್ತವದ ಅಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಅನುಭವಗಳು ಕಥನಗಳಾಗಿ ಅವರಿಂದಲೇ ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಗೊಂಡಾಗ ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆಯಾಗುತ್ತದೆ. ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆಗಳು ನಾಡಿನ, ದೇಶದ ನೈಜ ಇತಿಹಾಸಕ್ಕೆ ಪುಷ್ಟಿಕೊಡುವ ದಾಖಲೆಗಳು. ಇವುಗಳನ್ನು ಆಧರಿಸಿ ಚರಿತ್ರೆಯನ್ನು ಪುನರ್ ಕಟ್ಟಬೇಕು. ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಆಯಾಯ ಕಾಲಘಟ್ಟದ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ, ರಾಜಕೀಯ, ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ, ಆರ್ಥಿಕ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರಗಳ ನೈಜಚಿತ್ರಣವಿರುತ್ತದೆ. ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆಗಳನ್ನಾಧರಿಸಿದಾಗ ಇತಿಹಾಸ ನೈಜ ಸಂಗತಿ, ಘಟನೆ ಮತ್ತು ಅನುಭವಗಳಿಂದ ದಾಖಲಾಗಿ ಪರಿಣಾಮಕಾರಿಯಾದ ಪ್ರಭಾವವನ್ನು ಬೀರುವುದು. "ಆತ್ಮಕಥೆಗಳು ತಮ್ಮ ಒಟ್ಟಿಂದದಲ್ಲಿ ಕೇವಲ

ಗತಕಾಲದ ನಿರ್ದಿಷ್ಟತೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಗಿರಕಿ ಹೊಡೆಯುವ, ವಿಶ್ರಾಂತಿ ಪಡೆಯುವ ಜಡ ಬರಹಗಳಾಗಿರುವುದಿಲ್ಲ. ಲೇಖಕರು ಬದುಕುತ್ತಿರುವ ಸಮಾಜದ ಸಮಕಾಲೀನ ಒತ್ತಡಗಳು ಹಾಗೆ ಜಡವಾಗಿರಲು ಬಿಡುವುದಿಲ್ಲ. ಗತವನ್ನು ವರ್ತಮಾನದಲ್ಲಿ ಪರಿಗ್ರಹಿಸುವ ಮತ್ತು ಅದೇ ಕಾಲಕ್ಕೆ ಗತಕಾಲದ ಬೆಳಕಿನಲ್ಲಿ ವರ್ತಮಾನವನ್ನು ವ್ಯಾಖ್ಯಾನಿಸುವ ಮತ್ತು ಮೌಲ್ಯೀಕರಿಸುವ ಸೃಜನಶೀಲದ ಹಾಗೂ ಸೈದ್ಧಾಂತಿಕವಾದ ಕೆಲಸಗಳು ಏಕಕಾಲಕ್ಕೆ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿರುತ್ತವೆ.” (ಡಾ. ಬಿ.ಎಂ. ಪುಟ್ಟಯ್ಯ-ಆತ್ಮಕಥೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಕತೆ-ಪ್ರಸಾರಾಂಗ, ಕನ್ನಡ ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾನಿಲಯ, ಹಂಪಿ-1999 ಪುಟ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ-10) ಹಾಗಾಗಿ ಆತ್ಮಕಥೆಗಳು ಅನುಭವಗಳ ವಿಸ್ತರಣೆಗೆ ಸ್ಫೂರ್ತಿಯ ವಾಹಿನಿಗಳು.

ಅನ್ಯಾಯ, ಅದಕ್ಷತೆ, ಅಸಮಾನತೆಗಳ ವಿರುದ್ಧದ ಹೋರಾಟವನ್ನೇ ಉಸಿರಾಗಿಸಿಕೊಂಡವರು ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ನಾಗರಾಜ್‌ರವರು. ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ, ಸಂಘಟನೆ ಮತ್ತು ಹೋರಾಟಗಳೆಂಬ ಮಹಾಮಂತ್ರಗಳನ್ನು, ಮಹಾಕಾರ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ಹೇಳಿಕೊಟ್ಟ ಮಾನವತಾವಾದಿ ಡಾ. ಬಿ.ಆರ್. ಅಂಬೇಡ್ಕರ್‌ರವರು ತೋರಿದ ಮಾರ್ಗದಲ್ಲಿ ಸಾಗಿ ಸಾಗಿ ಸಾಧನೆಗಳ ಸೌಧಗಳನ್ನು ಕಟ್ಟಿದವರು ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ನಾಗರಾಜ್‌ರವರು. ನೊಂದು ಬೆಂದು ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಪಡೆದ ನಾಗರಾಜ್ ಅವರು ನೊಂದವರ ನೋವಿಗೆ, ಬೆಂದವರ ಬೆವರಿಗೆ ತಕ್ಷಣ ಸ್ಪಂದಿಸಿ ಆ ಯಾತನೆಗಳ ಮತ್ತು ವೇದನೆಗಳ ನಿವಾರಣೆಗಾಗಿ ಹೆಣಗಾಡಿದ ಸಾಧಕರು. ಸಾವಿಲ್ಲದ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯಕ್ಕೆ ವಸ್ತುವಾಗುವಷ್ಟರ ಮಟ್ಟಿಗೆ ತಮ್ಮ ಉಸಿರು ಇರುವ ತನಕ ಹೋರಾಡಿದವರು. ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯಿಯಾಗಿ, ಸಮಾಜ ಸೇವಕರಾಗಿ, ಸಮಾಜ ಸುಧಾರಕರಾಗಿ, ಸಂಘಟಕರಾಗಿ, ಕಾರ್ಯಕರ್ತರಾಗಿ, ಸಾವಿರಾರು ಮಂದಿಯ ಮನಗಳಲ್ಲಿನ ಮಾಲಿನ್ಯವನ್ನು ತೊಳೆಯುವ ಸಲುವಾಗಿ ದುಡಿದ, ಅವರ ದುಡಿಮೆ ಅಕ್ಷಯ ನಿಧಿ. ಆ ಅಕ್ಷಯನಿಧಿಗೆ ಅವರ ಜೀವನ ಮತ್ತು ಸಾಧನೆಯೇ ರನ್ನಗನ್ನಡಿ. ಕರಿಯನ್ನು ಕನ್ನಡಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ತೋರಿಸುವಂತೆ ಅವರು ‘ಮಾಮರದ ಮೇಲೊಂದು ಕೋಗಿಲೆ’ ಮತ್ತು ‘ಚಳುವಳಿಯ ಗರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ’ ಎಂಬೆರಡು ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ನಿಕ್ಷೇಪಗೊಳಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

“2004ರಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಕಟವಾದ ನನ್ನ ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆಯ ಮೊದಲ ಭಾಗ ‘ಮಾಮರದ ಮೇಲೊಂದು ಕೋಗಿಲೆ’ ವ್ಯಾಪಕವಾದ ಪ್ರಶಂಸೆಗೊಳಗಾಯಿತು. ನಾನು ಬರೆಯಬಹುದಾದ ಬಹುಪಾಲನ್ನು ಆಗ ಬರೆಯಲು ಆಗಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ಹಾಗಾಗಿ ಸವಿಸ್ತಾರವಾದ ವಿವಿಧ ಪ್ರಸಂಗಗಳನ್ನು ಮತ್ತೆ ದಾಖಲಿಸುತ್ತಾ ಹೋದೆ. ದಲಿತ ಚಳುವಳಿಯ ಆರ್ದ್ರ ಗಳಿಗೆಗಳು ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಒಡಮೂಡಿವೆ. ಬಹುಪಾಲು ದಲಿತ ಚಳುವಳಿಯನ್ನು ಕುರಿತ ನನ್ನ ವೈಯಕ್ತಿಕ ಅನುಭವಗಳು ಇಲ್ಲಿ ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿರುವುದರಿಂದ, ಬದುಕಿನ ಕಠಿಣ ಸವಾಲುಗಳು ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿ ಮಿಳಿತವಾಗಿರುವುದರಿಂದ ಈ ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆಯ ಮುಂದುವರಿದ ಭಾಗಕ್ಕೆ ‘ಚಳುವಳಿಯ ಗರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ’ ಎಂಬ ಹೆಸರು ನೀಡಿರುವೆ ” ಎಂದು ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ನಾಗರಾಜ್ ಅವರು ಹೇಳುವ ಮೂಲಕ ತಮ್ಮ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನಗಳ ಉದ್ದೇಶವನ್ನು ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟಗೊಳಿಸಿರುವರು.

ಹನ್ನೆರಡು ಅಧ್ಯಾಯಗಳನ್ನೊಳಗೊಂಡಿರುವ ‘ಮಾಮರದ ಮೇಲೊಂದು ಕೋಗಿಲೆ’-ಎಂಬ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನದಲ್ಲಿ ಬಾಲ್ಯ ಬದುಕಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಮಂಜು ಮಂಜಾದ ಅವಮಾನ ಅಪಮಾನಗಳ ಎಳೆಗಳನ್ನು ಬಿಡಿಸಿಟ್ಟಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಬಾಲ್ಯ ಬದುಕು ಕಂಡ ಈ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯ ಕ್ರೂರತೆ, ಕಪಟತನವನ್ನು ಬಯಲುಗೊಳಿಸಿರುವರು. ಸಿಂಹಾವಲೋಕನಕ್ರಮದಿಂದ ಎಣೆದು ಕಟ್ಟಿರುವ ಈ ಕಥನದಲ್ಲಿ ದಲಿತ ಕೇರಿಯ ವಾಸ್ತವ ಅನುಭವಗಳು ಅಕ್ಷರರೂಪದಲ್ಲಿ ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಗೊಂಡಿವೆ. ಏಕಾಂತ ಸೆರೆವಾಸದ ಒಂದು ದಿನ ‘ಎಂಬ ಅನುಭವದಿಂದ ಆರಂಭವಾಗಿ ‘ಹೊಳೆವ ಕಂಗಳ ದ್ವೀಪದಲ್ಲಿ’-ಎಂಬ ಅನುಭವವೊಂದಿಗೆ ಮುಕ್ತಾಯಗೊಳ್ಳುವುದು. ಇಲ್ಲಿನ ಅನುಭವಗಳು ಚಲನಚಿತ್ರದಂತೆ ಕಣ್ಮುಂದೆ ಚಲಿಸುತ್ತಾ ಕರುಳನ್ನು ಕಿವುಚಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವಂತೆ ಮಾಡಿಬಿಡುತ್ತವೆ.

“ಅಪ್ಪನ ಊರಿನ ನೆನಪು ಮತ್ತು ಪ್ರೀತಿ ಅಗಾಧ. ಅಪ್ಪ ದೊಡ್ಡ ಹುಡುಗನಾದರೂ ಗೋಲಿಗಜ್ಜುಗ ಆಡುತ್ತಾ, ಅಕ್ಷರ ಕೂಡಾ ಕಲಿಯದೆ ಇದ್ದ ಕಾಲದಲ್ಲಿ ಅಪ್ಪನ ಸೋದರ ಸಂಬಂಧಿಯೊಬ್ಬರು ಅವರನ್ನು

ಹಿಡಿದು ಸ್ಕೂಲಿಗೆ ಹಾಕಿದರು. ಅದರಿಂದಾಗಿಯೇ ಅಪ್ಪ ಅಕ್ಷರ ಕಲಿಯಲು ಸಾಧ್ಯವಾಯಿತು. ನನ್ನ ತಾತ ಯಾವ ಜವಾಬ್ದಾರಿಯೂ ಇಲ್ಲದೆ ಬೆಳೆದ ಮನುಷ್ಯ. ನನ್ನ ಚಿಕ್ಕ ಮಾವ ಡೋಲು ಬಡಿಯುವ ಕಲೆಗಾರ, ದೊಡ್ಡ ಮಾವ ದನಗಳ ವ್ಯಾಪಾರ ಬಲ್ಲ ಚುರುಕಾದ ದಲ್ಲಾಳಿ...ಅಜ್ಜನ ಸಜ್ಜನಿಕೆ, ಗೇಲಿಗುಣ, ನಗುಮುಖ ಮತ್ತು ತಮಾಷೆಯ ಮಾತು ಅಜ್ಜಿಗಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ವ್ಯಂಗ್ಯ ಕಟಕಿ ಲೇವಡಿ ವಿಡಂಬನೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಟೀಕೆಯ ಸ್ವಭಾವ ಅಜ್ಜಿಯದು.”(ಪು. ಸಂ-9-15)ಹೀಗೆ ತನ್ನವರ ವಿಭಿನ್ನ ಮನೋಧರ್ಮಗಳನ್ನು ಪರಿಚಯಿಸಿರುವರು. ಮಣ್ಣಿನ ಗೋಡೆಯ, ಸಗಣೆ ನೆಲದ ಮನೆಯು ತುಂಬಾ ಕೊಳಕಾಗಿದ್ದರೂ ಅಲ್ಲಿನ ಪ್ರೀತಿವಾತ್ಸಲ್ಯಗಳು ಅಪೂರ್ವವಾದವುಗಳು. ಅಜ್ಜಿಯ ಮನೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬಾಲ್ಯವನ್ನು ಕಳೆಯುವಾಗಿನ ಅವ್ವನ ಸಂಕಟಗಳ ಘಟನೆಗಳ ಚಿತ್ರಣಗಳನ್ನು ದಾಖಲಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ.

ಕೆ.ಆರ್. ನಗರದಲ್ಲಿನ ತಮ್ಮ ಮನೆಯ ಸಮೀಪದಲ್ಲಿದ್ದ ಬ್ರಾಹ್ಮಣ ಕುಟುಂಬದ ಹೆಂಗಸಿಗೆ ಕಾಯಿ ಚೂರುಗಳನ್ನು ತಂದು ಕೊಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ಘಟನೆ ಮತ್ತು ಕ್ರಿಶ್ಚಿಯನ್ ಹೆಂಗಸಿನ ನಾಲ್ಕಾಣೆ ಕಳೆದುಕೊಂಡ ಪ್ರಸಂಗ ದಲಿತರಲ್ಲಿನ ಸತ್ಯ, ನಿಷ್ಠೆ, ಪ್ರಾಮಾಣಿಕತೆಗಳು, ತಪ್ಪು ಮಾಡಿದ್ದರ ಖಿನ್ನತೆ, ಬ್ರಾಹ್ಮಣ ಹೆಂಗಸಿನ ಸಣ್ಣತನಗಳು, ಕ್ರಿಶ್ಚಿಯನ್ ಹೆಂಗಸಿನ ಉದಾರತೆಯು ಎಳೆಯ ಮನದಾಳಕ್ಕೆ ಇಳಿದ ಬಗೆಯನ್ನು ತಿಳಿಸುತ್ತವೆ. ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಅಧಿಕಾರಿಯಾಗಿದ್ದ ದಲಿತ ಲಾಲೋಜಿಯ ಕೌಟುಂಬಿಕ ಚಿತ್ರಣವು ಬಹುತೇಕ ದಲಿತ ಅಧಿಕಾರಿ, ನೌಕರರ ಕೌಟುಂಬಿಕ ಜೀವನದ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಯಂತಿದೆ. ಬಾಲ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಬಿತ್ತಿದ ಭಯದ ಪರಿಣಾಮಗಳನ್ನು, ಘಟನೆಗಳನ್ನು ಬಿಡಿಸಿರುವ ಲೇಖಕರು ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿ ವಯಸ್ಸಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಹಿರಿಯನಾದರೂ ಮುದುಕನಾದರೂ, ಸಣ್ಣತನಗಳು ಬಿಡುವುದಿಲ್ಲವೆಂಬುದನ್ನು, ಚಪಲಚಿತ್ತ, ಕಾಮವಿಕಾರಗಳು ಹೇಗೆ ಬಾಧಿಸುತ್ತವೆಂಬುದನ್ನು ಕಂಡ ಘಟನೆಗಳ ಮೂಲಕ ನಿರೂಪಿಸಿರುವರು.

“ಸ್ಕೂಲಿನ ನನ್ನ ಜಗತ್ತು ಸಂಕ್ಷಿಪ್ತವಾದದ್ದು ಬೀದಿಯ ಲೋಕ ಅದ್ಭುತವಾದದ್ದು. ಅಗಾಧವಾದದ್ದು. ಬೀದಿಯನ್ನು ನೋಡುತ್ತಾ ಶಾಲೆಯನ್ನು ಗ್ರಹಿಸುತ್ತಾ ನಾನು ಬೆಳೆದದ್ದು ನನ್ನ ಪಾಲಿನ ಒಂದು ವಿಸ್ಮಯ” (ಪು. ಸಂ-28). ನೆಲದಲ್ಲಿ ಬೆಳೆದ ಗಿಡದ ಬೇರು ಆಳವಾಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ. ಕುಂಡದಲ್ಲಿ ಬೆಳೆದ ಗಿಡದ ಬೇರು ಆಳಕ್ಕಿಳಿಯದೆ ಅಲುಗಾಡುತ್ತಲೇ ನಾಶದಂಚಿಗೆ ಬಹುಬೇಗ ತಲುಪಿಬಿಡುತ್ತದೆ. ನಮ್ಮ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಕುಂಡದಲ್ಲಿ ಬೆಳೆಸುವ ಗಿಡವಾಗದೆ, ನೆಲದಲ್ಲಿ ಬೆಳೆಸುವ ಗಿಡವಾಗಬೇಕೆಂಬ ಸೂಚನೆಗಳು ಇಲ್ಲಿವೆ. ‘ಶಾಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ನಾನು’ ಎಂಬ ಅನುಭವದಲ್ಲಿ ‘ಜಾತಿ’ ಎಂಬ ವಿಷಬೀಜ ಬಿತ್ತುವ ಮನುಷ್ಯತ್ವ ದ್ರೋಹಿ ಕೆಂಪಯ್ಯ ಮೇಷ್ಟ್ರು ಸಣ್ಣತನ, ಚಂದ್ರಶೇಖರಶಾಸ್ತ್ರಿ ಎಂಬ ಅಧ್ಯಾಪಕರಲ್ಲಿನ ಅಪಾರ ಮನುಷ್ಯ ಪ್ರೀತಿಯ ದೊಡ್ಡತನಗಳನ್ನು ಏಕಕಾಲದಲ್ಲಿ ಕಂಡು ಅನುಭವಿಸಿರುವುದನ್ನು ದಾಖಲಿಸುವ ಮೂಲಕ ಮೇಷ್ಟ್ರುಗಳಾದವರು ಹೇಗಿರಬೇಕೆಂಬುದರ ಸನ್ಮಾರ್ಗದರ್ಶನವಿದೆ.

ರೇಷ್ಮೆ ಸೀರೆಯನ್ನು ಆರಾಧನೆಯ ನೆಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಅನುಭವಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ಅವ್ವನಿಂದ ಆಕೆಯ ಗೆಳತಿ ಇಸೆದುಕೊಂಡು ವಾಪಾಸ್ಸು ನೀಡದೆ ಸತ್ತು ಹೋಗಿದ್ದು, ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಅವ್ವನ ಸಂಕಟಗಳು ಪ್ರತಿ ದಲಿತ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಸಂಕಟಗಳಂತೆಯೇ ಚಿತ್ರಿತವಾಗಿವೆ. ಅಪ್ಪನಿಗಾಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದ ಕಿರುಕುಳ, ತನಗಾದ ಕಹಿ ಅನುಭವಗಳು, ಕುಡುಕರ ಅಮಾನವೀಯ ಕಾರ್ಯಗಳು, ವಂಚಕರ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ದ್ರೋಹಗಳನ್ನು ಚಿತ್ರಿಸುವ ಲೇಖಕರು ಯೌವನದಲ್ಲಿನ ತಲ್ಲಣಗಳನ್ನು ದಾಖಲಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

‘ಕಾಲದ ಕೊರಳ ತುಂಬಾ ಕಣ್ಣೀರ ಮುತ್ತುಗಳು’ (ಪು-35), ‘ಪ್ರೀತಿ ಅಂದರೆ ಸೃಜನಶೀಲತೆಯ ಒಂದು ಋತುಚಕ್ರ. ಸಾವನ್ನು ಗೆಲ್ಲಬಲ್ಲ ಈ ಚಕ್ರ ಚಲಿಸುತ್ತಲೇ ಇದೆ. ಜನರು ಸಾಯುತ್ತಿದ್ದರೂ ಪ್ರೀತಿಯು ನಿರಂತರ ಬೆಳೆಯುತ್ತಲೇ ಇದೆ.’(ಪು.ಸಂ-53), ‘ಪ್ರೇಮದ ಹಿಂದೆ ಚಲಿಸುವರೆಲ್ಲರೂ ಭ್ರಮಾ ಜೀವಿಗಳಾಗಿರುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಪ್ರೇಮವನ್ನು ಅರಿತವರು ಮಾತ್ರ ಸಂತರಾಗಿರುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಪ್ರೇಮದ ಸಂಗೀತಾತ್ಮಕ ಗುಣವನ್ನು ಬಲ್ಲವರು, ಅದರ ನಡಿಗೆಯನ್ನು ಹಾಡಾಗಿ ಮಾಡಬಲ್ಲವರು ಕವಿಗಳಾಗಿರುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಅದರಲ್ಲೇ ಕರಗಿ ತಮ್ಮನ್ನು ತಾವು ಕಳೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳುವವರು ಮಾತ್ರ ನಿಜವಾದ ಪ್ರೇಮಿಗಳಾಗಿರುತ್ತಾರೆ. (ಪು. ಸಂ-54)

‘ಜಾತಿ’ ಎಂಬುದು ಯಾರೋ ಕಟ್ಟಿದ ಗೋರಿ ಅದನ್ನು ನಮ್ಮದನ್ನಾಗಿ ನಾವು ಮಾಡಿಕೊಂಡಿದ್ದೇವೆ’(ಪು. ಸಂ-57), ‘ಸಾವಿನ ನಂತರವೂ ಅಳಿಸಲಾಗದ ಬದುಕಿನ ಹೆಜ್ಜೆಗಳನ್ನು ಮೂಡಿಸುವ ಜೀವನ ಕ್ರಮವನ್ನು ಮನುಷ್ಯನು ಹುಡುಕುತ್ತಲೇ ಇದ್ದಾನೆ. (ಪು. ಸಂ-60), ‘ತನಗೆ ಸಿಕ್ಕದೆ ಇರುವುದನ್ನು ಹುಡುಕುತ್ತಾ ಹೋಗುವುದೇ ಬದುಕು’ (ಪು. ಸಂ.-64), ‘ಸಾವಿನ ಹಕ್ಕಿಯ ರೆಕ್ಕೆಯ ಕೆಳಗೆ ಈ ಜಗತ್ತು ಚಲಿಸುತ್ತಿತ್ತು.’ (ಪು. ಸಂ-65) ‘ಗಂಡು ಹೆಣ್ಣುಗಳ ನಡುವಿನ ಪ್ರೇಮವು ಪ್ರಕೃತಿಯಷ್ಟೇ ಪ್ರಾಚೀನವಾದುದು. ಪ್ರೇಮದ ಮೇಲೂ ತನ್ನ ಹಕ್ಕು ಸ್ಥಾಪಿಸುವ ಜಾತಿಯು ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಕ್ರೂರವಾದದ್ದು’ (ಪು.ಸಂ-72), ‘ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಯ ಬೆರಗು ಮತ್ತು ವಿನಾಶ, ಕನಸು ಮತ್ತು ಕಲೆಗಾರಿಕೆಯನ್ನು ಮಾನವ ತನ್ನ ಮೂಲಕವೇ ತಾನು ಕಾಣಬೇಕಾಗಿದೆ ’ (ಪು.ಸಂ-73) ಎಂಬಂತಹ ಅವರ ಅಪೂರ್ವವಾದ ಅನುಭವದ ನುಡಿಗಳು ಪದೇ ಪದೇ ಚಿಂತನ ಮಂಥನಕ್ಕೆಳೆಯುತ್ತವೆ. ಆ ಮೂಲಕ ಬದುಕು ಎಂದರೇನು? ಅದು ಹೇಗಿರಬೇಕು? ಎಂಬುದಕ್ಕೆ ಉತ್ತರವನ್ನು ಕಂಡುಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಪ್ರೇರೇಪಿಸುತ್ತವೆ. ‘ನನ್ನ ಬಾಳು ಕೇವಲ ನನ್ನ ಬಾಳಲ್ಲ ನನ್ನ ಜತೆ ಬದುಕಿದ ಅನೇಕರಿಗೆ ಸೇರಿದ್ದು ಅದು (ಪು.ಸಂ-76) ಎಂದು ಲೇಖಕರೇ ಹೇಳುವಂತೆ ಅವರ ಬಾಳಿನ ಅನುಭವಕ್ಕೆ ತೆಕ್ಕೆಗೆ ಬರುವ ಒಂದೊಂದು ಪಾತ್ರಗಳು ಒಂದೊಂದು ಘಟನೆಗಳು ಸಂದರ್ಭದ ತಲ್ಲಣ-ತವಕಗಳು ಈವೊತ್ತಿನ ಬದುಕನ್ನು ಗಟ್ಟಿಯಾಗಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ಪ್ರೇರೇಪಿಸುತ್ತವೆ.

ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ಅವರ ಅಪುಕಟಿತವಾದ ‘ಚಳುವಳಿಯ ಗರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ’ ಎಂಬ ಆತ್ಮಚರಿತ್ರೆ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿ-ಸಮಾಜ-ಸಂಘಟನೆಗಳ ನಡುವಿನ ಸಂಘರ್ಷ ಮತ್ತು ಸಂಕಟಗಳನ್ನು ಸಾವಧಾನವಾಗಿ ನಿರೂಪಿಸುತ್ತದೆ. ಈ ಕೃತಿಯು ಸಬ್ ಇನ್ಸ್‌ಪೆಕ್ಟರ್ ಎಲ್ಲಪ್ಪನ ಕಲ್ಲು ಹೃದಯದ ಅನಾವರಣದೊಂದಿಗೆ ಆರಂಭವಾಗಿ ದಲಿತರ ಪ್ರಗತಿಗಾಗಿ ತಮ್ಮ ಇಡೀ ಬದುಕನ್ನು ಸಮರ್ಪಿಸಿಕೊಂಡಿರುವ ಹರಿಹರ ಆನಂದಸ್ವಾಮಿಯವರ ಪರಿಚಯದವರೆಗೆ ವ್ಯಾಪಿಸಿಕೊಂಡಿದೆ.

“ಕನಸುಗಳನ್ನು ಕಾಣಬಹುದಾದ ಎಳೆಯ ವಯಸ್ಸಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಲೋಕದ ಕಷ್ಟಗಳನ್ನು ಹೆಗಲ ಮೇಲೆ ಹೊತ್ತು ಚಳುವಳಿ ದಾರಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಚಲಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದೆ. ಈ ಪಯಣದಲ್ಲಿ ನಾನು ಏಕಾಂಗಿಯಾಗಿರಲಿಲ್ಲ. ನನ್ನ ಜತೆ ಅನೇಕ ಸ್ನೇಹಿತರಿದ್ದರು. ಆಪ್ತರಿದ್ದರು. ಆಗ ಬದುಕಿನ ಬೆಲೆಯನ್ನೇ ತಿಳಿಯದ ಯೌವನ ನನ್ನ ಬಳಿಯಿತ್ತು. ವಿದ್ಯೆಯನ್ನು ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಬದಲು ಪದ್ಯವನ್ನು ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೊಂಡ ಆ ಕಾಲ ತುಂಬಾ ಅಪ್ರಾಯಮಾನಾದದ್ದೇ ಸರಿ. ಹೆಗಲ ಮೇಲೆ ಬ್ಯಾಗ್. ಬ್ಯಾಗಿನಲ್ಲಿ ತುಂಬಿ ತೂಗುವ ಕವಿತೆಗಳು. ಕವಿತೆಗಳೊಡನೆ ಹಗಲು ರಾತ್ರಿ ಸಂಚಾರ. ಅನ್ಯಾಯಗಳ ವಿರುದ್ಧ ಸದಾ ಪುಟಿದೇಳುವ ಉತ್ಸಾಹ. ನನ್ನದೆನ್ನುವುದೇನೂ ಇಲ್ಲದಿದ್ದರೂ ನನ್ನದೇ ಎಲ್ಲವೂ ಆಗಿತ್ತು. ಅಥವಾ ನಾನು ಹಾಗೆಂದುಕೊಂಡಿದ್ದೆ. ಮನೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಕಾಲ ಕಳೆಯುವುದು ಕಷ್ಟವಾಗಿತ್ತು. ಆಗ ನಾನು ರಾಶಿ ರಾಶಿ ಪುಸ್ತಕಗಳನ್ನು ಮುಂದಿಟ್ಟುಕೊಂಡು ಓದುತ್ತಿದ್ದೆ” ಎಂದೆಲ್ಲ ಹೇಳುವ ಮೂಲಕ ತಮ್ಮ ಬದುಕಿನ ಹಾದಿಯ ಆರಂಭಕ್ಕೆ ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟನೆಯನ್ನು ನೀಡಿರುವ ನಾಗರಾಜ್ ಅವರು ಸದಾ ಸಮಾಜ- ಸಂಘಟನೆ ಹೋರಾಟದಲ್ಲೇ ನಿರತರಾದರು. ಪೋಲೀಸರು, ರಾಜಕಾರಣಿಗಳು, ಅಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳು, ಮೇಲುಜಾತಿಯವರು, ಕೆಳಜಾತಿಯವರು, ಸಂಘಟನೆಯಲ್ಲಿರುವ ಕಾರ್ಯಕರ್ತರು, ಸಾಹಿತಿಗಳು, ಕಲಾವಿದರು, ರೈತರು, ಕೂಲಿಕಾರ್ಮಿಕರು, ಪತ್ರಕರ್ತರು, ಬಂಧುಮಿತ್ರರು, ಹೆಂಡತಿಮಕ್ಕಳು, ಅಪ್ಪ-ಅವ್ವ, ಅಣ್ಣ-ತಮ್ಮ, ಅಕ್ಕ-ತಂಗಿ ಮೊದಲಾದವರುಗಳು ಸಣ್ಣತನ- ದೊಡ್ಡತನಗಳನ್ನು ಆಯಾಯ ಸಂದರ್ಭಗಳಿಗೆ ಅನುಸಾರವಾಗಿ ಎಣೆದಿದ್ದಾರೆ.

“ಈ ದೇಶದಲ್ಲಿ ಮನುಷ್ಯ ಮನುಷ್ಯರ ನಡುವೆ ಅಪನಂಬಿಕೆಗಳ ಸಮುದ್ರವೇ ಇದೆ. ಇದಕ್ಕಿಂತ ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿ ಮೂಢನಂಬಿಕೆಗಳು ತಾಂಡವಿಸುತ್ತವೆ. ಜಾತಿ ಅಸಮಾನತೆಗಳು ಮಾತ್ರ ನಮ್ಮ ಜೀವನದ ಅವಿಭಾಜ್ಯ ಅಂಗಗಳಾಗಿವೆ. ಹೇಗೆ ನಿವಾರಿಸುವುದು ಇವುಗಳನ್ನು ಎಂದು ಗಲಿಬಿಲಿಗೊಂಡರೆ ನಮ್ಮ ದಿಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಹೊಳೆಯುತ್ತಾರೆ ಡಾ. ಬಿ.ಆರ್. ಅಂಬೇಡ್ಕರ್ ಅವರು” ಎನ್ನುವ ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ಅವರು ಅಸ್ಪೃಶ್ಯತೆಯ ನಿವಾರಣೆಗೆ ಹಳ್ಳಿ ಹಳ್ಳಿಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಅಂಬೇಡ್ಕರ್ ಸಂಘಗಳನ್ನು ಸ್ಥಾಪಿಸಲು ಆರಂಭಿಸಿದರು. ಆ

ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲಿ ಒದಗಿ ಬಂದ ಸಂಕಷ್ಟಗಳು ಸಹಸ್ರ ಸಹಸ್ರ ಅವುಗಳಿಗೆ ಕುಗ್ಗದೆ ಸಾಧನೆಯ ಹಾದಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಕುಪ್ಪಳಿಸಿದರು.

ಈ 'ಜಾತಿ' ಎಂಬ ವಿಷವೃಕ್ಷದ ದುಷ್ಟಲವನ್ನು ಜಾತೆ, ತೇರನ್ನು ಕದ್ದ ಘಟನೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ತಿಳಿಸಿರುವ ಲೇಖಕರು ಹಸಿವಿನ ಪ್ರಸಂಗಗಳನ್ನು ದಾಖಲಿಸಿರುವರು. ಹೆತ್ತು ಹೊತ್ತು ಬೆಳೆಸಿದ ಅಪ್ಪ ಅಮ್ಮನನ್ನು ಬಡತನದಿಂದ ಮುಕ್ತಗೊಳಿಸದೆ, ವೈಯಕ್ತಿಕ ಹಿತಾಸಕ್ತಿಗೆ ಗಮನಕೊಡದೆ ಸದಾ ಸಮಾಜ, ಜನರೆಂದು ಪರಿತಾಪಿಸಿದ್ದ ನಾಗರಾಜ್‌ರವರನ್ನು ಅವರ ಸಾಮಿಪ್ಯದಲ್ಲೇ ಬೆಳೆದ ಕೆಲವರು ಕಾಲಕಸದಂತೆ ಕಂಡದ್ದನ್ನು ತುಂಬಾ ನೋವಿನಿಂದ ಹೇಳಿಕೊಳ್ಳುತ್ತಾರೆ.

ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ನಾಗರಾಜ್ ಅವರ ಸೃಜನಶೀಲ-ಕ್ರಿಯಾಶೀಲ ಮನೋವಿಕಾಸವನ್ನು ಸಮಷ್ಟಿಯ ವಿಕಾಸದಡೆಗೆ ಅನ್ವಯಿಸಿಕೊಂಡು ಅನುಷ್ಠಾನದಲ್ಲಿ ನಿರತವಾಗಿ ಅದರಲ್ಲಿ ಸಫಲತೆ ಮತ್ತು ವಿಫಲತೆಯನ್ನು ಕಂಡು ಕೊಂಡಿದ್ದು ಅಲ್ಲದೆ ಅವರ ಜೀವಿತಾವಧಿಯಲ್ಲಿನ ಅಪಾರ ಅನುಭವಗಳು ತಲ್ಲಣಗಳು, ತಂಟೆಗಾರರ ತರ್ಲೆಗಳು, ಮುಗ್ಧರ ಭಾವನೆಗಳು, ಸಜ್ಜನರ ಸಂಪರ್ಕದ ಸ್ಫೂರ್ತಿಯ ಸೆಲೆಗಳು, ವ್ಯಷ್ಟಿ ಮತ್ತು ಸಮಷ್ಟಿಯ ನೆಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ನಿರೂಪಿತವಾಗಿವೆ. ನಾಗರಾಜ್ ಅವರು ತಮ್ಮ ವೈಯಕ್ತಿಕ ಬದುಕನ್ನು ಪ್ರಯೋಗಶಾಲೆಯಾಗಿಸಿಕೊಂಡು, ಅಲ್ಲಿ ಕಂಡುಕೊಂಡ ಹತ್ತು ಹಲವು ಸಂಗತಿಗಳನ್ನು ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಸಿರುವ ಇವರ ಈ ಎರಡು ಆತ್ಮಕಥನಗಳು ಹೋರಾಟಗಾರನೊಬ್ಬರ ಸತ್ಯ, ನಿಷ್ಠೆ, ಪ್ರಾಮಾಣಿಕತೆ, ಸೇವಾಬದ್ಧತೆಗೆ ಹಿಡಿದ ಕನ್ನಡಿಯಂತಿವೆ. ಪ್ರಗತಿಯ ಹಿಂದೆ ಪ್ರೇರಣೆಗಳಿರಬೇಕು. ಇಲ್ಲವಾದಲ್ಲಿ ಅಧೋಗತಿ ಕಟ್ಟಿಟ್ಟ ಬುತ್ತಿ, ದಲಿತ ಸಮುದಾಯದ ಪ್ರಗತಿಗೆ ಪ್ರೇರಕಶಕ್ತಿ ಅಂಭೇಡ್ಕಾರವರು. ಆ ಶಕ್ತಿಯ ಅಂತರಂಗವನ್ನು ಸರಿಯಾಗಿ ಅರ್ಥೈಸಿಕೊಂಡಾಗ ದಲಿತ-ಬಲಿತರೆಲ್ಲರೂ ಸಾಮರಸ್ಯ ಸೌಹಾರ್ದತೆಯಿಂದ ಬಾಳಲು ಸಾಧ್ಯವಾಗುತ್ತದೆ. ಬಲಿತವರು ದಲಿತರನ್ನು ಹೃದಯವಂತಿಕೆಯಿಂದ ಕಂಡಾಗ ಸಮಾಜದಲ್ಲಿ ಜಗಳ, ದೊಂಬಿ, ಹೊಡೆದಾಟ ಬಡಿದಾಟಗಳು ಇರುವುದಿಲ್ಲ. ಶಾಂತ ಸಮಾಜ ನಿರ್ಮಾಣವಾಗಲು ಈ ತೆರನಾದ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನಗಳು ಬಲಿತವರ ಹೃನ್ಮನ ಪರಿವರ್ತನೆಗೆ, ದಲಿತರ ಜಾಗೃತಿಗೆ ಪ್ರೇರಕವಾಗುವುದರಲ್ಲಿ ಸಂಶಯವಿಲ್ಲ.

ಬಹು ಜನರ ಅನ್ನವನ್ನು ಕದ್ದವನೇ ಶ್ರೀಮಂತ. ಅಂತಹ ಶ್ರೀಮಂತರ ಅಟ್ಟಹಾಸಗಳು ಬಡವರನ್ನು ಬಗ್ಗುಬಡಿಯುವ ತಂತ್ರಗಳು, ಜಾತಿ ಹೆಸರಲ್ಲಿ ಮೆರೆಯುವ ದಿಟ್ಟರನ್ನು ಒಂದಿಷ್ಟಾದರೂ ತಗ್ಗಿಸುವ ಅವರ ಆ ವರಸೆಗಳಿಗೆ ಎದುರಾಗಿ ನಿಲ್ಲಬೇಕಾದ ಪಟ್ಟುಗಳನ್ನು ಕಲಿಸಿಕೊಡುವ ವ್ಯಾಯಾಮ ಶಾಲೆಯಂತಿದೆ ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ಅವರ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನಗಳು. ಅಲ್ಲಲ್ಲಿ ಹಾಸ್ಯ, ಶೃಂಗಾರ, ಭಯಾನಕ, ಶೋಕ ಭಾವನೆಗಳು ಉತ್ಪನ್ನಗೊಳ್ಳುವಂತೆ, ಓದುಗನಿಗೆ ಒಂದೇ ಬಾರಿಗೆ ಅರ್ಥವಾಗುವಂತೆ ಸರಳ ವಾಕ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ನಿರೂಪಿಸಿರುವುದು ಈ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನಗಳ ವೈಶಿಷ್ಟ್ಯತೆಗೆ ಬೆನ್ನೆಲುಬಾಗಿವೆ. ಸಾಧನೆಯ ಹಾದಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಸಾಗಿದವರು ಅನುಭವಿಸಿದ ನೋವು-ನಲಿವುಗಳ ಪ್ರಾಮಾಣಿಕ ಅಭಿವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಯಾದ ಈ ಆತ್ಮಕಥನಗಳು ಸಾಧಕನ ಅಂತರಂಗ ಮತ್ತು ಬಹಿರಂಗ ಕ್ರಿಯೆಗಳನ್ನು ದಾಖಲಿಸಿ, ಸಾಧನಾಶೀಲರಿಗೆ ಪ್ರೇರಕಶಕ್ತಿಯಾಗಿದೆ. ಜೀವನ ಅನುಭವದ ಕಥನವಾದ ಇವುಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಜೀವನದರ್ಶನ, ಮಾನವೀಯತೆ, ಕಾರ್ಯದಕ್ಷತೆ, ಸಮಯನಿಷ್ಠೆ, ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ ಪರಂಪರೆಯ ಪರಿಚಯ, ಕೌಟಂಬಿಕ ಚಿತ್ರಣ, ಸಾಧಕನ ಸಾಮೀಪ್ಯ ಬಂದ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಳು ಇಲ್ಲವೇ ಸಾಧಕನೆ ಹುಡುಕಿಕೊಂಡು ಹೋದ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಳ ಸಂಕ್ಷಿಪ್ತವಾದ ಜೀವಚಿತ್ರಣಗಳು, ಹತ್ತು ಹಲವು ಘಟನೆಗಳು, ಮಾಹಿತಿ ಎಂಬ ಮಹಾನ್ ಸಂಪತ್ತು, ಸಾಧಕನ ಕಲೆಯ ಕೌಶಲ್ಯ ಮೊದಲಾದವುಗಳು ಈ ರುಳ್ಳಿಯ ಪೊರೆ ಬಿಚ್ಚಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವಂತೆ ಬಿಚ್ಚಿಕೊಳ್ಳುತ್ತಾ ಹೋಗುತ್ತದೆ. ಅದರ ಗಟ್ಟಿಯ ಮೂಲವನ್ನು ಪರಿಚಯಿಸುವಂತೆ ಮುಳ್ಳೂರು ಅವರ ಜೀವನ ಮತ್ತು ಸಾಧನೆಗಳು ಅಕ್ಷರವೆಂಬ ಉಸಿರಲ್ಲಿ ಜೀವಂತವಾಗಿವೆ.

